NICRE
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Research Report

Working collaboratively through rural community food hubs

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1. Abstract

Rural Community Food Hubs (CFHs) pursue goals other than productivity, and commonly seek to correct market failures. Because of this they tend to operate in social economies (rather that market (growth) economies) in pursuit of justice, equity and environmental goals. Volunteering pays a critical role in the viability of CFHs, but there are a number of structural issues (complexity, risk shunting, marketisation and tackling symptoms rather than causes) that inhibit their effectiveness. CFHs are innovative but deploy social innovation more than technical innovation, and this commonly draws on past experience. For all of these reasons, different approaches may be needed to measuring CFH performance over and above Gross Value Added (GVA) productivity based metrics. These might embrace equity, justice, positive environmental impacts, health and community cohesion.

2. Acknowledgements and funding

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Thanks go, too, to the participants in the interviews relating to social innovation in food reported in section 10, and to a series of anonymous referees for comments on peer-reviewed articles arising from this research, accepted for publication cited in the references to this report.

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4. Non-technical executive summary

Community Food Hubs (CFHs) seek to address market failures (environmental externalities, food disadvantage and food health) through community cohesion, operating in a 'not for profit' mode. With these characteristics, they must seek to innovate to survive financially. Volunteering plays an important part in this, as does adopting a number of social economy principles (such as circular economies, inclusive economies, sharing economies and place-based development). CFHs can also innovate within the market, for example by internalising externalities (for example repurposing waste food); converting capital costs into revenue costs; sponsorship; and through cross-subsidisation and experimenting with exchange mechanisms. The last of these includes donation boxes, 'pay it forward' and 'pay as you feel' initiatives, gifting and volunteering, as well as market exchanges at below market prices. All of these can have positive redistributive impacts. A range of partnership mechanisms (the natural collaborative nature of the 'hub') also allow for successful performance measures outside of a productivity frame.

5. Introduction and background

Enterprises in rural areas perform in many different ways. It is an aspiration on the part of government and many individual enterprises that this performance is 'efficient'. This can be measured in a number of different ways, the preference often being the pursuit of 'balanced Gross Value Added (GVA) productivity'. This is a mixture of performing well in terms of levels of income and output achieved.

But not all rural economic activity can be appropriately measured against this kind of yardstick because, whilst still creating income, jobs and outputs, some enterprises deliberately pursue things other than 'efficiency' (Curry, 2022c). This study focuses on rural CFHs as one such enterprise type. Rather than seeking to be efficient *per se*, they work collaboratively to secure the benefits of coming together to achieve collective ends. This can impair their efficiency. They also invariably work to 'clean up' some of the market failures left by more efficient enterprises. These include reducing negative environmental impacts, addressing food poverty and seeking to ameliorate food-induced poor health. Commonly, too, they seek to employ more marginalised people. All of these objectives can compromise efficiency in GVA terms.

In this context, this research is exploring the following issues through a blend of personal experience and empirical information:

- In what ways do rural CFHs perform and what contribution can, and do they make to the rural economy?
- What kind of economic structures and policy signals would make this performance more effective?
- What experiences do volunteers have as contributors to this kind of economic activity?
- What role can social innovation play in developing CFH performance?

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6. Research approach and methods

The research *approach* was that of a practitioner participant observer within a qualitative research frame (Robey and Taylor, 2018), consistent with Gold's (1958) original taxonomy of participant observer roles:

"*the researcher gains access to a setting by virtue of having a natural and non-research reason for being part of the setting. As observers, they are part of the group being studied*" (p. 219).

Bilous *et al* (2018) champion this approach as helping to distil common issues and points of reference, recognisable by practitioners from diverse backgrounds. This 'insider-researcher' approach can also elicit a complexity of issues not so apparent in research by 'outsider' researchers. As Hammersley (2012) stresses, for practitioners it can be a valuable tool with which to build research co-creation with academics, and also inform researchers of practitioner priorities.

