The background is a vibrant green with a halftone dot pattern. It features stylized foliage, including a large tree on the left and various leaves and branches. Overlaid on this is a bar chart with several vertical bars in shades of red, orange, yellow, and purple. A large purple arrow points from the left towards the chart. There are also some white lines and dots, including a curved line on the left and a small arrow pointing right on the right side.

# FOOD ISSUES CENSUS 2024-25

A THIRD SURVEY OF  
UK CIVIL SOCIETY



# FOREWORD

“

As change is needed, it is vital that those working within our food and farming systems—pushing for a transformation that supports the wellbeing of both people and the planet—can have a united voice. While the experiences, needs, and visions may differ across organisations, there is much that all the interconnected parts of the system have in common. The Food Issues Census helps make sense of this diversity, allowing common themes to emerge and making it easier for needs to be shared in a compelling way with allies and those seeking to direct resources into this work. Farming the Future is excited to have been able to support the census and is committed to listening to and amplifying the voices it represents.

– Bonnie Hewson,  
Farming the Future

“

The process of developing this iteration of the Food Issues Census has been intentionally inclusive from the outset. The team has worked hard to reach as many people as possible across the UK food system. The engagement phases used to evaluate insights have demonstrated a real commitment to inclusivity at a time when we urgently need honest brokers to help us understand how to rebuild the food system.

– Gawain Morrison,  
Brink!

In this third iteration of the Food Issues Census, we shine a spotlight on the critical work being done by organisations and communities tackling the UK's most urgent food and farming challenges. By gathering these powerful insights, we paint a vivid picture of the sector, amplifying the voices of those driving real transformation and providing essential data to inform the decisions that will shape its future.

This report aims to make information about the sector accessible and actionable for everyone involved in, or interested in, food and farming work. It highlights shared priorities, and points to practical solutions to sustain and amplify our collective efforts.

We are deeply grateful to the ~130 organisations who have contributed to this project, whether by attending a listening session, completing the survey, funding the work, or participating in the steering group that co-designed it. It is important to note that the views expressed in this report reflect the voices of the participants and do not necessarily represent those of the funders or the sector as a whole.



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1.

# MAKING THE CASE: WHY INVEST IN FOOD SYSTEMS?



**Everyone has a relationship with food. As Incredible Edible's slogan puts it, "If you eat, you're in." Food is a universal connector, crossing sectors like health, agriculture, environment, and social justice. A 2024 poll found that 68% of the UK population believes it is the government's responsibility to ensure access to affordable, healthy food.<sup>1</sup>**

## CARE ABOUT...

Human health and wellbeing?

The climate emergency?

Restoring nature?

The economy, and decent livelihoods?

The welfare of animals?

Inequality, poverty, hunger and hardship?

## WHAT TO DO?

## FOCUS ON FOOD

However, while food impacts many areas and there is a clear demand for governmental action, there is often a lack of dedicated resources and clear accountability. Responsibility for food system challenges is passed around, causing urgency to fade without a coordinated effort. This highlights the need for a comprehensive, integrated approach.

The case for investing in food systems work is undeniable. By addressing hunger, public health, economic growth, sustainability, and social equity, funders can drive transformative change. Yet, with resources stretched thin, it's essential to target investments effectively. This report offers insights and recommendations to help shape a funding landscape that drives lasting change.

## HOW DO WE KNOW THIS?

Four of the top five risk factors for avoidable illness, disability, and death are diet-related<sup>2</sup>. The UK food system's impact on chronic disease costs an estimated £268 billion per year<sup>3</sup>—over £10 per person daily.

The global food system is the second largest driver of climate change after energy<sup>4</sup>. If food waste were a country, it would rank third in global greenhouse gas emissions<sup>5</sup>.

The global food system is the single biggest contributor to biodiversity loss, to deforestation, to the collapse of aquatic life and to freshwater pollution<sup>4</sup>.

4.2 million people are employed in the agri-food sector in the UK (nearly 1 in 7 of the workforce), with food being the UK's biggest manufacturing sector<sup>6</sup>. Income fell for all types of farm in England between 2023 and early 2024<sup>7</sup>.

Over a billion farmed animals are reared every year in the UK, as well as many millions of fish<sup>8</sup>.

There are over 14 million people living in poverty in the UK<sup>9</sup>, and hundreds of millions globally. More than one in five in the UK are food insecure<sup>10</sup>.

**Simply put: change food, change the nation, change the world.**

Food is one of the most powerful levers for tackling key social and environmental challenges. Prioritise food—invest in transforming food systems.

<sup>1</sup> Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC) (2024). *New poll unearths food crisis in Britain*. March 2024 poll in conjunction with More in Common. Available at: <https://ffcc.co.uk/publications/new-poll-unearths-food-crisis-in-britain>

<sup>2</sup> Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME). (2023). *Global Burden of Disease Study*. Available at: <http://www.healthdata.org/gbd>

<sup>3</sup> Jackson, T. (2024). *Big Food: The Challenge of Transforming the Food System – and How Civil Society Can Lead the Way*. Food, Farming and Countryside Commission. Available at: <https://timjackson.org.uk/ffcc-report-big-food>

<sup>4</sup> (2021). *The National Food Strategy: The Plan – July 2021*. Available at: <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org>

<sup>5</sup> United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). (2021). *Food Waste Index Report 2021*. Available at: <https://www.unep.org/resources/report/unep-food-waste-index-report-2021>

<sup>6</sup> Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). (2025). *Food Statistics Pocketbook*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/food-statistics-pocketbook/food-statistics-in-your-pocket>

<sup>7</sup> Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra). (2024). *Farm Business Income by Type of Farm in England, 2023/24*. Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/farm-business-income>

<sup>8</sup> Compassion in World Farming (CIWF). (2022). *Animal Welfare in the UK*. Available at: <https://www.ciwf.org.uk>

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Rowntree Foundation (JRF). (2024). *UK Poverty 2024 Report*. Available at: <https://www.jrf.org.uk/report/uk-poverty-2024>

<sup>10</sup> Food Standards Agency (FSA) (2025). *Food and You 2: Wave 9*. Available at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2/food-and-you-2-wave-9>



## 2.

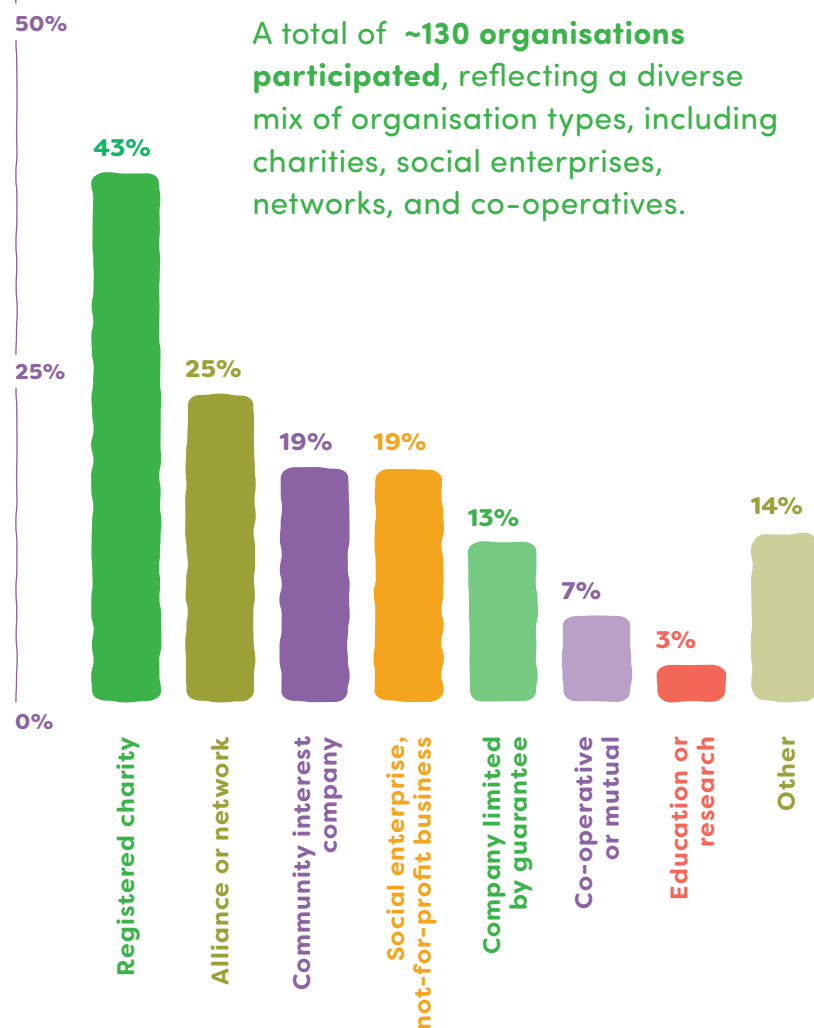
# SYSTEM MAKE-UP: WHO IS DRIVING CHANGE IN FOOD AND FARMING?

