



FULL REPORT

MY FOOD COMMUNITY

FULL EVALUATION REPORT ON THE FIRST TWO YEARS OF THE COMMUNITY FOOD LEADERSHIP PROGRAMME

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

In the context of a cost-of-living crisis, many activists are working within their communities to promote access to affordable, healthy, and sustainable food. Yet there are very few opportunities to share experiences, ideas, and resources between such community food champions, and to develop the skills needed to create change.

The Soil Association's My Food Community is a community leadership programme intended to create 'a network for good food champions to learn, connect and take action'. My Food Community forms part of Food for Life Get Togethers (FFLGT), a UK-wide National Lottery funded initiative designed to make the 'good food the easy choice for everyone'.

My Food Community (MFC) is run as an online training programme for approximately six months, with opportunity for face-to-face meetings. After the training, participants can apply for a small grant to give them the opportunity to put their newly developed skills into practice by implementing a food-based project in their local area. To date, the programme has run twice starting in September 2021 and in September 2022. This evaluation report covers both programme runs.

Central to the MFC design has been an ethos of 'test and learn', making the programme flexible and adaptive according to feedback during delivery. This iterative design was intended to help the team refine the programme as it develops. In the second year, key revisions to the programme included the presentation of more materials in advance, greater emphasis on the learning objectives and reflection processes, and a focus of the small grant on developing personal leadership skills. Year two also saw the number of enrolled participants almost double from 39 to 77 individuals.

Our evaluation of the MFC programme followed a mixed methods design that was tailored to each delivery. We sought to explore the impacts of the programme on the community food leadership of participants as well as participant perceptions of the delivery and value of the programme.

The findings presented here mainly concern Version 2 of the programme, but we start with a summary of the findings from the initial Version 1.



GET TOGETHERS

Bringing people together through food

MFC Version 1: Summary of the evaluation findings

The profiles of 39 participants in Version 1 showed that they were active across a wide range of community food projects prior to applying to the programme, with the majority involved in community events and workshops, activities associated with reducing food insecurity or growing produce. At the outset, 13 of 39 participants described themselves as being passionate about connecting communities and bringing people together through food, whilst reducing food waste, sharing food, food education and gardening or growing were all of equal importance.

Attendance fluctuated in the online sessions, with a core group of around one third of participants remaining highly engaged over the full course of the programme. Feedback showed that participants felt confidence and kudos from the programme, had developed their personal networks at a national level, and changed their ideas around leadership and their own aspirations.

A survey of 22 participants, 12 months after the start of the course (and six months after receiving the small grant) found that a majority (73%, n=16) 'strongly agreed' that their grant helped them to apply their learning from MFC. Recalling their experience, over 85% of respondents reported to have made several connections after taking part in the MFC programme in terms of sharing ideas, contacts, resources or working together on activities with others involved in food issues. A majority gave improved self-reports for a range of measures relating knowledge competencies, and skills for community food work and leadership. These self-reports helped shape the measures adopted for the evaluation of Version 2.

"My Food Community has been invaluable in gaining confidence to approach businesses, community leaders and individuals with my ideas... I learned how to place myself and learn skills in listening, how to position myself and how to succeed. Two years ago, I think I would have struggled to get this project to be a success."

MFC Version 2: Baseline profile of participants

For the baseline survey of MFC Version 2 (n=54/77), most of the respondents were women (65%, n=35) and from a White ethnic background (56%, n=30). The majority of the survey participants were aged 40–59 years = (37%, n=20). About one third described themselves as 'professionals' (35%, n=19), mainly from community and voluntary sector organisations. Most participants (44%, n=24) carried out their activities in England and the rest of the activities took place in Northern Ireland (7%, n=4), Scotland (9%, n=5) and Wales (9%, n=5).

Depending on the type of training, between one third and a half of participants had no prior experience of professional development support in five years. At the outset, 41% did not perceive themselves to be a leader in food activities. Overall, participation in prior training courses was not statistically associated with better self-perceptions of skills and competencies linked to community food leadership.

At the start of the programme, participants had high expectations. The main themes concerned their desire to make connections new people outside their networks who share interests on community food issues. Other themes reflected the goals of the programme, which was a good indication that the MFC application and selection process was well targeted.

MFC Version 2: Delivery records and profile of the participants at six-month follow-up

The programme records show that the team delivered 26 online sessions over a six month period. These covered themes around networking with the cohort, leadership approaches and skills, learning and inspiration on community food issues, peer-to-peer mentoring, and review/evaluation.

The team maintained contact to the end point of the online sessions with nearly all individuals enrolling with the programme (75 of 77). Records showed that session attendance varied between 49 to 18 people per session. About half of the cohort attended 25% or more sessions of the programme in real time (participants had the opportunity to catch up with recorded sessions). Attendance between different types of sessions varied, but there was little overall difference between the leadership component and the learning and inspiration components of the programme. Thirty five members attended one of the face-to-face events, and a small percentage (n=3) had a very high level of overall attendance (75% or more) across the course of the programme. For those taking part in sessions, the feedback was consistently very positive, with the overwhelming majority strongly or very strongly agreeing that they felt they had met specified learning objectives. From the total cohort of 75 completing the training element of the programme, 31 went on to successfully apply for the MFC Leadership Action Grant.

MFC Version 2: Effectiveness in developing knowledge, skills and competencies

At six months from the start, 31 participants completed a follow-up survey. Out of these, 18 provided personalised codes that allowed us to directly link follow-up responses to their baseline survey responses. At follow-up, we obtained representation from all demographic variables reported at baseline, albeit there were higher proportions who identified as women, White

and aged 50–59 years. Members of MFC Version 2 who took part in the evaluation baseline and follow-up surveys reported significant improvements ($p < 0.05$) in the following areas:

- Advocating and initiating for sustainable food-related issues within their communities
- Helping others to take action on healthy and sustainable food-related issues within their communities
- Developing ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in their local communities
- Raising awareness around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in their local communities
- Helping others to identify opportunities to promote healthy and sustainable food-related activities within their local communities
- Inspiring others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues within their local communities and actively connecting with others outside their local communities in food activities
- Skills and leadership in driving local food activities
- Personal understanding of food citizenship
- How to become an active food citizen
- Active reflection on how to influence healthy and sustainable food related issues
- Leadership in healthy and sustainable food-related activities within and beyond their community

The wide range of positive impact findings indicate that MFC achieved many of its programme ambitions after six months of training.



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Belville community garden, Greenock
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“ I am so often caught up in the day-to-day and just don't get the chance to actively reflect. This course ... brings me into a space where everyone is working with one another to do the same thing...”

“ Very useful from a technical perspective, and super-inspiring on a personal level. The number and variety of experiences stimulated by this programme that have led to tangible and significant real-world progress, is remarkable.”

MCF Version 2: Participant perceptions of the programme delivery

Participant perceptions of programme delivery help explain how many of the positive impacts were achieved. Several positive survey results showed that:

- The online and face-to-face environments enhanced flexibility to engage with the programme. The online sessions sometimes enhanced connectivity by bridging geographical barriers.
- My Food Community met or exceeded the expectations of members in various areas including leadership in food activities, networking, being inspired by others and learning new knowledge around food systems.
- Highlights that came through My Food Community for members were connections and networking, funding, opportunities for reflection, motivation and impact.
- Members found the Leadership Action Grant useful in enhancing partnership working and found them empowering in initiating and applying the knowledge and skills learnt from the My Food Community programme. They suggested that peer working or mentoring support would be helpful in developing the grant application.
- All those who were able to attend the nation specific events, found them to be inspiring and motivating.

SUMMARY OF THE MAIN LEARNING OUTCOMES

Using quantitative measures, baseline and follow-up evaluation showed that members of MFC Version 2 reported significant improvements in the following areas:

- Developing knowledge and understanding of food citizenship and local food system issues
- Applying specific leadership skills to work on food issues with diverse communities and situations
- Raising awareness and supporting other community members take action on food issues
- Influencing local policies and programmes on food issues

- Developing actions beyond their own community of interest or place
- Reflecting upon their personal journey and developing strategies for personal growth as leaders on community food issues.

These findings mirror results from first run of the programme. The positive outcomes indicate that MFC achieved many of its programme ambitions after six months of training. After the training period, initial feedback those taking up the Leadership Action Grant indicates that participants were able to put their learning into practice.

Participants also reported on areas where there was scope for further improvement in the programme, these covered the following themes:

- Respondents found the use of Circle (the networking software platform) challenging and would have preferred a more user-friendly virtual platform.
- Some respondents felt that there was a balance between the Leadership Masterclasses and the Learning and Inspiration sessions; whereas others felt more focus needed to be given to the learning and inspiration sessions and more in-depth discussions on the leadership topics.
- Although respondents felt that the Action Learning Sets (ALS) were useful, they felt that they could have been better integrated into the programme and the virtual forms in which they took made them challenging to engage with. Poor attendance of the ALS sessions affected the value some participants got from them.

- Further areas for improvement included more networking opportunities, a more user-friendly online platform than Circle, improvement in programme structure, better orientation into the programme, more collaborative working, mentoring and more in-person sessions.

Three evaluation case studies provide an in-depth account of participant's experiences of the programme and its role in changing outlooks and aspirations.

Conclusions

The evaluation findings of Version 1 of the programme helped shape the evaluation focus for Version 2. Both waves of the evaluation indicate that the programme had beneficial impacts on the knowledge, competencies and skills of participants in the broad field of community food leadership. The quantitative outcome evidence was very consistent with the qualitative evidence, suggesting that many of the self-reported changes could be attributed to participation in MFC, rather than other factors. As with many voluntary training courses that run over a six to twelve month duration, levels of participation fluctuated. For both deliveries of the programme, roughly one half were

heavily engaged, one quarter were moderately engaged, and one quarter were lightly engaged or disengaged. For the positive outcomes, the evidence is most visible for those that had strong engagement with the process, which is to be expected from a participatory programme. With its earlier inception, for Version 1 there is longitudinal data based upon participant's use of the small grant. This provides good evidence that participants continue to derive value from MFC many months after they completed the online training. Indeed, there is significant potential for participants to continue to benefit over time with the delivery of further programme run and the growth a network of MFC alumni.



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Belville community garden, Greenock
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"The MFC programme has exceeded my expectations. The facilitation and training have been excellent, with supportive and knowledgeable hosts and inspiring guest speakers, and a network of incredible people to learn from and share with each week."

"[I wanted to] develop my knowledge, skills and confidence to create change in my local community in the food system and connect and learn from other leaders creating change in other communities and places in the UK."

1.

MY FOOD COMMUNITY

THE PROGRAMME AND ITS DEVELOPMENT

1.1

Introduction

In the context of the current cost of living crisis, many activists are working within their communities to promote access to affordable, healthy, and sustainable food. Yet there are very few opportunities to share experiences, ideas, and resources between such community food champions, and to develop the skills needed to create change.

The Soil Association's My Food Community is a community leadership programme intended to create 'a network for good food champions to learn, connect and take action'. My Food Community forms part of Food for Life Get Togethers (FFLGT), a UK-wide National Lottery funded initiative designed to make the 'good food the easy choice for everyone'.

Since its launch in September 2021, My Food Community (MFC) has recruited and trained members of the public with a shared interest in food to become food champions, whilst also giving them the opportunity to put their newly developed skills into practice by implementing a food-based project in their local area.

To date, the full MFC programme has been delivered twice: in 2021–22 ('Version 1') and in 2022–23 ('Version 2'). A further run of the programme ('Version 3') is planned for 2023–24.

This report summarises learning from Version 1 of the programme before presenting the evaluation findings from Version 2. Bringing these results together in one place provides an

opportunity to review the implementation and impacts of the programme to date and to set the scene for its future development.

1.2

Developing the programme: Version 1 of My Food Community and its evaluation

During the delivery of MFC Version 1, FFLGT developed a set of self-guided learning materials and facilitated a series of online training sessions and regular virtual peer meetups. This was supported by Koreo, a leadership coaching specialist. In the latter stage of the programme participants were able to apply for a £1000 grant to develop a small-scale community food project of their own inspiration.

The evaluation of MFC Version 1, led by UWE, reported on the delivery period between September 2021 and November 2022. The evaluation was designed to be formative and iterative, developing alongside the programme itself. Data used in the evaluation consisted of a combination of desk-based research, observations at group sessions, analysis of feedback, participant and stakeholder interviews and surveys.

Central to the MFC design was an ethos of 'test and learn', making the programme flexible and agile, allowing it to evolve and adapt according to feedback during delivery. This iterative design was intended to help the team refine the programme in year one, with a view to rolling it out to a second cohort in year two.



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, An Tobar Wellness Centre & Social Farm C.I.C, Newry © Scott M Salt Photography

Whilst the programme was advertised through social media, the staff team drew upon existing Soil Association networks to target their recruitment efforts towards a diverse range of potential participants from different settings across the UK.

The profiles of 39 participants show that they were active across a wide range of community food projects prior to applying to the programme, with the majority involved in community events and workshops, activities associated with reducing food insecurity or growing produce.

Of the 39 profiles submitted, 13 participants described themselves as being passionate about connecting communities and bringing people together through food, whilst reducing food waste, sharing food, food education and gardening or growing were of equal importance.

During the delivery of Version 1 engagement was mainly online, with 17 MFC members taking the opportunity to attend a keynote face-to-face meeting towards the end of the first part of the programme.

Overall attendance across both compulsory and non-compulsory sessions fluctuated over time, with the highest attendances recorded at the initial induction session and the first learning and inspiration workshop (28 and 23 participants respectively). However, a core group appear to have remained engaged after these early sessions, with average attendance at the learning and inspiration workshops totalling 13 participants. The leadership masterclasses attracted 12 attendees on average, as did the roundtable discussion sessions, representing 30% of the total cohort.

