

August 2025

A Local Force for Climate Action
How Food Partnerships Are
Responding to the Climate Crisis



**food
matters**

sustainable, fair food systems

**SUSTAINABLE
FOOD places**



Food Partnerships and Local Climate Action

Across the UK, food partnerships are quietly changing how we respond to the climate and nature crisis. Grounded in local places and built on collaboration, they bring together councils, communities, producers, businesses, and civil society to take joined-up action across the food system.

Often recognised for their work on food poverty and public health, these partnerships are also making a real impact on climate and the environment: cutting food waste, supporting better diets, restoring land, reducing emissions, and strengthening local sustainable economies. What sets them apart is their ability to turn bold ambitions into practical action that works in context.

There are now over 120 Sustainable Food Places partnerships across the UK, each responding to its own local priorities and pressures. While no two are the same, they share a systems approach and a commitment to long-term, cross-sector collaboration. Yet their role in tackling the climate crisis remains under-recognised and under-resourced.



This report aims to change that. It brings together compelling examples of how food partnerships are turning climate goals into everyday action—locally, collectively, and with lasting impact.

How Food Partnerships Are Driving Action

The following five sections highlight a key area where food partnerships are contributing to the UK's climate response:



Farming for the Future: Supporting agroecological production, urban growing, land access, and climate-friendly procurement.



Reducing Waste, Closing Loops : Tackling emissions through waste minimisation, surplus redistribution, composting, and circular economy approaches.



Changing How We Eat: Promoting more sustainable diets, increasing access to seasonal and low-carbon food, and supporting a shift to climate friendly cultures.



Building Resilience to Climate Shocks: Responding to local climate risks—flooding, drought, food insecurity—with inclusive, adaptive action.



Enabling Systemic Change: Influencing policy, embedding food in climate strategy, and creating joined-up local governance.

Supporting Sustainable & Agroecological Farming

Food partnerships are growing climate-friendly production

Industrial farming is a major driver of emissions, biodiversity loss, and soil degradation. But there is a different path—one that restores nature, protects land, and supports communities. Agroecological and sustainable farming approaches can deliver significant climate benefits, but they require more than technical fixes: they need networks, infrastructure, and support on the ground.

Local food partnerships are helping to make this shift possible. Through grower training, land access, public engagement, and coordination across the supply chain, they are strengthening the foundations for more climate-resilient food production rooted in place.

What's happening on the ground?



FoodFutures (North Lancashire) has developed a multi-site FarmStart programme providing agroecological training and placements for new growers. Their community-led market garden, The Plot, has doubled sales while pioneering low-carbon delivery and circular composting systems.



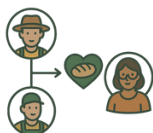
FoodWise (Leeds) & Feed Leeds established the Yorkshire Farming Forum to support more sustainable agricultural practices and co-authored the Growing a Resilient Food System in Leeds policy brief. These initiatives have helped strengthen links between farmers, researchers, and the council's climate resilience strategy.



Highland Good Food Partnership has been working to develop farm clusters that support regenerative farming. This work is shaping national conversations around collaborative, agroecological production models.



Greater Lincolnshire Food Partnership promotes community-supported agriculture schemes alongside outreach and celebration events like Apple Day to build support for local, nature-friendly farming.



Lewes District Food Partnership has built new links between community orchards and food banks, ensuring surplus produce like apples is shared locally—showing how small-scale local growing can support both sustainability and food justice.

Policy opportunity

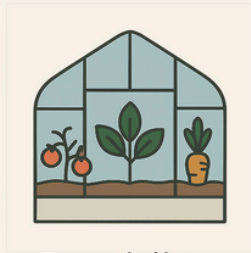
Food partnerships offer a delivery-ready network for advancing climate-friendly farming across the UK. But to scale this work, they need access to land, sustained funding, and inclusion in regional food, farming, and climate plans.

