The C.A.F.E. Project

CREATIVE ACCESS TO great, local FOOD FOR EVERYONE

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REPORT

Supported by

Aberdeenshire COUNCIL
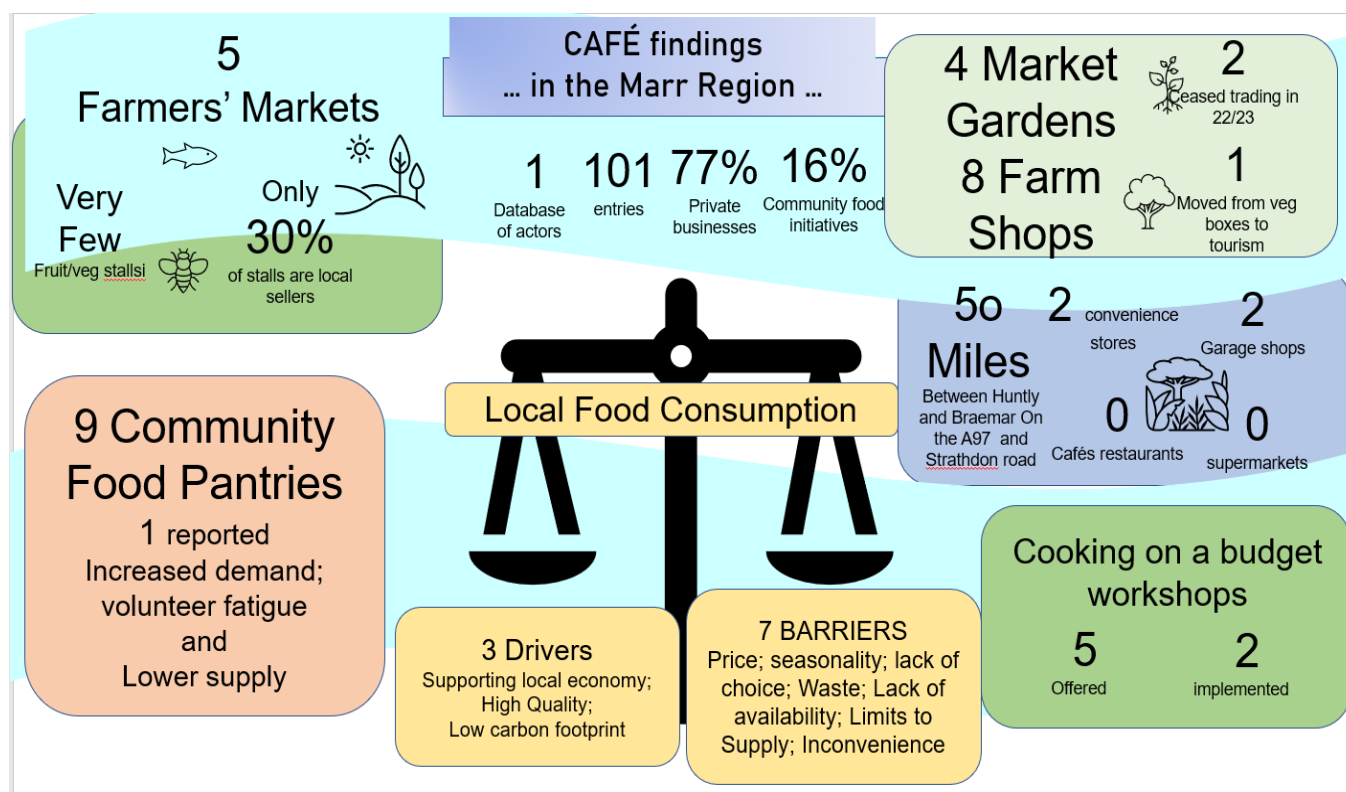
Executive Summary

This report encompasses the time from February 2022 to January 2023 during which the present work focused on setting up the foundations for a Food Information and Support Hub for the Marr area of Aberdeenshire. Such a "food hub" has been envisioned to act as a "one-stop shop" for anyone interested in contributing to creating a healthier and environmentally friendly food environment. It is where people would be supported in growing their own food and consuming more locally grown food, as well as in knowing more about the various food-related benefits of doing so, including nutrition, mental health, education, community, and climate mitigation. All these actions are aligned with the general goals of the Fair Food Aberdeenshire Partnership.

In this respect, the report makes a relevant contribution to the Fair Food Aberdeenshire Partnership by shedding light on some aspects around the "*who, what, where and how*" of the local food system in the Marr area. Specifically, it reports on the development of the first extensive Marr database of local food-related actors and the important information therein. Also, it presents the mapping of the Marr "foodshed" of local growers, producers, food markets and community provision, highlighting areas of high and low provision. Additionally, it presents important insights into the lived experience of local growers and consumers, gathered through interviews, that reveal some of the underlying drivers and barriers to upscaling local food systems in the Marr area, related to supply and demand.

Key findings

CAFÉ findings … in the Marr Region …

5 Farmers' Markets
Very Few — Fruit/veg stallsi
Only 30% of stalls are local sellers

1 Database of actors
101 entries
77% Private businesses
16% Community food initiatives

4 Market Gardens
8 Farm Shops
2 Ceased trading in 22/23
1 Moved from veg boxes to tourism

9 Community Food Pantries
1 reported Increased demand; volunteer fatigue and Lower supply

Local Food Consumption

5o Miles Between Huntly and Braemar On the A97 and Strathdon road
2 convenience stores
2 Garage shops
0 Cafés restaurants
0 supermarkets

Cooking on a budget workshops
5 Offered
2 implemented

3 Drivers
Supporting local economy; High Quality; Low carbon footprint

7 BARRIERS
Price; seasonality; lack of choice; Waste; Lack of availability; Limits to Supply; Inconvenience

Contents

1 Introduction

The work carried out so far by the CAFÉ project (*Creative Access to Food for Everyone*), has sought to set up the foundations for a Food Information and Support Hub for the Marr area of Aberdeenshire (Figure 1). The "food hub" has been envisioned to act as a "one-stop shop" for anyone interested in contributing to creating a healthier and environmentally friendly food environment, where people are supported in growing their own food and consuming more locally grown food, as well as in knowing more about the various food-related benefits of doing so, including nutrition, mental health, educational, community, and climate mitigation. Equally important is the sustainability and resilience of the local food system[1]. Recent economic and environmental events have shown the vulnerability of our current food systems, heavily linked to global markets and long supply chains, which have had a knock-on effect by worsening food insecurity and inequality at the local level[2]. What is more, food access for the rural consumer is constrained by the lack of one-stop shopping opportunities, physical distance to shops, increased delivery time, limited choice of product and higher prices than in urban areas[3].

Source: http://ruralpartnerships.co.uk/

Figure 1: The Marr Area in Aberdeenshire

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[1] Stefanovic L, Freytag-Leyer B and Kahl J (2020) Food System Outcomes: An Overview and the Contribution to Food Systems Transformation. Front. Sustain. Food Syst. 4:546167.

[2] Henaughen, K. 2023. Foodflation's 45-year high. The Scottish Farmer. March, 25, 2023. Scotland.

[3] Marshall, D, Dawson, J & Nisbet, L 2018, 'Food access in remote rural places: Consumer accounts of food shopping in the Western Isles of Scotland', Regional Studies, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 133-144.

The CAFÉ project understands food systems as "a set of interdependent elements that work together towards satisfying the food needs of a given population in a given space and time"[4]; from such understanding, the project aligns to international efforts and envisions the achievement of a sustainable food system as "*the one that delivers food security and nutrition for all in such a way that the economic, social and environmental bases to generate food security and nutrition for future generations are not compromised*"[5]

The Food Information and Support Hub, with Marr Area Partnership (MAP) providing a coordinating role in the Marr Area of Aberdeenshire, has been intended to support change towards sustainable food systems by highlighting the value of local food economies and exploring the potentials for shortening supply chains and shifting diets to more local produce. To do so, the CAFÉ project started with the examination of the "foodshed"[6] by exploring what there is "on the ground" including both the supply and the demand sides of the local food system in Marr. It is believed that by exploring some aspects around the *who, what, where and how* of the local food system, the CAFE project could produce valuable information, not easily obtainable from literature sources, to help local authorities and stakeholders (e.g. community food initiatives - CFIs) to better understand drivers and challenges that may be having an impact on the local food environment[7] and, therefore, on food security and inequality in the Marr Area.