Of the 39 participants, 33 progressed to successfully apply for a £1000 small project grant.

1.3

Learning from delivering the MFC Version 1 programme

Participant reflections at the end of the online sessions for Version 1 of the programme fell into seven themes set out below.

- 1. Confidence and kudos.** The programme gave participants the confidence to speak to others about food, express themselves more clearly and “walk the talk” around the food agenda. It was felt that the programme had given participants kudos or gravitas when speaking to others. An identity as part of a national programme was seen as a positive element of the programme.
- 2. Expanding and creating networks.** Participants value having a supportive network of like-minded people and have enjoyed learning from the experiences of others. Almost all participants reported that they had found new contacts from within the programme, and some had begun to expand their wider networks and spheres of influence too.
- 3. Accessible and interesting course content.** Many participants appreciated the content and length of the sessions. The ability to engage flexibly was important given that most had other ongoing commitments. The theoretical, task-driven content allowed the sessions to be targeted and having access to a Koreo coach was considered a premium aspect of the programme.
- 4. Shifting ideas about leadership.** Participant’s attitudes to leadership were clearly changing as the programme progressed. Some expressly stated that they had changed their views on what constitutes leadership, whilst others talked of becoming more confident and better able to take the initiative within communities (although they tended not to use leadership terminology).
- 5. Clarifying the course content and structure.** The programme would benefit from a clearer structure and sense of direction from the outset. Participants wanted details in advance to help them plan their time more effectively and to know what to expect. Expectations of participants could also be clearer as some believed that they needed to have well-formed ideas or far-reaching community projects, which was not the case.
- 6. Streamlining content.** Course content sometimes felt overwhelming to participants, and it was difficult for some to fit the sessions in alongside their other commitments. Some also found it hard to keep a reflective diary but felt that they were doing this through other means such as note taking.
- 7. Empowering and including participants.** More could be done to ensure equal participation in sessions – whilst some have more to say than others, it should not be assumed that those not speaking do not have anything to say. This may require some creative thinking around alternative ways to participate. Additionally, it should not be assumed that participants will naturally connect and get on, so more could be done to promote inclusivity.

1.4

Longer term impacts of the programme for participants

At six months after completion of the course, twenty-two participants in MFC responded to a survey on the impacts of the programme, particularly in terms of their use of grant.

Leading themes included: 'fostering inter-ethnic/ cultural working relationships', 'greater community engagement', 'innovation, building new relationships and collaborate working', and 'personal development'. MFC members also reported encountering various hurdles in their Community Action Projects. These were around time commitment, cost-of-living crises, manpower, funding, and difficulties in engaging others.

A majority (73%, n=16) 'strongly agreed' that their Community Action Projects helped them to apply their learning from MFC and only a few 'neither agreed nor disagreed' to this (9%, n=2).

Recalling their experience, over 85% of respondents reported to have made several connections after taking part in the MFC programme in terms of sharing ideas, contacts, resources or working together on activities with others involved in food issues. These connections ranged from 'more than 20' (n=8) to '6 to 10' (n=2) or '10-15' (n=2) connections.

As a result of taking part in MFC, respondents reported improved competencies in their community work for the following areas¹:

- raising awareness around healthy and sustainable food-related issues (64%, n=14)
- helping others identify opportunities for healthy and sustainable food activities (55%, n=12)
- inspiring others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues (55%, n=12)
- actively connecting with others outside their local community in food activities (55%, n=12)

After taking part in MFC, most respondents (68%, n=15) 'definitely' regarded themselves as a community leader in food activities. This was a positive change in self-rating compared to the start of the programme. Also, after taking part in MFC, 46% (n=10) perceived their skills creating change in food system to be 'extremely strong' in this area. No participants gave themselves this rating at the start of the programme.

After taking part in MFC, 27% (n=6) felt that their confidence in community leadership around food systems was 'extremely high'. Prior to MFC, no respondent had rated their confidence as 'extremely high' in this domain. After taking part in MFC, respondents felt that their knowledge in understanding of food citizenship had increased. Prior to MFC, no respondent felt that their knowledge on this subject was 'extremely strong', 41% (n=9) felt that they had 'extremely strong' knowledge of the subject after taking part in MFC.

Various factors helped participants achieve the goals of their groups. Those rated 'extremely important' included more grant funding (68%, n=15); more networking opportunities with like-minded groups (55%, n=12); more training and information resources on community food topics (27%, n=6); more mentoring and peer support opportunities (23%, n=5); better access to local facilities (64%, n=14); better access to volunteer support (50%, n=11) and more help to campaign on food issues (46%, n=10).

¹ Assessed in terms of a 5 star rating

2. EVALUATION OF MY FOOD COMMUNITY

VERSION 2

2.1

Research design and questions

This evaluation is a mixed methods study that combines a baseline and follow-up survey with participant written responses, case studies and the use of programme records. The study obtained ethical approval through the university's Research Ethics Committee (reference: HAS.20.11.034).

2.2

Research questions

The evaluation is based upon three leading research questions:

1. To what extent has the FFLGT programme changed the motivations and capacities of MFC organisers to start and sustain good food activism and lead others into more active food citizenship?
2. What are the effects of My Food Community for participants?
3. To what extent does the My Food Community initiative provide a model for building community capacity on local priorities?

2.3

Programme records and participant case studies

Food for Life Get Togethers staff collected monitoring and evaluation information about the delivery of the programme, participant engagement, and participant reflections. The team also undertook interviews with three participants from V1 and V2 to develop case studies about their experience.

2.4

Methods for the baseline survey

The UWE team designed an online survey in Qualtrics for all members who signed up to MFC. The survey was sent out on 15 September 2022 and was open for three weeks. The survey questions covered demographic information including age, gender, ethnicity, profession of respondents and nations where food activities took place. It also assessed members perceived skills and competencies in several leadership components around food-related activities. Finally, the survey explored the expectations of MFC members of the programme they had signed up to.

2.5

Methods for the follow-up survey

With the support of the FFLGT staff, the UWE team conducted a follow-up survey six months after the start MFC version 2. The survey was sent to MFC members on 15 March 2023, and open for five weeks. The survey questions covered experiences of various sessions of MFC version 2. It explored whether the expectations

of MFC version members of the programme had been met and whether there were any areas for improvement. Finally, it assessed members perceived skills and competencies in several leadership areas around food-related activities. For both surveys, respondents were requested to provide self-generated identity codes which would allow us to analyse the links between baseline and follow-up answers.



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Manchester © Scott M Salt Photography

3.

FINDINGS

OVERVIEW OF THE MFC VERSION 2 PROGRAMME DELIVERY

3.1

Delivery and engagement with the programme

The feedback from the participants of Version 1 was central to the planning and delivery of Version 2. Revisions to the programme included the presentation of more materials in advance, greater emphasis on the learning objectives and reflection processes. Circle (<https://circle.so>) a networking software platform was used to help members engage in dialogue and share insights outside of the online sessions. The grant was revised from £1000 to £500, and greater emphasis was placed on using the grant to apply leadership skills and knowledge developed through the programme. Partly in response to the volume of interest, the programme team almost doubled the number of people enrolled (from 39 to 77). As part of the recruitment and selection process, FFLGT was able to use its national partnership networks with an intention to attract people from diverse backgrounds who shared an interest in community development, food systems change, and 'good food' issues. In addition Version 1 alumni assisted with recruitment and shortlisting.

The programme records show that the team maintained contact to the end point of the online sessions with nearly all individuals enrolling with the programme (75 of 77, Table 2). However, the more specific attendance records indicate lower patterns of attendance (between 49 to 18, Chart 1) and that about half of the cohort attended 25% or more sessions of the programme (Table 2). Those who did not attend in real time, had the opportunity to catch up using recordings of session. Attendance between different types of sessions varied, but there was little overall difference between the leadership component and the community food focused

component of the programme (Chart 1). Thirty five members attended one of the face-to-face events, and a small percentage (4%, n=3) had a very high level of attendance (75% or more) across the course of the programme. A final indication of engagement was the 40% response to the follow-up evaluation survey (31 of 77) and the same number successfully taking up the Leadership Action Grant.

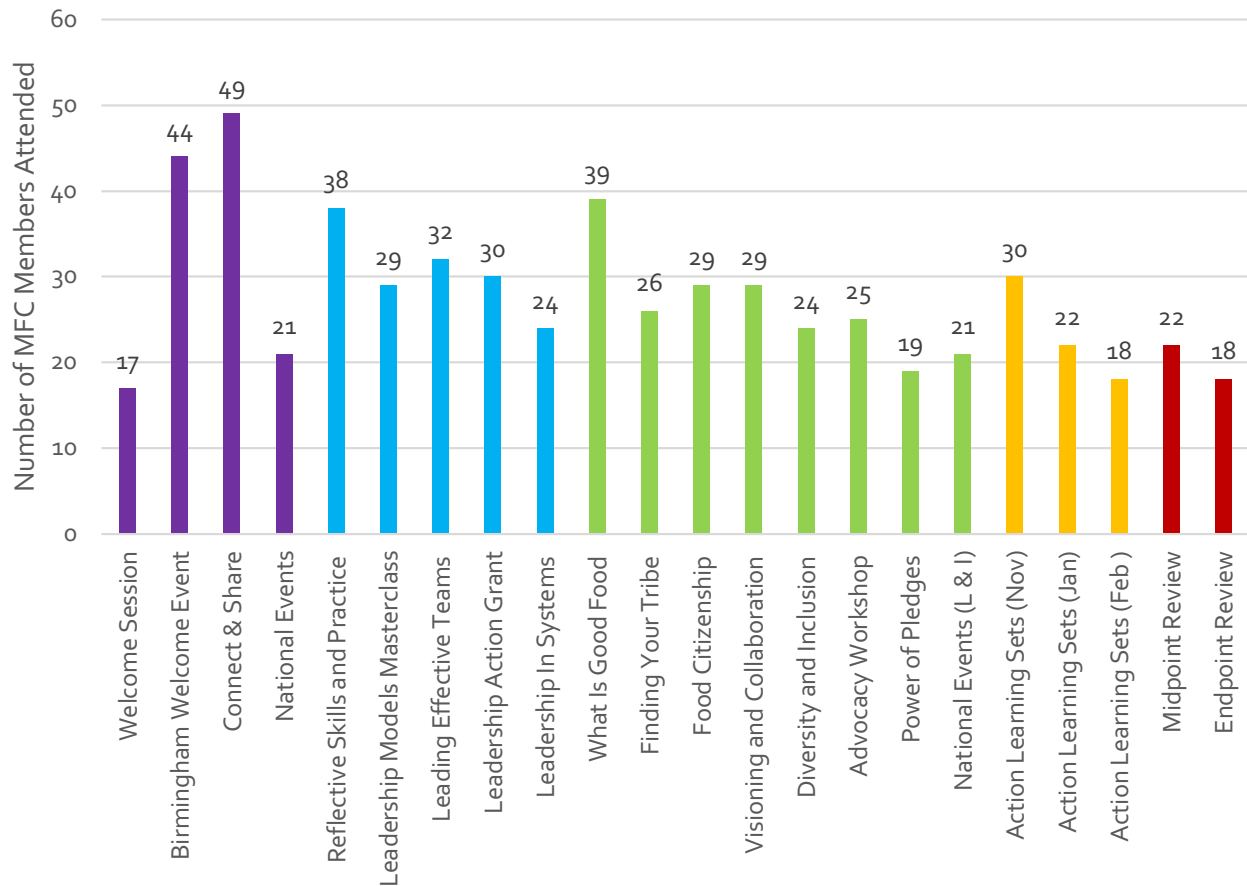
Table 1: Key monitoring and evaluation records for My Food Community v2

- MFC members starting the programme: **77**
- MFC members completing the programme: **75**
- Total hours of training delivered: **53.5**
- Number of sessions delivered: **26**
- Average number of attendees per session: **25**
- MFC members enrolling with Circle: **69**
- MFC Members attending face to face meetings: **35**
- Total grant money awarded: **£18,255**
- A total of 28 £500 grants awarded to 31 participants (three pairs collaborated).
- MFC members completing the UWE evaluation baseline survey: **54**
- MFC members completing the UWE evaluation follow-up survey: **31**

Table 2: Sessions attended by MFC members

Number of MFC Members	% of Cohort	% of Sessions Attended	Number of Sessions Attended
41	53%	0–25%	0–6
33	43%	25–75%	6–19
3	4%	75–100%	20–26

Figure 1: Numbers of members attending specific MFC programme sessions



Key: Type of session attended

Networking **Leadership Masterclass** **Learning and Inspiration** **Peer to Peer Mentoring** **Review and Evaluation**

At the end of each session, members were asked to provide evaluative feedback. For those attending these sessions, the feedback was consistently very positive, with the overwhelming majority strongly or very strongly agreeing that they felt they had met specified learning objectives. The national networking events that took place in February and March 2023, were particularly positively evaluated by attendees, where the leading sentiments to

capture the feeling of the day were ‘enlightened’, ‘energised’, ‘optimistic’, and ‘encouraged’. Many of the leading points of feedback given to the FFLGT team members were consistent with the feedback summarised below in the UWE survey findings. The ongoing use of reflection is part of the programme training process. This is likely to have helped members with their follow-up responses to the evaluation survey questions.

3.2

Case Studies of Participant Experiences

Three participants of the programme agreed to provide an account of their experiences. The case studies were developed by the FFLGT team, with editing by the UWE researchers.

