

Sourcing ingredients

Where you source ingredients will have an impact on your costings and operational procedures. This sheet looks at the advantages and disadvantages of sourcing from different places and suppliers.

Local and seasonal produce - straight from the grower or farmer

If you can source local produce direct you will potentially be able to make savings by cutting out wholesalers or transport costs and support another local business in your community! You will also benefit from the freshness of produce and promotional benefits of using local produce in meals so it is worth exploring what is available around you.

Wholesaler delivery

Setting up an account with a fruit and veg wholesaler can often be helpful as you may be able to pay at the end of the month (usually subject to a credit check). You will have access to a wide range of produce and be able to place small and regular orders. One disadvantage is that traceability of fruit and veg can sometimes be complicated as wholesalers change growers and producers frequently to meet demand e.g. you may be planning to buy British grown produce and then the wholesaler changes to produce that has come from abroad without you being notified.

Cash and Carry

A good way to access dry ingredients, equipment and packaging at discount prices. You will need to prove that you are a business or charity to set up an account.

Retailers

Even moderate-sized processors can use raw materials from retailers and for multiple retailers, all suppliers are required to be certified and to standard. One disadvantage: it is not easy to obtain product specifications from a multiple retailer.

FareShare or donated foods through charities

Using donated foods is also a possibility but this does come with some issues. If you are manufacturing a ready meal to a set recipe you cannot guarantee a regular supply of the same item. Also check use by dates on donated products in case they will go out of date before your ready meal product will. However if you can make use of donated products, it will save a considerable amount of money.

Gleaned vegetables

Gleaning groups are usually run by volunteers who pick unharvested vegetables left by farmers. This food is then donated to charitable organisations so it is another way of sourcing fresh and seasonal vegetables. There is however the same problem of regular supply if following a dedicated recipe. Usually gleaned vegetables come straight from the fields and will not have been quality controlled, washed, or checked for pests so you will need to include these steps in your manufacturing processes and have a dedicated washing area and cleaning processes to deal with any soil and pests that may contaminate your production area.

Local independent butchers or fishmongers

If you are using meats in your ready meals it is worth investigating local independent butchers, fishmongers, or direct with farmers if you are located close by. Locally supplied raw materials offer a marketing advantage as consumers see the benefit of supporting the local community. Local suppliers will also have a wealth of knowledge and be able to advise on cheaper cuts for your meals or prepare to order as well as supplying little and often. Ultimately, fresh and good quality raw materials will enable longer shelf life for your products and also ensure high levels of consumer satisfaction. Supply chain vulnerabilities and fraud are much more prevalent with a long supply chain and imported products and there are advantages with local suppliers where they may limit supply chain vulnerability.

References and further guidance

<https://fareshare.org.uk/>

<https://www.nisbets.co.uk/importance-of-locally-sourced-ingredients>

<https://gleaning.feedbackglobal.org/>

