

Summary: Sust Food Cornwall



This is a summary of a longer report co-created by a team of citizen researchers and food activists working with over two hundred food interested residents of Cornwall over spring summer 2021. We call ourselves 'Sustainable Food Cornwall' – not yet an organisation, working mostly voluntarily, we are collaborating as widely as we can to help Cornwall become a '[Sustainable Food Place](#)'.

The principle authors are Manda Brookman, Charmian Larke and Holly Whitelaw supported by Emma Pate and Matthew Thomson, with guidance from Cornwall & Isles of Scilly Local Enterprise Partnership Rural Group, Cornwall Food Access Alliance, Cornwall Council Food Security Group and a small grant from Sustainable Food Places and The Hive Cornwall (funded by the National Lottery Community Fund and Cornwall Community Foundation).

Kernow's food system is blessed with a great deal of good practice and energy, but also contends with an array of deeply entrenched structural problems. This report is an initial attempt to bring together the key actions needed to build a more sustainable food system in Cornwall. While incomplete, it points towards a Good Food Strategy for and is hopefully the basis for further partnership development.

*There are many more areas for action than we could capture in this report. All those ideas, conversations, enterprises, initiatives, and programmes we did not manage to mention, we salute you. You are part of our future and we cannot wait to work with you as we strive to **make Cornwall a place of good food, for one and all.***

Meur Ras! Thankyou!

Thank you Sustainable Food Places and The Hive Cornwall for enabling this study, to the National Lottery Community Fund and Cornwall Community Foundation for funding them, and to the hundreds of contributors who have shown us the way.



Summary

1 Where we are now

We carried out a survey, workshops and individual focussed discussions with a wide range of involved individuals, companies, groups and the public sector on their views of the present food system in Cornwall, what problems it poses and what they view a sustainable local food system entails.

Well over 200 people were involved, from struggling consumers, farmers, growers and fishers to food processors and retailers, food banks and hospitality, social services, gleaners and many supportive organisations such as councils, planners and health specialists.

The clear messages on present problems include :-

- ◆ Lack of knowledge about food

- ◆ Unsustainable expectations by shoppers
- ◆ Prices too low for local producers and too high for those in food poverty
- ◆ Problems with local supplies and traceability
- ◆ Nutrition and meeting needs
- ◆ Wider system issues around sustainability including supply chains, concentration of power in the supermarkets, lack of awareness of consumer power

Each sector has specific issues including for farmers and growers the major negative impacts of supermarket contracts, both pricing and contract conditions, as well as issues around achieving meaningful local supply contracts. Cornish fishing is diverse with day boat fishers feeling the reduction in fish and market availability and the larger fleets able to fish further out and maintain their place in the market.

Foodbanks and related organisations have seen very large increases throughout the pandemic and a continuing need for their

services, with problems in supplying enough good quality food for their clients.

Commercial caterers such as schools and colleges are often cut off from local supplies as their organisations are increasingly large groups with central purchasing, and smaller per person budgets with low sustainability criteria. A need for a Cornwall wide central purchasing system for local product was expressed.

The major barriers to a sustainable food system for Cornwall, and many other areas, centre around the power of supermarkets to attract customers because they value the convenience and perceived low prices above other factors.



This power is compounded by lack of knowledge and skills around food: its nutritional values and relation to health in particular, as well as low cash and time availability for many people.

Our respondents expressed very high levels of concern for those in food poverty, which is hitting an increasing percentage of local people.

Overall, the survey and discussions show there is a strong appetite for change and sustainability is well understood and valued. However, there is also uncertainty about how to implement the necessary system changes; particularly relating to larger local organisations, budgets, nutrition and food knowledge.

2 *What could be?*

Whilst pinning down the meaning of sustainability in general can be difficult we found in this survey that there is wide ranging agreement on a number of key topics.

Sustainable food is about everything else too and connects land, people, health and the economy.

