



FOOD ECO- CULTURE EDU

Connecting Disciplines in European Higher Academia



Module 6

COMMUNICATION,
COLLABORATION &
SERVICE

www.foodecocultureedu.eu



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01

INTRODUCTION



TOPIC



This module focuses on the role of communication, collaboration, and service in shaping contemporary food systems and food education. Learners explore how food is communicated through culture, narratives, and everyday practices, and how these messages influence values, behaviour, and decision-making. The module also examines collaborative approaches that bring together higher education, industry, and communities to address food-related challenges. Through service-based learning and real-world examples, learners consider how knowledge can be co-created and shared to support more inclusive, sustainable, and socially responsive food systems.

Learning Objectives

Focus: How communication and collaboration practices shape food systems, education, and service across community, industry, and higher education.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this module, learners will be able to:

- Explain the role of communication and collaboration in creating inclusive, sustainable food systems.
- Analyse how service-based learning and community engagement strengthen food education outcomes.
- Apply collaborative approaches to real-world food, hospitality, and community challenges.
- Reflect on their own communication practices when working across disciplines, cultures, and sectors.



02

**COMMUNICATION
AND STORYTELLING
IN FOOD SYSTEMS**



Food as a Form of Communication



Food functions as a form of communication that conveys **cultural meaning, social values, and collective memory**. Beyond nourishing the body, food reflects the history, traditions, and ecological relationships of the people who produce and consume it. Meals, food practices, and rituals communicate identity, belonging, and social relationships within communities.

This communicative role of food is recognised by the [Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations](#), which notes that food is “***a powerful expression of cultural identity, communal bonds and ancestral wisdom***”. Traditional dishes and locally adapted ingredients carry meanings passed down through generations and contribute to cultural heritage and resilience within food systems. Understanding food as communication encourages learners to consider not only what is eaten, but also how, why, where, and with whom food is shared, and how these practices shape values, behaviour, and social structures.

How Food Stories Shape Values

Food stories influence how people understand what food means and why it matters. These narratives include stories about:

- origin
- production methods
- cultural traditions
- ethical values

Through storytelling, food is often framed as more than a product, connecting it to ideas of quality, responsibility, and identity.

Food narratives shape values by:



Emphasising traditions, heritage, and cultural continuity



Highlighting sustainability, environmental care, and biodiversity



Linking food to health, wellbeing, and lifestyle choices



Creating emotional connections through memory, place, and people

Food Stories and Behaviour

Food stories also influence behaviour and everyday decision-making. The way food is described, promoted, and shared affects what people choose to buy, eat, and support. Narratives can encourage particular practices, such as choosing local food, avoiding waste, or supporting small-scale producers.

Food narratives can:

- Influence purchasing and consumption choices
- Shape attitudes towards sustainable and ethical food
- Build or reduce trust in food producers and institutions
- Normalise certain diets while marginalising others

At the same time, food stories may simplify complex food systems. Critical engagement is needed to understand whose interests are represented and whose are missing.



Slow Food: Storytelling for Sustainable Food Systems

Slow Food is an international movement that uses storytelling as a core tool to promote sustainable, culturally rooted food systems. Founded in Italy, Slow Food challenges industrialised food production by emphasising the connections between food, culture, people, and the environment. Slow Food promotes food that is:

Good – high quality,
flavourful, and
culturally meaningful

Clean – produced in
ways that protect
ecosystems and
biodiversity

Fair – respectful of
producers, workers, and
local economies

Through stories about traditional foods, local producers, and endangered ingredients, Slow Food raises awareness of biodiversity loss, cultural erosion, and environmental impact. Its storytelling approach encourages consumers to see food choices as ethical and political acts, rather than purely personal preferences.



Differences in Food Communication Across Cultures

For example, in some cultures, food communication focuses on sharing, seasonality, and respect for ancestors, while in others it may emphasise convenience, individual choice, or innovation.

Misunderstandings can arise when food communication does not account for cultural context, particularly in education, policy, or international food systems.

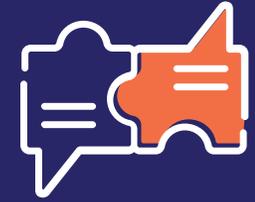
Food is communicated differently across cultures, reflecting diverse histories, values, belief systems, and relationships with land and resources.

