Bridging the Gap policy briefing

Background

Producing fruit, vegetables and pulses using climate and nature-friendly methods requires investment, and it is often smaller scale growers who bear the risks and financial burden. The dominance and power of big food manufacturers and retailers in the food supply chain drives down prices paid to producers, who also carry the highest proportion of risk in the supply chain. This creates additional barriers for growers to invest, grow their businesses and access markets, and often means that their produce is not available or accessible for many, especially for those on lower incomes.

From 2022 to 2025, Sustain and our partners co-designed and delivered nine pilot projects across the UK. These innovative approaches bridged the gap between fruit, veg and pulses - grown using organic methods by Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) farmers – and people on a low income across the UK – in both retail and school settings. Through action-based research, the programme found that it is possible to overcome barriers, and identified how these approaches could be scaled, drawing on additional evidence and expertise.

The fruit and veg gap

- The UK only produces 35% of the fruit and veg consumed[1]
- Fruit and veg consumption must double to reach health and planetary goals[2]
- 21% of people in the UK live on relative low income[3]
- 31% children under 5 are growing up in a food insecure household[4]

The pilots demonstrate that driving up UK supply as well as expanding access to affordable, climate and nature friendly fruit, veg and pulses would not only strengthen nutrition security and public health but also drive economic growth. With an approach to food policy that reaches across the food system we can create new routes to market

[1] Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), *UK Food Security Report 2024*, (Defra, December 2024), p. 128.
[2] Johan Rockström et al, *The EAT–Lancet Commission on healthy, sustainable, and just food systems*. (The Lancet, Volume 406, Issue 10512, October 2025), p. 1625 – 1700.
[3] Joseph Rowntree Foundation, *UK Poverty 2025* (Joseph Rowntree Foundation, January 2025).
[4] Thomas Weekes, Alex Viccars, Charlotte Miles, Adam Nichols, Arianne Clarke, Holly Clarkson, Ellie Ball and Sophie Padgett, *Hunger in the UK 2025* (Trussell Trust, September 2025).

for local food SMEs, generate well-paid jobs in communities that need it most and keep wealth circulating within those communities.

Creating a just, healthy and sustainable UK food system will require system-wide change alongside strong leadership. The policy recommendations below are based on the findings from the nine pilots.

Policy recommendations:

1. **Fix the supply - Boost British fruit, veg and pulse production**
2. **Fix the missing middle - Ensure fair prices and infrastructure for our farmers**
3. **Fix the access - Enable everyone to access good food**

Policy recommendations

1. Fix the supply

Food Strategy Outcome: 'Sustainable and resilient supply' with environmentally sustainable growers supported and greater resilience in domestic supply of healthy and sustainable food.
Bridging the Gap impact: More organic and agroecological growers entering the market and expanding production will build resilience. Diverse supply chains ensure supply is more readily available and fair prices support producer and consumer as scale builds efficiencies.

Farming of nutritious food with lower inputs, lower greenhouse gas emissions, and which restores nature and supports decent livelihoods for a diversity of growers must become the mainstream to build nutritional security and domestic resilience to protect us against global shocks. Our policy recommendations include ways to significantly increase domestic fruit, veg and pulse production in the UK[5], and with this, thousands more jobs (up to 80 jobs per thousand tonnes produced[6]), benefiting local communities[7].
Food grown according to organic principles is better for both people and planet.]

