Household Food Security in the UK: A Review of Food Aid

Final Report

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Background to this Report

This report presents findings from a Rapid Evidence Assessment undertaken from February and March 2013. The aim of the research was to arrive at a better understanding of the 'food aid' landscape in the UK and the 'at risk' individuals who access such provision, as well as the means and drivers for seeking access. The research used a standardized methodology for a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) of existing published empirical literature. To supplement the REA, other evidence was obtained through a 'call for evidence', non-governmental sources and a small amount of rapid primary research. This non-REA evidence was used where it constituted the best available evidence, with its limitations explicitly acknowledged in the report. In the short timescale available, it was not feasible to subject all non-REA evidence to detailed examination of its methodological rigour and quality (such as that used by NICE in developing public health guidance). However, this evidence offers an important starting point for future research, given the limited nature of existing published empirical research on this topic in the UK and the short timescale for the research underpinning this report.

Background to the Research

This research comes at a crucial time, both for those involved in the provision of 'food aid' in the UK, and for the increasing number of households and individuals asking for help. The growth of The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in particular has raised the profile of the problems to which such initiatives are emerging as a response. Policy makers, along with the media and the wider public, are now

engaging with some of the questions such initiatives raise, around contemporary experiences of household food insecurity, and the impact of the receipt of food assistance.

Aims and Parameters of the Research

The aim of the research was, through a Rapid Evidence Assessment of existing material, complemented by limited primary research, to come to a better understanding of the 'food aid' landscape in the UK and the 'at risk' individuals who access this provision, how they do so, and why. An important aspect of the review was to scope the UK evidence base; to highlight where existing evidence was present and identify any gaps which could be filled by further research. The research addresses key questions of who makes use of 'food aid' and why; what types of 'food aid' are available and whether there are trends in their use; the impact of 'food aid' provision on its recipients and local communities; and some of the key benefits and drawbacks of different types of 'food aid' provision.

'Food aid' was employed as an umbrella term encompassing a range of large-scale and small local activities aiming to help people meet food needs, often on a short-term basis during crisis or immediate difficulty; more broadly they contribute to relieving symptoms of household or individual-level food insecurity and poverty. The research elaborates a clear typology of such activities and explores their contribution to the issues concerned. From this typology, the kinds of food aid which were included in this research were: food banks; food provided as part of community care (for example 'Meals on Wheels'); food stamps or vouchers; building-based food provision (where food is prepared and eaten onsite); and non-building based provision (where food is taken away for consumption, for example a 'soup run').

The research was also framed by Defra's responsibilities for food security, with particular focus on household level experiences. Household food security is assured when members are confident of having economic and physical access to sufficient, acceptable food for a healthy life. This framing of food security, used for the purposes of this research, maintains a focus on both the supply and availability of food at affordable prices as well as on factors affecting demand such as the ability of

low-income households to afford food, household demographics, and local economic and social conditions.

In the light of much current interest in the topic, it should now be noted the research was not asked specifically to address the impact of public policies on social security in the UK. Systems of social security were undergoing reform during the period of the study, which sometimes made it difficult to interpret some of the research results reported by food aid providers and referral organisations.

Methods

The project drew on a range of different forms of evidence and involved five key areas of work. In the first phase a literature 'scoping' was undertaken; this was followed in the second phase by a systematic Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA) based on papers which passed credibility assessment, enhanced by a wider review of relevant literature. In order to strengthen this evidence review, an expert workshop (with 19 participants) was held, and a select number of follow-up interviews (five) carried out to provide insight and on-going experience to supplement the written evidence base.

Two elements of primary research were carried out: a rapid, internet-based search for evidence of small-scale food aid initiatives (loosely termed a 'mapping' exercise) and several short empirical case studies of food aid projects. These case studies, taken from the UK and beyond, provided more nuanced insight into how different types of initiatives are working, drawing on experiences of providing food aid and practitioners' views of future prospects and possibilities (from interviews with eight project managers and three food aid recipients).

The research was undertaken within a short timescale of nine weeks and therefore provides a 'snapshot' of the evidence available. In light of the lack of UK-based evidence, the REA drew largely on research from other country-contexts, notably the United States, Canada and Germany. In using this resource, we acknowledge differences in histories and national social policy regimes and welfare systems, as well as the established acceptability of giving food help to households in need. There

was UK evidence within the wider literature review; this included some academic peer reviewed papers, as well as surveys carried out by national charities and data reported by food aid organisations themselves. The latter were subjected to informal assessment of their methodological rigour, as far as was possible in the time available. The findings which draw on evidence from the Expert Workshop and case studies are limited by the short time-scale under which these were done, but they provide valuable insights for understanding the emerging food aid landscape.

Key findings

The evidence collected spoke unevenly across the main areas of interest (see table below), and principally addressed questions relating to users of food aid and trends in provision (questions 1 and 2 below). Very little research is available to provide evidence or informed comment on the benefits and drawbacks of different types of food aid provision (question 3), or on alternative ways of addressing household food insecurity (question 4). The evidence also spoke unevenly across different food aid types, with an emphasis on food bank schemes (which give food parcels to households in established need). Much less systematic evidence was available about community outreach or building and non-building based provision.

Research Questions	Evidence Base	Evidence Gaps
1) How do people become food aid users in the UK; what is their journey through the food aid system; and what are the socio-economic implications for these individuals?	Three key themes emerged: the relationship between receipt of food aid and severity of household food insecurity; the place of food aid within broader strategies households employ when trying to manage experiences of household food insecurity; outcomes of food aid.	As anticipated, most of the existing academic literature related to experiences of other countries (in particular the United States and Canada).
2) What are the current trends in provision of food aid; what are the different models available; and what are the socio-economic drivers behind certain models emerging over others?	Evidence was available on general trends in food aid provision and the importance of socio-economic context, as well as dimensions such as operational diversity, peaks in uptake and gaps in provision.	Beyond public information from national charities (such as The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network) there is little evidence of a 'food aid system' as such within the UK, as has emerged in some other countries with a longer history of charitable or state provision. Independent local initiatives in the UK are currently hard to capture in data monitoring or research.
3) Reflecting on the analysis	Limited evidence was available	There is very little evaluative

from questions 1 and 2 and drawing on evidence from other countries, what are the benefits and drawbacks of different models of food aid provision in the UK?	to inform this question, but reflections can be drawn on the importance of other, non-food, support on offer; co-ordination between providers and other local agencies; the role of food system surpluses; and questions of vulnerability and inefficiency of food aid.	research available. Furthermore, given the highly localised nature of this provision, gaining insights into working practices across food aid providers is challenging.
4) How do the research findings inform household food security policy across the 'triangle of change' (Government, business and civil society) in the UK?	Reflecting on the findings, two key themes were identified in response to this question: how the research informs understandings of how households try to manage experiences of food insecurity; and key implications for those in the 'triangle of change' (business, government and civil society) looking to 'respond' to household food insecurity.	More evidence is required over strategies households are employing to try and manage experiences of food insecurity in the current UK economic and policy context. There is also no effective monitoring of household food security..

Headline findings from the research, drawn from across the evidence base, are presented below. In each case, the REA findings are clearly delineated. More detailed exploration of these themes and analysis can be found in the main report.

Research Question 1: Food Aid Users

The key finding on how people become food aid users in the UK is that households employ multiple strategies to try and cope with experiences of food insecurity, of which turning to food aid initiatives may only be one.

The REA research shows that whilst uptake of food aid increases with the severity of household food insecurity, the most food insecure households do not always turn to food aid. For instance, in Canada, reasons given for households not turning to formal food aid initiatives include: perceptions that they were not in extreme need or that the assistance would be insufficient or inadequate; that the experience was degrading or shameful; and lack of access to, or information about, food aid provision systems (see Loopstra and Tarasuk 2012; Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2007).

Furthermore, the evidence suggests that turning to food aid is a strategy of last resort. When households have exhausted all other strategies (cutting back and changing eating and shopping habits, juggling budgets, turning to family and friends)

and do finally turn to food aid, they will draw on as much assistance as possible (both food and non-food related support).

At the time of the research there was no systematic peer-reviewed evidence from the UK on the reasons or immediate circumstances leading people to seek food aid (i.e. which could be included in the REA). However, national charities and food aid providers were reporting their own research and experiences, largely on usage of food banks. The factors identified by these organisations as important drivers leading people to seek food aid include both immediate problems which had led to sudden reduction in household income (two examples often cited by these organisations were job losses and problems associated with social security payments), and on-going, underpinning circumstances (such as continual low household income and indebtedness) which can no longer support purchase of sufficient food to meet household needs. There is both longstanding and recent UK evidence from peer reviewed research relating to experiences of food insecurity more broadly, that many food insecure households struggle to manage food needs, and adopt a variety of strategies to try and avoid having to ask for food help (for example Dowler et al 2001; Hitchman et al 2002; Dowler et al 2011; Goode 2012; Kneafsey et al 2013).

When the food provided and the means of distribution are adequate, food aid may provide immediate relief from the symptoms of food insecurity for household members. However, the evidence suggests that food aid has a limited impact on overall household food security status.

Research Question 2: Trends in Food Aid Provision

There are some key organisational models – for example The Trussell Trust Foodbank[1] – which have come to particular prominence in the UK in public knowledge and actual practice. However, on the basis of the REA and literature review, mapping and case study research undertaken the UK, the food aid landscape appears to be both diverse and difficult to document. In particular, there

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[1] Note: 'foodbank' refers to The Trussell Trust franchise project, 'food bank' refers to the wider category of food aid projects.

are a number of independent initiatives, which offer different types of food aid , but their existence and extent of reach can be hard to capture. It is impossible at present to give an accurate estimate of the numbers of people fed by food aid providers in the UK, in total or on a regular basis (monthly or annually).

International evidence from the United States and Europe suggests that demand for food aid may peak at particular times. In the US one paper found demand for food aid tended to peak towards the end of any given month (Berner and O'Brien 2004), and a paper from Berlin, Germany, found that demand was higher there in general during winter months.

The REA evidence suggests that broader socio-economic shifts that have adverse impact on household food security are important pointers to understanding trends in the growth of food aid provision and its demand. Social policy contexts are different in the United States, Canada and other parts of Europe, so that drawing direct comparisons for the UK is difficult. A clear important pattern is that reductions in governmental food aid lead to increased uptake of non-governmental food aid, and that systematic government provided food assistance delivered measurable positive effects on household food security, while informal food assistance did not.

There is no systematic evidence on drivers of food aid use in the UK, but available information suggests that factors which have impact on household incomes and financial capacity are important. In terms of models of operation, the UK case study research revealed significant operational diversity both in terms of the range of existing food aid types and the varying ways in which food aid projects of the same type were run. There are many different patterns of food provision organization in the UK, which partly reflects different aims and/or levels of operation. Some highly structured systems run through franchise or networks, while others are managed more independently. Furthermore, some organisations running food aid projects were also running other food initiatives (such as community cafés, cook-and-eat clubs, purchase co-operatives) at the same time.

UK-based (non-REA) research, supported by findings from the project case studies, showed that other formal and informal (non-food) support was often provided by food aid organisations, who regarded this work as integral to their offering. This support included emotional help, other practical services and signposting to help elsewhere.

The wider literature review and expert workshop questioned the role of 'surplus food redistribution' as a key source of food for food aid initiatives (as opposed to corporate or individual/community donations). Some workshop participants raised concerns about the appropriateness of using 'that which the supermarkets cannot sell', notwithstanding any moral obligation to use food which would otherwise be put in landfill, to meet people's needs, and also questioned the intertwining of corporate interests with help for those in need, particularly in terms of what was seen as the entrenchment of charity based provision.

Research Question 3: 'Best Practice' – benefits and drawbacks of different models of food aid provision in the UK

There is insufficient systematic evidence in the UK to establish models of best-practice, not least because aims and objectives vary between providers and systems. Nevertheless, a key finding from the case studies is that providers regard the non-food support they are able to offer through food aid provision systems or projects as a particularly important aspect of what they do.

Secondly, the case study evidence showed that co-ordination both between different food aid providers, and between food aid providers and other agencies, was seen as key to their functioning and success.

Finally, the wider literature review highlighted two further important issues: the vulnerability of food aid provision in being able to meet existing or rising demand, when dependent on donations and volunteers; and the appropriateness and value of using volunteer energy and skills on this kind of activity (collecting, sorting and distributing food for people's immediate needs).