A common theme was that all members from these case studies show how the programme has had a transformative impact on their agency to advocate for change in the food system as it applies to their community of interest. Case studies 1 and 2 include insights from the experience of the Leadership Action Grants for Version 2 of the programme.

3.2.1 CASE STUDY 1

From seeds of inspiration to shoots of growth

Eilish Blade is a qualified nutritional therapist and after many years successfully supporting individuals on a 1:1 basis she wanted to change direction and work in a way that put good, local and sustainable food in her local community at the heart of what she did. Eilish has what some might call a portfolio career, she runs a successful food pop up called the Wild Burger, and also manages the Sea Trust café in Fishguard, where she is based.

She heard about Get Togethers whilst researching sustainable food systems, wanting to find something to support her and learn from, as she transitioned to a role, she was forging locally away from nutrition therapy. She was keen to work in a way that was more aligned with her goals to have a real and meaningful impact in her community.

"I wanted to bring my knowledge more into my community, I had gotten quite tired after many years of clinical practice, coupled with a real feeling that I should be using my knowledge and skills to benefit the health of my local area and connecting the dots locally – linking farmers and growers and finding a way for us all to work together sustainably."

"My food pop-up had connected me with some suppliers, Chamber of Trade and other businesses and there was a lot of chatter about a community food festival, so I wanted to turn that chatter into a reality."

Fishguard is a coastal town in Pembrokeshire on the West Coast of Wales, neighbouring towns of St David's and Narberth are famed for

being popular second-home destinations, but Fishguard has a more permanent community and as with many UK coastal towns, has seasonal employment and issues around access and affordability of food and real pockets of poverty. As Eilish put it; "This exists in our community, the school are dealing with it every day. We have a food pantry, a food bank, it is not an affluent area by any means."

Reaching the school was something Eilish thought was vital. Educating the local children and connecting them to the farmland around them and the food they eat. But also getting them to see a future locally working on the land or with food.

One such way Eilish is doing that is by working with the local secondary school Ysgol Bro Gwaun, and thirty Y9 and Y10 pupils. They soon visit a local large-scale organic grower to experience for themselves the dynamics of setting up a food or farming business, Eilish is working alongside the teachers to create a programme that involves the pupils in several stages of agricultural and food businesses.

After the farm visits the pupils will be supplied with some of the organic produce grown and they will help run a pop-up café at the October community food festival, with the menu being based on the principals of a sustainable menu. Eilish has used the MFC grant towards this work, along with the PLANED grant (a community development fund, see <https://planed.org.uk/>).



3.2.1 CASE STUDY 1 continued

"My Food Community has been invaluable in gaining confidence to approach businesses, community leaders and individuals with my ideas. Previously I felt like the person with lots of albeit great ideas but perhaps without the confidence or knowledge that they were achievable. Since MFC I have had the confidence to know that they are – if I build the right network, I learned how to place myself and learn skills in listening, how to position myself and how to succeed. Two years ago, I think I would have struggled to get this project to be a success."

Eilish goes on to explain; "I am now working alongside the Chamber of Trade, Food Resilience and other businesses and organisations, we have

come together to be very ambitious and have applied to the Levelling Up grant and want to continue to work with the school closely across agriculture, hospitality and food and nutrition. We want to keep our young people in the community, and we are investigating how we can do that together."

MFC has threads of impact across a lot of what Eilish does, not just her food festival and school scheme. At the Sea Trust Café she is not just running it successfully but looking far deeper into the way it operates; "We are looking at the whole menu, food waste and our impact. I am so new to all of this, but I have gained so much confidence and that is grounded in my MFC journey."



My Food Community Welcome Event, Autumn 2022, Birmingham © Edward Shaw Photography



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Manchester © Scott M Salt Photography

3.2.2 CASE STUDY 2

Lightbulb moments and opening doors

Joy O'Neill is part of the My Food Community network, but unlike many of the members she is looking at her role in food from an academic and research point of view, albeit that she is striking out to do things differently than the traditional academic routes.

"I haven't had a traditional journey to food and farming, Joy reflects; "I did grow up around food, my mum was a chef, so I have vivid childhood memories of picking fruit, growing salads, and helping my mum out at pop-up events. I have a background in education, working with inclusion and children and young people with disabilities – nothing to do with food."

Joy wanted to set up a food and farming group for OxCAN which she did, and it was created in July 2021. She is the Director of Oxford Climate Alumni Network, "We didn't just want to see the research that was coming out of Oxford or other universities, but we had a real desire to look at research and topics that was of interest to us, to spend time on farms and with food producers – do it from the inside out and outside in as it were, as we strongly felt that these individuals on farms or producing food would have different views and experiences to researchers."

"We already have over 1200 members globally and the membership ranges from people in their 20s to their 80s, 60% have a climate related career with the remaining just have an interest in sustainable food and research. I very much feel like I am on the journey of learning with our members... As a group we became part of the Sustain Alliance in March 2021 and felt it was important we could share our voice, and resources, and when I came across MFC I hoped it would be the chance to be part of a group across the UK but specifically a network with a focus on sustainable food."

When asked about the highlight from MFC Joy laughs, and goes on to explain in one session where the group were reflecting on their purpose she realised that OxCAN don't have a farm, a garden or a café like most of her fellow members, and she questioned how she can support her members in a virtual rather than physical world, but this concern led to a lightbulb moment that cemented the purpose for her – which is to provide the knowledge and information so her members can take that into their communities.



3.2.2 CASE STUDY 2 continued

There was a second lightbulb moment shortly after when Joy was sharing back to the group and the MFC programme lead, Chandra, reminded her that their very first session, which was about the styles of leadership. She explained that Joy was probably in the enabler style of leadership, and it felt reassuring to Joy to know that she had come "Full circle".

"I didn't have set expectations when I joined MFC, I didn't have a food background and feel that perhaps I came with a more open mind than perhaps someone deep in the food scene who maybe had a problem to solve or a more engrained view. But what surprised me the most was how fluid it was. I come from an education background, I am used to a structure and a formality. Ultimately it was a benefit I think, but it felt a little uncomfortable at the beginning because it was so flexible. It was nice to be able to go with the flow and I know others felt that helped when it came to our practical projects."

"I feel different and more confident, previously I felt like I was playing at food leadership and now I can say I am a food leader. My mindset has changed. Whereas before we would have tentatively asked academics to speak or ask for

research, I think it felt like our group was an underdog but now people are approaching us. I am more knowledgeable; I sound more assured and more confident, and I think that comes across when I seek research and people now want to engage with us, and that is a result of My Food Community for sure."

"I used the MFC grant to provide some bursary places at the OxCAN conference in May and I have used it to have an away-day and workshop at an edible food garden in Bath in September. Our theme for the workshop is unpicking what makes a project successful or not, through the lens of Positive Deviants – we are looking for the outliers that are thriving despite the barriers."

"I finished my My Food Community in March, I am keen to support cohort three, and I will be a cheerleader to get other people to apply. I have just been offered a Climate Ambassador 2023 place – looking at how to take messages around climate and make them accessible to the general public. I start that in May. I feel absolutely certain that I wouldn't have the confidence and the shove to apply for the Climate Ambassador programme if I hadn't been part of MFC. It opens minds and doors to other things."

3.2.3 CASE STUDY 3

At the heart of a community

Camilla Lovelace lives in Splott, in the heart of Cardiff. Deeply passionate about her diverse, multicultural neighbourhood, she strives to make good food accessible to all. She retired, well sort of retired as she has probably never been busier but retired from her paid career in 2016 and has been on a mission ever since. At the heart of what Camilla does is the climate emergency.

With a background in education Camilla has been living in Splott all her life. She is part of a thriving community who run StarGarAllot, a community

growing group and Splo-Down Food Co-op, both of which enjoy the support of the Oasis centre. Camilla wanted to upskill in leadership and deepen connections at a strategic level. She went on the hunt for a programme which would help her find a place on a strategic platform to help influence decisions and strategies in Cardiff, which is how she came to enrol on My Food Community.



3.2.3 CASE STUDY 3 continued

"Our area features in the top 10% most deprived wards in Wales and obviously austerity and the cost-of-living crisis is making everything much more difficult. Any food grown needs to be given for free and actually growing food on allotments are not supposed to be done for profit so that fits in really well with what we wanted to do. 70% of the asylum seekers and refugees in Wales live in our neck of the woods, Oasis is the largest community centre for them in Wales."

But Camilla is keen to note that ranking highly on the deprivation rankings doesn't tell the story of the community she lives in; "you don't need a car if you live in a city, people from all over the world including 70% of asylum seekers are here alongside hardworking, working-class Welsh people."

"I guess you could call me a local food champion, I have been involved in the grass roots stuff like food co-ops and community growing. Then during the pandemic, we wanted to grow more. I am completely obsessed with the need for community growing and access."

"To me a local food champion is someone who wants to ensure that good nutritious tasty affordable and culturally sensitive food is available for everyone in my community. I'm passionate about food but also about learning how to change my lifestyle to care more about the climate emergency."

"I started off as part of the *Expert by Experience* group with the Soil Association and in 2021 I moved into My Food Community, I joined because I thought it would give me the tools I needed to succeed locally – such as leadership and influencing, having a voice at a strategic level."

"Just because you do what you do, or do something one way in your community, it doesn't mean other people do it the same in their community and there is a magic in that – taking

the best bits from how someone else approaches things. My Food Community was a space to get help and also offer help. It was a two-way transaction and that is quite rare. For example, you can get three or four critical pointers from someone who has already written a funding bid and save you a day at a screen struggling. That's My Food Community."

"The Koreo leadership stuff has been the most useful to me, I didn't realise it at the time though, it became vital once I began to implement my learning."

"I wanted to operate at a strategic level as a food champion, it was my personal goal for MFC. Since the programme ended, I have become a Board Member of Food Cardiff and I have moved into a more strategic level of influence. I feel like I am back talking to the people with the money to make the difference. I have been able to play a part in the development of a food strategy in Cardiff and I now confidently take part in platforms towards securing community food projects in Wales and I can confidently say that being part of My Food Community has helped me achieve that."

One of the most significant outcomes of MFC has been the continued network of participants who still work with, I think the skill swapping and resource swapping has been the most beneficial. I feel like I have a value now and can appreciate other people's value because of my work with My Food Community."

Camilla says she used her MFC grant to build bridges, and do community consultation in ten different languages, she also hosted events like Apple Days. "We have just done our third annual Splo-Grow Plant and Share event where we swap seedlings and give seedlings away – it is huge now; I was glad when it happened as I didn't have a spare windowsill as they were groaning under scores of seeds."

4.

FINDINGS

MY FOOD COMMUNITY BASELINE SURVEY

4.1

Introduction

Fifty-four MFC members responded to the survey, which represented 70% of those enrolled with the programme (n=77).

4.2

Demographic characteristics of survey participants

Most respondents were female (65%, n=35) and from a White ethnic background (56%, n=30). Majority of the survey participants were aged 40–59 years = (37%, n=20).

35% (n=19) stated they were professionals which included managers in the Third Sector, Community Development Officers, Complementary Therapists, Food Inequality Officers, Food Partnership co-ordinators, Nutritional Therapists, Public Health Dietitians and Registered Associate Nutritionists.

In terms of where participants' activities were based, most participants (44%, n=24) carried out their activities in England and the rest of the activities took place in Northern Ireland (7%, n=4), Scotland (9%, n=5) and Wales (9%, n=5).

4.3

Training prior to signing up for MFC

Respondents were asked whether they took part in various training programmes or activities in the last five years prior to them signing up for MFC (Figures 2 to 4). Overall, the responses show that between 43% and 54% of participants had received no prior training. Out of the 54 respondents for each training activity, 31% took part in training that was aimed at helping them to develop knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities. Another 31% engaged in training to connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities. Eighteen percent of participants engaged in training programmes within the last five years to help them lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in their community.

These types of training include formal degree programmes (e.g., BSc Hons Nutrition, MSc Nutrition and behaviour), short-term courses (e.g., Highland Good Food Conversation 1 day a week carried over 6 weeks), volunteering groups (e.g., local voluntary groups in past 4 years), workshops and seminars (e.g., 1–2 hour workshops – transition summits, Trust the People, Imagination Exchange, Waltham Forest food network; delivering workshops in the community relating to food and nutrition education, cooking workshops in-person and online), information from newsletters (e.g., Sustain newsletter), experience through work (e.g., Surplus Food Co-ordinator) and engagement in previous Food for Life Events (e.g., Local Partner Networks; Plant and Share Month, Cook and Share Month, The Big Lunch; Sustainable Food Places network seminars and briefing sessions).

Figure 2: Proportion of respondents trained in the last 5 years to develop their knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities.

Trained in the last 5 years to develop knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities (n=54)

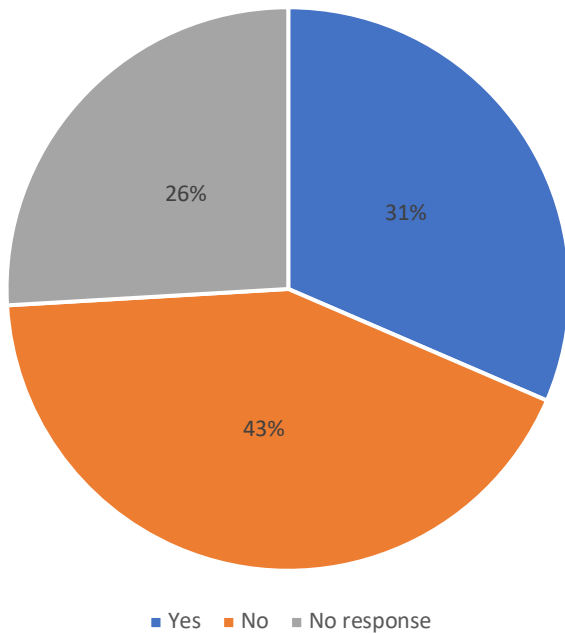


Figure 4: Proportion of respondents who trained in the last 5 years to lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in your community.

