

Solidarity for a National Food Service
NFS

National Food Service London Community Cooks Handbook



2nd edition
August 2021

A kitchen is a small space
Especially when there are lots of you
Working,
Chatting, carrying, cleaning,
Standing, stirring, serving,
Telling, tasting, resting, arranging, pouring, questioning, listening,
Mopping...
It offers a chance to know others intimately
In ways you may not otherwise.

Aileen Cooney - volunteer at The Gleaners Café, Walthamstow

Why read this handbook?

The handbook will seek to empower you with the skills, confidence, and knowledge necessary to cook large-batch meals for others within your community. You will find practical knowledge such as knife skills, nutritional basics, and recipes, as well as the larger context of food waste, communal eating, community gardening, and food sovereignty, topics which will be discussed later on and can be found in the glossary.

The intention is to create the handbook through the lens of anti-racist work and to break with the 'charity style' power dynamic of giver and receiver. Instead this handbook seeks to show how we can work together to ensure that each community can meet its own food needs. The handbook is meant to be accessible and was created with the intention of being representative and collaborative.



The bulk of the content has been researched, written and edited by Will Dorman and Sean Roy Parker. The authors are thankful to James MacKinnon and Beth Martin for their incredible input and support in its realisation.

This handbook has been commissioned by National Food Service London. Printing this handbook has been made possible by all the generous donations to the NFSL Crowdfunder campaign.

Second edition designed and typeset by Sean Roy Parker

Printed by risograph on recycled paper in New Cross, London by PageMasters
pagemasters.co

If you have any requests, corrections or feedback on this resource, we'd love to hear from you. Please email us on northlondon@nationalfoodservice.uk

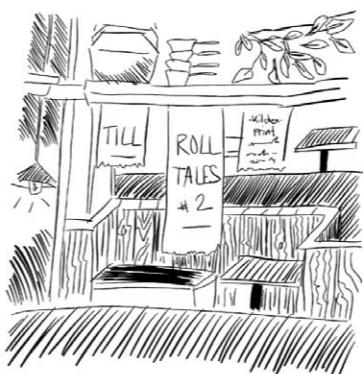
Contents

0 – Introduction	6
-What is the National Food Service?	6
-What is NFS London?	8
-NFS London Community Cooks Programme	9
-How to Use this Resource	10
-List of Contributors	10
-Collaboration as Methodology	12
-Consent Decision Making	13
1 – Safety Precautions and Good Practice	14
-Safeguarding	14
-Risk Assessment	14
-Prevention of the Spread of Covid-19	15
-Food Safety	16
-NFS London Community Cooks Manifesto	16
2 – Food Justice, Environmental Justice	19
-It Starts at Home	20
-Extraction and Consumption	21
-Environmental Justice in the Climate Crisis	22
-Turning Towards Food Sovereignty	23
-Community Gardens	25
-Compost	26
-Permaculture, Regenerative Agriculture, and Indigenous Knowledge	29
3 – Acquisition	32
-Intercepting Surplus Food	32
-Where We Stand on Food Waste	33
-Food Miles and Decarbonisation	35
-Sourcing Culturally Appropriate Ingredients	36
-We Can Build our Own Markets	39
-The Commons and Connection to Wild Food	41
-Cooking with Wild Food	42
-Foragers' Calendar	43
4 – Kitchen	46
-Pots, Pans, Kitchen Utensils	46
-Knife Skills	49
-Nutritional Basics	52
-Spices	54
-Large Batch Cooking in 4 steps	57
-Second Life	59
5 – Distribution	61
-Mutual Aid and Solidarity	61
-Dignity and Access	64
-Funding your Project	66
-Donation-based Services	68
-Why Social Eating?	69
-How to Organise a Community Meal	70

6 – In Action

-How to Use this Section	75
-Recipes	76
-Music in the Kitchen	94
-Trying to Run a Successful Self-funded Workers' Co-op	95

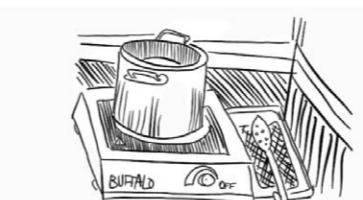
Glossary
Contributor Bios



Among many many other reasons, I hate Deliveroo for the adversarial relationships it causes between the shops/ food places, and the drivers,



Like, if something goes wrong or things take a longer time, we'll get angry at each other and not at the capitalist food system.



But I guess that's standard divide + rule. It doesn't help when it rains + everyone is miserable...

I feel at a bit of a political stumbling point at the moment I think a fair few people do



Maybe posterizing the area will make me feel better...?

Jess Kumwongpin-Barnes – Illustrator and cook, NFS London volunteer

0 – Introduction

What is the National Food Service?

The NFS started with a belief that there should be a public eating space on every street and in every community of the country. NFS is a network of community food justice projects stretching from Glasgow down to Falmouth. It was founded in 2018, and we currently have 11 branches, most of those joining in late 2019 and early 2020.

Imagine a world without hunger or social isolation. Imagine a social eating space in every street and high-rise made by people from all backgrounds, created in common. Places free at the point of entry, use and delivery. Social equality integrated into the very fabric of urban life and with people able to live happily in their city and community. Around the dinner table barriers are broken down and real change is made, these spaces should be at the heart of every city.

“Eating together is probably the most important way we build friendships. So a National Food Service would do more for our collective happiness and wellbeing, not to mention our health, than anything else we might think of doing.” – Robin Dunbar, Evolutionary Psychologist at the University of Oxford. Discoverer of the Dunbar number.

The National Food Service seeks to reach new standards of social equality through building on the initiatives that exist in our communities, evolving, scaling and adding to them to build a new National Food Service. We want to ensure a robust system for food security exists in emergency and non-emergency scenarios alike. The network first started in 2018 in the face of a climate emergency declaration and rising food bank usage despite modern farming methods providing an abundance. An inability to tackle food insecurity pre-crisis indicated an inability to feed the population during crisis.

During the UK Lockdowns our branches supported one another, sharing their resources in order to quickly change our model to emergency provision. NFS network has delivered over 100,000 meals between March and August 2020.

Our vision is a National Food Service as a public good, one that provides a sustainable and resilient and affordable food system where good food is available to everyone, distributed equitably and eaten with company.

We are a solidarity network of autonomous, grass-roots food projects around the UK. Our branches collaborate and share resources. We aim to grow, building new branches and integrating existing projects. Each branch works to make sure local people can access affordable, healthy, enjoyable food, produced and eaten in company.

We aren't asking for the state to build us a National Food Service. We are growing one by connecting and growing the services where they're needed. Once there is a NFS project in every area we will be impossible to ignore.

We are a grassroots organisation with branches that are active on the ground. Like the NHS was built upon pre-existing community and union run health services the NFS will be rooted in the communities it serves.

Principles



Access and Participation For Everyone – Participation in food culture, from production to consumption, regardless of immigration status, class, race, age, ability, sex, gender, wealth, beliefs or lived experiences. We actively fight discrimination and regularly investigate our own biases.



Solidarity Not Charity – Charity addresses symptoms of systemic issues, mutual aid builds new social relations. We're open to many different kinds of group, growing-projects, social eating etc but not open to capitalist, profit driven or traditional charitable models.



For and By the Community – We believe in community, not philanthropy. We welcome branches that are run by the same community that eats. We support branches to transition to a user-led model.



Democracy – We are a democratic organisation where members can co-create the strategy and direction of the organisation.



Sustainable – We believe in food with a low environmental footprint but big health impact. We aim for low waste, locally sourced, nutritious and of course tasty food. Social cooking and eating are important to us, sharing our love of food builds community and fosters connections.



Collaboration Over Competition – NFS seeks to collaborate with other organisations as our branches collaborate with one another.



Pro-Pudding – Healthy eating isn't just about eating your greens. Healthy eating means eating food you enjoy, eaten in company, in comfort, knowing that you can eat again when you are hungry.



Trial and Error – We are flexible, creative and responsive to the changing needs of the communities we operate in. We are not afraid to take a risk, try new things and cultivate individuals to lead new initiatives. We do not always have to be right but seek to learn and develop in all we do. We are constantly evolving.

What is NFS London?

We are a collective of London-based food-lovers, cooks, growers, activists and organisers.

Our mission is to grow and nurture a world where communities face no barriers to creating their own sustainable, resilient, and diverse food systems. One that builds and celebrates capacity for autonomy over access and production of good food in all London's communities.

National Food Service London (we will refer to it from now on as NFS London) started with an emergency food provision service in North Hackney, organised by local residents in response to the COVID-19 crisis. Since April 2020, we have cooked and delivered over 24,000 nutritious, tasty vegetarian and vegan meals plus 3,120 grocery packages to people in need of access to food.

We dream of a world where emergency food provision is no longer necessary.
We dream of a world where all communities mutually flourish by planting, growing, nurturing, harvesting, cooking, and sharing all the food we need to thrive.

Across all London's communities, we aim to:

- Promote and support diverse community-led action for a more sustainable, resilient and just food system, while ensuring access and participation throughout
- Connect and resource existing community food action and strengthen networks and partnerships.
- Increase access for all Londoners to affordable, nutritious, sustainable food
- Increase access and availability of local public spaces and common land
- Promote physical health, mental health and well-being, social connections and friendships for all Londoners
- Support the landworkers regenerating London's soil and increasing biodiversity

We operate with the values of mutual aid, solidarity and reciprocity. Members of our community contribute through time, energy, skills, art, social connections and donations of items, food and money.

We stand in solidarity with all members of our community.

We are committed to listening, reading, questioning, reviewing and learning. We are committed to decolonising ourselves and our organisation. We are working to build a queer, anti-racist, anti-ableist, feminist food justice organisation.

NFS London Community Cooks Programme

In these times of increased isolation, expensive produce and throwaway culture, the simple act of growing, cooking and sharing food with each other is a radical act.

We believe in changing the food system from the bottom up. The road to food sovereignty – having control over responsible production, acquisition, preparation, and shared consumption of food in a community – must be led by us and with our friends, families and neighbours. We know our communities. We know what we need, what we love, and how we like to do things. We need accessible, low-cost spaces of all sizes, shapes and cuisines organised by residents, for residents.

The Community Cooks Programme (CCP) detailed in this handbook is for those who dream of producing, sourcing, sharing and eating good food together in their community. The programme provides time, space and resources to build confidence, collective knowledge, social connections and practical development. This programme and its accompanying Community Cooks Handbook aims to grow and nurture community action that serves good food on everyone's plate.

Every vegetable harvested, every loaf saved from a landfill, every pot stirred, finger bandaged, song sung, and social connection made over food holds a seed for change, waiting to germinate.

For more info on Community Cooks Programme or for advice and resources for hosting your own, email hello@nationalfoodservicelondon.org.uk



Lead chef and trainees on the Community Cooks Programme, July 2021

How to use this resource

This handbook has been designed to bring together theoretical knowledge and practical skills around cooking in a National Food Service London kitchen, and in the wider community. We believe that with a good understanding of the systemic issues we face, as well as access to a range of tested tools and creative approaches, everyone has the power to implement powerful positive changes to the way we feed ourselves and each other.

The project navigates through five sections:

— **1 – SAFETY PRECAUTIONS AND GOOD PRACTICE:**

How to ensure the health and wellbeing of yourself, your colleagues and any volunteers is accounted for in a kitchen environment

— **2 – FOOD JUSTICE, ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE:**

How the privatisation of the UK food system has affected health and well-being, and an exploration of Indigenous practices.

— **3 – ACQUISITION:**

How we can intercept, grow and find food in peri-urban spaces, while focussing on co-operative and regenerative models.

— **4 – KITCHEN:**

How to effectively work in shared spaces, batch cook with limited tools, and get the best from your ingredients.

— **5 – DISTRIBUTION:**

How to get food to those that need it, and lay the groundwork for creating dynamic and fair social eating spaces for the near future.

— **6 – IN PRACTICE:**

How other cooks and projects have turned ideas into reality, with recipes and supporting resources for further exploration.

This is by no means a definitive guide; we intend for this resource to grow and transform over time. As the course and its participants develop, so will this handbook. While this resource was commissioned as a learning aid for the Community Cooks Programme, it has been written so that the concepts and practices outlined can be taken and applied to any communal cooking project.

In this edition, you will find some incredible contributions from members of the wider London community, professional chefs, and local organisations. These appear throughout in floating shapes, and will help create a wider impression of the goals and methods of NFS London for this course. Perhaps in the future, you will contribute too and we encourage you to use the Food For Thought areas to make notes and observations.

We Would Like to Thank the Contributors:

Joyce Adebawale

Sarah Bentley

Hari Byles

Euphemia Chukwu

Aileen Cooney

Maria Elia

Elki Guillen

Sabella Ibañez

Ali Kakande

Jess Kumwongpin-Barnes

David Latto

Alex Lee

James MacKinnon

Bethany Martin

Parvinder Marwaha

Fiona McAllister

Serda Mehmet

Jess Murray

Nancy O'Neill

Chineze Oniah

Amrit Singh and Anita Kaur

Sukh Singh

Dave Sohanpal

Saba Tadesse

AJ Tear

Cherry Truluck

Collaboration as Methodology

Working together is a necessary part of any organisation, ensuring all players in a team are pushing in the same direction while completing individual goals within deadlines. A key element of successful project management is finding a good combination of people for the job, but ultimately it will come down to those individuals to delegate and execute tasks. No singular person can do everything (if they say they can, they're fibbing), and too many cooks spoil the broth, so there is a fine balance to be struck.

Naturally, unconscious hierarchies will appear in any kitchen. These are a hangover from traditional institutions and their colonial learning styles, ie. schools, businesses and restaurants that are embedded with racial and class biases that benefit those who look, speak, or learn in a particular way – and punish those who don't. These are out-dated and damaging versions of 'fairness' and 'equality'. It's no wonder that when we enter the real world with these pre-loaded settings that they cause major problems in many workplaces.

While it is important to look out for how these hierarchies can damage our organisations, there will always be some structures in place that are necessary for a community kitchen to function as a well-oiled machine. One important element is having an experienced chef or cook who can lead the team and communicate with other sections of the operation. If it was totally anti-authority, there is potential for chaos and stress which might derail the plan. By placing someone in the role of the 'trusted leader', we can ensure that we're all moving together in the right direction. Beyond this hand on the steering wheel, community kitchens are an exciting space where, if we put aside our preconceptions, let go of our instinct to control, and embrace the spirit of collaboration, we can build something beautiful, useful and dynamic together. In our opinion, there is nothing more challenging, surprising or rewarding.

We believe that community kitchens:

- Create magical spaces that infinitely improve when participants bring their unique ideas, techniques and abilities
- Help us realise everyone has something valuable to offer – many have hidden talents, others opt to show them
- Show how learning from each other is an organic exchange that can happen across open conversation, open recipes and open jars
- Demonstrate the ultimate pay-off of working together in this way is not financial but social. When competition dies, co-operation thrives

Consent Decision Making (borrowed from Co-Operation Town Starter Pack)

Consent means there are no objections to a particular proposal or suggestion. Similar to consensus, consent decision making encourages all the participants to take an active part in the process.

Unlike consensus, the aim is not to achieve a compromise based on everyone's ideas, but to reach a collective agreement that is "good enough for now" and "safe enough to try" — a decision that no one has a strong objection to and that the group is happy and confident to implement.

A member makes a clear and specific proposal (for example, that the co-op holds a public event ahead of Christmas).

Everyone gets a chance to ask for clarifications on this idea.

Each member gives feedback on the initial proposal.

The person who brought the idea listens to the feedback and decides if they want to make changes. If so, they present an amended proposal.

Members can then respond with either agreement, objection or a pass (not having a strong opinion either way). Everyone gets a chance to respond.

Objections should only be made if members feel strongly that the proposal will disrupt or damage the co-op. These are called "paramount objections". Otherwise, people should follow the "good enough for now" and "safe enough to try" rule.

Consent decision making means that everyone gets to have a say and, unlike voting, no one feels like their ideas didn't matter in the end. It is a tried and tested decision making process used by organisations as diverse as activist groups and tech companies. Once everyone gets the hang of it, it will help make meetings more productive, efficient and, mostly, more inclusive.

Check out cooperation.town/resources for more information, tips and videos about consent decision making.

Objectors explain their strong reservations (in this case, for example, because they feel that organising the event will be a very big job).

The meeting discusses possible solutions and can propose an amendment (for example, calling on more people or planning fewer activities on the day).

The person who brought the idea presents it again with any amendments and everyone gets to respond again (agree, object or pass)

A decision is reached when there are no more objections.

1 – Safety Precautions and Good Practice

Safeguarding

Safeguarding boils down to the need for members of communities to work together to protect their most vulnerable members. We believe it is the responsibility of each member of a community to practice safeguarding within it. As a community cook, you should at all times consider the safety of colleagues, volunteers and project beneficiaries, including those with: dementia and alzheimers; physical and invisible disability; autism and neurodivergence; mental illness; substance abuse issue; or anyone else who may have support needs which could make them vulnerable to being taken advantage of (especially children)

Three guidelines for ensuring effective safeguarding:

1. Be aware of people's diverse and intersectional needs in your community,
2. Take care to make no assumptions of an individual's experience or preferences
3. Be willing and open to ask people questions about their experience and listen and respect their answers

As a community cook with National Food Service London, you are expected to follow our safeguarding policy and procedure (see Annex 1). If you are hosting your own community food event or project, we advise you develop your own safeguarding policy.

Risk Assessment

Risk assessment is related to safeguarding. It will help us see clearly what problems we may have and then make decisions about how to handle them. With any community project there will always be certain risks. If you are able to identify them ahead of time, and then take action to prevent the most dangerous and most likely ones, then you are practicing effective risk assessment.

Risk assessment is normally done in the following way:

1. Identify the things that could cause harm or injury (hazards)
2. Decide how likely this is to happen, and how severe the damage could be (risk)
3. Take practical steps to remove hazards completely, or reduce/control the risk when possible.

All risk assessments must be recorded and dated, see Annex 2 for our template risk assessment. As part of the programme you will have some class time practicing risk assessment, which will go into more detail and help you see how the process plays out in a real situation.

Prevention of the Spread of Covid-19

In a time of Coronavirus, working in a community kitchen has its additional challenges. We advise you to check the latest Government guidelines for preventing the spread of the virus before any event and integrate these guidelines into your Risk Assessment and Food Safety practices.

At the time of writing this handbook - in July 2021 - we are still on high alert and based in an area with some of the highest infection rates in the UK. It is imperative we remain vigilant at all times for the safety of everyone involved in the project, especially people who are extremely clinically vulnerable. If a team member receives a positive Covid-19 test, all other team members on-shift will also have to be tested, and should they need to self-isolate, we would be forced to temporarily put our emergency food provision service on hold.

Current procedures in place to prevent the spread of the virus include:

- Wear appropriate PPE at all times (face masks, cap/hair ties, clean aprons).
- Wear clean clothes in the kitchen (bring a complete change).
- Regularly wash your hands for at least 20 seconds.
- Maintain 2 metres physical distance between colleagues and no more than the maximum number of people in the kitchen.
- Open windows for ventilation.
- Regularly clean all surfaces and thoroughly clean the kitchen after use.



Made In Hackney team in action, using distancing measures

Food Safety

Food safety and good kitchen hygiene are important topics that ensure your community cooking projects will be legal and compliant with regulations. This guide itself will not go into deep detail about all the particulars of good food safety practices. However, as part of the programme you will undertake a Level 2 Food Safety and Hygiene course. This will give you an industry-recognised qualification and equip you with the knowledge to work safely in a community kitchen. Remembering the 4 C's (Cleaning, Cooking, Chilling, and Cross-contamination) will help ensure that all of the food you cook is safe. All the food that people eat will pass through your hands: both a beautiful and serious responsibility to have.

If you're on this Community Cooks programme you've probably cooked lots of meals for yourself and maybe even for your family regularly. Patience and enthusiasm are the two of the most important ingredients. The course is welcoming to individuals of all abilities and backgrounds, particularly those looking to make an impact in their community, learn new skills, or to turn their passion into a new profession.

Eating communally has been the cornerstone of human existence since our hunter-gatherer ancestors. It is how we socialise, tell stories, nourish and build intergenerational communities. Communal eating is happiness, wellbeing and security. Nothing else ties human beings together like breaking bread.

For much of my life I was intimidated and overwhelmed by cooking. I didn't grow up knowing the basics or feeling confident in my ability. Lists of ingredients towered over me and the anxiety of timing things correctly seemed like quantum physics. Cooking has always been a skill I admire in others, often with an uncomfortable envy. I saw it as a survival skill, the mastery of being a true adult; something to impress friends and family, and bring bountiful joy. It wasn't until I cooked at Foodhall Sheffield that I truly found my feet (or oven mitts).

Cooking in a team seemed less scary, like you couldn't go wrong. If you weren't sure, you could just ask someone who may know a little better. Chances are you would still end up laughing while figuring out what on Earth to do with twenty cauliflowers and a handful of sumac.