Findings from the Bridging the Gap pilots reveal that, while the market for organic is strong, domestic production of organic fruit and veg lags behind. Across pilot sites—from Welsh Veg in schools and Hackney Organic School Food to Carrick Greengrocers Friendly Food Club—pilot partners encountered shortfalls in domestic supply and an

[5] Tim Lang, with Natalie Neumann and Antony So, *Just in Case: narrowing the UK civil food resilience gap*, (National Preparedness Commission, February 2025), p. 333.
[6] Food Sense Wales, Tonnes of Change Summary Report, p. 19.
[7] IGD, *Viewpoint: Driving growth through a thriving food system*, (IGD, September 2025), p.35.

overreliance on imported produce. There was a 1% decline in organic producers and processors in 2024 compared to the previous year[8], with organic vegetables representing less than 10% of all organic production. While the market demand for organic is increasing strongly year on year, organic production still only makes up around 3% of total UK agricultural output[9]. For many small and medium growers, annual certification fees and administrative burdens and limited grants are barriers to entry, discouraging conversion to organic systems.

England

To support the increase in availability of organic and agroecological fruit and vegetables in England, the UK Government and other policy-makers should:

1.1. Introduce a cross-departmental Horticulture Growth Strategy to increase fruit, vegetable and pulse production and consumption.

- Introduce a UK government backed horticulture renewal programme for green growth in UK agriculture supporting growers, nutrition security, green jobs and climate and nature targets. The programme would combine elements of the Fruit and Veg Aid Scheme and Environmental Land Management (ELM) schemes, but unlike these schemes it would better enable access for organic, agroecological growers and move away from area-based payments thereby rewarding better land management in a comparatively small-scale, intensive sector such as horticulture.
- Support collaboration: Expand peer learning and collaborative models, such as those piloted under the Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme (SFS), to accelerate knowledge exchange. Develop grants for regional clusters of growers, collaborating and innovating to increase production, improve sustainability and connect with the market.
- Grants and land access: Provide capital grants, advice and land access for new entrants and growers, to allow them to invest in land, equipment and infrastructure to enable them to grow their businesses. This could utilise the existing Start-Up Loans and Enterprise Schemes (DBT) and the Farming Investment Fund (Defra) and promote funds for investment in small-scale horticulture.
- Training: Ensure the next generation of growers are trained and recruited while supporting the sector's transition to peat-free, low-carbon and nature-friendly production.

[8] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/organic-farming-statistics-2024/organic-farming-statistics-2024-united-kingdom

[9] https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/food-statistics-pocketbook/food-statistics-in-your-pocket

1.2. Integrate the Horticulture Growth Strategy with an organic action plan to ensure that the increase in production minimises environmental damage, increases biodiversity, and plays its role in both meeting and driving increased demand for climate and nature friendly food.

1.2.1. Ensure production of organic vegetables is supported to meet current increases in demand. This would include geographic diversification, incentivising nature-friendly production, including a transition away from peat-based soils, building on existing organic Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) packages and reintroducing the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS).

1.2.2. Establish legal foundations for Group Certification under a Producer Guarantee System (PGS), enabling small-scale and community farmers to access the organic market more easily, and reward collaboration within SFI schemes, incentivising cooperative actions that deliver shared environmental and community benefits.

- **Introduce a collaborative layer to farming schemes to support coordination between multiple growers.** The Welsh SFS includes a collaborative layer which aims to support actions that require coordination between multiple farmers and other supply actors, in exactly the way Bridging the Gap has supported in the Welsh Veg in Schools pilot. We recommend that:
  - England's SFI should include and encourage grower and supply chain collaboration.
  - This should be supported with incentives including payment for facilitation of these collaborations, and preparation for them. For example, the Welsh government is offering support through the Integrated Natural Resources Scheme (INRS) to help build capacity, with the idea to bridge to match funding from private sector.

1.3. Create a strong domestic market for UK organic and agroecological horticulture by harnessing the power of public sector procurement.

1.3.1. Deliver on the government's commitment to achieving 50% of public sector food from local or sustainable sources.

1.3.2. Fund supply chain facilitators and kitchen support in local authorities, which have been critical to all school pilots in unlocking opportunities for growers to access catering contracts.

1.3.3. Require schools to have a food policy and food in the curriculum, and among catering and educational staff to promote the food the children are eating.

