

LUSH

Linking Up Food Suppliers and Hubs Starter pack



Got a question about LUSH? Contact
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Advice for food
producers, farmers,
food retailers and
community food
projects

What is LUSH?

LUSH stands for **Linking Up Food Suppliers and Hubs**. It's a way to supply food poverty projects with good food, and at the same time increase sales for farmers, producers and retailers.

LUSH is a locally-driven initiative where two individual organisations that might not normally cross paths (eg a farm and an urban food project) get to know each other and work together for mutual benefit.

How does it work?



A food supplier (a farmer, producer or retailer) and a community food hub in the same local area get to know each other and understand each other's needs.



The food producer or retailer asks their existing customers to 'buy another one for someone that needs it'. Their customers pay to donate food to the community food hub.



The food hub uses the donations to address food poverty and bring social benefits. The supplier and hub talk regularly to ensure the partnership meets the needs of both.

Why we need LUSH

In 2023 about 17% of UK households were in food poverty. That's nearly one in five.

Many people in food insecurity are working. Many have children, are young, ill or disabled, or are carers. People in 'food poverty' are actually in poverty; many aspects of life become precarious and stressful, challenges are juggled daily, often with associated isolation, anxiety and depression. A parcel of food on its own does not fix poverty. The root cause is inequality.

Many households are choosing cheap calories to get by. There are widening health inequalities corresponding to the diet inequalities. Some people go to community food projects ('hubs') for food and social support.

Community food hubs at best provide a welcoming, safe, friendly environment where people can both give and take, as equals. Many people value the social aspects of food hubs, such as community cafes, as much as the food itself. At best, community food hubs are run in and with communities of need.

Community food hubs usually have low budgets for food and many are reliant on surplus food deliveries. The food they receive may be insufficient, poor quality, short date and not nutritionally balanced. Projects relying on surplus food do not get to choose what is delivered, or when, and cannot always make a decent meal from what arrives.

Many people are now in long term poverty. They use community projects' food not just for a one-off emergency referral, but long term; the provision affects their long term nutrition.

Farmers and food producers are not usually good at running food poverty projects in and with communities of need. They are not usually well placed to offer social support in communities.

Farmers are often working long hours for low wages in precarious business situations; the economic system for food trading tends to disadvantage farmers, especially small ecological ones. Farmers are usually busy, not well connected to urban communities and not able to give food away.

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LUSH provides a solution because the producer is paid for food given to the food hub. The food hub receives food it chooses, when it suits them. The food reaching households is good quality.

Sometimes, the producer and food hub people also begin to make relationships, undertake visits, understand each others' situations and start to collaborate. This can be a very positive experience, for example for people who have never been to an organic farm, or for people who have preconceptions about those in food poverty, or for those that thought all farmers are rich, or who had not previously had cause to think about where their food comes from.

Click below to watch a short video about a LUSH partnership in Stroud - find out how it addresses challenges for both the partners.



Watch LUSH **2 min video**

LUSH is a way of supplying high quality food to those in need, but it does not address the underlying problem: people should not be too poor to make good food choices.

How to find a LUSH partner

Finding a community food hub

Most towns have community food poverty projects. They are all different and there is not one central register. Some places have many outlets which collaborate, but are separately run. Some are traditional food banks that give out one-off food parcels. Others are community projects offering food alongside other activities.

Many community food projects are stretched and volunteer-run. They often depend on donations and surplus food which they did not choose, which might be poor quality and arrive in random amounts. Some food hubs have kitchens, freezers, cafes, mini shops, and networks of support. Others are small-scale, occasional and only offer tins and packets. You will need to pair up with a food hub that matches your offer.

Where to start

- Do an internet search using the words food bank, food hub, community food, community cafe or soup run in your local area, or somewhere you already deliver to.
- Food provision is often supported by churches, mosques or temples; they might have local contacts.



