

Dorset LNP Annual Forum: Food Production and Nature in Harmony

26 March 2025



Annual Forum 2025

This year's Annual Forum, was held on 26 March at The Exchange in Sturminster Newton. The forum was attended by around 60 people and focused on Food Production and Nature in Harmony.

Food is at the heart of some of the biggest challenges we face – including food security, ill health related to diet, access to healthy food and the impact of food production on nature and the climate.

Dorset is home to a lot of fantastic food projects. Our Annual Forum aimed to celebrate some of these projects, share issues raised within local and national Food Conversations, other related discussions, and have a workshop to talk about possible local solutions.

Thank you to all the presentations and attendees for making the event an inspiring session.



Presentations

The first part of the forum focused on inspirational presentations (presentations now available):

[The Food System in Context](#)

Joanna Lewis (Chief Executive, Wiltshire Wildlife Trust)

[A Land Use Framework](#)

Georgie Barber (Countryside and Land Use Lead, Food, Farming and Countryside Commission)

[Feeding Dorset Partnership](#)

Jon Sloper (CEO, Help & Kindness)

[Access to Food Partnership](#)

Jessie Budynkiewicz (Environment Community Engagement Officer, BCP Council)

Farming perspective: [Part 1](#) / [Part 2](#)

Dougal Hosford (Farmer / JHR Hosford)

[The Food Conversation: What are the issues?](#)

Maria Clarke and Sophie Burry (Dorset LNP)



Workshop

Prior to the event we held two Food Conversations – one in Dorchester and one online (and the Dorset LNP Manager attended a third in Shaftesbury) to understand views on the food system. We also contacted a wide range of youth groups and had responses from two youth forums (Dorchester and Weymouth). The responses informed the workshop session. The reports from our Food Conversations are [available here](#).

Responses were collated into three themes:

- Government
- Awareness and education
- Changing practices

Attendees were asked to consider possible actions that could be taken locally to address these themes and further thoughts on the issues.

The discussions across the three themes brought out common issues and have been summarised in the following pages. The full list of the comments is [available here](#).



Themes

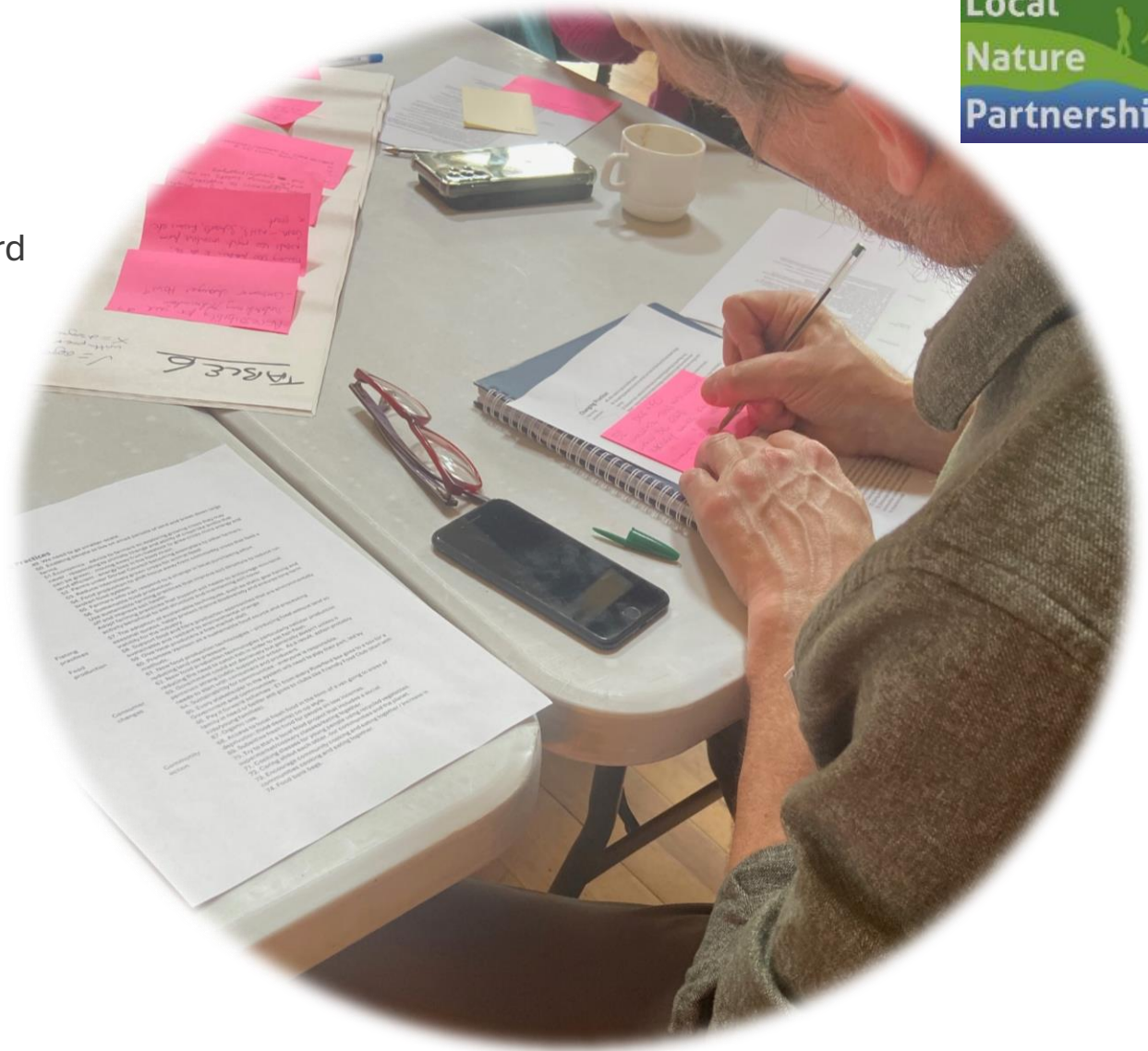
The comments have been summarised into ten topics.