Cultural context strongly influences how food is described, valued, and shared, as well as what is considered appropriate or desirable food behaviour. Across cultures, food communication may differ in terms of:

- **The importance placed on tradition, ritual, and collective eating**
- **The role of food in religious or spiritual practices**
- **Attitudes towards animals, plants, and the natural environment**
- **Meanings attached to hospitality, celebration, and care**



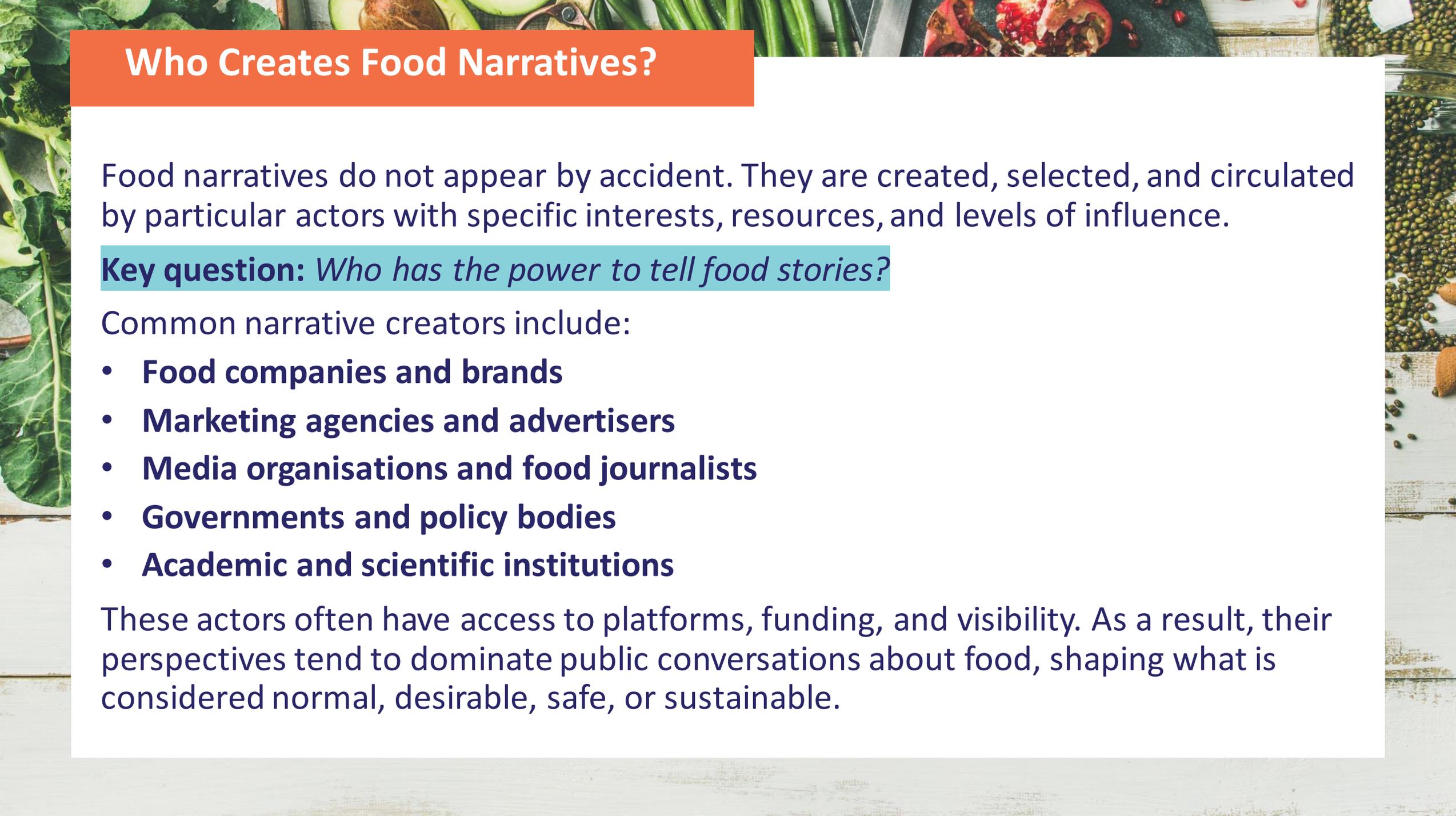
Differences Across Sectors and Disciplines



Food is also communicated differently across sectors and academic disciplines. Each sector frames food according to its own goals, language, and priorities, which can lead to both opportunities and tensions within food systems. Food communication varies across:

- **Education**, which often focuses on knowledge, skills, and critical thinking
- **Industry and marketing**, which emphasise branding, consumer appeal, and sales
- **Policy and governance**, which prioritise regulation, safety, and public health
- **Science and nutrition**, which focus on data, evidence, and measurable outcomes
- **Community and civil society**, which highlight lived experience, access, and social justice

These different approaches can result in conflicting messages about health, sustainability, and responsibility. Understanding disciplinary and sectoral differences helps learners communicate more effectively, collaborate across boundaries, and critically assess food-related information from multiple sources.



