

Sustain's progress on diversity and anti-racism

Progress report on Sustain's work to improve equity, diversity, inclusion and promotion of racial justice.



March 2026

Progress report on Sustain’s work to improve equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice

This Diversity Progress Report reports on the past 18 months of work (mid 2024 to end of 2025) to improve equity, diversity, inclusion (EDI) and racial justice in food and farming. Sustain is committed to become an equitable, diverse, inclusive and anti-racist organisation, and to use the privilege of our leadership role to build the momentum for wider change. Previous progress reports can be [read here](#).

Much of our work is built on principles supporting a structural approach to EDI and racial justice, including:

- **Championing** – for example, our work to platform Black people and people of colour (BPOC) on speaker panels, as trainers, and in informing and influencing policy and practice.
- **Universalism** – for example, our campaign for universal free school meals, and policies to improve nutritional quality of food, and to reduce the flood of unhealthy food, for the benefit of everybody.
- **Rights-based** – for example, our support for the Right to Grow campaign; and our work to influence the £3bn Crisis and Resilience Fund from the Department of Work and Pensions.
- **Structural** – for example, our Diversity Outreach programme; our work to create and support critical infrastructure for food system change, such as the Sustainable Food Places network and Good Food Local benchmarking of local authorities and their food equity policies and practices.

This year, we are pleased to highlight positive actions, developments and emerging opportunities in the areas of: movement building and solidarity; diversity outreach; inclusive recruitment and employment, children’s food; community food growing; dignified access to food for everybody; and local action.

However, we also acknowledge that we are making less progress on EDI and racial justice in the areas of public policy, food system governance and legislation, sustainable farming, fair and sustainable supply chains and food system resilience. As we enter into the period of our new Sustain Strategy, 2026 to 2030, we will renew our commitment to influencing decision-makers and food system actors to adopt equitable, diverse and inclusive policies and practices that support a better food future for everyone.

Work described in this report is inspired and catalysed by our colleagues from Sustain and Eating Better.



Sareta Puri, Diversity Outreach Coordinator, Sustain



Roshni Shah, Diversity Outreach Coordinator, Sustain (2025)



Idman Abdurahaman, Inclusive Movement Manager at Eating Better



The work is implemented by the innovation, activities, projects and campaigns of the Sustain team.

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1. Movement building and solidarity

Diversity Outreach

Sustain's diversity outreach programme was established in 2023. The purpose of this work is to:

- Improve opportunities for people of diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and personal characteristics to have their voices heard, gain access to learning, skills, land and resources; and to gain employment and influence in the food and farming sector;
- Support movement-building, convening and learning to address structural injustice in the food and farming system.

The principal ways in which we do so, and the actions we have taken over the past 18 months, are below.

Anti-racism training

In 2025, Sustain, Eating Better and Social Justice Collective co-led a series of anti-racism workshops for people working in the sustainable food and farming sector. Reflections and resources from the three sessions are available here:

- [Session 1: Self-reflection and understanding](#)
- [Session 2: Impact and why it matters to the sector](#)
- [Session 3: Action plan and race equity lens](#)

Unearthing Empire webinars



The image shows two promotional cards for webinars. The left card is titled 'Unearthing Empire: food, land and colonial legacies in the UK' and is scheduled for Thursday 11 September, 1-2pm. The right card is titled 'Unearthing Empire: reclaiming food and collective care' and is scheduled for Wednesday 26 November, 12-1:30pm. Both cards feature a background image of a green field and logos for Sustain, Roots to Work, and Eating Better.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=scOMnb0DB9U> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uASRoxmOKml>

Organised by Culture Roots Collective, Sustain's Roots to Work and Eating Better, these webinars explored how the British Empire disrupted Indigenous food systems, reshaped diets, and embedded exploitation in the supply chains we still rely on today. Through storytelling and historical insight, we aimed to connect the past to the present and begin to imagine decolonised food futures. These covered:

- [Food, land and colonial legacies in the UK](#): An overview of how Empire shaped what we eat, grow and value food today; and the impact it has on current global majority farmers. Featuring academic Corinne Fowler and writer and grower Naomi Terry.
- [Reclaiming food and community care](#): Landworkers and activists reclaiming ancestral foodways and reimagining community nourishment in the UK. Featuring seed sovereignty coordinator Randa Toko, radical dietician Lucy Aphramor and community organiser Obie Pearl.

Food and racial justice summit and working group

Since January 2024, Sustain and Eating Better have been co-hosting a food and racial justice working group with participation from across the sustainable food and farming sector. Individuals representing 25 national food or land-focused organisations meet regularly to develop more equitable, diverse, inclusive and anti-racist practice. The group openly shares challenges and participants receive support and advice from others in a supportive and confidential space. The group also provides insight into Sustain and Eating Better led initiatives and co-develop work where relevant.

‘Very impactful and a great non-judgmental space made for good growth and development.’ **Food and Racial Justice working group participant**

Some of the organisations involved are small and do not have much resource in this area, but do have the passion and commitment to make a change. A space to share issues as well as resources, information and updates enables them to take broader steps towards embedding justice and equity in their work.

If you work in a sustainable food and farming organisation and would be interested in joining the group, please email Sareta Puri, Diversity Outreach Coordinator, Sustain: sareta@sustainweb.org.

Racial justice in food and farming

In 2025, we co-hosted the first summit on racial justice in food and farming: [The Gathering Table](#), in collaboration with [Eating Better](#) and [AFN Network+](#). This was co-designed with the Food and Racial Justice working group, responding to a clear need for space where food systems and anti-racism work can unite; and to connect, reflect, and take meaningful steps forward together.



The Gathering Table summit in Bristol, June 2025. Credit: Tay Aziz

The Gathering Table was a celebration of the work going on in the sector, as well as a place for useful provocation on how to move forward. We have blogs on the following topics covered:

- [Allyship, solidarity and brave spaces](#)
- [Embracing culture for inclusive futures](#)
- [Dismantling justice: decolonial decision-making](#)

In January 2026 we held a follow-up in-person session on [solidarity and collective care](#), which offered a much-needed and alternative way to work on this agenda. There is appetite to continue to hold in-person gatherings to learn, share, build relationships, collaborate, and centre wellbeing.

‘Thank you! It was a really inspiring, energising and informative day that didn't shy away from the challenges of this work. It was well-paced and the efforts to make everyone feel welcome and included were really effective. I left feeling hopeful about change being possible, and I loved how the tone of the day – a gentle, caring, open energy – reflected the changes we want to see in the food system as we work towards decolonising it. Really excellent.’ **Food and Racial Justice summit participant**

Culture Roots Collective

Culture Roots Collective

Culture Roots Collective is a new platform dedicated to amplifying the voices of Black and People of Colour (BPOC) communities across food, farming, health and environmental spaces.

It has been co-created by BVEDS, AFN+ Network, Sustain and Eating Better. It aims to amplify and showcase the work of people from racialised and minoritised ethnic backgrounds in the sustainable food and farming movement. It features a directory of people to work or collaborate with, and resources on EDI and racial justice.

We need your help to grow the platform. You can: mention it at conferences; share your events with us; upload your profile to our directory (personal or organisational); send us relevant articles, research or resources; share training opportunities; and share hi-res images of BPOC thriving in the sector.

Share content/events [here](#); Join the Culture Roots Collective directory [here](#)



Culture Roots core group: Angelina Sanderson Bellamy, Navaratnam Partheeban, Roshni Shah, Sophie Constant, Sareta Puri and Idman Abdurahaman. Credit: Sustain



JEDI leadership programme

Following an intensive period of development, in February 2026 Eating Better and Sustain launched a JEDI (justice, equity, diversity and inclusion) Leadership programme, funded by Farming the Future, that will support 12 senior leaders from across the sustainable food and farming movement over a six-month journey, with impact far beyond. More information will be shared in due course.

Sharing knowledge and speaking out

Over the past 18 months, Sustain's Diversity Outreach Coordinator offered 1-to-1 mentoring for 21 people from 7 organisations, supporting them to embed EDI and anti-racism practices. Sustain's Diversity Outreach Coordinator(s) also advised partners such as Sustainable Food Places, Food Sense Wales, IFSTAL, Soil Association and DISHED; and spoke at several events, including the Oxford Real Farming Conference.

