



THE MARCHES REAL FOOD & FARMING PARTNERSHIP: A BIOREGIONAL FOOD GROWTH PLAN



INTRODUCTION: A BIOREGIONAL FOOD GROWTH PLAN FOR THE MARCHES

This report explores what growth in the food system means in the context of the Marches bioregion as a plan developed by the Marches Real Food and Farming Network (MRFFN). This is a partnership made up of Shropshire Good Food Partnership, Herefordshire Food Alliance, Bwyd Food Powys and Monmouthshire Food Partnership. All are members of the Sustainable Food Places network, and are engaged in a range of activities within their respective local networks and food systems.

This Bioregional Growth Plan begins by providing the context of the MRFFN, outlines the essential role of food partnerships in leading resilient bioregional food system transformation, and presents the MRFFN vision for interventions and delivery to achieve this. The approach to food system change outlined herein is the result of years of conversations, local consultations, case studies, pilot projects, and research. Perhaps most importantly, this is not a plan starting from 'scratch', but one designed to harness the momentum of the MRFFN as it enters its next phase of maturity and impact.

This report outlines five main action areas which are all designed to uphold the main objective: *food system resilience for the Marches*. This primary aim is designed with a programme of specific resilience-focused actions, and is supported by further plans for community engagement, policy interventions, regenerative food and farming, and relocalisation of the food economy. Bioregional development can only be achieved when the smaller community elements can offer a scaffolding from which to build larger, stronger networks.

This is an ambitious plan taking a holistic food systems view for systems transformation. Many of the actions outlined within this plan are already active at small scales within the Marches, and these individual projects allow for meaningful, albeit incremental progress. For example, the case studies presented herein are examples of successful initiatives which are part of the knowledge sharing and 'cross-pollination' between MRFFN partners. These present models which can be adapted to local contexts and implemented more widely across the Marches to embed food system resilience. However, to achieve the ambitious targets which we seek, these efforts will need to be scaled up, and deployed at a much more significant level across all scales of the Marches.

We believe this plan offers a roadmap for food system transformation for the Marches Bioregion that will support its people and landscape, while building prosperity and resilience through relocalisation.

Dr. Daphne Du Cros, Lead Author with the support of all colleagues representing the MRFFN partners: Shropshire Good Food Partnership, Herefordshire Food Alliance, Bwyd Food Powys and Monmouthshire Food Partnership.

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DEFINITIONS

Bioregional: A common geographic and ecological land area, as well as a 'landscape of shared consciousness' or heritage.

Food Security: The state of having reliable access to a sufficient quantity of affordable, nutritious food.

Local Food: Recognising that 'how' food is produced must be considered in addition to 'where', this report considers that food grown in season at home, in one's own community, county and bioregion, and country should be prioritised as 'local' over imported options of the same variety.

Regenerative: A system, such as a farming system, which is designed and managed to regenerate rather than being primarily extractive or degenerative.

Relocalisation: To invest in and prioritise local, such as through short-food supply chains, community and infrastructure systems to be more resilient and less dependent on distant supply chains and industry.

Resilience: The ability to bounce back from unforeseen shocks, ideally through preparation and collaborative action.

The Food System: The "food system," as defined by Parsons, Hawkes, and Wells (2019), is an interconnected system encompassing everything and everyone involved in bringing food from farm to fork and beyond. This includes the food chain itself, as well as economic, political, environmental, health, and social dimensions. It emphasises the interconnectedness of different aspects of the food system and how actions in one part can impact others.



THE ROLE OF FOOD PARTNERSHIPS

Food Partnerships are uniquely positioned to develop and deliver on a wide range of local food work, through policy and programme lifecycles to communication, galvanising communities and strategic planning. These organisations are often staffed by experts with deep knowledge not only of the food system as a complex structure, and also practical awareness of their own local food context. As such, they are aware of the key players engaging in the various areas of the food system, as well as assets, gaps and opportunities.

Food Partnerships often work with a range of stakeholders, including individuals and communities, through to various types of businesses, academic institutions, third sector organisations, council departments and policy spaces. It is these network connections and the relationships of trust built through food systems work that enable food partnerships to be nimble and responsive to crisis, or to see where links can be made, creating impact beyond individual initiatives.

Food offers a rare tool which can be used as a lever for change, where an action in one area of the food system or scale can have a broader ripple effect, resulting in multiple benefits in other spaces or sectors. From a regenerative perspective, interventions at the smallest level (individuals, households and farms) have the potential to gather momentum and bring about more significant shifts.

As social services and council budgets have been systematically reduced over the last 15 years, integrated food systems action has been picked up more by food partnership organisations. Recent research from the Sustainable Food Places network shows the diverse impact of food partnerships, the extent to which they are working with local councils, and their spread across the UK.

These organisations engage with food through its policy and economic contexts in practical ways. They are well-positioned to implement local initiatives which can respond to National level policy aims, and equally can navigate and support partners when National level changes may impact communities and programmes.

Some partnerships operate outside the formal council structure, others are embedded within their local councils (often working with Public Health or Sustainability teams), or sometimes as a hybrid collaboration between civil society actors and councils. There are advantages and challenges for each structure, but broadly work on the food system tends to reflect the six action areas of the Sustainable Food Places.

In practical terms, food partnerships must respond to windows of opportunity - either in relation to specific community needs, energy around a salient project area, or where there is financial support or policy impetus to engage in a programme. The combination of a wider food systems perspective and specific local awareness means that Food Partnerships are well-suited to identify and design impactful interventions.



A BIOREGIONAL FOOD SYSTEM



The Marches Real Food and Farming Network (MRFFN) is a collaborative group of Food Partnerships working across the Marches bioregion. This includes The Shropshire Good Food Partnership, Herefordshire Food Alliance, Bwyd Food Powys and Monmouthshire Food Partnership. All are members of the Sustainable Food Places network.

This network came about after the first Marches Real Food and Farming Conference in 2023, where partners recognised the need to deepen bioregional connections. The timing coincided with the creation of The Marches Forward Partnership, a Levelling-up initiative, presenting an opportunity for a new collaboration amongst the Councils spanning the bioregion and allowing the four Partnerships to feed into matters relating to food systems planning.

The development of the MRFFN is notable as this is a geographic area where political boundaries have historically hampered landscape-based collaboration and visibility of initiatives. As such, the MRFFN partnership has the potential to unlock huge potential in the areas of the bioregional economy, farm and landscape stewardship, community building and health - and indeed already has.



Figure 1: The Marches Real Food & Farming Partnership area, which roughly corresponds to the wider Marches bioregion.



PARTNERS AT A GLANCE

The Food Partnerships that comprise the MRFFN engage with a network of members and key delivery partners. These relationships are central to the conception, delivery and impact of projects/programmes. The Food Partnerships and their network members/delivery partners build the legitimacy and momentum of the broader food movement.



Bwyd Powys Food is the Sustainable Food Partnership for Powys, and aims to transform the local food system. Established in March 2022, the Partnership brings together key stakeholders to promote sustainable, healthy, and locally sourced food. Through strategic partnerships, community engagement, and a focus on local food culture it aims to make good food accessible to all, whilst supporting the environment and the local economy.



Monmouthshire Food Partnership is a county-wide collaboration of people and organisations, and is housed within Monmouthshire County Council. The partnership engages at a strategic policy level to support the following aims:

- Connect people, projects and partners trying to create a sustainable local food system.
- Take collective action to shape the local food system.
- Be a collective voice for food that positively shapes policy and shares best practice



The Shropshire Good Food Partnership CIC was founded in 2021 with a vision to create a resilient local food system that is 'good for people, place and planet'. With over 350+ members, including Shropshire Council and Telford and Wrekin Council, the partnership aims to build a resilient and collaborative food system across Shropshire county.



The Herefordshire Food Alliance is a network of individuals and organisations from across the county involved in local, community and sustainable food action.

The Alliance is co-ordinated by New Leaf Sustainable Development with support from Herefordshire Council and Sustainable Food Places.

INTRODUCTION: A BIOREGIONAL FOOD GROWTH PLAN FOR THE MARCHES

The Marches covers the catchments of the rivers Severn and Wye, and encompasses the counties of Shropshire, Herefordshire, Monmouthshire and Powys. We recognise the Marches as both a geographic landscape and a terrain of cultural consciousness. Natural systems don't adhere to political or administrative boundaries. The boundaries of the Marches are fluid, with constant economic and social exchange and with great potential to build links to enhance and regenerate the region's food system, and all spheres of life which rely upon it.

The Marches partner areas have in common a context of core areas of population density alongside dispersed population across a largely rural agricultural landscape. As with the rest of the UK, food production has been impacted by global distribution networks, reduced investment in farming and competitive pricing from economies of scale. Horticulture in particular has been significantly reduced, and farmer trust in government policies has been diminished.

The political and economic contexts of English and Welsh partners vary, with food systems engagement in Wales being more embedded in policy, including a commitment to horticulture and local procurement. The Wales Community Food Strategy shows valuable leadership, as does the report on Welsh Veg in Schools programme. These are examples and pilot programmes that offer templates for other Marches partners in England.

