

From the Ground Up

A report of the
Citizen Advisory Council's
What Works Here Inquiries



The Food
Foundation



Food, Farming
& Countryside
Commission

Citizen Advisory Council Foreword

In the Citizen Advisory Council, we want to focus on solutions, on how good food reaches everyone. For this report we went to find the places already making that happen and asked them what makes their progress possible.

We travelled to four regions of England and sat down with farmers, fishers, cooks, doctors, council leaders and the people running food banks and community kitchens. They have the knowledge of food in their areas and the ideas for improving it, and we saw how much they achieve with how little. Much of it is done against the odds, and the passion of the people doing the hard work is wearing thin.

The four regions are very different, and what the North East needs is often not what Cornwall needs. Yet the same obstacles showed up. The people best placed to judge what a place needs are those who live and work there. They need financial backing and resources to act on that knowledge.

A handful of large food companies shape much of what we have come to accept as normal about how food is produced and sold. Government sets the rules that make this possible, and only government can change them. We are asking the Government to give regions the power and the money to act on regional priorities, and to reform the national rules that hold good food back. These are our findings and recommendations.

Summary

In late 2025, the Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) ran What Works Here Inquiries in four different regions of England: Cornwall, York and North Yorkshire, Liverpool and Merseyside, and the North East. The CAC met more than eighty people, from those who grow, catch, make, sell and share food for a living, to those responsible for the health and prosperity of their regions.

In every region, people already create real value for their communities through food. In Liverpool, a not-for-profit caterer makes 26,000 meals a day for over eighty schools without relying on grants. In Cornwall, vegetables prescribed for food-related illness produce results that match medicine. North Yorkshire's Food for the Future framework brings together councillors, researchers, academics and farmers to create a food economy that works for everyone. In the North East, a food bank combines food with mental health, housing a welfare support to tackle causes of hardship, not just symptoms.

These examples keep the value of food close to where it is produced. This is not charity or nostalgia. This is growth with regional enterprises competing on quality and at ordinary supermarket prices.

But the same five barriers hold this work back everywhere:

- supply contracts that load risk onto farmers and undermine UK-grown produce
- public procurement that favours large multinational businesses over smaller local producers
- short-term, insecure funding for community organisations
- loss of local infrastructure for producing, processing and distributing food
- reliance on unpaid labour and on surplus food that does not match local needs

These are symptoms of one problem: a food system optimised for cheap calories and shareholder profits. Low prices at the till hide the real costs, paid in the nation's health, in unfair returns for farmers and in the environment.

Government can change this by devolving power and funding to places, reforming procurement so schools, hospitals and prisons prioritise healthy regional and UK produce, strengthening the Groceries Code Adjudicator, requiring honest labelling, and bringing the tangle of food rules into one clearer law.

What the CAC found came as a shock; that these beacons of good practice survive in spite of how the food economy is designed to work. It does not have to be this way. They offer these findings to the Good Food Cycle, in the belief that government can readily solve these problems, with the public behind it.

The Starting Point

Most of what the country eats is supplied by a handful of large companies, moving food through supply chains that reach around the world and onto supermarket shelves stocked with cheap, convenient products. This carries a cost. Food-related illness is one of the heaviest burdens on the nation's health, and it falls hardest on the poorest communities. Farmers are tied into contracts that barely cover the cost of growing the food, while the soil, water and climate they depend on are worn down rather than the place where good food begins. For many families, the food within reach after rent and bills is rarely the food that is good for them.

The future that citizens want is not yet a reality. The Citizen Advisory Council chose to focus on solutions in their second phase of work, going to where change was already happening to understand the conditions that make it possible.

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Food is a link between many things, it brings families together, but it also expresses cultures from around the world and that's why it is so important.

– Hasan, CAC Member

Established by Defra in May 2025 to bring citizen voices into the development of England's food strategy, the CAC brings together around 30 citizens from across the UK with a wide range of backgrounds, ages, ethnicities, regions and political perspectives. The food strategy is organised around the Good Food Cycle, ten interconnected outcomes describing what a food system working for people, the environment and the economy would look like, spanning healthy and affordable food, thriving food businesses, sustainable farming and strong food cultures.

