



Farming  
the Future

# Advice for funders of UK food and farming

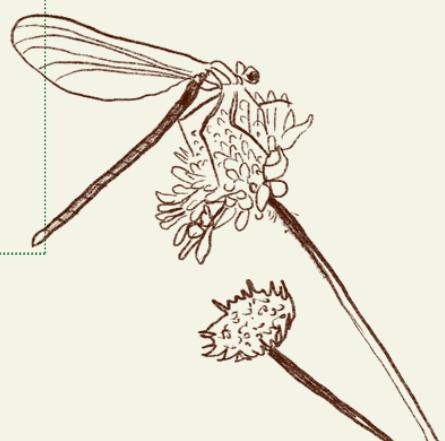
2025





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# Introduction



**Farming the Future, founded in 2019, pools funds, networks, and knowledge to grow and connect the UK's agroecology movement. As we've evolved, we've adapted our approach to better support a just agroecological transition.**

**Here, we share key insights from reports we value to help funders find their place in this sector and improve their practices.**

The UK is only just catching up with ongoing international work that encourages philanthropic collaboration, to ensure more and better funding is directed towards agroecology and regenerative food and farming systems.

***International players in this area:***

- The Global Alliance on the Future of Food whose Cultivating Change work involves 25 philanthropic partners who aim to leverage investments to unlock new funding and financial flows. In Europe they work with funders in Philea's European Foundations for Sustainable Agriculture and Food.
- European pooled funds that centre coalition building work in Europe around healthy, just and sustainable food and farm transition, like Healthy Food, Healthy Planet and the European Agri-food Co-Funding Alliance.
- The Agroecology Coalition and the Agroecology Fund, global initiatives that focus on making the case for financing agroecology in more participatory ways. Currently their work focuses more on the Global South.
- Funders for Regenerative Agriculture is a U.S.-based network of funders dedicated to accelerating the adoption of regenerative agriculture in North America.

There is plenty to learn from these endeavours both in **how** they function and **what** they focus on.

# Where to Start

**The quickest top-line summary of better ways to fund agroecology and food system transformation is a brief fact sheet from Both ENDS (2022).**

## They advise funders to:

- Conduct further research on strategies to channel greater financing toward agroecological transformation, ensuring funding mechanisms are accessible, flexible, and responsive to recipients' needs.
- Promote long-term partnerships between funders and recipients, recognizing that agroecological transformation often requires several years to take root.
- Co-develop financing terms with donors and recipients to ensure inclusive, participatory decision-making processes.
- Redirect funding to support community-led farming initiatives and organizations—such as cooperatives and local NGOs—that work closely with small-scale farmers.
- Prioritize small grant funds that are context-specific, needs-driven, and allow recipients to make funding decisions with minimal bureaucracy.
- Leverage agroecology's potential to address gender inequalities by explicitly supporting women's leadership, decision-making, and access to land.



More detailed recommendations can be broadly categorized into two areas: guidance on **how to fund** more effectively and guidance on **what or whom to fund**.





# 01 How to fund better

**Making Money Move for Agroecology** is a key resource that focuses on trust-based philanthropic practices, and behaviour as part of an ecosystem. It recommends:

**a**

**Engaging in interactive reflection and examination of donor practices including:**

- Increasing the **quantity** of funds.
- Thinking about how to **include farmers and communities** in your processes.
- Working in **communities of practice** with others (including donors) to reimagine and reshape agricultural farming.

**b**

**Transforming relationships between funders and recipients, including:**

- Inviting 'recipients' into the **governance** of funding organisations and programmes.
- Focusing on developing **long-term trust-based relationships** with recipients or places you are granting funds.
- Provide **long-term funding** commitments for long term outcomes.
- **Allow for flexibility and adaptation** so that grantees can respond to emerging issues and opportunities, rather than sticking to rigid plans.
- Use **participatory decision-making and grant processes** to ensure that those most directly affected—and best positioned to identify strategies for addressing current and future crises—retain control over decisions and access to funding
- **Decentralise funding** by focusing on small-mid scale funding programmes through civil society organisations and networks closer to the ground, including small scale food producers working at a local level.



