



Food Ethics Council

FOOD ETHICS COUNCIL

REFLECTIONS ON OUR YEAR

2024/25

This is not an impact report...

... The times we're in call for different ways of communicating - about the changes we've been part of, about what and how we've prioritised, and about our fundamental belief in the value of ethical thinking in the food system.

This is not an impact report. It's the story of just some of the shifts, connections, insights and relationships we've been part of this year. We share our reflections in the spirit of encouraging others to take the time to reflect too.

Looking forward, we want to explore and better understand the ripple effects of our work - on systems, mindsets, beliefs and practices.

The right to food

A beautiful and important highlight of our work exploring the right to food over the past year was bringing together a powerful collective of voices at the Oxford Real Farming Conference. **Dee Woods, Kay Johnson** and **Pete Ritchie** shared their perspectives on the true meaning of the right to food, locally, nationally and globally.

This conversation was book-ended by the voices of people from across the food system reflecting on how the food system really feels, and whether they have room for hope. These recordings sought to remind us all of the need to amplify voices that are not always present or heard in rooms like this whilst being conscious of not othering or presenting this as an exercise about 'other people' or 'those people over there'.

We acknowledged that there were people in the room with their own experiences of hunger, of scarcity, of injustice, of generosity, of solidarity because...

"In almost every room I am ever in, that is the case. I know you will all have rich, warm, painful, joyful stories. I do. Because we are all human beings".

Food sovereignty and the right to food can be transformational, putting people and ecological resilience, instead of profit and ecosystem decline, at the centre of food systems. We must take great care to ensure it's not a right to just any food, but a right to culturally appropriate, nutrient rich food, grown in harmony with planet and animals, by people who are fairly paid and cared for.

The reality of the funding landscape

Charities often struggle with fundraising, which can lead to territorialism as they compete for limited funds. However, collaboration has undoubtedly increased in recent years, which is hugely positive.

We've found fundraising tough in 2024. However, we have been creative and agile, and sought new income sources. Our first match-funded crowdfunding campaign with the Big Green Give provided funds to explore the important theme of the right to food. We are opening ourselves up for much more collaboration in future.

We appreciate both longstanding and new funders who support vital food and farming work. We know that taking an ethical approach is powerful, but we want to better articulate and demonstrate our role in transforming food systems. We also want the sector to thrive and we commit to playing our part in the collective mission of encouraging more resources into it. This is why the Food Issues Census we are coordinating is crucial.



Credit: Illustrations in this report are by Ali Spaul



Shifts in our organisational culture

This was a year in which our already compassionate, flexible culture underwent a further shift, in the wake of deep trauma and loss for several within our small staff team and Council.

Transitioning through hard phases of grief, we drew on each other's strength and care, we picked up what we could, we collectively figured out what was important, what was necessary and what could be left behind. We supported one another to take time off, to step back and to rest, and when the time was right to come back knowing that our whole selves were welcome and valued.

If we want those working in food and farming to look after others, animals and the planet, it is important to start by looking after them. As a small team, our people are our greatest assets. How we work and support each other is vital if we want to nurture a fairer food system.

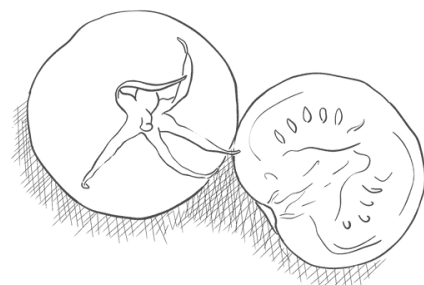
Empowering the sector

Those in civil society organisations will know how important it is to have better collective insights into the sector's activities and collaboration. Funders too need a clearer understanding of the civil society ecosystem and key funding gaps. This is why we established the **Food Issues Census**. After conducting this process twice several years ago, we decided it was time to initiate it again, and we asked CSOs to share their priorities with funders.

We designed the process to be inclusive and participative, incorporating listening workshops, an Inclusion Fund for those who might otherwise be unable to join, and partnerships with organisations across all four home nations to help with outreach. We developed and launched the survey in 2024, and can't wait to share the results with you in late spring 2025.

While the Food Issues Census alone won't solve all fundraising challenges, it aims to provide valuable insights to help you. This work is funded by A Team Foundation, Ennismore Foundation, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Farming the Future, and Treebeard Trust. Together, we're striving towards creating a more collaborative, dynamic, and impactful sector.

"This is such an important piece of work. Thank you for doing it again."
Chief Executive, leading food NGO,
commenting about Food Issues Census



Food Ethics Council

www.foodethicscouncil.org

What lies beneath

We're believers in the power of 'weaving', part of which is connecting people with others. A simple message, a call, an introduction... can unleash exciting opportunities. Another part is co-creation - we are increasingly trying to co-create all our projects. But there is more to this work than just what is immediately visible.

