



FOOD HUB GUIDE



A guide for communities to take back control of their food system through creating regenerative food hubs.

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Project partners

Siolta Chroí Meaning Seeds of Heart in Irish

Our aim is to restore our ecosystems and communities. We do this through transformative educational experiences. Siolta Chroí has an environmental education centre where we run courses and retreats focused on ecosystem restoration and similar topics. We also run projects on these topics locally, regionally, nationally and on a European level. www.sioltachroi.ie



Ecosystem Restoration Communities

We're a global, grassroots movement of more than 60 ecosystem restoration initiatives repairing the earth to create a world of abundance, to provide humanity with hope and a better future. We bring everyday people together to restore degraded ecosystems from the ground up. We are an official partner to the UN Decade on Ecosystem Restoration. www.erc.earth



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**The revolution now
is growing good
food and eating
good food.**

Dr. Vandana Shiva





Purpose of this guide

- To support communities all over Europe and the world to take back control of their food system through creating regenerative food hubs.
- To support the creation of local, resilient food systems, that in turn benefit the web of life as opposed to depleting it - as we see in many cases with our current food systems.

How can we create a food system that is local, sovereign, nutritious, non toxic, and non processed? One that regenerates the ecosystems that we are part of, and that is not a privilege for just a few? Can we enable an alternative to the food system that currently dominates in the western world? This is what this guide seeks to provide guidance for - so that people, and communities, may be able to solve these critical questions.

This guide does not have all the answers, but shares the experiences of different people and communities that have been working on creating and running food hubs for a long time.



Who is the guide for?

This guide is for anyone who wants to tackle social and environmental issues. It is for people that want to create a fairer local and global community. But specifically:

- For farmers that want to get a fairer price for their produce and their work
- For families and community members that want access to food that is good for their family, the community and the planet
- For entrepreneurs who want to create a livelihood that focuses on environmental and social justice

Some potential motivations for starting a food hub

- Do you want to ensure that the food you eat and feed to your family is safe, healthy and nutritious?
- Do you want to impact both your local and global community in a strong and beneficial way?
- Do you want to target the root causes of climate change, biodiversity loss, social poverty, corporate greed and income inequality?
- Do you want to ensure that the food you buy supports the regeneration of our earth's ecosystems?
- Do you want to play your part in meeting the challenges that climate change presents?

Beyond sustainable and towards regenerative

Regeneration is building something back up. It is something that is getting better and better as time goes by, as opposed to worse and worse. The work undertaken by partners of this project supports many ecosystem restoration and regenerative agriculture initiatives around the world.



Food as a way of restoring ecosystems

Ecosystem restoration is about restoring the earth's ecosystems, about working together to heal ourselves and wider nature. And to increase and build back the ecosystem functionality of degraded landscapes.

This work restores the cycles that operate in nature, such as the carbon cycle, nutrient cycle, mineral cycle and the water cycle.

Functional and healthy ecosystems draw carbon down from the atmosphere and hold it in the soil and biomass. Restoring degraded land also increases local biodiversity and enables improvement of food-security and local livelihoods. It is important to note that ecosystem restoration also includes the restoration of humans and communities. Restoring ecosystems creates a world of abundance.





What is possible?

So, what is possible? It is very easy to be overwhelmed by the problems we face as a local and global community. And, while it is vital to understand the problems and how they are interconnected, simply having this understanding is not enough to bring about change. We need to find solutions and enact them.

Perhaps the best way to do that is to look to nature for her guidance? Imagine the possibilities if all of humanity started working with the web of life, rather than against it. One example we have is the Loess Plateau in China.

In the 1980's John D. Liu, Chinese American filmmaker and ecologist, documented a landscape-scale restoration project on the Loess Plateau. This plateau, as large as the entire nation of Belgium, was so degraded by deforestation and overgrazing that the soil was being washed off by the rain and entering the yellow river, giving it its name. There was so much silt in the river that at points you could walk across its surface. The World Bank and the Chinese government teamed up to pay the local people to stop grazing their animals, and to terrace the land and plant trees instead. What is so inspiring, is the fact that with the effort of many everyday people, a vast part of the planet was re-greened and brought back to life.

We highly recommend that you watch John's film, [Hope in a Changing Climate](#), to learn more. What this project proves, as showcased by the film, is that everyday people, when working together with the rest of life, can transform our earth and our own lives for the better, using ecosystem restoration and regenerative agriculture.



Learn more about the Loess Plateau Watershed Rehabilitation Project here



Sustainable Development Goals

The Sustainable Development Goals, also known as the Global Goals, are seventeen goals set out by all the countries in the world to be achieved between 2015 and 2030.