Invest in food partnerships as trusted brokers of agroecological transition—connecting land, training, and community for a more sustainable food system.

SUPPORTING SUSTAINABLE & AGROECOLOGICAL FARMING

Food partnerships are growing climate-friendly production from the ground up

WHAT FOOD PARTNERSHIPS ARE DOING



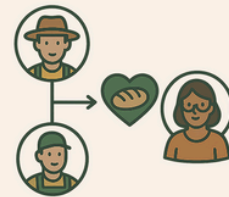
Providing agroecological training for new growers



Piloting low-carbon local food deliveries



Linking farmers, researchers, and council climate strategies



Connecting growers and local consumers



Promoting community supported agriculture

Why it matters

- Nature-friendly farming can be a powerful carbon sink
- Agroecological practices restore soils and protect biodiversity.

POLICY OPPORTUNITY

Invest in food partnerships as trusted brokers of agroecological transition connecting land, training, and community for a more sustainable food system.

Reducing Waste, Closing Loops:

Food partnerships are cutting emissions and building circular systems

Food waste is one of the most avoidable sources of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK food system. At every stage—from production to consumption—valuable food is lost, while organic materials end up in landfill or incineration. Addressing this waste is one of the most immediate and impactful actions we can take to cut carbon and build a more circular economy.

Local food partnerships are already taking the lead. Through surplus redistribution, community composting, education campaigns, and innovation in reuse and preservation, they are turning waste into a resource and unlocking social, economic, and environmental benefits along the way.

What's happening on the ground?



Herefordshire Food Alliance launched a project to coordinate redistribution of surplus chicken, estimated to have redirected over 20 tonnes to date. A centralised communication system and farmer-focused surplus events enabled producers to connect directly with local food groups.



FoodFutures (North Lancashire) is delivering the Closing Loops programme, establishing 20 community composting demonstration sites across gardens, schools, and urban parks.



Glasgow Food Policy Partnership piloted a food waste audit in primary schools to better understand waste volumes and behaviours in both catering and service kitchens.



Hull Food Partnership developed the Save Our Surplus project, helping families preserve local seasonal gluts into nutritious snacks and meals. Equipment for food preservation is now accessible via the Hull Library of Stuff, supported by training materials for wider community use.



Highland Good Food Partnership contributes to the Highland Community Waste Partnership, running fermentation and waste reduction workshops, promoting food waste tools, and co-developing the regional #BringItBack scheme to cut single-use packaging.

Policy opportunity

Food partnerships provide an on-the-ground mechanism to deliver the UK's food waste reduction goals. But they need consistent funding, access to infrastructure, and a clear role in local and national circular economy strategies.

Recognise and fund food partnerships as local catalysts for waste prevention and circular food systems — connecting climate action, community benefit, and resource efficiency.

REDUCING WASTE, CLOSING LOOPS

Food partnerships are cutting emissions and building circular systems

They are closing the gaps with initiatives like surplus food redistribution, community composting, and education



Herefordshire Food Alliance has redirected over 20 tonnes of surplus chicken via farmer and food group collaborations



Glasgow Food Policy Partnership

partners piloted school food waste audits to inform new waste strategies



Food Futures (North Lancashire) is rolling out community composting with training and demonstration sites

Hull Food Partnership

develop 'Save Our Surplus' to support families in preserving local seasonal gluts.

Why it matters

- 35% of UK food emissions come from food that is never eaten
- Preventing waste reduces carbon more effectively than recycling or energy recovery
- Surplus redistribution keeps food in the community

POLICY OPPORTUNITY

Recognise and fund food partnerships as local catalysts for waste prevention and circular food systems . connecting climate action, community benefit, and resource efficiency.

Promoting Sustainable Food Consumption

Food partnerships are enabling healthier, lower-impact food choices

What we eat—and how it's produced—has a profound impact on the climate. Shifting consumption patterns toward more sustainable, seasonal, and plant-rich diets is one of the most powerful levers for reducing emissions from the food system. But making those shifts accessible and attractive requires more than awareness campaigns. It takes infrastructure, relationships, and trusted local actors.

