



Local Food Farms

A Local Food Policy Framework



Talamh Beo

Land • People • Community



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Introduction

Talamh Beo believes everyone in Ireland should have access to high quality, locally produced food. Farmers should earn a fair living from providing that food into their communities. That means creating pathways for local food production through a Local Policy Framework which incorporates institutional recognition, income supports, labour and finance incentives, solutions for land access as well as short supply chain support and infrastructure.

In Ireland, the majority of us remain dependent on imports, large retailers and long supply chains rather than food systems integrated into the places and communities where we live. We do not have a functioning local food system.

Local food systems are foundational to both Food Sovereignty and Agroecology; across the world farmers are demonstrating that diversified, socially and environmentally integrated farming systems can feed the world's population using innovative production and distribution systems. Faced with a multitude of global challenges, it is to these solutions that we must now turn.

This document outlines a pathway for Ireland to build a resilient food system, with more farmers supplying food into local markets, and the crucial support and actions Talamh Beo has identified as essential in order to develop and accelerate the growth of our local food systems and short supply chains.

What is Agroecology?

Agroecology is a comprehensive philosophy that sees the food system as inherently complex, which when cared for properly nourishes the land, people and communities. It integrates into the global community through Food Sovereignty.

The term "Agroecology" comes from the union of two root words: agriculture and ecology. It applies the science of ecology to agricultural systems, integrating farmer-held knowledge and practices.

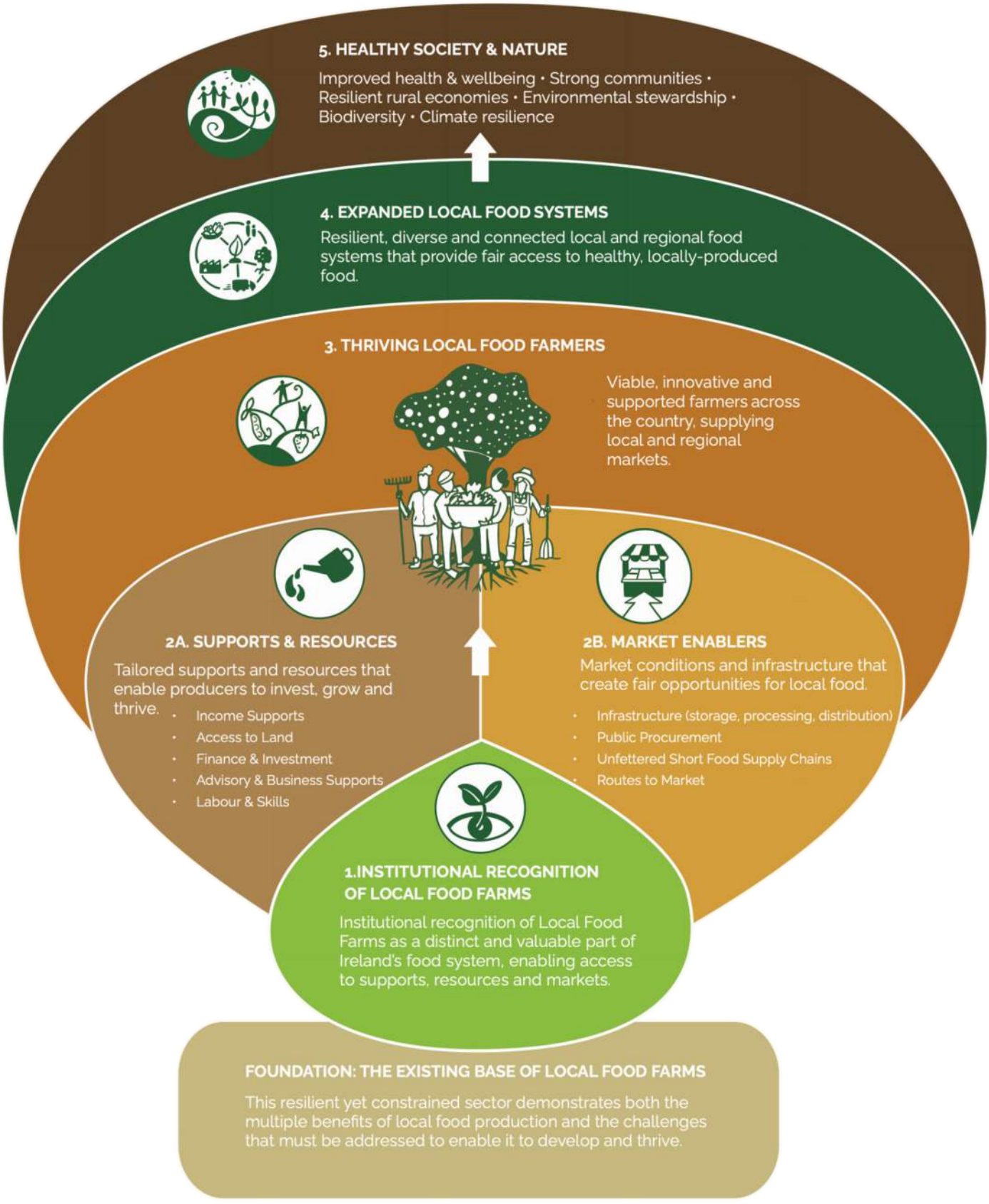
Agroecology is a way of farming and organising our food system that works with nature, centers farmer knowledge, and puts people, communities and fairness at its heart. It reduces damaging external inputs, builds diverse, resilient farms and embeds into ecosystems and into place.

