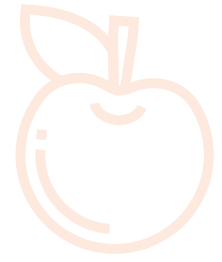




YORK CITIZEN FOOD ASSEMBLY POLICY BRIEF





BACKGROUND

Our current food system is responsible for extensive negative social and environmental impacts, which threaten the long-term wellbeing of society and the planet. For example, one in seven deaths in the UK are diet related and global demand for agricultural commodities threatens some of the most sensitive global biomes.¹ Recent research suggests these types of impact come from diverse lock-ins in multiple forms including: knowledge e.g. lack of information for consumers on environmental impacts; economic and regulatory e.g. profit maximisation in shareholder business models, and lack of due-diligence around supply chain sustainability; sociocultural e.g. movement to food on the go; and biophysical constraints e.g. soil degradation.³

Despite the multiple threats to the UK's food system and its 66 million food consumers who depend on it, there are currently very few outlets for genuinely democratic deliberation or opportunities for citizens to express their views on the food system. The IKnowFood collaboration, which is a four-year interdisciplinary research project funded by the UK Global Food Security programme, is now addressing this gap through the use of Citizen Food Assemblies. The first of these events, organised in collaboration with the York Environmental Sustainability Institute (YESI) and funded by the Economic Social Research Council (ESRC), was held in York as part of the Festival of Social Science between 2nd and 8th November 2019.

WHAT IS A CITIZEN ASSEMBLY?

A citizens assembly is a form of deliberative democracy in which people are brought together to discuss a public issue, or issues, and reach a conclusion about what they think should happen. The people who take part are chosen so they reflect the wider population. This is a form of public participation in democratic contexts of collective decision making that reflects contemporary governance mechanisms to deal, for instance, with the increasing concern about the uncivil behaviour of elites and the misuse of social media, hence the need for more citizen democracy.⁴ There is currently much interest in citizen assemblies in order to better engage civil society in a participatory approach to policy making.⁵ For example, recently in the UK context the House of Commons have announced a national citizen's assembly on climate change.⁶ At a more local level, certain councils, such as Oxford City Council, have

hosted citizen assemblies to address their stated climate emergency.⁷ In addition, citizen assemblies have been used in Ireland to inform debates around same sex marriage and abortion⁸. It was concluded in discussions between the IKnowFood research team at the University of York, DEFRA and the National Food Strategy team that a collaboration to hold a Citizens Food Assembly in York on the 8th November 2019 would provide the opportunity to test out this method in a food system context. To increase the diversity of attendance at the assembly we worked with Good Food York, which is part of the Sustainable Food Cities Network, to ensure a diverse range of citizens attended from the York community. The assembly was also attended by members of the local council, local food providers (growers, cafés, small retailers), the church, third sector, schools, charities, residents, academics and growers.

1 GBD 2017 Diet Collaborators. Health effects of dietary risks in 195 countries, 1990-2017: a systematic analysis for the Global Burden of Disease Study 2017. *The Lancet* **393** (10184), 1958-1972 (2019)

2 3keel, WWF & RSPB (2017) Risky Business: Understanding the UK's overseas footprint for deforestation-risk commodities.

3 Oliver, T. H., Boyd, E., Balcombe, K., Benton, T. G., Bullock, J. M., Donovan, D., ... & Nunes, R. J. (2018). Overcoming undesirable resilience in the global food system. *Global Sustainability*, 1.

4 Dryzek, J. S., Bächtiger, A., Chambers, S., Cohen, J., Druckman, J. N., Felicetti, A., ... & Landemore, H. (2019). The crisis of democracy and the science of deliberation. *Science*, 363(6432), 1144-1146.

5 Gastil, J., and R. Richards. 2013. Making Direct Democracy Deliberative through Random Assemblies. *Politics & Society* **41**:253-281.

6 <https://www.climateassembly.uk/>

7 https://www.oxford.gov.uk/news/article/1064/oxford_city_council_to_establish_uk_s_first_citizens_assembly_to_address_climate_emergency

8 Neblo, M. A., Minozzi, W., Esterling, K. M., Green, J., Kingzette, J., & Lazer, D. M. (2017). The need for a translational science of democracy. *Science*, 355(6328), 914-915.