There is clear recognition of the links of every part of the system to every other part and that for example soil quality impacts food quality, which impacts nutritional value, which impacts health: that low health impacts job prospects leading to poverty which leads to low quality food being the only food affordable or none.

Over 70% of our respondents want Cornwall's leaders and decision makers to commit to a sustainable, healthy, fair food system that could tip all existing system into a new way of thinking about the role of food.

The conclusions on what a sustainable food system looks like include

- ◆ Good environmental practice
- ◆ Better soil health
- ◆ Clear actions to increase health and social impacts
- ◆ Increasing local economic actions on food supply and processing

- ◆ Linking climate and soil/food supplies
- ◆ Linking planning and sustainable land use.

When considered together the discussions, workshops and survey responses indicated the key three principles which need to be applied for a sustainable local food system to emerge. These require systems thinking to enable actions within this framework.

Key principles

- ◆ **People care**
 1. Community power – raising awareness about all aspects of food growing, processing and marketing in local communities through collective processes of education and training.
 2. Health connections – diets, nutritional values of foods, the approaches of the health system
 3. Better education and skills training for local people including the role of food quality and diet in health
 4. Local places to connect within communities and with local food

5. System change to enable more affordability and accessibility for local food

◆ **Earth care**

6. Over 90% of respondents agreed that improved soil health & increased biodiversity are essential
7. Increased organic growing
8. Reduced pesticide use
9. Regenerative agriculture
10. Local sustainable fishing

◆ **Fair share**

11. Local ownership
12. Fair wages
13. Local collaboration
14. Fair contracts
15. Good business practices including sustainable approaches
16. Stronger local economy



Innovation is needed to enable a range of new types of enterprise to flourish. These will include many collaborative enterprises such as Community Supported Agriculture Schemes, support for more local food processing, work on a Cornwall Diet (where a high proportion of food is grown locally), new planning strategies to enable local growing, health oriented food takeaways. Cornwall Council's decision wheel process can help with this.

Collaboration is key to much of the system change needed. One powerful and essential example of collaboration is to establish local procurement of an expanding range, and quantity, of quality local food supplies. This is essential to higher nutrition for employees at work, for students and for patients & clients in caring environments.

Local systems planning also needs to encompass new thinking about the planning and land use system locally, how to reduce barriers to access, and how to move plans and decision-making towards

increased health and more local quality food.

All these proposed system changes will need understanding and clarity of vision to enable perceived risks to be minimised and local economic and health benefits to be maximised.



3 What can we build on?

There are many groups and individuals heavily involved in the work of improving local food supplies. These range from local growers and chefs to food bank and farmer's market volunteer, to teachers and planners, to community orchards and refill shops, CSAs and community fridges.

We can build on:-

- ◆ existing and new natural clusters of activity, sector, and geography
- ◆ emerging new national and local policies and strategies and put

planetary and human health, and food, right at their heart

- ◆ emerging thinking on local food security
- ◆ collaboration for market development
- ◆ local education with its hunger for relevance and increasing sustainability
- ◆ work already underway with local climate action groups, now >50



4 Existing examples of food sustainability

When considering examples in other regions it is clear that the most successful actions are those which cover all three main principles we have outlined above ie people care, earth care and fair share,

though they might express their principles differently.

The most advanced examples are Food Partnerships which include a large number of stakeholders in the public, social and private sectors of their region and all work towards improving local health, better food access and increased resilience for local residents and businesses. They have clear measures of success and take their metrics seriously.

Other examples tend to focus on part of the food system, such as CSAs which reach out into their community, or the Soil Association which runs the Food for Life Programme of improving food in schools. Taking the people centred approach examples include one where local biodynamic produce is supplied to the farmhouse which operates as a therapeutic centre for families and children in distress.

Improved land access for regenerative agriculture is enabled through various legal and other approaches including Land Trusts, the commons, tenancies and other less well known options.