Two different data collection *methods* were deployed: for a Local Enterprise Partnerships' (LEPs) survey of the social economy, information requests were sent to all 38 LEPs, requesting details of all strategies and documents developed by them, and all organisational structures germane to the social economy. A follow-up letter was sent specifically to chief executives one month later. In all, 15 resultant document sets were received, together with a range of written commentaries on the way that individual LEPs were accommodating the social economy. Supplementary analysis (via desk assessments) was undertaken of all other LEP Local Industrial Strategies and supporting documents. All of this documentary evidence together was subjected to basic content analysis and key word searching: sustainability; social economy; inclusive growth/inclusion; circular economy; social enterprise; community; third sector; voluntary action; voluntary and community sector (VCS).

Secondly, to explore social innovation, two CFHs were chosen within which to conduct in-depth semi-structured interviews. Selection criteria required adhering to those characteristics of CFHs, as outlined in section 7 (market failures and community cohesion). Consistent with the participant observer research approach, the researcher also had to ensure access to the fieldwork site; this was granted because of the researcher's direct involvement with these hubs as a board member.

Within the first hub, Lincolnshire Food Partnership (LFP), three in-depth interviews were conducted with leaders of food hub 'spokes' (see section 7), selected through purposive sampling, a technique widely used in qualitative research for the identification and selection of information-rich cases, often via a process of 'snowball sampling' (Patton, 2001). These 'spokes' were: Dunston Community Garden Group (DCGG), a community food and flower growing project; Liquorice Park (LP), a Millennium Green amenity space with herb and fruit growing; and Mrs Smith's Cottage (MSC), a rural museum with a particular emphasis on food heritage. For the second hub, Sustainable Food Cornwall (SFC), the coordinator provided a written response to questions on the same issues. Specific focus was given in these conversations to the extent to which (if at all) social innovation had been developed, and the extent to which it drew from past practice.

To contextualise and develop further these findings in relation to social innovation, primary data were used from two earlier surveys conducted by the author. *SOLINSA* embraced a case study of the Brighton and Hove Food Partnership (BHFP) CFH, utilising a wide range of research methods. At its most general, it explored barriers and catalysts to the development of learning and innovation networks for sustainable agriculture**.** A participatory methodology was used (Allen-Collinson *et al.*, 2005) with the co-design and co-development of methods agreed between the researchers and participants. In adopting an interpretivist approach, an in-depth understanding was sought, of the 'social world' of the BHFP and the life-worlds of its social actors. Within this frame, research methods embraced workshops, mutual learning, interviews, and desk studies.

The *Grey and Pleasant Land* (GPL) project involved 60 in-depth qualitative interviews with rural older people about past community action. These discussions of 'how we used to do it in the old days', embraced a range of food-related issues. This NICRE report focuses on in-depth, semi-structured interviews with two participants, a married couple, the wife being 93 years old and the husband 92 at the time of the interview. Both participants had grown up and still resided in a rural area of England. The participants were selected again via purposive sampling based on the criteria of age and lived food experiences of the 1930s and 1940s. Interview topics ranged over a number of contemporary aspects of community cohesion, where direct comparisons were made by the participants about how things used to be. The data used in the current report have been selected via thematic analysis from the interview transcripts, on the basis of specific relevance to food.

7. In what ways do rural community food hubs perform and what contribution can, and do they make to the rural economy?

7.1 Producer food hubs

Berti and Mulligan (2016) identify two types of food hub – those which are producer and community-based. In practice this is more a continuum than a duality. At the producer end, food hubs integrate supply chains and consumption for market efficiency (Colasanti *et al,* 2018). As intermediary hubs, producers (usually small) collaborate to supply larger customers otherwise beyond reach (wholesalers, large institutions, and public procurement) (Barham *et al*, 2012). This enables aggregation in products, marketing, and distribution and thus producer economies of scale (Reynolds-Allie, 2013). They tend to be place- based (Fischer *et al,* 2015).

Producer hubs have no necessary social goals (Avetisyan and Ross, 2019). Economic performance can be impaired by cooperation because of the need to agree on operational aspects (Colasanti *et al*, 2018). They contrast to large-scale industrial, vertically integrated, and distant monopsonistic (small enough number of buyers to influence the market) controllers of the food market (Hinrichs, 2000; Stevenson and Pirog, 2008). Producer hubs' non-market characteristics tend to be by-products rather than purposes of performance (Porter and Kramer, 2011), such as improvements in local employment, shorter food chains and shorter food miles (Berti and Mulligan, 2016).

