

Developing sustainable food cities

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Dr Juliet Wiseman. Credit: Philip Hartley

The issue of global food security is a problem for us now, and for future generations. Perhaps the most visible issue is malnutrition, which affects millions in the developing world and poses a risk to many vulnerable people in the developed world. But the issue of global food security is much broader than the supply of food – it also refers to the challenges of

our dependence on globally imported food, rising food prices, food waste and the provision of a nutritious, balanced diet.

Researchers at BU are working in collaboration with Bournemouth and Poole's Sustainable Food City partnership to tackle some of these issues through a new [project](#) designed to look at how we can encourage sustainable food and eating practices, particularly through the growth and consumption of local foods. At the heart of the project is the idea of nutritional wellbeing; a broad concept that incorporates issues such as a [balanced diet](#), trusting the source of food, knowing how to produce healthy meals, and [sustainable food production](#). A multidisciplinary team of researchers at Bournemouth University, funded by the European Commission, is working on the project, contributing expertise in a wide range of areas – from nutrition and sustainable, [local food](#), to improving wellbeing. Taking an interdisciplinary approach to the project is really important to the team, as it provides a depth of experience and a level of richness that wouldn't be possible through a single disciplinary approach.

As Dr Juliet Wiseman – a Marie Curie Research Fellow working on the project – explains, the project stemmed from the idea that "the current food system is responsible for most of the food related ill health that [people](#) are experiencing. While we can encourage people to eat healthily, they can't do it if the food production systems don't allow them to. Our project goes beyond just looking at providing a sustainable, local food system; we also want to improve people's health.

"We're hoping to create a culture shift," continues Dr Wiseman. "We particularly want to encourage people to think about growing their own vegetables and explore the barriers that prevent people from doing that." One of the barriers already identified by the team is the lack of fresh food markets in the local area. Where they do exist, they tend to be quite expensive, which presents another difficulty for many people. As the research team have observed, Bournemouth and Poole are still in the

very early days of developing a sustainable food model, which is part of the reason it's an exciting location in which to be designing and testing a new model.

By working with existing community projects, the team hopes to find out what people who are currently growing their own food get out of it and how this can be translated elsewhere. They also intend to set up their own project in an area of Poole where no one is currently growing anything, so that they can follow the development of a new initiative from the very beginning.

"We're very much focused on behaviour change," says Dr Dawn Birch, a Senior Lecturer in Marketing, who has an interest in sustainable local food. "In marketing, we call that social marketing – marketing an idea – that people could be more engaged in growing their vegetables in order to be more conscious of what they're eating and then in turn improve their wellbeing. At the moment, if you live in Poole and wanted to shop only for food produced in Dorset, there isn't really a way to do it, which is why we want to focus our efforts on creating a behaviour change around growing your own food. We can't influence the [food supply chain](#), but this is a tangible way we can make a difference."

Dr Jane Murphy, an Associate Professor in Nutrition, says that by the end of the project they want to "have produced a toolkit that translates this model of local, sustainable food that we develop, so people can use and engage with it elsewhere. The issue we're facing is that there won't be enough food globally to sustain our population," explains Dr Murphy. "And by developing a new approach and encouraging different behaviour changes, we hope to start developing a culture shift in the way we think about food."

"It's about educating consumers," continues Dr Birch. "By showing people there are different ways of approaching food consumption, we

hope to change the way things work now. The classic example of this is the 'ugly' vegetable – if consumers accept that vegetables don't have to look perfect, then they will begin to change how they source their [food](#). We want to develop exactly that kind of consumer led change."

Provided by Bournemouth University

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