



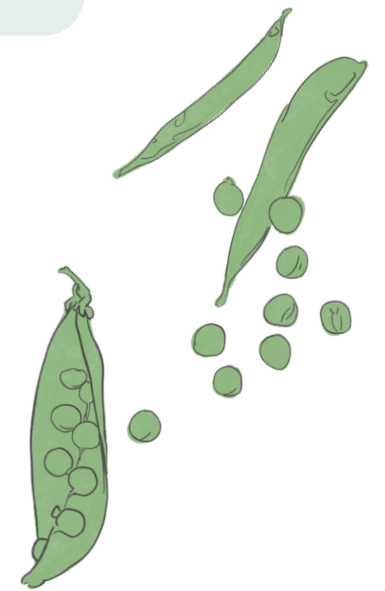
Moving
Together at the
Speed of Trust*
– what we
learned, heard
and felt at
recent
gatherings

In 2026, the Food Ethics Council deepened its work to strengthen the connections and relationships between those funding the food and farming transitions we need, and those acting to make them happen. We termed these groups ‘funders’ and ‘the movement’, noting as we did so that though these were imperfect terms, they were good enough.

Building from our Food Issues Census the previous year, and reflecting that while the Census document itself is tremendously useful, the two events we held to launch it produced really rich, nuanced insights themselves.

The launch events had the added benefits of being in person, with all of the human connection, the chance to challenge and be challenged, and the opportunity to learn and laugh together that this brings.

In order for things
to change, we
have to change
the way we do
things.



This solidified our belief that paying attention to *how* we deliver our work needed to be a key part of our learning and next steps.

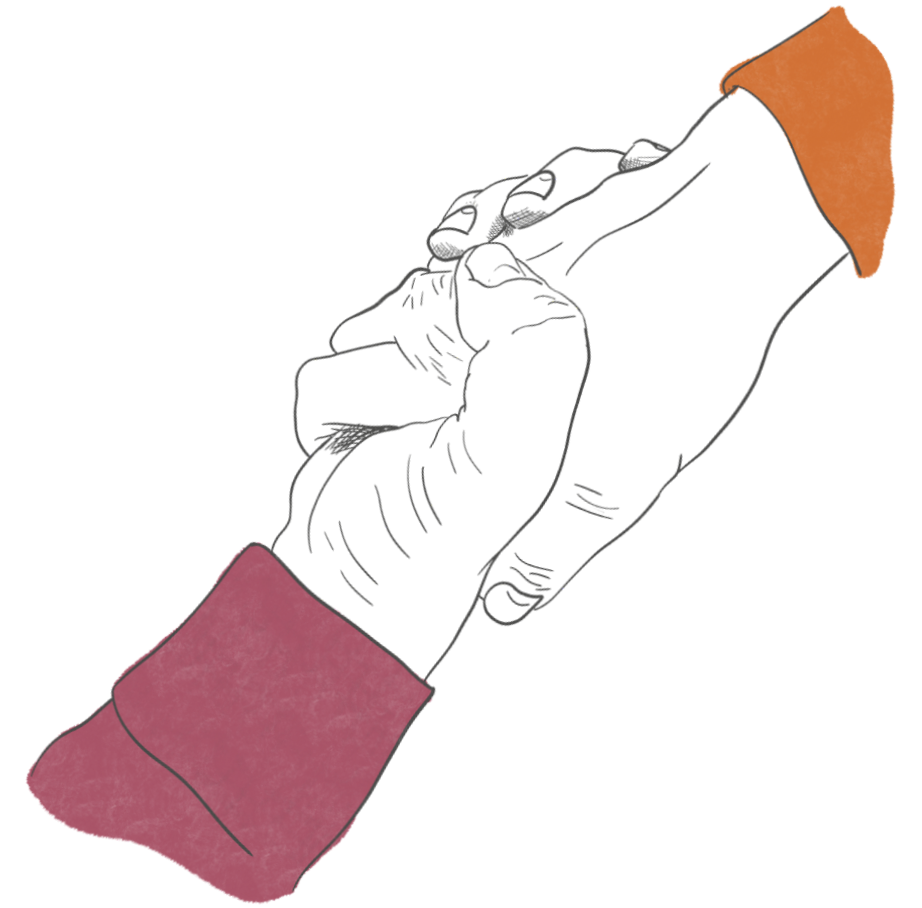
This is our attempt to document the learning, and the feeling, of those next steps.