Who Creates Food Narratives?

Food narratives do not appear by accident. They are created, selected, and circulated by particular actors with specific interests, resources, and levels of influence.

Key question: *Who has the power to tell food stories?*

Common narrative creators include:

- **Food companies and brands**
- **Marketing agencies and advertisers**
- **Media organisations and food journalists**
- **Governments and policy bodies**
- **Academic and scientific institutions**

These actors often have access to platforms, funding, and visibility. As a result, their perspectives tend to dominate public conversations about food, shaping what is considered normal, desirable, safe, or sustainable.

Whose Voices Are Missing or Marginalised?

Food communication is shaped by many voices, and there is growing recognition of the value of perspectives that have previously been less visible. Including lived experience and local knowledge helps create richer and more balanced food narratives. **Important perspectives include:**

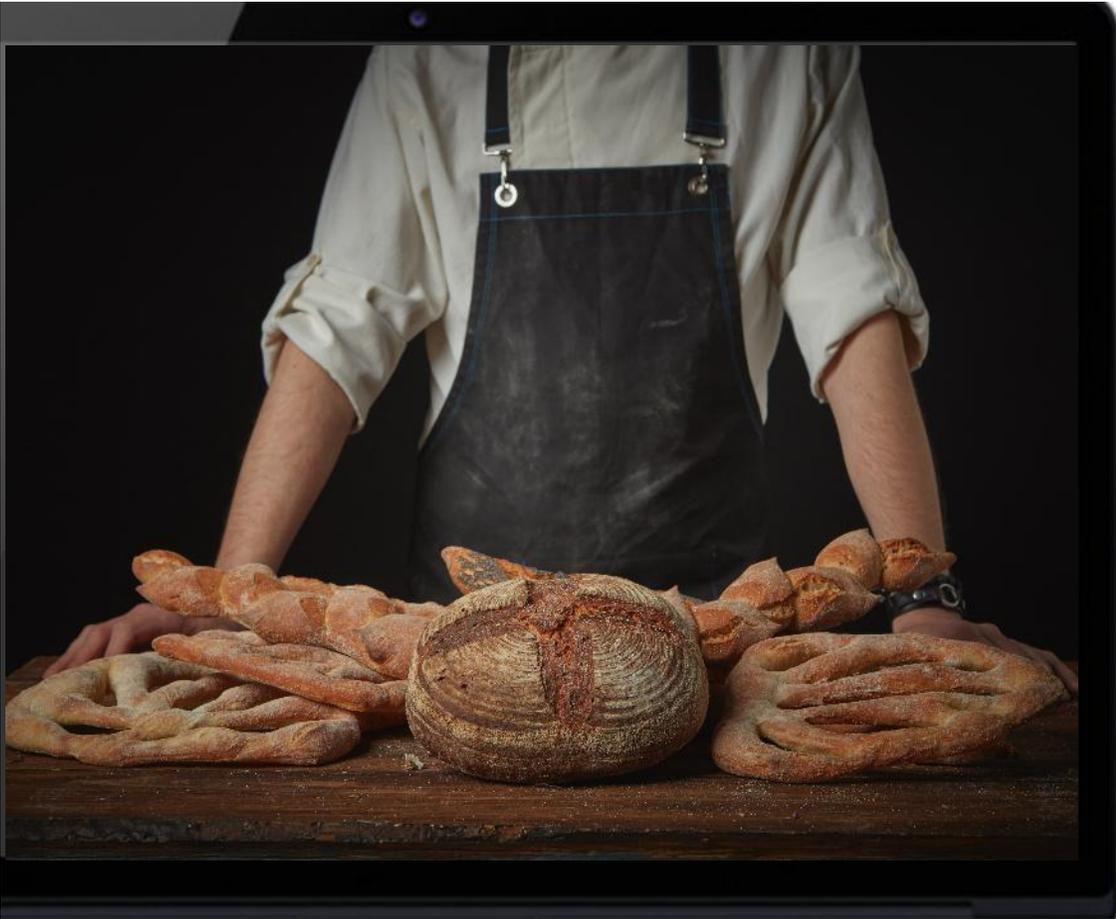
- Small-scale farmers and food producers
- Migrant and informal food workers
- Indigenous and traditional knowledge holders
- Low-income communities with experience of food insecurity
- Women and minority groups within food labour systems



When these voices are included, food stories better reflect the social, environmental, and economic realities of food systems. Independent food media platforms such as [Civil Eats](#) support more inclusive and transparent food communication by centring community, labour, and justice.



