

2024

the Suffolk FOOD SUMMIT

Workshop Report

A COLLECTION OF SUMMARIES



Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Introduction | 2 |
| Workshop 1: Producers' Perspective: Increasing Access to Local Food | 3 |
| Workshop 2: The Processed Puzzle: Unpacking perceptions of ultra processed food (UPF) and health | 5 |
| Workshop 3: RegenVen: How landscape scale deer management can recover nature and produce sustainable, healthy food | 7 |
| Workshop 4: Building Healthy Communities: Nutritious food at local food projects | 9 |
| Workshop 5: Wasting No Opportunity: Tackling food waste across the supply chain | 11 |
| Workshop 6: FarmStarts: A Pathway for new farmers to grow and thrive | 13 |
| Workshop 7: Celebrating Diversity in Food, Nature and Communities | 15 |
| Workshop 8: Growing the Future: Pathways for young people into agriculture | 17 |



Introduction

The Suffolk Food Summit, held on the 12th of November, was an inspiring exchange of knowledge and ideas thanks to all our panellists, facilitators and attendees. With eight diverse workshops (and not enough time in the day), we wanted to capture an essence of the day so that everyone can have a glimpse of what went on in the other sessions.

Each workshop is summarized in this report, with links to detailed minutes and any slides used provided at the end of each section.

We hope that these insights inspire your work and spark further conversations around food. Happy reading!



Workshop 1: Producers' Perspective: Increasing Access to Local Food

Facilitator: Krysia Woroniecka, Tilia Market Garden/Kids Kitchen

Panel:

- Clive Williamson, Maynard House
- Glenn Buckingham, Helmingham Hall Estates, NFU
- Marley Karazimba, ELIAS Permaculture/Bantu Farm
- Ryan Boyd, The Oak Tree Community Farm
- Samuel Morgan, Stour Valley Farming and Conservation



This session examined food producers' perspectives on balancing profitability with sustainability, alongside the infrastructure challenges they face. Krysia opened by summarising the current state of the UK food system, referring to the recent [House of Lords food and diet report](#). She emphasised the need to shift away from a globalised food system, which contributes to public health issues like obesity and diabetes, and undermines farmers' livelihoods. She highlighted the potential of local food systems as a solution to economic, health, social, and climate issues.

Challenges and Solutions

Five panellists, representing various scales of farming in Suffolk, shared their experiences—from small-scale Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) and livestock farming to medium-scale fruit and juice production, and large-scale commercial arable farming. It became clear that each farmer operated at a scale that suited their resources and access to the sector. New entrants, Sam and Marley, highlighted the importance of community connections in establishing their businesses, while Clive shared how financial pressures from supermarkets led him to downsize. Ryan highlighted the diversity of crops they grow at Oak Tree farm and the amount of food they produce, despite limited space. Glenn pointed out the critical threat to small-scale family farms, particularly due to the new Family Farm Tax introduced in the recent government budget.

Financial barriers were discussed; for example, smaller scale farms often struggle with high upfront costs and limited support from government schemes like ELMS. Some producers, like Ryan and Marley, rely heavily on community support to sustain their operations. The need for funding to support small-scale farms in developing on-farm infrastructure, such as toilets and community engagement facilities was raised. Another major

constraint for farm development in Suffolk is the lack of local infrastructure, such as mills and abattoirs. This forces businesses to transport their produce over long distances for processing, straying from local models.

In response to Krysia's question on affordability and access to local food, community-owned farms were suggested as a potential solution, especially with adaptable pricing models like sliding scales. Clive noted the opportunity to incentivise farmers to share land with the community, while Glenn emphasised the loss of local food in the industrial food chain, pointing out how his crops likely end up as animal feed. He also mentioned the shift in hospital food, where local and nutritious food is increasingly needed to meet patient health requirements.

Comments from Audience and Final Thoughts

The conversation concluded with a call for greater community engagement, improved local procurement, and more support for small-scale farms to help build a more resilient food system. The panel emphasised the need for individuals to connect with local food producers and gain a deeper understanding of where their food comes from.

The audience raised various perspectives. A model where food vouchers being worth more at farmers markets or CSA's was proposed. A headteacher in the audience discussed the importance of teaching children about food and cooking, especially through programs that incorporate local produce. A statistic was shared that 49% of farmers in the UK are considering leaving farming due to financial difficulties. The panel discussed how large farms might absorb smaller ones, and the potential consequences for local food systems, particularly in light of the new [family farm tax](#).

