



Food For Thought: Food Security In Rural Areas

Skye and Lochalsh Citizens Advice Bureau

March 2026



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Aims and Objectives

Skye and Lochalsh Citizens Advice Bureau (SLCAB) was successful in obtaining a £5,000 grant from Citizens Advice Scotland (CAS) in September 2025 to investigate food insecurity in the remote and rural community it supports.

This project examined the growing food security risks and proposes recommendations that could reduce household food insecurity and strengthen local food resilience in Skye & Lochalsh.

Recommendations:

- > Trial fresh and nutritious food.
- > Invest in a fridge/refrigerator to store fresh food and reduce waste.
- > Recruit and train more volunteers. Include nutrition guidance in food bags.
- > Work with existing community growers to introduce fresh fruit & vegetables to food parcels.

Aim:

SLCAB to bring together food providers to:

- > Improve the local availability of fresh, nutritious food.
- > Reduce food waste by directing soon-to-be-expired food through channels to the appropriate people.
- > Improve the nutritional content of food parcels given to people on low income.



Background

The Scottish Government describes food insecurity as **“a lack of access to adequate or appropriate food due to a lack of resources.”**

The Local Story

Skye and Lochalsh have a population of over 15,000 people and is classed as remote rural, with dispersed communities, and relatively limited local food retail options in some settlements.

The factors increasing food insecurity here include:

- > Seasonal employment and tourism-driven income volatility.
- > High costs of transport and heating, which squeeze household budgets.
- > Limited public transport and long travel times to larger supermarkets.
- > Increasing reliance on food banks and informal sharing networks.

On 30th April, 2025, the Co-op Group Ltd announced that it was the victim of a cyberattack, which led to the shutdown of many IT systems to protect customer and employee data. This caused "significant disruption" to deliveries of food to its retail shops, leading to empty shelves in stores on the Isle of Skye and Kyle of Lochalsh.

The Co-op is the only located 'supermarket' serving the populations of Skye and Lochalsh and it was only until mid-June 2025, that the [BBC reported](#) the Co-op was "very near to making a full and complete recovery," with its stores returning to normal trading. This affected food provisions on the Island for a number of weeks.

In response to the frustration with empty shelves, Kate Forbes, Deputy First Minister and Member of the Scottish Parliament, (MSP) for Skye, Lochaber and Badenoch, launched a Skye Supermarket Survey on 22nd May 2025 to gather information about grocery shopping habits on Skye.

With nearly 2,000 responses, the survey revealed concerns about the lack resilience in the supply chain and interest in a new supermarket.

The results demonstrated:

- > **30%** of shoppers said they spent £100 to £200 per week online on groceries and 17% said they visited the Co-op once a day.
- > **46%** of online shoppers ordered once a week, while 38% of those living in Skye and Lochalsh used the Co-op two to three times a week.

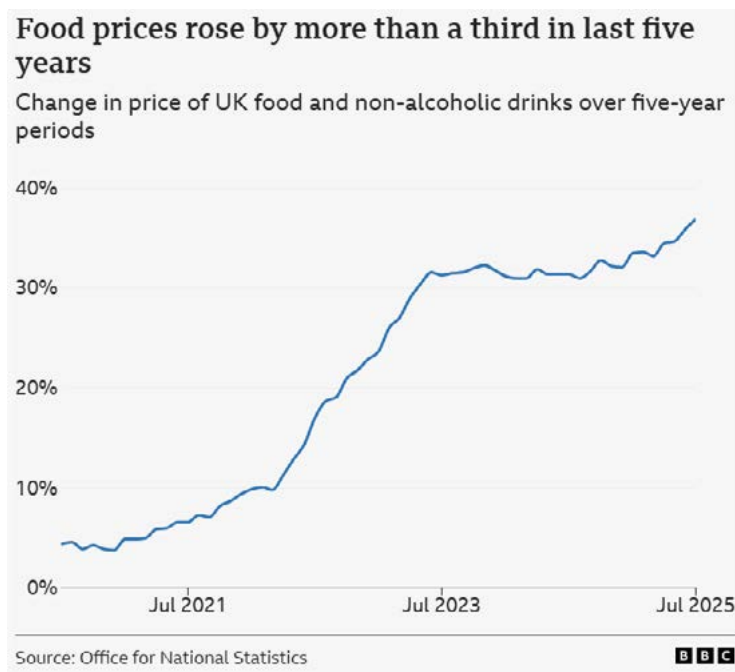
Background

The Wider Picture

A cross parliamentary Westminster report, published 3rd November 2025, noted that UK food production could slump by almost a third with 25 years unless urgent reforms were made to protect farmland and boost agricultural productivity.