THE YORK CITIZEN FOOD ASSEMBLY

The York Citizen Food Assembly was designed to raise awareness of the challenges and opportunities facing the food system in York, and collect people's views on the future of the York, Yorkshire and UK food system. The assembly was organised by the IKnowFood programme, in collaboration with YESI and supported by Good Food York, DEFRA and the National Food Strategy team.

The York Citizen Food Assembly involved a series of short presentations from citizens, researchers from the University of York, policy makers, food hubs (e.g. Food Circle in York, cafes), the Local Economic Partnership (LEP), charities and participants on their food system experiences. The presentations were followed by detailed discussions on challenges and potential actions to some of the problems identified by the assembly.

The assembly took place at the Priory St Community Centre in the heart of York. During the day (10am-3pm), approximately 100 people attended and 8-10 people were grouped around 10 roundtables. The participants were organised on a pre-selected table plan to ensure diverse representation across the food system. Each table had a facilitator briefed before the event to ensure all participants were able to express their different perspectives. In the first half of the assembly, citizens were provided with a series of short presentations to stimulate thinking, including an explanation of the food system (see figure 1). A copy of the food system diagram was also provided for each table. One of the participants commented about the diagram (see quote):



Never seen this drawing before but found the food system diagram really useful to see the different connections and realise it's much more than just consumption."

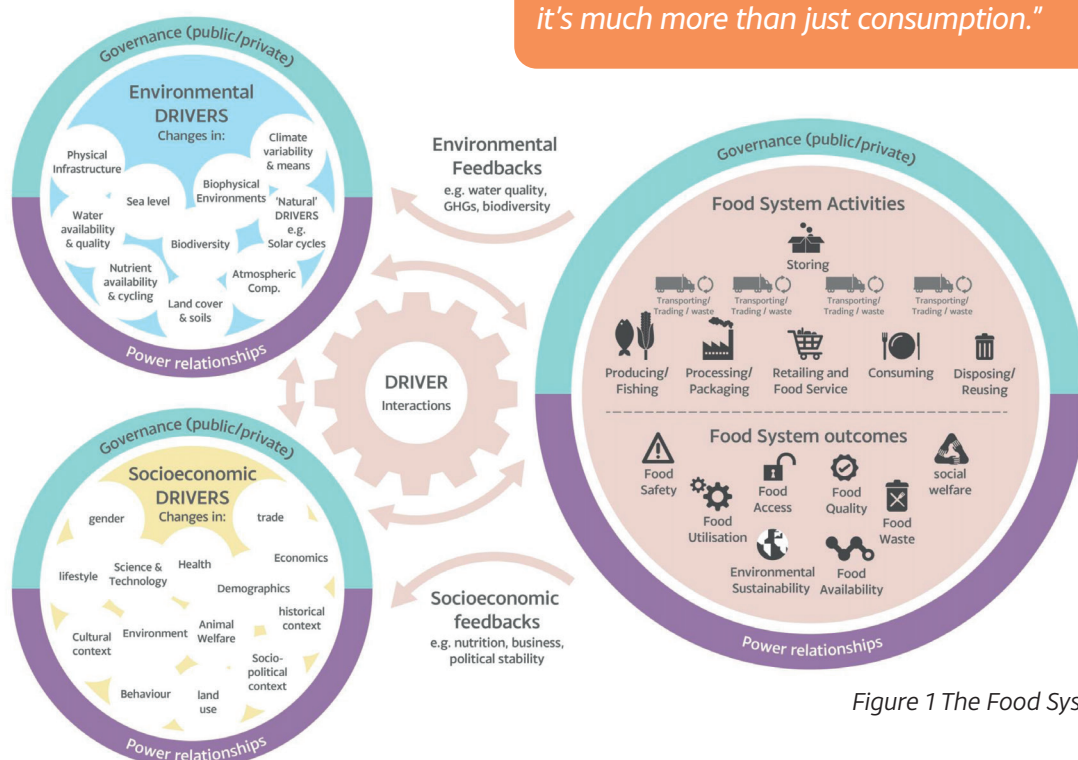
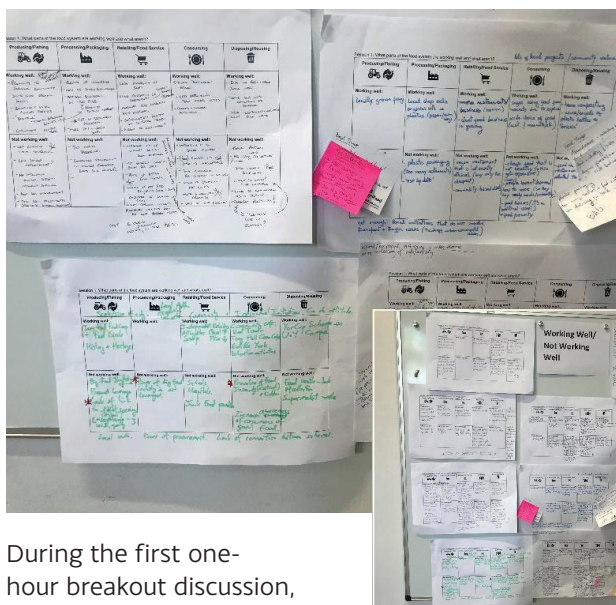