Marketing and Food Messages



Marketing plays a major role in shaping how food is understood and valued. Through advertising, packaging, branding, and promotional campaigns, food is often presented in simplified and appealing ways that influence consumer perception. Marketing commonly frames food by:

- Highlighting taste, convenience, and lifestyle appeal
- Using claims related to health, freshness, or sustainability
- Creating emotional connections through imagery and storytelling

These messages influence what consumers trust and choose, making marketing a powerful force within food systems.

Media and the Representation of Food



Media, including television, print, and online journalism, helps shape public understanding of food issues. Media coverage influences how topics such as nutrition, sustainability, food safety, and innovation are discussed and prioritised. The way food stories are selected and framed affects which issues receive attention and which are overlooked. Media representations of food can:

**Raise
awareness of
food system
challenges and
solutions**

**Shape public
debate and
opinion on food-
related issues**

**Simplify
complex topics
to fit news
formats or
trends**

Digital Platforms and Ethical Communication



Digital platforms have transformed food communication by enabling faster sharing and wider participation. Social media, blogs, and video platforms allow brands, educators, influencers, and communities to communicate directly with audiences, increasing the visibility of diverse food stories and experiences. These platforms play an important role in shaping diets, trends, and consumer behaviour, while also supporting learning, dialogue, and public engagement around food systems. At the European level, the European Commission's [Farm to Fork Strategy](#) highlights the importance of clear, transparent, and trustworthy communication to help citizens make informed and sustainable food choices.



Ethical Responsibilities in Food Communication

Effective food communication matters not only for clarity but also for fairness and trust. Ethical communication involves being **transparent about sources, production methods, and values**, and avoiding misleading claims or exaggeration. It also means recognising the impact that messages can have on people's choices, cultures, and well-being. When communicators act responsibly, they strengthen trust between producers, consumers, and wider communities and help support more informed and inclusive food systems.



VIDEO - Digital Food Storytelling & Marketing

This video explores how storytelling strengthens food marketing by helping brands connect emotionally with audiences, highlight values and heritage, and make products memorable. It illustrates how digital storytelling is used to share narratives about food culture, production, and brand identity — key skills for understanding contemporary food communication.



The Power of Story Telling in Food Marketing

Recommended Podcast on Food Communication

“Food for Europe” is a European podcast series that explores food, farming, sustainability, and policy across the EU. Through interviews with key figures in European agriculture, this podcast discusses how food systems are communicated, how policy and public narratives evolve, and how sustainable transitions are shaped across diverse regional contexts.

Each episode features insights into current food system developments, including digital communication, consumer engagement, and the values that shape European food narratives.



03

**COLLABORATION ACROSS
EDUCATION, INDUSTRY,
AND COMMUNITY**



Why Food System **Challenges** Require Collaboration



Food system challenges are complex and interconnected. Issues such as **climate change, food insecurity, public health, biodiversity loss, and labour** conditions cut across production, processing, distribution, consumption, and waste. These challenges are shaped by environmental, social, cultural, and economic factors, meaning they cannot be effectively addressed by any single organisation or sector working alone.

Collaboration is therefore essential to develop sustainable and inclusive food systems. By working across sectors, different types of knowledge, expertise, and experience can be brought together to address problems more holistically. The [Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations](#) emphasises partnerships as a key mechanism for strengthening food systems, improving resilience, and supporting long-term sustainability.

Collaboration Within Food Systems



Food systems involve a wide range of actors, including producers, processors, retailers, educators, policymakers, and consumers. Each actor operates within different contexts and priorities, which can lead to fragmented approaches if collaboration is limited. Collaborative food systems aim to:

- **Align environmental, social, and economic goals**
- **Connect policy frameworks with practice on the ground**
- **Support shared responsibility for food system outcomes**

At the European level, integrated approaches to food systems are promoted by the European Commission, particularly through initiatives that link food policy with sustainability, health, and education. Collaboration helps ensure that food system decisions are coherent, coordinated, and responsive to local and regional needs.





Roles of Education, Industry, Hospitality, and Communities

Different sectors contribute distinct but complementary roles within collaborative food systems. **Higher education institutions** play a key role in generating knowledge, developing skills, and supporting critical reflection on food-related challenges. They also act as spaces where interdisciplinary and applied learning can take place.

