



PROTEIN PRESSURES

RESEARCH FINDINGS
(AUGUST 2016)



UNIVERSITY OF
Southampton

INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH HERITAGE

Protein Pressures was a research collaboration between environmental charity, Hubbub Foundation UK, and Dr Emma Roe, BA Human Geography Programme Leader, Faculty of Social and Human Sciences (FSHS), University of Southampton. Delivery was co-ordinated with performance artist Dr. Paul Hurley.

AIMS

There is an overwhelming body of evidence that points to the need to diversify our protein consumption for future global food security. Protein Pressures sought to discover effective ways to talk about the culturally sensitive subject of meat consumption through an exploration of the public's understanding of and attitudes towards different sources of protein.

The project continued the development of the 'becoming-ecological citizen approach' created in [Foodscapes](#) in 2013 and 2014 by social geographer Dr. Emma Roe and Dr. Michael Buser.

KEY WORDS

Food, protein, community engagement, ecological citizen, sustainable communities, performative methods, ethnography, cooking, health, money, skills, meat, vegetarian

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6 KEY FINDINGS

WHAT IS PROTEIN?

Knowledge was limited about what protein is and where it is found beyond meat, dairy and nuts. Many saw pulses as protein rich but failed to identify it in vegetables and grains.

HEALTH BY STEALTH OR SCARE

Public health scares & personal health issues motivated change in protein consumption. Participants were worried about what “enough” protein looked like for children & felt that a healthy plant-based diet would require greater time and effort.

LIFE CHANGE MOMENTS

Moving house, or new friends and partners were important triggers to changes in dietary habits. Reflecting on when dietary habits have changed in the past made participants feel more able to conceive of future change.

6 KEY FINDINGS

SKILLS & CONVENIENCE

Meat dishes made up much of participant's culinary repertoire. Many felt that they could not make easy and interesting meals using plant-based protein alone. Likewise, it was deemed difficult to purchase non-meat items on the move.

ENVIRONMENT & ETHICS

Animal welfare and environmental concerns were often in the minds of participants. However, taste and cost were the key motivators for dietary choice.

FEAR OF OFFENCE

Meat was seen in many social circumstances as being a necessary part of the meal and symbolic of a special occasion. Many worried that not putting meat on the table when entertaining could cause offence.

RESEARCH ELEMENTS



LITERATURE REVIEW

March – May 2016



COMMUNITY WORKSHOPS

In Hackney, London May 10 – 25th 2016. The Protein Pressures workshops aimed to share and explore different knowledge (meanings, practices, understandings) about different forms of food protein through sociable, enjoyable and interactive activities



UTOPIAN FAIR

A participatory method continued with hummus making 24th – 26th June 2016



ONGOING TALKS

Our thanks go to Forum for the Future, the World Resources Institute and the Eating Better Coalition for their support.

METHODOLOGY

BECOMING ECOLOGICAL CITIZENS WORKSHOPS

The research was conducted using the [Becoming Ecological Citizens](#) methodology over a series of workshops and during the Somerset House Utopian Fair.

RESEARCH AIMS

The workshop methodology continued the becoming Ecological Citizens approach employed by Dr Emma Roe and team during past FoodScapes projects. The methodology employs the juxtaposition of contrasting elements (visual, interactive and discursive) to create a space for conversation around complex topics, such as food and the environment. Participants engage and explore the subject reflectively and relationally, in ways that integrate material, sensory and dialogical practices. The aim was to explore the understandings of and relationships to, protein through the food matter and preparation practices.

4 workshops were designed which would engage the participants with the proteins, through practices, preparation and exploration with other participants.



We must stop
meating
like this

FINDINGS



OVERVIEW

A complex interplay of pressures on the individual were shown to shape their protein choices. These pressures related to health, cost, personal taste, cultural heritage, convenience, culinary skills, social norms and conviviality and a range of ideas about different protein sources' relation to their health, the planet and animal welfare. Most people had a vague understanding of the different issues associated with meat consumption, but there is a gap between awareness and actually making a change.

The majority were concerned about the implications of their food choices, but were confused about what a change towards a more sustainable & healthy diet would entail.