7.2 Community food hubs

At the other end of the continuum, community food hubs (CFHs) have wider civic rationales and their motivations are different: they largely seek to address market failures in some way (Fisher *et al,* 2015). They serve multiple purposes.

Enhancing community values is achieved through community-building, reconnection, and developing grassroots collaboration (Le Blanc *et al*, 2014). 'Collective' activities contribute to community capital rather than market returns (Beckie *et al*, 2012). CFHs are driven by solidarity, mutual aid, and anti-market food sovereignty, invariably stimulated by considerable volunteering (McKeon, 2015). *Supporting the disadvantaged* ameliorates food poverty, by improving access to food, improving diets and nourishment, promoting healthier eating, and pursuing food justice (Rose, 2017). Food education (nutrition, diet), and practical cooking classes further supports this (Blay-Palmer *et al*, 2013).

Environment and sustainability purposes embrace food waste reduction, shorter food miles and the transition to organic farming (Stroink and Nelson, 2013). *Food insecurity* purposes embrace fossil fuel dependence, crop failures, intensive animal production, soil erosion, climate change and resource depletion (including water) (Weber *et al*, 2020). CFH also seek to *(re)localise food* to reconnect food with the local population (Cox *et al*, 2008). This embraces food advocacy and food campaigning (DuPuis and Goodman, 2005).

CFHs invariably are also *'not for profit'* embracing community shareholding, grant-aid support, donations, volunteering, income generation, and surplus reinvestment (Yarnit, 2021). They are seen as "flagship models of socially conscious business" (Colasanti *et al*, 2018, p. 11), but this can make them vulnerable (Le Blanc *et al*, 2014).

7.3 Melded food hubs

Most food hubs are somewhere on the producer/CFH continuum with producer elements stressing market innovation and community elements emphasising social innovation (Seyfang and Haxeltine, 2012). Thus, for example, melded hubs can sustain the supply of local produce at premium prices (producer purpose) whilst at the same time addressing food poverty and food education (community purpose) (Franklin and Morgan, 2014). Food hub melding might be temporal, with producer hubs increasingly becoming involved in community purposes over time (Colasanti *et al*, 2018).

Food hubs tend to work outside of mainstream agriculture and its structures of state support (Stroink and Nelson, 2013), engaging instead with other policy domains such as health, poverty and environment (All Parliamentary Group on the National Food Strategy, 2021). Wherever food hubs might be placed along the producer community continuum, Stroink and Nelson (2013) consider them to:

"*contrast with the dominant industrial food system that focuses primarily on efficiency in production and profit to the general neglect of social, health and community outcomes*" (p. 621).

In this way, food hubs have been described as being born of emic perspectives (internally developed objectives and performance measures) in contrast to the etic operation of

commercial agriculture (subject to external influence), which can lead to policy disjuncture (Feagan, 2007) – see Figure 2.

