

The case for local food:

building better local food systems
to benefit society and nature

Foreword – Lord Curry



When I chaired the Policy Commission on the future of farming and food in 2002 it was in response to a food and farming system rocked by foot and mouth and BSE. A central theme that emerged in that response was the need for greater reconnection, that farming had become detached from the environment and from people's lives. A key objective of the policies and initiatives that followed was to rebuild those connections, through investment, infrastructure, training, business and marketing support.

This new report, The Case for Local Food is in many ways the latest step in a journey started back then. The new context for this report may be different, but no less devastating, with food and farming having been hugely impacted by lockdown restrictions and the nature and climate emergencies threatening future production. Yet food systems have been largely absent from the policy responses in a year which will see the country host COP 26 and build towards a green economic recovery. With the second part of the National Food Strategy due to be released this summer, the importance of making the case for investment and policies that will support better food and farming, and within this the role of local food systems, has rarely been more time critical.

I am therefore delighted to be writing the foreword to this report which identifies the potential environmental, economic and social benefits which can be achieved through the growth of well-designed local food systems, and specifically the links to nature-friendly farming. The case presented here demonstrates both the need and potential for more farmer-focused, localised food systems as part of a diversity of approaches that can reshape our food system – one built on the kinds of reconnections that we sought to encourage twenty years ago, which are just as relevant now.

But the growth of these systems will not happen automatically, and the recommendations included in this report, if picked up by the variety of stakeholders, national and local, could provide a blueprint to securing real change which will improve livelihoods and communities and help address the nature and climate crises. I urge you to read this report and act on it.



Lord Curry

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Local food

lo·cal | fūd

Local food is food that is produced within a short distance of where it is consumed, often accompanied by a social structure and supply chain different from the large-scale supermarket system¹.

Nature

na·ture

Nature, in the broadest sense, is the natural, physical, material world or universe. Although humans are part of nature, human activity is often understood as a separate category from other natural phenomena.

¹ Waltz, Christopher L. (2011). Local food systems: background and issues. Nova Science Publish

Introduction

Sustain and the RSPB share a vision for a fairer, more sustainable food and farming system, which can address the climate and nature emergencies while feeding all people well.

Local food systems have played an important role in maintaining the UK's food supply and in helping support communities deal with the negative impact of the Coronavirus pandemic. At the same time, nature has provided solace and mental respite in this time of turmoil. Food and nature are inextricably linked, with agriculture being one of the main drivers of nature destruction but also having the potential to help restore it. As the national effort shifts towards recovery, we explore what part local food systems can play both in rebuilding the economy but at the same time helping the restoration of nature in the UK.

In this report, we summarise the shortcomings of the current food system and lay out how a well-designed and adequately supported one could play a part in addressing the climate and nature emergency. We demonstrate that this approach has the potential to provide real value for money and substantial public benefits. However, without the right framework, such benefits will not automatically arrive. National and local governments, enterprises and community networks all have roles to play to secure the positive impacts of local food and take more active roles in growing and managing local food systems through policies, procurement and investments.





People Images (istockphoto.com)

Our key recommendations

- **Create a Local Food Investment Fund to provide strategic support for sustainable local food systems**, as part of the planned Government funding for local areas, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund². Given one in seven workers is employed in the agri-food sector, investing in sustainable local food infrastructure and skills should form a strategic objective to “level up” regions in the UK and one in seven pounds of this Government investment should help deliver this. This should be closely co-ordinated with devolved governments and could be enhanced by leveraging matched local funding.
- Across government departments and in partnership with key stakeholders **develop a growth plan to deliver a 10% retail market share for non-multiples by 2030**, to help diversify supply chains with a view to increasing this to 25% by 2050. This should also include:
 - A specific targeted increase in the number of businesses active in direct/short supply chains and the percentage of local, sustainably produced food sold
 - Plans for growth in alternative retail sectors, such as street/covered markets
 - Identification of gaps in local food infrastructure across the UK
- **Ensure every local authority area in the UK is served by a food partnership by 2025**, either through support for existing partnerships or establishing new ones.
- Use existing public spend on food to support local and sustainable food systems, by **investment in local infrastructure to meet the target rollout of dynamic procurement to 33% of the country by the end of 2025**. Nationally, this means ensuring political buy in and one-off Government investment in the rollout of dynamic procurement and ensuring public purchasing rules are conducive to supporting local food suppliers (in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner). For local government, this involves proactively implementing established approaches that support community renewal or community wealth, such as a food version of the “Preston Model”.



Develop a growth plan to deliver a **10%** retail market share for non-multiples

² For an overview of potential government funds that could support investment in local food systems, see Piercey (2021): https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/news/government_funds_building_back_better_apr21/

Our vision

If current trends continue by the year 2030, we will be looking back at a decade of turbulence in the food system. However, it does not have to be this way, our vision is for the successful rebuilding of our food supply from the roots up and a restoration of nature to the countryside.

A key part of this will have been a revival in localised, nature-friendly food systems, supported by investment in infrastructure, skills and co-ordination, alongside policies that enable these businesses to operate successfully while providing a range of benefits to society.

This will have meant rural and peri-urban areas able to support growing numbers of meaningful and rewarding livelihoods. It will have provided a greater choice and diversity of opportunities of where to sell, giving smaller food businesses more control over their futures and the ability to plan with some certainty. Over 10% of the retail market share will be for non-multiple businesses, including box schemes, village shops, co-ops, markets and other independent retailers, with more of their produce coming from local producers, with many enterprises owned and run by people currently under-represented. This shift will have created many more jobs in retail and in the supply chains serving them. By 2030, all public sector catering will use dynamic procurement systems that help to make these contracts accessible to smaller – and often local – suppliers and producers, alongside a drive to higher food standards across public sector food. These developments, along with diversification in retail, will be enabled by advancements in technology and increased local infrastructure.

This stable growth will have fostered the confidence to invest not only in infrastructure, but in crops and production methods that reap dividends – both economically and environmentally – in the longer term, leading to the restoration of nature alongside adaptation to the changing climate and mitigation of the worst impacts. By the end of the decade, all UK farmland will be under nature-friendly and net zero (GHG) management, implementing agroecological principles and reversing the declines wildlife has experienced over recent decades. All local communities will have access to nature-rich greenspace.

The countryside will be alive once again with the sounds of nature, and people at work in harmony with nature, as local food systems provide a foundation for rebuilding local economies neglected or ravaged by global market forces. The declining trends in farmland birds and invertebrates will be reversed. People will be inspired to make food choices that reduce their impact on the planet, made easier by this food being more available, affordable, accessible and identifiable.

These changes will have been supported by effective national and local policies, including public goods payments that recognise the societal benefits of nature-friendly food production and which help underpin more sustainable business models, alongside a smart mix of other public, private and community investment, and robust requirements for higher standards and transparency throughout the food chain.



1. Local food systems

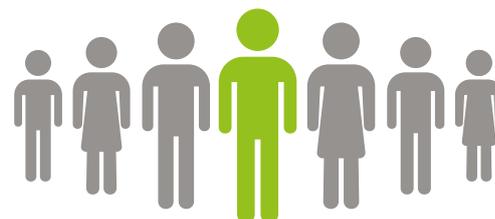
Local food systems – marked by shorter supply chains and affording a greater degree of diversity – are more than just a geographical denomination. The term, as we employ it here, functions as shorthand for an approach modelled on regeneration instead of extraction. It means a system where producers are paid a fair price for the public and market goods they help to supply, work in the food system is both well rewarded and rewarding, while all people – no matter where they live – can access safe, healthy and affordable food and know that it is restoring, not depleting, nature. It is in essence a more farmer-focused supply chain.

Not all food referred to as “local” is necessarily sustainable, nor can or should all food be produced locally. Principles and models for the “fair trade” of sustainable goods provide a valuable mechanism to ensure we make the most of our land, share prosperity across the globe and build resilience against localised deficiencies in supply that might be caused by disaster or war. Similarly, global trade in agri-food goods needs to be governed by principles of sustainability, transparency and responsible production. But we should also use our productive land wisely and build resilience in our food system by investing in diverse local production. This can increase robustness in the face of pests, disease and extreme weather, as well as resistance to shocks. There is a growing body of evidence that challenges the assumption that specialised, large-scale monoculture is the best way to produce food, with the existing economics ignoring the multiple externalities, such as the cost to our health and environment. Also by capturing a greater proportion of value, local food systems can support good employment and flourishing independent businesses, while enabling investment in nature and innovation on farms.

Local, or localised, food systems not only have the potential to facilitate more evenly distributed and greater economic prosperity but also to engender closer and more transparent relationships between supply chain actors. This means a more level playing field for suppliers of different sizes, with a market that is responsive to all the considerations affecting food, not only price, and with people better understanding where and how their food is produced and the impact it has. By prioritising investment in nature, facilitated by local food purchasing and public goods payments, we can help secure the return of species to landscapes and improve the provision of ecosystem services, thereby demonstrating tangible benefits for local communities.

1.1 What needs to change?

There is broad agreement that our dominant food system needs to change³. Key to this change will be shifting to sustainable and healthy diets, that reduce waste, support production systems that are animal and nature-friendly, and ensure that all actors in the supply chain are treated fairly.



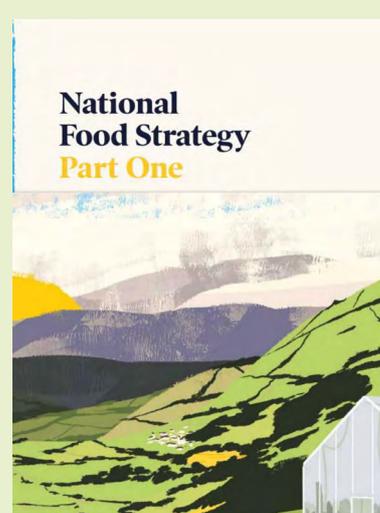
The food system provides jobs for **one in seven** of us

No part of our economy matters more than food. It is vital for life, and for pleasure. It shapes our sense of family, community and nation: cooking and eating together is perhaps the defining communal act. The food system also provides jobs for one in seven of us.

