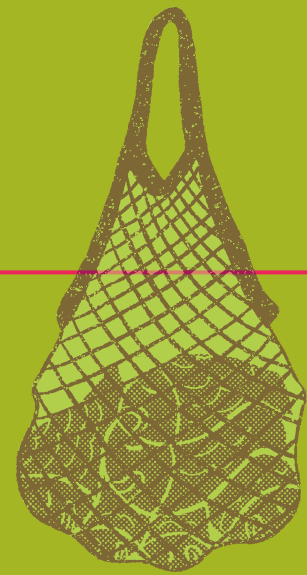


# BFT IMPACT REPORT

## 2025/26



Better Food Traders is a UK-wide network that represents and promotes locally-rooted food traders who are putting people and planet first. Our mission is to empower and support our members, and push for an independent, more sustainable food sector.

Our members include shops, bakeries, online sellers, food hubs, market stalls, veg box schemes, and local producers all committed to creating a better food system. This means supporting nature-friendly farming, boosting local high streets, creating good jobs, and bringing you closer to the people who produce your food.

✉ [hello@betterfoodtraders.org](mailto:hello@betterfoodtraders.org)

🌐 [www.betterfoodtraders.org](http://www.betterfoodtraders.org)

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# SUMMARY

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In a year of fast-moving food policy, Better Food Traders has played an important role as the voice of the independent, sustainable food sector. In July 2025, the government set out the National Food Strategy for England, with 10 priority outcomes to build a food system that grows the economy, protects the environment, and celebrates the best of British food and culture. We and many BFT members were at the launch in Bradford, and we contributed to development of the strategy through Defra's workshops, meetings with Defra officials, and participating in parliamentary events.

We launched our report Purpose Over Profit at the Labour Party Conference fringe with Foodrise; coordinated a letter to the Chancellor on Business Rates signed by traders and organisations representing 100,000s of businesses; and supported collaborative policy efforts by the Fruit & Veg Coalition, Sustain (the alliance for better food and farming) and a wide group of NGOs calling for a Good Food Bill. We are also proud to be on the steering committees of the Procurement For Good project led by Coventry University, and Backcasting to Achieve Food Resilience funded by UKRI and Defra.

While changing the policy landscape around food is vital, we also continue to work diligently at the enterprise level. We support sustainable food traders with training, peer-learning, networking, resources and connections, so that people and enterprises can thrive. Our membership has remained steady at 200+ (some 10 members sadly ceased or paused trading last year) and we were proud to welcome more than 15 bakeries into the network this year, along with some larger traders such as Hodmedod's.

The third pillar of our work involves public awareness and campaigning. Through our increasing social media presence and collaborative campaigns, we help reconnect people with where their food comes from via locally-rooted businesses that have strong relationships with farmers and producers. Our Trader Map helps customers find their nearest Better Food Trader, and we continue to amplify other important campaigns such as Organic September and Riverford's #FarmersAgainstFarmwashing.

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# OUR COMBINED IMPACT

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Our impact continues to grow year on year. Better Food Traders sold **£35 million** worth of produce\* from UK agroecological farmers last year.

More than **440 climate and nature-friendly farms** in the UK are being supported by our members, and more in Europe.

**200 Better Food Traders** including shops, bakeries, farmers' markets, online sellers, veg box schemes and wholesalers working together to change the food system.

"A better retail sector is already demonstrating what is possible. Supermarket alternatives have been shown to improve diets by increasing fruit and vegetable intake. Additionally, farmers earn three times more from alternative routes to market compared to selling into supermarkets. **Across the UK, small and medium enterprises (SMEs), cooperatives and community owned grocery businesses are already working to create fairer and healthier food environments.**" - Purpose Over Profit report

\*Based on turnover data collected when enterprises join the BFT membership

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# SUPPORT FOR TRADERS

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In the year 2025-26 we ran 24 hours of online learning and peer support, plus a full day, in-person field trip. Topics included social prescribing as a better food trader; enterprise stacking and collaborative business models; marketing strategy, voice and storytelling; data analytics; funding; building financial security; baking and retailing diverse grains and flours, and more. Average attendance at each session was 21 people, up from last year.

