

Civil Food Resilience in practice

Capacity-building for resilience across the Sustainable Food Places network



Acknowledgements

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Executive summary

This report distils insights and research from a group of Sustainable Food Places (SFP) member food partnerships, working as ‘first movers’ in Civil Food Resilience (CFR) planning across the UK.

Working with Sustainable Food Places, this group sought to:

1. act on the recommendations within the National Preparedness Commission’s report ‘Just in Case: seven steps to narrow the UK’s civil food resilience gap’ (Lang et al, 2025), and
2. integrate learnings from the community food sector and local government responses to the Covid pandemic to
3. inform resilience and preparedness planning ahead of future crises, emergencies and systemic supply chain shocks.

This report outlines key learnings; existing good practice; challenges and infrastructure gaps; and recommendations for action for food partnerships and community organisations, local government, regional resilience bodies, and the UK government.

The research is clear: action is needed now to ensure we are more prepared for when crises come. The SFP Civil Food Resilience Working Group has shown that significant work is already taking place on the ground, serving to mitigate and reduce the risks of crises, national emergencies and related supply chain shocks. This report offers a glimpse into a strong and growing network facilitated by food system experts and driven by urgency for action. The recommendations in this report outline how to expand this work from a current patchwork of good practice into standard practice within every local authority. This report recognises the determination and ingenuity of Sustainable Food Places who are paving the way and building capacity for food resilience across the UK.

Daphne Du Cros, Shropshire Good Food Partnership

Vera Zakharov, Sustain

Chloe Smee, Soil Association

Sustainable Food Places

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The working group

A working group of SFP member food partnerships with an interest in practical place-based action on civil food resilience has been convened by Sustain, the SFP programme partner leading on campaign and local action support.

The group included places already engaging with Local Resilience Forums, those developing food disaster preparedness plans, and those exploring the role of supply chain development, procurement, community-led enterprise and other food system interventions in a resilience and shock preparedness framing.

They joined together monthly to share knowledge and resources, as well as piloting actions, from mapping community food assets and infrastructure gaps, to preparing reports and convening stakeholder engagement around crisis food response planning.

Participating food partnerships included Birmingham, the Brighton and Sussex alliance of food partnerships, Bristol, Dumfries and Galloway, Lincolnshire, Monmouthshire, Plymouth, Powys and Shropshire, with input from Sustain’s work with London Resilience. Other food partnerships took part in meetings as observers and ad hoc contributors.

The label of “Civil Food Resilience” presents an emerging area of work for food partnerships, focusing on disaster preparedness and integration of planning around food, alongside other Critical National Infrastructure sectors, such as energy, water, transportation and digital infrastructure.

The CFR label offers a new framing and valuation of the critical work of food partnerships, who develop place-based interventions to expand public access to nutritious, sustainable food, and leverage food as a mechanism for wider societal aims such as cohesion, inclusion and wellbeing. Their work on policy development, reducing food inequality, supply chain innovation and cross-sector collaboration simultaneously strengthen community resilience in a time of crisis, as evidenced by research on the critical role of food partnerships in delivering more effective responses during the Covid pandemic.

Limited strategic place-based leadership on civil food resilience

A lack of Civil Food Resilience consideration and broader food system vulnerability has been a growing area of concern for those working across the food system in recent years. The 2025 National Preparedness Commission report 'Just in Case: seven steps to narrow the civil food resilience gap' by Professor Tim Lang et al (2025), laid bare the UK's lack of preparedness. And the point has been reinforced through multiple additional reports, including the second Eat Lancet Report (2025), the AFN Roadmap to Resilience (2025), the National Emergency Briefing (December 2025), the Government's own report 'Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security' (2026) and more recently 'Potential Pathways and Solutions to Acute Food System Crisis in the UK' by Bridle et al (2026).

The UK Government Food Strategy highlighted the need for a place-based approach, with Government recognising that it isn't prudent to coordinate purely 'from the centre':

"Our approach also needs to be grounded in place. The UK food system is made up of many smaller food systems at a national, regional, community and household level. Food is often at the heart of communities. Many are shaped by the productive food industries that give people a livelihood and a way of life and are enriched by their local food cultures and the prominence of food in celebrations and local identity. One size does not fit all. We need to unlock expertise, energy and experience at a local level to deliver improved outcomes where they are most needed." - [A UK government food strategy for England, considering the wider UK food system](#).

Noting this, there is yet to be clear guidance from central Government relating to food crisis capacity building and CFR planning. As organisations embedded in their communities with expertise in systems-thinking and coordination, Food Partnerships are uniquely positioned to contribute to - and lead - CFR planning. They cultivate vast, diverse networks that can be called upon to engage and inform, and be nimble in their responses to a crisis event, working from a position of trust with communities. Food partnerships have experience centring vulnerable people

and communities within their work, and it is these communities, often within the disadvantaged intersectional identity groups (race/class/immigration status/disability) who are disproportionately impacted in times of crisis.