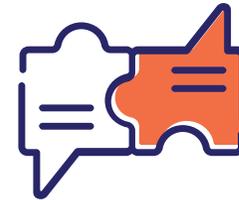
Industry and hospitality sectors influence food systems through sourcing decisions, innovation, and everyday practices that shape consumption patterns. **Local communities** contribute essential lived experience, cultural knowledge, and insight into access, equity, and social impact. Effective collaboration recognises the value of all these roles and supports dialogue between academic, professional, and community perspectives.

Working Across Disciplines

Food system challenges intersect multiple disciplines, including food science, culture, sustainability, business, health, and policy. Working across disciplines allows complex problems to be approached from different angles and reduces the risk of narrow or technical solutions that overlook social and cultural dimensions.

Interdisciplinary collaboration supports:

- Broader understanding of food system impacts
- Integration of scientific, cultural, and economic knowledge
- Stronger links between research, education, and practice



European initiatives such as [EIT Food](#) and [RUN-EU](#) actively promote interdisciplinary learning and partnerships between education, industry, and regional stakeholders.



Co-creation with Food System Actors



Co-creation refers to collaborative processes in which solutions are developed jointly by multiple actors rather than delivered by experts alone. In food systems, co-creation often involves producers, kitchens, food hubs, educators, researchers, and community organisations working together to address shared challenges. Networks such as the [European Network of Living Labs](#) support co-creation by enabling experimentation and collaboration in real-life settings, linking innovation with everyday food practices. Co-creative approaches support:



Communication and Trust in Food Partnerships



Successful collaboration in food systems relies on purposeful and inclusive communication. Partnerships often bring together actors from education, industry, hospitality, policy, and local communities, each with different priorities, languages, and ways of working. Without careful communication, collaboration can become fragmented or dominated by a single perspective.

Effective communication in partnerships involves clarity about aims, roles, and expectations, as well as openness to dialogue and feedback. It also requires recognising that not all knowledge is expressed in the same way. Technical expertise, cultural knowledge, and lived experience all contribute to meaningful collaboration. When communication is respectful and transparent, it helps support long-term cooperation.



Trust, Power, and Participation



Trust is central to collaborative food system work, but it does not develop automatically. Power imbalances related to funding, institutional status, or professional expertise can affect who is heard, who makes decisions, and whose knowledge is prioritised. If these dynamics are not acknowledged, collaboration risks reinforcing existing inequalities.

Inclusive partnerships actively reflect on power and participation. This may involve sharing decision-making, creating space for community voices, and valuing experiential knowledge alongside academic or professional expertise. When trust is built through fair participation and mutual respect, collaboration becomes more equitable and more effective in addressing food system challenges.

Ethical Approaches to Food System Partnerships

Ethical reflection supports stronger and more responsible collaboration in food systems. Ethical approaches encourage partners to consider questions of fairness, transparency, responsibility, and long-term impact, particularly when working across sectors or with communities.

Organisations such as the [Food Ethics Council](#) emphasise the importance of ethical thinking in food-related decision-making and partnerships. Rather than offering fixed rules, ethical frameworks support ongoing reflection on how collaboration is carried out, who benefits, and how relationships can be improved. Through embedding ethical awareness into communication and partnership design, collaborative food initiatives are better equipped to create trust, share responsibility, and support sustainable and socially responsive food systems.



FoodSHIFT 2023

FoodSHIFT 2030 is an EU-funded initiative that brings together universities, food businesses, local authorities, civil society organisations, and citizens to support the sustainable transformation of Europe's food systems.

The project uses food as a shared entry point to address challenges such as healthy diets, food waste, and environmental impact. Collaboration takes place through living labs, pilot projects, and community-based activities, where knowledge is co-created rather than transferred in one direction. FoodSHIFT 2030 demonstrates how partnerships across education, industry, and communities can support innovation that is locally relevant while aligned with wider sustainability goals.



Learner Reflection – Working Collaboratively in Food Systems



Reflect on the role of collaboration in addressing food system challenges.

- *Which sectors or disciplines do you think are most important to involve when working on food sustainability?*
- *How might power, resources, or expertise influence collaboration between partners?*
- *What skills do you need to communicate effectively and build trust when working with communities or industry partners?*
- *How can collaboration improve both learning outcomes and real-world impact?*

Learners are encouraged to connect these questions to their own studies, professional interests, or local food contexts.

