

# Food citizenship

## A communications toolkit



**Food citizenship is a movement.** As food citizens, we believe in the power of people. We want to and can have a positive influence on the way that food is being produced, distributed and consumed. We know that we express more of our true selves as citizens than we do as consumers. When given that opportunity, we feel empowered to catalyse and create positive change in and for our community. We include other people in creating positive change. We want to do the right thing for society to thrive now and in the future. We are resilient, persistent, inclusive, trusting, hopeful.

The language we use has a significant impact on how we define ourselves and others, what powers we think we have and what values we adhere to. For those of us working across food and farming, language also has the power to engage our audiences as active participants, so we can move away from the traditional relationship between the 'producer of knowledge' and the 'consumer of knowledge'. As food citizens, we are all equally knowledgeable; we simply bring different perspectives and ideas to the common cause.

This toolkit sits alongside our report '[Harnessing the power of food citizenship](#)'. It is aimed at organisations working across the UK food sector, although it is relevant to anyone wanting to engage citizens, rather than consumers. As always, use what resonates and what is feasible now, rather than try to do everything at once. There are no perfect examples of 'good' food citizenship. Test and revise your approach over a period of time. This is an ongoing process.

### Why do we do what we do?

Before we even consider *how* we engage our audiences, we need to be clear of our intentions in our individual actions, in our work, and across our organisations. The clearer we are about why we do what we do, the more we can inspire others to join us and be part of the change we want to see. Alongside this, we need to be clear about our values, shifting our narrative from "if only more people cared" to "we care very much and so do our audiences." We can tell our stories in a way that reflects this mindset and encourages our fellow citizens to engage and stand up for the kind of food and farming systems we all want - ones that are fair and healthy for people, the planet and animals.

As the [New Citizenship Project](#) asks in its [Purposeful Participation toolkit](#): "What are you trying to do in the world that's so big you need more people - and more diverse people - to help you do it?"