Individually and as a network under the SFP programme banner, Food Partnerships must continue to advocate, both locally and nationally, in their role and offer as food systems experts to support CFR work alongside Local Authorities, Local Resilience Fora and communities - both proactively and in response to crisis. Most crucially, Food Partnerships must build on established relationships of trust.

Objectives

In this early phase of CFR capacity building, Food Partnerships must respond through their own bespoke approaches based on knowledge of their local contexts and networks. In this research, the objective of the Civil Food Resilience Working Group has been to learn from one another, document the process, and share the insights with the wider network. Additionally, it seeks to highlight the significant action already taking place within the SFP network, and to emphasise the urgency around cultivating broader support and collaboration from organisations, council leads and other strategic bodies not already focused on food systems. Civil Food Resilience, as argued by Lang, et al (2025), cannot be the sole responsibility of community and food supply chain sectors, and requires a 'whole of society' approach.

For participating Partnerships, areas of focus and intervention varied based on the needs and circumstances of each community or local authority area, but shared themes and commonalities emerged. This collaboration was structured so that at least one Food Partnership in the cohort is engaged with work on one or more of the following areas:

- **'Heat mapping'** geographic areas, stakeholder groups, organisations or interventions most receptive to engagement or in most need of urgent development.
- **Engaging with LRF bodies** and making the case for a 'food focus' and collaboration, and/or elevating food in local 'risk registers'.
- Working out **disaster preparedness strategies** and coordination structures.
- **Community food asset mapping:** including critical emergency response infrastructure as well as other assets of value from a resilience perspective – eg land, venues suitable for food storage.
- **Community Food Resilience/Food Ladders approach:** interventions that enable a holistic, sustainable and dignified food support approach, reducing household insecurity and vulnerability to shocks, as well as establishing community trust.

- Assess the resilience of and working to diversify and de-risk community food supply chains such as easing over-reliance on surplus and charitable food aid.
- Convening 'shadow food resilience committees' – regional groups convening diverse food system voices on food resilience and preparedness – particularly where the LRF is difficult to engage, or where the engagement leads to the creation of a separate sub-group to focus on food.

Further detailed breakdown of activities is included in the following sections and categorised as: Baselineing, Community and Stakeholder Engagement, Proactive Activation for Resilience, Strategic Collaboration and Emergency Planning and Communication (proactive and responsive).

Outcomes

In January 2026, an online SFP member Food Partnership session was held to present the work of the Civil Food Resilience Working Group as a knowledge share. This also allowed convenors to do further data gathering to understand:

- How Partnerships are (or aren't yet) engaging with CFR work in their areas
- Which actions they intend to move forward with on their journey, having heard various examples from the knowledge-share session
- How SFP Programme Partners (including Sustain and Soil Association) can support members and CFR capacity-building in general.

The response from the knowledge-share webinar included greater clarity for Food Partnerships on the need for CFR work, where to start and how to begin engaging with leadership on collaborative work. Additionally, Food Partnerships acknowledged that a great deal of their existing work contributes to CFR capacity building, although without the political recognition it deserves, giving confidence that many are already laying a long term resilience foundation in their communities and highlighting the need to build recognition and credibility.

Shared resources and toolkits from the work of the cohort group will be collated and shared

within the wider SFP network, directly and by using the SFP website, as these become available. Case studies from each Working Group participant are already available alongside this report.

There is a collective desire among SFP members for an ongoing knowledge-sharing forum in the form of a SFP member drop-in for partnerships to ask questions, share progress and troubleshoot. The Working Group will transition into this SFP community of practice around Civil Food Resilience, building on the momentum already gathering on this theme and enable the network's timely response to opportunities to influence the food resilience agenda regionally and nationally.

Two of the recommendations in 'Just in Case...' are: assessing public mood and perception; and up-to-date, culturally appropriate guidance. Bearing this in mind, the SFP Programme aims to develop a communications support toolkit for food partnership use. This will support Partnership members and create a consistent narrative across the network, if not among other associated and allied organisations, for public engagement, education and outreach, in order to communicate the urgency, as well as opportunities and co-benefits, of CFR building to their LRFs, local authorities, broader networks, and the public.



