

Expression of interest: transforming UK food systems for health and environment

Opportunity status:	Open
Funders:	Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) , Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) , Medical Research Council (MRC) , Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) , Innovate UK
Co-funders:	Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra), Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), Public Health England (PHE), Food Standards Agency (FSA)
Funding type:	Grant
Total fund:	£14,000,000
Award range:	£250,000 - £2,000,000
Publication date:	2 February 2021
Opening date:	2 February 2021
Closing date:	22 April 2021 16:00 UK time

Last updated: 2 February 2021

Start application ►

Apply for funding to support interdisciplinary research into interventions that will transform the UK food system.

Your project should bring together elements from both of these areas:

- production, processing, manufacturing, food environments
- healthier diets and consumption.

Your project must be led by a UK- based researcher at a research organisation eligible for BBSRC funding or an eligible public sector research organisation.

Your project can be led by any discipline but must:

- integrate both social and natural sciences
- collaborate with at least one stakeholder organisation from government, business or civil society
- address UK government priorities.

Your project can be supported for two to three years.

This funding is from the Transforming the UK Food Systems Strategic Priorities Fund programme.

Register on our [online portal](#) for access to a call webinar, networking events, Q&A sessions, stakeholder videos and a collaboration finder.

[Close all](#)

Who can apply

Researchers from any discipline within UKRI's remit are encouraged to apply. All proposals to this call must be led by a researcher based at an eligible UK research organisation. As this call is being administered by BBSRC, please see the [BBSRC grants guide \(PDF, 378KB\)](#) for eligibility requirements. For co-investigator eligibility requirements see the [grants guide \(PDF, 378KB\)](#).

Businesses, civil society and government (local, devolved or national) are all strongly encouraged to collaborate and co-design proposals for this funding call. Whilst not eligible to lead on an application, or to receive direct funding from UKRI, it is a requirement that at least one stakeholder from businesses, civil society or government is included on each proposal as a project partner or sub-contractor. Detailed information about project partners and sub-contracting can be found in the [BBSRC grants guide \(PDF, 378KB\)](#).

Please note: sub-contracting costs will be provided up to 80% full economic cost (fEC) unless they fall within the fEC exception (see [grants guide \(PDF, 378KB\)](#)). Contributions from stakeholders could be in cash or in-kind, and formal letters of support do not need to be secured at the expression of interest stage. However, evidence of co-design and confirmation of a willingness to collaborate on the research (emails or letters) should be included.

Public sector research establishments (PSREs) with 10 or more researchers with PhDs (or equivalent) are eligible to lead on an application. If PSREs wishing to apply have not previously applied for UKRI funding and are not currently designated independent research organisation (IRO) status they will be required to complete an eligibility form. To ensure you have the required research capacity,

systems and controls in place to manage the research and grant funding, see the [guidance on eligible public sector research establishments](#). PSRE applicants should contact Food Systems SPF at the earliest opportunity to discuss their interest in applying: food.systems@bbsrc.ukri.org.

There are no constraints on the number of applications that can be submitted per institution, however applicants are only able to act as lead principal investigator (PI) on one application. There are no constraints on co-investigators (Co-Is), project partners or subcontractors.

To find a collaboration finder to help to find and contact potential partners, visit our [online portal](#).

What we're looking for

The [Transforming UK Food Systems SPF \(Global Food Security programme website\)](#) is an interdisciplinary research programme that will help transform the UK food system within a global context by addressing two over-arching questions:

1. If we put healthy people and a healthy natural environment at the heart of the food system, what would we eat, how would we encourage people to eat it, and where would that food come from? What would we grow and manufacture in the UK and what would we need to import?
2. In delivering this transformed food system, what interventions would be needed across government, business and civil society?

This programme will consider the complex interactions between health, environment, economic and behavioural factors across the food system, while taking into account wider needs for different groups in society. The programme will foster a joined-up approach linking nutritionally healthy and accessible diets with sustainable food production and supply. It will deliver coherent evidence to enable concerted action from government, business and civil society to help achieve dietary health, obesity reduction and net zero emission goals.