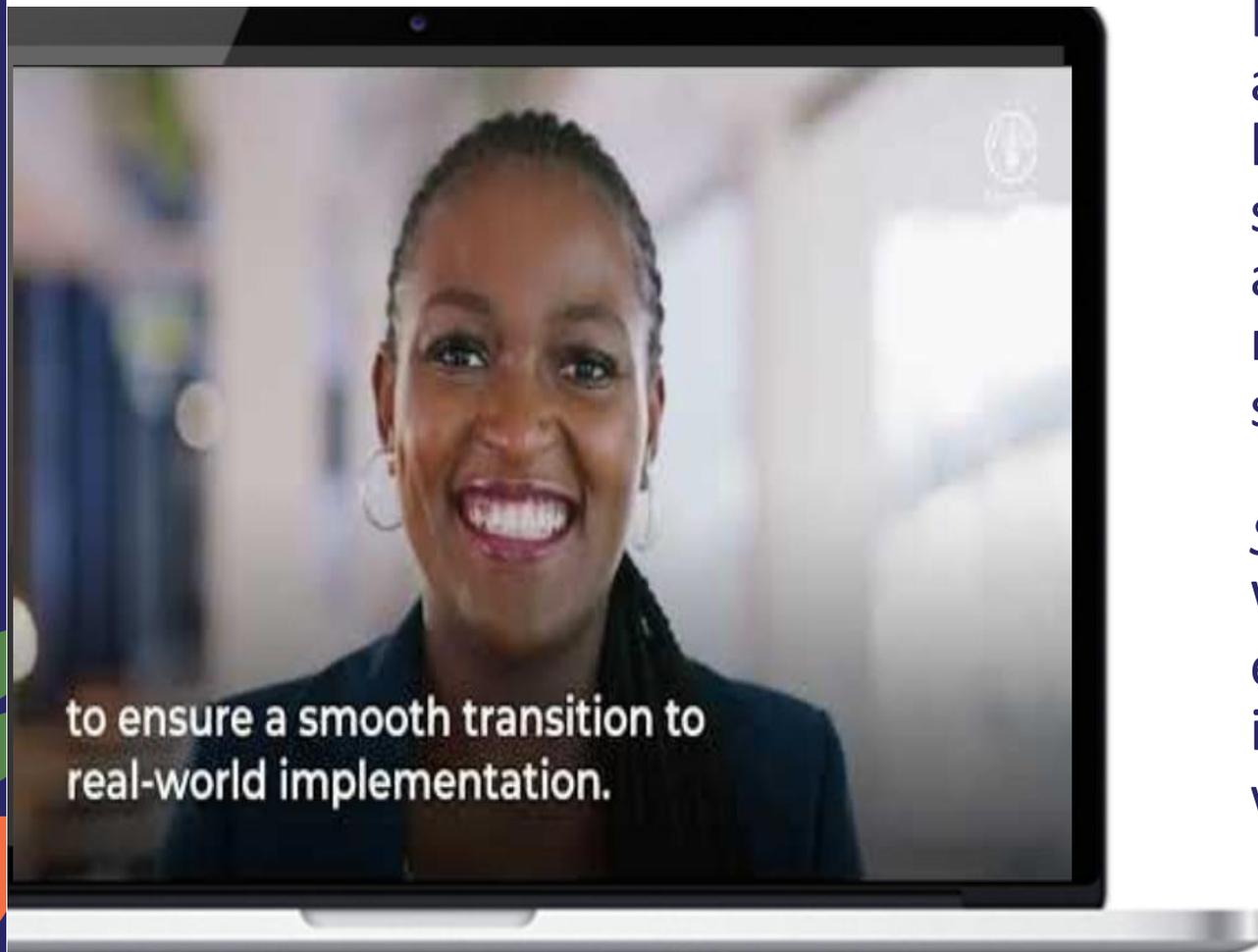


Partnerships and Collaboration in Food Systems

This short video from the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations explores why collaboration and partnerships are essential for building sustainable and resilient food systems. It highlights how different actors contribute knowledge, resources, and experience to address shared challenges.

Suggested use:

Watch the video and identify one example of how collaboration improves outcomes compared to working alone.