Credit: Brighton & Hove Food Partnership

Civil Food Resilience approaches across partnerships

Food Partnerships are engaging in CFR work through a range of interventions and approaches, including and not limited to:

Baselining:

- Data collection, ie: Census Data, project evaluation data, research and reporting
- Definition and typology of community food assets, including skills, services and logistical capacity
- Mapping existing food assets and vulnerabilities/gaps:
 - Farms, farm clusters, producers and processors
 - Community food projects, growing spaces
 - Cultural assets: Food events and festivals
 - Training and community education providers
 - Shops and services, wholesale markets and distribution networks
 - Infrastructure (abattoirs, refrigeration, storage space, transportation)
 - Social capital (local food champions, networks of trust, broader key stakeholder networks)
 - Emergency food provision services and food hubs, wrap-around support and citizen's advice
 - Community shared assets, spaces, tools, machinery rings

Community and stakeholder engagement:

- Backcasting and running crisis scenarios with stakeholders
- Piloting and scaling community interventions, building infrastructure, routes to market and infrastructure for relocation

- Regenerative community design interventions, ie: circular economy work, supporting small producers, regenerative finance and alternative community ownership models
- Relationship/network building and activation, including other regional food partnerships, parallel sectors (climate groups, school trusts, faith groups)
- Applying the SFP FAIR food Framework for Action on Inclusion and Representation to food system engagement, with consideration to intersectionality and vulnerability
- Education, outreach and facilitation, course and curriculum design
- Public consultation, community food assemblies/conversations

Proactive activation for resilience:

- Communicating the need for resilience and systems activation to decision makers at various levels, organisations, communities
- Trust building within communities, key stakeholder groups
- Upskilling individuals and communities
- Embedding micro-infrastructure in communities (seed banks, community fridges etc)
- Increasing growing capacity (home gardens, community gardens, allotments, market gardens, community farms), using policy tools like the Right to Grow, engaging with councils on County Farms
- Increasing seed resilience: seed saving skills, seed banks, domestic seed production at scale (horticultural and arable)
- Mapping, evaluating and activating routes to market
- Strengthening local supply chains (direct sales, online platforms, farmers markets, wholesalers, dynamic procurement)

Strategic collaboration and emergency planning:

- Initiate conversations with Local Resilience Forums and council Resilience Leads to ascertain their awareness of the issue, and any existing or related work to date
- Developing County and Local Food Resilience Strategies and Crisis Action Plans (bespoke for each community at Town and Parish council or community level)
- Building 'shadow LRFs' where conventional LRFs are slow to engage or prefer to co-host a food-focused LRF sub-group
- Building contact lists, plans and triggers for process flows for crisis scenarios

Communication (proactive in preparation, and reactive in response to crisis):

- Assessing existing crisis food preparedness guidance for equity, inclusion and cultural appropriateness, as well as socioeconomic, spatial and other barriers to adoption of guidance
- Communication campaigns to build understanding of food resilience (benefits of short food supply chains, valuing local farms and producers, and connecting with community food settings and infrastructure)
 - formal public facing campaigns
 - web resources, print resources as guidance for action in a crisis
 - public engagement via food events, assemblies and cultural activities such as Food Trails
 - engaging with political representatives and decision-makers, including councillors, MPs and council officers to support policy levers and investment in civil food resilience
- Aggregation of signposting of services and assets
- Stakeholder summits and resilience conferences
- Communications plans (analog and digital) for crisis protocol activation



Credit: Bwyd Powys Food

The role of the Sustainable Food Places Programme

Sustainable Food Places as a coordinated platform offers visibility and voice, as well as a collaborative model of leadership, for its 120+ member Food Partnerships across the four nations of the UK. Relationship-building with high-level ministers and government departments (e.g., DEFRA) and emphasising the crucial role of place-based activation on food resilience and security is essential and forms part of the SFP programme's public affairs and advocacy role. The programme has a duty to leverage high-level relationships with decisionmakers at the subnational and national level, as well as its platforms, to enable national leadership to influence local strategic priorities around CFR and public food security more broadly.

The SFP programme can influence and increase legitimacy of CFR work locally and nationally via the following:

- Continue to support a Community-of-Practice on CFR among SFP members who are already making visible their communities' vulnerabilities and leading through practical action to address them. A critical mass of food partnerships working on CFR capacity-building gives legitimacy for prioritisation for this work at unitary, regional and national governance levels.
- Engage local government and resilience leads to highlight the central role of food partnerships as critical community responders in crisis who hold local food supply chain expertise, personal relationships built on trust, and knowledge of local contexts, making them uniquely positioned to advise, activate, respond, and support local resilience planning in appropriate ways.
- Highlight the emerging leadership among individual LRFs, such as London's and Dyfed Powys, who are recognising the urgency of food systems emergency planning and addressing this through staffing, collaboration and consultation work, to further encourage other LRFs to consider food, with or without a directive from national government.
- Work with SFP members as a collective body to lobby the Government (including the Cabinet Office) to integrate risks to food supply collapse more meaningfully into the National Risk Register. Many LRFs take the lead from the Register and the Cabinet Office to shape the priorities of their work, which does not yet specify a focus food supply planning and response and thus limits the remit of Community Risk Registers.

