



# Food Sharing Initiatives: A Strategic Opportunity for Galway

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## SUMMARY FOR POLICYMAKERS

**Food sharing in Galway reflects a deep cultural legacy of cooperation and care, offering a powerful foundation for inclusive, sustainable food systems. Local decision-makers can make food sharing work better by recognising it as part of the food infrastructure and supporting initiatives. Using inclusion as a guide helps match the right kind of support to urban and rural initiatives, based on what is needed.**

Food Sharing Initiatives (FSIs): Community gardens, surplus redistribution, socially-oriented farms, and collective civic cooking and eating operations, offer promising paths for integrating inclusion, resilience, and sustainability. Together, they provide much of the everyday scaffolding that supports local food systems. Applying a data-driven inclusive framework, and studying FSIs as interconnected parts of a wider food system, rather than as isolated initiatives, we find that despite supporting inclusion, resilience, and social wellbeing across urban and rural Galway, FSIs are not supported in a systemic way, and remain invisible in regional food policy and planning. We identify a clear opportunity for local and regional decision-makers to strengthen Galway's urban-rural food system.

## KEY MESSAGES

- Fifty-eight FSIs were identified across urban and rural Galway.
- Acting as critical service providers during times of rising costs and service gaps, FSIs are providing Galway residences with reliable access to affordable food.
- FSIs are building stronger local connections, and reconnecting communities with each other and the land.
- Providing a lifeline for many and a local hub for communities Galway's FSIs need strategic support.



## OUR RESEARCH

In Galway, FSIs reconnect people with each other and with the land. They help communities cope with change, widen access to good food, and strengthen the social ties that underpin urban, rural, and coastal life.

We studied 58 FSIs across Galway (29% urban, 55% rural, with the remainder operating across both), forming a network of everyday food support across the county (Figures 1 and 2).

## OUR RESEARCH CONTINUED

Using a Food System Inclusion Framework tool, we looked at how FSIs operate across five areas of inclusion. Rather than ranking initiatives, this approach helped us understand different strengths, limits, and support needs across urban and rural contexts, and how different types of initiatives contribute to Galway's wider food system.

- **Access & Resources:** Urban initiatives were more likely to offer shared land, tools, kitchens, and learning spaces that are open to the wider public. Rural initiatives often operate on privately owned land with more limited access.
- **Participation & Representation:** Urban initiatives tended to involve more diverse participants and include community voices in decision-making. Rural initiatives reflected smaller populations and relied more on informal leadership.
- **Equity & Rights:** Equity and inclusion were explicitly stated goals in many urban projects, particularly those working with marginalised groups. Rural initiatives supported inclusion through everyday practice and mutual support, but without formal strategies or targeted outreach.
- **Empowerment & Capacity:** Urban initiatives provided structured training and leadership pathways, helping participants build skills and agency. Rural initiatives were resilient and community-rooted but often lacked the capacity to expand or formalise participation.
- **Resilience & Sustainability:** Rural initiatives showed strong resilience through land-based practices, seasonal adaptation, and long-term community ties. Urban initiatives contributed to resilience through innovation, collaboration, and creating multiple access points for food across the city.

### How resources are shared

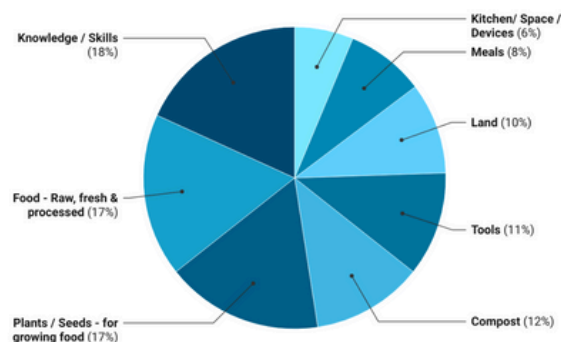


Fig. 2 (a). Resources that are shared across FSIs in Galway

### Ways resources are shared

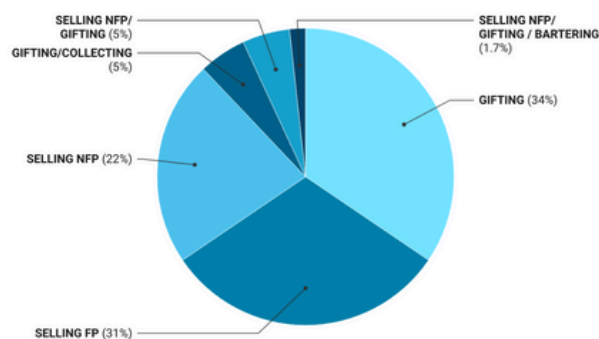


Fig. 2. (b) Ways resources are shared across FSIs in Galway

## CONCLUSION

Galway now has the evidence and a practical framework – the next step is for local authorities, funders, researchers and food policy partners to use it to better support FSIs and build long-term resilience across the city and county.

**Centre/Cluster:** Agriculture, Food Systems and Bioeconomy Research Centre

**Theme:** Agriculture and Bioeconomy

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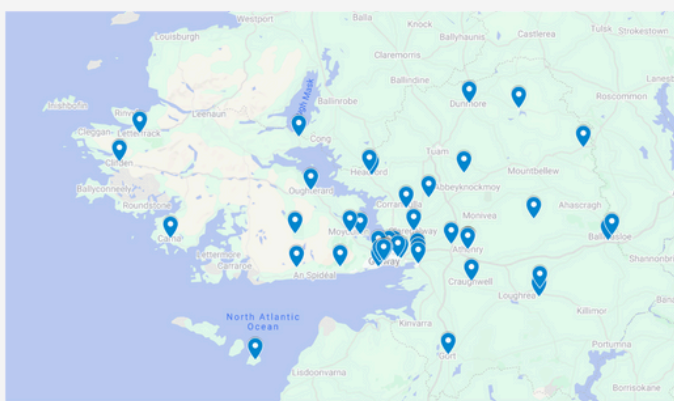


Figure 1a. Geographical distribution of FSIs across Galway City and County.

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