Sustain also co-created, in collaboration with Eating Better, the Disrupt to Transform resource, an introduction to alternative approaches to movement-building rooted in justice and equity. It offers ways to shift how we hold space; slow extractive habits; notice who takes up room; and welcome complexity.

2. Inclusive recruitment and employment

One of the key aims of Sustain's Diversity Outreach programme is to improve opportunities for people from diverse cultural and ethnic backgrounds and personal characteristics to gain access to learning, skills, employment and influence in the food and farming sector. A strong focus of our work over the past 18 months has therefore been on increasing and improving access to careers in sustainable food and farming.

Recruiting for diversity

In 2025, we reached out to young people, students and career movers to inspire and inform them about careers in the sustainable food movement. We ran university careers workshops in sustainable food and farming; and a webinar for students/graduates, careers advisors, career changers and other people interested in sustainable food jobs.

Find out more

Sustain runs the [Roots to Work](#) platform, as the home of sustainable food jobs in the UK, with thousands of people on the mailing list to receive news and opportunities. We are committed to advertising jobs that are good for the planet and for the people who do the jobs. We believe a sustainable organisation should proactively minimise the environmental and social impacts of their work, and also create positive outcomes, including building equity and wellbeing in their workforce.

Our Roots to Work platform promotes awareness of [inclusive recruitment practices](#) and [how to be an inclusive employer](#), with resources updated and promoted during 2025.

Also in 2025, we introduced three new tags for employers to use for job listings on Roots to Work:

- **Living Wage Employer**, committing the employer to paying at least the [real Living Wage](#).
- **Ethnicity Confident scheme** and **Disability Confident scheme**. Note: Sustain runs Ethnicity Confident and Disability Confident schemes in recruitment: [\[Read about our approach here\]](#)



Sustain Diversity Outreach Coordinator Roshni Shah at a 'Careers in sustainable food and farming' workshop, Birkbeck University



Careers in Sustainable Food and Farming webinar speakers: Sunita Ramani, Destructive Diets Campaign Manager, Foodrise; Shereen Chung-Blake, Future Gardeners Programme Coordinator, Bankside Open Spaces Trust; Ped Asgarian, Director, Feeding Bristol; and Idman Abdurahaman, Inclusive Movement Manager, Eating Better.

"I feel more empowered to follow my values." **Attendee of sustainable food & farming careers webinar**

"We love that Sustain's sustainable food recruitment website Roots to Work have introduced a tag for jobs with a Living Wage Employer." **Living Wage Foundation**

Roots to Work spotlights

Sustain’s Roots to Work jobs platform has shared inspiring stories of how people with diverse personal characteristics, and of diverse ethnic backgrounds, have pursued careers in food and farming.



Photo credit: Made in Hackney

The programmes manager

Raha Eskafi shared her journey from working in mental health to leading community programmes at plant-based kitchen Made In Hackney, connecting people and wellbeing via food. [\[Read more\]](#)



Photo credit: Bhuvaneshwari Gupta

The campaign manager

Bhuvaneshwari Gupta described her journey from public health to advocacy campaigns and why realising her lifelong passion for a sustainable planet led her on this career path. [\[Read more\]](#)



Photo credit: Sustain

The children's food campaigner

Naema Jannath, Sustain's children's food campaign officer, shared her story of landing this role after a Masters in Public Policy and an internship at food campaign Bite Back. [\[Read more\]](#)



Photo credit: Chris Young

The comms & public affairs bod

Zacharia Asri works at the Sustainable Soils Alliance. He shared how his public affairs role was shaped by passion for food systems change. [\[Read more\]](#)



Photo credit: Teresa Roffey

The Real Bread baker

As part of Pride’s celebration of the LGBTQIA+ community, Real Bread Campaign ambassador Connor Rose shared his pride in being a baker. [\[Read more\]](#)



Photo credit: Ali Taherzadeh

The researcher

Ali Taherzadeh shared their vast experience across facilitation, research, community organising and events, in a varied career in food + social justice. [\[Read more\]](#)



Photo credit: David Madden

The head of youth activism

Rhammel Afflick shared his story of campaigning and community organising on many social justice issues that finally lead him to become Head of Youth Activism at Bite Back. [\[Read more\]](#)



Photo credit: Inzajeano Latif

The project manager & head of organisational development

Rebecca Evans-Merritt shared her career path to become Head of Organisational Development and Climate Sisters Project Manager at WEN. [\[Read more\]](#)



Photo credit: Akè Collective

The social entrepreneur

Cobi-Jane Akinrele (former role-share Sustain Trustee) related setting up a social enterprise that celebrates the diversity and power of nutrient-rich African superfoods. [\[Read more\]](#)

Developing Sustain's own EDI and anti-racist practice

Learning, sharing and training

Sustain colleagues have delivered bespoke sessions / skills-shares for training and personal development on:

- Looking through the anti-racist lens
- Being an anti-racist organisation in the world today
- Managing placements and paid internships, which Sustain runs to support younger people and people from under-represented backgrounds to gain work experience in our sector

Sustain has also introduced mandatory training for all staff and senior managers, via online modules, on:

- Bullying and harassment, in support of our inclusion and anti-racism commitments
- Unconscious bias, with enhanced guidance for members of Sustain job recruitment panels
- Disability and neurodiversity awareness and inclusion

EDI and racial justice in projects and campaigns

A key concern for Sustain is ensuring we embed EDI and racial justice practice, objectives and innovation into our projects, campaigns, cross-cutting activities and organisational development. Over the past 18 months, we ran Action Learning Sets with support from an external facilitator to help colleagues develop their work. This resulted in key developments such as our Children's Food Campaign Parent Ambassadors.

The RACE Report

Sustain is recruiting for diversity, aiming to diversify our team, our board, and the speakers, trainers and contributors that we work with. We participate annually in The RACE Report to track our progress, publish transparently our progress and areas for more work, and drive our ambitions and improvements over time.

Racial diversity in the environmental charity sector remains significantly below the UK workforce average. Only 4.5% of staff in the sector identify as BPOC, compared to 16% in the national workforce, a worrying disparity. Data for Sustain's team show 16% (5 people) identifying as BPOC, including 1 person in the senior management team; with data for Sustain's governing body (Council of Trustees) shows 37% (7 people) identifying as BPOC (2024 Race Report data, published Feb25). Over the past 18 months, we have:

- Updated and consistently applied our own inclusive recruitment policies and practices.
- Run two annual Trustee elections, including proactive recruitment for diversity and a role-share scheme to enable younger people from diverse backgrounds to participate in charity leadership.
- Implemented our paid internship approach to support young people from diverse backgrounds to gain work experience, employing one paid intern, with plans to recruit another.

Diversity Style Guide update

We update our Diversity Style Guide annually, to ensure that we benchmark our language and portrayal of diversity against good practice and developments. The 2025 update [[download here](#)] covered further details on how we describe and portray ethnicity and cultural heritage; principles on equality, equity and liberation; adoption of the 'social model' of disability; and further guidance on describing neurodivergence.

3. Funders and the Food Issues Census

During 2024/2025, Sustain’s Chief Executive Kath Dalmeny joined the steering group for the Food Issues Census, coordinated by Sustain alliance member the [Food Ethics Council](#) and involving a range of civil-society organisations and funders interested in healthy, equitable and sustainable food and farming. The Food Ethics Council invited people and organisations working across the UK food and farming system to help shape the future of funding for food and farming work. This undertook extensive consultation to map civil society's work on food, with the final report launched in May 2025 [[Read the Food Issues Census here](#)].

Championing equitable funding

The Food Ethics Council planned the Food Issues Census work to bring in the experiences of a genuinely diverse range of organisations. Diverse communities, from Black and People of Colour (BPOC) to working class communities, LGBTQIA+ people, neurodivergent people and people with disabilities are under-represented in the food, farming and environment sectors.

As part of the launch of the research phase, the Food Ethics Council said: “We know that there is incredible work being done by diverse groups on the ground, often overlooked and under-resourced within the sector.”