Figure 1 The Food System



During the first one-hour breakout discussion, participants were asked to discuss what is working in the York food system and what is not working. All tables were provided with a worksheet with icons to represent different food systems activities and the roundtables were asked to discuss and complete their worksheets. These were then placed onto the white boards surrounding the room and people asked to move round to discuss (photo above):

The IKnowFood team and members of Good Food York then analysed the table contributions to draw out core emergent themes for further discussion. Appendix 1 shows the key themes that emerged. The numerical value in brackets is how many tables referred to this theme in their discussions.

WHAT IN THE YORK FOOD SYSTEM IS WORKING?

A strong theme was the popularity of various local food initiatives designed to supply fresh fruit and vegetables to disadvantaged communities and to redistribute food waste (surplus food). A range of organisations were highlighted by participants e.g. Edible York (creating community and school gardens) which have also created Abundance York, an urban harvesting project, which has a team of volunteers who harvest fresh fruit and vegetables that would otherwise go to waste from peoples gardens etc. One of their initiatives are apple press days from harvested apples.

<http://www.edibleyork.org.uk/edibleinitiatives/abundance/>

Abundance York use social media to mobilise volunteers and the public. One of the assembly presenters was Joe Fennerty of Food Circle, a food hub based in Tang Hall Community, which has developed supply chains of high

quality fresh fruit and vegetables from local farmers and growers by food aggregation and distribution to supply healthy food into the Tang Hall community in York. This can include high quality vegetables from local growers from cancelled retail orders.

The co-ordination and distribution of surplus/waste food by local York groups was another theme raised by more than one discussion table. One of our speakers, Emily Deckers, from the York Nurturing Community (YNC), talked about how they coordinate with restaurants etc. to redistribute their surplus food to organisations such as Food Without Bombs, which is a homeless charity. In addition, YNC run a community pay-as-you-feel café. Another York social innovation is the share waste app for redistribution of food waste across the city.

<https://www.yorkmix.com/share-food-dont-waste-pioneering-app-launches-york-family-picnic/>

A number of tables mentioned the need for more bring-your-own container stores (pay and weigh) to reduce the need for plastic packaging.

WHAT IN THE YORK FOOD SYSTEM IS NOT WORKING?

Food poverty is a real problem in York with 26 food aid providers in the city. There were also reports of teachers bringing food into schools for their pupils. The assembly also felt the availability of healthy food to disadvantaged communities was a problem. One of our speakers from the York Food Justice Alliance, which carried out a family survey in the summer of 2019 in partnership with the University of York, found that 26% of people who reported experiencing food insecurity had not yet visited a foodbank due to the stigma associated with this. This appears to suggest that food bank parcel provision is not an accurate indicator of food poverty. This also highlights the importance of innovations such as Food Circle York, YNC etc. (see above).