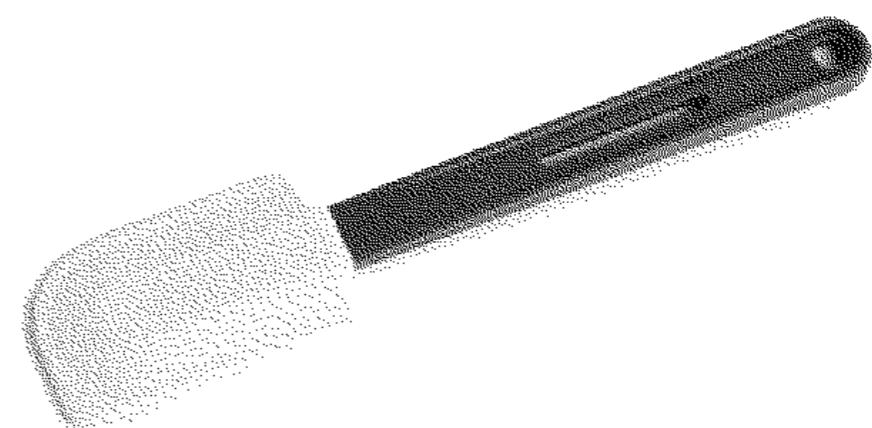
These are my cooking roots – a space of no judgment, no egos, no hierarchy – pure community. You can taste it in the food. It's time to reclaim our shared history, to collectively nourish our bodies, souls and minds.

Sabella Ibañez – Cook and forager, former volunteer at Foodhall Sheffield

NFS London Community Cooks Manifesto

Here are the key points we want to address through this resource, the course, and the NFS London operation. We'll explore them all, and hopefully you can use them to start (or continue) your own journey of reflection.

- Everyone deserves to have their food needs met, regardless of immigration status, class, race, age, ability, sex, gender or wealth.
- Food needs cannot be met without understanding the wider context of why the current system devalues, ignores or fails many consumers.
- Food sovereignty means creating dynamic governance – self-organising community structures which prioritise responsible production, acquisition, preparation, and shared consumption of food in a community.
- Food justice will only be actualised when we ensure everyone has access to high-quality, affordable and nutrient-dense ingredients.
- Social eating projects and pay-what-you-can / pay-as-you-feel enterprises remove the cold transactions of consumerism, creating space for inclusive, alternative currencies and restoring dignity and solidarity with those who are otherwise excluded.
- Social, food, climate, racial, gender and disability justice are not stand-alone concepts but entangled issues: One cannot be achieved without achieving all.
- We must see surplus food as a free, abundant resource that symbolises socioeconomic inequality and industry inefficiency, rather than make a value judgment on its appearance.
- We need to look at the entire lifecycle of food in order to understand how to achieve sovereignty. Currently, only see a small window of existence as it appears on shelves and in fridges.



Food for Thought

- What does food justice look like to you?
- How do you envision a fairer food future?
- Do you agree with the ideas in the manifesto?
- Are you good at working in a team?
- How would you encourage collaboration?

2 – Food Justice, Environmental Justice

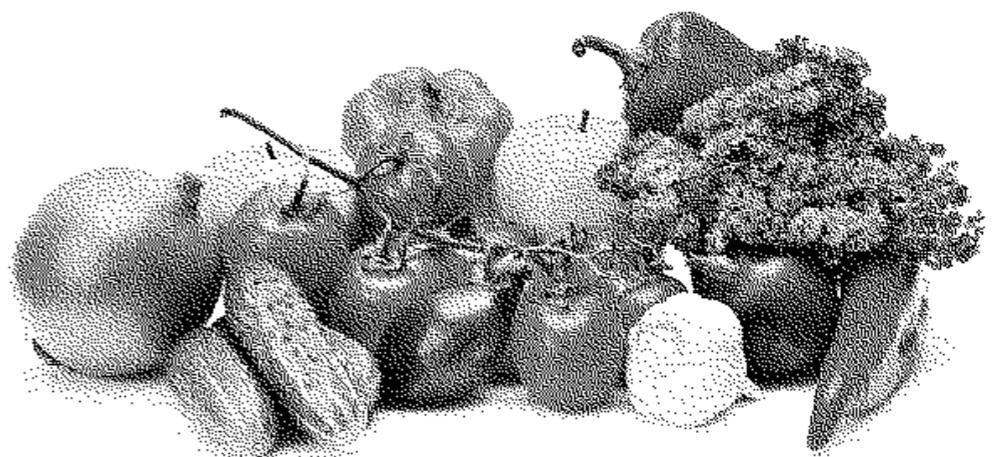
This section is trying to unpick and explore some very difficult topics that are far broader than this handbook can cover, and would take many years to become totally comfortable with. However, we believe that the issues highlighted are hugely significant when studying how the current system needs changing, and inform the way NFS London works at its core.

By no means do you need to read and understand this section all in one go; we suggest taking your time with it, considering some of the language and tone when moving through the rest of the resource, and revisiting it often to realign your learning.

It starts at home

Have you ever thought about how the food we eat can impact climate change? What about the difference between fresh ingredients and processed finished meals? Who makes the decisions about what food is offered at the supermarket closest to our house? Where is it from? Who cultivates and harvests this food? What are their working conditions?

There's a major difference between the basil growing on your windowsill and the basil grown in a temperature-controlled greenhouse with the use of fossil fuels, pesticides, and chemical fertilizers. Also, the lentil curry that you make as a community cook using fresh ingredients is very different from the one that comes in a microwave container from Tesco's. A big part of the responsibility of being a community cook is seeking to understand where your ingredients come from and how they are produced. Ultimately, for community kitchens to be a part of the solution, they will have to be involved from 'seed to plate' and eventually back to seed in the form of fertile compost.



Extraction and Consumption

Every synthetic object, space, system has been designed to affect the way we think. When speaking in terms of selecting food and other commodities, it is often called Consumer Psychology. Have you considered how marketing, branding and positioning in the supermarket influence the products you put in your basket? It's important to realise that each of us are subconsciously drawn towards items we desire that are not necessarily produced in an ethical way. Supermarkets only stock food which is profitable, and therefore not the most nutritious or affordable foods. Business interests are solely in financial margins, and never the health and wellbeing of its customers. This – along with food waste – are examples of chronic capitalist market failures in our food system.

Working out where foods come from, how they get onto supermarket shelves and end up into our homes is extremely difficult because the processes are often purposefully hidden. The packaging of our favourite brands says very little about where the natural resources are taken from and how they get turned into finished products. For example, a pack of supermarket own-brand chocolate biscuits is usually made with milk powder, wheat and cocoa, already three ingredients that result from entirely different processes. These may not even come from the same continent, as cattle, barley and cacao beans all require vastly different growing conditions. Once we begin to trace back the elements, we quickly find that huge amounts of time, energy and fossil fuels are needed to make some of the everyday items we take for granted.

Sean Roy (co-author) wrote this recently in a piece called "Choice Paralysis: Supermarkets and Food Capitalism" for his newsletter Fermental Health:

"When we walk around the orange-lit aisles, we are seduced by seemingly unlimited options, all presenting just enough individuality for us to embrace a favourite. There is almost no item, bar alcohol and tech, that the average person couldn't afford and this sense of power is pretty attractive (as an outsider). This infinite paradise, for me, creates Choice Paralysis. Having too many options overwhelms the individual who reverts to safety. Consumers are creatures of comfort and tend to stay loyal to an extremely narrow basket. Even something so minuscule as changing tea brands can be anxiety-inducing, and can lead to harsh critical comparisons. The smallest differences in products, despite knowing they're fundamentally identical, can cause havoc in a pantry."

The reality is that we have been convinced by advertising and psychological techniques to continue buying the same goods (sticking with our comfortable, repetitious ways) rather than trying new products that require less carbon, pay for fairer labour and regenerate the land that ingredients originate on.



Environmental Justice in the Climate Crisis

For many years now we have seen that Earth's climate is changing. These changes are driven by human activity – namely the different ways in which we use fossil fuels. We remove them from deep within the ground and then burn them, releasing different gases which pollute Earth's atmosphere. These gases trap heat as they accumulate, causing the planet to get warmer. This is known as the greenhouse effect. As the planet warms, ice caps melt and cause sea levels to rise. Warmer temperatures mean hurricanes and monsoons become stronger and more frequent. Natural disasters wipe out habitats which have become brittle and vulnerable due to human intervention and the effects of climate change and can no longer withstand extreme climate events. Ecosystems which depend on the delicate balance of many different species begin to collapse. As a result, arable lands are made inhospitable and whole human communities are forced to migrate. According to the UNHCR, nearly 40 million people each year must search for places to live as their homelands are either destroyed or desertified. Here, there are two major injustices:

Deeply rooted in Western culture is the idea that, we (humans) are nature's masters; superior to and separate from - rather than part of - nature. We extract resources, shape landscapes, harvest and farm fields, and give almost nothing back in return. Indigenous Peoples, and others who historically have stewarded and nurtured the earth, were (and are still being) violently removed by colonial settlers who destroy ecosystems and privatise land. Thus, they profiteer from the livelihoods of their victims and erase knowledge needed for future conservation and regeneration.

Those who produce the majority of greenhouse gas emissions are not those paying the price and suffering the consequences of their actions. People in the UK greatly benefit from a society built around burning fossil fuels while people in Africa, Central and South America, and parts of Asia – on the frontlines of the climate crisis – are forced into becoming climate refugees. Those who had no role in causing climate change are paying the price for it. This is what is meant by environmental injustice.

Living under a Western capitalist system, we are distracted from how interconnected, interdependent and essential every element of these ecosystems are. We fail to see how the destruction of nature is also the destruction of humankind. Scientists have warned of the total collapse of global ecosystems and shown us countless examples of the consequences. Our climate change predicament is certainly dire and yet we continue to produce and pollute at a similar rate. There cannot be food justice without environmental justice. In this way, the community cook needs to understand how the acquisition of food is a key part of food justice and food sovereignty. We cannot ensure that everyone's food needs are met if we degrade the planet and its soils to the point where we cannot feed anyone at all.

Turning Towards Food Sovereignty

Food sovereignty is the idea that the people who will consume food in a community should have the right to decide how their food is produced and distributed. The idea originated with La Via Campesina, an international organisation of peasants and landworkers, who launched its political vision at the World Food Summit in 1996. They saw that multinational corporations were controlling almost every element of the food market. They were allowed to create their own rules, using their economic dominance to lobby governments for laws which favour their interests, and fix prices on commodities to reap tremendous profits.

Many of these corporations promote the use of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) and in doing so encourage the monoculture farming model. A monoculture is the practice of farming entire fields of the same crop with the same genes for consistency and profitability. Because these crops are especially susceptible to disease and pests, this model of production promotes pesticide and insecticide usage and chemical fertilisers, which pollute water sources, increase soil degradation and reduce biodiversity. Those who consume these crops – and live on lands contaminated by their production – are not consulted, have little power to object, and can become afflicted with environmental illnesses, including allergies, Multiple Chemical Sensitivities, anaphylaxis and cancer.

Ultimately, it becomes very difficult to consume based on your values if the food on your plate is produced in a destructive manner. Therefore, a major element of the fight for food sovereignty is improving land access for environmentally-responsible practices. Connecting people with how their food is grown, tended and harvested brings a greater appreciation for the effort involved in food production. Caring for the land in a way that supports sustainable food production illustrates how environmental justice and food justice are intersectional and cannot be achieved separately.

There are many examples of incredible organisations working towards fairer food systems in London. Peri-urban farms (those in a transition zone between rural and urban) experiment with a variety of models that connect different types of knowledge, tools and methods. Worker co-operatives like OrganicLea take collective control over labour structures to create fair and dynamic systems. Sutton Community Farm runs a Community Supported Agriculture programme (CSA) which grows food for its members and works with local organisations to teach young people and disabled people about growing food. Growing Communities works as a ‘patchwork farm’ which joins smallholdings and urban farmers together to share skills and sell their produce via a popular Farmers’ Market.

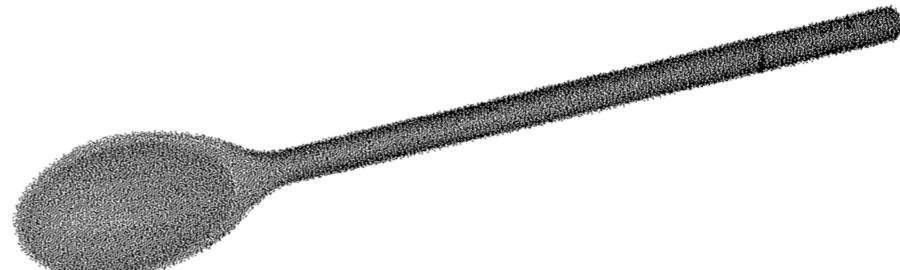
Landworkers Alliance is a democratic union of farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers that operates across the UK in regional branches. They provide support for operations of all shapes and sizes and protect the livelihood of its members through collective action, resource distribution and policy writing. Another great organisation is Land In Our Names (LION), whose website states they are “a Black-led grassroots collective committed to reparative justice in Britain by securing land for BPOC (Black people and People of Colour) communities.”

Land access is directly tied to making social and racial justice a reality. For centuries there has been a systemic appropriation of land belonging to BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour) by White Europeans and their descendants. Much of what we consider sustainable agriculture, permaculture, and regenerative agriculture has its roots in the ways that Black and Indigenous people originally farmed land. The following is an excerpt from a recent letter published by Indigenous leaders called **‘Whitewashed Hope’**:

“Regen Ag and Permaculture claim to be holistic in approach. When regenerating a landscape, ‘everything’ is considered: soil health, water cycles, local ‘wildlife’, income and profit. ‘Everything’, however, tends to EXCLUDE history: Why were Indigenous homelands steal-able and why were our Peoples and lands rape-able? Why were our cultures erased? Why does our knowledge need to be validated by ‘Science’? Why are we still excluded from your ‘healing’ of our land?

Among Indigenous cultures, people belong to land rather than land belonging to people. Healing of land MUST include healing of people and vice versa. Recognizing and processing the emotional traumas held in our bodies as descendants of assaulted, enslaved, and displaced Peoples is necessary to the healing of land. Returning our rights to care for, harvest from, and relate to the land that birthed us is part of this recognition.”

Appropriating this wealth of knowledge for the production of food while denying Black and Indigenous people access to land is a tremendous injustice. In this way, land access, food justice, environmental justice, and racial justice are inseparable.



Community Gardens

The rampant privatisation of cities and other urban areas with large populations has meant less access to land for projects that don't make big money, while the influx of supermarkets over the past 30 years has increased our dependence on cheap, imported foods that need fertilizers and fossil fuels. Luckily, local, inclusive educational projects like allotments, city farms and community gardens are still very much alive and thriving!

London is home to some incredible community gardens: Calthorpe in Kings Cross; Glengall Wharf in Peckham; Culpeper in Islington; Brockwell Greenhouses in Brixton; The Castle Garden in Stoke Newington. The intentional creation of vibrant and dynamic natural spaces in the midst of housing estates, industrial zones, run-down factories, and parking lots is often seen to go against common logic, yet perfectly illustrates the power of working together for common good.

These projects are melting pots of knowledge, experience and ideas, driven forwards by seasoned pros and keen volunteers. They experiment with DIY composting, alternative governance models and organic food-growing practices. They grow local food for local people. Their importance is heightened in neighbourhoods with less access to greenspaces, a valuable resource for alleviating everyday stresses and creating a culture of interpersonal trust. This disconnect has a greater impact on BPOC communities and working class communities in the UK, according to Natural England, as 'BAME' communities are 60% less likely to be able to access green space and natural environments than their white counterparts.

Community gardens create the shortest food loop possible in urban areas. Everyone who takes our Community Cooks courses will visit a local growing project to hear about its history, governance and social drive. These are important spaces for educating residents on how to turn vacant spaces, surplus materials and people power into nutrient-rich foods for everyone. Sounds familiar, huh?



"Through the pandemic we've been supporting gardens and growers to increase capacity and production to grow food for those most in need of healthy, affordable produce as part of our Community Harvest initiative (also helping gardens reach out to groups and community organisations). The pandemic has further highlighted that demand for growing spaces and allotments outstrips shrinking availability and we have seen first hand that people and communities are keener than ever to access land to grow fresh, healthy food as well as have access to nature. We're working with councils to get them to meet this demand and help their residents access green open spaces so they have a chance to grow their own."

We encourage community cooks and food activists to link up wherever possible with their local community allotment, garden, city farm or relevant project in their area. Connecting further with where our food comes from and having a go at growing some herbs or salad leaves from seed can really make the cooking journey more meaningful at a personal and community level. By growing (and cooking) together, and exploring culturally appropriate food growing, communities can reconnect with, celebrate, and experience different cultures, customs and experiences of food and the land as well as take back parts of our damaging food system into our own communities."

Fiona McAllister – Capital Growth Co-ordinator, Sustain



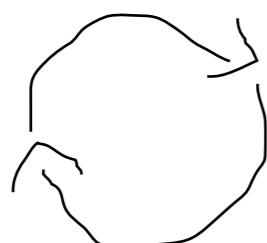
Author's photograph of Glengall Wharf Garden, Peckham, South London

Compost

Of all the fruit and vegetables a community kitchen receives, it's guaranteed some will be carrying blemishes or totally past their best. Once you have salvaged all usable peels for pickles, stock, vinegar or cordial, you'll need to dispose of the remaining tops, tails, bruises, stalks and seeds. Sending raw foods to landfill releases methane and other greenhouse gases, and leaves the journey of the plants incomplete. If we only take from the land and don't give back, we are contributing to soil degradation, so we need to work harder to close the loop.

All food scraps are high in nitrogen (green waste), and must be greatly out-weighed by carbon-rich materials like cardboard, leaves, woodchip (brown waste). Supported by a healthy combination of heat, moisture and oxygen, they will provide a habitat and food for bacteria and fungi which will help decompose and transform it into a precious growing medium for next seasons' vegetables.

Composting organic matter from community kitchens is an effective way to create bonds with growing spaces, community farms, urban composters, all experts in creating a second life for materials we've traditionally been told are waste. Look up the nearest projects and see if they'd like your scraps. Keeping our materials local reduces the distances they need to travel, eliminating the need for fossil fuels and creating stronger, more resilient neighbourhoods.



Partners in Slime: Thermal Composting Experiments in Hackney Downs & Bethnal Green

"Last spring and summer I got inspired by my friend Jack's composting antics at the small market garden they run as part of Growing Communities' Patchwork Farm. During the first lockdown, many community kitchens and cafés had begun providing emergency food for mutual aid efforts locally, and were considering how to dispose of their food waste more responsibly. Perhaps because collection services were stretched during lockdown (remember the uncollected rubbish bags blowing through empty streets in March and April?) – or because of increased consciousness about food justice, waste flows and soil health – Jack suddenly found themselves inundated with food waste collection requests from all over East London. They spent their days like a giant human-worm, cycling trailerfuls of vegetable and fruit peelings to their growing site, shredding and combining with woodchip and water to make compost. When Jack filled their 3-bay system, I offered to share a thermal composting method I'd learnt from a course by Dr. Elaine Ingham.

Using thick wire mesh to construct 1 metre tall composting cylinders (a quick, cheap and effective way of making composting containers), we mixed the food waste with manure, green waste, woodchip and water to raise the temperature to around 60-70°C. We also invested in compost thermometers, and felt extremely satisfied with our matching 'wands'. After a week the middle of the pile (where it was hottest) had transformed into dark crumbly compost and was turned several times, allowing oxygen in to support aerobic microorganisms to decompose the matter. These enormous steaming piles energised and excited us whilst rotting the waste material into nutrient rich soil for urban food growing.

I have taken on some of Jack's food waste collection rounds over winter, composting kilos of vegetable scraps alongside local household peelings at Bethnal Green Nature Reserve. In these cold and isolating times, I continue to find comfort, healing, life and warmth in the human and more-than-human entanglements that form around these steaming piles; a form of alchemy and offering to a future world."

Hari Byles – Compost Mentis Hari Byles

If you know a community kitchen, restaurant or café in East or Central London interested in foodwaste collections, please get in touch at hari@compost-mentis.com



Hari and Jack building and checking temperatures of community composting cylinders



Permaculture, Regenerative Agriculture and Indigenous knowledge

Earlier we discussed how anthropogenic climate change (ie. created by humans) is causing the collapse of biodiversity and the habitability of this planet for ourselves and other species. Then in food sovereignty, we looked at how the way we produce food can negatively impact our planet and its precious resources. So what do we do? Is there really a way to produce food for lots of people without harming the planet? Well, not only is there a way to do it which doesn't cause further harm, we can actually heal the planet in the process.

When discussing permaculture and regenerative agriculture it is essential to first mention that many of the following ideas are derived from principles and practices which have been utilised or created by Indigenous peoples across the globe. Since many of these people have been forced off their land, it would be an injustice to simply take their ideas and claim that we can change how we produce without both giving them credit for their immense contributions and insisting that they be given back access to their land, soil, and resources.