Research Question 4: Household Food Security Policy Across the 'Triangle of Change' (Government, business and civil society)

There is considerable evidence in the international literature on effective monitoring of levels of household food insecurity and food aid trends, which contrasts with the paucity of similar literature in the UK. This lack also emerged in the expert

workshop. These sources emphasised the need to address both the immediate situations which lead people to seek food aid, and the underlying social and economic circumstances which are limiting access to food more generally. The current economic and policy context means increasing numbers of households are having to deal with changes in circumstances which are potentially having negative impact on their food security in the immediate (and possibly longer) term. Some see it as appropriate for local groups to meet short-term food needs through temporary, non-governmental provision, but the evidence from international food security research suggests this is likely to be of limited effectiveness (Daponte et al 2004; Yu et a; 2010; also Loopstra and Tarasuk 2012). A broader approach to sustaining food access, which takes account of longer-term and underlying dimensions to household food insecurity is needed.

The international literature evidence highlights that those looking to monitor and respond to household food insecurity in the UK, from across government (at different levels), business and civil society, should focus on the root causes of this insecurity, rather than on numbers claiming food aid, which are unreliable indicators of problems. The North American international literature also shows that growing complexity of large-scale non-governmental food aid systems, and their increasing social acceptance as an appropriate way to deal with problems of food access, contribute to de-politicising household level food insecurity (Poppendieck, 1998; Riches 2011).

Nevertheless, the international evidence also suggests that civil society, which is where most food aid providers are located, can have an important and constructive role to play in terms of advocacy and lobbying, and in giving a voice to those who experience household food insecurity (Poppendieck 1998; Riches 2002).

Conclusions of the research

The research has generated a number of useful insights at a critical time in an emergent food aid landscape in the UK. It has not been able to provide in-depth

responses to all the research sub-questions[2]. However, it has provided a rapid picture of the diversity of work currently being done, in the UK and elsewhere; a detailed snapshot of the research evidence base available; and has enabled key reflections on trends and trajectories in food aid provision and outcomes.

Although there is a general lack of systematic UK evidence on the drivers of food aid use and trends in the UK, several key conclusions can be drawn from the research:

1. Those providing food aid, formally and informally, are consistently reporting an increase in demand, both in terms of new requests for help, and in terms of those who have been helped continuing to ask for food. Critical factors driving these actions are described (by many food aid providers) in terms of 'crises' in a range of circumstances, but particularly household income, and often underpinned by on-going problems of low income, rising food (and other) costs and increasing indebtedness. This growing demand may have contributed to more food aid being provided, through existing and new structures (both networked and independent). There is no systematic evidence on the impact of increased supply and hypotheses of its potential effects are not based on robust evidence.

2. Households employ multiple strategies for trying to deal with food insecurity; these may, or may not, include accessing temporary food aid. International evidence is that it is only after other main strategies have been employed (including changes to shopping and eating habits, cutting back on other outgoings, and turning to family and friends for help) that the most food insecure households may turn to food aid. Even then, there are many reasons why some households do not use food aid (Bhattatai et al 2005; Loopstra and Tarasuk 2012; Yu et al 2010; Aluwalia et al 1998; Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk 2009 among others). International research findings on household behaviour under financial pressure are a useful starting point for understanding in the UK.

3. The wider literature review and UK case study research suggests that where provision is adequate, appropriate and tailored to the needs of users, food aid may be able to relieve short-term symptoms of food insecurity (Poppendieck 1994). The literature also indicates that, whether short-term or more sustained, food aid does not address the underlying causes of household food insecurity.

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[2] See Appendix A.4 of full project report.

4. The totality of the evidence consulted for this report indicates that those involved in food security policy and other responses – from across government, business and civil society – require an ongoing focus on both the short and long-term causes of household food insecurity to achieve the best outcomes, even in the face of an increasingly high profile food aid landscape.

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Main Report

1. Introduction

This research, into food aid provision in the United Kingdom, is particularly timely. The growth of high-profile food aid initiatives, in particular the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network, has raised the profile of household food insecurity (defined as the lack of economic and physical access to sufficient, acceptable food for a healthy life[3]) and highlighted the ways in which charitable organisations are responding.[4] Policy makers, along with the media and the wider public, are increasingly engaging with some of the questions such initiatives raise, around contemporary experiences of household food insecurity, key barriers to food access, and the impact of the receipt of food aid. At the same time, current economic pressures, combined with rising costs of food and fuel, provides an important socio-economic context that drives a broader urgency and need to understand what is happening and why.

Within this context, the research aimed to provide a rapid but comprehensive and systematic review of evidence on the extent and effectiveness of current food aid provision within the UK. The review, which drew on a systematic assessment of published and grey national and international literature, was largely desk-based, but in its second phase was informed by a limited amount of primary research, including an expert workshop and case studies of a select number of food aid projects. The research was steered closely by both Defra and a wider steering group, details of which can be found in Appendix 6.

'Food aid provision' is used here to encompass a range of both large-scale and small local activities aiming to help people meet food needs, often on a short-term basis during crisis or immediate difficulty; more broadly such activities contribute to relieving symptoms of household or individual level

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[3] This definition draws on those outlined by Defra (2006) and Dowler et al. (2001).
[4] N.B. 'foodbank' refers to projects which form part of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network; 'food bank' refers to the wider category of projects.

food insecurity and poverty. The research drew on the definition of 'food aid' as given in Defra's specification for the research:

> 'An umbrella term used to describe any type of aid giving activity which aims to provide relief from the symptoms of food insecurity and poverty. It includes a broad spectrum of activities, from small to large scale, local to national, emergency one-off operations or well established food banks.'

Importantly, the research was located within the wider context of current policy for food security, particularly at the household level, and the challenges posed by current economic pressures. The research aimed to inform policy understanding, possibilities and decision making, for Defra and other key actors with capacity to affect household level food security, both within the food system and beyond, whether Government, business or civil society.

1.1 Aims and objectives of the research

The main aim of the research was, through a Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA), to systematically review existing evidence, complementing this with limited primary research, to come to a better understanding of the current food aid landscape in the UK and the 'at risk' individuals who access this provision, how they do so, and why.

Thus the primary research objective was to critically assess and summarise existing evidence about food aid provision in the UK.

Secondary research objectives:

- To identify different models of food aid provision in the UK, and come to a better understanding of the principles behind them and factors driving trends in their recent developments and practice;
- To improve understanding of different types or groups of current UK food aid users, their food consumption strategies, and something of their journey through the food aid system;

- To discern whether there are any current trends in the use of different types of food aid, and if so, what is driving those trends;

- To come to a better understanding of the socio-economic impacts of being in receipt of food aid;

- To draw on evidence from the UK and internationally to identify the benefits and drawbacks of different types of food aid interventions in the UK (including exploring notions of resilience and 'best practice');

- To examine views and expectations of food aid providers, and others engaged with 'at risk' households, over the immediate and longer-term potential for such provision, and its implications;

- To examine what food aid providers see as future possibilities and needs for their activities;

- To investigate other forms of support, and potential for promoting or protecting household and individual food security by different means, for those utilising current food aid provision, and thus ways in which numbers turning to food aid may be reduced;

- To look at how the research findings inform household food security policy across the triangle of change (Government, business and civil society) in the UK.

1.2 Research questions

In order to meet these aims and objectives the research was shaped by four key research questions.

1   The first explored the preconditions, process and outcomes of the food aid experience:

How do people become food aid users in the UK; what is their journey through the food aid system; and what are the socio-economic implications for these individuals?

2   The second explored the different types of food aid provision, and experiences of how, why and where they have arisen (including capturing any current/recent trends):

What are the current trends in provision of food aid; what are the different models available; and what are the socio-economic drivers behind certain models emerging over others?

3   The third was more evaluative in nature, looking at key lessons learnt and exploring notions of 'best practice', effectiveness and resilience for households and communities:

Reflecting on the analysis from questions 1 and 2 and drawing on evidence from other countries, what are the benefits and drawbacks of different models of food aid provision in the UK?

4   A fourth final question for the research sought to look at the implications of these findings:

How do the research findings inform household food security policy across the 'triangle of change' (i.e. Government, business and civil society) in the UK?

1.3 Understanding 'food aid' in the context of this research

For the purposes of this research, we used the definition of food aid provided by Defra and outlined above. Of particular interest were initiatives which are somehow targeted by 'need' and/or income level. Given the broad nature of this definition and the variety of initiatives which it would encompass, in the development stages of the research a typology was devised to clarify which types of food aid provision would apply. Parameters were placed around what was considered in scope, in agreement with Defra, which related to both practical considerations of the very limited time and resources available for the research and to more conceptual and theoretical considerations about which evidence would provide the most important insights.

In terms of institutions, schools were acknowledged to be a vitally important site for intervention, but the provision of free school meals was deemed outside the scope of the full evidence review, particularly in light of current ongoing work funded elsewhere (by the Department for Education) and a pre-existing evidence base. School breakfast clubs were also seen as outside the scope, partly for similar reasons and also because the extent to which such initiatives are targeted by need is less clear in practice. However, these types of initiatives were included in the initial literature scoping phase to identify existing evidence, but not in the full review .

In terms of target groups for food aid initiatives, one which was initially considered as largely outside the achievable scope of the research – namely those labelled as 'rough sleepers' – proved a more complex story. Previous (e.g. Evans and Dowler 1999) and ongoing (e.g. Lambie-Mumford) research by the project team indicates that particular aspects of provisioning for this group would have made considerable demands on the scope of this time-limited work. However, it became clear that such populations form an important but not necessarily exclusive target group for some food aid charities (particularly mobile and building based provision, soup runs, soup kitchens, drop-in centres). Therefore some discussion of issues relevant to 'rough sleepers' was seen as necessary. Furthermore, those who constitute 'vulnerably housed' individuals more generally (including: potential mortgage defaulters; those in temporary accommodation such as bed and breakfasts; and 'sofa-surfers') were captured by projects included in the research. At the outset of the project, housing circumstances were also seen as playing a key role in both the type of food aid accessed (for example the type of cooking facilities available will determine if someone is able to receive a food parcel as opposed to a meal eaten onsite), and also the reason for seeking food aid (for example money being prioritised towards paying rent or mortgage rather than food). However, it was anticipated that little formal literature would address the connection between housing circumstances and food aid provision.

There is a considerable literature on provision of food aid in countries outside the UK; this literature is henceforth referred to as 'international literature'. In order to draw on this experience whilst ensuring relevance to a UK context,

specific inclusion and exclusion parameters for the literature selection were set. Explicitly excluded were food aid (or 'emergency feeding') initiatives which follow natural disaster or conflict, or which are provided as part of development aid. It was recognised that using the search term 'food aid' would generate evidence about these forms of provision which are largely in the Global South, or in specific circumstances not regarded as pertinent to UK needs.

The development of a typology was a useful first step in capturing the diversity of the UK food aid landscape. The current high public profile of 'food banking', particularly in the specific form of Trussell Trust Foodbanks, was recognised as was the broader range of food aid provision and relevant food initiatives (including other forms of food banking) which the research team knew to exist.

Types of Food Aid Programmes within the scope of the research	
Food Stamps or Vouchers	Given to eligible individuals or households, which entitle them to purchase food at below market price, or to obtain a food ration. For example: Healthy Start.
Food provided as part of community care	Distributed to people in their own homes and may or may not be free to users. For example: 'Meals on Wheels'.
Food Banks	Projects which provide parcels of food stuffs for people to take away and prepare and eat at home. Other terms are used to describe this kind of provision in the US and Canada, for example, 'food pantry'.
Building-based food provision	Where food is prepared and eaten on-site. For example: day centres; lunch

clubs. Provision to children, for example in day care nurseries, was out of scope.

Non-building based food provision	Where food is provided (hot or cold, often soups and/or sandwiches) which people can take away. For example: drop-in centres; soup runs.

Types of Food Aid Programmes partially within the scope of the research	
Institutional Feeding (most commonly through schools)	Meals at midday or breakfast, or one commodity such as milk, are provided, sometimes free or subsidized. (Partially in scope: evaluations of free school meals and free breakfast clubs/nursery to be identified).
Supplementary Feeding (for infants, young children or new mothers)	Food is usually of a particular kind (e.g. high energy, high protein, micronutrient rich), to be consumed in addition to the usual diet.

