



PLANTS FOR ALL

WHY ARE SO MANY PEOPLE IN THE WORLD'S 6th LARGEST ECONOMY HUNGRY?

▲ In 2023/24 in the sixth wealthiest nation in the world (the UK), 7.5million people, 11% of the population, lived in households experiencing food poverty, including 18% of all children.

▶ Between 2024-25 more than 14.1 million people in the UK regularly went hungry.

▲ One in fifty Londoners are homeless or vulnerably housed.

▶ As of the end of 2023, 324,990 people were homeless in the UK.

£ The lowest paid professions in UK are carers, cashiers, shelf stackers, teaching assistants, cleaners.

▼ 3.4% of the UK's total workforce are working in the lowest paid professions.

▶ You receive Universal Credit five plus weeks after applying.

£ Asylum Seekers receive £49.18 a week to cover all expenses except accommodation and cannot work. If an asylum seekers

accommodation provides food, they receive just £9.90 a week.

£ Jobseeker's Allowance for aged 24 and under is £71.70 per week. Aged 25 or over get up to £90.50 per week.

£ Carer's Allowance for people who provide 35 hours plus a week of care is £83.30.

Consistently eating well isn't easy.

Time, resources, housing, race, caring responsibilities, culture, class, age, where we live, immigration status, occupation, physical and mental wellbeing, knowledge, skills, upbringing – all intersect and contribute to whether we're able to access enough nourishing, climate-friendly food.

What we do at MIH – building skills, knowledge and community through plant-based cookery classes and emergency food support – is one small part of a rich ecosystem of community-driven solutions doing food differently.

From food surplus saving apps to veg box schemes, food co-operatives to neighbourhood meal swaps – there's an abundance of projects to help us get more nutritious, delicious, plant-based food on our plates. Let's dig in.

* CRISIS SUPPORT

Although we don't like to think about it, most of us are just a few situations away from crisis.

I'll never forget those weeks in March 2020 before the first national lockdown when so many of our community members fell into crisis. This propelled us to develop, fundraise and launch our community meal service in collaboration with Angelina's restaurant in just 2 weeks. By April 2020 we were delivering meals by cycle courier to 500 households across Hackney. The team worked around the clock and we're proud of our contribution to keeping our community well-nourished during that scary time.

Pandemics aside, people fall into unexpected crises all the time, and that's why we continue to provide food support. Mental or physical illness, unexpected job or income loss, or a sudden change in caring responsibilities – all can change your financial situation drastically. Welfare or sickness benefits take five plus weeks to materialise, leaving you stuck in the meantime.

In the UK in 2024 there were over 6.7 million people experiencing unmanageable debt. In January 2024, 15% of all households experienced hunger. There may be a time when you, people in your circles and wider community need food support. There's no shame in this – the economic and political system has been designed in such a way it's unavoidable. So get clued up on how to access emergency food support.

▶ Food Banks

Food banks are for times of crisis as opposed to a regular means of accessing food. In the UK the largest network is run by The Trussell Trust who operate half the country's food banks. Food banks provide critical support for millions of people every week, but you need a referral from a GP, Citizens Advice Bureau, social worker, children's centre or job centre. This approach is a major barrier,

as many people would rather go hungry than have to prove to someone they're in a jam. This is why we adopt a "solidarity not charity" approach, meaning we give food to anyone who needs it, no questions asked. All food banks run differently but most have a limit on usage. Community-run food banks, or community food pantries as we call them to avoid the stigma of food banks, are different to national organizations and are usually happy to provide food for as long as it's needed with no referral or time limit.

The US has a federal programme, The Emergency Food Assistance Program (TEFAP), which distributes food to each state according to how many low-income and unemployed residents reside there. The food is distributed to community organizations and food banks to get to community members who need it. To provide for the growing number of migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and undocumented individuals, Greece has introduced a Food For All programme that provides grocery boxes and emergency supplies to over 5,000 people a day. Although this sounds like a basic humanitarian programme, it's quite radical compared to the UK and US where undocumented people would never dream of stepping forward for government food support for fear of deportation.

▶ Feeding People Experiencing Homelessness

Many charities, community groups and religious organizations offer food support to people experiencing homelessness, living in hostels or with unstable housing situations with no easy kitchen access. These services operate weekly from vans and mobile setups on the street

– such as charity AMURT UK’s weekly feeding programme – or in community or religious building halls such as the North London Action For Homeless project’s weekly three course meal dining sessions. If you live in a big city it’s possible to stitch together a week’s worth of hot meals from different food programmes.