Permaculture is the idea that we can design systems – farms, ranches, houses, cities, and so on – where all things work together and serve a purpose, or ideally many! A beautiful way to think about permaculture would be to imagine a ‘food forest’ in which different fruiting trees and shrubs planted together work in harmony to regulate soil health and provide human nutrition at different times throughout the year.. By closely examining the space that you have, understanding the natural processes at work, and then developing a plan which fits your goals and respectfully stewards the land, one can guide the Earth to produce immense amounts of food and resources from even a small space. Care for the land, and it will care for you.

Another similar approach which has started to become more widely-known is regenerative agriculture. Regenerative agriculture argues that we must examine the ‘holistic context’ of any system we want to participate in. This means that we must consider the interests of all actors involved, animate and inanimate, human and non-human. Regenerating land refers to practicing agriculture in a way which increases soil biodiversity and mimics natural systems. This is a wide topic but there are a few important points to bear in mind:

- ☞ Regenerative agriculture helps reverse climate change. Through photosynthesis, grasses and other plants will take carbon dioxide out of the air, fix carbon into the soil as organic matter where it belongs, and release breathable oxygen. As a result, the more grass and plants you have, the more carbon dioxide you can take out of the atmosphere.

- Grasslands developed naturally as a result of ruminant grazing by large herds of deer, buffalo, etc. Ruminant refers to animals with a rumen, a stomach which allows them to digest grass. These herds would eat from a particular patch of grass and then move on, likely as a result of migration from predators. This means they would eat and trample certain areas of grass only once in nine months or a year. It turns out that grass grows best when a third is eaten and a third is trampled. This stimulates their roots to grow and when grass grows, photosynthesis occurs. When photosynthesis occurs, climate change is reversed. Regenerative agriculture mimics this migration by allowing animals to graze small patches of pasture and then changing their location every few days.
- ☛ Fungicides, pesticides, and herbicides all disrupt the process of plants fixing carbon into the soil and therefore should be avoided at all costs. Plant roots are in a symbiotic (mutually beneficial) relationship with mycorrhizal fungi living in the soil. These networks of fungi provide the plants with nutrients from deep in the subsoil in exchange for carbon. When there is no life in the soil because it has been sprayed, then this exchange does not occur and the carbon sequestered by plants is simply re-released into the atmosphere.
- Other livestock such as sheep, goats, pigs, and chickens play an important role and so farming is also about creating diversity at all levels of the system.
- ☛ Regenerative agriculture can be respectful to the rights of animals as there is no reason to insist that they be consumed after they have lived a long and full life. This makes regenerative agriculture accessible to vegans and vegetarians, provided that it is practised responsibly, and with animal welfare in mind.

Understanding these relationships, and mimicking them in modern agriculture is the only way that we will be able to restore the fertility of degraded soils and be able to sustainably produce nutritious food for everyone on this planet. It also represents the only way that we can provide for humans while creating a world suitable for all other forms of life.

Underpinning all this is the universal concept that diversity creates resilience. Human relationships of course reflect and are shaped by complex, strong and beautiful natural patterns; medicine, diet, communication, clothing, mathematics, architecture. This symbiosis – the long-term, close relationship – between human and nature is key to our evolutionary success.

Food for Thought

- What actions do you already take in your personal life to combat climate change?
- What types of actions could we take together to fight the climate crisis?
- How does empowering small food growers help our communities?
- How can we shorten the distance between the field and the plate?

3 – Acquisition

NFS London uses various methods to source food for our emergency food provision, the Community Cooks Programme and other projects. Explaining the different streams here is important for transparency and to provide a base for critical discussion around current systems. We are dedicated to shortening the food loop and creating more responsible working models that connect with the abundance of produce that is cast aside or overlooked by the current wasteful global food industry. In this section, we'll take you through some of the ways we think about food as a precious resource rather than a commodity.

Intercepting Surplus Food

In 2019 WRAP, the Waste and Resources Action Programme, published [a paper](#) which revealed that surplus food redistribution in the UK had almost doubled between 2015 and 2018, for the charitable and commercial sectors combined. The report details:

- ▢ A 96% increase in surplus food redistribution overall (increase of 27,000 tonnes; the equivalent of an additional 65 million meals; with a value of £81 million).
- ▢ Charitable redistribution increased by around 180% (almost three-fold) or 21,000 tonnes over the three-year period (the equivalent of an additional 50 million meals), compared to an increase of around 37% or 6,000 tonnes via the commercial sector.
- ▢ Surplus redistributed via charitable routes made up almost 60% of the total redistributed in 2018, compared to just over 40% in 2015. There were increases in the supply of surplus food to the charitable sector from all three food business sectors where data is available (retail, manufacture, and hospitality and food service).

The increase of surplus food being redistributed by charitable organisations divides opinions amongst food justice activists. On the one hand, this approach kills two birds with one stone, diverting a free, otherwise wasted resource to those in need of support. On the other hand, many argue that sending rejected or out-of-date food to members is promoting 'second class food for second class citizens'.

At NFS London, we see the value of both viewpoints; to us, surplus food in any form is a precious resource that can perform a key role, but only when used correctly. We understand that everyone has different domestic set-ups, preferences and requirements of food support, which is why we deal with

everyone on a person-by-person basis. We take utmost pride in feeding our community, and also in the creativity our community cooks display in our kitchens. We will never distribute food that is out-of-date or spoiled, only sending out the best quality raw ingredients that we receive and saving blemished or overripe produce to be cooked, dehydrated or preserved.

There is an ongoing discussion about ripeness, quality and best-before (BB) dates. BB dates have started to disappear from UK supermarket shelves in the past few years, with Tesco removing them from own-brand products. It's argued they often don't reflect natural spoilage, which entirely depends on temperature, storage and handling, and that customers can safely judge the state of produce by look, feel or smell. Some suggest this is part of industry efforts to influence consumer habits – throwing away vegetables or eating them quickly after purchase means you will need to buy more in a shorter time-frame. Read [this article](#) for more information.

Where We Stand on Food Waste

It's a top priority of NFS London to cut food waste and inspire others to follow, however, it's also necessary to say that in principle, we disagree with the methods by which this food is grown, transported and sold in the first place. Most fresh produce we receive lacks nutrients, is imported from far away and sits in energy-expensive fridges. The unsustainable system of capitalism that we are locked in makes it seem difficult to influence the wider narrative, but NFS London is dedicated to exploring local, ethical alternatives and deep, fair structures.

As well as working with national and regional charities like FareShare and City Harvest, we are making strong connections with local initiatives and enterprises like Edible London and Felix Project to take raw materials in industrial quantities and complete the "last mile". Our cooks and volunteers demonstrate how to check, process and transform huge quantities of fruit, vegetables and perishables saved from landfill, and in turn educate a new generation of activists.

Receiving donated food obviously saves time and money, but it can also boost creativity and productivity. Having your ingredients decided for you is a chance to experiment with new recipes, try alternative flavour combinations, and innovate with underused textures. Through this practical transformation of raw materials on-hand, we can begin to critique our global food systems and understand more deeply why and how local cuisines develop around seasonality and availability.

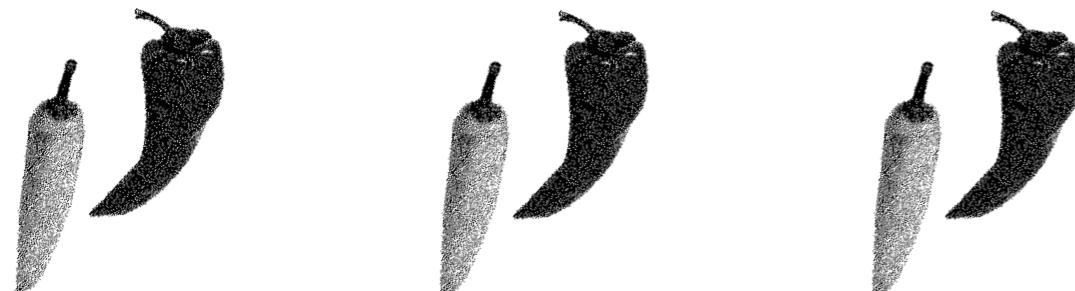
Uses for a bag of 10,000 surplus dried red chillies

"At The Gleaners Café we love spicy foods, so we were excited when we received a huge cotton bag of beautiful dried red chillies. The bag is nearly empty now, as over the past year we have been exploring how best to use them. Below are some suggestions, based on cooking for 40 people, depending on your desired heat.

Make sure you wear gloves and don't touch your eyes!

- As part of a paste-Thai-style curries (red or massaman), Manchurian sauce, harissa—use 40-80 chillies. Start by toasting them whole in batches in a heavy-bottomed pan until smelling fragrant. Rehydrate in a bowl of cold water for 5-10 mins. The toasting and rehydrating removes a little of their heat, so no need to discard the seeds. Drain the water (reserve some to add heat later, if desired) and then pound chillies in a pestle and mortar until they start to release their oils, at least 5-10 mins. A food processor also works, but not as well. They're now ready to be used as part of a paste!
- For a dhal or spiced parsnip soup, use 10-20 chillies. Simply throw them whole into the mix to infuse when adding water.
- For a dressing to accompany a rice noodle salad or stir-fry, use 10-20 chillies. Finely chop them, keeping the seeds if you want it hotter, and mix with soy sauce, rice vinegar, sesame oil, ginger, garlic, and any other tasty bits!
- Add a handful of whole and chopped chillies to an immune-supporting fire cider tonic to harness their cleansing properties!
- To make chilli flakes for seasoning or adding to preserves like kimchi, toast 40-60 chillies in a dry pan for a few minutes, moving constantly so as not to burn them. Once fragrant, roughly blitz in a food processor, dry out on cardboard then store in a jar for up to six months."

Alex Lee – The Gleaners Café, Walthamstow



Food Miles & Decarbonisation

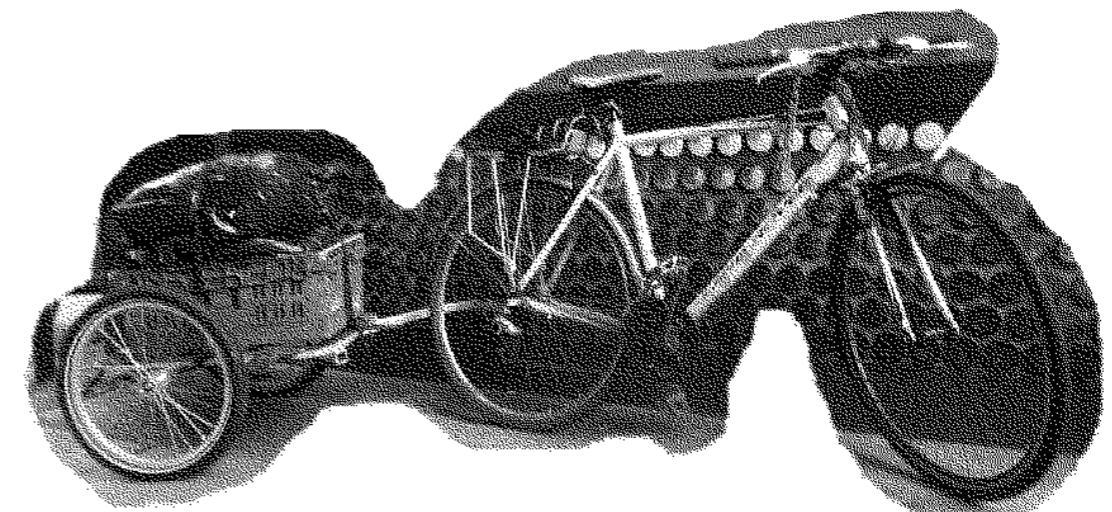
'Food miles' relates to how far produce travels from its origin to its end-of-life. Think about spinach imported from the Netherlands compared to chard grown in a community garden.

'Decarbonisation' is predominantly used in industry terms to describe avoiding energy-inefficient practices that require fossil fuels.

Intercepting surplus from landfill reduces the distance food travels to its final destination, using less fuel and releasing less carbon into the atmosphere. It is both decreasing the food miles and decarbonising the process. The simplicity of this equation pushes against the ingrained culture of year-round unseasonal produce sitting on supermarket shelves, and brings awareness to the invisible processes plants go through to end up on our plates.

If we trace back imported food to huge European monoculture farms, we discover that much of it needs constant electrical refrigeration to stabilise and is flown or sailed over. This begs the question: "What is the effect on the environment?". This is more a question about how the global food system is upheld by institutional supermarkets that prioritise the import of low-cost, high-energy crops over supporting British farms who grow the same. The quest to save money and increase profit has a detrimental impact on the foreign land that is pillaged with machinery and killed with pesticides, and our own farmlands where thousands of tonnes of rejected produce are left to rot in fields and release methane gases into the atmosphere.

Growing, finding, buying or foraging our food locally can drastically decrease the environmental damage our diets have, and create tighter connections with plants, the soil and each other.



Compost-mobile by Hari Byles

Sourcing Culturally Appropriate Ingredients

We believe people of diaspora communities should have access to their choice of affordable, fresh ingredients, and that any barriers to this are political. The narrow Western lens of flavour is consistently and wrongly used as a baseline to compare other cultural cuisine to. We acknowledge that many of these ingredients must be imported from countries with warmer climates. We advocate for creative, sustainable solutions for the production of these ingredients, or their closely-related cousins, closer to home.

While some culturally appropriate ingredients can be more expensive and harder to source, we encourage community cooks to budget for these ingredients when planning meals and events. We also advise building relationships with local shops that sell the produce that you are looking for, it is likely that they will gladly donate their food surplus to you.

If you are catering for members of your community from all different backgrounds and aiming for an inclusive and welcoming space, then make sure you do your research. Speak to your neighbours who have knowledge of how to cook different cuisines and invite them to cook with you. Experiment together and offer a range of dishes at your events celebrating different cuisines and cultures.

At NFS London, community cooks are encouraged to cook the cuisines they know and love and share their knowledge about these cuisines with each other. Where necessary, we purchase produce that we are unable to source from food surplus. Often food surplus can inspire interesting twists to traditional dishes!

"It's important that people have access to home-cooked meals that they are used to eating. It is comforting to eat the food we know and love, especially throughout the pandemic when many people live alone and feel isolated. A member of our community once said that our meals "taste like back home".

There is a connection between food and culture. Anybody should be able to embrace their heritage through their cultural food, regardless of their circumstances or how much money they have. It's important to remember that each dish has a special place in the culture to which it belongs, and is special to those who prepare it. Food is a portal into culture, and it should be treated as such.

We are happy and grateful to be able to offer the meals that we do. Carib Eats is more than just a tasty Caribbean-inspired meal. It's a chance for people to connect and feel they are truly part of the wider community and not defined by their needs."

Ali Kakande – Founder, Carib Eats

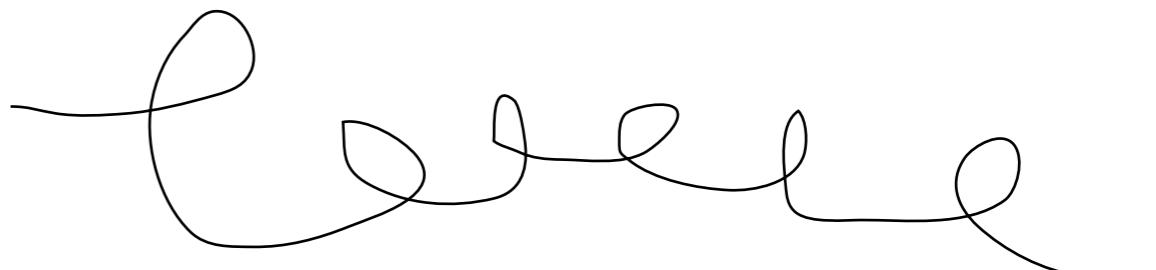
"One thing I really miss about my birthplace in the Far East is the variety of fruit, many of which don't translate to English. Some are seasonal, like mangoes, rambutans, pomelo, ciku, langsat, lychee, starfruit, rose apple, jackfruit (cempadak), mangosteen. Some are available year-round: papaya, guava, pineapple, banana. They're all generally cheap and readily-available at the local supermarket, night market or roadside stall.

My favourite, and the king of all fruit, is durian – there are 34 popular varieties! They can be very expensive depending on season and quality so it helps if you can spot a good one; it should have a thorny shell, with a strong fragrance and thick, fleshy meat which is a little creamy, sweet and bitter. It's one of the most popular and delicious fruits in Malaysia, and if you can bear the smell (some say it's like blue cheese), I'm sure you would love it.

Give it a chance in some traditional desserts (rice pudding, crepes, tart, muffins, cakes) jam, ice cream, candies and soft drinks. However, be forewarned – most public transportation and hotels do not allow durian on their premises for obvious reasons and I can also add schools...

Durian takes me back to being a young boy. There used to be a little stall next to school selling durian, so we would all chip in our pocket money to buy some during breaktime. It would make the whole classroom smell so the headteacher told the stall owner not to sell to us during school. Instead, we would go afterwards to help him pack up and get cheap fruit which we would put in our lunchboxes the next day!"

Dave Sohanpal



You are the medicine for your own trauma

Dig Deep

&
Look Inside



For only you can make those
wildflowers bloom again



We Can Build Our Own Markets!

Note: this section heavily quotes (in quotation marks) and is inspired by the Cooperation Town Starter Pack. [We recommend you check it out here!](#)

We know that supermarkets restrict our choice and control over where our food comes from and what food we stock our cupboards or cook with. On top of this “decisions about our housing, education, jobs and health are made by strangers, who don’t know us, ignore our needs and disregard our experience. Often, businesses have more say about how our communities are organised, than the people we live with. They make decisions about us — without us.”

Fortunately, there are alternative, more affordable models that we can turn to with our neighbours to not only reclaim control and choice over our food, but over our neighbourhoods too. To reclaim the power to make decisions about the things that directly affect us, everyday. Cooperatives are organisations that are jointly-owned and organised by the people that use their services with the purpose of meeting their common economic, social and cultural needs and aspirations. “Co-ops are based on the simple idea that organising together makes us stronger and more resilient — and saves us money!”

There are a number of different ways you can organise a food coop with your neighbours. Whichever way you choose to do it, the basic premise is the same. Together you agree your shopping list, purchase these items at wholesale cost from a local supplier, find a space (community centre, pub or an appropriate space in a church or place of worship) and organise regular meet-ups to portion the bulk into separate household orders.

Some neighbours organise bulk-buying clubs or food coops for purchasing whole and organic foods, like Naked Larder in West Norwood, South London. This dramatically reduces food miles, cuts back on unnecessary plastics and invests in responsible business. Neighbours and friends join together and order large quantities of organic and seasonal ingredients directly from suppliers - such as grains, legumes, herbs and spices, oil, vinegar, syrups and eco-cleaning products - thus saving money, petrol and labour.

In the Cooperation Town model, food coops top up their purchased staple goods – oil, pasta, rice, cleaning products – with food surplus donations from a redistributor eg. Felix Project. In this way, members are able to get the majority of their food supplies for as little as £3 a week and receive strange and wonderful produce they normally wouldn’t buy. “They are the most affordable — and sociable — way to get food!”. Our friends at Cooperation Town have developed a really useful guide to starting your own food coop. Check it out!

The model grows as it takes in more members (usually up to 20 households), then splits and replicates in a different area. Thus, it has a dropper effect and becomes more local to those interested as it copies itself over and over again without losing structure.^v

These models build community resilience and create safety nets for neighbours that might fall on hard times. Similarly, they can protect small farmers – usually at the mercy of supermarket powers – through direct partnerships, as in Community Supported Agriculture schemes. Members pay a subscription to support a farmer's labour and expertise, and in turn receive fresh, seasonal produce throughout the year. In this way both the risks and benefits of production are shared amongst the community and farmers.

While the models explored so far are set up to serve their members rather than the general public, community shop or pantry models have an open doors policy where you opt-in on a week-to-week basis. An inspiring example is situated on Kingsmead Estate in Hackney, organised by local residents in tandem with organisations Made Up Collective and Rise.365.

Every Saturday, residents come together and set up the hall for food collection. Signs above the produce indicate how much you are welcome to take per household to make sure everyone has a fair share. Every week over 100 families go home with 5-6 bags of food, including a top-up of surplus, all for £5.

With these 'social supermarkets', community groups and organisations create more fair, resilient road maps for strengthening the grassroots food justice movement. These models are still young, forever changing shape to suit the needs of their members. It's not far-fetched to imagine food coops and community shops popping up on every street, block and estate!

"Woodberry Aid makes it a priority to cater to the tastes of the BAME community as the standard for basic necessities has been marginalised to cater to the taste of those who originate from the western society. The high cost alone and the difficulty in acquiring culturally specific food says it all, it's as if the BAME community is not relevant."