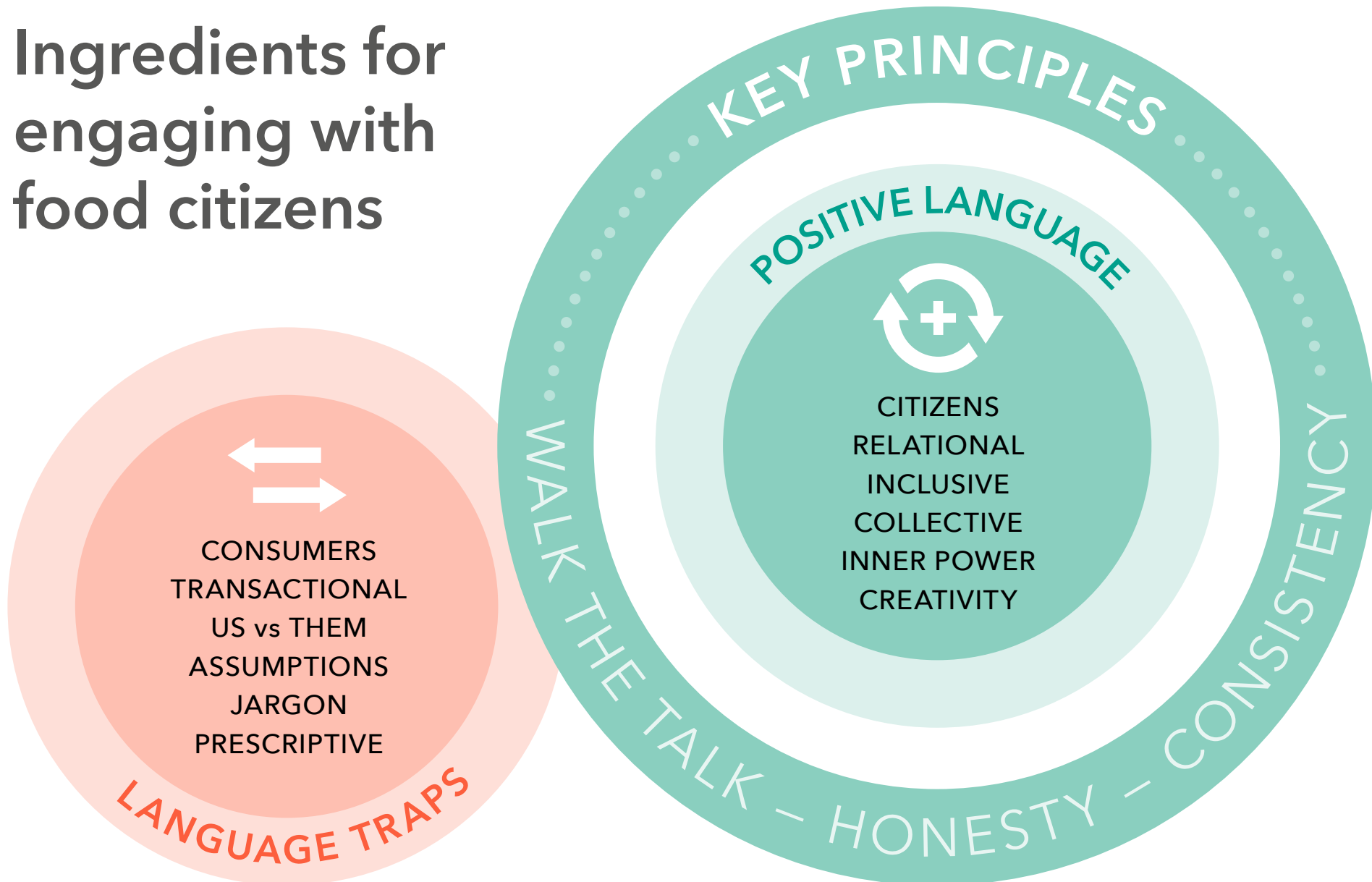


Here are some examples of food citizenship organisations that make their intentions and values explicit...



Intentions	Values
<p><b>Incredible Edible</b> wants to make it easier for all people to live incredibly.</p> <p>The <b>Belfast Food Network</b> aims to promote its thriving food economy, built on healthy, fresh, local and seasonal produce.</p> <p><b>BrewDog</b> is on a mission to make other people as passionate about great craft beer as they are.</p> <p><b>FoodChain</b> wants to democratise the food supply chain.</p> <p><b>Extinction Rebellion</b> wants to halt mass extinction and minimise the risk of social collapse.</p> <p><b>Rebel Kitchen</b> wants to redefine health.</p> <p>The <b>Social Gastronomy</b> movement aims to connect those who are growing, preparing and sharing food in order to co-create an equitable future, inclusive society and healthy planet.</p> <p><b>COOK foods</b> wants to nourish relationships.</p> <p>The <b>Karma Cola Foundation</b> wants the communities it works with to benefit from every product sold.</p> <p><b>Jamie's Ministry of Food</b> wants to keep cooking skills alive.</p>	<p><b>Extinction Rebellion</b> believes in non-violence and promotes reflection, learning and self-organising.</p> <p><b>Incredible Edible</b> believes in being positive, connected and brave.</p> <p>The <b>Landworkers' Alliance</b> values food producers and understands food as being produced for people rather than the global commodity market.</p> <p><b>Granville Community Kitchen</b> believes in the power of community to empower citizens, with food at its centre.</p> <p>The <b>Rural Youth Project</b> values the needs and desires of young people living in rural areas.</p> <p><b>Unicorn Grocery</b> follows its five Principles of Purpose: secure employment, equal opportunity, wholesome healthy consumption, fair and sustainable trade, and solidarity in co-operation.</p>

# Ingredients for engaging with food citizens



# Key communication principles

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Once we have a reframed, short, clear and inclusive purpose that is for the benefit of the collective, we can use it to frame our engagement efforts.

Next, we can ensure that we abide by the following three key communication principles:

## Practise what we preach.

If we promote sharing and collaboration, we need to make sure that we're collaborating with others and sharing information freely and openly.

For example, the Soil Association facilitates open source recipes for how to cook organic food through its **Organic September Campaign**. Meanwhile, Brewdog makes a powerful statement about sharing and then goes on to back this by sharing its beer recipes. Finally, **Incredible Edible** spreads inclusivity and accessibility in both messaging and in practice. Its Incredible Network is a library of open source materials and 'tool-kits' available for everyone who signs up with a free account.