What is Food Sovereignty?

Food Sovereignty is the right of peoples and communities to define their own agricultural and food systems. It means centering the right to food and the rights of people living in rural areas in trade, investment and agricultural policies, and democratising our food and agricultural systems so that farmers and citizens can work together to find solutions to the common problems of climate change, biodiversity loss and falling farm incomes. It prioritizes local, ecologically sustainable production, healthy and culturally appropriate food, and puts control over land, seeds, and markets in the hands of the food producers rather than multinational corporations. Food Sovereignty is a framework for building food and agricultural systems which puts land, people and communities first.

A Local Food Policy Framework can help build Food Sovereignty, while increasing community engagement in food systems from production to distribution. It can also provide the local food production skills and training for a new generation of local food producers.

Our Local Food Pathway



PART 1: The Foundation

Local Food Farmers

1.1 Who they are

Across Ireland, there are hundreds of farmers working hard to supply their local markets. Often these farms are looking after production, distribution, sales and marketing and are competing with an expansive retail sector which uses below cost selling to draw consumers to their doors.



Many citizens assume that Ireland is feeding itself – while in fact the majority of our food is imported and local food networks, supply chains and food producers are in the minority. Talamh Beo want this to change, and for Ireland to invest in the development of a thriving local food system. To do so it must build on the existing cohort of Local Food Producers which already exists.

Local Food Farms can contribute to ecologically balanced farming systems which increase local economic activity, enhance national resilience and strengthen rural cohesion, reconnecting people to the land around them by reconnecting food to place.

Their contribution

Local Food Farmers provide multiple benefits to the environment, community, economy and public health. They contribute to:

- **Vibrant Rural Economies:** The production and consumption of food in short chains drives local employment, supports enterprise, and builds stronger connections between urban and rural communities.
- **Systemic and Climate Resilience:** Diversified, agroecological farms and shorter supply chains can reduce dependence on external inputs and strengthen resilience to market, supply-chain and climate-related shocks.
- **Environmental and Soil Health:** Agroecological farmers reduce use of synthetic fertiliser, fossil fuels and other high emissions inputs and imports through practices that restore biodiversity, improve soil, and support circular economies.
- **Community Health and Renewal:** Agroecological farms deliver fresh, nutrient-dense food directly to local communities while creating viable pathways for generational renewal and diverse land use.