Euphemia Chukwu

The Commons and Connection to Wild Food

The shrinking common spaces in the UK is a direct result of increased private land ownership; whether it's local councils locking their parks or rich rural individuals blocking footpath access. The over-protection of dedicated greenspace has prevented us from forming a deeper connection with other-than-human lifeforms: The physical barriers to 'nature' spiritually remove us from wild plants – the root, shoot, leaf, flower and seed of all modern food, medicine and community.

Fortunately in this country, 'foraging' – spending time outside collecting wild food – is having a resurgence, and promises to have a huge knock-on effect to our diets. What is currently appearing in contemporary culture as a trend (mushroom hunting, people obsessing over wild garlic) is a survival skill most animals are born with; they harvest and eat plants in a way that maintains ecological balance. This could be through repeated removal of invasive, non-native plant species, the trimming of valuable species to encourage growth, or partly digesting hardy plants for the benefit of other herbivores. Learning to care for the plants that you harvest, especially by not harvesting too much, is an important element of interacting responsibly with nature.

Through the loss of practice and knowledge over time, and a worrying reliance on shops, we as humans have become blind to the availability of free, delicious, nutritional, readily-available food all year round. Introducing even a small amount of wild foods into our diet can be incredibly healthy, as many provide roughage, minerals and flavours that simply do not occur in domesticated or industrial crops.

"I'm originally from Mexico, but have been in London for a long time now. I'm currently volunteering at Streets Kitchen and Wolves Lane community kitchen, where I'm also involved in looking after the cactus greenhouse. Before going freelance two years ago I worked mainly with Latinoamerican and Mexican cuisine, but since I stumbled upon some cacti in Malaga, southern Spain, my curiosity got the better of me.

Firstly, I began to research how cacti are used in gastronomy (like in Mexico) and soon discovered how they were also prevalent in the Americas, across Africa and the Middle East. Now I'm finding out about how they aid water management in arid land and protect erosion in wet terrain, and other uses such as livestock fodder, textile fibres, biofuel, cooking oils, construction. Until I can travel again, I'm happy cooking and tending to the greenhouses."

Elki Guillen – Freelance chef, volunteer at Wolves Lane, Haringey

Cooking with Wild Food

It is exciting to consider how community kitchens could incorporate foraged ingredients. This natural bounty generally needs to be washed, prepared and cooked just like their cousins. For instance, you may have removed lots of dandelions from your garden – the leaves and flowers are bitter but delicious when cooked. Perhaps a volunteer has stumbled upon a heap of tri-cornered leeks – you use the bulbs like spring onions and the tops like wild garlic. You pick some blackberries then realise they're hard and sour – macerating them in fruit juice will help them soften and sweeten. The possibilities are endless and can unlock new flavours that will enhance our cooking!

Here are some basic rules:

- ☛ Identifying wild plants can be a risky business. Many edible and poisonous look-a-likes belong to the same family, or are almost identical, so you should never eat anything unless you're 100% sure you have correctly named it. Books, apps, internet forums, or an experienced guide can all help.
- ☛ To gain a deeper understanding of the characteristics and behaviours of plants, you should spend some time observing your local greenspaces. What is the weather like this time of year? How often does the land get tended to? What are the local laws?
- ☛ It's also necessary to consider carefully where you look. Never forage next to roads, paths or fences as these will be heavily polluted or soiled. Pick above the knee to avoid animal pee!
- ☛ Pick responsibly. Never uproot an entire plant or harvest all the leaves from one stem. This will prevent it from coming back and damage the ecosystem. Collect a few elements from each plant and only take what you need.
- ☛ A good place to start would be Lamiaceae – the family that contains mint, dead-nettle, sage – as it has no poisonous members. Lots of interesting aromatics here for flavouring teas, syrups, salads!
- ☛ The Brassicaceae (or Cruciferae) family contains no toxic species, and plenty of recognisable, resilient, iron-rich greens like rocket, mustard, kale – all related to broccoli and cauliflower.
- ☛ Check out the Asteraceae family, which contains daisy, dandelion, sow thistle and many other distinguishable plants whose leaves and rosettes are abundant, tasty and have excellent digestive properties.

In the near future, we could see an explosion of interest in foraging, which (as with everything) has positives and negatives. But the fact remains that finding, cooking and eating wild foods is an inexpensive hobby that does wonders for increasing the diversity of our diets and strengthening our connection with nature.

A Forager's Calendar

"Connecting our eating to the seasons is an act of collaboration with the earth; foraging is an act of close attention and deep learning.

January, the month of frost and the return of the sun. Make a warm winter salad with beetroot and delicate hairy bittercress, which thrives on the bare soil over winter. Add goats cheese and pine nuts or sunflower seeds, dress with oil and dandelion vinegar.

February brings Candlemas and the first stirrings of spring. Pick gorse flowers just after sunrise. Steep in sweetened milk and make a rich yellow custard for a trifle with the season's first rhubarb.

March is Women's History Month and brings Venus' own blossom, sweet violet. Blend with honey and butter for a magickal elixir that comforts heartache and grief (and tastes amazing with oat and pistachio muffins).

April, when the buds start to open, brings alexanders, burdock, fat hen, young hawthorn tips and mallow leaves, as well as forest floors carpeted in wild garlic. Make a simple potato soup base, then at the last moment blend with heaps of wild garlic.

May, Beltane – the festival of fertility and the peak of spring flourishing. Pick nettle tips, blanch and puree, then mix with 00 flour and water to make a soft pasta dough. Cut, cook and serve with river trout or ricotta and wild watercress.

June gives us the summer solstice and the first summer fruits. Harvest elderflowers for cordial to drizzle over wild strawberries. Sprinkle with hawthorn, red clover and meadowsweet flowers.

July's Meadow Moon is the time to seek out goosegrass (cleavers) and wild thyme. Use in place of spinach to make a wild spanakopita.

August opens with Lammas Eve, the Grain Harvest. Seek out locally ground wholemeal flour to make soda bread packed with hedgerow herb garlic mustard. Top with seasonal mackerel and raw sea buckthorn berries.

In September, as the summer fades, pick aromatic pineapple weed and make a syrup to drizzle over ice cream. Eat while standing barefoot in the grass.

October – pickle and preserve anything that's left! Bullace, crab apple, rowan berries, quince, bilberries, blackberries – they will carry you through the winter. Try packing sloes in salt, for an umeboshi-style preserve.

November's frost moon is a sign of the shift in full winter. Bake pumpkin bread to toast and top with sauteed wild mushrooms with wild garlic bulbs.

December's winter solstice is a time for renewal. Pick seaweed as the tide goes out under a full moon – pepper dulse, sea lettuce or laver – and fry it up with Brussels sprouts and butter."

Cherry Truluck – Creative Director, Custom Food Lab

Food for Thought

What ideas do you have about how we can use food surplus to nurture ourselves and the community?

Have you experienced a deep connection with nature?

What ways do you like to connect?

Have you ever collected or eaten with wild food?

How could wild food become an important part of your diet?



Sean Roy Parker collecting wild coriander seed

4 – Kitchen

In this section we get down to some of the practical aspects of working as a community cook. Some of you may have excellent experience of cooking large quantities of meals, and some may be trying for the first time. We certainly don't expect everyone to be experts. In fact, learning on the job comes with its own benefits: you find what's comfortable to you, get a sense of achievement, and build self-confidence. Whether you're a novice or a trained chef, every day in a community kitchen offers an opportunity to learn something new.

Finding your way around a new kitchen is often half the challenge, so having a solid toolkit of skills and go-to techniques will help you feel mentally prepared for your shifts. This section also contains some great hints and tips from chefs from NFS London and other projects.

Pots, Pans, Kitchen Utensils

Early on in your journey, you'll discover the value of having appropriate cookware. Want to make pasta for 75 meals? Great! How big a pot will you need to boil that much pasta in water? Good question... (The answer is ideally 100 litres).

Large pots for liquids that are wider than they are tall are known as stock pots. Smaller pots that are taller than they are wide are called saucepans. Water will evaporate more quickly in a stock pot than in a saucepan. Frying pans are very wide and shallow. The most important thing here is that you should choose the pot that best suits the purpose. If you need to heat something quickly, the wider the pan the better!

Pots and pans can be made out of many different materials, from cast iron and stainless steel to aluminium and copper. Pots and pans which have no rubber or other materials on the outside (e.g. handles, lids) can be used on the stovetop and also go directly in the oven, making them incredibly versatile. 'Non-stick' pans have a protective coating on the cooking surface which can wear off over time. Don't use anything abrasive like steel wool when washing up! They should not be used in the oven. It's important to always use either wooden or rubber utensils which won't scratch the surface when cooking. Any chipped coating will expose potentially toxic materials, and will require disposing of.

Large wide trays (shallow and deep) will be perfect for using in the oven. Industrial versions are known as 'gastros', an international, standard size for commercial kitchens. Roasting trays have the same purpose, but come in a range of shapes, sizes and materials.

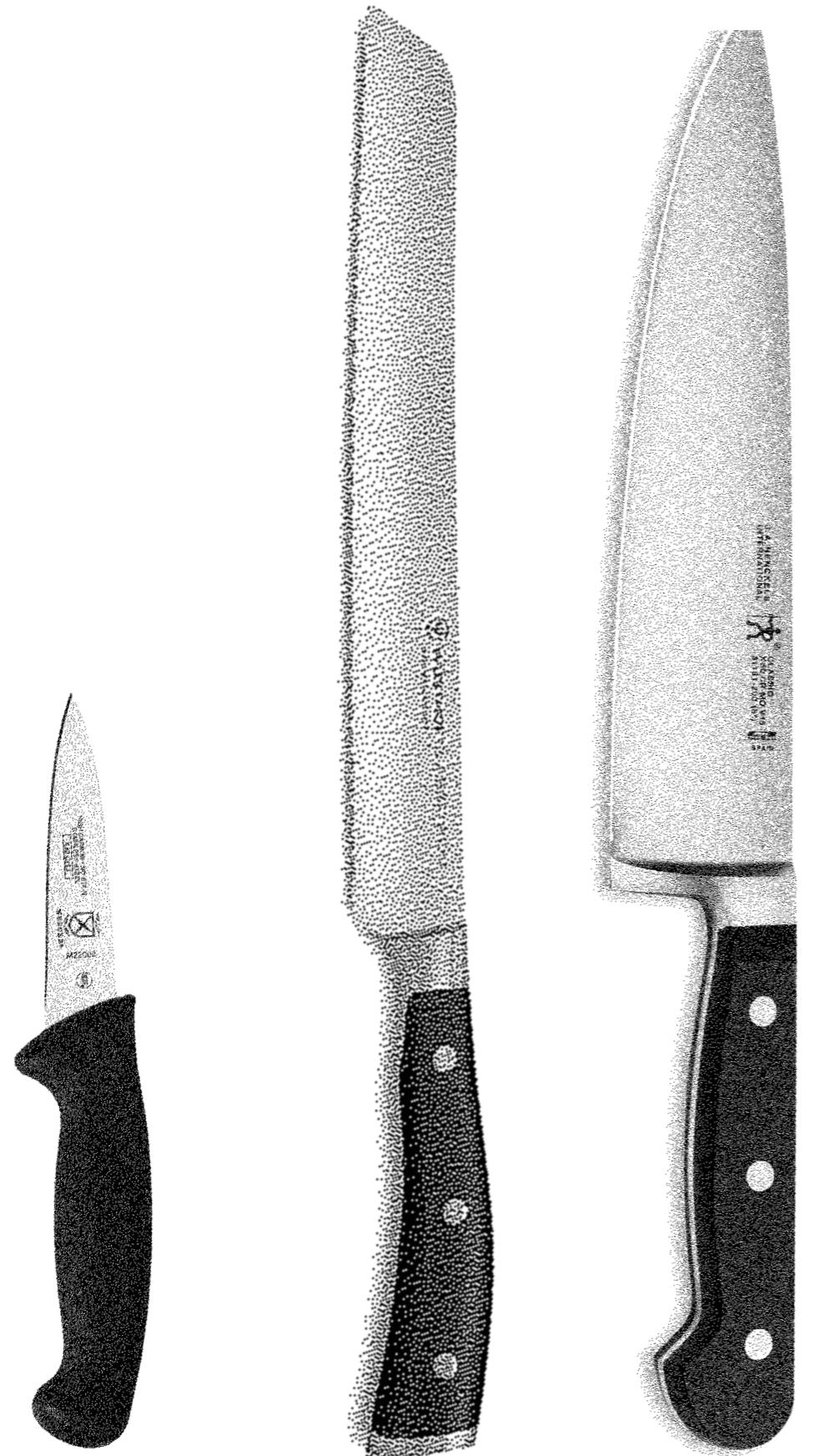




Knife Skills

A life goal for anyone who cooks, whether you're a chef or not, should be to feel comfortable holding and using a knife safely. Every knife has a totally different weight and feel, so you'll mostly learn through practice and experience. Sharp knives used correctly will slice produce very easily and without any resistance. Dull (blunt) knives are extremely dangerous. Most knife injuries occur when the cook picks up a knife that is too dull to do the job and applies too much pressure or approaches with an awkward movement to compensate. A sharp knife is a cook's best friend.

- ~ How you grip a knife is entirely up to you. Having said that, your instructor should guide you through the safest way since large knives and small knives should be held differently. Larger knives, also known as "chefs' knives" are great for breaking down large or hard vegetables. Smaller knives, usually called 'paring knives' are ideal for making smaller, more precise movements, such as cutting a strawberry or removing the skin from a clove of garlic.
- ~ Use your knuckles as a guide for your knife (like in the movies). Hold the ingredient firmly on the chopping board almost as if your hand is a claw, then tuck your fingertips in a bit and rest the flat of the blade against your knuckles. With dedicated practice you'll get the hang of it and find that by taking it slow to start and learning the movements, you will never cut yourself again!
- ~ While peeling the skin off produce has traditionally been done with a paring knife (a great skill, of course) this can be time-consuming and create additional waste if done in a hurry. Using a Y-shaped 'speed' peeler to remove the skin from produce will definitely be the quickest and safest way to prepare your ingredients for cooking.
- ~ Cutting should always be done on a high-density plastic chopping board. Metal surfaces dull or break knives, and wooden boards harbour bacteria. Secure your chopping board by placing a wet J-cloth or some damp compostable towels underneath it to ensure you have a stable surface to work on.
- ~ When cutting and chopping it is important to work clean. You will want to have a fresh, damp J-cloth handy, as well as a sterile container for your processed ingredients. You might want two spare containers: one for reusable offcuts (pickles, crisps etc), and one for compost (blemishes, mould).
- ~ Cutting large amounts of raw foods is extremely time-consuming and laborious. Having a food processor nearby means you can easily mince or dice ingredients in a flash – think onions and carrots for a tomato bolognese. Roughly chop the ingredients into chunks, then pulse them a few times to get them down to a reasonable size.



Paring knife

Serrated knife

Chef's knife

What We've Learnt – and Are Still Learning

"The Made In Hackney Community Cookery School is the work of many hearts and hands. Since we fired up our hobs nine years ago we're humbled to have delivered thousands of cookery classes across the capital, worked with over 200 community partner organisations and delivered over 55,000 community meals during the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether it's a class, feast or a community meal, everything we do ends in sharing wholesome, delicious food – made collaboratively with love.

The juggle of being a community food initiative and a solvent organisation has been a vertiginous learning curve. We've made mistakes – lots – and still do. Evolved through constant learnings – daily. And held on through endless tribulations – also daily!

If you're a community food collective, we'd love to hear your learnings too. For now, here's a few of ours.

- When it comes to community work, the quickest, easiest way is not usually the best way.
- Reliance on grants can be exhausting and disempowering. If you have other means of generating funds – nurture them. They may not be less exhausting, but they may be more empowering.
- Collaborate, collaborate, collaborate. Beautiful things happen when we work together.
- Co-create your work alongside the community members using your service.
- Listen, reflect, evolve. How you do something at the start should not be how you always do it.
- Build a supporter base – people, collectives, and companies who can support you.
- Integrate anti-racism work into everything you do – build in time for reflection and evolution.
- Do it with joy. If your community food provision feels joyless, reconsider your approach."

Sarah Bentley – Founder, Made In Hackney Community Cookery School

Nutritional Basics

Nutrition can be a controversial topic. As a disclaimer, the authors of this guide are not certified nutritionists or doctors and therefore don't intend to make any claims about what anyone should or shouldn't be eating. Rather, we believe that everyone has a universal right to a nutritious diet, and being free to choose your food is part of that. Here, we want to offer a few important guiding principles that take into account the health of those eating the meals you cook.

As we have explored elsewhere in this handbook, food is inherently political. Unfortunately, there are huge financial and social barriers to accessing a basic balanced diet for many communities in the UK, one of the richest countries in the world. For those who experience discrimination in – or are disenfranchised by – society, nutrition can be a means of survival rather than preference. Fruit and vegetables grown responsibly (organic, without pesticides, local and seasonal) are too expensive for the majority of consumers, reserved for those with disposable income. This means many have to rely on cheap, imported foods, much of which has lower nutrient-density from extractive farming processes and longer storage periods.

A Community Cook plays a key role in creating nutrient-dense, filling and flavoursome meals with a range of raw produce and utensils that may be donated by or shared with other projects. The following principles are guidelines for NFS kitchens and may not always be achievable with the ingredients and resources to hand. Your resourcefulness and ingenuity will always be your greatest ally:

Diet diversity – As with all living systems, the human body requires a combination of different elements to be healthy and balanced. Rotating ingredients and using lots of produce of different colors is a simple way to try and ensure that you are packing a variety of nutrients into every meal.

Vegetarian protein – Proteins contain amino acids which are essential to human health. While meat usually contains all the necessary amino acids, many vegetarian sources of protein fall short. For this reason, it is important to try to combine vegetarian proteins to create a 'whole protein'. Practically this means preparing both a legume or grain and a starch. Common legumes include lentils, chickpeas, and beans. Common starches are rice, potato, and bread. Daal, a dish which mixes lentils with potato is a good example of how to combine these ingredients to produce a nutritious and tasty meal.

Avoid processed foods – This is controversial because many consumers only have access to highly-processed items, in the form of ready meals, long-life or ambient shelf goods. Typical supermarket staples contain a variety of

sugars, extracts, colourings, preservatives and very little nutritional value. These can cause health problems if eaten in large quantities.

Balanced meals – Your body works best when it has a range of textures and cooked states to digest. If you can create a dish that features a mix of raw, cooked and fermented foods, it will stimulate and satisfy many different types of benevolent gut bacteria. Our microbiome is the most important part of our stomach, housing around 3 trillion micro-organisms that help extract vitamins, minerals and nutrients. A happy gut means a happier, healthier you.

Plant-based whenever possible – NFS London is committed to cooking meals which follow a plant-based diet as far as possible. We will never use products that are a result of animal death. Occasionally, we will purchase or receive donations of dairy, eggs, honey and others which are animal-derived products. No one is forced to consume a diet which is entirely plant-based nor are they required to consume animal-derived products if they choose not to. We are trying to strike a balance between fulfilling the dietary needs of our members, and advocating for animal justice.

Cater for (almost) everyone – As everyone has different dietary requirements, intolerances and preferences, it's almost impossible to make a dish that ticks all boxes. However, it's key to consider the most prolific allergens and often avoiding as many as possible from the main meal is a safe bet. This does mean you can be really creative with side dishes and garnishes, which can be skipped depending on the members' requests.

What are the 14 allergens?

- Celery
- Cereals containing gluten
- Crustaceans
- Eggs
- Fish
- Lupin
- Milk
- Molluscs
- Mustard
- Nuts
- Peanuts
- Sesame seeds
- Soya

Sulphur dioxide (sometimes known as sulphites)



"Despite its flaws, I loved our first location for NFS London. We had one tiny window for ventilation, always crowded with gastos and cooling racks stacked with whatever we had just baked. We only knew when it was raining because the skylight would leak on our heads or form slippery puddles on the floor.

My fondest memory was the day I met Maria, an incredible chef and woman! We worked together on the final shift before moving location, tasked with using whatever we had left in the fridge and making as little mess as possible. One discovery was a container with chunks of apples, oranges, pears and bananas. Someone had kindly removed the blemishes the day before, so we were left with this basic fruit salad. My minimal mindset jumped straight to zero-waste flapjacks – if we bake it, no-one will notice. Intuitive cooking at its finest!

After clean-down we strolled to the community garden behind the building, an oasis of shrubs and trees lovingly maintained by volunteers. While we were sniffing out some ripe figs, we accidentally disturbed some bees. Poor Maria got stung on her nose (I couldn't help but laugh when she started screaming), then I got one right on the forehead. The gardeners waved us to immediately go back inside, both laughing but on the verge of tears from pain. Maria had to pull the stinger from my forehead and we both went home with swollen faces.

A fabulous last day at that kitchen, one I will always cherish and remember with a smile."