Food partnerships are helping drive this change. Through cookery programmes, procurement reform, public campaigns, and citizen engagement, they are empowering people and institutions to choose food that's better for people and planet.

What's happening on the ground?



Bristol Good Food Partnership ran the Going for Gold campaign, encouraging individuals, organisations, and institutions to take climate-positive food actions. Over 1,000 actions were logged, ranging from reducing meat consumption to prioritising local and seasonal produce.



Sustainable Food Places Wales (Food Sense Wales) launched a national Veg Cities campaign and Peas Please pledge network, with partnerships in Cardiff, Monmouthshire and Carmarthenshire working to increase veg consumption through school meals, food banks, and public catering.



Brighton & Hove Food Partnership worked with local caterers and public sector anchors to reduce meat portions, increase veg, and support more seasonal, sustainable menus.



Calderdale Food Network introduced plant-based community cooking sessions, helping build confidence, skills, and cultural exchange around low-impact food.



Leicester Food Plan partners have worked to embed healthier, more sustainable options across public catering settings, with city schools achieving bronze and silver Soil Association Food for Life awards.

Policy opportunity

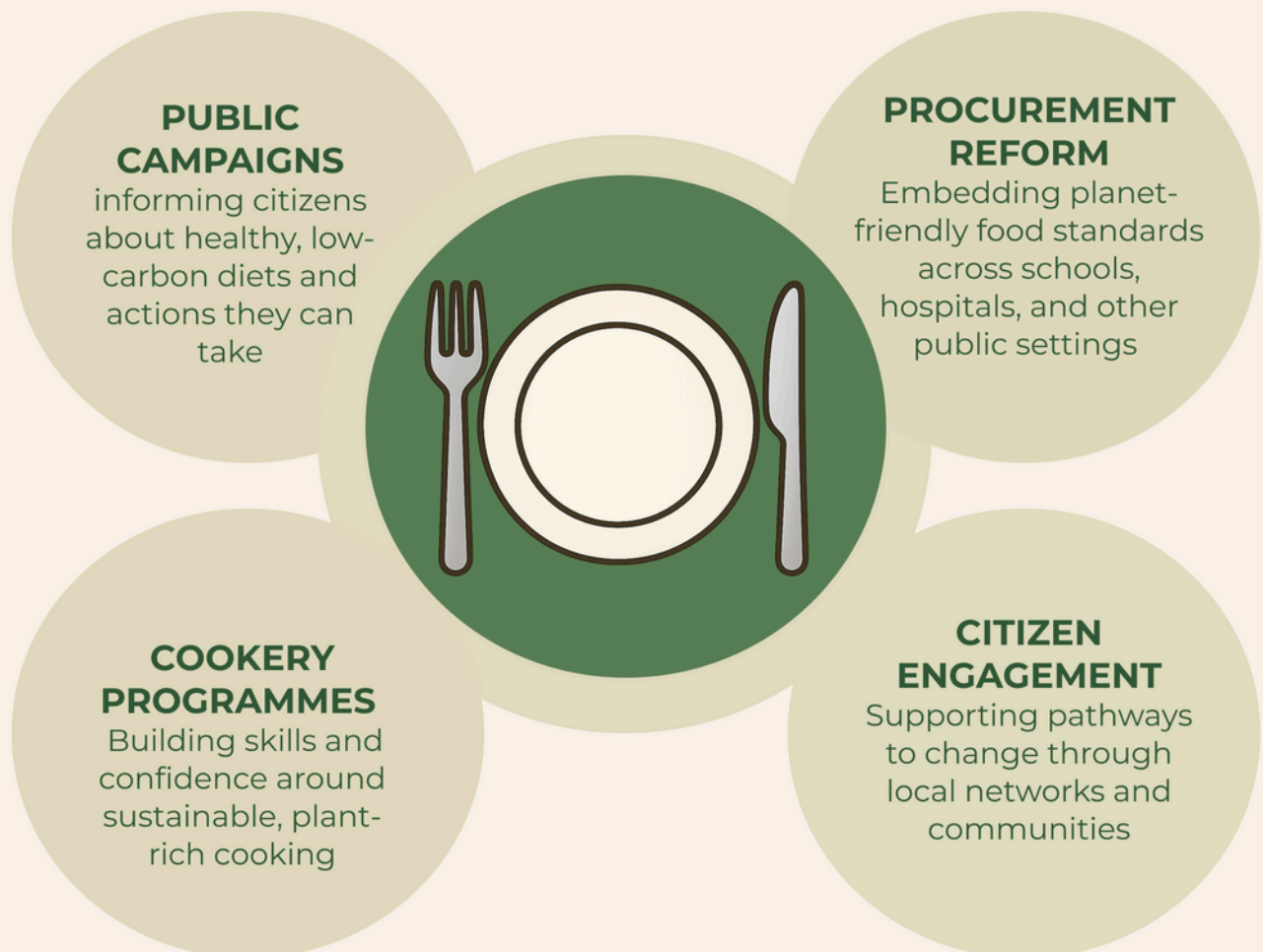
Food partnerships are already helping to deliver dietary shifts aligned with net zero and public health objectives. National strategies on food, health, and climate must enable and resource this work to reach its full potential.