Their constraints

Despite the contribution of local food production in Ireland, small-scale farmers face persistent financial insecurity, increasing climate and weather pressures, and significant structural constraints. Their long-term viability is shaped by seven core issues:

- **Income and Viability:** Rising sales often fail to translate into financial security, preventing reinvestment or scaling without severe risk.
- **Existing Policy and Support Gaps:** Support schemes, grants, and regulations are poorly tailored to small, diversified enterprises, creating a heavy administrative burden.
- **Labour:** High labour costs, long working hours and seasonal labour demands can make it difficult for Local Food Farms to recruit and retain staff.
- **Land Access:** High land prices, tight planning permissions, and restrictive financing hamper physical expansion.
- **Market Access and Pricing:** Strong supermarket dominance and a lack of mid-scale distribution channels limit fair pricing and reliable market routes.
- **Infrastructure:** The loss of local abattoirs, processing facilities, and lack of local food hubs and market infrastructure severely restricts regional distribution.
- **Climate and Weather Risks:** Increasingly unpredictable climatic conditions, including storms, droughts and other factors can affect incomes and farm viability.





1.2 Institutional Recognition

Local Food Farms are an established part of Ireland's food system, yet they remain poorly recognised within agricultural policy. Many sit outside, or at the margins of, existing funding, income support, advisory and research structures, which have largely developed around larger-scale production and export-oriented sectors.



This lack of recognition creates a policy gap. Farms producing primarily for domestic and local markets can deliver significant food, economic, social and environmental value, but there is no clear institutional category through which their particular needs and contribution can be identified and supported.

Talamh Beo therefore proposes the formal recognition of Local Food Farms as a distinct category within agricultural policy, supported by a dedicated Local Food Policy Framework.

Recognition as a Local Food Farm will permit access to a broader range of structured, targeted supports and resources needed to support local food production, distribution and consumption; from targeted income supports to market enablers and infrastructure which will allow the sector to expand and grow.

Formal recognition of Local Food Farms is a first step towards building a functioning Local Food System on the island of Ireland.

We propose:

Institutional recognition of Local Food Farms

What defines a Local Food Farm? Talamh Beo propose the following criteria:

1. **Primary Food Production** – the farm is actively engaged in the rearing or growing of primary food products
2. **Local Market Orientation** – local food farms sell at least 70% of food produced via Short Food Supply Chains
3. **Agroecological Production** – prioritising biodiversity and the long-term health of soils and ecosystems
4. **Commercial Activity** – able to demonstrate a minimum annual production value

An in-depth version of our recommended criteria for institutional recognition is included in our proposal for a Basic Income for Local Food Farmers.

PART 2:
Creating the Enabling Conditions

Formal recognition of Local Food Farms is only the first step. For this critical sector to grow, farmers need an enabling policy environment that addresses the practical barriers identified through our research. This means coordinated action on income, finance, labour, land, markets, infrastructure, knowledge and regulation.

The measures outlined in this section are intended to work together: providing greater security for existing Local Food Farmers, creating clearer pathways for new entrants, and building the local food infrastructure needed for the sector to expand.

2.1 Resources: Income, Finance, Labour and Land

The support and resources outlined here for Local Food Farms are aimed at providing a clear pathway for growth in local food systems. They should be easily accessible, complimentary and coordinated in order to provide effective pathways for existing producers and new entrants.



2.1.1 An Income Support Model: Basic Income

Farmers in Ireland receive substantial economic support. Average farm payments range from 16-18 thousand euros per year, depending on land area, historical production and other factors. Unfortunately many farmers fall between the cracks of the existing subsidy regime. Often farms supplying their local markets with meat, vegetables, milk or other farm produce are in receipt of little to no payments. This does not make their work any less valuable. Many Local Food Farmers fall into this category.

- Area-based payments provide limited support to highly productive farms operating on small acreages.
- Capital grants require investment capacity and often co-financing.
- Environmental and organic schemes support particular practices, but do not address underlying income insecurity.
- Advisory and development supports are uneven across sectors and farm types.
- Processing, distribution and market-development infrastructure remains limited in many areas.

There is no dedicated support recognising the role of farms supplying food primarily to local and domestic markets

The result is a support system that can assist particular activities or investments, but does not provide the predictable income security that farmers identified as central to their ability to remain in production, employ labour, invest and develop their enterprises.