The SDGs are:

- 1.No poverty
- 2.Zero hunger
- 3.Good health and well-being
- 4.Quality education
- 5.Gender equality
- 6.Clean water and sanitation
- 7.Affordable and clean energy
- 8.Decent work and economic growth
- 9.Industry, innovation and infrastructure
- 10.Reduced inequalities
- 11.Sustainable cities and communities
- 12.Responsible consumption and production
- 13.Climate action
- 14.Life below water
- 15.Life on land
- 16.Peace, justice, and strong institutions
- 17.Partnerships for the goals

What is amazing to see, as documented in the film, is that - as a result of the ecosystem restoration work involving the Loess Plateau - twelve out of seventeen of the Sustainable Development Goals were very tangibly worked on: No poverty; Zero hunger; Good health and well-being; Quality education; Decent work and economic growth; Reduced inequalities; Sustainable cities and communities; Responsible consumption and production; Climate action; Life below water; Life on land; and Partnerships for the goals.





We need a new paradigm

Industrial agriculture is destroying our climate, our ecosystems, our communities and our health. Toxic chemicals, originally developed in connection with weaponry during the second world war, are sprayed on our food - making us sick, wiping out biodiversity, and pushing farmers into debt and even suicide. Much of the earth's soil is dead, and our food is losing its nutrients. We sorely need a new paradigm, one where small-scale, highly productive farms enable the growth of a diversity of foods, in ways that regenerate our ecosystems, our health, and earn a fair wage. One where communities can access real, nutrient-dense food, and are healthy and happy as a result. This is why we need food hubs, with their implicit function of aiding and facilitating regeneration.

For a powerful, and deeper exploration on this, we recommend this video:





Regenerative agriculture

In the western world, the concept of restoring agricultural land is known as regenerative agriculture. This is, the range of practices that build back healthy soil, increase biodiversity, sequester carbon and feed people nutrient-dense, non toxic food. Farms involved in these practices also support the farmer to get a fair wage for their work, by being paid fairly for their produce

But while regenerative farming is really important work, it is important to note that this so-called new way of farming is in many cases the way indigenous communities have been farming for hundreds, if not thousands of years.

Our western-centrism has its roots in colonialism - and it is this that has led us to many of the problems we face today. We can learn a tremendous amount, by honouring and understanding other worldviews, such as Ubuntu from Africa and Buen Vivir from Latin America.





Can local food systems feed the world?

Dr. Vandana Shiva responded to this question. She states that 80% of the food we eat currently is from small scale growers and mainly local. Only 20% is from large scale industrial systems.

The large scale industrial food systems don't produce food - they produce commodities. 90% of the corn and soy grown worldwide go to biofuel and animal feed.

Vandana says: "So when you ask, can small feed the world - it is the only way the world can be fed".





The food hub

What is a food hub?

For the purpose of this guide, a food hub is the digital/online equivalent of a farmers market where you would typically find food grown and supplied by a range of local farmers. It is a community of growers and producers who join together to sell their produce.

Additionally to locally grown food, this would include locally produced foods such as baked goods, preserves, etc, as well as other complimentary products such as local crafts. It can even include produce imported by a local wholesaler. There are no hard and fast rules, and it is up to the individual food hub to define their own parameters - with other considerations to be taken into account such as whether to require organic certification from suppliers, and so forth. The aim is to support local producers, and local consumers, in connecting with one another.

How does it work?

Producers or food hub managers upload the details of the products they have available each week to the web platform, where they can manage their listings and stock levels. Consumers can then purchase through the web based online shop.

Each food hub can set their own desired markup on the goods sold, in order that the food hub may be financially viable. This will be subject to the individual needs, budget and financial strategy of any particular food hub - and once this is ascertained, it will be possible to decide on a fair markup on the cost price of the products so that the food hub may be sustainable and so that an income can be generated to support the livelihoods of the people running the food hub.

The food hub can operate different order cycles - this could be weekly, fortnightly or monthly order cycles. Additionally, special cycles can be run for specific periods such as over festive seasons.





What is the need for a food hub?

One of the primary reasons for exploring this topic of local food hubs is to determine how food hubs can be developed, as one of the ways to resource the work of ecosystem restoration and regenerative agriculture.

By creating a food hub, you are helping to fund and support the work of transforming the way in which we manage our land - while creating health, and natural wealth and abundance for all.

Creating a food hub gives farmers and growers, who are regenerating their land, means to receive a fair price for their food, and to provide food to their community, rather than selling it to supermarkets.

Other reasons include:

- Economic reconciliation
- Self reliance
- Ecosystem restoration
- Food security
- Food as a commons
- A way to engage in climate change action
- "SeedIt" unions and libraries
- New livelihoods and schemes
- A new way of thinking and being
- Enjoyment and celebration of food
- Community





Local economies

One of the problems with our current economic system is the impact to the local economy. According to "Tescopoly: How One Shop Came Out on Top and Why it Matters" - for every one job a supermarket creates, it costs at least one and a half jobs locally. It does this by displacing farmers, bakers, delicatessens etc.