Trained in the last 5 years to lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in your community (n=54)

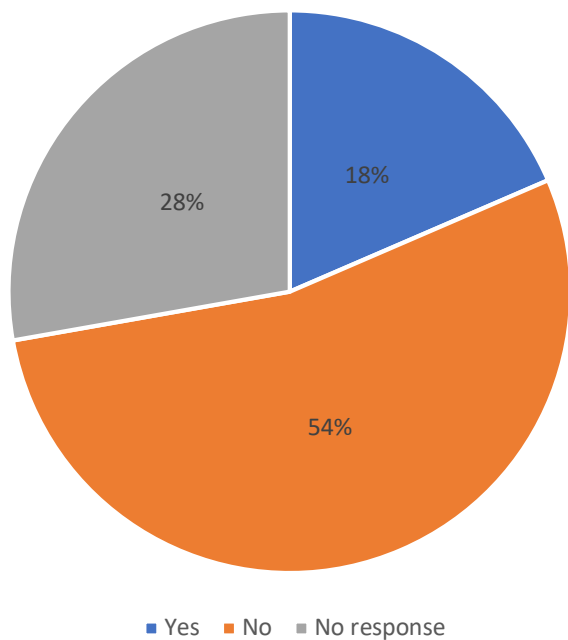


Figure 3: Proportion of respondents who trained in the last 5 years to connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities.

Trained in the last 5 years to connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities (n=54)

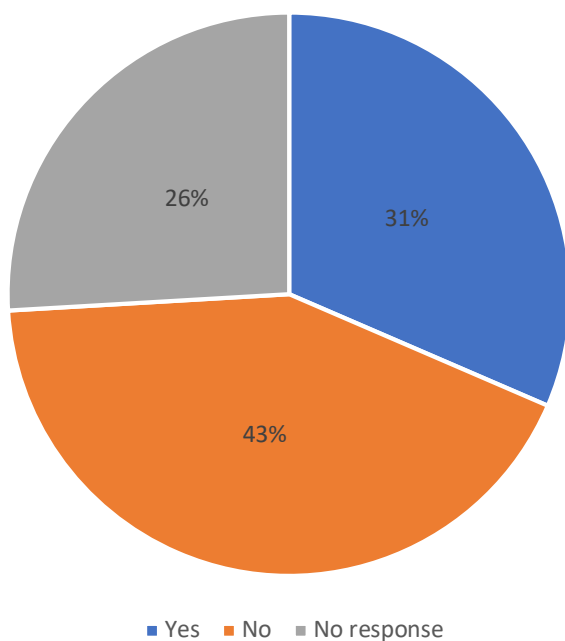
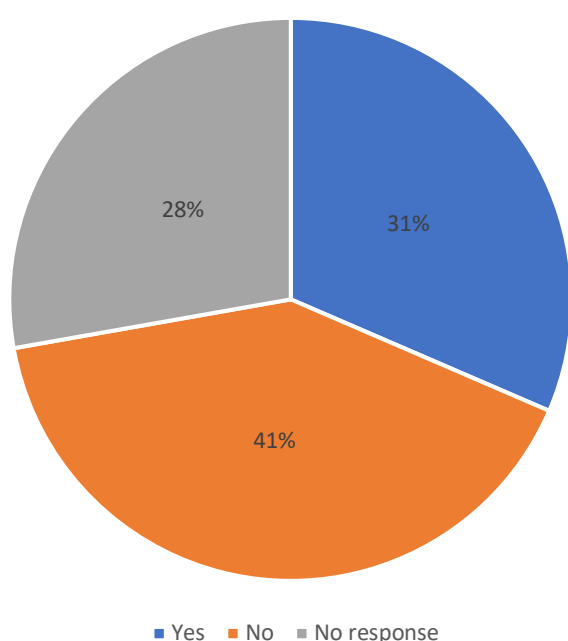


Figure 5: Proportion of respondents who perceived themselves as leaders in food activities.

Perceiving one's self as a leader in food activities? (n=54)



4.4 Leadership competencies

When responding to the question on whether survey participants saw themselves as leaders in food activities or not, 31% (n=17) answered ‘yes’, while 41% (n=22) responded ‘no’ to the question (Figure 5).

To find out whether there was a relationship between participants’ engagement in previous training in leadership of food-related activities in the last five years and their tendency to see

themselves as a leader, we performed a Chi-square analysis (Table 3). The results show that, there was no statistically significant relationship between survey participants involvement in previous trainings in the last five years and the way they perceived themselves as leaders in food-related activities (p>0.05).

Survey participants rated their skills and competencies on a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being lowest and 5 being highest) in various aspects of leadership in food-related activities (Figure 6).

Table 3: Relationship between being involved in previous training over the last 5 years and whether respondents currently perceive themselves as leaders.

Engaged in training in the last 5 years	Perceived self as a leader		Chi-square	df	p-value
	Yes	No			
To develop knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities	6	11	0.585	1	0.444
To connect with others working in food-related activities	6	11	0.585	1	0.444
To help lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in the community	5	5	0.255	1	0.614

Figure 6: Ratings of various leadership competencies and skills in food-related activities.





My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Wrexham © Scott M Salt Photography

The most frequent ratings for the various leadership skills and competencies were '3' and '4'. Thus, majority of the respondents rated their skills and competencies as '3' for three of the leadership areas: 'I initiate healthy and sustainable food activities within my local community' (n=19); 'I come up with big ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community' (n=18) and 'I inspire others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community' (n=21).

For three other areas: 'I advocate for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my community' (n=19); 'I initiate healthy and sustainable food activities within my local community' (n=14) and 'I help other people to take action on healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community' (n=15), the most frequent rating was '4'.

Equal number of participants (n=12) rated their leadership skills and competencies as '3' and '4' for the extent to which they 'help others to identify opportunities to promote healthy and sustainable food-related activities'.

We went on to investigate whether there were differences in mean ratings of leadership skills and competencies shown in Figure 6 between respondents who had engaged in previous leadership training programmes within the last five years and those who did not. Tables 4–6 show results of independent samples t-tests examining these differences. Participants who had engaged in training to connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities within the last five years prior to MFC rated their leadership skills in actively connecting with others outside their local community higher ($M=3.59$, $SD=0.94$) than those who did not take part in such training ($M=2.78$, $SD=1.13$), $p=0.05$. All other differences were not statistically significant.

Table 4: Differences in the mean ratings of leadership skills and competencies between respondents who were trained on how to develop knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities in the last 5 years and those who were not

Ratings in leadership	N	Trained to develop knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities in the last 5 years				t	df	p-value
		Yes		No				
		M	SD	M	SD			
I advocate for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my community	40	3.70	0.92	3.57	1.12	0.422	38	0.675
I initiate healthy and sustainable food activities within my community	40	2.94	0.90	3.04	1.02	-0.329	38	0.744
I help other people to take action on healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community	40	3.41	1.00	3.17	1.19	0.666	38	0.510
I come up with big ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community	40	2.88	0.99	3.13	1.17	-0.702	38	0.487
I raise awareness around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community	40	3.29	1.16	3.09	1.12	0.568	38	0.573
I help others to identify opportunities to promote healthy and sustainable food-related activities	40	3.29	1.26	2.96	1.02	0.934	38	0.356
I inspire others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community	40	2.76	0.83	2.82	0.94	-0.215	38	0.8311
I actively connect with others outside my local community in food activities	40	3.41	1.18	2.91	1.04	1.418	38	0.164

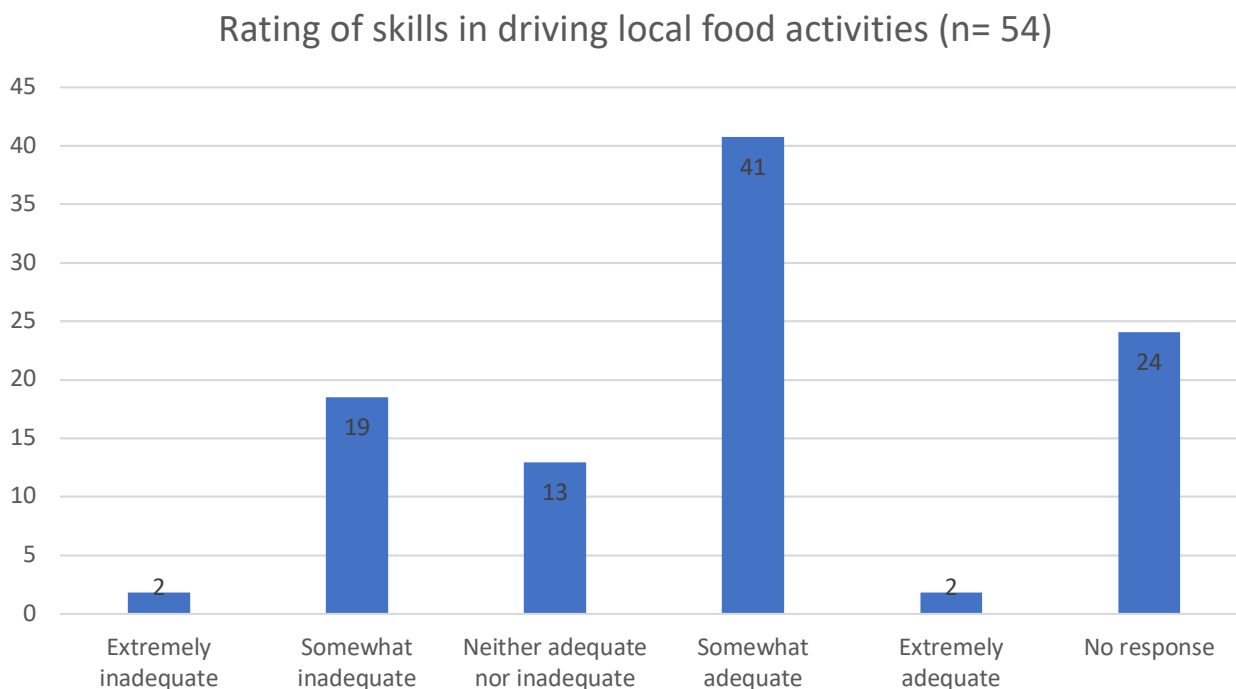
Table 5. Differences in the mean ratings of leadership skills and competencies between respondents who were trained on how to connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities in the last 5 years and those who were not.

Ratings in leadership	N	Trained to connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities				t	df	p-value
		Yes		No				
		M	SD	M	SD			
I advocate for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my community	40	3.59	1.00	3.65	1.07	-0.192	38	0.849
I initiate healthy and sustainable food activities within my community	40	2.88	0.78	3.09	1.08	-0.661	38	0.513
I help other people to take action on healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community	40	3.24	1.15	3.30	1.11	-0.192	38	0.849
I come up with big ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community	40	2.94	0.90	3.09	1.24	-0.411	38	0.683
I raise awareness around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community	40	3.12	1.11	3.22	1.17	-0.273	38	0.787
I help others to identify opportunities to promote healthy and sustainable food-related activities	40	3.24	1.25	3.00	1.04	0.647	38	0.521
I inspire others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community	40	2.76	0.97	2.83	0.83	-0.215	38	0.831
I actively connect with others outside my local community in food activities	40	3.59	0.94	2.78	1.13	2.395	38	0.022*

Table 6: Differences in the mean ratings of leadership skills and competencies between respondents who were trained on how to lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related activities in their community in the last 5 years and those who were not.

Ratings in leadership	N	Trained to lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related activities				t	df	p-value
		Yes		No				
		M	SD	M	SD			
I advocate for healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my community	39	3.800	0.92	3.59	1.09	0.556	37	0.581
I initiate healthy and sustainable food activities within my community	39	2.80	0.92	3.07	1.00	-0.749	37	0.458
I help other people to take action on healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community	39	3.70	0.82	3.14	1.19	1.381	37	0.088
I come up with big ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community	39	3.00	0.82	3.03	1.21	-0.083	37	0.934
I raise awareness around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in my local community	39	3.10	1.20	3.21	1.15	-0.252	37	0.401
I help others to identify opportunities to promote healthy and sustainable food-related activities	39	3.50	1.18	2.97	1.12	1.287	37	0.206
I inspire others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues within my local community	39	3.00	0.82	2.72	0.92	0.838	37	0.407
I actively connect with others outside my local community in food activities	39	3.70	0.82	2.93	1.16	1.924	37	0.062

4.5

Skills in local food activities**Figure 7: Extent to which respondents rated the adequacy of their skills in driving local food activities.**

Respondents rated how adequate they felt their skills were in driving local food activities (Figure 7). Most respondents (n=41) felt their skills in driving local food activities were somewhat adequate, while the minority felt these skills were either extremely adequate (n=2) or extremely inadequate (n=2).

There were no differences in the extent to which respondents rated their skills in driving local food activities between those who took part in previous training in the last five years and those who did not, $p > 0.05$ (Table 7).