Another important outcome of the CAFÉ project, with its focus on the availability and access to good, locally grown vs processed food from the point of view of local producers (e.g. market gardens) and consumers, is that it can be used to inform the Fair Food Aberdeenshire Partnership (FFAP) about aspects that directly relate to its priorities and ambitions. As the FFAP states, tackling food-related inequalities is an urgent challenge and the key elements are food security, the food environment, the food economy, food procurement, and food culture (Table 1).

Additionally, we will be showing links to different aspects to supporting the implementations of the FFAP by providing:

- The first extensive geo-referenced data of local food producers, manufactures and retailers within Marr, which can be input into the Aberdeenshire Council food map.

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[4] Malassis, 1996.
[5] FAO (2014). Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture systems (SAFA).Guidelines. Version 3.0.
[6] Feagan, R. (2007). The place of food: mapping out the 'local' in local food systems. Progress in Human Geography, 31(1), 23–42.
[7] Neve, K. et al. (2021). Understanding Lived Experience of Food Environments to Inform Policy: An Overview of Research Methods. Centre for Food Policy. University of London City.

- First-hand learning experiences on educational cooking courses, which would support the "Food culture" group at the FFAP.
- Important insights into the lived experience of local growers and consumers, gathered through interviews.
- Mapping of areas of low and high local food provision in the Marr area.

Table 1: Fair Food Aberdeenshire Partnership priorities and vision for Aberdeenshire

Priorities	Aims	Outcomes
Food Security	Ensure everyone has access to affordable and healthy food.	Fewer people living in poverty.
Culture	Transform our relationship with food.	Improved food education, growing and cooking skills and awareness.
Economy	Build a thriving and diverse food economy that's fair for, suppliers' producers and buyers	Robust and sustainable food economy.
Procurement	Increase good procurement and catering practice across public and private sectors	Increase demand for healthy, sustainable and local food.
Environment	Protect and enhance our natural assets and reduce harmful practices.	Reduction in the carbon footprint of our food system.

SSource: FFAP, 2023

Project Objectives

Developing a Food Information and Support Hub that has the capability of supporting the development of a thriving local food economy in the Marr area to:

- support locally-based businesses and producers;
- identify gaps in current delivery and community-engagement;
- identify supply and demand actors and activities;
- develop interactive maps of food outlets, growing projects and food skill initiatives;
- seek out and signpost local strategies for improving access to food to increase food security and minimise waste.

2. Methods and approach

This section outlines the methods and approach used during the CAFÉ project to address its goals. These were linked to the four dimensions of the food security framework used by the United Nations[8] (Figure 2; Table 2), to guide the actions undertaken for data collection and analysis during the project under a single approach. In this way, the CAFÉ project ensured the production of usable information and knowledge-based products and services to the communities within the Marr Area.

Figure 2: The four dimensions of Food Security (FAO, 2009)

In addition, the four dimension of food security, when applied to a local food system, intersect with the key components used by the Fair Food Aberdeenshire Partnership (food environment; the food economy; food procurement and food culture), shedding light onto the understanding of a more integrative perspective of the local food system.

Table 2: Explanation of the four dimensions of Food Security

Dimension	Explanation
Physical Availability of local food	**It addresses the "supply side" of food security and is determined by the level of food production, stock levels and net trade.**
Access to local food	**Economic and Physical Access to Food according to people's demand.**
Local Food Utilization	**Utilisation is understood as food preparation, diet, feeding practices, and diversity of the diet, among others.**
Stability of the Local Food System	**Stability focuses on adequate access to food on a periodic basis. It considers risks to long-term stability.**

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[8] FAO (2009). Declaration of the World Food Summit on Food Security (PDF). Rome: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. Archived (PDF) from the original on 2018-10-19. Retrieved 2013-10-15.

Methods

In the preparation phase of the project in which visions and goals were discussed and agreed, the data collection and analysis phase were organised around three methodological components: M1) knowledge gathering; M2) participatory systems model building; and M3) capacity building.

M1 Knowledge gathering: desk- and field-based identification of food actors

Desk-and field-based research on the identification and profiling of food related actors with presence in the Marr area was carried out through a thorough: i) an online search of relevant sources of information including from social media platforms, community and business websites, online registers such as companies house and the Charity register, and blogs; ii) the identification of relevant existing reports and newspaper articles; iii) tours by car around the Marr area to identify local food actors and activities visible from the road as well on community notice boards; iv) informal conversations with local experts.

M2 Participatory systems model building

A purposive sample of interviewees (i.e. parents of young families from Deeside) was carried out in April 2022. All interviews were conducted face-to-face individually. Starting with the question: *where do you get your food from?* participants were given a set of paired cards with different food groups per pair (e.g. meat, pulses, dairy, eggs, poultry, game, vegetables, fruits, bread and bakes, preserves, etc) and were asked to sort them out in two columns: one for the food they consume that is locally grown, processed, or manufactured, and the other column for the food they obtain from somewhere else outside Marr[9]. Once this was done a semi structured interview was carried out with the interviewer translating responses into a systems model using the causal loop model building methodology[10] (see box 1). Interviewees were guaranteed anonymity and responsible use of the data gathered.

M3 Capacity building

It's been acknowledged that today's diets are an important underlying cause of disease and a contributor of current unsustainable food systems[11]. Moreover, in the face of cost-of-living crises many people are trying to reduce costs while making the most of food. By building knowledge and capacities around food preparation and consumption, the CAFÉ project has tried to contribute towards bridging the gap between access to and utilization of locally grown food.

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[9] This is akin to a card sorting knowledge elicitation approach suggested by Rugg, G. and McGeorge, P. (1997), The sorting techniques: a tutorial paper on card sorts, picture sorts and item sorts. Expert Systems, 14: 80-93.
[10] Vennix, J. (1997) Group Model Building. Routledge.
[11] EU. (2021). Discovering the Role of Food Environments for Sustainable Food Systems. October 2021.

The educational workshops, led by a local organisation with extensive experience in the field (TRE-life C.I.C), sought to target people with no skills or not enough confidence in cooking. It did so by advertising the workshop and asking potential participants to fill up a brief questionnaire. Also, to provide quality teaching and a safe space, the number of participants by workshop was limited to no more than five participants.

Box 1 Causal Loop Modeling

In causal loop modelling (Vennix, 1996), the interview results are used to create a conceptual systems model in the form of a series of nodes connected by arrows (formally known as a directed cyclic graph). Whilst this type of model might sometimes be confused superficially for a mental model, causal loop models are more sophisticated since they have a syntax and semantics that allow them to represent statements about causal relationships (the arrows) between different interconnected components of the system (the nodes). By drawing a set of nodes and arrows in this way, the project was able translate what was said in the interviews into commonly perceived drivers of resilient service provision and as well as its barriers (see Figure 3).
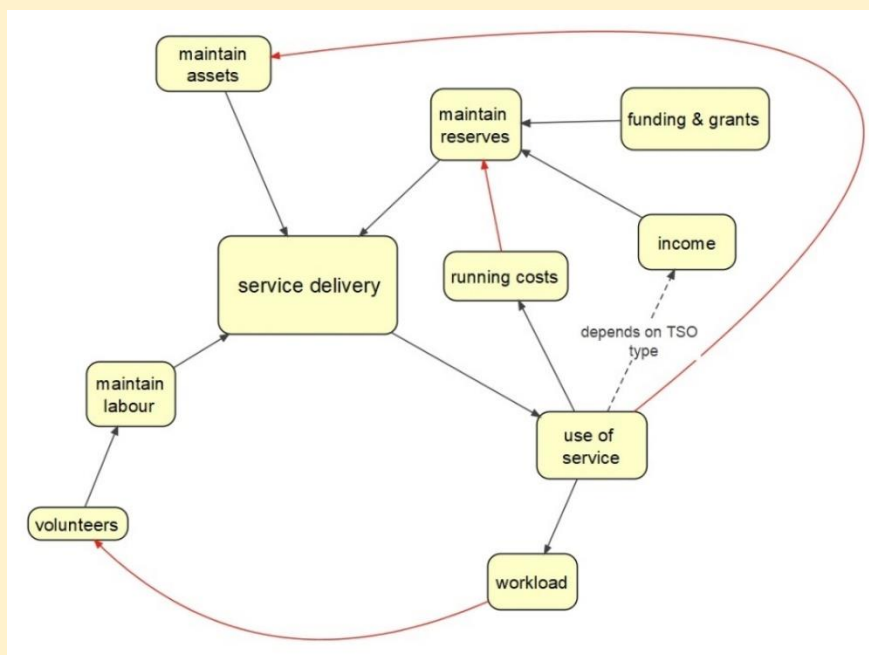

Figure 3. An excerpt from the core model of service delivery, showing the immediate drivers and barriers to resilient service delivery in the TSO sector. *Causal relationships (arrows) are colour coded "black" for proportional relationship and "red" for inversely proportional relationship between two nodes.*

System components (nodes) are also colour coded (see Table 3) depending on whether they are i) actions (COLOUR), ii) assets (COLOUR), iii) threats (COLOUR) (i.e. challenge, barrier).

