

LOCAL ECONOMIC RESILIENCE: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY FOOD ENTERPRISES A GUIDE FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES



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ABOUT THIS GUIDE

“Resilience is something we’ve been talking about since the first round of cuts - including helping residents stand on their own two feet - to be able to take care of themselves and have enough money in their pockets to meet their needs”

Local Councillor

This guide looks at how community food enterprises contribute to local economic resilience and how local authorities can help them to get established, grow and thrive.

It is based on research carried out as part of Better Land-based Economies, an action research project undertaken with three leading community food enterprises, Ecological Land Cooperative, Kindling Trust and Organiclea, over two years as they worked to access land, grow their businesses and create new livelihoods.

The research was conducted by Shared Assets and funded by Friends Provident Foundation. It consisted of research, site visits, workshops, and interviews with local authorities and other landowners.

What is local economic resilience?

Economic resilience is the ability of an economic system to adapt in response to both short-term shocks and long-term changes while supporting the community to thrive. A resilient economy is able to absorb shocks, to self organise, and to innovate and learn in response to disturbances¹.

To be resilient, local economies need a broad range of assets and skills that serve and respond to the needs of local people and the environment. They also require strong relationships between local people, responsive institutions and a strong sense of local ownership and care for the resources, goods and services that people use.

At a time when local authorities are experiencing severe budget cuts whilst facing an ageing population, changes to our climate, and uncertainty about the future of our political and economic institutions, local economic resilience is a concept that many people see value in.

What’s a community food enterprise?

Community food enterprises (CFEs) don’t simply produce, process or distribute food. They operate at a local level, working in and for their local community.

Local food systems and short supply chains have multiple and broad ranging economic, environmental and community development benefits². Across the UK, CFEs are playing pioneering roles in their local economies. Whilst meeting a growing demand for local, seasonal and healthy food, they are also using their land and their skills to offer employment, training, education and an array of opportunities for community participation. What’s more, they are demonstrating the potential to care for the environment and help build cultures of fair, cooperative trade whilst creating new economic opportunities. A recent estimate suggested that the UK community food sector is now worth between £77 million and £150 million per year³.

¹ Greenham, T., Cox, E. and Ryan-Collins, J. (2013) **Mapping Economic Resilience**, New Economics Foundation and Friends Provident Foundation

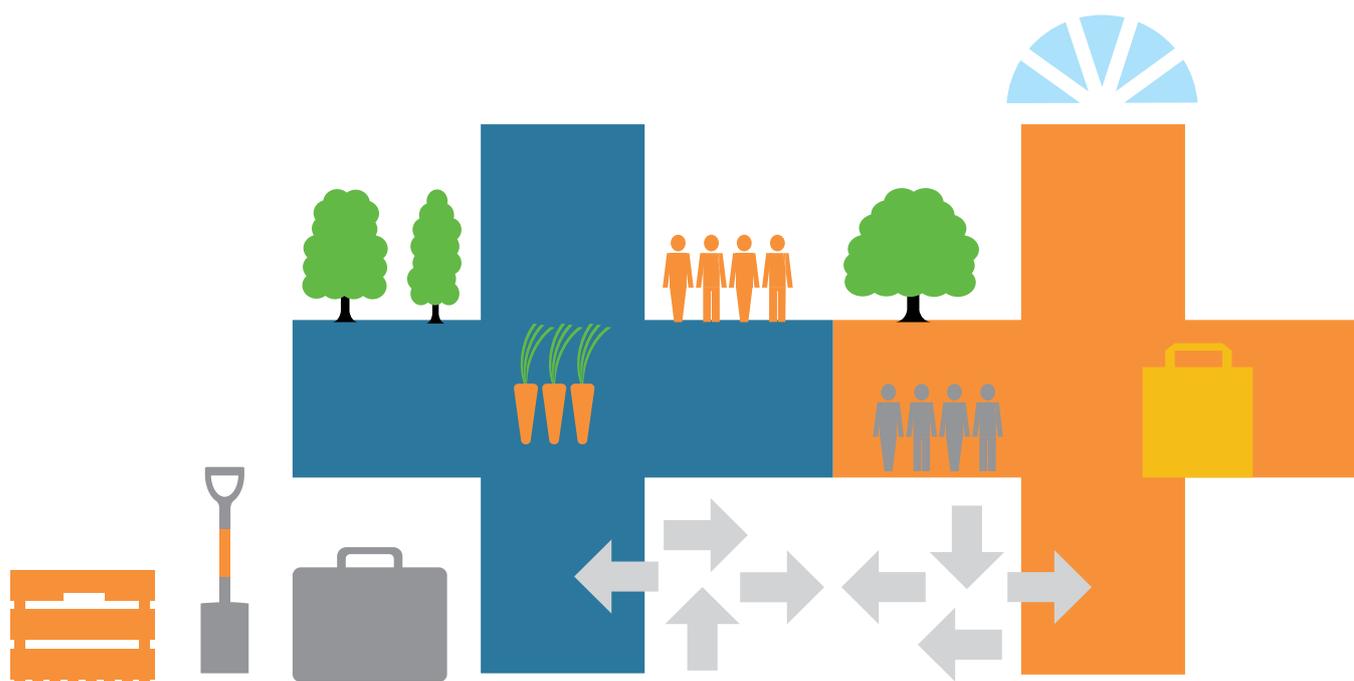
² EU Rural Review No 12 Summer 2012: **Local Food and Short Supply Chains**

