

Harnessing the power of food citizenship

Open space notes

2nd October 2019

A total of 70+ pioneers gathered and discussed eight chosen themes to further explore food citizenship and identify what the next steps may be for the moment. A summary of these discussions is presented here. If you would like to discuss any of these further, please [get in touch](#). If you were present on the day and want to add your reflections, let us know too!

Sessions to further address how thinking of ourselves and others as food citizens, rather than consumers, help solve the challenges of our food systems.		Page
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How can we bring a diversity of ideas into the National Food Strategy?

Overview of the National Food Strategy Call for evidence

- The call for evidence is really a call for ideas
- Process – summer 2020 – final report due to be published; which should receive a formal response from government
- Not finalised collective vision yet, but there is a draft vision and draft high-level objectives; policy development built on ongoing consultative process
- England strategy, but talking to Devolved Administrations – learn e.g. Wellbeing of Future Generations Act from Wales, Good Food Nation Bill from Scotland
- Not looking to rewrite Agriculture Bill, Fisheries Bill etc – strategy wants to build on existing landscape
- There is cross-party support for the strategy
- Looking at what can learn from other countries
- Want to see what hasn't worked as much as what has
- What are top areas of priority to change?
- Recognise overarching constraints
- Public dialogue – lots of questions about values; that's where National Food Strategy team wants to engage and understand more where people are at
- In responding to the call for evidence/ call for ideas, is the UK Government saying “we'll do your ideas for you” or “let's do them together”? It was suggested the latter would be more powerful
- The [Call for Evidence](#) is open until the 25th October 2019.

Suggestions

- CSA in every neighbourhood
- Need to look at import and export policy.
- More 'local' purchasing not just UK
- Look at large suppliers to public sector

“Any vision of a better food system has to be built upon an understanding of what citizens value. It cannot be generated in a vacuum. Citizens will also bring fresh ideas, insights, and energy to the process. In developing a National Food Strategy, we will involve people from all over the country in a national conversation about how we should transform our food system.”

Henry Dimbleby
Independent Lead, National Food Strategy

Quote from the report '[Harnessing the power of food citizenship](#)'

- Position the role of people/ the public
- Canada and New Zealand – create popular consensus around what people want out of the food system; set of principles to hang by
- CSA model – risks and reward shared between producers and citizens
- Tackle labelling
- Allotments Act – food growing communities in cities
- Food waste is not the solution to food poverty

Inspiration

- Food Citizenship toolkit – how people can influence/change business
- Sustainable Food Cities mentioned as being an easy route to getting into talking to people – good access to range of stakeholders
- Institutional settings important – hospitals, schools, prisons. Which prisons doing good things? Clink – training prisoners; Food Matters in Brighton – doing well; Belfast Prison

Examples of key collaborations

- Sustainable Food Cities
- Food Matters
- Food for Life (SA)
- Fairtrade Foundation network
- Ethical Trading Initiative
- Fair Food
- CSA network UK
- Networks developed by other government departments (eg: DOH, education, etc.)

Remaining questions

- What is the role of business, individual farmers, etc., going forward?
- How do we create an enabling environment?

Where are the synergies between positive mental health in food citizenship and healthy eating?

There was a focus on community connections, whatever form that takes – in person, online, making connections with people. Feeling isolated stops people stepping into the space as citizens. The way to overcome that is some form of action, something that can reconnect people, that can take many forms in today's society.

What can encourage people to become citizens is positive action with support from social media messages. It's in our nature to need stronger bonds with others, but we are dominated by a transactional society. How do we unlock that? With positive role modelling, and time.

TO	FROM
Lack of connection	Reaching out
Wages low, bullying, shifts long, unsociable	Emotional engagement
Suicides in kitchen-chefs and farmers	"let's have lunch together"
trapped, prisons, aggressive, stress	Vibrant, busy, connected
Motivation is hard	Green, soil, nature, growing (supports feeling better)
Debt/embarrassment	Spend 30-40% of time with what connects/serves you
Aloneness/loneliness, choice, barrier	Reciprocity
	Wellbeing in community
	No judgment
	Free space

Key intervention points

- Men's mental health
- Neighbours
- Skill-sharing
- Care homes + children
- Growing in outdoor spaces outside care homes + restaurants.