3. Findings

Who: actors in the local food system

Aware of the multidimensional nature of actions and relations involved in a food system, even in a local one, the CAFÉ project decided to focus attention on those local actors directly involved in the production, processing/manufacturing, and commercialisation of locally grown food and products, which can be directly sold in food outlets within Marr. Such delimitation excluded medium- to large-scale agricultural farms (i.e crop and cereal farms, lamb farms), whose produce usually goes to agri-industrial supply chains. Another type of food-related actor, or network of actors, that were included in the data base were CFIs or community food initiatives (e.g. food pantries, pop-up shops and fridges, community gardens, farmers' markets, etc.) given their growing role in distributing food across the area (see box 2).

Once the search criteria were set up, the project carried out extensive online research followed by conversations with local stakeholders, road trips across Deeside, Donside and Strathbogie, and visits to Farmers' Markets in Marr. As a result, a database of 101 actors was put together. Although the database is not a definitive record of all local food actors, it can be considered as a representative sample of the supply side of the local food system in Marr. Among these actors, we found:

- estates and farms involved in direct sales (agricultural, cattle, game, livestock, cereals),
- market gardens (horticulture; direct sales and veg boxes)
- secondary producers (jams, pies, bakes),
- food retail outlets (corner shops, farmers' markets, fish and game vans),
- Community Food Initiatives (community gardens, allotments, pantries, food banks).

Once identified, the food actors were distinguished according to their type of activity/produce. The percentage number of actors belonging to each category type of activity/produce in Marr can be seen in Figure 4, where 27% of actors are small farmers producing meat (beef, lamb, or pork) or growing vegetables, or undertaking both activities. 4% are small farmers growing cereals, 4% are beekeepers, and 7% are gamekeepers. In addition, 5% of actors are involved in the processing (butchering and milling) and 36% in the manufacturing. Finally, retailing is an activity carried out by 72% of all food actors in the database.

Box 2 Overview of Community Food Initiatives (CFI) in Marr

The Marr Area Partnership (MAP) established a Community Food Initiative (CFI) support and networking arrangement in late 2019. At that time Fareshare was supplying CFINE (Community Food Initiative North East) who were distributing ambient supplies to depots in Marr. Banchory Number One and then Aboyne Green Shed were offering supplies to pantries, community "shops" and larders along Deeside. Huntly and Alford also developed CFIs, each to a model best suited to their communities' needs, each one community volunteer-led. Within months the Covid-19 pandemic hit and these CFIs navigated new ways of supporting their communities in highly adaptive and imaginative ways. [Ref: Participatory Research with Aberdeenshire CFIs During Covid 19 in 2021. Extract from a Collaborative Inquiry (1st Dec 2021) Community Learning & Development]

These included MAP-hosted regular Zoom meetings where ideas and practice could be shared during these rapidly changing times. MAP also set up a WhatsApp Group for instant messaging and sharing of activity, information and stories. These ways of keeping in touch across the rural geography of Marr have persisted to this day and are a tribute to the resilience, tenacity and generosity of the local food sector and those who volunteer within it.

There are two Trussell Trust Food Banks in Marr, the North based in Inverurie reaching into North Marr, and the South based in Banchory reaching across Deeside to the West. With a wealth of experience around food insecurity and poverty, these Food Banks operate on a referral basis and are an important component in the wider CFI network across Marr. Alongside these Food Banks, there are now a range of pantries and larders which are all linked in some manner to their home-community, which may be a geographic entity (e.g. Cromar Food Waste Project serving communities in the Howe of Cromar) or in some cases a faith group (e.g. Deeside Compassion's Restart Social Supermarket).

Marr Community Pantries (including pop-ups, shops, fridges and larders) organise a variety of arrangements operating at community-level. Some are food waste reduction projects linked to community climate action groups (e.g. Deeside CAN and Banchory Number One). Over the duration of the network, these groups have benefitted from engagement with Council Officers, elected Councillors, Community Public Health and Citizens' Advice Bureau reps. The network has contributed to Scottish Government consultations on food and poverty policy, and Aberdeenshire Council's work developing a Food Strategy.
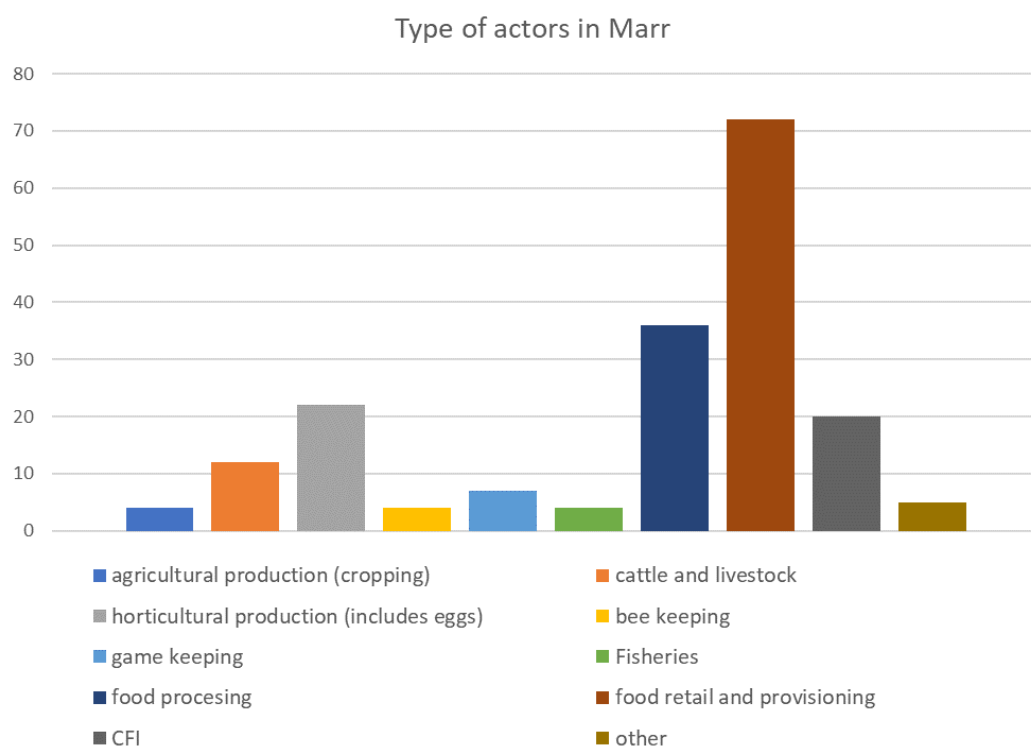
Type of actors in Marr

Figure 4: Food-related actors by type of activity/produce in the Marr area.

The identified actors were also distinguished by the type of food initiative/business they are running. Figure 5 shows that 77% of the actors are a small private business, 16% are community food initiatives (mostly voluntary groups), and 7% are social enterprises.