Wales

We welcome Welsh Government inclusion of financial support for organic conversion and maintenance, as well as the collaborative layer within the Welsh Sustainable Farming Scheme, both of which strengthen the sector. However, given less than 0.1% of agricultural land in Wales is used for fruit and vegetable production in Wales and 2% of land is required to grow our 5 a day in addition the Welsh Government should:

1.4. Develop an ambitious Growth Plan for edible horticulture that supports farmers to transition to agroecological practices. This plan should include provisions that:

- Target a 100% increase in agricultural land dedicated to horticulture by 2030 (to 0.2% of agricultural land in Wales).

1.4.1. Set an ambitious growth target for organic horticulture as part of an Organic Action Plan for Wales to support the sustainable growth of the organic sector.

- Enable funding for small scale commercial growers and community growing projects to maximise the opportunities for small-scale horticulture in Wales.
- Develop a planning system that reserves land for food growing (including publicly owned land) whilst enabling the infrastructure and rural enterprise dwellings needed for successful fruit, vegetable and pulse production.

1.4.2. Invest in paid work-based accredited training/apprenticeships for sustainable farming including horticulture.

- **Optimise the potential of the optional and collaborative layers within the Sustainable Farming scheme for sustainable horticulture.**
- **Invest in and build infrastructure required on farm and centrally (growing, processing, packing and storage).**
- **Support the development of innovative finance to drive the sector.**
- **Target two portions of local, seasonal, sustainably produced vegetables in all school meals and monitor progress.**

International case-study: Until recently, Ireland lagged behind much of Europe in organic production, with just 1.6% of farmland certified organic in 2020. To accelerate growth, the government launched the *Organic Farming Scheme* (OFS) and the *Organic Strategy 2019–2025*, updated in 2024 with a 2030 target of 10% organic land. The strategy combined generous conversion payments, advisory services, and investment in processing and marketing. These measures aimed to reduce barriers for farmers, build

consumer demand, and align with broader EU Green Deal and Farm to Fork goals. Results have been notable: by 2023, almost 5% of Irish farmland was under organic management, and the number of organic farms had tripled in just three years. Awareness campaigns and new value chains supported this expansion, though challenges remain in scaling processing capacity. Ireland's case shows how clear targets, incentives, and institutional support can rapidly expand organic farming.

Scotland

In Scotland, the Scottish Government has:

- A Vision for Agriculture that aims to "encourage more farmers and crofters to farm and produce food organically".
- A Good Food Nation Act (passed in June 2023) that includes a National Good Food Plan (due to be launched by the end of 2025), which will set out how the Scottish government plans to achieve a wide range of high-level outcomes for the food economy, health and environment.

In addition to this, the Scottish government should:

1.5. Use policy, regulation and funding to ensure that all food production is resilient, sustainable and nature-friendly, and underpinned by fair work, positive animal welfare and a circular economy approach.

1.5.1. Commit to transforming how Scottish agriculture is funded by allocating 75% of the existing agriculture budget to support climate resilient and nature-friendly farming and agroecological practices.

1.5.2. Establish a £500m Agricultural Transformation Fund to drive this shift over the duration of the next Parliament.

1.6. Create a dedicated Market Garden Support Scheme

1.6.1. This will provide fair funding for small-scale fruit and vegetable growers currently excluded from payments in acknowledgement of the fact that market gardens deliver healthy food, local jobs, and resilient food systems.

- **Include within the Scottish Organic Action Plan the following measures for growing the edible horticulture sector:**
- A dedicated campaign to improve promotion and signposting of existing funding to cover organic certification costs for farms under 3ha.

1.6.2. A gap analysis of existing provision of farm advisory services, knowledge exchange, training and research relating to organics in a Scottish context.

1.6.3. The development of new online resources for Scottish organic farmers and food producers.

1.7. Alongside the launch of the Scottish Organic Action Plan, the Scottish Government should:

1.7.1. Commit funding for a minimum of 5 years to implement its recommended measures, including for 'organic developer' posts.

