



## Healthy Start Veg Box Scheme

Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance: Final report, March 2021

### Supporting low-income families to access affordable fruit and veg

Cambridge Sustainable Food Partnership and Food Poverty Alliance members are working together to deliver affordable, organic, locally grown produce to low-income families.

Following a successful pilot in Summer 2020, established organic veg box provider Cambridge Organic and Cambridge Food Hub, working in partnership with Cambridge Sustainable Food CIC and the Food Poverty Alliance, have made the Healthy Start Veg Box Scheme a long-term initiative.

Up to twelve families in receipt of Healthy Start vouchers can join the scheme and receive their choice of a weekly medium veg box or a small fruit and veg box, delivered to their door. Payment is made with a Healthy Start voucher and £2 each week. The scheme has recently been expanded to families receiving free school meals, who pay £5.10 for their weekly box.

The fruit and veg in the boxes is the same as that received by full-paying box scheme customers (normal boxes retail at £11.00 and £12.50, including packing and delivery). All produce is organic and sourced locally as much as possible. Members can choose to exclude certain items from their box if desired. The scheme is promoted by Cambridge Sustainable Food Partnership and Alliance members, the Community Food Hubs Network and through social media.

Customers can join for a twelve-week period and, towards the end of that time, Cambridge Food Hub contacts them to see if they would like to continue. Most families have asked to remain on the scheme, with feedback including 'it makes me try new things', 'good variety' and 'we're eating more healthily...the kids get excited when the box arrives!'



*Communication is key – maximise your reach by promoting through your alliance, community food projects and other networks to identify families who can benefit most.*

## Our challenges and learning

Working with an established veg box scheme has enabled the project to run smoothly from the beginning. Cambridge Food Hub and Cambridge Organic already have the relationships with fruit and veg suppliers and infrastructure in place to set up and manage the scheme successfully.

Cambridge Food Hub made some changes to the scheme to help avoid the occasional issue of families signing up who are not in receipt of Healthy Start vouchers. The application form now includes a tick box to confirm the applicant receives the vouchers. Cambridge Food Hub also has a conversation with applicants before they start the scheme to re-confirm this. New members are asked to provide four vouchers upfront by post or on delivery of their first box, and then to leave a voucher out each week for collection with their empty box. If families are not receiving Healthy Start vouchers, but are in receipt of free school meals, they can still join the scheme.

We are awaiting further information on the operation and roll out of the digitised Healthy Start scheme. We will be looking at if/how we need to adapt the box scheme, for example in terms of payment methods, in response to the digitisation.

**“ We’re eating more healthily...the kids get excited when the box arrives!”**

Box scheme member

## Our next steps

Cambridge Food Hub and Cambridge Organic are running the scheme on an ongoing basis and Cambridge Sustainable Food and the Food Poverty Alliance continues to promote the scheme.

Partners are exploring ways to expand the scheme through a sponsorship or pay it forward model for full-paying box scheme members. Plans are also being made to include seasonal recipes in the veg boxes, to inspire families to try new dishes.

## Our key achievements and impact

- The scheme is enabling young families on low incomes to access affordable, organic and locally grown produce, direct to their door.
- Families are enjoying healthier and more diverse diets.