Why change and why now?

Organisations across the food system are doing deeply relational, preventative or movement-building work but are frequently forced onto a fundraising treadmill that can prioritise short-term projects over long-term transformation. Oftentimes the funding landscape is not able to respond strategically to the systemic and interconnected nature of food system change.

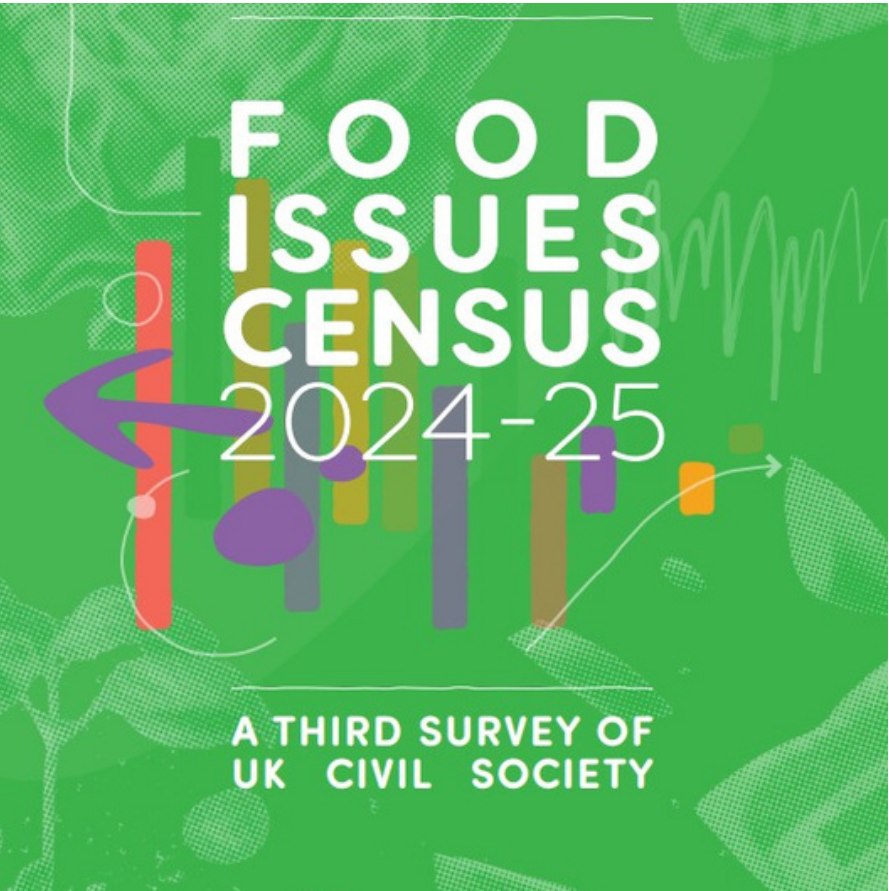
We know from the Food Issues Census and Environmental Funders Network's Where The Green Grants Went series that we need a radical increase in investment into genuine, systemic, agroecological food system transformation, encompassing land, labour, community, justice, biodiversity and animal welfare.

And we know that the risk of burnout is real - both for those working across the sector and for those working in funding and philanthropy.