"Change moves at the speed of trust"

Stephen M.R. Covey



Credit: Greater Lincolnshire Food Partnership

The role of food partnerships

Progressing work on CFR includes a range of roles and actions, alongside existing work undertaken by food partnerships that already benefits community resilience. These actions are already being taken up by members of the SFP network, but in a piecemeal and opportunistic fashion (i.e., where time and funding allows). The SFP programme aims to build on, support and connect up these efforts into a coherent strategic framework, enabling more places to take up actions and advocate for investment in coordinating CFR work.

Food partnerships can enable and lead local and regional CFR work in a number of ways, including the following:

- Review the report 'Just in Case' and share its recommendations with local elected officials, Local Resilience Forum leads, as well as local food and community networks to initiate conversations about planning and mapping necessary assets.
- Review and report local responses to recent crises (e.g., Covid-19) to identify good practice and 'pinch points' in infrastructure and assets.
- Map local food system assets and identify gaps, using existing community food and supply chain data, as well as insights from Covid-19 response strategies on what assets and infrastructure were also leveraged.
- Convene food resilience planning committees at a local authority, combined authority or local resilience forum geography scales, to align work with other disaster response planning strategies, as well as the scale of local supply chains and critical food infrastructure such as storage.
- Run "backcasting" simulation scenarios in small groups to interrogate how your community would respond to crisis events, and develop plans and capacity building recommendations.
- Develop more inclusive household guidance and signposting for emergencies that integrates accessibility, inequities and cultural sensitivity considerations, alongside the roles of the community and public service sectors.

- Communicate areas of good practice as well as barriers through case studies, briefings, events and summits, using these platforms to engage local and regional decisionmakers.
- Use the above mechanisms to engage local MPs, who can advocate for national-level intervention to address local barriers around local resilience planning on food and the necessary investment for CFR, such as engaging with DEFRA, MoD, the Cabinet Office, and other departments that can unlock resources and mandate local activity.

"Food resilience isn't obvious until a crisis, and people don't like thinking about crises. Thinking of what resilience means at every level helps. What does it mean on an individual, household, community, city wide, regional, national etc. Thinking bigger than just food."

Sarah Newton, Birmingham Food Systems Partnership, Dept of Public Health



Credit: Shropshire Good Food

The role of local authorities and mayoral strategic authorities

Political leadership has a valuable role to play, which can add direction, legitimacy and coordinative capacity to building civil food resilience. Food systems work is the specialism of SFP members, but will not deliver meaningful progress on food resilience without a strategic commitment that can only come from Government at all levels. As an example, the Welsh Senedd has recognised the value of resourcing its Food Partnerships as a part of its recognition of the need to increase Civil Food Resilience and domestic production. The Dyfed Powys case study shows how strategic leadership can offer a pathway to structural change.

Local Authorities and Mayoral Strategic Authorities can guide and enable CFR capacity building via the following:

- Host discussions with food partnerships and local resilience and business continuity leads in your geography on CFR, exploring local contexts, vulnerabilities and opportunities.
- Use your convening power to build collaboration on CFR across public sector departments, civil society networks and business stakeholders who have a role to play, ensuring this work not solely on the shoulders of the local community food sector.
- Support and where possible host Food Resilience Committees across the region (whether along LRF or MSA boundaries, whichever is broader) convening food partnerships alongside a diverse representation of stakeholders, sectors and community leaders with lived and learned experience to seek out consultation, knowledge sharing and CFR planning.
- Work with council resilience leads and LRFs to include household and supply chain food vulnerabilities into Local (Community) Risk Registers to acknowledge these risks to public health and wellbeing and enable a strategic and long-term focus.
- Integrate the use of the Vulnerable Person's Register in local and regional Food Disaster Risk Planning.
- Integrate CFR considerations into other relevant local and regional strategies, remits and policies, including Planning, Housing and Economic Development, Procurement, Skills, and Public Health and Wellbeing. This can be part of wider work to integrate a 'food equity in all policies' approach, or a whole-system local Food Strategy that links to other strategies. Policy levers include:
 - Implementing a 'Right to Grow' framework
 - Updating procurement contracts specifications to preference local, small to medium, and sustainable producers
 - Specification around provision of local production, processing, storage and trading infrastructure in Local Plans
 - Easing planning restrictions that affect small and medium horticulture producers to expand production and improve business viability, eg agricultural housing restrictions
- Integrate CFR infrastructure, asset and capacity-building needs into Mayoral investment strategies, including Planning and Regeneration, Economic Development, Skills and Employability, Public Safety and Wellbeing.
- Integrate CFR infrastructure, asset and capacity-building needs into Government funding streams intended to support thriving communities, such as the Pride in Place programme.
- Work with neighbouring Local Authorities and Food Partnerships to develop a Regional Food Growth Plan that aims to diversify and scale local and sustainable food supply.