Nancy O'Neill – Freelance plant-based chef, NFS London volunteer



Lunch using garden veg served on the Community Cooks Programme
at Castle Climbing Centre, July 2021

Spices

Spices are an important part of all cuisine. Some cultures prefer to use more than others: traditional Indian-style recipes often contain over 40 spices while Italian cuisine may use none at all. It may be obvious, but they come in many forms, from fresh and whole, to dry and ground. Japanese-style cooking sometimes uses fresh herbs, fermented liquids and homemade pastes as spices. Over time you will get more comfortable with spices and how to identify, cook, temper, garnish, preserve and, occasionally, "cheat" with them.

You can easily make your own spices, too – if you take fresh garlic, ginger, chili pepper or horseradish, then you can dehydrate them and grind them into flavour-packed flakes and powders. This works better for stronger flavours, but actually you could use any fruit or vegetable.

Slice, dice or grate your fresh ingredients and spread them out on greaseproof paper in a tray, then put them in the oven for 4-6 hours on a low temperature – around 60-80°C, depending on size. We are not trying to roast them so if there is browning, turn the heat down.

Once fully dry, pulverise in a spice grinder or food processor. You can air-dry on greaseproof paper to dry fully, then store in your neat tupperware library.

Here's a list of the basic dry ingredients we recommend you have in your kitchen:

Spices

Black pepper
Garlic powder
Onion powder
Ground ginger
Ground turmeric
Chilli flakes
Smoked paprika
Cumin seeds
Coriander seeds
Fennel seeds
Mustard seeds
Ground cinnamon
Curry powder*
Garam masala*
Ras el Hanout*
Vegetable bouillon or stock cubes

Herbs

Thyme
Oregano
Rosemary
Basil
Dill
Lemongrass
Bay leaves

*Some spices like 'curry powder' are simply blends of many spices (listed on the label) so while it can be helpful to have the blends on hand, you can always make your own mixes which are just as good or better.

Good quality sea salt is a must!

Wet sauces and pastes are useful to have around, and usually are refrigerated:

Soy sauce (contains soya and gluten)

Tamari (gluten-free soy sauce)

Miso paste (white miso is particularly tasty, many are made from soya beans)

Tomato passata (cooked and strained tomatoes)v

Global flavours with simple ingredients

"Creating varied meals with a limited larder can sometimes feel daunting. I once used an abundance of donated baked beans and took them on a flavour journey, but the principles could be applied to many pulses such as red lentils, cooked dal-style.

A flavour base for many styles of cooking is finely chopped onion, carrot, celery, garlic. Sweat down in a neutral oil until softened without colour, followed by your flavour-twist of choice:

- Asian-style: add ginger, lemongrass, chilli, fresh coriander, soy sauce and lime (optional additions - coconut milk, tamarind)
- Mexican-style: add ground cumin, paprika, oregano, chilli, fresh coriander and fresh lime to finish
- Italian-style: add a pinch of chilli flakes and fennel seeds, then finish with chopped fresh herbs, e.g. basil, oregano, rosemary or sage
- Indian-style: add fresh ginger, a pinch of ground cumin, coriander, turmeric, cinnamon, mustard seeds, cardamom and chilli
- Moroccan-style: ground cumin, cinnamon, coriander, ginger, paprika, cardamom and a pinch of turmeric, chilli or cayenne. Finish with coriander and a little orange or lemon zest

If you like, thoroughly rinse the sauce off the baked beans (optional), then add them along with a little water and simmer to infuse. Finish with plenty of fresh herbs and citrus."

Maria Elia - Award-winning Chef and NFS London volunteer

Large Batch Cooking in 4 Steps

Each international cuisine is founded on base recipes that use local, seasonally abundant and readily available ingredients. At first, large batch cooking can seem intimidating. However, with a good team, a clear plan, and effective tools you will find yourself churning out meals in no time. As part of the programme you will receive guided kitchen classes cooking large batches, with a chance to shadow our NFS volunteers to see exactly how it's done. By the time you've completed the Community Cooks Programme, you'll be prepared to step in and cook the meals yourself.

Here are the top four rules and guiding principles for large batch cooking:

1. Work together

Many hands make light work. Community cooks don't just cook for their community, they cook with their community. Preparing 100 meals is a lot of work, so it's important to have plenty of spare hands and a willingness to delegate tasks. When working with other cooks it's always good to ask them what types of jobs they feel comfortable doing, and ensuring everyone shares the washing up. This way everyone can bring their own skill set and contribute to the team goals. Maintaining a positive working atmosphere – one that acknowledges the incredible and beautiful act of cooking together – will be the first step to success.

2. Make a plan

Once you've got your team together, you can plan what to cook. Having a solid recipe with fixed ingredients and clear measurements can be a good way to feel comfortable with a new dish. Scaling up recipes from books to feed 100 is a skill worth learning in itself. That being said, human beings have cooked for thousands of years without using exact measurements, and some of the greatest ideas come from flashes of inspiration!

3. Be flexible and creative

Over time you will find recipes that work for you, begin to make adjustments and add your own personal flair. Always taste your food as you go and feel free to adjust according to what you feel is right. You can always add seasoning, but you can't take it away. When cooking with surplus food, learning to substitute ingredients is a creative way to use your culinary instincts! It is likely community kitchens won't contain all of the ideal ingredients or equipment that you would normally expect, so ingenuity is key. On occasions you might need to blitz 30 litres of soup with a stick blender or chop 50 onions with a food processor in batches.

4. Save yourself work, keep it simple and delicious

You will want to cut out unnecessary work to speed up the process, and many kitchen habits we pick up at home are counter-productive! Should you have a glut of sweet potatoes, try and process them with as little effort as possible. The skin contains valuable nutrients and roughage, so no need to peel – just be sure to give them a good wash and discard any blemishes before cooking. If you feel the recipe strictly calls for peeled sweet potatoes, save time by roasting them whole and easily peeling away the skin once cooled.

"I started out in the film and TV industry, having graduated from film school with a big chip on my shoulder. I wanted to heal the wounds of racial discrimination and use my medium to give voice to African women living under the sometimes selfish, oppressive regime ingrained in culture. I became really exhausted from being mad and angry at the world for all its injustices. One day it dawned on me, "Become the change you want to see in the world". This flicked a switch and, in part, helped me decide to become a chef.

Food has always been a central part of my life, not just from a gluttonous, self indulgent point of view. I see its magic in bringing people together with the gifts of love, laughter, and cultural exchange. It helps in sharing new philosophies of life and living, bridging the gap that have previously birthed wars and instead celebrating differences and commonalities. It welcomes peace, happiness and support into our homes and communities – I am energised by my passion for food. Just as I realised I was living out my dream, I found the team at NFS London, who challenged me to help build a fairer world for all. Delicious!"

Chineze Oniah - Freelance cook and NFS London volunteer

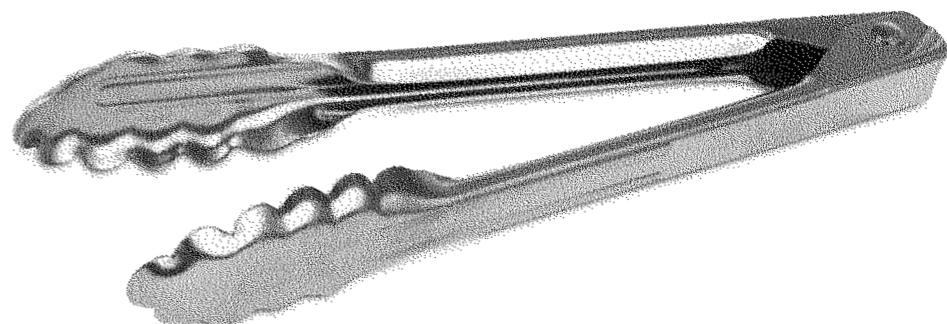
Second Life

The community kitchen is a great place to study the lifecycle of materials. Cooks can take advantage of surplus produce and 'upcycle' it into nutritious and satisfying food for the community (section 2 – Acquisition). We can consider how peelings and ends could be transformed into pickles or stock, or how stale bread can be the basis of a delicious pudding (section 5 – In Practice). Additionally, composting vegetable scraps and other organic material will enhance and nurture the living soil (section 4 – Distribution). However, not everything that moves through our space is edible.

Oftentimes we will use plastic packaging to transport cooked meals to people's homes because they are food safe and can be placed directly in the microwave. Although they are deemed 'single-use' we can bring them back into our system and find more uses. Once washed with soapy water and dried, these containers make great storage for dry goods like herbs, spices or teabags. There is nothing more satisfying than a wall of well-labelled spices! As these are 'free' materials, you can be inventive with new purposes.

The bottom line is that these composite materials have gone through many energy-intensive processes to end up in the kitchen. Sending them to landfill after a single use will create a need for more, which is not only a waste of money and resources, but also has a huge detrimental impact on the environment. When something is reused or repurposed, little or no energy is used and a new, useful item is gained. If all else fails, recycling is hugely preferable to going in the landfill bin..

It is important to keep separate bins in your community kitchen for compost, clean recycling, and general waste. You should work together to ensure that all items find their way into the appropriate place. Ask the team leader or building contact how your local council manages recycling and where the closest recycling drop-off point is.



Food for Thought

What elements of working in a community kitchen make you excited?

What parts make you nervous?

How important is nutrition in your life?

How does it make you feel when you think about cooking and sharing nutritious food with your community?

What are some of your favorite spices? How do you like to combine them? What tips and tricks can you pass on to others?

5 – Distribution

Once we have grown, intercepted or foraged our ingredients and collaboratively prepared and cooked them into delicious, nutritious meals, we now need to think about two key things: who will we distribute them to, and how will we do it? These factors are important when recognising some of the issues written about in section 2 (Food Justice, Environmental Justice) as they relate directly to the ways in which NFS London is embodying equitable local food systems.

This section considers the social and economic barriers that many face to receiving delicious and nutritious food, and why a multi-faceted approach is necessary to ensure no-one is left behind. We should celebrate the caring, dynamic and inventive methods for sharing food shown by non-Western cultures, which bring communities closer together and foster intergenerational bonds, while experimenting with new ways to make strengthened connections in the city.

Mutual aid and solidarity

As many of us have experienced throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, the isolated lifestyle perpetuated by buying, cooking and eating alone has become increasingly difficult. The support structures that many of us rely on have been restricted or removed completely, and this understandably can take a toll on mental and physical health.

- ↳ According to this [Guardian article](#), “One study from the University of Michigan found that replacing face-to-face contact with friends and family with messages on social media, emails or text messages could double our risk of depression.”
- ↳ Meanwhile [this BBC article](#) states “Pre-pandemic surveys showed about 5% of adults “always or often” lonely - or about 2.6 million people.”
- ↳ The [Big Lunch Study in 2017](#) found that “34% of people can go a whole week without eating a meal with someone else”
- ↳ The [Financial Times](#) found “the equivalent of 8.1 million people—said they had experienced some kind of food insecurity because of the Covid-19 pandemic.”

One approach to combating these feelings of isolation has been through the building of mutual aid networks, particularly in densely-populated cities like London, which provide on-the-ground support in their locale. Horizontally-organised community groups ie. those that approach decision-making as a community, have assembled to tackle food poverty with hot meals and grocery deliveries (much like NFS London). At the same time, many cafés,

restaurants and takeaways have expanded or completely changed their offering to help their neighbours in need by offering free school meals and subsidised takeaways. Operations can be funded by a profitting arm of the business or separate crowdfunding and grants, but many run entirely without money entirely.

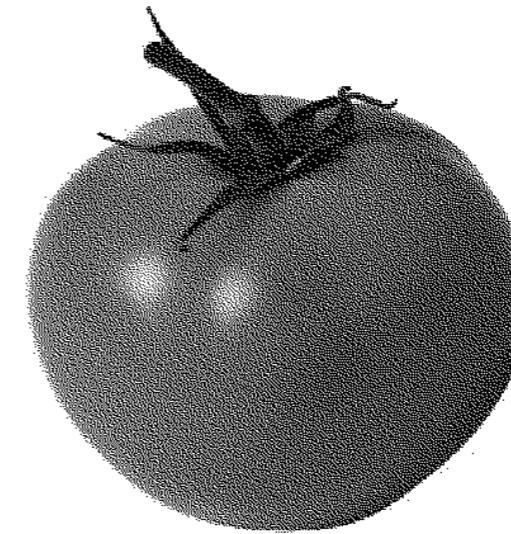
Mutual aid groups have long been at the centre of racial and LGBTQI+ activism, such as the Free Breakfast for School Children Program initiated in 1969 by the Black Panther Party in Oakland, California, and the numerous funding and protection networks for Black and Trans sex workers across America. The fact these models have seen a surge in popularity during this pandemic is a testament to the deep need for human interdependence and displays of selflessness in times of crisis.

A key feature of non-hierarchical organisations like NFS London is that we operate on a non-judgemental basis. Everyone is welcome. We do not means-test and anyone can self-refer, no questions asked. This removes bureaucratic barriers for those trying to access help, and instills a culture of trust and "solidarity, not charity". We believe that everyone should have their basic needs met, regardless of immigration status, class, race, age, ability, sexuality, gender or wealth.

As we work to imagine and create a society that values equality, collaboration, and diversity, mutual aid will form a big part of how we re-learn to interact with each other. Many indigenous communities and cultures never moved away from these reciprocal relationships. Recreating and reconnecting with these practices will bring us closer to one another and make dignified personal and social life possible in each community.



Breaking down surplus veg on Community Cooks Programme, July 2021



WANC (Women's Anarchist Nuisance Cafe) 1999-2012

"WANC was a feminist, queer, DIY space co-founded by Caro Smart and James Roselind which took place on a monthly basis in squats and autonomous spaces across North and East London from 1999 to 2012. Describing itself as a 'panacea to passive consumerism' it was built on an ethos of co-production and mutual care. WANC co-created playful spaces for discussions, performances, workshops, centred communal cooking and eating of vegan food.

Each month a theme would be created, a call would go out, and a team of people would assemble to build the space. Its DIY politics involved using the city as a resource for gathering free food, known as 'skipping'. Early morning visits to a wholesale market in Vauxhall was the favoured spot. WANC 'skippers' built good rapport with the vendors, giving them access to plentiful good quality food otherwise marked for waste. Stacked high with fruit and veg, they would cycle back across the city to chefs waiting with open arms, ready for whatever came through the door.

Embracing improvisation and chaos, and sharing resources, knowledge and skills directly opposed to traditional monetary transactional spaces was at the heart of WANC. It enabled people to build the world they wanted to see and live in; to feel a sense of belonging through inclusion, whether chopping vegetables, carrying pots and pans to the venue, washing up your own plate or eating with someone new. As someone recently said of WANC, 'there's a certain magic in food being available, because you have the sense that you're being nourished in more ways than one.'"

AJ Tear - community activist and NFS London co-founder

Dignity and Access

At the heart of the work being done at NFS is providing an alternative model to charity hierarchies. While many of these charity organizations are well-meaning, they often tend to reinforce the idea that the people who 'have' should help those who 'have not', reinforcing the idea that economic status is equivalent to human worth. We want to break this violent idea that middle-class and wealthy people should "help the poor" out of the kindness of their hearts. The rhetoric that those "victims" need the more privileged to help them out is archaic and damaging. Instead, we see a world where mutual aid is a reality and communities thrive when they work together so that everyone's needs are met and valued.

Every member of the community has something unique and important to offer. By creating an inclusive community which highlights and appreciates the diversity of people and things that it is made up of, everyone benefits. A dignified food system is one where everyone's rights are respected, everyone's needs are met, and the means of production are jointly owned and controlled by everyone who will benefit from them. We cannot discuss dignity while those that grow, transport and sell our food are also those who suffer most from poverty and environmental illness.

Land access (as discussed in section 1 – Food Justice, Environmental Justice) is vital to having a dignified food system. We must work within our communities to encourage land stewardship which is representative of its communities. We must ensure that nations and peoples (specifically BIPOC) have access to land ownership and the rights to cultivate it to benefit their community.

Community cooks should consider whether they intend to offer hot meals on-site, or include a take-away and/or delivery option. At NFS London, patrons can schedule a collection and take the opportunity to meet with others, eat a hot meal on-site (preferable for people with limited facilities and accommodation) and pick up some groceries. Some beneficiaries prefer to have their order delivered to them, a necessary service for people who are unable to leave their home or have caring responsibilities that make travelling more challenging. In these instances, we deliver their order to their home. This by no means removes these members' capacity to choose what food they would like, which is instead arranged over the phone.

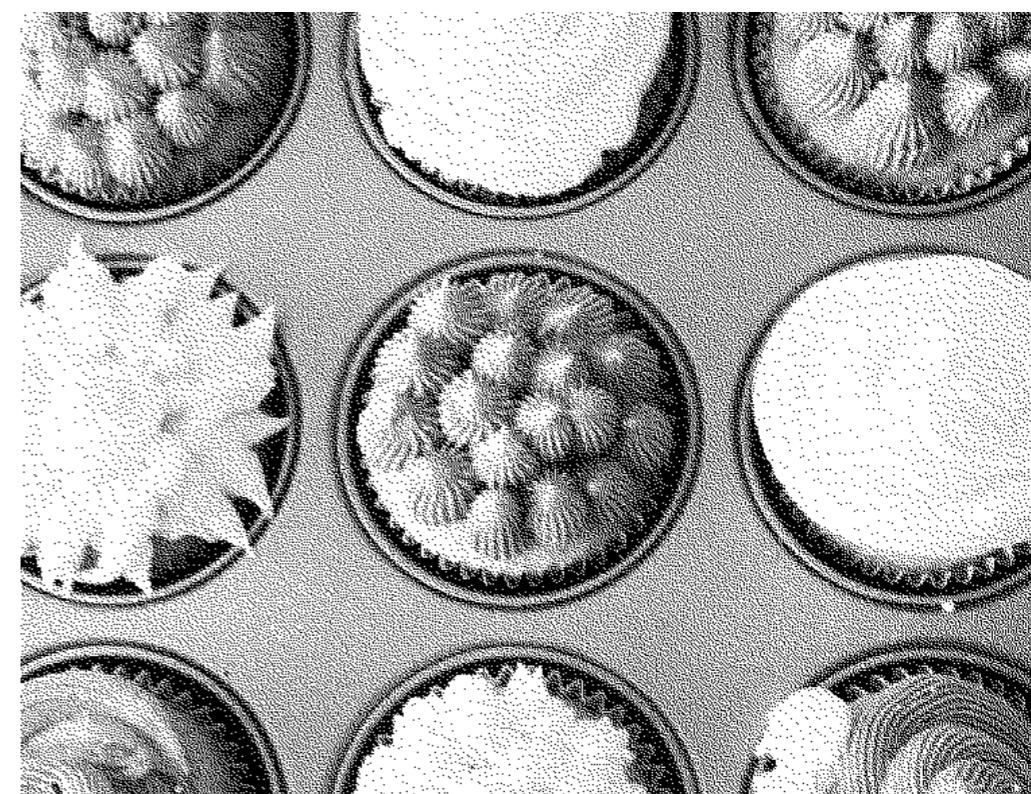
As we have seen during COVID-19, gathering in groups during a pandemic is ill-advised and potentially dangerous. At NFS London we don't believe in

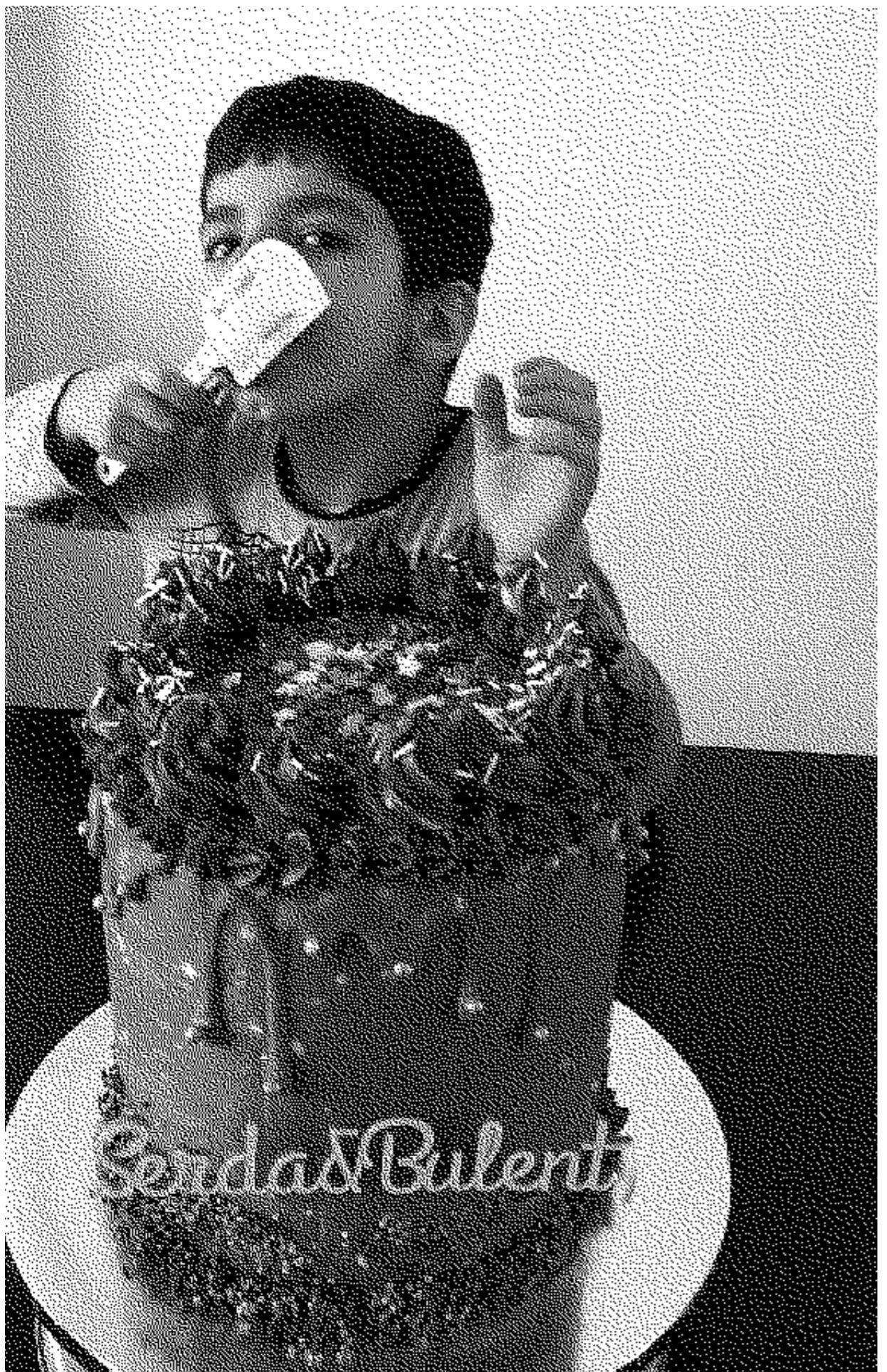
having people wait in line to receive food. When someone is depending upon a free meal service or foodbank for basic items and is asked to wait in line, they are more at risk of infection, or worsening pre-existing conditions. There is also an unhealthy relationship with poverty-shaming in the UK, which unfairly characterises those from low socio-economic backgrounds. .