³ Crabtree, T., Morgan, K., & Sonnino, R., (2012), **Prospects for the Future: Scaling up the Community Food Sector**, Plunkett Foundation

Role of local authorities

Yet, CFEs face many challenges. For many, the biggest is access to land; buying or leasing land at market rates is increasingly prohibitive. In a market dominated by supermarkets, CFEs must compete to provide customers with convenience and low prices. With rising living costs, creating good livelihoods on low incomes is a big challenge.

In this context, CFEs must get support from those who hold the keys to their success. Local authorities have an essential role to play in supporting CFEs to gain access to land at affordable rates, to secure planning permission for infrastructure, to develop services and to secure investment. In doing so you can help them to help you make your local economy, and therefore your community, more resilient.



CFES & LOCAL ECONOMIC RESILIENCE

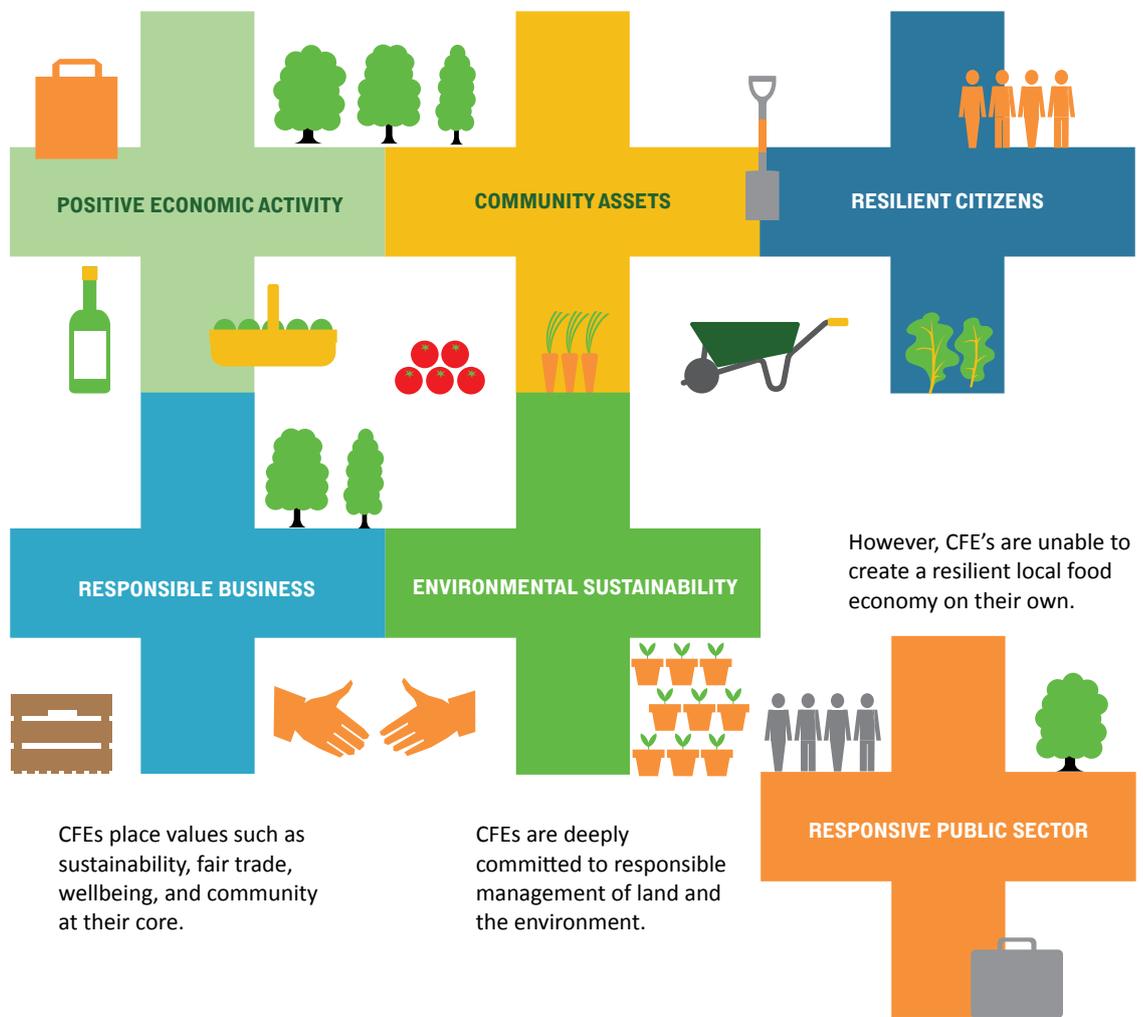
Our research identified that CFES can play a vital role in local economic resilience. They offer sustainable and healthy food through short supply chains that benefit both local producers and customers. But they play a much wider role too. CFES support good livelihoods, help local citizens improve their skills and wellbeing, build community assets, attract local investment, and build links between communities, businesses and public services in ways that are good for people and the planet.