## C

### **Creating and adopting more appropriate measurement and evaluation tools, including:**

- **Evaluate and adapt monitoring and evaluation processes** to make them suitable for agroecology –including social, political and cultural dimensions.
- Prioritise **long-term transformation processes** not short-term outcomes and milestones, rigid plans.
- Adopt **participatory assessments** that allow communities to assess their own change processes, based on their own ways of knowing;
- **Evaluate all funding programmes through an equity lens** to ensure you don't exacerbate inequity –explicitly addressing inequity related to gender, class, caste, disability, ethnicity and other dimensions of difference.



## UK Specific Advice on better funding

Where the Green Went 9 has whole section on effective environmental grant making (Section B: pages 39–61) to help funders assess where they are on a spectrum of behaviours, this includes spectrums on which funders can place themselves in three areas:

- 1 Do you treat your grantees as peers?** Looking at bureaucratic load, flexibility of funds (core vs project), 'power over' or 'power with'.
- 2 How profound is the change you seek?** Looking at political ambition, attitude to risk and centring justice, diversity and inclusion (JEDI).
- 3 How does your funding affect the structure of the environmental movement?** Looking at issues expertise/clear focus, movement ecology, don't fund alone, patience of capital.

EFN's follow up report on Increasing the effectiveness of environmental funder-fundraiser relationships also recommends that funding can be made more effective by:

- 1 Focusing on people and outcomes rather than projects and outputs
- 2 Underpinning all funding behaviour with trust and flexibility
- 3 Making decisions based on a combination of long-term thinking and urgency
- 4 Designing application and reporting processes carefully and relax requirements where feasible
- 5 Collaborating as much as possible
- 6 Creating and embracing opportunities to hear from grant holders



## Further Resources for better funding

Catalyst 2030 has gathered 1,283 signatories, including 137 funders, to a letter urging donors and funders to rethink traditional practices in order to better support grassroots organisations and sustainable social impact. Below are their 10 principles for supporting systems change, alongside Modern Grantmaking's top ten tips, which align closely and together provide a useful checklist of best practices for effective, trust-based funding.

Catalyst 2030	Modern Grantmaking
Give multi-year, unrestricted funding	Make most of your grants unrestricted Make more long-term grants
Be transparent and responsive	Be transparent about what you do and don't fund Say 'no' clearly and quickly
Invest in capacity building  Create transformative rather than transactional relationships  Offer support beyond the check	Don't short-change your grantees
Simplify and streamline paperwork	Invest to make applying for your money easy and accessible  Don't bounce grantseekers into doing things that aren't their priorities
Collaborate with other funders	Don't fund alone
Embrace a systems mindset in your grantmaking	Adopt a clear mission and make grants that support it
Build and share power	-
Fund networks	-
-	Take safeguarding seriously

- Additional resources for funders, including Farming the Future's best practice resource library, can be found on this blog of [resources for funders embarking on using their power for systems change](#).
- Eating Better's [Nourishing Justice Toolkit](#) helps point towards putting into practice the principles of a just, equitable and inclusive food system.
- You can explore more radical approaches like the R3.0 Blueprint for [Funding Governance for Systemic Transformation](#) and [CoFundEco](#), which rethink how resources are allocated and sourced.

# 02

## What and who to fund

**Making Money Move for Agroecology recommends funding key actors and initiatives driving a fair, sustainable food system.**

a

**Focus on farm re-design and collective local processes (if you are working on farm-level/local interventions) –look at:**

- Collective processes not minor tweaks and input substitution.
- Move from individual technical support to supporting transformation of farm-level practices.
- Any funding to enhance practices should be embedded in collective, social processes including farmer-led, participatory research, peer-to-peer learning and community seed systems, customary laws and biocultural practices, etc.
- Transitions at farm level should be integrated into broader socio-cultural, economic and political process of transformation and civil society organising at the local and territorial levels.

b

**Focus on ‘immaterial’ interventions, political work and movement building-these processes are vital to long term transformation, yet are often undervalued. Examples include:**

