



Transformation of Yorkshire's food economies

Summary report of the co-creative Three Horizons process

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Executive summary

Our food system, in Yorkshire and beyond, must transform towards a regenerative future. Hybrid food economies, characterised by purpose-driven 'hybrid' organisations that strive for positive social and environmental value rather than private gain, underpin regenerative food systems.

In our current failing food system, power lies with large corporations, which reinforces a lack of agency at local/ small scales to transform the system, so disrupting these power dynamics will be key for transformation.

In our desired future, regenerative dynamics - positive reinforcing cycles that spiral up benefits - arise particularly from increasing the knowledge, skills and engagement of people in the food system, including reinforcing dynamics between public engagement and health, as well as policy and governance that creates socio-economic conditions in which sustainable business approaches can thrive.

The shift in values between the present and the transformative future includes:

- from 'monocultures' (e.g. in crops and producers) to diversity;
- from concentrated to distributed power;
- from reactive to proactive and siloed to holistic in policy;
- and from a focus on price, efficiency and convenience to prioritisation of the environment and healthy nutrition.

Action must occur from a combination of bottom-up and top-down directions in order to drive transformative system change. Change driven by public demand is critical, although it must go hand-in-hand with policy/governance change, such as in the choice editing of supermarkets and workplaces (i.e. when they decide on behalf of consumers what produce to offer).

Equally, a thriving ecosystem of innovators (including novel sustainable business models) is seen as a core component of transformative action, but this must be enabled by policy that creates a level playing field supporting a diversity of smaller pioneer producers rather than a power imbalance towards the big players, and existing large producers must also be brought on board in the transformation.

Members of the public will be more likely to support transformation if they are inspired and engaged, e.g. by local change agents, celebrities and innovative case studies.

Domains of action with insufficient progress, that need to be urgently addressed to support transformation, include:

- coordination and connection between different actors, e.g. connecting food systems with Public Health England, the NHS and clinical commissioning groups, and engagement of small and medium sized enterprises;
- the mainstreaming of a culture change surrounding our concept of 'good' or 'basic' food and healthy diets; our concept is still focused on calories rather than nutritional content and there is still a lack of understanding about the need for sustainability (e.g. reducing carbon emissions).

Background: Fixing our Food

The challenge

Our current food systems underpin many social and environmental crises, including food poverty, obesity, climate change, pollution and accelerating biodiversity loss.

There is increasing recognition that simply tweaking the current system (eg improving efficiency) is insufficient to address these crises, and that a **more fundamental transformation** is essential: changing values, mindsets, paradigms and narratives.

Moreover, many aspects of planetary and human health have already passed critical thresholds, so simply reducing further harm is also insufficient.

Instead, we need new **regenerative food systems** that 'spiral up' social and environmental benefits and restore human and environmental wellbeing.

A core challenge is therefore finding ways to **steward transformations** towards **regenerative futures**.

The role of hybrid food economies

Our food economies - which relate to the production, distribution, valuation and consumption of food, food waste management and their underlying human/environment interactions - are a core aspect of the wider Yorkshire food system that will need to transform towards a more regenerative **hybrid food economy**.

Hybrid food economies are characterised by **hybrid organisations** that inherit characteristics from private, public and non-profit sectors. A hybrid organisation is purpose-driven by its mission and trades not for private gain, but to generate positive social and environmental value.

Transformation of our food economies is critical because they interconnect all other aspects of the food system, including how food is produced (eg at the level of farms) and consumed (eg in schools, workplaces and homes).

Aims

This work aimed to identify in Yorkshire's food economies:

- current challenges;
- desired futures;
- critical actions needed to support transformation;
- inspirational actors and practice already existing currently in the Yorkshire food system.

The work is one of three parallel processes undertaken as part of **FixOurFood**, a £6M project funded by the UKRI Transforming Food Systems Strategic Priorities Fund, which aims to understand how to steward transformations towards a regenerative food system in Yorkshire and beyond.

Approach

A series of surveys and workshops were held with people working in and researching the Yorkshire food economy, using the **Three Horizons practice**, to co-create strategic insights about how to support transformation. The approach is grounded in futures methods and systems thinking.