These companies vacuum up the money that would otherwise be circulating in the local economy. And in turn, this money is then accumulated in their massive profits while destroying the economy of local towns.

A food hub is one way to seal some of these leaks. To show how this works, we will use a story taken from the New Economic Foundation.





Local economies contd.

A tale of two cities

Imagine two towns, Localton and Leakyville. In Localton, people and organisations tend to spend most of their income on local items, such as vegetable boxes from local growers, dairy from the local farmer, local crafts, etc. They spend 80% of their income in the local economy.

Jack lives in Localton and he spends 80% of his income in his local food hub. He has €10.

He buys vegetables for €8 from his local food hub. He buys €2 worth of groceries in a chain supermarket. The vegetable grower then gets some sour dough bread from the local baker and spends 80% of the money from Jack on this which is €6.40 (that's 80% of €8). And she spends the rest of this money on a mail order subscription to a veg growers magazine.

The baker then buys some flour from the local farmer who grows the wheat and mills it into flour and sells it directly. She spends €5.12 (80% of €6.40) on flour, and saves the rest.

So that original €10 created €29.52 for Jack's town, all because of that original €10. If you take out the original €10, then that means an extra €19.52 circulated in Localton all due to his original €10, and that is only the first three rounds of spending.

The other town is Leakyville, where people don't spend much (generally just 20%) of their income locally. Most of their money is spent in chain stores and internet shopping.

Will lives in Leakyville and also has €10. He spends €8 on groceries online at a supermarket. He spends the remaining €2 at the local delicatessen. The deli owner uses 40 cents (20% of €2) to buy a coffee in the local café and the rest on internet shopping. The café owner uses 20% of that income to buy some locally grown mushrooms.

Will who had €10 spent €2 at the local deli, the deli owner spent 40 cent at the café, and the café owner spent 8 cent on mushrooms. The rest of that money left the local economy. So that's a grand total of €12.48 for Will's town. And if we deduct the original €10 this time as well, that means that the €10 here only generated €2.48 for Leakyville.

Food hubs create an opportunity to strengthen and build local economies, by retaining and re-circulating the money within the community.



A 14 step guide on how to set up a food hub





1. Understanding the context

These are the points that you need to consider to understand the context you're going to create your food hub within.

Market research - who will your customers be?

- What do they want from a food hub? Just food? Or food, community events and solidarity?
- What do they want from the food that they eat?
- What do they not want?
- How can the food hub help them with what they want but don't currently have?
- What is their weekly food budget
- What food do they like?
- Is collection possible? Locations for drop off points?
- Busy lifestyles?
- Desire/ability to engage in activities outside of food purchase and collection
- Extra spend for delivery desired?

Methods of finding out information from the community:

a) Community consultations

i) A market stall

Set up a stall in your local town and ask people as they're walking by - offer them free food on the way - industrial eggs and regenerative eggs - make it a game - can they tell the difference? Ask them questions about what kind of food they want to eat, etc.

ii) Open evening or open day

Rent out your local community centre and bring people together to introduce them to your food hub. You could sell tickets and provide a simple meal for people, and invite a couple of growers to sell you their produce to make the meal. You could offer discounted tickets to those with fewer resources. Remember to find time to ask people what it is that they would want from a food hub.

iii) Email survey

You could start collecting various people's email addresses - for example by putting a QR code on posters/flyers linking to an online form. And then send out a survey in order to ascertain what your potential customers would like from a hub.





b) Vision adaptation

Is what you discovered, from speaking to your community, and what kind of food system, access and quality they want different from what you envisioned? If so, adapt your vision so that it meets people where they're at, and serves a need rather than just what you think would be a good idea.

c) Desk research on demographics

Do some desk research and reach out to local community development organisations and government bodies to find out statistics on your community and food. Consider the following:

- i. How much money is spent on food by the average family?
- ii. What are the different income levels of people within the community?
- iii. What are the different jobs and occupations of the community?
- iv. How is the overall health and wellbeing of the community?
- v. How many people are using food banks?
- vi. What is already available in terms of food access? Supermarkets, other food markets etc.
Make sure you are filling a missing piece rather than try to do something that is already happening and therefore creating competition.

By doing some of the things suggested above, you will gain a clear understanding of the people in your community and whether a food hub is a viable idea. Are there enough people in your area who would like to buy their food this way?

d) Raising awareness

It's definitely important to find out where people are at, but it is another to nudge and encourage them towards embracing the possibility of accessing food via a system that is not as flawed - as our current food systems are.