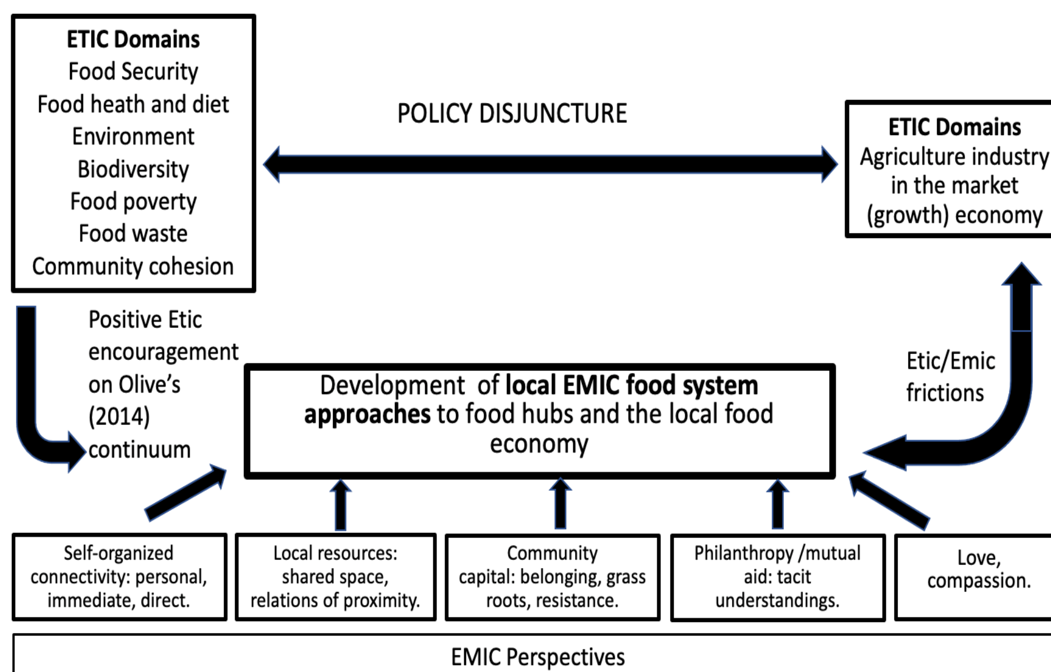

Figure 2 – Emic vs etic perspectives on food system

8. Social economy structures and policy signals would make this performance more effective.

The above characteristics mean that CFHs operate within a range of principles of the social economy (SE) which is gaining increasing support in policy circles, particularly in rural areas (Curry and Purle, 2020). The SE is concerned with social, societal, and environmental development, developing carbon reduction strategies and employing people inclusively, fairly and with dignity, in pursuit of the public interest, rather than financial return. This places individual and social objectives over those of capital: solidarity and sustainability rather than financial surplus (European Commission, 2020). In the SE, trading invariably pursues social rather than market goals within an 'ecosystem' involving collaboration, partnership, reciprocity and mutual support (Heap *et al*, 2017). The National Audit Office (2020) considers the 'third' sector, 'not for profit sector' and 'civil society' as all falling into the SE and stresses the critical role of volunteering in their operation.

The SE addresses economic systems rather than firms or sectors[1]. It is associated with several policy signals and directions for economies and economic structures:

[1] This, of itself, makes it difficult to measure GVA performance, which is done at the firm level (Defra, 2020).

- *Circular economies* which displace the linear economy – 'take - make - dispose' with a 'reuse - share - repair - refurbish - remanufacture - recycle' model – a close loop system. This minimises resource use, waste, pollution, and carbon emissions (Geissdoerfer *et al*, 2017).

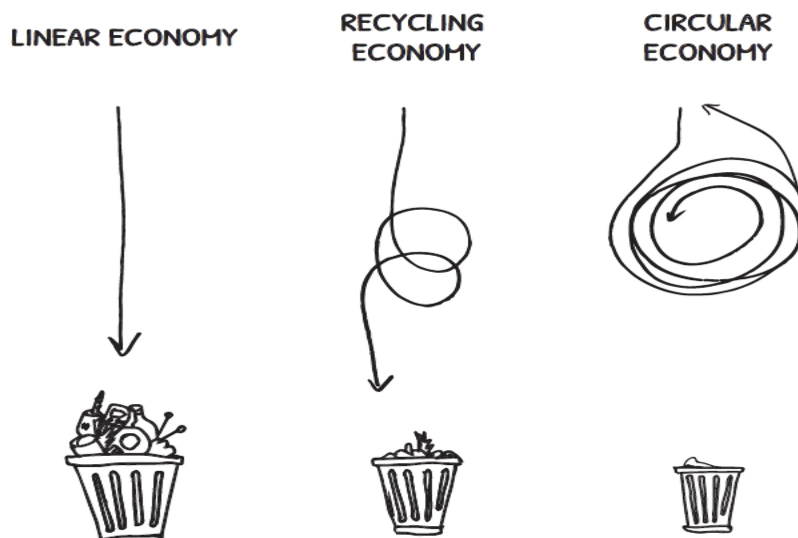

Figure 3 – The Circular Economy. Source: Circular Flanders, https://vlaanderen-circulair.be/en/infographics

- The *inclusive economy* which emphasises wealth distribution rather than creation: 'fair' work, and tackling discrimination and prejudice (Scottish Government, 2016).
- The *sharing economy* which prioritises access over ownership (Hossain, 2020) making use of otherwise underused resources, reducing waste, and enhancing social capital, through 'sharing' (Curtis and Mont, 2020).
- *Place-based development* which emphasises distributional benefits in less-developed (rural) areas (Sorensen 2018).
- *Systems approaches*, involving mutual economic interdependencies in pursuit of collective gain rather than that of the individual units within the system (Sala *et al*, 2015).

