Leicestershire's Grassroots Food Plan

Dr Ursula Davis

Going for Gold Working Group Meeting

Agenda

1 Introductions: Who we are

2. Delivering the project

3. Overview of Findings

4. Next Steps

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Introductions

A team of impact-led researchers…

- Combined experience of over two decades researching sustainable supply chains and food system transformation
- Current research focuses on transitions towards food systems and food supply chains that are inclusive and equitable for all human and non-human actors
- Expertise in participatory approaches and research methods



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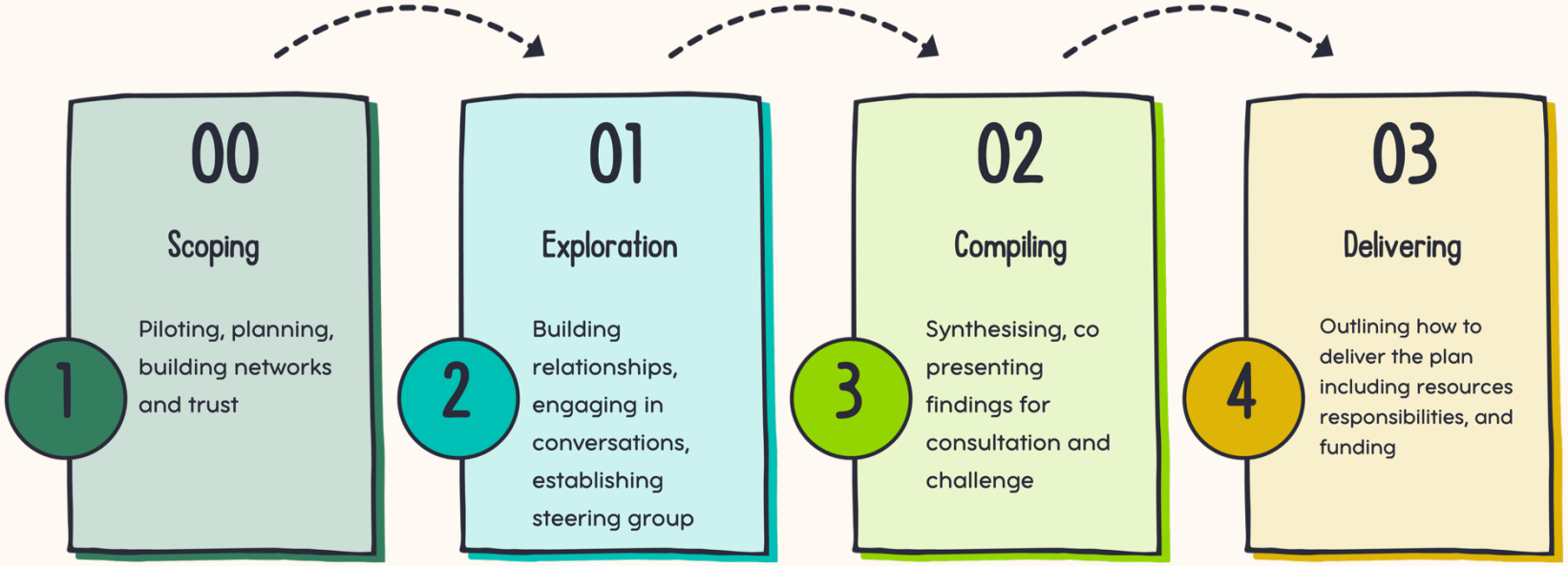
Introductions

So why us?

- Institutional involvement can lead to co-opting of local food system efforts and reinforce power structures (Laforge et al., 2017).
- As council outsiders, we offer an alternative mode of engaging with grassroots
- Allowing us to work with the community to co-produce and co-create a food plan based in the needs and reality of the grassroots (Shaw et al, 2024)

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Delivering the project



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Phase 0 – Scoping Pilot

Origins of the Idea

Seeking to identify how the idea for the grassroots food plan came about & the process involved

