

Food, farming, fishing and SDGs

How the work of the Sustain alliance furthers the aims of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals are a helpful way to organise action to achieve the safe and dignified living space described by Planetary Boundaries and Doughnut Economics.¹ The Goals have been agreed internationally by countries (including the UK), working together to achieve progress on social and environmental goals. Increasingly, governments, companies and civil society organisations are using these as a framework to prioritise their work, to measure progress and to collaborate to achieve shared aims.

As the United Nations explains “The Sustainable Development Goals are the blueprint to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. They address the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity, and peace and justice. The Goals interconnect and in order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve each Goal and target by 2030.”

We consider that Sustain’s work contributes to addressing at least 12 of the 17. Below, we give some examples from a snapshot taken in 2019 (our 20th anniversary year), noting that all of our work is usually relevant to more than one Sustainable Development Goal, and our work evolves over time, so our categorisation serves as an illustration. Click on the following SDG themes (listed in order of appearance, or grouped where linked), to find out more about Sustain’s work in action:

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We add a cautionary note: Whilst the Sustainable Development Goals are a helpful organising framework, they also fall short in some ways. Whilst the UK government is a signatory to the framework, there is no legal duty for those responsible for taking action to play their part, and we witness many policies and activities – by businesses, government and other public authorities – that result in sluggish progress or which can perversely undermine the goals. Hence, Sustain often advocates legal measures and systems for robust review, accountability and redress, to make sure that effective progress can be made and measured.

¹ Big Ideas that Change the (Food) World, a blog by Sustain chief executive Kath Dalmeny, 2019: https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/apr19_big_ideas_that_change_the_food_world/

No Poverty (SDG1); Zero Hunger (SDG2)



Sustain coordinates and/or participates in national programmes to tackle the root causes of food poverty and hunger.

All of the Sustain projects described below also work to improve health and well-being (SDG3) and to reduce inequalities (SDG10).

The following are those most directly relevant to tackling poverty (SDG1) and eliminating hunger (SDG2), where Sustain works on:

- **Food Power:** Sustain works with a large number and wide range of [local alliances](#) and networks to develop strategic responses to food poverty, and encouraging uptake of key schemes and policies that can reduce food poverty and hunger.
- **End Hunger UK:** Sustain is a member of the End Hunger UK campaign, which aims to tackle the root causes of food poverty, bringing together a wide range of local and national groups to call on the UK government to play its part in ending hunger in the UK. We also recognise that hunger occurs because people are living in poverty, so our food-focused work aims to strengthen calls for action to eradicate poverty.
- **Beyond the Food Bank:** Helping local authorities – [in London](#) and throughout [the UK](#) – to understand and implement the actions they can take to tackle food poverty and to help local residents improve their access to healthy and affordable food.
- **Right to Food:** Sustain is working in collaboration with legal and rights specialists to advocate legislation that secures a legally binding commitment for relevant authorities – at national and local level – to work together to play their part in tackling food poverty and ending hunger, providing the legal and accountability framework to help solutions flourish.

Good Health & Well-being (SDG3); Reduced Inequalities (SDG10)



Promoting public health is integral to Sustain's work, especially to reduce the inequalities in diet-related health experienced by people living on a low income.

All of the Sustain projects described for SDGs 1 and 2 (above) also work to improve health and well-being (SDG3) and to reduce inequalities (SDG10). In addition, directly relevant to good health and well-being (SDG3) and reduced inequalities (SDG10), Sustain works on the following:

- **Children's Food Campaign:** We champion the rights of children to have the best possible opportunities to eat well, learn about good food, develop food skills and live a healthy life. We champion parent power and government action to improve the food environment children grow up in.
- **Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics:** Sustain is a founding member of the Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics, with Compassion in World Farming and the Soil Association. It is an alliance of health, medical, civil society and animal welfare groups campaigning to stop the overuse of antibiotics in animal farming, to protect the efficacy of life-saving antibiotics for human medicine.
- **Sugar Smart:** Sustain is working with local authorities, local food groups and food outlets from schools, to hospitals, workplaces, universities and restaurants. We support local action to reduce the availability and promotion of sugary foods and drinks, and to promote healthier alternatives.
- **Better Hospital Food** and **Growing Health:** Over many years, Sustain has worked to improve food provided by NHS hospitals to their patients, staff and hospital visitors; and to improve advice given by health professionals to promote better food and healthier lifestyles, accessible to everyone.

Decent Work (SDG8)



Sustain works to promote decent work in food, farming and fishing. This includes good working conditions, fair pay, fair treatment in the supply chain and fair terms of trade.

