Local Food Plan

Local Food Growth Plan

A collaborative plan for action

April 2025

Contents

Executive summary and next steps

Evidence and experience shows us that local food systems can deliver a number of vital benefits. These range from strengthening local economies, increasing farm profitability and encouraging the uptake of nature-friendly farming to creating better jobs in the supply chain, connecting producers with communities and enabling a more accessible and reliable supply of healthy and affordable food.

To enable resilient local food systems to thrive, concerted effort is needed to secure investment in infrastructure and boost citizen support and demand. The **Local Food Growth Plan** (LFGP) is the culmination of a two year partnership project looking at how to grow the local food sector across the UK. It draws on insights gained from the needs and experiences of thousands of farmers, growers and local food businesses that we work with or represent.

The partnership consists of the Landworkers' Alliance (LWA), Sustain, Sustainable Food Trust (SFT), Pasture for Life (PfL) and the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC). The project was funded by the Rothschild Foundation.

This report builds a compelling case and impetus for growth, addresses the challenges identified in the **Snapshot Review** and recommends actions at local, regional and national levels to solve them.

We consulted actors from across the supply chain, but the project and recommendations look primarily at the food system beyond the farm gate. We chose to focus on this part of the system to address a gap in knowledge and to complement the existing efforts of the partner organisations who are actively working to increase the number of agroecological producers and land under agroecological management. This report seeks to create the best possible conditions for those producers to thrive.

What needs to happen: the findings

In order to successfully grow the local food sector, the LFGP sets out a plan of action which requires engagement from a broad range of people and organisations. Developed through our research and consultation process, this report contains chapters with detailed recommendations on the policies, investment and practical action needed across five areas:

1. **Policy**
2. **Infrastructure**

3. **Marketing and public-facing campaigning**
4. **Sector operations, efficiency and skills**
5. **Sector collaboration and coordination**

Public procurement is an important cross-cutting theme and is interwoven throughout multiple sections of the report.

The LFGP features a distillation of our findings and recommendations for action. Many of the actions in this report build on excellent work already happening across the UK, some of which is featured as case studies throughout the report. Summary tables of strategic goals and actions to achieve them are included in **Appendix D**, identifying just some of the organisations with roles to play, timescales and resourcing considerations.

Drawing on research and extensive discussions, we also developed a simple definition of 'local food': food that is produced, processed, sold and eaten within the same region or local administrative area through transparent, SME-focused supply chains.[1] The rationale and full definition is included in **Appendix B**.

Seven key priorities

The LFGP is a rich source of ideas and recommendations. We recognise there is a lot to do to achieve growth in the local food sector, requiring a shift in mindset and priorities for many people and organisations who are in a position to make a difference. Action is needed at all levels, from government, funders and businesses, to farmers, consumers and civil society.

We would like the UK government to declare growth in the local food sector as a strategic priority, and set the vision, strategy and expectations for various players to take necessary action. This would complement the Government's local growth and devolved powers agenda and could ensure the delivery of collective goals in the national interest. Simultaneously, we want local and regional players to follow the pioneering work of those already developing effective approaches and innovations.

We have identified seven key priorities for action that are crucial to achieving our shared vision, focusing on areas where clear and timely opportunities for progress already exist. Action will inevitably reach beyond these areas, but we hope they will act as rallying points, enabling key players to come together to collaborate and build momentum.

1. **Establish regional local food growth plans:** making the most of regional connections, priorities and relationships with farmers, underpinned by support for Farm Clusters or similar groups, as well as

coordinated food distribution and trading, to make the most of local purchasing, processing, distribution and marketing opportunities.

2. **Enable and invest in policies to support infrastructure:** supporting markets and retail spaces and increasing access to regional processing facilities and mid-scale infrastructure (such as grain and pulse processing equipment and local abattoirs). This enables efficient local food supply chains that prioritise community wealth, reach diverse communities and return value locally to SMEs and farmers through sales of fresh, healthy and affordable food.

3. **Prioritise support for horticulture in a national strategy:** increasing the supply, processing and distribution of fruit, vegetables, pulses and legumes, in order to improve both national and household food security, through healthy, affordable and climate-friendly food.

4. **Create a roadmap for meeting the commitment to public sector food procurement standards:** ensuring the use of transparent reporting and monitoring systems that require and enable a greater use of food from local farmers and SMEs, that return enhanced environmental and social value.

5. **Enable decisive action to make food supply chains fairer for farmers:** expanding and reinforcing the powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator, Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator and Food Crime Unit.

6. **Recognise the vital role of local action and networks:** supporting food partnerships, food strategies and action plans in every area, ensuring they grow routes to market and demand for local food through enabling collaboration between local farms, supply chains and citizens.

7. **Promote influential marketing, targeted business and training support to help the local food sector thrive:** recognising that simply appealing to consumers to buy more local food is not enough in isolation without systemic action to improve trading conditions, and access to infrastructure, supply chains and skilled workers.

Our shared priorities, and the detailed policy recommendations set out in this report, must be properly reflected and prioritised in key policy developments such as the **National Food Strategy**, the **25 Year Farming Roadmap**, the government's **Devolution Priority Programme** and in the research agenda for the UK's **academic research funding councils**.

Phase 1: **Local food snapshot**

Starter list of barriers and solutions

Strategic solution selection

we are here

Establishing a long list of the biggest barriers and most needed solutions from those working on the front line of local food.

Selecting the most critical solutions to take forward into development in the Phase 2.

→

Phase 2: **Solutions design**

Building out the key solutions

Focusing down the solutions

Building the specifics of those solutions with experts and examples from the UK and beyond.

Narrowing down the list of solutions into three categories: most impactful, strategically sound and practical.

→

Phase 3: **Action planning**

Action Plan

Bringing the solutions together in an Action Plan and Collaborative framework.

Conclusion and a call to action

This report highlights the need for a shift from competition to cooperation, towards food supply systems that prioritise access to high-quality food, fair livelihoods and environmental sustainability.

In line with the **sobering findings** of the National Preparedness Commission, we believe this work has a vital part to play in enabling the UK to achieve greater food security and ensuring our food system is inherently resilient. Our current food system is characterised by over-centralisation, economic power imbalances, low farm profitability, lack of diversity in supply chains and environmental harm caused by extractive buyer and production practices. The effects of climate change and global political instability further threaten our food system. The need for this work is increasingly crucial to ensure we are all better prepared to address these complex challenges.

We urge the UK government, local authorities, business support agencies, research bodies, funders and civil society to prioritise the revitalisation of resilient local food systems. Working together, we must take action to enable more food to be produced, processed, sold and eaten within the same regions and administrative areas through transparent, SME-focused supply chains.

What next?

Implementing the plan is the next phase of this work and has already begun. Using the Local Food Working Party and other convening spaces, lead partners will continue to gather people and organisations, so that we can build on opportunities and collectively overcome the challenges to growing the local food sector in the UK.

Contact **localfood@sustainweb.org** for more information.

Introduction

Background: the current state of local food

The New Economics Foundation report indicated that every £10 spent in a local food outlet generates approximately £25 in local economic activity, compared to just £2.40 from supermarkets.

Local food enterprises act as keystones for other local businesses: they foster interconnected growth and have been shown to contribute more to the local economy than supermarkets.[2] By reducing reliance on long, fragile supply chains, they strengthen community resilience and can help mitigate food poverty risks.[3]

While local food systems can provide healthy and sustainable food, growth of the sector is constrained by the market dominance of supermarkets and their artificially low prices. While affordability and accessibility remain crucial, the current UK food system is defined by deepening food insecurity, poor health and environmental decline - failures driven by a market prioritising corporate profit over public good.[4,5] Just eight companies control 80% of the UK's food supply[6], forcing farmers to compete with global prices and adopt intensive, unsustainable practices.[7]

The concentration of our food supply into a few supermarkets widens an already deep-rooted imbalance of wealth and power, and reduces opportunities to build resilience into our food supply.[8] Supermarkets' globalised supply systems lack resilience to external shocks that could increase the cost of production, such as climate change-induced crop failures, border issues or disruption to supply from conflict and war. As a result, the already strained supply chain is at risk of disruption, while consumers face price increases and unaffordability.[9] Building food systems that focus on collaboration instead of competition creates opportunities for food SMES diversify the UK food system and increase their market share, enabling a vital alternative for making fresh, nutritious food accessible to all.

In 2024, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, Steve Reed, detailed the Government's plans to create a new food strategy and build 'a food system that benefits everyone.' Defra is leading on the strategy development and promising a 'whole of government' approach.[10] This is an opportunity for recognition of food as a cross-cutting issue, which the local food sector has long advocated for. Additionally, the Labour manifesto made commitments to increasing the amount of local food in procurement, as well as strengthening the cooperative economy - just two of many areas that this Plan can help deliver on.

A shift toward a more resilient food system is critical. Prof. Tim Lang's recent report, '**Just in Case - 7 steps to narrow the UK civil food resilience gap**'[11] emphasises that "resilience is not a 'bolt-on' factor"; it must be built into the food system itself. His recommendations—including strengthening local and regional food production, ensuring fair access to food, and moving away from fragile 'just-in-time' supply chains—align directly with the role that local food enterprises, food growers and regional food networks can play in securing the UK's food future.

The current political context and emerging research provide both an opportunity and a clear mandate to transform our food system to be better equipped against current and future challenges, with the local food sector playing a central role in improving livelihoods, creating access to nutritious food, while strengthening community and ecological resilience.

Context and rationale - why a Local Food Growth Plan?

Around the UK, local food systems are helping to create thriving communities by strengthening local economies and expanding access to fresher, environmentally-friendly food. Growing these systems through increasing supply and demand can tackle major environmental, social and economic challenges. Over the past two years, we've worked with a range of stakeholders across the UK to co-create a plan to grow the local food sector that unifies our efforts, builds efficiency and makes a stronger national and regional case for investment.

Phase 1 began in 2022, resulting in the publishing of the **Sector Snapshot Review** in May 2024. This report provided the sector's collective vision for local food systems, the barriers preventing its growth and the solutions to help the sector thrive. During Phase 2, we further consulted sector experts to unpack and expand the suggested actions and recommendations. During this project, the work has been steered by the Local Food Working Party (LFWP), made up of representatives of a wide range of organisations delivering policy or practical work in the sector. LFWP members will also help to implement the plan.

Findings have been consolidated in this solutions-focused action plan, laying out the steps that need to be taken and by whom. The plan makes the case for local food as a generator of public goods; it can be used by stakeholders across the food sector, as well as investors, researchers and local and national governments.

Scope, vision and definitions

One of the challenges to growing local food systems is that they're so diverse. It's vital we define them in a way that leaves space for this diversity, while being clear about the type of systems we'd like to see. With that in mind, we reviewed the definitions of 'local food' currently in use, helping to guide our exploration of what matters to the local food sector, how we can monitor change and, most importantly, where we want to get to. This culminated in the 'Review of Local Food Definitions' report,[12] carried out by the Sustainable Food Trust. The report looked at over 80 definitions of 'local food' and underpins the Local Food Plan's definition. Through this process, we arrived at the following simple definition:

"Local Food is food that is produced, processed, sold and eaten within the same region or local administrative area through transparent, SME-focused supply chains."

The review also found that scale and localness tend to correlate. Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are more likely to be rooted in specific geographic locations, while big multinationals are not. Therefore supporting small-scale producers and food businesses naturally fosters thriving local food systems.

Building on this simple definition, we considered the key features of fully functioning local food systems. In doing so, we chose to use the term 'Effective Local Food Systems' (ELFS), meaning local food systems functioning at their very best. This is our collective vision [see **Appendix B** for full definition].

ELFS prioritise the social connections between food producers and eaters within a geographical area (where food is grown, produced and sold within the same region or a relative proximity), and go beyond a basic, purely spatial concept of food miles. As discussed earlier, these systems often centre around SMEs, and emphasise transparent and fairer supply chains for farmers and eaters. They also promote the production of both healthy and sustainable food, contribute to local economies and are accessible to everyone.

ELFS play a vital role in enhancing resilience and improving quality of life. They contribute to the following benefits:

- Fairness for producers - enabling sustainable livelihoods by creating fairer returns for farmers, processors, distributors and their employees
- Improved food security - creating closer connections across supply chain actors and their participation in food supply systems, enhancing food supply resilience by reducing dependence on long, global supply chains

- Community wealth-building - circulating money within the local economy through supporting SMEs, cooperatives or social enterprises, as well as fostering job opportunities with better working conditions
- Traceable identity - enabling a more transparent supply system encouraging higher ethical production standards and animal welfare
- Improved quality, variety and taste of food
- Better for health - higher nutrient density due to produce being fresher and minimally processed
- Stable climate and nature - reducing the carbon footprint associated with long distance food transportation
- Sustainable farming practices - higher returns for farmers, enabling more investment in protection and restoration of nature
- Community connection - enabling everyone to have access to safe, healthy and affordable food, regardless of where they live

How this report is structured

A glossary of key terms and a key for all abbreviations is included in **Appendix A**.

The key focus for the Phase 2 workshops was to develop the solutions identified in Phase 1 into tangible actions that can be taken forward after the publication of this report. From these workshops, 5 key action areas emerged:

1. **Policy**
2. **Infrastructure**
3. **Marketing and public-facing campaigning**
4. **Operations, efficiency and skills**
5. **Sector collaboration and coordination**

Many of our interviewees identified public procurement as crucial for growing the local food sector. The UK public sector spends approximately £5 billion annually on food procurement across public services including schools, hospitals and prisons. Improving access to procurement contracts for local food systems could significantly benefit public health, the environment, educational outcomes and local economies. However, procurement is a complex system that requires policy support, investment and collaboration across multiple areas, including infrastructure and supply chains. Given the cross-cutting nature of public procurement, we have chosen to integrate relevant actions throughout this report rather than dedicating a separate procurement section.

The research and consultation process revealed interrelationships across the thematic areas, resulting in some overlap of actions. This is indicative of the incredible and diverse ecology of the local food movement, and evidences the need for a holistic approach to overcome challenges and grow the local food sector. This action plan draws attention to the sector to attract investment by building on the amazing work already happening at local and regional levels, driven by local people, communities and organisations. Collaboration is key. We hope this report allows you to identify action areas that already align with your work and to explore other areas you can engage in.

The Will Quince review (2023)[13] highlighted both the challenges and opportunities in reforming procurement, while the 2024 General Election saw cross-party pledges[14] to increase local and sustainable food in public spending. The Procurement Act 2023[15], coming into force in February 2025, introduces greater flexibility, transparency and support for SMEs, while the Crown Commercial Service's Buying Better Food and Drink Agreement[16] aims to facilitate dynamic procurement. The Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act[17] aims to improve public service delivery and wellbeing in Wales. All local authorities in Scotland must now develop a Good Food Nation Plan that demonstrates how they will achieve the aims set out in the Good Food Nation Act 2022.[18]

Methodology

A key platform for shaping and consulting on the Local Food Growth Plan is the Local Food Working Party (LFWP). This group is convened by Sustain and includes Sustain alliance member NGOs and others, as well as supply chain practitioners and researchers. LFWP met quarterly online and contributed to the development of the plan from inception to publication.