"I love baking and during the first lockdown I decided to experiment and spread a little happiness in the community (and who doesn't love a cupcake?). I studied online for my food hygiene certificate, then took a cake decorating course. After completing it, I enrolled my kids to keep them busy, and we would experiment with different design ideas.

We started baking big and small, leaving some outside the doors of our friends, family and neighbours with a little note. My son suggested the name *fairy cakes by sm*. We received so many messages from people about how the cakes made them smile during this difficult period, it filled me with joy!"

Serda Mehmet





Funding Your Project

In order to run a sustainable project, you will need to work towards a model that covers its overall costs. There are a number of avenues available to you, some obvious and some not-so-obvious:

- Private funding i.e. from an individual or organisation that backs your project regardless of its income – as well as being quite rare, private funding can come with potential flaws with central reliance, including a duty to include logos and texts; uncomfortable hierarchy; unrealistic targets' and the constant possibility of removal.
- Local public funding pots, grants and awards – researching what your council offers, as well as city-wide opportunities, will help your project tap into available resources and become better connected with the flows of money and power in your area. However, this may also require lots of bid writing, meetings, targets and social media performance.
- One-off donations – crowdfunding campaigns, usually in a condensed time period, can be useful for laying out a clear target and purpose for your project. This does require much prior organisation, costing, transparency, and even gifts or perks to patrons. This approach is effective if you ask influential local people and organisations to endorse your projects by sharing on social media and in newsletters.
- Regular donations – designing peer-to-peer funding that brings in monthly amounts mirrors the money flow of business and ensures a solid base of contributions, yet it can be slow to build up and you may need to consider gifts and perks. If you can put in the groundwork though, regular donations tend to retain and increase, with much smaller drop-off.
- Paying customers – the most traditional model for a reason. A straight cash-for-goods transaction can create simpler processes, but also barriers to your service. This model requires high consistency in everything you offer to ensure customers come back; if you invite members to pay on a sliding scale (where they select a price based on their resources), make sure it's clear why and how you are doing so, and who it benefits.

Overall there are pros and cons to each method, and most sustainable business models use a combination of two or three in order to attract wider audiences, ensure more people can contribute, and work towards being self-

subsistent. For instance, to ensure a high level of autonomy, a project might work on building up a base of monthly donations, while having a volunteer or paid staff member write bids for local grants to cover the cost of specific pieces of equipment or training courses.

NFS London is here to support you develop a financially sustainable model for your project. We can support you with bid writing and we are developing a seed funding pot to support initial project costs.

Donation-based Services

In an increasingly privatised and expensive city like London, one way to dissolve financial barriers people might face in accessing good food is to provide it as cheap as possible or for free if you can, as many mutual aid and emergency food provision services do.

If you cannot afford to operate in this manner, or have an existing business that requires some income, you might consider distributing your meals on a pay-what-you-can (PWYC) or pay-as-you-feel (PAYF) basis. This way members can assess how much they can afford to exchange for the service, and no-one will be left behind.

Another option is pay-it-forward (PIF), a model which leaves the top end open, inviting those who can afford it to buy hypothetical meals that can be distributed for free in the future. Each of these find new and exciting ways to challenge existing formats and design new tools that better reflect the positive nature of the projects.

There is also space within these concepts to entertain alternative currencies. For instance, a person's lack of money is not representative of their personhood, absolutely everyone has hidden talents and something valuable to offer. Considering what other resources are needed to run a social eating project or community kitchen, you may be in need of practical skills, technical knowledge, or a lift to the market. Building stronger connections with volunteers, members and each other creates trusting relationships and opens up new possibilities for collaborative solutions.

Instead of money, you could accept:

- Contributions of artwork for your social eating space
- Help with DIY, labour or recipes
- Favours and IOUs
- Skillswaps e.g. running workshops or demonstrations
- Fresh or dried produce
- Social media boosts

Why Social Eating?

Scientists and anthropologists have published many studies which discuss the history of human eating habits. Professor of Psychology, Robin Dunbar writes in his book, "Breaking Bread: The Functions of Social Eating": "the act of eating together triggers the endorphin system in the brain and endorphins play an important role in social bonding in humans. Taking time to sit down together over a meal helps create social networks that in turn have profound effects on our physical and mental health, our happiness and wellbeing, and even our sense of purpose in life."

In early civilisation, when language began to develop as a part of social interaction beyond mere primary communication, early humans would have sat around a fire cooking food and spending time discussing any number of topics – the weather perhaps, or who had seen the biggest wooly mammoth that day. In this way, eating and verbal interaction developed as complementary features of society, and were the things which began to separate us from our primate relatives.

Despite living in overpopulated cities, many busy people have transitioned into eating microwaved ready-meals in studio apartments, far from human interaction or deep connection. Calls to return to social and communal eating spaces are valid, but also need to address the fact that many countries and cultures already still revolve around communal eating as a basic part of everyday life. The practical and spiritual benefits of communal eating with people from different cultures and socio-economic backgrounds is the most natural and ancient of human rituals – and food is at the very heart of it.

"Eating together has special significance in Sikhism. Every gurdwara has a community kitchen, langar, that provides food for all visitors; everybody eats seated on the floor together as equals, whatever their creed, social position, colour or gender.

The tradition of langar is about putting our beliefs into action. Sikhism is not a religion but a way of life. The three basic tenets, introduced by the founding father, Guru Nanak Dev Ji, are simran (meditation to still and awaken the mind), sangat (coming together, community, meditating and eating together) and seva (selfless service). All food prepared in the langar is vegetarian, and simran is done while preparing, cooking and packing it for distribution to ensure that the meals provided are infused with spiritual nourishment."

Sukh Singh - GMGG Food Support, Slough

How to Organise a Community Meal

Adapted from a National Food Service resource

Plan

1. Gather some friends to help you
2. Do a trial
3. Review the trial
4. Repeat and look for sources of funding and financial sustainability

Ingredients

- 1 venue with an approved kitchen
- Some volunteers, including at least 1 with a food hygiene certificate of 2 or higher
- Some food to cook
- A marketing strategy to bring people in to eat

Projects run by members of the same community that it supports can be the most valuable. A meal is for a day, skills in organising and working together are for life. Sometimes, setting up a community project can be challenging. It can be hard to find people who are passionate, skilled, have time to help out and are willing to pay membership fees – especially at the beginning and especially in deprived areas.

The best place to start when beginning a community project is to research what groups already exist. Find out where people gather already, be it in a local school, pub, church or existing dining club. Engage the community from step one.

Hold your meetings in a location they can reach on foot, if at all possible provide food and always, always stick to the meeting timings you advertise. Listen, include, and facilitate from the back.



Recipe

1. Make a list of the people, or types of people, you would like to invite.

You need to make sure your event is accessible to the right people. There's no point running an event for parents that clashes with your local parents' evening. You also need to make sure your event is engaging the right people. Would it work with the numbers you're expecting to come? Are the activities on offer appealing to the people you want them to?

Make it clear that companions, carers, and support workers can come in for free if they're supporting someone else to come.

2. Agree a date.

Make sure there are no clashes. Check Facebook for events that might be on the same days. Consider what events your target audience are likely to be going to already.

Have a backup date and consider how much lead-up time you need to organise and promote: 2, 4 or 6 weeks?

3. Work out how you will cover your costs.

What are your costs for the event?
How much do you expect to make?
Write that down: that's your budget.

Doing tiered prices for attendees is a good idea for larger events. You could charge something like £1 unwaged, £3 low-waged/student, £7 high wage, £10 solidarity. You want your event to break even with just 40% of the people you'd ideally like to come. It's fine to let people decide for themselves which ticket they can buy. Make sure to explain where this money goes.

Another option is to ask for donations on the day. You could suggest a donation amount that would cover your costs and explain that donations over that amount are a favour to all the people who can't pay so much. Often donations pull in more money than a small fee.

4. Work out where you'll source your ingredients from.

For a first event it might be easier to buy ingredients and make a cheap meal, like dal or soup. If it's a success then you can look into buying in bulk or using surplus food. Small businesses are often more likely to supply surplus food, or give you a discount on large orders.

Smaller shops don't have to go through so many layers of management to agree to things, so they can be more helpful than supermarkets. Contacting existing local lunch and supper clubs might also bring up some leads for sourcing foods.

If you're using surplus food, plan a flexible menu that can incorporate whatever vegetables you get.

5. Find a venue.

Make sure the venues are within your price range. Ask members and supporters of your group in case there's anywhere you might be able to use for free. Often venues won't advertise their prices up front, you'll have to email them to find out. Scout meeting huts, church halls, community centres and sometimes cafés are good ideas to try.

Unfortunately, cheaper venues are often less accessible, lacking things like lifts and accessible toilets. If this is a trade off you have to make, try and ensure that you choose a more accessible venue for at least some of your events, and apologise when they aren't.

Other accessibility concerns include heating, seating (are there enough? Are they padded? Are they wide enough? Do they have armrests?), ramps, steps, width of corridors, hearing aid loops, distance to bus stops and parking. Once you've agreed on a venue, go ahead and book. You may have to pay a deposit. If you haven't got any start-up cash then it's a good idea for everyone to chip in to cover this, so the risk is shared.

6. Devise a marketing strategy.

Where will you advertise and in what forms? Do you have a mailing list? Can you make a list of friends and family to invite individually? Make sure you invite all the relevant organisations and people who might be able to help you in your area. Make sure that your tactics will appeal to the right people. Use the social media they use, put posters in places they'll see.

You should draw up a calendar from now until your event that sets out marketing actions at regular intervals. Allocate tasks to people so that the work is shared fairly.

7. Ensure your accessibility information is easy to find.

If you can, visit the venue in advance to collect photos of the room, the entranceway, and any steps or physical barriers.

Make sure to list at least:

- If there's a sign language interpreter or not
- If there's a hearing loop
- If there's a lift and/or an accessible toilet
- The nearest bus stop
- Nearest parking

8. Create an itinerary for the event, then put it into action.

Write a list of all the tasks that need doing on the day, who's doing them and when they need to be done. If you have enough people, allocate someone to be responsible for supporting others to keep to the itinerary. It's useful to have someone on the day who's aware of everything.

Don't forget about tidying up at the end and disposing of any rubbish.

At the event, collect photos, with permission of everyone in them.

Collect emails of attendees who are interested in helping with future events. Before you do this, make sure you're going to store that data in a way that's GDPR compliant (protecting and keeping people's data private); using platform like Mailchimp will help you with this.

9. Review.

Reviewing how your event went is almost as important as the event itself.

- What worked well?
- Did you achieve the outcomes you hoped for? Did you achieve any others you weren't expecting?
- What was everyone's personal experience of the event?
- What would you do differently next time?
 - Is there anything you've learnt that might be useful to other groups?

Good luck!

Louise Delmege – director, National Food Service Bristol



WANC reunion meal 2019

6 – In Action

Food for Thought

Have you participated in mutual aid before?

What are some of the positive effects you have experienced or heard to have come from mutual aid?

Why is it important to maintain and restore dignity for members of your community?

Could you see yourself cooking in a community café setting?

How do you feel about pay-what-you-can models?

How to Use This Section

In this chapter you will find some lovely recipes contributed by people from all over the world. This diversity of backgrounds and experiences means that many of these recipes use different measurements and different methods. Some are very specific, and others allow for the reader to interpret them. We have chosen to celebrate these differences and hope that you will enjoy using these recipes as a starting point, rather than a finished product. Try these out and make changes as you see appropriate.

Recipes are only guidelines. Above all, your own creativity is the most valuable thing you have to offer. As you gain more confidence in the kitchen, you will surely begin to experiment and develop recipes of your own. Use your intuition to substitute ingredients and consider inventive alternatives.

In a community kitchen, a ‘handful’ is a great way to measure! Use the methods and measurements that make you feel comfortable and don’t feel any pressure to standardize your way of cooking. Be assured that teamwork and sharing knowledge will lead to success, so put your energy into that! When cooking a community meal, the journey matters far more than the destination.



Spirit, Caro and Ogu at Made in Hackney

Chai Breaker

Inspired by the icebreaker method, used to introduce people to each other so they feel more comfortable, 'Chai Breaker' aims to encourage conversations around making and drinking together as part of Daalston, a project I started in March 2020 as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. It hosts a growing community of people using food as a vehicle to break down boundaries, with online cooking classes for my colleagues and friends in the UK and South Asia - India, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Nepal. Here I've written how you can scale-up the chai tea making process. It is inspired by my experiences at the Sikh temple, where we always have a constant supply of masala chai made in bulk while we made food in the community kitchen to share.

Ingredients for 100 cups of Masala Chai

13 litres dairy/non-dairy milk
14 litres water
3 tbsp. green cardamom pods
1.5 tbsp. whole cloves
10 cinnamon sticks
5 (2inch) pieces of ginger
70 black tea bags e.g. PG Tips
White/ brown sugar / sweeteners (1tsp per person or to taste)
Optional: 1 tbsp. fennel seeds

Utensils

1 big cooking pot
1 pestle and mortar
1 stainless steel sieve
Measuring cups
Mugs

Method

- Bring water to boil on a medium heat
- Crush the cardamom, cloves, cinnamon, and ginger in the pestle and mortar and add to the boiling water. Let simmer for 5 minutes
- Add the teabags into the water and simmer for another 5 minutes.
- Pour in the milk and bring back to the boil. The chai will rise with foam to the rim of the pot. Once this happens lower the heat and allow tea to settle back down. Once settled, turn the heat up again.
- Repeat 4-5 times. This is a crucial part of making chai – it mixes the spices and creams the milk. There isn't a word in English for this but in Panjabi it is recognised as 'ubalana'.
- Strain through a fine sieve (strainer) into cups and serve hot. Add sugar as desired.

Tip: the longer you boil the chai on a low heat, the more flavoursome it will become. You can re-use the sieved spices for making chai again, but use fresh teabags.

Parvinder Marwaha – Founder, Daalston

Oat cake recipe: cheap, easy, healthy, yummy

Prep time: 10 mins

Baking: 35 mins

Total time: 45 mins

Ingredients for 32 slices

300g porridge oats
600 ml boiling water
4 ripe bananas (2 mashed, 2 sliced)
150g date paste (or chopped dates)

Instructions

Preheat the oven to 180°C.

Take a medium square cake pan and cover it with oven paper. Spread a teaspoon of cooking oil across the oven paper.

In a separate pan, mix the date paste and 4 tablespoons of boiling water on a low flame. Stir it until the date paste melts. Set aside.

In the cake pan, add in porridge oats and pour 600ml boiling water on top, until it gets creamy. Stir and let it soak until the mixture has cooled down. Add melted dates paste to the mixture.

Mix mashed bananas into the oats with your hands, until well combined.

Spread the mixture evenly across the cake pan. Make it thick and compact with your hands.

Arrange the sliced banana rounds on top of the cake.

Bake it for 35-40 minutes.

Cool it down to room temperature.

You can top with blueberries, or any seeds as well as nuts.

Saba Tadesse – Member services volunteer, NFS London



Chickpea Curry

Ingredients for 100 portions

30x 400g tins of chickpeas
 3 cups of vegetable oil
 1/2 cup of ginger root – minced
 1/4 cup of green chillies – minced
 5kg of white onions – sliced
 1/2 cup of salt
 1/2 cup of paprika
 1/2 cup of tandoori masala
 1/4 cup of garam masala
 1/4 cup of cumin seeds
 4 cinnamon sticks
 4 black cardamom
 10 cloves
 6x 400g tins of tomatoes
 2 litres water approx
 4 red onions – sliced to garnish
 1/2 cup of butter – cubed
 1 big bunch of coriander – chopped

Method

Heat the oil on low heat in a pan. Add white onions to the pan with the cumin seeds, cloves, cinnamon sticks and black cardamoms.

When the onions are caramelised, about 10-15 minutes, add the ginger and green chillies.

Next, add the tomatoes and stir.

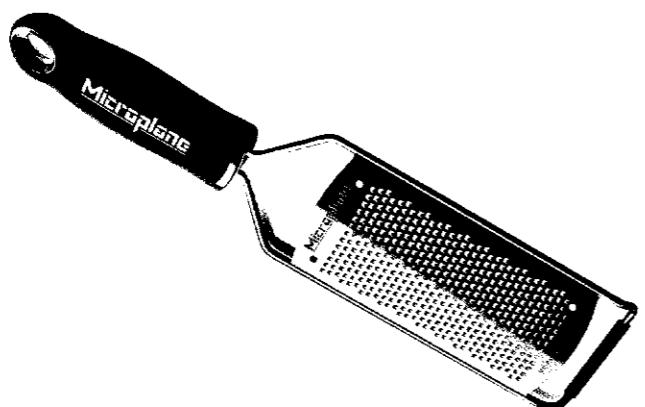
Add the salt, garam masala, tandoori masala and paprika. Mix it all well.

Empty the chickpeas in a colander, strain off and wash well. Pour the chickpeas into the sauce. Add 2 litres of water.

Let it simmer for 20-25 minutes making sure there's a sauce. Add some more water if it looks a little dry.

Turn the cooker off.

Garnish with chopped coriander, sliced red onions and the butter.



Mixed Yoghurt

Ingredients for 100 portions

10x 500g pots of Greek style yogurt
 5 cucumbers
 10 red onions
 2 tablespoons of salt
 2 tablespoons of pepper
 1 tablespoon of cumin seeds
 2 pints of milk
 Small bunch of coriander chopped

Method

1. Grate the cucumber and onion.
2. Squeeze the excess water out of it using a clean tea towel.
3. Mix it in with the yoghurt.
4. Pour the milk into the yogurt mixture.
5. Add cumin seeds, black pepper and salt.
6. Mix it together.
7. Garnish with coriander.

Cooking for me is Seva which means selfless service. It involves acting selflessly and helping others in a variety of ways. It is part of my daily routine. It brings me immense pleasure and happiness to cook and feed others in the community. This isn't cooking for me. It is LOVE which we should share with one another.

Amrit Singh and Anita Kaur

My granddaughter is 7 years old and this is what she would like to express about cooking:

All the food we cook
 Is all the love we make
 To make the best for you
 And I also want to say
 Is please stay safe.
 I really want to say
 Cooking makes me feel
 So much enjoyment
 And whatever I cook
 I fill with love and kindness.

Heerni Kaur Dhillon



Using a glut of kale

Kale pesto keeps well in the fridge, goes well with many dishes, makes a quick and delicious pasta companion, and is highly nutritious.

The recipe is flexible – all varieties of kale work well (our favourite is Cavalo Nero). For the seeds and nuts, use what you prefer or what you have in your kitchen. Same with the oil, we use a mix of olive oil & sunflower to be more economical. The measurements are based on a standard-size, home food processor, but you could use a stick blender or pestle and mortar.

