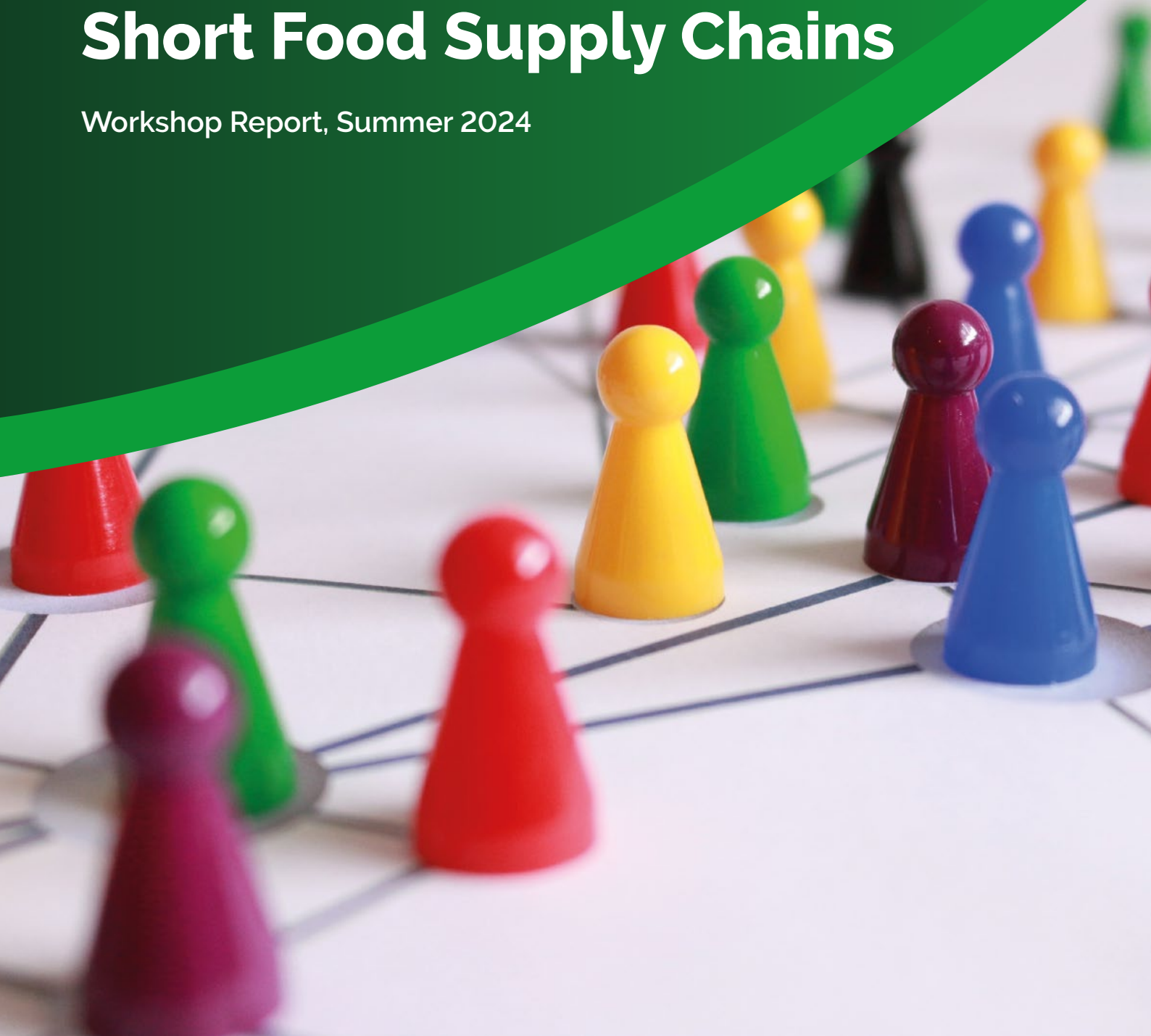


Developing the infrastructure for Short Food Supply Chains

Workshop Report, Summer 2024



Non-technical abstract

This is a write-up of a workshop held at the University of Warwick on 20 February 2024 focussed on developing practical strategies to develop the infrastructure for Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs). The workshop was attended by people from a range of different parts of the food sector, including organisations working directly in and with SFSCs, academics and third sector and public officials. The report summarises the rationale and potential benefits of SFSCs, before outlining an approach to thinking about infrastructure for SFSCs under six headings: human, social, legal, financial, digital, and physical. We discuss workshop participants' views on both the barriers and opportunities for developing the infrastructure under each heading and conclude by suggesting key actions different stakeholders could take to develop infrastructure to support SFSCs, and how the SFSC community might work towards these goals.

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Introduction and background

This is a summary of a workshop that took place on 20 February 2024 at the University of Warwick.

The workshop aimed to:

- Share the latest research and thinking on SFSCs.
- Discuss problems and opportunities for strengthening infrastructure to support SFSCs over forthcoming years.
- Develop pathways and pragmatic strategies to realise these opportunities, by thinking about which stakeholders to influence, how, and in what ways.
- Consider how the SFSC community should work together to achieve these aims.



The NICRE team which organised the workshop.

What are Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs)?

In SFSCs, food products move directly from producers to consumers with minimal intermediaries (distributors, wholesalers, and retailers). Key features of SFSCs include:

- Direct / stronger connections between farmers / food producers and consumers.
- Local and regional focus: SFSCs often emphasise local or regional needs and may mean that food is consumed nearer to where it is produced (although not always).
- Deploying a diverse range of marketing channels such as farmers' markets, local food hubs, on-farm and independent retail sales, and direct online sales.
- Associated with creating a 'good food' economy, emphasising values and goals like fairness, reducing environmental harm, and strengthening communities.

Figure 1 provides a more detailed presentation of the characteristics of SFSCs, based on the perspectives of workshop participants.

What are the potential benefits of SFSCs?

In general, SFSCs are seen as a way to promote sustainable and resilient food systems based on ecologically and socially responsible agricultural methods, with a now established and evolving trajectory¹. More specifically, key benefits of SFSCs mentioned in the literature include: Improved quality and freshness: With fewer steps in the supply chain, there is a potential for better food quality, freshness, and nutritional value. Moreover, producers in SFSCs tend to emphasise high quality, minimally processed, healthier and seasonal products: all of which helps to improve the quality and healthiness of people's diets. SFSCs may also provide producers with greater flexibility to respond to consumer preferences for specialty products, catering to local tastes and preferences.

¹ For further discussion of the benefits of SFSCs see, for example, Chiffolleau, Y., & Dourian, T. (2020), Marsden et al., 2000, 2002; Renting et al., 2003; Ilbery and Maye, 2005; Kirwan et al., 2013; Kneafsey et al., 2013; EIP-Agri Focus Group on Innovative SFSC Management, 2015; Maye et al., 2021; Strength2Food, 2020; Sustain and RSPB, 2021; Krzywoszynska et al., 2022; Lawes-Johnson and Woodward, 2022; Morley, 2023.

Supporting local food economies and producers: For consumers, fewer intermediaries can mean a more efficient food system with potential for improved value for money, and, in some cases, even reduced prices. Moreover, in SFSCs a larger share of revenue goes to local producers / businesses rather than national / multinational companies, so they represent a redistribution of economic activities and profits. Knock-on effects include better prospects for local food businesses and the possibility of better remuneration and job security for people working in food production.

SFSCs also give producers greater control over what food they produce, where and how they sell it, which represents a further power shift towards local producers that increases incomes, improves fairness, and reduces risk / vulnerability. It might also make food production jobs more rewarding and encourage people to make their livelihoods in the sector.

Community building: By connecting producers and consumers, and through other collaborations within and between communities (including both urban and rural areas), SFSCs can help create a stronger 'sense of place,' community and mutual support.

