

July's 'fabulous' Somerset Food Trail Festival set to become a key event in the county's annual calendar, with more food producers and retailers joining to celebrate the best of the county's produce.



The Somerset Food Trail Festival was declared a roaring success after more than 190 farmers, growers, food producers, cafés, pubs and restaurants took part in the 10-day festival from 15-24 July.

While visitor estimates are still being compiled, the Somersetfoodtrail.org website attracted 7,055 unique visitors and the online brochure was viewed more than 7,600 times, with 10,000 printed copies distributed county-wide. As awareness of the Trail's activities grew, so more producers came forward asking to be involved in future Trails, as well as potential coordinators to grow the footprint of the festival even further, bringing in areas such as Taunton.

Stewart Crocker, chair of the Somerset Food Trail organising committee, said the event had exceeded all expectations.

'We set out to showcase the range and richness of Somerset's sustainable food producers and farmers, and we were absolutely delighted by the number of venues that took part and the variety and quality of the activities and experiences offered,' he said.

'We wanted to create opportunities for people to learn more about where their food comes from, celebrate the excellent food produced here in Somerset and understand how we all can bring about a shift to nature-friendly farming through our everyday food choices.'

Many events sold out quickly, such as Wedmore-based Bioqua's farm tours – which enjoyed a visit from ITV to capture the process at work, Godminster's farm tours, near Bruton; the joint cheese, charcuterie and beer tours organised by Westcombe Dairy and Wild Beer Company in Westcombe, despite their doubling the number of spaces available due to popular demand; and On the Spoon's Somerset Feast, near Castle Cary. Whitehouse Farm Cherries' tours in Chard and Wedmore's [Somerset Sausage Company](#) sausage-making demos were also crowd-pleasers and fully-booked.

The response from visitors was overwhelmingly positive. As one visitor emailed: 'I just wanted to let you know that I have spent an absolutely fabulous day on the Food Trail round Bruton. I was very impressed with the guidebook and even more by the experience, I'll be continuing to explore!' Another tweeted that the brochure is

really an 'almanac' for Somerset local food production year round, so invaluable is it as a guide to what the county offers.

Participating venues ranged from biodynamic vineyards to community food forests, aquaponic market gardens to fermenters, foragers, distillers and smokers to goat herders, cider makers and artisan bakeries. Feedback from these enterprises, who stretched from Wedmore to Wincanton, and from Frome to Crewkerne, included Rawlins Cider in Ilminster, who said that, as a result of the Trail, "more people now know about us and where we are". The Mump Market Garden in Burrow Bridge said: "We have gained people wanting to volunteer and learn more about horticulture." Food writer William Sitwell organised a group of participants to join the trail in his hometown of Wiveliscombe. He served up lunch to 40 Food Trail guests on the first Friday of the Festival, working in tandem with his neighbour organic meat producer Westcott Organics to showcase their produce.

Take Art / Cultivate put on an incredible variety of dynamic performances and happenings, from theatre to kids workshops, all laced with edible treats. *Birthday Day*, a short play created especially for the Festival, took place on a gloriously warm afternoon, in the middle of Bower Hinton Farm's lush fields. Visitors had to sit and not eat a huge pavlova as it was passed from table to table of audience seating, as part of an almost interactive performance! Afterwards they were allowed to devour cream tea and cakes at the farm's picturesque Old Dairy Cafe & Farm Shop.

On a more serious note, a panel discussion about the benefits of regenerative farming – which lies at the heart of what the Trail is all about – was held in front of a packed audience at Aller's Seed Factory. Organised by Ebenezer Presents on 9 July to launch the Festival, *The Future of Food* featured contributions from Graham Harvey, former agricultural story editor of The Archers; agricultural vet turned nutritionist Dr Lucy Williamson; ecologist and producer of Six Inches of Soil James Murray-White; and smallholder activist with the Landworkers' Alliance, Ruth Hancock. A full day of talks at Yeovil's Ecofair and *Nifty & Thrifty*, a special session from Sustainable Wells run in tandem with the Trail on how to eat affordably and sustainably, brought focus to the Festival events.

The Festival closed on Sunday 24 July with a foot-tapping, cider-drinking knees up at the Bere Cider Company, Bere Aller, where Bill Bradshaw gave a Cider Tasting & Talk, music was provided by the Boston Tea Party and nine-piece band Tongues of Fire and poet David Reakes recited his tribute to the Food Trail in verse form.

The Trail team was very indebted to a network of around 30 volunteer coordinators who liaised with their area's participants to bring the Festival to life. We were thrilled to be approached by more volunteers who want to continue to support the Trail year-round, as well as producers and retailers wanting to become part of next year's Trail Festival. As a result, plans are already underway for next year's festival, with the aim of making it a key annual event in Somerset's calendar.

Sign up to our newsletter to find out more at Somersetfoodtrail.org.

- Website: www.somersetfoodtrail.uk
- Instagram: [@somersetfoodtrail22](https://www.instagram.com/somersetfoodtrail22)
- Facebook: [@somersetfoodtrail](https://www.facebook.com/somersetfoodtrail)