



BeanMeals
Thinking beyond the can



The Leicestershire Food Compass

Assessing the impact of our food system



In the Leicestershire Food Plan, we define good food as being food that: “supports and sustains the local economy; reduces the impact of poverty; helps people towards better health; has a reduced environmental impact; and is affordable, accessible and nutritious.”

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 food system outcomes that we aspire to in our Food Plan.

With a focus on Leicestershire County Council and Leicester City 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.

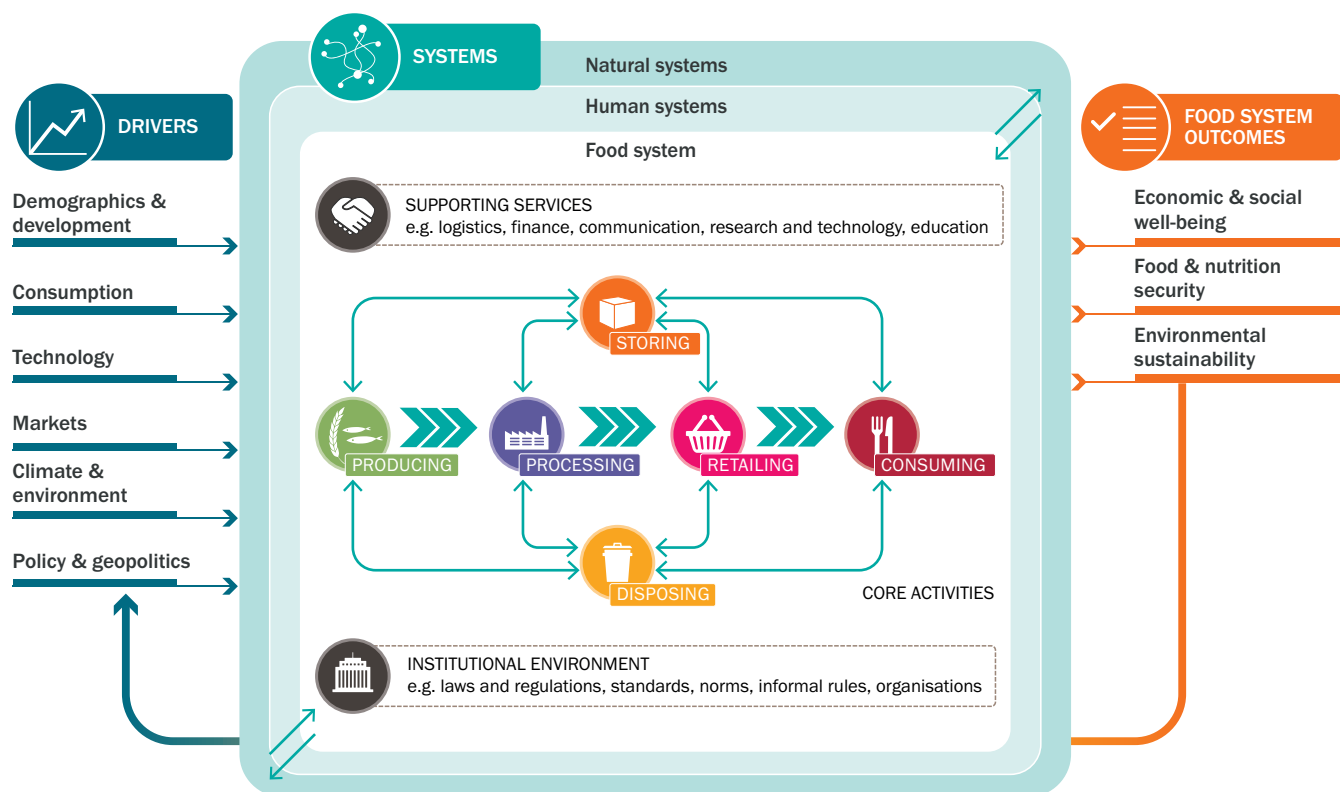
This report provides a snapshot of Leicestershire County’s food system. It outlines steps we are taking to achieve our food system goals, and identifies opportunities to collaborate across our food system to achieve the change we want to see.