Three Horizons was chosen for this purpose for a number of reasons:

- it is a simple yet powerful method of dealing with complexity and uncertainty in a way that fosters a **sense of agency and hope**;
- it develops the skill of conceptualising how futures emerge from the present (so-called **futures consciousness**);
- it explicitly distinguishes between **transformative change** and more reformist or conformist types of change;
- it identifies **where power lies** in systems;
- and it fosters **empathy for different mindsets**, creating a space where a diverse range of stakeholders can convene to constructively share their different perspectives^{1,2}.

Three Horizons centres around a framework of three overlapping 'horizons', each representing a pattern in the way things are done:

- **Horizon 1 (H1)** is the current failing pattern that is increasingly unfit for a changing world;
- **Horizon 3 (H3)** is the desired future pattern aligned to a changing world;
- **Horizon 2 (H2)** is the space of innovations, initiatives and actions that can potentially foster and create space for the emergence of H3.

Participants explored their collective understanding in relation to:

- challenges in the current food system (H1);
- the desired future (H3); and
- the transformative action (H2) needed to get to that future, including by identifying what H1 aspects we wish to keep or amplify, e.g. as a holder of resources that can power H2 action, and what actors and practice embodying aspects of H3 already exist in the present, providing sources of hope and inspiration.

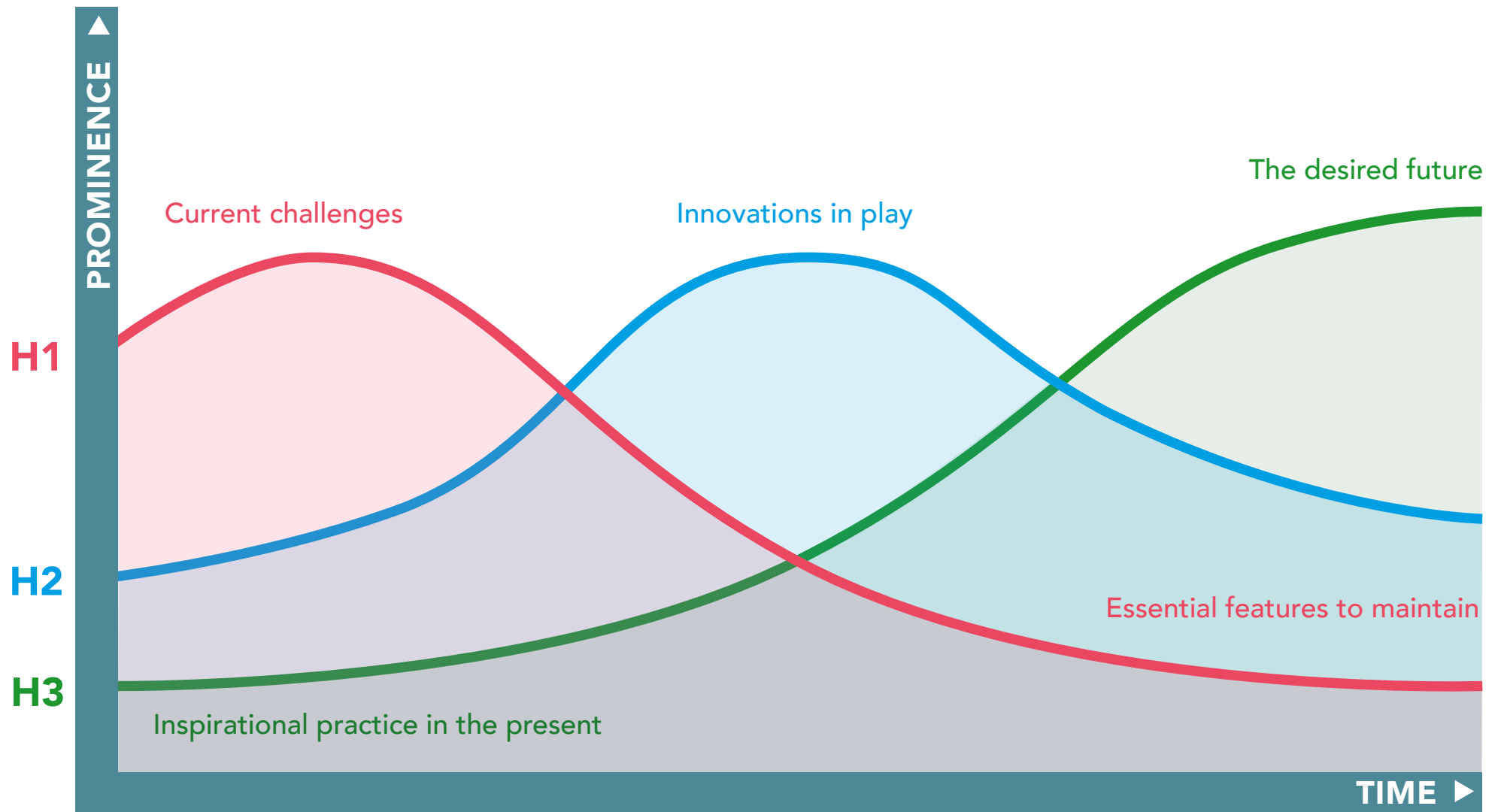
Participants then identified the interrelationships between the different aspects of each horizon, allowing us to create systemic concept maps for each horizon.