Some ideas on how to raise awareness are:

- Show photos of food grown industrially and food grown regeneratively
- Provide statistics of biodiversity levels on both types of farms
- Provide statistics on the lack of nutrients and minerals in industrial vs regenerative food
- Share information on the connection between the sickness of the land and the sickness of our society and our bodies - prevalence of disease, etc
- Tell people that their food choices matter and is arguably one of the most effective ways they can take climate action

Something to consider is that while statistics are powerful, once someone is already interested in your concept - an overload of information can be off putting. Storytelling is a much more powerful and evocative way of capturing hearts and minds. We recommend listening to the story of how corporations took over our food system, told so succinctly by Dr. Vandana Shiva in her video, [here](#).

Something else to bear in mind when thinking about raising awareness is that the ones who are likely to be most receptive are those who have the capacity to take on this new information. Those people are generally the ones that are sufficiently comfortable and aren't in survival mode.

People in survival mode (those barely managing to pay rent, bills and feed their families), might be too stressed and overwhelmed to deal with hearing about how toxic their food is. Community solidarity, that is, taking care of the overwhelmed and stressed as part of the food hub, will help to address this issue.



2. Creating a vision statement

Having a written vision statement for the food system you want to create will help you to stay on course, and remain inspired and motivated to do the work. We won't sugar coat it - setting up a food hub isn't easy. But it is extremely important and rewarding. So remembering why you're doing it will help to keep you going.

Additionally, if you are working with a team of people, ensuring that your vision is aligned will help to avoid future disagreements. There are plenty of resources online on how to create a vision statement.

3. Skills needed to create a food hub

To create a food hub, you and your team (if you have one, will need some or all of the following skills:

- a) Project management - being organised enough to have an overview of everything that needs to be done, and when it needs to be done by
- b) Finances and bookkeeping - managing income and expenditure
- c) Marketing and communications - telling your story, attracting new customers and keeping in touch with existing ones
- d) Community outreach - bonding with, and working well with people such as your customers, producers, other community members, partner organisations, other food hub creators and managers, funders and donors, and local government
- e) Perseverance - you need to be someone who doesn't give up easily because changing habits and lifestyles is hard - as well as starting a new enterprise

4. Asset mapping

Asset mapping means identifying and cataloguing key resources that you have which can help you in creating a food hub. Assets are things of value, such as tools, buildings, infrastructure, people, money, skills, connections and so on. By mapping them out, you can work out what is possible with what you have. And you can also see what you don't have. Something important to remember is that you don't have to do everything yourself.



Collaborating with other organisations who are trying to help those who are struggling to access food, those who need healthy food to recover from being sick, etc, could be beneficial to your food hub. So include these organisations in your asset map - who they are, and how they can help you achieve your mission, as well as their own at the same time. Please see Step 10: Building partnerships for more information on this.



5. What is your legal structure?

The next task is for you, and your team (if you have one) to decide what governance structure it wishes to follow.

Questions to consider:

- Are you at the scale of complexity to require incorporation?
- Do you have a defined group with a common vision for a food hub?
- Which legal form suits your values and ethos best?
- How will you start? How will you pay the start up costs?
- Do you want to form a cooperative?
- Will you need additional support for incorporation?

Some of the different options available are:

Unincorporated:

- No separate legal personality
- An individual or a collection of individuals
- It is not formed into a legal corporation
- Examples are Sole Trader and Association

Unincorporated:

- No separate legal personality
- Examples are Company, Society and Co-operatives

You will need to look into your own context and see what options are available, and most suitable to you.



	Sole Trader	Association
Start-up cost	Negligible	Negligible
Limited liability	No	No
Not for profit status	No	Yes
Annual returns	No	No
Audit exemption	Yes	Yes
Financing	Bank loans	Grants
Distribute surplus	Only to sole trader	Yes
Tax	Income tax	Must register for tax - taxation type will depend on context
Positives of unincorporated	Lower start up and running costs	
Negatives of unincorporated	No limited liability	



	Company limited by guarantee	Cooperative
Start-up cost	Cost involved	Cost involved
Limited liability	Yes	Yes
Not for profit status	Yes	yes
Annual returns	Yes	Yes
Audit exemption	Yes (but not for grants)	No
Financing	Grants and loan stock	Grants, loan stock and member shares
Distribute surplus	No	Yes
Tax	Corporation tax	Corporation tax
Positives of unincorporated	Limited liability. This is only applicable when directors act in good faith and exercise care and due diligence.	
Negatives of unincorporated	Higher start-up costs	



6. Understanding the finances

The ability to understand the financial health of your food hub will be essential to ensuring viability. For this, a balance sheet will need to be kept. The balance sheet is a statement that will show the financial position of your food hub.

With this knowledge you can explore opportunities while avoiding undue risks, and can be sure that you are earning enough to make a livelihood.

An income statement, also called a profit and loss statement, shows the income and expenditure for a specific period of time.