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 county we will be in a better position to take advantage of co-benefits.





How well is Leicestershire's food system serving its people?



Nutrition and health

31.8% of adults are meeting the recommended 5-a-day fruit and veg consumption (2022/23) | *England: 31%*

31.9% of pupils in Year 6 are classified as overweight or obese (2022/23) | *England average 36.6%*

18.7% of pupils in Reception are classified as overweight or obese (2022/23) | *England average 21.3%*

Overall message

Although Leicestershire is doing well in comparison to the England average, the overall trend is negative.



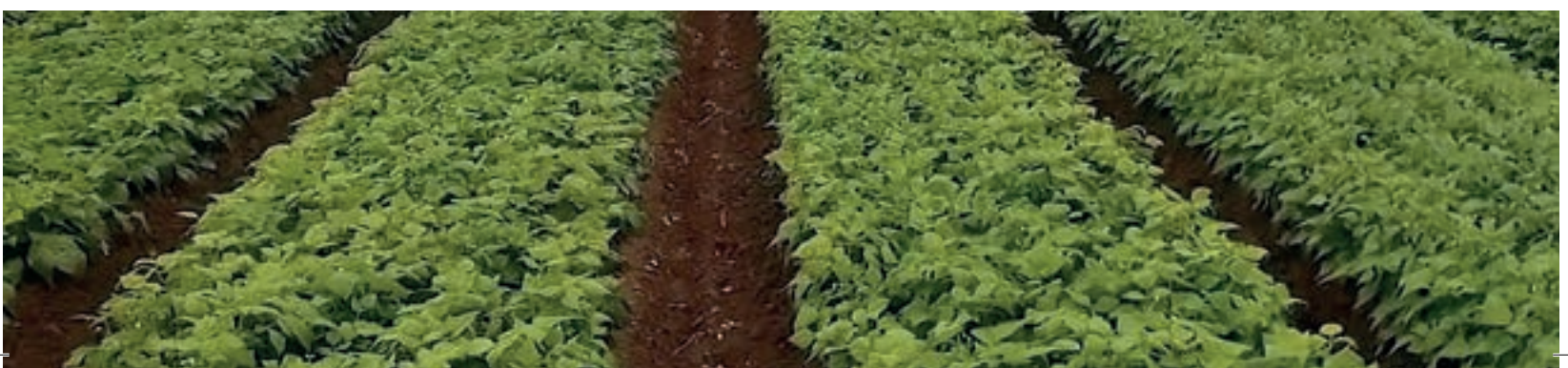
Environmental impact

In 2021, Leicestershire'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

In 2019, the number of people relying on food banks increased by **24%** on the previous year) **8,405** adults and **4,938** children (2018/19)

9% of households across the county are food insecure, higher than the national / England average of 7%.

Overall message

Food insecurity is increasing across the county.