Transparency, information, and education: SFSCs help increase consumer awareness of farming and distribution practices, and of issues such as sustainability and seasonality (Benos et al. 2022). This improves trust in the food system and helps people to make choices that benefit themselves and the environment.

Food security and food system resilience:

Food security remains a key priority and essential requirement of any food system (see Defra 2021; Dimpleby 2021). Greater diversity and plurality of actors in the food industry, with more people attracted to working in it, will strengthen it and make it more resilient to shocks, enabling, for instance, improved coping capacity, flexibility, and rapidity as system properties. This was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic when SFSCs adapted quickly and filled gaps in food distribution (see Jones et al., 2022; Krzywoszynska et al., 2022; Black et al., 2024).

Potential for reduced environmental impacts:

Smaller-scale producers using SFSCs typically have a stronger focus on environmental regeneration, lowering carbon footprints, and sustainability. As one of our workshop participants remarked:

“Ultimately this is about making food that is better for me, my family and the ecosystem as accessible and affordable as a bag of crisps and a bottle of coke.”

However, inefficiencies in logistics and small volumes often present challenges for ensuring environmental sustainability, hence the environmental benefits of SFSCs are typically mixed (Majewski et al., 2020).

WHAT IS A SHORT FOOD SUPPLY CHAIN?



Illustration: Amanda Steer

Figure 1: Attributes of SFSCs discussed in the stakeholder interviews and workshop.

Barriers to SFSCs

There are several barriers faced in developing and growing SFSCs and, while this is not the place to cover these in depth, it is worth summarising them as a platform for the recommended actions that follow. Key barriers are:

- Economies of scale mean that products from SFSCs are often more expensive for consumers.
- Consumer awareness of SFSCs is low, and they are generally harder and less convenient to access than mainstream options.
- Some farmers and food producers remain orientated to existing ways of operating. There are several factors behind this, including existing business models, contractual agreements, perceptions of risk, lack of skills needed to engage / market with consumers and a degree of attitudinal inertia. However, around a third of farmers are interested in increasing their involvement in direct / local sales (NICRE, 2024).
- An image problem, with SFSCs and local food initiatives (wrongly) associated and represented as purely the domain of health-conscious, green-ish, middle-class consumers.
- Lack of access to finance for small producers to invest and 'scale up'.
- Lack of appropriate skills or knowledge, with a need for technical advice / help with marketing communications and advertising (NICRE, 2024).
- Lack of appropriate infrastructure (NICRE, 2024).
- Regulatory burdens that fall hardest on micro and small-scale producers.

The importance of infrastructure

What emerges from the summary of opportunities and barriers above, drawn from the previous literature, stakeholder interviews and reflections during the workshop, is a strong, albeit evolving, vision for SFSCs and the local food sector in terms of building a better, more resilient food system and local economy.

However, there is also a persistent recognition that to effectively create a more diverse food economy, individual actions alone will not suffice, particularly to overcome barriers to scaling up and collaborative practice among producers, as well as to broaden access and availability to consumer communities. In this regard, infrastructure is a critical intervention to support SFSCs from production through to consumption, both in terms of supporting local food economies to develop, compete and grow markets alongside established 'mainstream' supply chains (i.e. functional capacity for SFSCs) and as a learning and social resource that promotes and fosters local food systems, business models and social community values (i.e. normative capacity for SFSCs).

This is reflected in the vision statement co-designed with local food stakeholders in a previous exercise for the sector (see Krzywoszynska et al., 2022) and excellent work by organisations such as Sustain, both as a means to strengthen local food cultures (Lawes-Johnson and Woodward, 2022) and as a mechanism to unlock pathways for farmer-focused supply chains and climate resilient agro-ecological food systems (Woodward and Hird, 2021; see also Sustain and RSPB, 2021).

In this report, we build on deliberative work with workshop participants, to extend thinking about what 'infrastructure' for SFSCs looks like, particularly forms of social and human infrastructure alongside more tangible, material forms.

Six different types of infrastructure

When considering 'infrastructure' there is a tendency to focus on what we might describe as 'harder' or more physical material aspects such as abattoirs or distribution centres (see Franks and Peden's (2021) excellent work on small abattoirs and livestock supply chains, for example), but a broader definition is helpful as 'softer' types of infrastructure are significant for establishing and growing SFSCs. Drawing on Krzywoszynska et al. (2022), and combined with insights from our interviewees, we propose the following typology, which Figure 2 also illustrates:

- **Human:** knowledge, skills, and training.
- **Social:** networks, horizontal co-operation, ethics / solidarity, social bonds / connectivity; forms of self-organisation and mutualism.
- **Legal:** contracts and agreements to enable fair routes to markets for producers, fair relations, and equitable distribution of surplus; government and public sector actions to support the local food sector, planning permission and operating permits, regulation in abattoirs, certification.
- **Financial:** access to different kinds of finance such as private / social investment.
- **Digital:** online food shopping and online platforms (virtual sales and open-source software); includes also data, data sharing and transparency.
- **Physical:** essential material services needed for SFSCs to function, including access to abattoirs, pack houses, hubs, etc.



Illustration: Amanda Steer

Figure 2: The types of infrastructure required for SFSCs.

Research design and methodology

The workshop took place on 20 February 2024 at the University of Warwick. 25 people attended from a range of backgrounds, all of whom were actively involved in developing SFSCs. They included academics, think tanks, local government organisations and practitioners involved directly in SFSC businesses.

The first part of the day focussed on evidence and knowledge exchange with presentations and discussion of recent research related to SFSCs. The presentations were:

- Infrastructure needs for SFSCs: evidence from agri-food practitioner interviews - Damian Maye & Barbara Tocco, NICRE
- SFSCs and marketing channels: evidence from State of Rural Enterprise Farm Business Survey 2023 - Damian Maye, NICRE
- Socio-technical infrastructures for public food procurement through SFSCs - Moya Kneafsey, Coventry University
- Developing a local food growth plan: emerging themes - Peter Samsom, Landworkers' Alliance

In the second part of the day, participants were invited to discuss each type of infrastructure to explore the key barriers for developing the infrastructure typology and associated needs, as well as opportunities to overcome them, focussing on the next three to five years.

We then asked participants to vote on what they felt were the most promising opportunities and, in the final session of the day, participants considered what practical actions could move these opportunities forward. To help with this, we asked people to consider:

- Stakeholders / target groups. Which groups of people / institutions do we most need to influence to achieve this change?

- Outcomes. For each stakeholder, how specifically do we want them to change?
- Activities. How can the SFSC community seek to influence or encourage these changes?

Throughout the process, we had in mind the idea of building a 'theory of change' for developing SFSC infrastructure, which is a widely used approach for planning advocacy activities and other programmes². The two key ingredients of a theory of change are:

- Clarity about the change we aim to see in the world (which is reflected in the above section on the potential benefits of SFSCs).
- Clarity about how we will work to achieve this change. Here our key premise is that developing the different types of the infrastructure for SFSCs is critical to growth, and the summary of stakeholders, outcomes and activities is our emergent plan (summarised in our 'call to action' at the end of the report).