We have been inspired by the work of Adrian R bke, who refers to four parts of 'network weaving' that lie beneath the surface, i.e. that most people do not see:

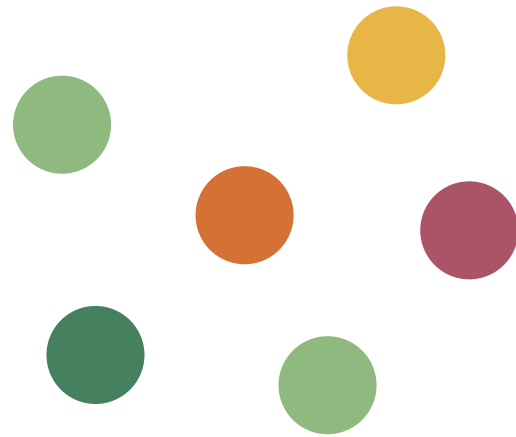
1. Cultivating relationships
2. Collaborating systemically
3. Learning together
4. Embodying wellbeing

If we are to collectively flourish, then we need to do all of these things, even if many of them are 'behind the scenes' and if they don't 'deliver immediate results'.



We may not have called it network weaving, but we have in reality been doing the work of network weaving for several years.

Although impacts from this work are traditionally hard to track, we believe this work of joining the dots is vital.



Visual: Adrian R bke - Network weaving isn't just what you see (Inspired by Tim Leake)

The power of writing

In a fast-paced, Tik Tok, Chat GPT world, some may think the age of writing is over. We disagree. We realise communications often needs to be multi-channel and punchy, but sometimes writing as a medium can be the most powerful way to communicate. Some of our most engaging and thought-provoking communications were blogs and articles. To pick just **three examples from our Council members**.

1. Radical dietitian **Lucy Apramor** wrote a thought-provoking article about **reframing nutrition, beyond the healthy/unhealthy binary**:

"...I can imagine a different world where encountering nutrition (or a newly named alternative) resources leaves us feeling witnessed, encouraged, and meaningfully informed. A world where instead of being conditioned into individualism and zero-sum thinking to achieve personal health we are conditioned to respect Life and think through right relationship, as we serve... collective non/human flourishing."

2. **Christina Adane**, campaigner, editor and cultural creator, powerfully argued that **to make healthy food sexy, we need to go where the young people are**:

"In order for youth and junk food to no longer be synonymous, we must disrupt this demand and redirect it to ethical food businesses, and help create alternative frameworks for youth culture through nutritious food. By doing this, we not only debunk the narrative that fast food is inherent to youth culture, but we show that healthy food isn't just for the upper echelons of society: it's for everyone."



3. Food systems researcher & consultant **Elta Smith** wrote on **the importance of establishing a right to food in law**, arguing for a 'beyond charity' approach:

"This isn't about individual choices, a failure of individual responsibility, or the need for charitable generosity. It's about system failure and collective responsibility. And it's why we need a more fundamental shift in approaching food security and a right to food."

Elta went on to highlight the role Food Ethics Council is playing in this space:

"I've previously highlighted how fragmented governance often leads to disconnected policy solutions. Through my involvement with the Food Ethics Council, I've seen how a right to food offers an opportunity to break this pattern."



Food Ethics Council

www.foodethicscouncil.org

Deepening our place-based relationships

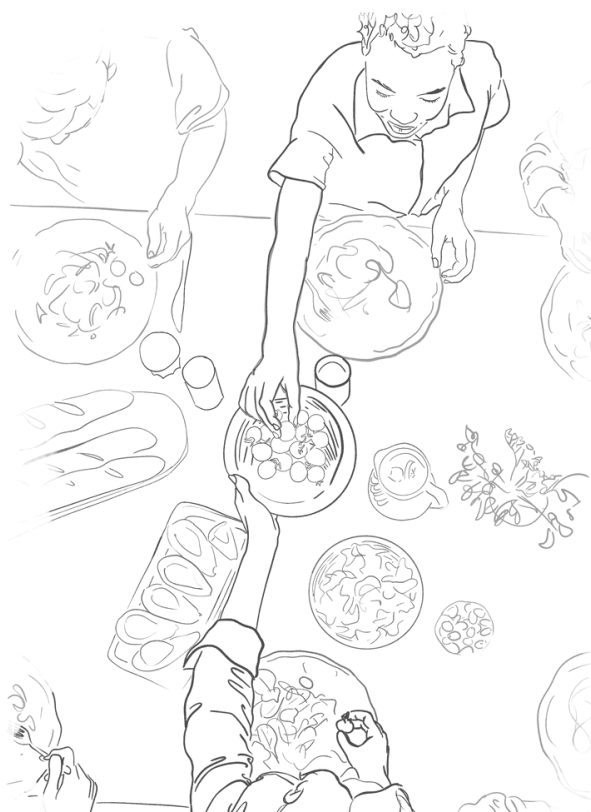
Since the pandemic, our team has become more dispersed across the UK, as we shifted from a core staff team mainly in London, often working together in a shared space, to having team members in Belfast, Edinburgh, Guildford, Wales and London working remotely. There have been many benefits of this, most notably the value of being able to explore ethical approaches at more local and regional levels, over time.