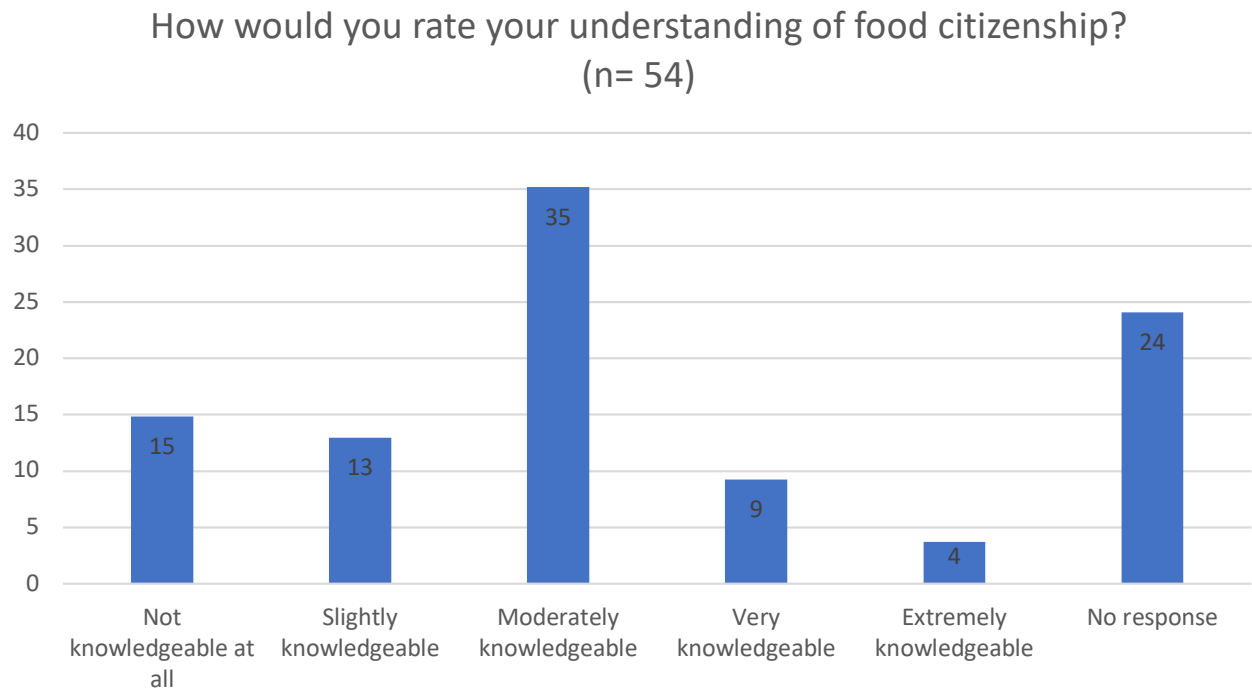
Table 7: Differences in the mean ratings of skills in driving local food activities between respondents who were trained in various food-related activities in the last 5 years and those who were not.

Training in the last 5 years		N	Skills in driving local food activities		t	df	P*value
			M	SD			
To develop knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities in the last 5 years	Yes	17	36.18	0.95	-0.553	38	0.584
	No	23	36.35	0.98			
To connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities	Yes	17	36.41	0.87	0.770	39	0.446
	No	23	36.17	1.03			
To lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related activities in their community	Yes	10	36.50	0.85	0.819	37	0.418
	No	29	36.21	1.01			

4.6

Knowledge of food citizenship

Figure 8: Extent to which survey respondents rated their knowledge of food citizenship.



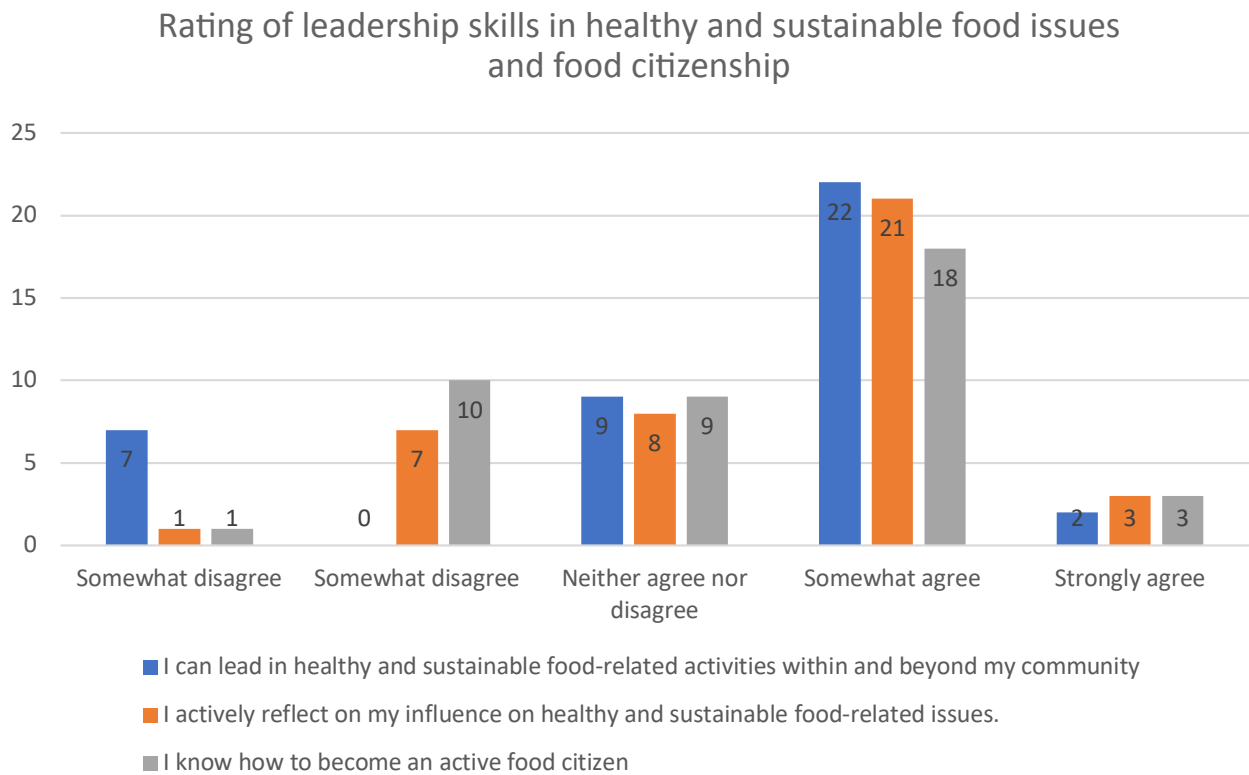
Most of the survey cohort (n=35) felt that their knowledge of food citizenship was moderate. Fewer (n=15) felt they were not knowledgeable at all and fewer still felt that they were slightly knowledgeable (n=13), very knowledgeable (n=9) or extremely knowledgeable (n=4).

With respect to their knowledge about food citizenship, there was no statistically significant difference between participants with recent experiences of training and those who had not received recent training, $p > 0.05$ (Table 8).

Table 8: Differences in the mean ratings of understanding of food citizenship between respondents who were trained in various food-related activities in the last 5 years and those who were not.

Training in the last 5 years		N	Understanding of food citizenship		t	df	p-value
			M	SD			
To develop knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities in the last 5 years	Yes	17	20.88	0.99	1.155	38	0.255
	No	23	20.48	1.16			
To connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities	Yes	17	20.82	0.81	0.856	38	0.398
	No	23	20.52	1.28			
To lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related activities in their community	Yes	10	20.80	0.79	0.519	37	0.607
	No	29	20.59	1.21			

4.7

Healthy and sustainable foods**Figure 9: Extent to which survey respondents agreed or disagreed to statements about their leadership in healthy and sustainable food issues and food citizenship.**

Majority of the respondents somewhat agreed to being able to lead in healthy and sustainable food-related activities within and beyond their communities (n=22); being able to actively reflect on their influence on healthy and sustainable food-related issues (n=21) and knowing how to become an active food citizen (n=18).

Statistically significant differences were only found between those participants who trained to connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities in the last five

years (M=6.94, SD=0.68) and those who did not (M=6.09, SD=0.97) on the extent to which they actively reflect on their influence on healthy and sustainable food-related issues (p=0.005) (Table 10).

All other differences in ratings of leadership skills in healthy and sustainable food issues and food citizenship could not be explained by whether respondents took part in the other training programmes in the last five years prior to signing up for MFC or not (Table 8 and 10).

Table 9: Differences in the mean ratings of leadership skills in healthy and sustainable food-related activities between respondents who were trained on how to develop knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities in the last 5 years and those who were not.

Ratings of leadership skills in healthy and sustainable food-related activities	N	Trained to develop knowledge on healthy and sustainable food-related activities in the last 5 years				t	df	p-value
		Yes		No				
		M	SD	M	SD			
I can lead in healthy and sustainable food-related activities within and beyond my community	39	18.35	0.97	18.55	0.74	-0.694	37	0.492
I reflect on my influence on healthy and sustainable food-related issues	39	6.76	0.83	6.18	1.01	1.931	37	0.061
I know how to become an active food citizen	40	6.47	1.07	6.13	0.97	1.052	38	0.300

Table 10: Differences in the mean ratings of leadership skills in healthy and sustainable food-related activities between respondents who were trained on how to connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities and those who were not.

Ratings of leadership skills in healthy and sustainable food-related activities	N	Trained to connect with others working on healthy and sustainable food-related activities				t	df	p-value
		Yes		No				
		M	SD	M	SD			
I can lead in healthy and sustainable food-related activities within and beyond my community	39	18.50	0.97	18.43	0.79	0.232	37	0.818
I actively reflect on my influence on healthy and sustainable food-related issues	39	6.94	0.68	6.09	0.97	2.963	37	0.005*
I know how to become an active food citizen	40	6.53	0.82	6.09	1.16	1.382	38	0.175

Table 11: Differences in the mean ratings of leadership skills in healthy and sustainable food-related activities between respondents who were trained on how to lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related activities in their community and those who were not.

Ratings of leadership skills in healthy and sustainable food-related activities	N	Trained to lead positive change for healthy and sustainable food-related activities				t	df	p-value
		Yes		No				
		M	SD	M	SD			
I can lead in healthy and sustainable food-related activities within and beyond my community	39	18.60	0.97	18.41	0.83	0.590	37	0.279
I reflect on my influence on healthy and sustainable food-related issues	39	6.60	0.97	6.38	0.98	0.617	37	0.271
I know how to become an active food citizen	39	6.40	0.84	6.24	1.09	0.418	37	0.339

4.8

Expectations

Participants responded to an open-ended question about their expectations of the MFC. These responses were coded and categorised into various emerging themes.

THEME 1

Connections and partnerships: Connecting and partnering with like-minded participants to support community food-related activities.

The main theme that emerged from respondents' expectations was to connect and partner with others who shared the same ethos of healthy and sustainable food-related issues in the community. Participants saw MFC as an opportunity to acquire, share and partner with others in the community food space to inform their own local food-related activities.

"making connections, which will introduce me to a wider range of approaches and a better understanding of the challenges and possible solutions"

"Connect with others in the food community"

"I am hoping to connect with people who can support the formation of a Western Isles Food Partnership."

"I am looking forward to making connections with people all across the food community spectrum. To gain insight into how we can connect to make a greater difference."

"I expect and hope to network with likeminded people across the [UK] and elsewhere, being able to hear their stories and visions"

"I think the connection with others, peer learning, and the experts leading the course will be really beneficial for this."

"It will be useful to connect with others who do similar work and to understand the barriers and aims that others have in relation to community food."

"For me more IRL experience is better so I hope there will be opportunities to meet again with others but not online."

"... Learn how to initiate conversations and activities, how to connect with the right people and make things happen..."

"To connect with other people working towards accessibility to good food."

"To connect with and learn from fellow food activists across the country. Develop a deeper sense of place and meaning within the community food sector."

"To help me to connect with others; share ideas and learn from each other; action learning opportunities to help address challenges; inspire new ideas."

"To make connections, learn from and share with like minded people"

"Work with services, charities, food providers and my community to make sure that everyone has access to health, sustainable food."

"make connections with other community food citizens, and to share learning and gain inspiration from other food projects."

"... and connect and learn from other leaders creating change in other communities and places in the UK"

"... and also make connections with similar projects and people outwith my locality."

"... as well as meeting and connecting with like-minded individuals."

THEME 2

Knowledge and skills building: Develop knowledge and skills in healthy and sustainable food-related activities in the community

Respondents also indicated that they were hoping to acquire and share knowledge and skills in various food-related areas.

"I hope taking part in My Food Community will expand my knowledge about community food issues, global issues and give me more confidence in speaking about these things publicly."

"I hope to gain confidence, knowledge and skills to implement impactful good food projects within the communities I work. Learning to identify where there is a need and a desire to improve local food systems and to gain an understanding of what projects can act as a gateway to bigger ideas. I hope to learn lots about different food projects happening across the nation, and I am looking forward to this sharing of knowledge."

"I suppose there are a couple of areas. First and foremost, there is always the opportunity to develop knowledge and experience further- no matter what my feelings of my baseline are."

"I expect to be able to learn how to become a good food champion to be able to help my community better."

"I hope to expand on my knowledge and confidence in leading a sustainable and secure community food project in my area ..."

"Improving knowledge and skills around good food movement and developing a toolkit to become a good food champion..."

"Learn about food-based issues/understand more about this sector/area of work/develop technical knowledge base/network."

"To develop my knowledge in different areas of sustainability."

"To enable greater understanding of community engagement and to connect and inspire."

"To increase my knowledge and understanding of food citizenship and how to build this within my community."

"To learn lots and get lots of [knowledge] from everyone who is part of it."

"A place to learn from one another ..."

"An opportunity to develop my knowledge and skills, by learning from others ..."