In all these examples, the alignment between the organisation's values and its offerings lends the claims' legitimacy and builds trust.

## Be as honest about our failures as our successes.

Showing that we all make mistakes creates a supportive environment for individuals to take their own risks.

For example, Rebel Kitchen is open about the realities of their supply chains and model.

**"Let's not hide the fact that our ingredients are sourced from around the world. Unfortunately for us, and you Rebels, coconuts don't grow in our back gardens. But that doesn't mean we don't want to know exactly where they come from."**

This honesty establishes a rapport with its audience, but also flags a contradiction between not wanting to compromise on its values and yet having to compromise for financial sustainability.

**"We are a conscious business and will always implement the best possible methods we can afford."**

This is a tension inherent in all businesses! The best approach is to be honest about that tension. Having to disrupt from within a system whilst also wanting to paint a picture of a new system requires transparency and honesty during the transition.

## Ensure our language is consistent across all our communications.

Being inconsistent in our language or between what we say and what we do means people can't trust us. A key question to ask is: *What platforms do we have in place for communication, and how consistent is our language across all these platforms?*



# Positive language

Food citizenship pioneers have developed a range of strategies we can use when addressing our audiences.

## 1. REFER TO (FOOD) CITIZENS

The word 'citizen' is very effective at empowering our audiences, but a key first step is to help people stop thinking of themselves as consumers. We can use a word that is inclusive and empowering within our unique context.

Rebel Kitchen talks about **rebels**. *"Rebels, when was the last time you asked why? Not because you didn't quite get it or didn't really agree, but because you really wanted to question something?"*

The Food Sovereignty movement talks about **people**. *"Food sovereignty is the **peoples'**, Countries' or State Unions' right to define their agricultural and food policy."*

Wigan Council's The Deal talks about **residents**. *"What is The Deal? The council and **residents** working together to create a better borough."*

Brewdog talks to a range of people, including its equity punk investors! *"We are an alternative company owned by over 97,000 **people** who love craft beer as much as we do. They are our **equity punk investors**; our **friends**, our **community**, and the heart and soul of our business. And this is your chance to join them."*

A useful question to ask is: Within my organisation, how do we refer to our colleagues, our shareholders, our suppliers, our members, our customers, the general public?

## 2. USE FRIENDLY AND FAMILIAR TONE

It goes without saying that our tone says a lot about our organisational personality. When we engage with our audiences, not only do we have the opportunity to share information, but also to inspire, welcome, acknowledge, and care for them.

COOK foods invites us to *"be part of our **family**"* where *"We **look out for each other**, look after each other and muck in where necessary."*



# Positive language

## 3. USE INCLUSIVE LANGUAGE

One way to make our audiences feel included is by finding the one (or more) thing that we all share or have in common, rather than what separates us. Incredible Edible's genius phrase **"If you eat, you're in"** illustrates this very well. It tells us that we are 'in' already, part of the movement, part of the action. It is effortless.

Another way of doing this is by referring to our audiences in the same terms as ourselves, framing ourselves as *knowledge sharers*, rather than 'us' knowing everything and the audiences just being consumers of knowledge. This symbolises that our community encompasses everyone who wants to take part - everybody can be part of the movement.

Extinction Rebellion does it very simply and explicitly with: **"Together, our rebellion is the gift this world needs. We are XR and you are us."**

Meanwhile, Incredible Edible uses a step-by-step narrative. It goes from 'us' the organisation, to 'you' as a direct address, to linking 'you' with what the organisation does, to 'we' that is now inclusive of 'you'.

*"At **Incredible Edible we're** all about building connected communities... And **we** connect in many different ways; with different people as well as with different groups and organisations. As **you** build your core group members, **you're** connecting people who maybe didn't know each other before with a shared mission to keep your group going. As **you** start growing in your community, you connect with people walking past your plot, talking about food and growing. As **you** support learning, **you** bring together knowledge, skills and experience to share with others in your community. And as **you** engage with local food producers and businesses, **you** connect people together in a conversation about local food and a kinder prosperity."*

## 4. TRIGGER THE COLLECTIVE

We can choose how our actions lead to others' actions and remind our audiences that we are not alone.