A Bioregional Growth Plan for the Marches represents a commitment to a shared vision and collaboration, as well as a practical framework of objectives and programmes to deliver these. This involves approaching strategic change using a food system lens (Figure 2), which considers the intersections of society/health, landscape/environment, economy policy/governance and their interactions at all stages of the food chain.

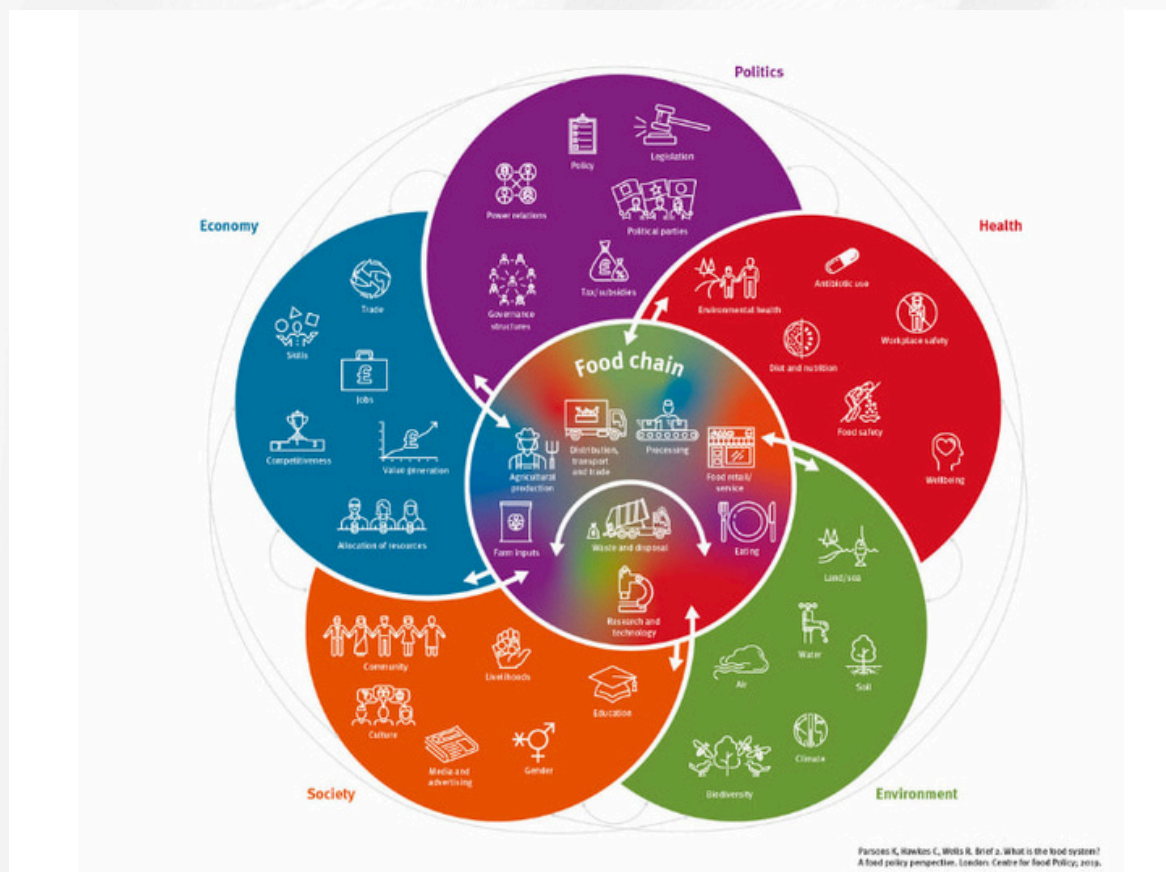


Figure 2: The Food System. From: Parsons, K., Hawkes, C., Wells, R., Brief 2. "What is the food system? A food policy perspective." London, Centre for Food Policy, 2019.



INTRODUCTION: A BIOREGIONAL FOOD GROWTH PLAN FOR THE MARCHES

MRFFN recognises that simply being 'sustainable' is no longer sufficient considering the scale and urgency of challenges that humanity is facing. Any approach to change now requires a framework that is focused on *regenerative* principles and holistic awareness of the systems at play, from the soil and natural systems of individual farms, to communities, the political levels, through to global climate systems.

From a farming and land management lens, a regenerative model seeks to shift agricultural practices away from those which are extractive, degenerative and focused on short term benefits. Regenerative farming offers a series of principles to guide farmers using a holistic systems approach which is uniquely place-based, outcomes-focused and long-term.

Similarly, a regenerative approach to place-based transformation draws upon design processes to engage with nested links and relationships (see Figure 3) across urban, rural and natural spaces. This area of regenerative thinking recognises bioregions, eco-zones and ecosystems, as well as human, political and cultural contexts.

As individual organisations and as a bioregional cluster, the MRFFN engages with regenerative thinking in both the food and farming context, as well as place-based regeneration practices, within individual communities through to the bioregional level. This prompts reflection on the role of 'growth' in the context of planetary limits and consumption. We recognise that this can not mean 'growth at all costs' and that the productionist paradigm which grew out of the Industrial Revolution is no longer a suitable or sustainable model for health, be it of people, society or the broader web of life.

Based on this, we seek to reframe growth as a way not only of scaling up to meet production needs, but of deepening connections with people and land, and expanding and strengthening our network of links across the food system.

The MRFFN aims to generate growth in many areas, including:

- Local food production: with a focus on increased horticulture and regenerative farming systems
- Food producers: in numbers, in knowledge and in confidence, from home gardeners to farmers.
- Local food awareness: nutrition, the value of 'Good Food' and where to get it
- Food Citizenship: valuing food by building relationships between farmers and producers
- Routes to market within and across Marches, including local food businesses of all types
- The economic market share of food grown and sold locally
- Composting and food waste reduction initiatives
- Carbon literacy and awareness of short food supply chains as a means of reducing the impact of food, farming and agriculture on emissions
- Food resilience and distributed networks
- The Right to Grow movement: public engagement with growing and support from local councils to facilitate its uptake
- Cooking skills and conviviality for health, wellbeing and community connection
- The number of schools, young people and their families engaging with food, building food skills and confidence



MRFFN: HOW WE WORK TOGETHER

The MRFFN is committed to collaboration, not competition, and believes that every individual and organisation has a role to play in food system change.

Each Food Partnership represents its own ecosystem of local partners, policy, food system action, economic and landscape-level activities. The Partnerships perform a 'connecting the dots' function across their local food systems, which reflect their specific contexts and needs.

Expanding on this, the bioregional network widens the platform for participation and ways of engaging. In this context, the reach and impact expands as the Marches broadens and deepens its links across borders, industry and project areas. This dynamic is illustrated in Figure 3, although this can be expanded even further to national or global levels. Engagement and action can be targeted at any level(s), depending on a project or intervention.

Nested Relationality in the Bioregional-Scale Partnership Model

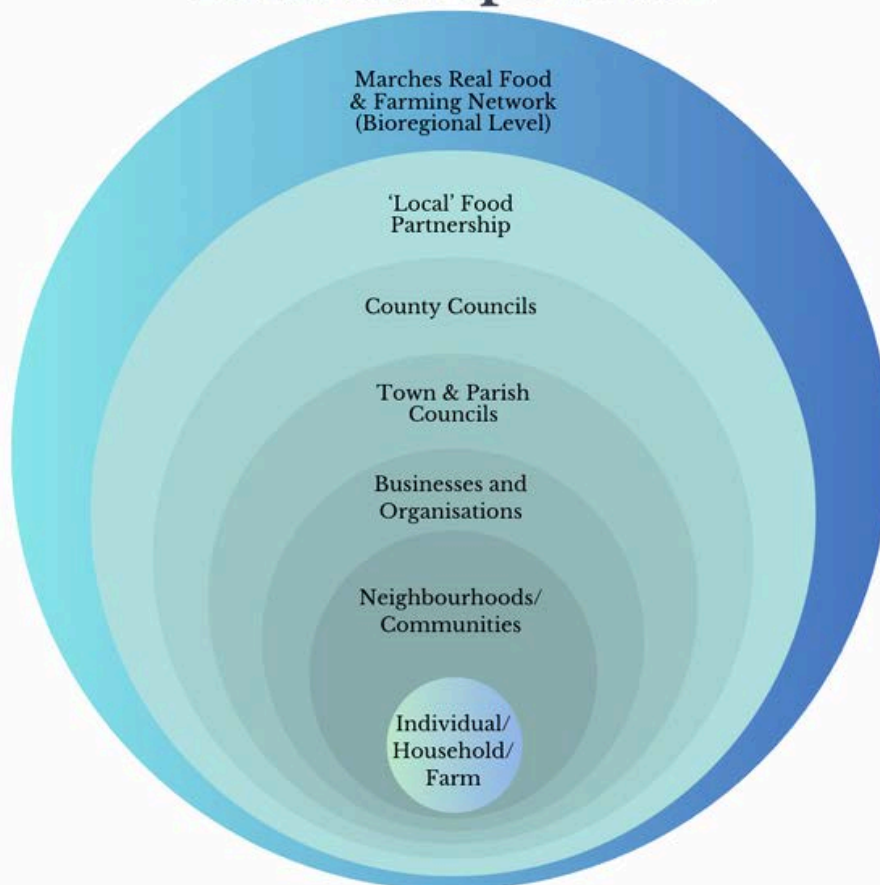


Figure 3: Nested relationality in the bioregional-scale Partnership model.