Types of Food Aid Programmes outside the scope of the research	
Emergency feeding	In refugee camps or following a natural disaster, or provided as part of development aid.
Food Rations	A more generic version of distribution, usually of fixed amounts of food commodities, given to all who are eligible. Eligibility is defined by government, aid-giving body or some other institution.
Food-for-work	Where people do a specific job, usually

manual labour, and are paid in food,
usually to take to their homes (e.g. sacks
of flour, cans of oil).

1.4 Context of the research: food aid and household food insecurity

In practice in the UK, informal food aid support has gone on for many years, largely undocumented and not widely understood in terms of reach and context of demand, other than for those variously described as homeless or roofless. Even the term 'food aid' has not been widely used in the UK to denote charitable or other forms of food distribution. However, the current economic climate, rising costs of food and fuel and reported levels of demand for food help sets the context for this research into such provision. Situated within the varied landscape of projects and providers in the UK, the rise and prominence of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network in particular, and public recognition and media and political attention which surrounds it, has, in recent months, made food aid an increasingly visible phenomenon.[5] The recent publication of the inquiry by the London Assembly into food poverty in London (London Assembly 2013) and a number of parliamentary exchanges (Hansard, 2012) are also examples of increasing political and policy engagement.

This project is also framed by Defra's responsibilities for food security, at national and household levels. This research focuses on the latter; as set out by Defra (2006, p6), household food security is a complex issue, with critical determining factors understood to be food purchasing power, income and other resources, essential outgoings and household management strategies (relative food affordability). In addition, there are potential localised problematic issues in access to shops selling affordable food which contributes to a healthy diet (so called 'local food deserts'; see, for example, Wrigley 2002). Household food security is said to be assured when members

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[5] The Trussell Trust foodbank Network has risen dramatically in the last decade: in 2004 it had two foodbanks in the South-West; it now has 345 foodbanks, nationwide (Trussell Trust 2013b).

are confident of having economic and physical access to sufficient, acceptable food for a healthy life.

Concern over food security often broadly focuses on supply and availability issues (Defra, 2006). However, it also concerns effective demand: whether low-income individuals and households can afford food which meets their health and social needs, and the role of household demographics, local economic and social conditions, housing costs, social protection and informal food aid support. Household food security is therefore an issue of relevance across Government Departments, engaging as it does questions of health, the economies of local communities and income levels.

A key element of this research therefore, is to make connections between findings from those engaged in provisioning and seeking food aid in the UK, and wider understandings of, and experiences in, addressing household-level food insecurity, in order to provide the most relevant evidence as possible to inform future action across the 'triangle of change'. Putting it into this context also enables engagement with a key question running through food aid and food policy debates: the extent to which symptoms rather than root causes of household food insecurity are being addressed.

2. Methodology

The research was conducted under a short timescale (within nine weeks) but draws on a range of different forms of evidence. It therefore was able to provide an important 'snapshot' of evidence relating to food aid provision in the UK.

This project involved five key areas of work. In the first phase of the project a **literature 'scoping'** was undertaken, involving a search and top-level review (based on abstracts) of literature available relevant to food aid. The second phase of the research was a **systematic Rapid Evidence Assessment (REA)** of nine papers which passed credibility assessment[6]. This in turn was supported by a wider review of other relevant UK-based literature, including some academic peer reviewed research, as well as surveys carried out by national charities and data reported by food organisations themselves. The latter were subjected to informal assessment of their methodological rigour, as far as was possible in the time available. The REA papers were predominantly statistical analyses, often of secondary data. There was no bias in the selection process towards quantitative or qualitative evidence. Further methodological detail is given in Appendix 1, and Appendix 2 provides the full critical review of REA papers.

A significant amount of this literature concerned evidence from other countries (particularly the US and Canada), and none of the nine papers reviewed for the REA was from the UK. Research based on different country experiences was drawn on with care. It was recognised that different countries have different histories and national social policy regimes, that are different in significant ways, as well as differing approaches to 'food aid' given to, or available at, household levels. Nevertheless, where there were pertinent findings from other countries' experiences in the international literature which could help inform understanding for the UK context, these were used. The

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[6] The nine papers were: Berner and O'Brien (2004); Bhattarai et al (2005); Daponte et al (2004); Duffy et al (2002); Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009); Purtell et al (2012); Rodgers and Milewska (2007); Tinnemann et al (2012); Yu et al (2010).

lack of systematic peer-reviewed research in the UK meant the wider literature review also drew on other sources of evidence, mostly from food aid organisations themselves, or other charities or NGOs, and which largely relates to usage of food banks rather than other types of food aid provision..

In order to enhance the evidence review, an **expert workshop (with 19 participants),** and **select number of follow-up interviews (five),** were also conducted. Whilst this part of the research necessarily had limitations, largely time-induced, it was able to provide insight and ongoing experience to supplement the published evidence base. The workshop provided a forum for UK experts to contribute to reviewing the key findings from the first stage of the review and to discuss the applicability and usefulness of, and key lessons raised by, the international evidence. The workshop also sought to draw out key learning from current and ongoing experiences of the experts.

Two elements of primary research were also carried out, including an internet-based **search for evidence of small-scale food aid initiatives** (loosely defined as a mapping exercise). Whilst this provided some insight, the exercise was limited by its necessary reliance on the internet and lack of time to follow up. A number of **empirical case studies** (six) of food aid projects were also undertaken to provide the research with primary data into the different types of initiatives in existence in the UK and abroad. These were necessarily 'light touch' in nature, again because of time, and not fully representative of this broad and variegated field   (involving interviews with eight project managers and three recipients) but provided some key insights.

Case study projects

Food aid type	Project	Location	Data collected
Community care	County-wide 'Meals on Wheels' programme (affiliated with the local authority).	County in the East Midlands, UK	Project manager interview; 2 recipient interviews.
Building-based	Large faith-based centre providing: free breakfasts; food parcels; a luncheon club for the over 50s; and other social programmes.	City in the West Midlands, UK	Project manager interview; 1 recipient interview.
Non-building based	A soup run.	City in Yorkshire and Humber region of England	Project manager interview.
Food bank	An independent food bank initiative.	City in Yorkshire and Humber region of England	Project manager interview.
International	Food Kitchen project	California, United States of America	Project manager interview.
Other dimensions of food aid	Project involved in the provision of emergency food boxes, surplus food redistribution and cookery courses.	City in Scotland	Project manager and Operations director joint interview; project manager of partner organisation

A full detailed methodology can be found in Appendix 1.

3. Findings

The findings presented here draw on the entire research evidence base: the literature assessed for the REA; other literature identified as relevant and appropriate for inclusion; analysis of workshop discussions and follow-up interview data; the rapid mapping exercise; and case study research. Findings from the REA are at the forefront, enhanced by insights from the other sources. Where findings are drawn from the latter sources, this is made clear.

As outlined above, the literature searches and calls for evidence revealed very little published research on food aid (use and trends) in the UK context. The contemporary academic (peer-reviewed) research that is available relates to the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network, which represents one particular model of food banking (Lambie-Mumford 2013). This is a distinct network of not-for-profit franchises and therefore has particularities which do not apply, or are less relevant, to other initiatives (whether or not labelled 'food banks'). Several pieces of research and evidence provided by charities themselves were identified and located (including the Trussell Trust and Citizens Advice Bureau) as well as a number of local-level pieces of research (for example Minahan 2012; McCarthy 2012; London Assembly 2013).

The literature scoping did, however, reveal a range of both academic and non-academic research which related more broadly to the strategies households employ when trying to manage in situations of food insecurity, including those which have particularly developed during the current recession (Shelter 2013; Save the Children 2012; Hossain et al 2011; Kneafsey et al 2013; Dowler et al 2011). Importantly, this work also fits within a longer history of research in the UK into barriers to food access and experiences of household food insecurity, including the strategies households employ in trying to manage (among others, Dowler 1997; Dowler et al 2001; Hitchman et al 2002; Tingay et al 2003; Kyte and Hirani 2008; Dibsdall et al 2002; Boukouvalas 2009; McEntee 2009). This evidence base was drawn on in particular to contextualise evidence on food aid receipt within the wider range of management strategies households employ.

The findings below are presented thematically under each of the four main research questions in turn. The evidence collected spoke unevenly across the three main areas of interest (the first three research questions) and principally addressed questions relating to users of food aid and trends in provision.[7] Very little research is available which can inform understanding of the benefits and drawbacks of different types of food aid provision in the UK, or on alternative ways of addressing household food insecurity. Importantly, the evidence also spoke unevenly across food aid types, with an emphasis on food bank schemes. Much less evidence was available which spoke explicitly to community outreach provision or building and non-building based provision.

3.1 Food Aid Users

How do people become food aid users, what is their journey through the food aid system and what are the socio-economic implications for these individuals?

This research question requires an exploration of the preconditions, process and outcomes of the food aid experience. The findings of the REA research particularly relate to how food aid is (or is not) used as part of the ways households try to manage in situations of food insecurity, and to notions of food security outcomes. Three key themes emerged; these are addressed in turn below:

- the relationship between receipt of food aid and severity of household food insecurity (3.1.1 and 3.1.2);
- the place of food aid within broader household food insecurity management strategies (3.1.3); and
- household food security outcomes of food aid (3.1.4).

3.1.1 Household Food Insecurity Status and the Receipt of Food Aid

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[7] See Appendix 4 for a table indicating outlining research questions and evidence base

The findings of the REA indicate a direct relationship between household food insecurity and need for food aid; there is research which implies **those who are more food insecure are more likely to turn to food aid.** For example, the REA paper Bhattatai et al (2005) identified higher food insecurity, along with other key demographics, to be important in food pantry[8] usage in the US context:

> "The general household characteristics found to influence food pantry and food stamp use were similar to the characteristics reported by other researchers, with poorer, more food-insecure households more likely to use such assistance." (p. 295)

This finding is supported by other research, such as Loopstra and Tarasuk (2012) which also indicates that the likelihood of food bank use increases with the severity of household food insecurity.

However, the REA also showed that not all households deemed to be food insecure turn to food aid. Evidence from the US (Yu et al 2010) showed that whilst food pantry use (equivalent to 'food bank use' in the UK) is often driven by a household's food insecurity, the converse is not the case: only 1 in 5 food insecure households sought and received 'informal food supports'; this finding echoes that in the Canadian work by Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009). Further Canadian research by (non-REA paper) Loopstra and Tarasuk (2012) also found that, of 317 low income families interviewed, 75 per cent were judged food insecure, yet only 23 per cent had used a food bank.

Evidence also provided insight into reasons why food insecure households do not seek out or use food aid. These include: lack of access or information, different perceptions of food aid (who is it for and what it will provide) or household need (feeling that one was not in extreme need). For instance, in Canada, Loopstra and Tarasuk (2012) (non-REA literature), were given many reasons by those they interviewed as to why they had not sought or used food bank provision. These included: not living

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[8] Projects which are similar to food banks in the UK

anywhere near food banks, or knowing they existed; not seeing themselves as being in sufficiently extreme need to go to a food bank; thinking the food provided would be unsuitable or was not likely to meet their needs; mistaken perceptions of who or what a food bank was for; or a sense that going to a food bank was degrading (p504). The wider literature also highlighted that accessing food aid (defined more generally than food banks) can involve negative emotional experiences, particularly, feelings of indignity (Engler-Stringer and Berenbaum 2007) and emotional stress (Ahluwalia et al 1998).

These findings from North American literature were presented at the expert workshop, to enable participants to discuss the applicability to a UK context. The discussions highlighted that many of the findings from the international literature had relevance in the UK. Among issues noted were: potential users' feelings of the shame of poverty which prevented some from accessing services; that people in need wanted to 'be like everybody else', and not be stigmatised by having to obtain food in undignified ways. This was echoed in comments from the food bank case study manager, who described users not visiting the project directly, but instead asking an agency to help:

> 'And lots of the families, their agencies have had to come and pick up their food parcels for them. Because the families, they're embarrassed to accept help, they're embarrassed to admit that they can't feed their children.' [food bank manager in case study]

Other issues raised in the workshop included that people were often not aware of local emergency food aid provision, or how to gain access to it; aspects of inclusivity (whether provision is open to all and whether formal referral is required); and geographical inadequacies. It was pointed out that many places have no food aid provision, and that local practice can be hugely variable in terms of the mechanisms through which food aid can be accessed and how often, provider opening times, and what type of food is available. Thus many parallels with the international experience were highlighted.