The SE is gaining increasing attention and providing a favourable context for CFHs. LEPs, for example, have adopted a number of the above principles[2] and the House of Lords Select Committee on the Rural Economy (2019) advocates them for rural areas, proposing that they are encapsulated within a new Rural Strategy. There are policy tensions, however, in that the government is less persuaded of the approach: a Rural Strategy is not required, the future of the LEPs is in question with initiatives to stimulate rural economic activity largely driven by growth and productivity, which do not capture the wider goals of CFHs in key areas of market failure (Curry, 2022a).

[2] A survey of all LEPs was conducted by the author and the results are reported in Curry (2022a).

9. What kind of experiences do volunteers have as contributors to this kind of economic activity?

9.1 Volunteering and complex decisions

Volunteering in CFHs requires making complex decisions, not least because of the pursuit of market and non-market objectives simultaneously. In addition, divergent and opposing views, values, motivations and priorities from volunteers themselves must be navigated? (Hutchins and Hazlehurst, 1992) in a range of ethical contexts (Heap *et al,* 2017).

Collective working increases complexity. In Lincolnshire, 70% of county voluntary groups worked in partnership and in competition at the same time (Involving Lincs, 2015), often compromising objectives. Crowding and voluntary group instability adds to complexity. The Lincoln Food Strategy (University of Lincoln, 2016) found 94 city voluntary groups with an interest in community food in 2016. This had dropped to 84 by 2017, but many of these were different organisations than in the earlier survey.

Complexity is compounded by external drivers. Martin *et al* (2015) note pressures placed upon CFHs by economic development agencies, to become more commercially-oriented. Regulatory requirements (such as around safeguarding, child protection or liability insurance) and exogenous policy requirements (linked for example to the environment, corporate social responsibility, equal opportunities, waste etc.) add to complexity, particularly where many voluntary groups are too small to have the resources to respond to such requirements fully. Volunteers can be commonly required to address much greater decision-making complexity than often is present in their professional and working lives, and as this complexity increases so does the likelihood of making 'wrong' decisions (North, 2005).

9.2 Addressing symptoms rather than causes

CFH volunteers can be 'forced' into tackling symptoms of food problems rather than their causes because they have little control over policy levers. For food poverty, says Tilly (2005), voluntary groups are associated only with the 'relief of poverty'. Food banks tackle the *symptoms* (a lack of adequate food) rather than causes. Nevertheless, the vision of the Trussell Trust Food Banks (2021), is "*A UK without the need for food banks*", but this can be achieved only by resolving the causes of food poverty, which requires advocacy (Ellis, 2001).

Yet advocacy can also be seen as too 'adversarial'. Dean (2015) suggests that the pressures of delivering service contracts to the state requires voluntary groups to depoliticise, forcing:

"*their efforts onto symptoms rather than root causes, and tackling short term and individual issues as opposed to campaigning for underlying change to tackle structural inequalities*" (p. 141).

But there are dangers that tackling symptoms becomes elevated to a key priority. It promotes the longevity of voluntary groups, whereas resolving causes renders them vulnerable. Tackling symptoms becomes assimilated as the acceptable norm in the food poverty landscape, as illustrated well in a Sustainable Food Places advertisement of 5 October 2021:

"*Brilliant jobs in food poverty in Wandsworth and Thanet.*"

Yeo (2017) also suggests that symptoms are easier to address than causes which are commonly structural and complex. In a similar vein, Ahn and Kalish (2000) suggest causes are easier to dispute, and there can be a lack of willingness to undertake diagnosis.

