

INFORMATION ON SETTING UP A FOOD PRODUCTION BUSINESS IN WESTMEATH



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Introduction

Setting up a food business requires careful consideration as food operators will be required to manage several aspects of their business carefully in order to run a successful operation. For example, they must:

- Meet Market Demands and Trends
- Produce high quality food in attractive packaging
- Comply fully with current legislation and regulation
- Develop a market and distribution channel for their food product

This guide has been produced to assist you in developing your food business and contains the following information:

1. Regulation and Compliance with Obligations as a Food Producer
2. Market Demands and Marketing Your Product
3. Supports available from Westmeath Local Enterprise Office
4. Directory of Westmeath Food Producers
5. Useful Information (websites, awards etc)

Section 1 Regulation and Compliance with Obligations as a Food Producer

Those operating in the food sector business are strictly governed by the Environmental Health Office of the HSE. Any person proposing to operate a food business is legally obliged to apply to their local Environmental Health office prior to commencement of trade, and failure to do so is an offence.

Food producers are responsible for informing themselves about all regulations regarding their particular business, which vary depending on the type of food business you are operating. Your local EHO will advise you on the particular regulations and standards that apply to your business. You are advised to contact your relevant EHO at the earliest possible stage in the development of your business as they will advise you on requirements of your kitchen and food preparation area and on issues such as storage, handling, transportation, labelling, hygiene requirements, waste disposal and also issues such as ceiling heights and water sources. These requirements may determine where you locate your business so it is important that you receive advice from your EH office as soon as possible.

National standards for the food industry have been produced by the NSAI are the following may apply to you:

I.S. 3219/1990 – Code of Practice for Hygiene in the Food and Drink Manufacturing Industry.

I.S. 340/2007 – Hygiene in the Catering Sector.

I.S. 342/1997 – Guide to Good Hygiene Practice for the Food Processing Industry in accordance with the Council Directive 93/43/EEC on the Hygiene of Foodstuffs.

I.S. 341/2007 – Hygiene in Food Retailing and Wholesaling.

I.S. 344/2002 – Hygiene for Domestic-Scale Production.

I.S. 22000/2005 – Food Safety Management incorporating HACCP.

NSAI – National Standards Association of Ireland. They are responsible for setting industry regulations in all sectors of business in Ireland.

FSAI- Food Safety Authority of Ireland regulate the food industry and produce useful information for food businesses in Ireland.

Specific Business Start-Up Packs are available from the **Food Safety Authority of Ireland (FSAI)** . Each pack contains :

- Information about the steps required to be taken when setting up a food business.
- A copy of the relevant food hygiene legislation.
- A copy of the appropriate Irish Standard (IS) published by the NSAI.
- FSAI guides to Food Safety Training
- FSAI information on Hazard Analysis and Critical Control Point (HACCP)
- Current issue of FSAI newsletter
- A list of useful websites, publications and contact telephone numbers.

A pack costs €65.00 and may be purchased by telephoning the FSAI advice-line on 1890 33 66 77, or emailing info@fsai.ie

Section 2 Market Demands and Marketing Your Product

Market Research

You may have a food production idea in place but it is worth conducting some market research to assure yourself that there is sufficient market demand for your product. As a result of market research, you may discover new opportunities for your product or you may decide to develop some new product ideas.

Firstly, ask yourself where to you intend to sell your product from ?

- Farmers Markets
- Local retailers
- Direct to the public
- Supply to restaurants / cafes
- Web-based sales

A good starting point, if you have never sold your product to the public before, is a local Farmers Market. A full list of farmers markets throughout the country is available on the homepage of Bord Bia at www.bordbia.ie

Mullingar Market : Takes place on the First and Third Sunday of the month in the Fair Green, Mullingar from 10.00 am to 3.00pm :Contact Anne Hamill 087-8125402.

Athlone Market : Takes place every Saturday from 10.00am to 3.00pm

Depending on your chosen sales channel, you will need to conduct in-depth research to assess market demands and what your level of competition will be. The only way to do this research is to visit each potential outlet and ask to meet with the Manager / Buyer. Have a list of questions ready and bring sample products with you. Think about food trends and see can you fill a niche in the market place with a new food product.

Additional possibilities for marketing your product include :

SHOP – Annual Trade Show supplying the retail trade. RDS, Sept 28-30th 2010.

Food & Design Winter Fair – 3 day Christmas Fair takes place in Belvedere, Mullingar each November.

Westmeath Tourism Food Events held at regular intervals throughout the year.

Section Three

Supports from Westmeath Local Enterprise Office

What can Westmeath Local Enterprise Office do for my food business ?

13 things we can do for food businesses locally

- One to one meeting with a Business Advisor (free of charge) to discuss your business in detail in a confidential setting. Advice and support on tax registration, legal structures, and general business development.
- You can meet avail of our mentoring service which provides specialist business advisors to work with you on a one to one basis to discuss topics of concern including marketing plans, financial issues, and business development .
- Marketing clinics on how best to develop your business and maximise sales.
- Potential for financial assistance for food producers (note :restaurant/coffee shop ineligible for grant aid) with construction / adaption of premises, employment of additional staff or purchase of necessary equipment. New grant programme launched in 2010.
- Specialist training programmes in Primary Food Hygiene and HACCP.
- Continuous business training programme to assist you to learn about your taxation requirements, marketing, business development, raising finance and financial management.
- Exhibition Assistance. Grant available towards costs of attending trade shows such as National Food Fairs and SHOP.
- Website Grant. Grant currently available towards website development or upgrade costs. Maximum allocation of €1,000.00
- Participation in annual 3 day Food & Design Winter Fair held in Belvedere House, Mullingar late November each year, facilitated by Westmeath Local Enterprise Office.
- You can apply for financial assistance for business training that you have identified that is relevant to your business. Assistance of up to 50% of the cost of your training course may be available, subject to criteria. Maximum allocation of €1,000.00.
- If you are a woman in business you could join our Women in Business network and attend our quarterly events where you can learn more about being in business but also make new business contacts.
- Promote your business at our Speed Networking Events.
- Sign up for a free Energy Audit with SEI. Reduce your energy costs by up to 20%

Food Mentors

A specialist panel of food mentors is available to assist you with issues that you may have in your food business. You can view a profile of the available mentors on our website at www.westmeath-enterprise.ie. If you are interested in meeting with a mentor, please contact a Business Advisor at Westmeath Local Enterprise Office.

Section 4 Directory of Westmeath Food Businesses

Section 5 Useful Information : Contacts and Websites

Environmental Health Officer, HSE (Westmeath) Tel : 044-9384890.

Westmeath County Council - Planning Permission Dept : Tel : 044-9332000

Food Safety Authority of Ireland. www.fsai.ie

Department of Agriculture : <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/>

Bord Bia : www.bordbia.ie

Teagasc : The Ashtown Food Research Centre : www.teagasc.ie/ashtown

Awards & Recognition

Having your food product recognised as a quality product in a local / national awards scheme is a great way to promote your business and assist in marketing yourself.

Local awards schemes include:

- Local Agricultural Shows
- National Agricultural Shows & Ploughing Championships
- Enterprise Awards – promoted by Westmeath Enterprise Board

National food award schemes include:

- Bord Bia Food Awards – details available at www.bordbia.ie
Closing date – Sept.
- Irish FoodWriters Guild Awards – www.foodwritersguild.com
- Blas na hEireann – Taste Awards : Group of food producers and grocers.