"In an ideal world, local authorities would be leading the way, supporting and showcasing the civil food resilience agenda. If the Local Authority could demonstrate what's possible within their power (e.g., procurement) and use their legitimacy to convene the partners across the sector it would make a big difference."

- Chloe Masefield, Dyfed Powys

Communicating Civil Food Resilience at community, local, regional and national levels

Appropriate and practical communication is a necessary part of Civil Food Resilience work. It's important to strike a balance between a sense of urgency in preparing for crises and a positive focus on investing in assets and collective action. A range of approaches are being utilised by Food Partnerships to engage within different stakeholder contexts, many building upon recommendations from the 'Just in Time' report.

Food system stakeholder and decision-maker engagement:

- Back-casting and scenario simulations for crisis events (see examples from Bristol, Dumfries & Galloway and Dyfed Powys) can be useful approaches to helping stakeholders to see the value in planning and developing strategies, action plans and networks as well as identifying gaps to focus investment on. Drawing on the experiences of the Covid-19 Pandemic presents an example from recent memory to review, making crisis relatable and using it as a learning opportunity.
- Crisis planning creates a framework upon which to structure and approach public communication, including both household-level preparedness and signposting to community food asset settings that can support further.

Public engagement:

- Community (Local) Risk Registers list essential items to prepare household for significant emergencies, including storing two days' worth of food. However, many experts, including Lang et al, argue that current advice is inadequate, especially in the context of household food insecurity, as well as other limiting factors including disability and skills. Likewise public engagement and promotion of existing guidance has to date been limited.
- In addition to preparedness messaging, public-facing communications around changing behaviour and practices that can

help mitigate chronic risks to the food system are also necessary, thus contributing to reorientation of the food system for stronger resilience. This includes encouraging public engagement in choices that support the recovery of small, medium and diverse supply chains, as well as reorienting away from food sectors that are damaging to climate and biodiversity.

- Messaging must be context- and culturally-appropriate, and sensitive to the lived experience and barriers faced by vulnerable and food-insecure communities, reflective of urban and rural contexts. However, a number of trailblazing interventions led by food partnerships are enabling equitable access to more diverse, local and agroecological supply chains, including those in the Bridging the Gap programme. These too need a level of public engagement and encouraging uptake.
- Physical (print) resources must be included in any communications campaign, recognising the limitations of digital public sector engagement channels, with libraries and community settings offering opportunities for distribution.
- Messaging should also address common (false) narratives around food to better support behavioural change, including the hidden cost of cheap food and building public awareness of the externalised costs of industrial food production and artificially low prices.
- Appealing to local culture and sense-of-place also offers opportunities:
 - Media campaigns and branding such as the Plymouth Fish Finger, and "The Sussex Six", the Shropshire Good Food Trail can appeal to citizens and build visibility of local producers, seasonality, provenance, health, local multiplier effect and climate impacts.

Developing a Communications Strategy with Local Authorities and Local Resilience Forums:

- Food Partnerships can work with the council to develop communication approaches depending on crisis models for activating emergency protocols, noting:
 - Stakeholder contact lists for essential services activation
 - Integrating the Vulnerable Persons Register, as well as community-held vulnerability data not held by statutory services
 - Planning communication strategies at the local level (council and community sector) as well as county and national levels, in co-production with residents and community representatives
 - Up-to-date digital and print materials, listing essential services, phone numbers and landline lists etc., (see phone tree model in the Appendix)
 - Considerations around keeping data up-to-date, with recognition that some information will always become out of date.

Engaging Businesses and Procurement:

- Communication can frame the value of CFR capacity-building, investment and deployment of assets as a pathway to additional associated benefits for business resilience planning, including meeting health and social value criteria as well as Net Zero targets. [The Appendices of this report present Vignettes illustrating approaches to communications and infrastructure for CFR capacity building.]
- Communication and engagement aimed at farmers and farm businesses can highlight the food resilience and security benefits of diversifying food production to reflect climate pressures as well as opportunities in CFR capacity-building work to support shorter supply chains, local direct sales, and enabling public shifts in purchasing preferences. This is reflected in Food Partnerships working with Farmer Clusters, and through public-facing agri-tourism events like the Shropshire Good Food Trail.