Our core aims as a partnership network are to:

- Share knowledge and best practice across partnership members and food system actors in the MRFFN
- Build self-reinforcing regenerative systems through cross-border connections, linking projects and people to increase resilience across our bioregional food system
- Collaborate on projects and share resources for sustainable and impactful operations

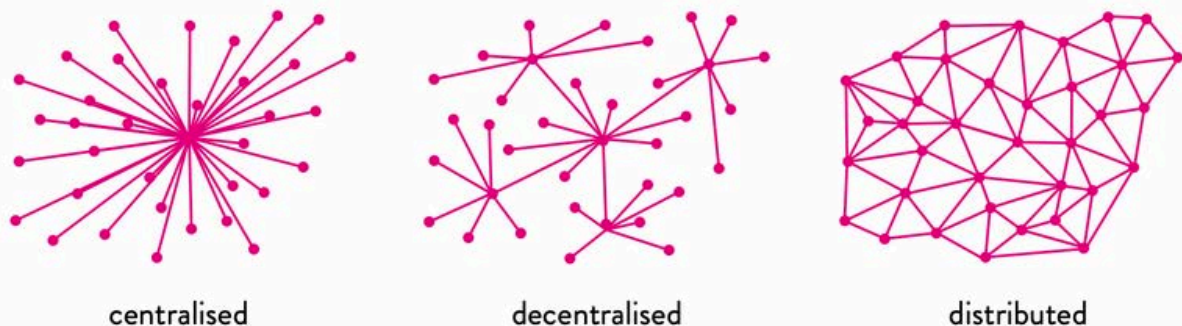


Figure 4: Transitioning to a distributed Food System, for long term food system resilience.

The MRFFN works using a food systems lens where we consider the 'farm to fork' approach, and interactions along the food chain and the food system stakeholders at many scales. We view this approach as one where agriculture and ecological regeneration also link with community-level regeneration, which brings in consideration of social inclusion and diversity, access to land and resources, equity, food justice, and different models for collective engagement.

Each of the Marches partners drives or supports a range of initiatives that respond to the needs of their local areas and networks. Each holds unique strengths, areas of momentum and challenges. It is through linking up, sharing and collaborating at the cross-partnership and bioregional landscape level that we can enhance our collective impact, build a distributed system for resilience and affect systems change (see Figure 4).

While much of the work that we seek to achieve through a Marches Food Growth Plan is outward facing, for the MRFFN to be successful, each of the Food Partnerships involved must be internally sustainable, which includes a commitment to personnel, as well as strong governance, clear communication/messaging and reliable ongoing funding.



CORE COMPETENCIES/AREAS OF SPECIALISATION

As food partnerships, we approach our work knowing that each organisation has established networks, initiatives and areas of specialisation, and each offers experience and models for best practice. The MRFFN partners have adopted a collaborative approach for sharing knowledge, documents and resources as a means of supporting new project development, enhancing ongoing work and building cross-border engagement. Together, we are more than the sum of our parts.



- Strong presence in the region, both in communities and governance, with Cultivate Newtown as a well-known food hub providing training and engagement as well as local food
- Established partnerships with Councils, third sector organisations, academic institutions and producers
- Research and practical engagement on local food loops and short-food supply chains for producers, with a focus on horticulture
- A focus on civil food resilience, schools and procurement supported by the Welsh Government



- Embedded within Monmouthshire Council and strong policy support from the national level of Welsh government relating to schools food procurement, the Future Generations Act and the Wales Community Food Strategy.
- Connections to the farming community via successful regenerative farming projects
- Established links with schools and successful projects, including the School Gardening Calendar.



- Established links with schools via the Schools Food Web initiative
- Partnership of 350+ members across the County
- Local Food Economy focus from the Shropshire Good Food Trail and engagement with Shropshire Tourism organisations
- Engagement with farmer clusters on the local food economy and routes to market
- Strong links with Telford and Wrekin Council via Sustainability and Public Health
- Civil Food Resilience and food strategy engagement



- Joint projects with Herefordshire Wildlife Trust and its nature action network, linking agriculture and water-sheds with regenerative farming approaches
- Council partnership via Public Health and its health and wellbeing strategies, the Climate and Nature Partnership Board
- Movement building via public engagement and events focused on food as a tool for systems change
- Strong partnership links with farmers, including National connection to Pasture for Life



AIMS: A BIOREGIONAL FOOD GROWTH PLAN FOR THE MARCHES

Based on local consultations with stakeholder groups, each food partnership has identified its own priority areas which reflect their specific context, and have been developed into bespoke charters, food strategies, action plans and projects.

Our Bioregional Growth Plan draws on the outcomes of these consultations and their priorities to stay true to the values of the Partnerships involved and the needs of their communities and stakeholders. An initial review and synthesis of partnership strategies and action plans recognises that core values and aims are strongly aligned across the four partners.

The Bioregional Growth Plan has been created with the view to fostering strategic collaboration and action across a range of linked programmes to build civil food resilience and food security across the Marches food system in the following areas:

- **Aim 1: Resilience-Building:** Both the overarching umbrella aim of the MRFFC action plan, as well as a specific series of interventions to address chronic and acute food crises.
- **Aim 2: Community Engagement and Empowerment:** Education and outreach for food skills, sustainable diets, community building around food, youth engagement; communication campaigns to build empowerment to address multiple issues through food, including the climate crisis, health crisis and the nature and biodiversity crisis. Local-specific, community-driven action is central.
- **Aim 3: Policy - A Food Strategy for Every Place:** Including co-creation of food strategies at various scales with farmers and communities to support resilient food systems, including local Town and Parish and county-level food resilience strategies, which support a broader resilience pathway at the Marches scale.
- **Aim 4: Regenerative Food and Farming:** Working with food producers and partners to share knowledge, and work from the farm to the bioregional landscape level for regenerative, diversified and multi-functional food systems; engaging with Councils, National Landscape teams, Wildlife Trusts etc., to build understanding, support and prioritisation of regenerative land management, health and the local food economy.
- **Aim 5: Relocalisation to support the bioregional food economy:** including supporting food producers, scaling up horticulture; training/knowledge sharing for producers, operations, manufacturing, marketing and re-valuing, direct-sales, routes to markets and supporting infrastructure.

While MRFFN partners share these core areas of development, it is understood that all approaches and interventions must respond to the needs and capacities of specific local areas in order to harness momentum and create lasting change. There are no blanket solutions, especially at the micro farm or community level, and these must be approached with a sensitivity to local context for effective and bespoke approaches. This is why the local knowledge and connections of each food partnership plays such an essential role in food system transformation.



AIMS: A BIOREGIONAL FOOD GROWTH PLAN FOR THE MARCHES

As a result of a consultation with attendees of the first Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence in 2023, the following organisational functions for SGFP were identified, which are shared by the Marches Real Food and Farming Network:

- **Convene and Connect:** Enable collaboration and cooperation; build communities of support.
- **Inform and Inspire:** Make visible what is going on; tell stories of possibility that capture holistic perspectives.
- **Resource and Empower:** Facilitate access to resources and skills to support relocalisation
- **Vision and Voice:** Galvanise food systems actors, amplify the messages of stakeholders, and engage accordingly in outreach for regional land use, policy and governance

These offer pathways for engaging across different sectors and stakeholders in the food system and have been used as a guiding structure for delivering actions for the five aims of the Bioregional Food Growth Plan for the Marches (see Appendix).