Examples of the comments are listed on the following pages – those listed do not necessarily mean these will be taken forward but are meant to highlight the varied conversations.

Comments inevitably interlink and some could also be part of other topics.

Topics

Farming, land management & fishing
Local markets
Local food systems
Local growing & community groups
Education & awareness
Access and healthy eating
National support
Advertising & supermarkets
Cost & procurement
Leadership, planning & food waste
Other



Farming, land management & fishing



A range of comments related to agriculture, the management of land and fishing. Support for farmers in terms of subsidies features under the national support theme.

Example responses

Support for farmers:

- Support farmers/growers to produce more fruit and veg for distribution locally so that every household in Dorset has access to one locally produced vegetable box.
- Easier access to training and education for farmers themselves. Learning new practices/diversification options. Making better choices for their land.
- Create a Dorset Farmers mentorship scheme to help those farmers wanting to become more regenerative & more sustainable with real life real time one to one teaching/learning exchange.

Land management changes:

- Proactively manage farm woods and hedgerows. Encourage community orchards and allotments. Agroforestry.
- Farming practices: smaller scale not totally needed but larger scale needs to be more diverse + be more heterogenous to encourage wildlife. Think more at a local scale.
- Campaign to make Dorset pesticide free.

Farmers clusters:

- Trust, empower and support Farm Clusters to deliver the changes that are needed.
- Ask farm cluster leaders if they need anything else.
- Links through cluster groups to empower self-driven, informed, business-led change.

Fishing:

- Fishing practices: need to consider impacts of freshwater fish farms on local populations. Link in game and wildlife conservation trust.
- Static gear in estuaries can be an issue for trout or salmon if not properly located.
- Prohibit all mobile bottom fishing gear for fishing.



Local markets



There were comments related to the selling of food and how to connect consumers and producers locally.

Example responses

Connecting farmers and consumers:

- Real life education. Getting out of the classroom and experiencing first-hand. Either via organisations or businesses on farms.
- Farm visits – Open Farm Sunday etc. Field to plate days. Go to a farm, learn, cook.
- How do we connect 70% of land that is used for farming with the 80% of the population that live in urban areas. Need to follow the learn...knowledge...change model. Need to understand our audience first.

Local markets:

- Markets – better locations, promotion + local producers in prime spots.
- Better promotion of garden gate and local food opportunities. E.g. Web-based map or similar.
- Facilitate behaviour change by taking food outlets to people's places of work. Subsidise local producers to go mobile.