National-level communications and engagement:

- As noted in the section, 'the role of the SFP Programme', emphasising and evidencing the link between food and resilience to ministers and policy leads in DEFRA, MoD, MHCLG, etc., is essential. This enables a link between local action within the SFP network and individual local authorities, with Government work on nation-level resilience, including the Government Food Strategy Action Plan related to outcomes around food security and resilience.
- Local to national advocacy corroborates the urgent need for Government leadership and recommendations outlined in the 2025 National Emergency Briefing, the AFN Network Roadmap to Resilience (2025), the Government's own report 'Nature security assessment on global biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and national security' (2026) and more recently 'Potential Pathways and Solutions to Acute Food System Crisis in the UK' by Bridle et al (2026).
- SFP member engagement with their local MPs offers an opportunity to build the case and encourage parliamentary activity on the subject of Civil Food Resilience, including Parliamentary Questions to Ministers, giving evidence to committees and involvement in consultations.
- Government engagement via briefings, parliamentary events and collaboration with local MPs to engage with ministers on behalf of food partnerships offers the opportunity to communicate the links between food, community resilience, diverse geographies, climate and nature recovery, public health and cohesion, and especially the link between food security and national security. The public affairs function of the SFP programme already contributes to work in this area, including developing briefings to DEFRA and others, the annual Sustainable Food Places Parliamentary event, as well as SFP participation in events popular with Government ministers policymakers, including the Royal Welsh Show, Groundswell, the Oxford Farming Conference and Oxford Real Farming Conference and others.

Barriers and levers

This section explores barriers and levers to local Civil Food Resilience action. The table summarises these through the lens of 'what's in the way / what's in our hands.' This is then explored in more depth below the table.

Theme	What's in the way	What's in our hands	Who needs to act
Emergency planning	No central mandate for food in emergency risk registers; Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) lack food system expertise and resist engagement with food partnerships	First-mover LRFs and Food Partnerships (FPs) provide a visible model; Sustainable Food Places (SFP) can build the case using existing evidence and direct engagement with DEFRA and ministers	Central govt, LRFs, FPs, SFP
Food Partnership funding and legitimacy	Short-term rolling funding prevents long-term planning role being respected; non-statutory status limits credibility with formal bodies	Treasury-recognised multi-year funding via the Good Food Cycle (DEFRA's Food Strategy); council-embedded FPs demonstrate legitimacy models; public health teams as internal allies	Central govt, Local govt, FPs
Public procurement	Limited local authority procurement capacity; underfunded school, hospital and prison food budgets; fragmented supply chains	Smaller contract lots; anchor institution coordination; reframing procurement as unlocking social value; comprehensive Food Procurement Toolkit; linking to public health teams	Local govt, Anchor institutions, FPs, SFP
Local food infrastructure	Decades of consolidation have stripped regional infrastructure; small farms excluded from Sustainable Farming Incentives; processing and distribution gaps	Regional food hubs; seed banks and machinery rings; community kitchens and food hubs; support for sub-3ha farms; direct sales and community ownership models	Central govt, Local govt, Community
Supply chain engagement	Businesses can lack food ethics awareness; private sector supply chains disengaged from local resilience planning	Businesses' existing resilience plan obligations as entry point; CPD, CSR and social value narratives; supplier and buyer events; civil society coalition-building	FPs, Private sector
Equity and reach	Structurally disadvantaged communities are hardest to reach but most exposed to food system shocks; equitable participation is under-resourced	Paying for participation; Food Ladders framework for community-level work; upskilling in growing, cooking and land-based skills; structural change alongside targeted outreach	FPs, Local govt, Funders, SFP
Shared knowledge	Asset mapping happens informally; practice is siloed; communications are inconsistent across the network	Formalised asset mapping tools; regular knowledge shares; shared facilitation toolkits; coherent cross-FP communications materials	SFP, FPs

Emergency planning and food system risk

Food is not yet formally recognised as a critical infrastructure concern within emergency planning frameworks, and the systems designed to coordinate crisis response are moving slowly to catch up. Central Government has yet to include food in Local Emergency Risk Registers, leaving LRFs without a clear brief. Many LRFs lack the food systems expertise to act even if the will were there.

Structural and cultural factors compound this: LRFs tend toward risk-aversion and established categories, and food partnerships (currently non-statutory actors) often find themselves on the outside of conversations they are ideally placed to inform.

What's in our hands is a growing body of evidence and a set of first-mover Food Partnerships who are already advocating for the role of food in emergency plans. Making these visible - through SFP channels, direct engagement with ministers and DEFRA, and peer-to-peer learning between LRFs - builds both the narrative and the political case for a formal mandate. This report is the start of that journey.

Food partnership funding and institutional legitimacy

The structural position of Food Partnerships remains precarious. Short-term, rolling funding makes long-term planning difficult and means that civic food resilience work is often squeezed alongside day-to-day food access / growing / strategy delivery. Non-statutory status can create a credibility barrier with LRFs.