The research discussed from the US and Canada draws on national surveys comprising systematic assessments of household food security in order to investigate the relationship between food aid usage of different kinds and

household food (in)security. In the UK, household food security is not routinely monitored. Household food security has only once been measured, using an internationally recognised method, as part of a national study on nutrition and diet in low income households (Nelson et al, 2007). In the absence of UK evidence, the international literature provides statistical relationships and patterns that offer the best available hypotheses about the relationship between food insecurity and food aid usage.

3.1.2 Reported triggers for food aid uptake in the UK.

As outlined above, there was a lack of systematic peer-reviewed research from the UK on the reasons or immediate circumstances leading people to turn to food aid. It was therefore not possible for the Rapid Evidence Assessment to draw any conclusions on this point. In light of the absence of evidence that met the high standards set for the REA, the more general literature review that supplemented it drew on other sources to inform the research and possibly provide a basis on which future research – seeking to fill this evidence gap - could build. This wider review revealed claims being presented by national charities and NGOs, and local-level research, regarding triggers for food aid use, at the time of the review. These claims largely relate to usage of food banks rather than other types of food aid provision. The reasons which are currently being reported by these various sources, as leading people to seek food aid (mostly from food banks, from a variety of providers) include (in order of ranking by the sources): loss of, reductions in or problems associated with, social security benefit payments; low income; indebtedness; and homelessness.

The Citizens Advice Bureau (2013, p.17-18) reports preliminary findings from national research that the two main reasons people require referrals for a food parcel are when they are experiencing delays in the payments of their benefits or when their benefits have been sanctioned. More detailed results from

national research are forthcoming from the Citizens Advice Bureau[9] (CAB, forthcoming). People visiting CAB offices are not a representative sample of the UK population or of the population of informal food aid users. Nevertheless, these reported findings are similar to claims made by the food aid provider The Trussell Trust on the basis of its own information, gathered through an online operational data collection system. The Trussell Trust identified a range of factors[10] that may be triggers for needing food aid, including low income, 'benefit delay', 'benefit changes', delayed wages, domestic violence, sickness, unemployment, debt, refused crisis loans, homelessness and absence of free school meals during school holidays (Trussell Trust 2013). Discussions in the workshop pointed to another group likely to be in food insecurity and seeking help, namely asylum seekers, whose recourse to public funds was thought to be increasingly uncertain.

It should be noted that recent and ongoing changes to the welfare system in the UK can make the implications of some of the findings discussed above in relation to benefits and food aid uptake (particularly those referred to as 'changes in benefit') difficult to interpret. The sources of evidence used by CAB and The Trussell Trust did not always make clear whether the reasons cited by claimants were due to administrative or payment systems errors with pre-existing benefits, or the result of more recent changes to administration of sanctions or incapacity benefits. Furthermore, Trussell Trust and CAB data reporting systems do not distinguish first time from repeat referrals.

As noted earlier, there is a lack of systematic peer-reviewed research from the UK on the stated reasons or underlying circumstances that lead people to turn to food aid. The claims from non-governmental organisations working in

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[9] Citizens Advice Bureaux survey spring 2013 (www.citizensadvice.org.uk/citizens_advice_bureaux_foodbank_survey). The results are from 29 Bureaux who recorded every referral to a food bank for one month in Spring 2013 and the reasons for the need for that referral. This will form part of a systematic repeat monitoring of food bank referrals. The data are collected systematically using a pre-categorized form, with space for further comments; entry is checked by a supervisor; spreadsheet data entry is centralised in London.

[10] See Trussell Trust website: http://www.trusselltrust.org/stats

informal assistance described above would provide a useful starting point for future research.

3.1.3 Food Aid in Household Food Insecurity Management Strategies

The results from the REA, supported by the wider literature and the workshop discussions, suggest that **households use multiple strategies in their attempts to manage not having sufficient food (i.e. being food insecure), in both the long- and short-term; seeking food aid is only one of the many ways people respond to constrained food access .** From the REA literature, Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009) found that in Canada:

> "The use of other resource augmentation strategies such as delaying payments of bills or rent and the termination of telephone and other services was relatively common. This is worrisome given that such strategies can only compound the vulnerability of food-insecure families by causing them to incur debts, risk eviction, exhaust social support networks and become more socially isolated." (p. 138)

In other literature, use of food pantries in the US was found to be only one of many strategies employed. These included: drawing on social networks (friends and family) for help (Aluwalia et al 1998: 604, 605), shopping around, using shopping coupons, budgeting differently, staggering their bills, and sending children to a relative for meals. Nnakwe (2008) found that people were deliberately eating less varied diets; were participating in federal food assistance programs (which are different from food pantries); and were also obtaining emergency food from a number of sources. Borrowing money from friends or family, working outside the formal economy, and using a credit card or line of credit were all strategies identified by the Daily Bread Food Bank in Canada (2011).

The literature search and other calls for evidence **provided a number of surveys on the impact that the recent recession was having on UK households** – including on their ability to access a sufficient, healthy and varied diet – and the strategies households were employing. **Several such**

evidence sources reported that households were changing the ways they shopped and ate in response to low incomes and increased cost of living such that people adopted different food shopping strategies and/or certain members were skipping meals, or cutting back on food.

The Defra pocket book (2012: 25) highlights the compounded effects of falling income and rising food prices over recent years, which had produced a double effect of reducing food affordability by over 20% for households in the lowest income decile. A survey by Save the Children (2012: 2) reported that 61 per cent of parents (defined in the survey as) 'in poverty' said they had cut back on food and 26 per cent said they had skipped meals, during the past year, because of lack of money. A recent YouGov poll of 4,000 people for Shelter (2013), found that a third of people (31%) had cut back on food in the past year in order to meet their housing costs. In a Joseph Rowntree Foundation study on the impact of the recession, Hossain et al (2011: 5) found that people were shopping and cooking more economically and that social support was very important at times of economic stress.

In the workshop and follow-up interviews, all of these strategies were mentioned, along with others which were said to be currently increasingly common in the UK; these included taking out 'payday loans' to pay for food[11], trading down in terms of food commodities, and tight domestic budgeting. It also emerged that ways of managing these challenges differ by religious or minority ethnic communities; several respondents highlighted the importance of understanding this broader context of coping and survival strategies, and potential extra costs incurred by poor households (the so-called 'poverty premium', see Strelitz and Kober, 2007, among many).

This evidence in the current research is supported by previous research on 'food poverty' and household food security, where many similar household strategies were shown (see Dowler et al 2001; Dowler 1997). Relatively recent research in 2010, commissioned by Defra, examined peoples'

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[11] a 'payday' loan is a type of unsecured short-term borrowing, typically for a small amount at short notice and very high interest rate, to be repaid when the next 'payday' occurs ('payday' can refer to wages or a social security benefit payment). The loan can be rolled over until the next 'payday'; people can end up owing a great deal of money for an initial very small loan.

reactions to increasing food prices and their views on responsibility for 'food security', that is, before austerity measures set in, and before current welfare changes (Dowler et al 2011; Kneafsey et al 2013).[12] In 2010, 90% of an online survey's respondents had noticed food prices rising over the previous two years and 37% of respondents said they were finding it more difficult to afford the variety of food they wanted to buy (Dowler et al 2011). The qualitative research showed that a number of strategies were being employed by households in attempts to cope with rising costs, including: cutting back on other household expenditure; reducing heat or electricity consumption; and, in terms of food consumption, adjusting food patterns by bulk buying, looking for 'bargains', purchasing supermarket 'own brands', and throwing less food away. Nearly a fifth of respondents with children said they (adults) regularly went without food to ensure their children received enough to eat (Dowler et al 2011). Nearly a decade ago, those identified as food secure or food insecure (using a household food insecurity measure) were found to have marked differences in food consumption patterns in research in a UK city by Tingay et al (2003). For example, 'subjects who were food insecure were less likely to eat either fruit or vegetables or salads daily when compared with food secure subjects' (Tingay et al, 2003: 158).

Ultimately the research indicates that food aid is a strategy of last resort. Aluwalia et al (1998; 604) found this to be the case in the US, where people turned to food aid when 'they did not have other options' or when other systems such as social networks had failed. Other evidence from the REA supports this finding; results from Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009: 138) 'suggest that [food bank use] is a strategy of desperation, not a means of routine food acquisition'. In the UK, Sleightholme (2013: 2), working in Rotherham, found that 'many respondents had exhausted other avenues of support'.

Research also suggests that **when households turn to using food aid, they are also likely to be seeking multiple forms of support**. Bhattarai et al

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[12] Defra project code: FO0414. Principle Investigator Dr Rosemary Collier, University of Warwick

(2005), reviewed as part of the REA, found that, in the US, people were drawing on multiple sources of assistance where they could, rather than opting only for either food bank or government food assistance:

> "Participating in one food assistance program increases the likelihood of participating in the other. Food insecurity appears to push motivated families to look for more than one possible source of food assistance." (p. 295)

These findings were echoed in Berner and O'Brien (2004) (also reviewed for the REA and from the US), which found a relationship between food stamp and uptake of other food aid provision. Furthermore, Minahan (2012: 7) found in the UK that those using food banks were also likely to be using other (non-food) services at the same time, including social or health services, and support from other projects from faith groups.

3.1.4 Household food security outcomes of food aid

The evidence reviewed for this research indicates that food aid has a limited impact on overall household food security status. However where it is adequate and tailored to the needs of users, food aid may provide immediate relief for household members. Findings from the REA suggest that positive food security outcomes of food aid are limited. Daponte et al (2004) found that in the US, intensive government food aid provision (for example, food stamps) was found to be strongly associated with households having the capacity to spend enough to achieve at least a minimally nutritious diet. By contrast, however, they found that non-governmental food assistance (for example food pantries) did not affect this capacity:

> "Use of food pantries is not statistically significant [as a predictor of food security outcomes]". (p. 80)

> "This research indicates that while receiving private food assistance marginally increases food acquisitions, it has no impact on whether a

household receives enough food. Private food assistance efforts do not meaningfully substitute for public efforts". (p. 82)

Yu et al (2010) drew a number of key conclusions relating to the food security outcomes of food assistance.

> "A conservative interpretation of our results would indicate that food insecurity and hunger, among children, persist despite effort of both formal and informal food assistance programs." (p.772)

These results of the REA are supported by other research findings. In Canada, Loopstra and Tarasuk (2012: 503) found a 'high prevalence of persistent food insecurity among food bank users, indicating that continued food bank use did not appear to reduce the likelihood of repeated severe food insecurity'. Research also found that in community kitchens in Canada (where people pool resources to cook large quantities of food):

> 'when groups cooked in large quantities (upwards of 5 to 8 family meals monthly), and especially when there was some subsidy involved, interview participants perceived CK [community kitchen] participation to increase their food resources' (Engler-Stringer and Bernenbaum 2007: 80).

The above finding indicates that whilst household food security measures may not be significantly improved by food aid, a more nuanced and detailed understanding may lead to greater insight. **The literature review and case study research suggests ways in which food aid may have a role to play in meeting immediate, acute needs (symptoms of household food insecurity), even though it is not able to address and overcome wider determinants (root causes) of household food insecurity.**

The wider literature (non-REA) further supports this point, suggesting that while food aid can meet some of the urgent, immediate needs of poor people (Poppendieck 1994), it cannot address underlying causes of household food insecurity (Tarasuk 2001; Riches 2002; and in the UK, Lambie-Mumford 2013). In the case study of a soup run, the assistant co-ordinator described

how the food provided has an important immediate impact on the users, particularly when:

> 'some will come and they'll say they haven't really eaten all day and they're absolutely ravenous, you can tell by the way they attack their food, they're very hungry.'