Local farming models - particularly those pioneering and supporting Short Food Supply Chains, developing agroecological initiatives and creating many other societal and educational opportunities - are of high value to citizens and broader society. However, the farmers themselves struggle to make a living from their production and many earn far below the median industrial wage. It is time to redress the imbalance in farm payments and introduce a specific payment aimed at supporting and stimulating local food production in Ireland.

We propose:

A Basic Income for Local Food Farmers

Eligibility for this payment would depend on being the nominated recipient of a Local Food Farm which fulfils the criteria previously outlined.

A basic income is a straightforward, implementable mechanism that would provide:

- Greater financial security, reduced stress and increased planning capacity for Local Food Farmers
- Increased innovation, collaboration and investment into Local Food Farms
- Stronger local food businesses in rural Ireland
- Additional public benefits (food security, biodiversity, rural livelihoods, healthier diets, climate resilience)

We have published a Basic Income for Local Food Farmers policy proposal which contains further detail on this measure.

2.1.2 Finance

Farmers supplying local markets and establishing new on-farm enterprises for short supply chains (horticulture, poultry, mushroom growing, micro dairying, direct sales of meat etc) often struggle to source effective finance options for their initiatives.

Financial institutions serving the farming sector focus on large scale, long-term investments in commodity, export and processing orientated production and have little or no availability of finance for new entrants, smaller scale operators or new enterprises which do not fit a prescribed format.

It is incumbent on the government to provide a vehicle to help finance new and existing local food start up initiatives with low or zero interest loans backed by government guarantee to support the establishment of new producers in local areas.



We propose:

The establishment of a new finance category for Local Food Farms

Aimed at stimulating and supporting local, agroecological production on the island of Ireland this finance category would incorporate loans, VAT and insurance.

Loans: Loans would be available for small scale primary production infrastructure, machinery and potentially land purchase. They would be backed by government guarantee, with low interest rates and have a long term of repayment.

Insurance: Local Food Farmers need insurance equity as many farmers are unable to engage in public events on their farms due to overly expensive insurance costs.

VAT: Local Food Farms adding value to their own on-farm produce should pay a zero VAT rate on the sales of those products, where at least 80% of ingredients are sourced from their own farm. This would stimulate on farm processing, preserving and added value.



2.1.3 Labour

We need more people on the land growing and supplying our local food systems to ensure our community resilience and future Food Sovereignty. This requires supporting the direct labour requirements of Local Food Farms and the upskilling of future local farmers by connecting them with existing local farmers.

We must also recognise that women make a major contribution to farming and rural economies, while often carrying a disproportionate share of unpaid care, administration and other work essential to farm functioning. This uneven burden can restrict women's income, time, visibility and opportunities within farming, and is particularly acute for single-parent farming households and carers.

Local Food Farmers have experience and skills to share, and the local food sector has large capacity for expansion and opportunity, so we should support the training and upskilling of farm labourers, while also creating opportunities for seasonal work.

We propose:

A series of new measures and schemes developed between the Department of Agriculture and the Department of Social Protection which encourage labour activation, retraining and offer pathways for new food producers in local areas.

- Introduce a new "Local Food Farmbridge" program which would subsidise employment on Local Food Farms, simultaneously alleviating labour pressure on farms and providing training for new entrants. This scheme could be integrated into an apprenticeship program for new Local Food Farmers.
- Create a scheme aimed at supporting Local Food Farms in need of specific relief; this scheme would resolve labour shortages at specific times of year or due to other family, personal problems or other circumstances. A Local Food Farm Relief scheme would allow participants to avail of targeted labour support for specific events or criteria to ensure continuity and ongoing activity.
- Introduce a tax relief scheme on PRSI for Local Food Farms.
- Collect gender-disaggregated data on ownership, management responsibility, paid and unpaid labour, income and access to supports within Local Food Farms, so that future policy can identify where women are participating in the work but excluded from recognition or resources.

2.1.4 Access to Land and Young Farmers

Land access and land markets in Ireland are subject to significant speculation and concentration. Access to land is uneven, and this is particularly true for women, who continue to face the legacy of historical patterns of inheritance and succession that have limited their access to land ownership.