- Tackling isolation
- Local-street, town, suburb
- Community leaders, duty, acts of service

Changing landscape

- Evolution of communication
- Mental health + social comparison as part of dietary guidelines

Inspiration

- Slow food
- Big lunch
- FFL get together
- Brazilian dietary guidance

Remaining questions:

- How to feel empowered when we are in a bad place?
- Can more structure help us with motivation?

How can food citizenship help us reframe poverty?

We are not going to solve food poverty with food. Under the consumer mindset, choices and actions we take are limited by capital. Can reframe it by not looking at it as a problem of access to food, but as a problem of responsibilities and rights.

Context

- Historic culture paternalistic



- Aid vs cooperative modes -> impact on how we think of solutions
- Food as a necessity – having the luxury of choice
- Uncomfortable with the words “food poverty” – but most people in this space know that what we are really referring to is poverty.
- Food poverty = visibility of system failure
- Food = necessity for life

Root causes

- Disempowerment is at the heart of people’s situation in poverty.
- Root causes – universal credit
- Urgency of food poverty – need to respond to immediate need + also address root causes
- “food poverty” -> problematising. What about metrics? calories? challenge framing of food poverty as fixable – poverty as root cause -> but food is a good angle to address it -> leverage it for advocacy

Principles

- From right to food to responsibility to feed? Food citizenship = responsibility to carry each other?
- Food citizenship =/= buying ethical
- action + agency
- Poverty vs fc – both an access point -> voices/campaigning rather than simply/only purchase decisions, and a hurdle (academic language/complex)
- Right to food? Better food? Passive vs active?
- Choosing vs creating options – choice as consumerist mode

Barriers

- Interlinked areas in life, not enough time, not in the right headspace
- Middle class citizenship -> how can people empower themselves? -> but choices available are very limited

Opportunities

- Use food banks as a starting point to look for/reshape solutions for (food waste) and poverty
- Immediate food transaction make access space source for greater agency. Eg: Sheffield social market, being a respected part of community (financially or otherwise eg: volunteering)
- To be a food citizen, need capital BUT Financial capital + social +cultural capital -> to participate as active participants
- Open up artisanal food? Less exclusive?

Key questions:

- In what ways do people want to be involved rather than what do we expect?
- Engagement with difficulty with access?
- Food system is commercial, therefore need money to participate. Where, when and how is it not?
- Food citizenship is very academic. How do we explain it without the jargon?
- How can food be inclusive? (Better yet, where/when is food inclusive?)

How is the term 'tribe' negatively or positively impacting food citizenship?

Tribes are initially used to create a groundswell of support, but language adapts and moves and evolves. As a brand or organisation scales up and moves forward, the language matures and evolves towards the language of 'movement'. This potentially make them more inclusive and creates more order within the community.

Non-maturation:

- Us vs them
- Remain exclusive/closed
- doesn't tell story/values
- colonial legacy
- excludes socio-economic communities
- fatigues

- dilutes message
- talks down

As it gains audience:

- Branding + marketing -> capture money -> consumerism mindset
- Early adopters to form a groundswell – fashionable terms “disruptors”, “bring down system”

Maturation:

- **leads to movement** (eg: Extinction Rebellion)
- **ordinary is OK** (don't need to try so hard, tell story honestly)
- **permeable**, open to change, longevity
- **creates a new system**, based on shared value and supporting ‘the whole’, no imposed hierarchy
- **inclusive**, rewarding the community
- **dynamic**, people can dip in and out as change occurs
- **adaptable**

Can we coalesce around the big issues of our time – global heating + biodiversity loss and join as vegetarian/vegans/selective meat eaters?

The short answer concluded was YES. The work from the New Citizenship Project shows very clearly that we are naturally citizens – it is other stuff that has got in the way. We have polarized around food (eg. vegan vs meat eater), but there are much bigger issues like global heating and biodiversity loss that we can coalesce and transcend if they are brought to the fore.