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My biggest takeaway from Cornwall is the sense of unity. There's a deep-rooted belief that the food system needs to change, and people are committed to working together to make it happen, no matter what it takes.

– Jo, CAC Member

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Healthy Food is an essential component of life. Yet the food system seems to have gotten quite distorted in the way that food is produced and consumed. Being part of this project has made me think about my family. It felt like an opportunity to be part of a wider conversation that might generate some change.

– Matt, CAC Member

Many regions across England are working to transform their food systems. From a longlist of those regions, Cornwall, York and North Yorkshire, Liverpool and Merseyside, and the North East Combined Authority were selected to represent the range of contexts across the country, coastal, rural and urban, and the different scales at which food system change happens.





Our Approach

The What Works Here Inquiries places citizens at the centre of the research process. Citizens conduct evidence sessions, visit sites and scrutinise findings collectively. They bring no institutional stake in any particular answer, which means they can ask fresh questions that practitioners do not always think to ask.

Between four and six CAC members attend each inquiry, which runs over two days. The first day brings witnesses to the CAC in a structured evidence session modelled on parliamentary select committee practice, addressing what is working well, what is standing in the way, and what they want a Good Food Cycle to achieve. The second day moves into the region, with site visits giving CAC members direct experience of the food system in that place.

Once all four inquiries are complete, the full CAC meets to review findings across all four regions and agree what the evidence means for the Good Food Cycle, drawing on a parallel analysis of recorded material, field notes, transcripts and reflection sessions facilitated by the FFCC and Food Foundation teams.

The Citizen Value Framework

The Citizen Value Framework reframes how the economic value of the food system is assessed. Conventionally that value is measured in narrow terms of activity, including products sold, profits, jobs. Those measures capture only part of the picture and can miss what citizens actually want food to deliver. The framework broadens the assessment, judging value against what citizens themselves told FFCC matters to them.

FFCC developed it from The Food Conversation, in which hundreds of citizens across the UK described what they want from food, for their families, their communities and the country. It builds on the approach to public value pioneered by UCL's Institute for Innovation and Public Purpose, which FFCC developed for the food system in its report Net Gain or Net Drain? The framework organises these priorities into four categories of value:

- **economic and financial value**
meaning a transparent, diverse, sustainable and fair food economy;
- **individual value**
meaning nourishing and affordable food for all;
- **social value**
meaning vibrant food culture, strong communities and the protection of the institutions and spaces where people share the joy of food;
- **environmental value**
meaning sustainable, resilient and responsible systems.

Rooted in what citizens value, the framework provides the analytical lens for the findings in this report, with the CAC's research mapped against these four categories of value.

Economic and financial value

VALUE CREATED

- ↑ Cooperative production models retaining value in regional economies
- ↑ Direct supply relationships generating fair returns for producers
- ↑ Local authority investment in markets creating diverse, resilient infrastructure

A transparent, diverse, sustainable and fair food economy

VALUE ERODED

- ↓ Supply chain contracts concentrating all production risk on producers while profits flow to buyers
- ↓ Procurement systems designed for national scale, locking out regional producers
- ↓ Infrastructure loss forcing value out of the regions where food is produced

Social value

VALUE CREATED

- ↑ Food partnerships coordinating across institutions, sustaining shared commitment
- ↑ Community-owned infrastructure anchoring food culture in place
- ↑ Regional food identity generating pride, skills and economic opportunity

Vibrant food culture, strong communities and protection of key institutions

VALUE ERODED

- ↓ Short-term funding cycles destabilising proven community food organisations
- ↓ Structural over-reliance on unpaid labour where sustained paid employment is needed
- ↓ Declining food careers as low pay and insecurity deter the next generation

Individual value

VALUE CREATED

- ↑ Food treated as a health intervention, generating measurable clinical outcomes
- ↑ Integrated support addressing root causes of food insecurity
- ↑ Dignity-preserving models connecting people to affordable, local food

Nourishing, affordable food for all, with protections for the most vulnerable

VALUE ERODED

- ↓ Ultra-processed food dominating the food environment, shaped by corporate scale
- ↓ Food deserts persisting where distribution infrastructure is absent
- ↓ Costs of poverty compounding across housing, fuel and food insecurity