In order to develop a coherent Local Food Policy Framework access to land is vital, particularly for young and new entrants into farming.

For new entrants not from established farming families, land is often the first barrier to establishing a new local food production business. At the same time an ageing farming population looks for solutions to ensure the continuity of people on the land. The combined challenges of land access and a lack of generational renewal are casting significant uncertainty over the future of Ireland's rural townlands.

Land support and access to land should be fair and new opportunities should be created to encourage Local Food Farmers who will, in turn, contribute to rural cohesion and a resilient Irish food economy. Local food production also offers an opportunity for older farmers to share their valuable skills with a new generation, and ensures the continuity of farms and their viability, further benefiting rural communities.



We propose:

The development of a land access strategy incorporating social innovation, farm organisations, community groups, local authorities and a new Irish Land Trust all working to develop local agroecological food production in Ireland. This new strategy should:

- Establish a public land purchase mechanism to give first option to local farmers/communities when land in their area is placed on the market in order to prevent land concentration and absentee ownership.
- Introduce long term leases specifically orientated for agroecological farming.
- Ensure public bodies/local authorities make land available for long leaseholds for agroecological farming projects in urban areas, by using existing land they own or, if needed, by acquiring land.
- Land availability scheme: allow existing farmers to lease out land to new entrants for agroecological food production on a per hectare basis to encourage more availability of land in rural areas for local food production, while retaining their existing supports.
- Establish a voluntary land trust which would take land into trust and facilitate long term leases to new entrants for agroecological food production, as well as supporting inter-generational land transfer.





2.2 Market Enablers

Growing local food production requires more than supporting farmers at farm level. Local Food Farmers also need reliable routes to market, appropriate distribution infrastructure and buyers willing to prioritise local supply.

Ireland's food system is currently dominated by large retail and wholesale channels designed around scale, standardisation and lowest-cost sourcing. By contrast, local, community-based and regional market infrastructure remains weak and fragmented. This limits the ability of smaller producers to aggregate supply, access public and institutional markets, and reach consumers efficiently. Additionally, there are little or no market incentives to stimulate the sector — buyers source at the cheapest price rather than relying on local provenance.

A stronger local food system therefore requires targeted market development: investment in food hubs and aggregation, support for short supply food chains, and procurement strategies that recognise local provenance and wider community value.

2.2.1 Short Food Supply Chains

Short Food Supply Chains (SFSCs) are key to the development of a functioning local food system. SFSCs are built on trust and citizen participation - bringing people closer to where their food comes from and a deeper awareness of how it is produced. They offer multiple social, environmental and economic benefits while building community cohesion, stimulating rural networks, reducing isolation and above all providing high quality, nutritious food to communities, towns and cities across the country.

However, many proposed solutions of SFSCs such as Food Hubs, online markets, producer groups and collaborative supply models need ongoing support for coordination, management and facilitation. These systems do not run themselves, and without support for people in these connective roles, local food initiatives remain fragile.

These problems can be resolved through understanding and supporting two key elements in Local Food Systems: people and places.





People

A host of administrative, organisational and other skills are required to run local food systems effectively. We propose the establishment of 'Local Food Facilitators' as a distinct role. This will require:

Defining and funding Local Food Facilitators as dedicated SFSC advisors who help farmers navigate routes to market, build trust, coordinate logistics, support collaboration, connect with communities and institutions, and hold together organisational work.

Strengthening the network of SFSC advisory systems across the country, with funding and support for exchange of expertise, training and access to and sharing of information about SFSCs.

Places

Ireland also requires dedicated community infrastructure for establishing and running SFSCs. Policy should support the development of appropriately scaled regional infrastructure, including shared processing facilities, local abattoirs and other infrastructure designed around the needs of smaller and diversified food producers. This can include:

Markets: Investing in or constructing multi-use spaces for Local Food Systems, for example new dedicated covered trading areas for Local Food Farms, with multi-functional amenity and community use outside market hours.

