

# FOOD CLUB SURVEY REPORT 2025



## SUMMARY

**This briefing draws on unprecedented parallel surveys of food club members, across Community Shop, Family Action, Feeding Britain, Message Trust, The Bread and Butter Thing, UKHarvest and Your Local Pantry.**

The survey findings show:

- Food clubs are proving to be a preventative alternative to crisis support and hunger. Nearly half of food club members (44%) say they have not needed to use a food bank. Of those who had previously used a food bank, most had now stopped doing so (35%) or report using them less often (25%). Furthermore, 66% of members who used to skip meals report that they now do so less often.
- Food Clubs are also helping people connect to the wider services and wraparound support that can help to build financial resilience, often offering these services on site. These connections are clearly valued, with two thirds (67%) reporting that they have accessed at least one form of additional support such as debt advice, income maximisation services or social and nutrition activities.
- Members frequently describe food clubs as warm, welcoming communities where dignity is upheld, friendships are built, and support is available. This is reflected in the 84% of members who say that they now feel more connected to their community. The impact of food clubs on members' wellbeing can also be seen in the 79% of members that report feeling less stressed or worried about food, and the 68% that now feel more confident in themselves.
- Food clubs are also supporting healthier habits at home. Almost all members (98%) report that they're more able to afford to eat balanced meals, and 78% are now eating more fruit and vegetables.

## WHY FOOD CLUBS MATTER

Across the UK, millions of people are caught in an affordability trap: working, caring, contributing, and yet still unable to afford basic, nutritious food. Escalating food costs and energy bills, a complex and difficult-to-navigate welfare system, and chronic low wages have created a situation where even full-time employment doesn't guarantee financial security.

For much of the past decade, food banks have emerged as a default response to this crisis; providing emergency food parcels to growing numbers of people each year. More recently, though, communities have begun turning the tide by embracing an alternative model known as food clubs. This model encompasses a wide range of contributory, membership-based pantries, community shops, and social supermarkets, which restore dignity and stability, while offering people a chance to regroup and rebuild.

Research consistently positions food clubs as a highly effective, multi-faceted intervention directly contributing to UK government goals for “affordable, healthier and more balanced diets for all” and “ending mass dependence on emergency food parcels” [1]. Indeed, data from the Food Standards Agency suggest that, for two successive years, a higher proportion of people have accessed food clubs than used food banks [2].

*“FoodSavers has given me back control. I can save money each week, put good food on the table, and do it with dignity. It isn't charity – it's community.”*

**FoodSavers Member**

## NOT JUST CALORIES: SUPPORTING HEALTH, DIGNITY AND STABILITY

Food clubs go far beyond simply providing calories. Regular access is positively associated with improved diet quality, increased fruit and vegetable intake, and enhanced wellbeing. Almost all members (98%) report that they're more able to afford to eat balanced meals, while 78% say they are eating more fruit and vegetables since joining. Members talk about learning new skills, trying unfamiliar foods, and feeling proud of being able to prepare nutritious meals at home.

But food clubs can be more than a way to put food on the table. They are places people genuinely value and of which they enjoy being a part. Members often describe them as warm, welcoming communities where friendships are made, support is found, and dignity is upheld. They are not just tolerated as a necessity, but cherished as vibrant neighbourhood hubs that bring joy and connection.

This sense of belonging translates into improved wellbeing. Food club members report better wellbeing, with 79% reporting that they feel less stressed or worried about food since joining their food club. Beyond food access, 84% of members feel more connected to their community or less socially isolated, and 68% report feeling more confident in themselves. These organisations can also play an invaluable role in connecting members to wraparound services, with 67% of members reporting that they have engaged with additional support such as debt advice, income maximisation, social hubs, or nutrition activities through their food club. By offering routine, access, community and choice, food clubs help counterbalance instability in people's lives.

*“It's helped my mental health, my eating habits for me and my family, I now am a regular volunteer paying forward within my community. It's fantastic.”*

**The Bread and Butter Thing Member**

[1] UK Government. (2025) A UK government food strategy for England, considering the wider UK food system. Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/a-uk-government-food-strategy-for-england/a-uk-government-food-strategy-for-england-considering-the-wider-uk-food-system>

[2] Food Standards Agency (2024) Food and You 2: Wave 7. Available at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2/food-and-you-2-wave-7#research-reports>

and Food Standards Agency (2025) Food and You 2: Wave 9. Available at: <https://www.food.gov.uk/research/food-and-you-2/food-and-you-2-wave-9>

## HOW FOOD CLUBS DIFFER FROM FOOD BANKS

While food banks were designed to provide short-term, emergency relief for people in immediate crisis, food clubs are designed to play a preventative and longer-term role - in the process, helping to reduce people's risk of needing to use food banks. They often offer a small weekly shop for a nominal amount, typically containing fresh produce, chilled and frozen items, and cupboard staples.

The difference in experience is significant. Many members say they would never have wanted to visit a food bank but cherish visiting the food club. Membership models can lead to more familiarity and trust between members, which makes it easier to introduce people to additional support and activities, as part of a wide-ranging "more than food" approach. Members are not passive recipients of aid, they contribute to and shape the spaces of which they are a part.

*"You can choose what you want. If you go to a food bank, you get what you are given and are thankful because you had nothing. Coming here, you can choose what you need or like. Here, it's non-judgmental [...] it gives people who do not have choice, a choice. That's important when you have no money."*

### **Your Local Pantry Member**

Crucially, nearly half of food club members (44%) say they have not needed to use a food bank. Of those who had previously used a food bank, most had now stopped doing so (35%) or report using them less often (25%). Similarly, 66% of members who have skipped meals report that they now need to do so less often.