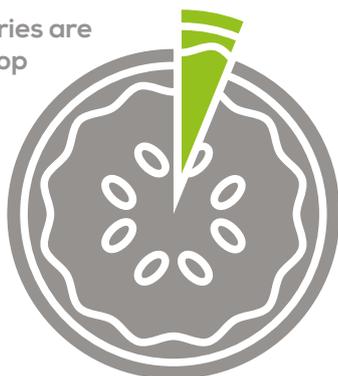
Much of this is made possible by a free market that performs a million daily miracles, producing, exporting, importing, processing and serving up a dazzling variety of reasonably-priced foods in an abundance unimaginable to previous generations.

But this bounty has come at a cost. Intensive farming practices have caused serious damage to the environment and food related disease is costing the NHS billions and drastically harming the lives of millions. Food security, too, is a growing concern: population growth, climate change, the global increase in meat eating is intensifying resource competition between nations.

NFS nationalfoodstrategy.org/



94.3% of groceries are sold through the top nine multiples leaving only **5.7%** of the market share for the alternatives (of which 1.8% is Ocado)⁴.



Our existing food system provides a plentiful supply of calories, yet millions of people live in food poverty with millions more consuming too many, and this has hidden costs, including negative environmental impacts and the toll on our health. These negative health inequalities impact the poorest the most⁵. Economies of scale no doubt make the face value of food cheaper but can undermine our long-term food security if they fail to invest in the people and natural resources which underpin them. The costs therefore can be felt by nature and society. The added dimension of the climate crisis resulting in more extreme weather events means building a resilient system is more important than ever.

³ <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2021/02/food-system-impacts-biodiversity-loss>

⁴ <https://www.kantarworldpanel.com/en/grocery-market-share/great-britain/snapshot/04.10.20/>

⁵ Young people are twice as likely to be at risk of obesity if they live in the most deprived areas of Scotland (13.7% vs 6.5%)” – Obesity Action Scotland 2019 <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/media/1383/primary-1-inequalities-briefings-oas.pdf>



Long opaque supply chains separate us from where our food comes from, hiding the negative impacts of its production and distribution, and so the true cost. The power inequality⁶ within the supply chain means that farms and smaller food businesses are forced to be price-takers, often producing at a loss and reliant on subsidies. A recent study⁷ modelled the impacts to farm businesses of the loss of direct payments, showing that a significant proportion would struggle to remain in farming without that subsidy support. The National Farmers' Union's (NFU) own estimates⁸ show that livestock farmers will lose between 60% and 80% of their income as direct payments significantly reduce over the next four years. This highlights the way in which farming has become reliant on subsidies, with many hoping that Environmental Land Management (ELM) will provide enough support going forward. These low farm incomes have resulted in a failure to invest in their products and sustainability resulting in many low-paid unskilled jobs and environmental damage. Often the response is to specialise, which may increase efficiency but can also result in less diverse and less wildlife-friendly systems which provide fewer jobs. There are real trade-offs between what we produce, where and for whom, and we must explore them fully and honestly if we are to reshape the food system in a way that delivers better for all⁹.

The NFU estimates show that **livestock farmers will lose between 60% and 80% of their income as direct payments significantly reduce** over the next four years.



⁶ https://www.law.ox.ac.uk/sites/files/oxlaw/the_relationship_between_supermarkets_and_suppliers.pdf

⁷ https://ukandeu.ac.uk/why-does-off-farm-income-matter-to-the-uk-farm-households/#disqus_thread

⁸ <https://www.agriland.co.uk/farming-news/path-to-sustainable-farming-leaves-english-farmers-with-questions-batters/>

⁹ Bene et al (2019) "When food systems meet sustainability – current narratives and implications for action" World Development 113, 116-130

1.2 Trade-offs

Challenges as complex and wide-reaching as reforming the food system will rarely be solved by individual “transformative” solutions. Food is too integral to our daily lives, identities and economies to be addressed by a single, “silver bullet” solution and the evidence in this report does not suggest local food is a panacea for all these problems. Trade in foodstuffs helps communities to overcome the limits of what can be produced locally, offering greater choice, flexibility and affordability, while also providing insurance against shortages and hunger when crops fail or extreme events impact local production. Too simple, uncritical or narrow a reading of the benefits of local systems should be replaced with a nuanced and balanced understanding of how and where geographically and qualitatively (e.g. shorter food chains) local food can contribute to a better food system for all.

Given the daily importance of food to our individual and planetary health, any proposed changes to how we procure, produce and consume food must be done with care – the potential risks are too high otherwise. But the immediate security of food supply and the availability of calories should not be used to justify a reticence to act in dealing with the longer-term and systemic issues that we know are ultimately catastrophic to human and planetary health. An RSPB/WWF report recently found that the UK’s overseas land footprint, a key element of the UK’s total environmental footprint overseas, has increased by 15% on average compared to their 2011–15 analysis.¹⁰ Offshoring negative social and environmental impacts through an over-reliance on imports with opaque, low-cost, unsustainable supply chains – with a corresponding erosion of diverse local productive capacity – is not a suitable alternative to improving domestic supply chains.

A balance must be struck and the arguments laid out in this report do not suggest that “local” food is intrinsically “better”; nor that food produced at a distance or internationally is necessarily “bad”. Local in this sense is not a synonym for sustainable, nor geographical, but instead is, we argue, more likely to exhibit the qualities and relationships in production and consumption that will contribute to a better food system for people and nature. It is those qualities and relationships – particularly shorter, farmer-focused supply chains and greater diversity of supply actors, from farm to fork – that need to be championed (in the food we consume both from nearby and afar) to bring about necessary change. Given the effect the Coronavirus pandemic has had on habits and perceptions of food, including a greater engagement in nearby places and networks, it is important to consider what precisely might be “good” about “local” and scale those benefits up. The purpose is not to support local businesses for their own sake but to encourage a diversity of scales of operation. This means creating an enabling business environment that allows such companies to compete. Without this it is impossible that those enterprises built on positive relationships and practices, which provide a range of benefits to society and nature, can operate.

It is precisely in the pursuit of balance and diversity that this report proposes steps to increase availability of and access to the benefits of local food economies. We suggest the need in the short-term for a modest growth in localised food systems, for example to 10% of market share in retail. This is unlikely to disrupt mainstream supply chains, but would help form part of a diverse system able to withstand future strains, while offering clear opportunities for communities, economies and environments. The evidence collated here suggests that policies and investment that support shorter supply chains will increase the number of jobs, and arguably the distribution of these jobs, helping to bolster local economies. It also suggests that well-designed local food systems can help drive climate action and nature recovery, reconnecting people with the impact of their food. With the right policy support these benefits could help drive a restoration of nature and address the climate crisis. It could help improve resilience – something we have traded for convenience and price at the till – but there is still scope to allow for both.

¹⁰ Riskier business https://www.wwf.org.uk/sites/default/files/2020-07/RiskierBusinessSummaryReport_July2020_revised.pdf

1.3 The impact of Covid-19

The impact of the Coronavirus pandemic has brought many of the weaknesses of the food system to the fore. As has been seen in cases of adverse weather, the just-in-time delivery model employed by multiple retailers struggled, leaving shelves empty of industrial loaves, flour, certain fruit and veg and other staples. Added to long queues outside stores, and home delivery slots fully-booked for weeks on end, many people – including those most in need – were forced to go without.

Retailers have been forced to up their game to meet increased household demand and the hospitality sector has suffered through multiple national lockdowns and sustained slump in demand.¹¹ The wholesale supply chain was forced to pivot to find new markets as restaurants, pubs and other eateries closed and innovative packaging and delivery solutions had to be found.¹²

After the initial panic buying there were some positive outcomes with more people cooking at home and reporting lower food waste¹³. Many smaller and ethical food enterprises were found to be very resilient, with a survey by Sustain finding that despite supply chain challenges, they were able to adapt to the changes, offering vital services to their communities, and in many cases creating new jobs. Finances, staff safety and logistics have made things difficult and uncertainty, particularly income fluctuation, has made it hard to plan for the future but networks supporting collaboration between these enterprises have helped with finding solutions.¹⁴

Shortages during lockdown helped inspire domestic and SME Real Bread bakers to look beyond supermarket shelves and wholesalers for flour. Lack of off-the-peg, roller-milled, modern wheat flour has led bakers to be more adventurous with their choices. Grower-millers including Gilchesters, Hodmedods and Scotland the Bread all reported unprecedented sales for their flours milled from locally-grown heritage wheats and other non-commodity grains.



Case study:

Scotland the Bread

scotlandthebread.org

The problem of access to flour, and therefore bread, that supports both physical and environmental health dates back generations. Affordability is often cited as a barrier to swapping sliced white industrial loaf products for Real Bread. Scotland the Bread founder Andrew Whitley and his team reject the idea that additive-laden industrial loaf products of questionable nutritional value and environmental impact should be the only option for people on low incomes.

Due to overwhelming demand for flour during the first Covid-19 lockdown, the supply to shops and many neighbourhood bakeries broke down. In response Scotland the Bread launched Solidarity Bags. People are invited to buy sacks of organic, wholegrain flour milled in Scotland from locally-grown heritage wheat. These are then delivered to community bakers, who portion the flour into small bags for home bakers, or craft it into delicious, nutritious Real Bread, all of which they sell at a fair price.