The outcome of this process is a collective and strategic understanding of how actions can be more effectively cohered to support systemic transformation.

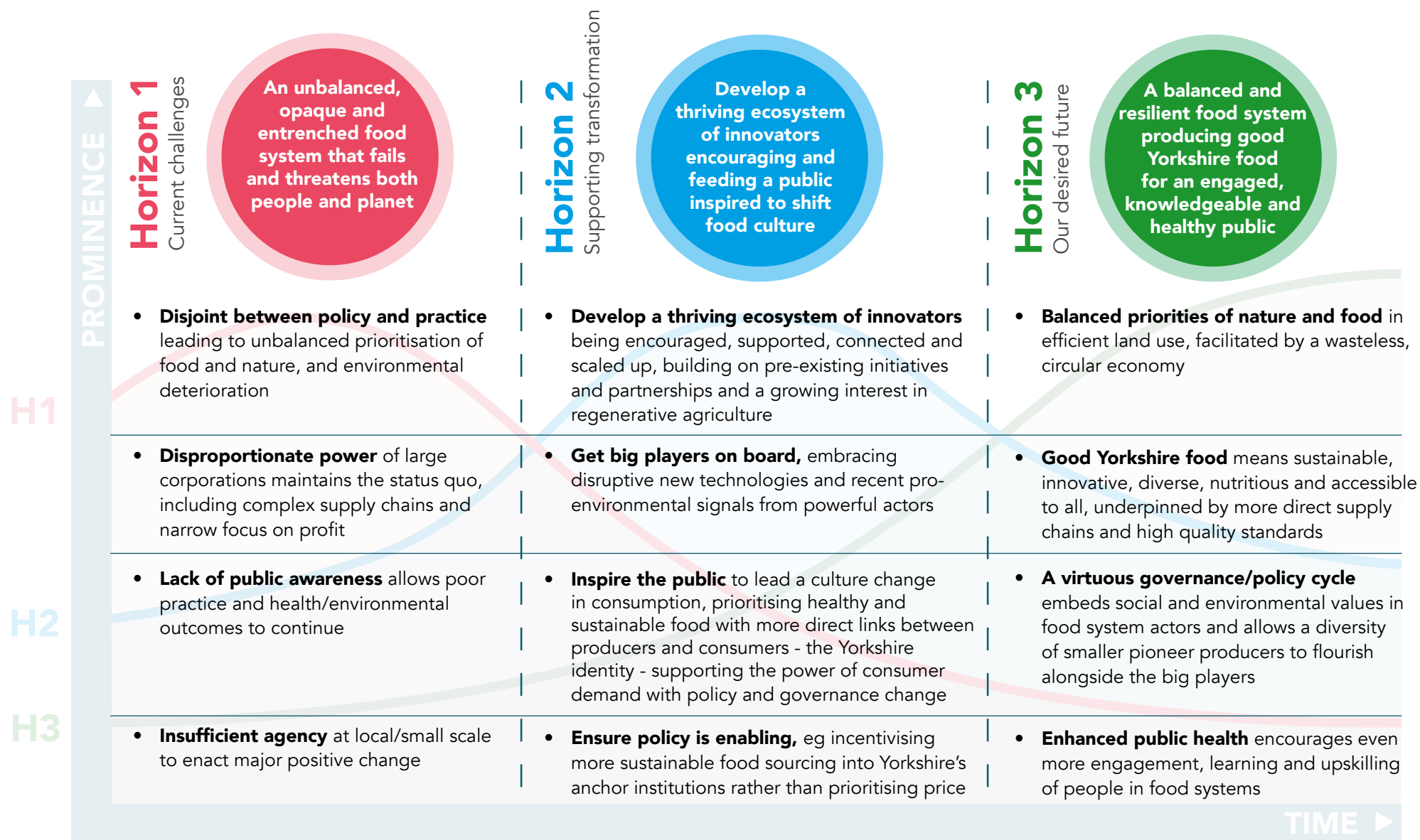
¹ Sharpe B, Hodgson A, Leicester G, et al. (2016) Three horizons: a pathways practice for transformation. *Ecology and Society* 21: 47. <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-08388-210247>

