



# Final Evaluation Report

Summary Report March 2014

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It's called the Local Food programme, but it is very much about people... Food is the medium, but it's not just about food -- it's all the other things. It does wonderful things to your soul!



## 1. Links to broader debates about local food

This report comes at an important time for the local food sector. Within debates about food production and food security over the last five years or so in the UK, it is significant that at a governmental level local food has been largely side-lined. Instead, the focus has been on ensuring food supply chain resilience through 'sustainable intensification', with an emphasis on the quantity of food available at a national level (Kirwan and Maye 2013; Lang and Barling 2012).

Nevertheless, there is an alternative perspective which argues that "definitions of food security should go beyond the quantity of food available to encompass the needs of communities, households and individuals" (Kirwan and Maye 2013, p. 91). It then becomes possible to recognise those who might be facing food poverty at a local level (MacMillan and Dowler 2012), and to develop policies that can help alleviate these problems and foster social inclusion and social justice (Dowler et al. 2001). Inherent within this is the need to develop the social and cultural acceptability of food at a local level, educate people about the nutritional benefits of local food, and provide them with the necessary skills to both access and grow it for themselves.

This evaluation, in examining the outputs of Local Food in terms of capacity building through social innovation, has demonstrated that the true value of the programme is best assessed at the level of social practice rather than simply material benefits.

While its material outputs have been relatively small, it has made a significant difference in helping to develop social agency, empowerment and organisational change. In this respect, it is important to acknowledge that it needs to be judged according to a different set of metrics, metrics that can encompass the value of cultural change rather than simply economic growth.



## 2. Background to the Local Food programme

Launched in November 2007, as part of the Big Lottery Fund's 'Changing Spaces' programme, Local Food is a £59.8 million programme that distributes grants from the Big Lottery Fund to a variety of food-related projects. It was developed by a consortium of 17 national environmental organisations that initially got together in July 2002 to discuss the possibility of bidding for Big Lottery funds. This consortium included: the Black Environment Network; BTCV; Community Composting Network; FareShare; Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens; Garden Organic; GreenSpace; Groundwork; Learning Through Landscapes; National Allotment Gardens Trust; Permaculture Association (Britain); Soil Association; Sustain; Thrive; and the Women's Environmental Network.

The Royal Society of Wildlife Trusts (RSWT) is the award partner for the Big Lottery Fund and has been responsible for the programme's management and delivery. Local Food opened for applications in March 2008 and the programme will run until December 2014, with all projects having to be completed by March 2014.

**The main aim of the Local Food programme has been to 'make locally grown food accessible and affordable to local communities'. It has encouraged the development of projects working towards five main themes:**

1. enabling communities to manage land sustainably for growing food locally;
2. enabling communities to build knowledge and understanding and to celebrate the cultural diversity of food;
3. stimulating local economic activity and the development of community enterprises concerned with growing, processing and marketing local food;
4. creating opportunities for learning and the development of skills through volunteering, training and job creation; and
5. promoting awareness and understanding of the links between food and healthy lifestyles.

Consequently, key elements of the Local Food programme include community enterprises, economic activity, health and education/learning, as well as local food itself. Projects are funded with the intention of improving local environments, developing a greater sense of community ownership, and encouraging social, economic and environmental sustainability.

In this sense, Local Food projects are being used as a vehicle for facilitating these wider societal changes to take place, with the funding from Local Food intended to act as a catalyst and enabler for positive change within communities.





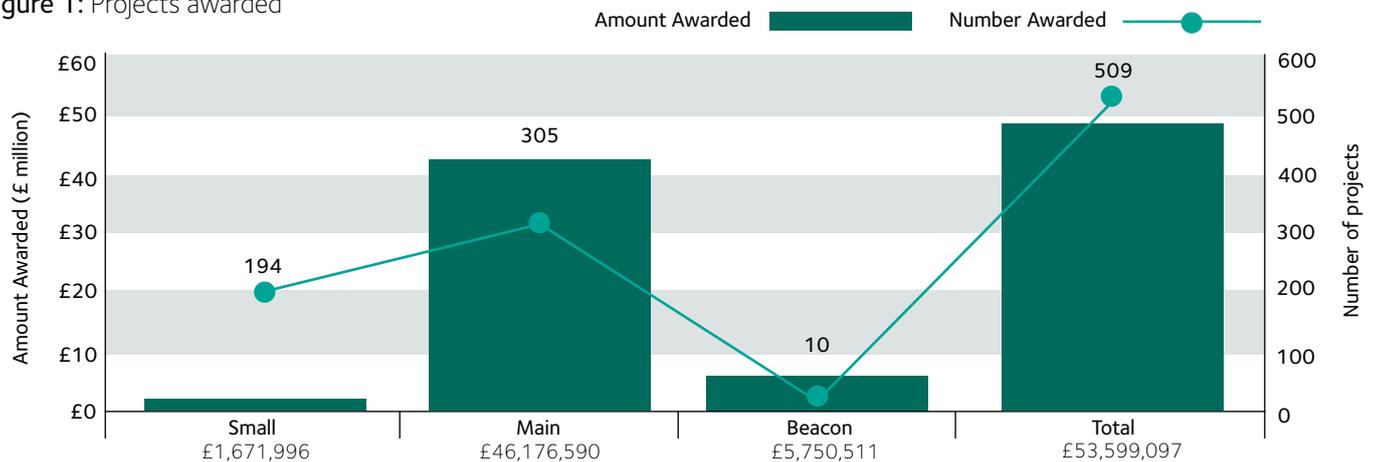
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### 3. Projects awarded

Three sizes of grant have been available through Local Food, ranging from ‘Small’ grants (£2,000 to £10,000) to ‘Main’ grants (£10,001 to £300,000) and what are termed ‘Beacon’ grants (£300,001 to £500,000). A total of 509 projects have been funded through the Local Food programme. Figure 1 shows both the number of grants and the amount of money awarded for each grant size category.