Characteristics of a resilient economy

CFEs produce goods and employment, generating income and attracting investment that benefit local communities.

CFEs invest in and improve land and infrastructure that strengthen local food systems.

CFEs provide employment, training or volunteering opportunities that help people build their skills, confidence and economic security.



CFEs place values such as sustainability, fair trade, wellbeing, and community at their core.

CFEs are deeply committed to responsible management of land and the environment.

However, CFE's are unable to create a resilient local food economy on their own.

A responsive public sector that is working to strengthen and invest in the local economy is a final critical element of a resilient local economy.

CASE STUDIES

Kindling Trust

Kindling Trust are based in Manchester and were founded in 2007.

They undertake a range of activities that support the development of a resilient and sustainable local food economy. As well as providing training and support to growers (and an army of willing volunteers!), they are working to create fairer and more resilient local supply chains, and grow markets for local organic food through public procurement. Their activities and projects include:

Kindling Trust:

Positive economic activity

- Supports individuals setting up their own food growing businesses through its training, mentoring and FarmStart projects
- Establishes and supports new cooperative businesses that link growers with buyers and create new markets for locally grown food

Community assets

- Is one of group of organisations managing an old local authority plant nursery transforming it into a community food hub that joins up inclusive community gardening and social prescribing with commercial organic food production

Resilient citizens

- Provides volunteering opportunities through the Land Army, who help growers by providing extra capacity when they need it, while providing volunteers with the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills around organic production
- Runs a 4-day commercial growers course offering people the opportunity to learn how to set up an organic food growing business directly from other growers
- Established FarmStart – an incubator for new growers and those looking to transition to commercial production enabling them to build up their skills and experiment with growing on a larger scale
- Is piloting ‘More Than Medicine’ a social prescribing project that enables GPs to refer patients for healthy veg, cookery classes and gentle exercise in the form of gardening

Responsible business

- Supports Manchester Veg People (a co-operative of growers and buyers) and Veg Box People (a workers’ co-op) to crop plan together. The aim of this model is to share the risk of food production more evenly between farmers and buyers by creating fairer and more stable markets

Environmental sustainability

- Uses resources carefully, building soil fertility and protecting the eco-system for the long term, by supporting and encouraging organic production
- Works with public sector catering procurers to enable them to reduce their carbon footprint through the purchase of local organic food

They are supported by:

A responsive public sector

- Stockport Borough Council has supported Kindling Trust in securing access to, and appropriate tenure for, the plant nursery site



“Having a social enterprise use the site has resulted in improvements to the quality of the asset. We have found them invaluable in terms of their networks: finding opportunities, networks, advice, and expertise. They’ve helped us build our knowledge and capacity”

Local Authority Officer

CASE STUDIES CONTINUED

Ecological Land Cooperative

Ecological Land Cooperative secure land to develop affordable sites for farming, forestry and other rural enterprises, and opportunities for ecological land-based businesses in the UK