A summary of this theory of change is shown on the following page:

² For more information about the theory of change approach see <https://www.thinknpc.org/resource-hub/ten-steps/>

A summary theory of change for developing the Short Food Supply Chain infrastructure

Call to action: Summary of stakeholders and changes we want to see

Food producers:

Develop new understanding / mindsets/ways of doing things
Willingness / confidence to try new ideas
Gain skills needed to work successfully in SFSCs

General public:

Reflect on food sources and question existing systems
Spend more on local food
Talk to local farmers and producers
Volunteer with SFSC projects

Schools / education system:

Educate young people about food and where it comes from
Give children different food experiences
Purchase from SFSCs

The SFSC community:

Look for promising opportunities. Be ambitious
Adopt and refine existing successful models
Increased collaboration, cooperation and peer support

National Government:

See SFSCs as a potential contributor to a range of different policy goals
Reform subsidies, taxation, regulations and legal frameworks
Funding for regional / cooperative infrastructure

Local authorities:

Ensure local plans cover food and signal support for SFSCs
Procurement and other decisions that support SFSCs

Financial institutions / Charitable foundations /social investors:

See the value of SFSCs, and how investing in them might make a difference
Greater flexibility around eligibility criteria and financial products that support smaller producers
Expand of finance schemes such as mutual banking and credit unions

Software developers:

More developers aware of and working on SFSC projects
Agree shared data standards, interoperability
Working collaboratively / open source

Food producers / infrastructure owners:

Shared understanding of what infrastructure is available, spare capacity, gaps
Willingness to invest jointly / share, co-own and co-run

Six types of SFSC infrastructure

Human: knowledge, skills and training

Social: networks, co-operation, forms of self-organisation and mutualism

Legal: contracts, planning permission, operation permits, regulation, certification, government and public sector support

Financial: access to different kinds of finance such as private / social investment

Digital: online food shopping and platforms, data sharing and transparency

Physical: essential material services needed for SFSCs to function, (eg abattoirs, pack houses, hubs)

Potential benefits of SFSCs

Improved quality and freshness

Supporting local food economies and producers

Community building

Transparency, information and education

Food security and food system resilience

Potential for reduced environmental impacts

Infrastructure development leads to expansion of SFSCs

Findings from the workshop

This section summarises the discussions relating to each type of infrastructure. Some discussions progressed further than others and more work is needed to refine these ideas, hopefully this summary represents a platform for further discussion and action.

1 Human infrastructure

Human infrastructure refers to people's knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes. During the workshop there was a strong feeling that investment in human infrastructure is crucial because all other types of infrastructure will ultimately follow from skilled and motivated people involved in SFSCs.

We considered two key aspects of human infrastructure:

- Barriers and opportunities for practitioners involved in food production and distribution.³
- Awareness and attitudes across society and people's relationships with food.

Barriers / opportunities for people involved in food production and distribution

A key barrier is the **prevailing culture and incentives in the food industry** which has been dominated by the 'agri business' or 'agri chemical' model for decades, and is 'taken as given' by institutions across society including central Government. We also discussed how farmers and food producers are often more motivated by the growing / producing side of the business and less by selling and distribution, which supports the division of labour in the current system. Amongst some within the farming community, there is a degree of conservatism and reluctance to change due in part to strong feelings of tradition and self-reliance. To engage successfully in SFSCs, producers need to overcome this reluctance: to let go of practices they have relied on, to see the potential of doing things differently and be prepared to adjust their businesses accordingly.

However, there is also an opportunity here. It is becoming clear that parts of the food economy are not working well: that many producers are struggling financially and concerned about the future. There is an **increasing appetite for new ideas and approaches** that accords with SFSCs, as also evidenced in NICRE (2024). One way to capitalise on this is through **peer approaches** where those already involved in SFSCs share experiences, help others identify opportunities and coach people to overcome barriers, risks, and concerns.

To realise opportunities, food producers will also need a **wider range of skills** to move into SFSCs, including, for example, marketing, digital and business planning. A related challenge is attracting skilled people to work in SFSCs and retaining them.

To overcome skills barriers requires **training and professional development**. There needs to be a variety of training courses and development opportunities for example:

- Apprenticeship schemes for people interested in the SFSC sector.
- Shorter / practical courses for those already in the food industry.
- Conversion courses / support for farmers interested in moving into agroecological transition (current examples include those provided by Duchy college, Devon border).
- Entrepreneurship programmes – for example Hartpury College in Gloucestershire.
- Peer learning programmes where those with experience in traditional, mixed, regenerative methods train others.

³ This is focused mostly on farmers and food producers. Recommendations related to those running community good food schemes are covered below in the section on social infrastructure.

- A final idea put forward by workshop participants was a '**startup studio**' that would help incubate and accelerate SFSC projects through access to skills / capacity building / peer support and start-up finance.

Cross-cutting observations across these ideas were:

- The importance of building on existing assets and skills and to capitalise on what people know and do already.
- The value of building skills around co-operation and co-design (to support collaboration as discussed in section 2).
- That skills development is best achieved in situ – i.e. on the farm or in the community itself rather than in the classroom.

A different way to help build and retain the SFSC workforce will be to understand and communicate the different career opportunities available in the SFSC sector such as information about career pathways, training opportunities and case studies of people and organisations in the sector.

Changing attitudes

Realising the potential for SFSCs requires **attitudinal change in the food production and distribution sectors** towards new mindsets and ways of doing things. We identified several strong arguments that might encourage food producers to invest in SFSCs:

- The potential for increased independence and autonomy outside of asymmetric relationships with supermarkets.
- Reduced risk through having several customers rather than relying on one or two key relationships.
- Reclaiming market share and revenue from supermarkets.
- Increased sense of fulfilment through developing and applying their skills in new ways and making the best use of their resources.
- Pride in how their produce is farmed and sold. The feeling of doing the right thing for communities and the environment.
- Job satisfaction through greater agency and opportunities to be creative / entrepreneurial.

Attitudes within society more generally and people's relationship with food.

A key barrier to further engagement in SFSCs is low public awareness of what they are, and the potential benefits, as well as perceptions that local food is expensive and inconvenient, reflecting also the earlier barrier of associating SFSCs with a 'middle-class' niche. We also noted how little awareness there is of what is already available, beyond farm shops and farmers' markets. Some participants saw this as part of a broader problem with the way people are disconnected from food sources and from nature, and how food is commodified.

In contrast, the following are the kinds of attitudes and behaviours participants wished to encourage:

- Thinking more about food sources and questioning existing system models.
- Move away from supermarkets: getting food from different places and spending more on local food.
- Discussing food with others and spreading the word.
- Talking to local farmers and producers.

To achieve these outcomes workshop participants would like to see the SFSC community **actively campaign and make the case for SFSCs** through the dual approach of:

- Presenting evidence that challenges the mainstream / supermarket system of provision.
- Persuading people to appreciate the value of food and demonstrating the benefits of local food systems. People need to see that there is something better to switch to and how to do it. Without this positive side of the argument, criticism of current shopping behaviours is just as likely to frustrate or desensitise people.

Recognising that different arguments will motivate different people; participants also identified different ways to make the case for SFSCs.

3 This is focused mostly on farmers and food producers. Recommendations related to those running community good food schemes are covered below in the section on social infrastructure.

Type of motivation	Possible arguments / appeals
Environmental	Talk about and normalise local food but without preaching and find new ways to talk about food choices.
'Fairness to farmers'	Appeal to a sense of fairness, support for British farmers, sovereignty, and tradition.
Flavour and quality (foodie)	Show how SFSCs deliver quality, innovation, novelty. Emphasise the benefits of seasonal eating, different meat cuts, recipes etc. Accessing local food as a way to stay ahead of the game.
Community	Encourage people to see that they can support their communities by buying and supporting local food projects. Connect neighbours with similar needs and interests via food, for example cooking skills, growing projects.
Health	Appeal to those concerned with nutrition and health. Juxtapose SFSCs with ultra-processed food.
Political	Emphasise the disruptive potential of SFSCs: how they challenge the status quo and transfer ownership and control from big businesses to communities. Demonstrate the potential of SFSCs for increased fairness, equity, and sustainability across society.

For reaching a broad cross section of consumers, a key point is to show how SFSCs can deliver on different things that people care about, and also to show people how these different drivers and goals are linked.

What actions could we take to persuade people?