Figure 1: Projects awarded



Within these three overarching categories, 17 distinct activity types have been funded (see Figure 2); these have been conflated in the evaluation to three main groups for ease of analysis and for sampling purposes:

- **Enterprise**, which includes box schemes, catering, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA), farmers’ markets, food co-ops, redistribution of food, and social enterprise.
- **Community Growing**, which includes allotments, city farms, community food growing, community gardens, composting, and community land management.
- **Education and learning**, which includes celebrating food cultures, education and learning, sharing best practice/networking, and activities on school grounds.



Grants have been awarded on a regional basis within England, according to the nine main planning regions, and some projects have also been multi-regional. Figure 3 gives the spread of the grants awarded, which is also displayed in Maps 1 and 2 on page 7. Map 1 shows the distribution by ‘activity type’, while Map 2 shows that more than 65% of the projects awarded by Local Food are located within the 50% most deprived areas of England, with less than 13% being in the least deprived 25%.



A total of 509 projects have been funded through the Local Food programme.



Figure 3: Activity types grouped

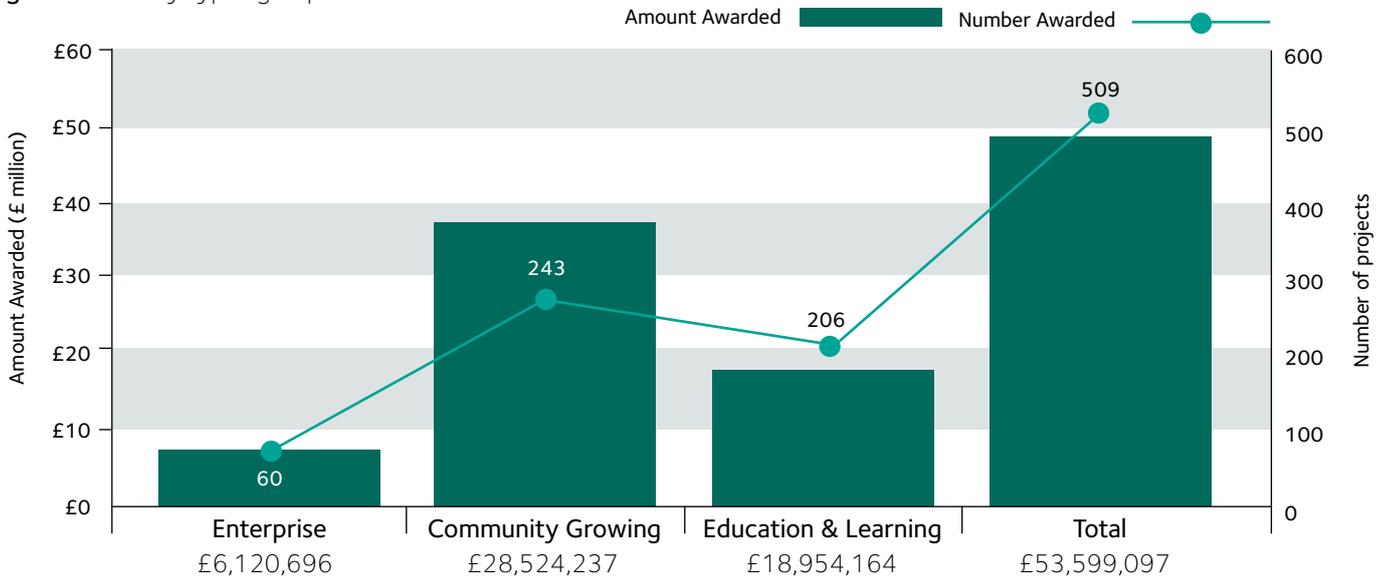
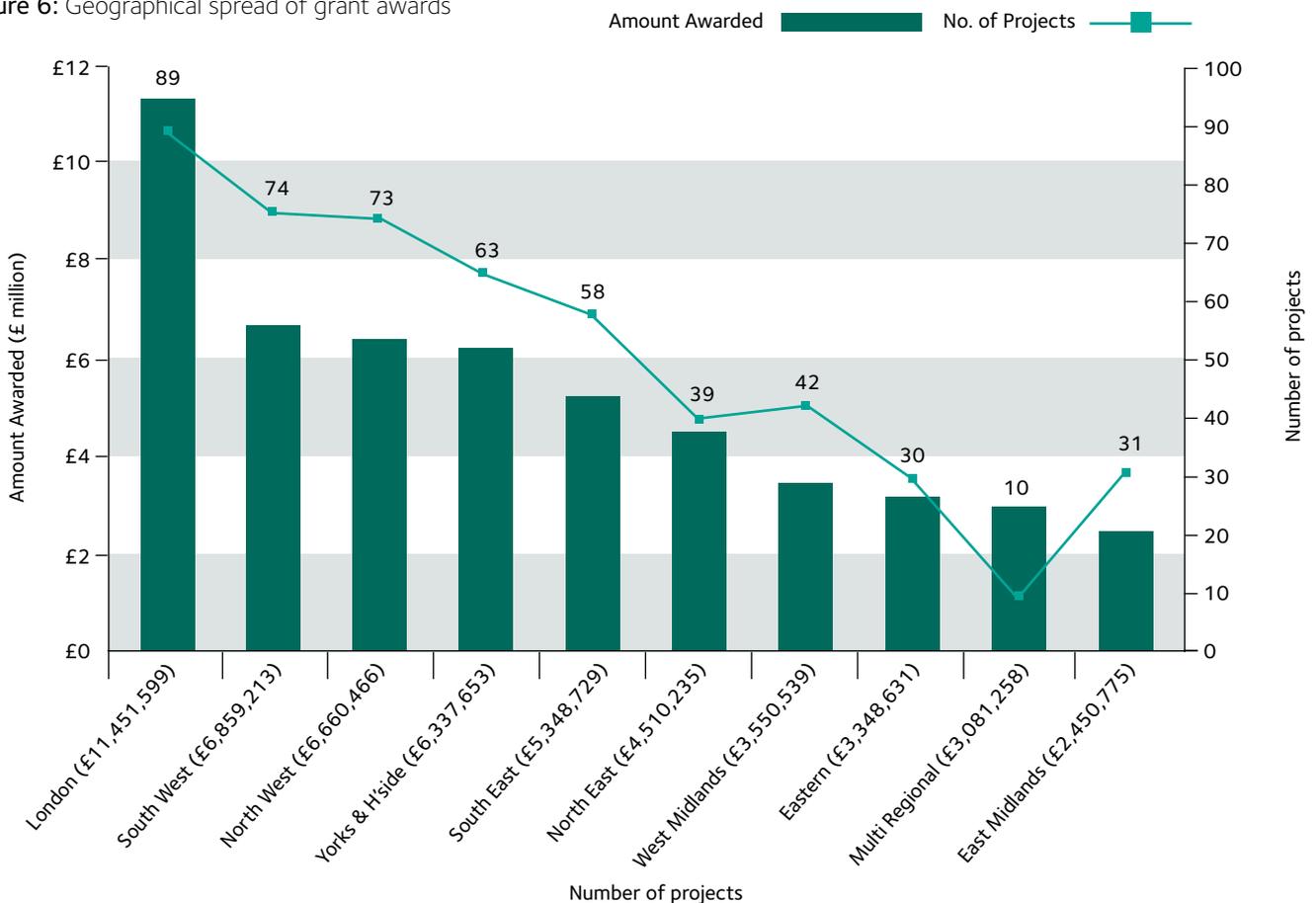
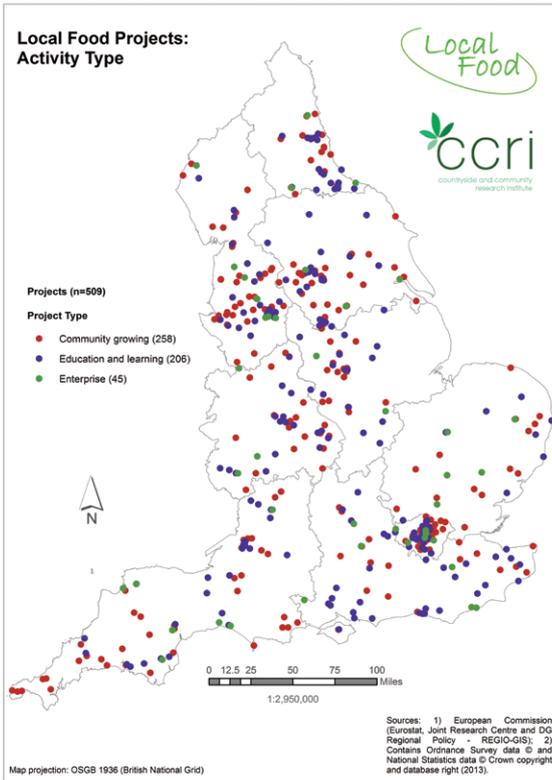