The study, led by former Nation Farms Union (NFU) chief economist Dr Derrick Wilkinson, projects that without policy change, domestic food output could decline by 32% by 2050. It urges ministers to elevate food security to the same strategic level as net zero and biodiversity, with a statutory goal of 75% self-sufficiency by mid-century.

In addition, food prices have also been rising and in April 2025 food price inflation reached its highest peak in a year with the British Retail Consortium (BRC) warning of further increases.



[BBC News - Why are food prices still rising by so much?](#)

Key risks have been identified as:

- > Rising production prices.
- > Adverse climate conditions due to global warming.
- > War in Ukraine & Iran affecting supply chains.
- > Trade barriers since the introduction of Brexit.
- > Supermarkets maintaining profits for shareholders.

Methodology

Assessing The Community's Needs

Against this background of lower food production, higher food prices and transportation costs to Skye and Lochalsh's remote rural location, the following quantitative and qualitative research was conducted between September 2025 and March 2026 to assess food security.

Quantitative Methods

1. Mapping of existing food production and retail.
2. A structured survey to measure frequency of food insecurity.
3. Analysis of average food parcels contents.

1. Mapping Of Existing Food Production And Retail

By conducting online research and attending community group meetings, such as the Skye and Lochalsh Reduce Reuse and Recycle event, we were able to identify the following food providers.

Food providers reliant on food delivery:

- > Co-op Supermarket - only located 'supermarket'
- > Tesco & Morrisons - on-line delivery to the area each day
- > The Selkie Collective Ltd – Eco conscious store
- > Maggie's Fruit and Veg Ltd greengrocer
- > Fruit & Nut Place greengrocer
- > Fasgadh Stores
- > Staffin Stores
- > The Village Shop – Staffin
- > Glendale Shop and Post Office
- > Rankins Supermarket
- > Jacksons Wholefoods shop
- > Armadale Stores
- > Skye & Lochalsh Community Food bank
- > Lochalsh Reuse & Recycle Hub – Community Fridge

Methodology

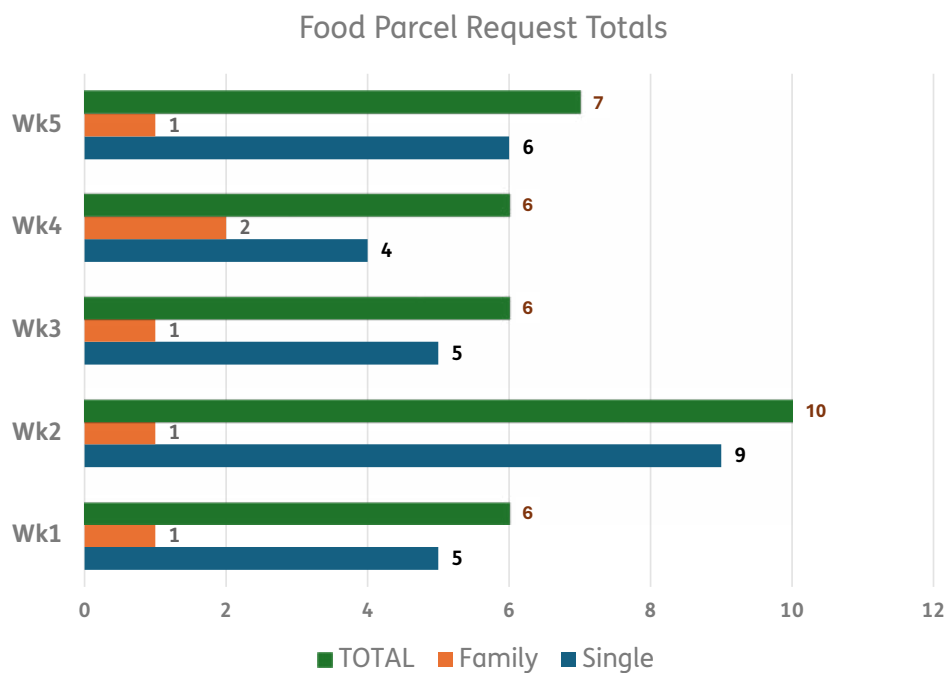
Food providers producing food locally:

- > West Coast Organics – weekly organic vegetable box scheme
- > Ella Croft – Market Garden selling vegetables
- > Skye Free Range – selling free range meats
- > Isle of Skye Baking Company
- > Broadford and Strath Community Company, Growers Hub – community allotments
- > Portree & Braes Community Allotments
- > Raasay community Garden
- > Uig Kindness Cabin

2. A Structured Survey To Measure Frequency Of Food Insecurity

During a 5-week period, 35 people requested a food parcel through SL CAB, of which:

- > Three people requested a parcel 4 times.
- > One person requested a parcel 3 times.
- > Six people requested a parcel 2 times.
- > Six people requested a parcel 1 time.

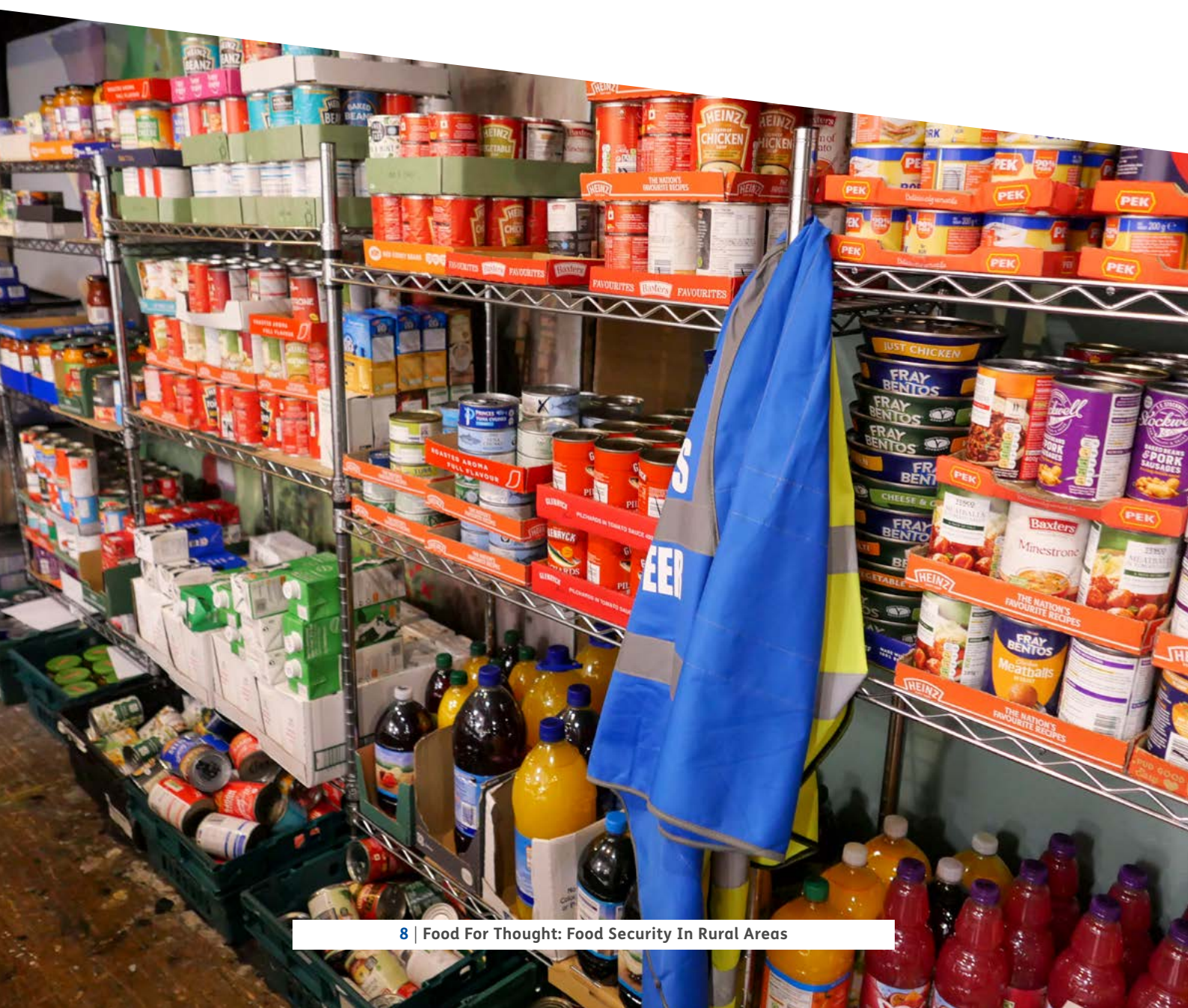


Methodology

On average, 5-6 single and 1 family parcels were requested each week. Week 2 was a bank holiday and saw an increase in requests.

3. Analysis Of Average Food Parcel Contents

- > The contents cover three days of meals.
- > Supplement the person's own food supply.
- > No fresh food.
- > Low nutritional content.



Methodology

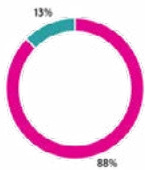
Qualitative Methods

- > 1. Semi-structured interviews of people who receive food parcels.
- > 2. Case Study – Person using the food bank.
- > 3. Focus Group - Skye and Lochalsh Reduce Reuse and Recycle event.
- > 4. Focus Group – Food producers and providers

1. Semi-structured Interviews Of People Who Receive Food Parcels

The interviews were conducted with people requesting food parcels from SLCAB to identify the need, access to food, and use of support services. 8 responses were received.

Q1: Does Household Income Cover Costs?



88%	No
0%	Yes
13%	Sometimes