Scoping the boundaries

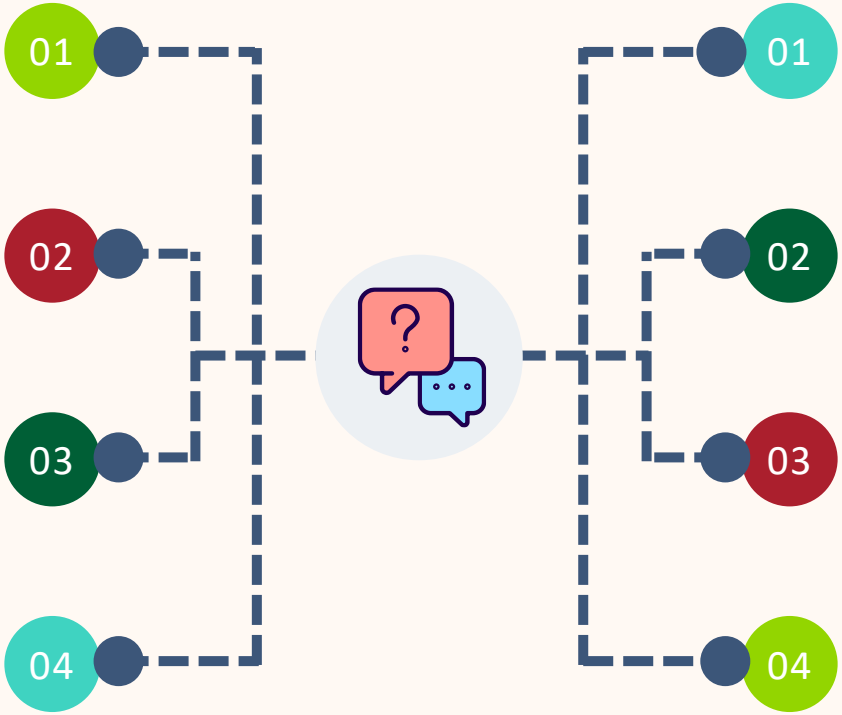
Interaction/relationship between the grassroots food plan and other food work carried out by the council

Expectations

Understanding the expectations of the grassroots food plan, including the conceptualisation of the term "grassroots"

Execution of the plan

Exploring what is possible in the short term and in the long term



About you

Understanding the individual's role in the food system, what they do and who they interact with

Food System Vision

Exploring their vision for the Leicestershire food system, and what's needed to realise their vision

Expectations

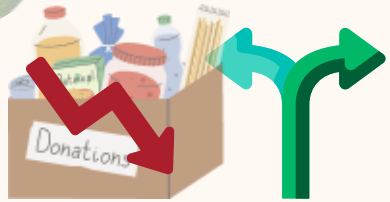
Understanding the conceptualisation of the term "grassroots", what's included and what's not included in the plan

Resources

Scoping out the resources needed to enable and support engagement with the work.

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Pilot: What we heard



Dignified food access & provisioning: less food banks, models that support choice e.g., social supermarket models



Resources & Infrastructure for food growing: securing access to food growing



Supporting the local food economy: championing local produce



Wrap around support: leveraging food as a touch point



Knowledge sharing and education: both informal and formal education settings delivering updated curiculum



Recentering healthy food: embedding healthy food choices across schools & public sector

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Pilot: Challenges

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Finance & resources

Access to, and appropriateness of funding prevents grassroots from scaling up

Lack of coordinated, transparent priorities

Provided to understand the nature of the competition and the industry specifics.

Building trust

Mismatch between grassroots organisations intentions and the council's criteria of trustworthiness

Despite both known and unknown challenges Leicestershire food citizens are keen to see grassroots led-change

Delayed or invisible impact

Impact is often either invisible/immeasurable, occurs after significant time has passed, or is lacking altogether

Infrastructure shortcomings

Lack of public transport connecting people & growing spaces. Planning that doesn't provision for food growing spaces