UNDERSTANDINGS OF PROTEIN

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Where do participants think protein is found?

What do participants think protein does?

PERCEPTIONS OF WHICH FOODS CONTAIN PROTEIN

Dairy, meat, fish and nuts were more widely considered as sources of protein than plant based proteins such as vegetables and pulses. Many participants did not know that items such as soya, seeds and pulses contained protein. Awareness of vegetable based proteins such as seaweed, spinach and brassicas was even lower. Knowledge of essential amino acids was patchy and no workshop attendees could explain what a 'complete protein' was.

The plant based protein workshop taught 80% of participants something new about where protein was found and how to cook with plant based proteins in a way that would meet their dietary requirements.

“There is protein in everything, even paper, we just don’t think about it like that” (Utopian Fair)

I wasn't probably aware that much of all the plant based protein” (Workshop 2)

UNDERSTANDINGS OF PROTEIN

PERCEPTIONS OF PROTEIN'S PURPOSE

Participants had a reasonable knowledge of protein's relation to tissue repair, bone and muscle growth. There was a general notion within the group that meat protein was more effective than plant based protein with respect to growth and repair. This notion was supported by many visitors to the Utopian Fair including a pair of medics. Of those with an understanding of complete proteins, a number still felt that they would not be able to meet all of their body's needs with plant based protein alone.

Many participants and event attendees expressed concern about getting a sufficient quantity of protein, especially for their children. Ideas about meat being the protein *par excellence* were accompanied by concerns around meat eating and health, namely diet related diseases such as CHD and Type 2 diabetes.

*“Vegans seem
healthier and live
longer”* (Workshop 1)

CONSUMPTION CHOICES

REASONS FOR EATING MEAT

- Taste
- Enjoy a varied diet
- Hard to get enough protein from plants
- Expectations from family members / friends
- Simple for them to access and prepare
- Haven't thought about it really, just 'normal'

All participants ate meat although everyone said that they were keen to reduce their meat intake. Many expressed preferences for meat in smaller portions, rather than a big steak or chop. Chicken and fish consumed more frequently than red meat (including pork) by the participants. Meat eating was seen as pleasurable and as playing a positive role in a normal diet, processed alternatives to meat such as Quorn were largely dismissed on the grounds that they did not taste (or smell) like meat.

“To me, food is about the taste, I suppose”

(Workshop 3)

“Meat, I don't kind of seek it, I do like it. The only kind of cravings I get for meat is ... I want a really good steak”

(Workshop 3)

CONSUMPTION CHOICES

COST VS CONVENIENCE

There was a general feeling that eating meat is expensive, convenience is the trade off. I.e., meat is the easy option when travelling as vegetarian lunch options were seen to be limited and 'less good value' than non-meat lunch items.

Several stated that cheap or supermarket meat was not worth eating, but still bought it because they knew what to do with it.

Felt that keeping to a vegetarian diet requires a lot planning ahead to ensure that a plant based meal a) tastes good b) makes them feel full, c) provides enough protein.

Plant based was largely perceived as cheaper but convenience often won.

“Quite often there is no [non meat] option that I find a preferences for” (Workshop 3)



“I always find the vegetarian section of our meal plan in terms of finding what to eat, it's the same stuff, the struggle to find something different.” (Workshop 1)

CONSUMPTION CHOICES

IDENTITY & TASTE

Social and cultural influences are important: Preferences often related to upbringing, familiar cuts & textures, (cultural) culinary repertoire.

More women than men were veggie / vegan, some men were outspokenly defiant in sticking to meat, just because... “I’m stubborn!”

Children and teenagers were often reported to rebel with dietary choices. I.e. one grandmother shared that her grandson used to sneak out of his vegetarian Hindu family to eat meat with friends. Teenagers seemed to see veganism or vegetarianism as an identity, older participants tended to see themselves on a spectrum “flexitarian”

“I’ve seen pigs being slaughtered. You take everything from it so it doesn’t go to waste. that’s what I was brought up with. So to me it’s like normal so to speak.” (Workshop 3)



CONSUMPTION CHOICES

NICE, NORMAL, NATURAL, NUTRITIOUS – FOR WHO?