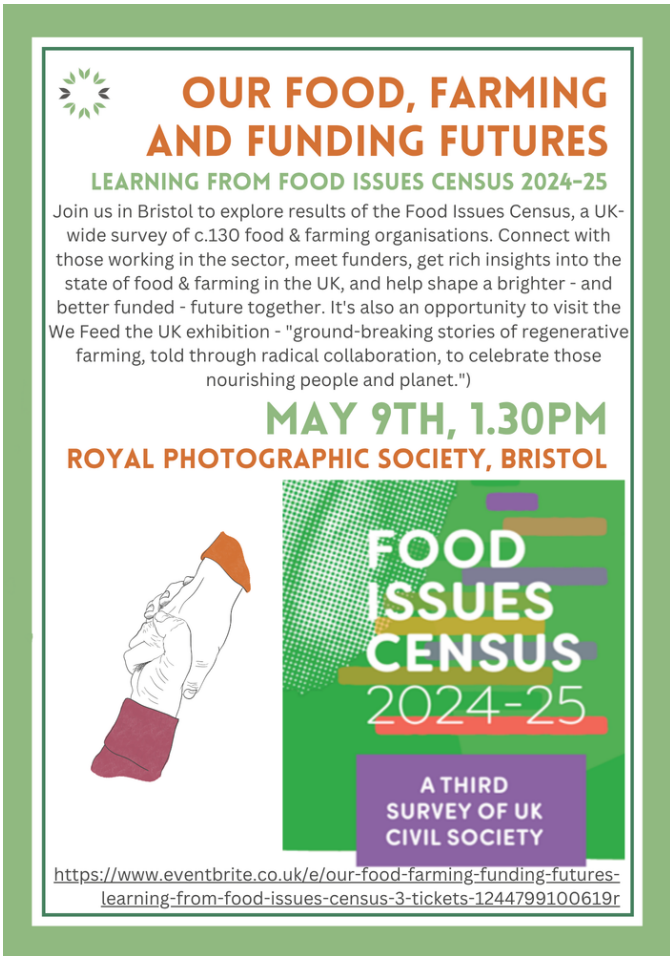


Different ways of knowing

Reports and data



Connections and convenings



Our session at ORFC 2026

There is an urgency running through the food system transformation space. The climate crisis, rising food insecurity, ecological breakdown and widening inequalities all demand, above all else, pace. In response, many of us have absorbed the directive to move fast and break things.

But when we break things, things get broken.

The funding landscape isn't neutral. Funding decisions dictate what change can happen. Power is held (sometimes unintentionally) over strategy, timelines, values and language. Much of the funding landscape rewards speed, scale and polish - and too often not work rooted in care (or depth). There is a need now for new narratives, new measures of success.

Funders need to see their resources as flowing through the ecosystem they are part of. Committing to complex, long-term work and core funding partnerships, but also listening, responding, adapting and filling gaps with allies to ensure riskier, earlier stage relationship and development work is funded too.



None of this is easy. Rebalancing power means confronting uncomfortable histories and present-day realities. It means slowing down in places, even as the crises we face accelerate. If food systems transformation is to be just, resilient and lasting, then trust cannot be treated as a 'nice to have'.

Trust doesn't just happen. It has to be nurtured.

*How you bring people together is as important, if not more important, as *what* you are bringing them together to do.*

Get it right and trust starts to flow, in both directions.



Moving, together, at the speed of trust

We conceived this event because creativity and joy are a feature of many events and gatherings within the agroecological movement. This is not yet typical of the funder world - in fact, when the two come together it is usually on funder terms, bound by structures that can represent the old world. We wanted to explore how it feels to step into a new world together:

- To greatly build the impetus to fund the work that needs doing in ways that help, not hinder, collaboration and progress
- To foster a greater sense of togetherness and building of trust within and across sectors, particularly funding
- For participants be re-energised, taken care of and valued

... and for the simple joy of dancing together, the demonstration that complex things can be made possible with a bit of wisdom and collective will to learn and move together.



 **MOVING TOGETHER**
SHIFTING FOOD SYSTEMS
RELATIONALLY

The best time to start funding, collaborating and working differently was 20 or more years ago. **The next best time is now.**

Join us for this creative event bringing together UK funders and food & farming organisations to explore better ways of relating to each other.

