

Good Food Leicestershire

The Push For Gold – Event Report

27th August 2026, Held at The Allerton Project, Loddington On 27th August 2026 over 70 people came together at The Allerton Project for the annual Leicestershire food gathering. Following last year's launch of Going for Gold, this year's event was about showcasing our Gold pitch, although Dr Shaun McGill, Acting Assistant Director - Public Health Commissioning & Partnerships on opening the event pointed out that 'it's not all about Gold'.

There was a different feel to this year's event, a different energy. It felt more coherent and powerful and reflected the maturity of the partnership, the relationships and the projects and work that are developing for the long term across the county. This isn't to say it's all rosy and in hand, indeed much of the conversations, presentations and workshops focussed on activity way beyond achieving Gold.



Of course, holding a large event in the summer meant that rain was guaranteed – that it was the first rain that Leicestershire had seen for around 2 months was cause for celebration (although we did feel for the amazing parking team from Allerton!).

Shaun McGill opened proceedings setting the scene with long term commitment to a sustainable food system, working alongside Sustainable Food Places and all the local partners we engage with. In particular Shaun raised the policy work and the clear line of sight between decision makers and the grass roots – an important marker for one of the afternoon sessions.

The rest of the morning focussed on a series of quick fire presentations – all focused on the exceptional work taking place across Leicestershire that sees farmers and producers bringing their products to local markets.

Joe Stanley - Head of Sustainable Farming at The Allerton Project and our host for the day, opened the session by setting the scene. For our Sustainable Food Places Gold bid, we were asked to identify two areas of exceptional achievement to explore in more detail; farming and supply chains is the first of these. Joe gave a clear and detailed picture of where farming stands today, from the sustainable farming approaches being

demonstrated at The Allerton Project, to the pressures on the farmed economy and the challenge of producing food in a changing climate, all within a system that continues to push for ever cheaper food. Joe also shared farm profitability figures along with more detail (from Sustain reports) showing where the money from products ends up. From a loaf of bread, the farmer would receive just 0.09p of profit, yet they shoulder all the risk for growing the raw materials.

Finally, Joe shared details of their new Leicestershire Local Food Cluster project, made possible through funding from the Samworth Foundation. The project will work with Leicestershire farmers to provide sustainable farming advice, peer-to-peer learning, farm business guidance and stronger links into localised supply chains.



SJ Hunt, Chief Executive of the Country Food Trust, followed next. She gave an interesting talk on using wild game as part of the chain, including the Trust's work to turn a resource that can otherwise be wasted for people experiencing food poverty showcasing the potential of, and ongoing work to improve nature recovery, through controlled use of wild game into food banks. Through this work, the Trust is creating high-protein food that is converted into healthy and appealing meals for food banks, or ingredients for food parcels — in Leicestershire alone, this amounts to over 100,000 meals distributed.

This presentation was about huge potential in two areas of our food system - another route to supplying food for those in food poverty, and an underused protein that should be better used in our local supply chain. But of course deer management is an important part of our Local Nature Recovery Strategy – another reminder that systems are often linked. What an imaginative project!

Alex Gray from Brooksby College (now part of Loughborough College Group) has been a long time supporter of Good Food Leicestershire and has featured at previous years events. The subject for this year talk was about the links that are being realised from the agriculture college becoming part of a larger (but still local) college group. By linking regenerative practices through on-farm demonstration, with catering, tourism and marketing, Alex is giving students a master class in 'the story' that needs to be at the

centre of every plate of food. Students are also benefitting from the opportunity to add experiential cooking and eating as part of this. As this theme develops, students and the farm are looking beyond immediate products and crops, towards complementary produce from the expanding agroforestry system. This is part story, part skills and part practices - multiple opportunities brought about through managing land sustainably and with climate resilience built in. And a final teaser from Alex? A UK Invasive Species menu.....catering for next year's event?

Debra Willoughby followed Alex. Debra and Tom farm at Grange Farm near Normanton on Soar. They are brave, proud farmers, determined to do what's best for their land, the food they cultivate and the livestock they have had. Debra explained how they came to Leicestershire as committed organic dairy farmers but eventually reached the point where the financial drain of farming, and the reality of continually operating in debt, was no longer sustainable. It was this pressure that led them to make a significant change in direction. Grange Farm is one of the farms that make up the Paget Estate in Leicestershire - this is an estate that is transitioning to Organic wholesale, either through tenancies as they change hands or through supporting existing tenants to convert.

