

Leicestershire Going For Gold - Report

8th July 2025

Held at Brooksby Agricultural College – part of SMB Group



On 8th July 2025, the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) launch, and the Leicestershire 'GOING FOR GOLD' Sustainable Food Places (SFP) launch came together for a slightly chaotic combination of food, farming, nature, networking and positive planning. The venue, Brooksby Agricultural College, renowned for its agricultural heritage and environmental focus - was so coveted by nature lovers and foodies alike, that both departments wanted it for their events on the same date resulting in over 160 guests attending the day.



Sustainable food was the consideration for the afternoon. Lunch was a delicious, nutritious, inclusive and sustainable menu - deliberately plant forward, with less but better meat. There were ingredients from Brooksby itself, locally sourced vegetables and wild venison sourced as part of local woodland management for those who wanted it (thanks to Michael Anker for answering the call for local sustainable meat).

The session started with Joshna Mavji (Assistant Director of Public Health at Leicestershire County Council - LCC) welcoming everyone and officially launching Leicestershire's bid to become a Gold Sustainable Food Place (more on that later). Joshna led us through the history of Leicestershire's work, the messiness of food systems, and the commitment towards whole system change. She mentioned two particular areas of focus where LCC would take a lead – food procurement and

coordinated action on food insecurity as well as broader collaborative work embedding the Good Food Movement. Joshna finished with two challenges to the partners gathered

1. How do we tell the story of the Leicestershire Food system better? How can we promote our strengths and celebrate our achievements in a way that can inspire others and will support our collaborative application for Gold?
2. The Grass Roots Food Plan – What is your role in driving food system change? How can others here in attendance support you in delivering your objectives?



Following the welcome, Amit Dattani – Director of Healthy and Sustainable Food at the Soil Association and member of the Sustainable Food Places (SFP) board - talked us through the Sustainable Food Places approach, reminding everyone that the awards are for the place (not the council) and demonstrating the broad nature of the challenge faced by Food Partnerships. Showing the journey that both SFP and Leicestershire has been on, it was clear that Leicestershire has all the right ingredients for Gold and remains an ambitious County member. Amit also talked through the process for achieving this gold ambition. A question from the audience asked why there was a lack of County representation within the SFP Network compared to Cities, recognition that having a county Gold winner would be helpful in enabling more counties to develop their sustainable food work.

We couldn't come to Brooksby without hearing more about their brilliant work – some guests were already booked onto a tour of the regenerative agriculture work on the farm. Dawn Whitmore - Principal and Chief Executive at SMB College (includes Brooksby) led us through why this is such an important shift. Taking partners through the background to the principles of regenerative agriculture before showing examples of different practices on the farm, and used for teaching the next generation of farmers and land managers. It was interesting to hear how these principles were running through the whole operation and included river restoration as a crucial aspect of habitat and biodiversity consideration.

Lydia Rusling – Director of Place and Prosperity at Melton Borough Council – then talked us through the work of the council investing in the rural economy. We all know the importance of food to Melton’s story, but Lydia brought this to life, recognising some of the challenges faced by the town but highlighting the tireless work to build on the strengths. We were brought up to date with The Stockyard development and the support and development this will bring for a diverse food economy, but this was also complimented with important community work strengthening links and taking services into the rural areas. This includes supporting the farming community, as well as taking the work of The Community Support Hub out to rural areas through the Rural Food Hub Network.

Finally, we had a trio of academics from the University of Nottingham and Circular Agriculture Hub – Anne, Ursula and Victoria introduced partners to their participatory work. This team are crucial to the Grass Roots Food Plan, described by Joshna and taking us full circle! Talking the group through the plans for mapping, co-producing visions and actions and bringing this work together across the Leicestershire Food System is a crucial part of bringing the Good Food Movement to life and ensuring that plans truly represent all our interests. The team will find you – but if you want to make their job easier feel free to get in touch with Victoria.Wojtynowska@Nottingham.ac.uk!

Following a short break everyone moved into their respective workshops –

Workshop 1 – Food Insecurity



The Food Insecurity workshop was led by Emily Bell (who chairs a working group on the subject) along with experience shared by Mary Flynn and Martha Jones who have set up the Pantry Nook in Wigston and walked the group through the set up and operation of the community resource.

The group talked through what learnings could be taken forward within a food insecurity action plan – how to share volunteers, designing resource to act as a community hub

and making sure that any resource is developed from the bottom up so that it reflects local challenges.

There were a number of linkages with food growing and local food surplus, the group discussed opportunities with foraging, local farms where volunteer pickers could work in exchange for produce, linking food insecurity provision with surplus from local shops and linking to fruit trees in gardens. Alongside this the group considered rural food poverty as a specific and lesser known issue – misconceptions and smaller communities means that rural food poverty is both hidden (by relative affluence and/or asset rich cash poor households) and more obvious (people worrying about others knowing their business), and exacerbated by lack of public transport, fewer and smaller retailers, and less community ‘infrastructure’ (e.g. storage facilities, fewer volunteers etc) – plus the viability of any resource will be reduced by the smaller numbers. The potential to have a mobile and/or pop-up offer was discussed along with linking in with other provision such as Good Neighbour Schemes. Finally, the group were interested in more joined up working, starting small and bottom up and learning what works, looking more closely at the ‘why’ around food insecurity to inform provision, and making better use of ‘resources’.

Workshop 2 - Innovation in Food Supply Chains



This workshop was led by Jess Latchford from Waste Knot and Charlie Jackson from EM Food, attached along with this report is the slide presentation they gave with an introduction to their organisations they represent.