¹¹ <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9111/CBP-9111.pdf>

¹² Manifesto for a resilient, adaptable and sustainable UK food system – Fast lessons from Covid-19. Dynamic Food Procurement National Advisory Board https://ad555873-f343-4a7c-b674-b0e4792f5f9a.filesusr.com/ugd/6b24d7_a54481998a1c4b45bbd44542515b592e.pdf

¹³ <https://wrap.org.uk/sites/default/files/2021-02/WRAP-Food-Waste-and-Covid-19-Survey-3-Life-in-Flux.pdf>

¹⁴ Sustain survey of 100 good food enterprises on impact of Covid (including cafés, producers, shops, markets and buying groups) https://www.sustainweb.org/news/jun20_enterprise_survey_findings/

Recovering together

Investing in nature for a greener, fairer future

The pandemic has seen the emergence of several prominent trends affecting the food sector, including a greater demand for and use of “local” food systems and conveniences, including shops, click and collect, box schemes and other delivery services. With long-term impacts of the pandemic unknown and future challenges uncertain, it is critical that increased public engagement in local food is both actively sustained and sustainable; i.e. emphasis on the “local” shifts beyond proximity to an appreciation of the benefits of local, nature-friendly systems in order to reap the full benefits this report outlines.



Case study:

Leeds Food Partnership

foodwiseleeds.org/

FoodWise Leeds (the food partnership) has supported local businesses to diversify their businesses to adapt to the changing landscape following the onset of Covid-19. A local business, Lean Lunch, launched GoodBox, a new vegbox scheme providing fruit, vegetables and other produce sourced from local suppliers, delivered with no packaging or plastics in a zero-emissions electric van. Since March 2020, two more Community Support Agriculture programmes have emerged. The food partnership is working on a Patchwork Farm project that would link existing small producers under a single brand, allowing produce to be aggregated and distributed from a single hub.

Case study:

Open Food Network

about.openfoodnetwork.org.uk/

Some of those food systems that most successfully responded to the realignments caused by the first lockdown from March 2020, were those based around short food supply chains. The Open Food Network (OFN) works with many food hubs like Tamar Valleys Food Hubs and Stroudco both of which have spent many years building close connections within their local communities between the people who grow, rear and produce the food and the people who eat it. These established food hubs saw increases in turnover of between 300% and 550% in the first seven weeks of the first lockdown.

At the same time many new enterprises set up online OFN shopfronts. These included farmers and growers urgently needing to find alternative routes to market for their produce. Examples include Woodlea Stables and the Wild Bread Bakehouse. Additionally many new food hubs sprang up in Spring 2020, led by community enterprises needing to get local food to vulnerable people who were self-isolating. These enterprises drew in volunteer support from their local communities – cycle couriers offering home delivery, pickers and packers willing to prepare boxes of goods from multiple local producers and phone buddies taking online orders for shoppers without internet access. Overall OFN saw an increase in turnover of over 850% in the first seven weeks of lockdown. This peaked and then fell slightly when the supermarkets recovered, and is currently running at just over 600% of similar levels pre-pandemic. Many of the local food enterprises have encouraged their customers to remain loyal, inspired somewhat by campaigns like that run by Better Food Traders.

1.4 Defining local food

Most people, when talking about buying locally, are using it as short-hand for buying from local businesses that are usually independent, or at least non-multiples. A Sainsbury’s local or local branch of Pizza Express would not feature in most people’s definitions. Local food refines this a little more with most people recognising that for a product to be local it would be produced nearby, and again, would be from a producer that wasn’t a large business, and notably with fewer steps in the supply chain. If you happen to live next to a chocolate factory you might support it for various reasons, but it would be a push for anyone to say they were buying “local food”.

So most people’s definition of local food, when purchasing it, would be a shorthand for food from a smaller producer via a shorter supply chain, as per the Waltz definition (see box). Page 15 goes into a more detailed exploration, in order that we are clear what benefits we can and cannot attribute to “local food”.

By extension a local food system is only partly a question of geography, and is also characterised by the kinds of production and trading relationships in which food businesses are engaged – notably marked by shorter, more direct supply chains, diversity in the profile of producers, products and production involved, and transparency and visibility of practices building closer relationships between producers and consumers. It is not however the same as sustainable food, and one cannot necessarily attribute all the benefits of an ideal food system in local food.

Local food is food that is produced within a short distance of where it is consumed, often accompanied by a social structure and supply chain different from the large-scale supermarket system.¹⁵



¹⁵ Waltz, Christopher L. (2011). Local food systems: background and issues. Nova Science Publishers.

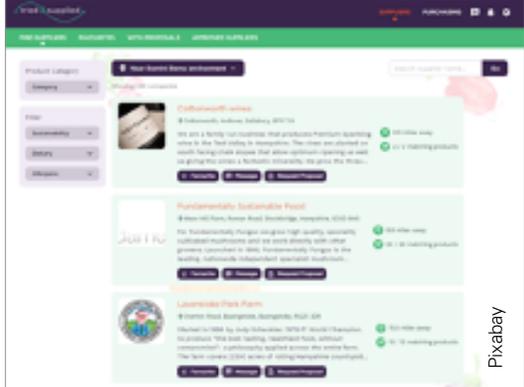
Case study:

Tried and Supplied

Tried and Supplied is a virtual platform that makes use of technology to create efficiencies in sourcing and purchasing, giving restaurant and catering businesses the option to choose local, sustainable suppliers and producers without the additional burden of managing a broader supply chain. It also helps build connections to foster collaboration across the whole network, spotting opportunities to reduce food miles and food waste.

For example, we have been working with a new sustainable restaurant with a New Orleans concept to find grits (a southern US type of food) locally. Because grits are usually imported from the USA, Tried and Supplied has worked with Letheringsett Watermill (a traditional water mill in Norfolk) to mill grits for the restaurant and supply flour for the wider restaurant group.

Tried and Supplied has been working with over 500 suppliers and producers to ensure that any food or drink that would otherwise go to waste is first marketed to hospitality businesses as high margin opportunities for their menus. Many products are unable to be sold through retail, but can still be used in hospitality: such as discontinued or experimental product lines, long-life products like flour packaged with an overly conservative shelf life date, and bi-products of food processing.



Pixabay



SoStock (istockphoto.com)

Case study:**Leicestershire School Meals
(Leicestershire Traded Services)**leicestershiretradedservices.org.uk/Pages/1554

The school meal service, Leicestershire Traded Services caters 35,000 meals per day (pre-Covid). Since achieving the Gold Food for Life Served Here Award in 2019, Leicestershire Traded Services, working alongside Food for Life and Sustainable Food Places in Leicestershire has been seeking to shorten supply chains by working directly with farms to grow to order including involving suppliers in menu planning (and where possible involving school pupils to harvest school veg). This work has led to exploring numerous directions to increase short supply, including trialling dynamic procurement in the council contracts and engaging county council farms to grow for local communities. As a proportion of food supply 33% of meat purchased is organic, 25% of fresh produce is organic and 70% of fresh produce is from either Leicestershire or adjacent counties. Future plans in development include investigating direct relationships with local livestock farmers to identify how procurement and recipe development could support greater small farm input, and a trial using locally grown pulses – these plans sit within broader food and farming discussions with local stakeholders.

Investing in nature for a greener, fairer future

Some enterprises intrinsically embody the definition of local food, such as farmers' markets and Community Support Agriculture (CSAs), for other retailers and caterers the extent to which they embrace "local" will vary.

What are local food systems?

We consider local food systems to have a number of specific characteristics – not just geographical – but also characterised by the kinds of production and trading relationships in which businesses are engaged.

Businesses within the system are likely to:

- Be smaller in size, including independent, co-operatives or collaborations (including farmers)
- Mostly be using shorter/direct supply chains with fewer links between producer and customer
- Be farmer-focused with the majority of the sale price going to the producer.
- Be primarily – or significantly – sourcing from, and selling to, their local geographical areas
- Be owned – and therefore more likely to reinvest – independently and locally, rather than controlled by and for the financial benefit of distant shareholders and hedge funds with no connection to or interest in the local community.

The system is likely to:

- Be diverse in the profile of producers, products and production
- Be transparent, with sources and production methods clear and well-communicated
- Have local infrastructure to help businesses run effectively e.g. abattoirs, mills, distribution hubs

What enterprises can you buy local food through?

Those enterprises that are by design "local":

- Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs), certified farmer's markets, Better Food Traders, most box/bag schemes, pick your own, farm gate sales, beekeepers, microbrewery tap rooms and off sales.

Those selling a varying proportion of local food:

- Cheesemongers, independent and Real Bread bakers, butchers, grocers, milkmen, fishmongers, farm shops, independent pubs and restaurants, small and medium scale caterers, food co-ops and buying groups, independent/wholefood retailers, independent home delivery, ethical supermarkets.

Those that contribute to a diverse food system with traditionally low proportions of local food:

- Street-food vendors and markets, street and covered markets, Symbol group retailers (e.g. Spar, Nisa).



Supply chain diversity

One angle considered originally for the report was to focus on a broader aim of increasing supply chain diversity. Diversity here is shorthand for a rebalancing effort to increase the amount of small and medium enterprises particularly in the retail sector. The arguments for focusing on this would be predominantly about resilience – not putting all your eggs in one basket – and economic, with higher numbers employed per pound spent in smaller enterprises. A focused drive on supporting supply chain diversity particularly in retail will help open up many new job opportunities.¹⁶ A target of 10% by 2030 market share (rising to 25% by 2045), and associated supporting policies could drive development of new routes to market and a growth in street, farmer and covered markets (see also market case study right), co-ops, box schemes, independent, local online and symbol group shops, and short supply chains. This would help address many of the problems for smaller farm businesses, as well as supporting local jobs and improving access to healthier, affordable food. Some of the policies needed to support this are detailed in Sustain's briefing on food retail diversity¹⁷. A focus on retail or supply chain diversity would not reap the benefits specific to local food, particularly environmental, or those economic benefits linked to local multipliers as detailed below.