1.7.2. Carry out a strategic communications campaign from Scottish Government and food and farming organisations on the features and benefits of organics for a range of audiences including farmers, retailers, caterers, procurers and consumers.

1.7.3. Publish new Scottish organic sector data and strategic market insights annually.

1.7.4. Produce a series of producer-led, data-informed sub-sectoral growth strategies for Scottish organic food and farming.

- Conduct strategic feasibility studies that unlock market opportunities for Scottish organic producers, in agriculture, retail, catering and public procurement.

1.7.5. Scope new capital and pilot funds to unlock capacity in organic supply chains and meet opportunities in agriculture, retail, catering and public procurement.

1.7.6. Convene a sector-led strategy group to review organic conversion processes, inform forthcoming policy and farm advisory services transformations, and carry out monitoring and evaluation of this action plan.

1.7.7. Support farms to convert to organic with conversion and maintenance payments (through the Agri-Environment and Climate Scheme (AECS), offer free organic conversion checks to farms interested in converting and specific financial support to cover organic certification costs for small producers.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs (DAERA) should:

1.8. Support established and new entrant smaller-scale agroecological growers involved in commercial production (including those under 5ha) by:

- Including them in future agricultural subsidy schemes, such as the Sustainable Agriculture Programme (SAP), farm Sustainability Payments and Farming for Nature.

1.8.1. Ensuring specific support in New Horticulture Schemes under SAP for organic conversion, modelled on the Republic of Ireland approach, and reward the unique social contribution of farms through payments for farm visits and social prescribing.

- Privileging support for new entrant growers to access land within Land Tenure Reform and Land Mobility Programmes with resources invested in capacity building (infrastructure and equipment grants, mentoring and new grower hubs) to establish a new cohort of agroecological growers.
- Providing capital investment that is appropriate to agroecological farming methods, such as polytunnels and smaller scale machinery rather than just innovative technologies that are not fit for smaller horticultural enterprises and agroecological farms.

2. Fix the missing middle

Food Strategy Outcome: 'Good Growth' in terms of fairer and more transparent supply chains.
Bridging the Gap impact: fairer supply chains mean better support for climate and nature friendly growers and for small and medium sized food businesses that play a vital role in communities, generating jobs and livelihoods, and ensuring nutrition security.

The Bridging the Gap pilots identified major supply chain bottlenecks that limit the distribution of local produce. Our pilots, Give Peas a Chance and Welsh Veg in Schools, uncovered a lack of local processing and packing facilities and insufficient logistics networks for small and medium sized producers to access school food contracts.

Successful farmer-focused SME wholesalers – like the Better Food Shed in Hackney and Tower Hamlets, or Organic North in Liverpool – illustrate what can work when the right conditions are in place. This includes supportive planning frameworks, accessible infrastructure, and start-up funding. There is a need for targeted government support that helps vital supply chain enterprises grow beyond initial investments and become financially resilient.

UK-wide

The UK Government, devolved nation governments and other policy-makers should:

2.1. Invest in and support short SME supply chains by creating a national or regional funding pot for start-up grants for organic and agroecological supply chain SMEs that can increase processing and aggregation capacity for local farmers. This can be achieved by:

- Prioritising grants and other forms of investment for increasing processing (such as washers and splitters) and aggregation capacity (such as wholesalers) between farmers or at distribution level.

a. **In England** this could be funded by better utilising existing streams such as the Shared Prosperity Fund, Section 106, Community Infrastructure

Levy, Community Right to Bid/Buy, and Community Asset Transfer to protect, enhance or create vital local food assets (e.g. local abattoirs, community food venues).

b. **In Northern Ireland** consider expansion of support such as Power to Change's match funding for Community Share Offers and other central government support (which does not currently extend to NI).
c. **In Wales** create a Foundational Economy and Food Infrastructure fund - to invest in infrastructure to develop local, sustainable and more diverse supply chains in Wales. This should include shared access to processing equipment and storage at county food hubs, developing shared routes to local markets and working with coastal communities to optimise the potential of seafood (e.g. seaweed).

