

Manchester Food Board Policy Statement

Introduction

Food is fundamental to our lives. We need it to survive. We use it to root ourselves in our families and homes, to connect with our communities, and to express our personal lifestyle choices. From fine dining restaurants to soup kitchens, from farms to supermarket shelves, food has a bearing on many social, cultural, health, and environmental issues. We believe that food is fundamental to Manchester's vision to "build back better".

Purpose of this statement

The Manchester Food Board (MFB) is independent, and its membership includes leading decision-makers from across the economic, health, environment, and social sectors. We believe that food has the ability to transform some of the most urgent challenges of our society into opportunities for the future.

In 2019, through collaborative consultations, MFB identified a number of strategic priorities that would help create a resilient food system for the city. Since then, COVID-19 has amplified already existing economic and social inequalities, created uncertainty, and undermined the stability of our food system in the UK and beyond. For this reason, MFB wants to reaffirm its strategic priorities and to realign aspects of our work in light of Manchester's recovery from COVID-19.

This Policy Statement is a chance to take stock of where we are as a city, what challenges we have faced, and what opportunities lie ahead. In Manchester, currently:

- The majority of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions relate to food consumption – even more so than the city's motor vehicles ⁱ
- Almost 50% residents are from a BAME or other ethnic minority background ⁱⁱ
- Around 11,000 new homes are currently under construction (more than any other major UK city and any individual London borough) ⁱⁱⁱ
- Manchester is the third-most visited city in the UK (after London and Edinburgh) ^{iv}
- 11% people work in the hospitality, leisure, and tourism sector, which pays some of the lowest wages ^v
- 20% of Manchester's workforce are employed in distribution, hotels, and restaurants ^{vi}
- Over 40% of children live in poverty ^{vii}
- 63% of adults are overweight or obese ^{viii}
- 1 in 10 older people are undernourished ^{ix}

Manchester is diverse and vibrant, but this diversity is not always reflected in the food we see in public and social settings throughout the city. We are also forward thinking and proactive; Manchester is aiming to become a zero-carbon city by 2038 or before – at least 12 years earlier than the national 2050 target. Addressing our food system will be a major part of achieving this aim.

We may have a world-leading food industry, but many adults in Manchester struggle to maintain a healthy diet and a healthy weight. We need to support residents to prioritise healthy, high-quality food in order to reduce both obesity and undernourishment. A significant proportion of people in Manchester work in low paid food-related jobs, supporting the city’s rapidly growing population and helping attract the millions of visitors we receive from all over the world. But many families and households in the city struggle financially. We see an opportunity here to build a more equitable food economy, in which workers of all levels can benefit.

Our approach



Food systems thinking (City University)

Food is a cross-cutting issue, and plays a significant part in a range of key challenges. We believe that food can be a tool for impactful and positive change, and we therefore aim to adopt a system-based approach to harness this deep interconnectivity. Our aim is to make Manchester a prosperous, thriving, healthy, inclusive, and green place to live, work and play.

Our strong foundation

Manchester has been quick to respond to the challenge of COVID-19, and recovery plans are in development. We aim to work across the public, business, and VCFSE sectors to develop multifaceted and multi-layered actions to drive change for the people of Manchester. This Policy Statement and the accompanying Action Plan is designed to work alongside and in close conjunction with other significant progressions being made in Manchester.

In particular we wish to assist:

- Manchester City Council's four recovery workstreams (economy; residents and communities; the council and public services; health and social care)
- Manchester Climate Change Partnership's [2020-2025 Framework](#) (Food is one of the six headline areas for urgent action)
- Wider business, enterprise, VCFSE, and housing sectors in their recovery priorities (e.g. jobs, skills, health, wellbeing, environment, and social justice)
- [Our Manchester Forum](#), to offer our support, and facilitate their vision through food.

These excellent responses build on Manchester's strong record on food sustainability:

- Manchester, along with the other 9 GM boroughs, is a signatory on the [Milan Urban Food Policy Pact](#). As such, food-led action is a key priority for the Manchester Food Board, its partners, and stakeholders.
- Manchester has a Bronze Award from [Sustainable Food Places](#).

Our key objectives

Manchester's food system is facing three major challenges: the departure of the UK from the EU; the impact of COVID-19; and climate change. As such, there is significant action to be taken in order to mitigate the short, medium, and long-term effects of these challenges. But there are also significant opportunities for positive change. Food is a major part of the solution to these challenges.

This Policy Statement and the accompanying Action Plan are intended to lay out a clear pathway for a food-focused recovery for Manchester. This pathway is designed to secure access to good food for all; rebuild the food economy through catering, hospitality, and retail; reduce unemployment; reconfigure inefficient supply chains; and minimise the environmental impacts of food.