Debra and Tom sold their remaining dairy cows and moved to an agroforestry system - planting thousands of trees, mostly fruit and nut trees in an alley system that allows arable crops to be grown in-between rows of cropping trees. The design has been carefully planned with expert input to create a mix of fruit and nut trees suited to the farm.

In amongst all of Debra's talk was a theme of adaptation; to funding, to income and debt, and crucially to climate. Bringing trees into the farmed system seems to be one of the core elements of diversifying food growing whilst providing resilience and shade and other ecosystem benefits.

Finally **Tim Foster**, Hospitality and Marketing Specialist, took us to the marketplace for local produce - The Stockyard in Melton Mowbray. Tim led us through this huge development in Leicestershire's food system. Known as the Rural Capital of Food, Melton has had a market for 1000 years, with it being the largest town centre market in the country. The Stockyard is respecting this history whilst bringing it up to date. Celebrating the producers, the products and the people. Tim walked us through how the development will really build those connections. From artisan products and specialist markets all the way through to experiences and schools to ensure that customers are more than just a transaction. An interesting part of the plan is to have a section that is focussed on smaller producers - they can bring their products to the market for selling on their behalf. The traditional market is still there, but The Stockyard closes the gap between farmer, producer, processor and customer, bringing opportunities for experiences, visibility and the story of the food.

Lunch followed – **Launde Farm Foods** are based 1.1 miles up the road from Allerton, and farm in the surrounding area, so it couldn't have been any more local. They farm predominantly lamb using traditional conversation grazing methods, but they also link

into local game supply and have strong links with local businesses and catering for local events – the kind of food story that we like to support. The food was a core of vegan curries with pheasant and lamb curries alongside.

Suitably nourished, the afternoon was a combination of workshops and tours of Allerton giving participants the opportunity to feed into the food work, as well as to find out more about the research and demonstration work that happens at The Allerton Project.



Workshop 1 – Leicestershire Collaboration on Food Poverty

Following introductions from Tim Adkin at Feeding Britain and Mary Collier, and Jenny Farrall-Bird at Trussell Trust, the workshop asked three questions which follow below with the main points described (the full write up is attached along with this report) –

1. Thinking about current ambitions, activities and challenges – what does gold look like for you and what are your ambitions for this subject?

The main theme focused on a set of fundamental questions for food poverty – mental health, education and bottom-up approaches which avoid ‘one-size-fits-all’. Looking at the reasons for food poverty and taking different approaches to solutions with more joined up working. Final themes were to start small and learn from others.

2. What should be the key takeaways in a food insecurity strategy or action plan?
What actions and challenges could we face in Leicestershire?

Practicalities – distribution partners (e.g. Samworths), sharing resources (volunteers, food), processes (DBS checks and food hygiene), use of a mobile offer, connecting with local growers.

Challenges differ in each area – location/access/socio-economic factors.

Enablers – hives/hubs for people to engage, good neighbours schemes, funding.

3. What impact does rurality in Leicestershire have on food insecurity?

Size – lower funding, lacking resources like storage facilities, lower numbers of volunteers and worries about everyone knowing each others business. Viability of support for lower need.

Remote – limited access to transport and infrastructure (e.g. smaller shops can lead to higher prices – the Rural Premium). Resilience is impacted, partnerships and networks can be more challenging.

Workshop 2 – Leicestershire Growers Network and Communities on Farms

Miriam from Halstead Farm, Louise from Leicestershire Growers Network, Sam who is involved in a Leicester Growers Network and Terri from Veg Van introduced their respective food growing work – all related but slightly different. See <https://localgrowersnetwork.carrd.co/> for more on Louise’s work, and the attached slides for Miriam’s. Terri is also developing an app to support with trading local produce. The group were asked to consider common gaps and areas for collaboration before a wider discussion identified practical areas for support. The full write up is attached with this report but a table of practical areas for support is below –