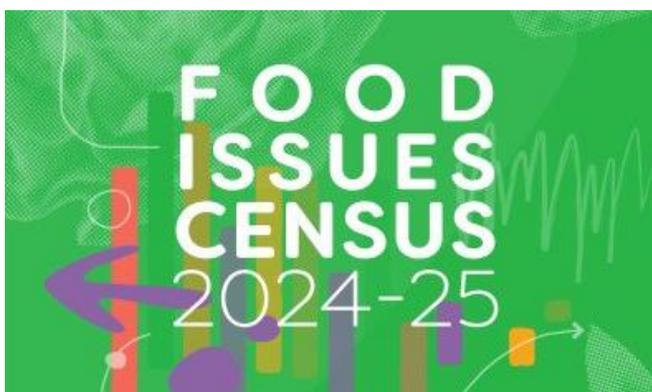
At the Oxford Real Farming Conference in January 2026, we ran a workshop with Food Ethics Council on: [What can funders and the movement do together?](#)

Learning from the report findings

In Sustain’s own work, we have heard from network members that lack of funding suited to BPOC-led work can be a barrier to participation. For example, members of our Capital Growth community food growing network need capacity to be able to engage; while better-resourced groups, who are often White-led, gain more opportunities and value. BPOC-led gardens, groups and networks (e.g. LION, Coco Collective, Go Grow, Black Rootz) have less secure funding and are often over-stretched, requiring additional support to relieve them of the burdens associated with participation. Conversations across our network suggest that the funding doesn’t always meet the particular challenges for BPOC-led groups and spaces. Funders need to adjust their criteria and approach to enable BPOC groups to do the work that is needed in their communities. The volunteering model, on which community gardens are very reliant, inadvertently can exclude economically disadvantaged people. BPOC people running community gardens need to be paid, to support the vital therapeutic and healing work they deliver. Recognising such needs, we organised for [Integrate Agency](#) to offer advice on how to fundraise for community gardens at our network events for the Capital Growth community food growing network in London.



Participants in a Food Issues Census consultation event, 2025



4. Sustain strategy theme: Good Food Production

Community food growing

In our experience, community food growing provides one of the most fertile opportunities to embed equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice. Community food growing is about enabling communities to come together to grow fresh food. But it is also about so much more. Community gardens provide a warm welcome; the opportunity to meet, work, eat and celebrate together. Participants report how much they enjoy being able to build relationships and share experience with people living in their neighbourhoods; as well as gaining access to land, skills and biodiverse green space, for health, nature and wellbeing.

“It’s great to feel connected and part of a wider movement of gardens across the city!”

“To be honest it’s just lovely to know you’re there for us all – it helps us feel connected to other groups who are helping to make a better, more sustainable future 🌱🌿😊”

Over the years, we have worked with hundreds of diverse community groups across London in our [Capital Growth network](#), as well as encouraging volunteering in community food gardens via our national [Good to Grow network](#). We make conscious efforts to ensure that this work reflects our commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice. We also engage with local authorities and national government to adopt strategies and policies (e.g. the UK Food Strategy; local and national planning policy) and funding schemes to make food growing accessible, with integrated commitments to equity, diversity and inclusion.

Sustain is backing the Right to Grow campaign

An increasing number of local councils and areas are signing up to the principle that food growing should be a right, not a privilege. The [Right to Grow](#) is an idea and a movement to make public land available for growing and greening. Land that is being left unloved could do so much more for health, wellbeing and climate resilience if local people were trusted and supported by local authorities to turn neglected pieces of land into oases for people, food and wildlife. The Right to Grow campaign is run by Sustain alliance member [Incredible Edible](#), and Sustain runs the London councils Right to Grow working group and supports the [London Learning Network](#).



Watch the inspiring [Right to Grow](#) film

“Right to Grow can democratise access to land for food growing, by requiring councils to provide transparent processes for residents to access land and working in partnership with community organisations. Our plan is to ensure underrepresented groups are involved in decision-making processes with councils from an early stage, including citizens’ assemblies that target marginalised groups, provide training and remuneration for community advocates, and ensure we involve and empower people who are typically left out of policy spaces.” **Rachel Dring, Sustain’s Capital Growth Coordinator**

Inclusive food growing in all four quarters of London

We ran SEWN Together, a networking event series for food growing communities across the four quarters of London that facilitates discussion and ideas-generation for a connected, food-secure and thriving urban edible landscape. These involved local council reps and community food growers exploring themes such as Right to Grow, inclusion for disabled and neuro-divergent garden users and how to fundraise effectively to secure sites and project activities.



Solomon Kwall of May Project Gardens, from the London Borough of Merton, giving a talk at SEWN East. Credit: Rachel Dring.

We make sure that contributors are from diverse backgrounds. At our SEWN East event, half of the speakers were BPOC and half were neurodivergent, bringing their lived experience to the presentations and workshops, adding welcome value and depth to the discussions.

This year, as part of our Capital Growth training and outreach programme, we:

- Organised an Action Learning Set, supporting 6 participants – working in community food growing in London – to navigate, understand and progress their approach to inclusive and equitable spaces.
- Facilitated three anti-racism peer learning sessions with community gardening leaders.
- Welcomed and provided paid opportunities and other support for BPOC community food growers to deliver workshops, networking and training sessions.
- Ran the Urban Harvest celebration from 1-29 September 2025 with 30 events happening across London, celebrating the abundance and diversity in community gardens.

Gardeners teach Londoners how to grow South Asian crops

Hina Joshi, Rishi Shah and Niru Patel teamed up with our Capital Growth network of community food growing spaces to run training on cultivating delicious South Asian crops in temperate London gardens. From propagating with a hot water bottle to cultivating karela gourds, it shared tips on growing diverse and authentic ingredients at home.



Niru Patel planting eddoes and coriander. Credit: Niru Patel

[Find out more](#)

“The South Asian Veg growing session was such a fantastic workshop with so much knowledge and food shared so generously.” **Feedback from a community garden participant**

Sustainable farming

In our work on sustainable farming, there are structural circumstances that persistently undermine equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice. These relate primarily to:

- **Increasingly concentrated power and ownership** of key assets and businesses, such as land, farms, supply chain infrastructure and routes to market.
- **An unfair economic system** characterised by huge power imbalances and damaging trading practices by large food buyers (wholesalers, processors, manufacturers, foodservice companies and supermarkets), with negative impacts on farmers, growers, animals, nature and the land.
- **Low pay, low profitability and precarious incomes** for many smaller farmers, as well as for farm, processing, supply chain, distribution, retail and catering workers.
- **Structural and economic barriers to access to land and infrastructure** for farming and food growing.
- **Reliance on migrant and seasonal workers**, creating precarity, gross inequalities and debt.

In this challenging context, our Sustainable Farming Campaign has focused over the past 18 months on key areas of work that can contribute towards equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice; alongside creating more opportunities for diverse people and new entrants to gain access to land, assets, skills and good jobs.

Putting agroecology on the national stage

Agroecology is an holistic approach to farming that applies ecological principles to create sustainable, resilient, and fair food systems. It replaces synthetic fertilisers and pesticides with natural processes, such as nutrient recycling and biological pest control, to regenerate soil health and biodiversity. Beyond farming, it functions as a social movement aiming to empower diverse, smaller-scale producers, and to create equitable, diverse and inclusive local economies.

Sustain helped establish the UK Fruit and Veg Coalition, launched in Parliament in December 2025, promoting the growth of organic and nature-friendly horticulture. The event was attended by over 40 MPs, plus Peers, the Defra Horticulture Team and policy officials. We also co-organised parliamentary events including 'A Taste of Agroecology' – attended by 51 MPs and Farming Minister Daniel Zeichner MP – gathering to hear directly from farmers and landworkers how nature-friendly agricultural approaches can help address pressing national challenges – from the climate and biodiversity crises to public health, food security and better farm incomes.



