

Growing the real economy

Rebuilding the real economy means investing in people and place. It is giving people the resources and power to make choices for their communities.

Focus on food

As FFCC has shown, through **The Food Conversation**, the biggest ever deliberation on what people want from their food, and now through the Citizen Advisory Council, advising Defra on its Good Food Cycle, when you talk about food, you find your way quickly into the things people really care about. The way we eat today is a prime example of how the real economy has been degraded, how communities across the UK have suffered, and how turning this around starts with people and places.

JUNK FOOD, JUNK COMMUNITIES

The current food system doesn't work for citizens, communities, good food businesses, and farmers. More than half of our calories come from ultra-processed foods, which lie behind a chronic disease disaster costing the country £268bn a year. Britain has some of the world's cheapest food, but one in six households can't afford a healthy diet. Meanwhile, farmers are struggling. They've been forced to intensify, scale up or taken on second jobs to stay afloat. The winners in this financialised food system are the handful of agribusinesses, manufacturers, retailers and fast food giants who dominate the food chain.

It's a system that's breaking down the connection and trust that's so important to strong communities. Time- and money-pressed families struggle to put home-cooked dinners on the table. Junk food, snacks and vapes pack the high street. Factory farming encouraged by Big Food pollutes rivers and air, creates fewer jobs, and is cut off from the countryside around it. Much of the value is extracted by the owners and shareholders of global businesses.

NOURISHING PEOPLE, FLOURISHING BRITAIN

Building a fairer, healthier food system means rethinking how we make decisions. We need to ask people and communities what they need, and hand them power and resources. Government must set the rules of the game for industry. Incentives and regulations should promote businesses that prioritise health, build strong relationships, and create value for communities and the UK economy.

What's the prize? Cities, towns and villages where everyone has a real choice of fresh, affordable, healthy food. A competitive food business landscape with big and small firms that create lasting value. Farming that's rewarded for growing good food while looking after animals, regenerating soil, sequestering carbon and protecting wildlife. This real economy of food would save public money, take pressure off the NHS, reduce waste and pollution, and create opportunities for people of all backgrounds.

ROUTES TO THE REAL

To make this happen, we need mission-focussed leadership, resources aligned across central, regional and local government, guardrails to prevent harms, and joined-up policies. These might include:

Housing, Communities and Local Government – Use national planning framework to incentivise local and regional food infrastructure and healthier high streets

Health – Expand preventative healthcare based on nourishing food, building on successes such as fruit and vegetable prescribing and accelerating momentum on junk food advertising bans

Business and Trade – Develop training and incentives for alternative business structures, such as employee- and community-ownership and co-operatives

Treasury – Use tax levers to encourage healthy food businesses that build community value

Education – Cultivate 'whole school' food approaches, linking curriculum, skills development, local and sustainable sourcing, and provision of healthy meals

Defra – Pilot devolution of agri-environment funding and decision-making to landscapes and regions