



How could local food groups influence policy effectively?

How do not for profit organisations influence UK policy on local food and are there lessons to be learnt from the experience of the United States?

What are the research findings?

The research has shown that:

- In both the UK and US there has been growing interest in local food and an increase in outlets such as farmers' markets.
- Single-issue non-profit advocacy groups compete for limited funds and media attention to influence policy.
- In reality the issues are complex and encompass a range of economic and environmental interests.
- The UK "food miles" debate was a high profile example of competing interests, including developing countries' exports, economic viability of small UK farms and UK environmental concerns.
- Single-issue campaigns narrowed local food to an environmental issue despite policymakers' interest in rural, economic and community impacts.
- Funders in the UK often fail to account for this complexity, while those in the US are more likely to support broad, multi-sector stakeholder-led efforts.

What are the implications for UK policy?

More effective policy framing, non-profit advocacy, and policy could be achieved if:

- Organisations were more inclusive and open to embracing a range of interests so that they speak with one voice.
- Stakeholder-led coalitions of local food groups were taking the lead in policy-influencing. Such bodies are more likely to respond to "on the ground" needs than professional "think tank" type organisations.
- Local food groups were better coordinated in their communication with policymakers.
- Groups were more aware of the risks when harnessing the media to promote their messages; divisions may become the focus of attention and negate any influence on policy.
- Funders took more account of how funding single-issue campaigns may reinforce ideological and organisational boundaries.

Further information:

- *“Civic Engagement in Food Systems Governance: A Comparative Perspective on American and English Food Movements, Newcastle University PhD thesis Alan Hunt 2013 (print only)*
- *Would more media campaigning secure more policy wins? Insight for the US Farm Bill from initial findings of a US-UK comparison on national policymaking for locally and regionally produced foods*, Fulbright Project Report, 2011
- Sustainable Food Cities website <http://sustainablefoodcities.org/>

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