Members of the new UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition, at the launch in Parliament in December 2025



Robert Fraser, Real Farming Trust; Jimmy Woodrow, Pasture for Life; Jyoti Fernandez, Landworkers' Alliance; Daniel Zeichner MP, Defra Minister for Food Security and Rural Affairs; Will White, Sustain Farming Campaign Coordinator; Martin Lines, Nature Friendly Farming Network, at our joint Taste of Agroecology event in Parliament, December 2024. Credit: Sustain

Campaigning for better supply chain regulation

Sustain aims to ensure that a fair share of profits for primary producers; and that farmers and growers are not subject to unfair trading practices such as bullying tactics, punitive contracts, over-ordering, late cancellation, and rejection of perfectly good produce for cosmetic reasons. Over the past 18 months, we:

- Engaged directly with the large retailers and supply chain actors by presenting to the Food Network for Ethical Trade working group meeting on Climate and Human Rights.
- Partnered with Riverford Organics to lobby MPs to support better supply chain regulation, with 3,000+ letters sent, reaching 500+ MPs (in 80% of local constituencies).
- Met with Defra Ministers and civil servants to share priorities for improvement to key structures, such as the statutory Grocery Code Adjudicator (GCA) and Agricultural Supply Chains Adjudicator.
- Submitted a response to the statutory review of the Grocery Code Adjudicator, calling for its remit to be expanded. The submission had sign-on from Sustain alliance members.

Supporting young people and new entrants

Sustain worked with Students Organising for Sustainability (SOS-UK); The National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs; Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN); and FLAME: the youth arm of The Landworkers Alliance, to recruit youth farming ambassadors as part of the [Back the Future](#) initiative. [Highlights](#) included:

- Collaboration by Sustain with [Emergent Generation](#) and [Soil Association](#) to run a [Food and Farming Futures Networking Hour](#) at the Oxford Real Farming Conferences in 2025 and 2026. We welcomed many new entrants and young people passionate about the politics and practice of food and farming.
- Holding a policy workshop at the Emergent Generation [Summer Gathering](#) on 'Reimagining Youth Voice to Influence Agrifood Policy and Build Better Food Futures'.
- Events such as a panel focused on 'Youth Leading the Way in Food System Transformation', organised by Eating Better; a Right to Food policy workshop with Nourish Scotland; the NFFN Scotland Summit; and the Scottish Food Coalition's Parliamentary Reception.

Sustain offered our support for a **UK World Food Forum (WFF) National Youth Chapter**, endorsing the Chapter's mission to empower diverse youth voices to engage in policy processes and influence decisions at local, national and international levels. Recognising that food system transformation requires collective action, Sustain stated that: "We believe the lived experiences of young people must inform solutions. Those directly affected by food and farming policies must be included in shaping them."



WFF Youth Initiative launches 40 new National Youth Chapters in October 2025. By supporting the Chapter, Sustain hopes to contribute to a future in which young people are equipped, organised and represented in shaping a just and sustainable food and farming system. [Read more](#)

Helping secure land and opportunities for growers

Sustain supports our alliance members in making more and larger areas of land accessible for biodiverse and agroecological horticulture, market gardening and community food growing. This aims to improve accessible employment and engagement opportunities, and affordable fruit and veg supply, for example in peri-urban areas accessible by diverse and low-income communities. Over the past 18 months, we:

- Worked with the Landworkers Alliance and the UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition to publish a briefing on how the government's Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) farm payments could better support smaller farms and horticulture.
- Ran an Oxford Real Farming Conference workshop on [Land Access Solutions for BPOC Farmers](#).
- Supported launch of The Agroecology Learning Collective (TALC) website to help people access skills and training in agroecology, with outreach to ethnically diverse learners.
- Published a report on [Employee Ownership](#) as an agroecological business model, working with the Open University and Riverford Organic Farmers (who have pioneered this approach).

"It's great to have something specifically linking business and asset ownership to a fairer food system – it's a key component of agroecology that is often overlooked in the UK."

Bonnie Hewson, Director of Farming the Future Fund commenting on Sustain's [Employee Ownership](#) report

LGBTQIA+ is part of Real Farming

LGBTQIA+ people and allies came together for a session called 'Growing the Rainbow' at the Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC) in January 2025. The aim was to discuss issues like urban queer communities feeling disconnected from the land and the isolation faced by LGBTQIA+ farmers and migrant workers. The message was: By welcoming diverse, creative minds into farming, we can address the rural/urban divide as well as the sector's skills shortage.



Growing the Rainbow: LGBTQIA+ perspectives in land work: A panel chaired by Sustain's Vera Zakharov, at Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC) 2025. Credit: Ella Brolly

[Out on the Land's](#) collaboration with [Land in our Names](#), [Cultivating Justice](#) showcased the importance of allyship across movements for marginalised groups, including Black, people of colour, women, LGBTQIA+ and people with disabilities. **Watch the session recording [here](#).**

Also at ORFC 2025, Sustain's Diversity Outreach Coordinator Roshni Shah joined Dawn Dublin from [Joyful Roots](#) and Nicola Scott from [Stir to Action](#), for a conversation on 'Radical Honesty', about racial justice in the food system. The panel reflected on progress since Covid-19 and the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement, and argued for a systematic anti-racist approach. **Listen to the recording [here](#).**

5. Sustain strategy theme: Good Food Economy

Bridging the Gap

Healthy food, thriving nature and a stable climate are fundamental to a more equitable, diverse, inclusive future. Sustain’s [Bridging the Gap](#) programme seeks to understand how we can make climate and nature-friendly food affordable for all. Over the past three years, we have supported pilot programmes in places across the four nations of the UK, working to ‘bridge the gap’ in price for people on a low income, and in diverse communities, who cannot otherwise access and afford organic fruit, vegetable and pulses.

Appetite for Organic in Tower Hamlets

A report by Sustain alliance member Alexandra Rose Charity, [Appetite for Organic](#), revealed the positive impact of a [Bridging the Gap pilot](#) in the East London borough of Tower Hamlets. The pilot with a community-run food co-op improved access to organic food and gave residents a sense of control over their food choices, food environment and their children’s health.

[Read more](#)



Teviot Centre Food Co-op. Credit: Sylvie Belbouab

Queen of Greens in Liverpool

In Liverpool, a community enterprise has delivered a [Bridging the Gap pilot](#) enabling people living in low-income communities that have little healthy food retail provision to access organic fruit and vegetables at affordable prices from mobile organic greengrocer, Queen of Greens.

[Watch a film about Queen of Greens](#)



Queen of Greens customer, Clair. Credit: Sustain

School veg in Northern Ireland

A [Bridging the Gap pilot](#) on a Newtownards farm in Northern Ireland made organic vegetables available to local families. This Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) pilot aimed to make healthy, nature-friendly food accessible and affordable for everyone. In Northern Ireland, Bridging the Gap has also supported Carrickfergus Greengrocers and community food club.

[Read more](#)



Thomas Ferguson, West Winds Primary School, by school organic veg beds at Ben Vista Farm CSA. Credit: Barry Ferguson

Watch the [Bridging the Gap film](#), which argues good quality fruit and veg should be only option on the table, shining a light on [the work of 9 pilots](#) making climate and nature friendly food accessible to everyone.

Local Food Retail

This project aims to build community wealth, promoting local food, and making good food accessible to everyone. During 2025, we developed the [Local Food Growth Plan](#), working with values-led [Better Food Traders](#), food co-operatives and [community enterprise](#) to promote affordable and accessible fruit and veg.

“I am truly inspired today by Sustain’s webinar on growing local food. Thanks a lot for the great insights.”
Ifeyinwa Kanu – AFN+ Network, which harnesses research to transform UK agri-food for net zero

Real Bread Campaign

Real Bread outreach

Our Real Bread Campaign works with 14 [Real Bread Campaign Ambassadors](#), of diverse backgrounds, identities and relationships with the rise of Real Bread. They include people from the UK, Chile, Czechia, Italy, Japan and Lebanon. All are united in their commitment to promote culturally diverse bread that is better for us, for communities and for the planet.



Photo credits: Boudicca Woodland © Alex Jenkins Photography, Nelly Trevelyan © Matthew Trevelyan, selfie © Utako Tanner, Camila Marcias © Charlotte Griffiths, selfie © Paul Raddan, Eddy Sleiman © Nic Crilly Hargrave, Marcia Harris © Markus Drayss, Giovanni di Sarno © Angelique Henday, selfie © Hannah Frost, selfie © Rom Jedlovec, selfie © Frances Logan, selfie © Liz Wilson, selfie © Neil Holland, Rebecca Bishop © India Hobson. Montage © the Real Bread Campaign.

