

# Bridging the Gap: Appetite for Organic

## Workshop notes and chat

The Bridging the Gap workshop Appetite for Organic, 12 May 2026, brought together food partnerships interested in expanding local access to climate and nature friendly British fruit and veg to explore opportunities and tensions around promoting and communicating organic. The Workshop featured an overview of Bridging the Gap findings including returns on investment into climate and nature-friendly food retail and procurement schemes, including climate and nature benefit, economic benefit and community benefit. It also featured a talk from Nathan Richards, co-owner of Troed y Rhiw mixed organic farm in Wales.

## Workshop Notes

### Introduction

Hannah Gibbs and Vera Zakharov introduced the programme and the motivation for hosting this workshop and discussion with Sustainable Food Places food partnerships. The intro is captured in the associated Presentation.

### Reflections from Katie Palmer, Food Sense Wales Lead

Presenting with both hats on – SFP and BtG, talked about how SFPs are at the start of conversations and source of inspiration to widen conversations on organic

Nathan Richards, farmer at Troed y Rhiw Farm – farmed since 2008, certified organic since 2009, organic allows to feed people local, nutritious food, believes in producing food from wider ecology, runs small scale veg box scheme around 100 boxes, 2 local markets, distrustful of other non-certified ideas e.g. regenerative, believes we should have many suppliers for local area, need investment in training

### Katie and Nathan conversation

Katie – pre green revolution, not using inputs, since green revolution we've started using new terms for farming

Nathan – if we look after land, we can produce food where we live

Katie – markets as ecological systems

Nathan – “no community in a barcode”, connects with people as a producer that cooks, 2 way street of info exchange

Also talked about other opportunities e.g. fringe farming which creates jobs

Katie – global disruption, penny now dropping with gov food security is a risk, what purpose has organic got?

Nathan – climate change massively affecting, return to home grown system with resilience

Katie – how do we use organic terminology?

Nathan – most important is forward thinking. Should feed people delicious and nutritious food

Katie – how to talk to people on low incomes on middle class thing “organic”

Nathan – people tell him his veg doesn't go off (because freshly harvested), also nearest big supermarket is 29 miles away so considering fuel prices, he is cheaper

Hannah – q about future crops

Nathan – farming is all about the long view, selling on markets/box scheme reintroduces ideas of seasonal eating

Hannah – how to manage burn out

Nathan – loves what he does, works a 7 day week, realities are hard going, volunteering, believes in a fair exchange, own bosses

12.5-13 acres of food produced, polytunnels

Sarah – what role has LA played?

Nathan – big policy supports us, but have to be activist to make it work, e.g. starting a farmers market

Sarah – what could SFP unlock?

Nathan – starting a local farmers market, small acts

Hannah – what compost do you use?

Nathan – we make 80 tonnes of our own! Klaussmans for substrate

### Attendee Discussion

Ian Smith, Food Plymouth – talked about organic v regenerative, hardest shift organic is a turn off, chemical free is a better approach, opportunities to go deeper with those already committed to grow out from a position of strength, need to find phrases that appeal to the “antis” and bring a persuasive argument

Denis Davies, Propagate, Dumfries & Galloway- how to make organic viable to farmers, subsidy would be necessary, universal basic income, have local solutions but no national strategy

Matthew Passchier, Northampton Home Centre (Good Food West Northants) – get local working before national, felt like we're going in the right direction

Mark Chapman, Southampton Food Partnership – how could this work for inner city kids, getting the message across about where the veg comes from, Molly about to run a school club with veg donated from a farm, mark getting kids to try veg, scaling needs infrastructure change

Laura Penn, Cheshire West Food Partnership – focused on perceived cost, automatically dismissed as something not available for them, long-lasting food, close/convenience of it could be possible sellers

Emma Winstanley, Lewisham Council – how things work in rural areas, how to bring into urban areas – didn't reach an idea but discussed.

Ian Smith – building on what sarah said, providing high quality organic/conventional fruit and veg into disadvantaged communities was really valued

Janie Bickersteth, Good Food Oxfordshire – thinks there's a big opportunity to support small farms, referred to Nathan as an example of growing a lot on a small piece of land

### Closing

Vera – asked for survey responses

Hannah – reminded everyone more specific qs can be answered via email

## **Workshop chat transcript**

00:35:39 Ian Smith - Food Plymouth: Hello Everyone. Great to be here with you all. Ian Smith from Food Plymouth. Overcast down here today.

00:35:47 Mark Chapman - U. Southampton: Mark Chapman, University of Southampton

00:36:37 Dawn Propagate: Hi Everyone, I am Dawn from Dumfries and Galloway Community Food Network under Propagate Scotland. Very windy here too!!

