



The Climate Action Fund Learning Signposts #3

Reducing carbon impacts of food production

Produced by Gerard Couper, CAG Consultants, on behalf of The National Lottery Community Fund

Reducing carbon impacts of food production



Who is this for?

This learning signpost is primarily intended for people involved in Climate Action Fund projects and other projects or groups that are involved in reducing carbon impacts of food production. It shares some of the early learning from Climate Action Fund projects that are working in this area.

Introduction

Food systems emissions make a significant contribution to Greenhouse Gases (GHGs). Estimates range from 20%-35%¹. At the same time the COVID-19 experience has highlighted and heightened the fragility of food networks, particularly for those on low incomes.

This learning signpost contains information from four Climate Action Fund projects which aim to address these issues in different settings. The first two projects are based in London, the third in Derry/Londonderry in Northern Ireland, and the fourth works with farmers in Cornwall.



Figure 1 - Just Food and Climate Transition, Limbrough community hub, Tower Hamlets

¹See: What is a sustainable healthy diet? FCRN, April 2014, available at assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a089dfe5274a27b20002df/FCRN-sustainable-healthy-diet.pdf and Food systems responsible for 'one third' of human-caused emissions, Carbon Brief, March 2021, available at carbonbrief.org/food-systems-responsible-for-one-third-of-human-caused-emissions

Some lessons emerging from the projects we highlight in this resource are:



Do:

- Put the legwork in and engage the community and key partners such as the council.
- Agree a shared purpose and vision.
- Design the project to draw out learning for yourself and others.
- Share what went wrong as well as what worked.
- Build on opportunities and skills that already exist. Work with those who are there.
- Look for opportunities to upskill participants.
- Make time to absorb and communicate information to project partners.
- Value the experience of climate change that local residents and farmers have.



Don't:

- Stay behind your laptops.
- Make assumptions about what residents know.
- Come with preconceptions about farming.
- Collect data you don't really need.

Project 1: Action for Local Food

Action for Local Food is a community-led project working to transform the food system from the ground up. It is based in the inner London borough of Islington and it works with local people in designing and developing a range of projects to address the challenges of food production in a dense urban area.

This project is a partnership between Octopus Community Network, Global Generation and Islington Council. It is a food-related response to the climate emergency declared in Islington. A key aim of the project is to ensure that those on low incomes have access to fresh food and are part of growing that food. The urban food growing programme was established 12 years ago.

A permaculture approach is used; earth care, people care, fair share. The project has set up a number of demonstrator sites which have been designed to inspire and encourage local people to get involved:

- Octopus Community Plant Nursery; providing plants for use in green space improvements and producing food for Islington's Community Food Hubs.
- Highbury Quadrant Community Gardens; three previously derelict spaces designed and looked after by local people.
- Brickworks Rooftop Garden; set up in partnership with Brickworks Community Centre to create a model kitchen garden in a difficult unused urban space. It looks at how to maximise growing capacity, incorporate water-harvesting and make a green space in a built up urban area.

- The Story Garden; a large urban garden behind the British Museum which also demonstrates water harvesting and composting systems.

Ambassador programmes (one for young people and one for adults) were designed to upskill Islington residents of different ages in food production, low impact technologies and permaculture, covering topics like composting, building soils, water harvesting and retention, as well as site planning and development.

Both groups of Ambassadors are also supporting and initiating movement building events across the borough, as well as visiting a range of other local growing spaces to strengthen their networks, learn from others and share approaches, skills and perspectives.



Figure 2 - Action for Local Food, Highbury Quadrant Garden

Learning so far

Partnership building

- It is important to build partnerships with the community; ‘We have been in the borough for 12 years, we are community developers first, gardeners second. By taking a community-led approach you can instil motivation, inspiration and tenacity in transforming urban spaces into creative growing areas.’
- Working with key partners such as the local council is essential; ‘The Homes and Communities team are a fantastic broker, with residents and other parts of the council. They are instrumental in working on estates. Getting permissions is also important, and the Public Realm team helped with that also’.
- The project established a leadership roundtable rather than a steering group. Focusing on generous leadership, they benefited from representatives from Sustain, the Soil Association, Shared Assets, and the Centre for Food Policy at City, University of London.
- Building skills and confidence is crucial; the Ambassador programme run by Global Generation aimed to engage those who are not the usual suspects in terms of climate action.
- Don’t lead with a discussion about climate change; most people on low incomes are concerned about having enough to eat or paying for heating. Climate change should not be the starting point for building relationships; invest time in building trust, and be committed to delivering and managing expectations.
- Not everyone wants to garden; ‘Some people can design, build, make a cup of tea – don’t force people to garden’.

Practical solutions

- The demonstrator sites show how to address problems of gardening in an urban environment, where access to soil and water is limited. Solutions have to be affordable and focused upon creating compost and harvesting water.
- The demonstrator sites also show how to use the sun to best effect; in the roof garden and the community plant nursery they worked with Grimshaw architects to do a sun analysis. Mapping the movement of the sun across the space informed a re-design of the space to maximise growing space. Shade is also another requirement, so the architects designed a flexible, sustainable shading structure, which provides vertical growing space.
- Through movement making events the community were involved in identifying spaces that could be used for food growing, resulting in the identification of 57 acres of land on social housing estates.



