Leveraging knowledge-policy interfaces for food systems transformation in the UK:

Lessons from civil society

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For more information on FixOurFood please visit: fixourfood.org

For more information on H3 please visit: H3.ac.uk

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Executive summary

This report presents the findings of a research project that explored how civil society organisations (CSOs) navigate 'knowledge-policy interfaces' to influence food policy in the UK. These interfaces encompass processes, spaces, and structures related to knowledge exchange amongst policy actors, including but not limited to researchers, policymakers, CSOs, and industry. CSOs, here, are defined as non-governmental, non-profit or not-for-profit, and independent organisations that operate in the public sphere (Edwards, 2014). The report provides insights into CSOs' approaches, constraints, and roles within these interfaces. It aims to make visible the important and challenging work of CSOs in driving food policy change and share valuable lessons for shaping food policy between sectors.

Evidence-based policymaking acknowledges that the use of rigorous research and scientific findings is needed to shape effective policies. However, the complex and political nature of policymaking suggests that evidence and policy are interconnected; each influences the other. There are also a wide range of factors that shape how different forms of knowledge influence or do not influence food policy including highly unequal power relations between organisations, diverse institutional capacities, and unequal access to resources such as research funding.

In the UK, 'formal' knowledge-policy interfaces, such as expert advisory panels and stakeholder consultations, shape food policies by influencing how evidence is selected, produced, interpreted, and evaluated. However, knowledge-policy interfaces extend beyond these formal processes. Understanding them requires us to examine the multiple relations between evidence and food policy; it requires us to engage with networks, practices, and capacities of the diverse organisations involved. CSOs play crucial roles in these interfaces, not least in bridging the gap between academic research, local knowledge, and policymaking. However, the diversity of approaches these organisations use to leverage food knowledge-policy interfaces in the UK are not well explored.

The research used a qualitative, mixed-methods approach, conducted between February and April 2023. It involved two phases of data collection: desk-based actor categorisation followed by semi-structured interviews. The first phase focused on understanding the types of CSOs involved in food knowledge-policy interfaces in the UK and their activities related to evidence and knowledge production. The second phase involved 17 semi-structured interviews with staff members or officers at CSOs to gain insights into their strategies, rationales, and challenges in influencing UK food policy.

Summary of findings

Categorising Civil Society Organisations working at knowledge-policy interfaces

1

We categorised CSOs (n=32) according to their governance form, activities, and legal structure. This resulted in a typology comprising three types of organisations: **registered charities, member-led organisations, and multi-stakeholder networks/alliances.** The categorisation highlighted the 'hybridity' of organisations active in knowledge-policy interfaces in the UK related to their membership base, governance structure, and engagement with for-profit activities. It also revealed the heterogeneity of CSOs involved in knowledge-policy interfaces and how specific organisational characteristics were associated with particular knowledge-policy activities.

Unpacking Civil Society Organisations' approaches to leveraging knowledge-policy interfaces

2

We identified three common approaches used by CSOs to influence food policy through knowledge-policy interfaces: **producing and using evidence, building and maintaining relationships, and mobilising narratives.** The findings highlight how CSOs enact these approaches through clusters of activities that we term, **direct, indirect, and networked.**

In relation to **producing and using evidence,** CSO activities include primary research, monitoring and evaluation, and synthesising evidence for policymakers. Some CSOs support practical change through on-farm trials, developing toolkits, and documenting innovative practices. Collaboration amongst CSOs, and between CSOs and academic institutions is also commonly used to enhance knowledge generation activities. These collaborative approaches enable CSOs to overcome resource constraints and to harmonise messages to policy audiences.

In relation to **building and maintaining relationships,** many CSOs invest in building strong relationships directly with policymakers as well as other organisations operating in knowledge-policy interfaces. These relationships sometimes take the form of formal partnerships and, at other times, more informal networks. Networked relationships between CSOs enable them to coordinate efforts and pool resources.

Lastly, in relation to **mobilising narratives,** many CSOs produce and amplify new narratives in public discourse in order to shift the nature of debate on food systems challenges and policy solutions. This can take the form of public campaigns as well as more targeted advocacy and lobbying efforts. Additionally, some CSOs strategically tailor messages and proposals to align with prevailing political framings and policy discourses in order to make their recommendations more likely to be taken up.

Adopting roles to navigate knowledge-policy interfaces

3

Looking across the catergorisation and analysis of approaches, this report identifies four prominent roles CSOs adopt when navigating knowledge-policy interfaces that we term: **insider advocate, critical friend, watchdog, and change agent.** Each role can be associated with specific combinations of organisations and approaches. CSOs often play multiple roles simultaneously. How CSOs combine and shift between different roles can result from long-term strategic decisions or in response to short-term changes in the policy-political environment.

- **Insider advocates** use direct approaches to influence policymakers by creating targeted policy outputs and expanding existing viewpoints.
- **Critical friends** build relationships with policymakers and provide valuable insights but may be cautious in proposing radical solutions.
- **Watchdogs** rely on networks to raise public awareness through campaigns and advocacy; challenge existing policies; generate diverse knowledge; and form coalitions with other CSOs.
- **Change agents** support and make visible practical examples of change; work at the grassroots level; and build alliances to achieve policy impact.

Leveraging knowledge-policy interfaces in practice

4

CSOs adopt, combine, and work dynamically between roles and approaches to influence food policy in the UK. Effective strategies to knowledge-policy interfaces depend on the organisation, policy area, and stage in the policy cycle.

Knowledge-policy interfaces are not just about communicating evidence but also about the interactions between organisations, individuals, narratives, and politics. These factors all play a role in influencing food policy in the UK, and their influence varies throughout the policy cycle.

There is no universally advantageous strategy for influencing food policy. Shaping more effective food policy requires tactically leveraging available resources, approaches, opportunities, and relationships.

Practical lessons include:

- Actively maintain relationships with diverse organisations to build collective agency
- Combine approaches to multiply the impact of any individual activity
- Harness and challenge dominant narratives regarding food systems and food policy

BOX 1: Key concepts and definitions used in this report

Civil society organisation: A non-governmental, non-profit or not-for-profit, and independent organisation that operates in the public sphere (Edwards, 2014).

Evidence: Information or facts that are systematically collected, analysed, and verified to support or refute a claim or belief (Maxwell, 2013).

Food policy: Policies and legislation that influence production, processing, distribution, purchase, consumption of food and its disposal (Hawkes and Parsons, 2019).

Knowledge: Practical or theoretical understanding of a topic. This includes scientific and academic evidence, but also knowledge based on experiences, know-how, and techniques (Vogel et al., 2007).

Knowledge-policy interfaces: Processes and spaces of interaction and engagement between actors and organisations involved in the production, translation, and application of evidence and information for the development of policies.

Narratives: Structured and coherent accounts that provide a framework for organising and contextualising information, as well as shaping the understanding and interpretation of a particular subject or field (Herman et al., 2007).

Policy cycle: The stages involved in the development, implementation, and evaluation of public policies (Cairney, 2012). The cycle typically consists of the following stages: agenda setting, policy formulation and adoption, policy implementation and policy evaluation.

Policymaking: Process by which decisions and actions are taken to create, modify, or implement public policies. It involves the different stages of the policy cycle and interactions between government institutions and other sectors, such as civil society, the public, experts, and industry (Dye, 2017).

Research: A systematic and organised process of inquiry or investigation conducted to discover new knowledge, validate existing knowledge, or solve problems (Leedy & Ormrod, 2019).