What defines an ethical food choice and how do we ensure people are making it despite barriers they might face (cost/availability/etc.)?

The discussion around ethics in food shed light on what a complex topic this is. We have to accept that our actions might be different under different situations.

Intellectual vs emotional

- Intellectual vs emotional actions
- From Choice to Action
- Labelling true cost, Transparency to allow choice
- Too much information can be overwhelming. Info overload.
- Consumer choice/action vs business providing ethical choices
- Education: True cost + value sharing

Ethics vs sustainability

- There is no universal system of ethics
- Not just about metrics
- Is ethics = sustainability?
- Access to traditional foods, Access to culturally appropriate food
- Buyers' ethics
- Ethics = complex values
- Best choice from options and information available
- Does price reflect value?
- What about fairness?
- Shelves in a supermarket don't allow you to have a debate (needed for ethical judgement)

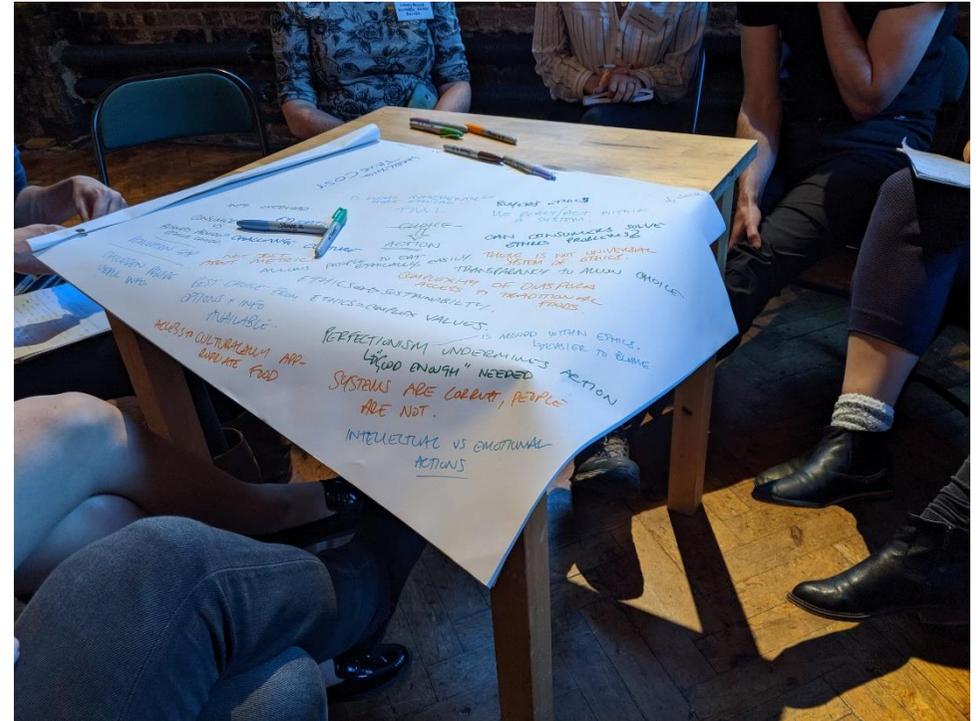


Photo credit: Emma Lange

System vs individual

- Challenge culture
- Perception gap
- Systems are corrupt, people are not
- We react/act within a system
- Food culture
- Mary Whitehouse? Decency on TV – lessons to be drawn
- Ethical food system (rather than simply ethical choices/actions)
- Allow people to eat ethically easily

Perfectionism vs 'good enough'

- Perfectionism undermines action – “good enough” needed
- Sustainability leads to metrics leads to perfectionism
- Ethics leads to judgment leads to trade-offs and ‘good enough’
- When perfectionism is triggered, there is little room for mistakes

Key questions

- Is local inherently more ethical?
- Can people solve ethics problems?

How can we bring existing food outlets on board with food citizenship, who see/treat food as a commodity?