We have developed our peer-learning groups, introducing a Member Spotlight segment and increasing facilitation for greater learning exchange. Under this new format, members are invited to prepare a presentation on their enterprise, one element of their recent learning and a request for advice from other members.

Spotlighted Members are paid for their time to design and deliver their presentation, and have expressed gratitude for the discussions their segment prompted, and the chance to speak publicly about their work.

We hosted our second in-person field trip - this time in the North West - in which 15 people from 7 different member enterprises connected at visits to Squash Liverpool and Kindling Farm for a day of knowledge exchange and networking. This pilot activity demonstrated an increased demand for in-person activities, which is something we plan to prioritise moving forward.



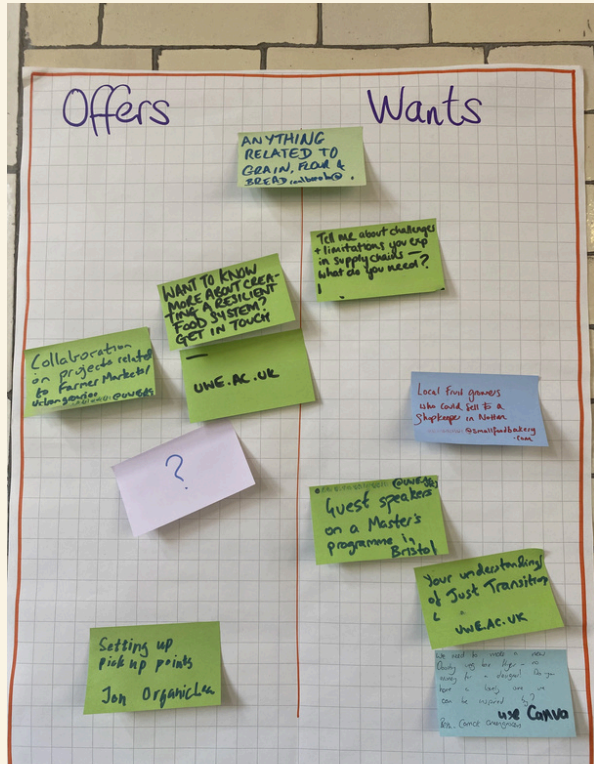
# MEMBER FEEDBACK

This year's sector-specific training, split by enterprise or skill, has been particularly well received by members for building their knowledge and confidence:

*"The advisor had read up on our initiative and was able to provide fantastic insights based on her own experience growing a veg box scheme from infancy."*

*"This [BFT session on Communicating Food as a Force For Good] has been so helpful and informative and has raised so many brilliant points and things to go and do."*

*"[BFT training] has been a great opportunity to reset a little – clear away all the overwhelming, complex marketing shoulds/shouldn'ts and get back to the basics of a clear, consistent message."*



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# SUPPORT FOR TRADERS

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## BUSINESS SUPPORT WEEK

This annual January event is a core part of our enterprise support, and this year saw 50 hours of one-to-one business advice clinics being delivered to 38 member organisations. We invited 10 advisers who offered tailored expertise on topics from financial clarity and confident decision-making to developing your retail offer, updating digital tools and systems, and aligning economics with regenerative enterprise. For the first time, we also ran a Winter Gathering for members, two workshops that were open to non-members and bitesize marketing tips shared online throughout the week.

Each advisor produced a summary of learnings from their 1:1 calls, which we have turned into a series of Trader Tips for members. These summaries have also helped inform our planning for future learning opportunities. 100% of feedback respondents said that they agreed or strongly agreed with the following statement: 'I am leaving the advice session with new ideas, information and/or confidence to tackle the business challenges we discussed'. Some of the specific feedback on 1:1 sessions:

- "Business support week is fantastic, pretty much worth the price of membership alone!"
- "Thank you so much for creating these opportunities. It helps to make these new connections, in what can occasionally be an isolating profession"
- "Made me see the blindingly obvious and also opened my eyes to new tools and processes."
- "Gave us great new ideas for expansion of developing our brand and what we can do better."
- "Gave great feedback on our website and socials, helping formulate our thoughts into actions that would work for us."