The [Real Bread Campaign](#) works to make bread better for us, better for our communities and better for the planet. Campaign Coordinator Chris Young continues to develop communication and engagement work to celebrate the globally rich diversity of Real Bread, and people behind its rise, from seed to sandwich, including:

- Articles about bakers of diverse ethnic backgrounds, bread cultures and personal identities, sharing their inspiring stories in True Loaf magazine and on the Campaign website.
- During Sourdough September and Real Bread Week 2025, people joined in from Australia, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Cyprus, England, India, Ireland, Nigeria, Mexico, Northern Ireland, Pakistan, Peru, Portugal, Scotland, Singapore, South Africa, Suriname, United Arab Emirates, USA and Wales.
- Celebrating Pride Month with a feature on LGBTQIA+ bakers making Real Bread.

“Once again, our care home residents celebrated Real Bread Week. There was a baking session weighing, mixing, kneading, proving and baking some lovely fresh loaves, which were served with the soup at the evening meal. The residents then enjoyed a grand bread tasting of all different breads from local bakeries, finding out about the origins of each bread and the process in making them.” **Sydmar Lodge Care Home in North West London, offering residential, respite and dementia care**

6. Sustain Strategy theme: Good Food for All

Children's Food

In our view, how our nation feeds children is one of the most important expressions of equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice. Health inequalities caused by an unhealthy food supply, and families having too little money to buy the food they need, are examples of structural injustice. These are experienced unfairly and disproportionately by people with disabilities and people of diverse ethnic backgrounds.

Our approach is to champion improvements to the quality of children's food – not just for those from privileged families, but for the benefit of *all* children. We do this by campaigning for healthy school meals, provided free of charge for all children; support for families with young children to access good food; better food standards, food education and information; and action to reformulate the recipes of everyday foods for health and wellbeing, whilst stemming the flood of unhealthy and damaging food marketing.

Read more: Children's Food Campaign Officer Naema Jannath reflects on impressive progress for children's food and health in 2025 [in this blog](#).

Children's Food Summit and Awards, 2025

Children's Food Summit and Awards

Sustain convened the second national Children's Food Summit in February 2025. Over 140 people from national charities, local campaign groups, parliamentarians, council leaders, and public health specialists joined us to celebrate the pioneering and courageous champions challenging the food system and working to ensure healthier, fairer and more sustainable food for children.

[Read more and watch highlights](#)

Leicester Mamas receiving the Children's Food Award for Championing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Children's Food. Their innovative peer support model provides non-judgmental breastfeeding and formula feeding advice, helping vulnerable families in Leicester, influencing advocacy for stronger marketing restrictions on breastmilk substitutes and better support for families. Awards also went to a range of young people and children's food advocates.

[Read more about award winners](#)



Food champion Dev Sharma (centre) chairs a panel of Ellie Chowns MP (Green Party), Jess Brown-Fuller (LibDems) and Emma Lewell-Buck (Labour) discussing policies to improve children's food



Leicester Food Mamas receiving the Award for Championing Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Children's Food

Parent ambassadors

As an important part of our commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice, we recruited diverse Parent Ambassadors, supported and enabled to voice their concerns about children's food.

Parent power in Parliament

Having recruited a new panel of Children's Food Ambassadors in 2023, we co-created and published a parents' manifesto for healthy children's food, taken to Westminster and shared with MPs and Peers as their first-hand experience of the barriers to ensuring children can eat healthily. Ambassadors have been developing their skills and voice to champion free school meals, food quality, food education in the curriculum, a ban on energy drinks and controls on unhealthy food marketing.

[Read more](#)



Parent Ambassadors present their manifesto for healthy children's food in Parliament with Sharon Hodgson MP and Baroness Rosie Boycott. Credit: Matt Crossick

Energy drinks: for adults only!

Our diverse parent ambassadors have also been at the forefront of campaigning for a ban on sales of energy drinks to children, including [blog interviews](#) and providing [compelling stories for the media](#). Together with our partners at Bite Back, we created [an easy guide to support parents and young people](#) to respond directly to the government consultation, as well as conducting demographically representative polling of parents with Savanta. As part of our [final submission to the consultation](#), we also highlighted the additional worries of parents of neuro-diverse children, and the need to ensure any future legislation fully protects all children, not just those up to age 15.

Free school meals for 500,000 more children

Sustain has campaigned for over 20 years for school food standards and universal access, alongside good food education to help children make healthy food choices and understand where their food comes from.

Free school meals success!

In 2025, Sustain welcomed [the announcement](#) that all pupils from households on Universal Credit will become eligible for free school meals from the start of the 2026/27 academic year, and expansion of school breakfasts clubs. We also celebrated the fact that [100 million free school meals](#) have now been served to London's schoolchildren, with proven benefits for health, inclusion and educational attainment. This boosted our call for [healthy school food for all](#).



Young boy says yes to school food for all. Credit: Sustain

Together with our partners in the School Food Review, the Children’s Food Campaign team participated in a series of learning and reflection work on EDI and Racial Justice in school food campaigning, which has strengthened our planning and campaigning approach, to make sure our campaigning centres the lived experience of parents, frontline school staff and most importantly children and young people themselves.

Recipe for Change

Benefits of an unhealthy food levy

Sustain is working in partnership with alliance members to call for an industry levy to help make food healthier; and to use the money raised to invest in children’s health and equitable access to good food. We see this as one big structural way to address the injustices of health inequalities and household food insecurity experienced by millions of families on a low income. Over the past year, there has been growing support, e.g. from [health groups](#), the [House of Lords](#), [IPPR](#), [academics](#), and CMO [Sir Chris Whitty](#).

In 2025, we worked with WeRise, an enterprise focused on youth empowerment, to listen to [young people’s views on accessing healthy food](#) and taxing companies. We also partnered with ActivMob to explore cost-of-living pressures and perspectives of families living on low incomes on taxing unhealthy foods. This was the first stage in the co-design of a new charter being developed and launched in 2026.

[Read more](#)



Sustain’s Chief Executive Kath Dalmeny asks, ‘How do we build a thriving food system that feeds Britain fairly?’ on a panel at the [Labour Party conference](#), with Anna Taylor (Food Foundation), Daniel Zeichner MP, and David Njoku and Sue Pritchard of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission. Credit: Sustain

Real Bread in schools

During 2025, the Real Bread Campaign consulted widely, within and beyond the Sustain network, to find islands of good practice of making freshly-made, additive-free bread available as part of school meals, as well as teaching children the valuable life skill of bread making. Work continues to secure funding for a partnership project to turn this into a landscape in which more (and eventually all) school children have the chance to make and enjoy delicious, nutritious Real Bread at school. In February 2026, [the Campaign urged the Government](#) to ensure the School Food Standards review resulted in improvement to the bread served.

Stemming the flood of unhealthy food marketing

The unhealthy food environment affects children from low-income households the most, who often live in areas flooded with fast food outlets and unhealthy food marketing.

Sustain [joined over 50 organisations](#) in writing to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) to acknowledge the long-awaited legislation restricting the marketing of less healthy food and drink on TV and online, which came into force from January 2026. The letter was co-ordinated by the Obesity Health Alliance (OHA) and co-signed by

many members of the Sustain alliance including OHA, Diabetes UK, Food Foundation, Alexandra Rose Charity, First Steps Nutrition, British Dietetic Association and many more.

Sustain has campaigned for advertising restrictions for over 20 years. This is a significant milestone in the government's ambition to create the healthiest generation of children ever. However, the final policy passed by government had been significantly diluted and weakened as a result of industry pressure. So it's not the end of the journey. The joint letter called on the Secretary of State to go further by strengthening the legislation and removing loopholes.

Cleaning up our high streets

Sustain is keen to ensure that children are not bombarded with unhealthy food advertising on their way to and from school.

With our support, a third of London boroughs have now adopted healthier food advertising policies to improve public health, with many other councils following suit around the UK.

Hounslow Council signed off the first ever comprehensive healthier baby food advertising policy in 2024, with Knowsley Council adopting the second, aiming to address misleading and inappropriate products marketed to/for young children.