It was said on occasion that it was ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ for humans to eat meat. The same rhetoric was used for men and meat eating, in reference to the cultural construct between masculinity and meat. Enforcing this was the prevalent notion that protein (which was primarily associated with meat) was essential for muscle growth. Participants spoke of men in their lives on high protein diets and marketing that pandered to the notions of masculine strength.

“We're probably programmed as a species to go for meat, somehow. There's a conditioning there. [...] The more meat you eat, the more masculine you're going to be. That's just how people are.” (Workshop 1)

“He just ordered a full pack of things that are powders for instance, pancake mix, or peanut butter. I took the peanut butter jar that we had in the cupboard and I compared the two. Actually, okay there's slightly, slightly, like 0.3 grams more protein in it.” (Workshop 3)

“I wouldn't see a meal as a meal unless it had meat - unless it's Cheerios, they are fine [...] I ate a pulled pork substitute with jack fruit a few weeks ago but I was put off knowing that it was even fruit. I know I'm being stubborn and that there's an animal ethics issue, but really I just love meat.” (Utopian Fair)

CHANGE

Decisions to eat less meat were largely for personal reasons; awareness of global implications was comparatively low.

HEALTH

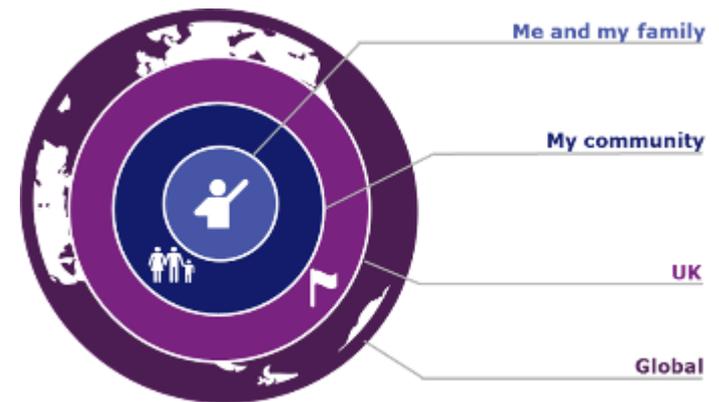
All participants spoke about “health” as a reason for deciding to eat less meat. Most spoke about this in general terms, or in relation to their weight, although some had made the change as a result of specific health issues for themselves, friends or family (e.g. IBS, cholesterol, CHD and type-2 diabetes). Public health scares such as BSE and the Horse Meat scandal were a driver for change, however public health messages around meat consumption often led to confusion. It was serious health scares that were most effective in helping people to make a radical dietary change.

“You don’t make steps like going veggie or vegan at once, unless it’s health related, then it is like changing a switch.”

(Utopian Fair)

“The nutrition things are so complicated and then something contradicts them. Day one you’re like, “Okay, so what is it?””

(Workshop 3)



CHANGE

FAMILY AND FRIENDS

Family and friends' views on eating less meat can help to trigger and sustain change...

Many noted times in life when a partner, friend or child had **inspired or influenced** their eating habits. Who had most control of the cooking was usually key to which of a couple's dietary habits was adopted. Many participants with adult children said that their children's dietary habits had introduced them to new meals and ingredients, which often involved less meat than their norm.

Conversely, many said that **families** and **social occasions** were what stopped them from going vegetarian, they would be giving up more than just meat; they would be somehow excluding themselves. Vegetarians said that Christmas is the hardest time. Family are hurt when they don't join in. Several participants expressed that they would not want to **impose their views** on their friends.

“I would never not serve meat to my in laws, they would take offense and think I had not made an effort.” (Workshop 3)

“I was the first person in my family to become a vegetarian, now mother has become a pescatarian. She’s moving in my direction!” (Utopian Fair)

CHANGE

PRICE

Just as convenience often trumped price when it came down to dinner plans, for many in the participant group the quality of meat was said to be more important than price. Participants were certainly not consistent in their choices but many mentioned that the quality of meat was important and due to usually higher cost of good quality meat, this often led to them eating less meat than they would if opting for a lower price point.

Participants mentioned going vegetarian for a period at times of financial strain, but this was never reported to have led to a conversion to vegetarian long term, and may well for some of the participants have a rebound effect where they ended up over compensating for the period of abstinence.