**Organisations working on food and farming across the UK are as diverse as the challenges they address.**

This section provides a snapshot of those who participated in the Food Issues Census, highlighting their size, structure and geographical reach, offering valuable insight into the sector's breadth and vibrancy.

## Who took part in the census?

A total of **~130 organisations participated**, reflecting a diverse mix of organisation types, including charities, social enterprises, networks, and co-operatives.



This is comparable in number to the 2017 Census<sup>11</sup> (137 organisations), but respondents came from a broader range of places and backgrounds, reflecting the additional resources dedicated to a more participatory approach this time.

The largest proportion of participants identified as **registered charities (43%)**, highlighting the strong role of the not-for-profit sector in driving food system change. There was also notable representation from **alliances and networks (25%)**, reflecting the importance of network-based approaches. **Community interest companies (19%)** and **social enterprises, not-for-profit businesses, or businesses that prioritise social and environmental purpose over profit (19%)** were also well represented.

### TYPES OF ORGANISATIONS

Shows different types of organisations that responded to the Census, noting that organisations can be in more than one category.

## What size are these organisations?

Organisations of varying sizes participated in the census, from those with no income or staff to large entities with up to 7,814 staff and £822 million in income.

- The most common respondents were small (£100k–£500k income, 26% of organisations) and very small (under £100k income, 24% of organisations). The least represented were very large organisations (over £10m income, 8% of organisations).

- Staffing levels varied, with 43% of organisations having fewer than five employees and only 5% employing 250 or more.
- Additionally, 8% of organisations reported no income, 12% had no staff, and some did not provide data (5% for income, 5% for staff).

This suggests a strong presence of small organisations in the sector, alongside a smaller number of well-funded, high-capacity organisations.

## Where do they work?

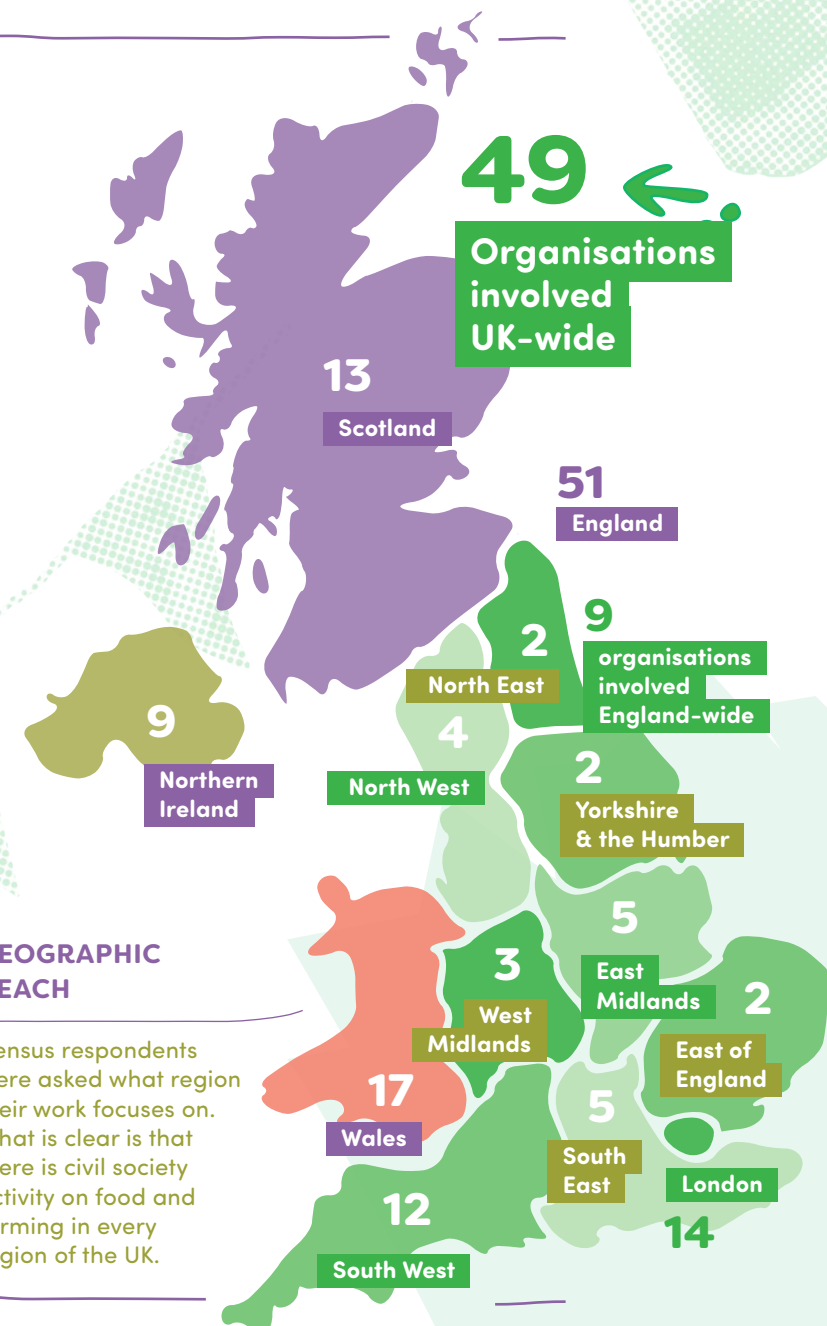
The impact of these organisations stretches across the UK and beyond, with some operating at a hyper-local level, while others span several regions, or have a national or global footprint.

Some work within a single area, while others operate across multiple regions, including the whole of the UK, leading to some overlap in the figures. A smaller group also has a global focus, beyond the UK:

This geographic distribution highlights a national movement driven by local action. While the survey respondents represent only part of the broader civil society ecosystem working on food and farming in the UK, they show that this work is happening across every region of the country.

### GEOGRAPHIC REACH

Census respondents were asked what region their work focuses on. What is clear is that there is civil society activity on food and farming in every region of the UK.



Next, we dive deeper into the work that these changemakers are leading on.



3.

# ACTIVITY: WHAT ISSUES ARE ORGANISATIONS ADDRESSING AND HOW DO THEY APPROACH CHANGE?



## Key issues being addressed

Survey participants worked across a diverse range of food system issues, with organisations addressing an average of five issues each.