Workshop participants discussed different approaches for communicating the message, including:

- A national campaign for local food, focussing on messages like those described above and celebrating successful SFSCs so that people can see that good things are happening and how to get involved. This would need a substantial investment from a funder and an organisation to lead.
- More local / regional campaigns.
- Getting celebrities / influencers to talk more about SFSCs.
- Helping people to share and influence one another, possibly through social media.
- Offering people experiences of SFSCs and opportunities to engage with local producers. For example, showcasing producers and food networks, community food projects, and encouraging farms / producers to engage with communities and community building.

- Opportunities for people to take part in research on local food systems or co-designing food projects.

Influencing the education system

Thinking longer term, workshop participants noted the importance of schools and the school curriculum in furthering this agenda. Specifically:

- Educating young people about food: its importance to society, where it comes from, how the food industry currently works and how it might be made better. Influencing young people to be 'food citizens'.
- Schools and educational institutions purchasing food from SFSCs themselves (i.e., greater support and active participation in locally-sourced public procurement).
- Giving children different food experiences such as organic and locally-sourced food, helping to expand horizons and normalising different diets and choices.
- Opportunities to engage with the food system, such as farm visits.
- Providing pathways and relevant training for possible careers in SFSCs.

2 Social infrastructure

Social infrastructure refers to networks, collaborations and any form of self-organisation and mutualism that supports SFSCs, potentially underpinned by shared goals, ethics, solidarity, and social bonds (either formal or informal).

More specifically, it can cover initiatives such as:

- Food networks / membership organisations which aim to encourage co-operation and inclusion – sharing support, resources, physical infrastructure, and solutions to funding.
- Clustering and collaborations.
- Place-based approaches, with a shared vision and strategic multi-actor partnerships.
- Shared incubators – spreading business costs and risks to increase scale.

A general point to make before moving into the detail of the discussion is that many of the workshop conversations about different types of infrastructure naturally orientated towards discussions around social infrastructure, in particular the need for more and better collaboration. This may be because this is where we see the most interesting ideas emerging, and / or because it is seen as a route to improving other types of infrastructure, but it underscores soft infrastructure roles, given a tendency to focus on material forms.

In terms of the barriers to the growth of the social infrastructure we identified the following:

- The need for motivated, passionate, skilled people with time and resources to invest in SFSCs.
- Risks associated with dependence on volunteers and voluntary labour that participants argued is unreliable, unsustainable, and ultimately unfair. Furthermore, such labour relations maintain SFSCs as the preserve of people with time and money on their hands.
- The challenge of engaging with citizens beyond the 'usual suspects'.
- Communities which lack a history of collaboration or existing networks to build on.
- The challenge of connecting and collaborating across disparate projects, geographies, and priorities.
- Little sense in public discourse of the 'right to food' having the same significance as the 'right to health'. A narrative of this scale would empower local communities and endure longer than short-term government changes.

Tried and tested models

In response to these challenges, a range of different social enterprises and related models have been tested across the country, including community-supported agriculture schemes, food partnerships, food co-operatives and the Incredible Edible movement. Participants felt that these models should be treated as successful, even proven, examples. Rather than invent new models, the priority, then, is to spread knowledge as to what works, which includes encouraging more people to take an active interest, ultimately galvanising communities to expand them further.

Community-based models

Many successful SFSCs illustrate the **power of thinking small**. Some of the most successful initiatives originate from the ground up, from communities themselves, and are focussed on relatively small geographies (food co-operatives were cited as a good example). These kinds of community-based schemes are robust because they build on genuine need, support, and enthusiasm. They can also work without much external funding and tend not to overreach or grow too quickly. The flip side of operating at this scale is that it limits the potential for achieving more substantial change beyond the local scale. However, the argument is that increased awareness of these ideas / models will ultimately achieve a tipping point that encourages more people and communities to engage.

This is not to say that larger initiatives are not also desirable. In particular, participants noted great potential in collaborative initiatives such as the Good Food Loop in Devon, which is a not-for-profit wholesaler that shares costs and resources across producers and communities.

Creating an enabling environment for social infrastructure

An important opportunity or role for larger organisations and funders in this context is to help create an **enabling environment** in which local food schemes and SFSCs can connect and prosper. This has two main elements:

- Provide funding, resources, and spaces for communities to come together and work in.
- Support, encouragement, training, and coaching.

However, an important consideration for larger organisations is to **avoid constraining or controlling local SFSC activities**. Ownership and control must remain at the local, grass-roots level and even well-intentioned attempts to curate the direction of travel can have the unintended effect of disenfranchising or discouraging local people. Larger organisations have to remember that communities can be resourceful if allowed to be, and while it helps to enable or convene communities, they also need to be willing to take a step back.

The importance of sector leadership was also discussed, and workshop participants felt that **leadership programmes** would be valuable, as well as helping to identify capacity building and support 'community champions' with the potential to start and lead initiatives. A good example of this in action was the Leader Programme in Scotland⁴ which provided light touch support, was built on trust and was effective in supporting people while ensuring they stayed in the lead. However, the focus on leadership comes with the important proviso that it should not be promoted at the expense of general collaboration and engagement with local communities. Participants cautioned for the need to be mindful of the risk that the agenda becomes associated with high profile individuals / organisations, which is arguably less sustainable than a broader, lower profile movement.

Finally, a specific opportunity discussed related to closer working with organisations responsible for running food banks. While the growth in food banks is indicative of social and economic problems, they are also an example of local food infrastructure development. Social enterprises associated with SFSCs, such as food co-operatives, can empower communities and contribute to other goals. Hence the idea is that some of the energy and resources currently invested into food banks could usefully be aligned with SFSCs. An example of this in action is the Felix Project⁵, a food redistribution charity in London, that focuses on more sustainable forms of food aid, such as local pantries and co-ops.

Collaboration

Another important opportunity workshop participants returned to often is **collaboration and enabling capacities to facilitate co-operation and peer support between different parts of the social infrastructure**. This, it was argued, would help in several ways:

- Through the spread of ideas, knowledge, and skills.
- Joining up activities and identifying new opportunities.
- Sharing resources, reducing duplication, and increasing efficiency.
- Agreeing shared goals and strategies and allocating resources accordingly.
- Providing mutual support, energy, and resilience.
- Encouraging people to be more ambitious for their communities.

Whilst, at the moment, both the farming industry and local food movement is fragmented, and practitioners are not always aware of what each other are doing, conditions are right for collaboration. While SFSCs are still a small part of the food industry there is lots of passion and potential for growth. Those involved generally want to work together, to feel part of something bigger and to grow the overall market, more than they want to compete to increase their own share. Opportunities for encouraging greater collaboration might include:

- Funding and ongoing support for networks and convening forums that provide people with opportunities to get involved (although recognising that maintaining local networks is labour intensive).
- Continued support for organisations like Sustain which bring people together.
- Appreciating the importance of building trust as the basis for genuine collaboration and sharing risk, with SFSC proximity and transparency key factors to enable this.
- The need for a shared vision and messages that are inspiring, tangible and have a clear rationale – so that collaboration has a clear purpose and is not just an end in itself.
- Similarly, the goal of nurturing a collective mindset and sense of community.
- Establishing stronger external drivers or incentives towards collaboration such as public payments.

⁴ <https://www.ruralnetwork.scot/funding/leader> ⁵ <https://thefelixproject.org/>

3 Legal infrastructure

Legal infrastructure refers to regulations, contracts, and agreements such as planning permissions, certifications, health and safety requirements, etc. For example, it might cover:

- Navigating / complying with regulations, e.g. legal entities, planning permissions / operating permits, contractual / tenancy agreements, environmental health, and various food certifications.
- Legal infrastructure is particularly significant for public sector food procurement (see separate discussion below).
- National and local public policies, subsidies, and procedures and laws regarding taxation.

Discussions in our workshop tended to focus on wider issues around public policy rather than specific or more detailed aspects of regulation.