Cash flow and profit

It's important to note there's a difference between cash flow and profit. Cash flow is the money that's coming in and out of a company. Profit is what is left after all the expenditure has been deducted.

INCOME	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Food hub sales												

EXPENSES	January	February	March	April	May	June	July	August	September	October	November	December
Website												
Venue rental												
Insurance												



7. Finding your producers

How to find and attract producers

The food hub will need to source growers and producers in order to sell their produce on the platform. To start this process, ask yourself where would you find local food in your area?

This could be:

- Search directories
- [Open Food Network](#)
- [WWOOFing](#)
- Other relevant food market
- hubs Word of mouth
- Door knocking

The food hub will then need to communicate - what are the benefits to join you and your hub? What are some of the potential barriers for them? What support can you offer? This might include calling them to update their stock etc.

Things to consider:

- Being able to offer a broad range of products to customers so that they can make full meals from what they buy at your hub and therefore don't need to go to a supermarket.
- Working with sustainable producers - what is your criteria for choosing producers, do they need to be growing food in a certain way?
- Will you only sell local producers or are some more exotic things such as coffee and bananas allowed? One hub decided to only sell goods sourced within a 50km radius. Another hub decided that people are going to buy produce such as bananas and coffee anyway, so they decided to offer ethically sourced options on the hub.



8. Finding a platform

There are different platforms designed for food hubs to use, which enable them to sell their produce to their customers. We want to specifically name the **Open Food Network** as a platform that we recommend, because it is open source and has values that align with what we want to see in new food systems.

As Nick Weir from the Open Food Network says - “If we are going to build a new food system that the world so desperately needs, we need to build it with tools that are different then the ones we built our current food system with. And for me that means the owners and the control need to be in the commons and not in the hands of one or two individuals. Even if the vision of the platform is beautiful. If it is not in the commons it could be sold on and a new owner then has the control”. (Open Food Network Ireland Training series online 2020).

9. Finding and communicating with customers

People need to know that you exist if they are to come and buy from your hub. So how are you going to tell them about your hub? How are people going to find out about you? There are various forms of marketing and advertising that you could consider, such as:

- Leafleting through people’s doors
- Putting up posters in local shops and community centres
- Working with local newspapers and magazines
- Partnering with other local organisations who can help spread the word
- Social media
- Having real life markets, perhaps once a season, so you have a physical presence
- Develop a newsletter for your food hub





Key messages

People are much more driven by their emotions than by facts. Good marketing taps into this by sharing a vision and a story that moves people. So, what is it about our food system that moves people? Here are some ideas:

- Keeping your family healthy and happy and safe from disease
- Taking care of our beautiful planet
- Doing something about our future to try and make it better, safer, etc by growing and eating food that is mitigating climate change
- Eating food that is delicious and full of nutrients
- Fighting against corporations that are making us and our planet sick because of their greed
- Food security and food sovereignty
- Let's come back together as a community again

These are examples of key messages - key messages are the important points that you want to get across to people in your marketing, as you think that this is what is going to inspire people to become your customers.

Branding

Having an attractive brand that tells your story is a highly effective way to attract customers and make sales. Your brand identity is your colour scheme, logo and tone of voice. Think of your brand as if they were a person. What is that person like? You want your brand to evoke loyalty, engagement and action.





10. Developing partnerships

You don't have to do everything yourself! A food hub is a solution to so many of society's problems:

- Health problems associated with eating processed food
- Ecological decline
- Climate change
- Income inequality
- Food waste
- Meaningful livelihoods
- Community breakdown / societal disconnection
- Corporate control / take-over
- Hunger

There are many, many institutions and projects out there that are working to solve the same problems that you are, many of them with budgets and an openness to hear new ideas. In your asset mapping exercise, you should have been able to see which organisations already exist in your area that are tackling the issues mentioned above.

Reach out to them and suggest a meeting to discuss potential collaborations. For example, it could be an organisation that has funding to improve access to healthy food, and your food hub could very well be the solution that they are looking for.





11. Community building / Community solidarity

Community building

One of the core reasons why food hubs are so important and what makes them so brilliant, is that they help to rebuild the communities that have been lost due to our current industrial and exploitative system. Being part of a supportive and thriving community is something many humans crave, even if they don't realise it, and food hubs are highly effective community creators. This is one of the key areas in which your food hub differs from a commercial supermarket - your food hub can help people to feel a sense of belonging, connection and support.

So, what are some of the ways in which your food hub can build community?