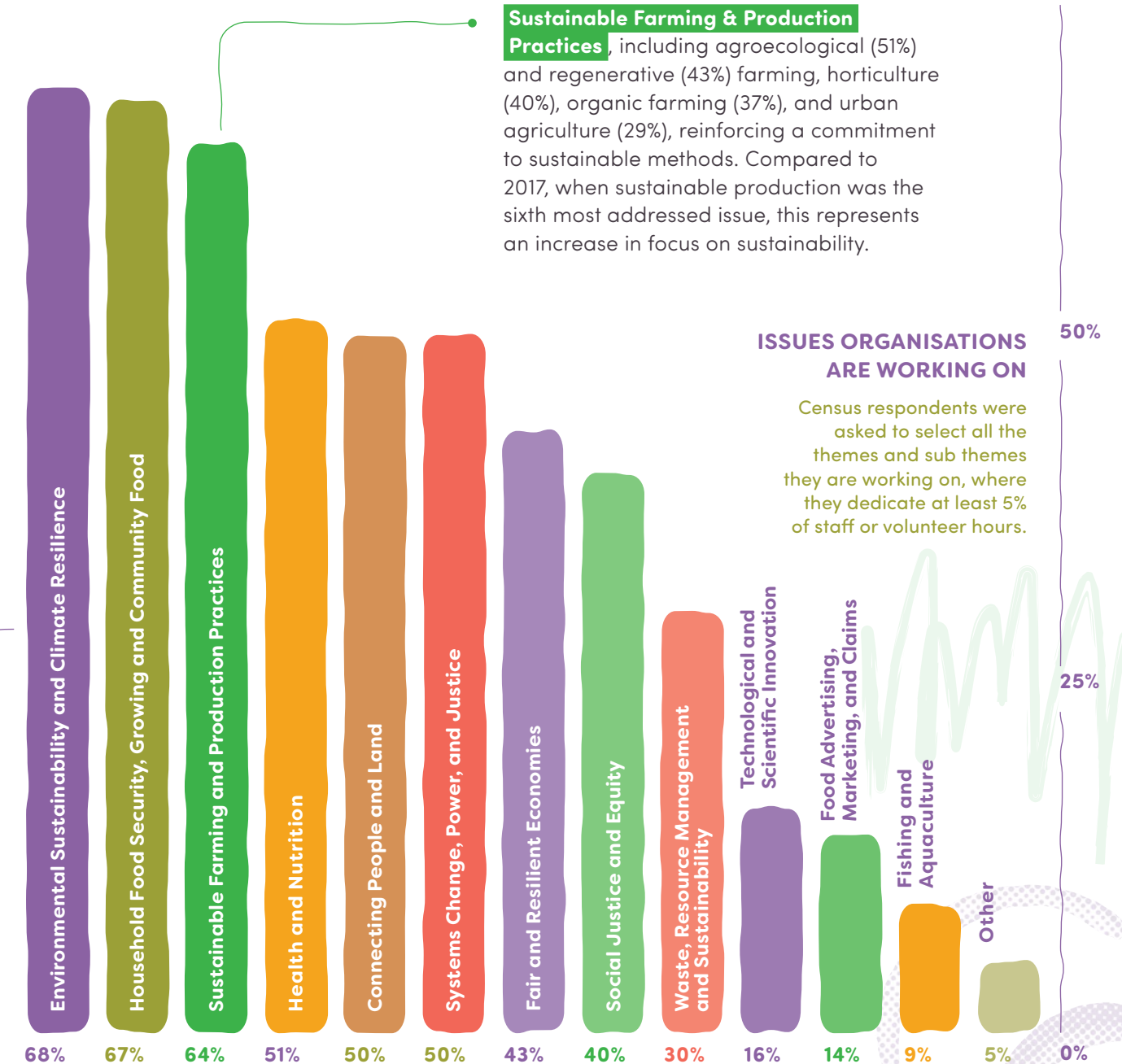
### Environmental Sustainability & Climate Resilience

with efforts on soil health (42%), biodiversity conservation and habitat protection (40%), agricultural biodiversity (39%), climate change adaptation (36%), climate change mitigation (36%) and land-use planning (32%), highlighting a strong focus on ecosystem restoration. Compared to 2017, when climate change<sup>12</sup> was the sixth most addressed issue, this represents a welcome increase in focus on climate-related challenges for organisations working on food and farming.

### Household Food Security, Growing & Community Food

remains a key focus, with organisations working on community food provision (49%), local food systems (47%), equitable access to nutritious food (47%), and addressing food insecurity (43%), balancing immediate needs with long-term resilience. In 2017, food poverty and access<sup>12</sup> was the second most addressed issue (rising from 15th in 2011), and it remains a priority for two-thirds of organisations, indicating it is not a temporary concern.

**Tagsa Uibhist** in Scotland is one of many organisations that have long raised concerns about household food insecurity issues, particularly around access. Research published in partnership with Nourish Scotland and 24 community researchers, *Our Right to Food*, highlighted a **28% island premium on Uist and Barra**, along with challenges in accessing basic food items. In response, Co-op held a series of community consultations and co-created changes to improve access to essential goods, which were rolled out in October 2024.



In contrast, fewer organisations focused on **Fishing & Aquaculture (9%)**, **Food Advertising, Marketing & Claims (14%)** and **Technological & Scientific Innovation (15%)** with fishing and aquaculture receiving notably less attention from major food and farming NGOs. Fish stocks and marine ecosystems were among the least prioritised issues addressed in the second census as well.

<sup>12</sup> The categorisation of issues in this census differs slightly from previous editions, with some categories redefined or expanded to better reflect current challenges and priorities in the food and farming sector.



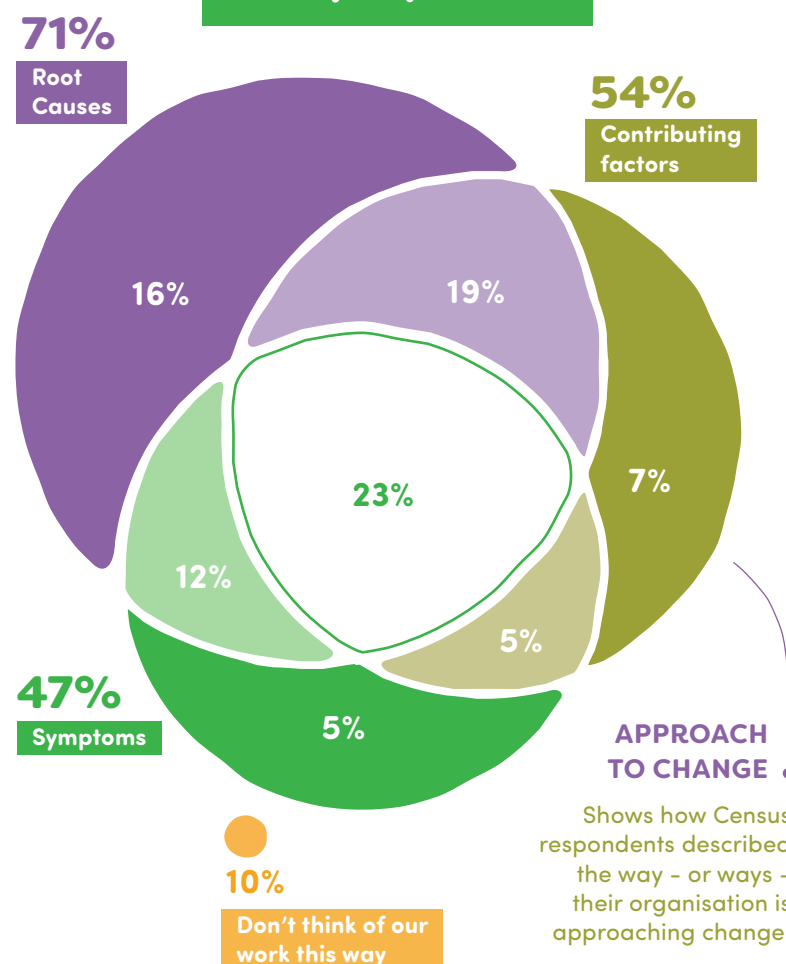
Civil society organisations take a multi-pronged approach to creating change, with the average organisation working across four different approaches.