"Bring knowledge practice understanding how to take a food project into community and deliver it well"

"I expect myself to learn valuable skills and dedicate time to a passion of mine. I hope to use this experience as a guide and tool in my development as a individual in the food and sustainability"

THEME 3

Develop leadership capabilities to influence local food-related activities

Another theme that emerged from the open texts of the survey respondents was on their anticipation to strengthen their leadership skills and competencies in initiating and championing community food-related activities through the MFC.

"I am hoping to develop better leadership skills so that I can assist in making the food system better for all people in Swansea. I need to understand how projects in other areas got going, and what makes them successful."

"I hope to improve my leadership skills, ..."

"It is also useful to consider my leadership in relation to food as it is default in what we do but I don't emphasise that part of my work enough."

"To develop and validate my leadership skills."

"To reflect upon and develop further my leadership skills."

"Develop leadership knowledge."

"a space to develop my food activities, influence and leadership with my local community while having others in similar situations who will support and share with me as I will with them."

"Learn and use tools/techniques for self-awareness."

THEME 4

Confidence building: Bolstering confidence in leading food-related activities

Participants anticipated that by taking part in MFC, they will be able to build their confidence in leading their own local food-related activities.

"... develop confidence and skills needs to become an advocate for healthy and sustainable food locally."

"Support my confidence-building as a leader in this space"

"Develop my knowledge, skills and confidence to create change in my local community in the food system ..."

"I want to grow my confidence to do projects independently from my job. I want to understand how best to support my community, to make people feel enthusiastic and that they have agency in the face of government cuts."

"To have support and [guidance] and [build] my [confidence]"

"... and increase my confidence going forward in my project."

THEME 5

Advocacy: To become an advocate of healthy and sustainable food-related issues and activities

Respondents also looked forward to developing their advocacy skills so that they can implement this in driving healthy and sustainable food-related changes within their local community.

"I want to inspire people to take action, peaceful forms of revolution by growing food."

"engaging with others and eventually some help or suggestions in how to bridge linking with people in authority who do not subscribe to sustainability. Particularly with climate change, many people like to forget that it is our soil which is so important and our best mechanism to [mitigate] climate change."

"how to design activities that have a lasting impact (ie by helping others become advocates too)."

"I am very active outside of my local Community. I am active pan Wales and in sub Saharan Africa. I would like to be active in my community. Community being where I live and the black and minority ethnic community."

"Great awareness of food poverty, who we can help, how our group can help and how to stay sustainable."

"Re-ignite my passion and develop my skills in food activism."

THEME 6

Developing an open-mind

A couple of respondents did not have any specific expectations in mind.

"I have an open mind. Not sure."

"Very little in practical terms, but very hopeful for more knowledge and networking. Basically I try to be open and keep the expectations to a minimum."

THEME 7

A reflective space: an opportunity to reflect on practice

One respondent felt that the MFC could be a time-out from their usual workspace to reflect on their practice.

"Second is that, due to the nature of my job, I am so often caught up in the day to day and just don't get the chance to actively reflect. This course will bring that about and bring me into a space where everyone is working with one another to do the same thing. Furthermore, it will ensure I take the time to do this and work this practice into my every day working schedule."

5.

FINDINGS

FOLLOW-UP SURVEY FINDINGS

5.1

Introduction

Thirty-one (31) MFC version 2 members responded to the survey. This figure represents 40% of those originally enrolled with the programme (n=77). Out of these, 18 provided personalised codes that allowed us to link follow-up responses to their baseline survey responses.

5.2

Demographic characteristics of survey participants

Of those who completed both the baseline and follow-up surveys (n=18), most respondents were female (89%, n=16) and from a White ethnic background (67%, n=12). Majority of the survey participants were aged 50–59 years (28%, n=5).

In terms of where participants' activities were based, most participants (67%, n=12) carried out their activities in England and the rest of the activities took place in Northern Ireland (6%, n=1), Scotland (11%, n=2) and Wales (17%, n=3).

5.3

Experiences of My Food Community sessions

5.3.1 Balance between the Leadership Masterclasses and the Learning and Inspiration sessions

Respondents were asked about their thoughts regarding the balance between the Leadership Masterclasses and the Learning and Inspiration sessions. Respondents generally acknowledged that there was a balance between the Leadership Masterclasses and the Learning and Inspiration sessions.

"I enjoyed both, and the balance was right".

"... it was a good balance".

"... it was perfectly balanced".

However, there was a call for depth rather than breadth on the leadership topics.

"... I think some of the leadership topics are just too big to cover in single sessions. I know they are an introduction, but I wonder if there is a way of trying to cover less and going deeper into some topics such as personal leadership styles, what it means to lead, leadership challenges people are facing maybe linked to the action learning sets?"

A couple of respondents felt greater focus could have been given to the learning and inspiration sessions.

"I would have preferred less masterclasses and more learning and inspiration".

"Felt the learning and inspiration sessions should have been prioritised and the leadership masterclasses come after Christmas".

5.3.2 Experiences from the Action Learning Set (ALS)

Some members found the ALS sessions to be useful.

"I valued them greatly as it was an opportunity to make deeper connections with a small group of people in a supportive environment. I wish they had started earlier in the programme".

"I found them very interesting and informative. I enjoyed seeing the other people and hearing about the work they are doing".

"I took part twice and felt that the person whose question had been selected gained massively from the experience- looking more relaxed, positive, confident and heard".

"Difficult to fight the reflex to offer solutions and opened my mind to other possibilities".

For others, there appeared to be a misunderstanding of the relevance of the Action Learning Set to the programme and its expectations.

"I found that the Action Learning Sets felt quite [separate] from the rest of the programme. And I wasn't sure how to complete them – or why? I tended to reflect on the sessions afterwards, but I didn't really need the Action Learning Sets to help with this..."

"... I didn't engage much with the Action Learning Sets etc – I didn't fully understand how it linked in".

"I would have preferred these ... to have more hints on lead-in and planning [beforehand]"

"I think more time needs to be put into helping people understand the approach [ALS] and the difference between giving advice and asking supportive/reflective questions. There was a tendency to offer advice and "fix" in our sessions. Prompts before the session included in the zoom link to come prepared with something to offer as a topic would have been useful. I think this is something about what you sign up for as part of an action learning set – ie you are an active participant and this comes with responsibility to show up prepared".

One respondent felt the Zoom virtual environment was not conducive for the ALS.

"Everyone involved got a lot out of the sessions, as they are a very powerful process. I don't think Zoom is the right place to do this however and participants would get much more out of in-person sessions".



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Wrexham © Scott M Salt Photography

Poor attendance of the ALS sessions affected the value some participants got from them.

"I found them really valuable and interesting, particularly as I am interested in coaching itself. It was a bit frustrating as I attended 2 sessions which were cancelled due to not enough people attending, so I only attended 2 sessions in total".

"I only was able to attend one session as there weren't enough people to make a second group so I didn't engage as much as I would have hoped".

A respondent suggested that it may be better for the ALS sessions to be part of the National meetups.

"This is borne out if one correlates with reports of participants' experiences with the national meetups. Perhaps the National meet up should have an ALS component?"

5.3.3 Experiencing of applying for the Leadership Action Grant

Some members found the Leadership Action Grant useful in enhancing partnership working, empowering them to initiate and apply the knowledge and skills learnt from the My Food Community programme.

"This is a good idea to practice what I had learnt on the course."

"I have the impression that it was a very useful focussing activity for many participants and in some cases already that the grant empowered individuals to take the initiative. This is very affirming in terms of leadership."

"Very valuable".

"I am able to work with a local community group to start an initiative that will benefit the surrounding community, without this we wouldn't have been able to start the conversations until we had funding."

"Massively. This has pushed me to run a 12 week programme with a group of women struggling with food poverty. This programme is 4 weeks in and the results already have been amazing."

"It gave me an opportunity to engage with more people and expand my ideas. I feel I have been able to improve my skills and experience".

"Very valuable, it's rare to have an opportunity to have a pot of money to initiate activities I personally would like to make rather than as part of my work."

"Completing the application was a valuable process in thinking and planning the project".

"I applied for the grant and will run an event during the summer. The funding was less than cohort 1 and I was thinking that cohort 2 would get the same amount; however, £500 can go a long way. I was very busy around the application period and completing it was very last minute and stressful".

"It is valuable but in all honesty I haven't actioned mine yet but will do over the next couple of months".

Reasons for not applying for the grant included lack of time and no need for it.

"I didn't apply as I don't actively have the opportunity to use the grant at this present time".

"No time".

"I did not apply as did not feel that I had an appropriate project".

"I did not apply as my involvement [in] food activities is small in our community. Other people are more involved, but I didn't feel there was enough cooperation to go ahead with yet another new project".

A member suggested peer working or mentoring support in putting together the application.

"I think that it would have been beneficial to have a mentoring session or a peer-to-peer mentoring session to help pull it together more and talk through the ideas".

5.3.4 The role of the Nation Specific events (The Role of the Community to Inspire Change) in enabling understanding of members' role in the community to inspire change

For those who were able to attend the Nation Specific events (The Role of the Community to Inspire Change), they found it inspiring and motivating.

"Yes, but I think they also highlighted the responsibility of each individual".

"Yes very much so. I would like to be involved in more networking and discussion of this kind."

"Yes massively. I distinguished that my leading style is by lived experience and [relatability]. This has helped me hugely."

"Yes, the events were very energising and inspiring."

"Yes I felt very motivated to start bringing like minded people together."

"Yes, particularly useful content for me on free school meal campaign which I was working on but also around the good food for England which was new for me. Connecting with others in a new setting was inspiring."

5.3.5 Experience in connecting with others online and in person throughout the My Food Community programme

The online and face-to-face environments enhanced flexibility to engage with the programme.

"Highly valuable to a remote and rural area such as ours. We could never normally afford to travel and connect with nationwide food leaders and "actionists" its created a great foundation for local partnership working".

Some found the experience in connecting with others virtually and physically to be fulfilling and rewarding.

"Very useful from a technical perspective, and super-inspiring on a personal level. The number and variety of experiences stimulated by this programme that have led to tangible and significant real-world progress, is remarkable".

"Amazing, there are so many people doing so many great things!".

"Excellent".

"Amazing, in person only".

"Feel very inspired by all the people on the course, great to see the range of roles and influences that people can have in this industry".

The online sessions sometimes enhanced connectivity by bridging geographical barriers.

"Brilliant, I have connected with people I would never have met due to geographical location. I have gained colleagues, friends and clients through the programmes".

However, others preferred the face-to-face sessions.

"It's been really valuable, having the opportunity to meet others who are doing different projects but with similar values. I found it easier to connect with others in person more, whereas online does not seem to come so naturally for me, and I feel it creates a bit of a barrier, although it was still useful".

"The face-to-face events really helped to inspire and take time from our usual schedules to make connections and learn".

"It has been invaluable. I feel so well connected. I was at an event the other week and a lady walked in and I knew I recognised her from somewhere and couldn't quite put my finger on it, then I realised she was also part of the My Food Community programme, when I highlighted who I was there was an instant connection and we have now planned to meet to discuss working together".

There were challenges in attending the virtual session, particularly via the Circle platform and members preferred a more user-friendly system.

"I really enjoyed Birmingham; however, there seemed to be a huge dropout rate and I didn't see most of the people I connected with again online. Only a couple of Welsh MFC people including myself attended the event in Wrexham".

"The launch event was a great introduction as was the national event towards the end of the programme. It would have been fab if more people had made it to the national event. Re online – I guess several issues. If there were (I think) 60 people on the programme, I didn't get that sense from the online sessions. I dip into to some Wednesday and some Thursday sessions and from the numbers of participants joining it felt like there must have been a lot of people who didn't attend the live sessions. That was a shame but I guess did mean that we made deeper connections with the people who did show up.



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Manchester © Scott M Salt Photography

"... If by online you also mean Circle – I found it a bit hard to navigate at first and very few people actually used it. From experience this is an issue for many online programmes using similar technology – it's hard to get people to engage with discussion platforms etc outside of the main learning content. As more user friendly platform may have helped but like turning up for live sessions there is something around personal responsibility and commitment. What are you signing up for and how do you see your role as part of a learning community – are you prepared to give to it as much as you take from it? Maybe this is something that could be explored on the first day together".

"As above, was looking forward to a face-to-face meeting after getting to know a few people online. I did not connect a lot on Circle but tried to keep an eye on discussions".

"I made some useful connections via Circle and had many questions answers and tried to do the same, but I didn't log automatically and it seemed to be the same people who engaged which was a shame".

"I was really busy before and after the sessions, and Circle was too complicated, so didn't connect with a few people who were into soil health".

"Only online, fairly good".

"As a person who is hearing [impaired] I would rather meet people face to face. However I now have more experience of online events and have grown to enjoy them".

5.4 **How members' expectations of My Food Community have been met**

Members expressed their expectations to have been met by My Food Community in the areas of leadership in food activities, networking, being inspired by others and learning new knowledge around food systems.

"My expectations of My Food Community have been met – both in terms of the quality of the programme and the benefits to me in my role".



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Wrexham © Scott M Salt Photography man

"I joined this programme with [an] open mind. My only expectation was that it would enable me to develop my knowledge and skills and benefit me in my role as a sustainable food leader. These expectations have been met through a combination of the workshops and the interaction with colleagues on the programme".

"Very much met and exceeded in part because I try to approach new activities with as little expectation as possible! I have been delighted with the people I have met and shared ideas and inspiration with. I have also been pleased with the level of response when questions arise. I have also learnt new things that I didn't even know I wanted to learn about".

"Great people on the course Many interesting sessions Having space to think about food issues".

"I have valued greatly the sense of being part of a larger community and the opportunity to engage with people involved in a large range of food action. it helped to provide a better perspective on the whole system and lift my head up from the pressing agendas of our food partnership. I have learnt new things and the programme has inspired me, challenged my thinking and energised me".