Disrupting Status Quo

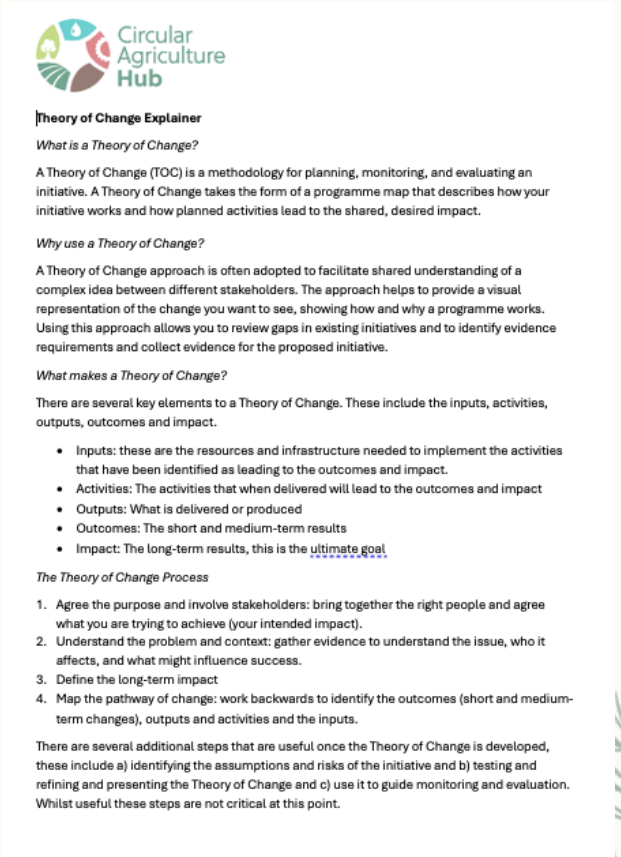
Detangling from current system is not simple, e.g. ending relationships with existing wholesalers. Stagnation without regulation

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Delivering the project

Theory of Change

- Methodology for planning, monitoring, and evaluating an initiative
- Programme map that describes how an initiative works and how planned activities lead to the shared, desired impact



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Theory of Change Explainer

What is a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change (TOC) is a methodology for planning, monitoring, and evaluating an initiative. A Theory of Change takes the form of a programme map that describes how your initiative works and how planned activities lead to the shared, desired impact.

Why use a Theory of Change?

A Theory of Change approach is often adopted to facilitate shared understanding of a complex idea between different stakeholders. The approach helps to provide a visual representation of the change you want to see, showing how and why a programme works. Using this approach allows you to review gaps in existing initiatives and to identify evidence requirements and collect evidence for the proposed initiative.

What makes a Theory of Change?

There are several key elements to a Theory of Change. These include the inputs, activities, outputs, outcomes and impact.

- Inputs: these are the resources and infrastructure needed to implement the activities that have been identified as leading to the outcomes and impact.
- Activities: The activities that when delivered will lead to the outcomes and impact
- Outputs: What is delivered or produced
- Outcomes: The short and medium-term results
- Impact: The long-term results, this is the ultimate goal

The Theory of Change Process

1. Agree the purpose and involve stakeholders: bring together the right people and agree what you are trying to achieve (your intended impact).
2. Understand the problem and context: gather evidence to understand the issue, who it affects, and what might influence success.
3. Define the long-term impact
4. Map the pathway of change: work backwards to identify the outcomes (short and medium-term changes), outputs and activities and the inputs.

There are several additional steps that are useful once the Theory of Change is developed, these include a) identifying the assumptions and risks of the initiative and b) testing and refining and presenting the Theory of Change and c) use it to guide monitoring and evaluation. Whilst useful these steps are not critical at this point.

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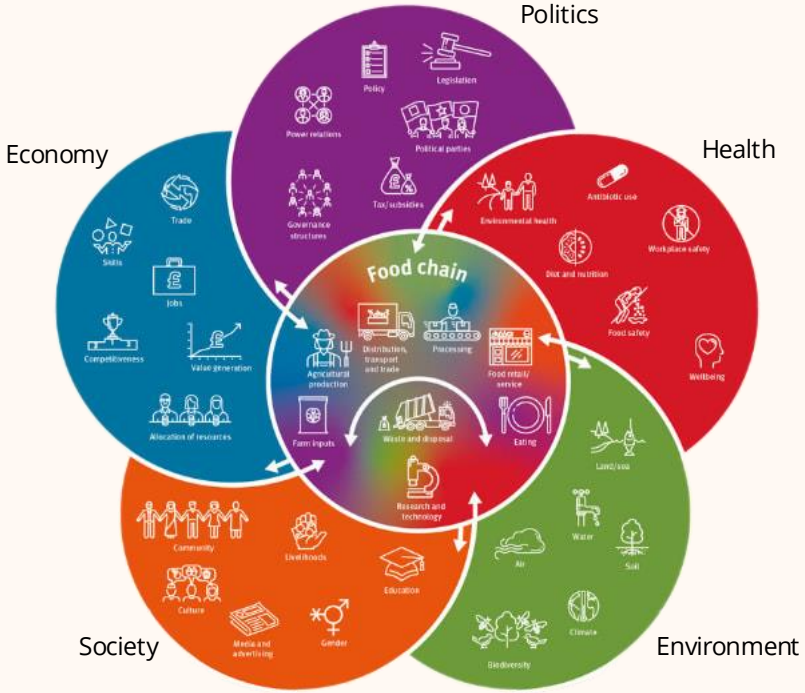
Based on: The Theory of Change Process – Guidance for Outcome Delivery Plans, Gov.uk

Delivering the project

Phase 1

Aim: to identify Leicestershire's grassroots food system actors using the Food System Framework

Note this is not an exhaustive categorisation – some actors fit in more than one!