Figure **5: Type** **of food-** **related**

initiative/business in Marr.
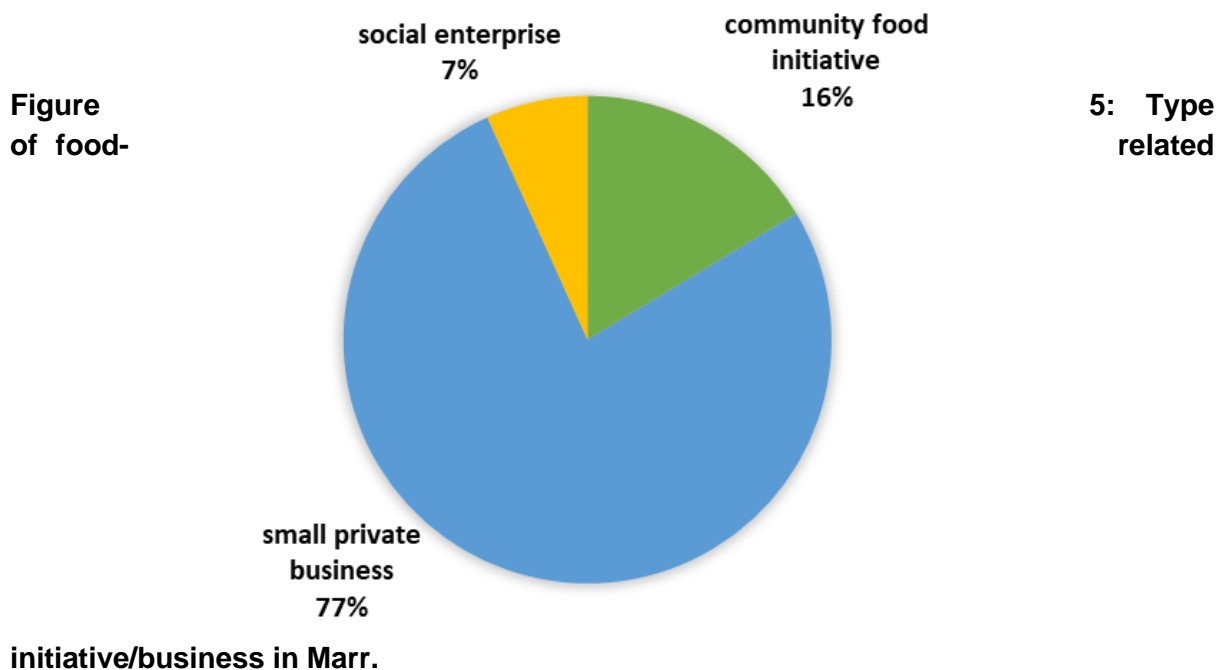
What: products grown, processed, and manufactured locally

From the database of local food suppliers, it was possible to gauge the type of food that is locally produced, processed, and manufactured within the Marr Area (Figure 6). The range of products identified as being produced in the Marr area included:

- Beef, lamb, and pork,
- Poultry and eggs,
- Game (venison, pheasants)
- Vegetables and herbs
- Fruits (apples, pears, and plums)
- Honey

The processed or manufactured foods using local produce included:

Processed

- Meat (– butchery)
- Flour (– milled)
- Oil (– rapeseed pressing)
- Coffee (– locally roasted)

Manufactured

- Beer and non-alcoholic drinks
- Bread, pies and other homebakes
- Preserves and jams
- Sweets and confectionery
- Lemon curd
- Cheese
- Ready-made meals

The comparative share of each of the above-mentioned products within the Marr area is show in Figure 6, where the size of the segments represents the number of actors, registered in the data base, producing food, including meat, fruit & vegetables, eggs, etc., followed by manufactures of jams & preserves, drinks, bakes & confectionery, etc., and finally, actors that process food, mainly meat (i.e. butchers).

Figure 6: **Food that is**
grown, **processed,**
and
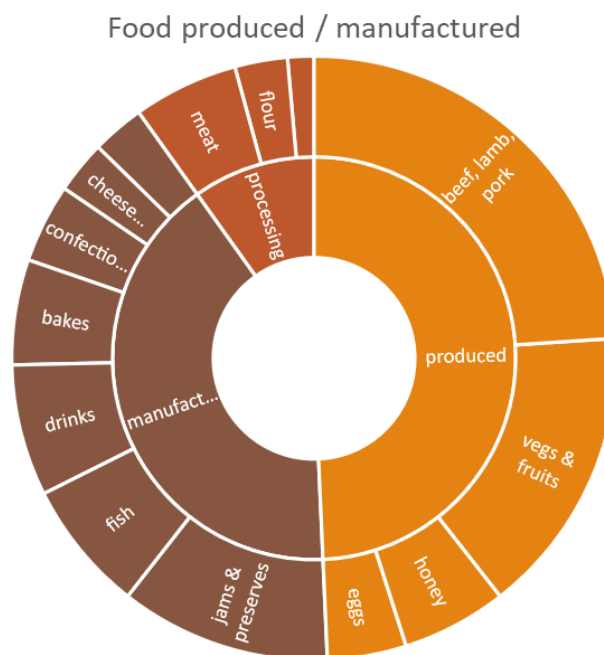

Food produced / manufactured

manufactured.

N.B. As was mentioned earlier, farms growing grains, cattle and livestock for the agro-industry supply chain were not considered in this work because their produce is usually sold and consumed outside the Marr area.

Where: Map of Food outlets, producers, and more

Another element of interest for the CAFÉ project was to map the local "foodshed". This implied finding out where in Marr produce is grown, manufactured, and sold. For instance, market gardens grow and sell their produce locally via home-deliveries or/and online sales to nearby households; some food manufacturers use local produce for their preserves and jams. The places that customarily sell local produce such as meat, fish, cheese, bakes, jams & preservers, and confectionery, are the farmers' markets and farm shops. It was interesting to note that only 30% of stalls in Marr local markets advertised in April-May of 2022 were from sellers physically located within Marr; the rest was from other parts of Aberdeenshire and even outside it. Although it is possible to find a few fruit and vegetables in these sorts of outlets, these are mostly produced and sold directly by market gardens. We identified four market gardens currently operating in the Marr area; along with them[12]. Other food growing initiatives such as community gardens and allotments were also identified.

Based on the database of local food suppliers, an interactive food map was produced (Figure 7).

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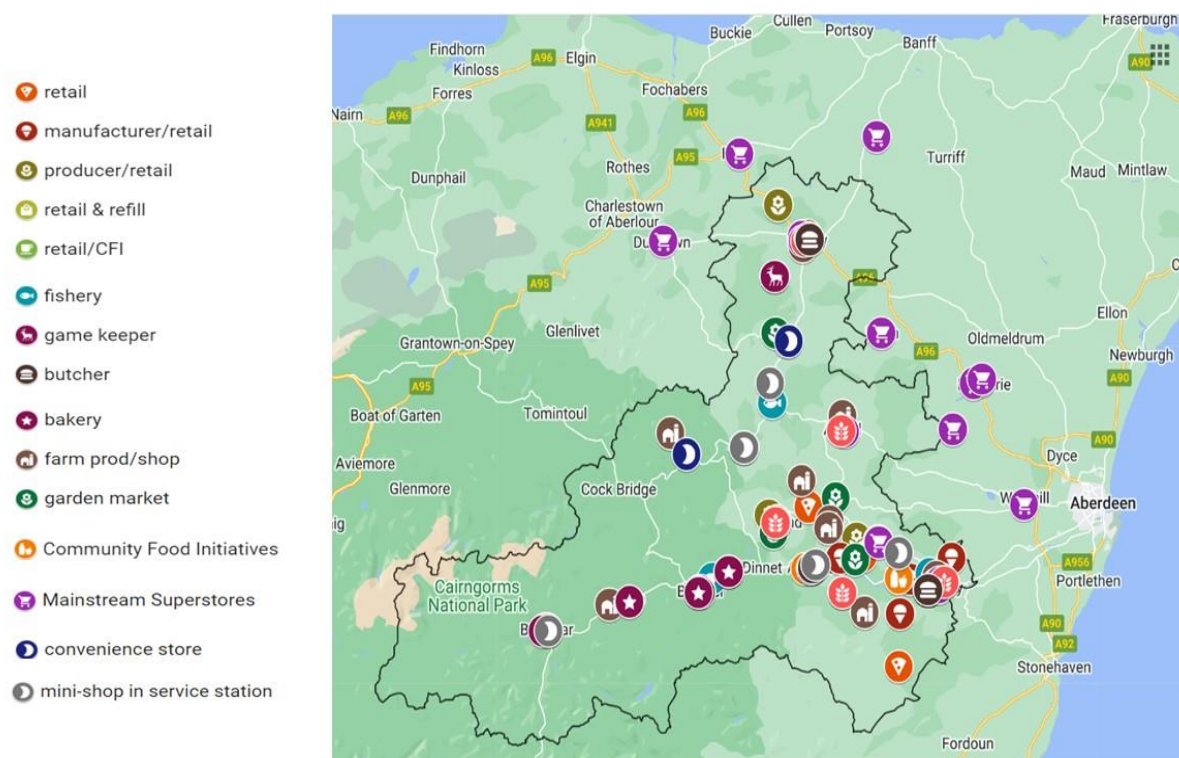
[12] One of these has since closed down and another has temporarily ceased veg box activities to focus on tourism on their land. One farm shop has also closed down since the research was carried out.