An important caveat, however, relates to whether food aid projects can always meet even immediate needs. For instance, Tarasuk and Eakin (2003) argue that food aid doesn't necessarily meet the needs of recipients if projects don't have enough to give, or the right type of food to distribute. Furthermore, food aid is not necessarily designed around the needs of the users; sometimes it is designed to fit around existing operations or available resources (Dachner et al 2009: 846). **These findings indicate that even in assessing how far food aid meets immediate needs, a close examination of the nature of the food provided (whether it is adequate and appropriate) and the manner in which it is delivered (whether delivery is tailored to the needs of users) are important.**

The case studies provided further important illumination here. The tender for the current research was premised on the notion of 'journeys through' food aid initiatives, which, while recognising that people's circumstances are not static, also implies some resolution to experiences of household food insecurity. However, the findings from the case studies are that, for some food aid recipients, the notion of journeys 'through' and 'out' of food aid provision may be hard to substantiate. Whilst the food bank investigated had a fairly structured approach (it required a formal referral letter and an understanding of time-bounded help - that a person would be helped once every two weeks for up to six months), a sense of 'motion through' the other initiatives was much less clear. The community care case offered a particular example where the notion of 'coming out' of the project may not apply. The manager interviewed had a clear sense that many users are likely to receive this provision on an ongoing basis. The recipients interviewed had both taken up 'Meals on Wheels' notionally as a temporary measure after a spell in hospital, but both had continued using the service for several years (four and seven

respectively). Both relied on it for their main meal of the day, five days a week, and would require a similar service were this particular one to be no longer available, because they were no longer able to care for their own food needs from their own resources.

The evidence reviewed as part of the REA found that, given the nature of food aid (short-term emergency provision), such initiatives are ultimately necessarily limited in the scope of impact they can make. Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009) found:

> "The apparent lack of a protective effect of food bank use observed in the current study has also been previously documented, with our research on food bank users in Toronto revealing no association between frequency of food bank use and severity of household food insecurity. Studies of children's food programs and community kitchens have also raised questions about their capacity to address problems of food insecurity due to factors such as limited scope and inability to address the food needs of those living in severe poverty." (p. 138)

Other research (Lambie-Mumford 2013) highlights how those running emergency initiatives navigated the tension between addressing immediate presenting symptoms and tackling root causes of household food insecurity. It also discusses mechanisms these initiatives utilised to work with recipients, beyond food provision. The Trussell Trust foodbank model, for example, places an emphasis on signposting recipients to other agencies or organisations for further help and on providing a supportive environment and a 'listening ear' (Lambie-Mumford 2013).

Nevertheless, the wider research also provided examples of those who suggest that food aid providers have a potential role to play in facilitating solutions through working as advocates (Riches 2002; Poppendieck 1998; Lambie-Mumford 2013):

'…they are in a powerful position to raise awareness that the problem is one rooted deep in society' (UK literature - Hawkes and Webster 2000)

This theme was also discussed in the workshop and participants' comments included the interplay between meeting immediate needs, work to address food poverty and wider work required around poverty generally in the UK. Indeed, one group raised the question: does emergency food aid provision perpetuate the problem of long-term food poverty? A related question also raised during the workshop (but beyond the capacity of the current research), was how far meeting immediate symptoms of household food insecurity may mask or prevent action on the root causes.

3.2 Trends in food aid provision

What are the current trends in provision of food aid, what are the different models available and what are the socio-economic drivers behind certain models emerging over others?

The focus of this second research question was on the different types of food aid provision, and experiences of how, why and where they have arisen (including capturing any current/recent trends). The findings of the research indicate there are a number of key dimensions to answering this question:

- Commentary offered on broad trends in food aid provision in the UK, notably the rise of key national charities within the wider context of other independent projects and the pre-existence of other types of food aid.

- Trends can in turn be contextualised in a wider understanding of socio-economic and social policy shifts which both have impact on household food security and on the relationships with food industry partners.

- Other particular dimensions to food aid models and trends can also be identified: that there is significant operational diversity both between and within food aid types; that there may be key points in the year and

month when food aid usage peaks; and outstanding questions about gaps in provision in the UK.

Further questions raised both in the literature reviewed from other international contexts and during the process of the current research include , how far the growth of food aid provision (or at least the growth of the public profile of food aid) can tell us anything about a growth in 'demand' or need. As Tarasuk (2001) discussed in relation to Canada:

> 'It is not clear whether hunger is more prevalent now than before the era of food banks or whether the problem has simply been rendered more visible as poor people, facing reduced supports from the state, have resorted to more public acts in their struggles to obtain food and meet other basic needs'. (Tarasuk 2001: 488).

Secondly, to what extent is the current perceived growth in food aid provision something of a misperception, or a masking of the history of, ongoing similar activities? For example, research into the growth of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network revealed that churches involved in each of the case study projects had in fact been offering some form of ad hoc food provision previously, before taking on a foodbank franchise (Lambie 2011: 15). In some ways this might not be surprising (previous experience offers confidence in taking on something new, as well as familiarity with needs and ways of addressing them), but these histories can potentially be lost in narratives of new network growth. Indeed, although the soup run case study had been established only two years previously, the other four UK case studies turned out to have been in existence for more than 10 years.[13] These case studies, selected randomly, nevertheless provide only a snapshot and are not a representative sample of food aid providers. However, these findings highlight the difficulties of assuming that food aid provision, particularly in the form of food banks, is necessarily completely new in the UK. What is almost

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[13] The building-based provider opened 10 years ago; the food bank 18 years ago; and the community care initiative had been established as a voluntary organisation – before becoming statutory provision – over 40 years ago; and the case study of 'other dimensions of food aid' opened in 2000 .

certainly the case is that there are now more providers, and more clients/recipients, at each provision point.

These issues in turn relate to a question which has been posed in the media and elsewhere, of whether upward trends in food aid are supply or demand driven – in other words, are more people seeking food aid because of increasing household need, or because more food aid is (known to be) available? It is ultimately beyond the scope of such a time-limited project as this to resolve, but some important factors are noted and discussed below. The long history of food aid in the UK, albeit possibly more ad hoc and less publically visible, suggests that need for such immediate, practical help has existed for some time. Anecdotally this help has been demand driven. As stated, there has been little systematic assessment of impact, and most evaluation has been operational (numbers of people served, etc) or relatively informal.

3.2.1 General trends in food aid provision in the UK

In terms of trends in food aid provision in the UK, the growth of the Trussell Trust Foodbank Network is at the forefront of public and media discourse surrounding this type of provision There has also been a substantial growth in food system surplus food redistribution initiatives, such as FareShare, which provide food for a range of food aid and other projects working with people in need.[14] These networked charities, which operate with established business models, are able to collect data systematically across their projects and partners, and to provide regular public access to the results (their data management systems are less open to public scrutiny). They are thus able to provide reasonably reliable data on trends in provision of their services. Information on the whereabouts of Trussell Trust foodbank projects and FareShare depots and partners is also publically available and easily accessible, but **information on other independent**

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[14] The UK Institute of Grocery Distribution set up a similar charity *Grocery Aid* (formerly *Provision*), in the 1990s, which redistributed food system surpluses to charities working with poor households.

initiatives is much more difficult to capture systematically. In the limited time available the mapping exercise and case study research attempted to document what information was available.

Area-based research can provide insight into the variety of provision. For example, work done by CLES (2012) sheds light on food aid in Greater Manchester. This paper found that:

> 'a total of 85 parishes across Greater Manchester are involved in food intervention… [and] 45 organisations have been identified [as providing] support in the form of food banks or other support, such as breakfast clubs' (CLES 2012:76).

The existence of a variety of provision is evidenced elsewhere in the literature; Bateman (2007), for instance, argues that food parcel schemes exist all over the country, ranging from one-off deliveries at festive times through to schemes helping hundreds. The case study that focussed on a city identified a range of provision locally including: evening soup runs (available Tuesdays – Fridays); a drop-in centre for 'rough sleepers' which provides lunch and other services from Monday – Saturday; and two food banks (one which was studied in more detail is open every week day; the other is a Trussell Trust foodbank which is open several days in the week). Importantly, however, these findings were based on both searchable publically available information, and the local knowledge of a few key people contacted during the case study research. It is very likely that many more initiatives may actually exist in the city which was surveyed only rapidly and once.

The first Trussell Trust foodbank was established in 2000 and the first of the not-for-profit franchises was set up in Gloucester in 2004 (Lambie 2011). Between then and February 2013, the growth of independent, franchised projects was slow at first, but then accelerated; it now stands at 345 launched projects across the UK.

FareShare provides a different model of sourcing and provision of food aid, based on national food 'redistribution' – sourcing food from within the food system, and organising its storage and distribution to a wide range of

community based projects. It has grown to be a prominent national organisation, involved in food aid provision via its partner projects. Operating in its current guise since 2004, FareShare now has 17 depots across the UK, from which food is distributed to over 900 community projects.[15]

The rapid mapping exercise, using information publically available on the internet but with no telephone or other follow-up, identified at least 60 independent food aid initiatives. Of these, 29 described themselves as food banks, 30 were loosely defined as 'meal programmes' where food was served directly, and one operated both a food bank provision and meal programme. Data from these initiatives are not presented here because they were not considered sufficiently robust. Consistency in data collection is unverified; it may include repeat users; users may also be visiting more than one project at the same time, and these may or may not have been identified in the web-based mapping. However, it is also probable that many local-level initiatives do not have much of a web presence, and thus were not captured in our internet trawl. The numbers of initiatives cited above is thus likely to be an underestimate."

Thus **it is impossible at present to give an accurate estimate of the numbers of people fed by charitable food aid providers in the UK, in total or on a regular basis (monthly or annually).**

The faith-basis of many food aid providers is a further aspect to note, in terms of general trends in food aid. The Trussell Trust Foodbank Network is a Christian faith-based initiative which works through local churches, and four out of the five UK case study projects visited were, as it turned out, also organised by Christian churches (the fifth being part of a local authority). Although many of the independent initiatives identified through the mapping exercise were tied to religious organisations, there was no clear pattern. There was not time to explore the role of faith-based provision in general and how such provision has evolved in recent years to accommodate needs of clients from a different faith to that of providers (which is known, anecdotally,

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[15] FareShare, 'About Us' webpage: http://www.fareshare.org.uk/about-us-2/ (04.09.13)

to be occurring). Furthermore, few faith based organisations operate strict targeting on basis of verified need; many simply welcome all who come. A small number of secular organisations were also identified in the internet search as running food aid provision. Examples of the latter include: Bradford Metropolitan Food Bank, Loughborough University Students' Union Action Soup Kitchen and Systems House, Padley Day Centre.

There is some evidence to suggest that the general growth trends outlined here – particularly in relation to the Trussell Trust foodbank Network and amount of food redistributed – are being experienced elsewhere in Europe. Papers identified in the literature review reported that in Germany increasing numbers of clients have been seen accessing food aid in Berlin, with the REA paper Tinnemann et al (2012) claiming:

> "The overall number of LAIB und SEELE [food aid project providing surplus fresh produce] clients in Berlin has increased over all food redistribution points by [around] 900 additional clients per month, or almost 10%, between 2006 and 2010." (p. 724)

This is supported by evidence from Pfeiffer et al (2011), who point to existing circumstantial evidence of the increase of food banks in Germany, and go on to explore the range of mechanisms German households employ to manage experiences of food insecurity (including reducing the quantity or quality of food purchased and eaten, food bank use and turning to friends and family). Other non-REA literature demonstrates increased provision in Finland, where it is reported that the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland has increased food aid provision by 86% in the last three years, with the amount of food distributed increasing by 40% in the year 2009-2010 alone (Silvasti 2011).

The consistency of these findings, that demand for food aid appears to be growing, raises the question of whether current food aid provision has the capacity to meet current and future needs. In Canada and the USA these issues are regularly discussed (e.g. Curtis and McClellan 1995; Riches 2011). Whether there will be a growth in need and the capacity of food aid provision to meet it in the UK was not an explicit question in this research. However, it is one which has been raised in current (non REA) literature; for instance, in

Brighton and Hove, the Food Partnership recently argued that currently demand 'well exceeds' crisis food assistance supply and that the capacity in existing projects is limited due to a lack of facilities and sustainable funding sources (Brighton and Hove 2012).

Interview and workshop discussions engaged with the future trajectory of food aid growth. In the sixth case study, which captured other dimensions of food aid, the manager spoke about the importance of evidencing need for food aid provision and maintaining a focus on wider solutions:

> 'I am really concerned when I hear organisations say we are going to start a food bank in every city […] are you doing an exercise to see if the need is there in that area?'