Environmental value

VALUE CREATED

- ↑ Farmers committed to regenerative practices and high animal welfare standards
- ↑ Short supply chains reducing food miles and connecting people to production
- ↑ Gleaning networks recovering surplus crops left in fields after harvest, reducing systemic waste

Sustainable, resilient and responsible systems

VALUE ERODED

- ↓ Price pressure making sustainable production economically unviable for many producers
- ↓ Inflexible contracts generating farm-level waste through cancelled orders
- ↓ Loss of processing infrastructure increasing food miles and removing regional resilience

What Works

Across the four inquiries, people meet their particular challenges with solutions built for that place. Where farmers, food businesses, community organisations and public institutions work for the same outcomes, they produce good food, get it to the people who need it, and keep more of its value in the region that makes it. This section sets these examples out, organised by the four categories of the Citizen Value Framework, though in practice the examples contribute to more than one category.

Economic and financial value

Presingoll Farm has been farmed by the same family for five generations. By partnering with a larger farm to share costs and labour, father and daughter farmers secured a supermarket contract that brings the financial stability to continue farming regeneratively. At Ennis Barton Farm, farmers sell through a farmer-owned cooperative rather than directly to supermarket buyers. They set their own prices and share in what the cooperative earns, giving them a stability that direct supermarket contracts do not provide.

The **Cornish Fish Producers Organisation** commissioned an economic analysis of Cornwall's historic fishing industry, finding one fishing job sustains 15 more across processing, distribution, retail and hospitality. Their **Young Fisherman's Network** works to bring new entrants into the industry, recognising that the regional economy those jobs support depends on the next generation choosing to fish.

In the North East, **Food and Drink North East (FADNE)** runs programmes that help small and medium-sized producers build the relationships and skills to access commercial markets that would otherwise be out of reach. FADNE's 'Room with a View' programme connects smaller producers with buyers they could otherwise struggle to reach, and 'Beyond the Kitchen Table' builds the commercial skills to sustain those relationships. The **North East Combined Authority** is investing £2 million over two years in the region's food and drink sector, building the provenance and reputation that allows regional producers to compete on quality rather than price alone.

The **Great Cornish Food Store** described how, when Waitrose opened in Truro, a planning condition required the supermarket to allocate retail space to a local food business. The Great Cornish Food Store took that space and now sells over 90% local produce.

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The position of farmers, I feel like they're very overlooked... they're getting less support. And I think as a result of that, it's becoming harder to do things sustainably and in ways that can bring a profit to them

– Ruth, CAC Member

Individual value

At **Alder Hey Hospital** in Liverpool, ward-based chefs produce more than 600 meals daily, achieving the highest patient satisfaction scores of any service in the hospital. **Dr Ian Sinha**, Consultant Paediatrician, makes the clinical case that poverty shapes children's health at a biological level and that nutrition determines health outcomes. Investing in good hospital food produces clinical results and changes the experience of families at a difficult time.

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We are getting so dependent on ultra-processed food (UPFs) in the UK. The first thing you'll find in a supermarket will be a UPF. And if UPFs are cheaper than healthy food, this impacts people living in poverty. The government needs to start listening because it's becoming a health emergency.

– Craig, CAC Member

Food for Thought is a not-for-profit catering model that delivers 26,000 meals daily across over 80 member schools in Liverpool, sourcing locally and operating without grant dependency. **Queen of Greens** runs a mobile organic fruit and vegetable shop serving children's centres, refugee communities and hospitals at supermarket prices, making fresh local produce accessible in parts of the city where it would otherwise not reach - areas that would be described as 'food deserts'.

The **WellFed programme** in Cornwall prescribes vegetables to patients with food-related chronic health conditions. Evaluations show that this programme leads to health outcomes that match pharmaceutical approaches. It also creates stable demand for local sustainable producers and generates evidence that feeds back into how the health system understands food.

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As a child, I was on free school meals. I still am on free school meals. I understand that one meal can make such a difference within the family. I had four siblings in the house when I was younger, so us all being on free school meals helped a lot when it came to tea times.