Final thoughts from the panellists emphasised the importance of connecting with local producers and rethinking food systems from the ground up. Marley urged the community to get involved in CSAs and local food initiatives, and Clive reminded everyone that consumers have the power to support local farms by choosing alternatives to supermarkets. Ryan advocated for more community-based support and engagement and Glenn called for better local food infrastructure and policy changes to support smaller farms. Sam highlighted the importance of localising farming systems to create more resilient and sustainable communities.

Krysia also made a thought provoking point: *“when we're talking about increasing uptake of local food, we're not saying we need to do away with the global system... if we just replaced 10% of supermarket retail with local produce, and make an in way into procurement, then that's already making a huge difference. It doesn't have to be all or nothing thinking.”*

Overall, the session highlighted the importance of a more connected, systems-based approach to addressing the challenges faced by farmers. The formation of the Suffolk Food Partnership offers hope for greater collaboration across sectors like procurement, farming, funding, transport, and infrastructure.

[Link to minutes](#)



Workshop 2: The Processed Puzzle: Unpacking perceptions of ultra processed food (UPF) and health

Facilitator: Emma Harvey-Lawrence



Summary from facilitator, Emma Harvey-Lawrence:

Lecturer in Health Sciences, Emma Harvey Lawrence, facilitated a creative workshop on the topic of ultra-processed food (UPF).

The Ultra-Processed Puzzle was an engaging session designed to deepen understanding and spark potential for action regarding UPFs. Participants were from diverse fields such as food production, local council, food charities, and estate management. The workshop aimed to build a shared understanding of UPFs, discuss practical dietary improvements, and explore the broader health and policy implications of UPF consumption in Suffolk. The session used interactive and creative methods to foster collaboration, insight-sharing, and suggested actionable outcomes.

Participants explored key questions about UPFs, such as their health impacts and prevalence in the UK diet, while delving into challenges and solutions through reflective and group-based activities. The session culminated in a "35" exercise where participants collaboratively ranked actionable insights to identify priorities for understanding and potentially reducing UPF consumption in Suffolk. This dynamic approach encouraged meaningful dialogue and practical takeaways for participants, emphasising collective action and informed decision-making in addressing the challenges posed by UPFs.

Key insights from the session included:

- **Definitional Challenges:** Lack of clarity in defining and categorising UPFs highlights the need for further research and education.
- **Affordability and Accessibility:** Affordability and convenience were cited as primary drivers of UPF consumption, with minimally processed foods often seen as more expensive and time consuming.
- **Social Inequities:** Populations with limited food choices, such as those relying on foodbanks, risk discrimination if affordable and convenient alternatives to UPFs are not provided.

- **Erosion of Trust:** Health claims on reformulated and fortified UPFs are perceived as misleading, eroding consumer trust in these products.
- **Cultural Risks:** Removing industrially made versions of traditionally processed foods may inadvertently reduce awareness and practice of cultural food traditions.
- **Systemic Solutions Needed:** Education and upskilling are crucial but must be paired with robust research, equitable policies, and systemic changes to reshape the food environment and reduce reliance on foods considered harmful.

For anyone interested in reading further, the following Food, Diet and Obesity Committee House of Lords report may be of interest: [Recipe for health: a plan to fix our broken food system](#)

Actions from the group

Actions and asks from the group included continued funding, to encourage and enable Suffolk cookery workshops to teach people how to cook from fresh, simple ingredients, as well as healthy ingredients at foodbanks and on the Be Well Bus. Further research is needed into community bulk buying schemes and subsidies for food producers to buy equipment which will reduce their costs, making products healthier and more affordable. Engaging local nutritionists and university researchers was also suggested to translate evidence into actionable tips for the community to identify healthy options.