This is the second and final research funding call in the Transforming UK Food Systems SPF Programme, and along with the [projects funded in the first call, and the Centre for Doctoral Training \(Global Food Security programme website\)](#), projects funded in this second call will contribute to the delivery of the overall [programme aims \(Global Food Security programme website\)](#).

This funding call will support high informed risk, high reward interdisciplinary research, aiming to transform the UK food system for healthier people and a healthy environment. Following analysis of the programme's existing research portfolio, three thematic areas have been identified in which we would like to see research proposals (see below).

This opportunity is open to, and can be led by, any discipline across the breadth of the UKRI remit and proposals must represent high-quality interdisciplinary research and innovation, integrating social and natural sciences. We wish to strengthen the research base by attracting new expertise and new partners into the field.

All proposals must demonstrate collaboration and co-design with at least one stakeholder organisation from civil society, relevant business or government (local, devolved or national). We would expect a more diverse and greater number of stakeholders in proposals bidding for larger amounts of funding. It is expected that the stakeholder or stakeholders will have helped shape the research through collaboration and two-way knowledge exchange, with this continuing throughout the research process.

The programme aims to support a diverse portfolio of projects of varying sizes which address different aspects of the UK food system. Funds of between £250,000 and £2 million (80% fEC) can be requested for projects of between two to three years. We anticipate supporting proposals across the breadth of the funding range (subject to quality and portfolio management), from smaller pump-priming awards through to larger interdisciplinary consortia.

All proposals will be assessed against the assessment criteria (see below) in the context of the amount of funding being requested to ensure a level playing field across different sized projects. We will also aim to ensure a breadth of coverage across the thematic areas (see below) and different grant sizes, in the projects invited back to the full proposal stage.

The [Strategic Priorities Fund \(SPF\)](#) has been established to:

- drive an increase in high-quality interdisciplinary research and innovation
- ensure that UKRI's investments link up effectively with government departments' research priorities and opportunities.

Proposals must therefore consider and describe how their research also addresses government priorities as set out in the government research and development priorities section (see additional info).

Successful projects will be expected to work with the Programme Director, (Professor Guy Poppy) and the UKRI SPF Food Systems team, and to participate in wider programme network events to add impact to the overall Transforming UK Food Systems SPF portfolio. Proposals are expected to be complementary to, but not spin-offs from, projects previously funded in the Transforming UK Food Systems SPF portfolio.

Scope

Following analysis of the programme's existing portfolio, we are inviting research proposals within three thematic areas (see below). If you have a highly innovative and transformative idea outside these themes that you would like us to consider on an exceptional basis, please contact food.systems@bbsrc.ukri.org. However, please note that research outside the themes is unlikely to be considered competitive.

We are looking to support transformative high informed risk, high reward interdisciplinary research. Within these themes it will address aspects of both:

- production, processing, manufacturing or food environments
- healthier diets or consumption.

We do not expect all of these areas to be covered within a single application, and research does not have to cover every stage of the food system. However, the research must be set in this wider context and recognise the linkages with other parts of the food system, even if these wider linkages are not actively researched. Successful projects will be expected to work with the programme to ensure the wider context is considered or utilised to enable wider food systems thinking.

Realising the programme's aims will require transformative new ideas and interdisciplinary research in collaboration with stakeholders across the UK food system, including (but not limited to) those who are involved in:

- production (for example, crops, livestock, aquaculture, fisheries, horticulture)
- processing
- manufacturing
- supply chain
- logistics
- marketing
- retail
- procurement
- catering
- food environments
- consumption.

We particularly encourage action-focussed research, such as interventions or trials, and research exploring the impact of interventions and research methodologies designed to enable and strengthen participation and action from citizens, where they might lead to food system transformation in the near to medium term. We are also particularly interested in addressing the disconnect between producers, manufacturers, distributors and consumers of food.

Thematic areas

1. Transforming food environments

This thematic area aims to support interdisciplinary research to transform food environments and improve public health for all sections of society by reducing the consumption of foods that are high in fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) in a sustainable way.