² Fazey I, Schöpke N, Caniglia G, et al. (2020) Transforming knowledge systems for life on Earth: Visions of future systems and how to get there. *Energy Research & Social Science* 70: 101724. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.erss.2020.101724>

Three Horizons map



Visual summary



Horizon 1 details

An unbalanced, opaque and entrenched food system that fails and threatens both people and planet

To understand H1, participants identified challenges in the current Yorkshire food economy that demonstrate its decreasing fit with wider changing conditions, and that it is under strain.

Participants identified a **disjoint between policy and changing socio-environmental conditions** (and the on-the-ground practice responding to them), leading to land management dilemmas with an unbalanced prioritisation of food and nature, and environmental deterioration.

The **disproportionate power of large corporations** (eg supermarkets and food delivery companies) maintains the status quo, including:

- the policy-practice disjoint mentioned above;
- a narrow focus on profit;
- complex supply chains and a lack of public awareness about the food system;
- poor public sector procurement;
- ethically unsavoury practices such as factory farming;
- high levels of waste;
- a lack of innovation and diversity in the food system;
- and insufficient agency at local/ small scales to enact major positive change.

Large corporations also dominate the virtual food environment (eg online services and delivery), whose offerings are often unhealthy and not sustainably sourced.

A **lack of consumer awareness** allows poor practice and detrimental health and environmental outcomes to continue.

Other H1 challenges include a decreasing fit between labour needs and provision, not helped by an ageing agricultural sector workforce, and rising food inequality.

H1 is thus an **unbalanced, opaque and entrenched food system that fails and threatens both people and planet**. The power lies particularly with large corporations at the expense of local/small-scale agency, so disrupting this power dynamic will be key for transformation.



Horizon 3 details

A balanced and resilient food system producing good Yorkshire food for an engaged, knowledgeable and healthy public

To understand H3, participants imagined looking around them in ten years' time and identifying evidence that the Yorkshire food economy has been transformed into a regenerative hybrid food economy that is now well aligned to meeting the needs of both people and planet.

Participants envisioned an efficient land use where there are **balanced priorities of nature and food**, facilitated by a wasteless circular economy.