Ecological Land Cooperative:

Positive economic activity

- Provides the sites, infrastructure and business mentoring to enable new growers to set up their businesses and livelihoods
- Raises money through grants, loans and community shares to invest in a local area in order to support the development of local farm businesses

Community assets

- Buys privately owned farm land and holds it as a community asset in collective ownership using a cooperative legal structure
- Increases the value of the assets through development of off grid renewable energy generation, shared services and facilities, and improving access

Resilient citizens

- Provides affordable smallholdings, and supports families to take on their management in order to establish profitable agricultural businesses
- Secures planning permission to enable smallholders to construct dwellings to enable them to live on site and ensure their livelihoods are sustainable by reducing costs and the potential for losses
- Coordinates volunteering and educational activities on the smallholding sites

Responsible business

- Demonstrates a model of collective ownership that can protect and enhance the land
- Shortens supply chains by localising food production and creating a direct relationship between growers and buyers of produce
- Undertakes research on UK agroecology and smallholder agriculture

Environmental sustainability

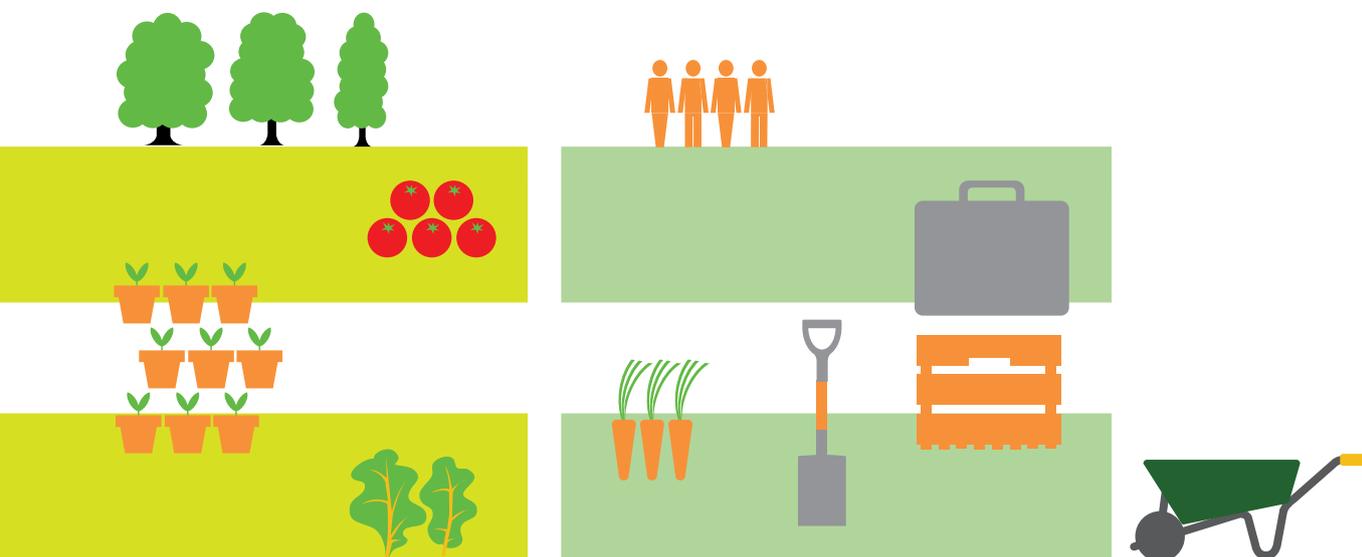
- Reduces non-renewable energy use
- Brings land into management that increases biodiversity and agricultural productivity, improves soil health and reduces agro-chemical use and associated pollution
- Provides farms/smallholdings in clusters, which means that infrastructure is shared and allows mutually beneficial relationships to develop

They are supported by:



A responsive public sector

- Secured temporary planning permission (on appeal to the Planning Inspectorate) for their first site at Greenham Reach in Devon, enabling the development of three farm businesses and the opportunity to prove the model



Organiclea

Organiclea in north east London run an organic market garden, a veg box scheme, provide training for new growers, and help them access land and set up new enterprises

Organiclea:

Positive economic activity

- Produces and sells food through a veg box scheme, market stalls and restaurants
- Supports the development of new food and farming businesses and provides a market for their produce through its retail and wholesale activities

Community assets

- Manages two local authority owned former plant nursery sites and leases a number of other local authority growing sites. These are sites that either had been or had the potential to be lost from public ownership, and on which community access and activity is being increased