Two-thirds (67%) identified systems change as a key approach, reflecting a focus on structural interventions as part of their work. Other frequently-mentioned approaches included awareness-raising (60%), policy work and advocacy (57%), and capacity building and education (55%), research and data collection (51%), innovation and experimentation (40%), and community mobilisation (36%). In the previous census (2017), the activity that most respondents took part in was education (18% of total frequency). While the categorisation of approaches was different

## Approach to change

this time, it appears that there has been an increase in the number of organisations doing policy work and advocacy (called 'lobbying' in the 2017 census), perhaps reflecting the huge amount of policy change in the UK post-Brexit. Market-based approaches and service delivery were less commonly reported, with 28% engaging in social enterprise models and 27% involved in direct service provision (despite income from products or services making up the third largest share of funding received by participating organisations – see page 16 for more on funding sources).

## Root causes vs symptoms



The majority of respondents focus on addressing the root causes of food and farming challenges, while many also tackle contributing factors and immediate symptoms. Nearly a quarter work across all three levels, while a small proportion do not explicitly frame their work in these terms.

Policy work and advocacy emerged as a key focus, with many organisations stepping in where government action has fallen short. As one person working in the sector wrote, "there's just so much blumming policy to influence at the moment and not enough funding."

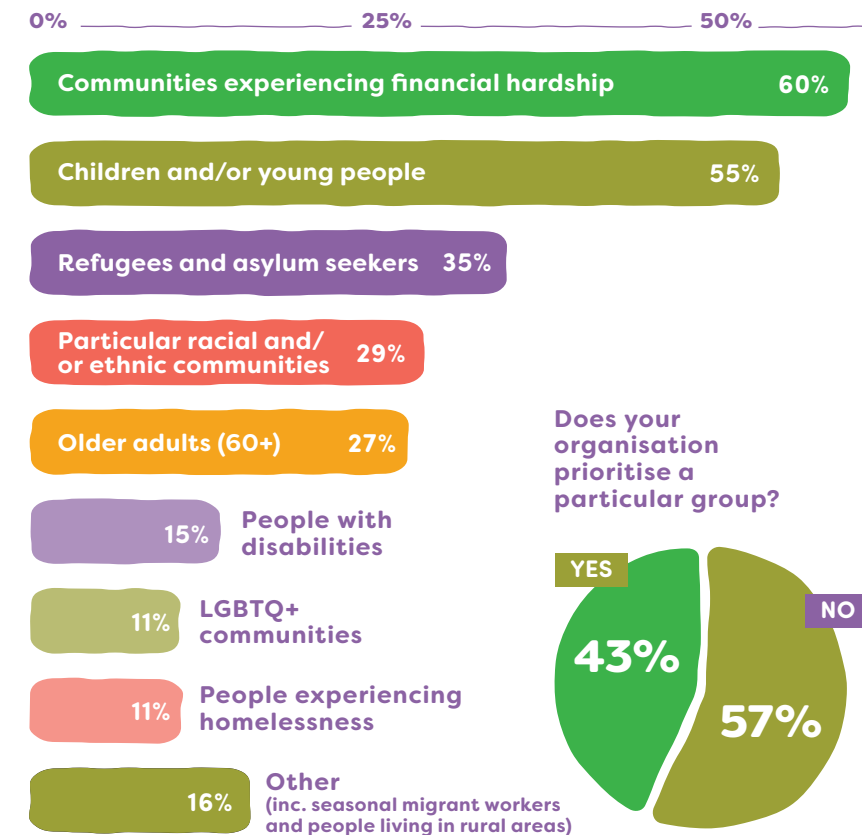
Despite nearly 700 diet-related policies introduced by the UK government between 1992 and 2020, rates of diet-related ill health have continued to rise<sup>13</sup>, highlighting the gap between policy intentions and real-world outcomes. This trend extends beyond diet-related health issues, underscoring the need for systemic, long-term solutions.

**71% say they are addressing root causes** – suggesting that civil society is working to fill critical gaps left by the government and other institutions.

## Intersectionality

### GROUPS THAT ORGANISATIONS SERVE

Census respondents were asked to highlight which groups of people their work focuses on or serves. 57% of respondents do not focus on these specific groups. The bar chart shows those that do serve such (often marginalised) groups. Responses include those organisations that serve multiple groups.



The **Black Rootz community growing programme** is a multigenerational, Black-led initiative in North London, focused on engaging Black and Racially Minoritised Communities in growing. It combines the expertise of the older generation with youth involvement in their surrounding natural environment. The programme uses a "decolonial approach" to growing, viewing the practice as a means of healing and liberation.

**Emergent Generation** is a diverse network of young people (18–35) working with experienced founders to build an agroecological food system and regenerative future. They empower young people to take action for change, offering mentorship and support.

Bite Back's '**Fuel Us Don't Fool Us**' campaign used data to expose the performance of the UK's largest food companies, calling for transformative action in the food system. Bite Back is a youth-led movement. Its collaboration with Oxford and Cambridge Universities led to impactful research, boosting its media presence and influence.

**FLAME**, the youth group of the Landworkers' Alliance, is a network of young people aged 16–30 advocating for radical change in food and farming systems. Their vision includes a food system based on food sovereignty, agroecology, and social justice, ensuring everyone has access to local, healthy, and affordable food.

In the next section, we explore how these changemakers connect, partner, and navigate the dynamics of working together.



4.

# RELATIONSHIPS: WHAT PARTNERSHIPS EXIST AND WHICH ARE BEING SOUGHT?

## Existing partnerships, alliances and movements

Collaboration is central to food and farming initiatives, with many organisations partnering to drive meaningful change.

Partnerships span grassroots projects to national alliances, with **Sustain (24 mentions)**, **Soil Association (24)**, and **Landworkers' Alliance (21)** frequently identified as key collaborators.

Other notable partners and networks include **the Nature Friendly Farming Network**, **Community Supported Agriculture Network (CSA)**, **Sustainable Food Places**, **Real Farming Trust**, **Eating Better**, **the Food Foundation**, **Food Sense Wales**, **Pasture for Life**, **Social Farms and Gardens**, **Nourish Scotland**, **WWF** and **the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission**. On average, organisations mentioned just under 7 partners, consistent with the 2017 census.

Most organisations (86%) also align with broader movements, such as the Food Sovereignty Movement, Slow Food Movement, Cooperative Movement, and the Plenty to Share Movement, reflecting a shared commitment to systemic change.

Organisations collaborate in different ways: 44% describe their relationships as cooperative, involving informal working and information sharing; 33% as coordinated, with aligned efforts and shared goals; and 23% as deeper collaborations, characterised by joint decision-making, shared resources, and integrated programmes.

### KEY PARTNERS IN THE SECTOR

The size of circles represents the number of times organisations were mentioned by other census respondents as partners.





## Partnerships being sought

While many existing relationships already thrive, there is a strong desire for new connections.

The most sought-after partnerships revolve around collaboration with **government and public authorities**, followed by network and advocacy organisations, and community-based organisations. Businesses and farming organisations are also seen as valuable potential collaborators.

## Barriers and enablers to collaboration

The main barriers to collaboration stem from limited time and resources, competitive funding structures, and misaligned values or approaches. Some participants also raised concerns about exclusionary spaces and unequal resource sharing, which hinder effective collaboration.

“

Often, funding and resources can be limited, which constrains our ability to work in collaborations, especially if the collaborations are not seen as central to our mission or remit. It also feels that support can be lacking for smaller breakthrough actors (who are doing things differently) to join collaborations and contribute their voice, which can be a barrier to achieving meaningful change.