– Keira, CAC Member

In York and North Yorkshire, **FixOurFood** worked with local authorities across the country to introduce auto-enrolment for free school meals, reaching 22,000 additional children as a result. A relatively simple administrative design change helps reached far more children than current opt-in systems do.

CASE STUDY

Food banks with different models

Pathways at Newcastle Food Bank addresses 59,000 cases of crisis annually. Rather than responding to food insecurity alone, it integrates mental health services, welfare advice, domestic violence support and housing support alongside food, addressing the causes of crisis rather than its symptoms. By supporting the local community in this way, the programme works to reduce the need for emergency food support rather than simply meeting it. **Transformation CPR in Cornwall** also combines food provision with utility support through South West Water, voucher systems, and community dining in one location. People can walk in for a free warm breakfast.

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We have to remember that people are still people. It doesn't matter what your circumstances are. Just because you're a bit short of money doesn't mean that you're not entitled to good food.

– Penny, CAC Member

Social value

Feeding Liverpool coordinates organisations across the city on the basis of shared values, with relationships built over years and multiple funding cycles. The relationships reflect the city's history of collective response to hardship, and as a Marmot City committed to tackling health inequalities, with dignity and justice as the terms on which organisations deal with one another and with the people they serve.

In Cornwall, **Sustainable Food Cornwall** also coordinates the public health, community food organisations and producers across the region around a shared understanding of what needs to change, as laid out in their Cornwall and Isles of Scilly Food Charter.

For local people who'd rather not see another supermarket selling unhealthy food open, **Liverpool City Council's** investment in city markets means they can get good food at reasonable prices. The markets also give local farms a stable market and supply wholesale, with local produce going to the cafés and restaurants of the city.

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The government needs to understand that people are concerned and they want their food to be more locally sourced, and they also want to be nourished properly.

– Peter, CAC Member

In the North East, the **Lighthouse Project** in Byker combines youth clubs, council events, bike workshops, holiday activity programmes and food education under one roof. When young people were asked why they value it, they said it is because it is a safe space. Safe spaces like this are needed in more places across the country.

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What I've seen in Newcastle is great collaboration. I can see the holistic support. I can see how proactive they are to centre dignity in food provision and food insecurity.

– Glory, CAC Member

The **Oswin Project** in Newcastle runs a prison employability programme where former offenders are employed at the charity's cafés, farm shops and market gardens. Training and practical experience in landscaping, gardening and stonework is also on offer. People currently employed by the charity describe the purpose it gives them, and their hope for the future.

Kehelland Trust in Cornwall provides day services to children and adults with learning disabilities, giving them a safe and supportive space designed for their needs where they receive training in food growing and gardening, with service users selling produce in an on-site shop.

CASE STUDY

Community ownership in Liverpool

Kindling Farm was bought by 800 members for £1.8 million. The farm grows organically and now supplies the University of Manchester, with 200 to 300 vegetable box subscriptions and a target of 1,000. At **Squash Cafe**, food grown in the community garden is prepared and served in a space where local people make the decisions, nourishing people through food and growing connection within the community. **Food for Thought** works with 84 schools, reinvesting all income back into food and schools, with headteachers and teachers on its board and accountable to students.

Environmental value

Across the regions, farmers are building models that make sustainable practices financially viable. At **Presingoll** and **Ennis Barton** farms in Cornwall, cooperative structures allow farmers to maintain sustainable practices while remaining financially viable. Farmers describe how sharing risk collectively opens doors to supply contracts that would be more challenging to secure individually.

At **Yolk Farm** in North Yorkshire, Emma and Ben Mosey reduced their flock from 6,700 to 750 hens and became more profitable. Selling eggs at volume at prices set by supermarket buyers made the business unviable. Diversifying into a restaurant, on-site shop and childcare built a model that allows them to farm on their own terms.

Walter Riddle of **Hepple Estate** and **Adam Riley** of **Riley's Fish Shack** trade directly with each other. Adam buys meat reared on the estate, knows how the animals are raised and can tell customers exactly where their food comes from. That direct relationship removes the intermediaries that drive up food miles and reduce what producers earn.