“Supermarket meat... sometimes it smells and is brown, especially the chicken. The skin tears really easily, it's sort of transparent. The chicken hasn't been protected very well, and it's not something that you want to eat. I find that farmer's markets particularly, you can tell they really take care of the meat. It's a little bit more expensive because there's a benefit to it.” (Workshop 3)

CHANGE

LIFE CHANGE MOMENTS: LOOKING BACK LOOKING FORWARD

Unsurprisingly, key moments of change in participant's lives such as leaving home, moving area or new relationships led to extreme dietary changes. Likewise market and policy changes also bore weight on what was available and consumed.

While this may tell us little in and of itself, helping participants to see the dietary changes undergone within their living memory, did help in opening them to the possibility of change in their future diet.



CHANGE

MEDIA

Media consumption influenced awareness of what you can do with meat alternatives and ethical, environmental and health concerns. Animal welfare was a reasonably strong influence in decisions to cut down on meat, most had gained information on animal welfare through online media and documentaries. Teenagers were an impressionable group on issues of welfare, with many long term adult vegetarians stating that they had turned vegetarian in their youth for ethical reasons.

The food documentary films that were given to participants to borrow if they wished raised awareness of some of the environmental issues associated with meat consumption. Many had prior knowledge of the 2016 USA documentary 'Cowspiracy' and those who had seen it said that it had shocked them and altered their thinking, especially in the case of dairy's environmental footprint. Many mentioned media focus on overfishing and how this had influenced their fish choices. As stated, media reporting on health scares did in many cases lead to dietary change.

“I stopped eating tuna after seeing ‘Sushi: The Global Catch’ ” (Utopian Fair)

“I was scared of the meat, when watching ‘Food Inc’.... . I don't know what shall we eat for my health and my safety.” (Workshop 3)

CHANGE

ENVIRONMENT AND ANIMAL WELFARE

Animal welfare issues and environmental issues were usually conflated, often both were referred to in one answer.

For the majority of meat eaters, issues of animal welfare were often half known, many did not want to know but were largely optimistic about the situation, feeling that standards are improving. The same cohort were happy to buy free range eggs and had a confidence in certification and labels. Likewise, many said that they “saved” their meat consumption to eating out, shifting responsibility for procurement onto the restaurant.

For many there was a feeling that they should change but what this change would entail was less clear. In the face of competing advice, participants stuck to what they knew or options with cost or health incentives.



CHANGE

ENVIRONMENT

Those with a greater awareness of the environmental issues linked to the meat and dairy industry expressed anger at the limited attention that was given to the issue. Cowspiracy, although set in the US, seemed to have tapped into a love of a conspiracy theory.

A young group talked about how meat had been demonised recently, questioning why this hadn't come out earlier suggesting a meat company cover up. They felt that it will be hard to get people to diversify protein, as supermarkets have an interest in selling meat over pulses because of greater profit margins and supermarkets have a lot of power in their marketing.





OPPORTUNITIES



OPPORTUNITIES

- There has never been an easier time to eat less meat, especially for urban dwellers
- Big appetite for easy, tasty and affordable recipes for plant-based meals
- Diversification or limiting animal-based protein is an easier sell than a no meat message. Helping a mainstream audience swap beef and lamb for lighter alternatives, or to follow a plant-based diet once or twice a week
- Tangible examples help to raise awareness of the environmental cost of meat production, the comparison of transport emissions to meat and dairy emissions was potent
- Engage the young before cultural prejudices permeate
E.g. a mother visited the Utopia stall and wanted to take the kids to KFC as she didn't see the hummus that they were making as a meal or something that the kids would eat, despite the fact that the kids were happily cooking and eating it



OPPORTUNITIES

- Help those already making a shift to find their voice and support friends
- Tap into pivotal life change moments, how can better eating habits be introduced with these life changes
- Tap into the trend for eating less red and processed meat
- Harness current trends in moderation
- Play to desires for smaller portions of meat, let plants take the centrepiece of the meal
- Help consumers to value the meat that they do buy as participants were willing to pay a premium when they could see benefit.

