

LEOs plant seeds for new Irish food start-ups

The Digital School of Food is the latest support established for food entrepreneurs in Ireland by the Local Enterprise Offices, following on from Food Academy and Food Starter.

The number of food start-ups in Ireland is expected to increase thanks to a new online programme run by the Local Enterprise Offices.

The Digital School of Food, which was piloted in the Dublin region in conjunction with Enterprise Ireland and Bord Bia, is the first of its kind in Europe and gives food entrepreneurs expert advice and guidance, from their home, office or kitchen.

Successful pilot

The online programme is an e-learning initiative that brings producers from idea right through to start-up and grow stages and is now available nationwide to qualifying applicants.

The programme will give food entrepreneurs insight into planning a product journey and route to market, an understanding of finance and how to grow sales, along with tips to expand the business in the long-term. It includes support from experts in the field as each course has a real producer who contributes tips and advice throughout.

The programme includes contributions from trade buyers in Supervalu, Musgraves and Spar along with the likes of Domini Kemp of ITSA Food Group and food producers who have been through the system.

Commenting on the new programme, Minister for Business, Enterprise and Innovation, Heather Humphreys T.D. said; “We have a proud heritage of producing world-class food in Ireland. Now, more than ever, it is vital that we support our food firms and particularly budding entrepreneurs with ambitions to start a new business. As needs have evolved, these programmes have evolved, and the online Digital School of Food is a testament to that. Aspiring food producers can now begin their journey from their own home.

The Local Enterprise Offices continue to innovate in the way that they are delivering programmes, and this is extremely significant now. They are playing a key role in helping our small businesses in this challenging economic climate and they will be to the fore as small companies rise up in the coming weeks and months.”



Entrepreneurs who complete the Digital School of Food are then primed to move on to take part in Food Starter programme offered by the Local Enterprise Offices and subsequently Food Academy, which gives producers the opportunity to get their product on retail shelves.

Announcing the new platform, chair of the network of Local Enterprise Offices, Oisín Geoghegan, highlighted the importance of cultivating the food sector. "Irish food is renowned the world over and we enjoy an enviable reputation for high quality food production.

"It is important that we continue to cultivate new food entrepreneurs and start-ups, particularly during these challenging times. The Digital School of Food is an excellent first step for anyone with an idea to establish a food production business," he added.

By Stephen Larkin

Published: 27 April, 2020