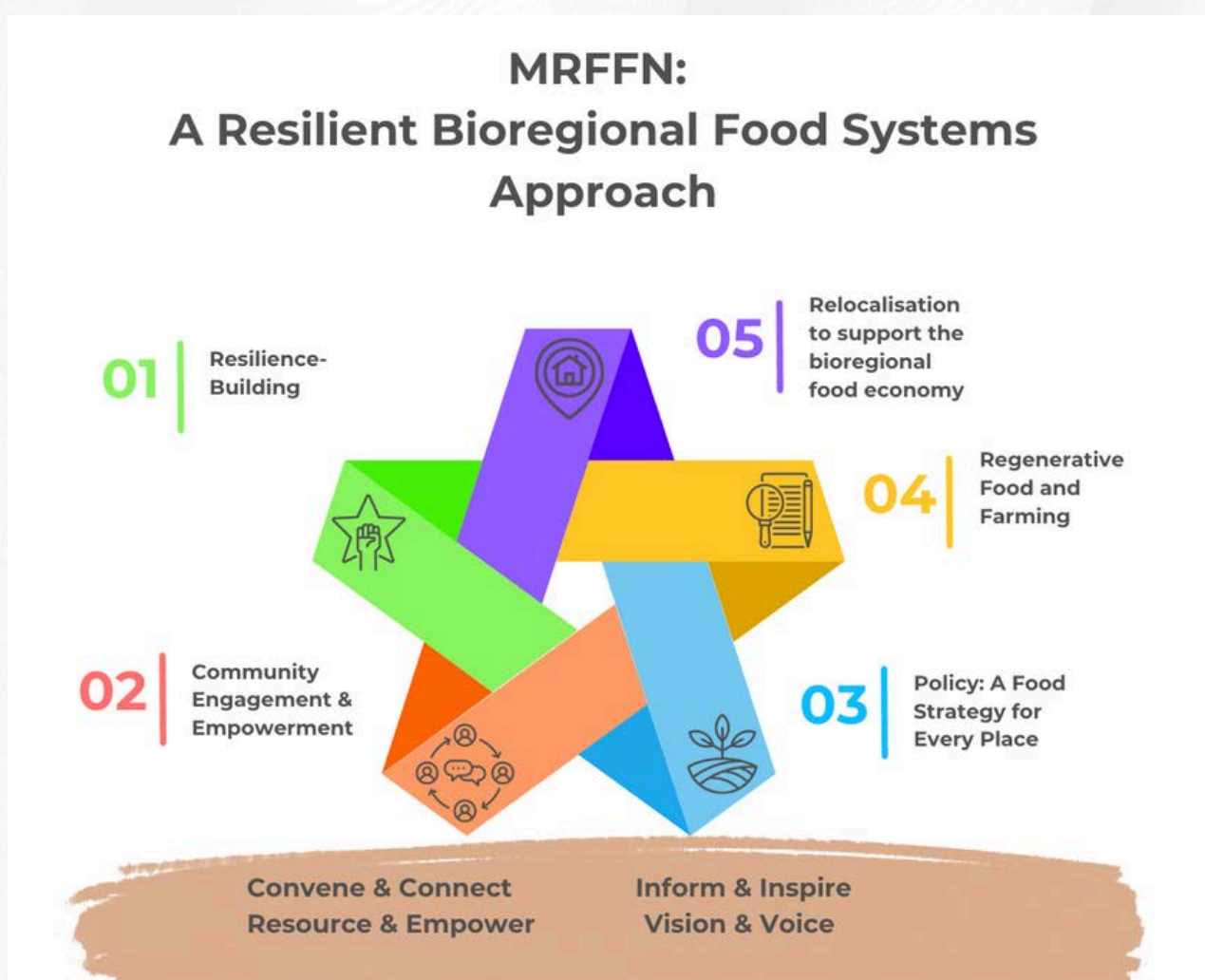


Figure 5: Themes for MRFFN Bioregional Food System Engagement



CASE STUDY

THE MARCHES REAL FOOD & FARMING CONVERGENCE

An annual gathering for farmers and food system actors from across the Marches, modelled on the mission of the Oxford Real Farming Conference



Overview

The Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence brings together farmers, experts, councillors and food system actors from across the Marches to share best practice for resilience, relocalisation and collaboration. It creates an interactive space to foster collaboration and build community, with the aim of exploring our local food future and building the partnerships to make it a reality.

Peer-to-Peer Learning

MRFFC was launched in Shropshire, and will travel across the Marches from year to year. Beyond the event itself, the MRFFC includes work throughout the year via an ongoing webinar series, and in-the-field practical sessions, often linked to farm clusters and guided by their interests.

Impact

As a participant in the Monmouthshire ACE Mentorship Programme, a last minute ticket change brought farmer Rob Whittle to MRFFC 2024. He was so inspired by the event that he offered to host the following one at Square Farm, his own organic mixed family farm and farm shop. His generous offer will bring MRFFC 2025 to Monmouthshire and engage new participants.

By showcasing the work taking place at a bioregional level, the MRFFC fosters an awareness of our shared landscape, agricultural heritage and responsibility. It promotes a rare opportunity for cross-pollination, building a sense of community amongst food producers, and connections across borders. This is an event which offers access to expertise on all aspects of farming, alongside inspiring examples of food system transformation.

RESILIENCE BUILDING

In response to global and national crises and the 2025 report from the National Preparedness Commission authored by Professor Tim Lang, we feel that it is appropriate and logical for food partnerships to frame our work within the context of *Civil Food Resilience*. This takes the view that food partnerships have a leadership role to play in partnership with Local Authorities, organisations and citizens to ensure adequate, accessible, and appropriate food production and supply proactively to shocks, and not simply in response. Engaging with Civil Food Resilience planning addresses concerns relating to public health, defence and civil security, economic stability, climate and emissions, procurement, land management and more.

Increasing food resilience across the Marches bioregion *is the overarching aim* under which all other activities, including those listed above, are nested. All initiatives which contribute to a more connected and regenerative food system, regardless at which scale they operate, builds and supports resilience.

APPROACHES

Reflecting back on the role of the Ministry of Food and the County War Agricultural Committees, **the Marches seeks to establish a bioregional-scale initiative to anticipate, collaborate, and plan a practical model for Civil Food Resilience.** This is based in the notion of 'nested relationality' illustrating the many scales and areas of engagement of individual food partnerships and the wider MRFFN (as in Figure 3), to achieve a distributed web of food provision (Figure 4). The MRFFN Resilience Building initiative presents a model to support households, community and council-scale resilience, and relocalisation of routes to market for producers. Many of these actions overlap and are detailed through the various thematic areas of this plan.

The most crucial aspect of resilience is to raise the existing baselines of food security, land management, emissions management, economic stability and health through relocalisation of food systems and rebuilding community connection around food. Crisis exacerbates existing gulfs and impacts the already vulnerable most severely, denying the Right to Food and food justice for individuals and communities. Chronic crisis in society manifests in many food-related ways, including poor nutrition, increased food poverty/reduced access, and lack of food knowledge and skills. Inequality is an issue of intersecting systemic problems and therefore requires leadership at the level of national government; however, there are actions which can buffer its impacts at the local, county and bioregional levels.

The internal work within MRFFN as partners involves collaborative planning, knowledge sharing, network development and programme delivery. As a significant and complex programme, this initiative requires the engagement and 'onboarding' of key delivery partners across each partner region to build cross sectoral plans and links for resilience, and must include:

- Local authorities and Local Resilience Forums
- Schools, Hospitals/NHS providers, Prisons and their catering providers
- Farms, and businesses performing various roles across the food system, including processing and distribution
- Academic institutions and training providers
- Community groups and the third sector, and food citizens of all kinds

MAPPING AND RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT

Addressing food resilience will involve engagement across all groups and sectors of society. Based on the recommendations from the 2025 report “Just in Case: 7 steps to narrow the UK civil food resilience gap” the MRFFN proposes the following:

- Undertake a detailed food system assessment for each partnership area, to be synthesised into a Marches level report and strategy, broken down to stakeholder type, including a land use exercise, infrastructure survey and metabolic analysis of the Marches and the individual partner counties to determine whether the Marches could feed itself, as a baseline exercise
- Conduct Citizen’s Assemblies across the county and online, and in various sectors of the food system to understand local contexts and enfranchise individuals and communities
- Examine the actions taken by projects/organisations in response to the Covid-19 pandemic as a proxy for future crisis response
- Evaluate the current crisis-response system and potential impacts to supply chains, and make adjustments with emergency services to ensure that it is fit for purpose
- Identify where support, education, investment and network building are needed
- Support with resources, templates, information and toolkits based on stakeholder roles in the food system and potential for pro-active engagement and crisis response
- Build communication systems, including education and outreach channels and campaigns

These activities support and are in turn supported by the other themes and action areas of this plan.

COMMUNITY LEVEL: TRAINING AND CAPACITY BUILDING

At the household level, we aim to support citizens to be proactive in their preparation, should a crisis event impact the food system. This will be approached through education and outreach to empower individuals and communities to develop skills, increase local production at all scales, build networks of support and mutual aid, and to develop food resilience plans.

Further Community Engagement actions are outlined in Partnership Aim #2.

FOOD PRODUCERS

Relocalisation is a key pathway to crisis resilience and climate adaptation, and supporting small to medium producers to scale up, diversify and future-proof their farms and businesses is essential, along with appropriate infrastructure and routes to market.

Further actions relating to producers are outlined in Partnership Aims 4 ‘Regenerative Food and Farming’ and 5 ‘Relocalisation to support the bioregional food economy’.

TOWN AND PARISH & COUNTY COUNCILS

MRFFN believes that leadership must come from all levels. Proactive planning for food resilience must involve community groups, Town and Parish and County councils in order to develop bespoke local food resilience strategies and crisis response plans.

Further actions relating to food resilience strategy development are outlined in Partnership Aims 3 ‘Policy: A Food Strategy for Every Place’.



CASE STUDY

SHREWSBURY FOOD HUB

Food System Resilience for communities during the Covid 19 Pandemic



Overview

Shrewsbury Food Hub is a volunteer-powered charity that stops food waste to protect the environment and strengthen the community. They collect surplus food from shops, manufacturers and farms and share it with local groups, community cafes, schools and food banks.