12TH FEBRUARY
2PM-8PM

St Luke's Community Centre
90 Central St, London
EC1V 8AJ

 Food Ethics Council



Collage

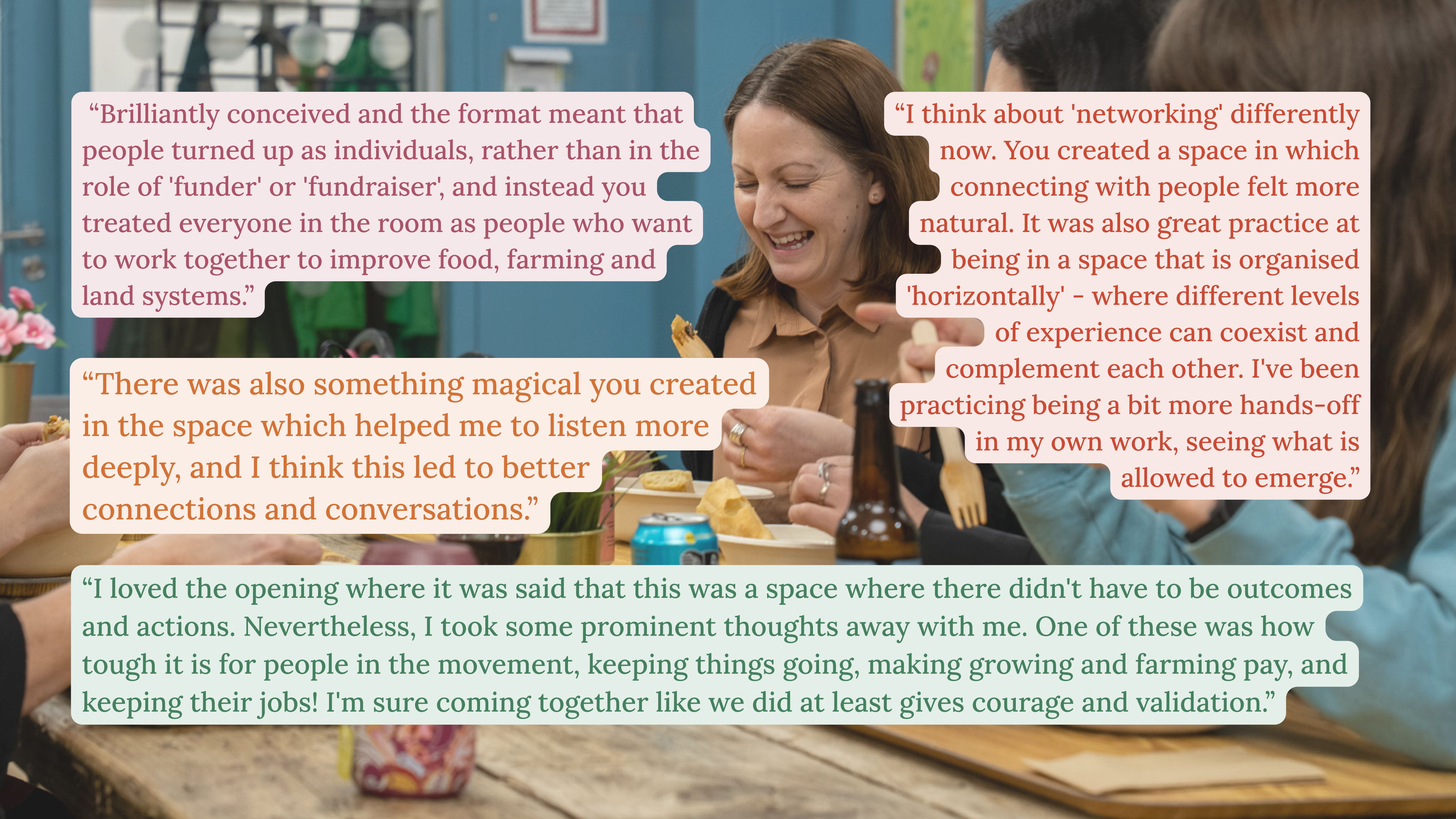


Ceili



Connection





“Brilliantly conceived and the format meant that people turned up as individuals, rather than in the role of 'funder' or 'fundraiser', and instead you treated everyone in the room as people who want to work together to improve food, farming and land systems.”

