

Transforming Food Systems Workshop - Ideas Exchange Summary

A summary of the cross-sector collaboration to unite rural and urban communities across Gloucestershire through food, climate, and nature - building a fairer, more resilient food system for the whole county.



Gloucestershire Food Systems:
Ideas Exchange May 2026



Gloucestershire Food Systems: Ideas Exchange 2026

Uniting rural and urban communities for a resilient future.

On 28 April 2026, 40 stakeholders convened to explore how we can transform our local food system. The event was co-hosted by Feeding Gloucestershire in partnership with Gloucestershire VCSE Alliance and the Gloucestershire Food and Farming Partnership (GFFP). This report captures the key insights and strategic next steps from that collaboration.

Purpose and Context

- Build relationships for system-wide collaboration
- Explore opportunities for a fairer, more resilient local food system
- Generate ideas for potential joint funding bids

A call for partnership bids to the National Lottery Community Fund Climate Action Fund (Food Systems) formed a backdrop for the event, but the day was intentionally designed as an “ideas exchange”, focusing on sharing knowledge and surfacing opportunities rather than developing detailed bids or plans.



What Happened

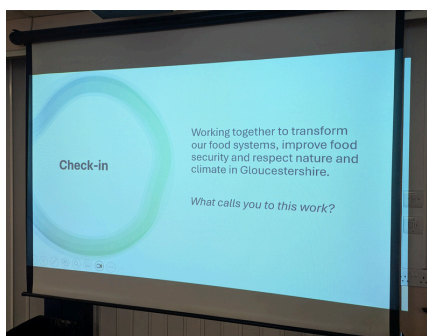
The day combined structured and open formats:

- **World Café discussions** exploring what's happening across 5 food system themes
- **Open Space** where participants set the agenda and developed ideas collaboratively

Participants explored the full food system – from production and distribution to access, culture, and governance.

Key Insights from the World Cafe

Strong Foundations to Build on:



Gloucestershire has a rich and diverse food ecosystem, including:

- A wide network of community growing initiatives, social enterprises, and agroecological farming practice
- Strong academic and research capacity and expertise
- Established collaborative infrastructure and partnerships across sectors
- Existing tools and strategies such as the Feeding Gloucestershire Food Map and local food strategies



There are notable examples of innovation:

- Surplus redistribution models (e.g. Network of Stroud Hubs)
- Urban food partnerships (e.g. Cheltenham Food Board)
- Integrated school food programmes (e.g. The Great Plate)
- Rural cluster models (e.g. Cotswold Farming Cluster)

5 Significant Opportunities for System Change



1. Local supply chains and infrastructure

- Developing local processing, storage, and distribution systems
- Expanding social supermarkets and local food hubs

2. Land and asset use

- Better matching of land, growers, and community need
- Use of development land and shared facilities (e.g. kitchens, vehicles)
- Embedding food growing into planning policy (e.g. Section 106)

3. Community food and access

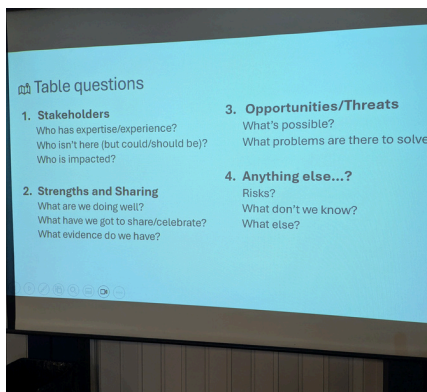
- Expanding community dining and reducing stigma
- Bringing food into places people already gather (schools, sports, faith settings)
- Improving rural access and transport solutions

4. Skills, training and education

- Agroecological training and horticulture skills development
- Linking schools and communities to food production
- Increasing public understanding of nutrition and sustainable food

5. Finance and investment

- Blended finance models and public/private partnerships
- Long-term, equitable funding approaches
- Support for community-led enterprise



Systemic Challenges and Risks

Funding and system structure

- Short-term and inequitable funding
- Competition between organisations
- Lack of capacity for smaller groups to engage

Affordability and economics

- Tension between fair prices for producers and affordability for consumers
- High infrastructure and distribution costs
- Workforce challenges (low wages, rural housing issues)

Access and inequality

- Structural poverty limiting access to healthy food
- Rural isolation and transport barriers
- Continued reliance on supermarkets due to convenience

Social and cultural barriers

- Stigma associated with food poverty
- Disconnection from food production
- Limited cultural diversity in food provision

Strategic and external risks

- Climate change and environmental pressures
- National policy constraints and economic instability
- Fragmentation across the system

Next Steps & Future Collaboration



1. **Prioritise Action:** Focus the next phase on a manageable set of shared goals and outcomes.
2. **Strengthen Coordination:** Establish a coordinating function or "backbone" organisation and improve communication tools.
3. **Build a Shared Vision:** Develop a collective narrative for Gloucestershire that includes diverse communities and lived experience.
4. **Align Funding:** Explore collaborative bids, such as the National Lottery Climate Action Fund.
5. **Maintain Momentum:** Reconvene for facilitated planning sessions to develop practical, deliverable initiatives.