Link

To find out more see: actionforlocalfood.org.uk

Project 2: Just Food and Climate Transition (FACT)

A partnership supporting community-led solutions for a sustainable and socially just urban food system in Tower Hamlets.

The Just Food and Climate Transition (FACT) is a partnership led by the Women's Environmental Network (WEN) which aims to work with communities in Tower Hamlets to research and explore how to create a sustainable and socially just food urban food system. Since the start, it has built on what was already happening in the area.

The focus of the programme is on engagement and learning. It includes the following elements:

- Three estate-based community hubs. The focus of the hubs is on mobilising individual and community action:
 - The Youth Hub programme is designed by young people and aims to give young people a voice. It is currently exploring issues around climate justice.
 - WEN hub has a space with a community kitchen and community garden and lots of workshops and events are planned.
 - The Parkview and Cranbook climate taskforce is community-organising on two housing estates. It is bringing residents together to co-design climate projects from scratch.

- Community Labs which tackle specific food system issues in an innovative way. Five have been funded so far. One of the labs, RUrban, is exploring a closed loop food system on a social housing estate. This includes anaerobic digestion for local food waste. They have an outdoor learning space, a community kitchen, run a composting club and are doing workshops with local growers. They aim to co-design with the local community and to upskill local residents so that they lead workshops themselves. They have found that this can help attract more people to the workshops. Other labs are looking at:
 - How to scale up food-co-ops, across the borough.
 - Rainwater harvesting and retention.
 - Reducing plastic bags in the markets.
 - Creating a community action plan for plastic reduction.
- A community-led action learning project, currently with 24 'Blueprint Architects'. This is a research project examining what a better food system in Tower Hamlets could look like. In the first year they have looked at food production. Ideas generated through their research may/ will be tried out in the programme.



Figure 3 - Just Food and Climate Transition, Be Green Students

Learning so far

Partnership building

- The real focus of the partnership is learning. 'We see it as a learning journey that we are all part of sharing with each other; what is going wrong and what is going right'. This started with co-creation workshops to develop a shared theory of change; 'A sense of how each partner's piece of the puzzle is feeding into the whole'. They have regular partner sharing spaces.
- You can never have too much time building relationships. 'If you want to reach beyond the usual suspects, it's important to move away from your laptops, and go around meeting people, finding organisations that aren't online.' For example, they are working in partnerships with an English as a second language class and other trusted local organisations; 'Trying to dissolve the community over there, us other here'.

Engaging the community

- The best way to keep the work connected is to build on opportunities and skills that already exist; 'Look for a local resource first rather than having to bring someone in from the outside'. RUrban, a local Bengali women's group, take time to get to know people and find out what their skills are.
- It's important to pay people for their involvement if possible. 'If you solely rely on volunteers, you are dependent on those who have the time and resources to take part'. One of the purposes of the Blueprint Architects is to upskill them and look for opportunities to pay them for pieces of work.
- Engaging different communities; 'Work with who is there and who wants to run things', e.g. RUrban runs one of the workshops. It is also important to look at barriers, e.g., they organised a Halloween pumpkin event, but a lot of people didn't come because culturally it wasn't appropriate.



Figure 4 - Just Food and Climate Transition, Blueprint architects

Link

To find out more see: [wen.org.uk/just-fact/](https://www.wen.org.uk/just-fact/)

Project 3: Acorn Farm

A project which mentors 260 families in Derry on how to grow their own fruit and vegetables.

The Acorn Farm, I Can Grow project is run by The Community Foundation Northern Ireland in partnership with Derry/Londonderry City and Strabane District Council, The Conservation Volunteers (TCV) and University College Cork.

Those involved are encouraged to take up tools and learn the basics of food production at home.

Families are given everything they need to grow food at home, learning from horticultural experts to begin the creation of a more sustainable food system throughout the city. Research into the local food system is also being carried out and the longer-term vision is to create an innovation hub for sustainable food production in St Columb's Park.



Figure 5 - Acorn Farm, Seed saving event at Brooke Park TCV by Conor from Social Farms and Gardens NI

Learning so far

Partnership building

- The collaboration with partners and The National Lottery Community Fund has been a supportive learning environment. When the pandemic hit, everyone was in the same boat. This gave the project a sense of cohesion; everyone was trying to do something collectively for a bigger purpose. 'The families really embraced it, a lot of families in a very ordinary way are looking to take action on climate.'
- Make time to absorb and communicate information to project partners. 'There is a lot of information at the cohort meetings – you need to set aside time for that, and report back to your project.' The project has a learning meeting in addition to the project steering group.
- Make sure your partnership agreement is nice and clear; you need an open partnership agreement designed to play to partners' strengths. This also needs to include an agreement on data sharing. 'Stay in your own lane and merge when you have to.'
- Scale; the project originally planned for 100 participants. They had 260 apply and didn't want to turn them down, but this was quite a pressure on the partnership. 'In the future, we will cut our cloth a bit better – we wouldn't take everybody, only because we can't support them. We will have criteria, or spread them out over different growing seasons.'
- Don't make assumptions about what residents know; the horticulturalists assumed that participants weren't interested in growing over winter. 'In fact, people don't go into their gardens in the winter, they didn't know they could grow food in the winter.'
- Don't collect too much data, 'People don't want to be filling in forms and you don't want a lot of data you don't need; you need the right questions.'
- Understanding more about the food cycle; 'Participants got to learn that the compost we use is our recycled food waste. Residents were previously raging about putting their recycling out, now they understand what the purpose of the recycling lark is.'