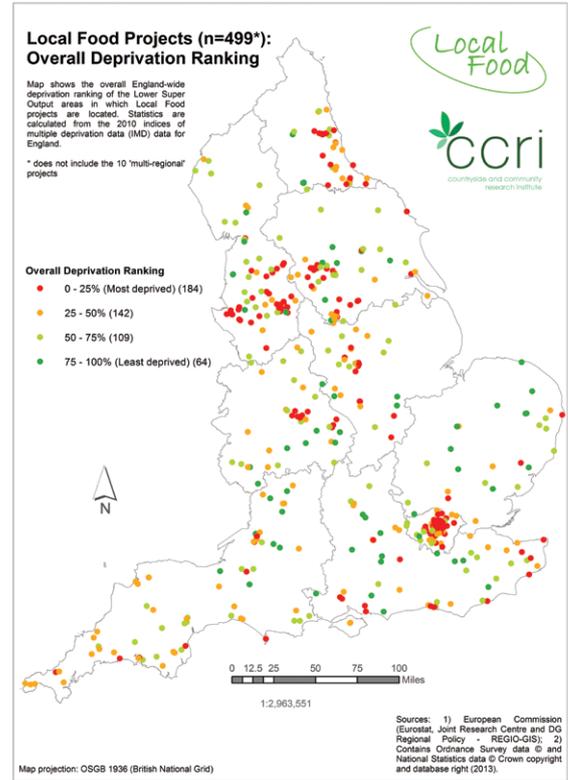
Figure 6: Geographical spread of grant awards



Map 1



Map 2



## 4. Evaluation approach

In 2009, RSWT commissioned the University of Gloucestershire's Countryside and Community Research Institute (CCRI), together with f3 The Local Food Consultants, to undertake an evaluation of the Local Food programme, which has run from 2009 to 2014. Due to the number of projects involved (509), coupled with the timescale of the evaluation, it has been important to ensure an effective and on-going dialogue between CCRI/f3 and the management team of the Local Food programme at RSWT. As such, an 'active learning approach' has been adopted that allowed for flexibility and the iterative development of the evaluation methodology and rationale. This has included regular meetings between the two teams and the production of a range of reports during the course of the evaluation that have been fed back to RSWT and the Local Food Steering Group.



The multi-phase methodological approach evolved as the evaluation of the Local Food programme proceeded, involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data. Quantitative data were collected across all the projects funded by Local Food, through 'end of grant' reports and project indicator forms, which has helped to provide the context, scale, scope, quantifiable outputs and initial understanding of the contribution that individual projects have made towards the overall success of Local Food. To achieve a more 'human-centred' focus, data were also collected through a detailed investigation of 50 case

study projects – 37 of which included project visits with the remainder involving telephone interviews. These were selected to reflect the distribution of all 509 projects according to grant size, project theme, project type and location. The interviews conducted at each of these projects elicited information on the aims and scope of the project, their context, current state, current outputs and longer-term outcomes, as well as the legacy of the projects involved. Most of these data were qualitative in nature, although some further quantitative data were collected through a series of 'fact sheets' that each of the case studies was asked to fill in.