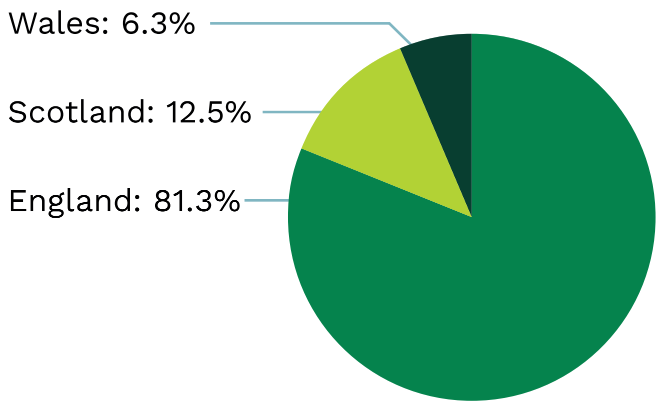
In Autumn 2024, project partners ran a total of 9 workshops, with **Sustain** leading on Retail sessions and **Landworkers' Alliance** and partners leading on Infrastructure and Procurement. The total number of participants across the workshops was 156. The full methodology and data is viewable in **Appendix C**.

Retail sector workshops were run with a mix of retail practitioners, NGOs and Sustainable Food Places coordinators. Total number of workshop attendees: 108.

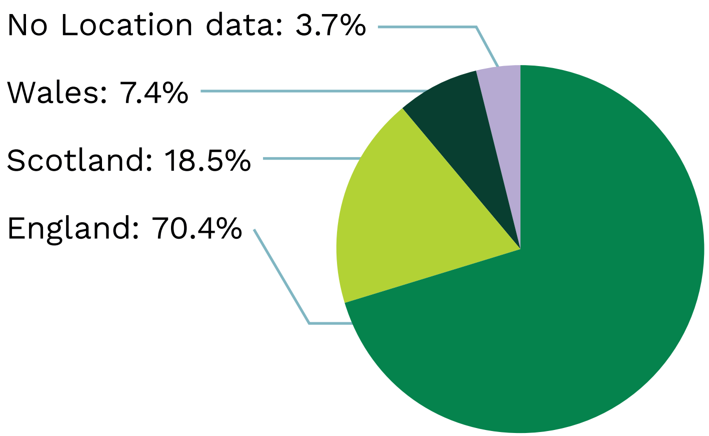
Infrastructure and Procurement workshops predominantly included producers from three sectors: livestock (meat and dairy), horticulture and arable. Sign ups were considerably higher than attendance numbers, indicating how interested and yet time poor producers tend to be. The workshop on the role of food hubs in procurement was the best attended and was mainly made up of sector professionals on paid time. In addition, the project team held 12 one to one conversations with procurement professionals from England, Scotland and Wales. Total number of workshop attendees: 48.

Workshop attendees were mainly from England, with some from Scotland and Wales. We had no attendees from Northern Ireland. We ensured a spread in invitations across the four devolved nations, but we had no control in who attended. This may have also been affected by organisational location. As such, we asked our devolved nation partners **Food Sense Wales**, **Nourish Scotland** and **Nourish Northern Ireland** to review the report and its applicability in their particular context.

Sustain workshop nations breakdown:



LWA & partners workshop nations breakdown:



Dozens of actions emerged from the workshops. We grouped and prioritised actions according to their impact and ease of implementation, with low impact actions deprioritised unless they were easy to implement or in the process of being implemented. From the selection process we developed the 5 strategic action areas, with Procurement as a crosscutting theme. We then worked with the Local Food Working Party to review and sense check the actions.

Huxhams Cross Market
Credit: Black Bark Films

Market Share

Why is market share of local food important?

The Local Food Growth Plan aims to grow and strengthen the local food sector, with metrics such as the market share of local food being traded in the UK being key to measuring the state of the sector.

Setting a target for growth based on market share presents a strategic opportunity to unify diverse stakeholders across the local food sector and attract targeted investment. The project team initially proposed an ambitious growth target of 10% market share, but further exploration revealed the complexity of measurement challenges.

One significant challenge is defining what constitutes 'local food' market share. While demand for locally-sourced products is growing, current data shows that independent and alternative retail outlets (the primary channels for local food) account for approximately 3% of the UK grocery market. This measurement is further complicated as:

- Grocery market data includes non-food items, potentially understating food-specific market share
- Not all food sold through independent outlets necessarily meets the definition of 'local' used in this report
- Some local food is sold through mainstream supermarkets but is not separately tracked.

The local food sector needs simple, replicable measurement approaches. Work will continue to develop appropriate metrics while also utilising complementary indicators that collectively demonstrate sector growth and impact.

This section of the report, therefore, looks at the sector to understand market share and the concept of growth of local food sold through inherently local retail (defined as outlets designed to support local supply chains, such as farm shops, farmers' markets, box schemes and other independent retailers).

a) Current market share estimates

According to **Kantar data (2024)**,[19] independent and other retail outlets account for 3.3% of the total UK grocery market. This figure includes non-food items, petrol and drinks, suggesting the share of food alone could be higher. These outlets are the primary channels for local food, given their focus on supporting shorter supply chains and local producers.

Currently there is a lack of recent data to identify local food sales in independent and other outlets, but research in 2012 by CPRE found local food accounted for between 40% and 70% of stock in traditional shops, averaging 55%.[20] Applying this average to the 3.3% overall market share of independent retail, it could be estimated that approximately 1.8% of the total grocery market is made up of locally sourced food sold through local retail outlets. As this is based on older data, further research is needed in order to create a baseline for growth.

b) Indicators of growth: key categories of local retail

Another measure of the growth of the sector is the scale of inherently local retail. The number of these outlets and the collective sales through these, have potential to measure the growth of the sector, but a robust flow of data would need to be established and tracked.

Farm shops and farmers' markets

A 2021 study by Harper Adams University, funded by the Farm Retail Association, identified 1,581 farm shops/retailers in the UK, collectively generating £1.4 billion in sales and employing 25,000 people.[21] In the study, farm shops reported strong growth prospects, with 64% anticipating increased sales in 2022. Notably, a third of farm shops have opened in the last decade, signalling robust sectoral growth and an essential avenue for consumers to access local food. In addition, there are over 1,070 markets held annually across the UK, according to the Farm Retail Association.[22]

Box schemes

Box schemes have long been part of the fabric of farmer-focused supply chains. According to research by the Food Foundation, Better Food Traders and the CSA Network, there were an estimated 500 box schemes across the UK prior to Covid-19.[23] Box schemes saw significant growth in 2020, but they have struggled to maintain these post-pandemic, due to cost of living increases affecting people's food purchasing patterns.

One of the largest is employee-owned **Riverford Organic Farmers**, generating a significant supply and identifying a large market for local food with 2024 sales reaching £110 million and 200,000 households.[24] Again, while growth has slowed post-pandemic, these schemes remain a vital part of the local food ecosystem and show the potential of the sector.

Local shops/independent retail

The lack of an umbrella body for this part of the sector presents challenges in estimating share and growth. Recent bodies such as Better Food Traders provide future opportunities.

Looking further afield, data from Statistica suggests there has been variation in turnover for their definition of local shops in the UK, peaking at approximately £3.07 billion in 2020, declining to £2.6 billion in 2024 but staying above pre-pandemic levels.[25] They also cite potential for growth in line with the growth in proportion of domestically produced food consumed in the UK.

Network bodies

Another useful indicator of growth could be to explore further the industry networks that exist for inherently local retail. This includes established networks like Farm Retail Association, with a membership of 284,[26] and more recently established Better Food Traders with a growing membership of over 200. Identifying growth of these networks could also indicate both strengthening and growth of the local food sector.

Challenges in measuring market share

While Kantar data and studies such as CPRE's provide a basis for estimating the local food market share, several challenges persist:

- **Aging/non-replicable data:** The 2012 CPRE study provides a good reference point, but market dynamics have likely shifted over the past decade. Replicating this study could provide a more accurate view of the sector, but will necessitate investment in research.
- **Scope of data:** Kantar's data includes non-food products irrelevant to local food systems, requiring careful interpretation. Measurements could focus on types of outlets, rather than food supply chains. This again would include some 'non-local' items sold by these outlets, but could still provide a useful indicator.
- **Regional variation:** The market share and availability of local food varies significantly across regions, influenced by factors such as the presence of traditional shops and the strength of local producer networks. For example, CPRE focused on England and therefore is not representative of the UK.

Implications and opportunities

Scaling local retail: The findings of this work highlight the importance of strengthening local (food) retail and the infrastructure that supports it, including farmers' markets, farm shops and business to business food hubs, in order to grow the sector and increase access to local food. A more targeted approach to the different areas of the retail sector could be worth exploring.

Improved data collection: Regular studies on the market share and economic impact of local food are essential. A replication of the CPRE study (and expansion to cover UK devolved nations) and collaboration with Kantar to isolate food-specific data would provide a clearer picture of the sector's performance.

Outcome measures: Other ways of monitoring the growth of local food systems were set out in the Review of Local Food Definitions.[27] These include monitoring of progress towards desired outcomes (e.g. proportion of farmers/growers making a decent living through food production, trends in diet and diet-related illness, average distance food products travel from field to fork), and changes in the negative and positive impacts of food production and supply on biodiversity and greenhouse gas emissions. All of these present their own challenges in terms of data collection and continuity.

Box delivery
Credit: Galloway Food Hub

Welsh Veg in Schools, Ceredigion
Credit: Food Sense Wales

Actions for growth

1. Policy
2. Infrastructure
3. Marketing and public-facing campaigning
4. Sector operations, efficiency and skills
5. Sector collaboration and coordination

1. Policy

Throughout our consultations, there were frequent calls for governmental policy changes to facilitate and overcome barriers to the growth of the local food sector. Specifically people identified the need to improve national coordination and joined-up working across departments, as well as provide more investment and capacity. **Food Matters: Wales**, a mapping of food policy carried out by the Welsh Government, provides an example of how this can be actioned. Several workshops identified local government intervention to be as impactful, by embedding support for local food across council strategies, and joining together initiatives to deliver co-benefits such as climate resilience or employment, skill and growth targets. There was consensus that third sector organisations should play a supporting role in facilitating these efforts.

Key recommendations identified cover a range of policies at different levels, from establishing a national Horticultural Strategy to local planning policies. Each recommendation enacted alone has the power to facilitate the growth of the UK's local food economies, but collectively can have a transformative effect by ensuring a more environmentally sustainable and healthy future for local communities, while delivering on the Government's growth agenda by supporting SMEs to thrive.

There is a central role for civil society organisations and sector bodies in ensuring the outlined strategic goals and actions are prioritised in political agendas, particularly among Government departments. Organisations and civil society coalitions are named where appropriate.

1a) Local and regional combined authorities

A thriving local economy relies on SMEs, and this is especially so in the case of food. Local food businesses create employment opportunities and ensure money circulates locally. **New Economics Foundation estimates**[28] that every £10 spent in a local food business generates almost £25 in the local economy, which was further reinforced through their research into Growing Communities social enterprise, which showed a £3.70 return for each £1 spent. An effective local food sector built on successful SMEs also has the ability to improve food and nutritional security for those on lower incomes, supporting equity, inclusion and sustainability, as demonstrated by initiatives such as Rose Vouchers, which are traded at and support local street markets.

Improving health outcomes for all citizens at a local level will reduce the burden on health and social services and increase the productivity of the wider economy. Research from the University of Gloucestershire revealed that for every £1 invested in local food, between £6 and £8 are returned to society.[29]

In 2024, the Government published a **Devolution White Paper**[30] demonstrating its commitment to relocalise decision-making over the coming years and allow local areas to make the right choices for themselves, standardising devolution deals already in place in devolved nations, London and other combined authorities. It is critical that growing the local food sector is strategised and coordinated at a level aligned with decision-making powers and access to Government funding for economic investment.

1b) Policy detail: Local and Regional Combined Authorities

i) Commission and develop region-level 'local food growth plans' to pinpoint opportunities to grow the sector

Developing local food growth plans at a regional level can better reflect supply chain relationships and enable co-development with SME farmers, retailers and other supply chain actors. These plans can facilitate growth by identifying opportunities to overcome blockages and enable upscaling, diversify supply chains and grow demand. Plans should be developed in collaboration with cross-sector food partnerships and other stakeholder networks to ensure that they are shaped by the communities they intend to benefit, meet local needs, and be applied to appropriate geographies e.g. bioregions. Key actions include:

- Civil society to engage with local and regional authority officers and leadership to pilot and support implementation of local food growth plans in different geographies, testing application of actions, enabling supply chain innovation and sharing learnings nationally to accelerate effective replication in other regions and nations.
- Local and regional combined authorities to identify funding streams to resource plan development and implementation, via existing government funding streams and private sector partnerships.
- Local and regional combined authorities to work in partnership with the Sustainable Food Places Programme to form and strengthen Food Partnerships and enable links with local farming groups, e.g. Farming Clusters, to identify opportunities for local food growth.

ii) Leverage under-utilised public and private spaces to create new opportunities for growing the local food sector

One of the challenges faced by SMEs and those entering the sector is limited access to appropriate space - whether retail space, warehouse and logistics space, or land. There is potential for local authorities to leverage under-utilised and vacant spaces (both within their estate and privately owned) to increase availability. In Wales, public bodies could incorporate this work into **the food section of their Wellbeing Plans**. Key actions include:

- Local authority officers in collaboration with growers and community groups to identify and map underutilised public land suitable for food production and vacant retail spaces to allow independent SMEs to create new or grow existing businesses.
- Local authorities to integrate these spaces into **Spatial Development Strategies**[31] and allocate resources and funding for food hubs, warehouses, processors, abattoirs and distribution centres to support local producers and supply chains.
- Local authorities to include allocation for community food space in residential or regeneration development, for example space for small-scale food production, processing or retail (see section iii).

iii) Utilise funding opportunities available to local government and other partners to increase resources available to the local food sector

Growing the local food sector requires investment in skills, infrastructure and supply chain diversification and scaling. Local and strategic authorities and supply chain partners need to strengthen the evidence base for the economic, public health and community benefits of local food and its associated infrastructure, and harness the co-benefits of local food in economic growth, regeneration and sustainable development objectives. Key actions include:

- Local authorities and supply chain partners to evaluate and build academic evidence base on how local food can improve public health, economic and other outcomes.
- Local authorities and civil society groups to utilise **Community Right to Bid**[32] (and the forthcoming **Community Right to Buy**) as well as **Community Asset Transfer**[33] to protect and take ownership of physical community assets that benefit local food systems and are at risk, such as small-scale abattoirs and community venues hosting commercial food activities.
- Local authorities to utilise the **Community Infrastructure Levy**[34] to respond to local food infrastructure needs as defined by the community, such as a local food distribution hub, and direct **Section 106**[35] funding for new community and social

infrastructure needs as a result of new development to ensure entry points for local food.

