



Evaluation of year one of the Community Food Initiative Programme (2013–2015)

Community Food Initiatives (CFIs) aim to positively influence the eating habits of families in low income communities by addressing the barriers to having a healthy diet and supporting greater access to affordable and healthy food at a local level. Overall, CFIs promote good health by making it easier for people to make healthy food choices.

Ten CFIs on the island of Ireland (IOI) are currently being funded by **safefood** as part of the CFI Programme 2013–2015, which is managed by Healthy Food for All. This document summarises the key findings from the first year evaluation report.

Why a CFI programme?

The programme supports and encourages all ten community projects involved, through shared learning, training and collaboration. The programme builds upon the key learnings and experiences from the initial Demonstration Programme of CFIs 2010–2012.







Objectives of the Programme

1. Fund ten community-based food initiatives across the island of Ireland, over a three-year period (2013–2015)
2. Provide technical support, collective training and facilitate networking
3. Encourage projects to consider long term sustainability from the start of the programme
4. Promote shared learning among CFIs on the island
5. Identify policy and best practice lessons and increase awareness of the programme among key stakeholders.

Reach of the CFI Programme

In year one, the CFIs engaged with more than 12,000 persons in activities related to healthy eating, growing food and cooking skills (see table 1). Many individuals engaged in activities from time to time e.g. school or community events while a smaller number of individuals regularly took part in core activities such as gardening and cooking. Projects varied and some had an association with local schools. While participants were initially mostly female, a more mixed group developed throughout the year but there was still low participation from teenagers and the elderly. The evaluation found that there is a need for greater emphasis on participation in food skills activities such as meal planning, budgeting and shopping skills.

Table 1: Total engagement in CFI activities in year one

Number of individuals that took part in CFI Activities		
	Overall reach of all CFI activities	12,117*
	Healthy eating	3,299
	Gardening/Growing	3,273
	Cooking skills	1,515
	Planning/Budgeting/Shopping	373
	Other activity such as physical activity, food and healthy living seminars/demonstrations, community meals, open or fun days, foraging and networking	3,717

* This number refers to the number of individuals who took part in an activity organised by a CFI. 60 individuals took part in more than one activity and are, therefore, counted twice, most participants (74%) took part in only one activity during any given month.

Programme achievements

All five objectives have been successfully addressed in year one, with further development required in years two and three.

1. Ten CFI projects were established across the island of Ireland
2. Technical support and training has been provided and three all-island networking events took place
3. Long-term project sustainability is now a growing focus for CFIs
4. Shared learning and networking has developed among the projects
5. Stakeholder awareness has been encouraged through promotion, building the evidence base and networking.

Challenges for programme coordination

- Administration
- Maintaining an all-island focus of the programme
- Consistent attendance of key staff at networking events
- Sharing information outside of networking events.

Year one successes for CFIs

- Most year one project objectives have been achieved
- Community gardens were established
- Administrative structures/budgets met
- Positive engagement with and response from local community/schools
- Training courses were well attended with positive feedback from participants.

Main challenges for CFIs in year one

The top five challenges identified by the projects were:

1. Maintaining and growing participant numbers
2. Motivating volunteers (i.e. during winter), managing interpersonal relations and volunteers' expectations
3. Recognising the need for a long-term sustainability plan for the project
4. Community engagement/networking with local organisations/agencies
5. The funding process.

Key learnings for CFIs

While the learnings from year one were diverse, some key trends identified were as follows:

- Continue to network and communicate with other CFIs – to learn and share learnings with others
- Be flexible and facilitate community member's needs – no 'one size fits all' approach
- Be creative – e.g. make food fun and tasty
- Get specialist support when necessary – e.g. involving a gardener
- Actively promote the project in the local community
- Encourage community ownership – let locals shape the project
- Continue to develop skills – long term planning, time management and project prioritisation.

Looking forward – Year two and three priorities

- Prioritise healthy eating/food activities – develop meal planning, budgeting and shopping skills
- Volunteerism – continue to sustain, recruit and organise volunteers and work to achieve results
- Promote shared learning among CFI's on IOI outside of organised networking events
- Encourage long term sustainability planning – including a social enterprise approach
- Continue to identify policy and best practice lessons and increase key stakeholder awareness.



To download a copy of **safefood's** full research report '*Evaluation of the Community Food Initiative programme 2013–2015*' visit www.safefood.eu



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