(Parsons et al., 2019)

Community Steering Group

Seeking representation from…



Education, skills/training provider



Farming/food production



Small food business (manufacturing /retail)



Citizen /community



Food provisioning/ justice



Other (e.g. gate keepers)

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Community Steering Group

- Community members as researchers (Pettinger et al, 2024)
- Agreed purpose statement and responsibilities
- Reimbursement for contributions to align with our values
- Holding us to account!



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Grassroots Food Plan Community Steering Group

Thank you for your interest in the community steering group. Here we have included further details regarding the purpose of the group and what your involvement could look like.

Purpose of the Community Steering Group

The Steering Group will play a vital role in *shaping and guiding* the Grassroots Food Plan. Its primary purpose is to keep the plan rooted in the lived experiences of our communities, ensuring that every voice is heard and represented. By participating, you will help us:

- Create a space for a wide range of perspectives, making sure that diverse experiences inform the plan.
- Act as a bridge between the project and local communities, fostering trust, awareness, and active participation.
- Encourage engagement from individuals and groups who may not have traditionally been involved in food planning or decision-making.
- Support the co-design and ongoing development of the Grassroots Food Plan as well as Theory of Change.

What to Expect

As a member of the Steering Group, you will:

- Attend regular in person/hybrid meetings (frequency and roles to be agreed upon collectively).
- Share your perspectives and feedback on the development of the Food Plan.
- Help us reach and engage with communities who are underrepresented in food planning and local policy development
- Involvement costs covered

Your VOICE MATTERS

Why Your Involvement Matters

We believe that a truly representative food plan must be community-led and inclusive. The Steering Group will serve as a critical friend to the project, offering insight, challenge, and guidance while championing an approach that works better for everyone

We welcome interest from all roles and backgrounds. Whether you are a community leader, local resident, food business owner, health professional, educator, or simply passionate about food and community wellbeing.

Next Steps

If you are interested in joining the Community Steering Group, please fill out this short Expression of Interest Form (5 questions, 10 minutes)
For questions or more information, please reach out to us at hello@circularagriculturehub.co.uk

Figure: Community Steering Group Advertisement Flyer

Engaging with the Grassroots

Inclusive* and responsive

Throughout the work it remained important that our approach was inclusive, and responsive.

We met people where they were, rather than expecting people to come to us.

We travelled, we attended markets, community days, community fridges.

But still, we did not reach everyone.





*we note our intention here is to be inclusive but that does not mean we have reached everyone

Engaging with the Grassroots

Online engagement







WHAT DID WE HEAR, AND FROM WHOM?

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Who did we hear from?

Grassroots Form Respondents



Online form = 42, Padlet = 2, Paper form = 3

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Vision (Version 1)

Co-created vision for the grassroots food system, by the grassroots



Vision

Local, seasonal food available in every community

"Fewer people needing to drive to a big out of town supermarket to be able to buy locally sourced, good value for money food that they are happy to cook at home"

"Maybe a local veg box available for delivery and sized for the number of people. I live alone and don't want a huge box of vegs as it will go to waste as I can't eat that much. But a vegs box for 1, 2, 4 etc people weekly would ensure local seasonal foods available to local residents..."

"Id really like local farm food shops which sell food at an affordable price for everyone, healthy foods to still be a priority, less food waste and local farms supplying more to shops."

"Locally grown organic healthy food in healthy soil! in 5 years plus kind organic farming. Where food can't be locally grown, purchase from other organic growers"

"Small local organic food producers on the outskirts of towns selling their food direct into the local population."

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Vision

Fair livelihoods for farmers, growers and food workers

"People (particularly food and seed growers) would be paid fairly for their work, and their work would be valued"

"...the money going to the growers, not some huge profit driven venture like HelloFresh etc"

"I want to support British farmers and British jobs"

"Farmers and growers respected and paid fairly"

"In 10 years - National supermarkets offering realistic prices to local farmers and growers, including small scale producers..."