The most successful strategies we found in this survey of others progress to a local good food region are noted below in order of likely action:-

- 1 Create a wide, representative partnership** which is well resourced and supported by the main bodies in the local area, including the Council, educational establishments and local NHS bodies.
- 2 Spend time developing a Strategy** which involves significant consultation and building enthusiasm locally and increases local expertise and “ownership”. This needs to address the main local issues of concern and directly address these in the Strategy development.
- 3 Develop many local “islands of coherence”** where sustainable food activities can flourish and spread across the region. These can range from small regenerative farms/smallholdings supplying a local village shop to a network of local food production units using a small processing unit: to a new approach to providing meals on wheels.

4 Survey local land availability and potential for regenerative growing options, as well as building dialogue with producers with a view to helping the transition to more regenerative practice.

5 Investigate in detail the actions needed to eliminate food poverty and health inequalities

6 Encourage project champions The wide range of successful projects is clearly the result of much hard work and enterprise by small groups of committed individuals. Without such people locally, nothing will happen.



5 Call to action

The existing situation is obviously harmful to many people and our precious local environment. There are many organisations which are comfortable with the present situation and hence they find it difficult to act towards a new approach –even when the benefits to all are well evidenced.

We have shown in our research through the over 210 responses to the questionnaires and the significant workshop and individual conversations, both structured and free flowing, that there is a hunger for change. We see nearly all respondents from all parts of our local food system recognising that the present situation has many flaws. There is a high percentage agreement on what is meant by sustainability and major interest in being part of the change.

Develop the Strategy iteratively

Whilst this is presented as a linear process it is likely to be iterative, with several approaches going on at the same time. The aim is to enable each topic area to progress to sustainability at their own

fastest pace, whilst keeping in touch with changes in other parts of the local food system.

1 Convene the Partnership Create a wide ranging multi-stakeholder group of people who represent diverse parts of the system under consideration.

2 Map the system together and get a shared understanding of it as a whole to create a context for shared actions.

3 Determine values by creating scenarios of the future and exploring developmental trajectories for how the system might change based on different assumptions and interventions. Agree the measures of success.

4 Agree a shared agenda around what the group most wants to see happen, and ensure an appropriate support system is put in place.

5 Outline the benefits of increasing sustainability such as:-

- ◆ Increased local economic activity and employment
- ◆ Increased local good food supplies

- ◆ Decreased local ill health, reduced GP visits, reduced hospital admissions
- ◆ Increased local soil health/biodiversity
- ◆ Increased community action & resilience
- ◆ Increased local good food awareness and demand

6 Major issues for inclusion

Both our team and many of our respondents feel passionate about transforming our food system towards sustainability. Whilst it is recognised that at this stage the Strategy is still to be developed we feel that some issues must be included.

These include:-

- ◆ Action on attitude change - away from acceptance & apathy and towards education, a spirit of inquiry, respect for food and its producers, sustainability and our planet
- ◆ Information on local food, nutrition and health - a strong and enduring communications and education programme

- ◆ Action to increase community resilience at the local level
- ◆ Action to reduce the need for food banks
- ◆ Local skills development including food production, processing, permaculture and regenerative agriculture skills, food preparation, cooking and nutrition
- ◆ Increased local food processing facilities for a wider range of local produce such as grains, malting, local abattoirs, food preservation, etc.
- ◆ Engage local leaders and project champions, including the young

7 Remain in inquiry

The local food system, as with any food system is complex and hence difficult and “unruly”. It is therefore vital for those involved to manage complexity by “Remaining in Inquiry” to avoid system disasters. The question Why? Is a vital tool for this process.

8 Aim towards food sovereignty

With food sovereignty in mind, the system design can develop towards sustainability.

9 Draw on local enthusiasm and energy for the transformation

An early task of the Partnership is to harness the abundant energy and enthusiasm shown by nearly all of our contributors, to bring people together and together move with confidence to what we all know is the right set of choices for local people, the environment and fair business health. Project champions are vital to the process.

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