

Sustain Briefing: Good Food Retail

Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, has produced this briefing in response to recent references to Good Food Retail in the London Food Strategy, among other documents. Our aim is to show how 'good food' ([see Sustain's definition here](#)) works in a retail setting and the types of venues and operations this would apply to.

We aim to provide useful ideas to help shape the concept of Good Food Retail, but this is not a definitive guide and as such we welcome comments.

What is Good Food Retail?

We use the term 'Good Food Retail' to refer to outlets that sell food mainly for consumption at home or to eat on the go. As well as traditional shops, this covers markets, stalls, box schemes, food co-ops, or home delivery, as well as small-scale production kitchens and bakeries that have a retail outlet¹.



The term 'good food' refers both to the quality of the food and to the wider activities of a values-driven enterprise. Good food retail outlets may be social and community enterprises, or for-profit food retailers that play a part in their community beyond just trading. Importantly we see Good Food Retail

¹ Foodservice only outlets (cafés, restaurants, takeaways) fall outside the remit of this briefing, as we are keen to focus Good Food Retail on specific settings. It also does not cover emergency food banks providing short-term food supplies for people in need, as these are not retail. Sustain supports work elsewhere to improve such food, see: www.sustainweb.org.

as seeking not only to sell food, but also explicitly to contribute to a healthier, more sustainable and resilient food supply that is affordable and accessible to all.

Good Food Retail outlets would be recognised by doing several, or preferably all, of the following:

- Focusing on selling foods that contribute to a healthier diet – seasonal fruit and vegetables, sustainably produced meat, dairy and fish, wholegrain foods and Real Bread; and being less likely to serve or promote highly processed fatty, salty and sugary foods and sugary drinks.
- Providing safe and nutritious food for diverse cultures and needs, and making special efforts to make good food available and affordable to people living on a lower income.
- Treating employees and suppliers fairly, and championing the real Living Wage or real London Living Wage (ideally with Living Wage Foundation accreditation).
- Developing collaborative relationships with suppliers, including paying farmers and fishers a fair amount for their produce, and promptly, and buying imported products such as tea, coffee and chocolate with the Fairtrade Mark.
- Reducing environmental impact through the supply chain and aiming to reduce waste radically.

Good Food Retail is likely to be run by people and groups who are motivated not only by profit, but want to run successful enterprises that deliver on social and environmental goals and contribute to a healthy and sustainable food system. By pursuing such aims, they are providing good food, helping to implement local or regional Food Strategies and policies and making life better for residents.

Other types of outlets

This broad definition would encompass the area of ‘social supermarkets’ and other initiatives that distribute surplus food from supermarkets and food manufacturers, often at low cost to those on a low income or facing financial crisis. To fit the definition they should focus on healthy and nutritious food to avoid exacerbating health inequalities experienced by disadvantaged communities.

We encourage food outlets serving very low income communities or people in crisis to coordinate with local welfare services to ensure customers benefit from advice and services that help tackle the root causes of their situation and be connected to networks addressing the bigger picture and tacking action to reduce poverty, health inequalities and disadvantage, see:

www.sustainweb.org/foodpoverty.

How can local councils support Good Food Retail?

When councils, local partnerships or initiatives such as a Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) support and promote Good Food Retail, then smaller-scale, values-driven and community-led food enterprises have a better chance of thriving. This could be through providing land, premises, market stalls, business advice, tax/business rate incentives and other support to help enterprises start-up, become established and expand.

Importantly, councils and BIDs can enable cooperation along values-led supply chains and help to connect Good Food Retail outlets with food producers and community food growers. In particular, councils can help to increase access and affordability of fruit and vegetables in a variety of ways.

