

Improving access to fresh fruit and vegetables



Learnings from a pilot scheme in Whitleigh, Plymouth

This report shares insights from a research pilot to assess access to fresh fruit and vegetables within a community. A place-based, non means tested intervention, the Fresh Street Community project focused on Whitleigh, Plymouth.

Learnings from this pilot project can inform recommendations for improving access to healthier food in less affluent communities. These insights will be of value to anyone considering how to improve the local food system so that communities can feel the benefit.

Enablers and barriers to a successful fruit and vegetable scheme

Enablers

1. Convenient location
2. Freshness and quality
3. Word of mouth recommendation
4. Welcoming, sociable environment

Barriers

1. Communicating via letters and flyers
2. Stigma associated with vouchers
3. Word of mouth can be slow
4. Short duration of the pilot²

Communities with poor access to and low intake of fruit and vegetables may have diets that drive adverse health outcomes¹

Recommendations: Implementing a community-focused fruit and vegetable scheme

- The inclusion of community food researchers (CFRs) who know the local context will be integral to the success of your intervention.
- Co-design your scheme with community members and local partners.
- Explore existing local assets and relationships to enable delivery; groups and networks, community hubs and spaces, social media channels.
- Communicate via word of mouth. People are often deluged with printed materials so personal recommendation can be more effective.
- Distribute fruit and vegetables in a location that is familiar, safe and accessible for participants.
- Provide engagement activities and spaces that offer participants the opportunity to stop in and chat.



A community-centred approach to improving access to fresh fruit and vegetables

Read the impact report for more on the results of the pilot:
research.reading.ac.uk/food-systems-equality/foodsequal-health/

The research from the pilot resulted in:

- Increased fruit and vegetable intake
- Enhanced participant wellbeing
- Increased social connectivity
- A permanent space for the market stall



The impact of community food researchers

The inclusion of community food researchers (CFRs) who know the local context is integral to the success of an intervention. In Whiteleigh they influenced the intervention in a number of ways.

Creating a welcoming and sociable environment.

"I'm enjoying engaging with people on the project. It's been really interesting learning for me, new techniques for using fruit and vegetables, and I have more awareness of this now." Community Food Researcher

Helping to mitigate challenges, for example, participant recruitment and engagement.

"Engagement is an ongoing challenge. This can feel discouraging at times. How do you make this happen? People might really value the opportunity." Community Food Researcher

Providing deeper understanding of the complex barriers.

"The voucher scheme may be stigmatising in the context of people who are used to getting and using vouchers as part of a means-tested life." Community Food Researcher

Powerful advocates, building confidence in the scheme.

"It gives me confidence that people are getting a good product and you can talk about it, we know what we are promoting." Community Food Researcher

Research insights

Employment and training of community food researchers maximised the success of the intervention.

The local knowledge of **community food researchers** (CFRs) can shape the intervention in a number of ways.

- **Research design** – CFRs' local knowledge directly shapes decisions such as which participants / streets to include, the most suitable community venue and the types of activities that will be of value.
- **Participant recruitment and engagement** – CFRs are pivotal in creating a welcoming space, encouraging participants to engage in research conversations, which is important for assessing impact.
- **Communication** – CFRs are important trusted advocates, explaining the scheme and key to supporting residents' willingness to participate.
- **Local 'buy-in'** – Successful operation of the scheme relies on the practical support and buy-in of local partners, who understand the needs of the community and can help embed the intervention.

Produce quality makes a difference

Maximise impact by ensuring high quality of the fruit and vegetables supplied. This will enhance the reputation of the scheme for all stakeholders and drive word of mouth recommendations.

Vouchers can help or hinder

The Fresh Street model is a voucher-based intervention. While vouchers are tangible, shareable and reduce the financial barrier to access, they can also be stigmatising.

Some participants who initially declined to take part, later joined, attributed to growth in local confidence in the scheme, the quality of the fruit and vegetables and reliability of the service, overriding initial doubt or stigma.



How to build confidence in your scheme

Personal recommendations are central to building confidence and encouraging new participants.

Community Food Researchers (CFRs) provide opportunities for connection and create a welcoming environment through hands-on engagement activities and conversation. The Plymouth team became familiar faces and were a regular and friendly presence at the monthly Saturday market. The provision of a regular and reliable service with high-quality fruit and vegetables helped participants to form new and positive routines.

" I saw the video on Facebook today and I came down. I like being able to buy small amounts."
Regular market customer.



About Fresh Street Community Plymouth

Fresh Street Plymouth is part of FoodSEqual-Health (FS-Health), a daughter research project of Food Systems Equality (FoodSEqual). The research aimed to test:

- the feasibility of as well as the local enablers and barriers to the distribution of fresh fruit and vegetables using a non-means tested, place-based voucher scheme.
- how to work with local stakeholders and a team of community food researchers to deliver the intervention.

Find out more about Fresh Street Community and access related impact reports:



research.reading.ac.uk/food-systems-equality/impact-plymouth-ffv/

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References

1. Food Foundation, 2025. [The Broken Plate Report.](#)
2. Pan, J., Relton, C., Howard, L., Garg, P., Puranik, M., Thomas, M., Bradbeer, J., Sutton, R., Wagstaff, C. and Pettinger, C. [Exploring enablers and barriers to a fruit and vegetable voucher scheme in England: Insights from the Fresh Street Community feasibility study.](#) doi: 10.3390/nu17030483.



About Food Systems Equality (FoodSEqual)

The FoodSEqual research project works with less affluent communities to investigate how to co-develop new products, supply chains and policy frameworks that deliver affordable, attractive, healthy and sustainable diets. The research has brought together academic researchers, food industry representatives, voluntary sector organisations and policymakers.

FoodSEqual is one of the large-scale research projects in the £47.5M Transforming the UK Food System for Healthy People and a Healthy Environment SPF Programme. (TUKFS).

About the TUKFS programme

Delivered by UKRI, in partnership with the Global Food Security Programme, BBSRC, ESRC, MRC, NERC, Defra, DHSC, OHID, Innovate UK and FSA, TUKFS aims to fundamentally transform the UK food system by placing healthy people and a healthy natural environment at its centre, addressing questions around what we should eat, produce and manufacture and what we should import, taking into account the complex interactions between health, environment and socioeconomic factors.

Visit the FoodSEqual website:

research.reading.ac.uk/food-systems-equality