Food environments can be defined as the collective physical, socio-economic and cultural context in which citizens engage with the food system to make decisions about acquiring, preparing and consuming food. Food culture and identity play a key role in shaping our food system in terms of where food businesses are distributed, what they sell, how they market and promote their products and what citizens eat. [A recent report \(on the Global Food Security programme website\)](#) stated that 96% of food system enterprises are SMEs, therefore consideration of the role of SMEs, technology and innovation in transformation could also be important. Alongside these factors there are powerful biological, psychological and social drivers that motivate us towards consuming HFSS foods.

Food environments play a key role in influencing food choices, and there has been an increase in recent years in the consumption of food prepared outside the home,

including through retail, the service sector, and online food delivery platforms. Interventions to reduce consumption of HFSS foods could take place anywhere in the food system, for example:

- sustainable food production and manufacturing
- retail
- marketing
- food procurement
- physical or online food environments, or in policy and regulation.

Consideration should also be given to co-benefits for a healthy natural environment, reducing environmental (greenhouse gas, or GHG) and wider sustainability.

Examples of research within this theme (not prescriptive or not limited to):

- the interplay between food environments and the drivers of food choices, data-driven approaches, lived experiences and the power of local food systems, place-based decision-making, participatory food movements and the impact of technology and regulation on driving change
- the role of marketing in shaping our food environments and driving consumption
- opportunities for integrating environmental sustainability and health within food environments.

2. Sustainable nutrition across the food system

This thematic area aims to support interdisciplinary research to transform the UK food system from a focus on 'calories per unit area' to one that prioritises the 'number of people fed healthily and sustainably per unit area' in an equitable and just way.

The nutritional benefits of foods need to be improved in a sustainable and environmentally friendly manner across the whole supply chain, from soils, farming and fishing, to food processing, manufacturing, retail and consumption. We need to ensure key nutrients are increased in production, processing and manufacturing, with concomitant increases in consumption and bioavailability to improve health outcomes, and reduce environmental impacts, as part of a balanced, healthy, sustainable, affordable and accessible diet.

Interdisciplinary research projects should contribute to the development of transformative and economically viable approaches or interventions targeted at critical points from the farm or ocean to the fork, and which can lead to demonstrable improvement in both environmental and human health. Consideration should be given to consumer demand and acceptance as well as the impact of any transformation on different groups in society.

Examples of research within this theme (not prescriptive or not limited to):

- new business models and how to transform food processing or manufacturing to improve quality over quantity in terms of wider nutritional and environmental benefits, whilst using sustainably produced ingredients
- novel production or manufacturing methods
- behavioural economics and incentives in food production and consumption

- maintaining affordability whilst reflecting the true costs to health and the environment in food prices
- increasing availability of nutrients in primary production, processing, manufacturing and consumption, including bioavailability and measuring health outcomes
- food from the ocean, wild capture and aquaculture and measures to increase consumption of seafood in a sustainable way.

3. Food imports and domestic production

This thematic area aims to support interdisciplinary research to understand where our food would come from in a healthy and environmentally sustainable food system, and how this might be best achieved in practice from a biological, environmental, social, economic and cultural perspective. It could consider the role of imports and food standards (public and private) in ensuring a healthy and sustainable UK food supply, whilst minimising our impact overseas.

The UK food system is diverse and varied and set within a global context. If we were to transform the UK food system for healthy people and a healthy environment, where would that food come from, what would we produce domestically and what would we import? Where are the opportunities, synergies and trade-offs? How do we take account of impacts and externalities in making this transformation? As we start to build back better following the COVID-19 pandemic and leaving the EU, there is an opportunity to transform the areas of food imports and domestic production for improved human and environmental health.