Community Food Hubs: Establishing Community Food Hubs as SFSC infrastructure and learning points, where facilitators can help coordinate and develop Local Food Systems with Local Food Farmers. Hubs can also provide a stable, fair-price route to market for agroecological producers. These hubs can also offer food skills, nutrition education, community cooking, and cultural food programmes, and be linked directly to Local Farm networks enabling better connection and communication between producers and consumers.

Local Processing Infrastructure: Local abattoirs can transform local markets for meat. This may include on-farm slaughter and processing facilities for direct sales and mobile abattoirs, especially for poultry and pigs. In addition specific community- and co-op-run local abattoirs, should be established, backed by public investment.

Mapping: Maintaining the ongoing mapping of Local Food Producers and Food Hubs, which will be essential for building SFSCs and should be managed and resourced in accordance with Local Food Farms criteria.

2.2.2 Public Procurement

Public procurement is a critical driver within a Local Food Policy framework. All public institutions currently purchasing food and/or catering supplies from the open market should be required to prioritise Local Food Farms first, utilizing the infrastructure established for SFSCs.

Specifically, public policies should require a minimum of 50% of food for public bodies to be sourced from Local Food Farms.

The Department of Social Protection could introduce an optional **"local food credit"** for people on low incomes or in receipt of a welfare payment which can only be used to purchase from registered Local Food Farms.

Community Food Hubs as Facilitators of Local Procurement

Community Food Hubs play a pivotal role in bridging the gap between small-scale producers and large public anchor institutions by:

- Establishing collaborative arrangements allowing smaller farms to aggregate supply and supply larger buyers.
- Supporting procurement officers to break procurement into smaller, accessible lots.
- Organising meet the buyer/meet the supplier type events to build direct relationships.
- Facilitating co-ops, producer groups, community businesses and shared logistics.
- Providing training and planning support for procurement officers and catering providers.



Spotlight on Community Wealth Building

The Community Wealth Building (CWB) model offers a practical framework for integrating Local Food Systems into the broader economy and building resilience against external shocks. CWB keeps capital circulating within local economies by supporting democratic ownership models (such as community food hubs and producer cooperatives) and leveraging public "anchor" institutions (such as schools, hospitals and local authorities) to purchase via SFSCs. This counteracts wealth extraction by multinational retail monopolies, generates fair local jobs, secures viable incomes for producers, and repurposes public land and assets for community benefit.

Action Pathways to Scale Community Wealth Building

In order to grow this concept, policy should focus on:

- Mandating local public procurement policies and targets as outlined above.
- Mandating City and County Councils to develop local CWB strategies and implementation pathways.
- Facilitating the establishment of community and worker owned enterprises, encouraging shared infrastructure, collective governance and other initiatives which lighten the administrative burden on local communities.

PART 3:
Outcomes and Implementation

3.1 Societal and Planetary Benefits

Talamh Beo's Local Food Policy Framework delivers well beyond farming; it incorporates multiple social, economic and environmental benefits. By supporting diverse, agroecological and locally rooted food systems, it connects public health, ecological restoration, rural prosperity and community resilience. In doing so, it provides a practical way of delivering on priorities already established across Irish government policy.

3.1.1 Health and Nutrition

A functioning local food system will improve both availability and accessibility of nutritious food. Supporting local farmers, food hubs, SFSC initiatives and a local food credit will increase access to fresh, minimally processed produce, particularly for communities facing economic or access barriers to healthy eating. This compliments the objectives of the Healthy Ireland, Sláintecare and Mission 3 of Food Vision 2030, while recognising that healthy eating is a question of infrastructure, accessibility and affordability rather than individual choice.

3.1.2 Climate and Nature

The Local Food Policy framework moves away from an extractive approach to farming systems to one which restores natural resources, and works within natural systems and ecological boundaries. Agroecology means a focus on healthy soils, a reduction of dependence on chemical inputs, and greater biodiversity in production systems. Short supply chains reduce transport and processing waste, while also decentralising production and distribution, creating more resilient food systems and mitigating against supply chain shocks and price fluctuations. These outcomes align with the objectives of the Climate Action Plan, Food Vision 2030, the National Biodiversity Action Plan and Ireland's targets for expanding Organic farming to 10% of farmed land by 2030.