Find out more here and here



Food poverty and dignified food access

Millions of people in the UK experience food insecurity – the inability to afford or access the food that people need to stay well, often linked to a lack of dignity and choice around food. In 95% of cases, household food insecurity is caused by low income. Crisis can be triggered by an unexpected expense, a change in or personal circumstances such as job loss, changes in housing, social security benefits delay, or a change in family circumstances, illness or bereavement. It can also be a long-term experience of not being able to access or have the facilities to prepare nutritious food – for example, low wages that do not cover the cost of living, or a disability that prevents an individual from accessing the food they need.

Sustain champions the right for everyone to have food security. This means ubiquitous availability of – and adequate income to afford and reliably access – nutritious and culturally appropriate food that is good for all people, livelihoods and the planet.

Household food insecurity (sometimes also described as 'food poverty') is experienced more commonly among families with children; people of diverse ethnic backgrounds; people with disabilities; people who are in receipt of social security benefits, and people with the immigration condition 'no recourse to public funds' (NRPF). See the Food Foundation's food insecurity tracker for further details.

People with the immigration condition NRPF are at a particularly high risk of experiencing food insecurity as they do not have access to many existing safety nets that can support people on low incomes to afford food. This often intersects with people being of diverse ethnic backgrounds, having language barriers, and stigma and fear of an impact on their immigration status or personal safety in seeking food assistance. Sustain has previously examined the shockingly bad food experience of people seeking asylum in London, and has worked with local authorities and others to try and improve this.

Four pillars of dignified food access

During 2025, Sustain brought together food, poverty and social justice organisations to refine our common approach to ending the mass dependence on emergency food provision, expressed as the [Four Pillars of Dignified Food Access](#). This was welcomed by participants as a timely and helpful process, and will frame our alliance's policy advocacy and practical interventions as we implement our new five-year strategy.

We agreed that achieving our shared vision will require concerted action by Governments at UK-wide, national and local levels on the adequacy of income through wages and social security payments, and intervention by a range of food system actors as part of a coherent, joined-up approach to food system strategy, policy and governance. The action required centres around four interlinked pillars:

1. **Prioritise a cash-first or income-focused approach to food insecurity:** Ensuring everyone has enough money to afford adequate and nutritious food through social security payments and/or wages. This should be part of a well-functioning, dignified ecosystem integrating local authority crisis support via cash payments and wraparound advice and support, helping people to maximise their incomes, minimise financial precarity and prevent financial crisis.
2. **Provide nutrition security and address diet-related health inequalities:** National policy and resourcing that enables better access to healthy and sustainable food via public procurement and nutritional security schemes, which also supports farmers and growers, promotes horticulture and more plant-rich diets. This includes free and nutritious school meals and breakfast clubs; meals in other public services (e.g. hospitals, military, prisons, work canteens); and through schemes including Holiday Activities with Food (HAF), School Fruit and Veg, and meals at home for people who need them. This also includes schemes such as Healthy Start and fruit and vegetables on prescription or similar, to support people to access healthy food. Also, effective action for better health by reducing the pressure of unhealthy food marketing and promotion and making food environments healthier, especially to support children and young people.
3. **Support community food assets and infrastructure while working to end the need for charitable food aid:** Enabling access to facilities, land, food supplies and resources, giving food power to people at local level to improve access to affordable, healthy and sustainable food. This should cultivate positive community-owned food spaces and activities that people want to participate in; food partnerships prioritising sustainable solutions including ending *reliance* on redistribution of surplus food as a systemic response to food insecurity and helping to build financial resilience through co-located advice and support services to maximise income where appropriate; community food assets – e.g. retail, catering, food growing, community kitchens and cafés, public diners, focused on sustainability, inclusion, community power and innovation, while enabling communities to respond to shocks to food supply due to e.g. extreme weather, supply chain disruption and pandemics.
4. **Implement good food governance:** The policy and legislation that puts accountable duties on government, local authorities and other public services to provide, facilitate or secure nutritious, fairly and sustainably produced food that is affordable, available and accessible to everybody, fostering wellbeing, enjoyment and inclusive and connected communities.

Moving ‘beyond the food bank’

The Sustain alliance shares a common aim of ending the need for charitable food provision, including food banks. This aim was echoed in the Labour Party Manifesto for the 2024 General Election, which stated: “We want to end mass dependence on emergency food parcels, which is a moral scar on our society.”

The responsibility for setting out how this manifesto commitment can be met was allocated to the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP), which is also responsible for the new three-year £3bn Crisis and Resilience Fund (CRF). Over the past 18 months, Sustain’s Food Poverty Project Coordinator has served on the Crisis and Resilience Fund Working Group of local authorities and third-sector organisations, advising DWP on how the money (which replaces the previous Household Support Fund) can best be spent by local authorities to respond to crisis and to build financial resilience for households and communities, with the consultation process and resulting CRF guidance warmly welcomed by participants, including Sustain.

Since publication of the CRF guidance, Sustain has been working with the Independent Food Aid Network (IFAN, a Sustain alliance member) and others to help transition the CRF working group into a support mechanism for DWP and the Local Government Association. The aim from 2026 is to help ensure that the CRF is a success; builds on evidence and models of good practice; is grounded in lived experience; is inclusive and accessible to all communities; is supported by digital inclusion; informs research and evaluation; and provides evidence to Government and HM Treasury of what works and makes the case for long-term support, beyond the initial three years of the current CRF programme.

Working with local authorities and partnerships

Over the past 18 months, Sustain has started to review how our nation can shift to a more structural response to achieve household food security. This includes looking at what food system legislation is needed. This could place duties and accountability on national government and local authorities to take the necessary action to secure an affordable and sustainable supply of nutritious food, accessible for all.

This would work alongside mechanisms to ensure that influential food system actors play their party. See the Section 7 of this report for further details of our ‘Good Food Local’ approach, supporting local authorities to introduce the policies and practices that can help local residents access the food they need.

Sustain also supported London housing associations such as Peabody and HACT to find sustainable solutions to support household food security for residents. The impact report of the London Food Insecurity Network highlighted the role of housing associations and cross-sector collaboration. Sustain has now been commissioned to help housing associations develop a food insecurity toolkit.

Addressing root causes of food poverty

Working with Food Matters, First Love Foundation and Social Investment Consultancy, Sustain completed the Food Roots programme.

Commissioned by the Greater London Authority, this supported ten food partnerships to tackle food insecurity in a structured way. Our 2025 evaluation demonstrated the Food Roots role in building sustainable support out of food poverty.



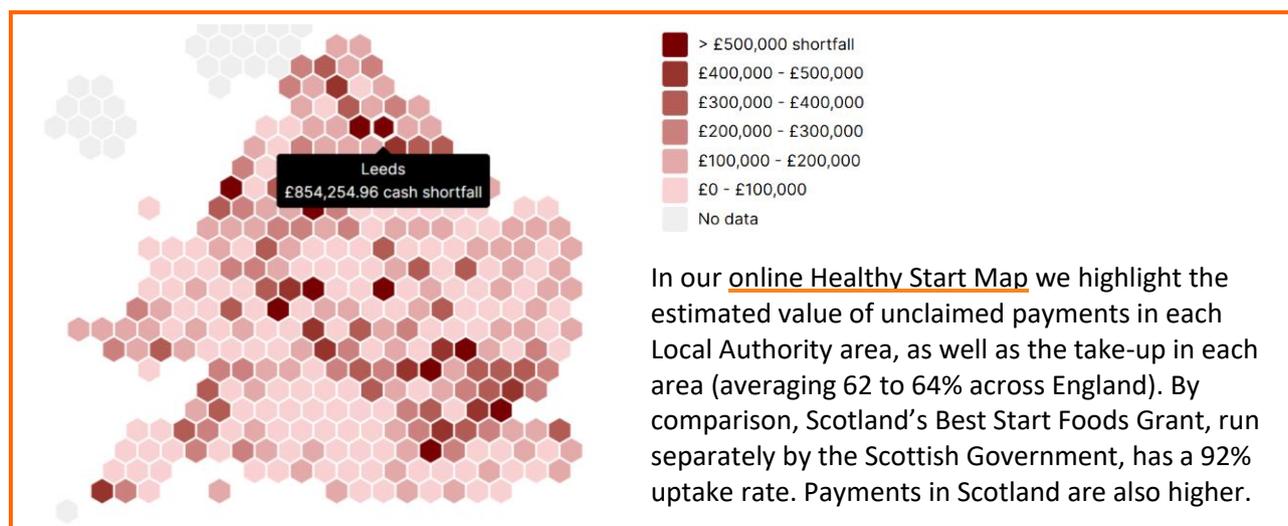
Food Roots group on social supermarket visit. Credit: Isabel Rice

Advocating for national policy

Sustain celebrated the Government's expansion of free school meals to an [additional 500,000 children](#) (see Section 6 of this report for further details). We also expressed relief for parents as the Government extended the [Holiday Activities and Food \(HAF\) programme](#) in August 2025, confirming £600 million to extend the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) for another three years. Advocacy led by Sustain during the Covid pandemic contributed to the national rollout of HAF from 2021, as a response to children's food insecurity during the school holidays. In 2025, the Government also announced a 10% [increase in the value of Healthy Start payments](#) to £4.65 (and £9.30 for infants under one), which will apply from April 2026.