One way of doing this could be showing how our actions are part of a coordinated collective. For example, BrewDog establishes a direct connection between the company, the product, and the individual. A Brewdog beer brings people together and is both the tool of revolution and the tool of community care.

*"Brewdog is not a standard business. It's a **revolution** against commercial mediocrity. **Everyone** is in the frontline, so raise your glass and be ready to fight." Meanwhile, Extinction Rebellion uses similar language: "We need you - whoever you are, however much time you have - to help build a powerful **movement**. Our vision of change involves **mass participation**. **Together** we're unstoppable."*

# Positive language

## 5. CONNECT THE AUDIENCES WITH THEIR OWN POWER

Community development comes from empowered individuals. As organisations speaking to potential changemakers, we need to believe in your audiences' good intentions and ability to create change.

We can think of our audiences as ambassadors of our purpose. By clearly expressing our mission and simultaneously empowering our audiences to spread the word, we are transferring power from the organisation to the individual.

As Brewdog says, "**Good people drink good beer; People like you.**"

We can also use verb-driven sentences. The present tense helps motivate our audiences to act. For example, we could start sentences with "get involved", "adapt", "join us", or "promote". The verbs we use also influence how our audiences respond. Action verbs define what people can do, rather than *feel* or *be*, which is more likely to lead to action. Non-active verbs could be used instead when we want to connect our audiences to our values and purpose, as shown in our own introduction: "**We are resilient, persistent, inclusive, trusting, hopeful**". See also the verbs we've used in this toolkit for each of the 12 categories in 'positive language' and 'traps to avoid'!

## 6. GIVE ROOM FOR CREATIVITY

Guiding our audiences rather than prescribing what they could do to support our cause allows people to come up with their own ideas.

*"**Feel free** to shorten phrases such as 'is not' to 'isn't'. It gives our writing an informal and chatty tone."*

*"We find the following model **seems to work**."*

*"**It might be an idea** to just have a chat at the first meeting and then have another one to start the planning..."*

Incredible Edible reminds the audiences of their own agency. The advice is expressed in a way not unlike that of a mentor. It avoids being prescriptive or limiting options that might work better in different contexts.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) also mentioned this flexibility in CSA models.

*"**There is no fixed way** of organising CSA. So **it is up to you to see how this works best for you, your farm or your local community**."*

This combination of support and freedom gives room to creativity for individuals. At the community level, it also builds resilience, and the feeling that you can experiment, fail and recover.



# Language 'traps'

Food citizenship pioneers also minimise the use of the following language traps, which can undermine our efforts of engaging with food citizens.

## 1. AVOID USING THE WORD 'CONSUMER'

We have seen it time and again, the word 'consumer' is anything but neutral. If we want to trigger the empowered collective, we are best to avoid using this word. There is no need to illustrate this example – we see it everywhere. As for the impacts of consumer framing, or even just the word 'consumer', we highly recommend reading the New Citizenship Project report ['This is the #Citizenshift'](#).

## 2. WATCH OUT WHEN CATEGORISING PEOPLE SEPARATELY

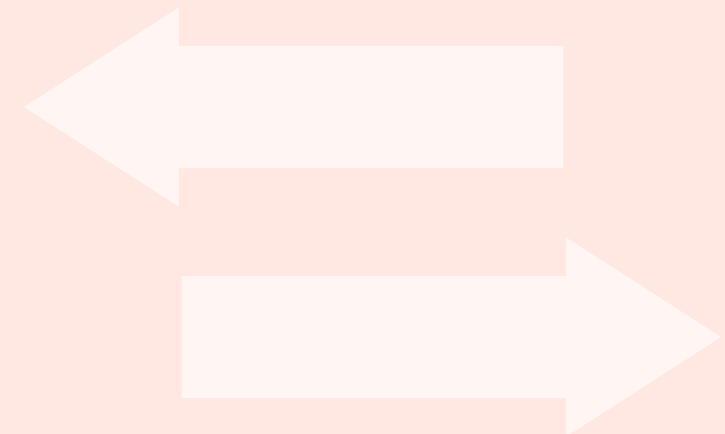
Focusing on what makes us different rather than what brings us together reduces our sense of belonging and community. We sometimes may need to address different audiences but are we treating each of them differently?