Q2: If Not, Can You Provide More Information?

- > Applying for ADP
- > On Universal Credit. Off sick.
- > Currently challenging Universal Credit award.
- > Universal Credit not enough.
- > Not enough income during off season periods.
- > Person struggles at certain times of year, such as Christmas.
- > On benefits and not enough to survive on.
- > Struggling to make ends meet due to high rental liability of over £1,000 per month.

Q3: Is The Food In The Parcel Sufficient For Your Needs?



25%	No
75%	Yes

Methodology

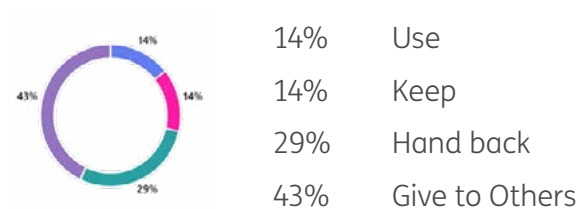
Q4: How Long Does The Food Parcel Last You?

- 28% 3 days
 - 43% 4 days
 - 29% 5 days
-

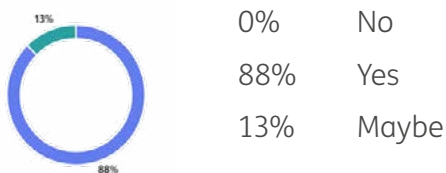
Q5: Have You Any Feedback On The Food Available?

- > Too much Tea & coffee
 - > Some parcels are better than others
 - > Not always sufficient
 - > Would like deodorant
 - > Person uses a microwave and does not use non-microwaveable pasta & rice.
 - > Very happy to receive. Brilliant service.
 - > Fine. Diabetic with allergies. Person passes on any items they cannot use or eat themselves if they're struggling.
-

Q6: What Do You Do With The Products You Don't Want?



Q7: Would You Be Interested In Fresh, Nutritious food?

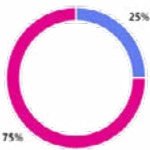


Methodology

Q8: If Yes, What Types? (e.g. Oranges, eggs)

- > Eggs and bread.
- > Eggs.
- > Fruit, Vegetables and diary.
- > Eggs and bacon.
- > Bread and butter.
- > Oranges and bananas as individual does not have healthy teeth.
- > Eggs, Milk, Oranges and bananas for vitamins
- > Fruit, i.e. apples.

Q9: Would You Be Interested In Simple Recipe Cards?



75%	No
25%	Yes

Q10: Do You Use Any Other food Providers?