- Local and strategic regional authorities to utilise **Shared Prosperity Fund**[36] (and successive funding opportunities) to expand opportunities for local food to deliver regional growth.

- Local and strategic regional authorities to explore how funding such as **Public Health Funds**, **Integrated Care Board**[37] funding, and **Shaping Places for Healthier Lives**[38] funding aimed at reducing health inequalities can support local food access for low-income communities.

- Strategic regional authorities to engage with government investment funds (such as Shared Prosperity Fund) to facilitate local food infrastructure investment as indicated in this Plan.

iv) Utilise the power of public procurement to grow the local food sector and economy

Procurement has long been an opportunity to drive change in the food system and utilise the spending power of councils. In Wales, **the Social Partnership and Public Procurement Act** provides a framework to enhance the wellbeing of the people of Wales through a variety of measures including public procurement. Ahead of action by Westminster, councils have the opportunity to be trailblazers and use the current flexibility to make an immediate difference.

Key actions include:

- Local authorities to adopt a target of 50% local and sustainable food, in line with the Government's manifesto commitment, and incorporate a weighting matrix for local SMEs into tenders for new (and where appropriate existing) contracts to ensure delivery of local benefits with additional scoring for social, environmental and health outcomes.

- Local authorities to reform procurement processes to remove barriers to entry for smaller enterprises by breaking down contracts into smaller parts to enable small producers to bid, and create flexible payment schedules to help SMEs overcome cash flow challenges, allowing SMEs to compete with larger scale national suppliers.

- Local authorities and civil society partners to provide additional support and guide local wholesalers and SMEs that are new to the process to navigate the tender and bidding procedures.

v) Utilise existing planning frameworks to enable a thriving sustainable local food sector including clearer acknowledgment of the social and environmental impact of applications

Current national planning policy in each UK country provides an opportunity to support local food through stipulating the need to create places that are healthy and contribute to tackling climate change. A localised food system can deliver those aims. Local authorities should utilise the current flexibility within existing provisions to support the growth of local food. Key actions include:

- Set out an overall aim within planning policy to support a localised and sustainable food system, and a radical reduction in emissions from food and farming.
- Require all intensive livestock unit applications to detail their greenhouse gas emissions, and that applications may be refused where the catchment is already polluted.
- Local and National Park authorities to support the sustainable diversification of farm activities in planning decisions for agricultural developments, encouraging small-scale farming enterprises and production of climate-friendly food.
- Local and National Park authorities to facilitate infrastructure necessary for diverse farming enterprises such as abattoirs, processing facilities, distribution centres and markets.
- Local authorities to require all major new residential developments to include private space for food storage, cooking and dining, and space for community and enterprising food activity such as food growing space, community kitchens and retail.

vi) Work with local Food Partnerships to enable the development of stronger policies and practices, driven through cross-sectoral collaboration to stimulate both local food supply and demand

Collaboration and sharing of assets enables food SMEs to get better support from existing resources and increases their economic viability and sustainability. Partnership working ensures good policy and practice, increases community ‘buy-in’ and creates connections across the local food system. Local and regional authorities should recognise and tap into this powerful social infrastructure, often delivered through local food partnerships. Key actions include:

- Local authorities to work with Food Partnerships to explore funding and partnership-led initiatives (e.g. investment in aggregation and logistics to streamline supply chains) reducing costs, improving efficiency and access to local food, while also boosting food resilience and security.
- Local authorities and food partnerships to increase collaboration between local farms, supply chains and citizens to grow routes to market and demand for local food e.g. cooperative, collaborative and solidarity economy systems that allow producers and retailers to pool resources and build financial resilience, maximising community benefit and building community wealth.

- Local authorities to maximise opportunities for stakeholder input into public sector procurement, particularly ahead of contract renewal, bringing in cross-sectoral and community priorities to help shape the tendering process.

1c) UK National Government

A national, integrated approach is central to delivering thriving local food economies. The UK Central Government needs to set the vision and strategy to develop and invest in a thriving local food economy and ensure that resources are adequate to meet that ambition. Defra, Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) and Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) have particular roles to play, while engagement is also necessary from other relevant departments, such as the Department for Business and Trade (DBT). The upcoming Food Strategy should be the foundation for the Government's Food Bill and use legislation to enshrine local food recommendations into law.

1d) Policy detail: UK Government

i) Establish a mandate and funding for a Food Partnership in every place (Sustainable Food Places)

Delivering a relocalised food economy needs planning, resource and supply chain collaboration. A mandate for every local authority in England, NI and Scotland to establish a Food Partnership will help deliver this. This should build on the approach taken in Wales, ensuring sufficient local budgets and resources for partnerships to deliver effectively. Key actions include:

- Defra and MHCLG to dedicate funding to support food partnership coordination, food strategy development and implementation.
- Defra to create a remit for Sustainable Food Places to foster collaboration between and within local government, businesses, communities and other stakeholders, and build resilience in supply chains.
- Identify opportunities within devolution to provide powers and duties to regional Mayors to build with and work with food partnerships.

ii) Create a national plan for long-term food resilience in the UK, recognising the value of short and diversified local food supply chains in supporting communities to withstand and adapt to food system shocks

Building on the publication of the National Preparedness Commission's report '**Just in Case: 7 steps to narrow the UK civil food resilience gap**'[39] (authored by Prof Tim Lang), greater focus on food resilience is needed to ensure we are prepared for acute and chronic shocks. This work needs to be led nationally by Defra and the devolved nation governments in conjunction with other departments such as DHSC, Home Office and MHCLG to ensure a coherent approach, alongside engaging local leaders. Key actions include:

- Invest in resilience through a national preparedness strategy that recognises the need for a diverse food supply within the UK and the role of localised food systems. In England, this would be through a national roll out of the **Food Security Planning Practice Guidance.**[40] Devolved nations should develop their own food security planning guidance.
- Mandate statutory authorities, mayors and local authorities to develop local food resilience plans that strengthen the local food sector as part of a joined up national approach to food resilience planning.
- Establish national targets for local food infrastructure, formally recognising their essential nature, e.g. covered and/or farmers markets, small abattoirs.
- Build effective national digital infrastructure to support local supply chains and SMEs with a focus on improving local food economies, utilising digital tools such as AI.

iii) Expand powers of the Groceries Code Adjudicator and the National Food Crime Unit to regulate unethical practices and improve fairness

One of the primary hindrances to small local producers' ability to grow and succeed is the power of the supermarkets to set terms. They often engage in practices that create challenging, if not impossible, conditions for new businesses to break through. The **Groceries Code Adjudicator** was established to help ensure fairness and transparency within the supply chain. The GCA powers need to be expanded to properly deliver against their objectives. The new **National Food Crime Unit** needs to be strengthened if it is to have a meaningful impact. Key actions include:

- Give NFCU sufficient powers to fully investigate food crime, including the ability to search people, vehicles and premises, and question suspects.
- Give the GCA the resources necessary to fully achieve its objective to improve fairness within the food supply chain, specifically ensuring fair negotiations of cost price changes and preventing retailers from imposing undue requirements on suppliers.

Sustain proposal for buying standards definition

'Locally produced' should be defined as meeting the criteria of being both 1) 'produced in the UK' and 2) sourced from an SME (small or medium enterprise) or bought through direct-to-farmer supply chains (e.g. dynamic procurement).

'Certified to higher environmental standards' should cover: 1) Organic or Soil Association-certified food, or 2) Fairtrade produce, or 3) Fresh or minimally processed fruit, vegetables, pulses, beans, wholegrains, nuts or legumes. Of the 50%, at least 20% must be UK-sourced organic fruit, vegetables or pulses, i.e. 10% of total purchases must be UK-sourced organic fruit, vegetables or pulses. We recommend that these targets be measured by weight, not monetary value – and should apply across whole contracts per institution.

iv) Defra to ensure UK Government Buying Standards for all foods are updated to reflect Government manifesto commitment that 50% of food procured is locally produced or certified to higher environmental standards

Increasing the share of local and sustainable food in public spending was a key pledge for the Government in the 2024 General Election. Public procurement policies are devolved, but all have to conform to the **Common Framework for Public Procurement**. **The Procurement Act 2023**, set to be fully enacted on 24 February 2025, introduces greater flexibility, transparency and opportunities for SMEs to engage with public procurement and allows public bodies to prioritise social and environmental considerations. **The Buying Better Food and Drink agreement** introduced by the Crown Commercial Service (CCS) in early 2024 supports dynamic food procurement (DFP) at scale for all public sector buyers. **The first contract of this kind** was launched in Spring 2024 between CCS, Entegra and Sodexo, using the DFP Agile Chain technology created by software company, Equilibrium Markets. However, the principle of "value for money' remains central, and 'local' typically refers to food produced in the UK or within individual UK nations.

Key actions include:

- Set out a roadmap to achieve the Government manifesto commitment on procurement, with clear definitions for 'locally produced' and 'higher environmental standard' (see Sustain's recommended definitions on p. 26), to be fully implemented by the end of the current term in 2029.
- Unify and mandate standards across all public sector settings and publish the updated Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services, following the example set by Scotland's **Good Food Nation Act**, whereby all local authorities must now develop a Good Food Nation Plan that demonstrates how they will work towards achieving the aims set out in the Act.
- Ensure public sector bodies dedicate a percentage of their funding to local food procurement within their procurement budgets, ensuring that this is not deprioritised due to cost constraints. This would have to be implemented through Government and devolved nations.

v) Defra and devolved nations to incentivise farmers and food producers to improve supply of local and sustainable food through direct farm payment schemes such as ELMS and SFS

One of the **ELM Scheme**'s original objectives was to deliver a model of "public money for public goods" to ensure a more sustainable farming future and to some extent level the playing field, but the funding structure has thus far failed to deliver on that vision. Meanwhile, the damage caused by unsustainable farming continues unchallenged due to the under-resourcing of regulators. Key actions include:

- Review the current ELMS funding to fully fund the cost of sustainable farming methods and better support small- and micro-sized agroecological enterprises (<20ha and <50 FTE).
- Strengthen the resources of the Environment Agency to properly regulate environmentally damaging farming businesses and enact the Polluter Pays Principle to level the playing field.
- Strengthen measures to provide better support for small agroecological businesses through **SFS in Wales** and Basic Payment Scheme and the Agri-Environment Climate Scheme in Scotland.

vi) Defra to deliver a horticulture strategy to improve the supply and access to domestic fruit and veg, and enhance the opportunity for growth of local food supply chains

While previous commitments for a comprehensive strategy for this vital sector have yet to deliver, the need remains. Producing a strategy for the horticulture sector will strengthen the sector and bring investment. Key recommendations for the strategy include:

- Address key areas of supply chain fairness, agroecological production support, energy costs and the development of better routes to market.
- Create new entrants skills/training programmes and grants/loans to address workforce shortages, incentivising better wages to deliver job security and safe working environments, as well as supporting new horticulture enterprises. This must be done in conjunction with BEIS and the devolved nations governments.
- Boost domestic production of fruit and veg to reduce the dependency on imports and bolster food security and enhance resilience. For example, **Nourish Scotland** and others are proposing direct income support for at least five years for market gardeners who are operating on a commercial basis.

vii) Defra to champion local food and its benefits in the Food Strategy to enable further investment

A strong government strategy for the development and growth of the local food sector is essential to support and expand the local food sector in the UK, with benefits of supporting SMEs felt within local economies. The development of a Food Strategy is an ideal opportunity to lay out how our food system needs to relocalise and demonstrate the powerful impact that local food can have. Key recommendations for the strategy include:

- Ensure a focus on a place-based approach that recognises the importance of local production for the future of food in the UK and through collaboration with the devolved nations governments, MHCLG, DBT and DHSC.
- Guarantee that UK food standards are not undercut in any future free trade agreement in order to maintain the highest food safety standards and avoid a race to the bottom.
- Create a roadmap and advocate for the increased inclusion of local food into public procurement tenders.
- Link growth of the local food sector to Coops UK growth for the cooperative economy, set in the Labour manifesto and supported by government Department for Business and Trade.

viii) DHSC to create a national pilot for prescriptions and vouchers for fresh locally sourced produce bought via SMEs, utilising Healthy Start and similar schemes

Evidence of social prescribing and fruit and veg on prescription has been growing,[41] with pilot programmes mooted in previous strategy documents. Targeting vouchers at people with poor health and/or low incomes, and distributed by public health professionals (GPs, health visitors, community carers) could have a beneficial health impact. Linking vouchers with SMEs could ensure that economic benefit is felt locally. Key actions include:

- Ensure that public health programmes such as Healthy Start (and similar schemes in the devolved nations) and Fruit and Veg on prescriptions are joined up with local food businesses and SMEs and identify how the schemes could be rolled out to improve local economic growth.
- Evaluate and build academic evidence base on how local food can improve public health outcomes.
- Ensure a cross-departmental approach with Defra, BEIS and DfE and equivalent departments in the devolved nations to leverage co-benefits with horticulture, health and publicly funded programmes.

ix) MHCLG to ensure that future planning regulation strengthens local food

There is a further unique opportunity in England, as the Devolution White Paper[42] will change planning processes, giving more power for strategic planning to higher-tier authorities, with a likely merger of some district-level planning authorities into larger authorities. Via its ongoing consultation process, MHCLG has the opportunity to deliver for greater reform to support local food. Key actions include:

- Local and strategic authorities utilise the consultation process on the future of planning and devolution to advocate for greater freedom to support local food.
- Work in consultation with Sustainable Food Places to understand how small local food businesses can be best supported through planning legislation.
- Incorporate the recommendation from the National Preparedness Commission for increased food resilience into local planning frameworks.

1e) Policy: case studies and evidence

A Food Partnership in every Welsh Authority

In 2022, the Welsh Minister for Social Justice committed £2.5 million in Welsh Government funding to develop and strengthen food partnerships across all 22 local authorities. The work of Food Sense Wales, who are the Welsh lead partner in the Sustainable Food Places programme, was instrumental in securing this funding. Their work and relationship development with the Welsh Government helped to evidence the central role of food partnerships in building local resilience, addressing root causes of food poverty, enabling citizen action, supply chain development, and maximising the effectiveness of funding (including government funding) in addressing these areas.

Food for Fife - Scotland

The Good Food Nation Act 2022 requires local authorities to develop Good Food Nation Plans demonstrating how they will work toward achieving its aims. In 2021, Fife Council, NHS Fife and local organisations established the Food4Fife Partnership aiming to make Fife's food system more local and environmentally friendly. Fife Council spends around £8.94 million per year on food. They aim to increase locally produced food through existing contracts via various methods including collaborating with contracted suppliers and Fife Council's Business & Employability Service to enhance supply chain opportunities, and by ensuring procurement contracts continue to promote sustainability and incorporate community benefits.