The group started by discussing the current food system and the effect that has on supply chains – with a focus on supermarkets, year round demands and the effect this has on farming and the general disconnect between people and food. This is amplified by commodities and international trade, as well as societal habits but also ignored by policy. The good practice out there (e.g. farmers markets) tends to be niche.

There were a few glimmers of hope discussed by the group – people talked about the positive changes being brought about by climate legislation and commitments and the potential through the new NHS 10 year health plan (and the new ambition for a ‘Good Food Cycle’ set out in the Governments new Food Strategy -

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-uk-government-food-strategy-for-england/a-uk-government-food-strategy-for-england-considering-the-wider-uk-food-system>). The group also discussed various practical aspects supporting change – investment in agroforestry, national funding for on-farm environmental actions, action on hot food takeaways, improvements in food at Loughborough University and local university collaboration on procurement. There was also reference to legacy from the BeanMeals project – beans being sold for catering and in ‘refill’ shops, as well as good practice developing in Leicester with a food award programme for food businesses.

The group finished with a number of calls for action -

- Farming – increasing mixed farming and supporting growing for human food rather than animal feed, shorter supply chains
- Accessibility – healthier, local, seasonal – making sure this is reflected in advertising and price
- Local – how to support local suppliers, or groups of suppliers – matching supply and demand. Also need to set criteria, definitions and goals to increase supporting/buying local, reflect this in policy
- Helping consumers with knowledge of where food comes from and what the benefits are – to include story telling

Workshop 3 – Community Food Growing



This workshop heard about two very different approaches to community food growing. Melton Community Allotments (MCA) which aims to ‘Improve health & mental well-being by growing and sharing fresh produce in a social environment’ is a small area of land within Melton Country Park with a membership that shares the produce between volunteers and members. The site can be used by disabled gardeners due to the raised

beds on site, and so the allotment has regular visitors from individuals and groups with disabilities. The site has benefitted from LCC grant funding as well as community donations (e.g. cabin from a local brewery, donations from Ragdale Hall). Finally – the use of a moat to prevent vandalism and harvest rain water was discussed – stacking functions!

Community Harvest Whetstone (CHW) is a Community Supported Agriculture project – where shares are bought by the community (which entitles them to a share of the produce grown) which covers costs of employing a grower, buying seed etc. CHW Shareholders are expected to volunteer for a minimum of 3 hours per week, 2 acres of land is rented from a farm. Surplus produce is donated to Help the Homeless who use the produce to cook meals for service users.

The main discussion points from the workshop were –

- Both have a particular focus on community cohesion and education
- Both work with volunteers to support the growing – however MCA is reliant on this (indeed the coordinators are volunteers), whilst CHW has a paid grower coordinating the growing
- Engaging with schools can be helpful – both in terms of improving growing skills, but also to engage people in community growing
- Funding for projects is an important consideration – MCA had funding from charities plus LCC funding a compost toilet. Other projects would rely on funding to progress – where could this come from (LCC, Public Health or another route)
- Supporting growing groups with how to apply for external funding was a key ask – writing applications are a challenge
- Potential to look at social prescribing and other schemes for community growing
- There needs to be an understanding that if projects are selling produce they aren't in a financial position to pay rent on their land

Workshop 4 – Brooksby Tour



The 'Tour' group enjoyed a walk around the regenerative agriculture work developing on the teaching farm at Brooksby – this includes pigs, cattle and sheep, trees as part of the

farming – agroforestry, and incorporation of techniques such as mob grazing for increasing plant diversity and for greater land resilience to flooding and drought. For more insight into the work at Brooksby see the slides from Dawn Whitmore, and follow Alex Gray on LinkedIn.

Whilst there wasn't the chance to formally discuss workshop outcomes from this group, there were general comments from participants that it was helpful to come together and share ideas and learn from each other, and that partners needed greater understanding of the plans for Gold SFP award so they can suggest their tangible actions. There was also a call for greater involvement from farmers and food producers as well as market gardens and growing organisations.

Next steps

These key next steps from the event will be progressed through working groups and in partnership –

1. Translate & disseminate the ambitions of Gold status across the different levels of partners. Engage partners in planning for food system actions.
2. Develop an understanding of where internal and/or external funding is available for project development, and identify support for groups with putting bids together. Identify other links to support e.g. social prescribing.
3. Farming and local supply – identify routes to increasing local purchase of local produce and how to set criteria and goals for local supply (including defining 'local').
4. Accessing and Accessibility – increasing awareness of the food system within public and partners, and enable people to have greater access to good affordable food.
5. Enable more bottom up approaches to food insecurity – including a particular focus on rural communities - with learning across Leicestershire (and other areas) to understand successful approaches and link into different routes to sourcing produce.

Attached with this report –

- Presentation from the speakers.
- More detailed notes from the workshops (excluding the Brooksby Tour).

List of participant organisations –

Loughborough University
University of Nottingham
University of Leicester
Soil Association
Sustainable Food Places
EM – Agile Chain
Incredible Edible
University of Warwick

Liverpool University
Melton Borough Council
CLOGs – Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)
Albanwise ltd
Brooksby college
Samworth Foundation
Climate Action West Northants
Community Harvest Whetstone - CSA
East Mids Chamber of Commerce
Grange Farm
Allerton Project
Halstead Farm
Garden Organic
Green party
Harborough green schools
Hospital caterer
Leicester City Council
Leicestershire County Council – various departments
LEAF marque
Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust
Melton Borough Council
Melton Community Allotment
National Forest
Oadby and Wigston Borough Council
Oxford Real Farming Conference
Rutland County Councillor
Rutland Couty Council
Food for Life (including Supply Chain Plus)
Sustainable Harborough
Wild Rutland
Wild venison