The multi-phase methodological approach evolved as the evaluation of the Local Food programme proceeded, involving the collection of both quantitative and qualitative data.



## 5. Framing the evaluation of the Local Food programme

Figure 5 shows how achieving the aim of Local Food can be conceptualised in terms of building three forms of ‘capacity’ – material, personal and cultural – which, in turn, can be seen as developing the overall capacity and resilience of the communities involved through the medium of local food<sup>1</sup>.

Underpinning the notion of capacity is the concept of ‘social innovation’, described as being “mould-breaking ways of confronting unmet social need by creating new and sustainable capabilities, assets or opportunities for change” (Adams and Hess 2008, p. 3). This idea has been developed further by the introduction of the term ‘grassroots innovations’, used to describe “networks of activists and organisations generating novel bottom-up solutions”, which differ from top-down solutions in that they involve people at the community level “experimenting with social innovations” in order to satisfy human needs (Seyfang and Smith 2007, p. 585).

Innovation within this context is not so much to do with technological or economic advances (although these are undoubtedly important), but is about encouraging changes in social practice (Howaldt and Schwarz 2010). This includes

new forms of collaborative action, changes to attitudes, behaviour or perceptions, as well as developing new social structures and the capacity to build resilience at a community level (Neumeier 2012). Inherent within this is the specific aim of increasing levels of participation, especially amongst those who had previously been excluded in some way; in so doing, those involved are empowered to take more control over their lives and to take a more active role in society.

In order to provide an analytical framework for this final evaluation report, the projects funded through the Local Food programme are assessed in terms of being grassroots social innovations that are instrumental in helping to develop community capacity (see Figure 4). In doing this, the evaluation draws on the work of Moulaert et al. (2005) and Adams and Hess (2008) in identifying five key dimensions of social innovation.

Figure 4: The five dimensions of social innovation



Adapted from (Adams and Hess 2008; Kirwan et al. 2013; Moulaert et al. 2005).



Building the asset base and capacity of those involved can help prevent the problems being faced by individuals and communities subsequently becoming a crisis.

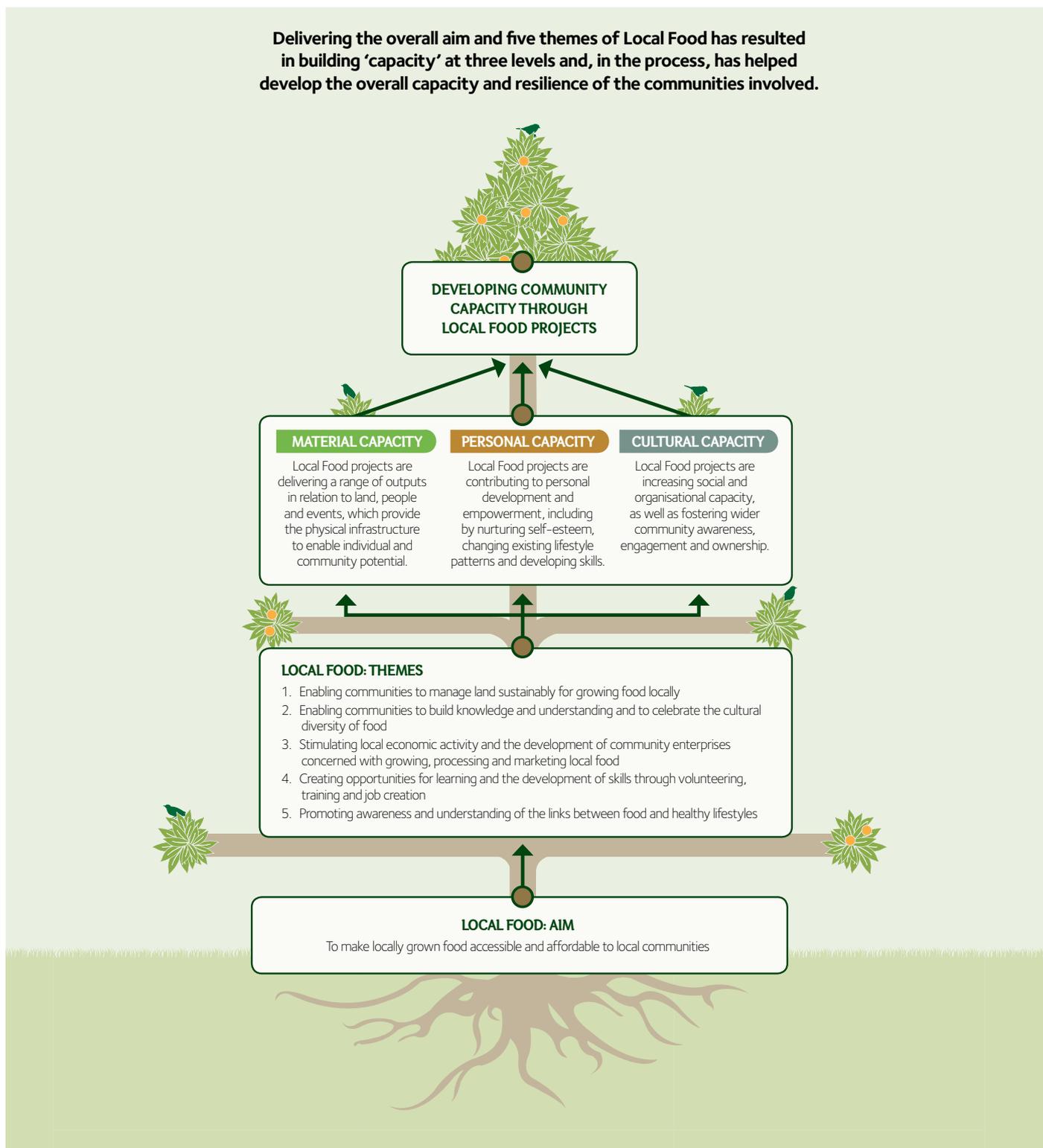


The first of these involves the “satisfaction of human needs that are not currently satisfied” (Moulaert et al. 2005, p. 1976), with a focus on direct outputs that can in turn be related to ‘material capacity’. The second is concerned with ‘process’ and changes to the dynamics of social relations, specifically through increasing the levels of participation by individuals, especially those who may previously have been excluded in some way from the community they live in, or wider society. This involves developing ‘personal capacity’, such as through nurturing self-esteem or improving individuals’ skills.

