

# From gate TO PLATE

Setting up a genuinely sustainable local sourcing scheme takes hard work, dedication and imagination. But, as NHS Trust head of catering William McCartney has proved in Sussex, the rewards can be worth it. Kathy Bowry visits the local food chain he has devised to see how it works

**W**illiam McCartney, head of catering services at the Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, has successfully united small suppliers and growers, building up a close relationship with them and eliminating the ‘middle men’ as he developed what is now a viable and sustainable local produce network.

Keen to share his insights and hold the partnership model up for the inspection of his peers, he recently invited a group of Hospital Caterers Association (HCA) members and other interested public sector caterers to a day’s field workshop so that they could experience a local supply chain at first hand.

The first producer the group visited was family-run Tottingworth Farms at Heathfield, which boasts 200 acres of pasture and ancient woodland supporting herds of Limousin, British Blue and Galloway cattle and a large flock of sheep.

produced meat, managing director Sarah Wareham has been building the wholesale and retail sides of the farm business.

Sussex Partnership has worked closely with her to help, not only in terms

**“EBLEX and BPEX were also extremely encouraging, and helped Tottingworth get Red Tractor accreditation”**

In addition to access to prime meat, Tottingworth has its own small abattoir that is now central to the business. To meet increasing demand for locally

of achieving accreditation, but also with setting up systems and policies.

One of the most important innovations proposed by McCartney, ▶





*Animal passports include all necessary details, from an animal's birth ear tag through to clear labelling on the carcass and all paperwork from the Sussex farm*



*The green Tottingworth cow helps promote the farm's local produce*



*Salads are grown in compost made from garden waste on JR Wholesale's Falkenvil Farm*

and now used by the Tottingworth abattoir, is the animal passport. These passports provide details from the birth ear tag through to clear labelling on the carcass and all the paperwork in between that needs to go to the catering butcher.

The passports then follow on to the Sussex Partnership's goods inwards documents and paperwork, ensuring clear labelling of all meat delivered to enable McCartney to show high due diligence and total traceability – an important consideration highlighted by the recent horsemeat scandal.

"Meat is hung for a minimum of 14 days, which is quite adequate for our purposes," says McCartney.

"Proudly in receipt of a Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) licence, Tottingworth supplies products guaranteed to come

from the south-east counties of Sussex, Kent and Surrey. EBLEX and BPEX were also extremely encouraging, and helped Tottingworth get Red Tractor accreditation, with the Soil Association also having an input."

pride in demonstrating cutting while preparing a top-bit and forequarter of beef as well as a whole lamb carcass.

Delves explains that KD was working with EBLEX and Sussex Partnership NHS Trust to develop a range of 'less-used' cuts

### **“ ‘Less-used’ cuts of meats can be used in menu cycles to provide locally sourced top-quality meals at a competitive price ”**

The next port of call in the local supply chain was KD Catering Butchers in nearby Polegate, the only one in Sussex and Kent to have achieved coveted British Retail Consortium (BRC) accreditation.

In its purpose-built European Commission-approved cutting unit, director Kevin Delves and his staff took

including rolled shoulder of lamb, brisket, rolled chuck of beef and top rump.

"These meats can be used in menu cycles to provide locally sourced top-quality meals at a competitive price," Delves says. "At certain times of year they can be even cheaper, so taking a seasonality-based approach to purchasing can help reduce food costs."



Along the road at JR Wholesale, the focus turns to freshly cooked local produce, including Tottingworth beef and local lamb tagine with vegetables from the market garden and other produce. The HCA group saw such produce prepared and cooked by the Sussex Partnership NHS's own pioneering catering team.

Not forgetting, of course, that West Sussex-based Turner's Dairies supplies the NHS Trust with yogurts made from British milk.

Adds McCartney: "The previous suppliers were selling us product at twice the price that was produced in England, but made from milk imported from Germany. That doesn't help us, local farmers or the infrastructure."

Finally, to complete their overview of the Sussex food chain, the HCA delegates were taken on a tour of JR Wholesale's Falkenil Farm where all kinds of lettuce, including vibrantly coloured lolla rosso, had recently been sown and the field was a riot of colour.

This family business, run by general manager Roly Knight and brother Keith, farm manager, takes its environmental responsibilities seriously; the organic produce is grown in earth enriched by garden waste recycled into compost from the local council facility.

Sussex Partnership has worked closely with JR Wholesale to create the supply chain, helping to set up systems for hazard analysis and critical control points (HACCP), health and safety, environmental health audits, accounting, computer invoicing and administration, plus pointing the way to greater operational efficiency through development of its process areas.

The result has been that the company not only supplies the partnership, but is also well placed to bid for contracts within the NHS and the education sector (universities, schools and colleges). It has already been supplying other NHS Trusts in Sussex over the past 12 months.

"Caterers can make huge savings by purchasing our freshly prepared vegetables – in staff time, less wastage, improved portion control and sheer convenience," says Roly Knight.

"For example, William [McCartney] can tell me exactly how many meals he has to serve on the morning we deliver and we can tailor the prepared produce precisely to that exact number."

As well as salad stuffs, crops grown on the 100-acre farm include broccoli, Savoy cabbage, cauliflower and endives of all kinds that are cut from the fields daily.

For ready-to-eat crops, JR Wholesale carries out continual HACCP risk assessments in line with FSA guidance. For crops not grown on the farm, Roly Knight has established a list of preferred local suppliers, negotiating directly with the growers wherever possible. ■



William McCartney, head of catering services at the Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust

### McCartney sings local praises

When, just a few years ago, William McCartney used to review the provisions budget for the Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, he admits he had no idea where the food was sourced, even though he was head of catering services.

"Now, 85% of all the fresh produce, which goes into half a million patient meals a year across 14 sites, is local. And this has led to the fruit and vegetable bill alone plummeting by 20% and meat costs by 10%," McCartney tells *Cost Sector Catering*.

"The scheme was born out of frustration with the existing supply chain. My objective is my patients' care and I didn't feel they were getting quality, value or choice.

"I was frequently asking questions about sustainability and there simply were no acceptable systems in place. There was a negative approach and the unethical practice of approved suppliers having to pay overrides (2–3% plus of contract price) in turn increased our own costs, which actually compromised the public sector budgets."

Fired up by what he saw as unacceptable practice from suppliers, and with the full backing of the trust board, McCartney decided to "walk the field tracks" to identify small local farmers, growers and meat and dairy producers who could get together to fill the public plate sustainably with good-quality produce.

JR Wholesale, market garden supplier of Hailsham, was approached and asked if it would consider investing in the business to bring it up to a standard that would win it trust supply contracts. This proved so successful that over the four years since the farm took the plunge, its turnover has increased by 30%.

"KD Catering Butchers of Polegate (BRC certified, Red Tractor assured, STS approved) is working with us to develop new cuts of meat. Roulade of Sussex Lamb combines innovative use of the shoulder joint with a unique butchery technique designed by myself and incorporating fresh herbs, also locally sourced.

"This works out as £2/kg cheaper and delivers a quality portion on the plate for my patients using Tottingworth Farm Red Tractor-certified meat.

"Now the trust wants to expand into a new production unit, offering best quality and supporting the local health economy. And there is interest from county councils and other NHS Trusts that want to work on producing locally sourced food.

"Finally, through invoice consolidation, we have reduced our number of invoices from 300 to just 20 per month, costing £7 each. These are real savings achieved via efficiencies that improve the bottom line without increasing staffing levels."