

'Who feeds Bristol? Towards a resilient food plan'

Context

Concerns about energy supplies, environmental degradation and economic disruption mean that food is becoming an issue of political concern at a global, national and local level. But in order for the city (and city region) to play a positive role in addressing concerns, it is important first to understand how the current system operates and where the strengths and vulnerabilities may lie. It is also important that decision makers understand how a decision about one part of the food supply system may have unintended and significant consequences for other parts of the system.

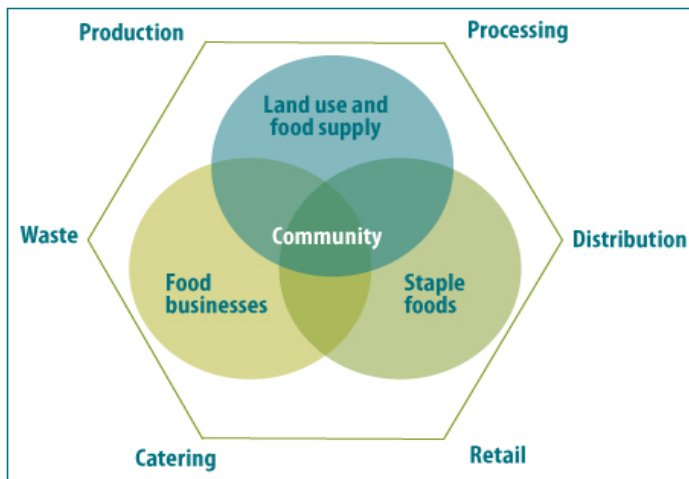
Commissioning of a baseline audit

To help Bristol residents and decision makers better understand the complex system that provides the city with a million meals every day, the NHS & Bristol City Council commissioned a research report, 'Who feeds Bristol?' and the work is already attracting considerable interest. It is a baseline report based on a rapid appraisal approach with 'snapshot surveys'. The research work was undertaken between April and October 2010, led by Joy Carey, a freelance consultant on sustainable food systems with a small specialist advisory group. The final report was published in March 2011.

'Who Feeds Bristol' report 2011 approach and findings

The 'Who Feeds Bristol' report, published in March 2011 identified the following:

i) The need for a *holistic approach* to understanding the food system and ii) the need to *understand strengths and vulnerabilities* in each component of the food system



It also explored five key *characteristics of resilience* in the food system

- Supply of food staples from the city region
- The ability of citizens to cook from scratch
- The extent to which citizens are engaged with food issues
- Diversity of food retail
- The use of 'closed loop' systems

Fresh *seasonal cooking from scratch is fundamental*; we need to build that objective into other strategies and policies. For example we need:

Joy Carey, Sustainable food system planning; author of 'Who Feeds Bristol?'

- Good diverse fresh food shopping areas
- Food produced in and close to the city
- Easy to reach fresh local food markets
- More land safeguarded for food
- More food education spaces created
- More kitchens and more gardens

WFB report findings – how resilient are we?

'It may be that we are at a tipping point on the high street and that if attention is not given to maintaining and in some cases re-establishing a more diverse mosaic of food retailers with strong links to local producers and processors, these opportunities could be lost.' We therefore need to:

- Increase the amount of fresh seasonal staple food items available through a wide range of markets
- Ensure that more staple food items are produced closer to urban areas

A 'Food Policy Council'

In Bristol much is already happening, at grassroots level, and through business entrepreneurs, non-profit and charitable organisations, and some parts of the public sector. In order to help nurture and drive the change, Bristol set up a 'Food Policy Council' for the City in 2011. A driver for this new step is the concern that if Bristol as a city does not act to create a sustainable and fair food system then health and health inequalities will suffer, probably sooner than we think.

A Bristol Good Food Plan

The Who Feeds Bristol report provided Bristol with a much clearer starting point for developing a resilient food plan and implementing changes. The ongoing challenge now is to use the report to engage a much wider audience within the city i) about what good food is and why it is important and ii) with a food system planning process that will enable informed dialogue and collective participation.

The report set out nine areas to be addressed, summarized in the holistic diagram below, which is the foundation for a resilient food system plan for Bristol. At its heart is the definition of 'Good Food'.



Definition of Good Food – good for people, places and the planet

A key take home message is that we have to reassess what we mean by ‘good food’. Our food needs to be more than just cheap and convenient. *‘As well as being tasty, healthy and affordable, the food we eat should be good for nature, good for workers, good for local businesses and good for animal welfare.’*



Our vision (based on 5 characteristics of food system resilience):

Within the next five years Bristol will become known as a leading sustainable food city, widely celebrated for its:

- Diversity of successful food businesses from which people can buy a wide range of fresh, seasonal, local and organic, regional and fairly traded, good food products
- Flagship wholesale market and other infrastructure supporting local and regional supply chains and helping to make fresh fruit, vegetables and regional staples widely available
- ‘Cook from scratch’ healthy food culture and fun approaches to engaging residents in cooking, growing and city-wide food events
- Innovative network of urban food producers making effective use of a wide range of sites including the best value agricultural land in and around the city
- Highly efficient systems for redistributing surplus food and innovative approaches to capturing and re-using energy and nutrients from food waste recycling

Next steps in 2015

See the Bristol Food Policy Council website for more details including the Bristol Good Food Plan with action proposals that relate to each of the elements of the food plan diagram. <http://bristolfoodpolicycouncil.org/>

The next stage in 2015 is to develop a more in depth action plan with clear targets and measures.