► **Religious Groups**

Many places of worship host weekly lunch clubs, community meals and food support services open to all. During the pandemic we partnered with the GMGG Sikh Gurdwara in Slough. The gurdwara has a huge kitchen and dedicated volunteers so they cooked and delivered the meals and we did the outreach, rapidly connecting with community projects across the capital whose service users needed food. The activation provided hundreds of thousands of meals and is a collaboration we’re very proud to have been a part of.

► **Meals On Wheels**

Meals On Wheels are commercial catering services that make and deliver ready meals to households, predominantly elderly people or people suffering from a physical ailment, dementia or recovering from substance abuse. In the UK they were traditionally paid for or were heavily subsidized by local authorities but the number offering this service has plummeted to 29%. Meals On Wheels America is a national charity operating in over 5,000 locations.

► **Mutual Aid Groups**

Mutual aid is a term created by Russian anarchist philosopher Peter Kropotkin and popularized in his essay collection Mutual Aid: A Factor of Evolution in which he stressed that co-operation not competition was the driving force behind evolution. One of the most famous and effective examples

of mutual aid is the Black Panther breakfast programme which within a year of launching in 1968 fed 20,000 people across 19 cities. There are many mutual aid groups in the UK and US with members doing anything from collecting shopping and prescriptions for people to hosting food support services and mental health support sessions.

► **Free School Meals**

London Mayor Sadiq Khan has committed to providing free school meals in primary school until 2028/29. School Food Matters, celebrity chef Jamie Oliver and footballer Marcus Rashford are campaigning for the government to follow the Mayors example and provide free meals nationwide. Finland, Sweden and Estonia provide universal free meals for all ages, and Latvia and Lithuania for some ages.

✱ **SAVING FOOD**

Food waste is a global outrage but we can all do something proactive about it.

Contrary to what you might assume, most food waste globally occurs in the home, 60% in fact, with food services and retail accounting for 28% and 12%. Surprising right?

In the UK 6.4 million tonnes of food and drink are wasted a year by households. If this food wasn’t wasted, we’d save a whopping 18 million tonnes of CO2 a year. In the US it’s a similar story but with the gas turned up. 78 million tonnes of food wasted is every year, 38% of all food produced. Global food waste produces over 9.3 billion tonnes of CO2, roughly equivalent to the total combined carbon emissions of the US and the EU. Woah.

According to the UN Environment Programme’s 2024 Food Waste Index, over one billion meals a day were wasted

in 2022, while 783 million people were affected by hunger and a third of humanity faced food insecurity. The numbers speak for themselves. There’s enough food to go around, more in fact.

But don’t be hoodwinked into thinking if those one billion meals weren’t wasted, world hunger would be solved.

When it comes to hunger, more nefarious forces are at play than waste. The real culprits are unchecked global capitalism in the form of food commodity traders manipulating food prices; gigantic agrichemical corporates who don’t give two hoots about people and planet; and rising living costs unable to be met by people surviving on poverty wages and welfare. Couple this with a lack of access to land to grow food, the escalating climate crisis, war and instability, and toxic historical and present day geopolitical wranglings aka colonialism and imperialism, and you get a world where inequality and hunger are endemic.

So, while hunger may not be caused by you not eating the lettuce dying a slow death at the bottom of your veg drawer, fighting food waste, or saving food as is our preferred expression, is still a great thing to do. We should do it to reduce our carbon footprint. We should do it to save money and resources. We should do it to show respect for the various life forces that had a hand in producing it. Here are a few of the projects, services and apps that can help us all to save food.

► **AT HOME**

Reduce food waste at home with our awesome cooking, preserving, fermenting and pickling tips from food savings hero Hannah Walker.

► **AT SCALE REDISTRIBUTORS**

In the UK large national charities The Felix Project, Fareshare and City Harvest operate

huge redistribution networks that take food surplus from retailers and redistribute it to food banks, charities and other service providers working to reduce hunger. Retailers have food waste due to products having too short a shelf life to continue being sold, over-ordering and unsold seasonal products. In 2016 the French government made it law for retailers to find a charity or food surplus redistributor to pass their surplus on to.

► **COMMUNITY FRIDGES**

You’ll find community fridges in public access buildings such as community centres, schools, nurseries and libraries. The model varies but essentially a large food waste diverting organization intercepts food that would be wasted and delivers it to these fridges for the community to help themselves to.