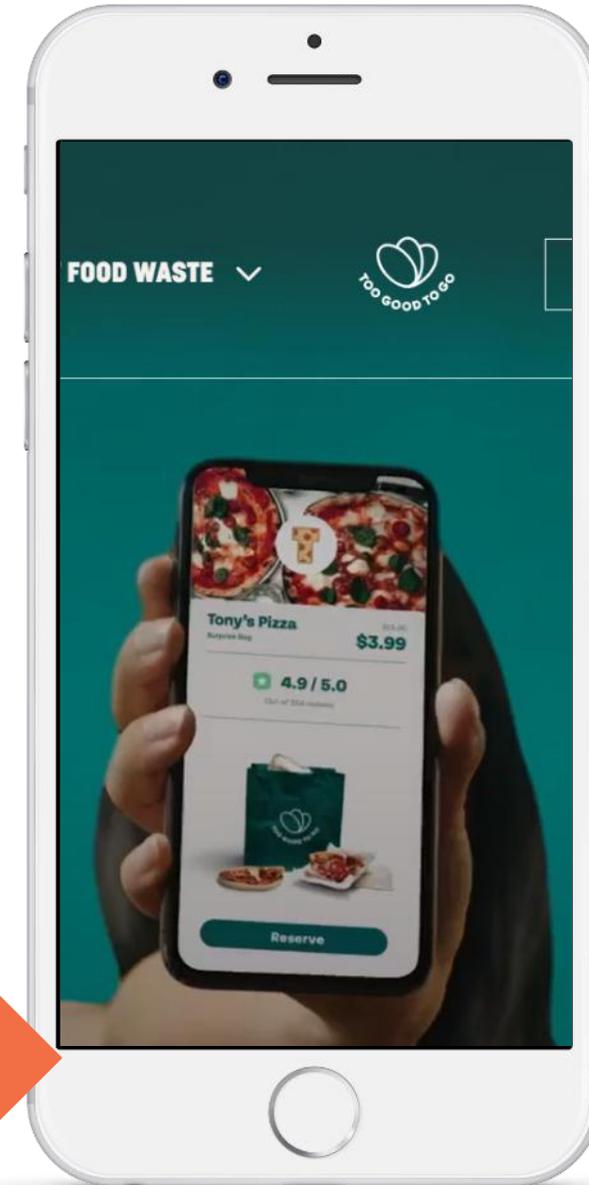


Too Good To Go

Too Good To Go is a Europe-wide social impact company founded in Denmark, working to reduce food waste across the food supply chain. It operates in many EU countries and partners with food retailers, hospitality businesses, local authorities, and consumers.

<https://www.toogoodtogo.com/en-us>

Click to Read



04

SERVICE-BASED LEARNING AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT



Food as an Entry Point for Service-Based Learning

Food is a highly effective entry point for service-based learning because it is local, social, and shared. Everyone engages with food in daily life, which makes food systems immediately relevant to learners across disciplines. Food connects personal experience with wider societal issues, linking everyday practices to questions of sustainability, health, culture, and justice.

In higher education, service-based learning uses real-world engagement to deepen academic understanding and civic awareness. Food-based projects allow learners to connect theory with practice while developing skills in communication, collaboration, and reflection. European higher education policy increasingly recognises service learning as a way to strengthen the relationship between universities and society, as reflected in initiatives supported by the [European Commission](#).



Linking Learning to Everyday Food Practices

Service-based food projects connect academic learning with everyday practices such as growing, cooking, sourcing, distributing, and eating food. These activities provide real-world settings in which learners can observe how food systems function in practice. Research in hospitality and food education shows that learning is strengthened when students engage directly with real food environments, as discussed in applied research shared through the Food Systems Journal. Engagement with everyday food practices helps learners understand:



Learning With Food Communities



Service-based learning is most effective when learners work *with* food communities rather than acting as outside experts. Food producers, cooks, market organisers, NGOs, and food workers hold valuable knowledge rooted in experience and practice.

This approach supports:

- Mutual learning and knowledge exchange
- Recognition of lived experience as expertise
- Stronger relationships based on trust and respect

Organisations such as [UNESCO](#) emphasise community engagement as a core principle of education for sustainable development.



Food Engagement, Access, and Justice

Food-based service learning brings attention to social issues that are often hidden in everyday consumption. Working with food communities helps learners understand challenges related to access to healthy food, food insecurity, labour conditions, environmental sustainability, and the protection of cultural food knowledge. Through this type of engagement, learners connect academic study with real-world social and environmental concerns. Organisations such as the [OECD](#) highlight civic engagement in education as an important pathway for developing social responsibility and active citizenship.

Unequal access
to food and
resources

Environmental
impacts of food
production and
waste

The role of food
in cultural
identity and
community
resilience

Structural
inequalities
within food
systems

Co-Creation in Food Projects and Living Labs

Many food-based service-learning initiatives use **co-creation approaches**, where knowledge and solutions are developed collaboratively rather than delivered by institutions alone. Community kitchens, food hubs, urban gardens, and local food networks often act as spaces for shared learning and experimentation.

