



BeanMeals
Thinking beyond the can



Leicester City Council

The Leicester City Food Compass

Assessing the impact of our food system



In the Leicester Food Plan (2021-2026), we frequently use the term ‘good food’ in relation to our ambitions. We define the term as food that is “healthy, nutritious, affordable and produced with care for the environment and natural resources in a thriving local food economy.”



In May 2022, we started a 30-month partnership with BeanMeals, a food system research project that is testing how to innovate in the food system to create the outcomes that we aspire to in our FoodPlan.



With a focus on Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council, the BeanMeals researchers evaluated how the local food system performs in four key areas: nutrition and health; environmental impact; social and equality outcomes; economic indicators.



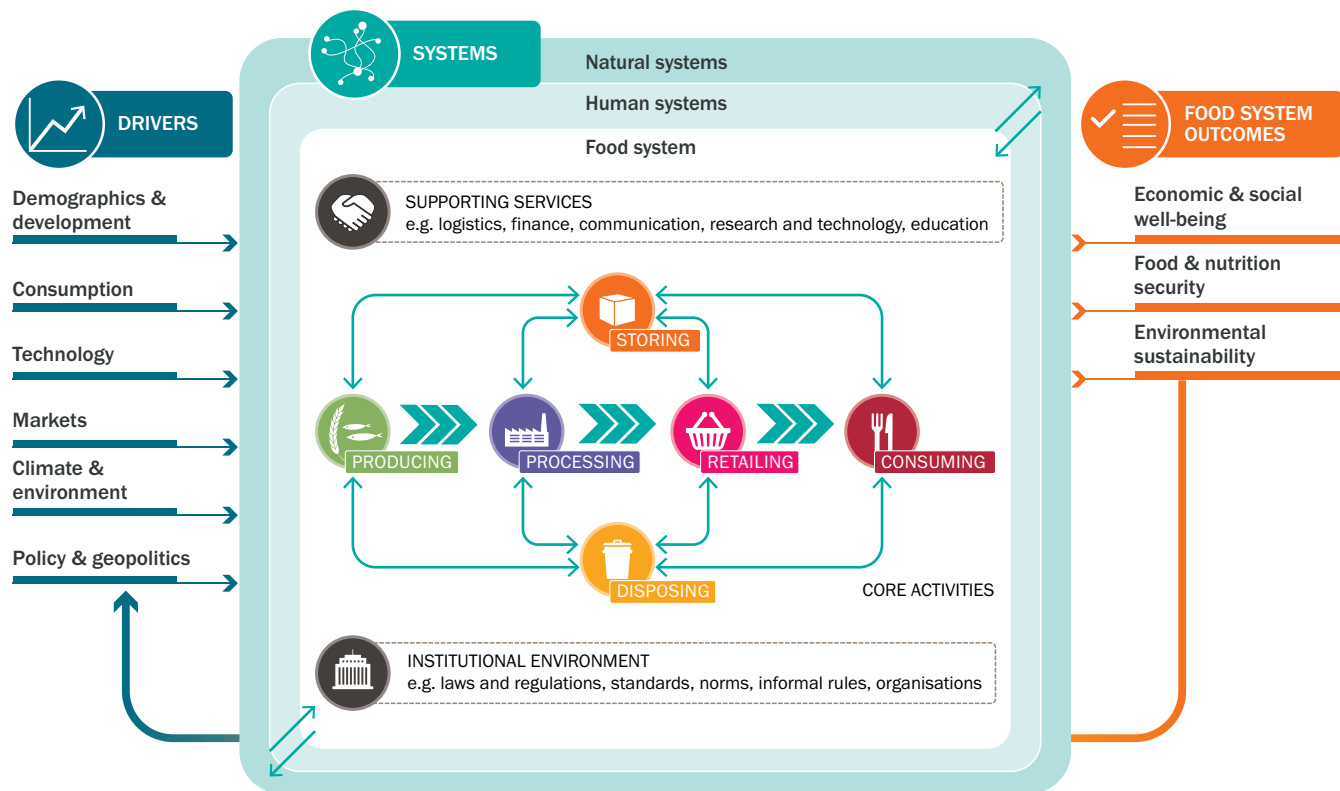
Three years after the launch of our second Food Plan, this report provides a snapshot of Leicester City’s food system. It outlines steps we are taking to achieve our food system goals, and identifies opportunities to collaborate across our food system to achieve the change we want to see.