Back food partnerships to lead local transitions toward healthy, sustainable diets—through procurement, education, and public engagement.

PROMOTING SUSTAINABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION

Food partnerships are enabling healthier, lower-impact food choices

Diets that are more plant-based, seasonal, and locally sourced can significantly lower emissions from the food system. To make these changes accessible and attractive, food partnerships are combining outreach, training, reform of public procurement, and more.



POLICY OPPORTUNITY

Back food partnerships to lead local transitions toward healthy, sustainable diets- through procurement, education, and public health

Strengthening Food Resilience to Climate Impacts

Food partnerships are building local capacity to weather future shocks

Climate change is already disrupting the food system. From extreme weather affecting harvests to supply chain breakdowns and rising food prices, communities are increasingly exposed to risks they didn't create and often least equipped to handle. Building resilience means more than emergency response: it requires long-term investment in local capacity, relationships, and infrastructure.

Food partnerships are playing a vital role in strengthening local food resilience. By coordinating emergency responses, supporting growing and distribution initiatives, and embedding food access into climate strategies, they are helping communities prepare for and adapt to a changing world.

What's happening on the ground?



Sheffield Food Partnership coordinated a cross-sector emergency food response during COVID-19 and has since supported the development of food hubs across the city to ensure access to food in future crises.



Good Food Oxfordshire led the Food Access Alliance, which created a county-wide food access map, developed a shared food justice strategy, and integrated food resilience into Oxfordshire's climate action plans.



Pembrokeshire Local Food Partnership piloted Food Security Plans in rural towns to assess local vulnerabilities and build place-based responses to future supply shocks, including routes for local growing and redistribution.



Plymouth Food Partnership supported the establishment of Growing Resilience programmes linking community growing with mental health support, improving local production while strengthening wellbeing and food access.



Lambeth Food Partnership worked with council teams to embed food resilience in local emergency planning, including mapping community assets, supply points, and vulnerable groups

Policy opportunity

The UK needs a coherent strategy to address climate-linked food insecurity. Local food partnerships offer a ready-made delivery network, but need policy recognition, long-term funding, and access to planning and emergency preparedness spaces.

Position food partnerships as core local infrastructure for food resilience—linking emergency response with long-term adaptation and equity.