Third, social innovations can empower individuals and communities to access resources through developing their social and organisational capacity. This relates to the notion of ‘cultural capacity’, as does the fourth dimension which focuses on “asset building rather than need” (Adams and Hess 2008, p. 3). Building the asset base and capacity of those involved can help prevent the problems being faced by individuals and communities subsequently becoming a crisis. The fifth dimension emphasises the significance of place, recognising that the community itself should be viewed as having agency with the capacity to engender change through taking ownership of the issues it faces.



Figure 5: Achieving the aim of Local Food through developing community capacity



## 6. The achievements of Local Food

The achievements of the programme are demonstrated through a combination of both quantitative and qualitative data, each of which give a different insight into the delivery of Local Food and are therefore reported separately.

### 6.1 Quantitative outputs from the programme

The collection of quantitative data within this evaluation has not been without its problems. This is partly because in many instances they were collected from projects that were only just starting, meaning there were no measurable outputs at that time. This is typified by the following quote from a project that had planted fruit trees: "Our orchard is in its infancy and will begin to bear more fruit next year". In addition, about 100 of the projects will not finish until March 2014, which is too late for their data to be included in this evaluation.

What this means is that the data below relate to 183 projects, out of a total of 509 funded projects. Thus, while the data below are helpful in giving an indication of what has been achieved by Local Food, they should not be considered as definitive and in practice the quantitative outputs will be considerably larger.

However, the key outputs to highlight from the 183 sampled indicator reports are:

- 195 ha of land have been used by projects for growing food.
- 262,620 people have been involved in the practical production of food.
- 28,423 kg of fruit have been produced.
- 61,214 kg and 21,386 boxes of vegetables have been produced.
- 3,640 food bearing trees have been planted.
- 235,271 people have attended learning opportunity and dissemination events.

- 99,737 people have received skills training.
- 36,329 people have been involved as volunteers.

### 6.2 Qualitative outputs from the programme

The qualitative outputs from the Local Food programme have been drawn from the 50 case studies that were conducted as part of this evaluation. Figure 5 sets out how the main aim of Local Food can be achieved through the development of 'community capacity' and how this in turn can be understood as being the result of five dimensions of social innovation (see Figure 4).

Each of these dimensions is now examined individually, although in reality there is considerable overlap between them. The result is an understanding of how the Local Food programme has helped to encourage and support grassroots social innovations as a means of developing community capacity.

#### 6.2.1 The first dimension of social innovation: the satisfaction of human needs that are not currently satisfied.

The focus is on the direct outputs achieved by projects, which in this case can be related to three main types of output - land, people and events - as well as the provision of physical infrastructure such as poly-tunnels, hand tools, raised beds and buildings. In the case of 'land', many of the projects have brought previously cultivated and/or new land into food production in some way.

The physical production of food on these spaces is certainly of importance to those involved in running the projects, but so too is the practical inclusion of members of the local community; indeed, this dual purpose underpins the rationale



Enabling change for the betterment of those involved is at the core of what projects supported by Local Food are intent on doing.



of most projects. In relation to 'people', most of the projects have involved quite large numbers of individuals, directly or indirectly, often explicitly encouraging those who are homeless, mentally ill or drug dependent; in other words, those who might otherwise be excluded from engaging in such activities within their community. The third output relates to the wide range of 'events' that have been organised by projects. These include training days, skills sharing and open days involving people of all ages and from a variety of backgrounds.

The provision of funding to purchase some kind of physical infrastructure has clearly been essential to the development of many projects. In some cases, this has been substantial in terms of a building; more usually, it has meant the purchase of smaller items such as hand-tools or raised beds. Whatever the scale of investment, it is clear that the ability to purchase such infrastructure has been an important part of developing the material capacity of projects, as well as constituting an important on-going resource/legacy once Local Food funding has finished.

### 6.2.2 The second dimension of social innovation: changes to the dynamics of social relations through process

Key to this has been encouraging individuals to participate in the projects concerned, especially those who may have been previously excluded in some way from the community they live in, or indeed wider society. This entails developing the 'personal capacity' of those involved through nurturing their self-esteem and improving their skills, thereby enabling a greater sense of well-being for the individuals concerned, and in the process benefiting society more generally.

Growing food can help build a sense of satisfaction and mental well-being through achieving something that is demonstrably worthwhile. As a result, those involved realise that they have something to offer others, giving them the confidence to go out and try and find employment and enter the job market. Benefits such as these are largely intangible and therefore difficult to measure; they are essentially about 'social process' rather than material output.

### 6.2.3 The third dimension of social innovation: empowering individuals and communities to better access resources by growing their social and organisational capabilities

It is evident that in most cases food provides the pretext for projects, but at the same time their aims encompass more than simply food. As one project organiser stated: "it is about using local food as an object to foster local community development" (MLF000671). In this sense, food is being used as a vehicle to increase the capabilities of communities and their constituent individuals. Enabling change for the betterment of those involved is at the core of what projects supported by Local Food are intent on doing. This includes, in many cases, deliberately including those with mental or physical health problems who may otherwise find it difficult to access resources in their community.