50%	No
38%	Yes
13%	Sometimes

Q11: If Yes, Please Detail Which Providers

- > Am Fasgadh
- > Bread Basket
- > Collected From Church

Q12: Do You, Or Anyone In Your Family Have Any Addictions. For Example, Drugs, Alcohol, Gambling?



63%	No
13%	Yes
25%	Previously

Methodology

Q13: Please Explain

- > Used to be addicted to illegal drugs.
 - > Alcohol.
 - > Alcoholic. Attends AA meeting each week in Inverness (6hr round trip)
-

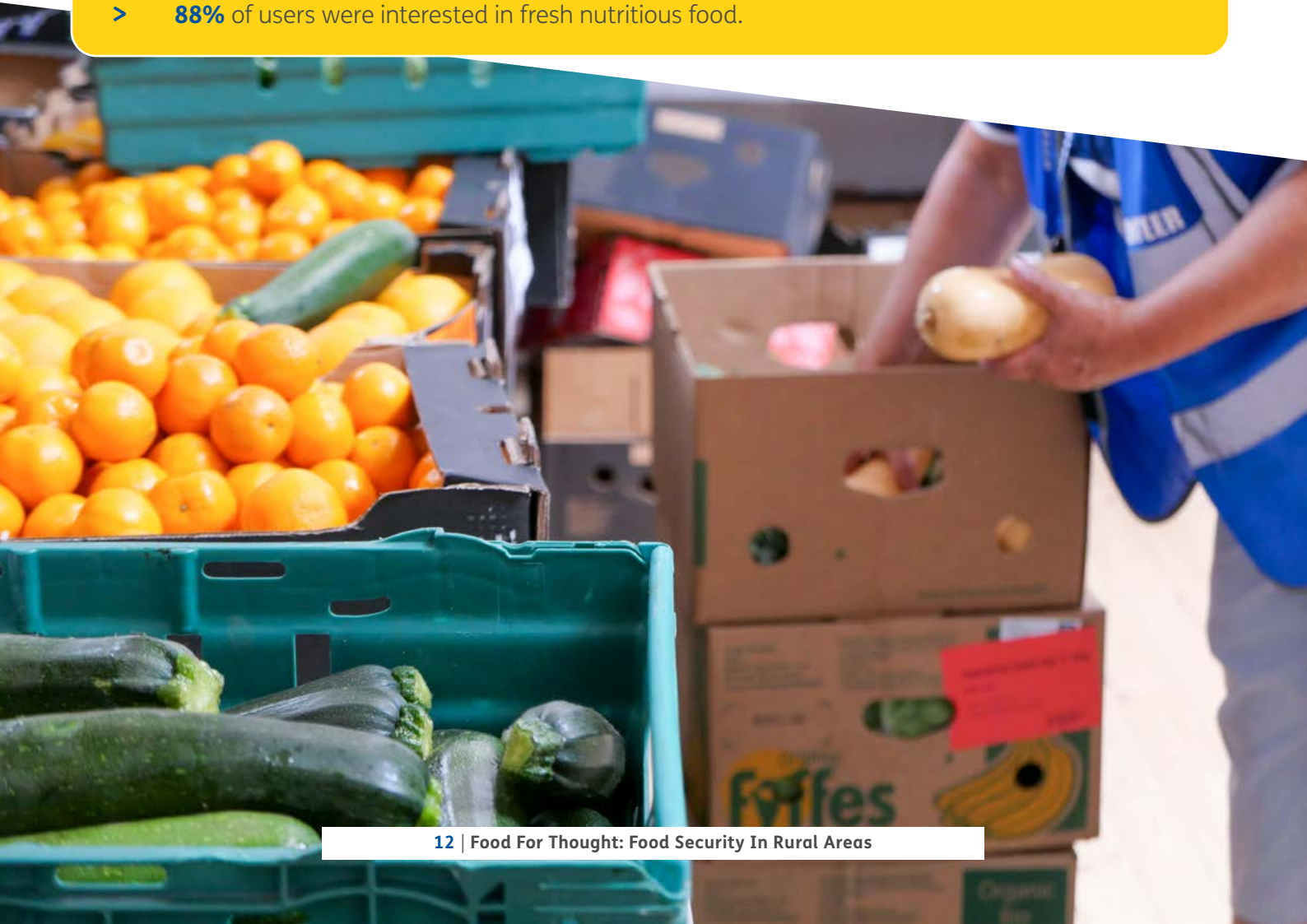
Q14: If Yes, Do You Want CAB To Provide You With Information On Support Services?



