

What Works in Cornwall?

Citizen Advisory Council What Works Here Inquiry
Cornwall, 10-11 November 2025

"My biggest takeaway from Cornwall is the collaboration between the people, the council, the government, and the various organisations that are working here. Everyone is so collaborative with each other, and it's a very symbiotic environment."

Siddhi, CAC
member

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) is developing a new food strategy to ensure good food for everyone. The Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) was established in May 2025 to ensure citizen voices are at the heart of this strategy, bringing together 30 people from across the UK with lived experience and diverse perspectives on the food system.

The **What Works Here Inquiries** are a pioneering example of how citizen-led work can inform government policy. This report brings together the results from the Cornwall Inquiry, co-designed by the CAC with the support of Sustainable Food Cornwall. It draws on the citizens' diverse knowledge and experience as well as the deep understanding of the Cornish food system contributed by the local leaders, business owners, community organisers, farmers and more.

Cornwall has a strong sense of pride and commitment to its local heritage in food production. Effective collaboration is succeeding in driving food system change and sustainable food production in the region, but there are barriers to progress. The citizens' research shines a light on those blocks and helps uncover place-based solutions that will power up regions to thrive. Blocks to progress include short term funding cycles and procurement systems designed for national and global suppliers which limit ability to invest and manage risk. Supermarket contracts leave many farmers and fishers reliant on export rather than UK markets. Lack of capital investment limits the ability for communities to build resilience in local and regional food system infrastructure. National government should set clear policy signals and create the conditions for Cornwall's collaborative, place-based approach to deliver its full impact.



Day 1 at the Cornwall What Works Here Inquiry

"National government would need to think about the fact that every decision that they make has a ripple effect on the community, the people that make up the community, the present generation and the generation to come."

Maria, CAC member

Key elements necessary for a healthy Cornish food system

Regional organisers Matthew Thomson and Mary Rose Surfleet from Sustainable Food Cornwall helped organise the inquiry and set the scene for the Citizen Advisory Council. Over two days, the citizens met with a wide range of people and organisations with a stake in the Cornish food system and spent time visiting projects to see what was working well and what national government could learn from Cornwall.

Working together, they identified the conditions necessary for Cornish food to thrive:

- **Fair contracts and pricing for producers:** pricing doesn't currently reflect production realities, or share risk equitably, needing more enablers for cooperative models for farmers and growers
- **Infrastructure that connects production to consumption:** more investment is needed in processing facilities, storage, and distribution networks
- **Procurement that supports collective approaches:** cooperative and collective approaches are needed to allow producers to access markets and institutions
- **Capital investment in proven approaches:** capital investment is lacking to enable long-term planning and emphasis on 'what works'
- **Education and pathways into food work:** jobs in the Cornish food system are not aspirational or valued enough

Building on what works

The CAC saw numerous examples of how people in Cornwall are making the food system better every day. And they picked out a number of ways to build on work that is already happening:

Collaboration is working	Initiatives such as the Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Food Charter have been successful in increasing collaborative approaches. Witnesses from the council, community organisations, farms, and fishing all described working collaboratively with a shared understanding of what needs to change in the food system.
Bring services together to reduce stigma and meet multiple needs	The CPR Foodbank was a great example of how integrating services works - they have combined food provision with utility support through South West Water, voucher systems, and community dining in one location. It was clear that this approach reduces stigma when people can get a warm meal at the same as getting help with other services and could be a blueprint for other areas.
Work that gives people purpose and supports families	Kehelland Trust provides hope for families with young people and adults with disabilities across a 16-acre horticultural site. People gain independent living skills and feel involved in purposeful activities such as crafts and producing food and flowers. Staff described how people often arrive quiet, reserved, or withdrawn, but after three or four months get to know what they can do and change completely. For many families, this place offers hope about their adult children's future.
Public health investment treating food as healthcare	<p>Dr Eunan O'Neill, Director of Public Health, explained that Cornwall's public health team provided initial funding for Sustainable Food Cornwall. Their approach connects health, economy, and environment, recognising the close link in Cornwall between environment and health. They are moving beyond 'eat less move more' messaging to address quality of life, recognising that people from poorer communities live shorter lives.</p> <p>Claire Judd's WellFed programme gets local food to people who also see where it's grown. Health improvements in people with diabetes match medication, building evidence that healthy food can work as healthcare. Citizens heard this coordination allows different actors to work together and share learning, with public health investment creating food system change.</p>
Producers working together through cooperatives and partnerships	Mark and Inez Williams at Presingoll Farm work in partnership with Riveria to grow brassicas, creating economies of scale to meet supermarket contracts while maintaining sustainable practices. At Ennis Barton Farm, the dairy operation supplies a farmer-owned cooperative rather than selling direct, demonstrating how cooperatives create market access for producers. The WellFed pilot partnered with Dan Sargison who owns Grassroots Garden CSA and also established an Incredible Edible project in Redruth, Cornwall. Dan grows the vegetables supplied in the pilot, giving him a stable market.
A planning system that is working for local food producers	Retail space is being set aside for local food in Cornwall. The Great Cornish Food Store has a Waitrose lease requirement to stock local and regional produce. Tesco Truro has space for Cornish food. Citizens saw potential for this good work to be expanded with new retail licenses, new build communities and retail parks favouring local producers from the start - designing in local value networks from the outset.