Figure 7: Food map of the Marr area

The foodshed map included 98 of the 101 food actors gathered in the database. by mapping the various food-related businesses and initiatives that are physically located within Marr, it is possible to get a preliminary idea of the proximity of food-related initiatives and business to settlements in the area (Figure 8).

Such information provides insights on food *availability* but also on some aspects about the *access* of people to locally produced food. This in turn can shed light on the type of food environment that is prevalent in the Marr Area and its influence on shaping food choices and consumption patterns (see section *How: Food consumption and purchase behaviour* below).
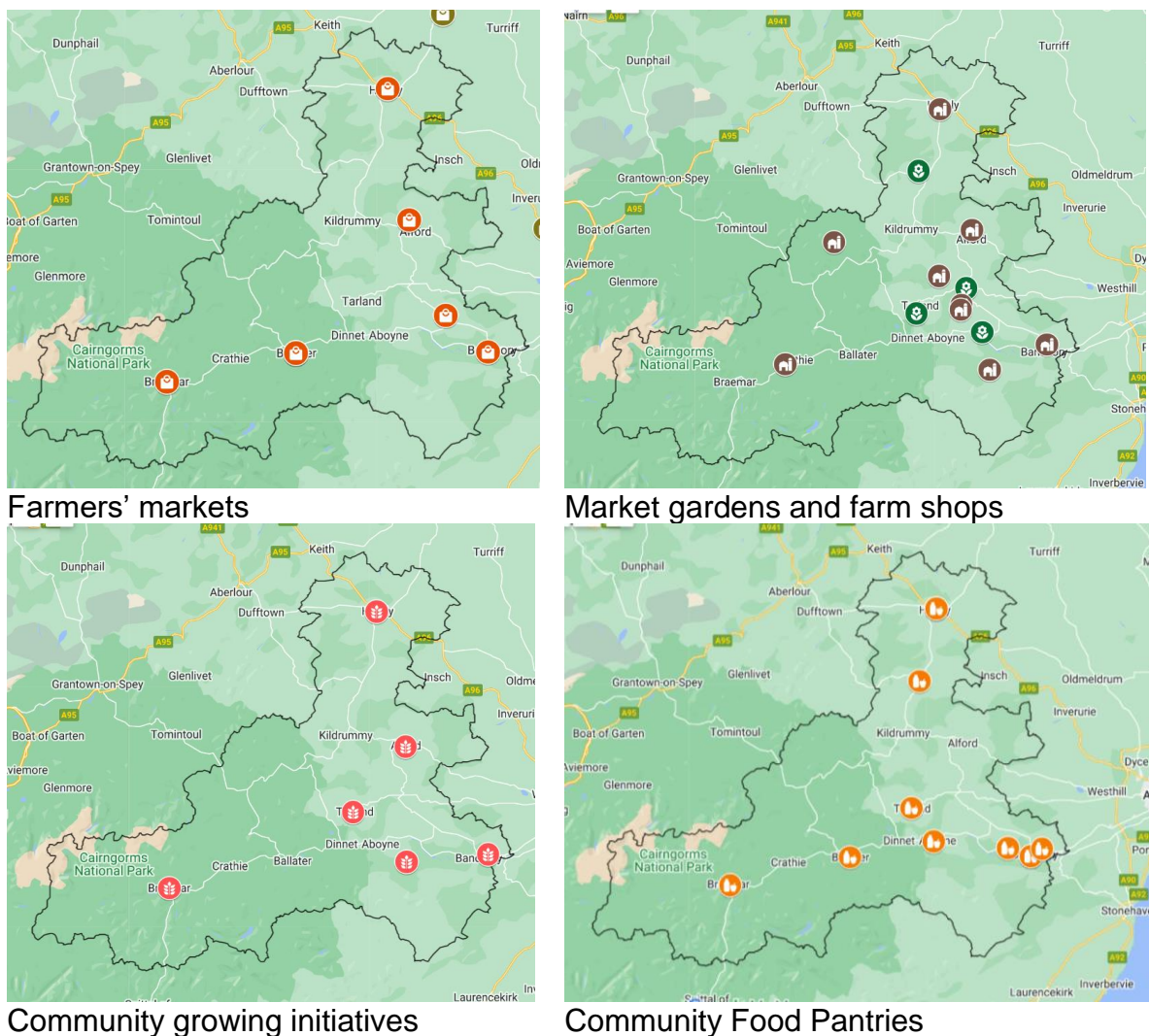

Farmers' markets

Market gardens and farm shops

Community growing initiatives

Community Food Pantries

Figure 8: Location of the various community-led and -oriented initiatives from the supply side in Marr

Mapping the location of corner shops, garage shops and supermarkets permitted us to explore the availability of, and local access to, a broad range of food types in the Marr area. As Figure 9 shows, within the 2,956 km^2 that comprises the Marr area, there are five small garage shops, six corner shops, and eight supermarkets (Co-op, Morrisons, Tesco). This figure makes it possible to start identifying important gaps in food accessibility in Marr.

Small garage shops   Corner shops   Supermarkets

Figure 9: Location of convenience stores in Marr

For example, one of those gaps is in the west of Marr alongside the A97 road that goes from Donside to Deeside well into the Cairngorms National Park delimitation (Figure 10). In this 50-mile corridor, the access to food is limited to only two garage shops and corner shops, with neither supermarkets, nor cafes, nor bespoke food shops of any size[13]. Poor or no transport links, in addition to a shortage of services and facilities convert this area, along with others of smaller size in Marr, into what have been described as "food deserts"[14], i.e. areas where people have very limited access to affordable, nutritious food, including fresh fruit and vegetables, and meat.

People living in these areas must make trade-offs between the cost of food, the cost of transport, and the time invested in getting food. Even when there might be convenience stores in food deserts some problems may still remain, as has been remarked recently elsewhere about UK food poverty: "Many of these areas [food deserts] are dotted with smaller convenience stores – which are demonstrably more expensive and less likely to stock fresh, healthy supplies – and force people who can't afford private transport to go without the healthy food they need."[15]

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[13] As of summer 2022. It has been reported that the corner shop in Strathdon is currently on sale, and a recently open coffee shop, selling local produce can be found on the A93 road, Crathie.

[14] Marshall, D, Dawson, J & Nisbet, L 2018, 'Food access in remote rural places: Consumer accounts of food shopping in the Western Isles of Scotland', Regional Studies, vol. 52, no. 1, pp. 133-144.

[15] Mcrae, I. and H. Westwater. 2023. Food poverty in the UK: The causes, figures and solutions. The Big Issue. 4 Jan 2023. Available at: Food poverty in the UK: The causes, figures and solutions (bigissue.com)

It's possible to drive a road corridor of around 50 miles between Huntly and Braemar (south on the main highway A97 and then via Strathdon) and only find 2 convenience stores and 2 small garage shops selling food.
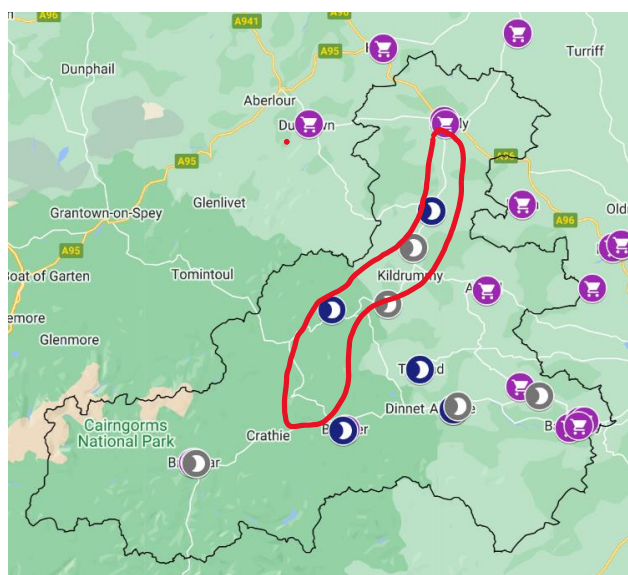
Figure 10: A geographical gap in food accessibility along the A97 in Marr

How: Food consumption and purchase behaviour

To explore the production-consumption nexus of the local food system in Marr, i.e., the demand for local, affordable and nutritious produce, the CAFÉ project carried out four participatory modelling exercises with parents of young families from Deeside.