We are not simply producing knowledge for consumers, we are a community of knowledge sharers. The way we address our audiences produces and reinforces strong power dynamics. Some organisations will establish a binary relationship between the 'producer of knowledge' and the corresponding 'consumers of knowledge'. This often surfaces as 'us' vs 'them' language and sentence structure. This structure is often defined as a narrative directed at or for an abstract 'other', often defined in opposition to each other.

For example, Wigan's The Deal structures its brochure into 'Our Part' and 'Your Part', dividing commitments and action points between these two groups. Instead of framing these commitments as achievable through collaborative action, each commitment is divided between the Council and residents. The Deal is a creative approach by both council and residents to provide services and save costs in times of austerity. Having easy to follow 'next steps' are essential for this goal. However, it begs the question: when are we creating division unnecessarily, and how is it affecting our messaging?

Another example can be found in the 'Tesco in the UK' report. The organisation establishes three distinct and monolithic groups: Tesco, Tesco's suppliers, and Tesco's consumers. The relationship between Tesco and the consumer is framed as a reactive one. Creating an 'us vs them' binary means that both parties are reacting. Instead, by using language that bridges group division, we could encourage *interaction*, instead of *reaction*.

*"Retailers, such as Tesco, rely on a substantial supply chain and distribution network to source and then sell a wide range of products to match consumer grocery demands. To remain successful and competitive in the market, it is important that Tesco works with suppliers to ensure it has the right products on store shelves."*



# Language 'traps'

## 3. BE AWARE OF MAKING ASSUMPTIONS

When we make assumptions about our audiences, we run the risk of removing free will and disempowering them. It can also exclude those that do not meet our assumptions. And what makes identifying our assumptions particularly tricky is that they are most often unconsciously done. One way to identify our assumptions is to test our communications, with extra efforts to reach those we normally struggle to connect with.

When we look at the Soil Association's Organic September campaigns over the past few years, we can see a significant shift from consumer to citizens. Historically, the campaign focused on all the reasons to *buy* organic. This assumes that the audience has enough financial freedom, and excludes those who don't. The organisation has significantly changed its language and framing in 2019, going from "Eat. Drink. Use. Choose. Organic" to "Together we can make a world of a difference".

## 4. MINIMISE TRANSACTIONAL LANGUAGE

Highlighting the cost and benefit opportunities in a strategy prioritises transactional and material benefits whilst ignoring the all-important role of human relationships in nurturing our sense of community and the values that underpin food citizenship.

Wigan's The Deal sometimes uses language where cost is prioritised over human relationships – an unfortunate reality for many local authorities.

*"Did you know that every face to face enquiry we deal with costs us around £9 and telephone enquiries cost us around £5. Online enquiries cost a fraction of this at just 15 pence per contact."*

Unfortunately, this language undermines and contradicts the vision of nurturing relationships and building communities. In this case, perhaps being honest about our own limitations as an organisation, and therefore honest about our awareness of this contradiction, can soften the transactional message.

## 5. STAY CLEAR OF DRY AND ABSTRACT LANGUAGE

Using dry and abstract language is disengaging and disempowering. It builds distance between the audience and the issue at hand. Examples include excessive use of academic language or having clause-heavy reports. This type of language has its place, but it doesn't lead to the level of citizen engagement we are looking for.

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## 6. AVOID BEING TOO PRESCRIPTIVE

When we present our ideas as the only (or the best) option, it stifles the creativity of our audiences. We have seen that Wigan's The Deal has a set of very specific tasks people can take – and this is great. But is there room for more suggestions to come in? The same goes for the Soil Association's previous Organic September campaigns with its "**Eat. Drink. Use. Choose. Organic**".

## Putting it all together

As we've seen, different communication approaches can either enhance food citizenship or undermine it. However it is important to not think of these approaches in isolation. Instead we should consider them as a cocktail of ingredients that together can make up a winning recipe. More importantly, it isn't about getting it perfect all the time. It is about ensuring that our dominant story is that of the food citizen. How does that look in practice? Below are examples from food citizenship pioneer organisations. They show us how we can review our own communications and how those ingredients work together to create a story of who our audience is.



## COMMUNITY SUPPORTED AGRICULTURE

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a system of partnership between farmers and those who purchase their produce in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared. (Extract from **CSA for consumers** pages on the CSA Network UK website.)

