

BFT IMPACT REPORT

2024/25



Our Vision

Better Food Traders is non-profit Community Interest Company that empowers and equips communities, local authorities, farmers and traders to rebuild an independent, sustainable food sector. We support agroecological farming and build routes to market that reduce the environmental impacts of food, enabling a just transition to a more climate- and nature-friendly food system.

✉ hello@betterfoodtraders.org

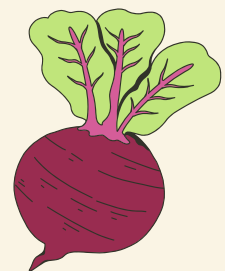
🌐 www.betterfoodtraders.org

SUMMARY

This has been our first year as an independent Community Interest Company (having previously been hosted by Growing Communities) and our focus has been on diversifying both our income and our work. This led to slightly slower growth in our membership though still strong (40 new BFTs over the year) while we put energy into internal systems and external work.

In terms of our income, we continue to build our membership fees, ticket sales and consultancy, and we are successfully diversifying our core funders as well as project funders. In terms of our work, our Theory of Change is based on the need to influence and shape three important and interrelated parts of the system: the traders who make up our membership, the research and policy landscape around food production and distribution, and the public and institutions who purchase food. We can't change one without the other, and together they create a virtuous circle of change.

While the last 12 months have continued to be challenging for sustainable food traders due to higher in-costs, wage increases, lower customer spending and now the increase in Employer's NIC contributions, the market for organic in the UK is still growing strongly - up 7.3% year on year, with 9% growth among independent retailers. Consumer support for organic food has stayed high and 7 in 10 shoppers are intentionally buying organic, according to the Soil Association's 2025 Organic Market Report.



There should also be some optimism around the government's forthcoming Food Strategy, the 25 Year Farming Roadmap, the commitment to put 50% local or sustainable food on the public plate by the end of this parliament, and the Devolution Priority Programme - all of which should enable a more resilient food system. Independent, sustainable food traders play a vital role in the rebuilding of our regional food systems, while new supply chains such as non-profit Regional Food Hubs offer an alternative to Big Food.

OUR COMBINED IMPACT



Better Food Traders sold over **£33,500,000** worth of fresh produce from UK agroecological farmers last year.

More than **400 climate and nature-friendly farms** in the UK are being supported by our members, and more in Europe.

200+ Better Food Traders and their **58,600 weekly customers** are working together to change the food system.

As Prof Tim Lang's *Just In Case: Narrowing the UK Civil Food Resilience Gap* report highlights, we urgently need to diversify UK food supply through more food being grown locally by sustainable means, and **more diverse supply chains and retail**. Currently, just 5% of all UK grocery spend goes through independent retailers, where local farmers and communities can take a fair share in the value chain.

WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT US



OUR MEMBERS

Feedback from members highlights how BFT support is especially useful because it is sector-specific and builds skills and confidence:



“The trainer really knew what she was talking about. They listened and responded with some very insightful suggestions and plans.”

“Your advisor boosted our morale and reassured us by suggestions she made - that we are doing, and have done, the right things.”

OUR PARTNERS

“Thank you to you all for a great event yesterday! We’ve received lots of positive feedback.” - Devon Food Partnership

“Thank you for your contribution to our webinar today. It was really interesting listening to you speak and you added some good insights to the discussion.” - UKOrganic

SUPPORT FOR TRADERS

In the year 2024/25 we ran 30 hours of online training sessions through the year on a wide range of topics from Marketing Strategy and Implementation to Setting Up a Farmers' Market to Finding Funding. Average attendance at each session was 15 organisations, similar to last year.

We have expanded our peer-learning groups, with regular online Meet-Ups for Shopkeepers, Veg Scheme Managers, Marketing Leads and now Market Managers and Stallholders, and we usually see 8-14 members at each one. We have a strong newsletter readership: our average open rate is 59% (above the typical average readership for the NGO sector of 49%), and engagement with our new peer-to-peer Facebook group is growing.

BUSINESS SUPPORT WEEK

This event has become a core part of our calendar of support, and this January we set up 55 hours of 1:1 business advice clinics for our members, delivered by experts on Margins and Pricing, Financial Planning, How to Establish and Run an Ethical Supermarket, Social Media, and Farmers' Markets. We also ran five workshops that were open to non-members, including a lively panel on Wholesale and a webinar on Growing Your Bakery Business, which was attended by 60 people.

Feedback on business advisors included: [the Farmers' Market expert] "gave great guidance and made me think about doing a few things really well rather than trying to do too much, too soon" and [the Marketing expert] "took my buckets of potential content/messages/selling points, which had felt overwhelming, and simplified and structured them". 85% of respondents said that their advice session was useful or very useful, and 100% said they would take part in BFT's Business Support Week again.

SUPPORT FOR TRADERS

ANNUAL GATHERING

This year, 60 attendees gathered at OrganicLea in Hawkwood, on the London/Essex border of Epping Forest. As ever, BFT members had travelled from all over the country, and were also joined by colleagues from Sustain, Organic Research Centre, Landworkers Alliance and the Soil Association.

The day included a round-up of Better Food Traders' past year, Business Advice Speed Dating, parallel sessions on Organic Market Insights and Selling Business to Business, plus a tour of the growing site and operations.

Participants said they particularly enjoyed the "Interesting, varied content; nice structure to the day," and one told us: "I loved today. I'm meeting the team tomorrow and I'm going to tell them what an inspirational day it has been."



SUPPORT FOR TRADERS

DATA DEEP DIVE

In June, we revealed the findings of the *Better Food Traders Data Deep Dive*: the only report of its kind to assess key metrics from BFT members (such as wages to sales, basket size, marketing effectiveness) against industry ratios. Members have told us it has been really useful to assess their own organisations against these benchmarks, and have been very supportive of the BFT aim of standardising data collection and aggregating sustainable food data to give a better picture of the whole sector.