Guided by a semi-structured interview, participants were asked to identify the food groups they most commonly consume and where they usually get them from, highlighting whether this is locally sourced or not. Systems models were constructed to understand interviewees' drivers and barriers to eating local food. A full systemic model was constructed integrating all the interviewees' models (Figure A.1, Annex A).

The types of food that interviewees said they got locally includes meat, game, fish, eggs, vegetables, bread, preserves, jams, and confectionery. When such food is bought, it is done so by attending the local farmers' market, and mainly as a treat or for a special occasion. Market gardens, community gardens and allotments are also a relevant source of locally grown vegetables. Other sources of vegetables and fruit, as well as of eggs, meat, game, and preserves include family and friends (Figure 11).

During the interviews, as the interviewees identified the various food sources and outlets in the Marr area where they can access local produce, they also identified the pros and cons (i.e. drivers and barriers) of each of them and how that shapes their food consumption and purchase behaviour (Table 3).

Table 3: Identification of drivers and barriers for identified food outlets in Marr

Outlet		Drivers	Barriers
Market Gardens & Veggie boxes	Vegetables, fruits, sometimes eggs	Locally grown, healthy, supports local economy, delivered at the doorstep	You get what you are given; seasonal produce, repetitive; you get what you've already grown on your own; might lead to waste
Farmers' Market	Vegetables, meat, eggs, honey, jams & preserves; pies; bakes; cheese	Support local economy, locally grown,	Expensive, not enough stalls selling veggies to achieve variety. Few "local" suppliers.
Corner shops & Convenience stores	Vegetables, meat, eggs, honey, jams & preserves; pies; bakes	Support local business, accessible. Some will deliver.	Expensive, usually vegs comes with lots of wrapping.
Supermarkets	Vegetables, meat, eggs, honey, jams & preserves; pies; bakes, milk; groceries	Cheap, availability and variety of various types of food; special food available (e.g. gluten free pasta); online option	Not local produce; unknown origin and quality; unfair competition for the local business
Farms shops (selling also via online)	Meat, eggs, pies, jams & preserves, honey, vegetables	High quality, locally grown; produce may be delivered at the doorstep	Very expensive produce
Butcher; baker	Meat; bread and bakes	Good quality, locally sourced/produced; Support local economy	Expensive; need to invest extra time and effort in getting there
Community Food Initiatives	Groceries, bakes, preserves, sometimes veg & fruit	Free food; support local initiatives	Mostly processed food not locally sourced
Community Garden	Vegetables and fruits	Free food, free of chemicals,	Seasonal, lacks variety, not enough produce

In general, buying locally-grown food represented several challenges for families, particularly if they have young children. Among the challenges are:

- Time costs
- Travel costs
- Availability of produce
- Cost of product
- Lack of choice (e.g. with veg box schemes)
- Physical access - few outlets for local food
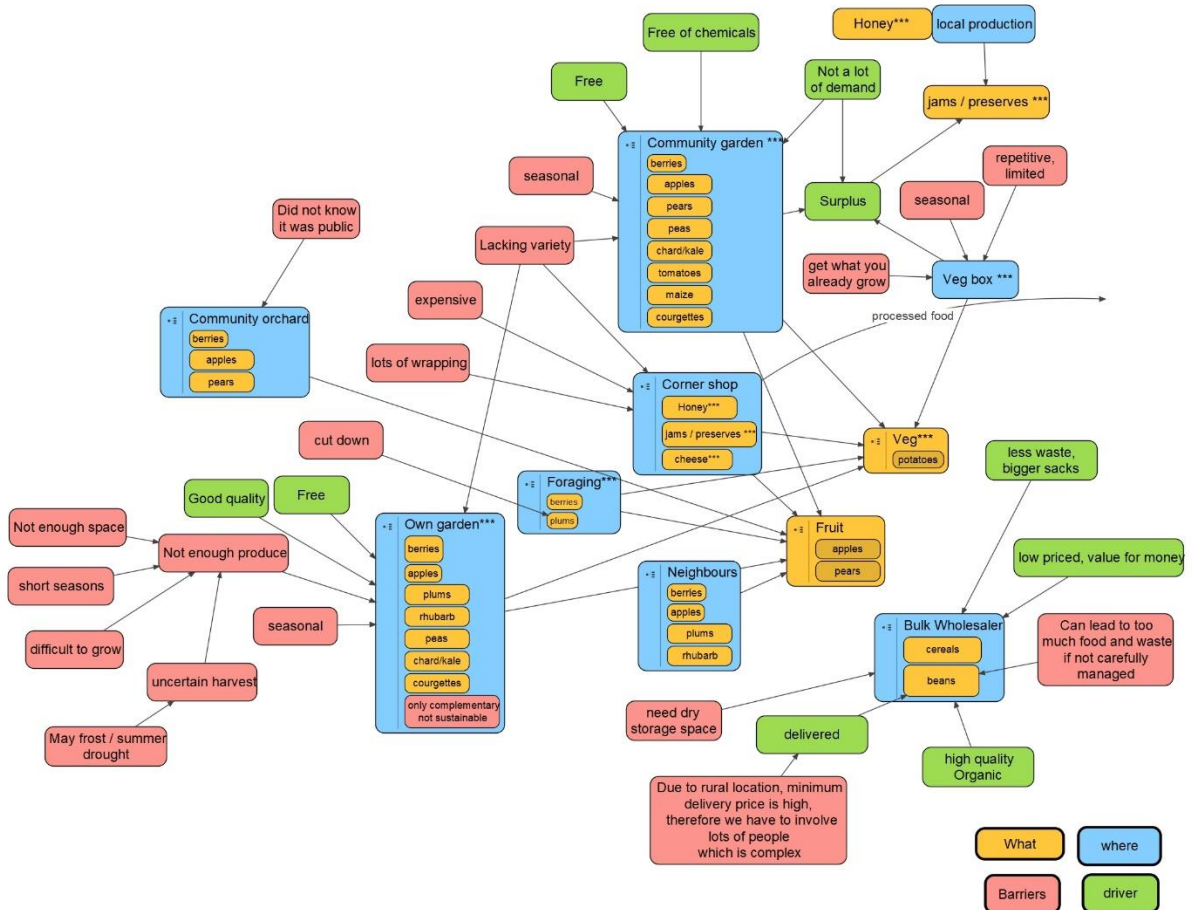- Recognising locally sourced food
- Convenience of supermarket shopping

Figure 11: Local produce identified by participants during the systems model building exercise. *System components (nodes) are colour-coded depending on whether they are i) sources of food (blue), ii) food types (orange), iii) drivers (green), or iv) barriers (burgundy). Causal relationships (arrows) between nodes are colour coded "black" for proportional relationships and "red" for inversely proportional relationships.*

Conversely, for all interviewees, the supermarkets (Aldi, Asda, Morrisons, Tesco) were the most preferred option to buy food on a regular basis (Figure 12). Among the reasons they provided were:

- value for money;
- the possibility of special cheap offers;
- convenience of a one-stop shop;
- reliable supply of family's most preferred food option
- delivery to your doorstep – online shopping options.