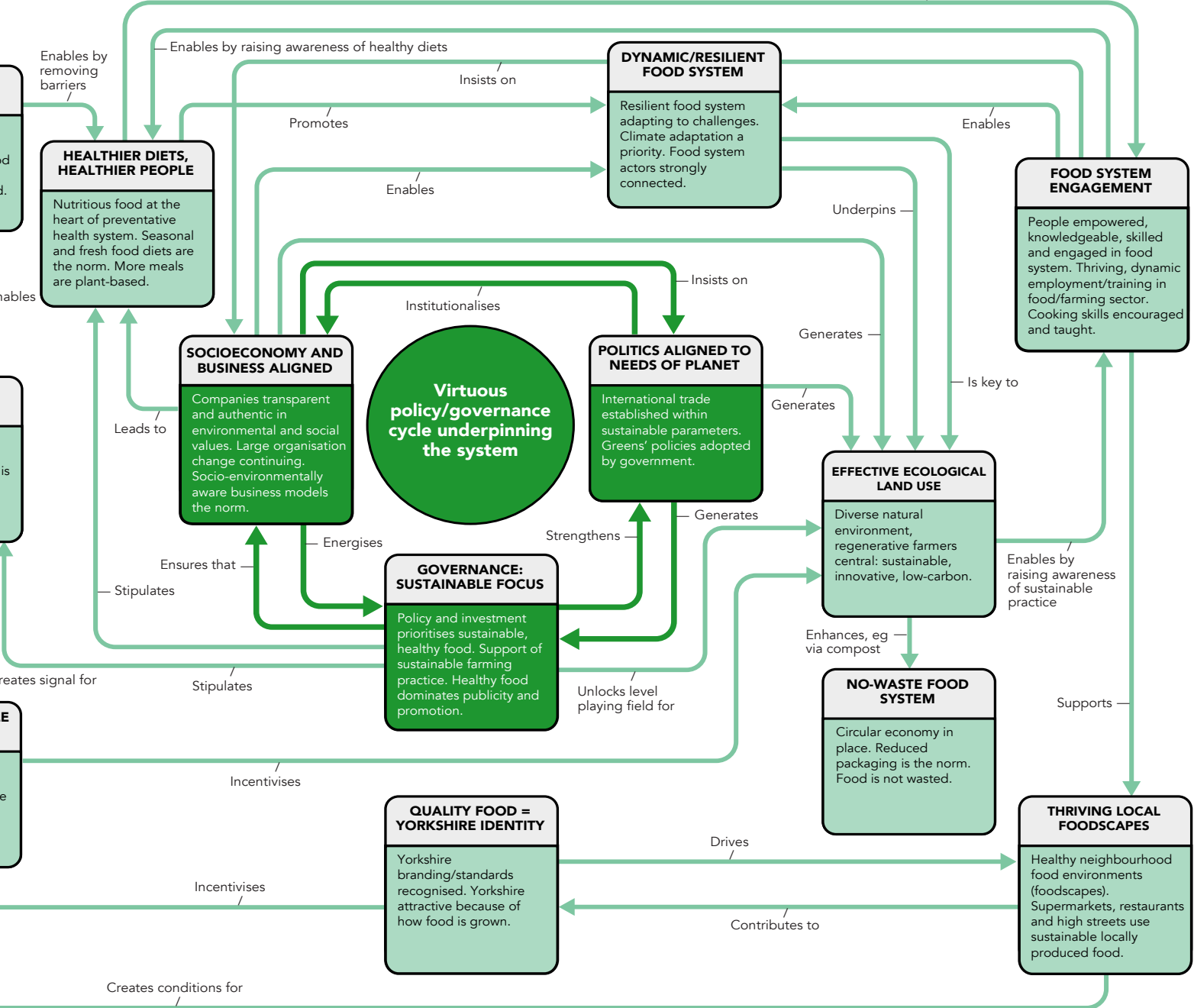
To the participants, the '**good Yorkshire food**' produced in H3 means sustainable and local, innovative and diverse, nutritious and accessible to all, underpinned by more direct supply chain links between producers and consumers, and high quality standards. This makes Yorkshire food distinctive and desirable across the UK.

The **enhanced public health** resulting from a greater focus on nutritious, fresh and seasonal food in diets encourages even more engagement, learning and upskilling of people in food systems.

A **virtuous governance/policy cycle** embeds social and environmental values in food system actors and creates a level playing field that supports a diversity of smaller pioneer producers rather than a power imbalance towards the big players

H3 is thus **a balanced and resilient food system producing good Yorkshire food for an engaged, knowledgeable and healthy public**. Regenerative dynamics appear to arise particularly from increasing the knowledge, skills and engagement of people in the food system, as well as policy and governance that creates socio-economic conditions in which sustainable business approaches can thrive.

Horizon 3 map



Value shift between H1 and H3

The transformative shift from H1 to H3 can be considered a shift in underlying values that needs to occur. Participants identified various examples of these value shifts for the H1 and H3 that they had described.