1. Introduction

The scale of challenges facing the UK food systems – not least in relation to climate change, environmental degradation, food insecurity, malnutrition and obesity – requires food policy that is more ambitious, more joined-up, and more effective than ever before. Such policies require evidence: what do we know about this problem? Which policy measures work, which don't , and why? Where are new interventions needed, and what form should they take? And yet the relationship between evidence and food policy is not straightforward and only partially understood.

In this report, we present the findings of a research project that examined how what we term *knowledge-policy interfaces* operate in the UK in practice. Broadly, we use the term knowledge-policy interfaces to refer to the processes of interaction and engagement between organisations involved in the production, translation, and application of evidence in the development of policies. We ask: what types of organisations are currently engaged in using knowledge to influence food policy 'and what do the actors themselves see as their most effective approaches?

Organisations that work in food knowledge-policy interfaces come from multiple sectors including academia, civil society, and the private sector. Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), here, are defined as non-governmental, non-profit or not-for-profit, and independent organisations that operate in the public sphere (Edwards, 2014). While organisations from these sectors have different strengths and expertise on how to use knowledge to influence food policy, cross-fertilisation across these sectors is limited. For example, much has been written on the relationship between academic institutions and policymakers (see, for example, Gluckman, 2016; Watson, 2005; Van den Hove, 2007), and on the ways that industry lobbying groups influence food policymaking (see Mialon, Swinburn, and Sacks, 2015; Mialon et al, 2016). However, CSOs provide the largest number of food policy proposals to government (FCCC, 2018). It is curious, then, that the strategies CSOs use to navigate knowledge-policy interfaces and influence food policy has not been such a focus of inquiry.

By making visible the ways that CSOs navigate knowledge-policy interfaces we aim to support the integration of more diverse forms of knowledge into UK food policy and to draw attention to the importance of networks, relationships and cooperation in navigating these spaces. Our use of *knowledge*-policy interfaces, rather than science-policy interfaces, emphasises the need to engage with the diverse forms of knowledge beyond academic and technical knowledge. Our use of the plural, *interfaces*, draws attention to the multitude of actors involved in generating evidence and data to influence food policy and the multiple processes through which these interactions occur.

First and foremost, we hope the analysis presented here can support the valuable work of CSOs working to shape better food policy by drawing together and reflecting on insights from a wide range of organisations. We also aim to contribute to a central mission of the Transforming UK Food Systems Strategic Priorities Fund, and all its affiliated projects, by making visible and critically reflecting on diverse and complementary approaches to realising policy impact in practice.

This project draws on a desk-based review of CSOs working at knowledge-policy interfaces in the UK and semi-structured qualitative interviews conducted with 17 staff members or officers from these organisations in March and April 2023. Following an introduction to knowledge-policy interfaces, the subsequent section sets out the research methodology. The third section presents findings from the empirical research, organised around three connected elements:

- Categorisation of CSOs working in knowledge-policy interfaces
- Approaches and activities used to influence food policy
- Typology of roles adopted to leverage knowledge-policy interfaces

We critically examine each of these elements in turn and reflect on how they relate to one another. In the final section we draw out some more general lessons for researchers, advocates, and practitioners that are looking to use different forms of knowledge to influence UK food-policy.

There are some important caveats to this report. Firstly, several of the larger organisations involved in this study work across the UK, meaning that they engage with devolved authorities with responsibility for some aspects of food and agricultural policy. This report focuses on knowledge-policy interfaces related to the UK Government, focused on England's food policy context. Secondly, CSOs included in this research were chosen for their work in respect to at least one of three main themes related to the TUKFS funded projects *FixOurFood* and *H3:* urban food production, regenerative agriculture, and/or local food economy. Insights from this study would likely need to be translated to be relevant in the context of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, as well as for CSOs working on themes not included in this study.

1.1 Understanding knowledge-policy interfaces for food system transformation in the UK

BOX 2: Knowledge vs Evidence

Knowledge and evidence are distinct but closely related concepts. Knowledge, here, refers to understanding of a topic. It can be technical and scientific, but can also refer to the information, know-how, and expertise that individuals possess based on their learning and experience. Evidence, here, refers to how information is systematically collected, analysed, and verified to support or refute a claim or belief. In the context of policymaking, evidence is often derived from scientific research including empirical studies, observations, experiments, and evaluations.

In the UK, food policy is made across various government departments and public agencies at the national, regional, and local levels. In England alone, at least 16 government departments and agencies are responsible for developing and delivering different aspects of food policy at the national level (Parsons et al., 2020). The development of food policy requires political support. However, a wide range of individuals and organisations inside and outside of government influence how food policy is developed and implemented.

These moments of influence come at different points in the policy cycle, which include the identification of priorities, policy formulation and implementation, monitoring, and evaluation (Chhokar et al., 2015). Several stages of the policy cycle typically involve stakeholder engagement, research and evidence gathering, and presentation to Parliament for scrutiny and amendment. Different stages of the policy cycle, then, hold different potentials to influence and inform decisions. Understanding how different actors – including CSOs, politicians, and lobbyists – wield influence and strategically navigate these opportunities is critical to understanding how knowledge-policy interfaces operate and with what consequences.

How evidence is produced, interpreted, synthesised, and evaluated in these interfaces can influence how policy is written, framed, and justified. As such, the legitimacy and effectiveness of food policies are closely related to the knowledge that has informed their development (Dinesh et al., 2021). The rise of evidence-based policymaking has drawn attention to the role of knowledge in the policy cycle, emphasising the importance of using rigorous research, data, evaluations, and scientific findings to identify effective policy options, predict potential outcomes, and evaluate the impact of policies (Young et al., 2014). The complex reality of policymaking, however, renders this focus too narrow.

In the UK, a variety of 'formal' knowledge-policy interfaces support the development of food policies. Formal interfaces include expert advisory panels, stakeholder consultations, All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), Select Committee inquiries, as well as government-academia research partnerships and multi-stakeholder

networks. Examples of cross-sector, formal knowledge-policy interfaces include the Food and Drink Sector Council,[1] UK Agri-Tech Centres,[2] and the Global Food Security programme.[3] However, our reading of knowledge-policy interfaces extends beyond these formal engagement mechanisms. It includes broader networks, processes, and relationships that determine how knowledge is produced and used in the context of food policy.

The process of getting evidence into policy can be slow and filled with a variety of challenges related to how policy is made and by whom (Waylen & Young, 2014). One issue is the challenge of effectively communicating relevant evidence, such as research outcomes, to policymakers at the 'right' time in a policy cycle to have impact. There exist, for example, well-defined formal channels for submitting verbal or written evidence to the UK Government. However, the impact of these processes on the development of policy can be opaque or difficult to trace.

Knowledge-policy interfaces are characterised by the use of knowledge produced through different academic disciplines as well as both codified and tacit, experiential forms of knowledge. However, not all forms of knowledge are valued equally in food policymaking. It is important to question, then, how particular forms of knowledge or evidence are valued over others, which disciplines or types of research output are effective for achieving policy impact, and why.

Relatedly, knowledge-policy interfaces can also be characterised by power imbalances between organisations working to use knowledge to inform policy. In this sense, knowledge-policy interfaces can be understood as relational constructs – defined by the unequal relationships and interactions between diverse organisations. For example, corporate lobbyists and CSOs exhibit significant variations in terms of mandates, resources and capacities, which shape their influence within food policymaking processes.