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# SUPPORT FOR TRADERS

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## ANNUAL GATHERING IN SHEFFIELD

This year, 70 attendees gathered at Channing Hall in Sheffield City Centre. BFT members travelled from all over the country, joined by sector partners working across the food system nationally, including from Sustain, Organic Research Centre, UK Grain Lab, the Soil Association, Sustainable Food Places, academic institutions, grassroots organisations and more.

For the first time, the day was written up and shared publicly via a summary report (see our website), which serves as both a record of the day, and a guiding document on the key themes and asks from attendees.

The event brought together ethical food retailers, wholesalers, producers and campaigners committed to transforming the way we produce and sell food in the UK. It was a dynamic space for sharing knowledge, building relationships, and strengthening our collective impact on the food system.



# SUPPORT FOR TRADERS

## ANNUAL GATHERING IN SHEFFIELD



This year, we were joined by more sector partners than ever before. Participants said:

- “It was fantastic to workshop solutions with other individuals/organisations coming from a wide variety of backgrounds and working models. Collaboration feels key to making progress in growing the better food movement.”
- “Fantastic people in the room, great informal and formal opportunity for sharing ideas and networking”
- “It was very useful to see the bigger picture today and share our experiences with other growers and traders. I’m leaving this gathering feeling empowered and positive, our voices are not as small as we thought and we are being heard.”
- “Reminded us of the need to both collaborate AND to be visible about the process.”

# FOOD SYSTEM CHANGE

## BAKING A BETTER TOMORROW

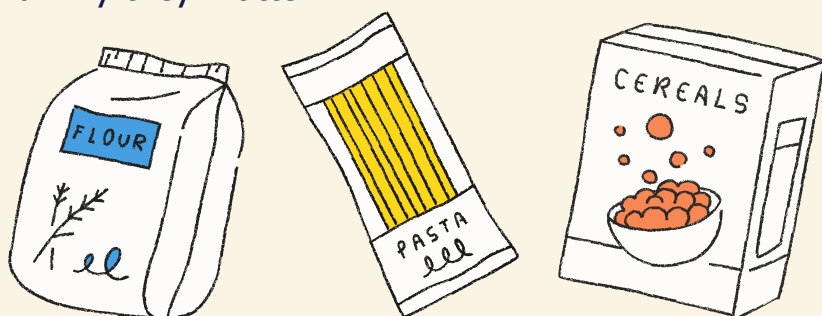
We partnered with UK Grain Lab, Real Bread Campaign and Organic Research Centre to produce a beautiful new resource available in hard copies and as a digital download called *Baking a Better Tomorrow*. The booklet highlights Grain Changers transforming the UK grain system through agroecological farming, diverse grains, local and community-focused bread production, and sustainable food traders who are getting these products to customers.

We distributed 3,000 hard copies - some via Hodmedod shipping them out with every order during Real Bread Week - and saw the pdf downloaded 320 times. This has been a great way to collaborate with the grain and bread movement, grow our bakery membership, and tell the public about the fantastic work being done to change the food system around bread.

## THE BFT STANDARDS

We recently updated the standards to which Better Food Traders commit in order to demonstrate that they are “better”. This was undertaken to ensure the standards work for all the types and business models we want in the membership; to make sure SMEs can clearly and easily identify when they are operating as BFTs; and to more explicitly cover meat and dairy.

We will be revamping our website and sign-up process in summer 2026, and this has been a very useful exercise to help us hone and define what at Better Food Trader is and why they matter.