- Workshop participants argued that policy makers at all levels need to see food holistically and as a potential contributor to a range of different policy goals, of which two were highlighted in particular:
- The potential role of food and SFSCs as a way to build communities and social capital. Community initiatives associated with SFSCs can be a vehicle for this as they connect people and offer ways to work purposefully together. Moreover, the focus on food is powerful as people always welcome opportunities to harvest, distribute, prepare, cook, and eat together.
- Food supply chains as contributors to regional economic development and the levelling up agenda.

At the national level participants wanted to see movement towards a cross-cutting national food approach—building on, for example, Scotland's vision for a Good Food Nation, and their National Good Food Nation Plan. This would signal endorsement of SFSCs and include practical measures such as:

- Reforms of regulations and legal frameworks to overcome barriers that producers face in transitioning to SFSCs or new entry into the market.

- Greater support and better legal frameworks for smaller farms, farmer-focused supply chains and agroecological farming systems. For example, longer-term tenancy agreements and schemes to provide basic incomes for farmers.
- Government funding for the regional / co-operative infrastructure to help create the enabling environment for SFSCs.
- Developing new ownership models such as guardianship and stewardship models for finance.
- Planning legislation that requires developers to build physical infrastructure to support SFSCs.

Workshop participants spent time discussing how local authorities could contribute to SFSCs, while recognising that their financial situation is a barrier. Suggestions included:

- Increased awareness and support for local food economies, collaborations and SFSCs.
- Ensuring that all local plans / strategies (e.g. climate, biodiversity, health, economy, and community well-being) include goals for food production and distribution, and signal support for SFSCs.
- Make procurement and other decisions that support SFSCs and encourage / incentivise people to engage in SFSCs.
- Allocate resources to SFSCs and local food economies. For example, funding for infrastructure organisations to sustain continuity and reliability of local food economies.
- Make buildings and other resources available for people running SFSCs.
- Continue to delegate leadership and control to local communities, and use food as a way to engage with communities and bring them together.

Public procurement and Dynamic Food Procurement

Encouraging the public sector to procure more food from SFSCs is an important route for growing the scale and influence of SFSCs.

While this is to some extent a cross-cutting issue – as all aspects of infrastructure have a bearing on the goal of increasing the role of SFSCs in procurement – we have opted to discuss it within this section on legal infrastructure because technical / legal aspects are crucial (designing the right policies, frameworks and systems). However, this is not to downplay the significance of other factors such as changing procurement cultures, staff training, collaboration, and visioning. Indeed, in the workshop we heard a case study from Copenhagen⁶ which emphasised how these aspects of infrastructure were just as crucial in helping the city to move towards increased purchasing of organic food and food from SFSCs (see Coach Project 2023).

The potential significance of public procurement is apparent when considering that in the latest estimate from 2014, around £2.4bn is spent each year in the UK provisioning food for public sector plates (schools, prisons, hospitals, etc.), which is over 5% of total UK food service turnover (see Morley (2023) and Love British Food (2024)). However, a survey conducted by Morley (2023) found only about 30% of food spend was on products which originated locally, and a third of supplier organisations could not even estimate how much was sourced nearby.

Capacity to supply is a significant barrier preventing procurement from small and/or local producers, given the quantity of food required by public sector organisations, and the survey found that seasonal vegetables are the most commonly reported product which suppliers were unable to source regionally.

Other products perform better – nearly half of respondents already sourced dairy regionally, for instance. The research concluded that we need to think beyond strict regionalism, which in practical terms means incorporating spatially extended SFSCs because primary production is so varied across the UK – for example, there are 4,250 fruit and vegetable producers in the East Midlands region, but only 255 in the whole of Wales.

Another strategy widely advocated is Dynamic Food Procurement (DFP) (e.g., Sustain and RSPB, 2021). DFP represents an alternative (or complementary) approach to supplier-mediated procurement arrangements. As noted in reports reviewed for this workshop report, and interviews with key stakeholders actively involved in the sector, the concept is potentially transformative, with the capacity to enable smaller producers to access public sector markets at their own scale and capability, and therefore not restricted by the usual quantity limitations.

By making the public procurement pathway as accessible as the typical routes to markets, producers could be persuaded by advantages such as selling produce which would have been rejected by supermarkets on cosmetic grounds. This potentially balances the risks associated with dynamic frameworks, such as for growers where it may be harder to plan planting for future demand (Morley, 2023). Sustain and RSPB (2021) have called for DFP to be adopted by all public sector catering by 2030; see also the recommendations in the National Food Strategy (Dimbleby 2021). Pilot work by Bath and North East Somerset (BANES) Council in local schools had a monetary saving of 6% compared with previous contracts – ameliorating concerns that it would be more expensive (Dynamic Food Procurement National Advisory Board, 2021).

DFP promises a means for small-scale producers in a region to access public food contracts via SFSCs and the case for supporting this innovation is already well made. However, as interviews and workshop participants reflected (see also Keech et al., 2021; Maye et al., 2021), significant barriers remain, which are both infrastructural and behavioural in nature. For example, DFP relies on online systems so dynamic automation technology is essential for the system to function. Positively, this technology exists, as demonstrated through the BANES pilot, so what is also needed is government and legal support locally and nationally, alongside overcoming a culture of nervousness in procurement contracts. This includes making contracts less complex and accessible than current arrangements (Morley, 2023).

⁶ <https://nicre.co.uk/media/cushjaw1/socio-technical-infrastructures-for-public-food-procurement-m-kneafsey.pdf>

4 Financial infrastructure

A common theme is the need for better access to finance and more finance for investment.

Barriers include:

- Eligibility criteria for funding and finance that exclude many farm types.
- Funding generally directed towards larger-scale operations.
- The cost of repaying business loans is often daunting and unrealistic for smaller businesses, including farmers with variable profits year-to-year, or new entrants.
- The need for not-for-profit initiatives to make enough financial return to achieve investment and growth, while also keeping costs down.
- Voluntary sector initiatives need income beyond statutory or charitable funding to be sustainable.

Workshop participants identified that a key opportunity for developing the financial infrastructure is increasing the availability of small amounts of seed / starter funding to get the ball rolling for community-based interventions that ultimately become influential.

“Grants up to £10,000 created quite a lot of social improvement...whereas one million pounds is unattainable. People can do quite a lot with micro grants to make low risk investments and almost get proof of concept for themselves.”

A related idea is the possibility of grants or finance for those creating the enabling environment for SFSCs, such as projects to pass on skills / expertise, promote innovation, share examples, etc. The sources for this kind of funding could be charitable funders such as community foundations, but participants noted they will need to be persuaded through clear proposals with a credible pathway to the expansion of SFSCs and projected beneficial impacts on people, communities and / or the environment.

In terms of access to finance, the workshop briefly discussed opportunities for those involved in SFSCs to benefit from mutual banking and credit unions, building on examples such as Ethical Investment Vehicles and social investment as repayable loans that factor in social and / or environmental returns alongside financial returns. To support this, there is a fairly active movement around 'social accounting' that has developed models for monetising social and environmental returns and calculating the social value of investments. These approaches are widely used in the charitable and government sectors; indeed, the Social Value Act⁷ (2012) placed a duty on public authorities to consider social value in procurement. However, these ideas do not yet have much traction in food infrastructure investment, possibly because it remains at heart a commercial sector. Hence, there might be some merit for projects that seek to monetise the social and environmental benefits of SFSCs that would in turn make the sector more attractive to social investors.

“A group of farmers could bid for some retail infrastructure, like a milk or meat vending machine, but the finance could take into account the value to the community.”

More generally, there are benefits to persuading potential investors to see the benefits of accepting slightly lower returns in exchange for contributing to SFSCs, for example investing in shared physical infrastructure or open-source software development.