STRENGTHENING FOOD RESILIENCE TO CLIMATE IMPACTS

**Food partnerships are building
local capacity to weather future
climate shocks**



COORDINATING EMERGENCY RESPONSES

Food partnerships play a vital role in local crises, mobilising quickly to get food where it's needed. They connect community groups, councils, and supply networks to coordinate action and share resources.



SUPPORTING LOCAL GROWING & DISTRIBUTION

Food partnerships boost local production and supply through community growing, food hubs, and short supply chains, improving access and resilience during disruption.



INTEGRATING FOOD INTO LOCAL CLIMATE ACTION PLANS

Food partnerships help embed food access and sustainability into climate strategies, linking resilience, health, and environmental goals at the local level.

POLICY OPPORTUNITY

Position food partnerships as core local infrastructure for food resilience, linking emergency response with long-term adaptation

Enabling Systemic Change through Collaboration and Governance

Food partnerships are reshaping local systems for long-term climate action

The climate crisis is not just a technical challenge, it's a governance challenge. Food systems are complex, fragmented, and governed by actors with different powers, priorities, and incentives. Addressing systemic issues like climate change requires collaboration across sectors, levels of government, and communities.

Food partnerships are helping to make that happen. By bringing together public, private, and civil society actors around shared goals, they are creating new forms of local leadership. Their work turns climate ambition into action: embedding food into local plans, convening strategic groups, and creating the conditions for joined-up change.

What's happening on the ground?



The Birmingham Food System Partnership has developed the Birmingham Food System Strategy and is galvanising local action across ten different workstreams, with sustainability embedded throughout. This has facilitated work such as a Full of Beans campaign around healthy and sustainable food.



Greater Lincolnshire Food Partnership produced a local Good Food Strategy co-developed with farmers, councils, community groups, and businesses, and is now working to integrate the strategy into the region's climate and economic plans.



Food Cardiff embedded food into the Cardiff One Planet climate strategy, ensuring local growing, procurement, and healthy eating are recognised as key pillars of place-based environmental action.



Good Food Oxfordshire co-convened the city's Food Justice Strategy with Oxford City Council, linking food equity, climate adaptation, and access to land through a joined-up governance approach.



Good Food for All Kirklees established a multi-stakeholder governance board to coordinate sustainable food work across the local authority, VCS sector, NHS, and anchor institutions—anchoring food in broader strategic planning.

Policy opportunity

To meet climate and food goals, the UK needs local systems that are coordinated, inclusive, and responsive. Food partnerships are already filling this role—but need stable funding, clear mandates, and inclusion in national strategies.

Mandate the development of local or regional food strategies in every authority across the UK, supported by national frameworks that allow for place-based tailoring.



ENABLING SYSTEMIC CHANGE THROUGH COLLABORATION AND GOVERNANCE

Food partnerships are coordinating cross-sector policy and practice that is breaking down governance silos and improving collaborative work



Developing local plans, strategies, and partnerships



Engaging citizens and local authorities



Embedding food into climate policies

Why it matters

- Action on climate requires joined-up governance
- Food is an untapped lever for emissions reduction and adaptation.
- Food partnerships strengthen local delivery of climate goals



Convening strategic groups



Coordinating place-based work

POLICY OPPORTUNITY

Mandate the development of local or regional food strategies in every authority across the UK, supported by national frameworks that allow for place-based tailoring.





Food Matters was set up in 2004 to combat the inequalities in the food system. We create opportunities to bring about changes to see healthy, sustainable, fair food become a reality for everybody, every day.

Our work focusses on food system transformation through person centred action and advocacy. We aim to create food systems that enhance health and wellbeing, nourish the environment, reduce inequalities and promote social justice.

- We ensure people and communities are at the heart of food system transformation by using participatory approaches to take action at every level to empower people and make better food policy.
- We support people to develop skills, knowledge and confidence so they feel empowered to take control over decisions that affect their lives and their food choices.
- We believe that change happens when policy interventions align with people's ability to make change happen.

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