Empowering local people by involving them in projects and encouraging 'learning by doing' has clearly been important, as has the development of their skills base through more formal training mechanisms. Not only has this helped develop their personal capacity, but also, in so doing, their cultural capacity.





Heightening awareness of what is involved in the production of food is a key part of the asset building that has been achieved.



There is a clear overlap with the second dimension, above, although the focus here is more on increasing the socio-political capability of both communities and individuals to access resources to enable them to address the problems they have identified at a local level.

#### **6.2.4 The fourth dimension of social innovation: asset building at both an individual and a community level**

As with the third dimension, this can be understood as developing the ‘cultural capacity’ of those involved. Asset building at a personal level is evidenced in the case studies’ longer-term outcomes, principally in relation to continued community food growing, but also increased education and learning about food. Heightening awareness of what is involved in the production of food is a key part of the asset building that has been achieved. As a result, more people are now capable of accessing the potential benefits of locally produced food.

Change may be most obvious at an individual level, but it is apparent that it has also subsequently often had an effect at a broader community level. There is evidence of projects that have brought together what were disparate organisations, thereby enabling the delivery of benefits at a community level that would have been very difficult for individual organisations to achieve. This greater cooperation across organisations has in some cases enabled the formalisation of a distinctive asset base at the community level.

In other words, Local Food funding has provided a necessary stimulus to encourage greater collaborative action among organisations.

#### **6.2.5 The fifth dimension of social innovation: the community as a social agent**

In this case the emphasis is on place, recognising that the community itself should be viewed as having agency and the capacity to engender change through taking ownership of the issues it faces. It is concerned with empowerment and the need for communities to both identify and have a key role in solving their own problems.

A key part of the Local Food application process is for the proposed project to identify some kind of ‘need’; furthermore, that they demonstrate engagement with members of the local community who will be involved in the project itself and stand to gain from its implementation. Indeed, many of the projects have an explicit focus on community cohesion and bottom-up development. In these contexts, although food may provide the medium for the development of the project and the support of Local Food funding, the project may in fact be more about improving the lot of the people involved and the wider community.

**Engaging the interest and active participation of the local community is critical if projects are to engender change; only then is it possible for the community itself to act as a ‘social agent’ and for community capacity to be developed.**



## 7. Social innovation in practice

### Growing Greenwich BLF000031: Community engagement in food growing and skills development.

The focus has been on engagement, encouraging community learning about food growing and the development of well-being through gardening. There has also been significant organisational development, both in terms of engaging a wide range of individual organisations, but also in terms of making food growing a more significant part of the culture of the wider Borough.

Growing Greenwich is a food growing project that builds on existing food growing projects and partnerships. Its aim has been to combine food and community development. It is essentially a training and capacity building project aimed at giving as many people as possible the necessary skills to grow food and run their own food growing groups. While the quantity of food produced has been limited, there is an increased awareness of food growing and a significant level of engagement by local people. The project has also linked up a number of diverse organisations and groups involved in food growing. The focus has been on engagement, community learning and wellbeing through gardening, including raising awareness at a political level about the important benefits that food growing activity can bring in relation to health and wellbeing. In this respect, the project has focused more on communities than individuals in order to prompt strategic change:

*“Developing the business plan for the GG project gave us the opportunity to develop a strategic partnership. We spoke to NHS Trusts and all the various relevant Council departments...There was work on cultural change within individual organisations getting involved in growing food, but we wanted something that would influence others in order to achieve a strategic change in culture right across the borough” (Director).*



As a result of the project, a number of large organisations have now committed to supporting food growing.

*“There has been a sea change with the council and with GCDA’s partner organisations in terms of taking food growing seriously” (Project Manager).*

.....

*“The lead member for Health at the Local Authority has come to us to ask how to engage every school in growing food and how to engage all the LA properties in food growing. A global mental health project for Greenwich now sees GG as a key delivery partner for providing positive mental health support. This means there will be GP referrals in the future” (Director).*

*“GG is useful in a political sense, in that it is helping to link people up. It is making food growing more accessible to children and to older people. Now the Council has opened their minds to making land available for food growing on housing estates”*  
(Volunteer working with the elderly).

.....  
*“We have seen changes in behaviour in our users who have learning disabilities. Many of the service users who attend our farm project have really changed. The challenging behaviours have disappeared. The skills they’ve learnt have changed their outlook on things. They are a lot fitter and have lost weight from being active. There’s much less aggression. It is one of our most successful projects. We want to develop more links with GG”* (Oxleas NHS).

.....  
*The project has made food growing part of the Greenwich culture. “We have a model of good practice for developing food growing in a city borough...I am [now] a valid voice on the Greenwich Health and Wellbeing Partnership. That is incredible!”* (Director).

.....  
*“There has been a hearts and minds engagement in food growing at all levels including the Council Members. There are now some key people in the Council who see the benefit [of food growing]”* (Councillor).

**Christ Church School Garden SLF002114:  
Land management for school and  
community food growing and education.**

Through the provision of a physical structure, local children and their families have been empowered by being able to get involved. Social relations have been improved through providing a social hub, helping to develop community spirit. It has also enabled change to the organisational culture of the school, in relation to food.

This project involved developing a community garden and inspiring local families in a socially deprived area to grow fruit and vegetables and, in the process, to breathe life back into a ‘forgotten estate’. It is an example of a school and local

community working together. The Local Food grant paid for a greenhouse, material for pathways and raised beds and a shed. These have provided a structure for the garden and created a productive, accessible and well-used space.

*“Success can be seen in the number of children who love to be out here, love working here, love eating the produce...Their engagement with the project and growing things and taking them home has been the biggest success and it’s now been built in to the curriculum for all the children throughout the school. It’s also getting the staff enthusiastically engaged”*  
(Head Teacher).

.....  
*“Without a doubt it’s changed the culture of the school. I’ve been in schools without a garden and the difference in the knowledge and attitudes to food is striking”*  
(Teacher).