While food outlets can often get a bad rep in our urge to positively change the food system, a key thought was that food outlets, business owners and staff too should be treated as food citizens by other stakeholders in the food system.

Meaning of food

- Why do we eat food? Meaning of food in our daily lives?
 - To Share stories
 - For nutrition
- The meaning of food in people's lives is a starting point. We need to think of it as a journey.

Barriers

What is the end game? Business doesn't necessarily know where they will end – where are they at now? A business may have good ideas but not necessarily have the resources/space.

Values

What are the values of food outlets?

- Positive language
- Empowerment

Building relationships

- Meeting half-way
- Use of language

Interventions

- Staff in food outlets are part of the influence. They should be treated as food citizens too.
- Likewise, Food citizenship for customers and business owners as well.
- Need positive + kind activism
 - Organisations may already be doing elements that are good.
 - Highlight the positives and share good practice (eg: chalk boards around free-range eggs), including good food stories.
- Creating a local food trail/map, which includes food growing + sustainable food outlets.
- Find ways to reach out to organisations to build up momentum

Key questions

- What sort of customers do they want to attract? And what do these customers want?
- How do we merge food citizenship with nutrition/environment, may not always be neat overlap.

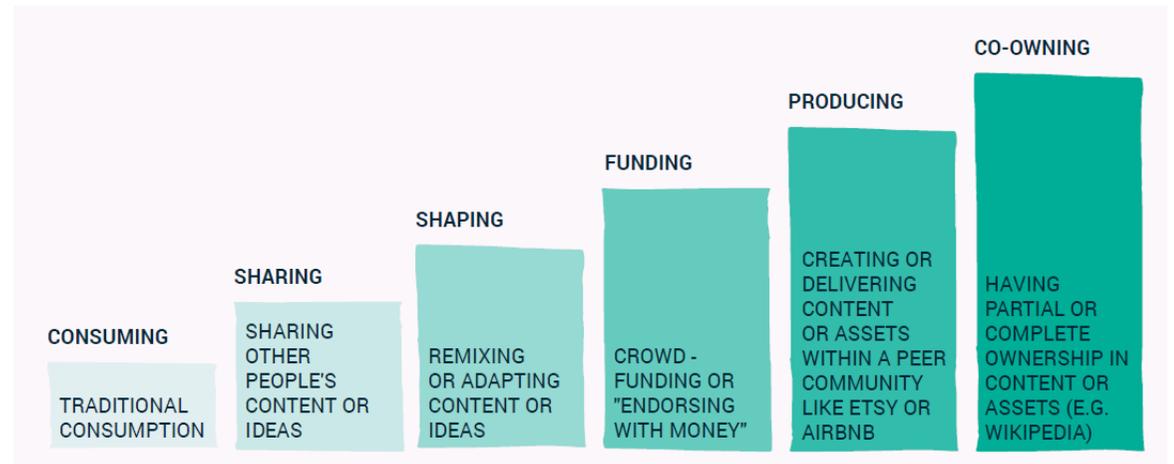
Based on everything today, what am I/you/we going to do (differently) tomorrow, next month and next year?

Moving beyond the consumerist mentality, we need suggestions that are not just 'shopping' and reframe our use of language.

The group loved the theory of food citizenship – but now what? Key reflections from the morning presentations included:

- Community-based definition of food citizenship is more inclusive.
- Start small + fun! Check out the Participation scale below for more inspiration
- Action at individual, organisation and movement level.
- Belonging firsts and then action.

A useful resource includes the Participation Scale from the book '[New Power](#)'. [Image source: [New Citizenship Project \(2017\) Food Citizenship \(page 43\)](#)]



Group members committed to the following actions to do following the conference:

1. Using 'find and replace' to replace 'consumer' with 'citizen, people, household' in action plans.
2. Going to change the classic Powerpoint slide about from 'where/how to shop' to taking the scope much further.
3. Being more intentional about the stories we tell, so they are beyond just consumerist narratives.

Find out more at foodcitizenship.info