Examples of research within this theme (not prescriptive or not limited to):

- considerations of the UK food system within a global context, including the appropriate level of domestic production
- the use of a diverse range of crops and production systems at local levels
- land use trade-offs
- the role of food imports in providing diversity/variation and positive contributions to the nation's diet from a health perspective
- politics, economics, trade and regulations
- traceability in supply chains
- sustainable and ethical sourcing of food from overseas to reduce the impact of our demand
- opportunities from the UK leaving the EU
- opportunities from a post COVID-19 food system.

Research call exclusions

Applications will be rejected before peer review for proposals which:

- are not interdisciplinary and do not integrate the social and natural sciences
- do not include aspects of production, processing, manufacturing or food environments and healthier diets or consumption
- do not include at least one stakeholder from business, civil society or government
- are not focused on transforming the UK food system for healthy people and a healthy environment, and foods consumed in the UK (including both domestic

production and imports).

Research on food systems in other countries is excluded, however the environmental impacts of the UK's demand on other countries is included.

How to apply

Expression of interest stage only. Information for the full stage application will be supplied to successful applicants at a later stage.

You must apply through the [Joint Electronic Submission system \(Je-S\)](#).

Proposals must be submitted by the call deadline of 22 April 2020 16:00 UK time. Electronic acknowledgements will be sent to the principal investigator and submitting organisation.

Applicants should select the following from the Je-S menus:

- log in to Je-S
- select Documents
- select New Document
- select Council: BBSRC
- select Document Type: Outline Proposal
- select Scheme: Standard Outline
- select Call/Type/Mode: Transforming UK food systems Call 2 – Outline
- click Create Document and follow the on-screen instructions to complete the form.

Please complete and submit:

- Je-S pro-forma, filled in as is specified on the document page. Mandatory sections: project details, investigators, objectives, impact summary, resource summary, summary, attachments, proposal classifications
- case for support (maximum four pages) further information see below
- a CV (maximum two pages per CV) should be submitted for the principal investigator, each co-investigator and the PSRE additional information, if required
- other attachments (optional) – formal letters of support from stakeholders do not need to be secured at the outline stage, but proposals should include emails or letters evidencing co-design and confirming a willingness to collaborate on the research.

Case for support: further guidance

Applicants must supply a case for support document with their applications. The case for support should be submitted as a single document and contain the following sections. Standard font and margin sizes apply. The whole case for support document should not exceed four pages (inclusive of references, diagrams and tables). Submissions that exceed these pages will be withdrawn.

Strategic relevance (approximately one A4 page)

- describe how your proposed research is interdisciplinary, integrates the social and natural sciences, and addresses aspects of production, processing, manufacturing or food environments and healthier diets or consumption
- describe how your proposed research fits in the context of the wider UK food system.
- describe how your proposal will transform the UK food system
- describe how the research has been co-designed with your stakeholder groups and has the potential for environmental, health, economic and societal benefits for the UK
- describe how the research addresses UK government priorities.

Summary of proposed research (approximately three A4 pages)

- outline the aims and objectives of the proposed research
- describe how the research team is interdisciplinary and comprises the full breadth of skills and expertise needed to achieve the expected outcomes, and the appropriate leadership expertise and experience to deliver the complexity and scale of the work proposed (for larger grants)
- describe the proposed research and methodologies.

The case for support should be a self-contained description of the proposed work with relevant background, and should not depend on additional information.

Applicants must not include URLs to web resources in order to extend their case for support. UKRI reserves the right to withdraw proposals that contain links to additional information that extends the case for support

General guidance

The pro-forma should include a summary of requested resources. Detailed justification of this request is not required at the outline stage. However, costings need to be as accurate as possible and include estimates of further costs that might be incurred from working with collaborative partners. For the full proposals, we will allow up to 10% deviation up to the maximum of £2 million (fEC) from the costings originally submitted in the outlines.

Please also refer to the Je-S guidance for outline proposals in the help section of the [Je-S website](#).

Applicants should note that under no circumstances should their application exceed the page limits described. Any outline submissions which exceed the stipulated page limits will be withdrawn.

Standard guidelines for research grant applications apply, as described in our [grants guide \(PDF, 378KB\)](#).