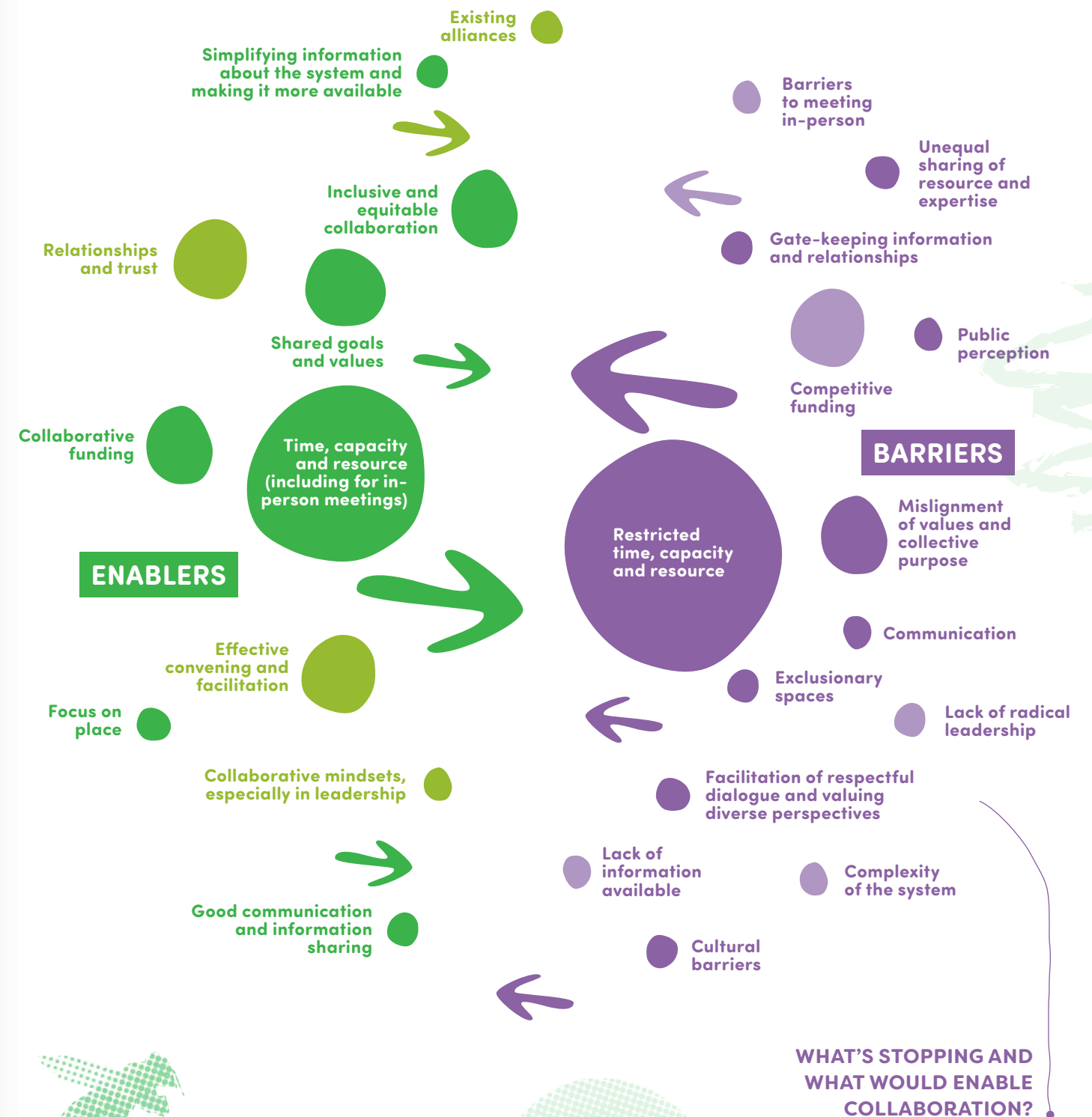
– Senior Policy Officer,  
large charity

On the other hand, organisations identified key enablers for successful partnerships, such as sustainable funding to support time and capacity, shared goals and values, and effective convening and facilitation. Collaborative funding and inclusive, equitable partnerships were also seen as crucial for ensuring long-term success.

“

Trust, relationships. Strong design and facilitation for collaborations as processes, ability to show they're useful, and/or faith in the value of collaborating even if outcomes are uncertain!

– Food Transition Affiliate,  
think tank organisation



Census respondents were asked about the key barriers and enablers to effective collaboration within the sector. Circle sizes indicate the importance assigned to each factor.

Next, we explore how resources shape the resilience and impact of these organisations.

WHAT PARTNERSHIPS EXIST AND WHICH ARE BEING SOUGHT?



5.

# RESOURCES: WHO IS FUNDING THE SECTOR'S WORK?



## Funding sources

The funding landscape for organisations in the food and farming sector remains challenging, with a diverse range of income sources within an increasingly constrained environment.

Of environmental grants from UK foundations and lotteries identified in Where the Green Grants Went 9<sup>14</sup> – based on 2021/2022 data, agriculture and food was only the fifth biggest category, significantly smaller than the climate and air quality theme. The amount focused on UK food and agriculture was just under £15.7 million, indicating a significant

underinvestment in this area. Additionally, important aspects like food insecurity and animal welfare are often not captured under 'green grants,' further highlighting the funding gap in addressing food system challenges.

According to data gathered through the Food Issues Census survey, on average, organisations reported drawing from three different income sources. **Charitable trusts and foundations** were the most frequently cited, making up over 67% of responses and contributing approximately £26.51 million. Income from products or services was another significant source, cited by around 51% of participants, contributing roughly £16.85 million. **Donations from individuals and philanthropists** played a key role, representing nearly 49% of responses and contributing £36.81 million—the highest category cited.

Percentage of organisations reporting this funding source	Total funding amount reported
Charitable trusts and foundations	67% £26.51m
Income from products or services (e.g. consulting, events, sales)	51% £16.85m
Donations (e.g. individuals or philanthropists)	49% £36.81m
Government funding (e.g. local, regional, or national grants)	40% £10.75m
Membership fees or subscriptions	25% £3.50m
Corporate sponsorship or partnerships	19% £15.15m
Lottery funding (e.g. National Lottery)	18% £1.24m
Research grants or academic funding	16% £0.52m
Crowdfunding or online fundraising	14% £4.78m
European Union or international funding	5% £0.62m
Interest and investment	5% £3.62m

In contrast, **European Union and international funding**, along with **interest and investment**, accounted for smaller shares at 5% for both. This marks a sharp decline from the 2017 census, where nearly one in five respondents received EU funding, and for those organisations, it made up 21% of their overall funding. The decline in EU funding for UK civil society organisations post-Brexit is evident.

Below, we outline some of the key funding sources and their associated correlations with the issues being addressed, organisational types, and geographic regions:

## GOVERNMENT FUNDING

Government funding is most strongly linked to sustainable farming practices, connecting people to land and addressing issues of systems change, power, and justice. This highlights the central role that public financial support plays in advancing environmental sustainability and social justice. However, it also underscores the limitations of relying on government funding to address broader, more systemic challenges. Notably, government funding is relatively stronger in Wales, with a significant amount directed toward local initiatives.

In the summer of 2022, the Welsh Government committed £2.5 million to support the establishment and strengthening of cross-sector food partnerships within local authorities across Wales. These partnerships aim to build resilience in local food networks and address the root causes of food poverty. **Food Sense Wales** has played a pivotal role in supporting the rollout of this funding, drawing on its experience in establishing and nurturing food partnerships as part of the Sustainable Food Places network. The Welsh Government has committed to continue supporting and resourcing food partnerships until March 2028, subject to annual reviews.