For parents of young families and especially for people with food allergies and intolerances, supermarkets offer *reliability*, *safety*, *stability*, and *convenience* which, they mentioned, reduces stress.
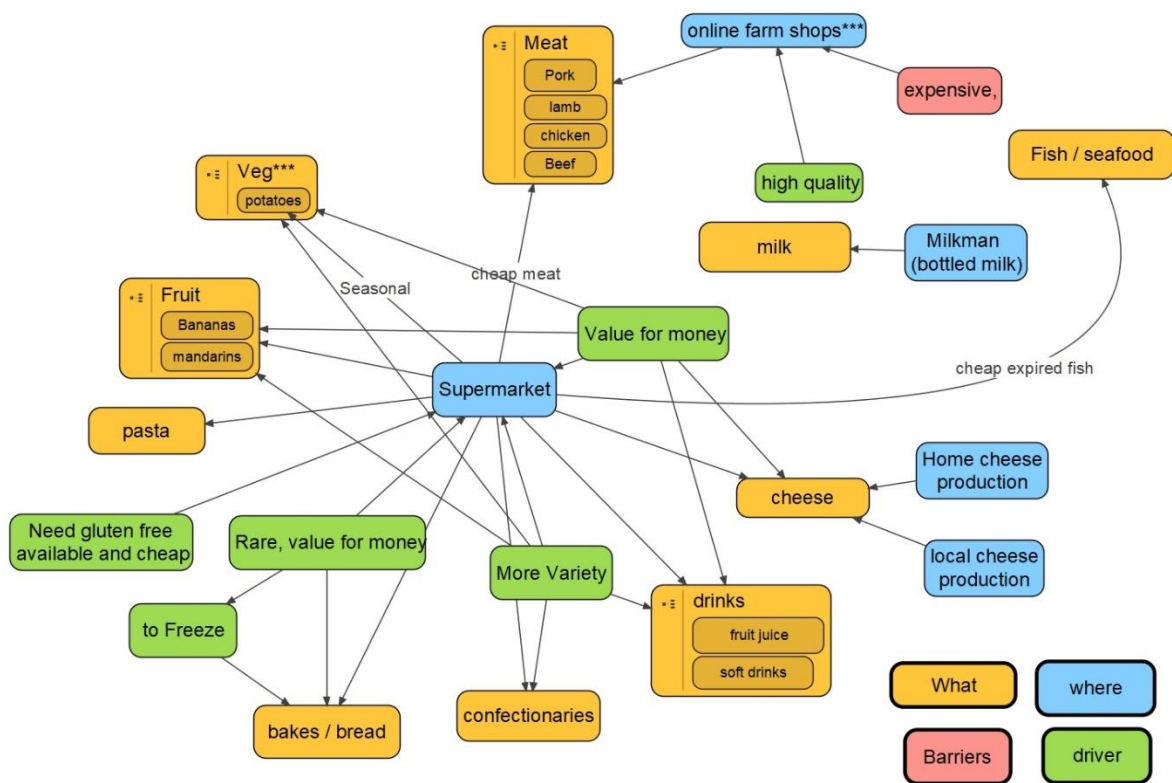
Figure 12: Produce that is usually purchased in the supermarket by participants.
System components (nodes) are colour-coded depending on whether they are i) sources of food (blue), ii) food types (orange), iii) drivers (green), or iv) barriers (burgundy). Causal relationships (arrows) between nodes are colour coded "black" for proportional relationships and "red" for inversely proportional relationships.

4. Challenges faced by local producers: horticulture.

Specific interviews with market gardeners from the Marr area were also carried out during the CAFÉ project timeframe. The intention of focusing on this group was to explore what market gardeners have to do to establish and develop their businesses, and ask the question "How easily could market gardeners expand supply to meet future increases in demand for their product?".

Among the recommendations the interviewees mentioned for establishing a business in horticulture, people recommended gathering, beforehand, a good deal of experience in not only growing vegetables but also in selling them. Running a market garden business can be very challenging from the outset.

The challenges they mentioned to start up a business in this area include:

- Access to affordable plots of land;
- Limited accommodation options nearby their plots;
- High initial investment costs and high financial risk;
- Access to markets, i.e. finding new opportunities for trading.

The challenges to consolidating and then expanding the business include:

- Insecure tenancies;
- Limited access to government subsidies, available to other producers such as farmers, due to the small size of their land;
- Limited access to funding due to land classification (not matching GM);
- Limited opportunities to expand their physical production area due to the high cost of land and difficulties in finding more land to purchase;
- Finding stable spaces for trading (e.g. some mentioned the difficulty of gaining a stall in local farmers' markets);
- Dealing with vested interests;
- Dealing with surpluses;
- Dealing with people's preconceptions about vegetables (eg. how they should all look alike; soil being seen as insanitary; lack of a large range of varied vegtables);
- The inceasing personal physical toll of the work on the body as one gets older.

5. Educational workshops

Building knowledge and capacities around food preparation and consumption has been highlighted as a fundamental step towards bridging the gap between access to

and utilization of locally grown food. The CAFÉ project explored local opportunities and venues for offering educational workshops for those who are either inexperienced in basic food preparation or need reassurance in how to achieve skills in healthy eating to help them make the best use of unprocessed food.

Benefiting from insights from the NHS Grampian Community Public Health team providing advice to the project, and from the expertise of Tre-Life C.I.C. on supporting individuals and communities, the CAFÉ project decided to develop a series of cooking workshops under the title of "Creative cooking on a budget" (see Box 3), taking place in community venues such as village halls, community kitchens and Men's Sheds.

As a first step, the cooking workshops were advertised in Lumsden and Tullynessle to test levels of interest and demand for this sort of event. Given that both events created only a very modest level of interest amongst the targeted communities, we looked for feedback from local Community Food Initiatives. These groups recommended to readvertise the workshops not as cooking lessons but as a cooking get-together events, framing opportunities on culinary styles (e.g. curry night) or seasons (e.g. pumpkin pie for Hallowe'en) to attract more users and, overall, to mitigate people's perception that the event might have been imposed on them or would patronise or stigmatise them for their lack of skills.

Box3 *"Creative Cooking on a Budget"*

One part of the CAFE project is to deliver a set of educational workshops to the wider community. The workshops take the form of cooking sessions aiming at supporting participants to prepare a healthy meal on a budget while reducing food waste.

 Specific goals are to develop skills and knowledge on:

• How to prepare a meal (for one person or a family) using inexpensive ingredients, including vegetables.

• How to make the most of everyday vegetables (e.g. potatoes) to prepare more than one meal out of them.

• How to make the most of cooked ingredients, meal leftovers, and food scraps.
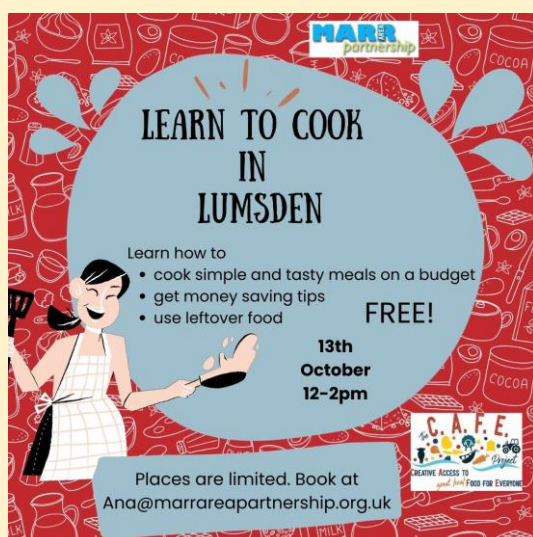
Examples of posters advertising cooking workshops in Lumsden and Tullynessle.

Under this new framing, educational workshops were planned with the Aboyne's Mens' Shed in November 2022. After an initial round of discussions with the Mens' Shed representatives, an event inviting gentlemen who were retired, or widowed, was advertised. The demand was such that it required the organisation of two such events to fulfil demand.

After the cooking events, all participants sat at the table to share their food and to exchange reflections about perceived change in food access and culture between when they were young and now. Among these reflections, the point was made that an important set of changes some have witnessed in their children's families involved the increasing access to highly processed food as well as the increased demand for it due to changes in lifestyle in which parents are rushing home from work and reaching for

the easiest product to cook quickly. Also, it was mentioned that food technology is permitting manufacturers to shape food to appeal to children such as slices of ham or meat nuggets in the shape of bears or dinosaurs which increases the demand from children for such highly processed food. Finally, children's expectations about what they can demand to be served (e.g. it has got to be shaped like a bear or else I will not eat it) have changed. In the "old days" kids had to eat what they were served.