[Link to slides](#)

[Link to minutes](#)



Workshop 3: RegenVen: How landscape scale deer management can recover nature and produce sustainable, healthy food

Facilitator: Sam Hanks, Suffolk Wildlife Trust

Panel:

- Esther Rosewarne, Suffolk Wildlife Trust
- Gren Strolenberg, Lavenham Butchers
- Lucy Manthorpe, Kiln Farm



The Suffolk Wildlife Trust's Landscape Recovery Projects (LRPs), named Connecting Constable and Gainsborough Country, aims to restore landscapes, improve biodiversity, and sequester carbon in South Suffolk. One of the key challenges the project faces is managing the deer population, which has been severely damaging woodlands and habitats across the region. Deer overpopulation has led to a decline in biodiversity, as the deer consume saplings, damage trees, and browse ground vegetation such as bluebells. The LRPs are focused on restoring habitats and promoting wildlife diversity by reducing deer numbers through controlled culling.

To address this, Lucy Manthorpe shared her experience in successfully restoring habitat on her farm, attributing much of the improvement to controlling the deer population. She explained that whilst monitoring the exact deer numbers in the UK is hard, we know approximately that, in 1977, the number of deer in England was around 70,000. This was thought to be a problem at that time, and yet today the estimate is 2.5 million. This unmanageable situation we have today is partially due to the deer act of 1963, explained Lucy, which promoted the welfare of deer and therefore demoted the killing of deer and access to venison meat.

"I quickly discovered the woods... (were) eerily silent and bereft of life... Everywhere, the woods, the hedges, the fields, were scarred by heavy trampling. The clue to all this was the large herds of deer, who it turned out, had made the farm their home... it became apparent, that if we had deer in such numbers, we would have nothing else."



After implementing deer management measures, her farm saw significant improvements, including the return of bluebells and orchids, a rise in species such as birds and moths, and improved crop yields. Lucy emphasised the importance of effective deer control as essential for the success of landscape restoration.

Greg Strolenberg, a local butcher, discussed the challenges of introducing venison into the market, noting the negative perceptions surrounding the meat, such as the misconceptions around "*killing Bambi*." He highlighted venison's health benefits, sustainability, and low carbon footprint, stressing that it is an ethical and locally sourced alternative to other meats. He also underscored the importance of providing a local market for venison to support deer culling efforts, which in turn benefits both the environment and local food systems.

The RegenVen initiative aims to address these challenges by promoting venison as a sustainable, nutritious food source. It seeks to engage local communities, businesses, schools, and farmers to address deer overpopulation while supporting habitat restoration. The initiative includes developing processing hubs to handle deer carcasses, creating infrastructure to improve venison distribution, and training new stalkers to support deer management.

Several suggestions for broadening the consumption of venison were discussed, such as introducing venison into school meals, collaborating with local food providers, and exploring new ways to engage the public through education and awareness campaigns.

A concern was raised from an audience member on how to scale deer management without disrupting the delicate balance of ecosystem restoration. The challenge lies in understanding the deer population dynamics and ensuring that culling efforts are sustainable over time, without overshooting the target. The involvement of supermarkets in selling venison was also debated, with concerns about how supermarket control could undermine the local, sustainable approach to venison production.

The project also has the potential to help charities by donating surplus venison, thereby contributing to the community while addressing overpopulation. As the initiative progresses, the key objective is to create a sustainable, coordinated approach that benefits both the environment and local communities.

[Link to minutes](#)

[Link to slides](#)

Workshop 4: Building Healthy Communities: Nutritious food at local food projects

Facilitator: Clare Frewin, Suffolk County Council

Panel:

- Emma Healy, Halesworth Community Larder
- Garath Jones, Castle Hill Community Centre
- Holly Wright, Food Cycle
- Susannah Robirosa, ActivGardens



Clare Frewin began by emphasising the importance of a holistic approach to health. Clare explained that healthy eating is not just about the food on the plate, but about creating environments that support healthy choices. This includes factors such as where people live and the systems in place to support their wellbeing. Her role focuses on children's health and wellbeing, using a strategy that includes "Eat Well, Move Well, Sleep Well," and prioritises overall wellbeing.

Introductions

Emma from Halesworth Community Larder shared the origin of their project, which began as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Initially a place to redistribute surplus food, it evolved into a community larder offering free food to those in need, with a special focus on fresh fruits and vegetables. They also offer cooking classes to help families learn to prepare nutritious meals. Despite being part of the FareShare network, the Larder faces challenges as supply and demand fluctuate. Emma said that *"the biggest dream I have is that Halesworth Community Larder should not need to exist."*

Holly, representing FoodCycle, explained their mission to reduce food waste and combat food poverty by offering weekly community meals. These meals, made from food that would otherwise be discarded, are open to everyone and aim to foster community bonds while addressing isolation. Holly stressed that FoodCycle's approach goes beyond food provision, offering a space for people to gather and develop skills, such as cooking and budgeting, whilst tackling isolation and improving wellbeing.