“There was also something magical you created in the space which helped me to listen more deeply, and I think this led to better connections and conversations.”

“I loved the opening where it was said that this was a space where there didn't have to be outcomes and actions. Nevertheless, I took some prominent thoughts away with me. One of these was how tough it is for people in the movement, keeping things going, making growing and farming pay, and keeping their jobs! I'm sure coming together like we did at least gives courage and validation.”

“I think about 'networking' differently now. You created a space in which connecting with people felt more natural. It was also great practice at being in a space that is organised 'horizontally' - where different levels of experience can coexist and complement each other. I've been practicing being a bit more hands-off in my own work, seeing what is allowed to emerge.”

A woman with long brown hair, wearing a bright yellow dress, is hugging a man from behind. The man has dark curly hair and is wearing a brown long-sleeved shirt and a grey scarf. They are both smiling and appear to be in a joyful embrace. The background is a blurred indoor setting with other people and tables.

“It has been really refreshing to start the year attending various events in which it felt like most parts of the system are working, in step, towards the same goal.”

“It was a gift to be in a space that had so much diversity, and which was so warm and nourishing.”

“It was a treat to come into London and be with like-minded souls for the day in a safe space.”

“Beautiful and much appreciated event.”

“I left feeling joyful .”

“The ceili broke down any barriers and got us all together, so I adored it.”

“How much you can still connect and learn about each others work without making it all about work!”

“We all dreamt of a resilient, equitable, inclusive future of food.”

Care as an intentional practice

Although we were bringing people together for creativity and movement, we knew that some harder feelings may come up. This is a natural part of any event where we're talking about the future, the land, care and community.

We were really intentional about how we designed the day. Creating spaces for openness and reflection, and room to talk about what was good, and what was tough.

“There was a moment when things could have not gone well. I remember that some of the conversations in the circle revealed some challenges that people were in the midst of, and that was beautifully caught [by the team].”



Since the event, we've heard about a few moments that landed heavily with people and we'd be remiss not to talk about those too.

We heard about the polarisation in the sector and how this event felt like a group of like-minded people.

One person reflected that a voiced criticism of funders felt very broad, and didn't acknowledge the funders in the room who are trying to make change in their organisations.

We heard that despite our intentions, this was just one afternoon and nourishing networks and trust needs more time.

A person's hand, wearing a blue denim sleeve and a ring, points towards a table covered with various sticky notes and markers. The sticky notes contain handwritten text in different colors. The background is slightly blurred, showing more of the table and the person's arm.

“This is good in some ways, but knowing who isn't in the room made my heart sink a little.”

“I understand it is frustrating for grassroots organisations [but] it is the system that's flawed, the people in the room are the ones trying to change it.”

“The funding landscape still feels quite impenetrable and inaccessible.”



Our primary reflection on these moments is gratitude - for people being open enough to share the hard stuff as well as the good stuff, for the humanity of all of the moments, all the connections, all the joy and all the movement.

It is through the embracing of this humanity that we can together begin to build collective appreciation of new perspectives, challenges and opportunities, bolstered by a shared hope - not a naive hope, but **a hope with teeth.**

In the face of polarisation across sectors, organisations and society, and noting that much of this is being deliberately stoked, we must be equally deliberate in our responses.

Bringing people together, to challenge, humour and care for each other, to find common ground and common humanity, is fundamental.

We'll keep doing what we're doing.
What can you do where you are?



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**Farming
the Future**