Instilling a sense of care in the children has been important:

*“They’re so enthusiastic and engaged about things they see. It’s about spiritual values as well and caring for things around us...The children now know what veg look like, where they come from; they’re picking things in the garden and tasting them. They’re connecting with nature and the bigger picture as well”* (Teacher).

Engaging with the local community and developing a community spirit has been crucial to the success of the project.

*“The development of the garden was a real community effort and it’s now a real kitchen garden...For me, it’s team work – this is a small estate and two schools and a fire brigade – the fact that we all pulled together and made this possible for our children. The community spirit really made my day”* (Head Teacher).

The garden is the physical legacy of the project, but it has also created an accessible and safe place for people to meet and work together – a social hub, where new connections are made. According to the secretary of the local Residents Association, “it has made the neighbourhood safer”.



Local Food-funded projects have been able to engage with and harness the power of communities, in so doing enabling the process of bottom-up or grassroots development.



**Climate Friendly Food at Fir Tree Farm  
MLF001546: Combining commercial  
production and care farming.**

The land rented as part of this project underpins everything it does; nevertheless, while the production of food and economic viability are important within this project, so too is community development. It is mainly about empowerment and providing an opportunity for people who might otherwise be marginalised to socially interact and in so doing increase their levels of confidence and self-esteem.

Fir Tree Community Growers is a complex mix between food, economic viability and community development. Food production for commercial supply through four community-organised outlets has been used as a vehicle to provide the opportunity for people from urban areas to work on the land and have access to the countryside.

*“It is showing how growing vegetables can be a vehicle for improving individuals’ lives” (Director).*

The three acres of land rented as part of this project are central to everything else that happens on the farm.

*“It enables people to connect with themselves... If we teach people how to harvest something, they feel really proud of their new skill and take ownership” (Director).*

.....  
*“It’s the link between just telling people and letting them come here and see it and try things for themselves. They then get so much more out of it” (Farmer).*

The farm has been key to the development of personal capacity. For example, John is a wheelchair user and, although this has restricted his range of activities, there is always something he can engage with on the farm:

*“I enjoy coming to the farm and meeting new people. The activities I like include watering, grading, labelling produce and carrying crates back from the field...”*

*“I like going somewhere where I am respected for who I am”.*

The independent evaluator for this project commented:

*“I was very impressed by the way in which all the volunteers were able to contribute, regardless of their disabilities”.*

The overall impact on the project’s volunteers seems to be mainly in terms of empowerment, whether in relation to mental health recovery or dealing with physical disability. In this respect, the skills gained by the volunteers are important in leading to increased confidence, self-esteem and social interaction, rather than specifically about food-growing. For example, the support worker for Adam says:

*“Adam has come out of his shell and works much better this year. I think a lot of that is down to working in a smaller, more bonded group...I can see that Adam’s confidence has grown. Adam thinks that the farm really benefits him in every aspect of his life – learning, socialising, organisational skills and actually gaining a work ethic”.*



It is apparent, through these examples, how the needs of people are being met; how social relations are being improved through the medium of local food; how individuals and communities are being empowered socio-politically through their engagement with projects; how the asset base of both individuals and communities has been developed, thereby strengthening their ability to cope; and finally how Local Food-funded projects have been able to engage with and harness the power of communities, in so doing enabling the process of bottom-up or grassroots development.



Projects, through the medium of local food, have also brought together groups of people who would not otherwise communicate or work together, helping to develop community cohesion.



## 8. Impact and legacy

### 8.1 Land and food production

The amount of food produced within Local Food projects has been relatively small and certainly not enough to make a significant quantitative impact on the wider food supply chain. Nevertheless, the data collected show that Local Food has brought small, often neglected pieces of land into production, developed local infrastructure and increased the physical quantity of food produced at a local level (albeit to a limited extent).

Crucially, the case studies have revealed that Local Food projects have enabled individuals and communities to build capacity at a social level to access and afford local food, in addition to the more tangible outputs of physically producing more food. Local Food funding has also been a vehicle for community cohesion, regeneration, healthy eating, educational enhancement, integrating disadvantaged groups into mainstream society, and developing people's skills so that they are better able to get into paid employment. It has also helped to change people's and communities' attitudes towards, and understanding of, food and local food in particular.

### 8.2 New connections

Projects supported by Local Food have connected a wide range of people and organisations to the ideas and values associated with 'local food', enabling new ways of working in partnership on food issues. This is particularly important in relation to children and young people, in terms of influencing their future decisions about food choices. Projects, through the medium of local food, have also brought together groups of people who would not otherwise communicate or work together, helping to develop community cohesion.

As one project officer commented: "I think the benefit is in the people", with local food effectively being used as a catalyst to foster community and organisational development. These types of benefits may be quite profound, even though they may not become apparent in the short

or even medium term, or be unambiguously attributable to the funding provided by Local Food. Wider community involvement and engagement are also critical to the on-going success of projects, not least where key individuals within projects may move on or retire.

### 8.3 Increased community resilience: material, personal and cultural capacity change

Material capacity entails the provision of physical infrastructure to enable individual and community potential. Personal capacity is concerned with personal development and empowerment, including nurturing self-esteem, changing lifestyle patterns and developing skills. And cultural capacity involves increasing social and organisational capacity, as well as fostering wider community awareness, engagement and ownership.

Individual projects differ in the emphasis they give to the development of each form of capacity, but it is apparent that material capacity in the form of land, people, events and physical infrastructure is both critical in itself, but also in enabling the development of the other capacities.

### 8.4 Increased community resilience: 'grassroots social innovation'

The notion of capacity(ies) can also be understood as being underpinned by 'social innovation' and in particular 'grassroots innovation'. Innovation within this context is concerned with encouraging changes to social practice, which includes new forms of collaborative action, changes in attitudes, behaviour or perceptions, as well as developing new social structures and the capacity to build resilience at a community level.