We joined [over 100 organisations](#) calling for government to scrap the two-child limit for social security payments, in an open letter coordinated by alliance member Child Poverty Action Group. We joined others in celebrating this transformational change, after the [Government scrapped the limit](#) from April 2026.

Sustain [made a submission](#) to the Chancellor's 2025 Autumn Budget advocating for expanded eligibility for Healthy Start vouchers for pregnant people and households on a low income that have children under the age of four, and increased value in line with food price inflation. We also secured a grant that will enable Sustain to work with the Food Foundation to make the case for expanded value and eligibility, alongside auto-enrolment to encourage uptake, with our [online Healthy Start map](#) having demonstrated that in 2024, low-income families all over the country missed out on £58m to make healthy food more affordable.



The Healthy Start Scheme helps eligible pregnant people and parents of young children buy vegetables, fruit, pulses, milk, first infant formula and vitamins. As a result of low uptake due to lack of awareness of eligibility, more than 220,000 beneficiaries in England, Northern Ireland and Wales are missing out on this much-needed scheme – a huge loss to families struggling to cover the enduringly high cost of living.

Together with the Food Foundation and other organisations advocating improvements to the Healthy Start Scheme, Sustain is calling on Government policy-makers to:

- move toward auto-enrolment onto the scheme to ensure all eligible families benefit;
- increase the value of Healthy Start payments in line with inflation;
- expand eligibility to families with children up to age 5 (payments currently stop at age 4);
- expand eligibility to all families on Universal Credit, to mirror the Best Start Foods Scheme, and to all families with young children with No Recourse to Public Funds who are on very low incomes.

7. Sustain strategy theme: Local Action

Sustainable Food Places

Sustainable Food Places is a UK-wide initiative, coordinated by a partnership of Sustain, Soil Association, Food Matters, Food Sense Wales, Nourish Scotland, and food system leaders in Northern Ireland. We believe that systemic approaches to improving equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice can be built and sustained by communities working together for change. [Sustainable Food Places](#) is a thriving network of local food partnerships in over 120 towns, cities and regions across the UK, taking collaborative, place-based action to improve their local food and farming systems for the benefit of everyone.

Anti-racism strategy

In April 2025, Sustainable Food Places (SFP) published its Anti-racism Strategy, aiming to foster a more equitable food landscape by centering the voices and experiences of those who have historically been racially minoritised. It also aims to hold SFP accountable for being racially representative, ensuring that a range of voices are heard, and active anti-racism in SFP's programmes and partnerships is encouraged.

[Read the SFP Anti-racism Strategy](#)



Participants in development of the SFP Anti-racism Strategy

This work has led on to rolling out of SFP's REDI tool, and further development of the [Fair Food initiative](#).

Countering racist violence in communities

Many places around the UK have witnessed violent attacks on BPOC communities and communities of faith, and growing hostility to people seeking asylum in the UK. It is chilling to see that so many of the towns and cities experiencing the racist violence are places that are members of our Sustainable Food Places network. Food partnerships have responded with solidarity and non-violent resistance, to re-double efforts to support welcoming and consciously anti-racist food provision, community activities, gardens and food spaces that bring people together and reach out across divides. Sustain has supported this work with events, webinars and communication to help groups share ideas and experiences and to take positive action. Read a [Sustainable Food Places blog](#) reflecting on this; and see Section 8 below on responding to international events.

Campaigning for policy change

Local food partnerships are now part of the critical infrastructure for food system change, and need to be embedded in long-term policy and practice. Sustain has over the past 18 months:

- Ramped up our campaign for recognition of local food partnerships in the national Food Strategy.
- Positioned local food partnerships and equitable food access as critically important to resilience.
- Enabled SFP to influence key national social justice policies, such as the Household Support Fund.
- Started to campaign for food system legislation (a [Food Bill](#)) to secure this work in the longer term.

Good Food Local

The power to generate equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice in the food and farming system lies in the hands of key food system actors. Sustain works to identify these food system actors and either help them to play their role, or to find some way to make it a requirement for them to do so.

We have identified local authorities, councils and public health teams as key food system actors. They can improve equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice in a range of specific and impactful ways.

Over the past 15 years, Sustain has worked with London's local authority and council leaders, officers and public health teams to co-create a food system benchmarking tool. This measures local authority action to improve the food and farming system, for health, equity, local economies, climate and nature. Our independent evaluation demonstrates that Good Food Local is an effective framework to drive action and improvement over time, and at scale, improving outcomes for tens of thousands of local residents.



In recent years, we have paid special attention to integrating benchmarking questions to measure how work on ethnic and cultural diversity in the food system is embedded across all benchmarking themes, which are:

- **Food governance and strategy** – assesses council action on taking a joined-up approach to food through food partnerships, policy and strategies.
- **Food growing and community food action** – assesses council action to support people to grow their own food, access land, build a local good food movement and platform community voices.
- **Healthy food for all** – reviews council action to address food poverty looking ‘beyond the food bank’, with a focus on tackling root causes of poverty and increasing dignified access to good food.
- **Healthy food for all: stemming the flood of unhealthy food** – from schools, workplaces and communities to catering, high streets and advertising hoardings, our measures of a healthier food environment encompass areas that affect the lives and health of local communities.
- **Sustainable food economy** – reviews how councils are joining up work on improving the local economy and regeneration, with the availability of affordable, healthy and sustainable food.
- **Catering and procurement** – assesses a key area where councils can act to reduce food-related emissions, and promote climate and nature-friendly food while supporting local economies.
- **Food for the Planet** – looks at commitments and actions taken on food to tackle the climate and nature emergency including councils signing up to Sustain’s Every Mouthful Counts Toolkit.

“We need to grow this — it’s really important.” **Participant in Food Systems Change workshop**

In 2025-26, a record 31 out of 33 of London's local councils participated. We are excited that the Good Food Local framework is now being adopted by other regions of the UK. We have worked with a cohort of 13 local authorities in the Northeast supported by the Association of Directors of Public Health NE, and are now receiving interest from cohorts of local authorities in the Southwest and Northwest of England. We have developed a series of food systems change workshops to engage local authorities and drive change.

8. Responding to international events

As a UK registered charity, Sustain has a UK food and farming remit to improve the health, equity and sustainability of the food and farming system. However, Sustain has always taken an interest in international developments, especially with regards improving working conditions in international food supply chains; reducing environmental impact and deforestation; and championing ethical trade.

Back in 1994, Sustain coined the phrase ‘food miles’ in our seminal [Food Miles report](#), not just to express the impact of the distance food travels, but also the power relationships inherent in the modern international food system, and the structural extraction and concentration of wealth, and the grossly damaging and unfair exploitation of people, land and natural resources. Framed with an international equity, diversity, inclusion and racial justice lens, the alliance recognises the colonial history of food and farming and the injustice, inequity and structural racism caused – both historically entrenched and ongoing today – by the exploitation of people and natural resources.

War and international conflict are also taking an immense toll. The impact is both on the countries, communities and people swept up in violence across the world; and also closer to home in the UK, through violence and racism in UK streets and communities, and increasingly divisive politics and public discourse.