Impact

In response to the Pandemic crisis appeal from Shropshire Council, the Food Hub drew on its established networks of volunteers, food producers, food banks and supporter for swift and sustained response to multiple stresses of the pandemic. Having established systems and infrastructure, the SFH was able to take on a coordination role for food distribution across Shrewsbury and surrounding areas, and to work alongside the Shropshire Food Poverty Alliance to link with its network of Food Banks.

Takeaways

Food hubs are often multi-functional and locally embedded. The SFH was best suited to respond to the crisis because of their knowledge of the local food system, and its actors. The level and speed of coordination that they provided and the problems solved through relationships of trust could not have been achieved through Council-action alone. Sustainably-resourced Food Hubs offer immeasurable value in crisis.

Further Application

This community-focused response to crisis has been presented as a model by the MRFFN to local food system actors to illustrate the power of relationships, planning and network mapping in the event of crisis. The MRFFN resilience focus includes developing a web of networks, response plans and capacity for crisis response.

GROWING RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

While national level policy and changes to food industry regulation are beyond our control as food partnerships, grassroots engagement for food system change is vital to bioregional food system transformation. We believe that food resilience begins by connecting with people and communities to support their reengagement with food and empowering them to be a part of the process of system reinvention.

Disconnection from land, food knowledge and the economic means to make healthy choices is something which impacts the majority of people. This plan incorporates 'health' into this Community Engagement aim as well as the Policy aim, based on the significant challenge of public engagement on the subject of healthy food and nutrition. Strong partnerships between MRFFN and Public Health bodies is essential. The Bwyd Food Powys Action Plan includes an ambition was to "Develop a Public Health Systems Action Plan" for collaborative working - This action reflects a parallel ambition for each MRFFN partner.

In order to empower change at the community level, this plan involves a programme of education and outreach based around an ambitious public campaign, to be supported locally by a network of community food ambassadors, including local food champions, community chefs and food producers.

The engagement campaign is anchored in the shared pride in our local and bioregional landscape, on re-establishing a love and appreciation for its abundance, and by empowering people through skills for adaptation. Through this, we can begin to change the narratives around food, health, nutrition, relocalisation, nature and biodiversity and the role of humans in relation to our natural environment, thus shifting attitudes towards consumption and valuing of food.

This Community Engagement plan involves four core components, comprised of many supporting actions:

- Engage with key delivery partners across Partner areas on a Marches-wide communication and public engagement campaign to address a range of food-related themes
- Train a number of 'Community Food Ambassadors' in a pilot initiative across the bioregion to connect with and empower local communities, organisations and councils for grassroots resilience-building
- Support schools to become hubs for community food transformation and support young people in a 'better food' journey,
- Know your farmer: Engaging with food producers and the abundance of the local food landscape via food trails and farm visits across the Marches

PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT

Broader public engagement involves harnessing the power of our partnership networks and encouraging them to be a 'unified voice' for food system change. This will include collaboration across online social media platforms, radio, podcasts, news, press releases, web-based and hard copy resources for distribution. Messaging will focus on empowering individuals to take action to build resilience - for themselves, their families, communities, county - with a broader empowerment message about how our actions can build up to become transformative.

Engaging with key delivery partners for a Marches-wide communication campaign will amplify the reach of this initiative beyond that of the partnerships alone. It would cover a multitude of themes to communicate the interconnections across the food system, including health, nutrition and wellbeing, the local food economy, whole foods, Ultra Processed Foods, 'less but better' meat, pulses and alternative proteins, the links between food and climate emissions, regenerative farming, 'know your farmer', cooking skills, and adaptation. The appeal of this campaign is its ability to address multiple issues through food, including the climate crisis, health crisis, the nature and biodiversity crisis, and to build empowerment through education and outreach for food skills, sustainable diets, community building around food, youth engagement and more.

The delivery of the campaign will be varied depending on the context of the communities and pathways, and would be supported through the role of Community Food Ambassadors. Campaign resources may include toolkits, resources, materials to be distributed through schools, food banks, GP surgeries, and will include events, webinars, training, engagement with food festivals and Food Trails.

COMMUNITY FOOD AMBASSADORS

Trained 'Community Food Ambassadors' will have an important role in empowering and supporting communities in their food resilience journeys. Recognising that it is not feasible to have an ambassador in each community part of this role will include training others as volunteer food champions to expand the reach of the initiative over time. Pilot initiatives will be identified for settlements of various sizes and characteristics across each of the Marches areas, with data collection, planning, reporting and knowledge-sharing as outputs.

The Community Food Ambassadors role will:

- Link community organising and local food strategy work by empowering communities and organisations with the skills to conduct community food assessments, to identify their assets, gaps, needs, wants and objectives and to action these
- Promote the development of community-led plans/strategies in partnership with Town and Parish Councils, including awareness of the Right to Grow
- Identify where community support is needed and respond with resources as a part of an iterative engagement process
- Develop an education and outreach plan for each community, relating to food resilience, growing and cooking skills, nutrition, food waste
- Support community planning and action relating to systems of mutual aid through examples of best practice

GROWING SCHOOLS

The MRFFN is working with partners supporting a movement to embed Food, Farming & Sustainability into the national curriculum in England, and to support food education delivery in the Curriculum for Wales (CfW). This means working with local school Trusts, caterers, chefs, administration, staff, students and parents.

MRFFN partners have shared the experiences of their successful engagement with schools, and identified ways to expand and embed the role of schools in community food system transition. Recognising that schools are communities unto themselves and are often at the heart of their local areas, school food initiatives offer huge potential in the short and long term to connect students and their families with food knowledge, skills and healthy meals, but also for local infrastructure, training, procurement and emissions reductions.

The Shropshire Schools Food Web, funded by 'Let's Go Zero' and the Ashden Foundation, initiated a program across 20 schools in Telford and Wrekin using food as a lever to decarbonise schools. This initiative engaged staff, students and school chefs about nutritional density, composting, seed saving, cooking skills and local food production, and has supported school administrations with a template for a School Food Strategy to reduce emissions. The success of this project has opened doors to further engagement with primary schools, and generated interest from secondary schools.

Monmouthshire identified an infrastructure gap for processing local vegetables which was hindering local procurement - now produce being grown on school grounds and bought from surrounding farms and is being used in school kitchens. Plans include developing a network of schools as distribution hubs for locally grown food. These are initiatives that can be replicated across a larger number of schools, and across all MRFFN areas.

KNOW YOUR FARMER

"Know your Farmer" is a call to action for relationship building, and reconnection to the food producing landscape. Visibility and knowledge of where food comes from is crucial to relocalisation, resilience and behaviour change in customers.

Out of the success of the Shropshire Good Food Trail, this initiative focuses on a number of 'trails' that feature farming, markets, local growing and where to buy and enjoy local food. These Trails will criss-cross the Marches to highlight the bioregional nature of the landscape, and foster collaboration across borders and tourism boards. An online map will support the visibility of local farms and producers all year round, thus supporting the ties across our bioregional food economy.

This goal of this initiative is to generate pride through increased connection: to place, food provenance, knowledge of good practice, and to make visible the range of skills and careers in food production ("*Grow a Farmer*", see the Relocalisation and Bioregional Food Economy).



CASE STUDY

SHROPSHIRE GOOD FOOD TRAIL

Showcasing the people who Make, Grow, Sell and Serve Good Food across Shropshire



Overview

The Shropshire Good Food Trail has become a nationally recognised agri-tourism initiative, which brings visibility to Shropshire's food producers, our rural heritage, and the high standards and quality of food which is made, grown, sold and served across the landscape.

As an initiative of the SGFP, the Trail highlights relocalisation, regeneration, and connecting with the people working across the food system so that visitors and locals can find a deeper appreciation for and engagement with Shropshire's abundance.

The Food Trail has partnered with local organisations such as Visit Shropshire, Shropshire Hills National Landscape, and Visit Telford.

Impact

The Food Trail showcases members both online, in print on the Good Food Trail Map, and across various media channels. It builds visibility for businesses and products, increases demand for local produce and supports tourism. In 2024 it included nearly 150 venues/hosts, including farmers' markets, pubs, cafes, farms, restaurants, community gardens and shops.

Further Application

The SGFT was inspired by the Somerset Food Trail. The experience from the first year of the trail was shared through a report and webinar with SFP coordinators.

Shropshire has been working with MRFFN members to develop plans and approaches to their own local food trails and create a wide-reaching public engagement platform showcasing food producers, the abundance of the landscape and supporting the bioregional food economy.

OBJECTIVE

While Local Nature Recovery Strategies are a statutory responsibility in England, Local Food Strategies are not. Local food strategies present an opportunity to show leadership in food resilience planning, public health engagement and economic investment in local food systems.

The MRFFN wants to see a food strategy in every Town and Parish Council, as well as County Councils across the Marches. The Wales Community Food Strategy recognises the need for community level food coherence for a more resilient food system.

As partnerships working at various scales, the MRFFN recognises a gap where coherent, joined up food system engagement is needed. It is best positioned to support and guide the development process in communities through civil society groups, Town and Parish Councils, County councils. Ideally, these actions will take place with a range of stakeholders and partners, and Food Partnerships are well-positioned to engage these actors, and link up the various scales of action.