If we want a world with No Poverty (SDG1) and to End Hunger (SDG2), then people need Decent Work (SDG8) so that they can afford to eat well. This includes the millions of farmers, fishers and producers who work in our food system, many of whom have low-paid and precarious jobs, and live in poverty. Sustain's work on this theme includes:

- [Roots to Work](#): Roots to Work is our online platform for people to advertise and find sustainable food jobs in the UK. Our goal is to connect good people with good food, whether on farms, in bakeries, at schools or around the table.
- [Sustainable Farming](#): As part of Sustain's campaign and policy activities seeking to achieve a sustainable farm system, we promote good jobs and livelihoods in food production and [Good Food Retail](#), supported by legislation and accountability for a fair supply chain.
- [Real Bread Campaign](#): We Champion and support small, local, independent Real Bread bakers, for example with our free [Real Bread Map](#), the book [Knead to Know](#), The Real Bread [Loaf Mark](#), the [No Loaf Lost](#) surplus reduction project, annual events including [Real Bread Week](#) and [Sourdough September](#), and ongoing media work.
- [Food Co-ops](#): We help people to connect with farmers and buy their food cooperatively, ensuring that consumers get high quality and affordable food, and food producers get a better deal.
- Sustain promotes the [real Living Wage](#) in our [Beyond the Food Bank](#) activities, encouraging local authorities to pay the Living Wage and encourage suppliers to do so too. We present decent incomes as a key part of a fairer and more sustainable approach.
- Sustain and the landlord for our offices are both accredited [Living Wage Employers](#) and in 2018 Sustain adopted a [Pay Ratio policy](#) to keep staff pay differences within sensible limits and to help promote fair pay in the wider food sector.

Sustainable Cities and Communities (SDG11)



Sustain supports local and regional action, at community and city level, to improve the healthiness and sustainability of food.

One of the key ways in which Sustain works to improve the supply and consumption of healthy and sustainably produced food is to support and catalyse local communities to take action. Food is a motivating, engaging and creative subject with which to do so. Some of Sustain's work in this respect includes:

- [Sustainable Food Cities](#): Working with the Soil Association and Food Matters, we work with food partnerships in towns and cities throughout the UK, helping local authorities and citizen groups to improve the healthiness and sustainability of their food supply, community gardens, food enterprises and thriving community connections. Via this and other networks, Sustain has special responsibility for coordinating national campaigns and grassroots action, including:
- [Beyond the Food Bank](#): Helping local authorities – [in London](#) and [the UK](#) – to understand and implement the actions they can take to tackle food poverty and to help local residents improve their access to healthy and affordable food.
- [The Big Dig](#): We hold national events across the UK that aim to raise the profile of community gardens and encourage thousands more people to take part.

- [Good Food Planning](#): Sustain’s online toolkit designed to help community organisations use the planning system to support community food growing, also with advice on diverse and sustainable food retail; action on food waste; and better jobs in the food and farming sector through local and regional distribution infrastructure.
- [Sugar Smart](#) (described under SDG3, Good Health and Well-being, above)
- [Sustainable Fish Cities](#) (described under SDG14, Life Below Water, below)
- [London Food Link](#): This is the umbrella for Sustain initiatives in London, working to promote food system change. We help to influence local government policy, provide hands-on food growing training, have run training for public sector caterers and businesses, create guidance for independent eateries and food producers, run public awareness campaigns, and join the dots between people around specific food issues. Some of our recent activities include:
 - [Capital Growth](#): Capital Growth is London's largest food growing network, with over 2,000 gardens throughout the city. The network is free to join, and we offer in-kind support to people who grow their own food in London, including providing access to discounted training, networking events, support with growing to sell and discounts on equipment.
 - [Good Food for London](#): In our annual London borough league table and series of good food maps, we shine a light on which boroughs and local councils are leading the way in creating a better food future for all Londoners, through action on healthy, sustainable and ethically produced food.
 - [Good Food Retail](#): We are supporting London councils to improve access to good food retail that provides healthier and more sustainable food, trade fair and reduce environmental impact.
 - [The Jellied Eel](#): The magazine of London Food Link, distributed free of charge through over 100 ethical eateries and stockists and read by 30,000 people. It promotes enterprises, campaigns and initiatives aiming to improve the healthiness, diversity and environmental impact of London’s food.
 - [London Food Poverty Campaign](#): Our programme of work focusing on specific issues within the Beyond the Food Bank London food poverty profile report, working with a range of partners. This includes promoting Healthy Start, championing school holiday food provision, highlighting good practice in meals on wheels provision and supporting areas to develop food poverty action plans.
 - [Urban Food Awards](#): Celebrating the people, enterprises, initiatives and organisations bringing good food to London’s table.
 - [Food Power](#): Sustain works with a large number and wide range of [local alliances](#) and networks to develop strategic responses to food poverty, and encouraging uptake of key schemes and policies that can reduce food poverty and hunger (also relevant to No Poverty (SDG1) and Zero Hunger (SDG2), above).

Responsible Production and Consumption (SDG12)



All of Sustain’s work is based on the understanding that health and sustainability need to be addressed in both the production and consumption of our food.

The policies and practices we promote are based on this joined-up approach, seeking to create virtuous circles of responsible production and consumption.