- Hubs as a third space - a social space between home and work where people can get together
- Eating together (here are some ideas)
 - a. Street Feast
 - b. Community meals held locally
 - c. Soup cafes
 - d. Drop in food/music/shopping
 - e. Cuppa and chats
- Film nights, book clubs, field trips (visiting producers)
- Linking and building relationships with existing communities also interested in good food such as:
 - a. Schools
 - b. Churches
 - c. Meditation and yoga centres
 - d. Sporting clubs
 - e. Council
 - f. Active ageing groups
 - g. Eco community groups



Community solidarity

What does this mean? Community solidarity means taking care of the people in your community who are struggling. Unfortunately, eating real, healthy food, directly from regenerative farmers and growers is often a luxury and a privilege, and people are often too overwhelmed and under too much stress trying to provide for their basic needs, that thinking beyond this to where your food comes from and how it's grown isn't possible, or they simply can't afford it. So, if we want to make this sort of food accessible to all, we need to factor in ways to support each other. Here are some ideas of how this can be done:

- Soup kitchens
- Seven families cooking for each other (one family cooks for the whole group each day of the week)
- Family meal buddy system (cooking meals for each other where the family with greater means cooks 3 meals for every 1 meal in return)
- Partnering with organisations helping people on the breadline to access to the things they need
- Pay it forward (buying your own veg box, and also one for someone who is in need of support)

12. Meeting people where they are at

Due to the breakdown of communities, inflation and a lack of fairness in terms of wages, many people are overly busy, stressed and overwhelmed. So how can your food hub take this into consideration? What does your hub need to do, and provide, to ensure that busy and stressed people are able to access it? Here are some ideas:

- Recipes - either written up and put in the boxes, or in video format, to help people learn how to cook a variety of tasty meals from scratch again. Include recipes that people know and love, or adaptations of them, as well as some new ones. Try and cater for the adventurous and the safe eaters.
- Delivery - people often don't have the time to collect, so can you deliver instead? Adding a delivery cost at the check out can help to cover these costs.
- Offering a range of foods so that the hub can fully replace the supermarket - can you partner with other ethical food providers so that your customers can make full meals from what they've bought from you so that they don't also have to go regularly to the supermarket?
- Don't try and change people's diets too quickly - give people some of what they're used to, and some of what they're not, with inspiration on what to do with new foods
- Is it possible to clean the veg before you send it to them - some people are put off by veggies being covered in soil because it takes longer to prepare or they find it unappetising



13. Designing for resilience

Trying to create a new food system, such as a food hub, is challenging in our industrial society. It is very much fighting against the grain! Burnout is common, which can wound a food hub, sometimes to the point where it is no longer possible to continue. So, the question to think about is: How do you design resilience into your hub so that this kind of burnout can be avoided?

Some ideas to help you design for resilience:

- Building team bonding into your hub - making a little bit of time to solidify your relationships together to improve your working relationships as well as getting the chance to hear from each other as to how you are, and detect early warning signs of burnout. This could look like a coffee/beer after a market, or a 5 minute check in at the beginning of a meeting.
- Can you put aside a small amount each month that builds up a pot for you to take a little bit of time off? If so, who can take over for you? Running a food hub with a team is much more likely to help with resilience. Managing solo can lead to burnout, so it is imperative that steps are taken to avoid this.
- Having firm boundaries can help. What are the limits of how much you can do? Be realistic. And don't go beyond them too often, because if you do, and you then burnout, you won't be able to do anything at all. Don't push yourself too far.
- Understanding a day in the life of each person in the hub can help you to all have compassion for each other and make better decisions on how the hub will work based on who is better suited to which tasks, and what their working day looks like already.
- Creating a support group/community of practice with other people running food hubs or those who ran them in the past to provide co-counselling for one another, ask each other questions about best practice, and to learn from what didn't work.
- Being realistic from the beginning about your limits and needs in every decision.
- Shared responsibility of roles - passing them between members of the group
- Sometimes managing volunteers can be more work than it's worth. Having easy and fixed roles for volunteers, that don't take a lot of explaining and management can help ensure that receiving volunteer assistance is genuinely useful to you

Some ideas specially for growers:

- Growing more perennials and relying less on annual crops. Annual crops are a lot more work than perennials because they need to be sown every year. With perennials, you plant them once, and the maintenance is minimal in comparison.
- A change in our diets? This then leads onto the question, do we need to change our diets? Our modern diets are possible because of industrial agriculture. What does a financially viable regenerative farm look like? What does it grow? And therefore what does a more climate resilient diet look like?



14. Advocating for change

Many food hubs aren't financially viable for a number of reasons. One of the biggest reasons is that many people are too used to the convenience of buying whatever they want, whenever they want it, for an artificially low price. Additionally, many people are stressed and overwhelmed and don't have the energy or headspace to cook from scratch. And many no longer even know how to cook.

Clearly, larger structural societal issues need to be addressed and changed to truly allow food hubs to become the primary way in which we access our food.