SHOPKEEPERS' TOOLKIT

In the autumn we released our *Organic Consumers: Retailers Toolkit* in collaboration with UK Organic and Organic Research Centre. This was a digestible and actionable version of a larger piece of research on organic consumers. In particular it highlighted that Organic consumers are not who you think they are (ie the wealthy, middle-class stereotype). It then went into consumer insights and product category recommendations. One reader gave the feedback: "This is so encouraging to learn about."

REGIONAL FOOD HUBS

In January, we began our 12-month Regional Food Hubs Support Programme – run in collaboration with Sustain, the Soil Association and Growing Communities. Through targeted training and support, the programme aims to help 12 hubs grow their wholesale operations and increase supply to public institutions.



From FoodLink NE in Aberdeenshire to Sustainable Food Cornwall/Falmouth Food Coop in the Southwest, these twelve hubs across the UK are all united by a mission to increase routes to market for agroecological produce in their regions. The majority are established and looking to build their sales or move into new markets, two are recent start-ups (Gather in North Lancashire and Bwyd Sir Gâr Food in Carmarthenshire) and three are planning to start trading in 2025 (Sussex Food Depot, FoodLink NE and the Cornwall partnership).

We aim to capture learnings and observations from the programme to help Sustainable Food Places better understand what conditions are needed to make a Food Hub viable, what are the main challenges, how to increase B2B and B2G sales, and whether food hubs are always the solution.

PARTNERSHIPS

We have a deep ethos of collaboration, which we see as vital to achieving systemic change. In the last year this has included working with:

Sustain, Soil Association, Sustainable Food Places and Growing Communities - the Regional Food Hubs Programme

Landworkers Alliance, Pasture For Life and the Food Farming and Countryside Commission - working on the Local Food Growth Plan along with Sustain

Bridging the Gap - on the steering group

Riverford, UKOrganic, Soil Association, FoodFacts.org, The Community Farm, The Nest - BFT is co-ordinating and chairing the Marketing & Public Campaigns subgroup of the Local Food Working Party

Member of the Local Food Working Party

UKGrainLab and The Real Bread Campaign - collaborating on training for bakeries

Ooooby and Growing Good - collaborating on training

The Food Data Collaboration - on the governance group

The Church of England - training and support for churches who want to set up farmers' markets and other food trading initiatives

We are partners on the Soil Association's New Organic Entrepreneurs programme, and hope to be working more closely with the Real Farming Trust and Ooooby in the coming months.

We've also worked with a number of Local Food Partnerships across the UK, including in-person training on food and sustainability principles for Devon Food Partnership, and convening an engaging and inspiring day for Kent Food Partnership, bringing together people from across Kent to use Collective Imagination Practice reimagine a diverse, vibrant and sustainable food economy for the county.

POLICY & RESEARCH

We have been growing our research and policy work this year, including:

- Undertaking scoping research into carbon footprinting regional food hubs and how they have potential to reduce carbon emissions, funded by the AFN Network+.
- *Backcasting to Achieve Food Resilience in the UK* part of a consortium of universities and NGOs involved in this 3-year UKRI-funded project.
- We are backing the Universal Income 4 Farmers campaign
- We co-signed the F&V Alliance's Horticulture briefing to the new Sec of State for DEFRA
- We co-signed a letter to Steve Reed concerning the economic situation facing farmers, co-drafted between Sustain and LINK.
- We submitted evidence to: the DEFRA Fresh Produce consultation, the Government's National Planning Policy Review and the Land-Use Consultation.

Policy and research events at which we've spoken:

- *Where are the limits of industry efforts? The role of policy in decarbonising the food value chain and ensuring food security* - panel discussion in Westminster organised by Tetrapak
- UKOrganic panel on consumer insights and the organic market
- In January, the BFT team took part in a number of discussions and workshops at ORFC, including a panel we organised on *Indie Food Retail: Challenges, Learnings and Success Stories*, which had strong audience numbers in-person and online, and got some trade press coverage.
- We also hosted BFT networking drinks at ORFC as part of Farming the Future's networks of supply field-building, which brought around 60 people together from sustainable food enterprises, sector NGOs and other networks such as UK Grain Lab. The atmosphere was buzzing and lots of great conversations and connections were created!

ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

In October, we ran a social media campaign playing on popular supermarket phrases such as “Taste the Difference” and “Feel Good About Food”, including paid adverts that directed shoppers to our trader map. For this campaign, the map had been updated and improved with a postcode search, delivery areas, and lots of lovely new photos and info.

As well as sending people to their nearest BFT, we wanted to showcase how many local, sustainable food retailers of all shapes and sizes there are across the UK. We need to become more visible as a sector, and encourage people to support British farmers by making independent food retail part of their regular shopping habits.

Overall the campaign performed very well with better delivery metrics than last year, likely due to the ads being made for paid activity. The campaign exceeded benchmarks for link clicks, reaching more than 275,000 Facebook and Instagram accounts and generating 17,500 clicks – a 2.82% click through rate. The campaign generated nearly 34,000 engagements, and we also gained 500+ Instagram followers and had more applications to join than normal, so all good outcomes.



THANK YOU

We couldn't support so many brilliant enterprises (and in turn, routes to market for climate- and nature-friendly farmers) without guidance from our brilliant board members and funding from:

Our members and supporters

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Farming the Future

The Collective Imagination Practice Fund

Evan Cornish Foundation

School for Social Entrepreneurs

AFN Network+

UKRI

Thanks to you all, especially our members who make this such a brilliant network.

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