"Fair prices"

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Vision

Sustainable, regenerative and nature-friendly farming

"Sustainable - financially but also pesticide and artificial fertiliser free. More soil conservation/regenerative farming, more native woodland planting."

"There will be a larger focus on home grown or local farming as opposed to buying produce from overseas which creates a huge decrease in carbon footprint and supports our community."

"Community supported agriculture working with nature and biodiversity"

"consumers aware of soil protection and environmental issues in food production, many more heritage crops grown - cereals, fruit and vegetables"

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Activities

How do we achieve this shared vision?

We asked people: what would need to happen,

who would be involved in doing what?



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Activities

Individuals: Support local producers, markets, CSAs, farm shops and independent retailers

"residents are buying more locally produced products"

"Residents make more informed and healthy food choices."

"Residents going to local farmers markets"

"Choose more local foods,... support local producers"

"avoiding shopping at supermarkets where possible"

"if possible start using more independent places rather than giant supermarkets"

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Activities

Individuals: grow at home, use allotments, share surplus, seeds and produce

”Be willing to engage….could start by using a small area of their own garden or windowsills”

“Form groups of enthusiastic gardeners to grow and sell their produce”

“get involved, if you have a bumper crop of something in your allotment tell people where to come and buy it.”

“Developing their knowledge and skills to grow their own food. Younger people using the experience of older citizens.”

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Activities

Communities: create networks, co-operatives, volunteering opportunities and neighbourhood food projects

"More organisations similar to Incredible Edible. Neglected urban spaces utilised for food production."

"Become hubs for distribution of produce, work on streamlining distribution"

"Get together in communities to establish large scale city farms"

"Share knowledge and work together. Maybe outreach events?"

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Activities

Communities: promote local producers, coordinate partnerships, provide communication

“Provide guidance, technical support for social media and comms, spread the word across the region.”

“Promote local business and farmers”

“Advertise local farmers more“

“Continue to disseminate ideas via events, films meetings and action.“

“Champion sustainable farming”

"using the non profit to subsidise the local producers so they can sell their produce at a lower rate to increase people buying their produce from local sources.“

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Activities

Businesses: Sponsor projects, provide funding, venues, publicity and support for community initiatives.

“Provide land, resources and time to encourage residents to grow their own food.”

“talk it up, offer up space for coffee talks, food share spaces where people can come and buy/sell locally grown produce, help with publicity”

“Support by sponsoring a project - like they sponsor plantings on roundabouts. - in order to do subliminal advertising for their business”

“Offer land, if they have any, for community groups to grow food. Fund local groups to distribute food.”

“set up activities for people to help grow the products, put on meals with locally sourced stuff."

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Activities

Farmers & Primary Producers: Work with markets, communities, CSAs and local distributors to shorten supply chains

"Farmer liasing directly with other farmers to share distribution."

"Engage with communities, markets and provide space for smaller producers/allotments."

"Be open to sharing with the communities to prevent waste."

"Start looking for local markets, especially talk to local councils about public procurement"

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What have we learnt



Time is a critical resource and should be prioritised



Ongoing engagement between individuals, communities, businesses, farmers and councils is essential to meaningful food system change



The grassroots is a critical mass in food system transitions already happening



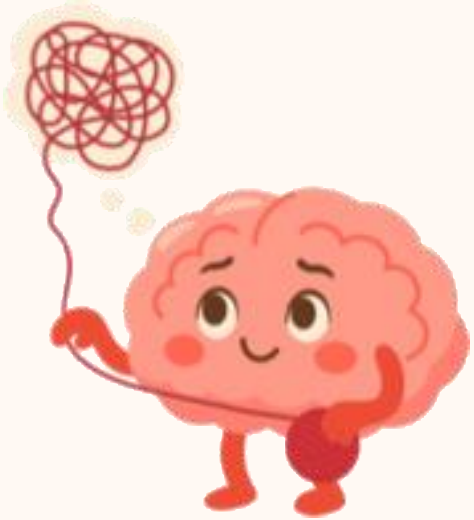
Involving grassroots organisations in place-based approaches to achieve better food systems

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Our next steps

- We will be continuing with our analysis of the findings
- Write up our findings including recommendations
- Pulling it all together using the Theory of Change framework
- We have secured a small amount of funding to look at establishing the resources required to implement recommendations

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Thoughts?

Reflections? Comments? Feedback?

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