2.1.1. Create planning policies at local level that prioritise space and facilities for food SMEs, including values-led wholesalers and distributors.

a. In England, leverage updates to the National Planning Policy Framework giving local authorities more scope to protect peri-urban farmland and plan proactively for food growing within spatial strategies. The 2025 Planning and Infrastructure Bill (once passed) could also ease regulations for community farms and food hubs by expanding delegated decisions.
b. Unlock underused spaces for food and farming. Local authorities, working with growers and community groups, should identify and map underutilised public land and vacant storage, distribution and retail premises. These spaces can then be repurposed for food production or to help independent SMEs establish or expand food businesses.
c. Embed food infrastructure into planning strategies. Spatial Development Strategies should integrate food spaces and allocate funding for food hubs, warehouses, processors, abattoirs and distribution centres, strengthening local supply chains and supporting producers.
d. Require food spaces in new developments. Planning policy should set an explicit aim to support sustainable, localised food systems and reduce emissions. Major residential and regeneration projects should include provision for food storage, cooking, and dining, alongside community and enterprise facilities such as growing areas, community kitchens, and retail spaces. Include food as a priority within Pride of Place funding and similar funding across the nations.

- Establish support for research, development (R&D) and feasibility studies, and expand pilots for promising models. Prioritise skills development and supply chain diversification to strengthen resilience.

a. This reflects the focus on investing in skills at a local level that was core to the Devolution White Paper and could utilise the funding streams of

both the Adult Skills F und and/or Skills Bootcamps, while R&D funding could also tap into the Farming Innovation Programme (DEFRA/UKRI).

b. Local authorities, regional bodies, and supply chain partners should collaborate with academia to evaluate the economic, health, and community benefits of local food systems, ensuring these co-benefits are embedded in regional growth, regeneration, and sustainability strategies.

2.2. Improve fairness and transparency across mainstream supply chains through legislation, and by strengthening the role of UK supply chain regulators.

2.2.1. This can be delivered through, for example, enhancing the mechanisms and powers of the Fair Dealing Obligation, Groceries Code Adjudicator and the Agricultural Supply Chain Adjudicator, and learning from good practice set by

International case-study: Smallholder farmers in Kenya produce a wide range of horticultural crops but often struggle to reach larger markets due to lack of aggregation, cold storage, and reliable distribution. Farmworks, a Kenyan SME founded in 2020, addresses this gap by acting as both grower and aggregator. Through an out-grower scheme, it contracts farmers, supplies inputs on credit, provides training, and ensures quality control before distributing to domestic vendors and export buyers. The company operates collection centres close to farming communities, reducing post-harvest losses and helping farmers meet good agricultural practice (GAP) standards. By 2023, Farmworks worked with around 1,000 farmers, with a target of scaling to 17,000 by 2027. It also services around 200 small vegetable vendors in local markets. Farmworks demonstrates how investment in aggregation, infrastructure, and farmer services enables SMEs to scale, rewards growers fairly, and builds more transparent and resilient food supply chains.

the Spanish translation of the EU's Unfair Trading Practice directive[10].

- **Produce a local food plan for each region in conjunction with farmers, growers, values-led enterprises, civil society and communities to improve how council assets are managed, improve spatial development strategies, improve supply chain infrastructure and increase equitable access to healthy and sustainable food, whilst boosting food resilience and local food economies.** Local Plans are already mandated as part of the Good Food Nation Act in Scotland and would deliver against the national Food Strategy's focus on place-based food economies and the commitment to "unlock expertise, energy and

[10] Head of State, *Law 16/2021, of December 14, which modifies Law 12/2013, of August 2, on measures to improve the functioning of the food chain*, (Head of State, December 2021), p. 153323-153352.

experience at a local level to deliver improved outcomes where they are most needed".