Inherent within this is the intention to increase the levels of participation, especially amongst those who may have been previously excluded from society in some way, thereby empowering those involved to take a more active role in society.



## 8.5 Increased affordability and accessibility

This evaluation has enabled an examination of what is meant by the terms ‘accessibility’ and ‘affordability’; specifically, how these critical aspects of the food supply chain can be addressed by the types of project funded through the Local Food programme. Key to this has been the ability to encompass the ‘softer’, more human-focused outcomes from the projects such as wellbeing and social inclusion, especially in relation to those who are often marginalised in discussions about food, but also within society more generally. In so doing, it has demonstrated that Local Food has delivered a range of broader societal outcomes that go beyond its original remit.

Accessibility is normally thought of in terms of ease of physical access, availability, convenience or nearness, with links to the idea of ‘food deserts’ (Wrigley 2002). However, it is clear from this examination of Local Food that it also needs to encompass: awareness of the issues surrounding

local food, including its provenance and the seasonal nature of food; knowledge about the nutritional value of food; the opportunity to get involved (very often with others) in actually growing food, thereby seeing what it is possible to grow locally; the confidence to try something new; and the broader social and cultural acceptability of local food.

Affordability, on the other hand, is usually understood in relation to cost -- both absolute cost, but also in relation to income. Within Local Food projects, the emphasis has not been on reducing cost directly, but on developing new skills and providing the opportunity for people to be more directly involved in growing food for themselves.

In many cases, volunteers who have been engaged in food growing initiatives have been able to take home for themselves some of the food they have been growing. Ultimately, accessibility and affordability have been addressed within the context of Local Food in terms of the empowerment of individuals through raising their awareness, skills and understanding of what is possible and available in their own locality.

## 9. Recommendations

### **There is a need for on-going national funding.**

Evidence of increased participation, valuable impacts and on-going demand for this type of community activity would indicate a strong case for continued national funding to support and encourage the future evolution of new and emerging local food initiatives and enterprises. The initial Local Food funding may be sufficient to allow some projects to continue indefinitely, but in other cases the nature of the projects means that they will need continual funding.

There is a fine balance between meeting social and economic objectives. By their very nature, projects that focus on communities which are disadvantaged in some way, or are intent on supporting people with disabilities or learning issues, are likely to always require funding.

The main need for continued funding is to provide skilled teachers, trainers and people who can maintain sites and facilitate volunteers and trainees to develop skills in the future. In addition, funding is needed to enable projects to be brought together, on an ongoing basis, in order to share their experiences and to learn from each other, thereby creating mutually supportive networks.

### **Local authorities should be encouraged to support and engage with projects that are focused on developing local food**

Food provides an opportunity to engage a wide range of people in a broad set of issues that face society today. Some of the larger projects are clearly being successful at feeding into policy and helping to develop strategies. If society determines that supporting localism is an important policy issue, there is a need to develop an integrated approach to food that can help facilitate tackling wider sustainability issues, such as resource use, obesity, general health and wellbeing.

Local authorities should be encouraged to support and engage with projects that are focused on developing local food, integrating them into their overall planning strategies.

### **Local food engagement should be prescribed for physical and mental health benefits, and wellbeing**

It is clear that an important outcome of Local Food projects is improvements to the physical and mental health of many of those involved; furthermore, that many of the projects contribute to a sense of physical, emotional and even spiritual wellbeing. While some projects are already partly funded by local health trusts, this is an area where further and greater funding should be sought in the future.

There is a need for greater cross-sectoral thinking and coordination. A key element of improved public health concerns changing public behaviour, greater exercise and better quality food. In this respect, food-related projects such as those funded through Local Food, provide a great opportunity. More links need to be made to health professionals such as GPs and clinical commissioning groups to prescribe engagement with local food projects and, in the process, justify supporting them through health-related funding.

### **Greater recognition should be given to the social benefits of local food projects**

The evidence from this evaluation is that projects such as those supported by Local Food enable individuals and communities to build capacity at a social level in relation to accessing and affording local food, in addition to the more tangible outputs of physically producing more food.

It is crucial, therefore, to ensure that any evaluation conducted is able to recognise and value the importance of these social benefits, recognising them as significant outputs for the communities concerned alongside the more obvious quantifiable outputs.

### **Policy makers need to recognise the role that local food can play in helping ensure food supply chain security and resilience**

Policy makers should give more recognition to the role that local food systems can play in helping to ensure



It is clear an important outcome of Local Food projects is improvements to the physical and mental health of many of those involved; furthermore, that many of the projects contribute to a sense of physical, emotional and even spiritual wellbeing.



food supply chain security and resilience, seeing them as complementary to national and international food systems. While they may not make a significant quantitative contribution to the amount of food produced in the UK, they can have a crucial role to play in developing social agency, empowerment and organisational change at an individual and community level.

### **The success of local food projects should not obscure the need for broader structural change**

In supporting and recognising the benefits of local food projects, policy makers should not use them as, in effect, a palliative measure that helps alleviate the problem of food insecurity and poverty in certain communities, without also addressing the need for structural-level changes to the food system to make it more equitable and accessible.

### **The management of volunteers must be supported**

Projects that rely on either voluntary and/or low wage labour are unlikely to be sustainable in the long term. While the voluntary sector is adding significant value across the supported projects, this needs to be supported by positions that pay a realistic wage.

Policy needs to consider how to fund meaningful employment in projects that may not be able to generate sufficient funds themselves, to do this. It is clear that having a full-time worker is usually critical to running a successful volunteer programme, since volunteers need a lot of support, skills training and encouragement.

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## Annotations

<sup>1</sup> These ideas were originally developed in some detail in the ‘More than just the veg: growing community capacity through Local Food projects’ reports.

As such, they will not be repeated here. These reports are available from the Local Food website: <http://www.localfoodgrants.org/>.



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