Working with the community

- Engagement with the participants; different methods are being used including a newsletter, direct visits to participants and training at a horticultural centre. 'Horticulturalists held participants' hands. They need that, a newsletter and YouTube are all very well, but direct practical engagement really works.'
-

Link

To find out more see:

communityfoundationni.org/programmes/acorn-farm-i-can-grow

Project 4:

Farm Net Zero

A project which supports farmers in moving towards Net Zero through information-sharing and working with Monitor Farms to measure their carbon footprint and monitor changes.

Farm Net Zero is a community-led project to showcase how farming and food production can help to reach Net Zero. The project is working with a core community of 40 Monitor Farms and three Demonstration Farms in East Cornwall; these farms range from small-scale market gardens and traditional beef and sheep farms to larger-scale dairy and arable farms.

By working with a range of farm types, the project hopes to represent as much of the region's food production as possible. The project partners include Cornwall College, Duchy College's Rural Business School, Farm Carbon Toolkit, Westcountry Rivers Trust, Innovative Farmers and Innovation for Agriculture.

Together, they are monitoring their farmers' progress to Net Zero through carbon footprinting and running events, trials and workshops for farmers to learn from one another. They are also engaging with the wider farming community and with non-farmers through a citizen science programme.

Work to-date has included:

- Workshops and events; since January 2021, a total of 219 people have attended workshops and events. These workshops have allowed for discussion between farmers and non-farmers, with the transfer of ideas and opinions

proving valuable to attendees and the overall project. A mix of event lengths are being run to make them accessible to farmers with little time. 'The attendees often comment on how positive the events are, which helps to encourage attendance at future events.'

- Baseline footprints; 'We are working through the baseline carbon footprints of our Monitor Farms and will be using them to start a conversation with the farmers on where they see the opportunities to change'. For some farms, gathering the data for their carbon footprint has proved complicated. 'To overcome this, we have allowed for different levels of detail on the carbon footprints.'



Learning so far

Working with farmers

- Explain that you want to learn from the farmers and their experiences.
- Listen to farmers and act on what they are telling you. 'Farmers are experiencing climate change in their day-to-day work and there is a lot of pressure in farming media on the impact on climate. Many farmers will want the opportunity to tell people about what they are doing to address climate change.'
- Don't impose preconceptions on farmers/farming. 'Due to the pressures outlined above, some farmers may feel defensive about their practices.'

Link

To find out more see:

farmcarbontoolkit.org.uk/farm-net-zero

Resources produced by The National Lottery Community Fund

The National Lottery Community Fund has published some information on two other projects, funded through The National Lottery Community Fund, that relate to food production and food waste. This also includes links to various useful resources on this topic tnlcommunityfund.org.uk/key-initiatives/food.

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful to the following for their help in compiling this resource.

- Alex Bebbington, Duchy College
- Elle McAll, Women's Environment Network
- Julie Parish, Octopus Community Network
- Shauna Kelpie, Community Foundation Northern Ireland



About the Climate Action Fund

The Climate Action Fund is a ten-year £100 million fund supporting communities across the UK to take action on climate change.

About The National Lottery Community Fund

We are the largest non-statutory community funder in the UK – community is at the heart of our purpose, vision and name. We support activities that create resilient communities that are more inclusive and environmentally sustainable and that will strengthen society and improve lives across the UK. We're proud to award money raised by National Lottery players to communities across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and to work closely with government to distribute vital grants and funding from key Government programmes and initiatives. As well as responding to what communities tell us is important to them, our funding is focused on four key missions, supporting communities to:

1. **Come together**
2. **Be environmentally sustainable**
3. **Help children and young people thrive**
4. **Enable people to live healthier lives.**

Thanks to the support of National Lottery players, we distribute around £500 million a year through 10,000+ grants and plan to invest over £4 billion of funding into communities by 2030. We're privileged to be able to work with the smallest of local groups right up to UK-wide charities, enabling people and communities to bring their ambitions to life.

National Lottery players raise over £30 million each week for good causes throughout the UK. Since The National Lottery began in 1994, £47 billion has been raised and more than 670,000 individual grants have been made across the UK – the equivalent of around 240 National Lottery grants in every UK postcode district.

www.tnlcommunityfund.org.uk



**REDUCING CARBON IMPACTS OF FOOD
PRODUCTION**

Produced 2022 Published 2023

