

The potential of food systems to contribute to the West Yorkshire Plan

This briefing highlights how food, food systems and food system transformation can strategically contribute to the five missions of the West Yorkshire Plan. It identifies opportunities for embedding food into future regional policy and investment.

1. A Prosperous West Yorkshire

An inclusive economy with well-paid jobs

- Public procurement, worth £2.4 billion per year in the UK, can act as a powerful local economic lever if redirected to support local, agroecological producers [1, 2].
 - Dynamic procurement models and infrastructure investment (e.g. food hubs, processing facilities) could build a thriving food economy that benefits small and medium sized enterprises [2, 3].
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2. A Happy West Yorkshire

Great places and healthy communities

- Transforming school food to increase nutritional content and accessibility is key to improving childhood health, reducing obesity, and tackling food inequalities [4, 5].
 - Programmes like aquaponics in schools improve food literacy and environmental awareness while aligning with the national curriculum [6].
 - Breakfast clubs and holiday food provision improve wellbeing and learning, especially in low-income areas [5, 7].
 - Student-led research reveals barriers to accessing healthy and sustainable meals on the Free School Meal allowance, highlighting the importance of improving school food infrastructure, pricing transparency and flexibility in allowance use [8].
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3. A Well-Connected West Yorkshire

A strong transport system

- Developing mid-scale infrastructure (e.g. processing, cold storage, logistics) could support local supply chains [1, 2].
 - Supporting short supply chains and local procurement could help to build resilience and reduce transport emissions [1, 2].
 - Dynamic procurement and regional food platforms can improve access for schools, hospitals and care homes to local, sustainable food [1, 2].
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4. A Sustainable West Yorkshire

Making lives greener

- Regenerative agriculture holds significant potential to enhance farm productivity and profitability, increase soil carbon sequestration, support soil health, biodiversity, and water quality, and reduce emissions under future climates [9].

- Public procurement standards could reduce meat consumption, prioritise more sustainable plant-rich diets with lower carbon emissions and water use, and encourage procurement of more sustainable and higher-quality meat [1, 2].
- Education initiatives like aquaponics and school food education help create future food citizens who are engaged in sustainability [6].

5. A Safe West Yorkshire

A region where everyone can flourish

- Food insecurity is associated with poor health and wellbeing outcomes for children and families [5]. Increasing the Free School Meal allowance would help to address current challenges faced by secondary school students in affording nutritious meals on the current allowance, including restricted food choices, stigma, and inadequate access to water and healthy options [8, 10].
- Free School Meal auto-enrolment, universal provision and stigma-free models like breakfast clubs can reduce shame and increase access [5, 7, 10].
- Community-based food initiatives can improve resilience, reduce loneliness, and offer dignified forms of support [11].

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