3.1.3 Society and Community

This Framework will contribute to generational renewal, rural employment and the revitalisation of rural economies. Labour activation, apprenticeships in local food production, an intergenerational land trust and short supply chain initiatives offer real, tangible mechanisms to support new entrants and existing Local Food Farms. Talamh Beo's framework positions farmers as central social anchors within rural Ireland. This aligns directly with the Department of Rural and Community Development's Our Rural Future strategy, which seeks to revitalize town and village ecosystems through local economic loops and community resilience. Furthermore, by fostering cooperative markets, direct-to-consumer farming (such as CSAs), and peer-to-peer knowledge networks, the framework helps combat isolation and severe mental health challenges in farming communities—a core focus of national rural health initiatives.



3.1.4 Employment and Professional Development



Farming is a profession - and Local Food Systems require dedicated people in our community providing the vital service of producing food. Supporting the training, establishment and development of local food systems creates viable, high-skilled local employment. This directly underpins the government's Food Vision 2030 (Mission 2) objectives to enhance primary producer viability and diversify farm activity into organic and horticultural growth. Talamh Beo's proposal for targeted labour/income supports and training mentorship pathways provides a structural route for a new generation of growers, addressing rural demographic decline and complementing national lifelong learning and social welfare reform goals.

3.2 Long-Term Vision and Generational Planning: Cross-Government Coordination

Developing a resilient, thriving local food system requires a long-term, multi-decade commitment that transcends standard political and electoral cycles. Because local food systems impact public health, environmental resilience, rural development, and economic equity, this framework cannot be delivered by the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine alone.

We Propose:

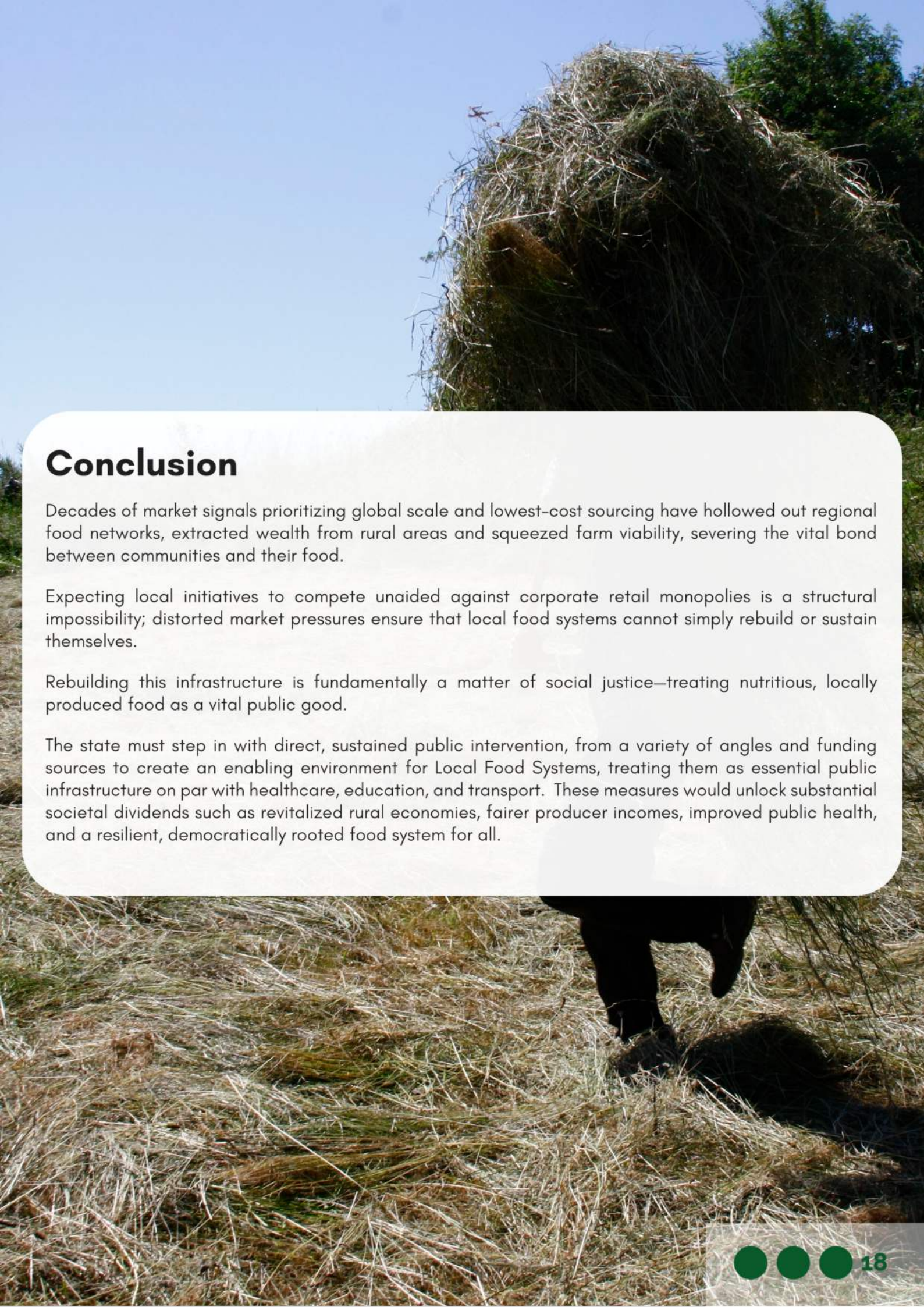
A series of coordinated measures to achieve true generational planning and ensure long-term policy coherence