Campaign for Local Abattoirs

The Campaign for Local Abattoirs began in 2018 with the Sustainable Food Trust, National Craft Butchers and support from other organisations including the Rare Breeds Survival Trust and Pasture for Life. This contributed to an inquiry undertaken by the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Animal Welfare whose 2020 report recommended the creation of an Abattoir Sector Group (ASG). The ASG successfully lobbied for the inclusion of slaughtering and processing in the Agriculture Bill, the establishment of the Small Abattoir Task and Finish group, and the announcement of a £4m Smaller Abattoir Fund which provided capital grants for existing smaller abattoirs.

Lula Kinnaird opens the Community Works, Oxford
Credit: Makespace Oxford

2. Infrastructure

Workshop participants highlighted the critical need for enhanced infrastructure, encompassing both tech solutions and physical facilities for retail and processing.

Technological infrastructure needs ranged from improved online software, streamlined logistics and better coordination systems for producers and retailers, to enhanced IT systems for farmers' markets and greater interoperability among various software platforms.

For physical infrastructure, participants emphasised the importance of reliable markets and retail spaces, alongside expanded regional access to processing facilities. The scarcity of small to mid-scale infrastructure—such as grain and pulse processing equipment or abattoirs for livestock—was identified as a significant barrier to growth and innovation.

Workshops participants often discussed the need for producers and others to work together to unlock the potential for new infrastructure. However, this is contingent on good networks and to some extent training. There were calls for better mapping of businesses, individuals, organisations and projects working in this space, either nationally or regionally, as well as the opportunity to build collaboration and cooperation, such as the role of industry bodies or farming collectives (see Chapter 5). Experience suggests that providing maps that are up to date and comprehensive is resource-intensive and hard to achieve. Rather, a focus on iterative development via networks, membership bodies and regular interactions can help with information management.

2a) Infrastructure: actions for growing the local food sector

i) Create and scale regional and local food hubs

A network of food hubs across the UK would improve coordination and efficiency across the supply chain. This would make it easier for a range of B2B customers, including public and private sector, to access a diverse range of local products that also support local food economies. Further investment and expansion is needed at a sub-national level to be able to grow the local food sector at scale. Key actions include:

- Establish geographic need for regional/local food hubs, supported by digital aggregation systems, to facilitate the collection, storage and distribution of local food. This would facilitate more routes to market for local food producers and could help ensure more local food reaches the public plate. For example, the Procurement for Good initiative by CAWR and OFN is developing a number of existing food hubs to expand into public procurement.
- Create networks to scale existing food hubs into interconnected regional systems to achieve economies of scale, share resources and promote collaboration across local food systems. For example, Better Food Traders are working with regional food hubs across the UK in their **Regional Food Hub Support Programme**[43] and will share learning.
- Develop local food hubs specifically for marginalised communities, ensuring access to fresh, affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate produce and encourage inclusion of solidarity mechanisms in existing hubs. Build on the lessons learnt from the **Resilient Green Spaces** and **Bwyd Sir Gar Food** projects in Wales to develop more hubs serving marginalised communities and finding mechanisms to balance the right to healthy sustainable food for all with the need of producers to earn a reasonable return on their produce.

ii) Expand access to markets for food producers and access to local food for consumers through strategic location and innovation

Local food enterprises have been found to act as keystones for other local businesses, fostering interconnected growth for local economies.[44] Positioning food retail outlets near other shops has the potential to increase footfall and facilitate access to untapped demand for fresh, local produce, while simultaneously increasing access to local produce for consumers. Key actions include:

- Leverage vacant retail spaces to create permanent outlets for independent vendors, farmers markets and cooperative and community-owned retail, supported by lower rental rates and community engagement programmes, reducing costs and expanding the variety of available products to consumers.

- Work directly with town councils to create access to market streets in urban towns for weekly farmers markets, when and where circumstances allow. Weekly markets rather than bi-weekly or monthly are essential to help facilitate a change in mindset that farmers markets are an elite one-off thing towards them being a necessity in the local area. This regularity could influence buying patterns and increase competition with supermarkets, who are accessible every day. An example of this is **Cardiff Farmers' Market**, who are also piloting **the planet card with BTG/Food Cardiff**.

iii) Improve and streamline digital infrastructure

The adoption of digital infrastructure by both retailers and producers is essential for the growth of the local food sector. But it's important to ensure these technologies are practical and accessible. Key actions include:

- Develop and implement unified purchasing systems to streamline supply chain operations, allowing wholesalers and buyers to source from multiple suppliers while consolidating orders, deliveries and invoicing. The system could incorporate dynamic food procurement principles by allowing real-time supplier updates and integrating small-scale producers alongside larger suppliers. This could be done by convening the sector through the **Food Data Collaboration**. BFT already offers tech advice and supports enterprises to adopt better tech and digital solutions.

- Introduce shared tools, like till systems, that track sales across multiple independent businesses while preserving operational autonomy, enabling businesses to operate collaboratively without losing individuality.

- Improve data standards to support (digital platform) interoperability between businesses, reducing reliance on any single system and broadening the range of functionality available to users. This mitigates risk while enabling gradual system-wide integration.

Ensure this process links effectively with existing low-tech practices, such as spreadsheets, which many producers and retailers still prefer.

- Develop innovative solutions to carry sustainability data from producers to consumers. This technology would require funding to develop but could provide transparency, drive consumer engagement, and add value to local food markets.

iv) Create conditions to underpin and expand local and regional processing infrastructure

Creating producer access to better processing infrastructure and equipment can open up opportunities and facilitate better access to markets.[45] By investing in regional processing infrastructure, Local Authorities and other organisations could play a central role in facilitating a thriving local food system as well as creating opportunities for SME producers to access bigger contracts. Those championing the sector need to align local food infrastructure with local and regional public sector priorities for public procurement, economic development, health regeneration and cultural goals. Actions include:

- Address regional disparities in food infrastructure development (through policy, planning regulations, facilitation and investment), tailoring solutions to local needs. For example, the Scottish Government co-invested in an **abattoir in Orkney**, supporting the local food economy and avoiding lengthy live transportation of livestock.

- Create access to collaboratively designed and shared logistics and processing infrastructure and equipment (e.g. washing facilities, dairy processing or fridge space) for producers through food hubs, producer groups and others to enable direct marketing of produce. For example, **small-scale growers in Carmarthenshire** have created a 'library' of machinery.

- Build evidence base and economic understanding of return on investment for food processing infrastructure.

- Establish a National Investment Fund to facilitate and support local or regional collaboration between farmers, food procurement professionals and (where appropriate) food service companies and wholesalers. Such collaboration should include consideration of training and infrastructure investment needs and allow sufficient time to develop understanding and trust between all procurement supply chain actors.[46]

- Create an Incubator Fund for investment in small and micro businesses so that food SMEs are able to plan for their future and ensure that they have the ability to invest in new infrastructure, training and technology. Decision criteria should also increase the success rate of minority-owned businesses and social enterprises in order to ensure growth in underserved communities. Grants should also cover overhead costs to enable transition to more sustainable and climate-friendly practices.

2b) Infrastructure: case studies

Courgette Pilot - Food Sense Wales

In April 2022, Food Sense Wales partnered with wholesaler **Castell Howell** and grower Blas Gwent Veg to pilot Welsh-grown courgettes in Cardiff schools. The project tackled barriers to local sourcing by sharing risks between producers and wholesalers. Castell Howell handled storage and distribution, while Cardiff Council ensured nutritional compliance and student engagement. Because Castell Howell covered the price gap, Blas Gwent Veg were able to scale up. The pilot guaranteed markets and fair pricing to encourage local production, and leveraged public procurement to support sustainable Welsh farming and local supply chains. This pilot has been scaled into **Welsh Veg in Schools**.

Meanwhile in Oxfordshire

Meanwhile in Oxfordshire is an innovative programme aimed at making use of vacant shops for community and economic benefit. The programme was led by Makespace Oxford with support from Oxford City Council, utilising £1.88m in funding from Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership via Government's 'Getting Building Fund'. The programme has supported 120 organisations into affordable spaces, reanimating 28 formerly vacant buildings across Oxfordshire, supporting at least 300 jobs. One venue is 'The Community Works', a community, arts and culture hub in Oxford City centre home to food enterprises, artists studios, offices, Oxford Poetry Library and Lula's Ethiopian and Eritrean Cafe, one of Oxford's top-rated restaurants.

The Greenhouse Grocers
Credit: Sussex Six Natural Partnerships

3. Marketing and public-facing campaigning

This chapter covers the range of responses raised by participants relating to how information and narratives around local food - especially its benefits - are communicated between enterprises, organisations, government and citizens.

Participants in group workshops shared ideas on effective narratives and broadly agreed that the benefits of local food and independent food retail needed better evidence and publicity. A key part of this is storytelling as a tool to attract customers and support for local food initiatives. Training for producers on marketing and storytelling as well as adaptable promotional material to explain the benefits of local and agroecological foods were cited as important.

3a) Marketing and public-facing campaigning: key actions for growing the local food sector

i) Build the case for local food to resonate with public and influencers, through data gathering and market research to inform marketing and campaigning strategies

The creation of a clear case for the benefits of local food for a public facing audience as well as those that influence demand is needed, including market research into what drives them to choose or pass up local food, are both essential to grow the local food sector. The case for local food needs to be backed up with clear and convincing qualitative and quantitative data, including case studies on why local food and independent food retail are important, while also embedding these into broader economic, environmental and health priorities as covered in the policy section. Key actions include:

- Conduct a rapid review of current evidence and research that illustrates how the local food sector supports farmers and producers, its economic benefits and positive impact on local public health and wellbeing.

- Prioritise new research and economic modelling based on community, economic and climate and nature agendas, including,

    - Modelling the economic benefits of local food systems, utilising successful case studies, e.g. Preston's anchor institution model and Food for the Planet reporting, to show the impact of growing the sector

    - Modelling and research to show the carbon emissions benefits and biodiversity gains, aligning local food with national and local climate goals, e.g. carbon sequestration and biodiversity conservation.

- Conduct market and consumer research to understand consumer motivations (e.g. taste, nutrition, sustainability) and segmenting of audiences to refine messaging and strategies, using case study marketing plans from Europe (e.g. food cities and bioregions) to identify best practices to see how these could be used in a UK context.

ii) Increase awareness and appeal of local food for the general public and public institutions through powerful evidenced based national marketing campaigns

Strong and cohesive marketing campaigns are essential to drive a cultural shift towards more demand for local food. These need to both amplify local food benefits and challenge misconceptions about cost and accessibility. Key actions include:

- Launch a national marketing campaign using relatable celebrities and influencers to promote local food and deliver clear, accurate and reliable messages about the environmental and ethical benefits.

- Identify a range of partners including trusted NGOs organisations (e.g. wildlife trusts, national parks) and localised institutions e.g schools, hospitals and doctors to champion.

iii) Mirror national marketing campaign with localised marketing campaigns that celebrate local identity and diversity and grow market demand in localities

While a national approach to marketing local food is needed and would bring a consistency of message and amplify resources, having a locally relevant marketing strategy will also be necessary to drive the sector and could be championed in areas with more developed supply or organisations that are keen to drive growth, such as regional food and drink federations. Key actions include:

- Develop campaigns in partnership with local or strategic authorities, tourism leads, food and drink federations and media outlets to promote local food as part of regional identity and attract wider audiences, utilising regional branding to create a cohesive identity for local food and engagement avenues such as food festivals, tastings and food trails.

- Promote the success of local food initiatives and share case studies to inspire replication and policy support, using personal, local stories, showcasing the people, processes and challenges behind the products and highlighting provenance to foster consumer trust and emotional connection.

- Build on FFCC's **The Food Conversation** by using the Community Conversation Toolkit to enable citizens' views on local food and explore their role as agents of change on local food.

iv) Run public-facing campaigns to expose the negative impacts of the current food system

NGOs in the sector need to keep producing hard-hitting reports that highlight the negative impacts of globalised food systems, including environmental impacts, unfair contracts for farmers and money not flowing into local economies. Key actions include:

- Use reports and findings to create public-facing campaigns that make people question the dominant food system and see why local food is better.

- Create opportunities for more media coverage and investigative journalism on the food system to provide the public need for more information, as shown from FFCC's The Food Conversation.[47]

- Create campaigns with calls to action that create real change around the purchasing of local food and activate citizens to get involved, for example by signing a petition.

v) Support independent and inherently local food retailers and suppliers to improve their offer and marketing through training and materials

In order to grow the local food sector, there needs to be a better approach across the board to create customer-focused products, services and marketing. This can be driven by sector-wide business support organisations, such as Better Food Traders, and draw on the experience of marketing professionals to provide the resources and skills needed. Key actions include:

- Help local food enterprises increase their marketing skills and understand what is needed to grow their sales.
- Provide enterprise support to help local food businesses develop products and services that meet their customers' needs.
- Help local food enterprises identify and promote themselves to new markets, such as B2B and public procurement.

vi) Enhance community and local food Initiatives that increase understanding of local food and build local advocates

The local food movement has wide support and understanding at a community level through networks such as **Sustainable Food Places**, so fostering community engagement and increasing local initiatives that grow the sector is a key opportunity to build awareness, trust and champions for local food systems. These efforts strengthen social connection, improve public understanding and make local food an integral and inclusive part of cultural and community life. Specific recommendations include:

- Sustainable Food Places team to support the network to increase Community Engagement and Events that promote local food and its benefits through activities, including local food trails, and art and cultural events, through sharing examples and signposting to funding.
- Food partnerships to leverage nature recovery projects (e.g. **Sussex Grazed Project** with the National Trust, South Downs National Park and Sussex Wildlife Trust) to demonstrate the ecological and environmental benefits of local, sustainable food systems and how they integrate with nature recovery.
- Use the growing number of local projects that engage with families via schools or those that provide access to food gardens, to help build champions and understanding of local food messages.

3b) Marketing and public-facing campaigning: case studies

Riverford's #GetFairAboutFarming campaign

Riverford's #GetFairAboutFarming campaign aimed to highlight unfairness in the supermarket supply chain and get supermarkets to commit to the Fair to Farmers Charter. The campaign used a variety of engagement approaches, including social and traditional media engagement, partnering with well known organisations in farming and food advocacy spheres, and working with influencer and celebrity farmers, including Jimmy Doherty of Jimmy's Farm fame. The campaign led to a petition being signed by over 113,000 people, which enabled the issue to be debated in Parliament on 22nd January 2024.

Organic September

Organic September, coordinated by the Soil Association, raises awareness of the benefits of organic food as well as the importance of shopping locally. The campaign offers a comprehensive digital toolkit for brands to support their Organic September celebrations. The toolkit features key messages, organic impact stats, graphics, social media assets, video content, press support guides and more. The campaign also includes Indies Saturday, a day to celebrate independent retailers and the organic producers and suppliers on their shelves via in-store tastings and events.

Sussex Six Campaign

Sussex Six is a marketing campaign led by Sussex Food and Drink, a web portal aimed at promoting local food and drink businesses. Sussex Six encourages hospitality and retail businesses to source and promote at least six products produced in Horsham, Chichester and wider Sussex, in exchange for promotion on their portal. Participating businesses can display a window sticker, further promoting the concept of eating local to customers, and strengthening the food identity of the county. The campaign is led by Natural Partnerships CIC, with support from Horsham and Chichester councils, and funding via the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.