A second key theme identified at the assembly was the significant amount of food waste created in the city. This appears to be exacerbated by the waste emanating from restaurants and cafés. This is not helped by City of York Council not having a food waste collection and composting service. Too much plastic and packaging associated with food was also raised by a number of tables. In addition, frustration with the lack of retail outlet diversity was raised by a number of tables along with low pay in the hospitality sector in York.

WHAT NEEDS CHANGING IN THE YORK FOOD SYSTEM?

The afternoon break out session asked the roundtables to discuss what could be changed and how people could action change themselves (agency). Each table filled in a sheet (see example in appendix 2).

Common suggested actions across the tables included:

- An award/verification scheme to indicate sustainable/ healthy shops, restaurants, B&B's etc. This would be awarded against a set of criteria including: number of healthy, vegan and vegetarian food choice options, dealing with waste, the percentage of profits used to tackle food poverty. The outlets who receive the award will be featured on tourist maps, websites, show award in their windows etc.
- Scale-up the infrastructure for community food hubs in York by attracting investment into these food innovations. Create a unified strategy by creating a sustainable food hub in York with key stakeholders present and citizens more involved in decision making. There is interest from the LEP to support this development.
- Make 'sustainable food systems' a City of York Council policy. This could partly be delivered by a new strategy for public procurement that prioritise healthy sustainable diets for schools, hospitals and other public venues.
- Education in early years, teaching about: nutrition and seasonality (school onwards), basic cooking using real ingredients and where fresh food comes from.
- Greater support for local/sustainable stores (perhaps through reduced rent, subsidies), to increase their number and make them more accessible e.g. healthy corner shops.
- Reduced council tax for those families accessing food aid providers.

I really enjoyed the group discussion elements – I think it was an excellent idea to have attendees divided between different tables to ensure a thorough mix of opinions and views."

CONCLUSIONS

A number of conclusions can be drawn from the citizen assembly regarding the food system and how to approach organising citizen assemblies, particularly those focused on food. The assembly was an effective way of hearing about a range of local food initiatives in Yorkshire, whose aim is to both relocalise food supply and production and tackle food waste. These innovative community business models are increasing the diversity of food provision, particularly in disadvantaged communities. A number of these organisations had incubated in their early start-up phase in the community interest company (legal form), Spark York. It is clear these spaces for innovation and the lessons learnt are important in catalysing these York food initiatives. This is important for those policy makers at both regional and national level looking to stimulate economic growth that delivers positive social and environmental change at the community level in the food system. The relocalising of food supply was also seen as a way of providing healthy produce at affordable prices into disadvantaged communities, where in some neighbourhoods there was a deficiency in supply of fresh fruit and vegetables. The assembly also felt the City of York Council (schools, hospitals etc.) coupled with other large institutions e.g. the two universities, could use public procurement to stimulate more sustainable sourcing of food provision in the region.

There was a clear frustration at the assembly with regard to the rise of food poverty in the city of York. The work of the York Food Justice Alliance (Power, 2019) and their report on seeking justice shows the problems with hidden food poverty in York. In fact, a household survey of 612 families in York carried out in 2019 reported that 26% of those families experiencing food insecurity had never visited a food bank due to the associated stigma.⁹ This appears to indicate a problem with hidden food poverty in York. There were several roundtables at the assembly who highlighted the lack of separate collection of food waste in the city of York. People felt there was an opportunity for both composting this food waste and being more resource efficient in how any surplus from hotels and restaurants could be utilised. YNC provide an innovative example of how waste food from this sector can be used in a social enterprise business model as a 'pay-as-you-feel' interactive café, which also supplies homeless charities. UK Government could introduce regulation making all councils collect and compost food waste separately.

⁹ Power, MS (2019). Seeking Justice: How to understand and end food poverty in York Report
<https://yorkfoodpoverty.files.wordpress.com/2019/07/seeking-justice-how-to-understand-and-end-food-poverty-in-york-4.pdf>

Feedback on the event itself was very positive; participants liked the fact the table plan was pre-designed with name badges having a table number to ensure there was table diversity. There was also an enthusiasm for further conversations to elaborate on the problems and proposals discussed. In addition, there was positive feedback on the tools provided for the tables such as the food system diagram and the worksheets. Participants felt they helped to stimulate discussion. Opportunities to repeat engagement (e.g. in non-working hours) and targeting specific stakeholder groups e.g. farmers, more actively is likely to broaden the stakeholder base and thus the breadth of opinion represented, which would be an important consideration for those wishing to act upon any of the recommendations made.