Finally, linking back to the previous section, central Government can play a key role in addressing some of the barriers around finance through reforms of subsidies and taxation aimed at facilitating or nudging producers towards SFSCs (or at the least removing financial incentives that discourage SFSCs). For example, tax relief for collaborative businesses, or for large estates looking to run schemes to stimulate micro enterprise activities.

⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/social-value-act-information-and-resources/social-value-act-information-and-resources>

5 Digital infrastructure

Digital Infrastructure are digital tools and resources which enable SFSCs, for example:

- Producer-to-consumer platforms (e.g. online sales, box schemes)
- Business-to-business matching services that facilitate transactions and collaboration (e.g. giving / seeking land, aggregating produce to fulfil orders / optimising logistics).
- Technology to support 'Dynamic Food Procurement', such as catering providers directly contracting producers and suppliers.
- Digital platforms for knowledge-exchange and peer-to-peer support.
- Digital tools that enable transparency across the supply chain (e.g. data sharing and blockchain technology).

The workshop identified that the key barrier to growth in the digital infrastructure is **system fragmentation** as producers currently choose between circa 20 platforms, each with different functionalities. While this diversity is an inevitable aspect of innovation it causes confusion, inefficiency and impedes growth.

The potential game changer - and also the key challenge - is **improved interoperability** across systems through interfaces or translation software that automatically share product lists and surplus across platforms. Groups of developers are already working towards this goal, including formal collaborations like the Food Data Collaboration and the Data Food Consortium. There are also international precedents in France and Australia. For these initiatives, an important short-term objective is getting **agreed UK data standards** and ultimately global standards.

Another action to increase cohesion across the digital infrastructure is to encourage working with **open-source code** which is made freely available for possible modification and redistribution by others. The arguments for open source are:

- Greater transparency across providers and increasing the potential for interoperability.
- Supporting collaboration. If it works well, open source enables people to create things, share, borrow and learn while also remaining in charge of what they do.
- It opens up the market by providing new opportunities for developers to get involved and produce work with tangible and widespread effects. All of which may encourage more developers into the SFSC space.

- It may help sidestep the problem of dependence on proprietary software controlled by larger private sector businesses which - past experience suggests - might either seek to exploit their market advantage or take their software out of markets if profits are too low.

At its most ambitious, open source has the potential to diversify control of the digital infrastructure and put it into the hands of people who are committed to the goals of SFSCs. This reflects a wider vision of building common platforms, common ownership, pooling knowledge, resources, and vision.

Despite these potential benefits, open-source development brings its own complexities and challenges and it takes time to build the right communities to do it well. To support this work, models such as 'Steward ownership' are one way to find the right balance between transparency, control and incentives that encourage people to get involved while feeling their interests are protected.

To take this goal forward, the SFSC community will need to persuade people that open source is the better path. In particular, participants argued for the need for a clearer and more granular picture of what open-source software and communities could look like, likely timelines, and to directly address misgivings such as organisations worrying about losing independence, control or market share.

The second barrier identified is the **general level of technical skills of people involved in SFSCs**. There are two parts to this.

Firstly, there is the general skill level and attitudes amongst users / potential users of the digital infrastructure. Participants believed that many food producers are not natural or instinctive users of technology, such that even where interfaces are straightforward, people may still struggle and feel intimidated. Added to this challenge is that producers cannot easily outsource their engagement with digital platforms because they still need to have a handle on their supply, understand their data and be able to deal with customers' questions quickly.

This issue might get resolved over time, through improved usability and interoperability of platforms and as more tech savvy, younger generations take over in the food sector. But

rather than just wait for change to happen, we could also consider whether educational projects or campaigns might help to increase technical skills across the SFSC community.

One opportunity is to offer practical help to help producers get on board. A cost-effective way to do this might be to encourage those who are already using platforms to spot opportunities, share experiences, spread the word, and coach others - and there are examples of this already happening through online user groups.

Another solution may lie in engaging with communities to find people with the right skills who are willing to help. Right now, food supply chains are not a natural destination for volunteers but, as community enterprises with an important social purpose, there is a potential offer to be made around the opportunity to build their skills in a dynamic and worthwhile sector. To take this idea forward, the SFSC sector could do a better job of articulating its appeal and social purpose, and possibly develop systems for linking producers and volunteers. There are already some examples of this happening locally with food hubs connecting producers to people in communities, and these might give us models and learning to take the idea forward.

The second aspect of technical skills is **finding software developers** who can undertake the work to improve the digital infrastructure. Advanced technical skills are in short supply across all sectors, and it is a particular challenge for SFSCs because developers ideally need an understanding of food logistics and an affinity with the values and goals of SFSCs. These people are hard to find, particularly as pay is higher elsewhere. Hence the key question is how can we encourage more developers to take an interest in the food sector and support SFSCs?

Pro bono schemes are an option and there are precedents in the charity sector such as Pro Bono Economics, but these tend to be better suited to limited projects than more substantial work, and pro bono volunteers are less likely to have the necessary knowledge of the sector.

As discussed above, a move towards more open-source software should allow platforms to draw on a wider network of developers, including on an ad hoc basis (e.g. people who want to do something that matters in their spare time). Moreover, common ownership of the infrastructure allows users to pool knowledge

and resources, and thus provide the basis for more people to get involved and work towards common causes. Thinking longer term, outreach into the education sector may help to develop a pipeline of people looking to develop and apply technical skills in SFSCs.

A further barrier mentioned is having the **resources and time needed to develop a digital infrastructure that works well**. For several reasons:

- Platforms that grow too quickly risk losing structural integrity and are prone to glitches.
- It takes time to involve developers with the right mix of skills to avoid these problems. Hence, there is also a tendency towards dependence on key individuals who have all the knowledge and skills needed but these people can be spread thinly.
- It is generally hard to find the time to make progress on challenges like interoperability while also staying focused on their current customers.

Funding / investment for development helps, but as participants noted, this does not completely resolve problems which are more about the lack of human capacity in the sector. One practical action to help is developing better documentation of digital infrastructure and training capacity needs to attract and support new developers, as well as to keep others engaged. However ultimately, it is important to have realistic expectations about how long it takes to develop the digital infrastructure, and work towards enduring solutions rather than quick fixes.

The final barrier discussed is **consumer awareness of online platforms**. Buying experiences are currently dominated by supermarket chains. The challenge for the SFSC infrastructure is how to generate wider interest and engagement in SFSC platforms. Or, in other words, bridging the 'chasm' that lies between early adopters (enthusiasts who are fairly small in number) and more mainstream markets.

To start the process of engaging wider audiences, workshop attendees felt that we need a better understanding of what consumers want and need, and how they might be influenced. This includes starting to understand different customer types and their interests and needs (we discuss this in more detail in section 1 on human infrastructure).

6 Physical infrastructure

Physical infrastructure refers to the physical structures and tools required for food production, processing, storage, distribution, and retail of food. For example:

- Production spaces (e.g. land for grazing animals, polytunnels / greenhouses).
- Handling and processing facilities (e.g. local abattoirs, butcheries, processing units for fruit and vegetables, fermentation tanks).
- Storage facilities (e.g. cold rooms / chillers, sheds).
- Packing and distribution spaces (e.g. food hubs, warehouses).
- Transportation equipment (e.g. pallet jacks / forklifts, trucks, distribution vehicles).
- Retail spaces (e.g. market stalls, pop-ups, gazebos).
- Places for communities to meet, plan and organise activities.

There is a general consensus about the fundamental role of physical infrastructure. However, workshop discussions regarding physical infrastructure revealed that often the barriers and opportunities identified were more to do with the underpinning human and social types of infrastructure noted earlier, such as changing mindsets, skills, and finding ways to support producer co-operation and co-ownership.