So, how can we do this? Here are some ideas:

- Reach out to your local government representative and make sure that they know who you are, what you are doing, and why.
- If you have already formed a coalition of local organisations who are fighting against the problems of the industrial food system, that will stand you in better stead and give you more power to make demands from public servants such as members of parliament.
- Support campaigns for:
 - a) A living wage
 - b) Fair prices for farmers and growers
 - c) Payments for growers who grow and farm ecologically

There may well be groups and organisations locally that are already advocating for such changes. Seek them out and support them if you can. [Here is an example](#) of one such organisation that is lobbying the EU government to make changes to support local food producers, which would in turn greatly support the stability of your food hub.





Case studies





Case study 1: Herenboeren - Netherlands

Herenboeren is a community owned, regenerative farm based in the Netherlands, which follows a model where the community owns the farm and employs the farmer. Two hundred families come together and each pay €2,000 to co-buy or lease farmland. This money is also used to employ a farmer, and to purchase everything needed to set up the farm.

Once the farm is up and running, each co-owner of the farm pays €10 per week in return for access to 50 to 60 different types of vegetables, fruit, eggs and meat. All of the food grown at the farm is for the co-owners. The model is zero waste, and is making moves to become circular. Part of this means that they have 25 pigs working on the land and recycling the waste.

Herenboeren prioritises the importance of creating and deepening the community. Lots of community events are organised, such as educational workshops on cooking, preserving, picnics and social gatherings, informative meetings, nature and biodiversity workshops.

The co-owners volunteer on the farm if they want too, and have the freedom to experiment with more and more regenerative ways of growing and producing food, as well as creating habitats and increasing biodiversity.

The local and national governments are both very impressed with this model, and there are plans for many more Herenboeren farms and communities to open across the Netherlands. For more information on this model, watch the full interview here:





What is possible

If we use the example of Herenboeren, they feed 500 people on their 20 hectare farm. This includes vegetables, meat, dairy and eggs, all farmed regeneratively.

According to EuroStat, EU farms used 157 million hectares of land for agricultural production in 2020. This is 38% of the total land area of the EU. According to the EU there are 447.7 million inhabitants living in the EU.

If 20 hectares feeds 500 people, using the regenerative food hub model exemplified by Herenboeren, and we use that as a general benchmark - then to feed 447.7 million people we would need 894,000 hectares for farm land. This is considerably less than the 157 million currently used.

This remaining land could be rewilded, returned back to wider nature, which would also have significant benefits for carbon sequestration, fixing the water cycle, and for the mental and physical health of humans and biodiversity levels.





Case study 2: The Food Assembly

This is an example of a food initiative that did not work

The Food Assembly is a food hub umbrella organisation that helps people to create local 'food assemblies'.

This is a model where anyone can create an assembly of their own, in their neighbourhood, and the umbrella organisation supports them in doing so with training, a website, access to a list of producers, and advice. You find a physical place to hold your assembly, such as the back room of a pub, or a local church hall, and customers purchase what they want online, and then come and collect it from your assembly on a given day of the week, in a 2 hour time window.

The original idea of The Food Assembly was not only to make high quality, ecologically grown food available to everyone, but also to build community and meet the producers, so that people had more of a connection to where their food comes from.

However, the problem with this model was that it was based on what would be ideal, rather than what is realistic, at least for some contexts.

What happened was that producers weren't selling enough produce to warrant driving all over to the different assemblies, they simply weren't making enough money. And they also didn't have the time to be physically present for 2 hours at each assembly, because they had too much to do. Also, the model was out of sync with the busy lifestyles of many Londoners, who wanted to buy their produce from the assemblies, but didn't want to put aside one evening a week just to collect their orders.

A different model is needed for somewhere like London, such as home delivery, possibly with an occasional market to bring people together, build community and give people a chance to meet their growers.



Case study 3: Cloughjordan - Ireland

Cloughjordan is an ecovillage, incorporating Cloughjordan Community Farm - which is a member-owned farm on the Tipperary Offaly border, that utilises biodynamic and organic farming methods. Their aim is to produce the highest quality, nutritionally dense vegetables, while also reducing the environmental impact of producing this food.

They were established in 2008, and supply fresh produce daily to over 70 households in the area.

The money gathered from members is used to pay the farmers a salary, to purchase seeds and equipment, and to lease the land that is farmed. Everything that comes off the land then belongs to the members. Members also have free or low cost access to all training and educational events.

The primary goal is to provide the most nutritionally complete vegetables and fruit possible. Vegetables grown in healthy, nutrient rich soil taste amazing! This makes being a part of Cloughjordan Community Farm a unique experience, as members are directly connected to the source of their food. The community knows the people who grow their food. The growers connect with the community, and members, with weekly harvest reports, farm news, member volunteer days, workshops and farm visits.

For more information visit www.cloughjordancommunityfarm.ie and watch the video here:





Case study 4: Gardens of hope - Women, Ecology and the Future of Humanity

In India, between 1995 and 2018, over 400,000 farmers committed suicide. This was primarily due to the debt that farmers incurred because of the current food system.