Living Labs provide a structured framework for this type of engagement. Networks such as the European Network of Living Labs and initiatives supported by JPI Urban Europe promote co-creation in real-life settings, including food systems and urban sustainability.





Ethics in Food-Based Community Engagement

Ethical reflection is essential in service-based food learning. Working with food communities requires respect for local knowledge, labour, time, and lived experience. Without careful attention to ethics, service-learning risks becoming extractive or reinforcing existing inequalities.

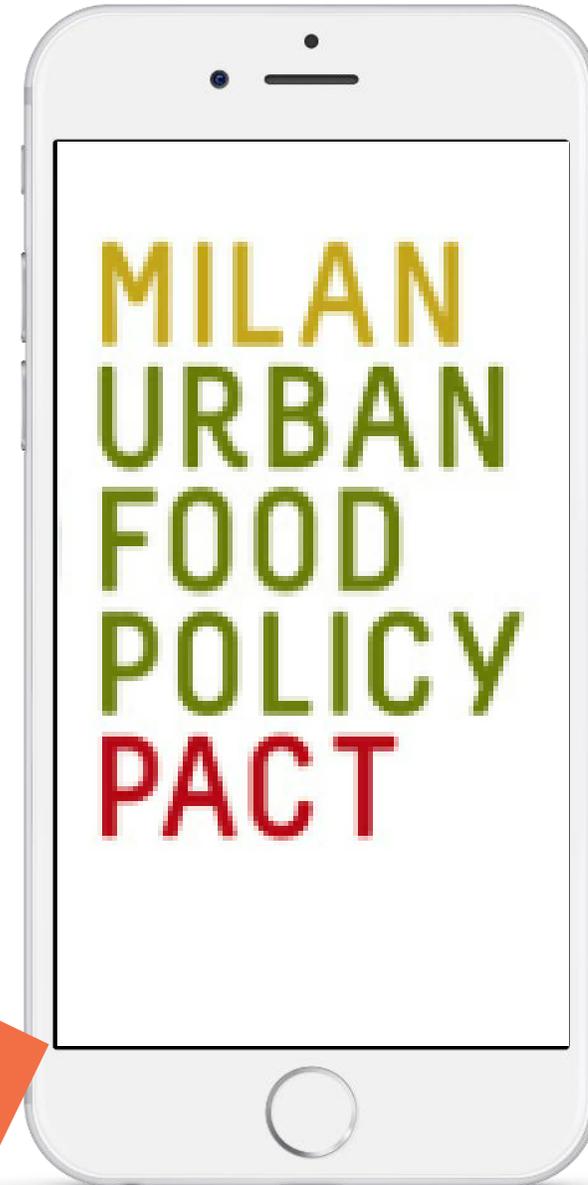
Ethical food engagement involves:

- **Valuing community contributions and expertise**
- **Being transparent about aims, roles, and limitations**
- **Building relationships beyond short-term projects**
- **Reflecting on power, privilege, and responsibility**

Organisations such as the [Sustainable Food Trust](#) and community-based [food policy networks](#) emphasise co-creation and long-term partnership as foundations for ethical and meaningful food projects.

CASE STUDY – The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact

The Milan Urban Food Policy Pact is a city-led agreement that supports sustainable, inclusive urban food systems and is widely used across Europe. Through collaboration with universities, NGOs, and local food organisations, students engage in service-based learning by contributing to activities such as food access mapping, school food evaluation, and community food initiatives. This approach links academic learning with real policy processes and demonstrates how food can act as a shared platform for co-creation between education, local government, and communities.





VIDEO – The Food Trails Project

This video highlights how cities within the **Food Trails project** — linked to the Milan Urban Food Policy Pact — are working with communities, governments, and partners to create sustainable, inclusive urban food systems. It provides a real example of collaborative action that ties in with service-based learning and community engagement

[Food Trails' Video Hero - Pathways towards Food 2030 led urban food policies](#)

Module Summary – Communication, Collaboration, and Service in Food Systems

This module explored how food systems are shaped through communication, collaboration, and service-based learning. Learners examined food as a form of communication linked to culture, identity, and power, and considered how food stories influence values, behaviour, and sustainability.

The module also highlighted collaboration across education, industry, hospitality, and communities, with a focus on co-creation, trust, and ethical partnership. Finally, service-based learning was presented as a way to connect academic learning with everyday food practices and community engagement, supporting more inclusive and socially responsive food systems.





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