Our most notable work in this respect includes:

- Sustain’s work on increasing consumption of sustainably produced food in the public sector, including our work on [Government Buying Standards](#), the [School Food Standards](#) the [Campaign for Better Hospital Food](#).
- [Sustainable Farming](#), which links up policy and practice to encourage sustainable production of food with fair terms of trade and payments, to ensure that farmers can make a decent living and consumers receive healthy and affordable food.

- Sustain is a co-founder of the [Eating Better Alliance](#), seeking to work with consumers, businesses and government to promote less and better meat and dairy – with action on both increasing production and achieving sustainable consumption.
- [Sustainable Fish Cities](#), working with very large foodservice companies to change their fish buying to purchase only verifiably sustainable fish, from fisheries that are well managed and protect precious marine ecosystems.
- Sustain’s support over many years for organic food and farming, including policy activities, calls for legislation and farm payments promoting an [agro-ecological](#) approach, and previously helping to facilitate a large-scale organic promotional campaign.

Links for all of the above work are also provided under other themes.

Climate Action (SDG13)



Sustain supports action to reduce the gigantic greenhouse gas emissions and highly damaging land-use change associated with what we eat and how it is produced, to help avert catastrophic climate change and to restore nature.

During 2019, the Sustain alliance is working to refresh our collective thinking and ambition on how to drastically reduce the greenhouse gas emissions from our food system that are contributing to dangerous climate change. In particular, we are interested in catalysing large-scale and effective action to achieve:

- Sustainable diets, including less but better meat and dairy
- Zero food waste
- Greatly reduced nitrogen fertiliser use
- Sustainable soil and land use
- Low carbon food supply chains

We have chosen these priority themes because there is good evidence of both the problems and the solutions, and already vocal champions of large-scale methods for mitigation that could be amplified by bringing a powerful alliance approach to bear.

Sustain is also one of the founding members of the [Eating Better Alliance](#), an independent coalition of over 50 organisations accelerating action for less and better meat and dairy for health, environment, animal welfare and social justice. We aim to inspire and equip people, businesses and government, so that we can all eat better.

Life Below the Water (SDG14)



Sustain works to promote sustainable fishing and marine conservation in policy and practice. As well as sustainable production, we also promote responsible purchasing and consumption (SDG12) – by businesses and citizens, to provide a growing and reliable market outlet to incentivise sustainable fishers and better methods of production.

[Sustainable Fish Cities](#): Sustain works with the UK’s leading marine conservation groups to persuade very large foodservice companies to buy, serve and promote only verifiably sustainable fish. We work with towns, cities, foodservice company clients and environmental groups to create a large-scale demand for sustainable fish, then help foodservice companies to adopt policies and practices to meet this demand.

[Sustainable fisheries policy](#): Sustain undertakes policy and advocacy work to promote a range of measures that must be implemented urgently to ensure that we conserve and restore precious fish stocks and marine ecosystems. This includes marine protected areas, scientific assessment of stocks and conservation status, an accelerated shift to sustainable fishing methods, and a reliable market for those fishers who are managing stocks and ecosystems sustainably.

Life on Land (SDG15) and Clean Water (SDG6)



Sustain works to promote sustainable farming and land use in policy and practice. As well as sustainable production, we also promote responsible purchasing and consumption (SDG12) – by businesses and citizens, to provide a growing and reliable market outlet to incentivise sustainable farmers and better methods of production.

[Sustainable Farming](#) – Sustain’s campaign and policy activities seek to achieve a sustainable farm system that provides healthy food grown to high standards of animal welfare and environmental protection (including clean water). We promote good jobs and livelihoods in food production, supported by a fair supply chain, and farming and land management that play their part in restoring nature and biodiversity and reducing the greenhouse gas emissions that cause dangerous climate change.

Partnerships for the Goals (SDG17)



As an alliance, partnerships and collaboration are woven into the fabric of everything that Sustain does. [Membership](#) of the national alliance is open to national organisations that do not distribute profits to private shareholders and which operate in the public or their members’ interest. The organisations must be wholly or partly interested in food or farming issues and support the general aims and work of the alliance.

Sustain also works with specialist sister alliances working on food, farming and fishing policy; fellow organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland; the Obesity Health Alliance; the End Hunger UK alliance; over 60 UK towns and cities and their food partnerships; the London Food Board; 2,700+ community gardens in London involving over 150,000 people; and we communicate regularly with over 50,000 people and tens of thousands more via social media.

Further, Sustain has plenty of opportunities for individuals, local groups, institutions and pioneering enterprises to get involved – usually as part of a thematic working party that advises Sustain campaigns and policy activities and helps people work together to take action.

Of note, Sustain does not take funding from the food, farming or fishing industries, to ensure that our work remains independent. Our approach embodies our values and is set out in Sustain’s [ethical funding policy](#).

Read more about Sustain’s work at www.sustainweb.org and follow us on social media [@UKSustain](#)

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