In other words, there is a wide range of factors that shapes how knowledge influences or does not influence food policy including but not limited to institutional capacity, power dynamics, and resource flows (Bielak et al., 2008; Waylen et al., 2023). Knowledge-policy interfaces, then, are characterised not only by their diversity but also by highly unequal power relations that privilege some actors and forms of knowledge over others. As Frediani and colleagues (2019, p. 10) describe:

> *"Interfaces are never neutral, as they define the spaces and norms in which knowledge is translated. They are the arenas in which the exchanges between research and practice occur at different scales and geographies, and in which different kinds of knowledge are – or are not – recognised."*

1 The Food and Drink Sector Council is a formal industry partnership with government: https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/food-and-drink-sector-council

2 The UK has four Agri-Tech Centres that bring together industry actors including from science, business and government to support the development and delivery of technology solutions for the agricultural industry: https://www.agritechcentres.com/

3 The Global Food Security Programme is the UK's cross-government programme on food security research: https://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk/

2. Methodology

The study followed a qualitative, mixed-methods approach and was carried out between February and April 2023. It included two phases of data collection:

- Phase 1: Desk-based research and actor categorisation (February 2023)
- Phase 2: Semi-structured interviews (March and April 2023)

The first phase focused on identifying CSOs working at knowledge-policy interfaces in the UK. It involved examining published literature and available online secondary data. Organisations were identified using internet searches and a review of relevant Select Committee publications and UK Government consultation processes. Relevant identified organisations shared the following characteristics:

- They are non-governmental organisations and either non-profit or not-for-profit, and direct their activities towards public benefit.
- They are actively involved in food policy in the UK by contributing to consultations and inquiries, undertaking policy advocacy and public campaigning, and/or generating policy-oriented evidence.
- Their policy work concerns at least one of three main themes related to the TUKFS funded projects *FixOurFood* and *H3*: urban food production, regenerative agriculture, and/or local food economy.

Thirty-two organisations were identified that met the above criteria.

The categorisation was adapted from Sharpe's (2016) typology of food governance actors in the UK and grouped CSOs based on their governance form, legal structure, and activities using information available on the CSOs' websites and at the Charity Commission and Companies House websites. This was complemented with information about organisations' size and formal alliances (involving formal agreements or commitments) found on the CSOs' websites and LinkedIn.

After the initial desk-based categorisation, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 17 selected CSOs. The aim of the interviews was to gain in-depth understanding of the different approaches used by these organisations to influence food policy in the UK along with their rationales, and an understanding of the diverse challenges they face. The following table provides an overview of organisations that participated in the interviews, with a general description of each as presented on their websites:[4]

4 This Table provides an overview of the CSOs that were part of the research project using the information found on their websites regarding how they describe themselves regarding organisation type, purpose, and activities. This information has been checked and complemented for the categorisation exercise described in this methodology section.

Organisation	Description
Soil Association	Charity promoting healthy and sustainable food, farming, and land use through supporting food growing, collaborating with farmers, businesses, policymakers and citizens, fostering innovation; developing organic farming standards, and advocating for global change.
Food Foundation	Charity working in partnership with researchers, campaigners, communities, industry, Government, and citizens to create a sustainable and healthy food system for all, using evidence, coalitions, citizens' voices, and impactful communication for widespread health and well-being.
Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC)	Charity fostering innovation, changing narratives, and enabling governments and businesses to enact progressive policies for an inclusive, sustainable food system and countryside.
Pasture-Fed Livestock Association (Pasture for Life)	Community Interest Company (CIC) working to support and advocate for 100% pasture-fed ruminant livestock in the UK by developing certification standards and promotional campaigns, amongst other activities.
World Wide Fund for Nature-UK (WWF-UK)	Conservation charity working to help local communities conserve the natural resources they depend upon, transform markets and policies toward sustainability, and protect and restore species and their habitats. One of its goals is to increase food availability and freeze its footprint.
Food Ethics Council	Think tank and charity offering ethical food and farming expertise, examining broad impacts and causes, and convening cross-sector dialogues for solutions to complex crises.
Green Alliance	Think tank and charity focusing on promoting ambitious leadership for the environment to accelerate political action and create transformative policy for a green and prosperous UK, including for sustainable food and farming.
The Countryside Charity (CPRE – formerly Campaign to Protect Rural England)	Charity advocating nationwide in England for a sustainable, accessible and healthy countryside, including sustainable farming and environmental land management, through a local CPRE group in every county.
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)	Nature conservation charity working in the UK and around the world to deliver successful nature and species conservation by forging powerful new partnerships, identifying problems and solutions using natural and social sciences, and inspiring widespread action.
Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming (Sustain)	Alliance of organisations and communities working together for a better system of food, farming and fishing, and cultivating a movement for change. It advocates for food and agriculture policies and practices that promote a healthy, sustainable, and equitable food system.
Sustainable Food Places	Partnership programme led by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain that supports a network of food partnerships across the UK working on all aspects of healthy and sustainable food.
Which? – Consumers' Association	Consumer-focused charity advancing education, protecting and promoting consumer safety, including access to healthy food, promoting compliance with consumer laws, and advocating for policy changes while safeguarding consumer rights.

Organisation	Description
Community-Supported Agriculture Network (CSA Network)	Multi-stakeholder cooperative for CSA farms across the UK dedicated to supporting and promoting CSA in the UK by providing a national platform to showcase and influence policy for CSA farms.
Landworkers' Alliance (LWA)	Union of farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers working to improve the livelihoods of its members and create a food and land-use system that is fair for all (nature, producers, and communities).
Nature Friendly Farming Network (NFFN)	Farmer-led network across the UK aiming to unite farmers and the public with a passion for wildlife and sustainability in farming and raise awareness of nature friendly farming, share insights and experience and work together for better policies for food and farming.
Better Food Traders	UK-wide network promoting ethical food retailers who sell local and sustainable food through accreditation, supporting businesses that prioritise sustainable sourcing, fair trade practices, and transparent information for consumers.
Sustainable Restaurant Association (SRA)	Organisation working at the intersection between the sustainable food movement and the hospitality industry through a tailored sustainability certification, advancing a socially progressive and environmentally restorative hospitality industry in the UK and worldwide.

Table 1: Participant CSOs

Interviews were transcribed and analysed using inductive coding – ground-up code development – to develop an initial schematic understanding of the collected data. Following this, the codes were organised into broader categories based on the study's objectives and the patterns identified across the codes. This divided the data into the following broad areas: challenges in influencing food policy; the value of CSOs in relation to food policy; effective strategies as perceived by interviewees; and knowledge-policy activities. These areas were then cross-referenced with the information from the categorisation of organisations presented in Section 3.1. This led to the identification of two final areas of findings: approaches and roles of CSOs in knowledge-policy interfaces.

2.1 Limitations of the study

- The identification of CSOs likely overlooked some CSOs working at food knowledge-policy interfaces in the UK due to its inclusion criteria and focus in line with the themes of the FixOurFood and H3 research programmes.
- The usefulness of the categorisation of CSOs could be enhanced by conducting a more in-depth document analysis of CSOs' produced outputs, websites, and formal engagement mechanisms' documentation.
- The analysis focuses on England's food policy context. Thus, the findings need to be translated to the context of Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland, or other countries.
- It is beyond the scope of this report to analyse how effective the approaches and activities are in influencing food policy.
- Rather than a comprehensive view of all CSOs working at knowledge-policy interfaces, we have focused on depicting the complexity and hybridity of these spaces and processes. Due to the project's time constraints, this report can only provide a broad overview of the types of CSOs present in knowledge-policy interfaces and points to consider when devising actions to influence food policy in the UK.