6. Platforms

The development of an online platform to host the Food Information and Support Hub is in its initial stages (see Figure 13). As the information is being built a conceptual model to support operational aspects of the Hub will be required.
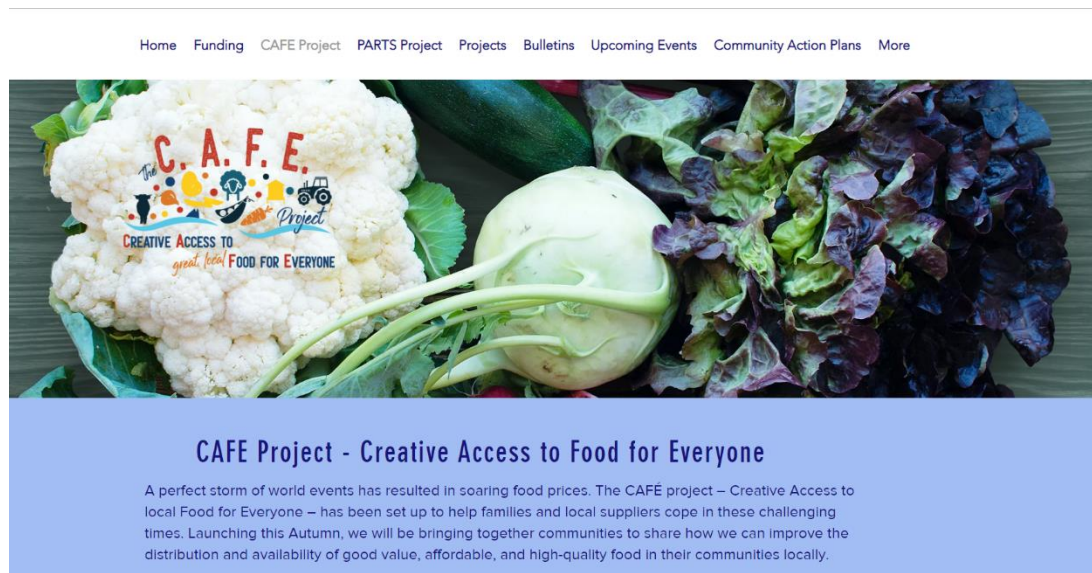

Figure 13: Opening page of the CAFÉ webpage at the Marr Area Partnership website (URL: https://www.marrareapartnership.org.uk/cafeproject)

Where the website should sit (who should host) and its intersection with the emergent work of the Aberdeenshire Council's Fair Food Aberdeenshire Partnership needs to be agreed. Also, Marr Area Planning Group are initiating a Marr Food Plan. Broadly, a public-facing resource could provide information to answer questions such as:

- Are you interested in buying more local food but do not know where to look for it?
- Are you interested in growing more of your own and meeting like-minded people?
- Are you a home grower and do not know what to with the surplus you produce?

- Are you worried about rising food prices and wondering how you are going to make ends meet in the future?

- Are you a producer or retailer of local foods and are looking for new opportunities to getting your products into the local economy?

- Are you involved in a food pantry and would like to stock more local, fresh foods?

- Are you interested in the potential for a robust local food economy to generate new jobs?

… then Marr's Food Information & Support Hub [the website] could have the answers.

7. Next steps

Following up on the progress reported in this document during 2022-23, the CAFÉ project is creating an alliance with the James Hutton Institute to carry out the following activities:

- To actively keep supporting the Fair Food Aberdeenshire Partnership;
- To share the geospatial database with key actors in the northeast Scotland food sector, especially to support the integration of different mapping initiatives;
- To conduct 2 follow up workshops: one with community food initiative representatives across Aberdeenshire, and another with key players and stakeholders related to the Fair Food Aberdeenshire Partnership;
- To carry out more research, e.g. upscaling the approaches and findings shown in this report to the whole of Aberdeenshire;
- To ensure the dissemination of this report to as many regional food sector actors as possible;
- To present the findings of this project to the Fair Food Aberdeenshire Partnership, and other groups.
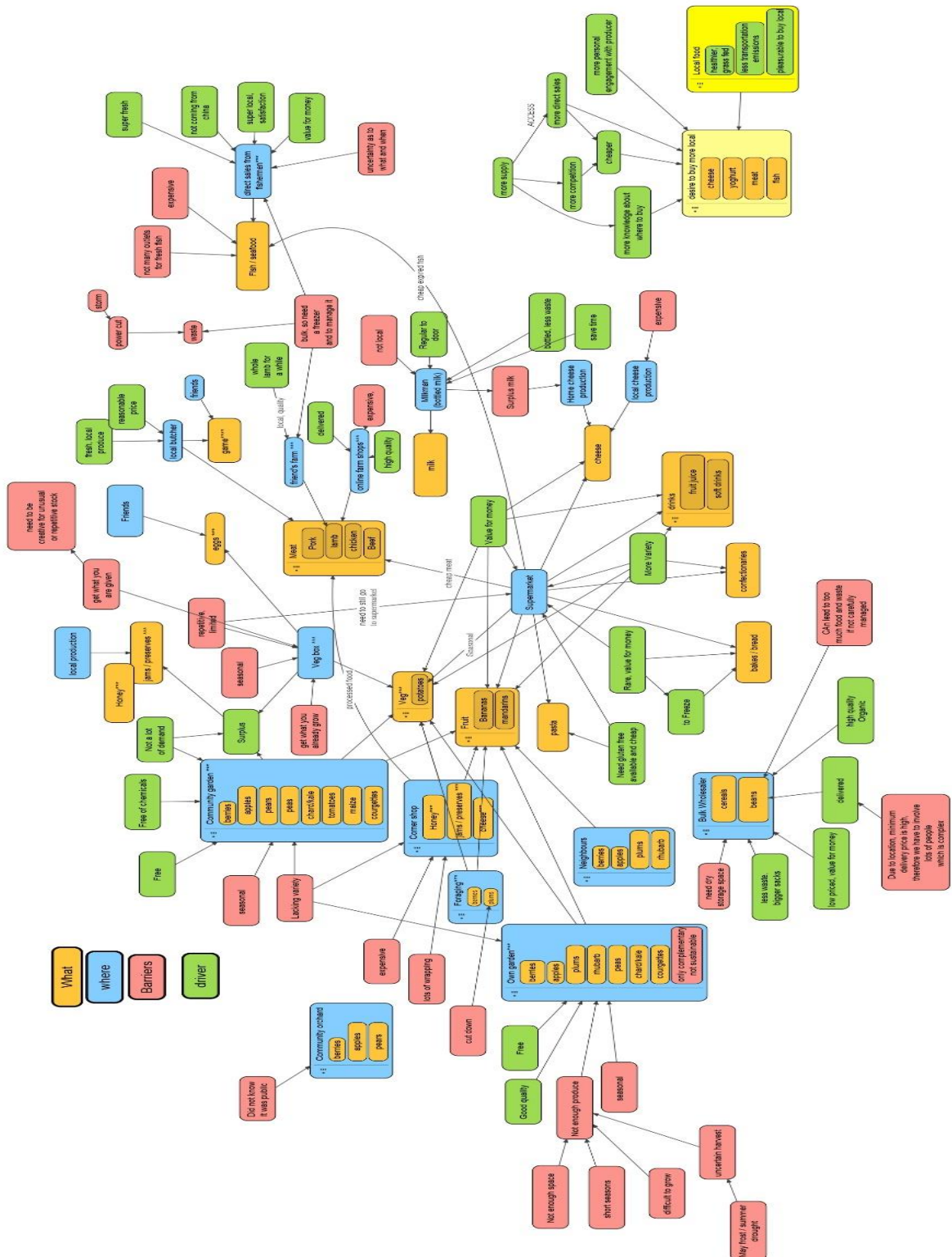
Figure A.1 : Full systems model of food consumption and purchase developed by integrating individual causal loop models. *System components (nodes) are colour-coded depending on whether they are i) sources of food (blue), ii) food types (orange), iii) drivers (green), or iv) barriers (burgundy). Causal relationships (arrows) between nodes are colour coded "black" for proportional relationships and "red" for inversely proportional relationships.*