Through this policy statement, we hope to support and create actions that:

1. Improve Manchester's food security, and reduce inequalities by ensuring that safe, appropriate, and nutritious food is available to all
2. Promote a vibrant food culture and grow a dynamic and robust food sector
3. Create resilient supply chains
4. Reduce environmental impacts throughout the food system, with a focus on food waste and a shift to more ecological practices
5. Facilitate collaboration, research and innovation in the food system

Recovery objectives

1. Improve Manchester's food security, and reduce inequalities by ensuring that safe, appropriate, and nutritious food is available to all

COVID-19 has torn through our city, threatening our health, our livelihoods, and our community resilience. Those in the most deprived parts of Manchester have been disproportionately affected, as

have our BAME communities, families on low incomes, individuals living alone, and people with disabilities. As a result, we have seen increased demand for emergency food services and food aid. The quick and co-ordinated response from food aid providers across Manchester has been highly effective in alleviating hunger; at the height of demand, food parcels were delivered to 16,000 people each week.

However, food insecurity is still a major challenge for many families experiencing poverty and hardship. Some households have struggled to access fresh, nutritious food and, in some communities, to access familiar and culturally appropriate food. Food charities generally rely on donations of surplus food from large retailers, which hampers their ability to respond to these issues.

To build food security, we need to ensure a diverse and inclusive range of access points for food. This includes not only food banks, lunch clubs, community grocers, and neighbourhood pantries, but also mainstream supermarkets and specialist food retailers. Additionally, we need to ensure that children, adults, and older people have the food knowledge and skills they need to thrive, and collaborate with our education providers and VCFSE groups to support their fantastic work in this area. This includes skills relating to growing, handling, and cooking food. Lastly, we need to foster and promote a collective food culture; one in which we value, savour, and celebrate food.

Taking this three-fold approach to improving food security will reduce the demand for crisis support and help ensure that all households can access safe, appropriate, and nutritious food. Underpinning this work is our understanding that “good food” is that which contributes to a diet that is healthy, tasty, affordable, convenient, and environmentally sustainable.

We want to improve people’s connection to food, and promote and create opportunities for people to share, enjoy, grow, and learn about healthy and sustainable food. We need to waste less of it, and to share it more readily. We need to find more ways of coming together as a city to enjoy and appreciate good food, in all places – restaurants, cafes, sports stadia, cinemas, hospitals, schools, care homes, and beyond. We want to support the people in our city in their pursuit of good food, and to promote the incredible work being done by local food growing, cooking, and community groups.

2. Promote a vibrant food culture and grow a dynamic and robust hospitality sector

Prior to the lockdown, Manchester’s restaurant and hospitality sector was a dynamic, thriving and diverse cornerstone of the city’s economy. Our outstanding food and drink offer helped cement Manchester’s reputation as a leading UK city in which to live and work, and helped attract increasing numbers of tourists to the city. Supporting and actively promoting our local hospitality businesses will be key to Manchester’s food-led recovery.

Climate change is a major threat to the food and drinks industry, as food supplies threaten to become less predictable and more expensive. To future-proof our hospitality sector, we therefore need to support and create businesses that are sustainable both economically and environmentally. A strategic approach that considers food provision at a hyper local level will help support this work.

We understand that economic and social development is intrinsically linked to other challenges, such as poverty and food insecurity. Our plan seeks to support local independent food producers, brewers,

makers, and manufacturers, in order to increase local prosperity for individuals, families, and communities across the city.

3. Create more resilient supply chains

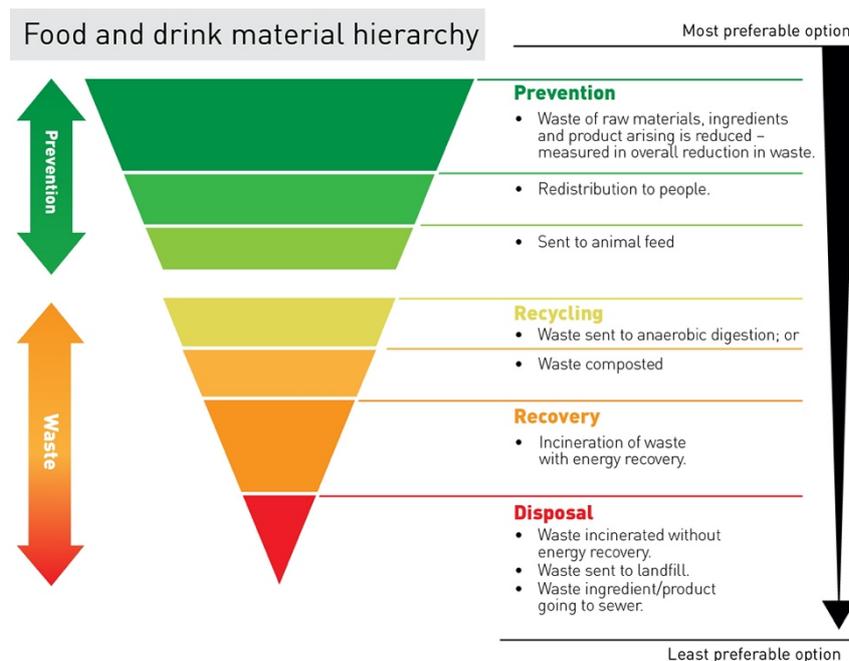
The UK imports much of its food, particularly fruit, vegetables, and meat. In 2019, domestic farmers and growers produced only 64% of all the food eaten in Britain, compared to 78% in 1984.^x Currently, 90% of the cod consumed in the UK is from overseas.^{xi} This leaves us vulnerable to changes in global demand, and also raises questions about the quality and fairness of food production practices across the world.