Storytelling and key messages

The participants involved came up with a number of hooks that could be used in marketing campaigns, subject to further research. These include:

- Communicate the benefits of eating seasonal produce while addressing misconceptions about food miles and availability.
- Create a Local Hero Product Campaign to spotlight producers, local food stories, and community benefits.
- Develop narratives around the true cost of food, educating consumers about the hidden costs of supermarket supply chains compared to the benefits of local systems.
- Acknowledge the challenge: local food may not always match supermarket prices or convenience, so campaigns should address diverse consumer motivations, such as health, taste and environmental impact.
- Address greenwashing by ensuring clear, evidence-based messaging about the sustainability of local, organic and agroecological practices respectively, including reducing soil carbon loss, minimising transport emissions and promoting circular business practices.
- Improve public understanding of concepts like seasonality, agroecology and organic food, breaking down barriers to adoption.
- Highlight the role of shorter supply chains in reducing food waste and enhancing freshness.
- Promote the convenience of a regular delivery cycle, such as weekly veg boxes, as a solution that saves time and is not just a product but a trustworthy service,offering variety, convenience and organic assurance without the need to shop around.

DAERA Minister Andrew Muir launches NI Food Strategy Framework at CGG
Credit: Carrick GreenGrocers

4. Sector operations, efficiency and skills

A lack of operational efficiency was felt to hold back growth across all producer sectors. This is partly due to a lack of training and upskilling opportunities, leading to a shortage of skilled workers, but it is also due to a lack of tailored support for business owners to address specific operational issues, including logistics and market alignment.

Workshop participants recommended conducting research into the availability and distribution of skills and training within the relevant industries, as well as exploring ways to support businesses in offering training opportunities. Suggestions from the livestock sector included tax incentives for abattoirs that provide apprenticeships and bursaries for farmers to train as part-time slaughter staff. Additionally, participants highlighted the need for better promotion of agricultural career pathways in schools and colleges, including roles in the supply chain such as processing.

Beyond the farm gate, there was recognition across all sectors of the need for more and better routes to market. Access was particularly complicated for arable farmers, who often struggled to find markets for non-commodity grains and pulses; they highlighted the opportunity for greater collaboration between producers to access processing equipment.

4a) Operations, efficiency and skills: key actions for growing the local food sector

i) Improve logistics and distribution to increase efficiency and widen the market

Streamlining logistics and distribution through the use of shared systems and infrastructure is an essential part of improving operations. Because this work is so interlinked with enhancing infrastructure, these actions are slight variations on/additions to actions in the Infrastructure section. They include:

- Develop cooperatively owned and not-for-profit logistics networks, with the aim of lowering margins and making local produce more affordable.
- Create more regionalised infrastructure - such as Local Food Loops and Regional Food Hubs - that provides transportation, distribution and storage, to enable smaller growers and producers to reach local markets. Use existing evidence base to make the case for investing in regional infrastructure.[48]

ii) Improve business support and scaling for food SMEs

Tailored business support has been proven to make a huge impact on efficiency and business interoperability. By creating supportive peer-to-peer environments, business support can help shift mindsets from competitive to collaborative, which is essential for our sector to thrive. Key actions include:

- Invest in tailored business support for both producers (such as the **Shared Assets and LWA New Entrant Support Scheme**) and the retail sector (such as Better Food Traders), to create peer-to-peer support, build on proven practices and develop replicable models. For example, social enterprises and CSA schemes could scale up to deliver food security by increasing reach to diverse demographics, including those on lower incomes.
- Address barriers that hinder the adoption of digital technology (e.g. mindset or access to internet connection) by emphasising the business benefits, including improved efficiency, transparency and profitability. Acknowledge that producers and retailers have different needs and focus on how digital tools can meet businesses "where they are" by adapting to existing workflows. Enabling spreadsheet integration is a good example of this.

iii) Create more farmer-focused trading models and relationships

Participants highlighted that growers often want to focus on growing/producing rather than excessive sales efforts, and that they want to engage in supply chains that work with them and their challenges. Key actions include:

- Promote to expand the adoption of CSA and veg box scheme models, emphasising seasonality and farmer-led supply chains to strengthen farmer and producer livelihoods. For example, promote models to Farm Clusters and Producer Organisations who may then decide to invest in expanding the use of these models across their group.
- Minimise transactional relationships by integrating buyers into farmers' operations as trusted partners, helping buyers to understand the implications of price on the farmers' ability to function well and invest in better practices. For example the Better Food Shed or CSA models.
- Foster strong loyalty-based relationships that support farmers by ensuring prompt payments by retailers/wholesalers and work with farmers to determine their pricing.

iv) Identify improvement to operations that align farming to the market and manage risk

Farmers and food enterprises face challenges in balancing production with market demand while managing financial and operational risks. Strengthening systems that improve market alignment can help create more predictable, stable trading conditions. Key actions include:

- Promote and facilitate the use of pre-ordering purchasing systems, so retailers can work with producers to mitigate risks and better align supply with demand, in turn minimising waste (e.g. Better Food Shed).
- Support food SMEs to stay informed about market trends and set prices that cover their costs while remaining competitive, ensuring long-term financial sustainability.
- Invest in research to unpack supply chain economics and show where the money is going, in order to empower farmers to demand better contracts and lower their burden of risk. This research could also help to match market needs to what growers and farmers are producing.

v) Develop new pathways into local food production and processing through training and skills development

Education, training and knowledge sharing will be essential to support any transition to more local, sustainable food systems. There is currently a skills shortage throughout the food supply chain, due to a lack of upskilling of current staff and limited opportunities in further and higher education for new entrants.[49] To tackle this, action will be needed at multiple levels and with support from a variety of stakeholders. Focus should be on addressing gaps in training, increasing learning opportunities, investing in skills development and promoting food and farming careers. Key actions include:

- Support organisations and collaborations working to create new pathways for education and training. Do this by signposting existing opportunities (e.g. courses, apprenticeships, farm start projects and higher education programmes) and collaborating with governments, academic institutions and training providers to identify gaps in current education and training provision (including agroecology, slaughtering and butchery) and make the case for increased investment in skills and training. For instance, in Scotland there have been calls from a range of parties for more investment in education and training to support a shift towards agroecology through an integrated Scottish Agricultural Knowledge and Information System (AKIS).

- Encourage and incentivise increased opportunities for farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange via farm visits and events to support skills development, with a focus on areas where a skills shortage exists (e.g. herding and horticulture).

- Support organisations and collaborations that are advocating for food and farming education in schools, increasing opportunities for on-farm learning experiences and encouraging work experience across the sector.

4b) Operations and efficiency: case studies and evidence

Landworkers' Alliance Accredited Apprenticeships with Plumpton College and Coleg Cambria

The Landworkers' Alliance is collaborating with Coleg Cambria in Wales and Plumpton College in England to develop their horticulture apprenticeships for the agroecological sector. Apprentices will obtain an accredited qualification through their college and gain practical training on the job, with opportunities to take part in the LWA's political training module, farm visits and business training for regenerative enterprises. The LWA will be working with the colleges to continue tailoring the apprenticeships to the needs of agroecological businesses and learners going forwards.

Good Food Loop

The Good Food Loop is a not-for-profit wholesaler and distribution network in the South West of England. They focus on creating circular food systems that minimise waste while supporting sustainable, local food production. By connecting farmers, food enterprises and communities, the initiative ensures surplus food is redistributed, composted or reused rather than wasted. The Good Food Loop also promotes regenerative farming and ethical sourcing, creating shorter supply chains that benefit both producers and consumers.

Organic North

Organic North is the largest organic produce cooperative in Northern England, supplying independent retailers, veg box schemes and restaurants with organic fruit, vegetables and more. Based in Manchester, it works directly with UK and European organic farmers, ensuring fair prices and stable markets. Committed to sustainability, they reduce food miles by prioritising local, seasonal produce. The cooperative upholds strong ethical values, supporting small-scale agriculture and a transparent, farmer-focused food system. By distributing high quality organic produce, it enables other local food enterprises to thrive, contributing to healthier communities and a more resilient food system. Recently, it began supplying vegetables to primary schools in Bury, Greater Manchester.

Carrick Greengrocer

Carrick Greengrocers, Northern Ireland's first community-owned greengrocer, opened in 2023 after raising £34,000 through a community share offer. Based in Carrick, it sells locally grown fruit, veg, and other produce. Run as a cooperative with 434 members, it partners with Bridging the Gap to run the **Friendly Food Club pilot**, launched in 2024. This scheme offers organic fruit and veg at a 50% discount to low-income members. Co-designed with people with experience of using emergency food providers, it is running from July 2024 to June 2025, involving **The Larder** in East Belfast and the Carrickfergus community.

Claire Barker Great Berwick Organics, Shropshire
Credit: Shropshire Good Food Partnership

5. Sector collaboration and coordination

Some of the most frequently raised solutions in our workshops fell under the themes of collaboration and coordination. For the purposes of this action plan, the partners defined:

- collaboration as positive relationships between supply chain actors, including food producers, retailers and B2B partnerships.
- coordination as the organisation of relationships and activities, both formally and informally between advocacy, non-governmental and/or charitable organisations to create opportunity and provide leadership for change.

Participants emphasised that both producers and food hubs often lack the capacity to seek funding or build networks themselves, so coordination to facilitate this was highlighted as a key action. Those engaged felt that membership organisations and the third sector were well placed to play a key role in capacity building, awareness raising and providing support with funding applications, as well as brokering dialogue and opportunities for partnerships between public procurement professionals, local producers and intermediaries, such as wholesalers.

Participants from various sectors and stages of the supply chain highlighted the importance of B2B collaboration in the form of networks and forums. These infrastructure organisations and spaces were seen as valuable for sharing best practice, exploring funding and coordinating larger bids and advocacy. All sectors showed an interest in producer partnerships, and collaboration was seen as crucial for securing larger contracts, establishing smaller-scale procurement trials etc. The importance of facilitation by trusted third parties was stressed repeatedly in order to deliver this work.

Across the supply chain, improving visibility by location or region of producers and retailers was highlighted as a critical part of this process, as was the need for an up-to-date overview of relevant policies, funding and best practice to inform business development. Representatives from all producer sectors were keen to learn from the experiences of others and there were also calls to map existing infrastructure to identify priorities for research and investment, as well as to identify the needs of local networks and producers.

5a) Collaboration and coordination: key actions for growing the local food sector

i) Improve and increase opportunities for local food sector networking and collaboration to foster growth and efficiency

Our food producing participants referred to a sense of isolation as well as limited access to support services and markets. Creating and facilitating networks for food producers, retailers and the supply chain (including procurement contractors) is critical to building trusting and practical relationships. This mutual understanding is key to growing the local food sector. Key actions include:

- Create one or more Working Groups of Sustainable Food Places food partnerships with an interest in supply chains, involving local authorities, producers, retailers etc., to build connections, support investment and increase collaboration to enable supply chain expansion.

- Utilise existing projects led by NGOs, membership organisations and other third sector organisations to facilitate cross sector discussions and/or build communities of practice with aligned objectives to advocate for/create change nationally or in their region. Examples could include: convening farmers, retailers and food hubs (e.g. to align crop production with market demand), schools working toward sustainable menus and farms seeking local buyers.

- Explore the potential for farm clusters to look at supply chains, working with food partnerships to consult and develop a pilot for collaboration.

- Utilise existing member-led organisations, such as Soil Association, Pasture for Life and Landworkers' Alliance to strengthen existing producer networks and facilitate discussion forums, both within and across organisations. This could include helping to establish regional farmer cooperatives to provide peer-to-peer business support and work towards coordinated crop planning or sharing of farm machinery. For example the Scottish Agroecology Partnership (made up of LWA, PfL, Soil Association, **Nature Friendly Farming Network**, **Scottish Crofting Federation**, Nourish and **Propagate**) currently have specific partnership funding to create Continued Professional Development (CPD) modules and build producer networks. The current proposal is for this to focus on peer-to-peer support and training for supply chains/business.

ii) Increase coordination within and across regions between supply chain actors, third sector organisations and local/regional governments

There is already an abundance of incredible work happening in this sector all across the UK, but these efforts are often functioning in isolation of each other.

To effectively grow the local food sector, we need to prioritise actions that link up existing efforts within and across regions. Key actions include:

- Build on the Local Food Working Party and develop appropriate sub groups on specific topics to ensure that the Local Food Growth Plan is progressed and implemented.

- Build on regional food growth plans in the SFP network to develop more regional approaches with existing supply chain networks, local authorities and regional food and drink bodies to champion local food systems and implement their own regional food plans, leading to growth of the local food sector and evidence of national policy needs.

- Research and highlight evidence and pilot activity (e.g. **Sustain's Bridging the Gap pilots**) that demonstrates the value of local food supply chains to citizens/ consumers and local governments through written case studies, and/or farm and retailer visits for the public and local government officials, to inform decision making and build trust in local food supply chains.

- Ensure direct engagement/consultation with food producers, food businesses and citizens, ensuring their needs and experiences shape advocacy efforts and regional policies. The FFCC have done this through their **The Food Conversation**[50] and **Hope**

Farm[51] projects. At a regional level, this could look like prioritising local food in regional economic development plans.

- Set up, support, expand and learn from existing collaborative groups/networks for specific sectors across the UK, such as the **UK Grain Lab**,[52] **Better Food Traders**,[53] **Abattoir Sector Group** and **Farm Retail Association**, to share information and best practice and advocate for change. Update case studies and evaluations of successful approaches and academic evidence on then benefits of increased local food provision.

5b) Coordination and collaboration: case studies and evidence

Shropshire Good Food Partnership farmer cluster collaboration

The Shropshire Good Food Partnership has been engaging with farmer clusters through interviews, online and in-the-field events, **case studies** and a Community Food Assembly to address local food resilience and contribute to a local food strategy. They have been working together to identify gaps in infrastructure like abattoirs and processing, routes to market and opportunities for branding and collaboration, including the **Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence** and the annual **Shropshire Good Food Trail** - an agritourism initiative to boost the local food economy by showcasing farms and local businesses that 'make, grow, sell and serve Good Food'.

Better Food Traders Regional Food Hub Support Programme

Many SFPs are developing Food Hubs as part of their local action plans. To help support regional food hubs and grow routes to market for agroecological produce, BFT have teamed up with Sustain, the Soil Association and Growing Communities to deliver a 12-month programme of sector-specific training, peer-learning and bespoke business advice for managers of Regional Food Hubs. The aim of the project is to create a space for people doing similar work around the UK to share knowledge, experiences and advice, as well as gain new skills and do some big-picture thinking. This is running from January to December 2025.

Northern Food and Farming

Northern Food and Farming is a dynamic collaboration, which brings together farming organisations, NGOs, researchers and other food businesses from across the North of England. They are working towards fair, healthy and sustainable food and farming systems across the region and have identified six strategic priorities which are likely to have the greatest impact on shifting the food system in a fairer, more sustainable direction.

