



Healthy food within reach

Community evidence for the Good Food Cycle

Food insecurity and poor diets are major drivers of health inequality in the UK, particularly in disadvantaged communities. The FreshStreet Community project from the University of Reading shows that fruit and vegetable voucher schemes, when delivered in community settings, can improve access to healthy food. They also strengthen social connection and support healthier choices. Trusted community settings were key to successful engagement, yet stigma remains an important barrier to address. Scaling these approaches, in line with the Food Strategy for England, Good Food Cycle, and the NHS Neighbourhood Health Framework, would support the shift from treating illness to preventing it. This can improve population health and reduce inequalities.



Photo credit: M. Puranik, FreshStreet Project, University of Reading

FreshStreet Community Project, University of Reading

The FreshStreet project combined providing fruit and vegetable vouchers with a weekly local FV market. It was delivered through a community hub alongside wrap-around services, including NHS health checks, Citizens Advice, and social activities. Participants reported improved confidence in buying and preparing fresh produce. They also felt less socially isolated. The hub created a welcoming and supportive environment. It helped reduce stigma and encouraged people to take part. It also increased fruit and vegetable intake, with participants eating an **additional 1.2 portions per day over 12 months**.

“It’s prompted us to eat more veg and we even do vegetarian days now.”

FreshStreet Participant, July 2024



Supporting health through community and connection

The community-based model creates safe, welcoming spaces that reduce loneliness and strengthen local support networks, while also improving diets. Participants valued the trusted faces, easy access, and sense of togetherness. However, mobility issues, language barriers, and stigma around using paper vouchers can limit participation. Such models also require significant resources. Policymakers must balance the benefits of tailored, community-led support against delivery costs. Early investments in improving citizens' health can generate long-term savings for the NHS and a wider range of social benefits.

"Easy to access... convenient to use, especially with familiar faces in the community. It encourages people to get healthy food."

Community workshop participant, May 2026

Policy Recommendations

- **To align with the Good Food Cycle and the NHS Neighbourhood Health Framework, Defra should invest in community-based fruit and vegetable schemes**, expanding funding for local authorities and trusted community organisations.
- **When designing these models, local authorities should aim to reduce stigma and ensure dignity for the user.** To avoid users feeling shame or charity schemes must be inclusive and welcoming.
- **The Government's plan for new 250 Neighbourhood Health Centres, as set out in the NHS 10-year plan, should integrate local food schemes.** This is an opportunity to use the new centres to play a role in the planned shift from treatment to prevention.
- **Defra's pilot studies under the Good Food Cycle must embed robust evaluation** to ensure success can be delivered at scale.

These recommendations support the Government's commitment to improving the local food system and support the shift from healthcare treatment to prevention.

"We need to unlock expertise, energy and experience at a local level to deliver improved outcomes where they are most needed."

UK Government Food Strategy for England, July 2025

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