3. Findings

Section 3.1 presents the results of the categorisation of CSOs that work at food knowledge-policy interfaces in the UK, based on published literature and available online secondary data. Section 3.2 advances this categorisation with findings from the semi-structured interviews, presenting the various approaches CSOs use to influence food policy through diverse knowledge and forms of evidence. This is followed in section 3.3 by a presentation of the roles adopted in navigating and shaping knowledge-policy interfaces.

The findings provide a broad overview of the complexity and hybridity of actions using knowledge to influence food policy in the UK, suggesting that there may not be necessarily a set of 'golden rules' for successfully navigating knowledge-policy interfaces, but a variety of pathways to influence UK food policy.

3.1 Categorising Civil Society Organisations working at knowledge-policy interfaces

The categorisation of (n=32) CSOs produced three main types of organisation:

- **Registered charities:** Organisations that have exclusively charitable purposes, such as community development, for the public benefit and are registered with the Charity Commission.
- **Member-led organisations:** Membership-based collective action organisations that have a defined constituency, such as farmers, landowners and/or producers, and are run by its members, aiming to support individual and collective interests. Not registered as charities.
- **Multi-stakeholder networks/alliances:** Organisations or initiatives specifically developed to bring organisations and other actors together for collective purposes. Multi-stakeholder networks/alliances may also be registered charities.

Table 2 *(overleaf)* provides a sample of the categorisation.

Name	Type of organisation
Soil Association	Registered charity
Food Foundation	Registered charity
Food, Farming and Countryside Commission	Registered charity
World Wide Fund for Nature UK (WWF UK)	Registered charity
Food Ethics Council (FEC)	Registered charity
Green Alliance	Registered charity
The Countryside Charity (CPRE – formerly Campaign to Protect Rural England)	Registered charity
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)	Registered charity
Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming	Multi-stakeholder network/alliance
Sustainable Food Places	Multi-stakeholder network/alliance
Which? – Consumers' Association	Registered charity
Community-Supported Agriculture Network (CSA Network)	Member-led organisation
Land Workers' Alliance (LWA)	Member-led organisation
Nature Friendly Farming Network	Member-led organisation
Better Food Traders	Multi-stakeholder network/alliance
Sustainable Restaurant Association	Multi-stakeholder network/alliance
Pasture for Life	Member-led organisation

Table 2: Categorisation of CSOs. See Appendix for further details on each organisation

3.1.1 How organisational type impacts ways of working

The categories can influence organisations' activities to influence food policy. They can also influence the resources available and affect how they might operate within knowledge-policy interfaces. For example, being a registered charity in the UK means that these CSOs must comply with specific legislation, meaning that while they can participate in political activities that support their purpose, this must not become the primary focus of their work or use a significant proportion of their resources. Crucially, charities must not give their support to specific political parties. This inevitably shapes how these CSOs, as registered charities, develop, present or support policy solutions and change.

The categorisation also provides a first insight into how membership type might influence CSOs' activities at knowledge-policy interfaces. For example, although most charities include differing degrees of membership (see Appendix), the degree of involvement of members is not equal across all organisations. This contrasts with those 'member-led organisations' in which members generally have greater influence over the organisational priorities and activities.

Member-led organisations focus on directly supporting their members. For example, the Land Workers Alliance (LWA) and the Community-Supported Agriculture Network (CSA Network) are both registered as co-operatives, owned and led by their members. This means that much of their work is directed towards providing resources, such as guidelines and toolkits, and supporting research projects that directly impact the livelihoods and values of their members. However, member-led organisations also engage in activities that foster policy change for public benefit in line with their members' aims. For example, the LWA has several campaigns to create a better food, farming, and land-use system for all. Compared to registered charities, these CSOs are less restricted in voicing their support for particular policies or political parties.

Multi-stakeholder networks/alliances often pool the resources of different CSOs to engage in collaborative projects and activities. For example, Sustain is a multi-stakeholder alliance with a focus on advocacy. It has a relatively small staff, but 100 organisations as members (including many of this study's participating CSOs). Sustain's network model increases its capacity to reach out to multiple organisations and engage in various public campaigns by sharing expertise and resources.

The categorisation also revealed that CSOs conduct various activities related to knowledge production, including commissioning and conducting research, certification schemes, benchmarking awards, farm trials, monitoring and evaluation, workshops, multi-stakeholder platforms, case study evaluation, and reporting.[5] Looking closely at which activities different types of organisations conduct reveals that certain activities are often associated with particular types of organisation. For example, case study evaluation and reporting appear to be conducted more frequently by member-led organisations.

5 The Appendix provides detailed information about the sample CSOs used in the semi-structured interviews and their engagement at knowledge-policy interfaces, including legal structure, membership type, activities related to knowledge exchange, and formal partnerships/alliances.

The categorisation also found that CSOs rarely operate in isolation, but rather engage in a variety of formal partnerships and alliances with several actors including other CSOs, private actors, and researchers, despite the organisation type (see Appendix). However, some CSOs develop more formal partnerships than others, and some CSOs develop more partnerships with particular actors than others. World Wildlife Fund-UK, for example, has developed several collaborative projects with retailers to promote sustainable food supply chains through the WWF's Retailers' Commitment for Nature, including Co-op, M&S, Sainsbury's, Tesco & Waitrose.

Differences between types of CSOs working at food systems knowledge-policy interfaces are further accentuated by significant differences in size and funding structure (see Appendix). The RSPB, for example, has over 2000 employees, including a specific UK Policy Team, and a Centre for Conservation Science with a specific scientific and research programme. It has over 1.2 million fee-paying members and a long history of working at knowledge-policy interfaces in the UK. Whereas a smaller and more recently established CSO, Better Food Traders, has less than ten employees, and non-paid membership. The differences in size and membership type, thus, can significantly impact the degree to which CSOs can engage in activities to engage in policy change, including knowledge production and dissemination.

3.1.2 Organisational hybridity

The categorisation also highlighted the 'hybridity' of many organisations, in so far as they combine for profit with not-for-profit activities and/or operate across the public and private spheres. While CSOs typically redistribute surplus funds back into their programmes, projects, or campaigns, this does not mean that they do not generate revenue to cover their operational costs and carry out their activities. Revenue can come from a variety of sources, such as donations, grants, membership fees, or government funding. However, several CSOs work under an umbrella 'brand' that encompasses an elaborate organisational structure that includes commercial and charitable activities, which enables for-profit activities to support social or charitable goals.

For example, Which? is a single brand encompassing two active companies: *Which? – Consumers' Association* and *Which? Limited*. The Consumers' Association is a registered charity. However, Which? Limited is a wholly owned subsidiary of the Consumers' Association. The profit it generates funds the activities of the Consumers' Association by providing commercial products and services, such as magazines, books, digital products, and legal advice services. The Soil Association has a comparable structure, with a wholly-owned subsidiary – Soil Association Certification Limited – helping fund the activities of its registered charity. Wholly owned subsidiaries may be for-profit or not-for-profit businesses.

Some member-led organisations have multiple business operations that fund their work in addition to a paid membership. For example, Pasture for Life, a not-for-profit Community Interest Company, has the Pasture for Life Standards paid-for service, which certifies dairy come from animals raised only on grass and pasture. Funding social or charitable goals through a combination of for-profit and not-for-profit activities could lead to ambiguity and a need to balance potentially conflicting values and regulatory environments. However, in the context of knowledge-policy interfaces, it can increase CSOs' the financial capacity and independence to conduct policy advocacy and research activities.

The categorisation reveals the diversity of CSOs engaged in knowledge-policy interfaces and the differences in focus and resources that CSOs may have. This provides a background to understand the following sections, which go more in-depth into why this specificity matters for navigating knowledge-policy interfaces.