Those involved in the event were genuinely enthusiastic and appreciative of having the opportunity to express their views, and were encouraged by the presence of individuals in positions of institutional authority (e.g. the University of York Vice Chancellor Charlie Jeffery and members of the City Council) which they felt lent credibility to the event. There was also enthusiasm for agency, with participants wanting to be involved in the change, and a strong call that outcomes from the meeting should include the establishment of a solid platform for information exchange and 'practical action' on the issues highlighted. Participation in the assembly appeared to also stimulate discussion in how citizens themselves could become more involved in supporting a good food system. Participants listed on their worksheets a range of actions they were going to take including, being more active on social media, become members of Good Food York, applying for funds to carry out community initiatives, more purchasing of

I would also like to see more information on how attendees would be able to affect change, or information on initiative and events in the local area that we could take part in (i.e. CSA, co-operatives). I think that it would also be good to reach out to local farmers and food producers to get their views, as well as encouraging them to form links with attendees and encourage dialogue between them."

local food, demand more information from mainstream retailers, and share knowledge with family and friends. This also shows the value of citizen assemblies in supporting behaviour change.

Overall, it is clear that many things in the city are working effectively and there are numerous 'good news stories', but there are also many challenges related to food which remain to be addressed to increase the sustainability and resilience of the local food system, and the benefits which citizens of York derive from it. As an affluent city, York represents a community which is well placed to respond and could therefore demonstrate leadership on the issues identified. But it is also important to note that problems in the food system are likely to be even more acute in other lower-income regions of the UK, and that there is a pressing need also to make sure that initiatives – and any eventually successes – achieved in York over the coming years can be replicated across the UK.

FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

- Establishment of a central 'hub' i.e. a mechanism to bring together all the relevant stakeholder groups, supported by local business and local and national government
- Present findings to government joint group of BEIS-DEFRA Food and Drink LEP group, which meets every quarter to share best practice
- Discuss with LEP possibilities of supporting investment in innovations such as food hubs to relocalise food supply
- Report to Waste and Resource team at DEFRA and BEIS regarding the food waste issue to discuss national legislation to collect food waste separately
- Investigate legal options for changes in the weighting of criteria (economic, social and environmental impact) of public tendering documents
- Reflecting on the citizen assembly method a number of participants recommended running a similar event at weekends. In addition, to increase the number of farmers attending to organise an assembly in a Yorkshire market town e.g. Malton.
- City of York Council to start measuring annually food insecurity in the City.
- Working with Good Food York and the City of York Council develop an award scheme to those hotels, cafes etc that meet a set of sustainable criteria

APPENDIX 1

Table 1: What parts of the food system are working well and which are not?

PRODUCING FISHING 	PROCESSING PACKAGING 	RETAILING FOOD SERVICE 
<p>Working well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Local producers are increasingly present among the community (farmers and gardeners) (x3) School gardening community orchard, community gardening and Edible York (x3) Proximity to farming community Relatively local fish producers Tang Hall Food Coop and Food Circle History and heritage- lots of farming nearby High production of food 'Odd boxes' and wonky veg sold Yorkshire is open to change 	<p>Working well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some artisan produces use better materials and are on the rise (x2) – driven by tourist market Some reduction in plastic packaging evident e.g. metal straws, re-usable coffee cups Apple press day More bring-your-own container stores (pay and weigh) (x7) Strong Yorkshire brand Plenty of industries Lots of small businesses Lots of R&D in sustainable processing Packaging is helping food to last longer (x2) Information on packaging makes choices easier e.g. traffic lights 	<p>Working well:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Food is available and widespread Cheap supermarkets and discount stores make food more accessible along with their delivery options Lots of farmers markets/ shops and diverse shops in York (x6) Voluntary sector picking up slack and helping those in need e.g. Abundance York (pick up excess fruit and veg), Food banks, Spark (x3) Street food business is growing Tang Hall food co-op Wide variety of restaurants – opening up to different food cultures (x2) Seasonal food markets and food festivals Supermarkets focused on cultural needs Supermarkets trying to help locally with local food drop off points and donations (x2)