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# ORG DEVELOPMENT

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## BFT FEES

In the last year we undertook two important pieces of organisational development: an update of our BFT standards (see above) and a review of our fees. We launched our new, tiered membership fee structure in September 2025. This was accompanied by clear communication about the value of the membership network and why we feel fees matter in supporting the collective work. We have already seen strong renewal rates and better recruitment of new members since the changes.



## THE BFT STAFF TEAM

This year it feels like we have completed the team, with additional funding allowing us to hire a Communications Manager (welcome Harri!) and make our North of England Coordinator, Luke, a longer-term role. With our team spread across the UK in Sheffield, Liverpool, Truro, Canterbury and London, we have good local intelligence to help us understand different regional needs. Overall it feels we have the right sized team and are really flying.

# REGIONAL FOOD HUBS

Between January and December we ran our Regional Food Hubs support programme – funded by Farming the Future and in collaboration with Sustain, the Soil Association and Growing Communities. The programme set out to assist 15 hubs from across the UK to establish or grow their wholesale operations, and increase supply to public institutions.



Ten bespoke online training sessions were delivered across a range of subjects pertinent to Regional Food Hubs, in addition to online peer support and mentoring. Evaluation of the programme by participants rated the programme 100% ‘good’ or ‘excellent’ across all categories (including range of topics covered, depth of knowledge gained, and applicability of content, amongst others).

The total learnings from online sessions, mentoring and participants were captured in a Lessons Learnt document to share what conditions make a Regional Food Hub viable, identify the main challenges, and avoid reinventing the wheel. This was launched at a webinar facilitated by BFT, attended by 100 sector actors including Food partnerships, civil society, Local Authorities and funders. This demonstrates significant interest in the role of Regional Food Hubs in strengthening our local food infrastructure.

# RESEARCH & POLICY

We have been consciously growing our research and policy work throughout this year, as we see this is vital to changing the food system in support of independent, sustainable food trade. We've also seen an increase in media and speaking opportunities as our organisational recognition has expanded. This includes:

- Co-authoring the briefing paper Purpose Over Profit with Foodrise, showing the importance of values-led sustainable food retail for delivering the Govt's Food Strategy for England.
- We launched this report and its sister paper, Profit Over Purpose, with Foodrise at the Labour Party Conference fringe, with a good number of Councillors and MPs in attendance.
- We also appeared on BBC Evening News to respond to supermarkets urging the Chancellor not to make changes to Business Rates.
- In November, we convened food, retail and SME organisations representing 100,000s of businesses to write to the Chancellor ahead of the Budget. We sought reduced Business Rates for smaller food retail premises, and were successful in getting the called-for changes.



# RESEARCH & POLICY

- We are currently working on a paper looking at innovative ways that Local Authorities can support independent, sustainable food retail by using Planning Laws and Business Rates powers.
- We ran a one-day workshop to explore food crisis mitigations as part of Defra & UKRI-funded Backcasting to Achieve Food Resilience in the UK.
- We took part in the Fruit & Veg Coalition's parliamentary lunch in November, which drew many MPs, Lords and the former Mayor of Manchester and made the case for a Horticulture Support Fund.
- We supported Sustain and the Food Foundation with the parliamentary event Making The Case for a Good Food Bill.
- We continue to back the Universal Income 4 Farmers campaign.
- We co-signed the Vegan Society's Reaping the Benefits of a Plant-Rich Diet: The Ten Point Plan.



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# PARTNERSHIPS

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We have a deep ethos of collaboration, which we see as vital to achieving systemic change. This year this has included working with:

- The 2 Minute Foundation - collaboration on a series of social posts for Organic September
- Sustain, Soil Association, Sustainable Food Places and Growing Communities - the Regional Food Hubs Programme
- Procurement For Good - on the steering committee for this large research project led by Coventry University
- BAFR UK - on the steering committee for this Defra and UKRI funded consortium
- Soil Association's New Organic Entrepreneurs programme - delivered training and mentoring
- Local Food Economy Group run by Sustain - on the steering group
- UK Grain Lab and The Real Bread Campaign - collaborated on Baking a Better Tomorrow booklet
- The Food Data Collaboration - on the governance group
- Fruit & Veg Coalition supporter

We've also worked with a number of Local Food Partnerships across the UK, including running training on marketing for Pembrokeshire Food Partnership, and training on sourcing for Shropshire Food Partnership.