FixOurFood conducts research into sustainable food systems, including new farming methods, and shares its findings and best practice through an open-access website, making the work available to farmers and food system practitioners across the country.

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My biggest takeaway from Yorkshire has been hearing from a huge range of different people working in the food system and how much good work is being done. People thinking a lot about sustainability and health and the circular economy. I've learned a lot, and it's made me feel really hopeful.

– Kerri, CAC Member

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Climate change will have a significant impact on locally sourced food; not only for transportation and storage but significantly upon local produced fruit and vegetables.

– Barbara, CAC Member

Gleaning Cornwall coordinates farmers and community organisations to recover produce that would otherwise go to waste, redistributing it to food banks. Citizens value the connection gleaning creates between local people and farmers, but highlight that these networks address a problem that fair contracts would prevent.



What Gets in the Way

Alongside this evidence of progress, across all four regions the CAC find that the people doing the most effective work are doing it against the odds.

The same five barriers recur across all four regions, eroding value and preventing a Good Food Cycle from emerging:

- supply contracts that load risk onto farmers and undermine UK-grown produce
- public procurement that favours large multinational businesses over smaller local producers
- short-term, insecure funding for community organisations
- the loss of local infrastructure for producing, processing and distributing food
- reliance on unpaid labour and on surplus food that does not match local needs

Supply contracts

Duncan Nelless and **Graham Rutherford** in the North East spoke about sharp rises in the cost of chicken feed – supermarkets refused to adjust the prices they paid to British farmers, took 7,000,000 hens out of production and imported eggs from overseas instead. Producers bore the entire cost of the shock while supermarkets maintained their margins.

At **Presingoll Farm** in Cornwall, farmers growing brassicas received a fraction of the retail price while carrying all the risk of a crop coming in outside the contracted window. Their contracts were cancelled when cauliflowers grew with leaves tinged purple from the natural chemistry of the soil on their organic farm, rather than meeting the commercial specification of green.

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At Presingoll Farm we heard how a crop of cauliflowers could be rejected because the leaves were purple, not green. The experience left me with a greater appreciation of the people who produce our food and a stronger belief that a resilient food system requires risks and responsibilities to be shared more fairly.

– Siddhi, CAC Member

Public procurement

Anna Longthorpe farms in York and North Yorkshire, runs **Anna’s Happy Trotters** and is investing in animal welfare. Anna wants to supply institutions nearby, but existing long-term catering contracts lock local schools into national suppliers, leaving nearby producers unable to access those markets.

Getting into public procurement comes up repeatedly. **Deliciously Yorkshire**, which supports smaller food businesses, and **Dan Sargison**, a grower in Cornwall, both raise it. **Kindling Farm** is already operating at scale but needs more institutional markets to grow. **Presingoll Farm** makes high-quality food but relies on partnerships to supply the volumes public contracts demand.

Farmers across regions point to supermarkets that market food using fabricated farm names and packaging that obscures where food comes from and how it is produced. For regional producers competing on provenance and quality, this matters as it displaces their products and actively misleads the people buying them.

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Getting used to processed and frozen food was a thing I struggled to understand. I came from a place where food is affordable, obtained naturally, either fresh or dried, and where you can trace the source easily. The food chain in the UK calls for a lot of questioning. The UK’s high rates of food-related diseases are directly linked to the prominence of ultra-processed food in its food chains.

– Wena, CAC Member

In the North East, a major new HMRC building in Newcastle was constructed without kitchens or social space, meaning thousands of workers must use nearby outlets, putting pressure on the surrounding area when it could have created opportunity for local and regional food businesses.

Short-term, insecure funding

Nourish Food School in the North East brings food education into community spaces, with sessions designed for the diversity of people in the area. A fifth of staff capacity goes to funding applications rather than delivery.

Kehelland Trust in Cornwall has built years of evidence about what its food growing, education and supported employment achieves for people with learning disabilities, but constant reapplication for grants that cover only what already exists prevents it from reaching the scale that evidence justifies.



Kehelland Trust is an establishment that's providing hope to families who are concerned about their young people and their future. You would only understand that if you're touched by it directly like me. This place offers hope, but they're struggling with financing and funding.