What is a food system?

Our food system is complex. It involves activities such as producing, processing, retailing, consuming, and disposing of food. The system is supported by infrastructure such as transport, financial services, trade, logistics, and IT systems. It is governed by regulations, policies, laws, and standards. These activities impact food security, nutrition, economic and social well-being, and environmental sustainability.



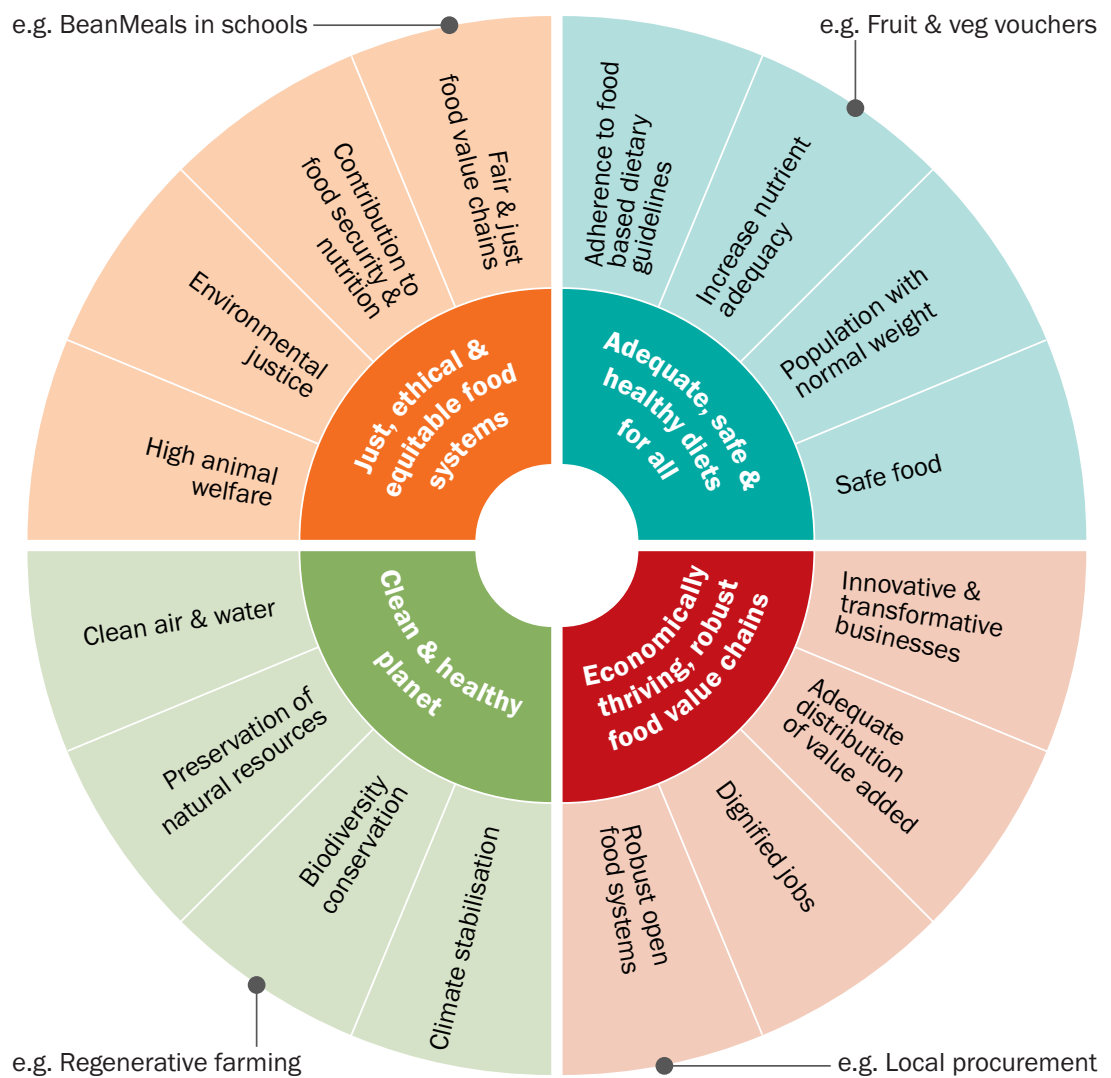


Assessing trade-offs as we make decisions



When bringing in systemic innovations, we need to assess the benefits and costs across food system outcomes at local and national scales.