Finding a community food hub: useful links

Fareshare	Distributes surplus food. They might be able to accept your food offer directly, or tell you about groups they deliver to who could work with you. Fareshare is regionally organised.	fareshare.org.uk/giving-food/
IFAN (Independent Food Aid Network)	A UK network of independent food support groups.	foodaidnetwork.org.uk
Sustainable Food Places	Some places have groups of organisations overseeing food issues in their area.	info@sustainablefoodplaces.org
Trussell Trust	A membership organisation for hundreds of food banks.	trusselltrust.org/winter2023PPC
Feeding Britain	A UK network of 91 partnerships (a network of networks) tackling food poverty in diverse ways including food pantries, larders and community kitchens.	feedingbritain.org
Your Local Pantry network	A network of low-cost community shops (members pay £3.50-£5.00 a week for food that would retail at £25-£30).	yourlocalpantry.co.uk
Community Fridge Forum	Network of community fridges, mainly small-scale.	Community Fridge Forum Facebook group
Good Food Scotland	Runs a network of affordable food spaces (larders) across Glasgow/Scotland, and a new Community Supermarket & Cafe. Available to anyone, with shopping 30-40% cheaper than RRP.	goodfoodscotland.org
Scottish Pantry Network	Supports a network of pantries across the central belt of Scotland.	scottishpantrynetwork.org.uk
Cyrenians Community Pantry network	Runs a network of community pantries across Edinburgh.	cyrenians.scot/how-we-help/140-community-pantries

Finding a food supplier

In general, farmers and small retailers are busy working, do not have spare money, operate under difficult business conditions and are not always well-networked beyond their immediate rural and farming communities. They often work long hours, avoid too much time on their laptops, might not respond to a voicemail, and do not have spare time to try out new ideas or extra deliveries.

Most farmers do not sell food to the public or process their own food. They often specialise in large quantities of a few products which they sell to a processor or direct to a supermarket, sometimes through a pack house, abattoir or dairy. Some produce such as barley, unprocessed milk or live animals will not be of use to a food project. A few farmers produce cheese, apple juice, ice cream - often these are small specialist producers.

Many farmers do have surpluses or grade outs. Sometimes grade outs are produced at the pack house rather than the farm. Farmers don't usually have the spare labour to harvest or deliver their surpluses.

LUSH works for any enterprise selling direct to the public, not just farmers. For example it could work for your local bakery or wholefood shop.

Your food project will need to match the scale of the farmer you work with. For most community food poverty projects that means approaching an unusually small farmer. LUSH works best with food producers that sell directly to the public. You will probably know about farmers in your area that do so because they will be at the farmers' market, have a farm shop or online sales.

Like food hubs, farmers are all different. Some can deliver, some cannot. Some have produce that is hard for them to sell. Some have produce that varies wildly throughout the year, and they may have gluts. Some trade in frozen produce, others only fresh. Start a conversation to see if you can match your needs up. There is a list of national farming networks below; many of these can refer you to their regional or local members.

Finding a food supplier: useful links

Real Farming Trust	Social media contacts with agroecological farmers - mainly ethical and small. Some sell direct to the public.	jade@realfarming.org
CSA Network	A network of a small number of specialist farms that have a high degree of community engagement and participation. All sell direct to the public.	csanetworkfunding@gmail.com
Soil Association	A charity representing organic farmers and food businesses. Well-networked with good communications and some social aspirations. Some sell direct to the public.	khochberg@soilassociation.org
Pasture for Life	A network of environmentally conscious meat farmers. This network is keen to support LUSH and has helped arrange several LUSH relationships.	peakdistrict@pastureforlife.org
Ooooby	An online platform used by farmers and food businesses that sell to the public. Ooooby is sympathetic to LUSH - they can offer farmers an online button for customers to pay extra as a donation.	seb.mayfield@ooooby.com
Open Food Network	An online trading platform for small producers selling direct to the public, many with a social purpose.	openfoodnetwork.org.uk
Young Farmers	A club and network for young farmers, with a mailing list.	sarah.palmer@nfyfc.org.uk

Meeting your LUSH partner: Questions to ask

At the start of a LUSH partnership you will probably be meeting people for the first time who might work in very different settings to your own - an urban food bank partnering with a rural farm, for example. The questions below might help you to see how well you match up.

Try to come to an arrangement that helps both partners. If the food hub can use an item that the farmer usually cannot sell (giant pumpkins for bulk soup, offal for faggots, offcuts from cheese packing) and the farm's customers are willing to pay for those products, that might help everyone.