Ingredients for 2 litres

1 tray kale, washed and stalks removed - can be used in other recipes
2 bulb garlic
1 kg seeds / nuts
500ml oil (half olive / half sunflower)
Salt to taste

Method

- First, blanch the kale in a pot of boiling water for a few minutes. Set aside to drain and cool.
- In a food processor put a handful of seeds or nuts. We used pumpkin seeds in this batch.
- Add 2 garlic cloves and half a teaspoon of salt. Blitz in the processor.
- Squeeze the kale to remove some water, add to fill the processor. Blitz again.
- Now while the processor is running add oil gradually until you reach your desired consistency. Try a spoon, adjust seasoning to taste.
- Pour into a clean container. Repeat this process until all kale is done.
- Top up your pesto with oil to cover it (which helps to preserve it) and store in the fridge for up to 5 days.

Hey pesto!

David Latto – The Gleaners Café, Walthamstow



Inspiration for surplus veg and ingredients

Daikon (white radish)

For several consecutive weeks we received endless amounts of daikon. Our creative mission: to use them in the tastiest ways possible. Here are a few ideas to get your daikon on!

- A classic idea is to pickle them in a solution of white wine/cider vinegar, water, sugar and salt. The result is great as an accompaniment to anything spicy or fried, as a garnish, or in a mixed salad. The leftover liquor makes a super dressing for slaws, rice or salads too.
- Shred into noodles and toss in a miso ginger dressing, adding roasted sesame seeds, coriander, spring onions, cucumber and tofu (for texture) or stir fry and use as a riff on pad thai.
- Lightly tossed in a tahini sauce with mixed herbs, roasted seeds and nuts. The leaves are equally delicious tossed through salads or stir fried.
- Turn into 'fries': cut into batons, toss in a paste made from fresh ginger, chilies, tamari or soy sauce, rapeseed oil, sugar and salt then roast until golden.
- Also great raw as a slaw, braised in a curry or used in place of celery in stews or soups.

Pink radishes

Delicious seared/griddled or barbecued as part of a salad, or sliced raw within a dish to add an extra peppery layer.

Courgettes

Cut into thick slices and cook in boiling salted water until very tender. Drain well in a colander, using a saucepan lid or plate to help remove excess water. Roughly chop and toss with a generous amount of lemon juice, olive oil, herbs and spices. Great with mixed grains, pulses or as a pasta sauce. It's a really tasty dish that requires little effort, yet produces maximum flavour.

Lemons / limes / oranges / clementines

Max out on flavour: remove the zest with a peeler and infuse in light olive oil before juicing the fruits. Use the lemon oil to flavour pasta, in salad dressings or in a nut/seed pesto.

Sunflower and pumpkin seeds

Toss in oil, season with salt, ground cumin, smoked paprika and a pinch of chilli, then roast. Use to add flavor and texture to salad and grains.

Tahini

Make a simple sauce with crushed garlic, a pinch of cumin, squeeze of lemon juice, salt and water. It's great with roasted veg or the above courgette idea. Blend with excess/wilting herbs to give extra flavor.

Maria Elia – Community Cook and NFS London volunteer

8 plant-based recipes

Tahini, boiled courgette and lemon pasta

This is a super straightforward recipe, inspired by Maria, it is more of a light summery dish but can easily be put on the side of any stew that will complement a zesty lemon flavour, which is basically everything.... Right?

Ingredients for 30 portions

4kg dry pasta (whatever we have on site)
4kg courgettes – quartered
1kg lemons – zested, then reserve the juice
500ml olive oil
500g tahini
1kg sunflower & pumpkin seeds

Method

- Start by boiling the pasta, as per the instructions of whatever pasta you are using, If there are no instructions then boil in some salty water and taste until it is cooked to your preference. (10-12 mins).
- Heat more water in a pot large enough to take the courgettes.
- Boil the courgettes until soft.
- When soft, use a colander and squeeze out all the liquid.
- Now for your dressing. Place olive oil, lemon zest and juice, and tahini in a large bowl, then whisk together. Alternatively, you can blend all these together to save time using a blender or food processor.
- Place the sunflower & pumpkin seeds on a tray in the oven for around 2-3 mins. These do not need long to toast so don't take your eye off them for too long.
- Dish assembly:
 - In a large container, place your pasta and courgette pulp.
 - Pour over your zesty dressing and mix well.
 - Sprinkle a generous amount of toasted seeds over the top.
 - Season with salt and pepper and mix again.
 - Portion out into containers ready to be delivered.

Nancy O'Neill – Freelance plant-based chef, NFS London volunteer

Bread and Butter Pudding

A true pudding staple from 2020 summer was bread and butter pudding! There always seemed to be copious amounts of bread when I came on shift for about a month. Here is an adapted vegan version.

Ingredients for 30 portions

60 slices bread
15 tbsp golden syrup (or any jam if there is some on site)
4.5l soya milk
600g sunflower spread
25 tbsp cornflour (or gram flour)
6 tbsp cinnamon
450g sultanas (or any dried fruit) (optional)

Method

- Slice the bread if it is not already pre-sliced.
- Melt the sunflower spread over low heat.
- Mix sunflower spread, milk, syrup, cornflour and cinnamon in a large pot and cook until you get a thick custard consistency (roughly 6 mins).
- Lay out the bread in a large baking tray. Try and slide half of one slice under the one before it, so you are creating a tier.
- Sprinkle the sultanas over the dry bread.
- Lastly pour the ‘custard’ over the bread and let it soak for a couple of minutes (roughly 10 mins).
- Place in the oven and bake until you get a crispy top.
- Ovens vary, on average around 180°C for 30 minutes will give you the desired crispy edges.

Nancy O'Neill – Freelance plant-based chef, NFS London volunteer

2/8

Zero-waste Flapjack

Ingredients for 25 portions

3kg mixed bruised fruit (e.g. apples, bananas, strawberries – anything!)
600g oats
450g coconut oil
120g coconut sugar
210g golden syrup
3 tbsp cinnamon or ginger powder

Method

- o Process all the fruit in a food processor. You still want to have some chunks of whatever fruit you are using for texture in the ‘jacks.
- o Melt the coconut oil in a bain-marie, or in a pyrex bowl over hot water.
- o Mix the first 5 ingredients together in a large bowl.
- o Place mixture in a baking tray and flatten out evenly into the edges.
- o Sprinkle spices over the top.
- o Bake on 180°C for roughly 30 mins, checking occasionally.
Allow to cool before portioning out.

Nancy O'Neill – Freelance plant-based chef, NFS London volunteer

3/8

Beetroot miso oat milk stew

Beetroot is one of my absolute favourite vegetables. It's really under appreciated and I strongly believe the best way to enjoy it is raw, though many do not agree with me, so I have adapted this dish to cater for more people's tastes. At the Castle Climbing Centre we used to get beetroots picked fresh that day from the community garden. This dish I hope champions the beauty of the root!

Ingredients for 30 portions

6kg beetroot – 5kg peeled and cut into chunks / 1kg into small cubes
4 litres oat milk
3 litres water + vegetable bouillon
200g miso paste
300ml olive oil
1kg leeks (or onion) - sliced
2kg cauliflower - cut into bite sized pieces, stalk included (save leaves for couscous recipe below!)
1kg rainbow chard - washed and sliced
3kg pearl barley
15 bay leaves

Method

- ✓ Boil the pearl barley in salty water with the bay leaves.
- ✓ Roast 5kg of beetroot with some oil, salt and pepper until soft.
- ✓ Mix 3L of water with 3 tbsp of Bouillon veg stock powder, whisk together
- ✓ Add the miso paste to the 'stock' and mix.
- ✓ When the beetroot in the oven is cooked, remove and allow to cool a little.
- ✓ When cool, blend with the oat milk using a food processor or stick blender.
- ✓ If more liquid is needed, add in a little of the stock mixture.
- ✓ In a large pan, cook off the leek in some oil, salt and pepper for 1 minute.
- ✓ Add the cauliflower and cubed beetroot, cook for a further 2 minutes.
- ✓ Add the beet puree mix, cook for 10 mins, until cauliflower is slightly soft.
- ✓ Portion out, with half pearl barley, half stew per container.

Nancy O'Neill – Freelance plant-based chef, NFS London volunteer

Apple & Thyme Olive Oil Cake

Apple + Olive oil + Thyme is a combination that can never go wrong!

Ingredients for 4 bread tin sized cakes (30-40 portions)

8 apples – core removed, skin on
280ml olive oil
200ml milk of choice
20 sprigs thyme
280g sugar of choice
800g flour (any)
4 tsp baking soda
2 tsp salt
4 tbsp apple cider vinegar

Method

- ▷ Blend two apples with the oil, milk, sugar and thyme.
- ▷ Prepare remaining apples into cubes.
- ▷ Mix flour and baking soda.
- ▷ Add the wet ingredients to the dry and mix well.
- ▷ Grease a bread tin, dust with sugar and flour.
- ▷ Pour mixture into the tin.
- ▷ Bake on 180°C for 40-45mins.
- ▷ Allow cake to cool before cutting
- ▷ You should get between 8-10 portions per cake

Nancy O'Neill – Freelance plant-based chef, NFS London volunteer

Choc Avo Mousse and Oat Crumble

If you ever get avocados donated, it usually isn't just one or two – it's usually kilos worth! So here is a simple quick recipe other than guacamole which can be whipped up. I made this one day when a corner shop just by the Castle kindly donated 12 punnets of blackberries on my way to start my shift. The shop clerk was about to throw out some avocados when I stopped him and asked if I could take them... and after thought, "Great! Now what am I going to do with these?!" The story of my life, trying to think of ways to transform fruit and veg that are on their last legs into an edible dish.

Mousse

Ingredients for 15 / 40+ portions

5 / 20 avocados – just the green flesh
100g / 400g blackberries – sliced
500g / 2kg coconut milk (or any)
250g / 1kg sugar
600g / 2.4kg cacao powder
500g / 2kg golden syrup
40ml / 160ml coconut oil (must be solid)

Method

- In a food processor, blend the avocado, coconut milk, sugar and golden syrup.
- Melt the coconut oil.
- This can be easily made without the blackberries and is just as delicious, or you can substitute with any other berries on hand.
- Add the cacao powder and coconut oil.
- Fold through the blackberries but DO NOT BLEND.

Basic Crumble Topping

Ingredients for	15+portions	40 portions
Oats	750g	2.2kgs
Almonds*	250g	750g
Coconut sugar*	200g	600g
Coconut oil*	350g	1kg

*or any version you have on-site

Method

- ☛ Melt coconut oil.
- ☛ Blend or chop the almonds (or any nuts/seeds). This recipe can also be made without nuts to reduce allergens
- ☛ Mix all ingredients together in a large bowl.
- ☛ Place on a baking tray and bake at 160°C for 10 mins.
- ☛ Portion the mousse out into containers and top with crumble.

Nancy O'Neill – Freelance plant-based chef, NFS London volunteer

6/8



Processing ingredients on the Community Cooks Programme

Herby, Zesty Couscous, Smoky Cauliflower and Crispy Lentils

The herbs in this recipe can any fresh or dried you have on-site. If there are no herbs on-site then it can be done with just the orange and lemon juices and zest.

Ingredients for 20 portions

500g couscous
500g French lentils (option to fry if there is time)
6 lemons – zested and and reserve juice
6 oranges – zested and reserve juice
100g rocket
50g coriander – roughly chopped
50g parsley – roughly chopped
3 heads cauliflower – cut into bitesize chunks, slice the stem, keep leaves
100g smoked paprika
25g ground coriander
50g maple / golden syrup
100g olive oil
1 tsp each salt and pepper

Method

- Cook couscous in 750ml salted water on medium heat (around 10 mins).
- Cook french lentils in 1.5 litres salted water (around 15-20 mins).
- ~ Drain both and allow to cool. Reserve water for stock, soup etc.
- Mix olive oil, smoked paprika, ground coriander, golden syrup, salt and pepper in a bowl.
- Roast the Cauliflower leaves with some oil, salt and pepper at 160°C for 10-15 mins.
- Toss cauliflower florets in the bowl with oil and paprika mixture.
- ~ Roast for 10-12 mins at 180°C.
- Mix the couscous, lentils, herbs, lemon juice and zest, orange juice and zest, some salt and pepper.
- Portion out $\frac{3}{4}$ couscous mix to $\frac{1}{4}$ roasted cauliflower per container.
- Place a few cauliflower leaves on the top of each meal.
- ~ Option to drizzle some tahini over the whole dish at the end.

Nancy O'Neill – Freelance plant-based chef, NFS London volunteer

Sumac, Aubergine and Tomato Stew with Quinoa

This dish is always a crowd pleaser, but personally I am not a fan of aubergines. I find them quite ‘leathery’, but in this dish I must say I can’t get enough of them. The aubergine is so tender and when paired with the subtle bitterness of sumac it really just works.

Also fun fact, did you know an aubergine is actually a fruit

Ingredients for 30+ portions

4kg aubergine – cubed
2 large or 10 small tinned tomatoes
1kg white onion – sliced
400g garlic – sliced
250g sumac (maybe more, taste as you go)
250g olive oil
3kg quinoa
50g sugar
Salt and pepper to taste

Method

- Saute onions with some oil, salt and pepper (10 mins).
- Add the garlic to the pan once the onions are transparent. Cook for 5 mins.
- Add the aubergine and saute for a further 10 mins. You may need to add a little water and pop a lid on top of the pan to stop it from getting too dry. Stir occasionally.
- Meanwhile, open tins of tomatoes and blend with olive oil, some salt and pepper, sumac and 100g of garlic.
- When the aubergine is slightly tender, add the tomato sauce and continue to cook with the lid on for another 15 mins.
- Taste and add more sumac, salt or pepper if needed.
- Add the quinoa after 15 mins and continue to cook for a further 10-15mins, until the quinoa is cooked.
- Taste and adjust seasoning as needed.
- Portion out into containers.
- If there are some salad leaves laying around, its always good to use them up and they can be placed in the container also, or by the side of the stew.

Nancy O'Neill – Freelance plant-based chef, NFS London volunteer

Veggie Burgers

Recipe from OrganicLea and Hornbeam Café, amended from version originally published in NLWA's Food Lover's Handbook

Ingredients for 45 portions

25 slices old bread, for breadcrumbs
 7 onions – chopped
 7 cloves of garlic – chopped
 7tbsp oil
 14tbsp flour
 Herbs (whatever you have or whatever you like)
 7 eggs
 7 cups leftover vegetables – diced (carrot, peas, or sweetcorn, etc.)

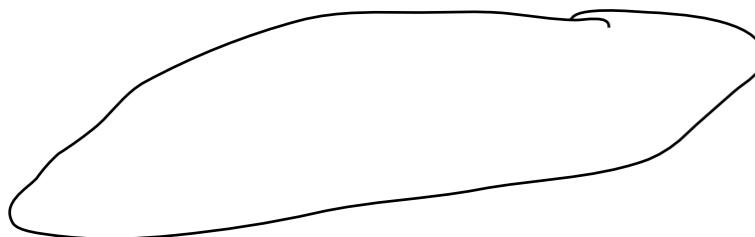
Method

Mix all the ingredients together except the flour and oil, mashing the beans with your hands while mixing and mould into balls the size of an egg.

Put the flour on a plate. Coat the balls with a thin layer of flour and then create a flattened burger shape

The burgers can be fried or baked. If frying, place oil in a pan under a moderate heat and cook the burgers for about five minutes each side.

If baking, preheat the oven to 200°C (gas mark 6), place on a tray with a drizzle of oil and bake for 15 – 20 minutes.



Cheesy Pesto Pasta

Recipe from Federico Lusi as originally printed in NLWA's Food Lover's Handbook

Ingredients for 45 portions

2 bunches fresh parsley – chopped
 5kg leftover or fresh and then cooled pasta
 15 spring onions – chopped
 3.5kg pitted olives
 2.5kg cherry tomatoes
 500g grated parmesan
 Mozzarella (however much you can find)
 1kg green pesto
 400g mayonnaise

Method

- Combine parsley, spring onions, olives, cherry tomatoes, and mozzarella cut into chunks
- Combine vegetables and cheese with pasta and parmesan
- Add pesto and mayonnaise and mix well to combine
- Add salt and pepper to taste!



Breaking down surplus fruit on Community Cooks Programme

Music in the Kitchen

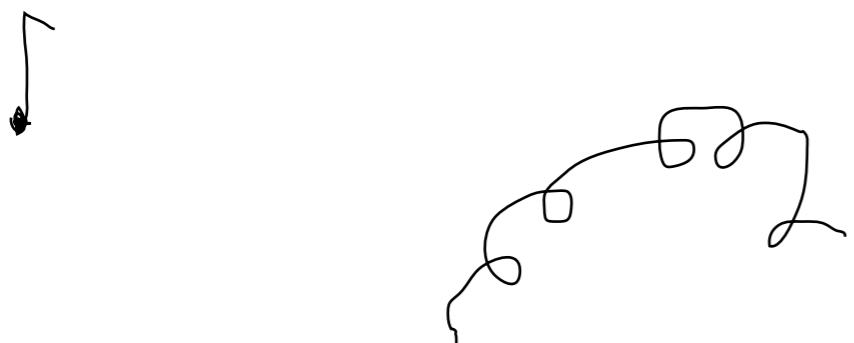
Just like the food we eat, music is a major part of culture – in many traditions, song and dance is central to any community gathering. In every kitchen across the land, music can lift spirits, relieve stress, drag you through a tough service, find common ground between co-workers, and be a cause for celebration. Food and music are both languages of love, so it's only right we share ours with you.

We've assembled a playlist of submissions from cooks, farmers, growers, and volunteers alike! The playlist will grow and evolve over time so we highly encourage you to write to Will at wdmd93@gmail.com to have your songs added to the list!

Here's a selection of the songs on the playlist:

"Murnong Farm" by Allara
"Buttered Popcorn" by The Supremes
"Sugar, Sugar" by The Archies
"Country Pie" by Bob Dylan
"Evan Finds the Third Room" by Khurangbin
"Sweet Things" by Mocky
"Maajo" by Maajo
"We Are the People" by Empire of the Sun
"Cooking a Way to Be Happy" by Eat Skull
"Somaiko Somaina" by Jaojoby
"R U Mine?" by Arctic Monkeys
"Glada" by Future Islands
"Highwomen" by The Highwomen
"Rome" by Dojo Cuts
"Fried Neck Bones and Some Home Fries" by Willie Bobo

You can find it on Spotify titled: "Community Cooks Playlist" or by following this link: https://open.spotify.com/playlist/0W2rGYGwqdRrLf2wGEF6mg?si=u_X053FvRgGY4Pk_SOZ_0Q



Trying to Run a Successful Self-funding Worker's Co-op

This piece has been submitted by Alex Lee of The Gleaners Café in Walthamstow. We feel it's a really important piece of writing to help us understand the details and methods in running a project that puts the need of its workers at the forefront and upholds clear ethics and missions. This is a progressive business model that we will be seeing much more of in the near future.

The Gleaners is a pay-what-you-feel community café run on quality surplus produce, based at the Hornbeam Centre in Walthamstow, London.

Although we are not-for-profit, we don't rely on funding to stay afloat, and we're trying to make our pay-what-you-feel model financially sustainable. For us, this is a journey, and we are still working on the best ways to achieve it, but would like to share some of our learnings so far.

First, it's good to be clear about why we decided to run in this way, and what motivates us to continue. We believe that a community café can and should be a stable and positive part of a vibrant local economy built on solidarity, not charity, which creates meaningful livelihoods for people while increasing access to tasty, healthy food within the community. For us, this means providing an inclusive social eating space that is not segregated based on economic circumstance, where everyone contributing what is affordable to them adds up to build a community café shared by all. We feel that this kind of approach can help to build stronger, more resilient communities, in which those who can afford to pay more recognise their privilege and use their resources to help resist, rather than drive, gentrification.

The realities of achieving this vision are complex -- even more so during the pandemic -- and so many of the ways we run the café are specifically designed to build our resilience to financial instability. And it's no coincidence that many of these cost saving approaches emerge from the social and environmental values that form the foundations of our workings. Below some of the key organisational decisions that help us to operate sustainably:



We run primarily on surplus produce, which keeps our food purchasing costs really very low – around £150 allows us to serve approximately 1000 meals per week, so that's 15p per meal! Using surplus also allows us to make clear the links between overproduction, waste, and lack of access to affordable, healthy food in our community. The surplus we use comes to us for free, and ranges from deliveries from larger food waste redistributors like The Felix Project, Fareshare, and City Harvest, through local supermarkets, independent stores, makers, and wholesalers, to local allotments and residents, and even farms.



⦿ The small amount of ingredients that we do have to buy, we purchase in bulk from wholesalers. This seems obvious, but makes a big difference in savings! We buy from Infinity Foods. If you can't afford a minimum spend, consider teaming up with another community kitchen.

⦿ We run as a workers' cooperative. That means we are owned and controlled by our workers, running a non-hierarchical workplace in which power and decision-making is shared through a democratic process founded on participation, inclusion, respect, and transparency. The practicalities of this in terms of financial sustainability are that we can decide together how to use our funds, including those of us with more financial stability delaying wage payments to make sure any workers struggling more can be paid sooner.