Over the past 18 months, Sustain’s Diversity Outreach Coordinator(s) and the Sustainable Food Places network of which we are a part, have played a convening or facilitation role in a range of third-sector conversations on how the food and farming movement should respond to racist narratives, politics and violence in our communities, strengthening the voice of people responding with compassionate anti-racism, and boosting our common purpose. Most recently, we ran a solidarity workshop in January 2026, responding to a desire for increased discussion on these important topics.

“I worked with [Sustain’s Diversity Outreach Coordinator] Sareta Puri to facilitate an event on solidarity and racial justice in the food system. She was a joy to work with. It is rare to receive such a thoughtful and clear brief. The co-creation process was full of thoughtful discussion. This event was all about centering care, and these values were demonstrated throughout the whole process.” **Facilitator for our Solidarity Workshop, January 2026**

Violence and famine in Gaza

Sustain [supports the IPC’s call](#) for immediate action to end the hostilities in Gaza and allow for unimpeded, large-scale, life-saving humanitarian response. We express solidarity for all those who are bereaved, suffering and frightened, and to applaud all who are working to bring food, water, comfort and peace to those in need – as far as humanly possible – often at the expense of their own safety or lives. We routinely and prominently promote [donations to the Disasters Emergency Committee \(DEC\) humanitarian appeal](#).

The Sustain staff team and many people in our networks (e.g. some alliance members and the Sustainable Food Places network) felt that we should speak up in solidarity with people suffering from extreme violence, hunger and the destruction of infrastructure essential to life and wellbeing in Gaza. After deliberation involving Sustain Trustees and the staff team, and expert facilitation support from Letesia Gibson of [New Ways](#), this resulted in communication to our networks about the conflict-induced [famine in Gaza](#), and support for local food partnerships in the Sustainable Food Places Network in responding to distress and racist attacks in their communities.

9. What people say about our EDI work

“Thanks for your newsletter. Good to read about Sustain's work on making the sector more representative - all my best wishes with this. Some of my work is in anti-oppression so this definitely ‘chimes’ with me! :-)”

Response to Roots to Work monthly long read in September

“A much higher number of suitable candidates applied for vacancies advertised on Roots to Work compared to other recruitment sites and it was heart-warming to know that there are so many passionate candidates who want to make a real difference in the world. It’s clearly reaching the right audience.”

Sustainable Merton, who advertise their vacancies on Sustain’s Roots to Work jobs platform

“I am grateful to the Sustainable Food Places Network for all the work you are doing locally to support vulnerable households facing food poverty.” **Jo Churchill, Minister for Employment, in response to**

Sustainable Food Places letter on the Household Support Fund

“I don't think I've seen the Race Equity Lens as a specific toolkit and process before - this felt brand new to me and I was excited to learn about it, as it is so actionable.” **Participant in anti-racism workshop**

“I have found it really helpful to better understand, and be equipped to articulate, how racial justice work is fundamental to creating a better food system, and therefore integral in our work, not a desirable add-on.”

Participant in anti-racism workshop

“I find it really fantastic to have a space to be able to bring these things to.” **Recipient of 1-to-1 mentoring**

“Mentoring sessions were instrumental in our group’s anti-oppressive work.” **Recipient of 1-to-1 mentoring**

“I am really grateful to have been a part of this event and was so impressed by the organising team and the way in which they held the event with inclusivity, compassion and humour at the forefront.” **Participant in**

The Gathering Table food and racial justice summit

“It was a really inspiring, energising and informative day that didn't shy away from the challenges of this work. It was well-paced and the efforts to make everyone feel welcome and included were really effective. I left feeling hopeful about change being possible, and I loved how the tone of the day - a gentle, caring, open energy - reflected the changes we want to see in the food system as we work towards decolonising it. Really excellent.” **Participant in The Gathering Table food and racial justice summit**

“I’m really grateful to have taken part in the first The Gathering Table. Discussion was rich and powerful. The stories shared by all – panellists, speakers, and attendants – were touching and deep. The workshop I attended, on allyship and solidarity, felt productive, and made a really important space for dialogue.”

Participant in The Gathering Table food and racial justice summit

“I found this programme really good. It created a lot of awareness for me and within our organisation, and gave us the tools to implement some positive changes.” **Response to workshop evaluation**

“The conversations we had with you were incredible. It felt like a very safe space to be honest about difficulties we were having, or questions we each had. It is also just quite rare to be able to sit and do that frankly with other colleagues in a dedicated space. I felt we were able to share and discuss issues that we wouldn't have done otherwise, and certainly wouldn't have done in front of a colleague in the same field. But you gave us the confidence to do that by creating an incredibly open and carefully held environment.”

Participant in the Food and Racial Justice working group

10. Looking to the future

Whilst writing this Diversity Progress Report, Sustain has also been entering the period of our new five-year Sustain Strategy, running 2026 to 2030. We are reflecting on what we have done and learned on the EDI and racial justice agenda, and what we should do next.

In this chapter, we briefly summarise the areas of work on EDI and racial justice that we will develop and pursue, either over the next year (with steps and allocation of responsibility set out internally in an Organisation Development Plan) or over the next five years (reported to our Trustees and alliance members, and in future Diversity Progress Reports).

Movement building and solidarity

Sustain will:

Secure longer-term funding, security and freedom to operate for our Diversity Outreach programme (where relevant, working in partnership with the Eating Better alliance), which can:

- Support the people who coordinate Sustain’s projects, campaigns and cross-cutting functions to develop and embed their EDI and racial justice knowledge, practice and impact.
- Cultivate sector leaders to develop their EDI and racial justice knowledge, practice, ambitions and leadership, for example via the JEDI leadership programme.
- Run training, mentoring, group discussions and learning events for food system actors.
- Run more gatherings that bring people together to discuss food and racial justice, including approaches that focus on decolonisation and structural approaches to building a more equitable, diverse and inclusive future for food and farming.
- Support the development of the Culture Roots Collective to amplify the voices of Black people and people of colour across the sustainable food and farming sector.

“As a network dedicated to empowering and connecting women across the food industry, joining Sustain is a natural next step for us at Women In The Food Industry. Together, we’ll contribute to a powerful collective advocating for health, equity and environmental stewardship – values that are central to our mission of celebrating and supporting women’s leadership throughout the food system. Joining Sustain strengthens our ability to collaborate, influence change and ensure women’s voices help shape a fairer, more sustainable food future. We look forward to working alongside fellow change-makers on projects, campaigns and practices to improve the food system for people and planet.”



Big Food vs The People event, coordinated by Women in the Food Industry. Copyright: Women in the Food Industry

Mex Ibrahim, Co-Founder of Women In the Food Industry, which joined the Sustain alliance in 2025

Inclusive recruitment and employment

Sustain will aim to:

- Implement our commitment to recruitment for diversity, reporting transparently on progress via The RACE Report.
- Run one paid internship per year to provide work experience to a young person from an under-represented background and enable them to contribute and influence our work.
- Develop the Roots to Work platform as a key mechanism for supporting young people into good jobs in food and farming.
- Require mandatory training for all staff in key EDI and anti-racism policies and practice.
- Develop Sustain's own EDI and anti-racist practice through events, learning, training, policy development and practice.
- Ensure that people with lived experience can help shape our work, the policies and practices that we advocate for, and the decision-makers that we seek to influence.

Influencing policy-makers and funders

Sustain will aim to:

- Use our influence with charitable funders, and via partnership funding bids, to champion and integrate EDI and racial justice.
- Use our unique and influential position in the UK food system to identify funding streams that could help meet the needs of under-represented people and communities, and advocate for these to be used in ways that support the EDI and racial justice agenda.

EDI and racial justice in Sustain strategy implementation

Sustain will aim to:

- Make a public statement on how implementation of Sustain's new five-year strategy will embed and champion EDI and racial justice.
- Work with each of Sustain's projects, campaigns and cross-cutting functions to develop objectives and activities that embed and champion EDI and racial justice in practice, and which prioritise structural change.
- Engage Sustain alliance members and allies in the EDI and racial justice agenda, and support people and organisations who champion solutions to have more prominent voice and influence.
- Champion new food system legislation (including a Food Bill) that would provide structural support for equitable access to healthy, affordable and sustainable food.
- Continue to take a responsive, positive and supportive approach to responding to international events, and the impact on diverse people and communities at home and overseas.

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