

‘Playing with Food’: Using Games to Engage with the Complexity of Sustainable Agri-food Systems

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Background

Why This Matters: The future of agri-food systems is increasingly shaped by interconnected sustainability challenges, often referred to as a 'polycrisis,' including climate change, biodiversity loss, and food insecurity. These complexities demand tools that help us explore trade-offs and imagine different paths forward.

What Is Playful Learning? Playful learning is a hands-on, creative approach that uses games and interactive activities to explore big ideas. Instead of focusing on right or wrong answers, it invites open-ended exploration in a safe space where people can test ideas, make decisions, and learn through doing. This makes it especially useful for tackling complex challenges like those facing our food systems.

What Do We Do — and Why? We use playful learning to engage people in thinking about food and sustainability in new ways — from classrooms to festivals. These tools spark curiosity, encourage collaboration, and open up conversations about the future of food in an accessible and engaging way.

Playful Games & Interventions

Foodopoly: A Game in Global Food Sustainability

Players role-play through global food system dilemmas, blending competition and collaboration to explore food system complexities and strategies.

Bad Outcome:
Unsustainable and unhealthy





Good Outcome:
Sustainable and nutritious



Audience Participation

Volunteers wear hats symbolising key challenges in food systems.

The audience face decisions and encounter event cards that bring unexpected consequences.

The audience reacts in real time, voting to improve conditions for their teams.



Whac-a-Mole Food Systems Challenge

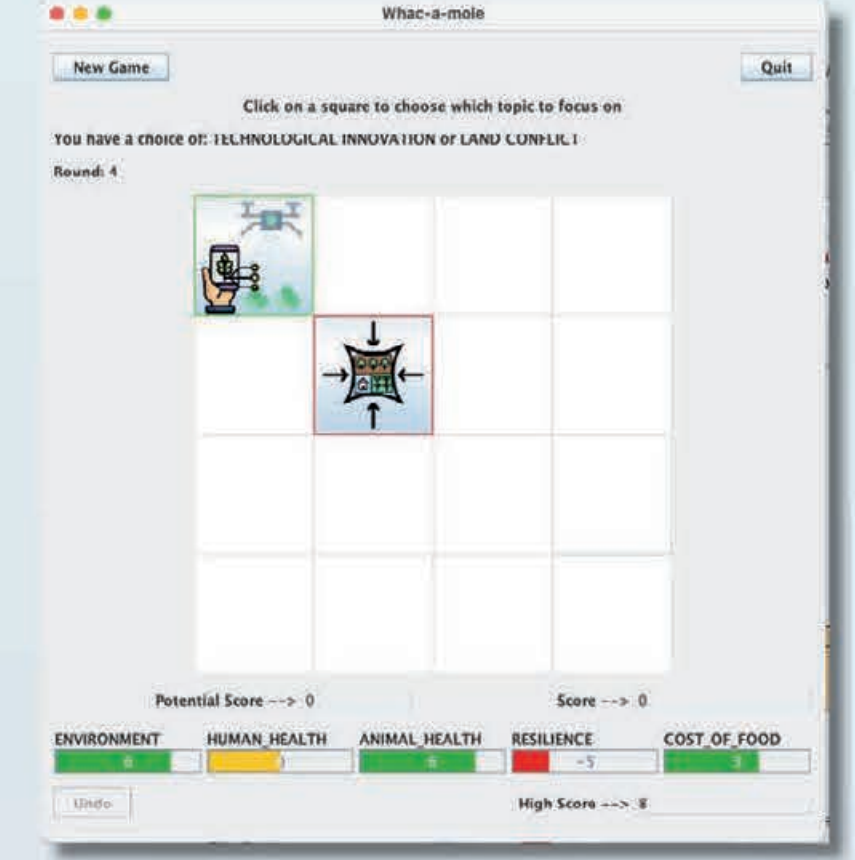
A fast-paced game where players make real-time choices about food system problems and solutions — balancing trade-offs across different priorities.

Arcade-Style Game (in Development)

Hit or ignore symbols as they pop up. Each one represents a pressing food system problem or solution. Your choices on what to hit or ignore affect your score, not just your speed.



Digital Game (in Development)



‘Top Trumps’ Sustainability Showdown

A game comparing sustainability and nutritional metrics of various foods, highlighting food choice trade-offs.

Health vs. Environmental Impacts

Choose the best card from your hand based on health and environmental impacts. Play against others, with higher or lower values winning the round.



Other Playful Interventions

These interactive activities complement the main games, offering engaging ways to explore sustainable food systems, reflect on personal choices, and encourage commitment to future food sustainability.

How Balanced is Your Plate?

Sort wooden food items onto a plate, then compare your selections with dietary guidelines.



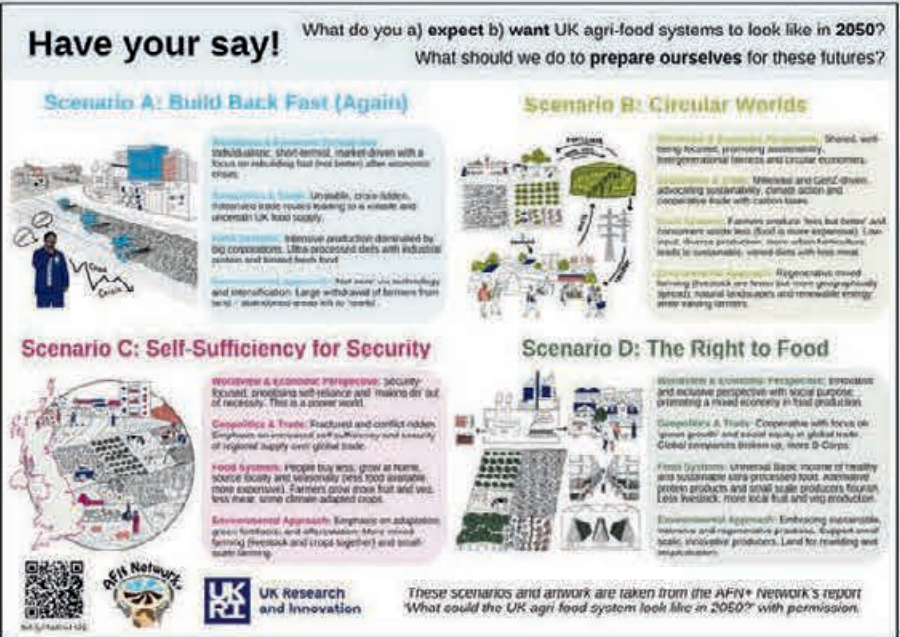
Food Sustainability Digest

Explore research on sustainable food systems.



Four Futures Voting Station

Vote on how you envision the future of food systems.



Make a Pledge Station

Pledge for sustainable food futures.



Our Approach



Playful Games & Interventions

Developed to convey food system complexities



In the Classroom

To support learning and stimulate discussion



Public Engagement

To spark curiosity and encourage dialogue



Evaluation & Insights

Surveys, focus groups & interviews to assess impact



Iterative Design

Refined to boost engagement & accessibility

Outreach in Action



Glastonbury 2024: Foodopoly Stage Performance and Stall



Glastonbury, June 2024

‘Feeding the Future’ in the Science Futures area: stall and live stage show

EFI Course, March 2025

Edinburgh Futures Institute (EFI) postgraduate food sustainability course

Coming soon, June 2025

Climate Festival & Meadows Festival in Edinburgh

Plans to digitise games & resources

To further expand their reach, making them accessible to a wider audience