EAT MORE COTTAGE CHEESE

SUPPLIES MORE PROTEIN THAN

ONE POUND

YOU'LL NEED LESS MEAT

A Postal Card Will Bring Recipes
for using this meat substitute
U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE, WASHINGTON, D. C.

COTTAGE CHEESE OR MEAT ? ASK YOUR POCKETBOOK !

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE COMMUNICATIONS

MAKE ME FEEL GOOD

MESSAGING TO BE POSITIVE, UPBEAT AND FOCUS ON WHAT IS GAINED BY DIVERSIFYING PROTEIN, NOT WHAT IS GIVEN UP

- Tap into people's personal, immediate concerns around health and cost
- Use ethical issues to sustain not trigger changes to diet: people are more motivated by their own immediate needs, concerns and circumstances

SPREAD THE WORD

MANY PEOPLE BELIEVE MEAT IS IRREPLACEABLE AND PROVIDES ESSENTIAL NUTRIENTS. EDUCATE ABOUT ALTERNATIVES

- Promote and expose people to ingredients they may not be aware of – people are afraid of what they do not know
- Raise awareness of the protein content of alternatives and essential amino acids
- Make the lifestyles of 'less meat' proponents aspirational

INCREASE THE EASE

MEAT IS CURRENTLY THE CONVENIENT DEFAULT OPTION, ALTHOUGH NOT INHERENTLY CONVENIENT

- Most seemed willing to incorporate more plant-based protein into their diet as long as these meal choices were convenient, varied, easy to make, and cheap, More varied less meat menu options and recipes should be made available.
- Less meat convenience foods such as ready meals may serve as a gateway drugs

WHAT'S NEXT FROM HUBBUB

CONTINUED AMBITION

- To find innovative and effective ways to encourage a mainstream audience to eat less meat (not necessarily no meat).
- To change the narrative and challenge common misconceptions which exist around meat consumption.
- To build a 'coalition of the willing' – diverse organisations who share this common goal.



WHAT'S NEXT FROM HUBBUB

ENGAGE STAGE 1

AUG 2016

Panel discussion:

“What’s the role of the creative industry in engaging people with their protein choices?”

Recipe book: Lighter: Reimagining Britain’s Favourite Dinners (less meat)

Protein packaging: with a twinkle in its eye

Do It Day: Submit men & meat brief

COALITION STAGE 2

SEPT 2016

Create a new coalition of diverse organisations working to find innovative and effective ways to encourage a mainstream audience to eat less meat.

TRIAL STAGE 3

JAN 2017

Develop a series of highly targeted campaigns to increase awareness, challenge preconceptions and change behaviour. 1st campaign ‘Men and Meat’.

SCALE STAGE 4

LATE 2017

Following measurements of targeted trials, scale up successful campaigns using: posters and advertising, social Media, recipes, events, media stunts and Interactive displays / installations.

