



SHORT REPORT

# MY FOOD COMMUNITY

SUMMARY EVALUATION FINDINGS FROM THE FIRST DELIVERY OF THE PROGRAMME IN 2021-22

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Amy Beardmore, Mat Jones, Sarah Hills, and Sanda Ismail





My Food Community Networking Event, March 2022 © Bokehgo Studio

### FEEDBACK FROM MY FOOD COMMUNITY PARTICIPANTS

“ The leadership and inspiration sessions really resonated with me and I have felt more confident to pursue the version of leadership that works for me. ”

“ I was able to put into action the skills that I had developed during the year of attending the My Food Programme sessions and activities. I was particularly pleased that I had developed much better leadership skills and so was able to run events and get involved at a more strategic level. ”

“ My current role in the community can be quite an isolated position so the MFC environment provided a brilliant space to share ideas, talk about food systems and gain inspiration from others. I had realised that I had reverted to quite traditional ways of thinking in my role and participating in MFC reminded me that I could be a disruptor and I could divert from the status quo. ”

“ I was already deeply involved in local food systems work... however, I was not very confident and the programme helped me to overcome this. ”

“ I believe [My Food Community] allowed me to be more inclusive, more understanding and to reach out and make sure all individuals in the community are able to take part. I am not fearful or nervous now in... putting an idea out there and making it happen. ”

“ It was really helpful to see how others are connecting to their communities and found inspirational ideas I could use in mine. ”

# 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 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, 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.

MFC is delivered through a range of self-guided learning materials, online training sessions and regular virtual peer meetups. This was supported by Koreo, a leadership coaching specialist. In the second phase of the programme, participants apply for a £1000 grant to develop a small-scale community food project of their own inspiration.



# EVALUATION

## OF THE PROGRAMME DELIVERY

This evaluation, led by UWE, reports on the first pilot of MFC that took place between September 2021 and November 2022. This is a summary from the full evaluation report. 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.

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 all participants 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 all of equal importance.

At the point of joining the programme, the area that they looked forward to most was the opportunity to share ideas and learn from others.

Of the 39 who registered with the programme, participants joined an average number of nine sessions. 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 grant to delivery a Community Action Project.

# LEARNING

## FROM DELIVERING THE PROGRAMME

Participant reflections at the end 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.

# 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.

- Respondents were asked to report on what well with their grants to deliver Community Action Projects. Leading themes included: 'fostering inter-ethnic/cultural working relationships', 'greater community engagement', 'innovation, building new relationships and collaborative 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).
- Respondents found specific sessions of the MFC programme useful in their role as a Food Champions. These were the 'Learning and Inspiration Sessions' (n=14); 'Round Table Discussions' (n=10); 'Connect and Share Sessions' (n=12); 'Coaching' (n=7) and 1-2-1 with other participants and team members (n=10).
- 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 areas<sup>1</sup>:
  - advocacy for healthy and sustainable food-related issues (82%, n=18)
  - initiating healthy and sustainable food activities (73%, n=16)
  - helping other people take action on healthy and sustainable food-related issues (73%, n=16)
  - creating big ideas around healthy and sustainable food-related issues (64%, n=14)
  - 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)

<sup>1</sup> Assessed in terms of a 5 star rating





**My Food Community Networking Event, March 2022** © Bokehgo Studio

- After taking part in MFC:
  - most respondents (68%, n=15) 'definitely' regarded themselves as a community leader in food activities. This was positive change in self rating compared to start of the programme.
  - 46% (n=10) perceived their skills creating change in food system to be 'extremely strong' in this area. No participants gave themselves this rating for the start of the programme.
  - 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.
  - 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 national networking opportunities with like-minded groups (36%, n=8); more local 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 community food issues (46%, n=10).

## Authors

Sarah Hills, *Senior Lecturer in Sustainability*<sup>2</sup>

Sanda Ismail, *Senior Lecturer in Public Health*<sup>1</sup>

Mat Jones, *Professor of Public Health and  
Community Development*<sup>1</sup>

Amy Beardmore, *Senior Lecturer in Public  
Health*<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Centre for Public Health and Wellbeing, UWE Bristol

<sup>2</sup> Department of Geography and Environmental  
Management

## Contacts

UWE Mat Jones: [matthew.jones@uwe.ac.uk](mailto:matthew.jones@uwe.ac.uk)

Food for Life Get Togethers:

Dale Cranshaw, Head of Programme  
[dcranshaw@soilassociation.org](mailto:dcranshaw@soilassociation.org)

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For the Full Report see:

<https://www.fflgettogethers.org/about/our-impact-and-research/my-food-community-first-delivery-of-a-food-leadership-programme/>



**Front cover:**  
**Larne community fridge and garden**  
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