Garath, from Castle Hill Community Centre, discussed their transition from a food bank to a "top-up shop," which offers affordable food in exchange for a small fee. He highlighted the growing role of their project in crisis intervention, as they partner with other local services like Citizens Advice and Anglia Care Trust. Garath pointed out that many of the people they serve face broader challenges such as financial hardship and lack of skills, which are addressed by offering education and support alongside food.

Susannah Robirosa from ActivGardens explained how their community garden project in Ipswich and surrounding areas helps promote health and wellbeing through food growing. They work with disadvantaged communities, particularly long-term unemployed individuals, to develop gardening skills and provide a space for social interaction. Beyond food production, ActivGardens main focuses are improving health and wellbeing, skills and learning, and creating and building community.

Affordability versus nutrition

The panel discussed the balance between providing affordable food and promoting healthy eating. Clare highlighted the need to create new systems that make nutritious food more accessible, acknowledging that affordability often trumps nutrition for many families. Garath noted that while processed foods are often cheaper and more convenient, projects like Castle Hill's slow cooker workshops aim to teach people how to cook nutritious meals from low-cost ingredients. Emma echoed this point, emphasising the importance of supporting people in making healthier food choices, even if the food they receive is unfamiliar or difficult to prepare.

The discussion also highlighted the role of social stigma and convenience in food choices. Holly pointed out that many people facing food insecurity may choose pre-made meals due to limited cooking facilities or time, and overcoming this requires creating an inclusive environment where people feel comfortable learning about and accessing healthier options. The importance of community meals and shared food experiences was also stressed as a way to break down barriers to healthy eating.

Susannah from ActivGardens noted a memorable experience when 50 women from Suffolk Refugee Support came to their gardens, got the fire going and made Kosovan pancakes, Iraqi flatbreads and dolmades wrapped with chard leaves. It was a fantastic display of cultural sharing and showed how food binds us and brings us together. She went on to say that **“There can never be too many community food projects...(and it's) fantastic that there are so many different groups and organisations fulfilling different pressures that our societies are facing.”**

Broader challenges

The panel also reflected on the broader challenges of promoting healthy eating, particularly among younger families. Susannah noted that engaging younger parents, who often face time constraints and lack cooking skills, is particularly difficult. Clare pointed out that the high cost of fuel for cooking is another major barrier to preparing nutritious meals at home.

In terms of education, the panel agreed that it is crucial to approach learning with empathy and practicality. Garath emphasised that teaching people how to use basic food items through hands-on learning is key. Emma suggested that food education should start in schools, where children can learn about budgeting and nutrition, although she acknowledged the resource limitations in schools.

Finally, the panel discussed the support needed from local authorities and policymakers to ensure the success of community food projects. Clare advocated for a shift in focus from economic indicators like GDP to health outcomes, ensuring that health and wellbeing are prioritised from the outset of such initiatives. Garath stressed the need for collaboration between community groups and councils, while others noted the importance of trained leaders to guide these initiatives, rather than relying solely on volunteers.

[Link to minutes](#)

Workshop 5: Wasting No Opportunity: Tackling food waste across the supply chain

Facilitator: Antonia Lancaster, Suffolk County Council

Panel:

- Michael Barret, FareShare East Anglia
- Rowen Halstead, Food Waste Chef
- Roz Scott, Still Good Food and LIONS Gleaning
- Samantha Oldfield, Food Savvy



The session, facilitated by Antonia Lancaster of Suffolk County Council, brought together a diverse panel to discuss strategies for reducing food waste across the supply chain. The session encouraged audience interaction, with questions and suggestions adding depth to the discussion.

Antonia opened the session by presenting striking statistics on food waste. A handout revealed that 25% of food produced never gets eaten, 33% is left on farms due to cosmetic standards, and 73% of food waste occurs at the household level, amounting to 4.6 million tonnes annually. These figures set the stage for exploring solutions to this pervasive problem.