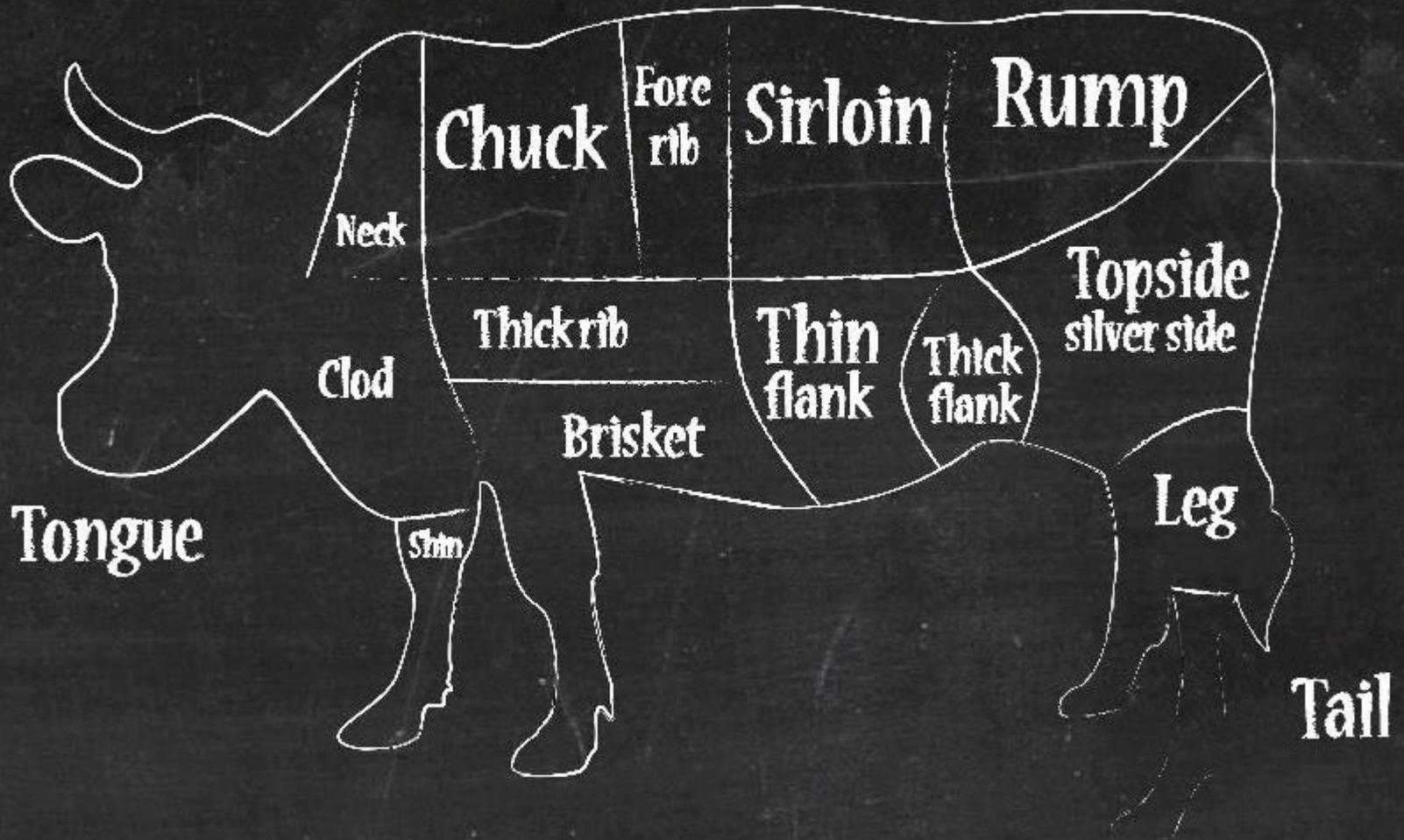
LET'S TALK ABOUT THE MEATY ISSUE

GET IN TOUCH:
HELLO@HUBBUB.ORG.UK
@HUBBUBUK



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APPENDICES



APPENDIX 1: THE WORKSHOPS

OVERVIEW

In total the team hosted seven cooking workshops in the London borough of Hackney with 20 members of the public. The participants were recruited with help from Hackney Council and Made in Hackney Community Kitchen. The workshops were free and open to all. The research team attended and participated in all workshops, directing and prompting the conversation where necessary. All sessions were recorded.

The sessions were a space for conversation, cooking and eating. Through task and discussion groups, participants shared reflections on their protein choices. Each workshop focused on a **different type of protein: plant-based, chicken, fish, dairy and eggs**. Similarly, the focus of the group discussions ranged from **'plant protein'**, **'protein and the body'**, **'my food life'** and the **'future of food'**. The workshops provided rich insights into how people perceive protein, as well as the barriers and opportunities to diversifying protein.

Participants were given a disposable camera in the first session and asked to take pictures of their food for the week. A notebook was also given for personal use throughout the workshops, participants were able to share from the note book with the group as they wished. A library of 4 DVDs was also made available throughout the workshop process. Films included: The End of the Line, Food Inc, the Moo Man, Cowspiracy.

THE WORKSHOPS

OBJECTIVES

To share and explore meanings, practices, understandings about how different forms of thing becoming food protein are produced, their sustainability and their meaning to the individual

To share and explore 'knowledge' on food protein cooking skills and consumption cultures.

To analyse the material cultures, practices and performances of protein production, processing/cooking and consumption.