Inter-Departmental Steering Group: Establish a dedicated cross-government taskforce—bringing together the Departments of Agriculture, Health, Climate, Rural and Community Development, Social Protection, Finance, Public Expenditure and Local Government—to align policy objectives and streamline funding mechanisms.

National 20-Year Local Food Strategy: Legislative backing for a long-term roadmap that sets clear, incremental targets for local food markets, including procurement, land access, and regional processing infrastructure through to 2045.

Integrated Local Authority Activation: Require City and County Councils to incorporate Local Food System Strategies into their County Development Plans and Local Economic and Community Plans, ensuring national policy translates into local land-use planning and infrastructure.

Ring-Fenced Generational Renewal Funds: Multi-annual budget allocations dedicated to supporting new entrants, intergenerational land transfers, and long-term advisory networks and local food facilitators, giving young and aspiring farmers the security to build lifelong careers in local agroecological production.



Conclusion

Decades of market signals prioritizing global scale and lowest-cost sourcing have hollowed out regional food networks, extracted wealth from rural areas and squeezed farm viability, severing the vital bond between communities and their food.

Expecting local initiatives to compete unaided against corporate retail monopolies is a structural impossibility; distorted market pressures ensure that local food systems cannot simply rebuild or sustain themselves.

Rebuilding this infrastructure is fundamentally a matter of social justice—treating nutritious, locally produced food as a vital public good.

The state must step in with direct, sustained public intervention, from a variety of angles and funding sources to create an enabling environment for Local Food Systems, treating them as essential public infrastructure on par with healthcare, education, and transport. These measures would unlock substantial societal dividends such as revitalized rural economies, fairer producer incomes, improved public health, and a resilient, democratically rooted food system for all.

TALAMH BEO is a member-based organisation, led by farmers and land workers, and open to everyone with an interest in food and agriculture. Together, we are working towards a fairer, more sustainable food system and are informed by direct experience of the issues we campaign on.

We want to create a better food system in Ireland, where all people have access to healthy, nutritious and affordable local food.

We want to farm in ways which benefit and restore natural ecosystems and build soils, leaving the land better than when we started.

We want to show solidarity with rural communities across Ireland and the world and ensure that living from the land and with the land continues into the future.

We believe that farmers and communities should be at the center of decision-making for food and agriculture systems and developing agricultural policies.

We stand for a system which puts the power back into the hands of communities instead of corporate interests.

Support Local Food Farms

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