9.3 Volunteering and risk shunting

Levels of risk for volunteers in CFHs can be high given the complex nature of decisions they are expected to make, a lack of volunteer skills, and fragility of resources. Voluntary sector risks are further exacerbated if the majority of risk is 'shunted' down to community deliverers. In this way responsibility and blame can be shifted away from government (Taylor and Burt (2005).

Yet many of the calls to change food behaviours (Eat-Lancet Commission, 2019); Dimbleby, 2021) have implementation proposals that sit in the voluntary sector, where risks are highest and resources smallest. Similarly, many 'food poverty' grants introduced as Covid emergency measures were passed from central to the local state and in turn to the voluntary sector for delivery, with the risk of misallocating emergency resources also passed on. Volunteer deliverers are thus 'responsibilised' into accepting risk rather than being shielded from it by the state (Hemmings, 2017).

'Responsibilisation' itself increases risk, because rules of responsibility are increased (often through service level agreements), and then are more frequently breached (Alexander, 2010). Risk becomes measured as failure to deliver contract terms, rather than failure to improve human welfare. This drives much risk-taking 'under the radar' (Rochester, 2013) or dealt with through 'folk wisdom' (Zinn, 2008).

9.4 Marketisation and volunteering

'Responsibilisation', too, is part of the marketisation of voluntary activity (Foucault, 2008). Jayasuriya (2002) asserts that volunteering reduces dependency, improves social conduct, and allows the identification of the 'good citizen'. But seen in this way, Fougere *et al* (2017) suggests volunteering is used to legitimate welfare withdrawal, replacing it with markets in the neoliberal tradition: with market failures, albeit social ones, seen as correctable by markets. This can obscure social 'problems', recharacterising them as individual problems with market solutions (Brown, 2006). Volunteering becomes 'citizenship entrepreneurship', conforming to the established norms of market competition (Mirowski 2013).

This can impact directly on voluntary activity where volunteering becomes seen as 'work':

"*Dominant ideas about volunteering have moved away from self-help, community development and campaigning to the "workplace model" that sees volunteers as unpaid workers*" (Dean, 2015: p. 9).

This model reifies productivity at the expense of social purpose (Fredheim, 2018), inevitably exploiting volunteers and devaluing professionals. The Cumbria Local Enterprise Partnership Local Industrial Strategy (2019) even uses volunteering as one of its 'growth' anchors:

"*Cumbria's excellence in the voluntary and community sector and the strong nature of many of our communities provides a real launching pad"* (for the Industrial Strategy) (p. 9).

Dean (2015), too, suggests that volunteering has become more instrumental and competitive under marketisation. This focuses on the individual and can downplay altruism: volunteering becomes a consumer good, subject to audit. Handy *et al* (2010)'s international study confirms student CV improvement as the main motive for volunteering. Musick *et al* (2000) suggest that this minimises intrinsic volunteer benefits and discourages more altruistic volunteering in later life.

Marketisation can impact on community food projects as well as on their volunteering. Rosol (2016), for example, suggests that community food gardening is about state imposition of 'civic engagement' (as well as being good for the volunteer), as a means to ameliorate public finance shortages through communities taking 'self-responsibility'.

10. What role can social innovation play in developing community food hub performance?

A second key characteristic of CFHs operating outside of a productivity and growth framework, is the way that they focus on social, more than economic and technical forms of innovation, to develop (Klerkx and Leeuwis, 2009), and commonly draw on past experience.

Whilst innovation is generally about doing things in a new way, it can also be about using 'old' ideas in new contexts (Adams and Hess, 2008) - the "logical result of pre-existing conditions rather than a creative surprise leading to new experiences" (Nyström, 2013, p. 19). Because of this, history can shape, in particular, social innovation (Pantzar and Shove, 2010). This is more than nostalgia. Pickering and Keightley (2006) suggest, that returning to examine "the way we used to do things" is an essential part of innovation and a strong "basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future" (p. 921).

In community food, innovating using the past has been manifested in an increased use of the re-prefix (*Re-generative* agriculture, Soil *re-storation re-silience*, *re-localisation*) and many of the Covid emergency food actions undertaken by CFHs have replicated those used in the Second World War. But more generally, past ways of 'doing' food are being adopted in CFHs.