3.2 Three approaches to leveraging knowledge-policy interfaces

While the categorisation of CSOs reveals their diversity and hybridity, it does not explain how they engage with knowledge-policy interfaces. This section draws on the findings of the semi-structured interviews with the sample CSOs, to address this question. It sets out a range of approaches that CSOs themselves identified as effective for influencing food policy.

The following page sets out three common approaches to navigating knowledge-policy interfaces identified in the research: *produce and use evidence, build and maintain relationships*, and *mobilise narratives*. Each approach is associated with areas of activity that we characterise as *direct, networked*, or *indirect* according to whether they predominantly involve engagement with policymakers (direct), other CSOs (networked), or other public and private sector actors (indirect).

Three approaches to leveraging knowledge-policy interfaces

Approach 1: Produce and use evidence

Direct: Produce and disseminate targeted policy outputs

Networked: Collaborative production and use of evidence

Indirect: Support and make visible place-based, practical change

Approach 2: Build and maintain relationships

Direct: Identify, build, and maintain relationships with relevant policy- and decision-makers

Networked: Build cross-sector alliances for food policy impact

Indirect: Engage other influential actors and organisations

Approach 3: Mobilise narratives

Direct: Harness and expand current narrative framings

Networked: Build common narratives with difference

Indirect: Amplify new narratives in public discourse

Approach 1

3.2.1 Approach 1: Produce and Use Evidence

This approach combines three broad activity areas, which in turn contain a range of activities that may be more specific to organisational types and policy areas. We characterise these, using the typology outlined above, as *direct, networked,* or *indirect*.

	Approach 1: Produce and use evidence		
	Direct	**Networked**	**Indirect**
Activity area	Produce and disseminate targeted policy outputs	Collaborative production and use of evidence	Support and make visible place-based, practical change
Example activities	■ Curation and translation of evidence ■ Analysis of food policy trade-offs ■ Monitoring progress towards policy targets	■ Joint research funding bids ■ Sharing expertise and best practice ■ Research collaborations	■ Publishing toolkits and advice ■ Trials and experimentation ■ Producing case studies

Table 3: Summary of Approach 1 to leveraging knowledge-policy interfaces

The first activity area is direct: **produce and disseminate targeted policy outputs**. This includes activities such as producing and presenting policy briefs to policymakers and civil servants directly or through formal knowledge-policy interfaces, such as Select Committee inquiries.

This activity area concerns decisions that CSOs take with regards to forms of knowledge produced, how this knowledge is packaged as evidence, and how it is communicated to policymakers. Interviewees emphasised the importance of succinct communication with politicians and civil servants. They also emphasised that effective communication should be targeted at *specific* policies, departments, or individuals. This can require parallel communication strategies for engaging with different departments with regards to the same policy issue.

Interviewees highlighted the importance of proposing possible solutions to policymakers, alongside the identification of problems. At the same time, it can be effective to frame communications in terms of issues that impact Members of Parliament (MPs)'s particular constituencies. Sustain provides an example of how they promoted the need to boost uptake of Healthy Start vouchers to MPs in this way:

> *“It depends on what would make a particular product more persuasive […] We’ve produced a digital map, for example, to illustrate take-up of Healthy Start vouchers and to shine a light on which areas are doing better than others in terms of driving take-up of Healthy Start vouchers. That would be using publicly available figures, but turning them into a more compelling digital product, and then using that product to engage policymakers and parliamentarians, for example. That was quite a useful thing that we were able to send MPs and say, you can just click on your constituency, and you’ll see how much money your constituency is missing out on. That got us quite a lot of attention from policymakers.”* **(Sustain)**

Many CSOs produce diverse forms of evidence for policymakers that can play different roles in influencing policy. Interviewees suggested that while quantifiable evidence and economic arguments can be useful for attracting the attention of policymakers, many felt they were more likely to be influential when quantitative evidence was combined with ‘lived’ and contextualised examples. As such, effective policy outputs often draw on a range of forms of knowledge. However, not all CSOs are able to produce targeted evidence because of limited resources and capacity.

A second area of activity within this approach concerns working across the sector, through more or less formal networks, towards the **collaborative production and use of evidence** to influence food policy. Generating evidence through research is a crucial activity of many CSOs, particularly when the available evidence needed to make an argument is not available. However, not all CSOs have the resources to undertake research, which can limit their ability to generate useful knowledge to use in knowledge-policy interfaces, and many CSOs are unable to bid for public research funding directly.

Related to this, many interviewees perceived the research funding system in the UK as slow, hierarchical, detached from on-the-ground realities, and/or inaccessible. Lack of CSO leadership in publicly funded research means that academic forms of knowledge are often prioritised and privileged in evidence-based policymaking. For some CSOs, then, collaborations with universities can be particularly important.

CSOs have different forms and levels of knowledge production expertise. Some have more experience of conducting a specific type of research or relationships with particular groups of potential research participants. For these reasons, collaboration between CSOs and pooling available resources were perceived to be effective. This could involve making joint funding bids, sharing expertise and best practice, or commissioning research. For example, the Agroecological Research Collaboration (ARC) promotes farmer-led research by increasing connections between the research and the farming communities. It is led by the Land Workers Alliance (LWA), and includes the Ecological Land Cooperative, the Organic Growers Alliance,

Pasture for Life and the CSA Network as partnership members. Collaborative approaches to generating evidence was an approach that was common across the categories of CSOs.

The third activity area is indirect: **support and make visible place-based practical change**. Some examples activities include doing on-farm trials, supporting farmers to change agricultural practices by producing toolkits, and identifying case studies of innovative practices on the ground. The rationale behind these activities, as explained by the CSA Network, is that while national policy change is needed, it can be a slow and tedious process and takes time to get results. There is a need, then, to also engage in developing and facilitating grass-roots innovations and alternative ways of doing things. Through these activities, CSOs can generate tacit knowledge – knowledge gained through lived experiences – that supports other activity areas:

> *"We also are incubating some new approaches. So, testing them and trialling new approaches. And that includes some trials that we're doing on the Land Use Framework. And also, on a national nature service. And this is really to help develop capacity in communities and businesses. But also, primarily to showcase real world examples of how that change can look and how it can feel in action. Because sometimes when we just talk about evidence, or we just use narratives like it's not… It doesn't feel real to people. So, we use these practical trials and examples to bring that to life."* **(FFCC)**

Together these three activity areas enable CSOs to build on their existing strengths including organisational capacities, networks, and place-based activities to produce and use evidence to maximise their impact in food knowledge-policy interfaces. This impact is further enhanced through complementary approaches, below.

Approach 2

3.2.2 Approach 2: Build and maintain relationships

The second approach, identified by interviewees, concerns the importance of building and maintaining relationships with food policymakers, CSOs, and other actors such as universities. Again, we identified three activity areas that comprise a wide range of specific activities that are determined by organisational profile and policy area.