- Current food system complexities often obscure the implications of policies and mask trade-offs between different food system goals and stakeholder preferences.
- We need better ways to visualise actual and potential trade-offs for increasing bean consumption by identifying how food system outcomes will change and who the winners and losers are.
- Opportunities for addressing obesity, food insecurity, and fostering local food economies/industry are possible. By understanding the pros and cons of our options for change, as a city we will be in a better position to take advantage of co-benefits.





How well is our food system serving the city of Leicester?



Nutrition and health

19% of children are eating five or more portions of fruit and vegetables than in 2021/22. That's a drop from 23% in 2016 but higher than the UK / England average | *Leicester: 23% (2016) 19% (2021/22). UK: 18% (aged 5 to 15, 2018)*

19.4% of children eat takeaways more than once a week. This figure has fallen from 23% in 2016 | *Leicester: 23.0% (2016) 13.2% (2021/22)* | In the UK, **1 in 5** children eat meals out at least once a week (2018)

17.5% of children are worried about having enough to eat – more than three times than the national/England average | *Leicester 17.5% (2016). UK / England 5.9% (2022)*

19.5% of Reception pupils are classified as overweight or obese. By Year 6, the number is **38.4%** (2019/20)

Overall message

Childhood obesity is an issue in the city.



Environmental impact

In 2021, Leicester's water stress rating was reclassified from 'moderate' to 'serious'.

The East Midlands had 7.2 kg/ha for the phosphorus balance in the soil in 2020, ranking 4th highest in eight regions of England. Agriculture contributes to high levels of nitrates in the region's soil. A surplus of these nutrients poses a serious environmental risk in areas such as air and water quality.

Overall message

Our demand for food is putting significant stress on our local water system.





Social and equity outcomes

The city has a higher density of fast-food outlets than the national average. There are **137.6** fast food outlets per 100,000 of the population | *Leicester: 137.6 (2019/20), UK/England: 96.5 (2019/20)*

There are **22** emergency food networks, from food banks to community larders. **9%** of East Midlands households are food insecure, higher than the national/England average of 7%

Overall message

Food insecurity is increasing across the city.



Economic indicators

495 new food and drink businesses launched in the county between 2010 and 2019.

Micro businesses* make up 86% of the agri food and drink sector across the county. *A micro business is made up of less than 9 employees

8% of jobs in the county are in the agri food and drink sector – higher than the national / England average (6.8%)

Overall message

An innovative, diverse food system will benefit the population, while food related industries and enterprises are very important to the locality.