CONSUMING**Working well:**

- Strong buy local ethos in York **(x3)**
- Civil sector response to food poverty and awareness of issues
- Varied food culture in York – plenty of restaurants/cafes
- Increasing vegan/veggie options
- Strong independent shops
- Lots of pay-as-you-feel and £5 meals, Food Circle, Red Tower, Tang Hall community cafe, edible York – food accessible for the less wealthy **(x3)**
- Less deprivation than other cities
- School linked activities
- If you have the money you have plenty of access to variety
- Strong community networks
- Sustainable System accolade

**DISPOSING
REUSING****Working well:**

- Local groups collecting food to avoid waste **(x5)**
- Rise in refillables
- Co-ordination and distribution of surplus food **(x4)**
- Voluntary initiatives for recycling
- York Rotters (until defunded)
- Free compost from Harewood
- Home composting done by many residents
- Some food waste collection for businesses
- Greater awareness
- New apps being created e.g. share waste app
- Clifton Moor food waste project

PRODUCING FISHING



Not working well:

- Not enough allotments/small gardens and lack of training for making the most of it **(x5)**
- Environmental degradation/ poor soil health – too much use of fertilisers and pesticides **(x3)**
- Not enough space for Edible York
- Not enough local sourcing
- Low skill employment
- Intensive animal systems and farming
- Equity of access is an issue
- Lots of food miles associated with produce from supermarkets
- Corporate dominance **(x2)**
- Unsustainable use of palm oil in many of the products we buy
- Modern slavery
- Low paid, zero contract hours on farms
- Market volatility
- Surplus food based on cosmetic reasons
- Biodiversity loss
- Animal antibiotics contamination
- Lack of link between local and regional farmers

PROCESSING PACKAGING



Not working well:

- Too much plastic and packaging **(x7)**
- Food manufacturing jobs poorly paid
- Local companies specialising in highly processed food (e.g. Nestle)
- Limited access to weigh and pay – not enough yet!

RETAILING FOOD SERVICE



Not working well:

- Food is not always healthy and processed
- Dominance of supermarkets: buying items at lower than cost price isn't good for farmers
- Independent stores forced to close because of supermarkets and their delivery services **(x3)**
- One stop shopping due to time poverty **(x2)**
- Lower than average pay for the hospitality sector
- No funding for people trying to do something
- Commodity based diets
- Increasing number of outlets sourcing from overseas
- Not enough organic food
- Influx of fast food deliveries making food unhealthy, expensive and putting local restaurants out of business **(x2)**
- Not enough outlets providing healthy food
- Poor accessibility to smaller outlets on the outskirts
- Farmers markets and local shops are generally more expensive and aimed at the middle classes

CONSUMING**Not working well:**

- Lack of information in schools and foodbanks about healthy eating and cooking (x3)
- Too many chains, tourists vs locals causing tension (x2)
- City centre has become more tourist focused- too overpriced (x2)
- Obesity is a big issue putting pressure on hospitals (x2)
- 'Healthy snack' pushing sugar tax – making poorer people poorer
- Unhealthy/expensive school meals (x2)
- Nutrition system out of date
- Food poverty present despite being the 6th richest economy (x4)
- Use by dates confusing (x2)
- Cheap food that is not healthy
- Time poverty- people don't have time to prep food (x2)
- Lack of community food events
- Lack of food sharing
- Community groups tackling the issue are not joined up
- Too much food wasted at events
- Disconnect from what you're consuming

**DISPOSING
REUSING****Not working well:**

- Poor food waste collection and composting by the council (x8)
- Not enough recycling points
- Not funding Rotters
- Too much foodwaste by restaurants and supermarkets (x5)
- Poor council recycling in York (x3)
- Plastic bottles
- Confusion and lack of communication over recycling

APPENDIX 2

Session 2: What aspects of the food system would you most like to see change in Yorkshire and how?

Table number

We recommend that...

How will we know we have succeeded?

How could you/your organisation support this?

YORK CITIZEN FOOD ASSEMBLY POLICY BRIEF



THANK YOU TO THE EVENT ORGANISERS AND FACILITATORS

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