- Develop and implement Local Food Plans: Councils, in partnership with civil society and communities, should create food plans to better manage public assets, strengthen spatial strategies, and improve supply chain infrastructure. These plans should increase equitable access to healthy, sustainable food while boosting local resilience and economies, with pilots in different regions to test and share learning nationally.
- Secure resources and partnerships: Local and regional authorities should identify funding through government programmes and private sector partnerships, and work with initiatives like the Sustainable Food Places programme to build strong Food Partnerships. The Welsh Government is doing this,[11] which should be emulated across all UK nations. These partnerships can link with farming groups to invest in aggregation, logistics, and other supply chain improvements that cut costs, increase efficiency, and enhance nutrition security.

3. Fix the access

Food Strategy Outcome: 'Healthier and more affordable food' An improved food environment that supports healthier and more environmentally sustainable food sales**.**
Bridging the Gap impact: By using public money for public goods the government can secure a market for agroecological fruit and vegetable growers while ensuring everyone, no matter their income, is able to access food that is good for their health and the planet.

Findings from the Bridging the Gap pilots demonstrate that improving access to healthy, sustainable food requires strengthening both demand and supply-side mechanisms through coordinated policy action. Voucher and card schemes for health and wellbeing outcomes – trialed across Cardiff, Liverpool, and Tower Hamlets – showed that there was strong interest in buying organic fruit, veg and pulses, particularly because the produce was free from harmful chemicals.

Meanwhile, the Bridging the Gap public sector procurement pilots highlighted strong value for money, with supply chain facilitators and kitchen support roles in place to improve coordination. Yet, these pilots also identified systemic barriers, including a shortage of suppliers, limited regional processing and distribution facilities, and the absence of efficient digital logistics systems to connect producers with buyers.

[11] https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/news/may25-wales_support_for_food_partnerships/

Together, these findings point to the need for a more joined-up national strategy - one that embeds voucher schemes within social and health frameworks, while investing in the infrastructure, coordination roles, and digital systems required to strengthen local supply chains.

Such an approach would simultaneously enhance public health, improve value for money, and support a more resilient and equitable food system. The Good Food Cycle, as outlined in the Food Strategy, shows how access to affordable, nutritious food drives better health outcomes and could reduce pressure on the NHS. When people can buy and eat more fruit, vegetables and pulses, rates of diet-related illness such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease should decline. This creates a positive feedback loop: healthier diets improve wellbeing, cut healthcare costs, and strengthen communities. The Food Strategy makes clear that affordability and access are essential to enable this change, strongly linked also to climate change mitigation and nature restoration imperatives. Expanding affordable agroecological produce is therefore a key step in delivering the Good Food Cycle.

In retail settings

3.1. Use existing and new incentive schemes to increase access to organic fruit, veg and pulses in independent retailers.

3.1.1. **In England** this should be through a joint DEFRA/DHSC programme for fruit and veg on prescription. This would advance the outcome in the Food Strategy of improving diets and reducing inequalities by making healthier food affordable for low-income families. This would:

a. Work with social and healthcare prescription settings on developing and testing robust prescription models.
b. Collaborate with markets, neighbourhood retail and independent greengrocers selling certified agroecological and organic produce.
c. Monitor and evaluate health and social wellbeing benefits for patients, families, and wider communities.
d. Assess and document benefits for farmers, growers and local retailers participating in the scheme.
e. Measure and track economic benefits to the local economy, including job creation and resilience.
f. Explore opportunities for using public health funding to sustain and expand the programme long-term.
g. Consider providing families eligible for Healthy Start with an extra £1 for each £1 spent on fruit and veg from approved agroecological suppliers

3.1.2. **In Wales** the Welsh government should explore opportunities to incentivise fruit and veg consumption through mechanisms such as the Social Prescribing Framework and review of Healthy Start in Wales.

