

## Savour the Flavours calls on D&G to support local businesses as lockdown eases

Dumfries & Galloway's food and drink brand, Savour the Flavours, is calling on people to continue to support local businesses as lockdown eases. The call comes after Savour the Flavours launched its first industry consultation last night. Following a relaunch of the brand on Saturday, twenty three businesses met online to discuss emerging issues and challenges being faced by the industry.

Liz Ramsay of Savour the Flavours said:

“Our region's local businesses swung into action to meet the needs of our communities when lockdown hit. It was fantastic to see so many businesses going the extra mile to make sure that vulnerable people, particularly in rural areas, had deliveries of the products they needed. It must be remembered, when the big supermarkets closed their online doors to many people in this region – our local businesses stepped up and did an absolutely amazing job.

“My big concern now is how exposed these businesses are. Businesses might look busy, but I can absolutely guarantee people that no-one is ‘benefitting’ from this crisis. Many of these businesses have changed their trading models completely, which has huge financial implications. Several have needed to source new equipment or staff to manage demand, and all will have experienced cashflow challenges.

“I know for a fact that several local businesses have put people ahead of profit by running at a loss to meet the home delivery needs of people in rural areas. Because that's what we do in Dumfries & Galloway – we look out for each other.

“So we're calling on the people of Dumfries & Galloway to now look out for our local businesses by, wherever possible, buying local and supporting local.”

Ronnie Graham of Barony Country Foods in Lochmaben was one of the business owners who took part, he said:

“This first meeting was a breath of fresh air after all the stress that small business owners like myself have been under. It was great to speak to other people who are going through the same, or worse, things than our company is, and there were a lot of ideas getting shared and that was really helpful.

“Emotionally what hit me the hardest was seeing our friends and customers in the industry look crushed. I find it really upsetting to be honest. We are very, very lucky compared to most because we have been able to change our business and keep going. My heart goes out to every person running a hospitality business right now.

“When this crisis hit it was difficult to know where to turn. As a small business you put so much of yourself into what you do, and when you think you’re going to lose absolutely everything it’s a terrible time. It’s actually difficult to explain just how hard that is.

“One thing I would say to local people is, please don’t forget about us when life starts to return to normal. A comment I’ve heard a lot recently is ‘we maybe can’t travel, but by god we can eat well’. So many people didn’t realise the quality of local food that’s available to them in this region. Food production is a real strength of our local economy, and we need local people to continue to support it.”

Roan’s Dairy is another local business who has continued trading throughout the lockdown period. After the meeting, Tracey Roan commented:

“Being able to bring so many producers and local businesses together virtually was great - I think it was just what we were all needing. You can get so much from just listening to others - this new type of networking is priceless. It was great to hear how we have all adapted to the challenging times we are in and just how important it is to share experiences and information, and I've come away from the meeting with some new ideas.

“Local businesses pride themselves on what they do, and our local food and drink businesses have a passion to make Dumfries and Galloway proud of what it produces. Tonight just emphasised the need for this type of networking and Savour the Flavours is just the ticket. This is our opportunity to really shout about what we do here, many of us just don’t have the time to blow our own trumpet. But we are all in this together, so the more we can come together and do this as an industry, the better.”

The insights and business feedback shared during the meeting will now be consolidated and made available to industry partners and public agencies to help inform recovery planning.

The next industry meeting will take place on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> June at 7pm. Businesses can register to take part at [www.savourtheflavours.co.uk](http://www.savourtheflavours.co.uk).

## Snapshot of Business Impacts of Covid-19

### Ronnie Graham, Barony Country Foods

“Sometimes running a small food company is a very lonely occupation. We are faced with many tasks that would normally be left to specialist personnel or departments in a larger organisation. Some days we feel like we have been accountant, microbiologist, advertising executive, IT expert and general dog's body all in one morning. That's in addition to producing some of the finest foods produced in the country. It can be fraught and stressful but also very rewarding work.

“When faced with a crisis like the current Covid-19 pandemic this can make things even more challenging and make many small producers feel like they are near breaking point with nowhere to turn. Our own company Barony Country Foods has gone from being primarily a wholesale producer selling 90% of our produce into local hotels and restaurants to being a 100% retail supplier with all our sales coming from our shop, home deliveries or mail order. This has been an astonishing change to our customer base and has not been without its ups and downs.

“It's times like this that being able to communicate, ask questions - or simply chat about and share our own experiences - is vital. An organisation like Savour the Flavours will play an important role as a hub to bring together the food businesses of Dumfries and Galloway and share the incredible knowledge base and experience that they bring.”

### Tracey Roan, Roan's Dairy

“When the lockdown was announced our family business changed completely. We lost almost all of our trade customers overnight, and the demand for doorstep milk delivery exploded. We had been working hard for years to build up our customer numbers but when you are small family-run business, operating in a rural area like Dumfries and Galloway there are big logistical challenges in delivering to rural homes.

“Demand for our milk, cream and other local products stretched our storage facilities to capacity, but we knew that to serve our community we had to find a way to meet demand. When the supermarkets shut their doors to new online deliveries in this area, we literally worked night and day to make sure no one went without.

“Yes, this has meant fast growth, but it’s been challenging, and wondering whether all our customers will stick with us after lockdown is a worry. So being able to speak with other local producers is invaluable. Seeing how local businesses have adapted here in Dumfries & Galloway to the coronavirus is a credit to the region. The more we can share our experiences, the better we can continue providing first class customer service to the customers who have supported us through this time.”

Ends

#### **Notes for Editors**

- Savour the Flavours was an industry-led food and drink project in Dumfries & Galloway that ran between 2009-2013 to boost the regional food and drink industry.
- The brand has been relaunched as a series of online industry discussion groups to support businesses.
- It is being done on a voluntary basis by the team who previously ran the organisation - Liz Ramsay, Lorna Young and Ian and Rachel Findlay - to provide a single voice for the industry.
- The industry-only online meetings are open to any business operating in the food and drink or hospitality sector in Dumfries & Galloway.
- Industry feedback from each meeting will be uploaded to the Savour the Flavours website.