Beans as a lever for food system transformation



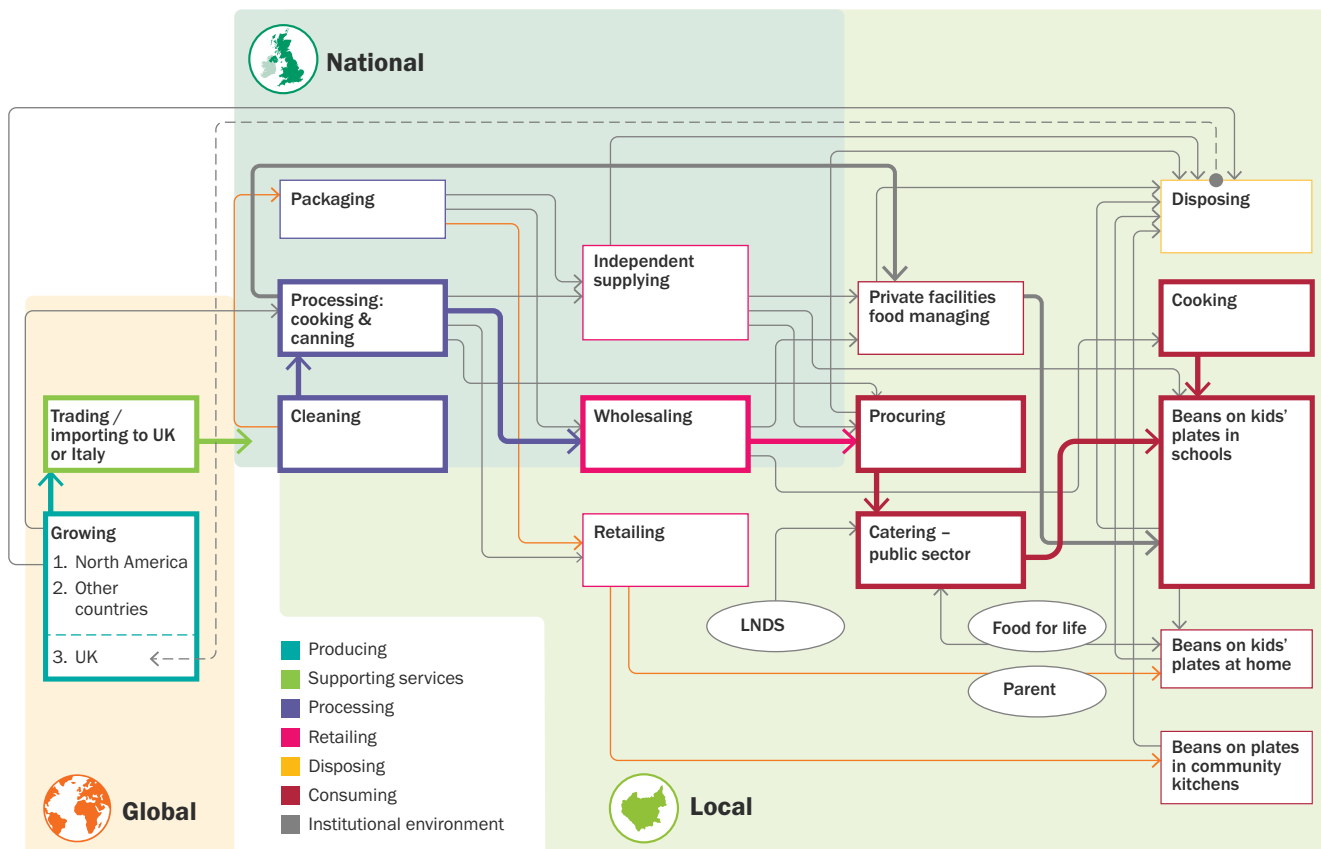
The vast majority of beans we consume in the UK are imported from overseas. We wanted to find out if eating more home-grown beans create positive change in our city's food system. Since May 2022 we've been working on with BeanMeals, testing whether greater consumption of UK beans could enhance local health, environmental and business outcomes.

BeanMeals researchers worked in six schools in Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council to test how school children – the decision makers of the future – took to UK dried beans when they were included in school lunch menus.

The research also looks across the food system to analyse what needs to become aligned in order to get healthy, locally grown ingredients into school meals. These areas include production, supply, and procurement.

Is it possible to create a food system that achieves all our goals? If we want to change something in our current food system, we need to take a whole-system view to understand the trade-offs. Who would be the winners and losers in a new scenario?

This graphic shows what it takes to get a bean grown in the US into the lunch menu in city and county schools. If we change something in the current system, what are the impacts for other parts of the system?





Moving towards food system transformation in Leicester City



It's clear that there are red flags in our food system, from the proliferation of fast food outlets to the high levels of soil nutrients that can negatively affect water and air quality.



Despite these challenges, there are opportunities for change across the whole system. If we seek these out, we can transform the UK food system towards better health, environmental, economic and social outcomes.



Key messages for transforming our food system



- The food system is interconnected – a positive action in one part of the system may create a negative effect in another.
- Actors from all parts of the food system need to work together to co-create solutions that achieve joint benefits.
- Collaboration is essential in order to ensure people in one part of the system does not unintentionally lose out.

We were awarded Sustainable Food Places Bronze in 2022 for our systems approach to improving the local food system.

Three of the ways we're taking a systems approach through our Food Plan

- Supporting Healthier Food Choices – a healthy weight strategy for children and young people moving to a whole systems approach.
- Enabling local schools to increase positive healthy eating behaviours, knowledge about nutrition and increased cooking and growing skills.
- Improving food standards for Leicester City Council school dinners by serving fresher, healthy, ethical food using some local and organic ingredients through the Silver Food for Life Served Here accreditation.

Watch a video on how BeanMeals has been working locally





Work with us to transform our food system



Contact

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More information

Download the Leicester Food Plan: www.leicester.gov.uk/media/swwbnpco/leicester-s-food-plan-2021-2026.pdf



Find out more about BeanMeals:

www.eci.ox.ac.uk/beanmeals



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