Farmers and food hubs vary widely - your assumptions might not be correct.



Questions to ask food hubs

- Can you handle fresh produce?
- Can you handle fresh meat and dairy?
- Do you have indoor ambient rat proof storage?
- Do you have chilled or frozen storage?
- Will your customers like offal / muddy beetroot / large joints / oversized cabbages / pet food?
- How much produce can you shift in a week?
- How much shelf life do you need?
- Can you repack half a cow / 25kg sack of flour / sack of potatoes or do you need prepacks only?
- What items do you need more of?
- What days of the week can you accept delivery?
- Is there parking?
- Can you collect?
- Where do you already drive to that might be a good place to meet?
- Do you make ready meals / recipe packs / juice etc?
- Who eats your food? Do they pay? Do they need a referral?
- Why are your customers in poverty? What else is happening in their lives?
- What sort of people come here for food?
- Would you like a farm visit one day?
- What marketing materials (personal stories, photos) can you give us to help us to encourage our customers to buy food for your project?
- Can you cook?
- What times of year is food most useful?
- Are you good at H&S, HACCP etc?
- What's the best way to contact you?
- How many staff and volunteers do you have?
- What other premises do you use?
- Are you registered as a food business?



Questions to ask food suppliers

- **What do you produce?**
- **How often, how much?**
- **How does it change during the year?**
- **What are you currently selling cheap, what surplus do you have?**
- **What happens when your customers go on holiday?**
- **Can you introduce us to other farmers / processors who have surplus or who want to try LUSH as well?**
- **Does your produce come in small pack sizes or in bulk?**
- **Is it frozen / chilled / suitable for our store room?**
- **Do you already drive / deliver close to any of our projects / volunteers' houses?**
- **What's the best way to contact you?**
- **Would you like to visit our community hub?**
- **Does your food contain allergens?**
- **Is it labelled ready for direct sales?**

Yolanda's story

This is a personal account of using a food hub which can be shared in LUSH marketing. For privacy the interviewee's name was changed.

I am a single parent with three kids. Until quite recently, I didn't think very much about the cost of food. We ate well, I cooked from scratch, our diet was healthy, I often brought home new foods for the kids to try, things were straightforward.

My circumstances changed suddenly when one of my kids became unwell and had to miss a lot of school. I could not maintain my job, which was in school hours, and overnight my household finances became unmanageable, including the food budget.

I'm quite resourceful, a graduate and in good health myself but I found to my horror that no matter how much attention I gave to balancing the finances, they simply would not stack up. My life became precarious in every direction and my stress levels went through the ceiling.

There was an immediate impact on how we ate. I didn't have the cash flow to bulk buy or to buy extras like spices. I couldn't cook anything that the kids might not eat. They could no longer invite friends back for tea. I didn't buy fresh vegetables in case they went off. Sometimes I skipped my own portion and picked their plates clean when I washed up. For the first time, I resorted to unhealthy ready meals and oven chips; we could all have tea for £5.

I was soon exhausted with the juggling. I didn't want to become a 'charity case' and did not talk about what was happening at home. Even people who knew me well did not know what was happening.

I stopped going out, mainly for financial reasons but also I became isolated and preoccupied with the daily challenges. For the first time in my life, I admit I got pretty low.

The community food hub was very helpful because it was friendly and I didn't feel ashamed to go there. Nobody asked intrusive questions and I was welcome to help with the cooking and other tasks. That was important for me; I'm a good cook and I didn't want to feel 'needy.'

The food hub has a LUSH arrangement with a farmer and sometimes we were able to eat really good quality food. We really welcomed that in our household. One day I found myself laughing with the others at the food hub. I realised it had been quite a while since I'd had a laugh with other people. I've made some really good friends, people I respect and now I'm back on my feet with a new job, I like to go and help when I can.

I think LUSH is good because it helps the food hub to get the kind of food it wants, and at times that suit the hub. They rely a lot on surplus food or donations. It comes at random times in random amounts and is not always good quality or healthy. There's not always much choice or the right balance of food. When we get really good quality food there and we know we are linked up with an environmental farmer you can see people's self respect picking up. I think it helps families with their nutrition too and taking more interest in where food comes from.