	Approach 2: Build and maintain relationships		
	Direct	**Networked**	**Indirect**
Activity area	Identify, build, and maintain relationships with relevant policy- and decision-makers	Build cross-sector alliances for food policy impact	Engage other influential actors and organisations
Example activities	■ Organise one-to-one meetings with policymakers ■ Organise public events ■ Visit food-related programmes and projects	■ Exchange strategic insights ■ Build on and reference the work of other CSOs	■ Build relationships with public bodies, academic researchers, and celebrities amongst others

Table 4: Summary of Approach 2 to leveraging knowledge-policy interfaces

The first activity area is direct: **identify, build, and maintain relationships with relevant policy and decision-makers.** Interviewees identified the importance of individual personalities, values, and experiences in determining how evidence is received and interpreted. This subjective, human dimension is rarely the focus of policy research, but was raised by several interviewees as a critical influence on the relationship between evidence and food policy:

> *"What we've tried to do is get to understand who [policymakers] are, not what their job is, but who they are and what is their own personal thinking [...] we have to understand the people who are developing the policies or the politician who is wanting something to be done. We need to pull at their heart strings a little bit and then show them the evidence that connects with them."* **(NFFN)**

Many of the CSOs interviewed invest in developing personal relations with policymakers. Some explained that they engage in regular one-to-one meetings with civil servants and politicians to present relevant reports and policy briefs. However, this is something that is more readily available to CSOs that have existing relationships with government.

Other CSOs indicated that they struggle to engage with policymakers and build relationships directly and instead utilise formal opportunities to increase interactions with decision-makers. For example, some interviewees explained that they take advantage of UK events, such as Parliamentary Receptions or Parliamentary Drop-ins to network or present relevant reports and research findings.[6] Member-led CSOs, particularly those working with farmers, such as the Nature Friendly Farming Network, invite policymakers to farm walks or other on-the-ground projects. Others, such as the Food Ethics Council and the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, develop spaces for deliberation in which policymakers are invited to participate.

The second activity area is networked: **build cross-sector alliances for food policy impact.** Interviewees frequently raised the importance of collaborative working between multiple organisations, for example through the development of joint campaigns, to successfully influence food policy. This collaborative approach supports knowledge exchange and mutual learning between CSOs, enables them to avoid duplication of efforts, and use their resources and capacities most efficiently. Many CSOs extend these networks into formal alliances and partnerships, such as the Eating Better Alliance, which brings together sixty organisations to advocate for 'less and better' meat and for plant-based diets.

However, not all CSOs engage in alliances that are directly connected to policy processes. For some, working collaboratively through informal channels and developing collaborative projects was perceived to be more effective. CSOs that have regular discussions with ministers, for example, can share insights on food policy developments with other CSOs through forums such as the Farm Working Group, convened by Sustain.

The third activity area is indirect: **engage other influential actors and organisations.** As outlined in Section 2, food policymaking involves more than just policymakers. A variety of actors shapes food policy, including members of government advisory bodies (such as the Climate Change Committee), parliamentarians, academics, public figures, and celebrities. CSOs may engage with all of these. A particularly successful example was the Food Foundation's work with celebrity footballer Marcus Rashford, to campaign on free school meals and other food insecurity issues during the COVID-19 pandemic, which eventually led to extended support for free school meals in England.

6 Parliamentary Receptions are held in the buildings of the UK Parliament to facilitate networking, engagement, and communication between government officials, MPs, industry representatives, CSOs, and other stakeholders. Parliamentary Drop-ins are informal sessions or events that can be organised by CSOs to provide an opportunity to MPs to learn more about a topic, campaign, or project.

Other CSOs, such as Pasture for Life, have increased their collaboration with academic researchers not only to increase their knowledge base, but also to build relationships with individuals who may be perceived by policymakers as authoritative sources of knowledge:

> *"We have been really trying to get more MPs and more officials out on farms to see what we're doing, and also more researchers. And that's been really key, because the more researchers that we can get out on the farms seeing this stuff, they then feed into the advisory, the academic advisory teams that then support policy. […] So I think that's something that actually maybe we found more effective, is that if we can use our connections with researchers to highlight some of these different ways of doing things, not only does it mean that they start thinking about it in terms of their own research, but they're more aware of it for when they're then asked to kind of inform policy."* **(Pasture for Life)**

Together these activity areas represent a relationship-focused approach to influencing food policy that complements and strengthens the first approach concerning the production and use of evidence. These approaches are strengthened further by a third approach, which concerns the ways that CSOs mobilise narratives to leverage food-knowledge policy interfaces.

Approach 3

3.2.3 Approach 3: Mobilise narratives

The third approach concerns the development and mobilisation of new narratives to reframe and reshape responses to particular food policy issues. Knowledge-policy interfaces interact with the dominant narratives attached to understandings of how food policy issues should be addressed. This influences what forms of knowledge and evidence are valued in these spaces. Many interviewees were acutely aware of the importance of narratives in the development of food policy, both in terms of the power of dominant narratives to constrain the policy discourse and the potential of new narratives to generate new opportunities for food systems change.

	Approach 3: Mobilise narratives		
	Direct	**Networked**	**Indirect**
Activity area	Harness and expand current narrative framings	Build common narratives with difference	Amplify new narratives in public discourse
Example activities	▪ Tailor messages to political ideologies ▪ Use of 'chameleonic' ideas	▪ Create spaces for productive dialogue and building common language	▪ Public awareness campaigns ▪ Media engagement ▪ Ambassadors

Table 5: Summary of Approach 3 to leveraging knowledge-policy interfaces

The first activity area is direct: **harness and expand current narrative framings.** Narrative framings, here, refers to how big ideas – such as efficiency, net zero, inequality, free trade, and green finance – shape and potentially constrain mainstream policy discourse. The Green Alliance describe the importance of understanding dominant narratives:

> *"When (former UK Chancellor) George Osborne was in his ascendency, politics had to be expressed through the lens of economics, otherwise you would be ineffective. And if you made a political argument without not necessarily real economics but an economic sort of veneer, it didn't touch anything. You could have the most brilliant piece of research imaginable, and it would just not do anything. So, that's what I mean by you have to start from where the politics are."* **(Green Alliance)**

However, some CSOs also explained that dominant narratives and ideologies can be navigated, and even expanded through careful framing of evidence and policy proposals. The FFCC termed this as the use of 'chameleonic ideas': ideas that can speak to many different ideologies and people, which can be interpreted in different ways, but which the majority can accept in essence. For example, the idea of 'public money for public goods' can be accepted equally whether it is viewed from an economic or a more equity focused lens.

The second activity area is networked: **build common narratives with difference.** CSOs working in food knowledge-policy interfaces are incredibly diverse. They have different histories, mandates, cultures, and interests. They are also made up of diverse individuals. It can be challenging, then, to build common narratives that both embrace and transcend these differences. Despite widespread networking and alliance-building activities, some interviewees indicated that siloed approaches remain amongst CSOs. These silos can result from how organisations focus on different aspects of food systems – childhood nutrition or trade policy, for example – as well as how organisations cooperate or do not cooperate. Siloed approaches lead to the risk that individual CSOs push policy ideas that are good for some aspects of the food system but have the potential to negatively impact others.

However, this diversity is also a strength – reflecting diverse organisational capacities as well as a plurality of experience and knowledge. Building collectives narratives through difference refers to activities that look for commonalities but value diversity and difference. Many interviewees referred to the importance of creating spaces where a productive dialogue can take place in which organisational differences are recognised but a common language and common narratives are constructed. Formal collaborations such as the Eating Better Alliance and the Fruit & Vegetable Alliance, for example, provide avenues to build collective momentum based on common narratives. Many CSOs also stated that using a common language and shared narratives can strengthen the impact of each organisation:

> *"Having a very broad coalition of organisations that all want the same type of change, then that can really make the case to policymakers that they need to be listening if it's businesses and consumer organisations and trade unions. That's a bit like the Retained EU Law Bill. There are a lot of people there who have common views, even if the actual interests we represent are different."* **(Which? – Consumers' Association)**

Academic institutions can potentially play a useful facilitatory and convening role, here, for example by partnering with diverse CSOs in research projects; resourcing spaces for dialogue and horizontal knowledge exchange between CSOs; or adopting action research approaches that contribute to the organisational aims of academic and CSOs partners in practice.