**Groundswell** - Our Executive Director spoke on a panel about Reshaping Supply Chains for a Regenerative Future.

**ORFC** - BFT took part in a number of sessions in Oxford, including our Executive Director speaking on the Wild Live panel run by the Wildlife Trusts; a workshop in conjunction with Sustain on Retail Landscapes for Agroecology to Thrive For All; and our own workshop on Sourcing and Selling: How to find local, sustainable products for your food business.

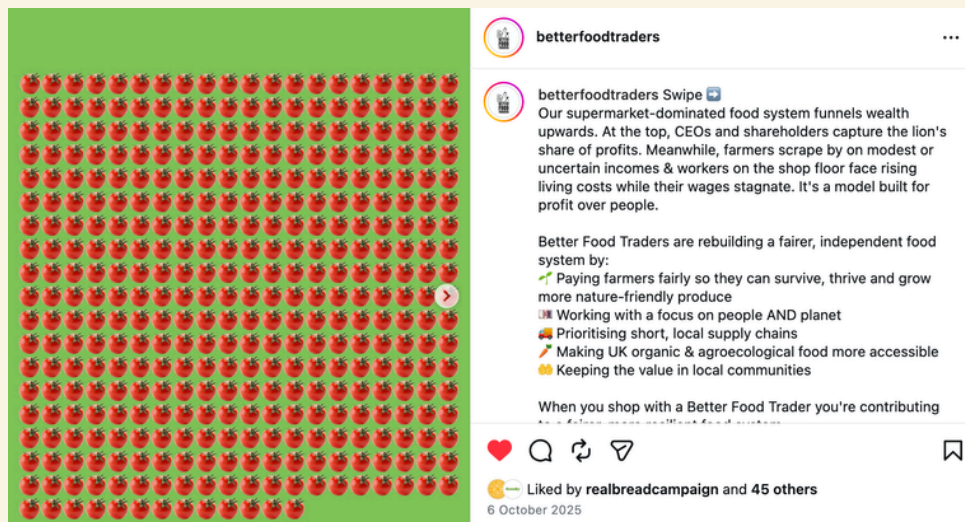
# ENGAGING THE PUBLIC

In October, we launched a paid social media campaign to drive consumer awareness of independent food retail across the UK. The theme was “beyond the basket” looking at why Better Food Traders are different to and better than supermarkets, and directing shoppers to our retailer map. The campaign aimed to increase the sector's visibility, explain some of the main issues with our dominant supermarket system, and build the habit of independent, ethical shopping among consumers.

The campaign significantly exceeded benchmarks across all key metrics:

- **Reach:** 275,000+ Facebook and Instagram accounts
- **Link clicks:** 17,500 with a click-through rate of 2.82%, surpassing platform benchmarks
- **Engagements:** 26,966 engagements including 7,550 post reactions, 127 comments, 114 post saves and 227 post shares
- **Audience growth:** 500+ new Instagram followers

Delivery performance improved year-on-year, attributed to creative assets being purpose-built for paid activity and having external support on the Meta campaign management. The results demonstrate strong consumer appetite for this messaging and reinforce the case for continued investment in sector-wide visibility campaigns.



# THANK YOU

We couldn't support so many brilliant enterprises (and in turn, increase routes to market for climate and nature-friendly farmers) without guidance from our brilliant board members and funding from:

Our members and supporters

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Farming the Future

The A Team Foundation

The Roddick Foundation

Evan Cornish Foundation

School for Social Entrepreneurs

UKRI

Thanks to you all, especially our members who make this such a brilliant network.

## **BETTER FOOD TRADERS CIC**

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