► **FOOD SURPLUS APPS**

In recent years an abundance of apps – Too Good To Go, Phenix, Karma, Flashfood, OptiMiam – have emerged to help people buy food for a discounted price that would otherwise be wasted by retailers. On these apps you can find fruit, veg, pastries, bread, sandwiches and take away meals. Olio lets you share food surplus with neighbours. Great solution for the pre-holiday fridge clear-out.

► **WONKY FRUIT & VEG BOXES**

A particularly enraging type of food waste is spoilage due to aesthetics. Retailers have strict criteria about the size, colour and appearance of produce, meaning farmers often plough in crops (destroy the crop by ploughing it into the ground) that are good to eat but a little small, blemished or unusually shaped. Bonkers. Consumer outrage has been enough for a plethora of “wonky” fruit and veg box schemes to emerge, like Oddbox and Earth & Wheat in the UK, and supermarkets to launch heavily discounted “wonky fruit and veg” lines.



ACCESSING ORGANIC

With the cost-of-living crisis and food insecurity soaring, talking about our collective right to organic food may seem tone deaf. Like an unrealistic, out of touch call for unnecessarily expensive, bouji food at a time when many people would be grateful for having enough food, any food, at all.

To do this is to do a gross disservice to people and planet. In our modern lives we often tend to fail to see the interconnection between the health of our planet – its soil, waterways, air, biodiversity – and the health of people and all the other beings that live on it.

If you can't afford to go completely organic, choose five staples your households eats a lot of, and switch these to organic. Look for budget organic lines in supermarkets or go online for deals.

For non-organic produce, be sure to peel and wash it thoroughly, as this can remove a decent amount of the pesticide and herbicide residue.

American organization The Environmental Working group annually publishes The Clean Fifteen, which details the top fifteen non-organic items in the US with the least amount of pesticide and fertilizer residue. Produce with tough skins – avocados, mangos, onions, watermelon – tend to rank highly.

Fired up to seek out organic food? Here are some options for lightening the cost burden.

ORGANIC VEG BOX SCHEMES

Not-for-profit organizations and community interest companies offer organic at a lower price than conventional retailers, and have the bonus of local sourcing, providing jobs and being part of a thriving local food ecosystem. You usually sign up, pay monthly and receive a veg or fruit box each week which you collect from a pick-up point. We've long been inspired by Growing Communities in Hackney and OrganicLea in Waltham Forest. Both use electric vehicles to deliver veg bags to pick-up locations across their respective boroughs. Many box schemes in the UK accept Healthy Start vouchers and offer discounts for elders, students and people on a low income. South Kilburn's Granville Community Kitchen offers a Good Food Box with an option to choose specialist cultural produce and a solidarity price where people with more resources can pay more.

ORGANIC FOOD BUYING CO-OPERATIVES

Join an organic food buying cooperative to bulk purchase staples at cost price. The format varies but essentially a group of people form a co-op. Some are free to join, some aren't. The group selects the organic wholesalers they want to source from, and members choose what they want to buy each week, fortnight or month. This big order gets delivered to one location (a co-op member with access to a large space) and members



pick up their shopping. If there isn't a group near you, start one.

VOLUNTEER ON A CSA FARM

CSA stands for Community Supported Agriculture – these are growing spaces supported by the local community. They're usually organic, although sometimes not certified, and offer community plots, volunteer days, growing qualifications and apprenticeship schemes. In exchange for taking part you might receive free organic produce, the opportunity to buy it at a reduced cost, or a reduced price veg box scheme membership. These magical places offer scope for connection, friendship, mental health support and physical activity via the healing activity of growing food with other renegade souls. There are farms and land-based growing projects specifically serving Black and brown community

members. In London we have LION (Land In Our Names) and Black Rootz, a project by The Ubele Initiative.

ORGANIC BUDGET LINES

Supermarket-own organic lines, particularly those in budget supermarkets, are lower cost than your average organic brand. It's great if you can support independently owned organic companies. But if that's not an option, supermarket-own lines could be for you.

GROW YOUR OWN

You don't need a garden to grow your own organic delights – a window ledge, balcony or kitchen tabletop will do fine. Sprouted seeds, salad and herbs are all within reach if you have windows and a bit of space.

✱ BUDGET SOLUTIONS

The fact that millions of working people in the UK and US struggle to cover their basic costs, including ensuring everyone in their household has enough nutritious food to eat, is a biting indictment against our current economic system.