3.1.3. **In Northern Ireland** the Department of Health should establish a social prescription pilot that provides fruit and vegetable prescriptions for patients at risk of diet-related ill health. The pilot should be co-funded through public health budgets, monitored for health and economic outcomes, and designed to scale across Northern Ireland by 2028.

3.1.4. **In Northern Ireland** the government should support the replication of Carrickfergus's Friendly Food Club scheme in existing greengrocers and support new greengrocers (including community owned) to buy local agroecological food and subsidise the cost.

3.1.5. **In Scotland** the government should gather data on public sector food costs to better understand the investment in a Scottish 'basket of goods' that maps the cost differentials between organic and conventional options, identifies other barriers to supply, and presents feasibility studies and business cases for investments, potential regional pilots and national substitutions.

International case-study - The Gus Schumacher Nutrition Incentive Program (GusNIP), funded by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA) since 2019, supports projects that make fruit and vegetables more affordable for low-income households. Operating nationwide, it provides *conditional cash incentives* to participants in the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP). A common model is "spend $1 of SNAP on fruits or vegetables, receive $1 extra", effectively doubling purchasing power for healthy food. GusNIP is implemented through partnerships with farmers' markets, independent retailers, grocery stores, and healthcare providers. Evaluations show participants consume significantly more fruit and vegetables, while local growers benefit from increased sales. The program also funds "produce prescription" pilots, allowing healthcare providers to prescribe fruit and veg to patients at risk of diet-related illness. By aligning public health and agricultural policy, GusNIP strengthens local food economies while improving nutrition security. Its success has made it a flagship model for healthy food incentive programmes globally.

In school settings

Across all UK nations, local and regional authorities should enable more people to access agroecological, nature-friendly fruit, vegetables and pulses in public sector settings, such as schools. In practice, specifying organic is the way this can be achieved in public sector contracts and procurement.

3.2. Invest in supply chain facilitation roles and facilities to ensure connection and feedback between growers, local authority procurement officers and kitchen teams so there is a good mutual understanding on both sides of seasonal UK grown produce and school menu pressures.

3.2.1. In Scotland, the Food For Life Served Here (FFLSH) programme is funded by the Scottish government, enabling Soil Association Scotland to support Local Authorities, Health Boards and public sector organisations to serve more organic and local foods. This approach could be replicated in other nations.

3.3. Fund and incentivise frameworks that support local, sustainable and British sourcing, shorten supply chains and enable participation by British producers and SMEs, such as Food for Life Served Here.

3.3.1. Make procurement more SME-friendly by allowing flexible payment schedules and breaking up large tenders into smaller lots.

3.3.2. Introduce sustainability and locality weightings in tenders to favour regional suppliers and environmentally responsible producers (e.g. organic), ensuring procurement delivers climate and community benefits.

3.3.3. In Scotland, this means increasing and ring-fencing food budgets with legally protected nutrition standards and investing in the necessary processing facilities to further support local food economies. Continued investment in initiatives that facilitate positive food system change, such as Food For Life Served Here, will also help.

3.4. Amend free school meals guidance that makes a target % of quality assured produce (organic certified fruit, vegetables and pulses) a condition of the grant.

3.4.1. In Wales, the government should use the opportunity of Universal Free School Meals for all primary school children and the revision of the Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations, to enable them all to access locally grown climate and nature friendly produce, with Local Authorities adopting 25% of primary school veg to be local and organic by 2030.

Legislation case study: Well-being of Future Generations Act (Wales, 2015)
In 2015 the Welsh government passed a groundbreaking law to protect people alive now, and those who haven't yet been born. The nation's commitment to the well-being of future generations takes inspiration from indigenous wisdom and the Seventh Generation Principle.
In practice the act requires Welsh government, health bodies and local councils to take long-term action to improve social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being. Food is becoming increasingly prominent in well-being plans, policy and initiatives in Wales, and the Future Generations Commissioner has issued guidance on how food can be integrated into well-being plans and action. The Future Generations Report 2025 cites Bridging the Gap's Welsh Veg in Schools pilot and calls on local authorities to join the programme as part of their commitments under the Future Generations Act.