Conclusion and next steps

The proposed actions in this report reveal a common thread: the need to shift from competition to cooperation. As such, a values-based approach will be essential to move our food system beyond fragile market-driven ethics and towards food supply systems that foster resilience through transparency and deeper community connection. Local food systems strive to do this by prioritising access to high-quality food for all, a farmer-focus to create fair livelihoods across the supply chain and environmental sustainability by limiting damaging practices and restoring nature. These systems ground trade in mutual dependence and respect, rather than centralised power and extraction.[54]

Integration of ways and systems of operating and the existence of networks between food producers, food SMEs and third sector organisations is key to sector-wide success. Creating more collaborative ways of working, such as Food Partnerships who engage with supply chains and food producers and traders, is crucial to get the changes we need in infrastructure and cooperation. There is also a need to connect local, regional and national efforts, which can be driven by the Sustainable Food Places network, to drive coherent approach.[55] Equally, building sector based umbrella networks to support, monitor and advocate for the sector, such as LWA and Better Food Traders, will speed up this sector growth and progress.

To ensure we make a meaningful impact and are able to tell the right story, we need to get better at reporting, data sharing and continuous learning. Finding improved ways to collect and collate this information, and involving those who are engaged in local food systems on the ground, will enable the sector to become stronger. Linked to this, an emerging theme that came out of all the action areas is the need for continued research across the local food sector. Partnerships between academic institutions, other research organisations, farmers and the third sector is crucial to the growth of the sector.

Engagement also brought out the recurring challenges of funding and organisational capacity, which pose risks to implementing these actions. Understanding and also addressing these barriers is critical, to sustain the momentum generated through existing budgets and the incredible array of inter-organisational efforts. The next steps for all partners involved is to advocate for increases in mainstream funding and support for the local food sector, actively seek funds to pilot and pump prime the sector and advocating for the policy environment to help with this investment.

The pivotal importance of policy in setting a direction for the food system is highlighted in the actions of this report and amply demonstrated by the approaches taken in Wales and Scotland. Both have shown proactive leadership, setting examples for policy advancement that should be considered more widely. Local authorities, including health boards and trusts, must be central to this transition. They have an essential role to play in procurement, social prescribing and policy implementation, and are positioned to benefit from stronger local economies, job creation and the positive health, wellbeing and environmental outcomes associated with robust local food systems.

In carrying out this work, we aimed for broad representation from across the sector within the time constraints of delivering the project. While we recognise that this is limited, we welcome the opportunity to share the next steps and support more people and smaller organisations to take action. We hope this action plan empowers local communities to drive change in their areas, offering clear guidance on where to find support.

Complexity and diversity is what makes a local food system more resilient and better able to cope with the interconnected challenges that the UK currently faces. Collaboration creates the conditions for effective local food systems to thrive and create meaningful, long term benefits for communities, local economies and the land.

The publication of this report is not an end point - further work will be vital to bring about the necessary changes highlighted in this plan. While there are many opportunities for organisations and individuals across the sector, the Local Food Working Party (currently coordinated by Sustain) represents an opportunity to focus on creating action and implementing this work while tracking changes and blockages. Through 'task and finish' and dedicated small group working, we will champion flagship actions and welcome others to engage. We want the Local Food Growth Plan to help others to fundraise or advocate for their work, and we welcome feedback on how best this can be supported. We have already begun to focus on delivering specific actions, such as developing a pilot for regional food plans, and establishing working groups dedicated to marketing and data. We will continue to use the Local Food Plan website as a focus for news, reports and relevant information and will proactively seek ways to put our policy findings to national governments and local policy makers. Anyone interested in taking an active role in this implementation is invited to get in touch.

To get more involved contact:
localfood@sustainweb.org
or visit **www.localfoodplan.org**

Appendix A: Glossary

Abbreviations

AKIS - Agricultural Knowledge and Innovation System
BEIS - Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy
BFT - Better Food Traders
DHSC - Department of Health and Social Care
ELM - Environmental Land Management Scheme (England)
FDC - Food Data Collaboration
FFCC - Food Farming and Countryside Commission
FRA - Farm Retail Association
LWA - Landworkers Alliance
MHCLG - Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
OGA - Organic Growers Alliance
OFN - Open Food Network
PfL - Pasture for Life
SFT - Sustain Food TRust
SFPS - Sustain Food Places
SFS - Sustainable Farming Scheme (Wales)
SME - small and medium size enterprise
SRA - Sustainable Restaurant Accociation

Glossary terms (by report section)

Introduction

Dynamic Food Procurement and purchasing systems: digital purchasing systems which allow all suppliers who meet the specification to market their products, and buyers can choose how and what they want to buy. Once supply and demand have been matched, produce will be consolidated and distributed by a regional logistics provider. The specification can have a greater focus on sustainability, seasonality, quality and welfare standards.

Sectors: individual parts of a supply chain or industry, eg livestock, arable, horticulture and dairy in farming.

Processed: any food or drink that has been changed in some way when it's made or prepared. Most foods we eat are processed in some way, eg bread and cheese.

Local administrative area: geographical area governed by a single local authority.

Policy

Regionalisation: the ongoing process of having more decisions about policies and how they are implemented made in the region where they apply, e.g. Regional Mayors and Combined Authorities.

Strategic Authorities: public sector bodies, including Combined Authorities and Mayoral Strategic Authorities, being established as part of devolution in England to take strategic action in a series of specific policy areas including skills and employment, economic development and regeneration and environment and climate change. In Scotland these include Highlands and Islands and South of Scotland Enterprise.

Public Sector Chair: a person chairing a partnership group representing a democratically elected public body or someone employed by such a body.

Spacial Development Strategies: a plan or document that outlines the development and organization of physical spaces within a specific region, encompassing aspects such as transport and housing.

Farmwashing: the misleading marketing where big retailers present produce as being from a fictitious farm and as grown or reared in the UK.

Wellbeing Plans (Wales): a document that sets out priorities for improving the quality of life for the people of Wales. Well-being plans help to ensure that the benefits of growth are felt by all citizens now and in the future.

Infrastructure

Local Food Economies: systems that support the production, processing and consumption of food grown or produced in a particular locality.

Food Hubs: an organization that provides physical and digital infrastructure to enable locally-produced food to be sold to other businesses and/or public bodies, emphasizing ethical and sustainable practices. Food Hubs can also sell directly to the public.

Market Streets: a "market street" typically refers to the central street in a small town, often called a "market town," where a regular market is held, selling local produce, crafts, and other goods, acting as a bustling commercial hub for the surrounding area.

Ethical Food Production / Distribution: methods of production or distribution which are primarily driven by values, including environmental protection, fair trading and wages, limits on profits etc.

Local food access projects: local initiatives aiming to make good food available to people who struggle to do so on their own.

Town Centre Partnerships: groups of organisations and businesses, usually including local authorities with a remit to improve the social and economic wellbeing of a particular town.

National Investment Fund: a fund usually administered by central or devolved nation government to provide investment in specific areas of the economy, eg. local food infrastructure. Such funds have specific agreed aims, clear criteria and a transparent decision making process to allocate funds.

Incubator Fund: type of investment fund managed by a government agency, public or private entity designed to provide early-stage funding and support to new businesses, particularly innovative or socially impactful ventures, within a specific region or industry. An incubator fund is likely to be paired with other specific support for those new businesses, like mentoring and networking.

Operations, efficiency and skills

Anchor Institutions: bodies that have an important presence in a place, usually through a combination of being largescale employers, large purchasers of goods and services in the locality, controlling large areas of land and/or having relatively fixed assets. They are tied to a particular place by their mission, histories, physical assets and local relationships (e.g. local authorities or universities.

Pre-ordering systems: allows customers to place orders for products that are not yet available, for instance before they have been grown or produced. Proordering systems remove some of the risks from the production of food. Such systems can agree a fixed or minimum price for the produce.

New Entrants: people new to a particular industry, in particular to farming, who don't have easy access to land, the resources and the skills required to run a business in that industry.

Farm Clusters: groups of farms, usually in a specific area, working together to learn from each other and from others, with a view to improve their own farming practice. This can be on a variety of topics.

Producer Organisations: groups of farm businesses who work together to market their products and improve their bargaining power.

Sector collaboration and coordination

Third Sector Organisations: organisations (usually charities or not-for-profit) which are neither in the public sector nor in the private sector. They are usually driven by specific interests rather than profits.

B2B (business to business): business model where products or services are sold to other businesses, rather than to consumers (B2C).

Communities of Practice: a group of people who share a passion or interest in a topic, and who learn and work together to improve their skills, e.g. farm cluster.

Other:

Unsustainable (unsustainably produced): methods which do not minimise the negative impacts of the production of that product, e.g. energy use, minimising waste, etc.

Local food definitions (Appendix B)

Non-market values: things we value but which are not usually bought or sold in a market place. These include clean air, wildlife and nature.

Sustainable (practices): as a shorthand for "environmentally friendly / sustainable food production" (LFD).

"Equitable" as shorthand for " fair rewards for farmers, and accessible/ affordable for consumers" (LFD).

Good Food: food that is produced, processed, bought, sold and eaten in ways that provides social benefits, contributes to healthy economies and enhances the health and variety of both plants and animals, protects natural resources and helps tackle climate change. **The Sustain Guide to Good Food** elaborates.

Farmer-focused supply chains: supply chains focused on decent livelihoods for farmers, growers and supply chain workers.

Higher Environmental Production: production of foods to standards higher than legally required, eg by also delivering biodiversity benefits. Such standards may be associated with accreditation, eg. Soil Association Organic.

Local Authorities: also known as councils, are organizations that provide public services to communities. They are run by elected representatives who are accountable to the public.

Public Plate: foods paid for through public sector budgets, including free school meals, hospital and prison foods.

Supply Chain Actors: everyone included in the food system including producers, processors, transporters, retailers and buyers.

Appendix B: Local food definitions

1. Simple definition of local food

Through this project we have landed on the following simple definition:

“Local Food is food that is produced, processed, sold and eaten within the same region or local administrative area through transparent, SME-focused supply chains.”

A ‘Review of Local Food Definitions’, carried out by The Sustainable Food Trust as part of this collaboration, found that scale and localness tend to correlate. Small & Medium Enterprises (SMEs) are more likely to be rooted in a specific geographic location in a way that big multinationals are not. Therefore supporting small-scale producers and food businesses can naturally foster thriving local food systems.

As such, we have chosen to focus on SMEs supply chains, which often enable:

- greater transparency in the supply chain and for more benefits of the supply chain to be felt locally. By operating through non-market values, SMEs build relationships and interdependence between each other and with other small / local supply chain actors. This can often lead to shared insight and goals. *This is reflected in the ‘knowledge and values section’ of the Venn diagram (Figure 1).*
- increased trust and social connections across their supply chains, from producer to eater. The small size of SMEs prevents dominance, ensuring a balance of power in the supply system. Their scale fosters connections with small supply chain actors and communities, promoting diversity, choice and innovation. *The Venn diagram reflects this as ‘community’ (Figure 1).*

Implicit in each of the above points is the idea that SMEs contribute to their local area, by providing **social, environmental and economic benefits**. Due to the size of their supply chain, they are more likely to be in touch with their locality - for instance, its landscape, land uses, history and culture, including its capacity to produce food. This definition recognises that not all food produced will be consumed locally. For instance Sustain’s ‘Good Food’ definition states ‘“local” food is good, but not all “good” food is local.’ For example food can be healthy and sustainable, but not local. *This is the ‘location’ part of the Venn diagram (Figure 1).*

2. The Venn diagram

Building on the SME focused definition above, the Venn diagram below (Figure 1) looks holistically at the essential features of a local food system, including health, sustainability, equity and localness.

This representation is by no means definitive and is intended to stimulate discussion, however we hope it provides a lens through which to evaluate the interconnected components of local food systems.

Figure 1: A holistic look at local food

Effective Local Food System [coloured Venn]

The coloured part of the Venn diagram is intended to illustrate what features are needed to enable an 'Effective Local Food System' (see section 3), which sits at the nexus of the three circles: Healthy and Sustainable Food; Equitable Food; and Local Food. We expand here on our definition of Local Food to include 'knowledge and values', 'community' and 'location' (as shown in the green circles), as this is the area of focus for this report. The rationale for these three features are pulled from the SFT **Review of Local Food Definitions** report.

Healthy and Sustainable Food: Although 'healthy food' and 'sustainable food' have their own definitions, it is often assumed that food that is produced sustainably tends to be healthier.[56] Hence we have grouped them together for the purposes of this Venn diagram.

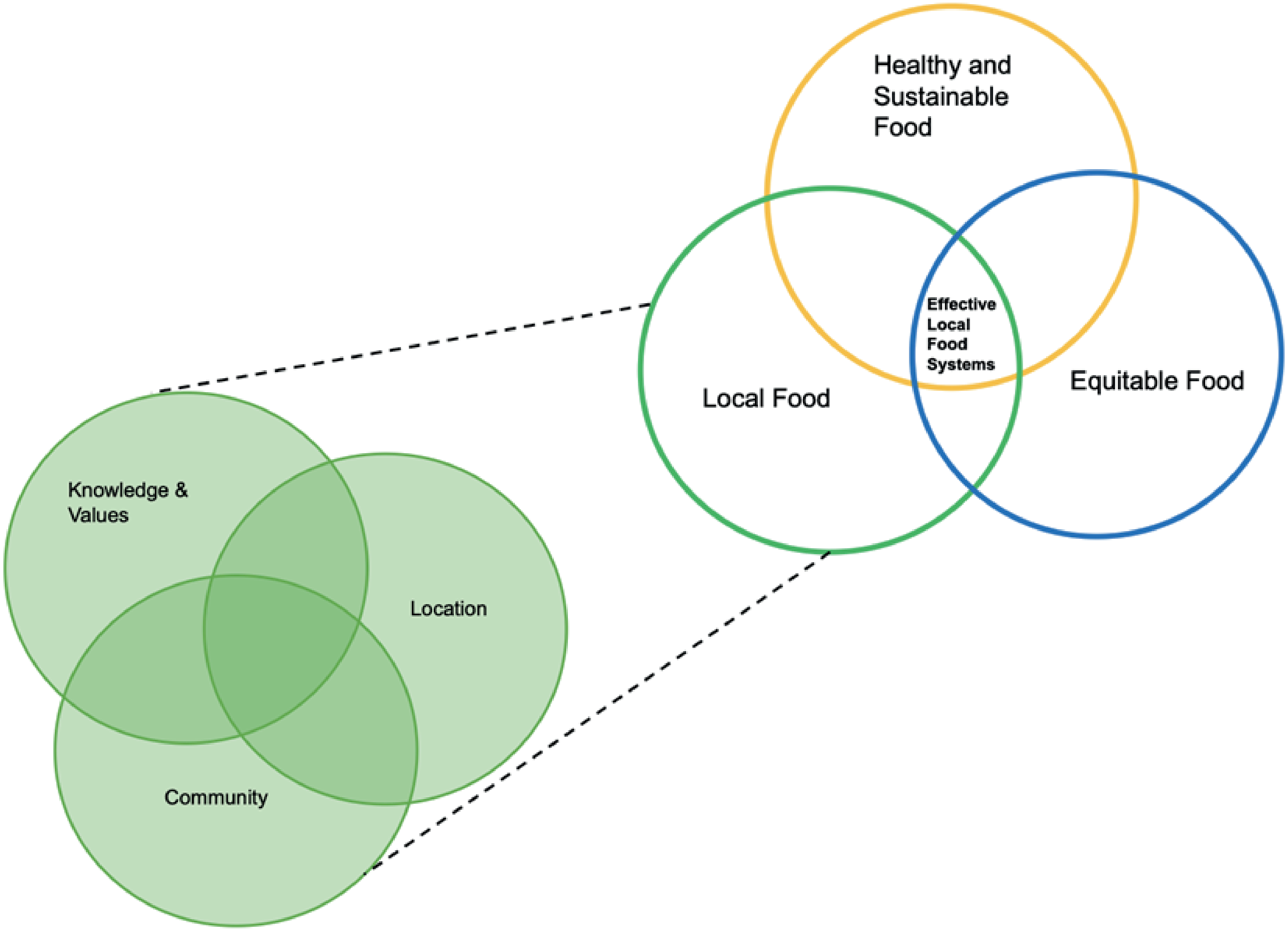
Equitable Food: Equitable food captures accessibility and fairness at each end of the supply chain, including fair rewards for farmers and accessible/ affordable for consumers.