Resilient citizens

- Provides a wide range of training, educational and volunteering opportunities, including grow schools and forest schools
- Established FarmStart – an incubator for new growers and those looking to transition to commercial production enabling them to build up their skills and experiment with growing on a larger scale

Responsible business

- Pay Living Wage and provide paid training opportunities
- Work cooperatively with buyers, the local authority and other growers to create a sustainable and fair food system that provides sustainable livelihoods for growers

Environmental sustainability

- Work to organic standards (certified) and have set aside substantial areas for wildlife conservation
- Reduce carbon footprint delivering by bicycle and electric milk float, which is charged via solar panels
- Source and work as local as possible



A responsive public sector

They are supported by:

London Boroughs of Waltham Forest and Haringey have provided access to, and appropriate tenure across, a range of growing sites and engaged Organiclea as consultants to support them in the development of food growing strategies and partnerships

“It’s not just what they do it’s how they make people feel about the area that they live in - that it is loved and there is positive activity happening here”
Local Councillor

A RESPONSIVE PUBLIC SECTOR

“The council’s role is changing from being a funder to being a partner or enabler”

Local Authority Officer

“Everything is already out there. I can sit in my office and say ‘we need food recycling’ and then find there is already someone out there doing it. It’s described as mapping but it’s actually having relationships and joining the dots”

Local Authority Officer

“The Council set things up that we are already doing. Come to what is already happening. But come prepared to be criticised. Don’t get annoyed or defensive”

Food Grower

“Once you know what you own you can then make decisions about what the priorities should be and what that land should be used for”

Local Councillor

A critical factor in ensuring a local economy is resilient is the presence of a responsive public sector that is working to strengthen and invest in the local economy. Local authority resources are increasingly stretched and the scale of these projects is small compared to many of the other issues faced by officers and councillors. However there are things that a local authority can do, even on limited resources, to help develop a more resilient local food economy.

What you can do

Be a facilitator

Often the most valuable thing you can offer is your knowledge and connections. You can provide valuable signposting and make connections with other relevant organisations and individuals – especially with colleagues in other departments within the council. Attend meetings of local food partnerships as a partner rather than leading them.

Access to land

Local authorities own a wide range of assets, some of which are ideal for use by CFEs, such as old plant nurseries. You may also be looking for new uses for derelict or disused assets such as bowling greens or underutilised allotment sites, or considering food growing in parks. By offering CFEs affordable leases on public land and supporting them through the planning system, you can make a critical difference to their viability whilst delivering against a number of council priorities in relation to public health, training and the environment.

Know your assets

It sounds basic but know what you have in terms of land and assets. What kind of sites might be suitable for food growing? Do they have access and services such as water or electricity?

Appropriate tenure

In order to get things moving and enable a new group to prove itself it may be appropriate to consider a short term lease or licence to operate, but in order to secure investment and commit to making improvements to the site a CFE is likely to need a longer term lease so that it can be sure the investment is worthwhile. In some cases transferring the freehold to a community enterprise may be the best way to secure the asset for the long term and ensure it continues to deliver benefits to the local community.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Leadership and buy in

There will often be competing uses and priorities for local authority owned land. For instance leasing a site to a CFE for food growing may mean that the local authority will have to accept less than market value for the freehold or leasehold.

It will be important to be clear about the wider objectives and strategies that food growing on the site will help to achieve, and to have clear political and executive leadership, in order to make a strong case to colleagues in finance, estates and legal teams to work flexibly to enable it to happen.

Keep in touch

Having regular informal contact with your local CFEs means that you will be aware of their capacity, resources and needs so that you can be opportunistic if the right piece of land becomes available and already have a relationship of trust established.

See the whole system

Community food enterprises may be small, especially in the context of the wider issues that local authorities are dealing with on a day to day basis. But these organisations are frequently at the heart of a wider system, supporting a myriad of small businesses, building markets for local food, supporting individuals into work, training or healthier lifestyles, and enabling communities to be more self reliant.

See our guide **Growing for change: creating good livelihoods for a better food system** for more information about local food systems.

Local plans

In many cases CFEs may need to develop sites in order to develop their businesses, and may even need to build dwellings to enable them to develop a sustainable livelihood. Ensuring that Local Plans reference the need for sustainable and resilient local food systems can help provide an enabling policy framework for CFEs.

