

Stadia

incorporating **TURF**

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Malin Sparf Rydberg, Sweden Arena Management, Stockholm



CATERING

Centerplate's green pork chili, made with hormone- and antibiotic-free pork, at the 2012 Super Bowl in Indianapolis

As a rule, the venue tries to source all of its staple products from within a 15-20-mile radius. All of its bread, as an example, is made a mere 1.5 miles away from the stadium in a traditional, family owned bakery that has been in Brighton for more than 150 years. "We see our local suppliers as partners rather than as just suppliers and we communicate with them and represent them as such," Moore says.

There was also a desire on the part of Brighton's owners to create a unique, locally sourced product that was distinctive to the stadium. "We wanted to have a point of difference in terms of what we offered, which would set us apart from other stadia," Moore explains. "Our research led us to choose the Piglet's Pantry Pie," he confirms.

The popularity of this locally produced delicacy has really taken everyone by surprise. They were initially made onsite by a local pastry chef, using local pastry and local ingredients. But, as Moore explains, "the demand for the pies was so huge that the chef had to move out of the stadium and set up her own company!"

It was forecast that they would sell about 2,000 pies a match – they actually sell around 8,000. But the appeal of the local produce doesn't end with the pie. The stadium also offers two locally sourced beers – both 'real ales' – called Harveys Best and Dark Star Hophead, which are brewed in Lewes and Partridge Green near Brighton by Harveys and Dark Star respectively. "The real ale outsells the regular lager," Moore enthuses. "That's unheard of at a football stadium! We sell 7,000-8,000 pints of real ale at every game.

"At the Amex, the local products sell much better than the regular products," he notes. "Everyone here has been blown away by the sales."

A local sourcing approach to stadium catering operations certainly has benefits – sustainability credentials, positive publicity and support of local communities to name a few, but just how important is it? "Local products should not be chosen just

THE WEMBLEY WAY

Each year Wembley Stadium welcomes around 1.75 million sports fans and corporate guests, and this summer the stadium also hosted several London 2012 Olympics football matches. Wembley's high profile means guests have high expectations, so the pressure is always on for the stadium's caterer, Delaware North UK. "Our guests are becoming more and more interested in where their food comes from and how it is cooked," believes the company's Mia Manson-Bishop. "Delaware North has a commitment to sustainability and the environment, as well as offering quality products to our guests," she adds.

All fresh fish served at the stadium is responsibly sourced from a supplier that is certified through the Marine Stewardship Council (MSC) Chain of Custody Registration scheme. "We understand the importance of a great fish and chips meal for football fans, for instance, but we're not satisfied with the frozen options available, so we decided to source our own pollock," she says.

"We endeavour to procure products from sustainable farming methods and environmentally managed resources. Delaware North's hotdogs for the London 2012 Games, for example, were Lincolnshire sausages as opposed to bockwürsts – both local and in-line with LOCOG's vision for a sustainable Games.

"Using seasonal produce is also cost effective as it's in abundance for the quantities we require," Manson-Bishop adds. "Working with preferred suppliers also gives us strong buying power, which reduces the cost of produce and strengthens our relationships with producers."

because they are local," advises Robert Read of Robert Read Associates, a highly respected catering professional who has vast, practical operational experience. "The quality needs to be there, too. If it's more expensive and the quality isn't there, then the fact that it's local isn't good enough. Visitors ultimately want their food to taste good. They want it to be served quickly. And they want it at the right price," he recommends.

"Where it makes sense to source locally – either to save costs, to create some good local PR, or to improve the fan experience – then it is a good long-term strategy, but if it's not practical and not adding quality, it simply isn't worth it. First off, you've always got to consider what's best for the business."

"You're not going to put the 'alternatives' in every stand, but you want it to be an option," says Delaware North's Rich Abramson, who also points out that local produce, especially organic products, can be sold at a premium. "An organic hotdog will sell for more than a regular hotdog and, at the same time, everyone feels good about it!"

"The consumers are driving the trend," he concludes. "Fans at ballparks and stadia want to have a unique experience and we now have much evidence that they're willing to pay for it." ■