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



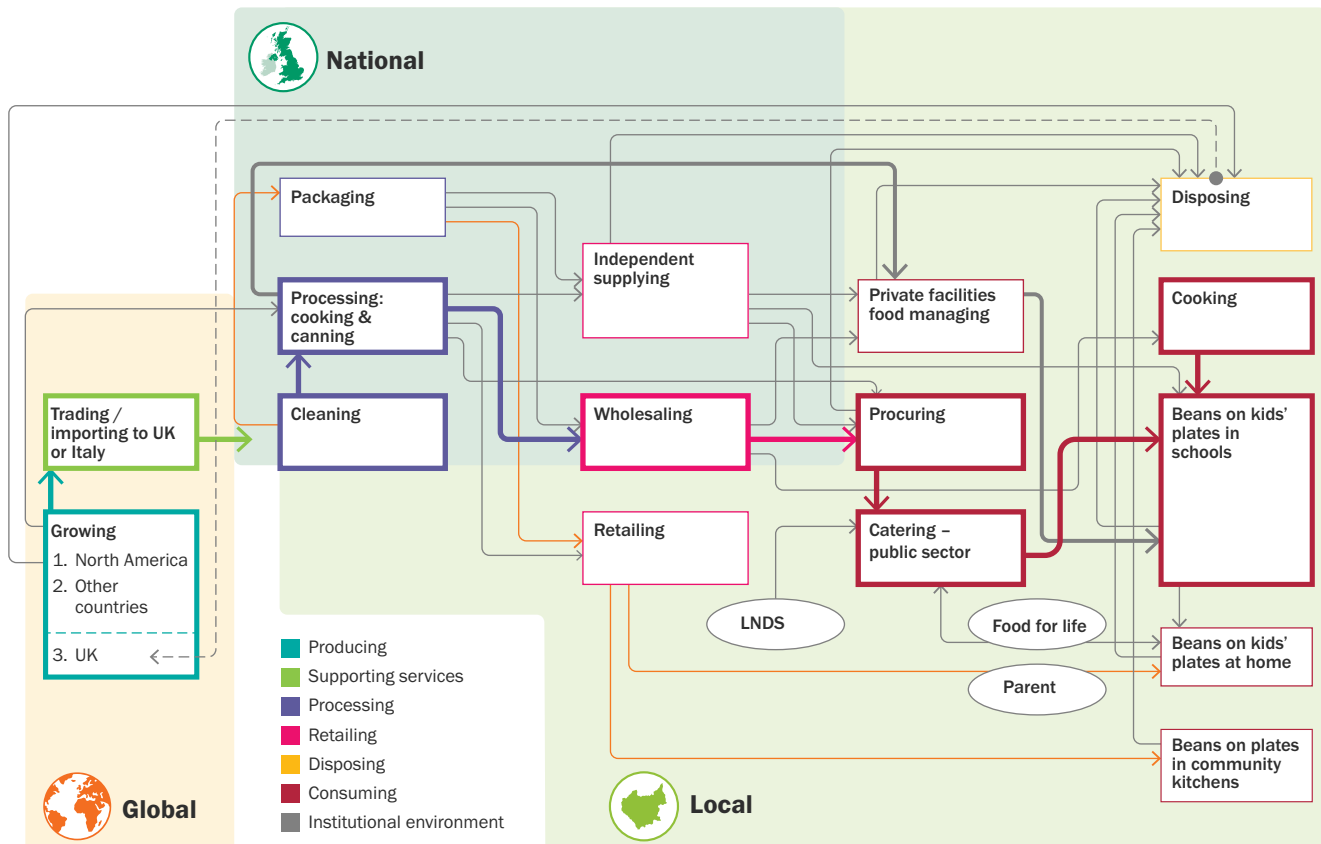
The vast majority of beans we consume in the UK are imported from overseas. We wanted to find out if eating more home-grown beans create positive change in our county's food system. Since May 2022 we've been working on with BeanMeals, testing whether greater consumption of UK beans could enhance local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

BeanMeals researchers worked in six schools in Leicestershire County Council and Leicester City 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 county and city 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 Leicestershire County



It's clear that there are red flags in our food system, from significant rates of childhood obesity 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.

How we're taking a systems approach through our Food Plan

In January 2024, Good Food Leicestershire was awarded a prestigious Sustainable Food Places Silver Award as it progressed towards a more sustainable and just food system. The Good Food Leicestershire partnership pulls together a diverse set of stakeholders from across the food system. This collaboration is underpinned by the Leicestershire Food Summit, which fosters further networking and collaboration.

Good Food Leicestershire supports a range of local strategies; one example is the Healthy Weight Strategy, which takes a whole systems approach by addressing areas such as inequality, the environment and the workplace in addition to diet and activity levels.

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

Good Food Leicestershire: resources.leicestershire.gov.uk/health-and-wellbeing/good-food-leicestershire



Find out more about BeanMeals:

www.eci.ox.ac.uk/beanmeals



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