

Laying the Foundation

A Food Strategy that works for everyone



The Food
Foundation



Food, Farming
& Countryside
Commission

Citizen Advisory Council Foreword

As members of the Citizen Advisory Council, we believe citizens deserve a say in the policies that shape the food on our tables. We have been brought together from across the UK and represent a wide range of backgrounds. This is our opportunity to confront and meaningfully address the pressing issues affecting the entire population.

We want to ensure that food is not only affordable but also nutritious. We want farming to support both the welfare of nature and the livelihoods of farmers. And, crucially, we want people to be at the heart of these changes – not only as consumers, but as informed citizens with voices that matter.

We know at times our priorities may clash with the priorities of others focused on profit and growth. But we believe this citizen-led approach can build a food system that is fair, resilient, and genuinely nourishes both people and the planet for generations to come.

Summary

The Citizen Advisory Council spent the summer working with government to help shape the government's new Food Strategy.

The Council produced six key recommendations for a fairer food system:

- Start with what is already working
- Learn from innovative leadership across the country
- Include everyday voices consistently
- Build in accountability
- Create the right incentives for industry
- Get to the root of the problem

In the next phase of work, the Citizen Advisory Council will investigate what's working well by visiting regions where food system transformation is already happening.

The Council's unique perspective

Everyone in society understands the importance of food. It's critical to life and central to the social fabric of our lives – of how we take care of each other. While some involved in the Food Strategy are focused on market opportunities or technical solutions, members of the Citizen Advisory Council are involved as citizens – thinking about what works for their family, their community, and future generations and what will help them and society prosper.

The 20 Council members represent different geographic, social and economic backgrounds, yet have found they are united in a desire for a fair and healthy food system that puts people at its centre. They come with personal expertise about food and bring different priorities to the conversation than those representing food businesses or sector organisations. They have already helped shape projects to improve the food system including the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission's Food Conversation and The Food Foundation's Food Ambassador programme.

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We have to have these conversations as citizens, everyday people, not people who are working in government or working for industries. How does the food system affect you as a mother, as a daughter, as a sister, as a friend? How does food affect you?

– Maria

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There's been a commonality of desires amongst a pretty diverse group of citizens. We're all working from a common base that will help to move things forward.

– Catherine

““

I'm really grateful to be a part of this process and to be able to bring in young voices – and ensure citizen voices are heard in these kinds of strategies.

– Emmanuela

What citizens want the Food Strategy to deliver

The Citizen Advisory Council is calling for the government's Food Strategy to:

Start with what's already working

Understand what's already successful about food, around the UK and internationally, and figure out how it can be replicated and scaled across different communities.

Learn from innovative leadership across the country

Learn from mayors, councils, businesses, and community groups who are already transforming food systems where they live and work.

Include everyday voices consistently

Involve citizen perspectives, alongside industry and expert views, for a better chance of delivering policies that will improve people's lives in the long term.

Build in accountability

Include clear ways to measure success and make sure things happen.

Create the right incentives for industry

Introduce regulation and taxation to ensure companies prioritise public health, and public interest, instead of relying on voluntary commitments that are easily wound back, or don't deliver change fast enough.

Get to the root of the problem

Tackle why people find it hard to eat well by acknowledging what is shaping the food environment they live in, and the economics of a system which relies on cheap, unhealthy food to offset other very high household costs (like housing and energy).

How the Council worked in Phase 1

At the beginning of the project, the Council observed stakeholder workshops in London, Leeds and Birmingham. These workshops were hosted by Defra, led by the Institute of Grocery Distribution (IGD), and provided a space for industry and civil society groups to discuss issues and solutions related to the food system.

The industry voices in the room represented significant economic interests and technical expertise, but their conversations largely centred on corporate profit and growth, regulatory compliance and commercial viability. As observers, the Council members heard representatives talk in general terms about "consumer behaviour", make assumptions about citizens and their "poor" choices, and ignore the nuanced and diverse experiences of people who live with the food system every day.

Council members reflected that some of these assumptions revealed gaps in understanding and could result in policies that do not have impact on people's real lives. They also worried that the workshops focused too heavily on restating the problems with the food system. They determined that their work should focus on solutions.

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I believe the government live in a bubble, the Westminster bubble. And I think it's very important to get out and speak to people from all, all different corners of the UK and from all different social, social aspects, you know, social standings, to understand what the real problems are at the ground level.

– Kevin

With all of this in mind, the Council set about designing workshops with a wider group of citizens. These workshops uncovered insights into what influences local food environments, from the food in our cupboards, to what is stocked at local shops, to the impact of advertising and marketing, and social media. They spoke about cultural heritage, dietary requirements, food education and lack of resources. They connected food policy to broader issues like housing and transport and worked up ideas for practical solutions, helping to unpick conflicting priorities or policy trade-offs.

These workshops helped the Council to provide detailed feedback on the government's draft Good Food Cycle before its publication in July 2025. They welcomed the government's ambition and called for the Food Strategy to focus on the root causes of the food system's problems.

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Industry will always have a certain agenda towards profit making. They are businesses, so I don't blame them. But a citizen who consumes food, that goes to supermarkets, that is directly affected by the things that these industries do. I think it's important to hear that voice, because the government needs to know who these policies are directly affecting.

– Ruth

Why citizens' voices matter in policymaking

Governments in many countries are looking to citizens for solutions: from *Assemblée Climat* in Brussels to Scotland's *The National Advisory Council on Women and Girls*, France's *Les 150* (Citizens' Convention on Climate) to the *Association of the Austrian Climate Council of Citizens*.