100% No
0% Yes
0% Maybe

Key Outcomes Of Survey

- > **88%** of users responded that household income doesn't cover costs
- > **88%** of users were interested in fresh nutritious food.



Methodology

2. Case Study – Person Using The Food Bank

Name: “Mairi” (pseudonym) Age: 38 Location: Isle of Skye, Scotland

Household: Lives alone in a council property. Two children (ages 6 and 9) stay with her every weekend under a shared-care arrangement.

Benefits Received:

- > Adult Disability Payment (ADP) – Daily Living & mobility components
- > Council Tax Reduction through Highland Council
- > Housing Benefit element of Universal Credit, covering rent for her council tenancy
- > No child-related benefits (no Child Benefit, Scottish Child Payment, or child elements in Universal Credit) because the children’s main residence is registered with the father

Background

Mairi has a long-term health condition which restricts her mobility and causes chronic fatigue and pain. She is unable to work and relies fully on Adult Disability Payment and benefits linked to her housing and council tax. She lives in a rural part of the Isle of Skye, where access to affordable shops, services, and transport is limited.

Key Challenges

1. Increased Living Costs on the Isle of Skye
2. No Benefit Support for Children Despite Regular Care
Although her children stay with her from Friday evening to Sunday night each week.
3. Rising Food Costs
4. High Energy Usage Due to Disability and Weekend Childcare
5. Limited Capacity to Increase Income

Outcomes

Due to rising food and energy prices and the lack of child-related support, Mairi experiences:

- > Food insecurity, needing a food parcel every few weeks
- > Anxiety about providing adequately for the children during weekend visits
- > Reduced personal food intake to ensure the children have enough
- > Increased financial strain during winter when heating costs rise significantly
- > Emotional stress and worsening health symptoms linked to financial pressures
- > Social isolation, as she cannot afford to travel or join community activities
- > Even with housing and council tax support, her disposable income is far below the level needed for stable living on the Isle of Skye.

Methodology

3. Focus Group - Skye and Lochalsh Reduce Reuse and Recycle:

18 people took part in the event including:

- > 11 Third Sector community groups
- > 1 small eco business offering a refill service and ethical choices
- > 1 statutory agency

Key Highlights

- > Lochalsh Reuse & Recycle Hub – A community fridge was set up as part of the to reduce food waste from local shops and provide nutritious, fresh food, open to all.
- > Imogen Percy-Bell, Principal Waste Management Officer on the Highland Council Waste Management Team, identified that the average household, is putting 36% of food in the ‘general waste’ bin. Including food & drink still in their packaging.

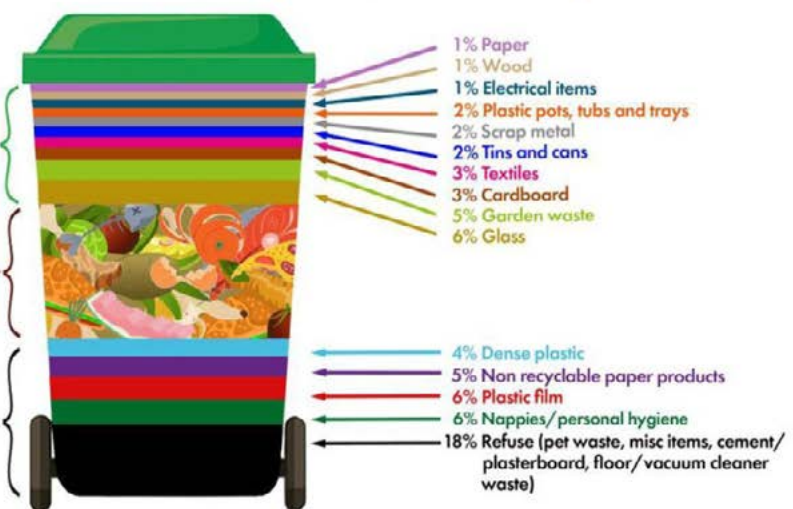
36% of the contents on average in household refuse bins in Highland could be recycled or composted*