## PRIVATE DONATIONS

Private donations are a key source of support for registered charities, particularly on issues such as waste management and sustainability. While philanthropy enables organisations to fund critical work, it also introduces challenges—charities may find themselves adapting to donor priorities rather than responding directly to community needs, and financial instability can arise when donor interests shift or funding fluctuates.

## CROWDFUNDING OR ONLINE FUNDRAISING

Crowdfunding and online fundraising have become important for addressing household food security and community food initiatives. This demonstrates that grassroots, community-driven funding models are stepping in to fill gaps left by established funding sources—such as government grants and large charitable foundations—especially when these formal structures fail to meet the needs of vulnerable communities. Registered charities are increasingly turning to digital platforms to mobilise support for specific projects, showing the growing role of these platforms in bridging funding gaps.

## CHARITABLE TRUSTS AND FOUNDATIONS

Charitable trusts and foundations provide crucial financial backing for registered charities, particularly those with a national geographical footprint.

## CORPORATE SPONSORSHIP OR PARTNERSHIPS

Corporate sponsorship or partnerships are especially strong within registered charities. This reflects the growing involvement of corporations in funding social causes. However, it also raises concerns that organisations may become too closely tied to corporate interests, which could compromise their social or environmental goals, particularly if these corporate agendas do not fully align with the mission of the organisation.

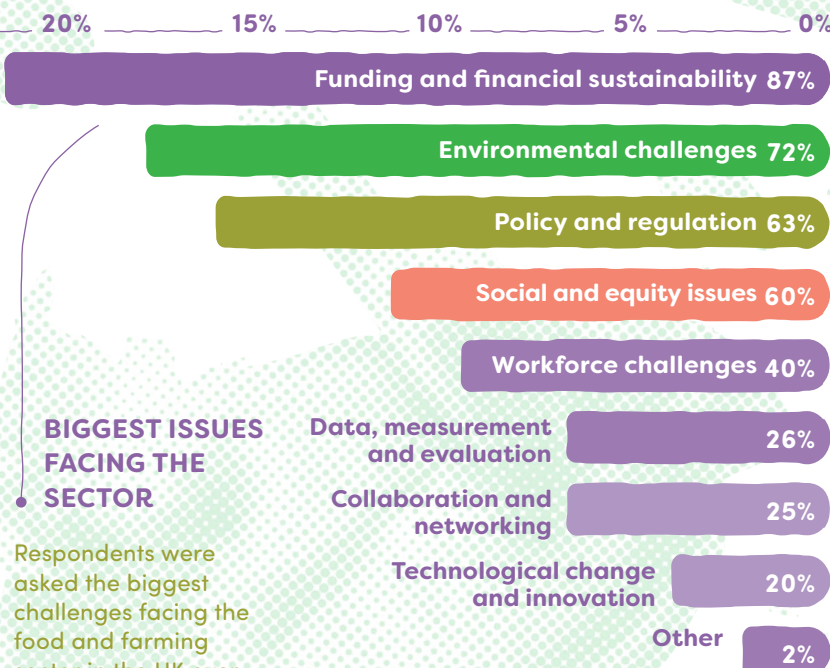
Next, we turn to the sector's priorities—what organisations say they need most to sustain and strengthen their impact in the face of ongoing challenges.



6.

# SECTOR PRIORITIES: WHAT CHALLENGES DOES THE SECTOR FACE, AND WHAT SUPPORT IS NEEDED?

## Key challenges facing the sector



### BIGGEST ISSUES FACING THE SECTOR

Respondents were asked the biggest challenges facing the food and farming sector in the UK over the next 3–5 years.

The most pressing issue for organisations in the sector is funding and financial sustainability (87%). Many struggle with unpredictable funding streams (77%), making it difficult to plan for the long term, to retain staff, and to strengthen their impact. Without stable financial support, organisations risk stagnation or closure, limiting their ability to drive meaningful change.

**Environmental challenges (72%)** also pose a major threat for those in the sector, with climate change impacts (68%) and resource scarcity (47%) increasing operational risks. Rising temperatures, extreme weather events, and soil degradation directly affect food production and land management, making sustainability a growing concern.

**Policy and regulation (63%)** remain a significant barrier to civil society organisations, with a lack of supportive policies (57%) and complex regulations (29%) creating uncertainty. Many organisations feel hindered by shifting or unclear policies, which limit their ability to implement long-term solutions and secure investment in systemic change.

The sector is also grappling with **workforce challenges (40%)**, as skills shortages (32%) and high staff turnover or burnout (22%) make it difficult to recruit and retain trained personnel. Burnout is a growing issue, particularly in underfunded and overstretched organisations, weakening the sector's capacity to deliver its goals and profoundly damaging the wellbeing of the people within it.

Finally, **social and equity issues (60%)** continue to impact participation and representation. Inequities in access (56%)—especially for marginalised groups—along with barriers to land ownership (40%), restrict opportunities within the sector. Underrepresentation and systemic racism (26%) further reinforce these disparities, limiting diverse voices in decision-making and leadership.

## Issues in need of most funding

Participants identified core funding and financial sustainability as the most urgent need, highlighting financial insecurity, particularly among grassroots initiatives. Policy work and advocacy also emerged as key priorities, reflecting the sector's focus on systemic change.

“The issue that would benefit most from funding is narrative change on land ownership—currently, the general public is ‘stuck’ in a capitalist worldview, which is damaging.

– Resourcing & Relationships Coordinator, social enterprise

“Core funding is what we need. While there are options for targeted funding, minimal core funding makes it difficult to support a properly functioning organisation.

– Chief Executive, farming organisation

Other key themes included community leadership, local food systems, and sustainable and ethical farming, with participants emphasising the need for more support for sustainable producers. Participants also highlighted the importance of investment in food security, economic equity, and intersectionality, alongside land access, ownership, and infrastructure.

The **‘Family Farm Succession project’** was cited as an effective collaboration between Shared Assets, Stir to Action, Ecological Land Cooperative and CSA Network. It explored how community ownership models such as Agroecological Farmland Trusts (AFTs) can provide farmers with an alternative to sale or inheritance – particularly important in the light of farmer protests of 2024–25 over planned changes to inheritance tax.

This points to a strong demand for funding that supports both structural solutions (policy, advocacy, infrastructure) and community-led initiatives, ensuring a balance between long-term systemic change and immediate local impact.

Organisations are calling for both longer-term and more flexible funding to provide stability, alongside greater investment in capacity and infrastructure to ensure operational resilience. There is also a strong appetite for collaborative funding models that prioritise partnerships over competition, as well as deeper engagement from funders who understand the realities of food and farming initiatives.

## What the sector needs from funders

“Be more open to funding core costs and exploratory/learning phases of projects, particularly by local and marginalised communities. Most funders continue to use an output-oriented approach which limits the possibilities of projects to those that funders think are possible and useful, rather than recognising that local communities know best what may work for them.

“Salaries and core costs – we know the need is there, and we know what the solutions are, but without dedicated paid staff to facilitate actions, then nothing happens.

– Senior Community Development Officer, local infrastructure charity

– Food Justice Campaign Lead, grassroots organisation



There is a strong correlation between those organisations generating income from products or services and those calling for long-term and flexible funding, reinforcing the need for funders to offer both stability and adaptability. Similarly, there is a strong correlation between organisations who have crowdfunding or online fundraising with those asking for enhanced capacity and infrastructure, indicating that organisations

**Growing Communities** was mentioned by a census participant as having “done the hard yards by developing ever more innovative iterations of solutions to local high quality produce supply”

Those behind **Henbant** in Caernarfon, North Wales, are trying to answer the question of whether it is possible to buy a small farm on a mortgage, pay that mortgage, produce good, nutrient-dense food, while at the same time ‘building soil, building biodiversity, building social capital and enjoying it.’ Their response is: ‘We think we are doing it. If we get others to do the same, there is little excuse to do much else. We can change the world.’

relying on grassroots funding need greater support to strengthen their operational systems. Furthermore, there was a clear call for funders to invest in the documentation of successful frameworks and business models, and then to fund the replication of these models in ways tailored to local communities. This would enable broader, more contextualised impact across regions and groups.