– Maria, CAC Member

Queen of Greens almost had to stop running the van serving children's centres, refugee communities and hospitals across Liverpool because the insurance it needed was unaffordable. The service would have ended had an insurer prepared to support a social enterprise not stepped in to offer cover it could afford.

Loss of local infrastructure

The physical infrastructure of regional food systems is disappearing, from abattoirs and packing facilities to processing capacity and cold storage. Farmers describe a pattern of long journeys to abattoirs and a lack of local processing and packing facilities that forces food out of the region before it can reach the people within it. Walter Riddle of Hepple Estate's animals have wonderful lives but are transported long distances for slaughter because local abattoir capacity cannot support the supply chains his commitment to animal welfare requires. Northumberland eggs leave for packing in Yorkshire and return to the region as a finished product. In Cornwall, gleaning networks need refrigerated transport and processing hubs that do not exist at the required scale to handle the volumes they could redistribute.

Reliance on unpaid labour and surplus food

People keep this work going against the odds. Community food projects absorb the impact of food insecurity caused by poverty, with coordination roles filled by people working beyond their contracted hours because the alternative is that the work does not happen. Food bank operations depend on volunteers to manage the redistribution of surplus from supply chains that generate more waste than the system is designed to address. Skilled, committed people do irreplaceable work without the security or recognition of paid employment, and volunteer coordinators burn out. This essential work cannot continue on goodwill alone.

Food banks and community organisations receive national redistribution surplus unsuitable for their communities as it does not reflect local dietary needs or arrives in poor condition. In many cases, people in these communities do not have access to the cooking facilities needed to prepare the food and community organisations spoke of struggles accessing space to cook community meals instead.



What really surprised me is how food policy and legislation isn't working, even when all the players are really trying to work together. And how Yorkshire and Cornwall are similar, with lots of small farming units battling against the same things.

– Paul, CAC Member



How to Change It

The people citizens met are working to build food economies that work better. They have tried things and learned what works. They point to action at both regional and national level.

Regional

In each region, organisations know and trust each other, and are actively working together to achieve a common goal. This looks different in each place, from a formal food partnership to research partnerships, underpinned by a co-developed local food strategy. This coordination is what makes progress possible. Permanent funding for that coordination, with support and partnership from local authorities and councils, would allow it to go further.

North Yorkshire Council's Food for the Future framework sets out clear outcomes for the region's food system, with annual monitoring and governance spanning sectors. **Mayor David Skraith's** devolved powers over transport, housing, skills and health allow place-specific responses to the challenges that emerge from York and North Yorkshire's particular geography and economy. The **White Rose Pact** provides a model for cross-boundary working between regions to tackle shared infrastructure and logistical challenges.

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In my council estate, even today, you can buy blueberry vapes but not blueberries. This demonstrates how our food system can provide access to flavour without access to nutrition. People living with food insecurity are experts on how the failures of the food system are experienced on the ground, and their knowledge is essential if we are to address the inequalities that leave some communities surrounded by abundance while remaining excluded from it.

– Dominic, CAC Member

Other regions demonstrate the importance of devolved power and the strategic direction that becomes possible. **Newcastle City Council's Food Systems Strategic Group** prioritises good food as a public health issue, laid out in Newcastle's 2030 Good Food Vision. **Northumberland County Council's Food Action Plan** supports the county's food and drink sector, enhances food security, and improves access to sustainable food. **Feeding Liverpool's Good Food Plan** aims to build an equitable and sustainable food system. The Director of Public Health's long-term investment in **Sustainable Food Cornwall** treats good food as something public health depends on, with food as a matter of health, environment and economy.

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I think the government could do a lot more in terms of things like sugar tax and taxing unhealthy food and putting that money into important aspects for the next generation.

– Martin, CAC Member

Losing regional food infrastructure has consequences for producers and communities alike. Rebuilding this infrastructure would allow cooperative models and short supply chains to function, create jobs and restore economic value to the regions where food is produced.

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You can't just do a blanket policy for the whole country. What works in Cornwall will not necessarily work in London, or elsewhere. The government should be focused in a way that suits the people of that area.