In the case study interviews, each project was asked what they anticipated the future would hold for their project. Every response was that the provision would certainly continue to be needed, and, in most instances, that some kind of expansion was anticipated. For example, the food bank manager spoke about expanding the church's current work to setting up a café and a recycled furniture store. The manager of the soup run talked about hoping to put increasing efforts into more co-ordinated, church (i.e. building) based provision. The manager of the community care project was keen to see a national 'Meals on Wheels' programme. The building-based project anticipated particular growth in the need to be supporting families and others who are not homeless but living in poverty.

3.2.2 Contextualising food aid trends: changing household food security

International research evidence suggests that broader socio-economic shifts that adversely affect household food security are an important aspect to consider when looking at trends in the growth of food aid provision and its demand. There is no systematic evidence on the drivers of food aid use in the UK, but the information which is available suggests that factors which have impact on household incomes and financial capacity are important.

Results from the REA highlighted a number of studies that looked into the impacts of shifts in social policy in a number of non-UK contexts (e.g. Berner and O'Brien 2004; Daponte and Bade 2006; Riches 2002; Warshawsky 2010). It is difficult to draw direct comparisons to the current UK context, given differences in social policy structures and administrative practices. Nevertheless, the results do show clear patterns: (1) reductions in governmental food aid lead to increased uptake of non-governmental food aid, (2) systematic government provided food assistance delivered measurable positive effects on household food security, while informal food assistance did not[16]. For further discussion, please see Appendix 2.

The wider, non-REA, literature from other national contexts shows the role that socio-economic shifts have had in facilitating the growth and entrenchment of food aid in North America in particular, where the proliferation of food aid took place in the context of deep recession, increases in unemployment and inadequate social security provisions (Riches, 2002; Poppendieck, 1998). The expert workshop included specific focus on international evidence findings and their applicability in a UK context. The discussion also considered how to disaggregate uptake driven by issues with social security benefits on the one hand, and the impact of increased awareness and levels of food aid support available, on the other. Experts also raised the issue of whether erosion of elements of the 'welfare safety net' was contributing to the growing demand for food aid. (The expert workshop did not resolve these issues).

The results of the REA, wider literature and participants at the UK workshop provide an important basis for future research hypotheses and highlight need for systematic evidence on the drivers of food aid in the UK.

3.2.3 Diversity in food aid operation

The non-REA UK literature, mapping exercise and, in particular, the case studies, highlighted the **considerable operational diversity between**

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[16] The UK does not have the large-scale governmental food aid systems of the USA or Canada, other than provision of free school meals and vouchers systems for food, such as Healthy Start.

different types of current food aid initiatives. For example, the case study research found that the organisations which were in charge of three of the five UK case studies (the food bank, building-based project and the project involved in other kinds of food aid) ran more than one type of food assistance initiative. The project running food aid related initiatives was involved in several types of activity which included both surplus food redistribution and cookery classes. The church which ran the food bank also runs what they refer to as a 'soup kitchen', providing a hot lunch for those in need, every Monday. The building-based project runs a number of food initiatives, including an over 50s' bi-weekly lunch club, breakfast service for homeless people and provision of food parcels to the needy. As mentioned, four of the five UK case studies were Christian faith-based initiatives (building-based, food bank, soup run, 'other dimensions' case), and the other (community care) was part of a local authority funded activity.

The food bank case study was the only one where there was any sense of a procedure for accessing the provision (in this instance, by obtaining a referral letter from a recognised 'gatekeeper') and which had the most sense of structure to its provision (food parcels provided every fortnight for up to six months). The other case studies appeared to operate a more open policy; however each seemed to be premised on the notion that, whilst in theory 'anyone' could access this provision, it would only be the 'very needy' that would do so. So, in these instances, only those who really had need of it, would queue for soup in a car park, ask to have their meals delivered in the middle of the day or access a 'homeless breakfast' or over 50s' lunch club. In other words, the users were seen as self-selecting (which takes pressure off the institution managing the provision):

> 'The meal service is there for absolutely anybody but someone who is fit and well wouldn't want to wait in [at home] everyday for a driver so it...does filter its own users' [Community Care Manager]

This operational diversity can also be found within a specific food aid type; so, for instance, comparing the Trussell Trust foodbank model (three food parcels, up to three times during any one crisis; distributed at specific days

and times in a week) with the independent food parcel provision which was one of the case studies, highlighted differences in approach and practice. The case study food bank (from Yorkshire and the Humber region) also worked on a referral basis, but provided one parcel every fortnight for up to six weeks, which could be obtained by visiting the church office any time during the working week. The partner food bank working with the charity in Scotland worked differently again, operating a referral system where recipients were required to arrive at the centre with a letter which entitled them to help for between 6-8 weeks.

The range of operational diversity both across and within types of food aid provision suggests that generalisations are inappropriate and that nuanced understandings of food aid provision are needed. The use of typologies of food aid provision (as adopted in this research) may help to promote clearer understandings of the food aid landscape, by taking account of the broad range of initiatives included within the wide category of 'food aid'.

3.2.4 Peaks in food aid uptake

The REA results indicate that there may be particular points at which uptake of food aid peaks; notably in winter months and towards the end of the month. The findings of the Berlin study by Tinnemann et al (2012) indicate that uptake of food aid varies at different points across the year, with particular peaks in winter months:

> "During summers, the food redistribution points had fewer clients compared to wintertime. This pattern could be repeatedly shown annually. One possible explanation is the higher living costs during the winter months, such as electricity and other expenses, whereas more can be spent on food during the summer." (p. 724)

The findings of Berner and O'Brien (2004) in the US also support these conclusions, with their results around varying peaks in demand:

'Nearly half of respondents [to a survey of food aid providers] stated that the number of clients coming for emergency food assistance varies according to the time of year, with 25% of those noting an increase in winter months. Sixty two percent of respondents stated client service varies according to time of month, with 69% of those noting an increase at the end of the month. Nearly half of those identifying an increase at the end of the month attributed this increase to a lack of food stamps for clients.' (p. 666)

These findings were further enhanced by the wider literature documenting increased demand in the UK during school holidays. Research in Lambeth, Hampshire and from one food aid provider who attended the workshop, reported increased demand during periods when families with children are unable to obtain free school meals (Minahan 2012; McCarthy 2012).

3.2.5 Gaps in food aid provision in the UK

The REA paper from Canada, Kirkpatrick and Tarasuk (2009: 137), found that household distance from a food bank did not have an effect on food bank usage, even for regular usage. This is an interesting finding, since food aid provision in the UK is not spread evenly in geographical terms. Reasons given for having food aid at a localised level include the costs involved in transport to and from providers, the time involved and limits to what users can carry a long way home.

The issue of 'gaps' in terms of user groups accessing food aid appeared in the literature in a number of places. The very limited evidence provided by small scale local studies (not included in the REA) from the UK presented mixed messages about the diversity of food aid recipients. In Lambeth, Minahan (2012) found that 44% of recipients were from Black and Minority Ethnic communities. However, Sleightholme (2012) found that 100% of recipients of food vouchers in Rotherham during the time of the small survey

were white. [17] This could be in part or even wholly informed by the ethnic diversity of these particular areas, but the question of accessibility for all is potentially raised by such findings.

There may also be a question about how accessible food bank projects are to the elderly. Minahan (2012) found that only 1% of food bank users in Lambeth were aged 65 or over. This finding echoes small-scale research in Hampshire which found that elderly people can be 'reluctant to seek help' and that it was difficult to 'ensure the system reaches out to them' (McCarthy 2012: 2). Questions of the impact of people's mobility and the physical accessibility of these services for older people are also still outstanding from existing research. Interestingly, in the US, Bhatarai et al (2005) found that at the time of their research, in more rural areas elderly people were more likely to turn to food pantries compared to younger people. However, there is very little research evidence about older people's usage and experience in the UK.

3.3 Best Practice

Reflecting on the analysis from questions 1 and 2 and drawing on evidence from other countries, what are the benefits and drawbacks of different models of food aid provision in the UK?

This research question is more evaluative in nature, looking at key lessons learnt and exploring notions of 'best practice', effectiveness and resilience for households and communities. Given that very little of the work identified had any kind of comparative element or was even evaluative, it is difficult to draw many firm insights into this question. However, a few key themes can be identified:

- The importance of non-food support offered by food aid projects;
- The ways in which food aid projects co-ordinate with other food projects and wider services in local communities;

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[17] This finding is from a survey of people who received food bank vouchers from Rotherham CAB in the third quarter of 2012. There was an 85% response rate with 39 of the 46 people given vouchers taking part (Sleightholme 2013)

- The role of surplus food redistribution;
- The vulnerability and inefficiency of food aid.

Before presenting these findings, however, a question was raised by discussion in the workshop around how far best practice (where it was possible to be determined) could be assured going forward. One workshop participant commented:

> 'There is likely to be a huge increase in demand for emergency provision and it was suggested that this is likely to be met by local community groups, some of which might not follow 'best practice'

The key concern for this research was to determine whether notions of 'best practice' were possible to establish in food aid provision; however this point also highlights the question of how far this could be assured given the variety in the types of providers as well as the local level nature of this work. It is also the case that many of the concerns relate both to 'food aid provision' initiatives, and to other food initiatives and projects, which may or may not include free food provision, but which also rely on volunteers, local community support in kind and cash, and systematic support from local authorities.

3.3.1 'Food plus': the importance of other support provided by food aid

The case study research suggests that non-food related support provided by food aid initiatives is a particularly important aspect of their work. Interviews with those involved in providing food aid revealed they saw the non-food support they offered users as particularly important, conveying a sense of providing "food-plus". This was referred to differently by different case studies. For example the soup run was seen as also providing an important source of stability and continuity in the lives of highly vulnerable people, and providing a time for them to have 'personal contact' and the opportunity to 'chat'.

> 'I think the greatest things that we provide is the continuity and the stability more so than anything, regardless of whether it's thick in snow

we never ever miss, we are always there and they know that so the
ones that are really homeless, that have nowhere to go know they can
actually come and they can have someone to talk to as well as get the
food and the drinks and I think it's quite an important part of their
routine.' [soup run manager]

Critically, in this quote the food aid provider indicates that this 'other' support
is in fact some of the most important aspects of their work. The manager of
the food bank had a similar perspective and emphasised the importance of
users feeling that 'somebody cared', and demonstrating this being the most
important part of their work.

For the building-based project, other more formalised support was on offer,
and the morning breakfasts for homeless people was one of a number of
different services individuals could access while they were there. The meals
on wheels programme differed slightly from the other cases in that the food
provision was described as:

'It is a lifesaver for a lot of people. We have people who come on the
meal service who, previous to us providing, they were surviving off
crisps and biscuits.' [Community Care Manager]

Many of the other dimensions of support on offer at the Community Care case
were formalised through what are referred to as 'safe and well checks' which
are undertaken by a delivery driver every time someone is visited in their
home.

The food bank partner of the case study from Scotland also pointed to the
ways in which they worked as a point of access to other services in the local
community. In describing the ways in which recipients of their food aid would
continue getting support by returning to the centre for a cup of coffee or
accessing other projects at the church the manager remarked:

'it tells you it's not about the food, that's just the warning light on the
indicator'

The cookery classes provided by the sixth case study provided further insight into how other forms of support are seen to feed into a wider understanding of promoting household food security. The project runs around 300 cooking classes a year, involving small groups (of four people) and teaching them 'what to do with the food' and covers advice beyond cooking, including on nutrition, food shopping and budgeting. Whilst the programme does evidence the eating habits of people before and after participation in the courses the important element of the classes from the manager's perspective was the impact they have on building confidence in cooking:

> 'for me it's skilling people up, but it's giving people the confidence to cook'

This case study provided further insight into this notion of 'food plus', with its underlying ethos and understanding that food distributed by them (either in the form of surplus or emergency food packs) must eventually be provided alongside support for other issues with which food insecure individuals or households are struggling. A notion of 'hand up not hand out' was seen to be key, and that projects which enable people to receive food have to be coupling food provision with other forms of support (for example, overcoming addiction support, or work with offending behaviour) for the vulnerable people with whom they work. An emphasis is placed on holistic assistance, that food is linked to wider support so that people don't become simply dependent on food provision:

> 'We've always felt it is a hand up and not a hand out, it's about supporting projects that are supporting people to move on in life'

In this case there also appears to be a way in which this particular interpretation of 'food plus' brings it together explicitly with concerns for 'root causes' of food insecurity and addressing 'underlying issues'. It seems that this is sought to be realised in particular through the building of relationships only with agencies who are 'coupling food provision with other forms of support'. Whilst this case study had its own particular ways of working, the idea of situating food provision within other forms of assistance can also be

found in other models which link to services in the community either through a referral system or signposting approach.

