



YOUR PLACE AT THE TABLE

How community dining is having a positive impact on diet, health and the planet

This report was commissioned by FoodCycle, written by the British Nutrition Foundation and funded by Danone UK & Ireland.



Executive summary

In the UK, unhealthy diets are estimated to cause more than 75,000 premature deaths each year, including almost 17,000 deaths among individuals aged 15 -70 years¹. People with low socioeconomic status are more likely to live with and die from diet-related disease². Such alarming findings underscore the critical need for effective interventions to promote healthier eating habits and address the impact of diet on public health.

FoodCycle is a national charity which has been serving up community meals across the UK since 2009. Every week its volunteers turn surplus food into nutritious three-course meals, that are enjoyed by members of the local community. This report explores the potential longer-term impact that meals like this can have on both people and the planet.



Are community dining services like FoodCycle contributing to healthier diets?

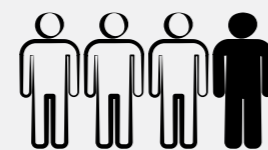
The literature suggests that community dining increases access to healthy, sustainable meals and promotes positive dietary behaviour changes among guests, but evidence remains limited. The British Nutrition Foundation and FoodCycle therefore aimed to investigate whether attendance at FoodCycle community meals encourages guests to try new, healthier and more sustainable foods and meals, both when dining at FoodCycle and at home. Fostering a greater liking and familiarity of these foods/meals in a supportive environment may potentially lead to lasting impacts beyond the meal setting.



Key issues for the UK



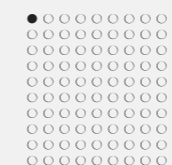
Poor diet accounts for 13% of all deaths (FSA 2022)



Around 1 in 4 adults and 1 in 5 children (ages 10-11) are currently living with obesity and these figures are even higher in more deprived areas (NHS 2023)

£58,000,000,000

Annual cost of obesity is £58 billion (Frontier Economics 2022)



Less than 1% of the population eat a healthy, balanced diet (defined by the Eatwell Guide) (Scheelbeek et al. 2020)

7,200,000 PEOPLE

7.2 million people are living in 'food insecure' households, which is linked to diet-related diseases such as obesity, type 2 diabetes and poor mental health (UK Parliament 2024)



Food production contributes 15-30% of total greenhouse gas emissions in the UK and therefore contributes significantly to global warming (BDA 2021)

Key findings

A rapid literature review by the British Nutrition Foundation and a survey conducted amongst FoodCycle's guests and volunteers suggests that community dining provides a stable, dependable, inclusive and dignified service that supports both physical and financial access to food, helping to meet dietary needs and empowering communities to play an active role in their wellbeing.



Healthier eating means a healthier planet – following the Eatwell Guide or other healthier plant-rich dietary patterns can significantly reduce environmental impact.



70% of FoodCycle guests reported positively changing their eating habits since attending the community meals and two-thirds are thinking more about eating in a way that is better for the planet.



Community dining can create multiple points of contact, facilitating experiences that include volunteer networks and support for underlying issues related to food insecurity.



Over 50% of FoodCycle guests report eating more plant sources of protein, including pulses like kidney beans, chickpeas and lentils.



Positive social interactions around food can lead to healthier, more sustainable food choices and improved overall wellbeing.



Since coming to FoodCycle around half the guests report eating less sweets/sugary foods (49%).



Some research suggests that when people eat with others they tend to consume more fruit and vegetables. 71% of FoodCycle guests said they have tried or bought fruit or vegetables that they wouldn't normally eat as well as increasing the variety of these choices.



Dietary changes can happen quickly, with changes being reported in less than three months of eating at a FoodCycle community meal.

FOODCYCLE RECOMMENDATIONS

How can you help?

How you can help people and communities achieve improved health outcomes by supporting community dining initiatives.

Local Authorities

Use this research to influence policy as well as signposting and promoting community dining services such as FoodCycle.

Government & Public Health

Define community dining as a key pillar of social prescribing, use this research to support change and invite FoodCycle to speak at events.

Funders

Provide core funding for community dining projects, fund vital research in social innovation for health and invest in local infrastructure and facilities.

Businesses

Donate to, or fund, community dining projects, encourage employees to volunteer, partner with FoodCycle on longer-term initiatives and raise awareness of community dining and its benefits.

Schools, charities and community groups

Signpost people to community dining services and contact us if you want to launch community dining at your school or group.

Individuals

Volunteer, donate or fundraise and raise awareness of community dining.

A full list of recommendations and actions can be found in the full report or please email hello@foodcycle.org.uk

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This report was commissioned by FoodCycle, written by the British Nutrition Foundation and funded by Danone UK & Ireland. The views expressed are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views or opinions of Danone.

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Our thanks and warmest gratitude to FoodCycle guests and volunteers that kindly gave their time and insight.