A reference to the flexibility of the model. [CREATIVITY]

### CSA for consumers

*What can you expect from joining your local CSA farm?*

Each CSA is different, however all of our CSA farm members agree to the principles laid out in **our charter**, giving you piece of mind.

Active and inclusive language is a positive encouragement to get on board. [INCLUSIVE]

When joining a CSA farm, you can expect to receive a share of food, have direct contact with the farmer or grower and know that you are helping to provide them with a sustainable income.

It is a good tactic to address the audience directly with 'you'. We need to be mindful though that we don't accidentally create a divide between the audience and 'others.' Could we highlight more connections between farmers and the community? CSA has so much potential to highlight the interdependent support. [US VS THEM]

Many CSA farms offer volunteer opportunities, work parties and open days where you can put on your wellies and help out. This provides a fantastic opportunity for you or your family to learn more about how your food is produced and meet lots of new people..

### CSA farms don't just provide vegetables!

Implies there are more options. [CREATIVITY]

Here are some of the other great produce you might find on offer at your local CSA farm:

- sustainably reared meats
- cheese
- eggs
- herbs
- fruit
- fruit juices
- honey
- flowers
- locally baked bread
- sponsor an apple tree schemes, to share in its fruit
- rent-a-vine schemes from a vineyard

'CSA farm members' is a great alternative to 'consumers' and shows that participants are engaged in the farm more meaningfully or beyond simply what it is that they purchase. [CONSUMERS/CITIZENS]

Are we triggering security values rather than laying out the vision and enticing trust? [TRANSACTIONAL]

This reminds our audience that there is power in their actions and that they too can create positive change. [INNER POWER]

There is an emphasis on the relationship between farmers and communities. [RELATIONAL]

True! But the benefits of CSA farms are not limited to produce. They provide a community, a connection to nature, a way to celebrate our farmers and food production. Could this be laid out more clearly? [PRESCRIPTIVE]

## INCREDIBLE EDIBLE

Extract from the [Get Involved](#) page on the Incredible Edible website:

### Get involved

We're here to support you however you'd like to be Incredible - remember, **if you eat, you're in!** Sign up to our website to access a wealth of resources, whether you're thinking of starting a group or have been Incredible for years.

Our Talking shop brings together Incredible social media feeds local to you, keeping you up to speed with what's going on. The Marketplace is where we share stories from across the network - in the UK and beyond. And the Toolshed is packed with ideas and resources to support your group to be Incredible.

### **We provide a range of support:**

- Get going with lots of information if you'd like to start a group.
- Our Catalyst Partner programme, for you if you're from an organisation and interested in how Incredible Edible could work in your communities.
- Our Growing Leaders course, for you if you're already involved in an Incredible Edible group and would like to expand your skills.

Use of the imperative and encouraging us to act. [INNER POWER]

What we hear: "You are already Incredible!" [INNER POWER] [INCLUSIVE]

This implies that there is something for everyone. [INCLUSIVE]

Does this word make us think of the friendly chatter of farmer markets [RELATIONAL], or of the international food market [TRANSACTIONAL]? Words don't work in isolation, so worth thinking about the context in which our choice of words sit.

Could we talk of inspiration and guidance rather than information? [TRANSACTIONAL]

What we hear: "We welcome your ideas. We don't judge what you can and cannot do. Our support is unconditional." [CREATIVITY]

Call to action that comes after reassuring that we are not alone and that we are already part of the movement.

What we hear: "We bring people together - here is where we meet." [WALK THE TALK]

An invitation to join forces with others. [COLLECTIVE] [RELATIONAL] [INCLUSIVE]

After saying "We're here to support you", providing evidence of this. [WALK THE TALK]

The use of conditional means there is flexibility, giving room for options rather than dictating what to do. [CREATIVITY]

This toolkit was developed following a discourse analysis of publicly available communications from key UK food organisations. We are extremely grateful to Alisa Graham-Brown for all the hard work that went into this tool.



Do you have a story to tell?

Do you have questions?

Would you like to be part of the movement to accelerate the shift towards food citizenship?

Join us: [foodcitizenship.info](https://www.foodcitizenship.info)



Food Ethics Council