What's in our hands is a clear and evidenced case for Treasury-recognised, multi-year funding (ideally through Defra's National Food Strategy) alongside practical strategies for building legitimacy within existing structures. Linking food resilience work to public health teams within councils tends to open doors; public health teams often have more cross-departmental flexibility and experience of systems-thinking than planning or emergency functions. Council-embedded Partnerships can model what institutional legitimacy looks like. On the other hand, independently-hosted Partnerships bring a community convening reach that embedded ones sometimes cannot.

Public procurement

Procurement is one of the most potent levers available to local and regional government for boosting local food resilience and investing in local growers and diversity of production, yet it remains under-used. Limited capacity at Local Authority level, underfunded food budgets in schools, hospitals and prisons, and fragmented supply chains all act as constraints.

What's in our hands is a set of practical, tested approaches from across this cohort:

- Breaking contracts into smaller lots makes it viable for local producers to access public sector contracts
- Coordinating across anchor institutions - hospitals, schools, prisons, councils - means shared vision can unblock barriers that feel intractable when any single institution acts alone.
- Reframing procurement as unlocking overlapping social value (with good food as one of several outcomes, not the sole rationale) tends to find more traction.
- A shared Food Procurement Toolkit would make this accumulated knowledge accessible across the network.

Local food infrastructure

Decades of consolidation have quietly eroded the distributed networks that underpin local food resilience - regional processing facilities, local abattoirs, direct sales routes, aggregated supply chains, and support for small-scale producers have all contracted. Sub-three hectare farms, which tend toward high diversity of production, are currently excluded from the Sustainable Farming Incentive, a structural gap with direct resilience implications.

What's in our hands is a practical infrastructure agenda: regional food hubs that enable local growers to collaborate and access consistent routes to market; seed banks, libraries and machinery rings that reduce barriers for small producers; community kitchens, food hubs and processing facilities that strengthen the local food system's ability to absorb shocks. Community ownership and direct sales models build both economic resilience and long-term civic investment in local food.

Supply chain and business engagement

Many businesses do not yet understand their role in food system resilience - or know that food partnerships exist to help them think about it. Private sector supply chains remain largely disengaged from local resilience planning, and the potential of food system interventions for social value is underutilised.

What's in our hands is an entry point that doesn't require starting a new conversation: businesses are already required to hold resilience plans. Food partnerships can work with that obligation, introducing food systems thinking through CPD, CSR frameworks and social value narratives. Supplier and buyer events build the direct relationships that relocalised supply chains depend on. Civil society partners (National Landscape bodies, climate and water action groups) can add to a unified voice that councils and businesses find harder to dismiss.

"There's a lot of interest in trying to build a system where the need for crisis food is alleviated, where people don't get to that point of crisis, and can access intervention points in between."

Chloe Masefield, Coordinator, Dyfed Pows, on the Food Ladders approach.

Equity and community reach

The communities most exposed to food system shocks are often the hardest to reach and the least represented in the processes that shape food resilience planning. This is not incidental. It reflects the same structural disadvantage that makes those communities vulnerable in the first place. Equitable participation does not happen by accident, and the resourcing required to make it real is underestimated.

What's in our hands is both practical and structural:

- Paying participants who rely on emergency food provision to attend workshops and consultations is a concrete and necessary step.
- The Food Ladders framework provides accessible language and visuals for community-level food system work.
- Upskilling in growing, cooking, seed saving and land-based skills builds durable in-community capacity.

SFP caveats that targeted outreach is not sufficient on its own - structural change and community-level support need to work in parallel. SFP's Fair Food framework models to food partnerships the routes to embedding these approaches.



Credit: Ian Smith, Sustainable Food Plymouth

Appendices

The following Appendices offer brief vignettes of project areas from the Civil Food Resilience Cohort convened through Sustainable Food Places. More detailed case studies are available alongside this report which can be requested by contacting the Sustainable Food Places team: info@sustainablefoodplaces.org

Appendix A: Communications & Networks Vignette - Birmingham Food Hub

The Food Hub supports the [Birmingham Food Justice Network](#). BFJN comprises over 270 independent groups across Birmingham and surrounding areas which serve vulnerable communities via foodbanks, food pantries, pay-as-you-can meals, warm hubs and schools. The role of the food hub is to collect surplus and discarded fruit, veg and other products and to communicate what is available to the wider FJN so that collections can be coordinated and food redistributed/ repurposed. This is a valuable physical resource for storing and distributing food, reducing food waste and convening and building networks.

The unit at the Birmingham Wholesale Market which houses the Food Hub offers an opportunity to share the space with producers coming from Wales and the counties surrounding Birmingham. Links with farmers for food surplus donations are sporadic, as a result of the terms of their contracts for large grocery retailers. Maintaining relationships with farmers is difficult, since they are often busy and coordination with the Food Hub requires extra communication. There is therefore great interest in 'gleaning' of surplus and collection from overproduction from farmers in the areas surrounding Birmingham to redistribute from the Food Hub.