– Ruth, CAC Member

In Cornwall, planning policy has been used purposefully, with retail space set aside for local food. Planning frameworks could give local authorities consistent tools to do the same across England, with restrictions applied to fast food outlets where they already dominate.

National

Nationally, the dominant narrative says big businesses keep the food system running. The What Works Here Inquiries show that at a regional level, the food economy leans on low-paid or volunteer food workers, and runs down the environment that future production depends on.

Public procurement, through schools, hospitals, universities, prisons and local authorities, provide stable markets for local and regional producers while also supporting the health of people in those communities. People want simpler and more user-friendly procurement systems that support shorter contract cycles and regional sourcing criteria. The Social Value Act gives public bodies the legal basis to prioritise local and social value.

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You can't just do a blanket policy for the whole country. What works in Cornwall will not necessarily work in London, or elsewhere. The government should be focused in a way that suits the people of that area.

– Ruth, CAC Member

When exploring the risk of current supply chain contracts, many regional experts suggested that extending the Groceries Code Adjudicator's (the independent regulator that requires the largest supermarkets to treat their direct suppliers fairly under the Groceries Supply Code of Practice) remit and power would bring more fairness into the system. Honest and transparent labelling would protect farmers competing on provenance and quality, and give people the knowledge they said they want about where their food comes from and how it is produced.

Regulation across the food system is fragmented, with different departments pulling in different directions, and much of it carries the complexity of frameworks inherited from the EU without the coherence a domestic food strategy requires. Regional experts spoke of the need for a joined-up approach, with legislation that gives the food system a stable foundation.



Regional Action

- 1 Fund local food partnerships
- 2 Devolve power and budget
- 3 Rebuild regional infrastructure
- 4 Give councils enhanced planning powers

National Action

- 1 Reform public procurement
- 2 Make supply contracts fairer
- 3 Honest, transparent labelling
- 4 Joined-up food legislation

Next Steps

The CAC is not short of ambition. They want a country where healthy, good food, sustainably produced, is within reach of everyone, and the producers who grow and catch it are paid fairly. Set against that ambition, the What Works Here Inquiries findings came as a shock. In every region, these beacons of good practice survive in spite of how the food economy is designed to work, not because of it, and the costs fall on the people and places least able to bear them. It does not have to be this way.

The CAC offers these findings to a government developing a Good Food Cycle. The conditions that produce food security, resilience and better health outcomes exist and are working. A Good Food Cycle backed by coherent legislation that brings together the fragmented rules and responsibilities currently pulling in different directions is what would allow those conditions to develop beyond the places that have found ways to create them.

The CAC's work does not stop here. FFCC and the Food Foundation are working with Defra on how citizens' voices can best be heard as the outcomes of the Good Food Cycle are delivered.

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For generations, people have made decisions for the greater mass of the population, and we're seeing the results every generation of how that doesn't work. So I think it's about time they started listening to every day people: no more making decisions about us without us.

– Catherine, CAC Member

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One thing that I think the people we've spoken with are asking for is for a voice at the table. I think that's the message that I'm going to take back, that we're going to need more local experts in the room when decisions are being made.

– David, CAC Member

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People like me know what food insecurity is like, we need to have some kind of say in how things are shaped, which does not really happen very often.

– Penny, CAC Member



Acknowledgements

The What Works Here Inquiries were made possible by the commitment and generosity of everyone who gave their time and knowledge to the CAC across four regions of England. The CAC is grateful to every person who presented evidence, opened their doors for site visits, and trusted citizens they had not met before with the realities of their working lives.

The Citizen Advisory Council

The Citizen Advisory Council comprises citizens drawn from FFCC's The Food Conversation and the Food Foundation's Food Ambassadors programme. The CAC has been working with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs since the summer of 2025 to ensure that citizen knowledge is embedded in the development of England's food strategy.