In addition to connecting users in to other forms of support on offer by the providers themselves, the case study research found many of the food aid providers were not only offering forms of support directly themselves (for example addiction support or job advice), but were signposting and/ or giving information about other forms of support and help. These findings are supported by evidence from the workshop, where models which aim to provide support in addition to food parcels alone (e.g. signposting or 'listening ear') were highlighted suggesting they 'support personal dignity and family life'. These findings suggest that the impact of food aid could extend to other, both formal and informal, outcomes in terms of emotional support and taking up other services on offer with the agency or being signposted to elsewhere. Importantly, such findings leave the question of the impact of the food itself unanswered.

3.3.2 Food aid project co-ordination and relationship to other agencies and food assistance

Findings relating to how some food aid initiatives work collaboratively – both between themselves and with other agencies – came through in the case study research in particular. The soup run initiative visited referred to an ongoing and developing relationship with other church-based providers of food assistance; and the manager of the food bank had been involved in assisting the set-up of another food bank project locally. These relationships extended to other agencies in local communities, with the building-based case study making reference to working with the local council and police as well as with other local service providers such as drop-in centres or accommodation projects. Being part of a County Council, the community care initiative works as part of the social care framework and also provides information about other services, for example providing recipients with information leaflets about the digital switchover, from trading standards and advertising local luncheon clubs.

The food bank partner agency of the sixth case study talked about the importance of relationships between food bank providers as more projects set up in proximity to each other.

> 'so when it comes to food banks, if you've got multiple food banks working in any area what will happen is these guys will come to one and get some food – enough for a week – they'll then visit another one, maybe on Friday which they will not eat and they will trade. […] And my question to a different food bank working in an area I was in – how are we going to make sure this isn't going to happen?'

This quote provides an interesting insight into reasons why joint-working may be beneficial. However it does so in the context of other research findings, that households in food insecurity who turn to food aid are likely to seek out as much assistance as they can obtain and also findings from the food bank case study. When asked if they minded people getting food from both them and the other food bank in the area, the food bank case study manager said:

> 'Not in the least; if I was hungry I would do anything I could to get food so I don't mind, I'd rather give extra than miss them out.'

Interestingly, evidence reviewed as part of the REA (Berner and O'Brien 2004) indicated that communication between emergency food aid providers (EFPs) in the US may be limited:

> 'To gauge interagency communication, respondents were asked to name other EFPs in their county. Many (19%) were unable to name any EFPs, and 44% could only name one or two. Although a few counties have only one or two EFPs, most counties have upwards of 10 EFPs. Yet, there appears to be little communication between these agencies'. (p. 666)

Given the limited nature of the empirical research conducted for this project, comparisons are impossible. **However questions of how food aid projects communicate, work together and relate to other agencies involved in social welfare activity (broadly defined) may be interesting to explore further.**

A further dimension relates to **how food aid initiatives sit alongside other types of food projects which are promoting food accessibility in local communities in other ways.** In the workshop discussion, concern was raised that food aid provision could be creating a parallel system of food projects which could undermine other pre-existing initiatives which are also targeted at very low income people. The question was also raised in the workshop as to whether emphasis needs to be placed on other 'more dignified' ways of promoting better access to food such as co-operatives and food buying groups.

3.3.3 The role of surplus food

The focus of this research is on direct food aid provisioning, rather than the redistribution of food as a sourcing mechanism. However, during the research a number of points for reflection emerged on the role that so-called surplus food redistribution is playing in wider trends in thinking about food aid provision.

Findings from the literature review (non-REA papers) and comments in the expert workshop indicate two particular dimensions. **On the one hand, the notion of a 'moral obligation' to redistribute food system surplus** in line with the 'waste hierarchy' was raised in the workshop, **and the ways in which using food system surplus to help those in need can be seen as a 'win-win'** is documented in earlier research (Tarasuk and Eakin 2005; Hawkes and Webster, 2000).

The case study of an organisation involved in the redistribution of surplus food also highlighted the benefits of redistributing fresh fruit, vegetables and meat for projects which may traditionally have had to rely on tinned or long-life foodstuffs (for considerations of cost and more large scale catering provision). The project redistributes a range of food stuffs, but the manager talked about the value that projects placed on the fresh food redistributed:

> 'And immediately people [project staff] were saying, we're seeing a
> difference in what people are eating because they're being given fresh

fruit, fresh veg, fresh meat, it was certainly on the journey to a
balanced diet.'

On the other hand, a different perspective was also provided in the workshop
and the (non REA) literature. **The ways in which the food so provided can
be framed as 'that which the corporate sector cannot sell'** was discussed
by Tarasuk and Eakin (2005: 117; see also Hawkes and Webster, 2000),
**along with the ways in which the joint intertwining of interests of those
providing food aid and the corporate sector can lead to entrenching the
provision and normalising the system as a solution** (see same authors,
and also Lang et al 2009: 269). Other more practical issues also raised in the
literature and in the workshop are that charitable donations can be time and
content limited and highly variable (Tarasuk and Eakin 2003: 1508).

**One important point for distinction and clarity, however, is between
surplus food redistribution and food donation commitments by food
industry partners.** For example, whilst Kellogg's donates food to foodbanks
in the Trussell Trust foodbank Network (Kellogg's 2013), partnerships
between FareShare and companies in the food industry (such as Unilever)
involves their surplus being redirected through FareShare depots. This
distinction also emerged in discussions in the workshop over Corporate Social
Responsibility outcomes, which incentivise such food donation relationships
into the future. However, questions were also raised over the role such
building of relationships of commitment may play in embedding food aid
provision as normative in the UK, as in North America.

There were a number of food redistribution charities present at the workshop,
so that discussions covered the role of such initiatives and the relationship
with policy in some detail. Some argued for a significant potential for this type
of work to expand, and put forward a number of policy options, including tax
and other incentives for companies to donate to such schemes. Other
participants argued that such an approach fails to address the underlying
causes of household food insecurity, and entrenches a system which does not
offer dignity or a sustainable means of solving the problem.

3.3.4 Vulnerability and inefficiency of food aid

Another factor raised in the literature (non-REA papers) by Poppendieck (1994) is that **food aid initiatives often depend on volunteers and donations, which can leave them vulnerable and fragile** (Poppendieck 1994). **Furthermore, they take up a substantial investment of time and voluntary labour, raising questions over the efficiency of such approaches** (Poppendieck 1998). Indeed, a critical point of discussion in the workshop was around how to move from an approach of 'emergency food aid' to one which supports development of a more structural response. There were those who argued there is too much energy going into emergency provision, at the expense of creative approaches to more long-term solutions.

3.4 Informing household food security policy

How can the findings from the research inform household food security policy, across the 'triangle of change' (Government, business and civil society)?

Two key themes emerged from reflection on the findings which are relevant to this question:

- The ways in which the research informs understanding of how households are trying to cope with contemporary experiences of food insecurity;
- The importance of an ongoing focus on underpinning causes of food insecurity for those from government, business and civil society who are looking for the most effective responses to household food insecurity.

3.4.1 Household experiences of trying to cope with food insecurity

The findings of this research suggest that a focus should be maintained upon both the short and longer-term determinants of household food insecurity in order to facilitate the most effective responses.

The findings presented above from the REA and wider literature review highlight that households employ a number of strategies in trying to manage food expenditure in the current socio-economic context of rising food prices and stagnant incomes, with concomitant reduction in community initiatives of support. Among those strategies, usually one of last resort, is seeking food aid. Whilst the data available on the exact drivers of food aid uptake in the UK is limited, the findings, mostly from the non-REA literature, highlight that seeking food aid follows immediate changes in economic access which leave households without enough money for food. Asking for food aid is usually done alongside changed household strategies over expenditure, shopping and domestic management such as much tighter budgeting, changing shopping habits, spending much less on food (trading down, eating different things, reducing variety), skipping meals altogether, throwing less away, and/or sending children to relatives. Institutional changes, such as not having a (free) school meal in the holidays (Gill and Sharma, 2004), can contribute to crises in how to obtain enough food to last until the next income day. There is evidence that more and more people are turning to 'payday' lenders (see above section 3.1.3), sometimes even to buy food, but certainly to try to manage what they regard as unmanageable financial circumstances (Which, 2013).

Given the on-going economic pressures, reforms to social policy and expectation that food prices are likely to remain high for the foreseeable future (Defra, 2012) there are likely to be further implications for household food security. The effects of these factors will be difficult to quantify given the lack of systematic monitoring and evidence gathering on food insecurity and food aid uptake.

Earlier (non REA) research shows low household income has long been important in weakening household food security. For instance, systematic work on incomes needed to enable households of different demographic

structures to meet minimum, consensually defined, standards of living, including minimum expenditure on food to meet healthy dietary requirements (Hirsch, 2013), has shown for a number of years which households in the UK have incomes below these levels, whether the income is generated by work or social security benefits (Padley and Hirsch 2013). Indeed, in the workshop, evidence was provided of parents whose in-work incomes were so low that their children were accessing food aid provision.

In terms of specific demographic profiles and reverting to discussion of food aid user 'journeys', in the case studies those running the community care project (often known as 'Meals on Wheels') said clients were likely to be receiving them on a long term basis. Although in some instances the intention may have been to seek assistance for a brief spell (for example, after a stay in hospital) to enable users to move on to being able to manage alone, many recipients went on receiving such provision for significant amounts of time because health or age-related impairments meant there was little likelihood of their not needing it in the future.

3.4.2 Responding to household food insecurity

Findings from the REA and non-REA evidence show that food aid provided some relief to the symptoms of household food insecurity, but left structural factors which underpin it untouched. This implies that **those looking to respond to household food insecurity in the UK, from across government, business and civil society, should continue to focus on the root causes of this insecurity.**

International evidence also indicates that the institutionalisation of systems of food aid provision can contribute to de-politicising understanding of, and response to, household level food insecurity , by normalising informal provision of food as a sufficient – and indeed, only – response to the problems (see for example Riches 2011). Furthermore, there is the danger that the corporate sector, as partner organisations supplying and sometimes helping manage food aid provision systems, may contribute to entrenching a 'hand-

out' response to meeting immediate needs, which fails to address root causes of household food insecurity. In Canada, for instance, Riches (2011) argues that the institutionalisation and corporatisation of food aid can:

> 'Allow the public and politicians to believe that hunger is being solved. It reinforces the notion of hunger as a matter for charity, not politics'. (Riches 2011: 768)

Tarasuk (2001) further argues that, in Canada, food banks help frame household food security as a 'food [lack]' problem, which is best 'addressed by giving food' [from charitable sources]. This not only contributes to de-politicising the problem, it also, in effect, moves away from the framing of food security as a balance between appropriate, affordable, sustainable supply and effective demand. The problem then becomes a lack of food itself, rather than a lack of the means (economic and social) to obtain food, and solutions are accordingly located in donation of food – which, if surplus to retail needs, would otherwise go to waste, so that food aid provision also seems to address another key sustainability problem – that of 'food waste'. Riches (2002), and Poppendieck (1994), among others, instead frame the issue in terms of the human right to food, and discuss the negative consequences for realising rights and entitlements, from a reliance on charitable provision:

> 'the emergency food system may be able to meet some of the urgent, immediate needs of poor people, [but] they do so in ways that may further undermine rights and entitlements and erode the cultural basis of support for the welfare state' (Poppendieck 1994: 69)

Discussions in the workshop highlighted a concern for the UK to focus more on the root causes of food poverty and called for policy to focus on underlying causative mechanisms of household food insecurity. This is likely to be hindered by the current lack of monitoring of household level problems and their root causes, and a focus by charitable providers and others on trends in food aid provision. The capacity for other types of intervention across the 'triangle of change' is thereby reduced.

Nevertheless, as mentioned in section 3.1, one role for those managing or volunteering in food aid initiatives identified in the REA and non-REA literatures is advocacy and lobbying. Workshop discussions, including contributions by food aid providers themselves, reflected on this view as applied to the UK situation, including how providers might work together to achieve a collective voice:

> 'The explosion of food aid is reactionary, but [there is as yet] no common way of lobbying.' [workshop participant from a food aid charity]

Workshop participants also emphasised the need for comprehensive and collaborative approaches by policy makers and other actors to address these underlying causes. There is also scope for food aid initiatives to give opportunity for those living in difficult circumstances to voice their own experiences, and ways in which more long-standing and appropriate help could be generated.