Local produce:

- Promote venison as a sustainable food source.
- Raise profile & promote eating of wild meat, rabbit, pigeon, deer, duck. Availability of safe to eat wild meat.
- Use channels to promote and support local food producers.



Local food systems



Understanding the local food system and making the best opportunities for the local action came through the comments.

Example responses

Local Food system:

- Support organizations coordinating local food projects – lots already do this!
- Access to fresh food for more rural areas across Dorset. Local community champions to help deliver support for all.
- Grassroots initiatives need to change national policy which will support local food policy. Starts at the bottom.

Mapping:

- Mapping exercise to show where local food is from.
- Create a buzzing “shop window” to show how much is already happening across the County (gather evidence base & promote).

Funding:

- Pooled funding from relevant partnerships.
- Depending on our own resources, we could contribute to a local fund for regeneration/food education etc.
- Central pot of pooled funding is a good idea. It should have focused local priorities decided locally.



Local growing & community groups



Understanding the local food system and making the best opportunities for the local action came through the comments.

Example responses

Local growing spaces:

- Some means for 'spare' land to be used by community. Parish Councils or other able to promote?
- People without growing space/gardens having access to land not used.
- More allotments for local produce. Encourage farmers to offer some land – or large gardens.

Foraging:

- Encourage community groups to plant foraging hedges in relevant areas.
- Increase awareness of foraging/food for free in your community.

Community composting:

- Can we make mass composting into a community benefit? Communal collection. Paid staff to process and sell to cover the costs. With a reduced rate for garden centers!

Growing fruit & veg:

- Increase home grown soft fruit and vegetables.
- Cook & eat sessions for groups that grow their own veg

Community groups:

- Citizen science events & training
- Retirees work & projects, perhaps with young people – intergenerational projects to do with the environment, farming,



Education & awareness



Increasing the understanding of local food both in a formal education setting and within the community featured strongly.

Example responses

Formal education:

- Integrate nature-based farming into new GCSE Natural History curriculum.
- Breaking down barriers with schools through curriculum to farms (regular Open Farm Sundays) opportunities Gov –School Teachers – Farmers.
- Home economics on national curriculum – linking schools with farms.
- Celebrate “world food day” like world book day.

School grounds:

- Safe spaces to grow food (community allotments).
- Worm farms at home and in local schools.

Community:

- More opportunities for local people to learn how to grow fruit & veg.
- Encourage food businesses like pubs and restaurants to host cooking lessons. Share equipment.
- Giving people skills and confidence to source their own food or grow own produce.

Awareness raising:

- Understanding that the environmental impact of food continues into how you prepare it. E.g. Green beans in Kenya have a lower carbon footprint than some locally produced/grown produce.
- More celebration of wildlife on nature rich farms and opportunities for people to visit.



Access & healthy eating



Comments about what we eat focused on the importance of healthy food, a reduction of ultra processed food as well as how people access to food.

Example responses

Access to food:

- Pay it forward schemes.
- Accessibility for all. Subsidising/education. Consumer change.
- Map and monitor the change in peoples' eating towards
 - a. health in eating
 - b. eating locally grown and produced food - promote shop window about this.

Healthy eating:

- Who will pay for adverts about healthy eating – tax?
- Making connections between health & food.
- Encouraging healthy eating habits through social & broadcast media using celebs. The 'wartime' advertising model.

Ultra processed food:

- Tax ultra processed foods to make it more expensive than fresh fruit and vegetables.
- Ultra processed food is not talked about honestly enough
- Regulation to encourage fresh local vs UPF



National support



While much can be achieved locally, it was recognised that top-down action is also needed – local lobbying could influence national change.

Example responses

Funding:

- Subsidies to farmers to encourage sustainable practices.
- Fully funded support for ELM. 'Bridging' support for farmers transitioning to regen practice.
- Use/ringfence taxes raised to subsidise nature friendly farming so that locally grown food becomes cheaper and as accessible in shops as UPF.

Support from MPs:

- Involve MPs in changing the food system (FFCC) discussions and ask for action to represent community voices.
- Lobby government as a collegiate group of Dorset stakeholders for change in the food system.
- Political leaders in the UK need to have more courage, imagination and integrity or none of this will happen.