- Dialogues and Raising Awareness
- Knowledge-sharing exchanges
- Strengthening peasants’, womens’ and farmers’ organisations and cooperative structures
- Building synergies in funding between research, movements and practice
- Agroecological education through agroecology hubs
- Supporting communities of practice and agroecology schools
- Investing in intergenerational and intercultural learning

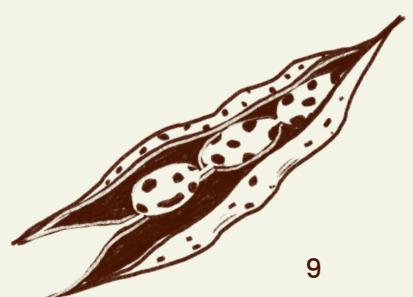




PHOTO CREDIT: ISABEL OLAMIDE

## C

### **Focus on empowering food producers, farmers, producers networks, and civil society:**

- Ensure food producers, not institutional experts or policy-makers, lead the process. Position other actors as a supportive “backing cast” to amplify producers’ voices.
- Prioritise initiatives led by food producer organisations and civil society. Pay careful attention to power dynamics within these communities to ensure inclusivity.
- Provide dedicated budget lines that grant funding directly to farmers and their initiatives – focus on organisations led by women, youth, and indigenous food providers



## UK Specific Advice

### **Food Issues Census**

The Food Ethics Council conducted the first Food Issues Census in the UK in 2011, followed by a second census in 2017 and a third full Food Issues Census in 2024–25 which provides a comprehensive overview of the work of a diverse range of civil society groups in the UK, providing insights into the sector's size, structure, strategies, issue areas, strengths, and vulnerabilities.

### **Farming the Future**

Farming the Future provides movement listening and insights and signposting materials for funders interested in connecting their work and strategies to transformational work within UK food and farming. As well as supporting our own Donor Partners to flow their money through participatory pooled funding into movement collaboration, we also work with other donors to connect them to impactful organisations seeking funding.



## Further Resources

### ***Imagining Long-Term Futures for Food Systems: The Long Food Project***

The Long Food Project's Long Food Movement report explores multiple pathways for transforming global food systems, including how to shift financial flows and strengthen civil society collaboration. Here is an excerpt that highlights the an important opportunity to developing better funding:

#### ***Pathway 4: Rethinking Civil Society Collaboration***

To advance systemic change, civil society must collaborate more deeply across sectors, overcoming rivalries and funding competition. Ongoing crises are driving new forms of cooperation and shared purpose.

#### ***Opportunity 11: Making Cross-Sectoral Collaboration the Norm***

Food movements increasingly align with digital, climate, and environmental justice activists. By the 2030s, coordinated planning and co-funding are becoming common practice, though tensions between urgent action and long-term strategy persist.

#### ***Opportunity 13: Building New Partnerships for Transformation***

Food movements are pushing funders toward longer-term, flexible, and risk-tolerant financing models. By the 2030s, progressive donors expand funding cycles and commit to catalyzing broader financial and policy shifts to support a 25-year food systems transformation.



## ***Philanthropy and System Transformation: Cultivating Change***

The Cultivating Change initiative by the Global Alliance for the Future of Food represents a significant and collaborative effort among philanthropic organizations focused on transforming food and farming systems. The main report is accompanied by a set of Annexes that are particularly valuable for philanthropic actors. They:

- Identify key areas of need in system transformation (p.12)
- Make a compelling case for adopting an agroecological framework
- Explore both the shallow and deeper levels of change required (p.16)
- Explore the scale of investment necessary to enable a just and sustainable transition.

The Annex outlines key principles to help funders align their choices with desired outcomes and collaboration styles including:

- **Diverse strategies used by philanthropic partners**—spanning policy and regulation, research, finance, markets, ecosystem coordination, and technical support (pp. 69–70)
- **Opportunities for collective impact** (p. 71), such as strengthening strategy and coordination, equity, and policy
- **Challenges to supporting transition** (p. 72)
- **Ways to leverage greater interest and investment** (p. 73) through catalytic funds, ecosystem coordination, national plans, knowledge sharing, participatory grantmaking, de-risking, and public commitments.