All these materials can be recycled

- 10% Compostable e.g. veg and fruit peelings
- 12% Still in packaging e.g. unopened packets
- 12% Avoidable e.g. could have been eaten
- 1% Drinks still in original packaging

Food & drink

Non recyclable



*Highland Council Waste Composition Analysis December 2022

Methodology

Next Steps

The event identified the following idea to take forward for future meetings:

- > The development of a Skye and Lochalsh Reduce Reuse and Recycle directory – to help address the need for more effective information and communication.
-

4. Focus Group – Food Producers and Providers

Discussions were held with the following local food producers and providers to capture shared experiences, community perspectives, and opportunities for collaborative solutions, which result in a targeted strategy.

- > Skye Community Food Bank
- > Skye and Lochalsh Mental Health Association - Am Fasgadh



A Targeted Strategy

Strategic Plan & Recommendations

Goal 1: Increase Access to Nutritious Food – Timeline 6-12 months

Strategy 1.1: Trial fresh and nutritious food

- > SLCAB partner with local food bank organisation, mental health charity and local supermarket to increase availability and access to fresh food.

Strategy 1.2: Mobile Distribution

- > Assist the food bank to recruit volunteers in remote areas to distribute and store food parcels with suitable organisations to ensure the availability of fresh food.

Strategy 1.3: Local Partnership Initiatives

Work with existing community growers to introduce fresh fruit and vegetables to food parcels.

Goal 2: Improve Food Security & Resilience – Timeline 6-12 months

Strategy 2.1: Support Local Food Production

- > SLCAB and community partners liaise with community allotments and gardens, to provide free fresh food locally, supported by Highland Council's food growing strategy.

Strategy 2.2: Food Preservation

- > If it's possible to find a suitable location, invest in a fridge/refrigerator to store and extend the lifespan of fresh food and reduce waste.
-

Goal 3: Enhance Capacity of Food Assistance Programs – Timeline 6-12 months

Strategy 3.1: Volunteer Recruitment & Training

- > Skye Food Bank to work with community partners to recruit and train more volunteers, include nutrition guidance in food parcels, and signpost people to free food options.

Strategy 3.2: Funding & Resource

- > Pursue funding to ensure food supply and project sustainability.
-

Goal 4: Empower Communities – Timeline 6-12 months

Strategy 4.1: Community Support

- > Use existing forums (e.g. Community Wellbeing & Support Forum, Skye & Lochalsh Reduce Reuse and Recycle) to embed food security as a core agenda item.

Project Outcomes

Expected Outcomes

- > **Higher local access to nutritious foods** through more distribution points.
 - > **Reduced incidence of food insecurity** among households and children.
 - > **Stronger community capacity**, increased volunteer participation & support roles.
 - > **Sustainable integration of local food production** into community supply chains.
-

Metrics

- > Weekly/monthly food distribution volumes by type and location.
- > Number of households supported and frequency or repeat use.
- > Reduction in reported food insecurity on surveys.
- > Participation in training and growing projects.



Conclusion

The UK is one of the least food self-sufficient countries in Europe. The Food Security Report updated in October 2024 found that the country was 54% food self-sufficient. Other countries such as the US, France and Australia are food self-sufficient, meaning, if required have enough food to feed their populations without imports.

The Skye and Lochalsh area faces multiple challenges to food security due to rural remoteness and transport cost barriers. The war in Ukraine & Iran has affected supply chains and there is limited access to fresh, affordable food — despite strong local volunteer efforts.

A community-centred strategy would focus on expanding access to fresh fruit and vegetables, build local capacity, and work together to improve food security. The next steps being to:

- > Trial fresh and nutritious food
- > Invest in a fridge/refrigerator to store fresh food and reduce waste
- > Recruit and train more volunteers. Include nutrition guidance in food parcels.
- > Work with existing community growers to introduce fresh fruit & vegetables to food bags.

By enhancing partnerships among community organisations, residents, and the local authority this plan seeks to address immediate needs while building sustainable resilience across the region.



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[UK food inflation highest in 11 months, likely to rise further, BRC says | Reuters](#)

Why are food prices still rising by so much?
[Why are food prices rising so fast? - BBC News](#)



www.slcab.org.uk

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