We believe that considering Manchester’s local food supply chains is a fundamental part of ensuring the city’s food-led recovery delivers long lasting and meaningful change. We plan to do this by increasing local food production, both within the city and in the surrounding areas, working with regional leaders, and supporting our local retail and wholesale markets. This will improve resilience and also create more flexibility in our food chain, allowing local food and drinks businesses to withstand and respond effectively to major challenges.

4. Reduce environmental impacts throughout the food system with a focus on food waste and a shift to more ecological practices

Food is one of the main contributors to the UK’s greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions, and each stage of the food supply chain – from growing and transporting to processing and packaging – presents an opportunity to improve.

The most impactful way to reduce the levels of GHG emissions from food is to cut the amount of food we waste, both at a commercial and a domestic level. Of the total food wasted in the UK each year, 70% is from households, and a further 12% is from the hospitality and food service industry.^{xii}



The food waste hierarchy (from WRAP)

The food waste hierarchy advises that preventing food waste is by far the most environmentally friendly option. Reducing food surplus and minimising avoidable food waste is therefore a top priority. The second most attractive option is to ensure food waste is redistributed and redirected to households experiencing food poverty. The third best option is to convert food waste into animal feed.

By working with retailers, food redistribution charities, and households across the city we aim to support the pioneering work being done to reduce Manchester's levels of surplus food.

We also need to reduce GHG levels by reducing the environmental impact of the food we buy and eat. Foods like fruits, vegetables, beans, and grains have a much lower carbon footprint than red meat, poultry, and fish. Increasing the proportion of our diet based on low-emission foods will help reduce the carbon footprint of our food system. We also need to increase our consumption of sustainably sourced and sustainably produced food, which supports environmentally friendly farming methods and protects animal welfare.

5. Facilitate collaboration, research and innovation in the food system

Planning Manchester's recovery from COVID-19 presents an opportunity to explore, develop, and adopt new ways of growing, processing, and accessing food. Technological innovation will pave the way for a pioneering, efficient, and interconnected food system for our city. The bedrock of this work will be collaboration, and we plan to engage with a range of academic, business, and community-based partners to develop these bold new ideas.

To build an evidence base for this work, we must conduct thorough and insightful research on a number of different fronts. National and international funding will support research related to climate, environmental impacts, farming, food technologies, social adaptation, and other relevant fields, which will be fundamental to tackling the imminent challenges we currently face.

Technological innovations such as vertical farming, aquaponics, and agroecology are well-suited to urban environments like Manchester, and have the potential to contribute to food availability in the city. Similarly, other alternatives elsewhere in the food chain could improve distribution and storage of food.

Conclusion

Manchester Food Board is on a quest to improve the ways in which food is produced, distributed, and consumed in our city. We are committed to decreasing the negative impacts of food on people and the environment; we work towards better food for all. To this extent, the Board acknowledges the impacts of COVID-19 and recognises the imminent need to act strategically, using food as vehicle of change.

We plan to do this by identifying barriers, as explored above, and converting them into opportunities to make a prosperous food economy. Creating a resilient food system for Manchester will also require co-operation and collaboration with other groups, anchor organisations, and businesses in various sectors of the economy. By working together, we can create an enabling environment for change that will allow for a resilient, diverse, and sustainable food system in Manchester.

This document presents our ambitious vision for Manchester’s food system, which can only be achieved through collaboration with other local partners. We are currently working to capture existing projects and initiatives around food in Manchester, and identifying future gaps and opportunities. **So, if you are involved in a food project, you have a suggestion, or you would like to collaborate with us then please get in touch with Rachel via rachel@foodsinc.co.uk.**

References

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