This ambition links to the wider public engagement campaign to empower communities, with the support of Community Food Ambassadors and Food Partnership guidance.

LOCAL FOOD STRATEGIES (TOWN AND PARISH LEVEL)

To highlight the role of Town and Parish Councils in supporting food resilience and building bioregional food networks, the MRFFN proposes a series of events, both online and in person to empower community-scale action. This includes a policy focus at our annual MRFFC event and engagement with councils across the Marches on an ongoing basis. By working with the National Association for Local Councils we plan to promote local level leadership and the value of food systems engagement and planning.

In order to develop resilient local food systems, baselining through community food assessment is essential. This involves:

- Engaging community members, civil society groups and local councils to engage in food resilience planning
- Mapping the food landscape, including assets and gaps, along with objectives, plans and actions to design regenerative food systems that support each unique community context
- Support and signposting for Councils and civil society groups: The Sustainable Food Places Toolkit offers useful resources for the strategy development process, which can be supported by a local food partnership

Ideally, implementation of Town and Parish level strategies would be guided by County Council leadership, however communities often have a greater autonomy and capacity to develop, adopt and implement their own strategies. An example of this is the Bishop's Castle Community Food Resilience Plan, presented in the Case Study below.

Some members of the MRFFN have developed guiding documents for local food action, such as food Charters and Action Plans. The Bwyd Powys Food Action Plan offers an example of a place-based plan created through consultation, with actions for key partners. Bespoke local strategies across the Marches would create a distributed network of communities which are food-aware, and proactive in food system planning and actions

COUNTY COUNCIL STRATEGIES

Food Partnerships within the MRFFN, whether within the County Council structure or separate, have the expertise to guide the development of an evidence-based food strategy which corresponds to local context and national policy priorities.

At the County Council and Unitary Authority levels, the Food Partnerships will work with key partners to highlight the need for food policy, and collaborate with councils in gathering evidence, policy/strategy development and consultation. For English councils, this can be supported by the Good Food Local tool, launched by Sustain. The Marches Forward Partnership provides an opportunity for the MRFFN to advance bioregional food strategy aims in an existing governance forum and advocate for stronger, more joined up food systems engagement and policy.

As food has historically been 'siloe'd' within Council organisations and policy, these strategy efforts guided by MRFFN members have the potential to bring a more holistic approach using food systems as a tool for greater impact across the bioregional economy, health and wellbeing, landscape and biodiversity, emissions and beyond.

The food theme of the Marches Forward Partnership presents an opportunity for MRFFN partners to highlight the necessity of county-level food strategies across the council partners involved. This presents an opportunity to share learning with the aim of incorporating policy tools, such as planning guidance. As an example, the recent legal ruling in Herefordshire relating to intensive farming operations and the pollution of the Wye river presents a precedent upon which other counties could draw from as rationale to adjust the planning approvals process.

In 2023, SGFP conducted a review of both the Shropshire Economic Plan and Climate Strategy to evaluate its engagement with food, farming and agriculture as an effort to illustrate opportunities and give recommendations to Shropshire Council. This was to guide the development of a food strategy appropriate to the county's rural context.



CASE STUDY

THE BISHOP'S CASTLE COMMUNITY FOOD RESILIENCE STRATEGY

The first and only food strategy in Shropshire County. An initiative of 'Food Forward BC', supported by SGFP.



Overview

The Strategy was developed by Food Forward BC and SGFP in response to the supply chain threats of Brexit and the Covid-19 Pandemic. It was adopted by Bishop's Castle Town Council as a complementary strategy to the town's Climate Action Plan.

Further Application

MRFFN views this as a template for local level food strategy development that can be adapted to any local food context, and supported by the local food partnership. Local strategies are replicable, adaptable and scalable to any level. SGFP has held webinars and guidance for community food resilience planning, including the National Association of Local Councillors (NALC) and the Shropshire Association of Local Councillors (SALC), and this knowledge is shared amongst partners in the MRFFN.

Impact

As the only food strategy in Shropshire, the experience of Bishop's Castle has been shared across the County as a model for local level food system planning and engagement. It is the only Town and Parish Council to have a food policy group with civil society actors working in partnership with councillors to monitor and advance the initiative.

In early 2025, a community assembly brought together members of the public to discuss local food resilience and how to update the strategy to reflect the changing local context, as it is impacted by global geopolitics, food system dynamics, cost of living and climate change. This community-led process reflects a place-based response to regenerating communities and food systems.

This strategy shows that even at a Town and Parish-scale food system planning is valuable, especially when statutory responsibility for food systems planning does not exist at the County level.

REGENERATING THE MARCHES

Developing a regenerative food and farming system involves engaging with food producers of all types, as well as businesses, service providers and consumers as food citizens - each has a role in food system transformation. '*Regenerating the Marches*' will support resilience: this is the goal. This ambition will involve building a movement of key partners and food citizenship through place-based actions and infrastructure. Engagement across scales is represented within Figure 3.

The MRFFN believes that relocalisation holds the key to bioregional food system resilience, and this requires a holistic approach using regenerative scales and principles, rather than siloed sector-specific interventions. This involves:

- Regenerating social systems: Reconnecting food citizens with the geography, pride-in-place, and culture of the food landscape in ways that encourage its protection and stewardship
- Regenerating natural systems: Working with partner organisations that engage with water systems, soils, nature recovery and biodiversity, climate and across various sectors to map shared priority areas
- Integrate food, farming and regeneration, and associated practical skills into formal (primary, secondary, apprenticeships and higher education) and informal learning/training across communities
- Create circular systems for food which reduce, redistribute or repurpose waste products to benefit the system
- Facilitating knowledge-sharing, training, and peer-to-peer mentorship for producers to engage with regenerative principles and apply them to their farming practices/systems.
- Promoting home and community growing through the 'Right to Grow', and land/ food sharing models, and systems of mutual aid for local food resilience

All MRFFN partners recognise the value of regenerative approaches to land management, and that the principles of regenerative farming offer direction which go beyond the fuzzy aspiration of 'sustainability' which has been prevalent since the 90s.

Based on a set of principles, 'regen' does not present a one-size-fits-all approach, but rather a framework to create a management plan for a farm's unique context. For this reason, it has been applied successfully across a range of farming types, scales and landscapes, from market gardens, arable systems, uplands grazing, livestock operations and more. Regenerative farming encourages diverse, multi-functional farm systems and businesses which are more resilient to crises and aim to operate in alignment with planetary boundaries.

REGENERATING THE MARCHES

All MRFFN members have worked diligently to build relationships with farmers across their areas. This has allowed for collaboration on various initiatives, including research funding for farm-level projects, identifying policy priorities for farmers, routes to market and business training, story-telling and building visibility of farms, bid and funding collaboration, knowledge-sharing and peer-to-peer mentorship.

MRFFN members work with farmer clusters to identify areas of support and collaboration. Farmer clusters offer potential for engagement at a larger landscape level, and also brings in farms of various scales which may otherwise have not engaged with their local food partnership. The following case study illustrates how two linked projects in Monmouthshire have had a positive impact on increasing the number of farms using regenerative principles.

The Marches has many nationally recognised experts in regenerative farming and they have played an essential role in promoting regenerative principles and demystifying the approach. MRFFN would like to support more farmers along their regenerative farming journey by facilitating more of the above actions and bring more producers in by normalising regen as a pathway in farming.