### ***Embedding Transformative Change: Making Money Move***

The Making Money Move report highlights broader systemic issues essential for achieving a just and sustainable food system, encouraging funders to move beyond simply directing resources “where people are.”

Key recommendations include:

- **Centre agroecology in funding portfolios:** Learn from existing initiatives to mainstream agroecology, integrating its principles into larger funding streams on climate, gender, sustainable livelihoods, and community economic development.
- **Target systemic political and cultural change:** Shifting financial flows alone is insufficient. True transformation requires changes in policies, institutions, practices, and values at local, national, and international levels, with inclusive and participatory governance that amplifies marginalised voices.
- **Repurpose funding away from harmful practices:** Redirect resources from industrial agriculture and ineffective approaches like climate-smart agriculture to support transformative agroecology.
- **Maintain a transformative perspective in crises:** Crises can act as catalysts for equitable system transitions.
- **Transform professional culture:** Institutions, science, and policy-making should prioritise the agency, voice, and knowledge of food producers, embracing transdisciplinary and farmer-led approaches.
- **Ensure equity within agroecology:** Without an explicit focus on feminism, equity, and participation, agroecology risks reproducing exclusionary or colonial dynamics.
- **Avoid one-size-fits-all solutions:** Effective agroecology must be locally rooted, emergent, and responsive to the specific context and people it serves.

# Links

Both ENDS Factsheet November 2022

## Finance for Agroecology



**ABOUT AGROECOLOGY** Agroecology is a scientific discipline, a set of agricultural practices, and a movement. It aims to transform food systems by applying ecological principles to food production, while upholding important aspects like equality, social justice and resilience, and also focusing on the need for socially equitable food systems.

The potential of agroecology is increasingly being recognised in public policy making. However, this potential currently remains untapped by public funding, with many opportunities to more strongly support agroecology as a means to achieve food systems transformation.

**THE 10 ELEMENTS OF AGROECOLOGY** Developed by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the 10 elements of agroecology present a comprehensive framework to guide the transition towards sustainable food systems:



Many studies have been conducted in recent years to analyse financial support for agroecology from different funders. This factsheet aims to put their main findings together to paint a general picture of the support provided to agroecology.

POLICY BRIEFING April 2021



## MAKING MONEY MOVE FOR AGROECOLOGY

TRANSFORMING DEVELOPMENT AID TO SUPPORT AGROECOLOGY

Co-funded by the European Union

Research Centre

Agriculture, Water

and Environment

CIDSE  
together for global justice

GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOD



## CULTIVATING CHANGE

A Collaborative Philanthropic Initiative to Accelerate and Scale Agroecology and Regenerative Approaches

GLOBAL ALLIANCE FOR THE FUTURE OF FOOD  
DECEMBER 2023 – UPDATED MAY 2024

ANNEX

## Cultivating Change: Accelerating and Scaling Agroecology and Regenerative Approaches

A Philanthropic Theory of Transformation

LONG  
FOOD  
PROJECT



## MODERN GRANTMAKING

A Guide for Funders Who Believe Better Is Possible

## CATALYST 2030

Collaborating to achieve the SDGs



The Philanthropy  
Playground

22 creative games that reshape how we fund change.



## Weaving and Mapping with the CoFundEco Community

An invitation to embody the resourcing ecosystems we wish to see in the world

START PRESENTATION

Redesign  
Resilience  
Regeneration

Blueprint Series 2019-2022

Blueprint 8: Funding Governance for Systemic Transformation

Allocating investment and grant-making for a regenerative and distributive economy

## FOOD ISSUES CENSUS 2024-25

A THIRD SURVEY OF  
UK CIVIL SOCIETY

Eating Better

## NOURISHING JUSTICE



Jon Cracknell, Florence Miller,  
Patricia Cremona and Heather Godwin  
September 2024



Environmental Funders Network

## Where the Green Grants Went 9

Patterns of UK Funding for Environmental Work

Environmental Funders Network

## Increasing the effectiveness of environmental funder-fundraiser relationships

Lead author: Sophia Cooke (EFN)  
Second author: Ellen Kinsley (The Wildlife Trusts)



PHOTO CREDIT: JASON TAYLOR

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