The **Larder>East**, a community food hub in East Belfast, was cited as “doing extraordinary work to break down the narrative that good food is only for those who can afford it. Food justice, community wealth building, agroecology, bread as a human right – these are all being tackled with the lightest, kindest touch”.

There are many inspiring projects and organisations in the sector, often involving blood, sweat and tears. As one respondent put it very starkly though “We should not be creating inspiring case studies encouraging people into a sector that is on its knees.” Inspiration remains important, but inspiration alone is not sufficient. Replicating in local contexts – and resourcing that replication properly – can be challenging, but it is surely necessary if we as society are to move away from the dominant ‘scale up or get out’ model.

## What the sector needs from alliances

Organisations want better collaboration within and across sectors, knowing that strong partnerships can help increase their impact. They also highlight the importance of advocacy and influence, particularly for systemic change, alongside resource sharing and capacity building. Many also stress the need for more inclusive and transparent engagement, ensuring alliances reflect and elevate the voices of those they serve.

“Alliances continue to be closed spaces – it’s difficult to know how they could improve when the work that they do is not clear to those outside. More transparency and open membership would be good, as well as actively engaging marginalised and grassroots organisations.”

– Food Justice Campaign Lead, grassroots organisation

## What the sector needs from researchers

From researchers, organisations seek community-driven and applied research that centres lived experience and real-world challenges. They also emphasise the need for evidence that informs policy and advocacy, ensuring research is both rigorous and actionable. Another key priority identified is making research more accessible and applicable, alongside deepening understanding of the interconnections between farming, health, nutrition, and sustainability.

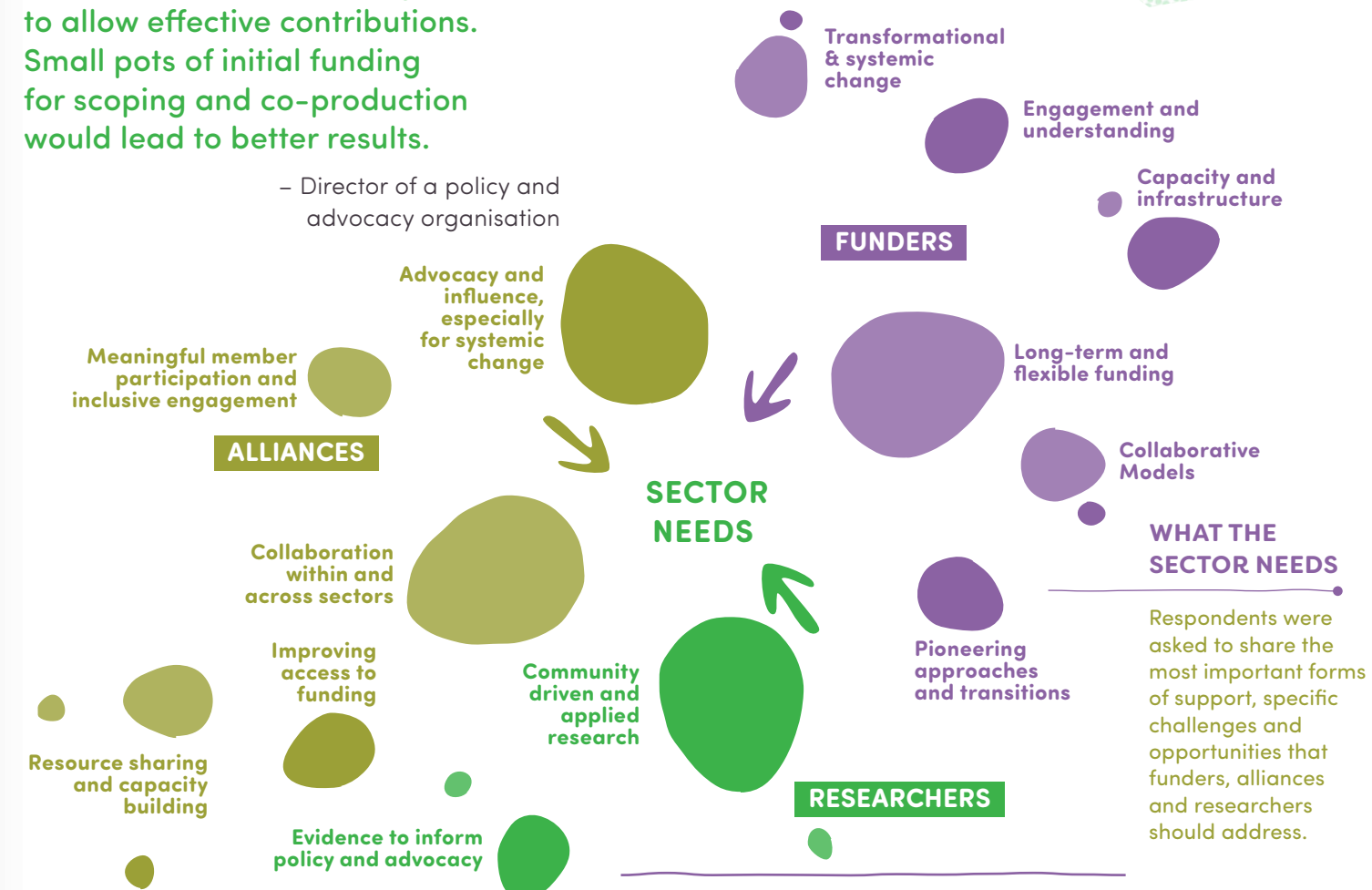
“It is hugely helpful when researchers invite participation early, involve others in shaping the bid so it is genuinely relevant, and build in budget to allow effective contributions. Small pots of initial funding for scoping and co-production would lead to better results.”

– Director of a policy and advocacy organisation

“Seek input from the sector to shape research priorities—engage the sector early, not at the last minute when preparing a funding bid!”

– Head of Policy at a conservation and environmental advocacy organisation

Across all three groups, organisations highlight the need for **deeper collaboration, transparency, and resourcing**, ensuring that funding, partnerships, and research efforts align with the sector’s needs and realities.



Finally, we distil what this all means—drawing out key takeaways, emerging insights, and practical recommendations.



## 7.

# CONCLUSIONS: WHAT ARE THE KEY TAKEAWAYS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION?

The need to transform food systems has never been more pressing. Issues such as hunger, public health crises, environmental degradation, economic instability, and social inequality are escalating, demanding more purposeful action from those shaping the future of food and farming.

1.

## More funding and more funders.

Broadening the base of support – the range of funders and funding models – is essential. Whether through funders bringing others along or researchers developing evidence-based alternative funding models, everyone can play a role in strengthening financial resilience.

2.

## Prioritise flexible funding and long-term funding.

Organisations stress the need for funding commitments of at least five years, allowing them to focus on meaningful work rather than being trapped in a cycle of short-term fundraising. Funding must be adaptable—empowering communities to be resilient and responsive rather than constrained by rigid sectoral themes. As one respondent put it, the sector needs “an appreciation of the slow and networked nature of change, and support for the infrastructure required to drive this shift.”

Funders, policymakers, researchers, and civil society organisations all have a role in ensuring that resources, policies and strategies align with the sector’s most pressing needs.

Yet, even as the need grows, the sector faces increasing constraints. Organisations are struggling to secure resources, and the growing demands of fundraising can come at the expense of core work.

The insights and recommendations below reflect the voices of those working across the sector, offering guidance on how to build more resilient, fair, and sustainable food systems:

3.