## ADDRESSING PLACE-BASED INEQUALITY

Addressing the distinct challenge of rural hunger and hardship, food clubs are expanding their reach into these often-overlooked communities where residents frequently contend with limited commercial availability of fresh, healthy food. This means longer travel times, navigating inadequate transportation, and incurring higher costs, which collectively restrict their food choices.

*"Helped me to not worry about the quantity and consistency of the food available to my family and don't have to worry about travelling long distances to and from the shop."*

This combines with accessibility issues such as limited and/or costly public transport, further cutting into the budget available to buy food. By delivering affordable, nutritious food directly to these communities, food clubs are an effective and targeted solution to this gap.

# SECTOR SURVEY REPORT 2025

## THE CASE FOR STRATEGIC SUPPORT

Food clubs represent one of the most promising place-based approaches to tackling hunger in the UK. They can:

- **Reach people in acute need without stigma or referral, and act as a preventative model for those at risk of hunger.**
- **Improve diet, wellbeing, and social connection.**
- **Act as a focal point for wider support to boost incomes and reduce costs.**
- **Help people transition from emergency support to greater independence.**
- **Mitigate the hunger effects of in-work poverty and financial precarity.**
- **Strengthen the community assets and social capital necessary for resilience.**

As the sector matures, there is increasing momentum behind creating shared metrics to capture the full impact of food clubs nationally covering wellbeing, dietary improvements, food insecurity status, and how many people leave the service because they no longer need it.

Hunger in the UK is not an isolated issue, but a systemic problem rooted in low wages, high housing and energy costs, unaffordable childcare, and inadequate transportation. Being at risk of hunger can create a vicious cycle, but it is a solvable problem through proactive policy interventions and support systems rooted in the places where people live.

Food clubs can and must form a part of a multi-layered strategy to eliminate hunger from the UK, demonstrating that affordable, nutritious food can be a vehicle for transformation, not just survival, and that with strategic support, this transformation can be sustained and scaled.

## REPORT COMMISSIONERS

This work is a collaboration between Community Shop, Family Action, Feeding Britain, Message Trust, The Bread and Butter Thing, UKHarvest and Your Local Pantry, and has been supported by Professor Greta Defeyter (Northumbria University), Dr Megan Blake (University of Sheffield), and Professor Paul Stretesky (University of Lincoln).

The logo for Community Shop features the text "Community Shop" in orange, with a small orange tag below it that says "OPEN for more".The logo for Church Action on Poverty features a stylized red flame icon above the text "Church Action on Poverty".The logo for Feeding Britain features a green circular emblem with a map of the UK and the text "FEEDING BRITAIN" and "A HUNGER FREE UK".The logo for Family Action features a green speech bubble shape with the text "family action" inside.The logo for The Bread and Butter Thing features the text "The bread and butter thing." in a playful, rounded font, surrounded by small icons of people and food.The logo for UKHarvest features a yellow bus icon with the text "UKHARVEST" on its side.The logo for Your Local Pantry features a blue and white shield-like shape with the text "Your Local PANTRY".The logo for Message Community Grocery features a stylized "C" icon with the text "message Community Grocery".

# SECTOR SURVEY REPORT 2025

## METHODOLOGY

Figures in this report are drawn from a survey of people accessing affordable food provision in the UK during the summer of 2025, conducted by Community Shop, Feeding Britain, Your Local Pantry, UKHarvest and Family Action. This one-off cross-sectional survey took place between 16th July 2025 and 18th September 2025. Participating projects invited all users of their service to participate via email/text message and publicity within the food project. Most questionnaires were online self-completion, however some projects chose to complete the questionnaire in person at the Food Club. 3085 responses were gathered across all organisations, with 60% of member responses coming from Feeding Britain, 18% from Your Local Pantry and 22% of responses from Community Shop, UKHarvest, and Family Action combined. Anonymised responses were aggregated across all organisations, as well as the organisation specific sub-set being available for internal use.

In December 2024, The Bread and Butter Thing conducted a parallel survey of its members with similar questions. This survey received 9491 responses, with findings reflecting those presented in this report. For example, 67% of respondents reported that they had been connected to wraparound services and support through their food club, and 46% said that they now had reduced need for food banks. 72% of members also reported that they felt more connected to the community since joining the food club. Data collection took place December 2024, using online self completion surveys promoted to members through text messages.

A final coordinated survey was conducted by Message Trust between February and March of 2025. This survey received 1597 responses and was promoted to members via email, social media and in store. All surveys were online self-completion. Members were surveyed on the impact of the service, with findings broadly reflective of those outlined in this report. For example 73% of members reported a reduction in skipping meals, and 84% reported now feeling less worried about running out of food. Similarly, 77% of members felt that their diet had improved as a result of using the food club.

In all surveys, question topics covered frequency of use of the community food project, impact of use on household access to food, financial situation and access to wider benefits and services. Some questions repeated those used previously in annual surveys by some community food providers (Feeding Britain and The Bread and Butter Thing). Most questions were closed, Likert scale responses, with some open-ended. The surveys were conducted to explore how affordable food projects are helping people avoid food crises and build financial resilience and strengthen the case for long-term, community-led solutions to food insecurity. The surveys were funded internally by the participating organisations. Feeding Britain also received funding for their survey from Sainsbury's and Comic Relief, through Nourish The Nation.