¹⁶ Supermarket Failure. Sustain, 2019. https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/super_market_failure/?section=

¹⁷ Sustain 2019. Evidence submitted to the National Food Strategy <https://www.sustainweb.org/resources/files/responses/FoodretaildiversityplanNFSCallforEvidencefin.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.nmtf.co.uk/coronavirus/surveys/>

¹⁹ <https://www.mission4markets.uk/>

Case study:

Markets

Markets are one of many sectors that will be building back from a virtual standstill during lockdown, with roughly two thirds of markets closed even after Government had clarified that most markets could open for essential traders¹⁸. With the predicted wave of unemployment we need not only for all these markets to be supported to reopen, but new ones too, better distributed across the UK as they provide flexible spaces to support small or start up enterprises. Despite having almost 50,000 towns and cities in the UK, there are only just over 1,000 markets¹⁹. We need an ambitious long-term plan that would spread the opportunities that markets provide. If only 10% of UK towns and cities had a market, this would mean almost 4,000 new markets. A slightly more conservative quadrupling of markets could lead to 100,000 new business opportunities, or at least expansion of (32,400) existing businesses, not to mention the extra trade created for nearby businesses on market days. This will require funding, and buy-in particularly from local government, and most importantly it needs high profile national leadership to give this vision the profile needed for it to succeed.



2. What are the potential benefits for society of local food systems?

One solution to address the shortcomings of our food system is to aim to enhance the role of local food systems and make societal and environmental benefits an explicit goal. Local food in itself is not by definition beneficial for people or nature, but there is both a strong correlation between the two, and evidence that by building on the best examples, local food systems as defined in this report could play an important role in supporting a green economic recovery.

2.1 Economic benefits

Local food systems offer many potential economic benefits. They have shorter supply chains, so a larger proportion of revenues are retained in the local economy, particularly by the food producer, so there is greater local value added. They may offer opportunities for premium pricing on some products, and therefore higher value added, by emphasising quality and positive social, economic, environmental impact over price. Higher value added has a range of benefits, delivering greater profitability and incomes for producers, as well as enabling opportunities for better paid employment and investment in skills development and research and development.

Farm shops and farmers' markets provide a valuable opportunity for farm businesses to diversify and to add value to their production. Direct selling through such outlets provide a direct link to customers and the opportunity for feedback – though familiar to most service industries, this is a radical concept for some farmers.

Case study:

Totnes

The Local Economic Blueprint for Totnes and District, Local Economic Blueprint was undertaken in 2013.

The report estimated the potential value of four key sectors of our localised economy, including food.

The research found that £30 million was spent annually on food and drink, of which just one third was spent in the 60+ vibrant independent food shops in and around Totnes.

Encouraging people to shift just 10% of their weekly food spend to independent food shops would result in an extra £2 million to our local economy.

grownintotnestoolkit.co.uk/our-story

reconomycentre.org/home/economic-blueprint/

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Local reinvestment

Local food systems tend to have stronger local multipliers, as local retailers and producers are more likely to source goods and services locally than national chains. A study by NEF (2002) compared the multiplier effects of shopping for fruit and vegetables in a supermarket and from a local organic box scheme, finding that every £10 spent with the box scheme resulted in total spending of £25 in the local area, compared with just £14 when the same amount was spent in a supermarket. More recently NEF (2011) have demonstrated that local procurement of school meals has strong economic multipliers. Case studies found that each £1 spent locally resulted in additional local re-spending of at least £1.19 in Nottingham and £0.85 in Plymouth²⁰.

Looking beyond supply chains that are inherently local, to others that contribute to diverse supply chains, NEF and University of Leeds (2018) demonstrated the significant local economic and social value of traditional food retail markets, including through multiplier effects.



MachineHeadz (istockphoto.com)

²⁰ https://neweconomics.org/uploads/files/8730d0b778c9021bab_cpm6b61os.pdf

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Case study:

Better Food Traders

betterfoodtraders.org/

The Better Food Traders is a network of ethical food retail businesses who have come together to show a better alternative to the current food system. One that is good for people and the planet. The 27 Better Food Traders have a combined revenue of over £8 million from food sales to their 12,445 weekly customers. The members prioritise sourcing fruit and veg from small and medium scale agroecological UK farmers. They source via extremely short supply chains (frequently directly from growers), resulting in over 50% of the customer pound going back to farmers across the UK. This provides farmers with a reasonable, reliable return (compared with 9% of the supermarket retail pound). These radical retailers all have a mission to promote supply chain transparency and community education so that a localised and seasonal diet is easy to choose and easy to eat.

All our members create jobs within their communities and use pay ratios of 3:1 or lower, often operating as co-operatives, so big bonuses for directors or shareholders are ruled out and employees are paid fairly.

Together we can make the food system better for people and the planet.



2.2 Employment benefits

Local food systems often support higher levels of employment relative to sales than national chains. CPRE (2012) estimated the contribution of local food webs to the economy. They found that:

- Smaller independent local food outlets create a job for every £46k turnover, which is three times the return on investment of supermarkets. This means local outlets support three times the jobs of national supermarket chains. With just over 1 million employed in food retail currently²¹, a shift of 10% of supermarket trade to smaller independent outlets could provide a further 200,000 jobs.
- Research by Porter and Raistrick (1998) on the effects on employment following the opening of 93 edge-of-town supermarkets showed that over a four-year period, there had been a net loss of 276 jobs in a 10-mile radius of each of the supermarkets, equivalent to a national total loss of over 25,000 jobs.
- Producers involved in the local food economy employed on average 3.4 full-time workers compared to the regional average of 2.3 per farm.
- In certain towns – such as Ledbury, Otley, Penrith and Totnes – there are relatively high numbers of outlets selling local produce, a large number of suppliers and good availability. For their size, local food supports a relatively high number of jobs and turnover in and around these towns.
- Employment per hectare in Community Supported Agriculture systems is five times higher than the agricultural average. (Although subsequent research by the CSA network puts employment in these enterprises at 0.99 FTE per Ha, which is over ten times the national average of 0.08 FTE per Ha.)

A study by the University of Essex for the Soil Association found that there are 32% more jobs per organic farm than equivalent non-organic farms due to higher labour requirements in field and also on farm marketing associated with organic systems. These findings are based on the first national survey of employment on UK organic farms. Not all food in local/short supply chains is organic, but a higher than average percentage is – see environmental benefits below.

²¹ Statista website <https://www.statista.com/statistics/315887/food-retailing-workforce-in-the-united-kingdom-uk/>

Case study:

Dynamic Food Procurement

dynamicfood.org/

Dynamic Purchasing Systems (DPS) are nothing new in the public sector – but until recently, such approaches to overcome barriers and provide access to the public sector for SME primary food producers have been difficult to implement.

By facilitating access to public sector markets for smaller scale, sustainable growers and maintaining strong price competition throughout the duration of the contract, DPS can improve the process of procuring, fulfilling and consolidating a large number of primary food and drink producers and delivering with a single catering kitchen order, invoice and delivery.

The system is being piloted currently in the southwest, in conjunction with Crown Estates, which if successful, could be rolled out UK-wide for public sector food buyers. The National advisory Board for Dynamic Food Procurement aims to divert over 33% of UK public sector food and drink spend to fresh, local produce from sustainable SME producers by 2025.





Local food and drink can benefit the tourism sector, and strong links between food and drink and tourism are evident in many parts of the UK. A study for Defra by ICF (2016) found that a localised food and drink offer can enhance the tourism offer of rural destinations and offer benefits to rural businesses and economies by:

- Increasing the attractiveness of rural destinations and attracting additional visitors;
- Encouraging greater tourism expenditures, by enhancing the quality of the local tourism product, increasing expenditure per visit, supporting more productive jobs and higher added value and providing support for economic regeneration;
- Extending the tourism season; and
- Increasing the retention of tourism expenditures in the local economy (economic multiplier effects).

Case study:

Food tourism and a sense of place: Taste Causeway Northern Ireland

tastecauseway.com/

Northern Ireland's Causeway Coast is famed for its rugged, breath-taking landscapes and rich cultural heritage. Tourism is one of the key economic drivers in the area, the region was voted as the world's best region to visit by Lonely Planet in 2018.

The Causeway Coast is gaining growing recognition as a key destination for food tourism. Local artisans and producers offer a variety of high-quality produce from kelp, craft beer and meat and vegetables from local farmers.

In 2019, recognising the unique food offering in the area, Taste Causeway was established, with support from the local Council and Invest Northern Ireland. The initiative provides a collective brand and digital platform for local food producers, retailers and restaurants enhancing the economic benefits both for the producers and the local area in general, helping to unpin local food production.

With Covid-19, many members have experienced catastrophic disruption to their normal business. Taste Causeway has provided support for its members through these unprecedented times. Despite the recent difficulties, the foundations built by Taste Causeway provide numerous examples of the benefits of local food tourism. With the right support local food tourism can provide numerous benefits to the local economy, farmers, artisans and producers. Taste Causeway is being recognised for its approach in promoting the region as a top-quality food destination, coming runner up in an All-Ireland Foodie Destination Award and has been accredited as a Slow Food destination.

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The scale of benefits was found to vary between locations and was most significant in areas with:

- A strong and varied supply chain that is willing and able to source produce locally;
- High levels of awareness and a good reputation for local food and drink amongst visitors;
- A high-quality tourism offer to attract and support high value visitors; and
- Strong support from public sector decision-makers and delivery bodies.

The study found that a strong local food offer can increase the overall size of a food economy, making comparisons between two tourist towns in Cornwall (Padstow and Bude) whose local food offer is at different stages of development.