Our team mate **Beth** co-chairs the Belfast Food Partnership, working closely with Belfast City Council, Brink! and other partners to collaboratively build a more equitable food system in Belfast. This means we can bring all our networks, learning and opportunities to Belfast, but also means that our broader food system interventions across the UK are richer and more insightful as they are grounded in the reality of a specific place.



"We want to forge better links between those who produce local sustainable food and those who want to access it, between those that have land that could be used for growing and those that are keen to utilise it. We can make such a difference in the food system if we work together."

Belfast Food Partnership's Food is Everything blog



Food Ethics Council

www.foodethicscouncil.org

The journey of allyship

In 2024, we teamed up with Blueprint Architects, part of Platform London. Initially we were stuck in the mindset of allyship and partnership needing to yield immediate results, events and outputs – given the scale and urgency of problems of racial injustice and oppression. But we were wrong. That’s not what it’s about at all. It’s better to go slow and build relationships in a spirit of mutual support and learning, than to churn out a ‘toolkit’ or a report and risk it being, or being perceived as, a tick box exercise.

Working with Blueprint Architects was an eye-opening joy. Any initial frustration at slowness transitioned into fruitful conversations, unplanned actions, further connections and a realisation that we should all make room for slowness – urgent slowness. The partnership has changed our organisational thinking profoundly. The effects are still rippling.

We always prided ourselves on being respectful. But through the partnership, we are always learning – the importance of respecting people’s time, paying for people’s time, respecting cultures, traditions and history. We definitely haven’t cracked how to ‘do’ racial justice and anti-oppression work, but we’re committed on the journey. For one thing, we’re changing how we think about ‘impact’.

“Using “impact” for any form of performance management makes it much more difficult for organisations to do impactful work. This is the uncomfortable truth that leaders must face if genuine impact is to be created in the world.”

(Toby Lowe)



Food Ethics Council

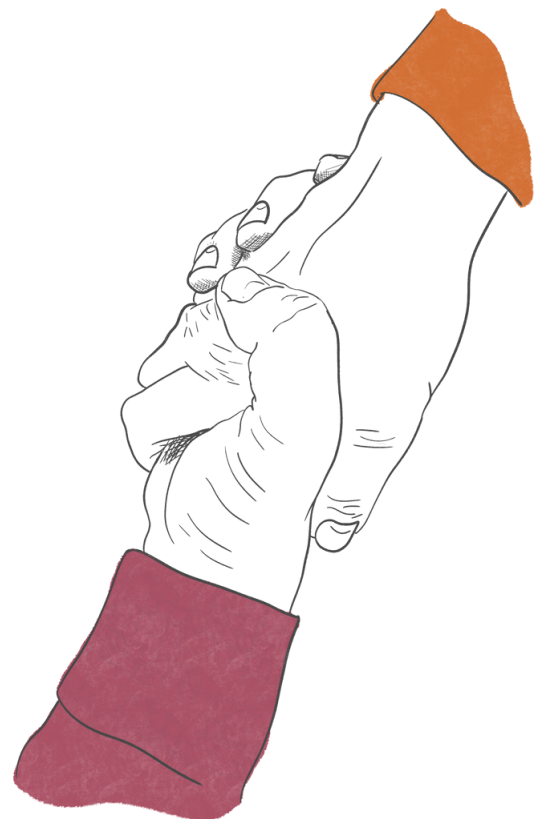
www.foodethicscouncil.org



Photo credit: @foodjusticeldn (Instagram)

For more information about The Blueprint Architects, explore Platform London’s website via:

<https://platformlondon.org/project/seeds-for-a-revolution/>



Reflecting on allyship

We know we have a lot to learn about being a good ally, but importantly we're listening, caring and changing how we work. Our then Communications lead, **Tesni**, shared insights in a [powerful blog](#):

"We've disentangled what feels like a useful, reciprocal synergy between 'think tank' style organisations and grassroots communities delivering change on the ground. Those working locally and immediately rarely have the headspace or time to connect their work to the bigger story, to learn from similar yet geographically distant projects, and to build up relations with media or travel to speak at conferences and events. However, remote NGOs, with staff peppered across the UK, are well-placed to do this work of connecting, convening and amplifying."