Conclusion Success depends on trust, relationships, and the ability to work collectively across sectors to create a fairer, more resilient food system for all.



4. Partnership is Critical - but Needs Strengthening

A central theme was that how organisations work together is as important as what they do.



Strengths include:

- A strong history of partnership working across Gloucestershire
- Established place-based and community-led initiatives

However, key gaps were identified:

- Fragmentation and siloed working
- Lack of shared data and system-wide intelligence
- Need for stronger coordination and facilitation

Participants emphasised:

- The importance of trust, inclusion, and shared purpose
- The need to “go to communities” rather than expect engagement
- The value of storytelling and inclusive communication



Emerging Priorities from Open Space Discussions

Key themes emerging from participant-led sessions included:



- Better coordination and mapping of food system activity
- A more unified approach to funding bids, potentially aligning around a shared county-wide proposal although there were strong place-based proposals
- Development of urban growing and skills programmes (e.g. apprenticeships)
- Investment in processing hubs and local infrastructure
- Addressing food insecurity through integrated, localised models
- Strengthening links between climate resilience and food systems
- Embedding food more strongly in public health and local authority priorities

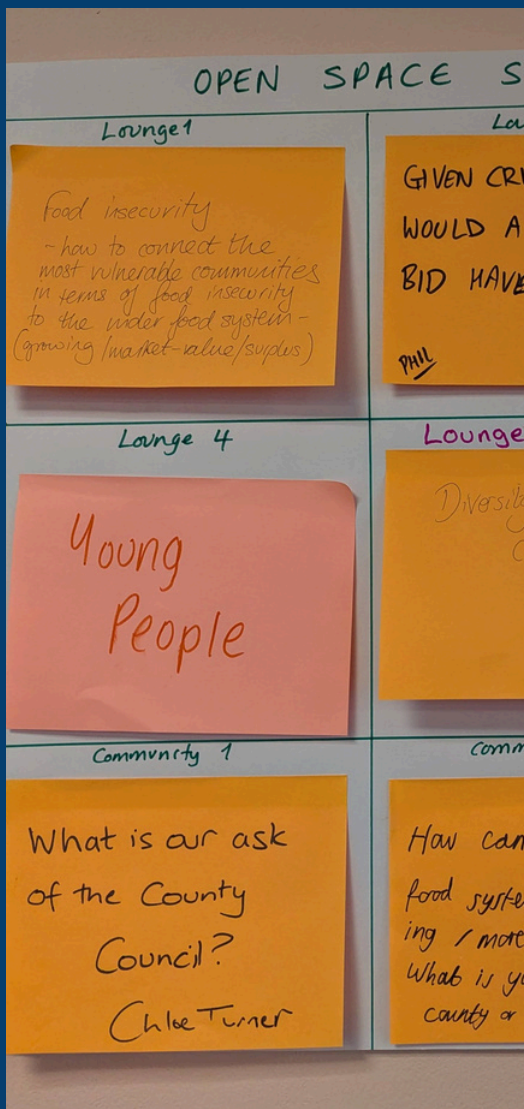
Outcomes and Impact of the Event

The workshop achieved its immediate aims:

- New relationships and connections formed across sectors
- Increased visibility of existing activity and expertise
- Generation of a large volume of ideas and potential collaborations
- Strong energy and commitment for future joint working

However, participants also reported a sense of complexity and the scale of the challenge, and the risk of overwhelm without clear next steps.

Key Messages and Next Steps



1. Move from Divergence to Focus

The event generated a wide range of ideas. The next phase requires prioritisation of a manageable set of actions and clear articulation of shared goals and outcomes

2. Strengthen Coordination and Infrastructure

There is a need for a coordinating function or backbone organisation and improved data, mapping, and communication tools.

3. Build a Shared Vision for System Change

This includes developing a collective narrative and strategy for food systems in Gloucestershire, ensuring inclusion of diverse communities and lived experience.

4. Align Around Funding and Delivery Opportunities

There was a desire to explore collaborative funding bids, including the National Lottery opportunity. However, it is unclear whether a single coordinated bid or multiple aligned proposals would be most effective.

5. Continue the Collaboration

Participants expressed a clear desire to:

- Reconvene for facilitated planning sessions
- Develop practical, deliverable initiatives
- Maintain momentum and relationships built during the event

Conclusion

This Ideas Exchange demonstrated that Gloucestershire has significant assets, expertise, and commitment to transforming its food system. However, it also highlighted the complexity of system change and the need for strong coordination, shared vision, and sustained collaboration.

The success of future action will depend not just on funding, but on trust, relationships, and the ability to work collectively across sectors and communities to create a fairer, more resilient food system.