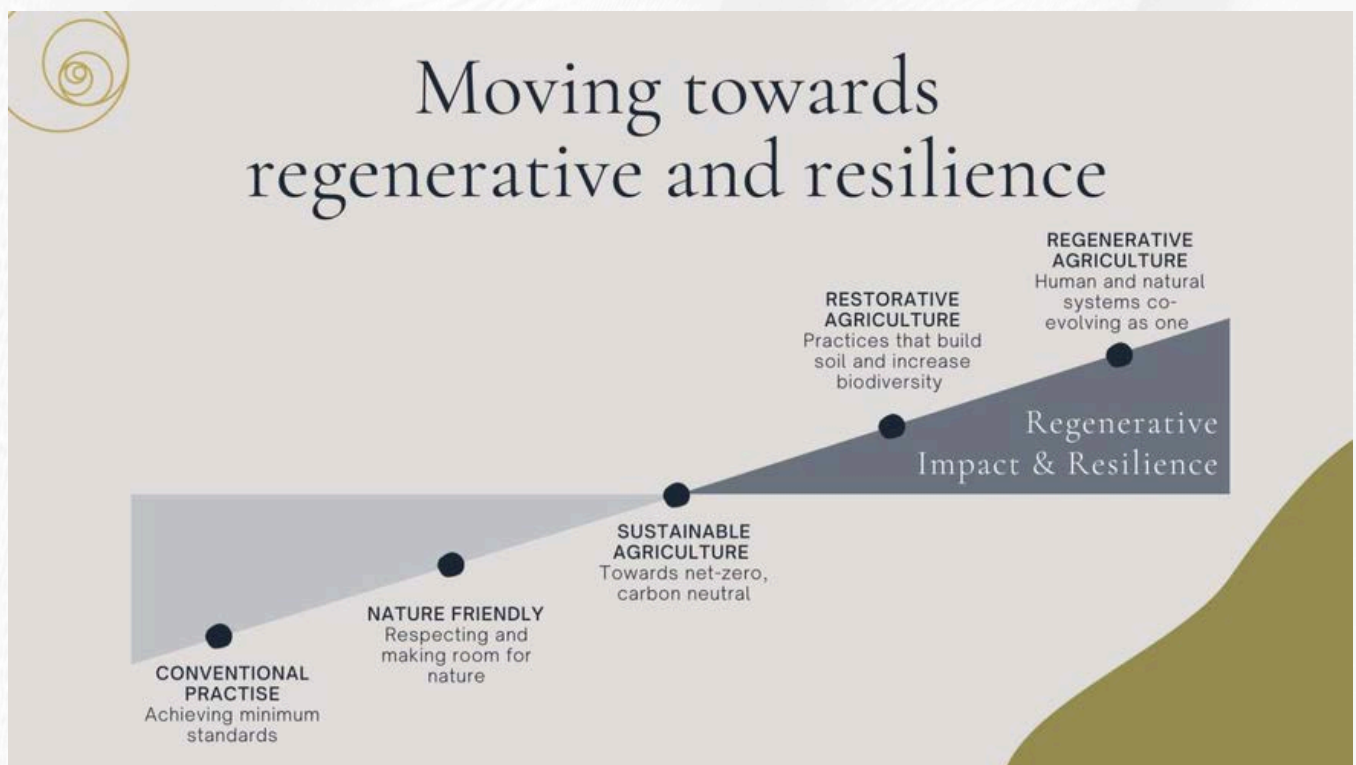


Figure 5: Moving towards regenerative and resilience. Image credit: Roots of Nature, Caroline Grindrod.

UK SPF FOOD RESILIENCE PROGRAMME & ACTION ON CLIMATE EMERGENCY REGENERATIVE AGRICULTURE MENTORING PROJECT

Seeding Regenerative Farming in
Monmouthshire



Overview

Monmouthshire has shown valuable leadership in supporting its farmers. Two linked initiatives have showcased the role of regenerative farming in food systems transition. Farmer clusters offer opportunities for shared learning, and will often build self-reinforcing positive loops where participants support and feel accountable to one another to maintain high farming standards.

UK SPF Food Resilience Programme

This initiative helped to launch a local farmer cluster in Monmouthshire. It included a focus on catchment-level interventions, emissions monitoring, and building confidence in regenerative systems and management. Events and farm visits supported regenerative learning, and facilitator support helped guide the development of the farmer cluster.

Action on Climate Emergency Regenerative Agriculture Mentoring Project

By working with Herefordshire's Ben Taylor-Davies, better known as 'Regen Ben', this programme provided mentorship to Monmouthshire farmers as they embarked on their regenerative farming journey. It addressed 'ghost acres' of soy-based feed and rotational grazing, as well as conversations about regenerative farming and storytelling to showcase farm transitions, reduced inputs and costs, and increases in biodiversity and product quality.

Applications

These linked initiatives offer a programme model for other MRFFN members to roll out to new and existing farm clusters, and make links across the counties to showcase best practice and share learning for regenerative transitions. Supporting clusters and offering mentorship can help to embed regen practices and its place in the local food economy and landscape.

THE MARCHES FOOD ECONOMY

The Marches food economy is vibrant and complex, and involves a wide range of stakeholders who must be considered within any intervention. These include the hospitality industry, public sector procurement, primary producers, transport and processing companies, food hubs and food banks as catchment services, schools, hospitals, prisons, shops, retailers, wholesalers, food tourism, livestock sales - the list goes on. The Marches Real Food and Farming Convergence offers a space for these actors to come together annually to build connections and an awareness of activities across the Marches, with the aim to co-create a more resilient bioregional food system.

Formal consultations, interviews and conversations with MRFFN members and various stakeholders has given insight into some of the ways that the MRFFN could reinvigorate local- to bioregional-level food provision and sales in a distributed model. Initiatives surrounding the local food economy overlap with the aims relating to regenerative farming, supportive local food resilience strategies and public education and outreach relating to food skills. Promoting the local multiplier effect, alternative ownership models and the value of 'knowing your farmer' builds the regenerative mindset and connection to the bioregional landscape.

PRODUCTION

Farmers do not feel supported at the national level, and this impacts their ability to invest in their businesses and land with confidence. Producers often see the value in relocalisation via direct sales models as well as diversification and environmental stewardship, but it needs to be easy as well as profitable.

Supply and demand of local food requires bridging in many areas. The UK needs more farmers and growers to meet the demands of production in a changing climate, but faces many barriers.

The MRFFN seeks to support growth in local food production in several ways:

- *"Grow a Farmer"* - This initiative seeks to work with schools, farms and training/academic institutions to present career pathways into farming and horticulture, and involves training and apprenticeships for new entrant farmers and food producers, land matching support and supportive structures (see Future Farms Case Study).
- Support individuals and communities to skill-up and produce more of their own food locally, and utilise the 'Right to Grow', community gardens, garden-shares and allotments
- Introduce and support alternative ownership, cooperative, community and profit share models to involve more people in food production
- Encourage farmers to diversify their production with support via peer-to-peer learning, appropriate processing infrastructure and routes to market
- Build engagement with local farm clusters to encourage self-reinforcing loops of accountability and quality, mental health support, and collaboration; support the development of new farmer groups
- Support producers to work towards more resilient regenerative production systems for higher standards of land management, animal welfare, biodiversity and nutritional density

ROUTES TO MARKET

Research has shown that local sourcing for public sector procurement offers opportunities to support local producers through large volume purchasing (Morgan, 2025), with the potential for cooperatives of small farmers to ensure contract requirements. Public sector procurement is often framed as the ideal 'quick win', if only local producers could offer the volumes and the buyer would pay appropriately. This remains a tension at all scales of the food system.

Investigation into food loops by Bwyd Food Powys suggests that farmers are interested in new models of direct sales and distribution. Research for Our Food 1200 and Social Farms and Gardens (Wales) focused on how to de-risk horticulture for new entrants in the Future Farms project (Du Cros, 2024). This involved examining appropriate/desirable pricing for both seller and buyer, demand for produce and routes to market within Wales and into urban markets.

Small- to medium-scale farmers struggle with the loss of rural infrastructure (processing, transportation, abattoirs) and often lack the skills that would allow them to engage in direct sales for higher margins.

The MRFFN Bioregional Growth Plan seeks to address this by:

- Building demand for local products and pride through local branding and promotion of quality products from the landscape, and building the visibility of local producers and their practices
- Engaging farmer ambassadors across each partnership region to build links within the farming community with a view to building direct sales models or the development of cooperatives or food loops for increased volumes/diversity for larger buyers
- Helping to develop structures that allow businesses and customers to access local food, at volumes that are suitable and in ways that allow for shorter food supply chains and local procurement
- Working with partnership members in hospitality, industry and public sector partners to prioritise local purchasing and make it easy, via networks of producers, support with contracts and policy
- Supporting farmers with training in direct sales, marketing and promotion as well as presenting options for online sales platforms or physical outlets through a county directory

All MRFFN members have worked to build relationships with farmers across their areas. This has allowed for collaboration on various initiatives, including research funding for farm-level projects, identifying policy priorities for farmers, routes to market and business training, story-telling and building visibility of farms, farmer training and associated school farm visits, bid and funding collaboration, knowledge-sharing and peer-to-peer mentorship and more.

The MRFFN sees opportunities for wholesale/distributor infrastructure and is aware of models which prioritise local producers, such as Organic North Wholesalers, a members-owned cooperative out of Manchester. Community ownership also presents interesting avenues for farms, abattoirs and processing infrastructure community kitchens and shops, with Fordhall Farm as a well-known example in Shropshire.



CASE STUDY

FUTURE FARMS

Creating viable new growing enterprises on a Powys County Farm



Overview

The Future Farms Partnership shares a vision for more agroecological horticulture enterprises across Wales-helping to meet the fruit and veg needs of citizens and supporting a flourishing rural economy. Bwyd Powys Food is part of the project steering group and has also provided funding for polytunnels.

Partners

Powys County Council (providing the land), Social Farms and Gardens, SharedAssets, Landworkers' Alliance, Cultivate, Nature Friendly Farming Network, Lantra, BlackMountains College, Ecological Land Cooperative, Eco Dyfi, Gwlad Consortium and BwydPowys Food.

Holistic Thinking

This initiative has gained significant visibility for its ambition, using a county farm model trialling new supplementary planning guidance released by Powys County Council allowing homes to be built for horticultural enterprises. This project seeks to de-risk the role for the producer through various supports including housing, identifying demand, developing routes to market, training, infrastructure and living-wage pay.

Applications

This model illustrates the impact on food resilience which is generated from increasing food production, and local food loops/routes to market for food resilience across the Marches. This project illustrates pathways for investment, skills development, land management and business design, led by an innovative partnership, at a time when the horticulture industry is in need of champions.



CONSULTATION WORK

Beyond the conversations that take place daily with stakeholders about local food systems, each of the Marches Partners has conducted formal consultation work and research. Consultations and research have served to guide the development strategy, to develop relevant project work, or to conduct monitoring or feedback.