4. Discussion

The findings presented above highlight several important aspects of contemporary UK food aid provision. Firstly, they demonstrate how households employ multiple strategies when trying to manage situations of food insecurity, of which food aid may or may not be only one. When food aid *is* taken up, the research suggests that it is often a last resort by the most food insecure households, who may well be seeking multiple forms of assistance (both food and non-food related).

The findings also indicate that food aid ultimately has a limited impact on overall household food security status. When the food provided and the means of distribution are adequate and appropriate, they may provide immediate relief for household members. However, food aid necessarily cannot address underlying causes of household food insecurity. Indeed, findings indicate that providers see the non-food related support given by food aid projects (providing a 'listening ear' or other more formal support) as having as much importance as the food itself, and in some cases this non-food support is seen as the primary contribution charitable support can make.

Findings relating to trends in current UK food aid provision provide evidence both of the growth in number of key national food aid charities and of the contemporary and historical presence of other independent local initiatives. The diversity of operational approaches to food aid is also partially captured (both within and between food aid types), although these are difficult to document. Importantly, the findings highlight the need to contextualise food aid trends within wider socio-economic shifts which have an impact on people's ability to afford and access food.

From the perspective of household food security policy, the research indicates that an ongoing focus on both short and long-term determinants of household insecurity (for example, some of the problems reported by food aid organisations which include long-term low income, indebtedness and social security benefit payments, indebtedness and long-term low income) will be

necessary in order to facilitate effective interventions. Wider responses, from government at national and local levels, business and civil society (including those involved in food aid provision) should not be hampered by poor understanding of the root causes (and triggers) of food insecurity and a lack of monitoring of the scales of this insecurity.

4.1 Limitations of the research

The Rapid Evidence Assessment and other research methods in this short review revealed a distinct lack of contemporary peer-reviewed research on food aid provision and experiences and only limited research on contemporary household food security in the UK. None of the nine papers reviewed as part of the REA were domestic papers; seven were from the United States, one from Canada and one from Germany. The research therefore drew on other sources of evidence, in particular, research published on UK circumstances by academic researchers, policy researchers and charities. The robustness of these sources varied and was treated with care; where necessary, clarification of methodological approach and rigour was sought informally from sources.

As outlined in the findings above, the evidence base spoke unevenly to the research questions, with an emphasis on food aid users and trends. Very little was available which was sufficiently evaluative in nature in such a way as to inform understanding of best practice in food aid provision in developed countries. Whilst the research began with a typology of food aid provision, the evidence available did not cover all the types of provision identified. The predominance in the REA literature of food bank (or food pantry) schemes meant most commentary is focused on them. Much less evidence was available on community outreach provision or building and non-building based provision.

The expert workshop and follow-up interviews provided an opportunity to explore the relevance of findings from the international literature identified, along with current trends and future projections relating to food aid in the UK.

The mapping exercise – although very rapid and limited in light of its only capturing internet based publically available data – enabled further tentative insights to be drawn. The case studies, which were chosen to represent a range of interventions (with help from the Advisory group) were particularly useful for adding depth to the research, providing insights into contemporary food aid work and further detail in particular on operational ways of working and user 'journeys'.

Given the lack of a robust UK evidence base, this research has necessarily been unable to present substantive findings for many of the sub-questions outlined in the tender document.[18] However, the research has been able to provide a number of useful insights at what is arguably a critical time in the emergent food aid landscape in the UK. It has provided a snapshot of the evidence base to be taken and some key reflections to be made on trends and trajectories.

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[18] See Appendix 4 for a full outline of the evidence base identified for each sub-research question, along with a more detailed commentary.

5. Conclusions

The findings of this research, which have drawn on evidence from both domestic and international contexts, point to the following key conclusions in response to the four main research questions.

How do people become food aid users in the UK; what is their journey through the food aid system; and what are the socio-economic implications for these individuals?

The first conclusion in relation to this research question is that households employ multiple strategies for trying to deal with food insecurity which may or may not include accessing food aid. It is only after other key strategies have been employed (including increasingly extreme changes to shopping and eating habits, cutting back on other outgoings and turning to family and friends for informal help) that the most food insecure households may turn to food aid. Even then, there are many reasons why some households do not make use of this type of provision: they do not know about it, and how it works, or there is none available where they live, or they are too ashamed or anxious to try, or they feel they will not meet criteria for access.

The second conclusion is that food aid ultimately cannot address the underlying causes of household food insecurity. Where provision is adequate and tailored to the needs of users, food aid may be able to relieve some symptoms of this insecurity but the existence and receipt of food aid leaves 'solutions' outstanding.

What are the current trends in provision of food aid; what are the different models available; and what are the socio-economic drivers behind certain models emerging over others?

The main conclusion of the research findings regarding trends in food aid provision is that, whilst the last decade has seen a rise in important national systems – notably The Trussell Trust Foodbank model – the food aid landscape in the UK is, and has a long history of being, very varied. There is a range of provision from many independent initiatives which are hard to document in practice and reach.

Where it exists, evidence on the nature of independent food aid provision shows highly localised ways of working, which make it hard to capture information about what is being done, how, by whom and for how many. Where available, evidence points to an extensive variety in the mix of networked and independent food aid provision, and in operational approaches taken by providers. This exists not only *between* food aid types (for example, between a soup run and a 'Meals-on-Wheels' programme) but *within* food aid types (for example, different ways of running a food bank).

Reflecting on the analysis from questions 1 and 2 and drawing on evidence from other countries, what are the benefits and drawbacks of different models of food aid provision in the UK?

There is little systematic evaluative research available in the literature to enable full discussion of benefits and drawbacks of different food aid models. Nevertheless, some tentative conclusions regarding working practices can be drawn.

Firstly, the non-food support (both formal and informal) provided by food aid initiatives and organisations that might be behind them, appears to those offering it as an important contribution for their users. Providers valued being able to offer both supportive spaces for those in need and informal support (or formal advice where available); some also had evidence that their users or clients valued these aspects too.

This leads to a second conclusion, of the importance of interconnectedness between food aid providers and other (food and non-food) services in local communities. Provider perspectives are that being able to refer people on to

other services for help with issues which may be affecting their food security is an important part of their food aid provision work.

Thirdly, whilst there is clear evidence that food aid provision cannot overcome the underlying causes of household food insecurity, there is also evidence that such initiatives can have an important advocacy role. Thus a final conclusion, in relation to 'best practice', is that food aid initiatives potentially have an important contribution in promoting more systematic responses to food insecurity. This implies that better mechanisms are needed which link providers and enable their voices and experience, and that of their clients', to be heard. There is a role for major charities involved, or for the corporate sector, or regional authorities, to help broker and support such collaborative work.

How do the research findings inform household food security policy across the triangle of change (Government, business and civil society) in the UK?

The key conclusion relating to the fourth research question is that those involved in food security policy and other responses – from across government, business and civil society – need to focus on both short and long-term causes of household food insecurity. Furthermore, that household food insecurity must remain a priority for each of these actors, even in the face of an increasingly high profile for food aid provision.

5.1 Implications of the research: identifying evidence gaps

Given the lack of published empirical research (particularly academic peer reviewed research) on the provision and experience of food aid in the UK context, there are a number of avenues for future research. These are discussed here in terms of the research questions.

Gaps in the evidence around the use of food aid and wider household food security (Research questions 1 and 4):

- **Household level strategies for trying to reduce or mitigate food insecurity:**

  There is currently relatively limited systematic evidence on how households try to reduce or mitigate food insecurity in the UK. More specifically, there is a lack of peer reviewed research providing evidence on how households are trying to manage in the contemporary context of recent recession, rising food prices and changes to social security in the UK (with the exception of Goode 2012).

- **Why and how households use food aid provision:**

  The finding that, in other countries, many food insecure households do not ask for or seek out food aid, raises questions about whether this is also a common experience in the UK, and if so, how such households are trying to manage, and why they do not look for charitable food help.

  There is little longitudinal, qualitative and quantitative research on how households use food aid as part of trying to cope with food insecurity, and what they think and feel about such provision. There is anecdotal evidence from media interviews and incidental evidence from research looking at living on low incomes (from wages and/or social security benefits) which mentions food, but there is very little qualitative work specifically on managing (or not) the food budget in current circumstances. There is little work on the implications for household food consumption and other consequences, over a period of time, rather than cross-sectional or one-off survey evidence. Goode's (2012) research, which was specifically aimed at looking at management of credit and debt, is a rare example of in-depth study of the realities of living – and eating – on a very low budget.

- **Accessibility of particular types of food aid for older people:**

  The findings of this research raised questions over the accessibility of food banks for specific groups, in particular for older people; evidence is cited

which suggests that older people may not be utilising this kind of provision. However, there is little evidence on why this may be.

Gaps in the evidence around trends in food aid provision (Research question 2):

- **Difficulty capturing independent food aid projects in research:**

  The findings of this research have indicated the importance of independent food aid provision (that is, that which operates outside national networks), but that such initiatives are hard for research to capture, particularly because it is often highly localised in practice and reach. Research which specifically examines different types of localised food aid provision would be useful, to examine the extent to which it is built on to other local food initiatives, the motivations and support on which such localised provision draws, and the implications for actors across the 'triangle of change' (in potential support, or in non-interference).

- **Lack of UK evidence relating to the notion of a 'food aid system':**

  There has only been a limited amount of research to date which examines the social and political background to the current emergence of 'food aid provision systems' in the UK, looking at what is driving and sustaining such systems, the implications for local level and national thinking about social support networks and/or the food system, and the part such provision is, or might in future, play in addressing food rights for different households in different conditions of need. In particular, there is little current research on systems supporting food needs of those who are vulnerably housed, including issues of budgeting, cooking skills and access to equipment. There is also little work on those who are asylum seekers and refugees.

Gaps in the evidence around best practice (Research question3):

- **Lack of evaluative research:**

  Overall, there is very little published systematic evaluative research on food aid provision in the current UK context.

- **Appropriate indicators to measure effectiveness of food aid provision:**

  There is little UK based evidence on appropriate measures to use in assessing 'effectiveness' of food aid provision; several providers use indicators of process management. 'Effectiveness' begs the question of what food aid provision is trying to achieve; where measures or indicators from providers (from the UK or other countries) can be identified, the basis for them is often hard to determine, since few come with systematic justification. Research on which indicators of food aid provision would be appropriate and fruitful for different levels and types of evaluation and types of food aid provision would help close this gap. For example, contributions to immediate household needs versus longer-term outcomes, and in terms of quantitative, quasi-objective measures versus more subjective indicators of security (such as are used, with verification, in the US and Canada).

- **Questions over the role of surplus food redistribution:**

  Research is needed on the role 'surplus food' redistribution is playing within food aid provision and what factors are driving change. How much is surplus food redistribution driving food aid provision in particular directions; to what extent is its increase promoting an entrenchment of food aid provision? There is also a need for systematic examination of the ethical and sustainability dilemmas involved in seeing 'food aid' as a solution to 'food waste'. Such research should include different types of food aid provision, and not just focus on food banks or 'soup kitchens'.

- **In-depth evidence regarding the co-ordination and inter-connectedness of food aid and other service providers:**

There is little systematic research on how interconnectedness between food aid provision and other service providers is being, or might be, generated and sustained, and what the key factors which support such coordination might be, at national and local levels. Such research would need to address both the large scale, national food aid providers, and smaller, more localised and independent types of provision. It would also need to include different types of food aid provision, not just that which is through food banks.

Other Avenues for Research

Further important areas to consider, which were not captured as part of this research, are:

- **The role of schools as sites of intervention for addressing household food insecurity (particularly through breakfast clubs, and free school meals);**

- **Questions around health and nutrition outcomes of food aid.**

As highlighted in the scoping review and methods section above, there is some UK and international evidence around these issues which were beyond the scope of the current research. Evidence on institutional food support (through schools and other institutions) and on health and nutritional outcomes should include research on socio-economic factors contributing to household level food insecurity. Research should include qualitative methods to help understand the dynamics of food usage and beliefs within the household and in children's developmental thinking. Such evidence can contribute to developing a more comprehensive and strategic approach to household food insecurity and food assistance evidence and action.

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