FOOD HUBS FOR SECURITY, HEALTH, INCLUSIVE GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY

18% of UK households are experiencing food insecurity and don't have access to enough nutritious food

THE UK

The Northeast is worst affected with **27.8%** of households in food insecurity

4 million children live in households affected by food insecurity

Households with **children, ethnic minority groups, and people with disabilities or on benefits** are more likely to be food insecure

Figure 1: Food insecurity in the UK[1]

What are Food Hubs?

Food Hubs distribute food to people and organisations and often have specific ethical priorities.[2] They include food banks, social supermarkets, food pantries, community cafés and cooperative farms. As a key actor in local food systems they:

- Serve disadvantaged communities living in 'food deserts'
- Act as food aid or surplus food distribution centres
- Offer food pantries, community cafés, and food growing and cooking classes
- Develop links between producers and consumers which reduce food miles, waste and greenhouse gas emissions
- Support local, small food businesses
- Signpost members to financial support and other services

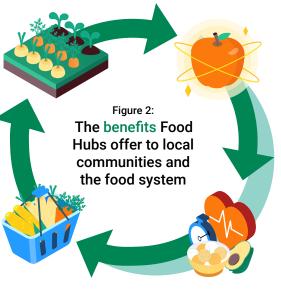## Our research evaluated how Food Hubs benefit communities and the food system.

We used **Leeds** as our study area as it has a thriving community of over 50 Food Hubs. Our interviews and surveys revealed four main benefits:

Enhance sustainability
- Reduce food waste
- Reduce GHG emissions
- Reduce food miles
- Plant fruit and vegetables
- Support biodiversity
- Improve soil quality

Support local economy
- Provide market access to small/medium food businesses
- Generate revenue
- Employ staff and provide volunteering opportunities
- Facilitate connections between local businesses/organisations
- Assist members access financial and other services and support

Figure 2: The **benefits** Food Hubs offer to local communities and the food system

Strengthen healthy local food systems
- Provide access to land/facilities for food growing
- Develop food growing and cooking skills
- Raise awareness for benefits of healthy, local food
- Support purchase of healthy, local food
- Advocate for healthy, sustainable, local food systems
- Offer diverse range of healthy, local foods

Improve wellbeing
- Improve physical health
- Improve mental health
- Promote opportunities for social connection
- Offer community activities

Food Hubs play a crucial role in supporting food insecure people

but food aid cannot address the root causes of poverty and is not a long-term solution.[3]

Recommendations for UK policy and food actors

Recommendation	Outcome
1 Government departments, agencies and local authorities should support Food Hubs to transition from providing emergency food to delivering more holistic solutions focusing on community wellbeing, healthy diets, local economy and environmental sustainability.	• Stronger and more resilient local food systems • Improvements to people's health and well-being • Supporting the 'just transition' to Net Zero • Enhanced sustainability • Stronger local economies
2 Food Hubs should gather further evidence of their activities to demonstrate their impact. Consider our tool.*	• Compelling evidence of their impacts on food security, human and planetary health, food justice, sustainable and inclusive growth. • Policy support and funding for Food Hubs.
3 Local authorities, the third sector and commercial organisations should foster partnerships with Food Hubs to collaborate, share best practice, build capacity and coordinate their work.	• Scale out place-based solutions, tailored to communities' needs that increase resilience and provide a sustainable, healthy, just, and economically viable alternative food system.
4 Society should address the root causes of food insecurity through decent wages and benefits in line with the cost of living.	• Everyone can access affordable, nutritious and culturally appropriate food at all times • Eradicated food insecurity and dietary inequalities

Impact Evaluation Toolkit for Food Hubs

*The tool can be found at Global Food and Environment Institute or FoodWise Leeds.

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[1] The Food Foundation (2022) "**Food Insecurity Tracking Report**"
[2] Guzman, P., Reynolds, C. (2019) "**Food Hubs in the UK: Where are we and what next?**"
[3] Papargyropoulou, E., Fearnyough, K., Spring, C., Antal, L. (2022) "**The future of surplus food redistribution in the UK: Reimagining the true 'win-win' scenario**". *Food Policy,* 108, 102230.