Local Food [shaded green Venn]

Put simply, 'local food' is food that is produced, processed, sold and eaten within the same region or local administrative area through transparent, SME-focused supply chains. As explored in section 1, 'local food' also includes communities, the knowledge and values they hold, and where they are (geographically, historically and culturally), as illustrated in the green part of the diagram.

- **Knowledge & Values:** The skills, knowledge, experience and values of the people in an area including their vision for their food system.
- **Community:** The number and types of people in a location and the relationships between them, including those who produce food or are part of the food supply chain.
- **Location:** The landscape of a particular locality – its topography, natural environments, land uses, climate, history and culture, including its capacity to produce food.

Figure 1: A holistic look at local food



3. Effective Local Food Systems

By Effective Local Food Systems (ELFS), we mean local food systems which are functioning at their very best and in essence this is what the sector is striving towards; this is our collective vision.

They prioritise the social connections between food producers and eaters within a geographical area (where food is grown, produced and sold within the same region or within a relative proximity), and go beyond the basic, purely spatial concept of food miles. As discussed in Section 1, these systems often centre around SMEs, and emphasise transparent and fairer supply chains for farmers and eaters. They also promote the production of both healthy and sustainable food, and contribute to local economies and are accessible to everyone.

Examples of social, environmental and economic benefits of an Effective Local Food System:

ELFS play a vital role in enhancing resilience and improving quality of life. They contribute to the following outcomes:

- Fairness for producers - enabling sustainable livelihoods by creating better returns for farmers, processors, distributors and their employees.
- Improved food security - creating closer connections between supply chain actors encourages more participation in the food supply systems, which enhances the resilience of the food supply system by reducing dependence on long, global supply chains.
- Build community wealth - circulating money within the local economy through supporting SMEs, cooperatives or social enterprises, as well as fostering job opportunities with better working conditions.
- Traceable identity - enabling a more transparent supply system encouraging higher ethical production standards and animal welfare.
- Improved consumer quality, variety and taste
- Better for health - higher nutrient density due to produce being fresher and minimally processed
- Stable climate and nature - reducing carbon footprint associated with long distance food transportation.
- Sustainable farming practices - higher returns for farmers enabling more investment in the protection and restoration of nature
- Community connection - enabling everyone to have access to safe, healthy and affordable food, regardless of where they live.

Appendix C: Methodology data

Key research delivery dates

1. Local Food Working Party May Session to sense check the key barriers coming forward in the snapshot review, which were used to frame the next stage of research where we looked for solutions and key actions to solve them (13 attendees) **May 2024**

2. Policy and growing the local food retail sector (Sustain) (5 members of staff in online session, 4 separate longer consultations with other staff members including CEO) **July 2024**

3. Improving Retail Aggregation, Infrastructure and Operations (25 attendees – key stakeholders targeted from across the supply chain) **September 2024**

4. Devon Food Economy Workshop attendance to consult on solutions for growing the local food sector with a range of stakeholders, including Good Food Loop, LOVE Food CIC, Pipers Farm, Apricot Centre and the University of Exeter. **September 2024**

5. LFP Producer Infrastructure: Member Workshop 1 (online, 5 attendees) **September 2024**

6. LFP Producer Infrastructure: Member Workshop 2 (online, 7 attendees) **September 2024**

7. LFP Producer Infrastructure: Food Hub Procurement Workshop (online, 16 attendees) **September 2024**

8. Growing the local food retail sector: Product, price and convenience of local food (21 attendees – key stakeholders targeted from across the supply chain) October 2024

9. Growing the local food retail sector: Marketing and Campaigning for local food (20 attendees – key stakeholders targeted from across the supply chain). **October 2024**

10. LFP Producer Infrastructure: Livestock Workshop (online, 7 attendees) **October 2024**

11. 1LFP Producer Infrastructure: Arable Workshop (online, 5 attendees) **October 2024**

12. LFP Producer Infrastructure: Horticulture Workshop (online, 8 attendees) **October 2024**

13. SFP fringe session at the SFP conference Actioning the local food plan through a series of exercises

including visioning an effective local food system, sense checking actions from previous workshops and adding additional key actions in group discussions (14 SFP members attended). **October 2024**

14. Local Food Working Party October to sense check the key actions from consultations and build on consultation solutions. **October 2024**

Sustain data

Consultation participants (18 people who filled the form out of 108 participants).

Gender:

Woman: 50.0%
Man: 44.4%
Other: 5.6%

Organisation Type:

Not-for-Profit Organisation: 33.3%
Business: 16.7%
Social Enterprise: 16.7%
Educational Institution: 11.1%
Food Partnership/Local Authority: 5.6%
Freelancer: 5.6%
Government Agency: 5.6%
Cooperative: 5.6%

Role:

Business Manager: 33.3%
Founder/CEO: 16.7%
Project Manager: 11.1%
Coordinator/Project Assistant: 5.6%
Senior Research and Policy Manager: 5.6%
Produce and Marketing Coordinator: 5.6%
Comms Manager: 5.6%
Community Organiser: 5.6%
Researcher: 5.6%
Marketing & PR: 5.6%

Ethnicity:

White: British: 72.2%
White: English: 11.1%
Other: Chinese: 5.6%
Black: African: 5.6%
Asian: Indian: 5.6%

Devolved nation breakdown:

England: 81.3%
Scotland: 12.5%
Wales: 6.3%

LWA & Partnership workshop data

Consultation participants (27 people who filled the form out of 148 participants).

Gender

Woman: 52%
Man: 48%
Other: 0%

Ethnicity

White (British): 59%
White (Welsh): 18%
White (Scottish):15%
White (English): 4%
White (Cornish): 4%
Other: 0%

Devolve nation breakdown

England: 70 %
Scotland: 19 %
Wales: 7%
No Location data: 4%

Appendix D: Summary tables of strategic goals and key actions to grow the local food sector

The tables included in this appendix go into further detail on sector organisations who can take actions forward, what resources are needed to enable progress on these actions, as well as timelines and key indicators of progress. The information in these tables was compiled by Local Food Plan project partners and the Local Food Working Party, with scope for further developing the implementation of these actions with wider supply chain organisations via network engagement events. If your organisation would like to contribute and drive these actions forward, please get in touch: **localfoodplan@sustainweb.org**.

Policy: key actions - local and regional combined authorities

Strategic Goal	Key Actions	Roles & Responsibilities	Funding & Resources	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation
Develop region-level 'local food growth plans'	Pilot and support implementation of local food growth plans in different geographies	Food Partnerships	Small kickstart grants from trusts, foundations and local authorities	10 pilots by 2026	No. of Regional Plans in place
	Identify funding streams to resource plan development and implementation	Local and regional authorities to commission, Food Partnerships to collaborate	Future support by Defra	Defra engagement 2026	Resources levered for local level actions
	Form and strengthen Food Partnerships to build links with local farming groups and supply chains	**Sustainable Food Places** Network to facilitate cross-regional learning	Grants/funding for SFP Programme, nation partners and individual partnerships, including resources for peer learning	Peer group established 2025	No. of partnerships engaged in growing local food sector
Leverage under-utilised land and spaces	Identify and map underutilised public land and vacant retail space suitable for food production and distribution	Local and regional authorities and SFPs to commit to and drive forward mapping	Local and regional authorities, utilising funding from wider funding pots	Leading authorities identified - 2025/26	Right to Grow established in 2 regions - 2026
	Integrate these spaces into Spatial Development Strategies	Incredible Edible (Right to Grow)	Grant funding for Right to Grow		
	Include community food space provision in residential or regeneration development	Identify opportunities through growth funds and devolution agenda			Case studies of good practice

Utilise funding opportunities available to local government and other partners to increase resources available for local food sector	Review and build academic and other evidence base on local food impacts on public health, economic and other outcomes Leverage the **Community Ownership Fund**[57] and **Community Infrastructure Levy**[58] and direct **Section 106**[59] funding for investment in infrastructure Utilise Shared Prosperity (and successive) funding opportunities	Local Food Working Party (research and data) to identify evidence and gaps, led by Sustain, **BFT**, **Organic Research Centre**, SFT	Staff time to compile evidence, build academic partnership and identify any gaps	Data review 2025/26	Review of evidence and research sub-group formed
		Sustainable Food Places network to research and share funding opportunities and related case studies	SFP Programme and partner staff time to engage food partnerships in region-level plans	Lead authorities identified and supported 2025/26	No. of Local authorities levering funds
			Further research commissioned	2025/26	
Utilise the power of public procurement to grow the local food sector	Add targets for local and sustainable food and incorporate weighting matrix for local SMEs into local authority Remove barriers to entry for SMEs in council food-provision contracts	**Procurement for Good**/ Sustain and **Soil Association** to identify lead councils Local authorities to reform procurement processes with increased weighting for local SMEs	NGO and Council staff to collaborate on delivery of opportunities for procurement	2025-2028	No. of councils including targets/ weighting matrix

Utilise local planning frameworks to support local food	Protect high grade agricultural land Facilitate infrastructure necessary for diverse farming enterprises such as abattoirs, processing facilities, distribution centres and markets.	Local authorities, using existing levers/local planning frameworks CPRE/Sustain and Farming Working Party to look at opportunities and evidence SFT and other farming led NGOs to continue to campaign for investment	Local authorities in partnership with civil society partners to utilise current flexibility within planning frameworks Civil society to lobby MHCLG to reform the **National Planning Policy Framework**	2025	Local, sustainable food acknowledged within national planning policy
Create and support local food partnerships to underpin local work	Engage or set up Food Partnerships to explore funding and partnership-led initiatives focused on local food supply Pilot and develop collaboration between local farms, supply chains and citizens to grow routes to market and demand for local food via SFP networks	Local and regional authorities with support of Sustainable Food Places	Advocate for national and local government investment in partnership coordination	2026 as part of National Food Strategy	No. of food partnerships/a partnership in every area
		Farming networks and NGOs working with SFPs (e.g. SFT)	Third sector to seek innovation funding	2026	No. of partnerships with active farming links

Policy: strategic action – summary table: UK Government

<table>
<tr><th>Strategic Goal</th><th>Key Actions</th><th>Roles & Responsibilities</th><th>Funding & Resources</th><th>Timeline</th><th>Monitoring & Evaluation</th></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="3">Establish a mandate and funding for a Food Partnership in every local authority</td><td rowspan="3">Advocate with Defra and MHCLG for mandate and funding to support food partnership coordination, food strategy development and implementation

Identify opportunities within devolution to provide powers and duties to regional Mayors to create and work with food partnerships</td><td>Sustainable Food Places, Defra, Local and Regional Authorities</td><td>SFP time and coordination to advocate</td><td>2026/2027</td><td rowspan="3">Sustainable Food Places operating in every local authority across the UK

Reference to food in devolution agenda</td></tr>
<tr><td>Defra and MHCLG</td><td></td><td></td></tr>
<tr><td>Sustainable Food Places</td><td>Resources to support food partnership development</td><td>2025</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Create a national plan for long-term resilience of food in the UK</td><td rowspan="2">Invest in resilience through a national preparedness strategy

Mandate statutory authorities, mayors and local authorities to develop local food resilience plan and establish targets for local food infrastructure</td><td>Defra, DHSC, Home Office, MHCLG</td><td rowspan="2">Time for advocacy</td><td rowspan="2">5 years</td><td rowspan="2">A local food resilience plan in every local authority</td></tr>
<tr><td>NGOs and food supply chain organisations to engage Government Departments</td></tr>
</table>

Expand powers of the Grocery Code Adjudicator and the National Food Crime Unit to regulate unethical practices and improve fairness.	Give NFCU sufficient powers to fully investigate food crime, including the ability to search people, vehicles, and premises and question suspects Give the GCA the resources necessary to fully achieve its objective to improve fairness within the food supply chain	Defra, DBT Sustain-convened Groceries Code Action Network (GCAN) to influence	Within existing work of Sustain and GCAN	3 years	Expanded NFCU powers
		Defra, DBT GCAN to influence	Within existing work of Sustain and GCAN	3 years	Expanded powers and budget of the GCA
Ensure UK Government Buying Standards reflect government manifesto commitment that 50% of food procured is locally produced or certified to higher environmental standards	Set out a roadmap to achieve the government manifesto commitment Unify and mandate standards across all public sector settings and publish the updated Government Buying Standards for Food and Catering Services	Defra working with farming and supply chain groups/SFPs Defra	Resources for councils to implement	2026 for roadmap 2029 to deliver	Road map in place 50% target met

Incentivise farmers and food producers to increase supply	Review ELMS, SFS (Wales) and BPS and AECS (Scotland) funding to better support small- and micro-sized agroecological enterprises Strengthen the resources of the Environment Agency to properly regulate environmentally damaging farming businesses	Defra, devolved nations Sustain, LWA and NGO and farming organisations to engage Defra on actions	Existing farming budget	2026	Improved financial incentive schemes Polluter Pays Principle enacted
Strengthen horticulture through a National Strategy	Address key areas of supply chain fairness, agroecological production support, energy costs and the development of better routes to market Create new entrants and skills/ training programmes to address workforce shortages, Boost domestic production of fruit and veg	Defra NGO and farming organisations, Farming Working Party to engage Defra on actions	Existing farming budget	2028	A published National Horticulture Strategy
Champion local food in the National Food Strategy to signpost its further investment	Ensure a focus on a place-based approach that recognises the importance of local production for food security Expand powers of the Grocery Code Adjudicator and the National Food Crime Unit Guarantee that UK food standards are not undercut in any future free trade agreement	Defra, in collaboration with MHCLG, Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and DHSC Sustain and other NGO alliances to advocate with Defra	Within existing budget	2026	Direct reference to the benefit of local food within the National Food Strategy