Case study:

Pipers Farm

Thirty years ago Pipers Farm was a 50-acre, permanent pasture farm in Devon where Peter and Henri Greig reared native Red Ruby Cattle, which they sold to customers through their butcher’s shop on the local High Street. Fast forward to today and Peter and Henri still run the 50 acre family farm, and Pipers Farm has become a sophisticated online marketplace for sustainably-produced British meat, dairy and grains.

“Working with a network of 30 small-scale family farms, Pipers Farm is providing healthy, high-welfare food straight to the homes of tens of thousands of people UK wide. Within our network, most of our partner farms are based within a 50-mile radius of Pipers Farm. We believe small-scale mixed farming is the most sustainable way to produce food.

Enabling a direct relationship between farmer and customer has been absolutely vital in times like the pandemic where local food systems have proved most resilient in being able to respond to consumer demand quickly, and ensure constant supply of good food. Our family farming business model is built around relationships, trust and respect for the work carried out by each person within the supply chain. Directly we employ 42 people, but indirectly our model impacts on the livelihoods of hundreds in a whole web of local businesses.

If we look to our future and the ecological and climate issues we face, livestock has a very clear role to play in the production of food (including grains and crops) and adding value to the sustainability of the farming system. Our farms rear native breeds on natural diets, in their natural environment. When farmed the right way, they contribute to healthy soil, biodiversity, and improving carbon sequestration.

Recently, Kantar reported that 630,000 more households bought from independent butchers in the year to Feb 2021, spending nearly 50% more per trip compared to other retailers. Evidence that value in local, quality meat is on the up. We need the next generation to see farming as a viable career and reassure them that it will be fit for purpose in 10–20 years time. We genuinely believe it’ll be farming business models like ours which will stand the test of time.”



Henri Greig with outdoor free-range pigs, foraging in a fodder crop, Pipers Farm

2.3 Environmental benefits

Local food systems are defined primarily by arrangement for distribution and marketing therefore the environmental benefits that they offer are not clear cut and strongly dependent on the food in question and the impact of its production methods. There is evidence that both producers engaged in and customers of local food systems are motivated to generate environmental benefits. However, this aspect of local food systems is often low on the policy agenda, and is not well described and only modestly supported²².

There is evidence that a much greater proportion of local food is associated with agroecological production than produce sold through other outlets which has benefits for nature:

Box schemes are more likely to be sourced from agroecological farms.

A recent survey of veg box schemes²³ found that the majority (67%) of 101 respondents were small-scale producers regularly supplying up to 300 veg boxes per week to local communities, and that most of these were organic. Fifteen were Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes also supplying under 300 boxes a week. Seventeen were larger box schemes supplying between 300 and 2,000 boxes a week, and one was a large-scale organic box scheme supplying 55,000 boxes weekly pre-Covid-19. Most²⁴ box schemes include organic produce in their range and are seen as having benefits for land management and biodiversity conservation. Studies²⁵ have shown that organic farming supports more biodiversity than conventional systems.

²² Grieve and Slee (2003)

²³ Wheeler (2020)

²⁴ Brown et al (2009)

²⁵ Hole et al (2005)

Case study:

Lunan Bay

lunanbayfarm.com

Local nature-friendly food systems in action: Adaptability of local food supply and the importance of investment in local food systems.

Founded by farmer Neil McEwan in 2016, Lunan Bay Farm are producers of sustainable ingredients located at their beachside farm in Angus, Scotland. With help from his wife Jillian McEwan, Neil rears over 400 goats, grows honeyberries and asparagus. They are members of the Nature Friendly Farmers Network.

Since they started their farm business Jillian and Neil have been keen to run the farm sustainably – reducing its environmental footprint, improving its value for nature and increasing the nutritional value of its output. They joined a local RSPB initiative to help corn buntings. The regular monitoring has made them more aware of the wildlife on the farm. They have also significantly reduced artificial fertilisers and are using the goats to improve the carbon content of the soil. They grow asparagus which is a permanent crop meaning they can crop it continually for up to 10 years.

The Coronavirus pandemic hugely impacted the business. Most of the asparagus had been presold to restaurants so they had to pivot to new markets. Luckily the response from small independent retailers was amazing and they hope that these new routes will remain an outlet once the restaurants reopen. A number of local food hubs have also helped sales, linking them to new markets. The business relies on local infrastructure including a small abattoir. Without it the business would not be viable. This processing infrastructure for grain as well as livestock is crucial for local food economies and is worthy of public support because of the benefits it makes possible in terms of resilient local food production.

Neil and Jillian take an entrepreneurial approach to the farm. Although they welcome grants for diversification and support for nature improvements they do not want to be reliant on government funding. They want the government to invest in the local food infrastructure so they are able to get a fair price for the sustainable, healthy food they produce.



dulazidar (istockphoto.com)



CasarsaGuru (istockphoto.com)

By strengthening connections between food producers and customers, local food systems provide opportunities for nature-friendly farmers to market their produce directly to the public.

Buying through alternative, local supply chains supports **nature-friendly farmers**, rare breeds and diverse farming systems.

Many nature-friendly farms are increasingly involved in local food systems – a recent report by the Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN, 2020)²⁶ presents case studies demonstrating how farmers are changing the way they supply the food they produce, and are marketing directly to the public, through local food hubs, online platforms and farmers markets. Local food systems provide opportunities for nature-friendly farmers to engage directly with customers and offer opportunities for them to enhance their income by selling directly to customers with an interest in nature and concern about food production methods.

Simplification and specialisation of farms leads to lost features and habitats²⁷. A thriving local food economy requires diverse farming systems which can bring benefits for nature by sustaining a diversity of habitats and management. Local food systems encourage and reward a diversity of production systems, meaning there is less pressure to specialise to survive. This is confirmed by research by CPRE (2012) which found that local food webs underpin local diversity in the scale and type of farming in the area from livestock to cheese to fruit cropping. Local food systems would therefore be more supportive of mixed farming, which benefits nature as it is able to support more wildlife than specialised farming systems²⁸. They can also support genetic diversity within the farming system in traditional and rare breeds, heirloom and heritage varieties not suited to large-scale processing and distribution systems. This helps improve the resilience of the overall agricultural system, crucial against a backdrop of our changing climate.

²⁶ https://www.nffn.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/NFFN-Report-15_04.pdf

²⁷ "Postwar changes in arable farming and biodiversity in Great Britain," Journal of Applied Ecology Issue 1, pp157-176, February 2002, Landscape diversity section <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1046/j.1365-2664.2002.00695.x/full>

²⁸ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0006320704003246>

Case study:

Lynbreck Croft

The vision for Lynbreck Croft is to create a joined up network of habitats where people and wildlife live alongside in harmony and food is produced for the local community. All of our decisions are driven by achieving positive environmental outcomes in order to ensure the long-term natural health of the land. We run a small fold of Highland Cattle for beef, rare breed Oxford Sandy and Black pigs for pork, laying hens for eggs and bees for honey.

We sell all of our produce direct to build regular relationships with our customers and maximise financial return. We also offer added value produce which we create on-site in our micro butchery. Our business model mimics natural systems in embracing diversity, giving us greater resilience in times of uncertainty from a variety of income streams.

We live in an area with low population density which means that establishing a healthy and reliable customer base can be a challenge. However we have found that with positive communication of approach to farm with nature and quality of goods, we are now in a situation where we have a number of repeat customers with growing interest from others for our produce.



Pixabay



Red Snapper (istockphoto.com)

Climate change benefits for local food systems

When considering the climate implications of food, “right crop, right place” is the most important principle. Food grown in the UK doesn’t necessarily have lower emissions and consideration must be given to how the food is produced (tomatoes grown in Spain and Italy have a smaller GHG footprint than most of those from the UK, for example, which are normally grown in heated greenhouses²⁹. There is also some evidence that large-scale transport operations’ have economies of scale that offer greater efficiency than individuals driving to a local farm shop, for example, assuming that the delivery vans are relatively full³⁰.

However, there are a number of contexts in which local food systems offer considerable climate benefits:

1. **Produce is much more likely to be from “right crop right place”** – investigations into the range of UK schemes³¹, including the “big players³²” strongly suggests that the UK box scheme market continues to offer produce with lower production emissions.
2. **Lower food miles and storage emissions.** Refrigerated transport, storage in regional distribution centres, and refrigeration in stores means large-scale retailers add significantly to the climate emissions of UK vegetables (4–45% depending on the product). Retailer supply chains add 69g CO₂e per kg to emissions for potatoes and 959g CO₂e for strawberries, for example. Food businesses that offer produce direct from farms or with minimal storage cut out a big chunk of those emissions. Markhussen et al (2014) calculated that for each kg CO₂ emissions in the “distribution phase” of a small-scale box scheme, conventional long supply chains emit 3kg³³. Ultra local supply systems such as milk vending machines have also been shown to have a lower environmental impact.³⁴
3. **Avoiding air-freighted food** – air-freighted produce comes with a colossal carbon footprint. In the UK, 70% of the beans, peas and asparagus in our supermarkets are air-freighted, and this adds 4–6kg CO₂ equivalent to their carbon footprint per kg (at least 75% of their emissions are from transport). By comparison, a study of 228 box schemes across four countries (including 147 from the UK) found that 41% boxes used produce from their own farms, 76% within 100km³⁵.

Retailer supply chains add **69g CO₂e** per kg

to emissions for potatoes

and **959g CO₂e** for strawberries.