The women, after losing their husbands, decided to plant a garden. They'd lost their land and their husbands but they had their hut and a little patch of land. They started Gardens of Hope. It is now here where women exchange vegetables and seeds. Some of the women have become community seed suppliers.

Dr. Vandana Shiva talked about how, during the Covid-19 pandemic, when everything else closed down and the bigger industrial farms were not able to meet their disruptions - it was the women in the Garden of Hopes who were feeding the community.





Case study 5: Bodemzicht - Netherlands

Bodemzicht was formed in 2020 as a regenerative demonstration farm with a mission to facilitate life, resulting in an abundance of delicious and healthy food. Together with the Bodemzicht Foundation, they are working on a thorough shift of perspective in Dutch agriculture: from far-reaching, exhaustive monocultures to well-founded, resilient farms.

They grow vegetables in a regenerative market garden, as well as eggs from chickens that are grazed holistically on meadow pasture amongst a growing agroforest. Their chickens are moved in chicken mobiles and only come 'back to start' when the vegetation looks better than it looked prior to commencing. In this way, they build living soil, capture CO₂, increase water retention, and fruit production in the field and the chickens can eat fresh grass and insects every day. With Farm Bodemzicht, they want to create a realistic regenerative alternative to current agriculture, and create long-term prospects for farmers in the Netherlands and Europe.

The food hub began with Anne, one of the farmers, setting up a pop up market stall in a friends front garden to sell their eggs on a trust basis. People could take them and pay for them later. This trust helped to build community and their future customer base. They market their products directly and sell them to their community in the nearby town. They also often collaborate with other regenerative initiatives, building a close-knit community around the farm. Customers select what they want from a simple online PDF that is updated regularly with what is available. Customers fill in an excel sheet with what they want, meaning money is saved on an online shop.

The community is invited to get involved in the farm 5 times a year, with events that help them properly connect to where their food comes from, and to each other. This is vital, so that Bodemzicht can properly explain how food growing works, so that customers have an understanding and a realistic expectation of what is possible. Bodemzicht believes that people shop at food hubs because they want connection and belonging.

For more information see www.bodemzicht.nl





Conclusion



Local food systems; that is where you can make a difference. You can't create a different supply chain - that is not our role. Our role is to build from the ground up, from the soil up, from the earthworms up and do the real work, care for the earth, care for our communities.

Dr. Vandana Shiva

Many of us want to play our part in solving some of the issues that we currently face as a global community. To create a new type of world for ourselves, our families and our communities. A food hub - whether establishing your own or supporting one that is already in operation - is a great way to do that.

We hope this guide supports you on your journey.





Remember...

Make it easy for customers

People have become accustomed to convenience, and are generally overwhelmed with the responsibilities of life. Therefore, they are much more likely to purchase from your food hub if the process is as easy as possible. Things to think about here are ease of purchasing, and ease of collection. This looks like an effective, clean and quick website to make the purchases, and collection/delivery slots that are flexible and adaptable to people's busy life schedules.

Challenge the status quo

Aim to provide a broad range of products i.e. the "Full grocery list". Competing with the cheap price and convenience of supermarkets isn't easy. People will be more likely to shop at your food hub if you can help customers buy as full a food shop with you as possible, so that they don't also have to regularly go to the supermarket.

Consider burnout

It is very easy for regenerative farmers and food hub organisers to get burnt out, as there is often far too much work to do and not enough time to do it in. Consider this from the offset and try to build in ways to support yourself and others, through partnerships and community care to ensure that this doesn't happen.

Meet people where they're at (ideal vs reality)

You probably have a vision for how you want your food hub, our collective food system, and our society to operate. However, if you try to run things in ways that are too different from what they're like now, many people will find these changes are too large and feel that they are happening too quickly. They may not use your food hub if the way that it functions is too unfamiliar from what they know and are used to.

Perseverance!

You need to really want your food hub to succeed, and not give up easily. It is not going to be an easy thing, to try and rebuild our broken food system, one food hub at a time. Persevering will be necessary to achieve your goals.



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www.erc.earth

Workbook section

Useful documents and worksheets

The templates that follow are examples of ones you can recreate in Excel, to support you on your journey.



Key insights from market research

Your vision statement

Asset mapping

Templates for finances - Income

INCOME	Income	How often	Weekly total	Monthly total
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
			€	€
	Total income		€	€

Templates for finances - Expenditure

EXPENDITURE	Expenditure	How often	Weekly total	Monthly total
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
	€		€	€
			€	€
	Total expenditure		€	€

Database of contacts

Name	Email	Organisation	Notes	To do	Status
PRODUCERS					
PARTNERS					
POLITICIANS					
FUNDERS					