In the UK, US and much of Europe people doing crucial jobs society relies on – care workers, cleaners, classroom assistants, support workers, shelf stackers, street sanitation workers, retail cashiers, child minders and lower band nurses – are paid the lowest wages. These wages haven't kept pace with rising living costs, in particularly in rapidly gentrified areas such as Hackney, where house prices and rents have soared to push households to the edge of managing, or out the area altogether.

People who are too ill or incapacitated to work, or have caring responsibilities, receive benefit payments that are just enough to survive on. But if anything goes awry – a fridge breaks down, a child loses a pair of shoes – carers forsake meals and basic self-care to try and plug the gap.

According to the Equality Trust in the UK the top five percent of people own two-thirds of the nation's wealth. And since 2022, inequality has got worse, with the incomes of the poorest 14 million people falling by 7.5%, while the incomes for the richest fifth increased by 7.8%. This is not a UK phenomenon, but a global trend, wealth accumulating in the hands of a minority while the majority of people are becoming poorer. This is not the trajectory of a progressive world with equality and justice at its core.

All this builds up to a picture where millions of people, while perhaps not in crisis, walk a

monthly budgetary tightrope of just-about-managing. It's stressful, difficult and not conducive to a healthy, happy life.

Enter these brilliant solutions to provide nutritious food at low cost. Paying something is key, as it removes the stigma and psychological barriers some people experience in relation to receiving food support.

COMMUNITY SHOPS

Community food shops provide low-cost food sourced from donated food surplus and items bought at wholesalers. Some collectives in rural communities or underserved urban areas have mobile shops that change location daily. Customers pay a weekly fee or joining fee. The mix of donated surplus and wholesale items means people get their shopping for a quarter or less of the usual price and the shop can stock specific cultural items (bought at the wholesaler) enjoyed by their community members. Made Up Kitchen in collaboration with Rise 365 youth group and local community leaders from the Kingsmead estate in Hackney created a weekly shop during the pandemic that's become an integral part of the local community. It's been a catalyst for other wellbeing interventions including walking clubs, intergenerational activities and youth projects addressing systemic racism.

COMMUNITY FOOD PANTRIES

Based in schools, nurseries, religious hubs and community centres, community food pantries are like food banks in that they provide food for free. Unlike the more established food banks, they don't require referrals, vouchers or means testing. They usually run once or twice a week and people can collect pre-packed bags or choose what they want. Some pantries

offer additional support services in money management, training, legal support and health and wellbeing.

PAY WHAT YOU CAN CAFÉS

At pay what you can cafés you enjoy a meal and pay what you can for it. Some have suggested prices while others leave it up to diners' discretion. They're usually run by volunteers and are based in religious, cultural or charity owned buildings. They often utilize food surplus and have other activities such as film screenings, workshops and music.

SOLIDARITY CAFES

Solidarity cafes either work the same as a pay what you can café, or they offer customers the option to "pay-it-forward" so a future customer with fewer resources can enjoy a drink or meal for free. To allow customers to discretely ask for free sustenance there's instructions on a board or wooden spoons people can pop on the counter. No awkward conversation necessary.

GOVERNMENT-SUBSIDIZED CAFES

Some nations have government-subsidized restaurants to tackle health inequalities and food access. Brazil used to have a thriving network until former president Jair Messias Bolsonaro shut down the National Council for Food Security and Nutrition (CONSEA). The UK had a similar network of restaurants during World War II (over 2,000 by 1943) called Communal Feeding Centres. They were renamed British Restaurants as Winston Churchill thought the name "redolent of Communism and the workhouse". Today Sri Lanka has a thriving network of government-subsidized restaurants called Hela Bojun's.

SUPPORT VOUCHERS

Healthy Start in the UK helps pregnant

people and families with children aged under four who receive benefits or have low incomes (less than £16K a year per household) access fruits, vegetables, dried or tinned pulses, vitamins and formula milk. It starts from ten weeks of pregnancy to a value of £4.25 a week and £8.50 a week for each baby from birth to one, and £4.25 a week for each child aged one to four. A 2024 study by BMC Medical Journal found only 46% of people eligible for Healthy Start use it, citing distrust of authorities, concerns about needing to pay it back and a complicated application process. The Alexandra Rose charity runs a similar scheme across London and a few UK cities offering families vouchers – £4 a week for every child, £6 if the child is under one year old – and have worked with local markets to ensure the vouchers can be used not only to support families but the local food economy. The US has two programmes, SNAP and WIC, which provide food stamps to women, infants and children.