Local supply systems have been shown to have a **lower environmental impact.**



²⁹ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0048969719319758#bb0085>

³⁰ <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/abs/pii/S0306919208000997>

³¹ <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/7/2734/pdf>

³² <https://www.ethicalconsumer.org/food-drink/whats-veg-box>

³³ <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/6/4/1913/htm>

³⁴ Pereira A., et al. (2018), Fresh milk supply through vending machines: Consumption patterns and associated environmental impacts, Sustainable Production and Consumption, 15

³⁵ <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/12/7/2734>

4. **Reducing food waste** – About a third of the food grown globally is never eaten – a shameful waste of resources and an enormous source of greenhouse gas emissions, and while there has been growing support for individuals to reduce household level waste (like the Love Food Hate Waste campaign³⁶), buying through shorter supply chains could help reduce waste in the food system. The long supply chain model generates a high percentage of post-farm loss, estimated at between 3% and 10% at the retail and distribution stage from over-ordering, grading, storing and packing loss³⁷. Feedback's research suggests that farm-level waste due to cosmetic standards is about 7.4%, though much higher for some crops, and overall waste thanks to supermarket demands for overproduction are 10–16%³⁸.

By comparison, less food is lost in short chains where there is higher acceptance of less-than-perfect crops and pre-ordering of produce to reduce overproduction.³⁹

This evidence is supported in the research comparing salad and vegetable waste in CSAs and Supermarkets, which proposes the concept of Net Yield Efficiency (NYE) as an important indicator of the efficiency of food systems. NYE is a measure of the yield actually consumed – not simply what is grown. In other words, it combines farm productivity data with FLW data to arrive at a figure that describes a food system's effectiveness at producing food and delivering it to the fork.⁴⁰



Case study:

Slade Farm, South Wales – mixed farming with nature in mind

Slade Farm is a mixed, tenanted 300 hectare, family-run organic farm, four miles outside of Bridgend, on the Glamorgan heritage Coast. It produces high-quality pork, lamb, beef and mutton, as well as growing cereals for Welsh flours. In addition, for the past five years it has organised “5 Mile Veg” – Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) providing locally grown vegetables through the summer and autumn to families in the surrounding area who have signed up. Direct revenues are supported by the meat sales in the farm shop and butchery, located on the main farm holding in St Brides and through a monthly meat box scheme available for delivery to much of the wider area. In addition, farm and garden visits, and on-site camping and holiday cottages both supplement farm income and enable opportunities for local engagement with the nature on farm.

The farm, which contains a SSSI and other key meadow habitats, has been supported since 2000 through agri-environment contracts with the Welsh Government. These have helped fund bi-annual hedgerow management, hay meadow restoration, spring sown cereals and pulses, over-winter stubbles, reduced grazing pasture management, wetland management, streamside corridor establishment, pond and wildlife habitat creation, and red clover ley establishments for pollinators. This government support has been vital for the farm to be managed with nature in mind but additional income from direct sales to the local economy have helped create more stable income streams, foster a closer relationship to local consumers, and ease some of the financial pressure on farm profitability. While nature-friendly management can reduce yields to the core cattle, sheep and arable production, the environmental biodiversity yields have increased exponentially, while national farmland biodiversity has continued to suffer. Wildlife recorded on the farm over the past few years has included various species of mammal (brown hares, polecats, pipistrelles and lesser horseshoe bats, weasels) and birds (choughs, barn owls, skylarks, lapwings, linnets, yellowhammers, reed buntings, spotted flycatchers, marsh tits, house sparrows, tree sparrows, grey partridges, bullfinches, starlings, song thrushes, peregrines, buzzards, meadow pipits, rock pipits, stone chats, yellow wagtails, swallows, snipes, curlews, goldfinches, green woodpeckers and great spotted woodpeckers, as well as a host of invertebrates, flowering plants and lichen. Slade Farm is a member of the Nature Friendly Farming Network.

³⁶ <https://www.lovefoodhatewaste.com/>

³⁷ https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1109&context=busadmin_fac

³⁸ https://feedbackglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/Farm_waste_report_.pdf

³⁹ <https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/6/4/1913/htm>

⁴⁰ Baker, Popay, Bennett and Kneafsey, (2019), Net Yield Efficiency: Comparing Salad and Vegetable Waste between Community Supported Agriculture and Supermarkets in the UK, *Journal of Agriculture, Food Systems, and Community Development*



Whilst the climate benefits for buying local aren't always straightforward, particularly for perishable goods like fruit and vegetables it is clear that the distribution and retail phases for long supply chain systems are resource intensive and lead to higher waste compared to localised systems. It is also likely that shorter supply chains get produce to customers quicker, and therefore have a longer shelf life and cut waste. Regional food and producer groups, food hubs, public-transport accessible locations and zero-emissions delivery could all help to address the challenge that sometimes driving to a farm shop is less efficient than doing all your shopping in one place.

More research is needed into the farm and distribution emissions for localised food systems to allow for better comparisons, and more research into the origins of produce sold in localised supply chains like independent restaurants, market stalls and recipe-kit box schemes. However even without this, the climate benefits of buying through shorter supply chains and directly supplied goods are evident.

Case study:

Growing Communities

growingcommunities.org

Growing Communities (GC) is a not-for-profit organic food business in Hackney, north-east London. They run a thriving veg bag scheme, the only 100% organic/biodynamic farmers' market in the country, a patchwork of small growing sites in Hackney and a 1.5 acre farm in Dagenham.

GC has successfully provided an alternative local food system in Hackney for 25 years, providing a steadily expanding route to market for small, agroecological farms mostly within 60 miles of London. GC recently conducted a study with the New Economics Foundation (NEF) and the Soil Association, called "Farmer-focused Routes to Market" which found that for every pound spent buying organic food through a farmers' market or veg scheme, almost £3 more is generated in benefits to farmers and growers, their workers, local suppliers, citizens and the environment. Growing Communities' core operations generated an estimated £6,294,000 in social, economic, and environmental value and they ensure sustainable farmers can survive. To illustrate this: they pay their organic farmers 80p or more for a kilogram of potatoes, while the conventional farmgate price is around 15p a kilo.

For staff, farmers and the people who eat the food, the biggest impacts were improved general health, greater sense of community and social interactions, and wellbeing from managing better financially. The greatest impacts environmentally were in carbon sequestration, water quality and reduced greenhouse gas emissions. The research shows that short, local supply chains enable environmentally beneficial production and distribution to be economically sustainable.



2.4 Social benefits

Local food systems can provide a range of social benefits. CPRE (2012) found evidence that Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes are characterised by more cohesive communities, higher employment, sharing of skills, more local processing and concern for the environment. For example 55% of CSAs planted additional hedges and trees and 61% have introduced new wildlife areas. Community-based orchards can additionally offer considerable benefit of community cohesion, biodiversity, access to nature, and supporting mental and physical wellbeing.⁴¹ In remote areas local food systems can help build cohesive communities. For example, crofting townships in Scotland and in upland areas, where the continuation of local food production and the relationships it builds can be essential to sustain local communities⁴².

Local food systems may give producers greater commercial freedom to pursue their preferred farming practices. CPRE (2012) argued that, by adding value to traditional methods of land and livestock management, local food webs enable producers to resist the pressure to intensify and industrialise production, which could damage habitats and landscape features, and can keep fields small, retaining more hedgerows.

By connecting food producers and their customers, local food systems play an important role in enhancing awareness of food production systems, improving public information, and better enabling customers to express and discuss preferences and concerns directly with producers. This enhanced engagement with food⁴³ can enable shoppers to understand the realities, challenges and impacts of food production and to choose to make a difference individually and collectively. For example farmers' markets offer people a direct connection with the source of their food. Shoppers can find out first-hand how their meat is reared or how to cook unusual vegetables, as well as obtaining access to fresh, local, seasonal, distinctive and specialist produce that is produced in more environmentally-sustainable ways. CSA schemes offer customers a regular supply of fresh, healthy produce, from a known, local source; and provide people with access to a local farm, where they can not only learn about food and farming, but have greater involvement, playing a decision-making role in the running of the farm enterprise.



66% say their shopping habits have changed, to **more local shopping** through the CSA initiative.

⁴¹ <https://www.theorchardproject.org.uk/>

⁴² Pg 33 <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/strategy-plan/2021/03/national-development-plan-crofting/documents/national-development-plan-crofting/national-development-plan-crofting/govscot%3Adocument/national-development-plan-crofting.pdf?forceDownload=true>

⁴³ CPRE (2012)

Case study:

Community Supported Agriculture (CSAs)

CSAs offer many benefits, but a key one is the social benefits of community involvement and direct supply. A study by the Soil Association on the impact of CSAs published in 2011, found that 70% of CSA members surveyed reported that their cooking and eating habits have changed, primarily through using more local, seasonal and healthy food; 66% say that their shopping habits have changed, principally through a shift to more local shopping in addition to buying through the initiative. Before joining a CSA initiative, 73% of members had shopped regularly at a supermarket; as members only 51% were regular supermarket shoppers.

The Soil Association found that 70% of over 400 individuals involved in CSA's found their overall quality of life has improved; 46% say their health has improved; 32% say they had developed new skills; 49% identify some other personal benefit. Employees frequently report high levels of job satisfaction from a supportive work environment and regular contact with the community the initiative supplies.

Almost half (45%) of CSA members feel that their initiative has had an impact on the broader community, often by bringing people together or providing a focal point for community activity. Many initiatives provide a service where none previously existed: not just direct provision of food from the initiative but in some cases wider services such as a village shop or farmers' market. Many also offer a wide range of social events and activities for participants and other community members.

Benefits of shorter supply chains in an urban context

With more and more people living in urban environments, it is worth considering how the concept of shorter supply chains or direct supply applies within the settings that most people live. The benefits listed so far all apply to much the same extent, but in theory would be harder to access in some places, particularly in larger cities like Greater London and Manchester. However whilst the distance travelled may be further, there are often as many options of direct supply through box schemes and farmers markets. The idea that “local food” may have travelled 100 miles may seem counter-intuitive, but whilst the short-hand might not seem appropriate the rest of the definition, of direct supply from smaller enterprises, with the associated benefits, still applies. There is also an argument that currently cities have more wealth, and that shorter supply chains are a way to ensure that a greater amount is shared with rural areas than conventional supply chains provide.