Local Planning Authorities (LPAs) often assess applications for low impact agricultural dwellings against criteria normally used for conventional large-scale agriculture and on this basis refuse them, only for their decisions to be overturned at appeal. It is therefore also important for LPAs to understand the underlying principles of such proposals, and the material considerations that are relevant to them.

See our guide for local authorities **Essential rural workers' accommodation for small-scale agriculture** for more information.

“We used to only offer tenancies on our land on the basis of the highest bid and ended up with a lot of pony grazing, but now we factor in social value and a good business plan for a food growing social enterprise would get priority”

Local Authority Officer

“It wasn't really about developing a specification and then looking for the ideal site, more about developing a shared understanding of needs, constraints, and opportunities. We had to be fleet of foot when the opportunity arose and flexible about access in order to get stuff happening. That required trust and credibility”

Local Authority Officer

“This project has the impact of strengthening the whole ecosystem across all of these groups. We are starting to kick ourselves that we haven't done this sooner”

Local Authority Officer

WHAT YOU SHOULD EXPECT

If you are going to support a CFE to secure access to piece of land, especially where there may be competing priorities for its use, you will want to be sure that they are able to deliver a viable and sustainable business.

Skills and capacity

Taking on a new piece of land and developing a business is not easy. Ensure you are able to check the experience, track record, or qualifications of the people who will be leading the work.

Clarity about needs

It is reasonable to expect the group to have a good idea of the kind of land they need – size, services, access, shelter etc – in order to help you identify whether there is anything suitable within the local authority's estate and to act quickly if something should be become available.

Realism

The CFE should have reasonable expectations. It is unlikely that you will be able to provide a fully serviced town centre site at a peppercorn rent. Be honest about what might be possible and test to see where they might be flexible in their requirements and how pragmatic these seem.



A business plan

A CFE should be able to provide you with a business plan that is of an appropriate scale to the nature of the enterprise. It should clearly outline how it is structured, how it runs, and how it will stack up in terms of finances and resources.

They should also be able to provide practical plans outlining how they will deal with likely issues such as nuisance and visual impact.

Finally you may wish to work with them to produce a business case outlining how they will contribute to wider local authority objectives such as; public health, economic development, educational attainment etc. These may be backed up with evidence from research, case studies, or examples from elsewhere.

You can find more information on how CFEs can evidence their impact in our guide for community food enterprises **Local economic resilience: the part you play**.

“One of my roles is translating to these groups what council priorities are and encouraging them to measure what they do so it will be easier to persuade colleagues of their value”

Local Authority Officer

“Some have a good business plans, experience and capacity. Others don’t. We developed protocols and questionnaires for assessing skills”

Local Authority Officer



FURTHER RESOURCES

In this series

Essential rural workers' accommodation for small-scale agriculture

A guide for local authorities

Local economic resilience: the part you play

A guide for community food enterprises

Growing for change: creating good livelihoods for a better food system

A guide for community food enterprises

Access to land: working with local authorities

A guide for community food enterprises

Understanding the planning system

A guide for smallholders and community food enterprises

You can find these resources at:

www.sharedassets.org.uk/innovation/local-land-economies/

Other resources

Greenham, T., Cox, E. and Ryan-Collins, J. (2013) **Mapping economic resilience**, New Economics Foundation and Friends Provident Foundation

Powerful Communities, Strong Economies, 2017, Locality: This report provides a framework that local authorities can use to commission for economic resilience

<http://locality.org.uk/resources/powerful-communities-strong-economies-report/>

Sustainable Food Cities Network: Helps people and places share challenges, explore practical solutions and develop best practice on key food issues. <http://sustainablefoodcities.org/>

Project Partners

Shared Assets is a think and do tank that provides practical advice, support and training to landowners and communities who want to manage land as a sustainable and productive asset www.sharedassets.org.uk

Kindling Trust support new organic growers in Greater Manchester through their FarmStart training programme, and have established and support a cooperative of growers and buyers, and a worker owned organic box scheme www.kindling.org.uk

Organiclea run an organic market garden, a veg box scheme, provide training for new growers in London, and help them access land and set up new enterprises www.organiclea.org.uk

Ecological Land Cooperative secure land to develop affordable sites for farming, forestry and other rural enterprises, and opportunities for ecological land-based businesses in the UK www.ecologicaland.coop

Friends Provident Foundation is a grant-making charity whose Building Resilient Economies programme aims to contribute to a more resilient, fairer and sustainable economic system www.friendsprovidentfoundation.org