In previous studies of CFHs, contemporary modes of **production** commonly drew on the past:

"*In the park, nearly all of what we do is retro. We don't use chemicals or fertilisers – we have so many volunteers that we can pick weeds by hand. We also do a lot of composting as this is a good way to use green waste from the park. These are traditional methods but that is why they work.*" (LP 10:25)

Often from 'growing' memories:

"*In developing our community growing, I went back to thinking about how my dad did this stuff and just did it how I remember it. Nobody else in the group knew what do either so we all adopted the same 'how I remember it' approach. So we had no sprays and pesticides, which eventually became part of our philosophy.*" (DCGG 4:56)

And documented past practice:

"*Despite many changes in 'productive' agriculture Mrs Smith resisted most of them. When chemicals and pesticides were becoming much more popular* (in the 1950s)*, she would still grow comfrey and borage to use as pesticides and fertilisers, you know.*" (MSC, 17:04)

Contemporary CHFs make use of **community cohesion**:

"(the BHFP) is a community-based and led initiative rather than a food-based one. In that sense it doesn't really interface with agriculture and its innovations are not really measured against an agriculture yardstick, but rather a community one. The council has made land available for many different community groups but their catalogue of classification is community, rather than food." (BHFP, Interviewee 12, 7:20)

Which chimes with historic practice:

"*The village production and allotments were communal, and work and produce both were shared. Particular harvests, for example, apples, would be styled as social events for all to partake. The following month would be taken up with making apple chutney, which also was shared.*" (MSC, 13:10)

'**Localness'** is also an important characteristic of contemporary CFHs: short food chains, home-grown food and food sharing:

"*The food from the village hall grounds goes on a table with a donations tin and people can then help themselves. People are usually very generous financially, contributing to the cause as well as paying for the food* (DCGG 10:04). *More recently, people have been bringing surplus from their own gardens to leave on the table too. This has a cumulative impact on food sharing.*" (DCGG 15:15)

Localness was again reflected in the memories of older people, from the 1930s and 1940s:

"*My uncle Alec kept three chickens in the backyard and they would produce at least one egg a day. When there was more than one he would give the extra away to someone local who was ill."* (GPL, M 40:20)

"*Yes, but my father used to give a lot of his vegetables away, usually to the extended family, because he needed the space to grow more vegetables. If you didn't give them away, you just wasted them.*" (GPL, F 5:25)

Many of these CFH characteristics are consistent with older people's recollections of food:

"*People did tend to grow food in their back gardens if they had a back garden, but many people did not. We didn't, but my father had an allotment. This was natural for him as he came from a farming family, as many people did at that time. This was all laid out formally for vegetables: a special place for mint, a special place for cabbage. We used to grow everything: celery, beetroot, the whole lot.*" (GPL, F, 2:40)

From these surveys, innovating from the past is well summed up by BHFP:

"*Yes, it is interesting. In many ways it is about rekindling our forgotten past. Some of the things that have happened that are about going back to something that we did before, are things that have really sparked huge enthusiasm. For example, the Keep is an archive centre and we managed to get a community orchard planted in the grounds. Local people in that area of Moulsecoomb, a quite deprived council estate, said it reminded them of childhood. One elderly woman recalled that there was this old apple variety called, um, the Russian White ……. and as part of this orchard, we got the Brighton Permaculture Trust to source the tree for this apple and they planted it. That story went into the press release, and it was one of those things that people got really excited and emotional about. The fact of putting back into the ground, you know this heritage variety that had been around Sussex a long time ago.*"

This 'innovating from the past' is endorsed by the National Food Strategy for England (Part 2). In the introduction to its recommendations for a long-term shift in food culture, it begins:

"*We cannot make lasting changes to the food system without innovation in the widest sense. We need to change the way we use our land, reintroducing forgotten farming wisdom while simultaneously developing robots and AI to serve the farms of the future.*" (Dimbleby, 2021, p. 159)

11. How do rural CFHs pursue non-market goals in a market context?

11.1 Using market mechanisms to achieve non-market goals

Three examples are offered from Lincolnshire practice. Firstly, *markets can be used to internalise externalities*. This can have positive redistributional effects. The Lincolnshire CFH repurposes 'waste' food. Near sell-by-date food, or with damaged packaging, is donated free, passed on free (food banks) or resold in community cafes at about 10% of restaurant prices. It also runs cooking classes to improve people's understanding of food. The university grows fruit and vegetables for agricultural robotics research: once robot-picked, rather than being thrown away, they are donated into the CFH. Community growing projects also contribute their surplus produce to the CFH.