H1 value	H3 value
Monocultures (in a broad sense), eg monocropping and the dominance of a few big supermarkets, resulting in low resilience	Diversity: multicropping and more diverse rotations, and engagement of many different smaller producers and other food system actors, creating higher resilience and self-sufficiency in different parts of the country
Concentrated power and agency in the hands of the few	Distributed power and agency
Asset use is for individual organisations' own isolated purposes , so skills and infrastructures are under-utilised	Asset use is optimised through collaboration and partnerships , allowing for vibrancy and engagement in communities
Reactive policy	Proactive policy
Siloed, disjointed policy	Holistic policy across the food system underpinned by joined-up thinking
Rewarding poor practice	Rewarding good practice
Good practice is talked about but not put into action , eg in relation to more local procurement	Good practice is normalised , recognising its wider benefits (eg for health)
Underlying assumptions of change are driven by free markets	Underlying assumptions of change are proactive , supported with a focus on local actors that enables adaptation
Focus on price, efficiency and convenience	Prioritisation of the environment and healthy nutrition

Horizon 2 details

Develop a thriving ecosystem of innovators encouraging and feeding a public inspired to shift food culture

To understand H2, participants identified current initiatives, or initiatives that were needed, that could help to facilitate the transformative shift from H1 to H3. Participants also identified domains of H2 where good progress is already being made, and domains of H2 where there is insufficient progress and/or currently a lack of action. A list of specific inspiring actors and initiatives was compiled.

Participants further identified aspects of the status quo that need to be maintained or amplified in H3, and inspirational 'pockets' of H3 (eg actors or initiatives) already existing in the present. The former can be an important holder of resources for powering H2 action, whilst the latter provide hope and inspiration.

According to the participants, there is a need in H2 to develop a thriving ecosystem of innovators and innovations (including novel sustainable business models) being encouraged, supported, connected and scaled up, building on pre-existing initiatives and partnerships, and a growing interest in regenerative agriculture.

Policy must be enabling, creating a level playing field that enables this ecosystem to thrive, introducing financial incentives for transformative practice, and changing public food procurement standards, eg so that there is greater prioritisation of sustainable food sourcing for Yorkshire anchor institutions rather than price.

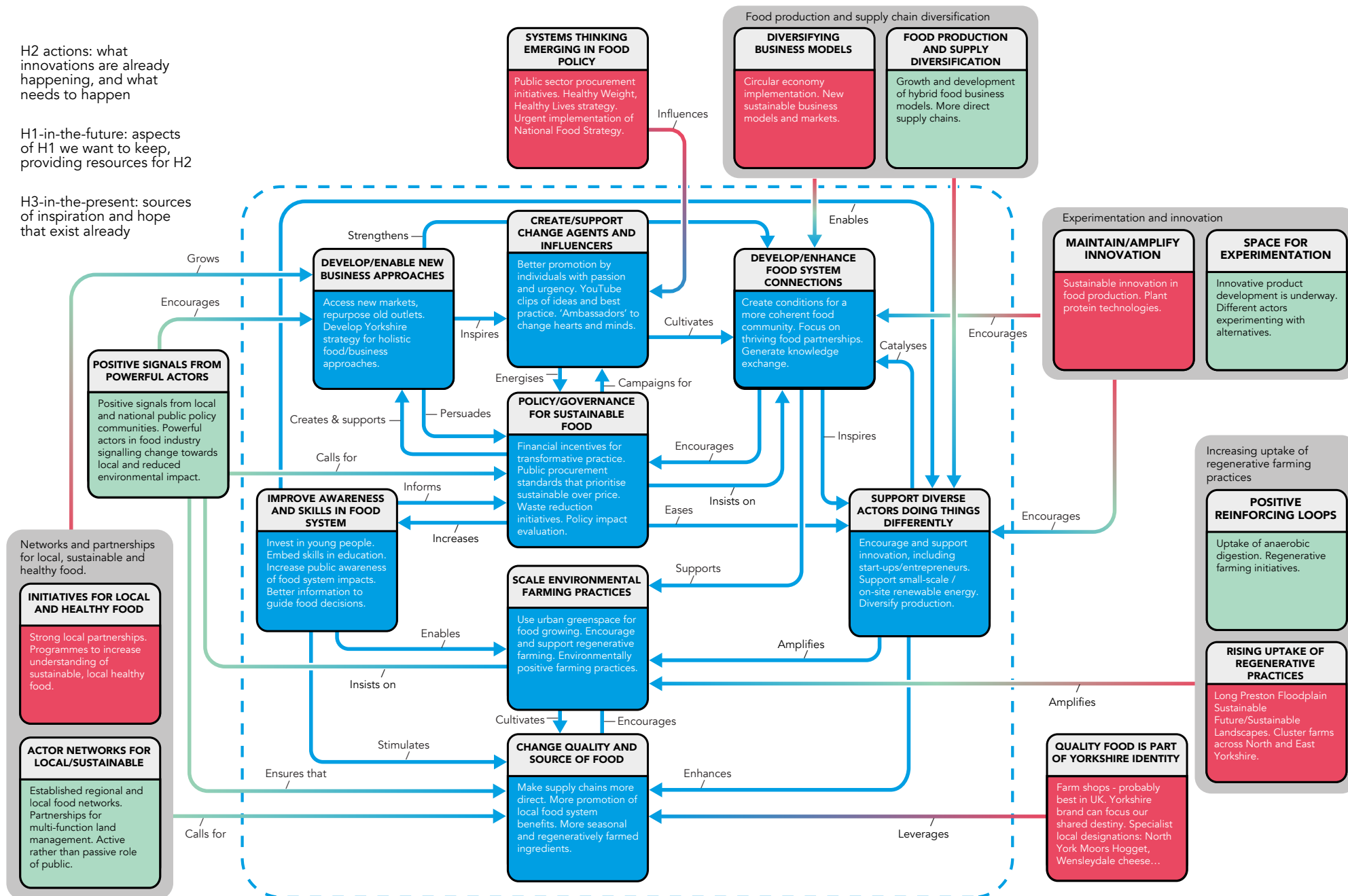
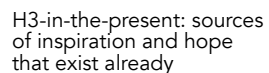
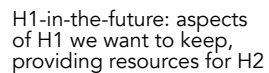
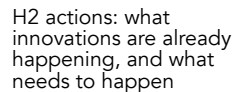
At the same time, it is important to **get big players (eg large-scale food producers) on board**, embracing disruptive new innovations (including technologies) and practices, and recent pro-environmental signals from powerful actors.