FRUIT & VEG ON PRESCRIPTION

This initiative, also from the Alexandra Rose Charity, was piloted in 2022 in London areas Lambeth and Bromley By Bow. The charity linked up with GPs and social prescribers to give out fruit and veg prescriptions that people could spend at the local market. 80% of participants consistently ate the recommended five-a-day of fresh fruits and vegetables and nine out of ten people experienced improved health outcomes. The charity is calling on the government to pilot a three-year Community Eatwell programme based on the success of their model.

COMMUNITY KITCHENS

Peru has the largest network of community kitchens in the world – estimated at 13,000.

* TIME SAVING

People consistently tell us the main challenges they face to eating well are time, money, capacity, access (both physical and mental) and skills.

Given the rising cost of living it's no surprise people are working more, doing multiple jobs, more hours, extending their retirement age or creating a side hustle alongside their fulltime job to make ends meet. But a lack of time to cook runs deeper than this.

The global north's centring of the nuclear family has put impossible demands on people to be and do all things – work, childcare, manage the household, cook – without support from extended or older family members, while isolating and burdening uncoupled, child-free people and elders with high living expenses. No one is winning.

During milestones around hatches, matches and dispatches, people come together to support, drop off food or pop in to do the dishes, but otherwise life isn't very communally centred. Some migrant communities and intentional communities buck this trend, but overall in the global north we're living alone and struggling to pay the bills, or living in a nuclear family and struggling to do everything to keep self, kids and household afloat.

To overcome this, people are getting together to alleviate the pressure with these simple time-saving ideas.

Batch Cook Club

Batch cook clubs are groups of people who have got together to bulk cook meals for the week. Every member makes a different meal, then swaps so everyone has 7 different meals. Budget, weight per portion, heat

level, organic or not, allergies, preferences, cultural/religious/health requirements are all up for discussion. If group batch cooking isn't for you, pick a day and batch cook for your household for the week instead.

Ready for Change

People are sniffy about ready meals and justifiably so as many are nutritionally poor. But the reality is many people don't have the capacity or facilities to cook from scratch so are reliant on them. Enter ready meals done better. The Ready Healthy Eat project piloted in Brighton and Hove, Edinburgh, Belfast and London provides quality meals for free and at discounted prices. Our Community Made programme provides 400 nutritious meals a week to families, hostel residents and housebound community members.

* SOCIAL DINING

Feeling lonely? You're not the only one.

In 2022 half the adult population of Britain reported feeling lonely, with 7% of people experiencing chronic loneliness. In the US 21% of adults said they felt lonely and disconnected from friends, family and the world. What's causing this loneliness and sense of disconnection?

In the UK 30% of all households, that's 8.4 million people, live alone, and in the US 36.05 million people do. But just because you live alone doesn't mean you'll necessarily feel lonely.

The rise of home working means many people no longer have a physical in-person work community, seeing no one or interacting with anyone face to face for days on end.

In a world of endless communication

via social media, some of us feel less connected but more stressed and alone. A 2024 published article in Scientific Reports explored how excess reliance on smart phones reduced happiness and other wellbeing indicators resulting in loneliness.

Digital interactions lack non-verbal visual cues and offer no scope for unfocused quality connection, deep empathy, touch, hugs and less conscious things such as familiar or comforting smells.

For people lacking a sense of purpose, direction or perceived "place" in society, feeling lonely was a more common state. A 2023 Swiss study found having a sense of purpose protected more against loneliness than being around people.

Boost your mental wellbeing with these social dining experiences.

Community Feasts

Community feasts are a brilliant way to try new food and meet new people. Hosted in community centres and cultural spaces, the meal is usually free, by donation or very low cost with accompanying activities such as games, music, singing and more. A squad of volunteers, sometimes led by a paid pro chef, get together and cook – this provides a great opportunity to learn new skills and feel a sense of purpose and achievement.

Lunch Clubs

Lunch Clubs cater to a specific community, culture or age group. Participants pay for the lunch at a cheaper rate than a café, but a higher price than a solidarity café or community feast. In return they know they're getting a good meal cooked by a pro. They provide a great space to make friends and build community.

Out Of Hours Kitchens

Collectives are looking at ways to use catering facilities in schools, nurseries and daycare centres outside their usual working hours for social food programmes. The Future Foundations CanTeam project, for example, collaborates with school students to teach them employability skills, nurture entrepreneurship and build a thriving food culture by combining a low-cost evening meal for students and their families.