Addressing Food Waste at Different Levels

Roz Scott described how gleaning works, where surplus crops are collected from farms before they are ploughed under. This year, her group gleaned 12.5 tonnes of produce, distributing it through foodbanks, Still Good Food shops, and one school. However, Roz lamented the difficulty of keeping gleaned produce within Suffolk due to logistical and contractual barriers. She posed a poignant question: *“Why can’t something that is grown in Bury St Edmunds be eaten in Bury St Edmunds?”*

Rowen Halstead shared insights from his 13 years in the restaurant industry, highlighting widespread waste and a disconnection from food systems. Now focused on education, he runs workshops and supper clubs to teach

creative ways to utilise food waste. His mission is to reconnect people with their food and reduce waste through practical and engaging methods.

Samantha Oldfield discussed her role with the Food Savvy campaign, which tackles household food waste by raising awareness and offering practical advice. She emphasised the societal normalisation of food waste, noting that low food costs, convenience, and time constraints often lead to wasteful habits. Food Savvy focuses on helping people save time, money, and food through education on planning meals, proper storage, and using leftovers.

“There is almost a societal norm to wasting food. We all do it, and a lot of it goes unquestioned”

Michael Barrett provided an overview of FareShare East Anglia, which redistributes surplus food from manufacturers and retailers. Operating from a large depot in Ipswich, FareShare handles 80 tonnes of food monthly, with 50% being fresh produce. FareShare has a Surplus With a Purpose programme, which funds farmers to harvest unmarketable crops for donation. They are also exploring innovative uses for surplus raw ingredients through initiatives like [WeCan](#), which turns surplus items (e.g., potato chips) into products like bean and potato soup. While Tesco, their main supplier, has reduced surplus volumes, FareShare sees this as a positive sign of decreased food waste at the source.

Key Challenges and Potential Solutions

The session touched on systemic issues contributing to food waste, including the power dynamics of supermarkets. Roz shared how gleaning mobilises volunteers to collect surplus crops, showcasing the power of community action. However, she faces challenges in distributing gleaned produce within Suffolk. After delivering to shops, she struggles to move the remaining produce locally, as schools and prisons are often tied to contracts. She criticised the influence of large retailers, which she claimed drive waste by imposing cosmetic standards and restrictive contracts.

Rowen and Samantha discussed consumer education as a critical tool. They emphasised the importance of teaching people to shop wisely, store food properly, and use overlooked edible parts of produce, such as broccoli stalks and cauliflower leaves. Rowen and Michael also highlighted the role of social media in raising awareness.

Michael described the difficulties of moving large quantities of fresh produce at short notice, while remaining financially accessible to charities.

The panel also explored innovative solutions such as cooperative purchasing, gleaning networks, and food-sharing systems. Michael encouraged forming local cooperatives to reduce costs and waste, while Roz advocated for reviving barter systems to exchange surplus produce for staples like canned goods.

Education and Empowerment

Education emerged as a recurring theme, with speakers stressing the importance of teaching both children and adults about food waste. Samantha highlighted her work in schools, where children learn to reduce plate waste and influence their families. Rowen proposed creating accessible resources, such as cookbooks focused on repurposing food waste. He also touched upon use by and best before dates which are often misunderstood by public, resulting in huge amounts of waste.

The session concluded with a call to action from Antonia, who urged participants to consider one actionable step they could take to reduce food waste in their lives. The panel emphasised that addressing food waste requires collective effort from individuals, communities, and the entire supply chain.

[Link to minutes](#)

Workshop 6: FarmStarts: A Pathway for new farmers to grow and thrive

Facilitator: Sabine Virani, Sustainable Food Norwich



The session, facilitated by Sabine Virani of Sustainable Food Norwich, introduced the concept of FarmStarts as a solution to support aspiring farmers and strengthen local food systems. Sustainable Food Norwich, which joined the Sustainable Food Places network in 2022, represents a significant step toward addressing gaps in East Anglia's food partnership landscape, with Suffolk potentially joining next year. Sabine shared how collaborative efforts from organisations like the Norwich Institute for Sustainable Development and Goodery bolstered their initiative.