This aside, important barriers to the growth of SFSCs related to physical infrastructure, including a lack of, and access to, appropriate processing and handling facilities, as well as storage, packing and distribution spaces, with recognition that these needs were not always generic and particular to sectors and regional geographies. The workshop discussion reflected on the much-debated issue of access to suitable abattoirs in many counties, particularly for smaller-scale livestock producers. Some key messages:

- For many aspects of physical infrastructure for SFSCs, the trend is in the wrong direction. Abattoirs, for example, are closing because of cost pressures and regulations.
- In Sustain's (2021) survey of infrastructure needs, when farmers were asked about access to local infrastructure, respondents said that the largest gap was livestock processing, logistics and storage. Reflecting on these findings, and the abattoir

example, workshop participants agreed that this clearly limits opportunities to stimulate or access local markets or add value to products that are sold further afield. However, to be viable, investment in infrastructure needs a certain level of throughput that SFSCs often cannot realise (at least while they are starting out).

- This tension underscores the critical need for essential forms of infrastructure such as abattoirs alongside investment models that make their provision viable.

Whilst these barriers are a challenge, workshop participants identified opportunities to overcome them.

Firstly, participants considered alternative 'routes to market' which are arguably the essence of SFSCs. Ideas included:

- Increased investment in food retail infrastructure such as refrigerated lockers for farm-gate sales, mobile or 'pop up' bakeries / butchers. In essence, expanding the successful 'fish van' model into areas like fruit, veg and meat.
- Building on the increasing popularity of farmers' markets and farm shops, although participants acknowledged the pros and cons of temporary vs permanent operations.
- Digital platforms for reaching consumers (see section 4).
- Food hubs as part of the picture because they cover the whole supply chain (aggregation, storage, processing, distribution, and marketing). However, participants were also concerned that food hubs can appear more attractive in theory than in practice, and that to work they must have a clear business model and clear demand from the community itself. The Better Food Shed model was cited as a good example.

An important goal is to ensure that the existing physical infrastructure is used to its full capacity. One route towards this is 'placed based' projects to map what community-based assets and spare capacity are available in places - for example, cold storage units, packaging plants and kitchens - which help optimise use and identify gaps.⁸ However, these projects require someone to lead, as well as funding to set up and maintain.

8 This idea is explored in more detail in Sustain's 2021 report A Tale of Two Counties.

A potentially unrealised opportunity relates to producers investing jointly and / or sharing aspects of the physical infrastructure such as land, machinery, and premises. There are examples of this in action, such as 'machinery rings' and 'flying flocks' of sheep, and therefore scope to expand this idea into new aspects of the infrastructure to help reduce the risk of transitioning to SFSC approaches. However, past attempts have often run into intractable barriers, such as securing insurance or guaranteeing sufficient scale and returns on investment. Hence work is needed to improve the enabling infrastructure for co-operative models and successful schemes need to share what they have learned for others to follow.

Looking for opportunities for agglomeration is another lens to apply, as different parts of the infrastructure are often best placed in proximity to each other (processing, packaging, waste disposal, veterinary). Could new investment focus on opportunities to unlock or make these facilities available for smaller, local producers alongside established supply chains?

Building on co-ownership and shared ownership as a general theme, the discussion also considered challenges around land ownership and the possibility of new contracts that permit rights to use land, as well as share farming and ways to incentivise estates to share land (for example through tax relief). These ideas raise important questions relating to governance and legal structures and there is the potential to build on several ideas and trial schemes currently underway. For example:

- The North East Cotswold Farmer cluster. While this is focussed on land management for environmental protection, it is a model for working at scale that might be possible to replicate.

- Lessons from the Defra Sustainable Food Pilots / Environmental Land Management Test and Trial.
- Another idea was a company might own the asset, but ethical investment could be arranged through an article of associations.
- Meat processors – possibility to pay or financially incentivise them.

It is worth noting that increasing collaboration and co-operation is a key theme running through all these ideas, and workshop participants had the general feeling that there is some way to go in embedding the idea of infrastructure collaboration and encouraging people to see opportunities for sharing resources with others. Positively, we identified that farmers have a track record of collaborating to secure environmental payments and will often group together to bid for pots of money. There does not seem to be a strong reason why this kind of precedent could not be extended to support SFSCs and other schemes for public benefit. The theme of collaboration is addressed more thoroughly in section 2 on social infrastructure.

Key conclusions and implications

The report explores the benefits of taking an infrastructure approach to developing SFSCs, drawing mostly on evidence from a workshop with participants involved with SFSCs in different capacities. Positively, we found that workshop attendees could engage with the concept, and it proved a helpful prompt for thinking about barriers, opportunities, and practical strategies for the future.

Undoubtedly, all types of infrastructure are important, but we can see them as playing different roles and status.

- Human and social infrastructure are the skills, attitudes and behaviours of people involved in SFSCs and, as such, underpin the whole movement and are potential drivers of change.
- The legal and financial infrastructure are enabling factors that frame what is possible by placing / removing barriers and incentives for change (access to land for example).
- Improved digital and physical infrastructure is the intended goal, and the immediate precursor to more sustained progress towards SFSCs.

There is also an inherent circularity to this. For example, the more improvements in digital and physical infrastructure there are, the more people will be brought into the fold and a greater knock-on influence can be possible for human and social infrastructures.

We also identified some important themes running across all of the discussions about different types of infrastructure:

- Chief among these is the significance of **co-operation and collaboration** (which have been treated as part of the social infrastructure but emerged in all the other discussions). We discussed how to increase collaboration amongst traditional food producers, such as co-ownership of physical infrastructure, as well as collaboration amongst those more consciously working on SFSCs, for example mutual support

across different communities and initiatives. In essence, co-operation is seen as the key way to overcome barriers and unlock the potential of SFSCs, particularly at this nascent stage of their development.

- A particular focus for increased collaboration might be between what we might characterise as the traditional food production / farming sector and those in the SFSC movement. While the two groups have different cultures and motivations and in some cases not a strong track record in collaboration, there are also many common interests. Efforts to bridge this gap and getting the two communities working together are likely to be worthwhile.
- The goal of increased collaboration also comes with the warning of not simply replicating current systems, and this leads to the second cross-cutting point which is the value of a **shared vision for SFSCs that distinguishes itself from the supermarket system**. This is in turn about the potential benefits and values, with connections to wider agendas, such as nature restoration, jobs, and skills development, levelling up, well-being, etc. The report covers several arguments for SFSCs that might appeal to different segments within the population, perhaps the most prominent of which is practical action towards healthier and more sustainable diets as well as viable producer returns. For some, the driving force for SFSCs is more political: seeing them as a route to substantial social and economic change and a lot of our workshop discussion reflected this. However, the movement is best seen as a broad church that can accommodate both more or less radical horizons.

- A lot of recommendations across the different parts of the infrastructure spectrum also reiterate the need to better **communicate successful existing SFSC arrangements**, such as models that have worked and steps people have taken to overcome barriers and engage communities.
- **Public opinion and behaviours** remain a key challenge and we are still a long way from SFSCs 'bridging the chasm' between niche and mainstream. Similarly, other aspects of the infrastructure challenge, such as digital interoperability, will take time and effort to resolve. Those involved in SFSCs will need to be patient about timescales and not expect magic bullets.
- There is a **tension between top-down and bottom-up initiatives**. We heard several examples in which stakeholders were told "you cannot make people do this". All stakeholder groups need to see the advantages themselves and new initiatives will only work with genuine local involvement. National organisations may want to push things but in doing so may take on too much ownership and actually risk discouraging bottom-up action.
- Another tension is around the **role of volunteers**. On the one hand, more people volunteering to get involved in SFSCs would undoubtedly help the movement to grow, in particular volunteers with key skills like digital, finance and logistics. On the other hand, there is the risk of SFSCs being dependent on volunteers, which could limit growth and sustainability and may even create an image problem, with SFSCs being seen as the preserve of wealthier people with time on their hands.
- There is a **key role for action from national and local governments**, which need to see SFSCs as part of their own agendas and take steps to create the enabling environment through reforms of taxes, subsidies, legal frameworks etc. Much can be learnt from experiences of the devolved administrations and from abroad.
- Perhaps the most direct way for governments to develop SFSCs is through changing **public procurement** processes so that increasing amounts of food is sourced from local producers. There are some good examples of this happening both in the UK and abroad, and Dynamic Food Procurement is a proven model for successfully integrating local producers into public food chains. The barriers are equally technical, legal, human, and social, but they can all be overcome.