Secondly, *converting capital costs into revenue streams* has also developed. Lack of revenue is often the biggest problem for CFHs. Partnering with the local community energy company the Lincolnshire CFH has secured state capital grants for solar panels. Placed on municipal buildings, these generate an income stream for more than 20 years, which (after direct costs) are donated to community food projects on a continuing basis – known as the 'Feeding Tariff' (Curry, 2022b).

Thirdly, *experimenting with different mediums of exchange* has also been valuable for reducing inequalities. In one local community café (Mint Lane Café, 2021), *price-based monetary exchange* takes place at a fraction of market prices. *Pay as much as you feel* also operates, and when there are gluts of perishable items, these are *given away free*. There are *donations boxes* (some wish to pay above prevailing prices for redistributive purposes) and *pay it forward vouchers* for those who wish to buy food for other people. These are all in addition to the above food *gifting*. *Volunteering* is a non-monetary exchange: volunteers have 'free food' entitlements.

S*ponsorship* is another medium of exchange. The café has been refurbished by a local kitchen company (a prize in a 'Caring Kitchen of the Year' competition) and is one of 20 UK 'Starbucks Community Cafes': Starbucks provides a range of coffees, teas and biscuits free on a continuing basis. *Cross-subsidisation* also allows redistribution. In an example from outside of Lincolnshire, Stroudco, a Stroud, UK food hub, sells food at premium prices, using the income to cross-subsidise nutrition improvements in low-income communities (Franklin *et al*, 2011).

11.2 Partnerships and collisions

Partnerships also offer potential for non-market objectives in a growth market climate. The Cornwall (UK) Regenerative Food and Farming CFH, works with a *regional (county-level) grouping* of CFHs in six towns (using online technology), to develop economies of scale in purchasing, sales and publicity. This 'smooths' differences in food quantity and range across the area (Whitelaw, 2021).

Consumer-producer partnerships also provide workable models. The Seikatsu CFH in Japan (Poirier, 2007) is managed by producers and consumers jointly: they also consume food together (with the consumers cooking). Similar partnerships in the Farmer Direct Produce CFH in California (Cleveland *et al*, 2014), keep social, environmental and economic objectives on the agenda.

CFHs also partner with *other agents* concerned with food market failures. For example, Sustainable Food Places partnerships (such as the Lincolnshire Food Partnership and the Good Food Oxfordshire Network) include the local state, health authorities, food banks, and growing groups, as well as producers and consumers (Moragues-Faus and Sonnino, 2019). They can help raise awareness of resources held by different partners and improve integration of services (for example social prescribing).

CFHs can also involve partnerships that link *food with non-food activity* (often addressing other market failures). The Acts Trust (in Lincolnshire,) for example, is a CFH set up to increase life opportunities, providing opportunities for furniture repair, skills and training, young offender employment and advice on benefit claims. Food (they have a food bank,

a community café and a membership supermarket) is often a conduit for these wider goals (Acts Trust, 2021). In a similar way, Sustainable Food Cornwall in the UK combines food with craft industries (Whitelaw, 2021) and Liquorice Park (2021), combines food growing with public amenity space.

12. Conclusions

This exploration of CFHs shows that such structures can make a positive contribution to rural economies whilst at the same time stimulating social cohesion and addressing a number of market failures simultaneously. The characteristics of global growth market economies are coming under increasing scrutiny because of the damaging impacts that they have in respect of climate change, the environment, the distribution of wealth and notions of economic justice. Under these circumstances, it is likely that structures such as social and economic hubs will grow within the precepts and yardsticks of the social economy. These will act as a counterbalance to economic structures that pursue only narrower productivity goals.

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