## Value people’s time and expertise properly.

Policies, funding mechanisms, and research approaches should include participation fees and inclusion funds so that those closest to the issues—especially those who would otherwise be excluded—are fairly compensated. Volunteering is incredible. However, moving away from the expectation that everyone should donate their time for free is essential for meaningful and equitable engagement.

4.

## Remove structural barriers to collaboration.

Systemic obstacles often hinder partnerships – both within the sector and between the sector, government, and business. Policy frameworks and funding models should value synergy over competition, particularly for CSOs and grassroots groups, enabling stronger, more transparent, and effective collaboration.

5.

## Strengthen participatory research and evidence-based advocacy.

Research should be co-created with sector stakeholders from the outset, addressing real-world challenges. Funding should prioritise applied, community-driven research that centres lived experience and local knowledge. Findings must be accessible and actionable, shaping policies and practices that drive meaningful change.

6.

## Support community-led initiatives and the infrastructure that sustains them.

Wicked problems can not be solved top-down. Strengthening local food systems and community leadership can address both food insecurity and sustainability. This requires investment in diverse, inclusive community-led initiatives, and improving access to land for new entrant farmers and growers, especially those from marginalised groups. It also requires funding for effective, skilful facilitators and for anchor organisations and alliances that provide vital networks and resources.

7.

## Work smarter, not harder.

Civil society organisations, funders and researchers need to become (even) more agile and savvy. We all need to find creative ways of working differently, including pooling resources and intelligence more effectively, whilst still valuing diversity.

## Using the Food Issues Census

For civil society organisations working in, or organising around, food and farming, use the insights and data from the Food Issues Census to bolster your case for support and to guide future advocacy. Grant managers, use this as a strategic resource to influence your Board. Funder trustees, use the census results to shape your funding priorities. Persuade resource holders both internally and externally to invest in the just food transition. Funder networks, present this snapshot to your members to encourage more, and better targeted, funding into the sector. The census is an invaluable resource for researchers, policymakers and the wider sector too. Please use the census and please tell us when you do.

## A powerful recipe for change

Most of the solutions are already out there. The food and farming civil society sector is rich in knowledge, collaboration and persistence. It is not rich in financial resources. How do we change this? Respect people working in the sector, recognise their resolve and energy for collaboration, support resilience (at individual and sector level) and properly resource the work. Building these four Rs together – respect, resolve, resilience and resources – will be a powerful recipe for change.

Much of the above is already known. We can not afford to wait or to be timid in our asks. We hope this report contributes to closing the gap between knowledge and action. The best time to start funding, collaborating and working differently was 20 or more years ago. The next best time is now.

## RECIPE FOR CHANGE

What is needed to transform the sector.

RESOURCES

RESPECT

BUILDING TOGETHER

RESOLVE

RESILIENCE

WHAT ARE THE KEY TAKEAWAYS AND  
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION?



# APPENDIX: DEVELOPING THE FOOD ISSUES CENSUS

## Steering group

The development of the Food Issues Census followed a co-designed process that actively engaged a diverse range of stakeholders from the outset. The project's design was shaped by a Steering Group consisting of funders and third-sector organisations, representing a national footprint (across all four nations) and a range of organisational types and sizes.

These Steering Group members played a key role in defining the scope, process, and outputs of the census, providing invaluable expertise and guidance at every stage.

The group was facilitated by The Food Ethics Council and members included:

- **Anna Van Der Hurd / Sarah Davenport**, A Team Foundation
- **Jessamy Gould**, Treebeard Trust
- **Bonnie Hewson**, Farming the Future
- **Kath Dalmeny**, Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming
- **Will Steadman**, Esmée Fairbairn Foundation
- **Gawain Morrison**, Brink!
- **Anna Chworow**, Nourish Scotland
- **Liz Parry**, Ennismore Foundation
- **Katie Palmer**, Food Sense Wales
- **Sumayyah Zannath**, Platform London

They played a critical role in refining the survey questions, ensuring they addressed the sector's diverse needs. They also supported survey dissemination, ensuring a broad and inclusive range of organisations that reflect the diversity of the sector.

## Inclusion Fund

The Food Issues Census aimed to actively address the underrepresentation of certain communities, particularly those from Black and People of Colour (BPOC) backgrounds, working-class communities, LGBTQIA+ individuals, and neurodivergent people. To ensure that voices from these communities were included, an Inclusion Fund was established to provide financial and language support to grassroots organisations, particularly those that would otherwise face barriers to engagement.

Organisations were offered up to £250 in support to participate in the three stages of

the census: the Listening Phase, the Survey Participation Phase, and the Dissemination Phase. This fund aimed to reduce barriers to participation by providing financial support to those who might not otherwise be able to engage, including translation services for non-English speakers. 13 organisations applied for the fund and we distributed £1000 to those that met the criteria, with payments ranging from £35 to £140 per organisation. We encourage funders to provide Inclusion Funds for relevant projects, and for fundraisers in civil society organisations to include similar mechanisms in funding applications where appropriate.

## Census development and dissemination

The census development process included a Listening Phase, during which stakeholders were asked to help shape the questions being asked in the census through a virtual facilitated session and an online survey. Questions focused on the kind of information that would be most useful for decision-making, prioritising resources, backing advocacy

efforts, and understanding others in the sector. This phase helped ensure that the survey would be relevant and actionable.

A total of 126 individuals signed up for the listening event, 58 attended, and 25 responded to the listening phase survey.

## Questions

The main census survey was structured around five key sections:

1. You and Your Organisation – Collecting basic information on the organisation's type, geographic focus, and key food and farming issues addressed.
2. The Work You Do – Exploring the organisation's approach to creating change, including the focus on root causes versus alleviating symptoms.

3. People and Resources – Understanding income sources, resource allocation, and specific funding needs. Respondents were asked to use information from their most recent financial accounts.
4. Your Connections – Investigating current collaborations, desired partnerships, and barriers to effective collaboration.
5. Inspiring Successes and the Future – Identifying challenges for the sector and sharing success stories.

For the full list of survey questions, please refer to the [complete survey document](#).

## Participation and Reach

The survey was disseminated widely via email, newsletters, social media platforms, and physical posters, ensuring it reached a broad and diverse audience. To ensure confidentiality, all responses were anonymised, and both quantitative and qualitative data were analysed to inform actionable insights.

We received 134 entries. We excluded five entries. Two entries were excluded because they were based overseas. Two entries were duplicates and one entry had essential data

missing. You can find a list of organisations that responded to the survey [here](#) (this list does not include entries by individuals).

Ultimately, the development of the Food Issues Census 2024-25 was a collective effort, ensuring that the final product would provide a valuable, comprehensive resource for the food and farming sector, offering insights to guide future advocacy, policy decisions, and funding priorities.



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**Food Issues Census 2024-25** offers an in-depth snapshot of the UK's food and farming sector, gathering essential insights on the challenges, opportunities, and resource needs faced by organisations dedicated to transforming food systems. Co-designed with a diverse steering group of funders and sector leaders, the census captures both quantitative and qualitative data, ensuring it reflects the varied experiences of those working at the forefront of food and farming. The findings are intended to inform funding strategies, support advocacy efforts, and guide collaborative action to build more resilient, sustainable and equitable food systems. This report provides information and insights needed for stakeholders to make informed decisions and strengthen the collective impact of the sector.

#### **Food Ethics Council - Lead Author**

The Food Ethics Council is committed to ensuring that food systems are sustainable, fair and healthy for people, animals and the planet. An independent charity, the Food Ethics Council works to promote ethical practices and policies in food and farming, bringing together diverse voices to drive systemic change. Through initiatives like the Food Issues Census, it continues to support and amplify the work of those leading the charge for a more just and sustainable food future.

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**Food Ethics Council**

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