With people being further removed from traditional sources of production, the growth of urban agriculture, and the potential for more peri-urban agriculture are worth considering as they provide some benefits to city-dwellers beyond simply a source of food. They can provide local sources of fresh food and food education opportunities. In its recent report *Fringe Farming Sustain* found that:

Agroecological community farms in London have significant productivity, but their impact is far greater than just the volume of food they produce. Their active community programmes, volunteer engagement, training, and events, result in social, economic and physical and mental health benefits, reflecting the attention they give to other outcomes, in addition to the wildlife and ecosystem benefits of their farming methods. The report also highlighted significant land opportunities for additional agroecological farms on the edge of London to increase the public goods these shorter urban supply chains provide.

Case study:

Tamar Grow Local

Established in 2007, Tamar Grow Local CIC has created over 28 community food projects in the Tamar Valley including allotments, community orchards, a farmstart, online farmers market, produce co-operatives and also supports over 60 local producers to market and distribute Tamar Valley food.

Traditionally a vibrant market gardening area, cheap imports saw the decline of the industry from the 1960s and much of the area’s productive growing spaces falling into decline. Through an interconnected food system of helping recreational growers move into farmstart businesses, creating an online farmer’s market where producers set their own prices and by working in partnership with councils and housing associations in Plymouth to bring local produce into urban areas, Tamar Grow Local seeks to build a fair and resilient food system with community and environmental benefit.

Widening distribution through free collection points as well as home delivery and by maintaining short supply chains embedded in a not-for-profit Community Interest Company model enables prices to be fair for producers and consumers. In 2020, Tamar Grow Local paid over £159,000 to small local producers, distributed over 7 tonnes of vegetables to people facing food insecurities and health changes in partnership with the Grow Share Cook project and provided paid work at a minimum of Living Wage rate to 14 part-time and full-time workers.





jacko.usin (istockphoto.com)

Case study:

Ledbury

ledburyfoodgroup.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/CPRE-Report-final.pdf

CPRE (Campaign to Protect Rural England) have worked with many local areas, including Ledbury, to analyse food webs – “local network of links between people who buy, sell, produce and supply food. The concept stems from earlier research in east Suffolk⁴⁴, which showed how a thriving local food chain can benefit the quality of life, prosperity and landscape of an area.” Ledbury is a vibrant, relatively prosperous market town in Herefordshire, traditionally a farming county. The town centre has many historic buildings, a number of conservation areas and good walkable access to the surrounding countryside. Much of the centre is occupied by small independent outlets with few national chains, though Co-operative and Tesco supermarkets are sited at either end of the town centre. A high number of outlets use local food suppliers, and a weekly retail market and country market both sell some local foods.

CPRE’s research found that choice, availability and access to local food are good with 25 food outlets selling local food; for a majority it represents a quarter or more of turnover.

Many shops and suppliers contribute to community life by donating to local good causes and offer a friendly, personal service. Local food supports, we estimate, 200 jobs at outlets and over 480 at local suppliers. Local food sales in Ledbury are an estimated £1.5 million to £2.7 million a year and help to support £29.5 million of turnover at supply chain businesses. Local food supports diversity in farming, which shapes and maintains the character of the local countryside.

However sourcing sufficient volume remains a problem for small outlets as suppliers prioritise bigger buyers. Communication between outlets and suppliers needs facilitation as businesses lack the time to find new suppliers or markets. Ledbury’s shoppers value smaller outlets for extra shopping but these outlets need to find ways to compete with the convenience of supermarkets, which attract most shoppers for their main shopping. Environmental benefits of local food remain largely unrecognised.

⁴⁴ Cranbrook, C, The Real Choice, Campaign to Protect Rural England, 2006

Build a market for local food through assurance, standards and claims

The evidence review in this report finds that local food systems have the potential to deliver real economic, social and environmental benefits, however these are not a given. Assurance, standards and claims are tools which can help citizens identify the best examples. However assurance schemes can be difficult for smaller producers to access. To help overcome this we propose that funding should be allocated to:

- **Support smaller/independent producers** to help them enter into environmental assurance schemes where suitable.
- **Build local capacity** on key areas of compliance/assurance e.g. food safety.
- **Work with local producers** to help build awareness and understanding of sustainability claims (within or without assurance schemes) to build trust and expertise.



3. Conclusions and recommendations

In light of the range of economic, environmental and social benefits identified above, it is clear that there is a strong case to invest in local food systems to play a greater role in our food system as a whole. They can help address some of the major challenges our food system faces, not least making best use of resources. We do not argue that all food should be derived from local food systems but that they should play a greater role as part of a knowledge-intensive food system geared to provide better for people and nature.

But the potential benefits of local food systems are not given. We need to invest, particularly in the infrastructure, and set the right policy framework to ensure they deliver for people and nature. Not only would such an approach provide the tangible economic, societal and environmental benefits highlighted above, we argue that it would also have the added benefit of increasing resilience against future crises – some of which have been predicted, others as yet unforeseen – by creating a more diverse food supply with stronger food businesses.

How can we realise this vision?

Local food systems provide an opportunity to address some of society's biggest challenges associated with the food and farming system through a restructuring of policies and investment to drive change. Local food systems – if given the right infrastructure, investment, protection from unfair market forces, and access to solid community networks – can deliver benefits but it is not easy or inevitable. The policy recommendations below provide part of the plan, but a fully costed investment plan also needs to be developed alongside a cost-benefit analysis to justify it.

While the specific appetite for action and the policy contexts in each of the four UK countries is different, local food systems, delivering benefits for people and for nature, are relevant and desirable across these islands. The recommendations outlined below should be read in light of the progress already made in each of the countries towards local sustainable food economies and adapted according to local frameworks and conditions. While there is progress to be made at the local level and within countries, agri-food systems across the UK are highly interdependent and wider policy approaches will shape the likelihood that local efforts are successful. With this in mind, there is a clear need for coherence and co-operation between governments across the UK to define and work towards shared objectives for the food system, of which local food will play an increasingly – and hopefully more beneficial – role.

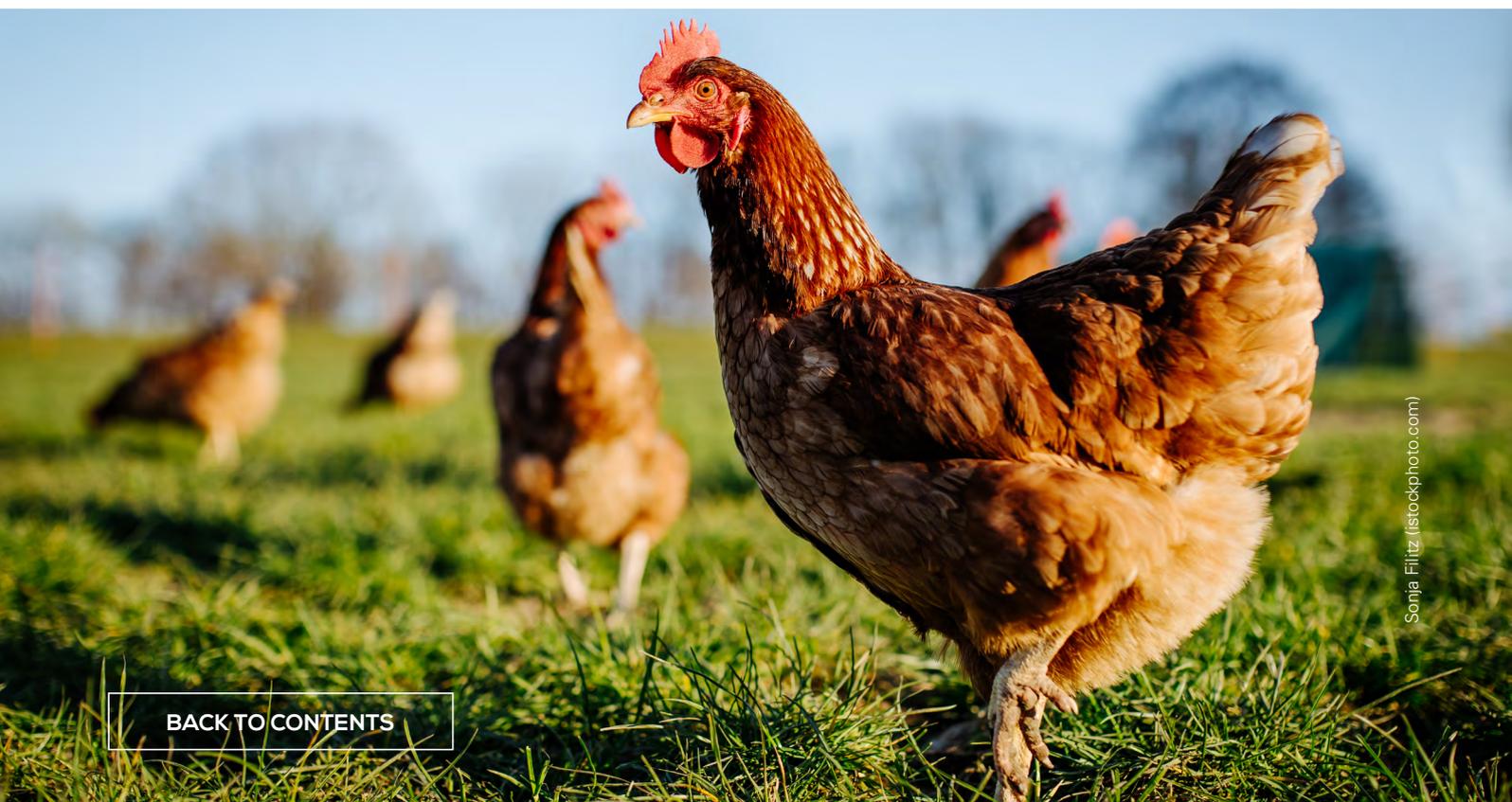
3.1 Policy recommendations

Actions for national governments

- **Strategy:** ensure effective mechanisms for co-operation between the four governments in the UK exist to create the enabling conditions for local food economies to thrive. This can and should mean collaborative approaches to inform trade policy, the workings of the UK Internal market, state aid and subsidy rules, public procurement, and UK-wide funding mechanisms such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund, all of which could support or impede efforts to foster more farmer-focused supply chains and markets. This is especially where UK policy may impact areas of devolved competency.
- **Strategy:** across government departments and in partnership with key stakeholders (such as local chambers of commerce and local economic partnerships) develop a growth plan to deliver a 10% retail market share for non-multiples by 2030, to help diversify supply chains. This should also include:
 - A specific targeted increase in the number of businesses active in direct/short supply chains and the percentage of local, sustainably produced food sold.
 - Plans for growth in alternative retail sectors, such as street/covered markets e.g. a growth target of 10% of UK towns and cities having a market would lead to 4,000 new markets, and over 100,000 new business opportunities.
 - Identification of gaps in local food infrastructure across the UK e.g. abattoirs, processors, storage and refrigeration, logistics and delivery and prioritising investment in those areas with best potential to support growth in diversifying retail.