FarmStarts are site-based incubator programs designed to address common barriers faced by new entrant farmers, such as financial constraints, lack of land access, and limited training opportunities. These programmes offer participants access to land, equipment, and infrastructure, while also providing business support, mentoring, and social solidarity. They emphasise agroecological principles, which focus on farming practices that care for both the environment and the community. While not all FarmStarts are certified organic, participants in the UK are encouraged to adopt ecological land management practices to meet sustainability standards.

Origin

Originating in the United States and Canada 30 years ago, FarmStarts have since spread worldwide, with over 400 programs in France alone. In the UK, the [Landworkers' Alliance \(LWA\)](#) manages the network, with diverse models tailored to local needs. For example, Kindling Trust in Manchester requires participants to contribute financially, while Organiclea in London offers free training. These programs demonstrate that FarmStarts are adaptable and scalable, providing a critical pathway for new farmers to gain experience and establish their careers.

Why we need them

FarmStarts address a growing crisis in the agricultural sector. The average age of farmers in the UK is increasing, with 68% over 55 years old and only 5% under 35. This demographic trend highlights an urgent need to attract and support younger farmers. Additionally, the UK food system faces vulnerabilities, relying heavily on imports for 40% of its food, including 85% of fruit and 43% of vegetables. These challenges are compounded by geopolitical and climate pressures that disrupt global supply chains. Supermarket monopolies exacerbate the issue, offering low prices to farmers while retaining most of the profit. The result is a food system that struggles with sustainability, food insecurity, and farmer well-being.

The urgency of transforming food systems is further underscored by rising food poverty in the UK. Currently, 4 million children face food insecurity, a number that doubled between 2022 and 2023. Cases of malnutrition-

related illnesses, including rickets and scurvy, have been reported in schools, highlighting the systemic failures in providing access to nutritious food.

“We need to build some sort of resilience in our system”

Examples from other regions showcase the potential of FarmStarts to integrate into broader community initiatives. In the Southwest, the Good Food Loop uses the Open Food Network to connect farms, bakeries, and producers with customers through a streamlined online platform, minimising waste and maximising profits for small producers. Similarly, Growing Communities in London has developed a food zone model based on permaculture principles, advocating for localised production and reduced reliance on imports. These examples demonstrate how FarmStarts can foster vibrant local food economies.

“Where communities have really focused the effort to make this happen, they can really flourish”



FarmStarts in Suffolk

Participants in the session discussed practical considerations for implementing FarmStarts in Suffolk. While land and infrastructure are critical, the success of FarmStarts also depends on comprehensive support systems, including training, mentoring, and community-building. Programs are often tailored to different levels of experience, offering a mix of hands-on farming, business planning, and technical training. The models are adaptable, with some focusing on vegetables and others exploring diverse crops like hemp or lavender.

Policy and funding challenges remain significant barriers. The lack of a national food strategy, coupled with competing land uses for housing and energy development, poses obstacles to scaling up FarmStarts. Sabine emphasised the importance of collaboration across regions to strengthen funding opportunities and advocate for supportive policies.

Conclusion

In conclusion, FarmStarts represent a transformative solution for addressing the interconnected crises of farming, food security, and sustainability. By supporting a new generation of farmers and fostering resilient, localised food systems, these programmes have the potential to drive meaningful change. Sabine’s call for collaboration underscores the importance of regional partnerships in scaling these initiatives, ensuring a more sustainable and equitable future for food and farming in the UK.

“It's diversity, the diversity is the key. Because it gives you choice. And choice gives you freedom.” (audience member)

[Link to minutes](#)

[Link to slides](#)

in Suffolk. She pointed out how that is the same region where many of our migrating human populations are coming from.

“We were talking about journeys, all the kind of migratory journeys of food and people”

Everyone connected around the food being cooked, and where the ingredients came from. Sarah Mawkes from Manningtree shared how her shop prepares dal using locally grown pulses, rather than using imported mung dal from India. Carrie added how more Suffolk farmers are now growing nitrogen-fixing legumes, which bring huge diversity in terms of wildlife to the land (unlike standard wheat and barley). Hodmedod’s, a pioneering company creating market routes for British-grown beans and pulses, was celebrated for its impact on the local food system.

Jamila, one of the SRS cooks, discussed the versatility of yellow split peas, confidently listing at least 25 dishes she could make with them!



Surrounded by aroma of toasting spices and lively chatter, participants sampled a variety of delicious dishes, including samosas and a potato korma, both made using yellow split peas, and a vibrant red pepper and tomato chutney. These recipes, drawn from Afghan family traditions, sparked more conversations around the food being cooked, the ingredients used, and the stories behind them.

