



The Food Foundation



Food, Farming & Countryside Commission

From the Ground Up

In late 2025, the Citizen Advisory Council (CAC) ran What Works Here Inquiries in four very different regions of England: Cornwall, York and North Yorkshire, Liverpool and Merseyside, and the North East. The CAC met more than eighty people, with different connections to food systems; those who grow, catch, make, sell and share food for a living, and those with responsibilities for the health and prosperity of their regions – doctors, council leaders and mayors.

In every region, people are already creating real value for their communities through food. In Liverpool, a not-for-profit caterer makes 26,000 meals a day for over eighty schools without relying on grants. In Cornwall, vegetables prescribed for food-related illness produce results that match medicine. North Yorkshire's Food for the Future framework brings together councillors, researchers, academics and farmers to create a food economy that works for everyone. In the North East, a food bank combines food with mental health, housing a welfare support to tackle causes of hardship, not just symptoms.

These examples keep the value of food close to where it is produced, so more people share in it and fewer costs fall to the public purse to fix. It is not charity or nostalgia, and none of it is 'anti-business': these are regional enterprises competing on quality, not subsidy. This is a better way to run things, already happening at scale and at ordinary supermarket prices, in hospitals, schools and on housing estates.

But the CAC also saw how hard this work is. The same five barriers came up everywhere.

1. Supply contracts that load risk onto farmers and undermine UK-grown produce
2. Public procurement that shuts local producers out of the schools and hospitals on their doorstep
3. Short-term funding that stops good organisations from planning ahead
4. The loss of abattoirs, packing and cold storage that a region needs to feed itself well
5. A reliance on unpaid labour and on surplus food that often does not match local needs

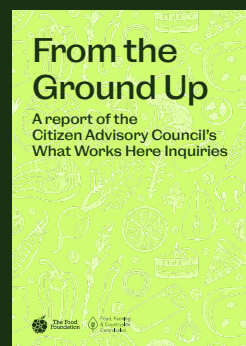
The CAC identifies that these are symptoms of the same problem – a food system now optimised for cheap calories and shareholder value for global agribusinesses. Yet low prices at the till do not reflect the real costs. The rest is paid in the nation's health - where food-related illness falls hardest on the poorest - in unfair returns for farmers, in the environment, soil, water and air.

Government can change this. People want to see:

- **Power and money devolved to places with long-term funding, devolved budgets and investment to rebuild local infrastructure**
- **Procurement reformed so schools, hospitals and prisons can prioritise healthy regional and UK produce**
- **Food rules untangled into one clearer law, much of it simply clearing the way for what works, at little cost**

The CAC is not short of ambition for a country in which healthy, good food, sustainably produced, is within reach of everyone, and producers are paid fairly. Yet what they found came as a shock; that these beacons of good practice survive in spite of how the food economy is designed to work. It does not have to be this way.

The CAC offers these findings to a new food strategy for England, in the belief that government can readily solve these problems, with the public behind it.



Read the full report:



ffcc.co.uk/publications/from-the-ground-up