This should explicitly set out social and environmental objectives and build in conditionality to ensure they are achieved. The plan should identify opportunities for growth in geographical locations where there is demand and by strengthening existing infrastructure.

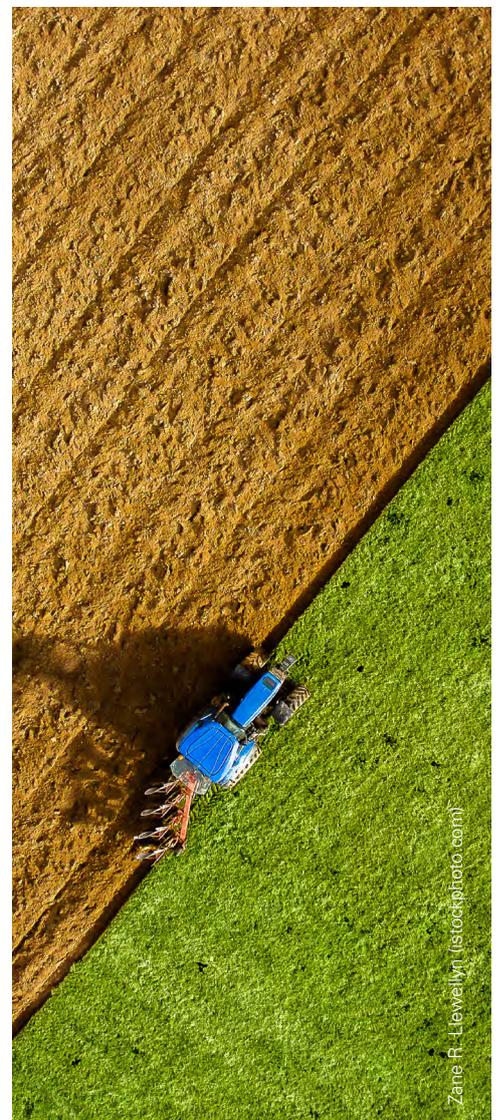
- **Strategy:** developing and leading a plan for growth of non-multiples in retail towards a 10% target market share. This would increase retail diversity and as such supply chain diversity complimenting the aims of the local food growth plan, and may usefully be developed in tandem to identify areas of common opportunity.



Investing in nature for a greener, fairer future

- **Procurement:** use existing public spend on food to support local and sustainable food systems, by investment in local infrastructure to meet the target rollout of dynamic procurement to 33% of the country by the end of 2025. Nationally, this means ensuring political buy-in and one-off Government investment in the rollout of dynamic procurement and ensuring public purchasing rules are conducive to supporting local food suppliers (in a transparent and non-discriminatory manner). For local government, this involves proactively implementing established approaches that support community wealth or renewal, such as a food version of the “Preston Model”⁴⁵
- **Advice:** access to training, mentoring and advice is important in helping businesses access new markets and deliver public goods. Government should fund delivery of affordable training, advisory services and farmer-to-farmer mentoring (e.g. Innovative Farmers group) to provide a coherent, joined-up service for smaller farms to gain support in business planning, including succession planning, co-operatives, marketing and in delivery of public goods such as access, landscape features, climate, and nature protection.
- **Investment:** create a Local Food Investment Fund to provide strategic support for sustainable local food systems, as part of the planned Government funding for local areas, such as the UK Shared Prosperity Fund⁴⁶. Given one in seven workers is employed in the agri-food sector, investing in sustainable local food infrastructure and skills should form a strategic objective to “level up” regions in the UK and one in seven pounds of this Government investment should help deliver this. This should be closely co-ordinated with devolved governments and could be enhanced by leveraging matched local funding. In England, this should complement the Environmental Land Management scheme (ELMS) in supporting delivery of public goods by helping to develop local supply chains beyond the farm-gate. While in the other countries it should be used to support the strategic development and implementation of new farm support schemes that reward public goods and deliver for people and nature. This could be distributed through a combination of local food partnerships working with local enterprise partnerships (LEPs) and local nature partnerships. This should focus on strengthening local food infrastructure, including abattoirs, milling, processing, storage, food hubs/wholesale, logistics and farmers’ markets; alongside a programme of business support favouring values driven, or social enterprise that prioritise environmental, social and health benefits.
- **Planning:** the review of the National Planning Policy Framework should encourage the development of a sustainable food system. The most pertinent for encouraging shorter supply chains is to encourage a diversity of retail outlets including community shops, markets and town centre food hubs, and the development of infrastructure to support short supply chains, such as abattoirs and processing for smaller food businesses. The framework should also ensure that rural and peri-urban land is safeguarded for food growing, and that the best and most versatile agricultural land will be protected.

There are many sources of advice which can help farmers better deliver public goods alongside food. For example farmwildlife.info is a source of information for farmers to help them choose the right measures and manage them in the right way for their farm. Farm wildlife has been developed with farmers for farmers.



Zane R. Lewellyn (istockphoto.com)

⁴⁵ Preston Model <https://www.preston.gov.uk/article/1339/What-is-Preston-Model->

⁴⁶ For an overview of potential government funds that could support investment in local food systems, see Piercey (2021): [https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/news/government_funds_building_back_better_apr21/-](https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/news/government_funds_building_back_better_apr21/)

3.2 Policy recommendations

Actions for local government

- **Procurement:** local government should take a lead on implementing the recommendations above ahead of any National Government guidance, to prioritise more local purchasing, particularly through dynamic procurement.
- **Partnerships:** every local authority in the UK should support existing, or help set up, a food partnership, as a proven vehicle for successfully co-ordinating food work locally. These cross-sector partnerships, bring together public sector, private sector, communities, academics and other stakeholders and can promote shorter supply chains, alongside other environmental, social and economic improvements in the food system locally. These partnerships should carry out an assessment of local productivity capacity and the benefits that can be secured through investment in it. Addressing local biodiversity objectives, local economy diversification, resilience in terms of food security. This could include a target for a percentage of farmland under agroecological production e.g. organic or nature-friendly certified, pasture-fed accredited and agroforestry.
- **Investment:** local government should ensure there is a food, farming, climate and nature representative on every local enterprise partnership and that good food is considered within their priorities and those of local economic development teams, particularly where this can help strengthen local food systems, as covered in the recommendations above.
- **Planning:** spatial planning visions and local plan policies should apply the principles of a sustainable food system, and specifically encourage more localised food systems supporting producers to have the space to produce, process, supply and sell food, thereby ensuring residents have access to this locally-produced food.
- **Council Assets:** to ensure the county farm network is nature-friendly, strengthen the environmental requirements of business plans submitted for application to county farms. Applicants must outline how they intend to improve the nature and climate benefits of the land and not just maintenance of the status quo. Incentives should be offered to support applicants who wish to become organic certified in recognition of the climate and nature benefits. In addition, Councils should look at other land, estate and assets – such as land and buildings – that could provide useful entry points for local food growing, infrastructure, logistics and retail.
- **Markets and promotion:** to support diverse retail through promotion including signage, and work with these retailers, such as markets, to increase the proportion of produce they buy from shorter supply chains and nature-friendly farming.
- **Support efforts to seek funding** for local facilitators (e.g. Farm Clusters) to co-ordinate groups of farmers or growers to work together e.g. in sharing equipment, knowledge, marketing, purchasing power (for seed etc.).
- **Compile, manage and analyse data** in order to understand and manage local food systems where government already has a role in the food sector – e.g. farm payment schemes and advisory, large public procurers (schools, hospitals etc.), healthcare, social care, education insight (e.g. healthy start vouchers, free school meals), Food Standards Agency, chambers of commerce. This will facilitate better connection of local demand and (sustainable) supply, informing investment in local food and dealing with shocks and crisis.



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Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, tackle climate change and restore nature, improve the living and working environment, enrich society and culture, and promote greater equality. It represents around 100 national public interest organisations, and cultivates the movement for change, working with many others at local, regional, national and international level.

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RSPB is the largest nature conservation charity in the country, consistently delivering successful conservation, forging powerful new partnerships with other organisations and inspiring others to stand up and give nature the home it deserves. Our birds and wildlife are increasingly vulnerable in a rapidly-changing world. Together, we can create bigger, better, more joined-up spaces to save our wildlife, and our shared home. We are working with others, especially farmers, to radically change our food and farming system so that it provides the right balance of incentives, regulation, market support and advice – to effectively address the nature and the climate emergencies.

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