Create a national pilot for prescriptions and vouchers for fresh locally sourced produce bought via SMEs	Pilot voucher and prescriptions schemes Ensure public health programmes e.g. Healthy Start (and similar devolved nation schemes) and Fruit and Veg on prescription are aligned with SMEs food businesses and climate and nature friendly supply Engage DHSC to identify how Healthy Start could be rolled out to improve local economic growth	NGOs, Academia and Defra Evaluate and build academic evidence base Defra, working with DHSC, BEIS and DfE to leverage co-benefits for public health and local economies	Funding needed for piloting schemes and establishing evidence of co-benefits	3 years	National pilot successfully operating
Ensure that future planning regulation strengthens local food	Use consultation process on the future of planning and devolution to advocate for greater capacity to support local food.	Sustain, SFP and NGOs working with councils	Within existing budgets	ongoing, 2025	More Local Authorities have local food referenced in their local plans
	Revise and reform the Planning and Infrastructure Bill to expand opportunities for local food businesses	MHCLG Sustain, SFP and NGOs working with councils	Funding needed to add capacity to engage local partners in this work	2025-2027	Infrastructure Bill enables and supports planning for local food supply chains
	Incorporate the recommendation from the **National Preparedness Commission for increased food resilience** into local planning frameworks	MHCLG Sustain and SFP to influence	Funding needed to add capacity to engage local partners in this work	2025-2027	More Local Authorities have food resilience referenced in their local plans

Infrastructure: key actions summary

Strategic Goal	Key Actions	Roles & Responsibilities	Funding & Resources	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation
Develop Regional Food Hubs across the UK	Establish regional/local food hubs as physical spaces, supported by digital aggregation systems	Local Authorities; third sector organisations (Better Food Traders); (supported by academic research, e.g. OFN, CAWR) Social Farms & Gardens, producers	Funding required for premises and staffing	Procurement for Good: 2025-2028 2026- Further projects developed	Creation of new food hubs; investment in new food hubs
	Develop local food hubs specifically for marginalised communities, ensuring access to fresh, affordable and nutritious produce	Soil Association Innovation Programme, OFN and local food access projects	Funding; a broad base of producers; other food services	2026- Further pilots developed	Marginalised communities have access to healthy, local food
	Create networks to scale existing food hubs into interconnected regional systems	Local Authorities; third sector organisations (Better Food Traders); SFPs	Could be delivered through some current organisational budgets, but would require more funding	2025 onwards: OFN/ BFT/ SFPs to explore further networking	Creation of strong regional networks, creating thriving local food economies

Expand access through strategic location and innovation	Leverage vacant retail spaces to create permanent outlets for independent vendors, community owned retail and food coops	Local Authorities; Town Centre Partnerships; SFPs	Funding needed and supportive planning policy (e.g. supported by lower rental rates)	Subject to funding	Farmers sharing resources, expanding access to markets for producers and expanding the variety of available products to consumers
	Working directly with town councils to create access to market streets in urban towns for weekly farmers markets	Local Authorities; third sector/farmer cooperatives; SFPs; **Plunkett Foundation**	Funding needed to fund capacity	2025 onwards- SFP Programme to consider pilot programme (in collaboration with Plunkett Foundation)	Expanding access to markets for producers and expanding the variety of available products to all consumers
Improve and streamline digital infrastructure	Continue to develop and apply more unified purchasing systems to allow buyers to source from multiple suppliers	New Buying Better Food CCS Framework (EM); Third sector orgs (BFT, Food Data Collaboration); Local Authorities (eg Yorkshire Purchasing Authority)	Funding needed	Happening to some extent, 2028 Further development	Producers have access to procurement contracts, therefore more local food on the public plate

Improve and streamline digital infrastructure	Promote the adoption of digital technologies to enhance efficiency, collaboration and transparency across the supply chain	Third sector orgs (Better Food Traders, OFN, Oooby etc)	Funding required to enable sector engagement	Ongoing	Food businesses working more efficiently; more information available across supply chain including (for?) eaters; influencing buying habits
	Explore innovative ways of providing dynamic information to improve visibility of local producers and retailers	FDC, third sector organisations	Funding required	2027 Ideas in development	Improved access to markets (inc procurement) for producers (and increased access of variety of produce for consumers)
	Improve data standards to support interoperability between businesses (incl till systems)	FDC; third sector organisations (e.g. Oooby)	Funding required through social investment	2025-2027	Environmental, nutrition and production data readily available across the supply chain

Create conditions to underpin and expand local and regional processing infrastructure	Create access to shared logistics and infrastructure for producers through food hubs	Third sector orgs (Better Food Traders, OFN, LWA etc); (Academic institutions?)	Mix of organisational (project) budgets, and new funding	Ongoing - when funding available	Strong regional networks of producers with increased access to markets
	Address regional disparities in food infrastructure development	Local Authorities; third sector orgs (eg FairShare); SFPs	Funding needed and supportive planning policy / regulations	5 - 10 years	Increase in regional processing infrastructure with strong inter-regional relationships/ support
	Align local food infrastructure with (regional) public sector catering and broader council plans for development	Local Authorities; SFPs; OFN & CAWR	Funding needed	Ongoing Procurement for Good Project 2024-2028	More local food on public plate
	Build evidence base of return on investment for food infrastructure	Academic institutions	Currently delivered through some existing budgets, but would require more funding	Ongoing	Reports published
	Establish a National Investment Fund to facilitate and support local/regional collaboration between farmers, food procurers, food service companies and wholesalers	Government; devolved nation governments; Local Authorities; Third sector organisations to advocate	Funding needed	By end of current Parliament	Fund implemented and funds allocated; number of collaborative projects funded
	Create an Incubator Fund for investment in small and micro businesses so food SMEs can plan for their future	Charitable Institutions; Local Authorities; Social Investors	Funding needed	By end of current Parliament	Evidence of investment in small / micro businesses & social enterprises supplying underserved communities

Marketing: strategic actions

Strategic Goal	Key Actions	Roles & Responsibilities	Funding & Resources	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation
Build the case for local food to resonate with public and influencers, through data gathering and market research to inform marketing and campaigning strategies	Rapid review of current evidence and research	Better Food Traders, Sustain's Local Food Working Party, **Bridging the Gap** programme, academic partners including Organic Research Centre	Academic support with rapid review	2025-2026 Form working group and identify research partners and funding	A suite of data and market research, that can be shared with local food retailers and public institutions to help with their marketing strategies
	Prioritise new research and economic modelling based on community, economic and climate and nature agendas		Market leaders such as Riverford, Hodmedod's, to support market research		
	Conduct market and consumer research to understand consumer motivations		Funding for economic and social impact research with partners such as New Economics Foundation		
Increase awareness and appeal of local food through powerful evidence-based national and localised marketing campaigns	Develop clear, specific and evidence-based national marketing campaigns working with trusted NGOs and institutions such as schools and hospitals as champions	Better Food Traders, Soil Association, SFT, **UK Organic**, Sustainable Food Places, Riverford to develop and pitch	Need significant funding	2025-2026 Better Food Traders to convene Marketing task and finish group as part of Local Food Working Group	A national marketing strategy for local food, and a plan for execution at a local level, coordinating with retailers, local authorities and other partners.
	Identify opportunities for localised and regional marketing campaigns showcasing the personal stories behind products and highlighting provenance	Local and regional authorities, tourism and food and drink bodies, food partnerships,			

Support independent and inherently local food retailers and suppliers to improve their offer and marketing through training and materials	Help local food enterprises increase their marketing and understand what is needed to grow their sales	Better Food Traders, Sustainable Food Places, Soil Association	BFT current resources, but need to identify local or national funding streams and partnership with other SME providers	2025 Identify SME support providers and how other sectors fund this support	Better products and services from local food suppliers
	Provide enterprise support to help local food businesses develop products and services that meet their customers' needs. Help local food enterprises identify and promote themselves to new markets, such as B2B and public procurement		Funding needed for SFP and food partnerships to to build an asset base to support network learning and enterprise support		Increase number of food hubs with an aggregated offer
Enhance community and local food initiatives that increase understanding of local food and build local advocates, through the Sustainable Food Places programme	Expand Community Engagement and Local Events Leverage nature recovery programmes to demonstrate the co-benefits of local food systems Work with community and school networks to help activate champions on local food messaging	SFP, Local Councils, LWA, Farming organisations (PfL, NFFN, NFU), FFCC, SFT	Councils to work with civil society to fundraise Identify additional funding for SFP to develop work around promotion, marketing and advocacy on local food	2025 Identify SFP network appetite and main challenges around promoting 'buy local'	People are more connected to food production, independent retail and community food

Operations, efficiency and skills: key actions

Strategic Goal	Key Actions	Roles & Responsibilities	Funding & Resources	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation
Improve logistics and distribution to help improve efficiency and widen the market	Develop cooperatively owned and not-for-profit logistics networks	third sector; LAs; OFN; food hubs; SFPs; Soil Association	Funding required	Ongoing -	Increased interoperability between producers and increased access to markets
	Create more regionalised infrastructure that provides transportation, distribution and storage	Local Authorities; third sector organisations (Better Food Traders); academic institutions	Funding required	Ongoing - further projects developed when funding becomes available	Creation of new food hubs; investment in new food hubs
Improve business support and scaling for food SMEs	Seek investment for tailored business support for both producers and retailers	Third sector orgs (BFT, LWA, Sustain, CSA Network); Government; LAs?; SFPs	Being delivered through some current organisational budgets, but would require more funding	Ongoing - further projects developed when funding becomes available	Regular business support programmes for producers and retailers, leading to food SMEs with strong business plans
	Address barriers that hinder the adoption of digital technology	OFN; BFT; Charities eg **Catalyst Digital**; academic partners; UKRI / Lottery funding to address digital exclusion	Funding required	As soon as funding is available	Food businesses engaging with digital technology to further enhance practice

Create more farmer-focused trading models and relationships	Promote to expand the adoption of CSA and veg box scheme models	CSA Network; BFT; Farm Clusters; Producer Organisations; Riverford	Is being delivered through some current organisational budgets, but would require more funding for scaling	Ongoing	Increase in the number of CSAs and veg box schemes
	Minimise transactional relationships by integrating buyers into farmers' operations as trusted partners and foster strong loyalty-based relationships	Oooby; OFN; The Better Food Shed; BFT; Organic North; Producer Organisations	Already happening but additional funding needed	Ongoing	Strong local supply chains creating financially successful food SMEs
Identify improvements to operations that align farming to the market and manage risk	Promote and facilitate the use of pre-ordering purchasing systems to align supply with demand	Wholesalers and food service companies, Better Food Shed	Happening in some areas but further capacity and development of relationships needed	Ongoing	Adoption rate of pre-ordering systems
	Support food SMEs to stay informed about market trends and set prices that cover their costs while remaining competitive	**Farm Retail Association** (FRA), BFT, regional food and drink organisations; Riverford	Partly existing budgets, more funding needed for more accessible dissemination of info	Ongoing	Evidence of food businesses responding to market trends swiftly
	Invest in research to unpack supply chain economics to show where the money is going, in order to empower farmers	FFCC; ORC; academic institutions; Agro-ecological Research Collaboration (ARC); Riverford; Soil Association; Sustain; SFT	Research funding bodies, potential to add elements to wider projects	Ongoing	Evidence of research being used in policy development and development initiatives

Develop new pathways into local food production and processing through training and skills development	Support collaboration between government, industry and education providers to create new pathways for education and training	Department of Education; LWA; higher education / academic institutions	Funding needed	Ongoing - already happening to some extent	The development of new courses which fill gaps in current training provision
	Encourage increased opportunities for farmer-to-farmer knowledge exchange	Third sector orgs (BFT, SFT); Membership organisations (LWA, OGA, PfL, Soil Association, NFFN, CSA); regional SFPs; LEAF	Could be delivered through some current organisational budgets, but would require more funding	Ongoing - Further knowledge exchange to be developed when opportunities arise	Growth in existing farmer networks and the creation of inter-organisational networks
	Support organisations and collaborations advocating for food and farming education in schools	Third sector (e.g. **School Food Matters**, SFT, **The Harmony Project**, Food Sense Wales); Schools; Local Authorities; Department of Education; Soil Association (Food for Life)	Already happening but additional funding needed	Ongoing -	School syllabuses include courses / modules on agroecological food production and retail

Sector collaboration and coordination: key actions

Strategic Goal	Key Actions	Roles & Responsibilities	Funding & Resources	Timeline	Monitoring & Evaluation
Improve local food sector networking and collaboration to foster growth and efficiency	Create SFP working group/s	SFPs, Sustain, Soil Association, Food Matters	Could be resourced through current SFP budgets, potential for devolved nation funding	2025-2026	Creation of new SFPs; increased investment in SFPs
	Explore the potential for farm clusters to look at supply chains, working with food partnerships to consult and develop a pilot for collaboration	Sustain, SFP and key Farm Clusters	Seed funding to explore collaboration	2025-2026	No of farm clusters and SFPs connected
	Facilitate cross sector discussions and/or build local communities of practice	Membership organisations (LWA, PfL, FRA); third sector organisations (Sustain, Shared Assets, BFT, Soil Association, SRA); Academic institutions; farming clusters	Could be delivered through some current organisational budgets, but would require more funding	2025 onwards	Regular meetings (making use of existing membership meet ups), sharing of ideas to inform best practice. More producers linked up with food hubs/ local retailers

Increased coordination within and across regions between not-for-profits and local/ regional governments	Develop sub groups in specific regions to take forward Regional Local Food Growth Plans	Sub groups - supported by Local Food Working Party (Sustain); SFPs; Local Authorities	Potentially significant funding needed for coordination and delivery of actions	Begin through LFWP, but ongoing 2025	New SFPs
	Research which demonstrates the value of local food	Research organisations/ academic partners (SFT, ORC, FFCC, ARC, Universities, Farming for the Future, Riverford)	Funding required	Ongoing - already happening to some extent	Reports published
	Direct engagement / consultation with food producers, food businesses and citizens to inform advocacy and policy	Local Authorities; advocacy organisations (FFCC, LWA, Sustain); Academic institutions; Riverford, FRA, **Feeding Britain**, BFT	Already happening but additional funding could support specific engagement activities (e.g. FFCC citizen consultations)	Ongoing	Food producers, businesses and citizens views are reflected in regional policy
	Sector-specific groups set up or developed across the UK (e.g. Abattoir Sector Group, UK Grain Lab)	Third-sector organisations and academic partners (ORC; SFT; **UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition**	Funding required	Replicating the models in other sectors - so could begin soon subject to funding	New sector specific groups set up

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Local Food Growth Plan

A collaborative plan for action