Advice for building a healthy LUSH partnership

From Pasture for Life

Spend time getting to know each other — visit each other's place (farm and hub) to make sure you understand each other's system, and have trust that each can deliver a good product/service.

Have a single point of contact for the order and accepting delivery.

Share photos and stories with each other to help with marketing in newsletters/blogs etc - but don't just enter into the agreement as a publicity stunt.

The food hub should decide what type/cut of meat it prefers (mince, offal and cheaper cuts go further).

The farmer should treat the hub similar to any other paying customers.

Make sure you give feedback to each other — was the pack size right? Was the product right?

Farmers - when selling to the philanthropic customer and encouraging them to buy additional portions:

- **Advertise using portion size (e.g sufficient for 4 portions or 4x4 portions etc) rather than focusing on kg or £.**
- **Think about the timing of sales - some Pasture for Life farmers limit the offer to just a few times a year because they feel promoting it every month would lose impact. Other farmers advertise this option on their website all the time.**
- **Share how the partnership is going with the people who donated, and with your wider customer base.**



Case study

Bypassing a broken food system: Peelham Farm & Cyrenians

How one homeless charity works directly with organic beef farmers to source nutrient-dense food

In 2023, Sue O'Neill Berest, Food Education Manager at Cyrenians Edinburgh, was introduced to Denise Walton, an organic beef farmer in Berwickshire. Sue was keen to find out if there was a way of accessing good quality meat for the Cook School in Leith, which offers cookery classes to homeless people.

Since then around 100kg of high quality meat has been supplied to the Cook School, where it is turned into nutritious meals for homeless shelters.

This connection of farmers and other food producers with community food projects and hubs - known as LUSH (Linking Up Suppliers and Hubs) - enables direct access to high quality food for those in most need. It's a win-win for both the food business and the community food project. In the case of Cyrenians and Peelham Farm, both are under different kinds of pressures, which LUSH can help to alleviate.

Cyrenians often rely on donations of waste food - these can be 'orange-ticketed' items which are not always nutritious, can have a short shelf life, and may not be useful for cooking meals. Added to this, community food projects have very little money, and must make the most of what's on offer.

Meanwhile, Peelham Farm (and other agroecological, nature-friendly farms like them) need to receive a good price for the high quality of their produce - in the case of Peelham, 100% grass-fed Pasture for Life certified beef - but they are competing in a corporatized food system dominated by supermarkets. Profit-oriented multinationals don't pay farmers a fair price (click to read about Riverford's #GetFairAboutFarming campaign). Farms like Peelham need to attract and keep customers engaged with the quality of their product, not least its benefits to human health, nature and, therefore, wider society.

So when Sue met Denise, they talked about whether Denise's customers might want to donate meat directly. Peelham now promotes the idea of sending a gift of good quality meat to Cyrenians.

Sue explained: "Cuts of meat that we can use at the cook school, such as mince, stewing meat and sausages, are offered with a 15% discount and listed on the donations page of the Peelham website. Peelham customers sometimes kindly place some things from this page in their basket while they shop for their own meat. This meat is then stored in Peelham's freezer for us.

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“Denise normally gets in touch on a Thursday evening saying they have meat for us. I collect it at Leith market on a Saturday morning where Peelham has a stand; it is roughly 10 minutes from our Cook School. The meat is frozen. I bring it back - usually 15 to 20kg each time - and put it in our freezer. We receive mainly donated meat from Peelham customers which they store up until they have a good amount to give to us, and sometimes they add offcuts from their processing which can be put to very good use as well.”

Sue continued: “Our food projects make sure that people can access food with dignity: open to all, and where people are able to choose what they eat, and when. People who come to Cyrenians sometimes already have excellent cooking skills, and want to turn donated food into good meals. The supply of meat from Peelham is a great source of nutrition and gives people dignified access to high quality food.”

“To all the angels working on this, Thank you so, so much for what you’re doing. EVERYONE should have a basic right to real food, good food. That you’re helping to make that happen is amazing. I’m honoured to donate.”

Peelham customer

Meat from Peelham Farm customers is used at Cyrenians’ Leith Cook School to supply the Bethany night shelter



Sue O'Neill Berest taking delivery of meat from Peelham Farm