There is no fixed set of measures that define a Good Food Retail borough (or BID), but indicators within an area could include:

- Development of a **Good Food Retail Plan** that considers the opportunities and priorities within the borough/ward/BID, and allocates responsibilities for supporting growth in the sector, with built-in measures of success and senior buy-in

- **High number of retail outlets accepting Healthy Start Vouchers**, to help new parents on a lower income be able to eat well, in a variety of different types of outlets
- **Alexandra Rose Vouchers are available in the borough**, working especially with settings that can reach lower income parents, such as Children’s Centres and neighbourhood shops
- The presence of **street markets** with thriving fruit and vegetable stalls
- Preferential access to street markets, empty retail premises and **street food trading opportunities** for fresh fruit and vegetable vendors, especially in areas with low access
- Consideration of reduced or removed rental costs, or reduced business rates, to help facilitate more **healthy food retail outlets** through low-cost, low-risk opportunities for start-ups
- **Food co-ops/fruit and vegetable projects that increase access to affordable fruit and veg or sustainable, organic produce** across the borough/BID, with central information and support
- **A Better Food Trader/independent fruit and vegetable box scheme** in the borough
- **Identification of premises** suitable for a range of Good Food Retail trading models; identification of any gaps and opportunities within the area for encouraging such retail
- Small-scale loans or grants for **start-up costs**, perhaps with business support from an enterprise specialist or recognised start-up support or other specialist network
- **Innovative retail approaches** to tackling household food insecurity, for example Growing Communities fruit and vegetables stall at Dagenham East tube station in the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham, Croydon Council’s The Food Stop, or BuyWell in Tower Hamlets.

Local councils can also go further in their role as convener or enabler through using their existing plans and activities as well as influencing the actions of other partners and organisations through:

- **Good food featuring in business support**, regeneration and planning
- Local authority economic development, regeneration and planning teams engaged in encouraging more Good Food Retail in the borough/BID. This might include:
 - increasing local fruit and vegetable supply, e.g. by allocating or encouraging local authority, park and social housing land for small-scale horticultural production
 - a remit to collaborate with other boroughs on wholesale ‘routes to market’ for food growers in nearby rural and peri-urban areas
 - land, stalls and premises available for Good Food Retail and for small-scale packing and processing of fresh produce; and to encourage community food growing and trading enterprises
- An advertising approach that restricts advertising of less healthy foods that are high in fat, salt and sugar and supports the promotion of healthier products
- Reporting on the number of (food) retailers that are accepting Healthy Start vouchers and paying the London Living Wage and promoting both
- Coordinated marketing programmes and celebrations to help Good Food Retail gain recognition and customers (this could include, for example, participation in Veg Cities)

What is Sustain doing in this area?

As part of Sustain’s London Food Link programme of work, we are currently supporting local authorities with Good Food Retail plans within London. In particular we are looking at how we can increase uptake of Healthy Start vouchers and creating a peer learning group on Good Food Retail.

Other previous and current work in this area includes:

- **Buywell:** We were a delivery partner in a London-based project to increase access to healthy food in convenience stores. [Read more here.](#)
- **Food Coops Toolkit and Network:** Since 2007 we have run a [food co-ops network](#) and developed a well-used toolkit to help others to set up and thrive. Currently we are also supporting students in colleges and universities to set up food co-ops and buying groups through the Big Lottery Our Bright Futures Student Eats project.

- **London Food Poverty Campaign:** We currently run a campaign to tackle some of the underlying issues that are creating food poverty in London. This includes producing Sustain's annual [Beyond the Food Bank](#) report on actions that councils are taking to address food poverty and helping to address these issues through focused campaigns and actions.
- **Food Power:** We work with 60 communities across the UK to strengthen their ability to reduce food poverty and tackle its root causes. This includes increasing the availability, accessibility and affordability of fresh and healthy food, linked in to local food poverty action plans, as well as amplifying the voices of those who have lived experience of food poverty in decision-making. [Learn more.](#)
- **Veg Cities:** This is a national campaign to increase vegetable consumption being run by Sustain as part of the Sustainable Food Cities network, which includes increasing retail promotion and sales. [Learn more.](#)

If you have any comments on this approach or document please email sarah@sustainweb.org

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