Policy / legislation:

- Ensure food policy differentiates between actual food producers v. landowners.
- Government to promote the value of food and family mealtimes. Basic human need according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs.
- Tax/prohibit the manufacture and use of nitrogen fertilisers and pesticides. Tax/prohibit imported animal food.



Advertising & supermarkets



Advertising, labeling and the role of supermarkets in the local food system featured in many comments.

Example responses

Advertising:

- Ban unhealthy adverts on bus stops/signs etc. Use platforms to promote work of environmental groups, volunteer opportunities etc., Local farms and food.
- Focus on positive social media advertising on healthy food as a first priority.
- Actually promote healthy foods instead of ultra processed foods.

Labelling:

- Traffic light food labelling scheme: Red = not recommended - Orange = think twice - Green = Go for it!
- Encourage supermarkets to display flags/ of the country the produce is from next to the product name. e.g. Bananas = Costa Rica.
- Not just 'locally produced' label. Labels should include actual food miles.

Supermarkets:

- More wonky fruit and veg needed!
- Push for a 'local' corner in supermarkets – at affordable prices.
- How to get supermarkets into the conversation? Going beyond food waste/poverty to products produced in nature friendly and sustainable ways.



Cost & procurement



Comments around the cost of food included whether people understood the true cost of food (e.g. impacts to the environment) were understood by the public. Opportunities for greater local procurement also featured.

Example responses

True cost of food:

- Do people in general understand the full cost of food?
- Farmers cannot deliver for nature without fair profits
- Case studies & examples of costs & prices paid by markets & end users.

Pricing:

- Fair prices for general food commodities.
- Taxing – if done right could be very effective.
- Food producers to determine what they should be paid for food.

Procurement:

- Local government bodies should encourage consumption of locally produced food in all organisations – schools, councils etc.
- Ensure Dorset schools procure food from local farmers, growers. Re-look at purpose vs profit with the food we feed our children.
- Councils should contract 'healthy' procurement.



Leadership, planning & food waste



The importance of leadership, both in terms of leading by examples, and the role of planning in the system were commented on. The need to reduce food waste was also highlighted.

Example responses

Leadership:

- Systemic change is required. Brave leadership is needed to tackle the accessibility, affordability and nutritional value of food.
- Dorset Council is planning to use the county farms to champion regenerative and nature friendly farming – it takes time....contracts/leases, etc.
- People need to lead by example.
- Has Dorset got a food resilience plan? Where is this? Does it network the local growers/farmers/allotments/market gardens etc?
- Create a strategy within Dorset at least to change the demand for good food in order to influence the supply and support farmers in moving towards regenerative farming.

Planning:

- Planning needs to change. Simple form to fill out rather than having to pay for planning. Veg growers can't afford ANY extra costs to grow veg on a small scale.
- More planning control/policy around large supermarkets.

Food Waste:

- Food waste bins legislated from the Environment Act.
- Too good to go – mostly/always filled with ultra processed food. 'Good to sow' bag with veg/seeds/info on growing own food.
- Need to encourage local compost making. Compost bins (small and large).



Other



A range of other comments were made that did not fit within the other nine themes.

Example responses

- Start people thinking as citizens, not consumers.
- Water needs to be part of the food conversation. Refill points for water more ubiquitous in town centres and community facilities.
- Make the link between climate change, biodiversity and health and well-being to promote resilient food production.
- Being able to talk about diet & change without a wedge being tried to be driven artificially between people & their support for farmers.
- Stop culture wars around food & farming – we need to listen to each other respectfully.
- Work with fragmented system – transformation planning opportunistic synergy of normally discrete developments. Make better connections to achieve bigger aims.
- Be pragmatic (share the load).



What Next

Since the Forum, the Food, Farming and Forestry Commission has published the report: [The Food Conversation – A Citizen Mandate for Change](#) – which brings together responses from the national Food Conversations and mirrors much of what come out of our Food Conversations and the Forum workshop.

The Government published [The Good Food Cycle](#) in July 2025. It sets out 10 priority outcomes for the food system, which also reflects those coming out of our Food Conversations and workshop session. More details are expected later in the year on how these will be delivered.

The information from our Food Conversations, the forum workshop and The Good Food Cycle will inform the development of an action plan for Dorset. This will be developed with additional discussions via a Task Group.



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