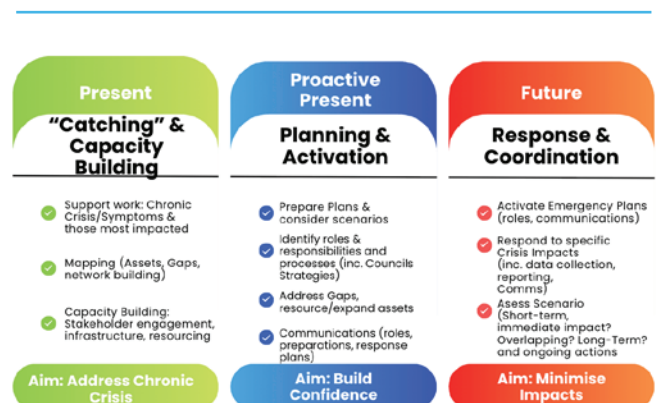
Emmanuel explains that the imports which come into the wholesale market reflect the cultural diversity of Birmingham's communities, with a range of products coming from Africa and South Asian producers, as well as Spain and the Mediterranean. While there are many businesses which buy from the Wholesale Market, there are many individual buyers.

Appendix B: Communications Vignette - Shropshire Good Food Partnership

Addressing Inequality as Capacity-Building

This work includes both proactive planning, scoping and coordination work, (which aligns with the 'Food Ladders' approaches of 'Catching', 'Capacity building' and 'Transformation'), and reactive response to a specific crisis event. Reflecting on the Pandemic experience, many SFP coordinators have noted that personal relationships proved to be our strongest asset. Before a crisis hits is the ideal time to be cultivating networks.

Systemic inequality means that the most vulnerable are disproportionately impacted in acute crisis events. Interventions that reduce inequality (along with "catching" services) support those impacted by chronic crisis and reduce the gap in the event of an acute crisis event. Inclusive engagement that builds connections and trust with vulnerable communities is essential. All interventions will be bespoke to the circumstances and needs of individual communities or areas.



An example framework as a simplified Civil Food Resilience process for building Town and Parish Council engagement, using inequality as a starting point for capacity building (Shropshire).

Appendix C: Infrastructure Vignette - Welsh Veg in Schools

[Welsh Veg in Schools](#) was founded by [Food Sense Wales](#), [Lantra](#) and [Castell Howell Foods](#). It is a movement of stakeholders led by Food Sense Wales and Lantra striving to increase the production, supply and access of organic fruit and vegetables in Wales to grow Wales' horticulture sector.

Recognising that Welsh organic vegetables are generally, though not always, more expensive than conventionally grown veg, **Welsh Veg in Schools** covers the price gap between local, organic produce and standard prices through a nature friendly uplift payment. The guaranteed income and support offered by the initiative has enabled growers to scale up, diversify crops and build resilience.

Supported through Welsh Government's Backing Local Firms Fund; [Bridging the Gap](#), as well as in-kind support from Castell Howell Foods and wider project partners – including Wales' network of Local Food Partnerships – **Welsh Veg in Schools** supplied over 40 tonnes of organic fruit and veg in 2025. It was produced by 14 growers and supplied 400 schools across 13 Local Authority areas through 3 wholesalers.

In **April 2025**, Food Sense Wales published a series of reports noting the project's achievements. You can read the various reports by clicking on the relevant links below:

- [Welsh Veg in Schools: Summary Report](#)
- [Welsh Veg in Schools: Full Report](#)
- [The Story of Welsh Veg in Schools](#)
- [Appendices](#)

In **2026**, **Welsh Veg in Schools** is working with over 20 growers; 5 wholesalers and 16 Local Authority areas, supported by Local Food Partnerships, and aims to supply around 100 tonnes of local, organic vegetables to schools across Wales whilst expanding work to build children's confidence with veg through initiatives such as farm visits. The next phase of the project is being supported through private, charitable, and public funds including Welsh Government's Local Places for Nature.

Bibliography and further reading

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Bridging the Gap: a Sustain programme modelling nine new ethical supply chains that support farmers and local communities, and bring organic fruit and veg to more people. <https://www.sustainweb.org/ing-the-gap/>

Local Food Growth Plan: a multi-partner project defining a framework of action at the local, regional and national level to expand the local food sector. <https://www.localfoodplan.org/the-plan/>

Food Ladders: a framework and toolkit of community-scale interventions aimed at building local level resilience in the face of food insecurity. <https://geofoodie.org/food-ladders-toolkit-welcome/>

Civil Food Resilience in practice

Capacity-building for resilience
across the Sustainable Food
Places network