00:39:58 Sarah Williams - Sustain: Replying to "Hi Everyone, I am Da..."

i thought your surname was Propogate for a minute. That would be fun!

00:40:45 Laura Penn: Laura from Cheshire Community Action involved in the Cheshire West Food Partnership

00:41:54 Sarah Williams - Sustain: Welcome @Denis Davies can you introduce yourself in the chat

00:42:36 Denis Davies:Hi I'm Denis, I work for Propagate in Dumfries and Galloway

00:52:06 Katie Shaw: katie@hcga.org.uk Katie from Hammersmith Community Gardens

00:55:34 Sarah Williams - Sustain: Replying to "katie@hcga.org.uk Ka..."

welcome Katie - great to have someone from HCGA - not been down for years :)

00:57:02 Ian Smith - Food Plymouth: Ian Smith, Food Plymouth. e ianmsmith1.5@gmail.com m 0772 017 4634.

01:00:25 Sarah Williams - Sustain: Do start to think of questions that you might have about the idea of broadening the scope of organic... or any specific questions for the speakers and those involved.

01:09:09 Sarah Williams - Sustain: Do let us know if you have any questions for Nathan

01:11:20 Vera Zakharov, Sustain: This resonates so much - I think that a lot. Food is inherently relational, it's what culture and community are built on

01:12:06 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: This really resonates with our findings from Bridging the Gap. We found that across the pilots people changed the variety and type of cooking that they did through conversations with farmers and retailers. An experience they don't get in supermarkets

01:13:03 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: Replying to "This really resonate..."

Check out our report for more on this <https://www.sustainweb.org/reports/dec25-bridging-the-gap-how-to-fix-the-food-system-for-everyone/>

01:13:19 janie bickersteth: Janie Bickersteth, OxFarmToFork, Good Food Oxfordshire - love what you are saying about community engagement and the need for market gardens around cities - this is something we are trying to support

01:16:23 janie bickersteth: Yes, climate change - Storing water is a huge issue for the farmers we work with, but the most diverse producers, using perennial veg and keeping the soil covered with crops all year round is helping

01:16:58 Mark Chapman - U. Southampton: I am interested in novel crops (thinking about climate resilient crops for the future, such as chickpeas, lentils, lupins...) and we have just started a network <https://novelcropnetwork.ac.uk/> - how much do you think about growing crops that might not be ideal now, but worth investigating for a few decades time?

01:21:13 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: Again this resonates with the experience of households on Bridging the Gap who said that they have lower levels of food waste as they are able to buy the quantities they want/need and it stays fresher for longer

01:21:39 Dawn Propagate: Sorry everyone, I need to leave, unexpectedly. Thank you

01:21:54 janie bickersteth: Nathan - you are amazing but how do you avoid burnout? If you and your team (?) are supplying 52 weeks of the year, how can we sell this lifestyle to new growers?

01:22:33 Denis Davies: Thanks for an energising talk :)

I'm curious about some figures:

how many acres do you farm?

how many people are earning a living?

how many volunteers (or volunteer days per wk/month/yr) do you have (if any)?

01:25:40 Vicky Gerrard, Sustain (she/her): My Mum used to look forward to her satsuma in her Christmas stocking! not british grown obviously but I think eating seasonally makes us value food more too!

01:26:03 Mark Chapman - U. Southampton: thank you @Nathan Richards- Troed Y Rhiw Farm !!

01:26:15 Vera Zakharov, Sustain: Our Civil Food Resilience Report (launching tomorrow) focuses on seed saving and storing systems as a key (and often ignored) action at place!

01:27:32 janie bickersteth: So how do we sell this to the next gen??

01:27:48 Denis Davies: Reacted to "So how do we sell th..." with 🙌

01:28:16 janie bickersteth: I know you love it and that says a lot - so many people I talk with say "I couldn't cope with the office any longer"

01:28:56 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: Nathan mentioned Woofers. See here if you don't know about it <https://wwwoof.org.uk/en/>

01:29:37 West Northants sustainable food network: What compost do you use?

01:30:17 Sarah Williams - Sustain: I have a question about the role of local government and if Nathan see's a clear role and/or if his farm does well despite council

01:31:31 Áine Douglas - Calderdale Food Network: Unfortunately I have to leave for another meeting. Thank you all!

01:31:39 Vera Zakharov, Sustain: · One thing that stood out for you

- Where do you see opportunities for championing organic in your work over the next year?
- Where in your networks do you see the hardest shift?

01:32:31 Amie Watson - Hull/Northern Lincs Food: Apologies I have to leave now for another meeting, very interesting. Sorry I had some log in issues earlier so missed the first part so look forward to seeing what happens in the recordings. Thanks

01:46:41 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: Replying to "So how do we sell th..."