The third activity area is indirect: **amplify new narratives in public discourse.** Various interviewees raised the importance of shifting how the public thinks about challenges in food systems and the role of new narratives in achieving these shifts. For many CSOs, public awareness campaigns can be helpful in creating momentum and enabling debate that challenges dominant narratives around a particular food topic. This is particularly present in advocacy organisations. For example, Sustain recently collaborated with academic researchers to produce a report called 'Unpicking Food Prices' (Sustain et al, 2022), examining how the price paid for five everyday food items was distributed along the supply chain. The report was widely publicised and offered a new narrative position on (in)equity in food supply chains.

Together these three approaches represent complementary activities that enable CSOs to leverage food knowledge-policy interfaces in England. By producing and using evidence CSOs can more effectively articulate challenges facing the food system and propose policy solutions. By building relationships with policymakers and other actors they enhance the potential impact of this evidence. And by strategically working with dominant and new narratives they gradually shift what is permissible in mainstream food policy discourse. Each approach is strengthened by the others and CSOs frequently work dynamically across all these approaches at the same time.

3.3 Emerging roles to navigate knowledge-policy interfaces

By looking across our findings – how different types of CSOs use different combinations of approaches to overcome constraints and influence food policy – we identify four roles that CSOs take on in knowledge-policy interfaces, that we term: *Insider advocate, Critical friend, Watchdog,* and *Change Agents*.

Insider advocates have a strong focus on using direct approaches to navigating knowledge-policy interfaces. They are often perceived by policymakers as 'authoritative' sources of knowledge. They frequently influence policymakers by creating targeted policy outputs and expanding existing viewpoints. Some of the activities associated with this role include providing policymakers with detailed policy briefs or reports based on research they have either conducted or commissioned. They also create opportunities for policymakers to engage in reflective discussions about necessary policy changes. Insider advocates frequently work behind the scenes rather than making their advocacy efforts public. They focus on changing perspectives and narratives among different groups involved and support the government in achieving food systems goals.

Examples of CSOs that adopt this type of role include the FEC, the Green Alliance and the FFCC. When describing their policy work, both during the interviews and on their websites, these CSOs described themselves more as a think tank rather than focusing most of their efforts on public advocacy. As think tanks, most of their policy work revolves around providing leadership in policy processes to address food systems challenges, based on evidence synthesis, knowledge generation, and multi-stakeholder dialogue. However, they also sometimes engage in public advocacy by supporting other CSOs' campaigns, such as by signing joint letters.

Critical friends build and maintain relationships through direct, networked, and indirect activities. They often establish close connections with policymakers and are regularly consulted. Critical friends can provide evidence through formal policy knowledge-policy interfaces, such as Select Committees. Some activities associated with this role include having regular one-to-one meetings with policymakers and government officials, organising public events where CSOs can disseminate knowledge, and inviting policymakers to visit projects such as farm walks.

Critical friends often have valuable insights into the food policy process. However, this access can also constrain CSOs' ability to proposing more "radical" solutions that may not align with dominant narratives. This role is typically taken by CSOs that have been working at the knowledge-policy interface for a long time, have successfully built personal relationships with policymakers and other relevant actors in the policy cycle, and/or are recognised as authoritative voices on food policy.

For example, the NFFN's efforts revolve around building relationships by routinely attending meetings and networking events in Westminster. They aim to operate on a positive footing with policymakers by offering support and gaining greater access to the barriers to address current policy challenges and find relevant solutions.

Watchdogs often rely on indirect or networked approaches to navigate knowledge-policy interfaces that include public awareness campaigning and advocacy. They frequently aim to amplify new narratives in public discourse and form alliances across different sectors to impact food policy. Watchdogs mobilise the public to increase pressure on the government. Activities associated with this role include bringing attention to issues through the media and organising public campaigns with the help of ambassadors or celebrity endorsements (such as the Food Foundation's Children's Right2Food campaign).

The watchdog role is centred around challenging existing policies that negatively affect citizens or fail to meet expectations or stated aims. Therefore, these CSOs also put effort into generating diverse knowledges through research that highlights the trade-offs of current policy approaches. One significant challenge faced by CSOs in this role can be gaining government access.

An example of a CSO that adopts this role is Sustain. Compared to other organisations routinely on government stakeholder lists and consulted, such as those adopting the role of Critical Friends, Sustain has opted to be more critical and explicit about the change needed in the current food policy landscape. This is mainly done through public campaigns, such as the 'Good Trade Campaign', advocating for good food and farming trade that benefits people and the planet in the UK and overseas, including six steps for the UK Government to promote child health in trade.

Change agents often prioritise indirect approaches to influencing food policy, such as supporting and making visible place-based practical examples of change. They frequently prioritise practical knowledge and building capacity to implement change at the grassroots level. Some activities associated with this role include creating toolkits, experimenting with new or alternative food system models, providing certifications, and collecting case studies of successful interventions or projects that promote transformative solutions for the UK food system.

Many small CSOs are change agents, and typically have limited government access and resources. Therefore, when they directly engage with policymakers, it is usually through formal channels of knowledge-policy interfaces. Due to these limitations, this role is strongly connected to building alliances across sectors to have an impact on food policies. The networks and collaborations formed through these alliances are then used to influence policymakers, for example, by collectively signing agreements or participating in public campaigns.

Pasture for Life adopts this type of role. Much of its policy work revolves around raising awareness of alternative food production systems rather than having particular policy asks due to reduced capacity for direct policy work. Significantly, its priority is supporting change on the ground, which during the interview was discussed as a crucial backbone to be considered a credible source of information in policy spheres. Much of their work, then, includes developing an evidence base, which includes the lived experience of farmers, to add credibility around pasture-fed livestock.

BOX 3: Role Hybridity

While certain types of organisations are clearly associated with specific roles, such as member-led organisations with the role of Change Agent, the reality for many CSOs involved in this study is more nuanced. CSOs may take on different positions and fulfil multiple roles simultaneously due to factors including their governance structure, evolving policy impact strategies, external influences, and partnerships.

An example of Role Hybridity is Sustainable Food Places (SFP). SFP is a partnership programme led by three CSOs: Soil Association, Food Matters, and Sustain. Its main focus is promoting local food partnerships across the UK by supporting innovation and implementing best practices for healthy and sustainable food. SFP engages in various activities related to knowledge production, such as creating toolkits and guides to enhance the work of local food partnerships. It also regularly collects and shares local case studies. These characteristics position SFP as a **Change Agent**.

But SFP also operates as a **Watchdog**. Being a partnership programme led by two advocacy organisations means that SFP also engages in activities related to developing local and national campaigns. For instance, it is involved in the 'Veg Cities' campaign led by Sustain, which is directly linked to the Peas Please initiative of the Food Foundation, aimed at promoting vegetable consumption in the UK. SFP actively brings the knowledge it generates to national policymakers to influence broader food policy changes.

4. Conclusions

This research has found that knowledge-policy interfaces go beyond communicating evidence to policymakers. Power-laden interactions between organisations, social networks, and individual personalities all play a role in influencing the development and implementation of food policy in the UK.

The findings from this study highlight three key approaches to leveraging knowledge-policy interfaces: *evidence, relationships,* and *narratives*. CSOs utilise these areas to their advantage through different areas of activity: *direct* (by directly engaging with the government), *networked* (through collaborations and alliances), and *indirect* (focusing on public engagement).