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| Barbara, West Yorkshire (York and North Yorkshire Inquiry) | Kerri Bridges, London (York and North Yorkshire Inquiry) |
| Catherine McMinn, County Londonderry (Liverpool and Merseyside Inquiry) | Maria Chukwu-Nsofor, Kent (Cornwall Inquiry) |
| Claire Fraser, Caithness | Martin McCloy, County Antrim (Liverpool and Merseyside Inquiry) |
| Craig, Northumberland (North East Combined Authority region Inquiry) | Matthew Bixby, Gwynedd (Liverpool and Merseyside Inquiry) |
| Dave Salter, Cornwall | Paul Fowler, Cornwall (York and North Yorkshire Inquiry) |
| David Njoku, Berkshire (York and North Yorkshire Inquiry) | Penny Walters, Newcastle (North East Combined Authority region Inquiry) |
| Dominic Watters, Kent (York and North Yorkshire Inquiry) | Peter Gorringe, Northumberland (North East Combined Authority region Inquiry) |
| Emmanuela Kumi, London | Rebecca Sly, Devon |
| Glory Omoaka, Glasgow (North East Combined Authority region Inquiry) | Rushda Mahmood, West Yorkshire |
| Hasan Nassar, Halifax (York and North Yorkshire Inquiry) | Ruth Amaeze, Kent (Cornwall Inquiry) |
| Jamie, Carmarthenshire | Siddhi Pandit, London (Cornwall Inquiry) |
| Jo McLoughlin, Greater London (Cornwall Inquiry) | Wena Isename, Edinburgh (Liverpool and Merseyside Inquiry) |
| Katharine McKerrell, Orkney | |
| Keira (Liverpool and Merseyside Inquiry) | |

Regional anchor partners and witnesses

Cornwall

The inquiry was co-designed with Matthew Thomson and Mary Rose Surfleet of Sustainable Food Cornwall, who introduced the CAC to:

Dr Eunan O'Neill, Director of Public Health for Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly; Chris Ranford, Cornish Fish Producers Organisation; Matt Sharp, Cornwall Council; Mark and Inez Williams, Presingoll Farm and The Grower; Dan Sargison, Grassroots Garden CSA and Incredible Edible Redruth; 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; Sally Pyner at Kehelland Trust, Elliot Kett at Tregew Farm, Martin at Camel Fish, and Andrew Brewer at Ennis Barton Farm.

York and North Yorkshire

The inquiry was co-designed with Dr Belinda Morris of FixOurFood and Allison Kane of Deliciously Yorkshire, who introduced the CAC to:

Adam Bedford, Fera Science; Ruth Everson and Jenny Thompson, North Yorkshire Council; Cllr Paul Haslam, North Yorkshire; Jan Thornton MBE, Vice Chair of the FixOurFood Commission; Sam Buckton, Research Associate, University of York; Anna Longthorpe, Anna's Happy Trotters; Louise Cantlay, Food Circle York CIC; Cristina Talens, Source Climate Change Coffee; David Skaith, Mayor of York and North Yorkshire; Emma and Ben Mosey at Yolk Farm, Liverpool and Merseyside

The inquiry was co-designed with Keenan Humble and Michael Fitzsimmons of Feeding Liverpool, who introduced the CAC to:

Cllr Jane Corbett; Liz Fisher, Public Health; Chris Walsh, Kindling Farm; Dr Ian Sinha, Alder Hey Hospital; Daniel Heffy, GSG Hospitality; Michael Bracken, Liverpool City Council Markets; Angela Phillips, Food for Thought; Lucy Antal, Alchemic Kitchen CIC and Queen of Greens; Anita Welsh and Jackie Swanson at Squash Cafe and Grapes Community Garden.

North East Combined Authority

The inquiry was co-designed with farmer and regional expert Tom Burston, who introduced the CAC to:

Susan Justice and Steve Wheaton, Food and Drink North East; Walter Riddle, Hepple Estate and Hepple Spirits Company; Adam Riley, Riley's Fish Shack; Maria Antoniou, Northumberland County Council; Shion Gosrani, Newcastle City Council; Carlos Yescas, Food Newcastle; Fiona Sample and the Cafe 16 team, the Oswin Project; Mac Young, NFU Northumberland; Ross Lowrie, North East Combined Authority; Carole Rowland and Gemma Whaley, Newcastle Food Bank; Joanna Lacey, Nourish Food School; Duncan Nelless, Thistleyhaugh Farm; Graham Rutherford, View Law Farm



The Food Foundation

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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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