Things	Source
Small local abattoirs	Melton (for sheep), Sutton Bonnington for everything (but very small scale)
Seeds – local seed bank and seeds in bulk with local provenance	Heritage seed library (Garden Organic), seed swaps – but do we need a buyers coop for larger bulk seeds (what do other areas do?)
Land – especially for new entrants	Leicestershire land owners to come together to discuss?
Basic income for farmers	Farm start incubators – learn from South West trial
Dealing with surplus	App (through Veg Van) and FareShare
Processing	Mobile or centralised and shared? Move surplus or move processing kit? ➔ Fund centralised storage hub and processing – include food grade kit + training through skills funding.
Stakeholder directory/map	
Linking growers and restaurants	
More community grow spaces close to home	
Library of knowledge	Academics
Funding for growing projects	
Processing hubs (people with skills e.g. food safety)	Sutton Bonnington? Brooksby and Loughborough College?
Food retail	Retail space – Sprout Grocery
Data and communication	App through Veg Van

Workshop 3 – Grass Roots Food Plan – mass conversation!

The Grassroots Food Plan seeks to identify, using a Theory of Change approach, a shared vision for Leicestershire’s Grassroots Food System, the activities required to achieve the vision, and the outcomes and outputs of such activities. The work has been conducted independently by researchers at the University of Nottingham with guidance from a community steering group. Through consultation with community members, an

initial shared food system vision and a set of actions were developed. The workshop aimed to provide an opportunity for consultation to the ongoing Grassroots Food Plan development.

The workshop consisted of two main activities, 1) reviewing the grassroots food system stakeholder map and 2) reviewing the identified vision and activities.

In activity 1), participants were presented a food system framework with categories of actors based on Person et al., (2019) as well as indicative actors for each category. Participants were invited to consider who was not represented in the framework, and to detail additional actors within each of the categories. It was noted that this is not to serve as an exhaustive list but to gather an understanding of the nature and variety of actors within the Grassroots food system. Participants reflected that often it was difficult to place actors in a single category, as actor activities spanned multiple sections of the framework.

In activity 2) participants were invited to review, reflect and comment on the shared vision. The following guiding questions were posed “Which elements of the vision resonate?”, “Is there anything missing from the vision?”, “How well does the vision reflect local needs, opportunities, and experiences?”. Initial reflections from participants included sentiments that the preliminary vision was desirable, yet ambitious and urged caution in being overly aspirational. In the next part of this activity participants were asked to review the set of activities and to identify priority and feasible activities as well as to add further activities considered as necessary to achieving the vision.



Following the workshop, the feedback gathered will be reviewed and incorporated to the next iteration of the Grassroots Food Plan. Beyond the development of the plan additional funding is being secured to progress the work.

For further comments, reflections and thoughts please do get in touch via email on: hello@circularagriculturehub.co.uk

Next steps

Next steps identified in this report will be fed into the Grass Roots Food Plan, the Food Plan Working Group and the wider Whole Systems Approach.

In the meantime we'll be busy completing the application for Gold award and will be in touch with some (hopefully) good food news by the end of the year!

Attached with this report –

- Presentation from the speakers.
- More detailed notes from the workshops.

List of participant organisations –

Allerton Project	Leicestershire County Council – various departments
Brooksby college	Local Growers Network
Climate Action West Northants	Loughborough University
CLOGs – Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)	Melton Borough Council
Community Harvest Whetstone – CSA	National Forest
Country Food Trust	Norfolk Regional Deer Strategy
CPRE Leicestershire	North West Leicestershire District Council
DeMontfort University	Nottingham Growing Network
Feeding Britain	Oxford Real Farming Conference
Food for Life/Soil Association	RCC Leicestershire and Rutland
Garden Organic	Route and Branch VCSE
Grange Farm	Sprout Grocery
Halstead Farm	Sustainable Harborough
Healthwatch	Trussell Trust
Hertfordshire University	University of Nottingham
Hinckley and Bosworth Borough Council	Vegvan
Incredible Edible	Voluntary Action Leicestershire
Leicester City Council	Warwick University Crop Centre
Leicestershire County Council – various departments	White Goose Flower Farm
	Willow Fields Farm

Finally, the Good Food Leicestershire Team would like to extend our massive thanks to all the speakers, workshop hosts, The Allerton Project, caterers and all participants who attended the day.

Good Food Leicestershire are keen to hear from you! If you have a good food story to tell, please get in touch by emailing goodfood@leics.gov.uk