3.5. Review and reform school food funding to reflect the true cost of delivering sustainable and nutritious meals, including food, labour, workforce and skills development, and local infrastructure.

3.6. Set ambitious environmental targets for organic fruit, veg and pulses in public sector food, set in buying standards and school food nutrition standards that are specific to each UK nation.

3.6.1. In England, the government should clarify how to deliver the '50% local or sustainable' target in public sector food. This would utilise the spending power of taxpayers to deliver the Food Strategy's objectives and drive demand for healthier, climate-friendly food. This could be achieved by stipulating that:

a) 'Locally produced' should be defined as meeting the criteria of being both 1) 'produced in the UK' and 2) sourced from an SME (small or medium enterprise) or bought through direct-to-farmer supply chains (facilitated through e.g. dynamic procurement).
b) In terms of fruit, vegetables and pulses, 'certified to higher environmental standards' should cover organic -certified food or food produced without use of chemical inputs.
c) Of the 50%, at least 20% must be UK-sourced certified organic fruit, vegetables or pulses, with this ambition increasing over time as supply increases. We recommend that these targets be measured by weight, not monetary value.

3.6.2. Expand the Government Buying Standards to include all schools in England and integrate them with school food standards, while also improving the Standards to meet the climate and nature targets outlined above. Monitoring these buying standards should be enforced by Ofsted through mandatory reporting.

3.6.3. Set environmental standards in the Department for Education (DfE) school food nutrition standards, achieved by requiring quality assurance marks, and certification standards such as organic, within the revised school food standards.

3.6.4. Ensure that DfE-approved frameworks meet the food standards, including:

a) Buying Better Food and Drink (CCS)
b) Catering standards (ESPO)
c) Food and drink – framework (YPO)
d) Food and drink – Dynamic purchasing system (DPS)
e) Outsourced catering services (CPC)
f) Sandwiches and food to go (ESPO)

3.7. Require all schools to have a food policy and food on the curriculum, in order to ensure that all students have an understanding of the critical importance of healthy and sustainable food.

3.8. Increase pulses on school menus, including where relevant, relaxing the requirements to serve meat.

3.8.1. DfE should relax the requirement on schools to serve meat three times per week, making more space for pulses on school menus. This would reduce the carbon footprint of school meals while lowering costs and adding health benefits from increased dietary fibre.

3.9. Scale and replicate Bridging the Gap pilots across the UK nations.

3.9.1. In Northern Ireland DAERA should fund and oversee pilot procurement schemes with schools and hospitals that commit to sourcing 20% of fruit, vegetables and pulses from organic or agroecological growers. Within this pilot, DAERA should publish clear guidance on organic and agroecological criteria, framed as delivering on climate, biodiversity, and health goals.

International case-study: Denmark is often cited as the global leader in using public procurement to expand the market for organic food. In the early 2000s, the Danish government set ambitious targets for organic food in public kitchens, covering schools, hospitals and care homes. A flagship initiative was the Copenhagen House of Food, established in 2007 to retrain kitchen staff, redesign menus, and reduce waste. Rather than relying on higher budgets, the programme emphasised cooking from scratch, seasonal sourcing, and reducing meat consumption, which freed up resources to buy nature-friendly organic ingredients. By 2015, Copenhagen had achieved 90% organic food in public meals without increasing costs, setting an international benchmark. The steady institutional demand created a reliable market for farmers and processors, giving them confidence to convert land and expand supply. Denmark's approach demonstrates how targeted public procurement can normalise organic food consumption, strengthen supply chains, and accelerate growth of the organic sector, for the benefit of growers, health, climate and nature.

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