****

**Laois Food businesses to connect with specialist training and mentoring**

30 food businesses to avail of specialist training and mentoring to help develop their businesses. ***Connect 2 Laois for Food***, a collaborative project between Laois County Council, the Local Enterprise Office and Laois Partnership, is a programme of market led innovation, best practice transfer and product and service development. Importantly, it will create a synergy between the food sector and support agencies in the county that will aid their development growth and sustainability.

***Connect 2 Laois for Food*** is aimed at supporting and nurturing start-up and established businesses in the County and will allow them to have access to a programme of supports to improve their businesses. James Burke & Associates, Ireland's leading Food Consultants and Retail Advisors, have been recruited to deliver the programme which is funded under the Rural Economic Development Zone (REDZ) Initiative through the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs.

Speaking at the launch of the programme**, Cathaoirleach Mr. Padraig Fleming M.C.C** stated ‘the ***Connect 2 Laois for Food*** programme responds to the need to progress enterprises in the food sector in the County’. Mr. John Mulholland, Chief Executive of Laois County Council noted that ‘while many of the targeted businesses have ideas for future development, there is a clear need to facilitate innovation and product development, new skills development and competitive positioning allowing them to scale up and create further employment opportunities’.

Anne Goodwin, Laois Partnership added that ‘in creating an awareness of best practice activities and enabling participants to see their enterprises in new ways, it is envisaged that these 30 enterprises will become more progressive in their development’. Head of Enterprise with the Local Enterprise Office, Evelyn Reddin noted that ‘this multi facet programme involving specialist training and mentoring support from James Burke & Associates, accessing best practice and building new contacts, networks, businesses, entrepreneurs will help to strongly position the Laois food sector on a national and international scale’.

An information session will be held on *Wednesday 9th August at 3:30pm* in the Midlands Park Hotel Portlaoise with the programme commencing in September. Anyone interested in participating in the programme should contact Liz Kennedy, Project Co-ordinator at any of the following:

Liz Kennedy

***Connect 2 Laois for Food,*** REDZ Project Co-ordinator, Laois County Council

Email: [lkennedy@laoiscoco.ie](mailto:lkennedy@laoiscoco.ie); Phone 086 174 6370

ENDS