"Supportive network expanded knowledge and learnings understanding different ways to approach food for people place and planet becoming more 'actioner' confidence to put food issues top of the agenda closer contact with established campaigning organisations".

"A fantastic opportunity to connect with likeminded people working in the industry which is what I expected. I came to this course wanting to develop and learn more about what it is like to work in the food community space, as this is where I would like to direct my career. It was great to learn the theory in this".

For some members the programme exceeded their expectations.

"The MFC programme has exceeded my expectations. The facilitation and training have been excellent, with supportive and knowledgeable hosts and inspiring guest speakers, and a network of incredible people to learn from and share with each week".

"Far exceeded".

"The course covered more than I expected – I appreciated the range of sessions and topics they covered, all which were very relevant and applicable to my work. It helped me contextualise my own work and see how I could extend the training that I am already running in my community".

"The provision of expertise and resources have exceeded my expectations. I feel that the development of connections across the network has not kept pace and may take more time to develop".

"The course exceeded my expectations. I found a community of likeminded people, interesting sessions, supportive leaders and I found that my mood was lifted every week when I signed on".

"Over and above! [The MFC team] are amazing. They go over and above to support and guide. They are actively interested in the projects that I have been doing. I have even been able to have news and newspaper coverage down to the PR team at My Food Community! Amazing!"

"The programme exceeded my expectations in its interesting, informative workshops, expert leadership coaching and wonderful UK-wide networking opportunities, run by considerate, committed facilitators. The coaching aspect of the course helped me to identify my own leadership style and approach and encouraged me to draw out skills I can use to support my work. The expert-led workshops have improved my knowledge of food citizenship as well as being enjoyable and inspiring opportunities to meet and share thoughts and experiences with other members of the MFC cohort".

Comments from a few members showed that they had no expectations, but their experiences of the programme were positive.

"I went in with no expectations whatsoever, so everything I've experienced so far has been hugely valuable".

"Great to meet likeminded people and see variety of projects across the [UK]"

"I've learned so much during the course. We've covered a wide range of topics on the course which have inspired me to research further. I wasn't aware of the amount of work being done

in this field but I now feel far more confident in my understanding and my ability to drive forward [change] in my community".

"Built confidence in myself as a leader Increased knowledge on food system and how to [actively] influence this. Connect with others working on similar issues".

"The programme has facilitated a network of like-minded food citizens and has been invaluable in building my confidence in leading sustainable food projects. It has also increased my knowledge in topics relevant to my role".

"Really great leadership training workshops Lots of opportunity to reflect on my role and my work with other like-minded people A really valuable network of community activists and organisers, with a lot of knowledge and insight to share – it was great to listen to everyone and learn from them".

For a couple of members, it was hard to tell from their responses whether they had expectations or not, or experienced positive outcomes or not from the programme.

"I had no expectations and was unsure what to expect but I feel the My Food Community are doing their best to use their combined skills in helping programme participants become advocates for Good Food for All".

"The programme was very good in content and in presentation. I needed to test myself against recognised food leadership skills, as I was working hard in a local SFP [Sustainable Food Places] partnership, but progress was slow. I really enjoyed meeting other activists and sharing our situations and challenges. Personally, I decided that I was more suited to support others behind the scenes, than to be the responsible leader".

For a few others, it appeared their expectations were not met. These were due to the relevance of the contents of the programme to their roles, issues with networking and barriers in using the Circle platform.

"The sessions were very good. Sometimes challenging to relate my own role to it, there was a lot of talk from and about SFPs, obviously, and I didn't always feel as a gardener and nature and wellbeing person that I fitted in".

"I hoped I would meet people who are doing lots of different activities which I could learn from".

"I liked the inspirational speakers – some of whom I'd heard before. The leadership sessions were basic at times; however, I took nuggets from all of them. I thought Circle would be easier to use – it stopped my engagement as I just wanted to get on and off quickly; however, finding information was too time consuming. Also, no-one was particularly engaging in the chat".

5.5

Highlights that came through the My Food Community programme

One of the highlights of My Food Community was fostering connections and building networks.

"The highlight for me has been the engagement with a diverse range of people and to work through challenges and ideas with colleagues with different experiences, skills and approaches".

"Making connections with other food partnerships".

"Meeting others".

"The times we came together in person".

"It's possible that all these good people in the pursuit of good food can make a positive difference

"Connecting with others despite it being virtually".

"I love having contact and support with others that are interested in helping to change our food policies".

"Meeting so many people who think similar ways and have similar values and ideas!"

"Meeting some really lovely people".

"Building a community of sustainable food experts that I feel comfortable to contact in the future, either directly or via Circle".

"The tools and techniques for leadership and engaging with others".

Some members found the grant to be valuable.

"The Leadership Action Grant has been really valuable as a way of focusing and applying my learning. I think the grant is also important as a means of ensuring that what we gain from the programme is actually passed on to our communities in a positive, practical way".

"The opportunity to be funded to start a project in my local area, freely and with support and encouragement".

For one member, the programme helped them to personally reflect on their work.

"The opportunity to take time to reflect and identify my strengths and the [areas] I need to develop more".

A couple of members found the programme inspiring and motivating.

"Ability to see range of positions in the food community space as I begin my career".

"I really enjoyed the in-person sessions, which were energising and inspired me with more ideas for my own work and how to run sessions".

Some members shared how knowledge and skills from the programme was already used to build impact in their communities.

"The cook and share event that I hosted at the local food bank for the volunteers. This got a northern [Ireland] news channel coverage interview, radio interview a video recording. It was also featured in the local newspapers. Amazing exposure for the cause of food education and eat well on a budget".

"Learning about food citizenship was a real highlight. It's impacted on my thinking and influenced the work I'm doing with colleagues".

"Advocacy session was particularly helpful for me and I'm now using the skills in my campaigning Food citizenship session reinforced learning I've used before".

"I found several presentations insightful, especially the one by Samantha Evans of the Eden Project, who spoke clearly about the different roles taken within her team by different members. I will take this forward into the working groups I am part of".

"Realising I was enabling change in my community".

"The Leadership Action Grant has allowed me to put my new skills and knowledge into action, giving me the confidence to lead on a new community pantry project. As well as providing a service to benefit the community, it supported me during the course by giving me a model on which to focus my reflections and learning".

Four members mentioned specific sessions as their highlights of the programme.

"... the leadership masterclass sessions was my absolute highlight. Her sessions were engaging and I learnt so much. I looked forward to her lessons and I go back to refer to them now".

"I particularly liked the advocacy session and would have liked that sooner".

"Food citizenship session".

5.6

Areas for improvement in My Food Community programme

To improve the programme, respondents highlighted the following areas:

More networking opportunities

"Perhaps some facilitation of more networking opportunities for the cohort(s), outside of the weekly meetings – e.g. a themed monthly evening conversation on zoom, or more local (e.g. South East) national meet-ups. Although maybe we can arrange something like this ourselves!"

"Engagement with more of the cohort. I was sad that so many people did not seem to actively use circle and as I was not able to attend any Wednesday sessions, I was unsure who those people were or how to approach them, thus meeting only a very small number of active participants. I would have liked to know that my travel and accommodation could be re-imbursed for the initial Birmingham event so that I would have looked at coming more seriously and tried to raise the funds to do so".



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Manchester © Scott M Salt Photography

"Perhaps a session or two around working with local authorities to influence policy and secure commitments to action".

A more user-friendly online platform than Circle

"A real disconnect with those who struggled with using Circle. If it was easier it would have led to more fruitful connection outside of the weekly zoom sessions".

"... Get rid of Circle – really didn't like it and it became a barrier to participation".

"An induction on the Circle would have helped me to negotiate it better".

"It was sometimes hard to find things on the Circle platform, like the Zoom links for sessions".

Improvement in programme structure

"Better organisation of information More structure in the course – getting key messages and information on time".

"I can't think of anything except to say I felt like the programme lost momentum from the December review session onwards but that may be a personal thing as my time became more pressured".

"I think that there needs to be more communication and planning with regards to the speakers that are coming in, such as we have a comfort break at this time, we have a certain amount of time where the floor is opened up for learners to speak. Some of the speakers talked at us, didn't give a comfort break and seemed to lack engagement felt that many of the other speakers who came to talk were quite low energy and not engaging. One really good example of it working well was that it came across that there was a real link between [the team facilitators] because [they] followed their framework and it flowed well".

"A reminder of session with link 30 minutes before start. Having the timetable accessible. Circle being very easy to access and having limited places to look for information. Being given the reflective journal at Birmingham – rather than finding it after a few months".

"For me, the admin side seemed a bit clunky at times. For example – there was no automation of adding sessions to my calendar, so I had to do it manually and kept forgetting!"



My Food Community Welcome Event, Autumn 2022, Birmingham © Edward Shaw Photography

Better orientation into the programme

"Perhaps more of a run through on how to get the most out of the programme at the beginning including how to use circle, set up notifications and connect. How to use reflective journaling tools which I didn't find until later".

"I feel that a short online interview would be helpful before undergoing the programme so both participant and programme provider could explain/ understand more fully what they want to get from the experience".

More collaborative working

"Opportunity to visit projects of / or discuss projects in person with, other participants and to host the same".

"Maybe working on projects together – I am aware that was a possibility for the action learning set. I learn best when there are practical things to do, and bouncing off other people".

Mentoring

"It would have been helpful to have had a mentor or even peer mentor during the course – someone to be more accountable to and to help one another develop our ideas. More in-person sessions would also be valuable, or the opportunity to facilitate smaller ones with others living in the same region".

More in-person sessions

"I think I would have preferred more in-person events, which helps me to in-bed my learning".

"In person events/meet ups".

5.7

Additional comments

Many members were pleased with their experience on the programme.

"Thankful have the opportunity to go on the course and recognise the work that was put into delivering it. There was a lot to take in and I am sure the knowledge I have gained with help in my future".

"I have really enjoyed being part of this community and I will miss it. Chandra, Beth and everyone else has been so lovely and supportive".

"A massive thank you for the last 6 months it has been amazing, inspirational and so motivating!"

"Great programme, thank you for opportunity Lots of food for thought".

"Have met a few lovely and interesting people!"

"Thank you – this is a brilliant course and I would recommend it to anyone working in the 'good food' sector".

"Just a massive thank you for enabling me to access this life changing programme. The warmth and encouragement shown by everyone made it such a pleasurable and positive experience. It's had an enormous impact on the work I'm doing and given me confidence to establish a social enterprise focusing on the food circle".

"Thank you for the opportunities experience and training. I have learnt a lot and made some great contacts".

"Just a thank you for a wonderful, inspiring experience that I won't forget".

"I think the MFC team worked very hard to make the programme a positive experience during the two hour sessions. So, thank you!"

"Overall, a really great programme. I feel like I've learned loads and will definitely encourage others to sign up".

"The programme has been really enjoyable and informative and I have felt valued and supported throughout the journey. I feel I now have a better understanding of food systems and issues, and more confidence to challenge and change these in my community and beyond".

"Sincere thank you for your investment in me, and Western Isles Food Partnership colleagues – I hope we can build a powerful partnership from your support".

"Today someone mentioned that the £500 was a very small amount in terms of what they normally work with. For me all of this has been amazing because the programme is free and that amount of money is huge to me. I feel lucky to have been included even if I was not initially certain that any of this applied to me".

"Also want to say a massive thank you to everyone who has put this programme together and contributed to the sessions. The breadth of what we've covered has been amazing and the session leaders and content inspiring and engaging. I am grateful for the opportunity to have taken part in the programme. Thank you".

"I'm looking forward to putting the learnings from MFC to good use along with my greatly developed confidence in my leadership ability. thankyou!"

Sometimes, work pressures made engagement with the programme challenging.

"No – these things take a while to bed in and teething issues are to be expected. I wanted to contribute more but a variety of work/life things kept getting in the way!"

"My struggled to switch between work and learning so didn't always get the most out of sessions, for this reason I would welcome evening opportunities for sessions as I would have been able to engage better on my own time. Still grateful for my employer to enable me to take the time to attend and I rarely missed sessions".

One member of called for more diversity on the programme in terms of age demographics and a range of communities.

"Anything to encourage a more diverse range of folk on the course would be good – so encouraging folk from a wider range of communities and ages".

There was an additional comment from one member about the disconnect of the ALS to the rest of the programme. The same member also suggested for the programme to be run as a food partnership.

"I wonder if the action learning sets could be taken out of the main programme and be something people engage with at a different time during the programme. For example – people join/are allocated to an action learning set at the launch event and the group arranges a monthly session. It would free up more time in the programme for 'taught' content to maybe go deeper into some of the other topics. The same with the half-time review 2 hours in December felt like a long session and not many people participated.

"... I wonder what it would look like if the programme was to run within a food partnership rather than on a national level. The potential to build up a critical mass of food activist in one location and evaluate the impact feels very exciting to me. If you ever wanted to pilot this I know one food partnership in the NW who would be very happy to work with you!"

There was a suggestion for the sessions to be more self-directed.

"Step back and lead less! Trust participants to make waves and connect to the extent that you would deem the Circle platform unnecessary. Provide support and encouragement for them to do this. Find or invent ways of monitoring that process that would enable you to evaluate effectively and continue to enhance the programme over subsequent cohorts. You are doing this to a pretty impressive degree already. I encourage you to go further!"

Some other additional comments are:

"It would be lovely to have the opportunity for meet ups in person as the time goes on between all of the cohorts".

