



## **Manifesto For Sustainable Food For All**

**March 2025**

People will go to the polls on May 1st to elect their new regional Mayor of the West of England Combined Authority. Once elected, this leader will shape the future of food in our region. We need to ensure they commit to delivering healthier and more sustainable food for all.

### **Why This Election Matters**

Westminster has committed to localise decision making and allow communities to make the right choices for themselves. Regional and local governments have been empowered to make changes to improve the lives of those in their community and help them to thrive. We want to see healthy and sustainable food that is produced locally be at the heart of the new administration's agenda.

### **Why Food Matters**

Food can help us deliver a more sustainable and equitable future for all people. There are approximately 150,000 residents in the region living in deprived communities with poor access to good food. All families deserve to be able to access climate and nature-friendly food that is affordable and nutritious. These foods are grown without harmful chemicals and are full of nutrients and deliver measurable improvements for the planet, including [biodiversity](#) gains and [carbon emission reductions](#).

### **Our key asks for the new administration**

1. Conduct a strategic review of food access across the region to improve spatial development strategies. This could then inform development /regeneration and guide how council-owned agricultural land could be more strategically managed as a region.
2. Ahead of any closure in the coming years of St Phillips Fruit and Veg Market, consider proposals that facilitate the collection, storage and distribution of local food to ensure a thriving future for SMEs in the food sector.
3. Unlock and simplify access to funding for initiatives that tackle health inequalities and climate/nature impacts that are driven by the food system, in particular provide support for smaller organisations that are rooted in local communities.
4. Engage with civil society and community groups working to deliver food systems change across the region and work collaboratively to create a Regional Food Plan to lay out a clear framework to improve supply chain infrastructure and bolster local food resilience.
5. Promote career development and training for individuals entering the sustainable, local food sector and provide business development support for SMEs to expand and for new startups to succeed in recognition of the positive role of local food economies for regional growth.

## These Asks Will Help Deliver...

- **Increased access to local, sustainable, healthy food for all**

Household food insecurity has steadily increased across the region in recent years. Existing challenges were compounded by Covid-19 and the subsequent cost-of-living crisis, worsening the situation for citizens who struggle to make ends meet. While financial insecurity is a key driver, food access and availability are often overlooked. Where a person lives shapes their relationship with food. If you live in a 'food desert', a 'food swamp', or have been housed somewhere with limited shopping options for your budget, this hinders your ability to thrive. We need a whole systems approach to addressing this injustice by considering how we value food in strategic decision-making around development and regeneration.

- **Support regional growth**

A thriving local food economy depends on SMEs that create new employment opportunities and ensure that money stays within the regional economy. The [New Economics Foundation estimates](#) that every £10 spent in a local food business generates almost £25 in the local economy. WECA can help support regional growth by providing a positive environment for local food businesses, including peri-urban farms and market gardens, to thrive. This, in turn, creates new career paths for young people, and provides new green job opportunities for people in the region.

- **Skills and training**

Developing green skills and work opportunities has been [identified by WECA as a priority](#), but this needs to include jobs in the food production and supply chain. There are many barriers facing new entrants getting into farming as a career, which when coupled with an ageing farmer population demonstrates that we need to invest in a new generation of food producers in the region. There is a shortage of programmes that teach sustainable food and farming practices and equip people for a career in this sector. The region needs a pipeline of training opportunities from entry level to career level training that is equitably accessible to all.

- **A green and resilient future**

Supporting better food across our region can help meet regional net zero targets and support WECA's goals around nature recovery. Sustainable agriculture can help protect our [wildlife](#) and reduce our [carbon emissions](#). Purchasing local food also reduces food miles and associated transport emissions. By strengthening local food economies, regions will be better able to respond to shocks to our food system – whether geopolitical or environmental. We need to ensure that we have a resilient localised food supply to reduce future risk.

- **Improve health outcomes**

Investing in healthy food programmes can help reduce health care costs and improve people's mental health by providing access to high-quality green space. Research from the University of Gloucestershire revealed that for every £1 invested in local food, [between £6 and £8 are returned to society](#) in the form of social and economic benefits, including health and wellbeing. Diet-related ill health can have pernicious and long-term economic impact and can trap people in cycles of poverty. Supporting access to sustainable healthy food can help raise living standards across the region and improve future prospects.