Nathan said "Farming always has been hard work but it's amazing the number who are coming into it. There are lots of people who want to come into organic horticulture but opportunities to access land are challenging and scaling – the skillset is missing. So we need to find access to funding for training"

01:50:58 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: Replying to "I have a question ab..."

Nathan feels relatively supported at national level, but it can be challenging to have that trickle down. Farmers markets are one good example of that where there can be a lot of resistance at a local level.

01:51:22 West Northants sustainable food network: Replying to "What compost do you ..."

I thought we were 1

01:51:28 Sarah Williams - Sustain: The point about getting the local right first is an interesting one @Medway Council

- 01:52:11 Sarah Williams - Sustain: We are trying to demonstrate how the local works and i think do have some good examples, but i think we are still to make the tipping point of getting national to take note and support this so it can accelerate
- 01:52:50 Sarah Williams - Sustain: You might also like to look at the polling that Hannah and the team did on Organic - where there was a lot of support for organic produce from low income groups - @Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain is there somewhere we can signpost to?
- 01:53:10 Charlie Rosthorn (Eastbourne Food Partnership): Sorry I need to go, thank your hosting this session!
- 01:53:14 West Northants sustainable food network: We defiantly talk about urban and rural challenges is west northants being very different.
- 01:53:27 Katie - Food Sense Wales: We are working on farm visits as part of Welsh Veg In Schools together with Food Partnerships.
- 01:53:46 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: Replying to "You might also like ..."  
It's not available online anymore but I can share it with anyone who is interested over email
- 01:54:16 Sarah Williams - Sustain: Interesting to think about what the role of food partnerships are specifically... as conveners and connectors and also in terms of communicating some of the key messages
- 01:54:36 Katie - Food Sense Wales: Slade Farm is working with Food Vale for example Slade Farm
- 01:56:19 West Northants sustainable food network: culturally appropriate food is a challenge also
- 01:56:55 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: See Better Food Traders read out of the polling we commissioned: [https://www.organicresearchcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Organic-Consumers\\_-Tips-for-Retailers.pdf](https://www.organicresearchcentre.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/09/Organic-Consumers_-Tips-for-Retailers.pdf)
- 01:57:34 Katie - Food Sense Wales: Yes - Halal came up in our Wales workshop as not being able to be organic
- 01:58:25 West Northants sustainable food network: To keep the conversations going is important
- 01:58:35 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: Please do check out our Bridging the Gap report here: <https://www.sustainweb.org/reports/dec25-bridging-the-gap-how-to-fix-the-food-system-for-everyone/>
- 01:59:02 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: And for those particularly interested in school food: <https://www.sustainweb.org/reports/mar26-how-to-make-school-food-work-for-children-farmers-and-planet/>
- 01:59:32 Katie - Food Sense Wales: Nathan also mentioned that Farmers markets maybe one of the key mechanisms for supporting organic. There will be a key role there for SFPs in supporting market development.
- 02:00:02 Denis Davies: Replying to "Yes - Halal came up ..."

surely halal food has been organic for most of history?

02:00:59 Vera Zakharov, Sustain: Replying to "Yes - Halal came up ..."

i think it's mainly to do with livestock supply chains, and limits on halal/free range as well. i think it' to do with limited demand on double certifications of halal and ethical, likely due to price...

02:01:17 West Northants sustainable food network: Replying to "Yes - Halal came up ..."

Most of the halal chicken comes from the two sister's group. Mass produced.

02:02:00 Sarah Williams - Sustain: If anyone is developing a bid or proposal for the new Lottery Food Fund please do look at the learning from Bridging the Gap on how to address some of the structural and other gaps.

02:02:50 Denis Davies: I need to go thank for an inspiring chat everyone

02:02:52 Laura Penn: Whilst Halal meat can't be organic, islamic principles advocate for more veg than meat so a push for more veg is still in line with culturally appropriate food.

02:03:15 Katie - Food Sense Wales: That's how we are operating with Welsh Veg in Schools Janie.

02:03:27 Ian Smith - Food Plymouth: What I was trying to say is that experience from the FoodSEqual project in Plymouth is that top quality fruit and vegetables are deeply appreciated by people from disadvantaged backgrounds. Opportunities for us here, I think! Thanks.

02:03:51 Hannah Gibbs (she/her), Sustain: Bridging the Gap evaluation survey – Fill out form

02:04:13 Katie - Food Sense Wales: I see it every week Ian with the huge queues at Cardiff Farmers markets for the organic veg stall!

02:04:30 Medway Council: Thank you!

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*Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional, and local level. [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)*