The public must be inspired to lead a culture change in consumption, focused on healthy and sustainable food with more direct links between producers and consumers - **the Yorkshire identity**. Members of the public will be more likely to support transformation if they are inspired and engaged, eg by change agents, celebrities, innovative case studies and new narratives. However, exploiting the power of consumer demand must go hand in hand with policy/governance change, such as in the choice editing of supermarkets and workplaces.

In summary, key H2 actions required are to develop a **thriving ecosystem of innovators** encouraging and feeding a public inspired to shift food culture. Change must occur simultaneously from bottom-up and top-down directions, with bottom-up consumer pressure and innovators enabled by higher-level policy.

Horizon 2 map

KEY





H2 domains of strength

Domains of H2 where good progress is already being made include:

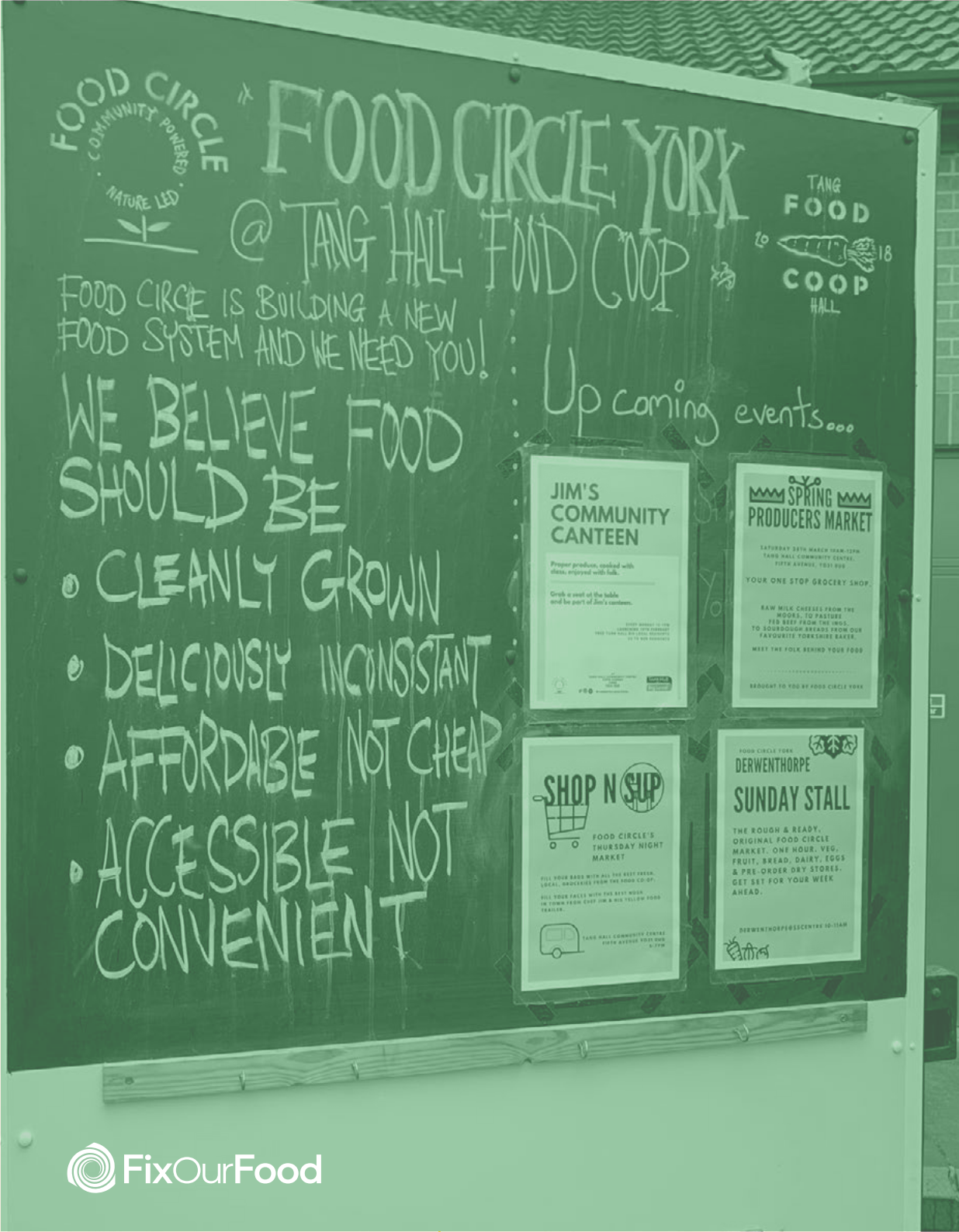
- policies already moving in the right direction at both national and local levels. As well as promising signs from the UK government, such as an emphasis on developing dynamic food chains with greater involvement of local producers (eg Dynamic Purchasing Systems), there is impressive policy at local levels in Yorkshire, such as local authority food strategies;
- increasing support for sustainable farming practices by major supermarkets.

Participants identified many inspiring organisations and initiatives already active in the H2 space of hybrid food economies, such as Deliciously Planet Ltd, Food Circle York CIC, Rooted in Hull and Sturdy Foods Ltd.

H2 domains of weakness

Areas of H2 where there is insufficient progress and/or currently a lack of action include:

- coordination and connection between different actors, eg connecting food systems with Public Health England, the NHS and clinical commissioning groups, and engagement of small and medium sized enterprises;
- the mainstreaming of a culture change surrounding our concept of 'good' or 'basic' food and healthy diets. Our concept is still focused on calories rather than nutritional content and there is still a lack of understanding about the need for sustainability (eg reducing carbon emissions) - it was felt that we haven't yet capitalised on the popularity of farmers' markets;
- other domains such as transformative rather than reformist policy; the effective use of celebrity that cuts across class barriers; the scaling-up of small-scale initiatives; and action-oriented approaches.



Next steps

We hope that the insights presented in this report will help to guide food system transformation.

Building on this work, next steps for FixOurFood include growing a network or 'entrepreneurial ecosystem' of business models to initiate transformation and knowledge exchange, combined with both an Anchor Institutions platform to make public food procurement more sustainable and a Food Systems Council for the Yorkshire food system to ensure legacy beyond the life of the FixOurFood programme.



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Green Street Bradford
Good Food York
Grow Yorkshire
Hull Food Partnership
Incredible Edible
James Sturdy (Sturdy Foods Ltd)
Leeds City Council
North Yorkshire County Council
Office for Health Improvement and Disparities (Yorkshire and Humber Region)
Victoria Robertshaw (Delicious Planet Consultancy)
West Yorkshire Health and Care Partnership
Yorkshire Food Farming and Rural Network

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