"I had not used Circle before, but I did find it worked quite well for me, as I had chosen to receive alerts by email. Several others found it difficult – there are so many platforms to learn – so it might be worth spending a bit more time early on with a tutorial, with examples, so people don't waste time looking for things".

"I got most out of the food related topics rather than leadership, perhaps as I had done some learning before on that or that's what felt most relevant".

"I appreciate that the 2 hours per week work for some, but perhaps one full day, in person might be useful for some topics/reflections".



My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Belville community garden, Greenock
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5.8 **Effectiveness of the My Food Community on leadership competencies and skills**

We asked respondents to rate their leadership competencies and skills in the follow-up survey and compared these responses to the same questions that were asked before they engaged in the programme (baseline).

We noticed significant improvements in all the leadership competencies and skills after six months of engaging in the MFC version 2 ($p < 0.05$). That is, relative to baseline ratings, respondents rated their leadership competencies and skills higher in the areas of advocating and initiating for sustainable food-related issues within their communities; helping others to take action on healthy and sustainable food-related

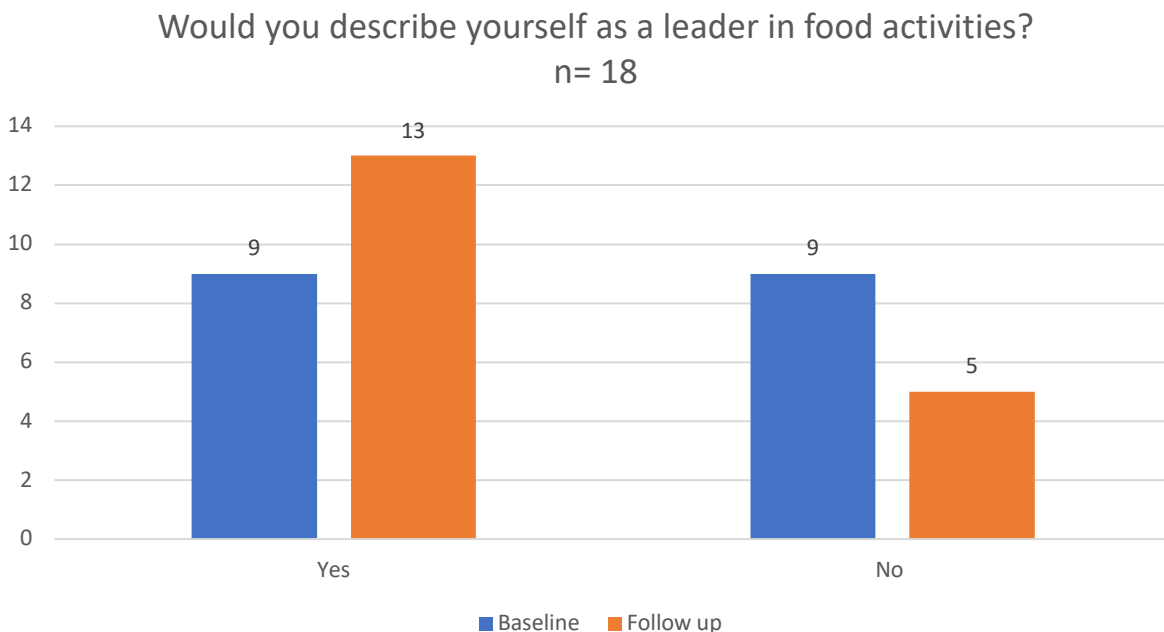
issues within their communities; coming up with ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in their local communities; raising awareness around healthy and sustainable food-related issues in their local communities; helping others to identify opportunities to promote healthy and sustainable food-related activities within their local communities; inspiring others to contribute to healthy and sustainable food-related issues within their local communities and actively connecting with others outside their local communities in food activities (Figure 10).

The strongest areas of improvement were around raising awareness, helping others to identify opportunities, inspiring others and actively connecting with others outside their local communities in relation to healthy and sustainable food-related activities (Figure 10).

Figure 10: A bar graph comparing the ratings of several leadership competencies of My Food Community members before and after taking part in the My Food Community. * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$.



Figure 11: A bar graph comparing the number of respondents who described themselves as leaders of food activities before and after taking part in the My Food Community.



There was a significant increase in the number of members who described themselves as leaders in food activities after taking part in the My Food Community compared to before they started engaging in the programme (Fishers exact test, $p=0.015$) (Figure 11).

A paired-samples t-test was conducted to compare the mean ratings of participants in their skills in driving local food activities before and after taking part in the My Food Community. The results show a significant improvement in the mean ratings of the skills of members in this area, $t(17) = 3.688, p=0.002$ (Figure 12).

Figure 12: A bar graph comparing the mean ratings of how respondents described their skills in local food activities before and after taking part in the My Food Community.

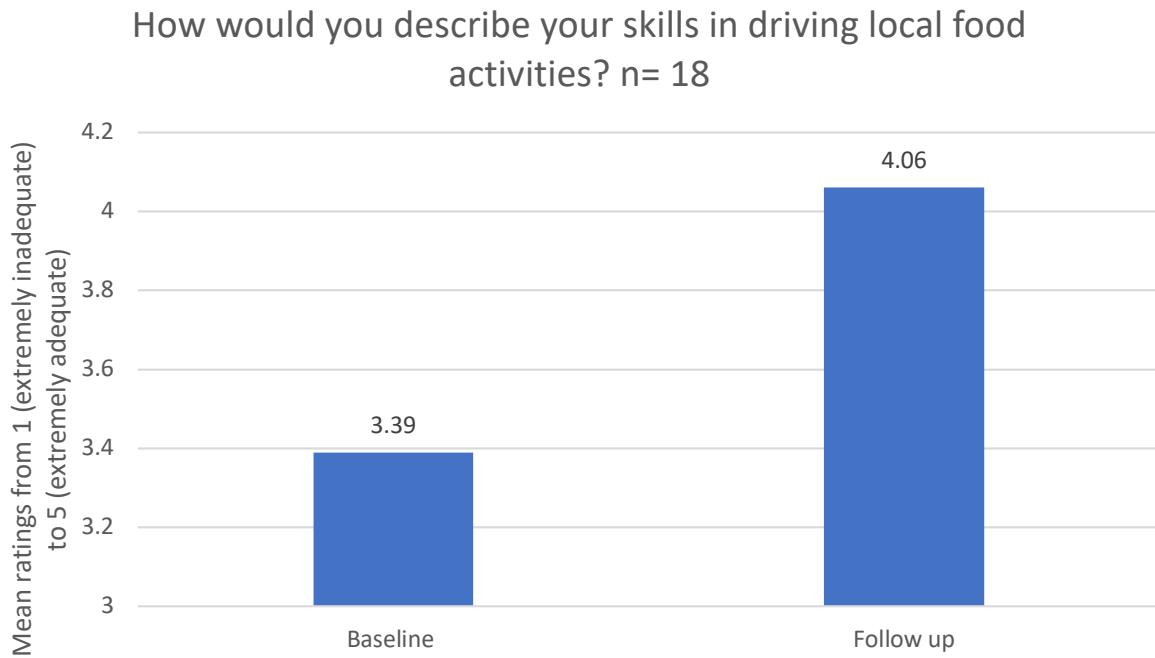
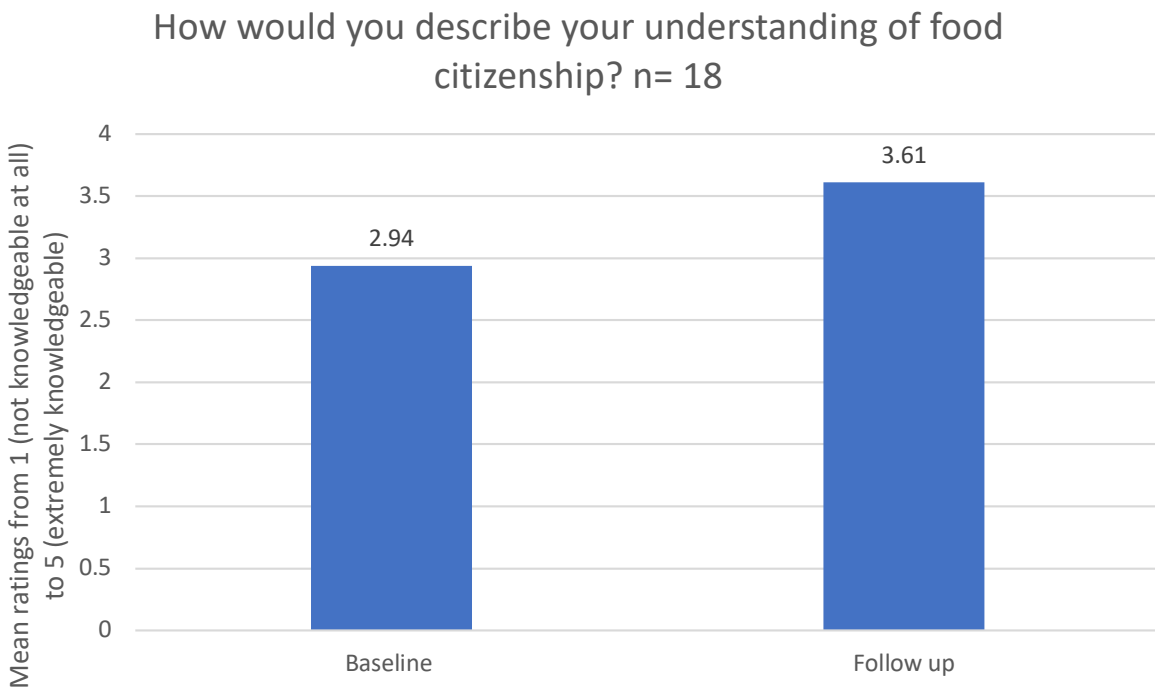


Figure 13: A bar graph comparing the mean ratings of how respondents described their understanding of food citizenship before and after taking part in the My Food Community.





My Food Community Nations Networking Event, Spring 2023, Manchester © Scott M Salt Photography

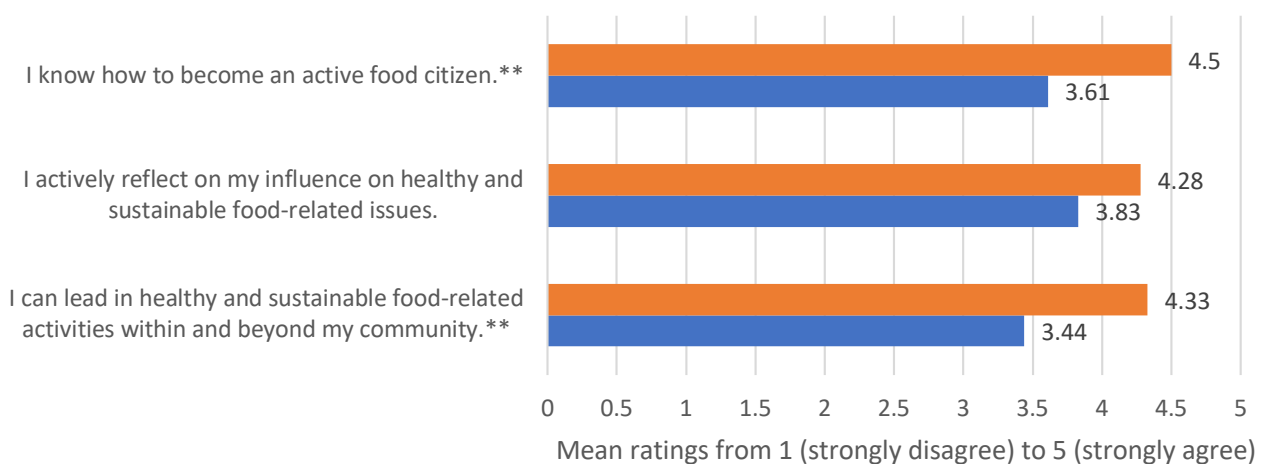
Figure 13 compares respondents understanding of food citizenship before and after taking part in the My Food Community. The graph shows that the mean ratings of respondents had significantly increased from baseline (mean = 2.97) to follow-up (mean = 3.61), $t(17) = 2.608$, $p = 0.018$.

We found that the mean ratings of respondents in how they can lead in healthy and sustainable

food-related activities within and beyond their communities [$t(17) = 3.496$, $p = 0.003$] and knowing how to become an active food citizen [$t(17) = 3.688$, $p = 0.002$] significantly increased after members engaged in the My Food Community programme. However, this was not the case for actively reflecting on their influence on healthy and sustainable food-related issues, $t(17) = 1.719$, $p = 0.104$.

Figure 14: A bar graph comparing the mean ratings of how respondents described their abilities in various food-related areas.
** $p < 0.01$

To what extent do you agree with the following statements?



6. CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation findings of Version 1 of the programme helped shape the evaluation focus for Version 2. Both waves of the evaluation indicate that the MFC had beneficial impacts on the knowledge, competencies and skills of participants in the broad field of community food leadership.

The quantitative outcome evidence was very consistent with the qualitative evidence, suggesting that many of the self-reported changes could be attributed to participation in MFC, rather than other factors. As with many voluntary training courses that run over a six to twelve month duration, levels of participation fluctuated. For both deliveries of the programme, roughly one half were heavily engaged, one quarter were moderately engaged, and one quarter were lightly engaged or disengaged. For the positive outcomes, the evidence is most visible for those that had strong engagement with the process, which is to be expected from a participatory programme. With its earlier inception, for Version 1 there is longitudinal data based upon participant's use of the small grant. This provides good evidence that participants continue to derive value from MFC many months after they completed the online training. Indeed, there is significant potential for participants to continue to benefit over time with the delivery of further programme runs and the growth of a network of MFC alumni.

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