⦿ The workers' cooperative at the core of the café is supported by a team of amazing local volunteers, who give their time to support the café to exist. Without this incredible voluntary effort, we wouldn't have been able to support our community in the way that we have through the pandemic, continuing to encompass the values of our model while adapting to change. We try to provide a sense of exchange for their hard work by encouraging all volunteers to take surplus groceries home, saving a bit of extra time and money in the process. We also involve all volunteers in our decision making, which helps to create a supportive and cohesive team where everyone feels valued and we learn from each other.

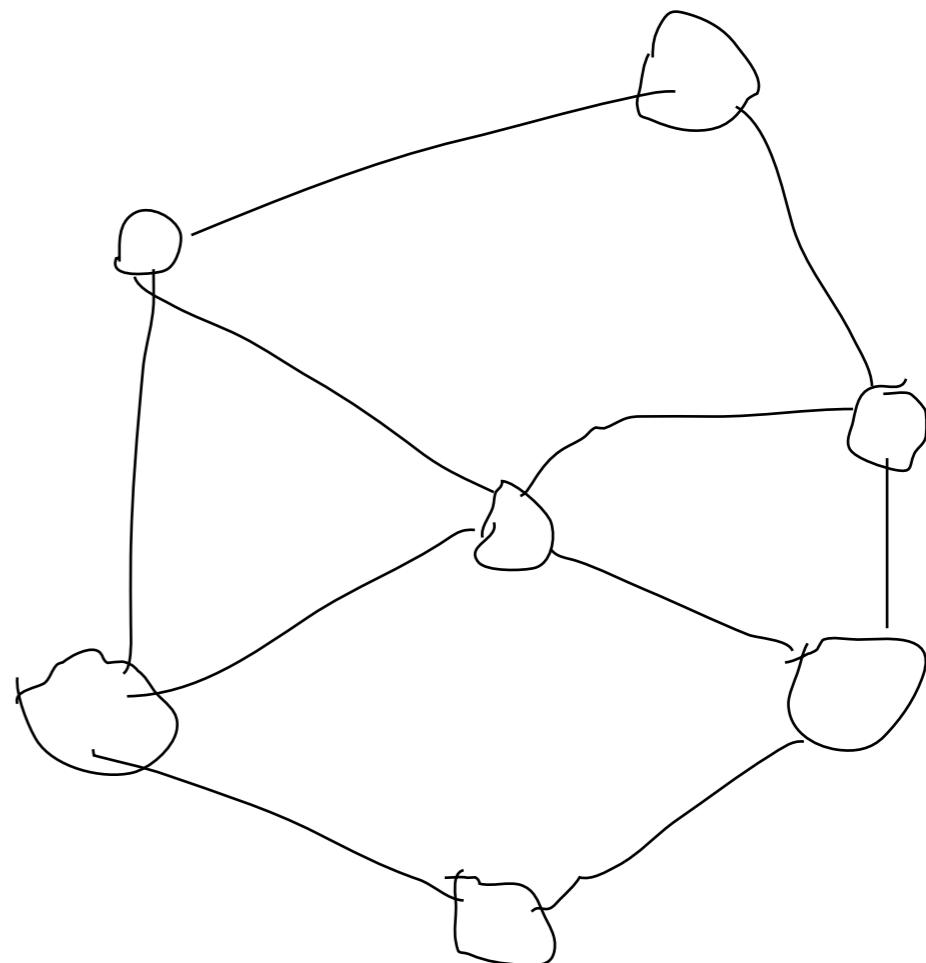
⦿ At the beginning of the pandemic, we lost a huge amount of our daily income, as most of our customers who would pay a little more also had more food security, and so were able to stay safe at home. Over the subsequent months, we primarily supported those struggling with food security, who came to the café to get lunch and groceries most days. We responded to this by setting up a Crowdfunder, which kept us afloat over the first lockdown and beyond. Now, we are partnering with Open Collective, a platform for setting up regular payments to support community projects. We feel this sits better with our values of participation and solidarity, since local residents can sign up to give regular payments in exchange for deliveries of our meals and other creations without having to come to our door. We're hopeful that this will be instrumental in our sustainability through the next lockdown and beyond.

⦿ We benefit hugely from working with the community centre in which the café space is situated, and would suggest that this approach can be really fruitful and mutually beneficial. Although we are independent from the community centre in our governance and finances, we are supported in a range of really important ways, including subsidised rent and utilities (waived during covid), access to pre-existing surplus food networks, and the occasional funding support which can help us to stay afloat while working on our longer-term financial sustainability.

⦿ We try to be resourceful, low-waste, and low-impact in every little thing we do, which also acts to reduce our costs. This includes many small but important details like never using (or buying) cling film or plastic bags, finding most of our equipment second hand (on Gumtree, eBay, Freecycle, or other marketplaces), spending that extra bit of time working through our veg and other produce so that we only discard what is spoiled, and using all edible parts of our produce (cauliflower leaves are delicious, and lemon peel is as important as juice!).

⦿ Finally, we have learned (and are still learning) the fundamental importance of clear communication with our community. We can't expect people to engage in our model, and play their part in its success, unless we are really clear about what it is that we are doing.

We're always up for a chat with other groups who'd like to set up a community café in a similar way. Please get in touch if you'd like – aleex19@gmail.com



A Day at The Gleaners



Joyce Adebawale – volunteer at The Gleaners Café, Walthamstow

Glossary of Key Terms

Arable – land that can be used for agriculture

Access (food) – The FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization) defines this as “access by individuals to adequate resources (entitlements) for acquiring appropriate foods for a nutritious diet. Entitlements are defined as the set of all commodity bundles over which a person can establish command given the legal, political, economic and social arrangements of the community in which they live (including traditional rights such as access to common resources)” Put simply, this means that people have the genuine ability to get the foods they need to eat a nutritious diet, for example the money to buy food or land, tools and seeds to cultivate food.

Anti-ableist – Simmons University defines this as “strategies, theories, actions, and practices that challenge and counter ableism, inequalities, prejudices, and discrimination based on developmental, emotional, physical, or psychiatric v/v(dis)ability.”

Anti-racist – Robert J. Patterson, professor of African American Studies at Georgetown University defines anti-racism as “an active and conscious effort to work against multidimensional aspects of racism”. Anti-racism implies action

Autonomy – the right and ability for a person or community to make the decisions which directly affect them

Availability (food) – The FAO defines this as “the availability of sufficient quantities of food of appropriate quality, supplied through domestic production or imports (including food aid).”

BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) – this term is used as an abbreviation to refer to people who are Black, Indigenous, or Persons of Color

Boil down – the exact meaning of something. Also a kitchen pun!

Carbon sequestration – the process of taking atmospheric CO₂ and storing it as carbon in the ground. This reverses the greenhouse effect

Communal eating – The act of eating together. We believe that bringing people together over food through communal meals is a fundamental part of a thriving community, where each individual’s food needs are met. Eating together has many social benefits as well.

Community garden – spaces set aside within communities to grow food. Greenleaf Communities says “social ties are important to the wellbeing of people in a community since they can bring positive health effects and community involvement. Community gardens allow for the creation of social ties and build a greater feeling of community.”

Community self-organised – initiatives that are organized by the same community that will utilise them. This is in contrast to charities or organizations that come into a community to help them, rather than members of the community who create their own initiative to benefit the community directly.

Consumerism – pressure or desire to continually acquire goods or services without any real purpose or limit. The use of people or things without thinking about the larger context, the only consideration is their/its direct utility to your needs.

Co-operative – alternative business model where according to Oxford dictionaries “a farm, business, or other organization which is owned and run jointly by its members, who share the profits or benefits”

Decolonisation – BC Campust defines this as “...the process of deconstructing colonial ideologies of the superiority and privilege of Western thought and approaches. On the one hand, decolonization involves dismantling structures that perpetuate the status quo and addressing unbalanced power dynamics. On the other hand, decolonization involves valuing and revitalizing Indigenous knowledge and approaches and weeding out settler biases or assumptions that have impacted Indigenous ways of being.”

Extraction – the removal of something, specifically a non-renewable resource without giving anything back in return. Extraction goes in one direction and is the opposite of circular systems that prioritise minimal impact.

Feminism – there are a number of different discourses within the term ‘feminism’, many contradictory. The Oxford English Dictionary defines feminism as the “advocacy of equality of the sexes and the establishment of the political, social, and economic rights of the female sex; the movement associated with this”. While this definition needs further discussion and critique - a topic too large to discuss in a glossary! - we will make two things clear about our use of the term in this handbook. Firstly, all feminism must be intersectional feminism (see Intersectionality). Secondly, this term is trans-inclusive; we reject Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism (TERF). We fight for the rights of our non-binary, transgender and QTPOC (Queer, Trans and Intersex People of Colour) siblings.

Food Security – The World Food Summit 2002 definition of food security is ‘a situation that exists when all people, at all times, have physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences for an active and healthy life.’

Food Sovereignty – Global Justice Now defines this as “food sovereignty allows communities control over the way food is produced, traded and consumed. It could create a food system that is designed to help people and the environment rather than make profits for multinational corporations.”

Food waste – Think. Eat. Save. defines this as “food Loss refers to food that gets spilled, spoilt or otherwise lost, or incurs reduction of quality and value during its process in the food supply chain before it reaches its final product stage. Food loss typically takes place at production, post-harvest, processing, and distribution stages in the food supply chain”.

GMOs (Genetically modified organisms) – seeds or plants whose DNA has been artificially modified to produce certain traits. Companies copyright this DNA and therefore have total ownership over the seeds and technology they produce. Few studies have shown GMOs to produce a health risk to humans. However, GMO will mean that whole field of plants has exactly the same DNA – a total monoculture and an environmental risk.

Hierarchy – the idea that certain individuals or groups should be placed above or below other groups comparatively. We want to highlight the difference between hierarchy that allows one person/group to control another vs. those that work together based on mutual-consent.

Horizontally-organised – organisations which have less managers and leaders and instead distribute most authority among its members. The result is empowered people who have the ability to act on decisions that directly affect them.

Intersectionality – an analytical framework, coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, “for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages. It takes into account people’s overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices they face” (Oxford Dictionary)

“Kill two birds with one stone” – this saying means to accomplish two different goals with one action.

Monoculture – the opposite of crop diversity. A field which has only one species of plant growing in it at a time. I.e. A field of corn in Iowa, U.S.A.

Mutual aid – voluntary exchange of goods, resources, ideas, etc. in a reciprocal relationship. At the NFS this means not paying for emergency food but instead looking to volunteer and take part in the preparation of the food. Everyone gives and takes according to their own self-determined needs.

Mycorrhizal fungi – underground networks of fungi which aid in plant nutrition, soil biodiversity, and overall ecosystem health. Without these fungi, soil cannot be healthy nor fertile.

Neurodivergence – Disabled World defines this as “an approach to learning and disability that argues diverse neurological conditions are the result of normal variations in the human genome”. This language is more respectful than ‘disorder, disease, or deficit’.

Nutrient-dense – foods or ingredients which contain many essential nutrients for physical and mental health. Dishes which provide someone with a diversity of important nutrients.

Permaculture – a theory of design based on Indigenous knowledge that seeks to design gardens, houses, communities, cities, etc. in a way which minimizes waste and maximizes sustainability.

Photosynthesis – chemical reaction that takes place in the leaves of plants which takes CO₂, light, and water and converts it into food for the plant. A by-product of this process is the release of oxygen into the atmosphere.

Privatisation – when publicly owned businesses are purchased by private enterprises. The history of privatisation is rooted in progressively less land and resources being owned by normal people or in the public trust but rather consolidating these essential things in the hands of businesses that seek to derive profit from them.

Queer – is defined by Stonewall as “a term used by those wanting to reject specific labels of romantic orientation, sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It can also be a way of rejecting the perceived norms of the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans) community (racism, sizeism, ableism etc). Although some LGBT people view the word as a slur, it was reclaimed in the late 80s by the queer community who have embraced it.” The term is associated with radical LGBTQIA+ politics.

Radical – a person, idea, community, organization, etc. that seeks to fundamentally and thoroughly change the social and political composition of a society, community, business, etc.

Reciprocity – both a value and an action. Rather than only taking and receiving, reciprocity is rooted in both giving and receiving, as well as the abundance of Earth's resources which should be shared equitably and respectfully.

Regenerative agriculture – using Indigenous principles of land management to work in harmony with livestock to fix carbon into the soil through controlled grazing. The result is nutrient-dense produce and reversing climate change.

Resilient – people, systems, communities which have the ability to withstand difficulties or challenges. Resiliency is made up of many different principles, among them: diversity, sustainability, mutual support, mental health.

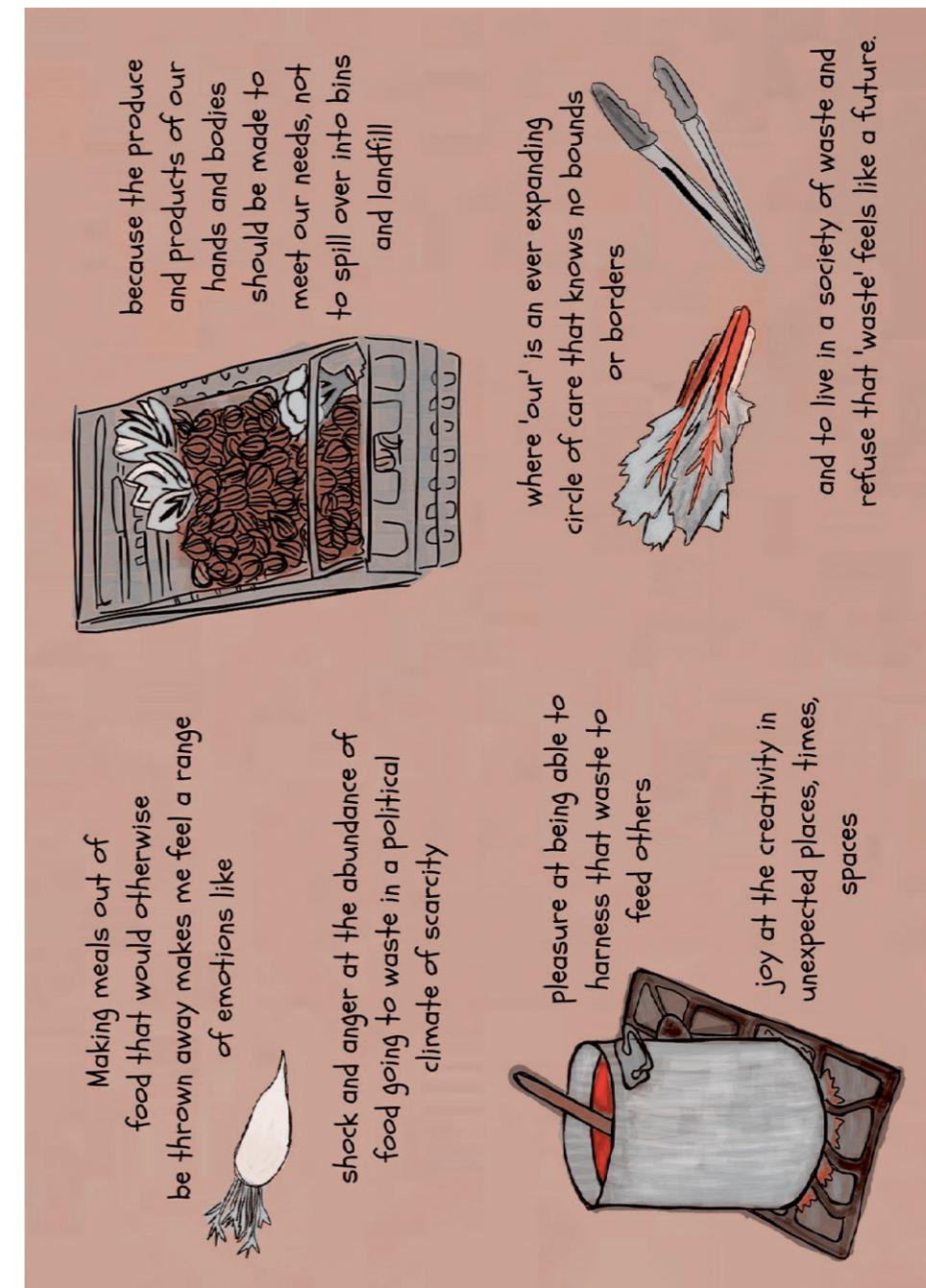
Solidarity – people or groups working together without hierarchy towards a common interest. Solidarity is an action.

Sustainable – a business, system, ecosystem, relationship, etc. which can exist in the current form indefinitely without doing so at the expense of other peoples, places, things, etc.

Throwaway culture – a society based around single-use and disposable materials end up in landfill, rather than the production of resilient goods or education around fixing, reuse and recycling.

“Too many cooks spoil the broth” – phrase which suggests that too many people working on the same thing can create confusion and chaos.

Utilisation (food) – The FAO defines this as “utilization of food through adequate diet, clean water, sanitation and health care to reach a state of nutritional well-being where all physiological needs are met. This brings out the importance of non-food inputs in food security.”



Jess Kumwongpin-Barnes – Illustrator and cook, NFS London volunteer

Biographies

The following contributors opted to provide a bio for the publication of this handbook:

Hari Byles – Hari Byles is a researcher, grower and compostist with a focus is on accessibility, sustainability, soil care and alternative sanitation. They are a member of @compost_mentis_coop & Queer Ecologies.

Aileen Cooney – I am London born & bred although a part-time Tokyoite. I work in chemistry research and enjoy cooking (cooking = chemistry ultimately!). I volunteer at The Gleaners Café in Walthamstow. Instagram: @aileen_milk

Will Dorman – Will is a chef, butcher, and climate and food sovereignty activist. He currently works as a columnist at The Preserve Journal and the Operations Manager at The Green Butcher in London. He also currently serves as one of the Directors for the National Food Service London. Instagram @will.dorman3

Maria Elia – Award winning author, chef, globe-trotting food consultant & proud participant of the fabulous NFS initiative
Books: Smashing Plates, The Modern Vegetarian & Full of Flavour
Instagram - @mariaelia9

The Gleaners – A pay-what-you-feel community café. Cooperatively run & using surplus produce. Based at the Hornbeam Centre, East London.
Instagram: @the_gleaners_cafe

Community cook, food activist and forager. NFS London Volunteer. Early development officer and first person to ever cook at Foodhall Sheffield. Food insta: @_dirty_beans

Ali Kakande - Founder of Carib Eats London

Jess Kumwongpin-Barnes – I'm a queer chef based in North London, who grew up in a Thai restaurant on the coast. I care deeply about migrant rights (NELMA), trans solidarity (@transzines) and food justice.

Parvinder Marwaha – I'm interested in socially-driven food and drink, and the role community and design play in this. I founded Daalston last year - a cross-cultural project using food to mobilise conversations about identity, migration, connection, sustenance and collective care. Instagram: @daalston.kitchen

Fiona McAllister – Fi McAllister coordinates Sustain's Capital Growth, London's community food growing network, and supports growing initiatives across the capital. Prior to working with Sustain, Fi worked with Growing Communities, an organic fruit and veg scheme based in Hackney. She has worked in a variety of community engagement roles with food growing projects in East London. She also teaches with Made in Hackney's community cookery programme.

Serda Mehmet – I'm Serda, a mother of 3 boys. We originally lived in Wood Green but moved to Enfield. I'm a teaching assistant, who loves baking. My Instagram page is @Fairycakesbysm

Nancy O'Neill – Nancy (Drew), insta handle @nancydrew2741, plant based chef, TRX and HIIT trainer. I enjoy rock climbing, skateboarding, cycling, yoga and any excuse to bake up a delicious batch of cookies/cakes.

Sean Roy Parker – I'm an artist, environmentalist and fermenting enthusiast, currently living in London but heading into the countryside. I've been working with food justice projects for almost three years and occasionally volunteer at NFS London. I also help with strategy and graphic design for National Food Service campaign. Instagram: @fermental_health

Amrit Singh – Hello My name is Amrit Singh. I am a loving housewife, mother and grandmother. I am a proud Indian Sikh woman, and in my spare time I enjoy going to the temple. I cook and enjoy serving others by doing Seva (selfless service). The temple is my sanctuary where I have learnt the practice of meditation and the importance of sharing, showing kindness and compassion to all. Donating food to the poor and homeless is also an important part of my life.

Saba Tadesse – Hello everyone, this is me:

Name: Saba
Identity: Eritrean-Italian
Aspiration: dance-fitness instructor and mindfulness teacher
Goal: help people change their mind with their body
Passions: dancing, knowledge
Interests: mindfulness, neuroscience
find me on instagram: @tadesse.saba

Cherry Truluck – Cherry Truluck is an artist and Creative Director of Custom Food Lab, an artist-led food organisation working with communities to achieve food security
www.customfoodlab.org
Instagram @customfoodlab
Twitter @customfolkes
Facebook @customfoodlab.org

Solidarity for a National Food Service

NFS