The decision to focus on a particular approach or area of activities, or to adopt one role or another, depends on the circumstances of the CSO, their policy focus, and the context in which they are operating. Factors including resources, capacities, structures, relationships, and networks all play a role in this decision-making process. For this reason, there is no single preferable strategy for navigating knowledge-policy interfaces. Different approaches are perceived to be appropriate and effective in different situations.

This research has shown how CSOs are highly dynamic and adaptive with regards to leveraging food policy change. It also suggests that combinations of approaches and activities may be valuable, as well as taking an approach that is flexible and responsive to different stages of the policy cycle.

However, drawing across the experience of all the interviewees, some common lessons did emerge that may be useful for CSOs as well as researchers looking to leverage food systems change through knowledge-policy interfaces:

- **Strong relationships and collaborations with diverse stakeholders, both inside and outside of government, can help to build collective agency and enhance claims for food policy change.**
- **Combinations of approaches, such as producing targeted policy outputs, conducting research studies, engaging in advocacy efforts, and mobilising public campaigns, may multiply the impact of each individual activity.**
- **Strategic framing of evidence in terms of dominant narratives may increase the chances that it will influence policymakers.**
- **Compelling new narratives can also help shift mainstream food policy discourse.**
- **Flexible approaches to roles, approaches, and activities can be useful for enhancing impact at different stages of the policy cycle.**
- **Existing resources can be leveraged, combined, and used in innovative ways to drive food policy change through a diversity of formal and informal collaborations.**

Before deciding on the best approach to pursue, it is important to understand the internal and external context. This includes looking at the available resources and capacities, analysing the current policy landscape related to the issue being addressed, and identifying the prevailing narratives within the government and public discourse.

As this report has emphasised, knowledge-policy interfaces are complex, contested, and power-laden. But by examining them critically, and by working with and learning from those organisations that leverage these interfaces on a daily basis, we can identify new opportunities to inform the development of more effective food policies in the UK, towards the development of fairer and more sustainable food systems.

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Appendix: Profiles of participating CSOs

Name	Legal structure (based on Charity Commission/ Companies House)	Membership	Activities	Formal partnerships/ alliances
Soil Association	Charitable company – Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	Paid membership	Organic certification Food for Life programme: Early Years Award, School Awards, etc. Innovative Farmers network: Farmer-led on-farm trials Public campaigns	Eating Better Alliance Green Alliance Wildlife Countryside link Sustainable Food Places Fruit & Vegetable Alliance Sustain
Food Foundation	Charitable incorporated organisation (CIO)	No membership	Monitoring: Food Price Tracker, Food Insecurity Tracker, Annual Broken Plate, Plating up progress, Right2food Dashboard Public campaigns	UKRI Transforming food systems projects partner SHEFS partner Fruit & Vegetable Alliance International Benchmarking Coalition Secretariat to the APPG on the National Food Strategy Sustain Eating Better Alliance
Food, Farming and Countryside Commission	Charitable company – Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	No membership	Commission and conduct research: Our Future in the Land, Farming for Change, Farming Smarter, Citizens' voice Promote a Land Use Framework	
World Wide Fund for Nature UK (WWF-UK)	Charitable company – Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital use of 'Limited' exemption	Paid membership	Conduct research: Livewell programme Monitoring: WWF Basket Environmental footprint app	Catering for sustainability – Sodexo WWF Tesco Partnership WWF's Retailers' Commitment for Nature – Co-op, M&S, Sainsbury's, Tesco & Waitrose Sustain (Observer) Eating Better Alliance
Food Ethics Council (FEC)	Charitable company – Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	No membership	Workshops and multi-stakeholder platforms: Dairy Project The Food Ethics Council Business Forum Food Policy on Trial event series	Food citizenship project Eating Better Alliance Hunger Hardship Steering group Unchecked UK FSA Consumer Stakeholder Forum Defra's Consumer Stakeholder Group Sustain (Observer)

Name	Legal structure (based on Charity Commission/ Companies House)	Membership	Activities	Formal partnerships/ alliances
Green Alliance	Charitable company – Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital use of 'Limited' exemption	Paid membership	Commission and conduct research: e.g., Shaping UK land use	Food and Nature Task Force – Nestlé, Co-op, Sainsbury's, Tesco Greener UK Secretariat to the APPG for the Environment Sustain (Observer)
The Countryside Charity (CPRE – formerly Campaign to Protect Rural England)	Charitable company – Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital use of 'Limited' exemption	Paid membership	Commission and conduct research: e.g., BMV land analysis	Sustain
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB)	Other – Royal Charter company	Paid membership	Commission and conduct research: e.g., Centre for Conservation Science Monitoring: Annual monitoring of species, National survey of scarce and/or restricted species, Reserves monitoring data Fair to Nature Certification	National Biodiversity Network Gateway Eating Better Alliance EU LIfE+ Farmland Bird Project Cambridge Conservation Initiative Sustain
Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming	Charitable company – Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital use of 'Limited' exemption	Paid membership	Commission and conduct research: Fringe farming, Unpicking food prices, Bridging the Gap Public campaigns	Food Learning Forum Roots to Work Alliance to Save Our Antibiotics Sustainable Food Places Capital Growth Food Power Alliance Good to Grow London Food Link Fruit and Vegetable Alliance Eating Better Alliance Greener UK Groceries Code Action Network Sustainable Soils Alliance Trade Justice Movement Wildlife and Countryside Link
Sustainable Food Places	Not applicable – Partnership programme led by the Soil Association, Food Matters and Sustain	Voluntary membership	Case study evaluation and reporting Sustainable food places awards	Programme leaders: Soil Association, Food Matters, Sustain Eating Better Alliance

Name	Legal structure (based on Charity Commission/ Companies House)	Membership	Activities	Formal partnerships/ alliances
Which? – Consumers' Association	Charitable company – Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	Paid membership	Monitoring: Monthly consumer insights tracker, Lived inflation rates, Priority Places for Food Index, Supermarket tracker	Sustain (Observer)
Community-Supported Agriculture Network (CSA Network)	Registered society – Multi-stakeholder Cooperative	Paid membership	Case study evaluation and reporting: CSA impact in Wales	Agroecological Research Collaboration Fruit & Vegetable Alliance Eating Better Alliance Open food Network UK Sustain
Land Workers' Alliance (LWA)	Private Limited Company by guarantee without share capital use of 'Limited' exemption	Paid membership	Case study evaluation and reporting Activating land justice Growing with Food – ELMS trials Fringe Farming – Peri-urban practitioners forum Cultivating justice	Agroecological Research Collaboration Eating Better Alliance Edible Horticulture Roundtable Fruit & Vegetable Alliance Sustain
Nature Friendly Farming Network	Private company limited by guarantee without share capital	Voluntary membership	Commission and conduct research: Member surveys Case study evaluation and reporting	Eating Better Alliance Supporter organisations: Wildlife Trusts, Blumblebee Conservation Trust, Soil Association, Friends of the Earth, RSPB Sustain
Better Food Traders	Not applicable – UK-based network funded by the Esmee Fairburn Foundation and partnering with Sustain. It sits as a project of the London-based social enterprise Growing Communities	Voluntary membership	Case study evaluation and reporting	Supporter organisations: the CSA network, Open Food Network, LWA
Sustainable Restaurant Association	Private limited Company	Paid membership	Food made good sustainability rating – accreditation Food made good awards	Eating Better Alliance SU-EATABLE LIfE project – EU LIfE programme
Pasture-Fed Livestock Association	Private company limited by guarantee without share capital – Community Interest Company (CIC)	Paid membership	Pasture for Life Certification	Agroecological Research Collaboration Eating Better Alliance Sustain

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