

Regional Food Hubs Programme

Notes from Q&A session 22nd October

Q: Do you know where we could get funding to pay staff members to attend this? We are really stretched with current income and funding. Some staff may attend for free but others couldn't do this. I know this programme would be invaluable eventually but immediately would be a drain on our resources.

A: We recognise this could be a barrier for some hubs signing up to the programme but we're trying to work on a solution so we can best support hubs to be able to make this time commitment (½ day per month). We're seeking additional funding to be able to offer bursaries to cover the costs of those attending, but at this stage we can't make any promises unfortunately. We're also putting together a comprehensive document on where to look for funding which we hope to make available in November- there may be small, local pots of money that hubs can apply to to cover their staffing costs, or to be able to put a manager in place to drive their project forward. We'll circulate this document as soon as possible.

Q: Why focus on B2B as opposed to B2C operations?

A: The rationale of this is that B2B trading and public procurement enables hubs to operate at scale and to increase the volume of production and sales needed to make a bigger impact on the food system as a whole. This programme is focused on helping to set up/improve strategic infrastructure that will enable greater regional food trading and collaboration, with the ultimate aim of growing the market for more local and agroecological food production.

Q. We are planning to set up a hub within the coming months, at this stage small scale. We'd welcome support and links and insights, but it sounds like we wouldn't qualify as we don't have a Manager yet? **Can we get involved in some other way, or what support might be available to the likes of us?**

A: You may perhaps be at a slightly earlier stage of development than what this particular programme is scoped to support. For the purposes of this programme we're defining 'start-up' in the context of a 'regional/strategic' food hub. Therefore ideally we'd like any hubs that are in the 'start-up' phase to be already trading B2C, but perhaps only just beginning to explore B2B or B2G trading. Hubs that are in the very nascent phases will at least have a manager in place, be focused on building in B2B/B2G trading from the outset, and ideally be looking to start trading next year.

[Better Food Traders](#) (one of the lead partners of the programme) is a great network for hubs that are trading in local and agroecological produce, but perhaps don't quite meet the eligibility criteria for this particular programme. We currently offer 12 months free membership to any new Better Food Trader in return for online sector specific training sessions and events, a place on our trader map, peer support and being part of a network of like minded businesses.

Q: What experience of running food hubs does the lead team have? (I appreciate parts of this are sharing experiences and information)

A: Growing Communities are one of the lead partners on this programme- they set up the Better Food Shed, a food hub and wholesale operation based in East London. You can [read more](#) about GC and the shed and download their Better Food Shed explainer from their webpage. Staff from GC and the Better Food Shed will be delivering some of the training sessions, and Julie Brown, Director of Growing Communities will be offering a 1:1 session to everyone on the programme. Through our own networks and contacts, Better Food Traders have lots of knowledge and connections with trainers who are well placed to deliver very high quality, sector specific training for this programme.

Q: Will the regional food hubs participating on the programme be restricted or directed in any particular way as to how they can operate? ie. the types of food they handle, the suppliers they use, their price points, profit margins, legal structure, profit distribution etc.

A: No, we definitely don't want to be restricting or directing individual hub's activities, in fact far from it! We highly value diversity of type and place and recognise that what may work in one location may not be the best fit for another. We will be looking to curate the cohort so that we have a diverse spread of operations and geographic locations and can learn from all the different business models in operation. We will however be matching those with similarities to be 'accountability partners' so that hubs can share ideas, inspiration and problem solve.

Q: How much will the programme address the supply side challenges we're facing? It's great to take steps to increase demand and routes to market, but it's the supply side issues which continue to define the products and services, and most importantly the prices we can offer, which in turn defines the market, and customer demand we have to work with.

A: The emphasis of the programme is on developing regional and strategic infrastructure and helping existing operations to scale up or out. By building the infrastructure to source from a number of producers or wider geographic area (as with the Good Food Loop), it is likely hubs can offer a greater diversity of products. This combined with public procurement contracts can help build sufficient demand to enable some producers to feel more confident in scaling-up production, thereby easing some of these supply challenges.