In the case of the Food Strategy, involving citizens is helping bring perspectives that expand policy discussions: in conversations about economic growth and innovation, citizens ask questions like:

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Does industry growth in unhealthy food really help families eat well?

They connect food policy to housing costs, energy prices, and transport access, noting that:

“““

At a household level this issue is related to how near you live to shops that have healthy food.

Citizens bring their expertise as participants in the food system to policy discussions, revealing fundamental problems and backing decisive government action. They highlight when policy language seems disconnected from everyday realities:

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This isn't innovation. Ensuring access to good food for everyone in society is a basic human right. It's using posh words to ignore the facts of the crisis.



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Sometimes the process of becoming an expert, say, in food or working for industry, takes you away from some of the day to day realities that ordinary people live. Like, for instance, you know, I've heard people from large food companies speak and they don't necessarily talk about some of the issues that people like myself face day to day, and it's not their fault, but you kind of need someone like me in the room to say, hey, have you thought about this?

– David

“““

I got involved in the Citizen Advisory Council for the Food Strategy as it is vital for policymakers to hear voices from disadvantaged and unheard communities. To achieve any real change, we need to develop a shared level of understanding of what the reality is like for those experiencing food insecurity. My lived experience as a council estate single dad allows me to do just that, to speak up for the poorest in society.

– Dominic

“““

My hope for the future is that we've given Defra enough confidence in this process – and that now we can bring together the evidence, our commitment and the will of the government to be able to implement change.

– Paul

Next steps: what works here?





The Council is now entering its second phase, expanding its work to investigate successful food initiatives across England. From October 2025 to January 2026, members will visit regions where food system transformation is already happening – working directly with mayors, council leaders, businesses, and community organisations.

Their mission is to understand what enables transformation and what barriers remain. They want to discover practical solutions that are already working for communities and identify how national policy can support and scale success.

The Council members want to be solution-finders, bringing back real evidence of what's possible to inform the ongoing Food Strategy development.

Citizens' common-sense outcomes

Health

-  Everyone can afford good food
-  Companies don't profit from food that makes people ill
-  Children aren't targeted with adverts for junk food that harms them
-  The health problems caused by unhealthy food are recognised as such

Food Security

-  British farmers are fairly paid for their work
-  Food companies don't dictate what people can afford to eat
-  Benefits cover the cost of healthy food
-  All communities can eat food from their culture close to home

Sustainability

-  Farmers' role in caring for nature and biodiversity is recognised and paid for
-  Eating sustainably is affordable to all
-  We stop wasting food
-  Regionally/locally produced and seasonal food is available everywhere – no more food deserts

Economic Growth

-  Healthy people are essential to a healthy economy
-  Communities benefit (including financially) from their local food businesses
-  Food jobs strengthen neighbourhoods, not drain them
-  People have money in their pockets for good, nutritious food

Background

Citizen Advisory Council

The Citizen Advisory Council is formed of 20 citizens from The Food Foundation Ambassadors programme and participants in Food, Farming and Countryside Commission's The Food Conversation. Age, ethnicity, education level, disability status, household composition, political views and many other criteria were all considered to ensure the Citizen Advisory Council members are largely representative of the British population. Defra, The Food Foundation, and the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission partnered to ensure citizen voices were central to developing the Food Strategy.

Catherine McMinn County Londonderry
Claire Fraser Caithness
Dave Salter Cornwall
David Njoku Berkshire
Dominic Watters Kent
Emmanuela Kumi London
Fayeth Jones Denbighshire
Glory Omoaka Glasgow
Hasan Nassar West Yorkshire
Jamie Carmarthenshire
Karl Cornwall
Kerri Bridges London
Kevin Tyne and Wear
Maria Chukwu-Nsofor Kent
Martin McCloy County Antrim
Paul Fowler Cornwall
Penny Walters Tyne and Wear
Ruth Amaeze Kent
Zahistha Gafoor London
Citizen 20 (prefers to remain anonymous) Northumberland

The Food Foundation Ambassadors

The Food Foundation's Food Ambassadors are people aged 14 and up with lived experience of food insecurity who contribute to campaigns, research, and events as experts by experience. They've worked on campaigns from school meals to tackling food poverty, including with Marcus Rashford on the #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign.

The Food Conversation

Since 2023, the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission has run the UK's largest-ever public dialogue about food. Through deliberations in 12 parts of the country and over 75 community conversations, citizens explored policy interventions and produced the Citizen Manifesto to Fix Food in March 2025, a call for joined-up thinking to address food inequalities, poverty and waste.

UK Government Food Strategy

Announced in December 2024, the first phase of the Food Strategy was published in July 2025. The Good Food Cycle, unveiled at Bradford's Darley Street Market, featured presentations from representatives of the Citizen Advisory Council. It identifies ten priority outcomes needed to build a thriving food sector.



The Food Foundation

The Food Foundation is changing food policy and business practice to ensure everyone, across the UK nations, can afford and access a healthy and sustainable diet.

We are policy entrepreneurs and use surprising and inventive ideas to catalyse and deliver fundamental change in the food system by building and synthesising strong evidence, shaping powerful coalitions, harnessing citizens' voices and driving progress with impactful communications. We continually identify new opportunities for action, and trial new levers for change.

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Food, Farming & Countryside Commission

The Food, Farming and Countryside Commission is helping to shape a more sustainable future for food, farming and the countryside. We bring together leadership across sectors and communities – listening to citizens and seeking out innovation and seldom-heard perspectives. We focus on the radical ideas and the practical actions that will make a real difference for communities and the country.

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Registered in
England and Wales

Company no. 12562770
Charity no. 1195790