Understand how change has happened and could happen in people's food lives - diet, health, food intolerances, ecological practices.



THE WORKSHOPS

THE PARTICIPANT SAMPLE

North East London Residents, from early 20's to early 70's.
The demographic of the group was broad, bringing together men and women from different age groups, nationalities and social backgrounds.

14/20 attendees attended all 4 workshops (participants were recruited in advance, but 2 workshops attendees joined the group in passing at the venue and stayed for the remainder of sessions)

Residents were split into 2 group A and group B. Group A were able to attend sessions in the day time what group B attended sessions in the evening.

FIELDWORK DATES

10th May, 20th May, 25th May, 27th May.



THE WORKSHOPS

CONTENT WORKSHOPS 1

Group A and B participants attended together. The first of the workshops took the form of an informal meal, where all participants gathered to introduce themselves and taste a range of protein based dishes.

Objectives

- Project introduction
- Sharing food (Sausage Rolls, Cashew Nut Cheese and Pickle Onion, Bean, Halloumi Skewers, Liver Pate on Toast, Pizza Bites w/Mozzarella, Tomato and Sea Spinach Salad, Tofu Mince Sausage on Sticks, Arancini Balls with bugs)
- Participating in focus group/discussion around a menu of different courses of protein-related topics
- Begin to get an understanding of project participants' food lives and of their expectations of the project
- Distribute disposable cameras and scrapbooks

THE WORKSHOPS

CONTENT WORKSHOPS 2

Group A and B participants attended separately

The second workshop involved an introduction to plant based protein, from plant based cookery school Made In Hackney. Attendees were given an introduction to plant based food and then cooked a plant based lunch together.

Objectives

- Continue to build group dynamics
- Develop understanding of participants' individual knowledge and daily practices around protein and environment.
- Carry out a group food prep / cooking activity, as a basis for conversation.
- Distribute DVDs

THE WORKSHOPS

CONTENT WORKSHOPS 3

Group A and B participants attended separately

The third workshop took place at Redmond Community Centre, the discussion topic was Protein & the body; both the body of the individual but also the body of the animal. Discussions covered tastes and textures, squeamishness, offal, acceptability of edibility, protein and muscle, health and bowels.

Objectives

- Review participants' protein photo diaries
- Develop understanding of participants' individual knowledge and daily practices around protein and the body, using photo diaries as an aid for this.
- Explore: Relationships between protein and the human body - e.g. taste, texture, nutrition, muscle, fat, passing wind
Understandings of interiority and exteriority, psyche and soma, human and non-human (animal, plant, abject, body parts), other bodies (images on food packaging and in magazines, bodies of partners, children, pets, etc.)
- How consciously participants incorporate protein into daily diets
- Carry out a group food prep / cooking activity, as a basis for conversation

THE WORKSHOPS

CONTENT WORKSHOPS 4

Group A and B participants attended separately

The fourth workshop took place at Redmond Community Centre, the discussion topic was my food life, looking back, looking forward.

Objectives

- To identify past and possible future moments of change, in relation to individuals' food lives, and to explore catalysts and obstacles to these.
- Continue explorations of different protein sources through different forms of milk alternatives.
- To consolidate co-learning and understandings from previous workshops, reflect and feedback from participants and PP team about all of our journeys.
- Dr Emma Roe to give a talk on the dairy industry
- Carry out a group prep activity around different forms of milks as a basis for discussions

APPENDIX 2: THE UTOPIA FAIR

OVERVIEW

All AHRC funded initiatives were required to exhibit their research at Somerset House over the course of a weekend 24-26th June. The Protein Pressures team chose to open the research questions to a wider audience through a set of interactive features including hummus making, a personal food timeline, a body board and a protein shop highlighting issues associated with different forms of protein. The stall was manned by the research team. The researchers participated in the activities alongside members of the public in order to continue conversations. Insights from the day are included in this paper.

METHOD

Informal conversations with the public. My Food Life, and attitudes towards food and the body were mapped on a board.

SAMPLE

Minors and adults passing through Somerset House during the course of the weekend. Tourists and UK residents.

FIELDWORK DATES

24th – 26th June 2016