We are very grateful to **Sumayyah** from the Blueprint Architects for sharing her personal reflections on the fellowship with the Food Ethics Council and on allyship:

"Working with Food Ethics Council has been an incredibly insightful experience into what meaningful allyship can look like. An openness to listening and learning is what has allowed our relationship to move beyond a traditional organisational partnership towards long-term and meaningful solidarity."

As always, questions remain - how do we build sustainable relationships between communities and organisations that don't rely on individuals? How can we ensure that our work remains meaningful in spaces that use different language and where power is unevenly distributed in complicated ways? What can and should reparative accountability look like?

The beauty in our relationship with Food Ethics Council is a mutual willingness to experiment and explore with all the possible answers whilst remaining committed to working in solidarity with each other."

Sumayyah Zannath, Blueprint Architects



Photo credit: @foodjusticedn (Instagram)



Food Ethics Council

www.foodethicscouncil.org

Taking an ethical approach

We all need to carve out time and space to reflect on what the key issues within our food systems actually are. This includes:

- gathering a fuller picture of who and what is impacted,
- understanding the root causes of these issues,
- engaging and bringing together diverse people, to share their understandings & experiences,
- reflecting on the systems, power dynamics and knowledge hierarchies at play.

These in turn help changemakers create solutions that are fairer and better balanced for all involved. This is what we mean by 'taking an ethical approach'. Deepening our collective understanding of the current system will move us beyond narrow thinking and quick fixes - and build capacity for transformational change.

Ripple effects

Looking ahead, we will work with others to create ripple effects* in our food systems: that build on the positive energy already there, that get to root causes, that bring diverse people and perspectives together and that tackle power head on. Some ripples go far and some become powerful waves. We need both. **With your support and involvement, we will create a major food ethics ripple effect together.**

*This is not a Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) report. However, it touches on changes we want to see, and we plan to do ripple effects mapping in future. For more on REM, see: <https://bmcmedresmethodol.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s12874-022-01570-4>

Our focus going forward

Our three strategic themes are:

1. Identifying levers to create a fair food system for all (e.g. right to food)
2. Challenging business as usual – dismantling harmful practices and outdated systems
3. Allying with and empowering changemakers to build a just food system

Through food, we can address key environmental and social concerns. The prevailing status quo and vested interests are strong. We at the Food Ethics Council are one small organisation in the vibrant ecosystem of civil society organisations. However, we remain determined to transform food and farming. That does not mean rushing. We firmly believe taking the time to put ethics at the centre of food systems is vital if we want them to be fairer for people, planet and animals.



Who we are and what we do

Food Ethics Council is a charity that provides independent advice, challenge and constructive support on how to bring ethics into food and farming. By considering things 'in the round', we enable organisations to think about the food system as a whole, and explore how to balance the impact of food and farming systems on people, animals and the planet.

We take the long-term view and understand the necessity of tackling root causes rather than treating symptoms. Openness and authentic collaboration are central to our way of working, and we bring people together from across farming, businesses, NGOs, grassroots community groups, academia, policy and the public, to hold honest, productive conversations - creating considered, collective solutions to the multiple crises we face.

Our Council members

Our Council Members are amongst the leaders in their relevant fields, and are appointed as individuals. They bring a broad range of expertise to our work, from academic research through to practical knowledge of farming, business and policy. Our staff and Council are all committed to creating fair food systems.

Want to **collaborate** with us?
Contact our Executive Director, Dan Crossley via dan@foodethicscouncil.org

Together we will transform the food system

Food is THE best lever for addressing the social and environmental challenges we are facing. Everyone can relate to food.

Only by taking the long-term view, considering wider consequences and tackling the root causes of problems will we transform the food system.

By working with us and by funding our work, we can move away from sticking plaster food banks, ensure no one is left behind, deliver a genuinely just food and farming transition, and push for collective flourishing.

We welcome donations of any size from donors who share our vision and values. We only accept funds that will not compromise the charity's independence and ethical stance.

Support our work:

<https://www.foodethicscouncil.org/engage/support-our-work/>

Our mission

Our mission is to facilitate a shift towards fair food systems that respect people, animals and the planet .

Work for a business in food or farming?
Join our **Business Forum** community of changemakers:

<https://www.foodethicscouncil.org/engage/our-business-forum/>



Food Ethics Council



“Looking ahead, we will work with others to create ripple effects in our food systems: that build on the positive energy already there, that get to root causes, that bring diverse people and perspectives together and that tackle power head on. Some ripples go far and some become powerful waves. We need both. With your support and involvement, we will create a major food ethics ripple effect together.”