In summary, by bringing problems and opportunities to the surface and suggesting a range of actions for different stakeholders, we hope this report supports the continuing growth of the SFSC movement, as well as highlighting some of the issues to keep reflecting on as the sector develops.

A call to action

The table below summarises the stakeholder groups' discussions across the different sections above, along with identified changes (outcomes) to support the development of SFSCs and the actions we could take to contribute to this change. All the outcomes in the table were mentioned by delegates during the course of the workshop, although we have developed them a little through our write-up, in particular when thinking about possible actions to pursue (in the third column).

Stakeholder group	Outcomes we want to see that will help develop the SFSC infrastructure	How the SFSC community might work towards this
Human infrastructure		
Food producers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better understanding / awareness of SFSCs. Attitudinal change in the food production and distribution sectors towards new mindsets and ways of doing things. Increased willingness and confidence to try new ideas and break out of the 'agri-business model'. Gain the skills needed to work successfully in SFSCs. Increased willingness to co-operate with others. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communicate the potential of SFSCs for helping producers to respond to financial and other challenges in their business, such as 'pride', independence, and fulfilment. Peer-based communities in which producers learn about SFSCs from others. Provide relevant training courses and development opportunities. Efforts to convene local producers to identify opportunities to work together and make SFSCs less risky / more viable.
Potential businesses / employees in SFSCs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Awareness of SFSCs as a career and business option and the skills needed. Excited / inspired by the idea of working in SFSCs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provide opportunities to learn more about SFSCs, both in education / school and into adulthood. Information about different career pathways, training opportunities and case studies of people and organisations in the sector.
Food consumers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater reflection regarding food sources and questioning existing systems of provision. Buying from SFSCs and spending more on local food. Discussing food with others and spreading the word / positive word of mouth. Talking to local farmers and producers Increased volunteering with SFSC projects, including offering skills such as software / technical support to food producers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase our understanding of different population segments and what might motivate them. Actively campaign and make the case for SFSCs and local food economies (nationally and locally). Involving celebrities / influencers / TV chefs. Helping people share and influence one another, including through social media. Offering people experiences of SFSCs and opportunities to engage with local producers.

Stakeholder group	Outcomes we want to see that will help develop the SFSC infrastructure	How the SFSC community might work towards this
Schools / education system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating young people about food: its importance to society, where it comes from, how the food industry currently works and how it might be better. • Giving children different food experiences such as organic and locally-sourced food. Helping to expand horizons and normalising healthy and sustainable diets and choices. • Purchasing food from SFSCs themselves. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Providing educational materials that schools / teachers can use. • Working with schools to provide opportunities to engage with the food system, such as farm visits. • Pathways and relevant training for possible careers in SFSCs.
Social infrastructure		
SFSC community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look for promising opportunities, i.e. where there appears to be community need / appetite and focus on enhancing the social infrastructure. • Adopt and refine existing successful models rather than start from scratch. • Be ambitious about the potential of SFSCs and, where appropriate, working on increasing their scale. • Increased collaboration, co-operation, and peer support between different parts of the social infrastructure supporting SFSCs. • Increased trust as the basis for genuine collaboration, co-operation and sharing risk. • Nurture a collective mindset and sense of community across SFSCs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Help build an enabling environment in which local food schemes can connect and prosper. • Provide funding, resources, and spaces for communities to collaborate. • Support, encourage training, and coach SFSC leaders and others. • Build stronger links with food banks / community fridges, etc. • Funding and ongoing support for networks and convening forums. • Create a shared vision and messages that are inspiring and tangible – so that collaboration has a clear purpose • Continued support for organisations like Sustain which are doing the work of bringing people together.

Stakeholder group	Outcomes we want to see that will help develop the SFSC infrastructure	How the SFSC community might work towards this
Legal infrastructure		
National government	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy makers to see food holistically and as a potential contributor to a range of different policy goals. • Reforms of subsidies, taxation, regulations, and legal frameworks to overcome the barriers producers face in transitioning to SFSCs. • Greater support and better legal frameworks for smaller farms and farmer-focused supply chains. • Government funding for regional / co-operative infrastructure to help create the enabling environment for SFSCs. • Develop new ownership models such as guardianship and stewardship models for finance. • Encourage local authorities to support SFSCs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emphasise the role that food and SFSCs can play in building communities, social capital, and regional economic development. • Develop specific proposals for making the legal environment more conducive to SFSCs (e.g. public procurement, particularly models that support and enable local and smaller-scale producers to access procurement contracts - see Dynamic Food Procurement National Advisory Board, 2021; Keech et al., 2021).
Local authorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase engagement, awareness, and support for SFSCs. • Ensure local plans / strategies cover food production and distribution and signal support for SFSCs. • Make procurement and other decisions that support SFSCs. • Make community buildings and other resources available for people running SFSCs. • Continue to delegate leadership and control to local communities. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage local councillors in SFSC activities and debates. • Templates / examples of local plans that incorporate SFSCs. • Case studies of how procurement can incorporate SFSCs. • Train procurement teams.

Stakeholder group	Outcomes we want to see that will help develop the SFSC infrastructure	How the SFSC community might work towards this
Financial infrastructure		
Charitable foundations / social investors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better understanding / awareness of SFSCs. See the value of SFSCs, and how investing in SFSC infrastructure might make a difference across society. Provide small grants / loans. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify and outreach to foundations / investors whose goals align with SFSCs. Develop clear proposals / asks to take to foundations / investors, for example seed funding schemes. A project to monetise the case for SFSCs in terms of 'social value' as a way to engage / influence social investors.
Banks / financial institutions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer greater flexibility around eligibility criteria and financial products that support smaller producers. Expansion of finance schemes outside of established institutions, such as mutual banking and credit unions. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support SFSCs in the development of appropriate business plans and financial planning. Engage with social finance institutions and angel investors.
Investors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Understand the potential social / environmental returns of investing in SFSCs (and potentially being willing to accept lower financial returns as a trade-off). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set out a clear, monetised, case for socio-economic returns on investment in SFSCs.
Digital infrastructure		
Software developers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More developers aware of and working on SFSC projects. Agree shared data standards. Increased collaborative working by everyone involved in digital infrastructure. Contribute to the goal of increased interoperability across platforms. Take an open-source approach to software development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a pro bono scheme through which people with technical skills could offer support to SFSC producers. Support and encouragement for collaborative data projects / initiatives.
SFSC community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Explore the opportunities for increasing sales and community engagement via digital platforms. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work with existing digital platforms to improve SFSC presence.

Stakeholder group	Outcomes we want to see that will help develop the SFSC infrastructure	How the SFSC community might work towards this
Physical infrastructure		
Food producers / infrastructure orgs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased recognition of the importance of physical infrastructure for the development of SFSCs (and achieving wider goals). Increase shared understanding of what infrastructure is available, spare capacity, and gaps. Greater willingness to invest jointly, co-own and co-run physical infrastructure. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Invest and deliver infrastructure mapping projects. Identify and promote successful models for collaboration and case studies. Identify specific barriers / disincentives for co-ownership and lobby government / banks etc. to resolve them.
Land infrastructure owners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increased openness to sharing infrastructure with those involved in SFSCs. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Greater collaboration between farming and food processing communities.

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