Joint research projects: when the application involves work at more than one eligible institution, funding for a joint research project may be requested by either submitting one joint application from the lead institution or by completing separate Je-S applications from each institution. See paragraphs 4.34 to 4.36, 4.52 and 5.18 of the [research grants guide \(PDF, 378KB\)](#).

Standard font (size 11 point and we recommend the use of Arial, Helvetica or Verdana typeface) and margin sizes (not less than 2cm) must be used for all forms and CVs (excluding text on diagrams and the use of mathematical symbols). A minimum of single line spacing and standard character spacing must be used. Applications that do not adhere to these guidelines may be withdrawn from consideration.

We recommend that where a document contains any non-standard fonts (scientific notation, diagrams and so on), the document is converted to PDF prior to attaching it to the proposal

Students should not be included in the application.

How we will assess your application

Expression of interest proposals will be assessed and shortlisted by an independent panel comprising of academics, business representatives and other stakeholders in June 2021 (dates subject to change). Proposals will also be assessed for portfolio spread and strategic relevance by the Transforming UK Food Systems Programme Board and Executive Sponsor.

Shortlisted proposals will be invited to develop a full proposal in June or July with a deadline close in September or October (dates subject to change).

Successful projects will be expected to start no later than April 2022.

Assessment criteria

All proposals will be assessed against the assessment criteria, with points two and three taking into account the amount of funding being requested to ensure a level playing field across different sized projects.

All four criteria will be assessed at the expression of interest and full proposal stages. We will also aim to ensure a breadth of coverage across the thematic areas and different grant sizes in the projects invited back to the full proposal stage.

1. Research excellence

The quality of the research in the proposal as a whole and its relevance to the aims of the call. The proposal must bring together the social and natural sciences, and link healthy and accessible diets with sustainable food production and supply, in the context of the wider food system.

2. Transformative potential

The extent to which the proposed research will help to transform the UK food system by providing strategies and evidence to drive change. This includes the feasibility of the research balanced against its stated outcomes, as well as value for public money. It is recognised that transformation will require disruptive, high (informed) risk, high reward approaches.

3. Environmental, health, economic and social impact

The extent to which the research has been co-designed with stakeholder groups and has the potential for environmental, health, economic and social benefits for the UK. This could be through for example, policy changes in government and businesses, or wider societal change.

4. Ability to deliver and leadership quality

Proposals should demonstrate that their research team comprises the full breadth of skills and expertise (across disciplines and sectors) needed to achieve the expected outcomes, underpinned by an appropriate institutional environment. Larger projects must also demonstrate that they have the appropriate leadership expertise and experience to deliver the complexity and scale of the work proposed.

Contact details

For any questions relating to your application please email the following address food.systems@bbsrc.ukri.org.

Additional info

Please visit our [online portal](#).

Here you will find information and videos about the funding call and the Transforming UK Food Systems SPF Programme, a schedule of upcoming networking events, as well as a collaboration finder to help researchers and stakeholders interested in developing a proposal to find and contact potential partners.

This call is part of the wider £47.5 million Transforming the UK Food System for Healthy People and a Healthy Environment SPF Programme delivered by UKRI, in partnership with:

- Global Food Security Programme
- BBSRC
- ESRC
- MRC
- NERC
- Defra
- DHSC
- PHE
- Innovate UK
- FSA.

The programme is supported by UKRI's [Strategic Priorities Fund \(SPF\)](#).

Supporting documents

- [Data requirements \(PDF, 59KB\)](#)
 - [Transforming UK Food Systems: SPF Programme purpose and aims \(PDF, 174KB\)](#)
 - [Government R&D priorities \(PDF, 64KB\)](#)
 - [Supplementary background document \(PDF, 113KB\)](#)
 - [The Transforming UK Food Systems Programme funded projects \(PDF, 1.6MB\)](#)
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Timeline



Related content

[Global Food Security: Transforming UK Food Systems SPF Programme Webinar, Q&A and Collaboration Finder Portal](#)

NOTE This is the first phase of our new website – let us know if you have [feedback](#) or would like to [help us test new developments](#).

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