Carrie closed the session by thanking everyone for their contributions and inviting further ideas for future Natural Habitat projects, encouraging participants to reach out directly with suggestions.



Workshop 8: Growing the Future: Pathways for young people into agriculture

Facilitator: Gaina Dunsire, Barleybird CIC

Panel:

- Andy Jolliffe, East Suffolk Council (Field to Fork)
- Lynsey Wilson, Rural College
- Shan Buss, Agricultural Association
- Toby Greenhalgh, Suffolk Rural College



Gaina Dunsire, from Barleybird CIC, facilitated this session which delved into the challenges and opportunities young people face when pursuing farming as a career.

Youth engagement in food and farming is a central focus of programs like the Suffolk Agricultural Association's (SAA) School Farm and Country Fair and Food and Farming Student Day, which expose thousands of primary and secondary students to farming.

“Our aim is to not just teach them where their food comes from, but to hopefully inspire the younger generation to consider a career in food and farming as well”

– Shan Buss

Andy Jolliffe from Field to Fork in East Suffolk described how the programme fosters community involvement by providing grants and starter kits for growing food at schools, community gardens, and homes. By targeting primary schools in deprived areas, the programme encourages interest in food production at a young age while making the experience accessible and inclusive. Over the last two rounds, about 10,000 people across the district have now got access to one of their kits.

Toby Greenhalgh and Lynsey Wilson spoke about the hands-on experience and skill development at Suffolk Rural College. Students participate in farm work, acquire industry-relevant qualifications like tractor operation, and engage in learning about animal husbandry and food production. Success stories of students launching careers or businesses in agriculture demonstrate the effectiveness of these initiatives. Recognition programmes like the Rising Star Scholarship Award and Agriculture Apprenticeship Awards further motivate young talent.

Challenges

Despite these efforts, challenges persist in promoting agricultural careers. Gaina highlighted the challenge of engaging secondary schools in agriculture, noting that primary schools are easier to work with due to their local

reach. She shared findings from a LEAF study which explored the assumed disconnect and disinterest between young people and the agri-food industry. You can read the full report [here](#).

It showed that students want more hands-on agricultural experiences, but logistical and financial barriers exist. Teachers lack training on agriculture, affecting students' understanding of farming careers. Gaina called for better resources for both teachers and students, including accessible career information and more inclusive farming education. She also pointed out a lack of awareness about sustainability, with students focusing on packaging rather than environmental impact.

Engaging with schools remains difficult due to educators' limited knowledge of farming opportunities and logistical barriers like exam schedules. Additionally, farming is often perceived as low-skill work, which discourages students from considering it as a viable career path. Secondary school students also show less engagement compared to primary-aged children, further complicating outreach efforts.

Strategies to attract youth to farming include making agriculture relatable by linking it to sustainability, environmental concerns, and food culture. Social media platforms like Instagram have proven effective in showcasing the dynamic aspects of farming to younger audiences. Collaborating with academy trusts can streamline engagement with schools, while experiential learning opportunities, such as farm visits and hands-on activities, provide an accessible introduction to agriculture.

Inclusivity and diversity remain priorities for organisations like Suffolk Rural College, which actively encourage participation from people outside traditional farming backgrounds, including women and underrepresented groups. By creating relatable content and fostering an inclusive environment, these programs aim to broaden the appeal of farming as a career.

“We're just trying to include everybody, so anyone can come into farming, anyone can pursue this.”

– Lynsey Wilson

To address systemic barriers, speakers and the audience emphasised the need for government-led campaigns similar to recruitment efforts in teaching and policing. Encouraging diversification in farming practices, such as market gardening and forestry, could also spark interest among younger generations. Teachers and career advisors need better training and resources to educate students about agricultural opportunities, including the sustainability aspects of food production.

Practical actions, such as expanding partnerships with schools and careers advisors, improving work experience opportunities, and providing relatable content, are essential to nurturing the next generation of farmers and food producers. Bridging gaps between education, employment, and government support will be key to ensuring a thriving and diverse agricultural sector.

[Link to minutes](#)

[Link to slides](#)



Report produced by

Sara Azeem and Maisie Dyvig

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