Dr Eunan O'Neill, Director of Public Health for Cornwall

"If you look after your fishermen and your farmers, that's what feeds this country, and that's what makes our country great."

Martin, Camel Fish

Barriers to change

Despite all the efforts of people in Cornwall to create and sustain a healthier, fairer, greener food system, there were clear and recurring barriers to change.

Organisations are operating on grants that require constant reapplication and gaps in infrastructure limit real progress. Citizens heard from organisations like Kehelland Trust and Wellfed about the way that old infrastructure and distribution challenges prevent expansion of effective programmes. Despite clear evidence that this work is driving beneficial health outcomes, these organisations are unable to scale their work. Good ideas stay small.

The CAC representatives also met farmers and fishers who are limited in their ability to provide sustainable produce by unfair supermarket contracts and low pay. Andrew at Ennis Barton Farm told citizens that supermarkets push for more efficiency without adjusting payment to account for the extra work farmers have to put in. Mark and Inez Williams at Presingoll Farm work in partnership with Riveria Produce to grow brassicas together, and described the huge risks held

by farmers when the climate means something comes out of the ground a few weeks later or earlier than contracted.

Chris Ranford from CFPO explained that one fishing job supports 15 other jobs in the local economy, yet fishers struggle to make the work pay. They also talked about the lack of visibility of farming and fishing among young people – without apprenticeships, bursaries, training, and visibility (through careers officers and school curriculum), these pathways remain invisible and the average age of farmers and fishers keeps rising. Ideas like the young fisherman's network could be a place for learning and connection and more networks like this are needed.



Kehelland Trust's Sally Pyner talking to the CAC about the work they do

"There's a deep underlying theme where everyone really understands that the food system needs to change, and they're all willing to do that together."

Jo, CAC member

Summary

The CAC members who spent time in Cornwall came away with a clear sense of a deeply resilient community, full of pride and potential. There are many fantastic initiatives which successfully help build community, expand access to healthy food, and support local and regional food producers. Local government is being pro-active and using tools within their power – like the planning system – to make food work better.

"I didn't realise how many people were actually struggling here, and even in terms of the farming and agriculture, it's very hard for small businesses to start up despite the wealth of land and greenery."

Ruth, CAC member

"There's some kind of connection and relationship going on. Each person is very passionate about what each company does and organisation does. There's a deep care for the value of people, a deep concern about food, which is a basic commodity that affects all of us"

Maria, CAC member

However, Cornish people cannot transform their food system without supportive policy signals and targeted investment from national government. At present, food systems are designed predominantly to benefit big national businesses to the detriment of smaller producers, work in the food sector is low paid and failing to attract the next generation, deprivation limits many people's ability to eat healthily. People are doing a huge amount to help themselves, but they want national government to help level the playing field and create the conditions to enable people to thrive.



CAC members Ruth, Siddhi and Maria at the oyster processing plant in Tregew, Cornwall

Thank you to the people in Cornwall who made this work possible

Matthew Thomson and Mary Rose Surfleet from Sustainable Food Cornwall helped set up the inquiry. They introduced the Council to a range of people working across the food system:

- [Dr Eunan O'Neill](#), Director of Public Health
- Chris Ranford, [Cornish Fish Producers Organisation](#)
- Matt Sharp, [Cornwall Council](#)
- Mark & Inez Williams, [Presingoll Farm and The Grower](#)
- Dan Sargison, [Grassroots Garden CSA](#)
- Claire Judd, [WellFed](#)
- Emma Pate, [Great Cornish Food Store](#)
- Lucy Jones, [Cornwall Food Box Company](#)
- Joyce Duffin, [CPR Foodbank](#)
- Holly Whitelaw, [Regen Food and Farming CIC](#), [Gleaning Cornwall](#) and [Bosavern Community Farm](#)

The Council also visited Sally Pyner at [Kehelland Trust](#), Elliot Kett, Martin at [Camel Fish](#) and fish monger, Giles Gilbert at [Tregew Farm](#), and Andrew Brewer at [Ennis Barton Farm](#).

Who We Are

The Citizen Advisory Council is made up of 30 citizens from across the UK, who are part of The Food Foundation Ambassadors programme or participants in Food, Farming and Countryside Commission's The Food Conversation, representing a diverse cross-section of British society. The Council was formed in May 2025 and have been working with Defra to ensure the new food strategy can ensure good food for everyone.

The following Citizen Advisory Council members led the What Works Here Inquiry in Cornwall:

- Jo McLoughlin, Greater London
- Maria Chukwu-Nsofor, Kent
- Ruth Amaeze, Kent
- Siddhi Pandit, London

The Inquiry Process

The What Works Here Inquiries used a participatory research approach, positioning citizens as researchers. Over two days in Cornwall, Citizen Advisory Council members conducted field research through site visits and dialogue with local stakeholders. Citizens took detailed field notes and then took part in structured reflection sessions. Through this collaborative analysis, citizens synthesised their individual findings into collective insights, distinguishing between what was working well, what barriers prevented progress, and what would support regional food systems.

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.

Food Foundation Food Ambassadors

The [Food Foundation 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.