- Consultations for '[A Food Vision, Strategy and Action Plan for P O W Y S 2024-2028](#)'
- Consultation and surveys with farmers on the viability of local food loops as alternative routes to market for Powys food producers.
- Monmouthshire: Supported consultation work for the Wales Community Food Strategy, which commits to "encouraging the production and supply of locally sourced food in Wales."
- Chwedlau Bwyd (Food Stories) was a fully funded food education programme designed to increase confidence and uptake of Free School Meals by engaging schools, pupils and their families through creative, play-based learning
- Community Meal kits Impact Report
- Regenerative Agriculture Mentoring Project, in partnership with Action on Climate Emergency (ACE) and UK SPF Food Resilience Programme to establish a farm cluster group with a focus upon resilient and sustainable farming.
- Citizen's Assembly and Collaboration Hub at the first Marches Real Food and Farming Conference (2023) to shape the [SGFP internal strategy](#) to guide its action as an organisation in service to the county's food system.
- participation in the FFCC Food Conversations which focused on [Shropshire's youth](#)
- [Interviews and features on regenerative farmers in the Shropshire Hills](#)
- Community consultation on for the review of the Bishop's Castle Community Food Resilience Strategy
- 2023 review of Shropshire County policies to identify gaps in relation to food and agriculture
- Research in collaboration with Our Food 1200 and Social Farms and Gardens (Wales) and Birmingham Food Partnership on horticulture, pricing and routes to market
- Engagement in Public Health with Food Poverty Mapping and Healthy Weight Strategy consultation
- Engagement with farmers and food system stakeholders through multiple showings of the film 'Six Inches of Soil'

A Note:

As Food Partnerships, we recognise that we work within a system that requires all actions and their outcomes to be tracked and quantified to prove their impact and legitimacy. The Sustainable Food Places network has conducted valuable research on the impact of Food Partnerships, which highlights our areas of engagement and the ripples across multiple areas of the food system from our actions, projects and programme areas.

It is essential to note however that not all actions and outcomes can be quantified in the conventional measure of 'value' or return on investment. Some outcomes are more subtle - inspiring an urban child with a farm visit where they have seen the rural horizon for the first time (one of our student participants in the Schools Food Web Project), or connecting two neighbouring farmers at a field event where they share ideas and are empowered to try rotational grazing (members of our Cleve View Farmers Group). These seemingly small, insignificant personal or interpersonal moments are transformative: they change lives and landscapes, and they cascade outward in a way that only food-inspired actions can.

This is not 'high-level' policy change. It is often quietly taking place at the farm, community or grassroots level, but this how regenerative food systems and ways of thinking spread. It is not easy to put a figure on these moments and the changes that they fuel, but they are a significant part of the work of Food Partnerships that are in many ways just as significant and worthy as larger project investment areas.

-Dr. Daphne Du Cros, Shropshire Good Food Partnership

This report was developed as a collaborative effort with colleagues representing the MRFFN partners: Shropshire Good Food Partnership, Herefordshire Food Alliance, Bwyd Food Powys and Monmouthshire Food Partnership.

May 2025

The Marches Real Food and Farming Network (MRFFN) is grateful for the support of the following organisations which have generously provided funding for the MRFFN to develop this plan.



Theme/Actions	Convene and Connect	Inform and Inspire	Resource and Empower	Vision and Voice
Resilience-Building	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bring together partners, stakeholders and emergency services from across the food system, and working in parallel to food systems and at various scales to emphasise a collaborative approach to resilience Community food assessments: mapping/develop plans/strategies/roles for responding to acute/chronic food crises; See: 'Community Engagement and Empowerment' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showcase best practice in projects at various scales across the food chain, including crisis response from Covid 19; Public outreach: Empower communities and support transitions to regenerative food systems, relocalisation and small/domestic-scale production; School food programmes to engage with youth and schools as communities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support individuals, food producers and communities through programs and funding to up-skill, get growing/increase production, diversify, develop and map systems to mutual aid; Develop and share hard copy and online resources for members of the public on what to do in the event of crisis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Guide communities and councils to take leadership in food system transitions; Consult with communities and stakeholders to co-create place-based policies and systems; Work to embed food, farming and sustainability in school curriculum See: 'Policy: A Food Strategy for Every Place'
Community Engagement & Empowerment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated communications and public engagement campaign with key delivery partners across the Marches Community Food Ambassadors to engage with communities to connect with and discuss food, identify needs, and to shape local food systems; Working with schools as as "School communities" as food hubs and growing spaces 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public engagement and showcasing examples of what is possible to empower community action "Know your farmer": focus on local food systems, bioregional links, the value of local food, producers, whole foods, food skills, including food trails Schools Food Campaigns 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support small initiatives through microgrant schemes and trainings; Train Community Food Ambassadors (including chefs, farmers), build a network of trainers and volunteers; Community up-skilling/education plans and resources to support adaptation and increased production based on local needs; Support the development of mutual aid networks within community food systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share the wants and needs of citizens with policy makers and businesses; Encourage citizen empowerment via community food groups and food policy councils; Engage with Public Health and Sustainability teams within Councils to engage in programmes that prioritise health, wellbeing and nutrition;
Policy: A Food Strategy for Every Place	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ongoing consultation with communities, farmers and stakeholders to gather information and identify needs/priorities; Public outreach campaign: Build a movement around the need for local and county-level Regenerative Food, Farming and Resilience plans which link up across the Marches; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share the impacts and successes of existing policy and community food initiatives; Inspire community-led action and pride of place through food, farming and business within the local food economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Normalise local food strategies/food resilience plans as resilience and adaptation tools; Empower communities (ideally, civil society and Councils in partnership) to conduct community food assessments and declare 'Food System Emergencies' which demand a local strategy response. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to advocate for a Marches Forward Partnership which prioritises Regenerative Food, Farming and Resilience plans and is supported by county-level food strategies; Engage with policy makers on food and landuse, planning/agricultural housing, public health, procurement etc. for joined up policy, with the support of the Sustain and SFP tools. Engage with National Level policy to underpin and coordinate local and bioregional food system policy responses

Theme/Actions	Convene and Connect	Inform and Inspire	Resource and Empower	Vision and Voice
Regenerative Food and Farming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Public outreach campaign: Regenerating social systems and connection to the food producing landscape; Working with farmer clusters to share knowledge, connect and collaborate; Hosting MRFFC annually on rotation throughout MRFFN partners; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sharing case studies and training opportunities in regenerative farming, diversification, and business management; Engage with farmers of all ages via training, CPD, talks, events; Work to embed food, farming and sustainability in school curriculum and all formal education and community learning spaces; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Regenerating natural systems by working with primary producers; Creating circular systems within the local food chain; Host and fund online and in-the field training and events to build the reach and impact of MRFFC; Build partnership links for collaboration with farmers and farm clusters; Trial local branding initiatives with producers; Promote home and community growing through the 'Right to Grow', land sharing models etc Support on-farm diversification through training, supports, infrastructure, and routes to market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocacy and communication on the value and possibilities of regenerative farming and diverse land-use systems; Work with councils to integrate planning guidance to support regenerative food and farming that will support community food resilience, landscape health and biodiversity; Work with councils and communities to build the uptake of the 'Right to Grow', and growing spaces.
Relocalisation to support the bioregional food economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Celebrate food culture and heritage and showcase successes; Gather annually for the Marches Real Food & Farming Convergence; 'Map the Marches' food system infrastructure to identify opportunities for Food Loops and diverse routes to market (producers, buyers, locations); 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build a food movement based on a cross-border bioregional campaign; Advocate for producer livelihoods and the true cost of food; Explore and showcase alternative models of business and community ownership; Build up domestic-scale and community growing by skills development, supported by Community Food Ambassadors Work to embed food, farming and sustainability in school curriculum and all formal education and community learning spaces; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Grow a Farmer' training initiative: Support new entrants to farming through training, mentorship, land matching, networking; Engage food producers from each partnership area to communicate and build a network of producers focused on collaboration and coordinated/cooperative working and routes to market; Trial local branding initiatives with producers, and online sales platforms; Support businesses to make local sourcing easier and build visibility and pride in 'locally sourced' Work with producers to explore diversification, pulses as vegetable protein sources and regenerative practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Build the case for relocalisation and investment in infrastructure for local food production, processing, storage, transport and sales as a part of County and Marches-wide Economic development and Climate plans; Work to relocalise procurement through policy and engaging with catering providers, contractors, and restaurants See: 'Policy: A Food Strategy for Every Place'
Partnership working for Regenerative place-based systems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work across scales, networks, partners and the food chain to support the vision and practicalities of a distributed system; Share communications for a wide-reaching public engagement campaign; Engage via the Marches Real Food & Farming Convergence, knowledge-shares and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Showcase best practice through combined cross-border communications, events, projects and materials; 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaborate on funding applications within MRFFN in order to build collaborative programmes and strategic engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Represent the Marches and advocate for strategic systems level change in food and farming, community food resilience, land management, policy, health, society and education.