
Report: TRI-SoMe Chicken Stakeholder Workshop 1

London December 2024

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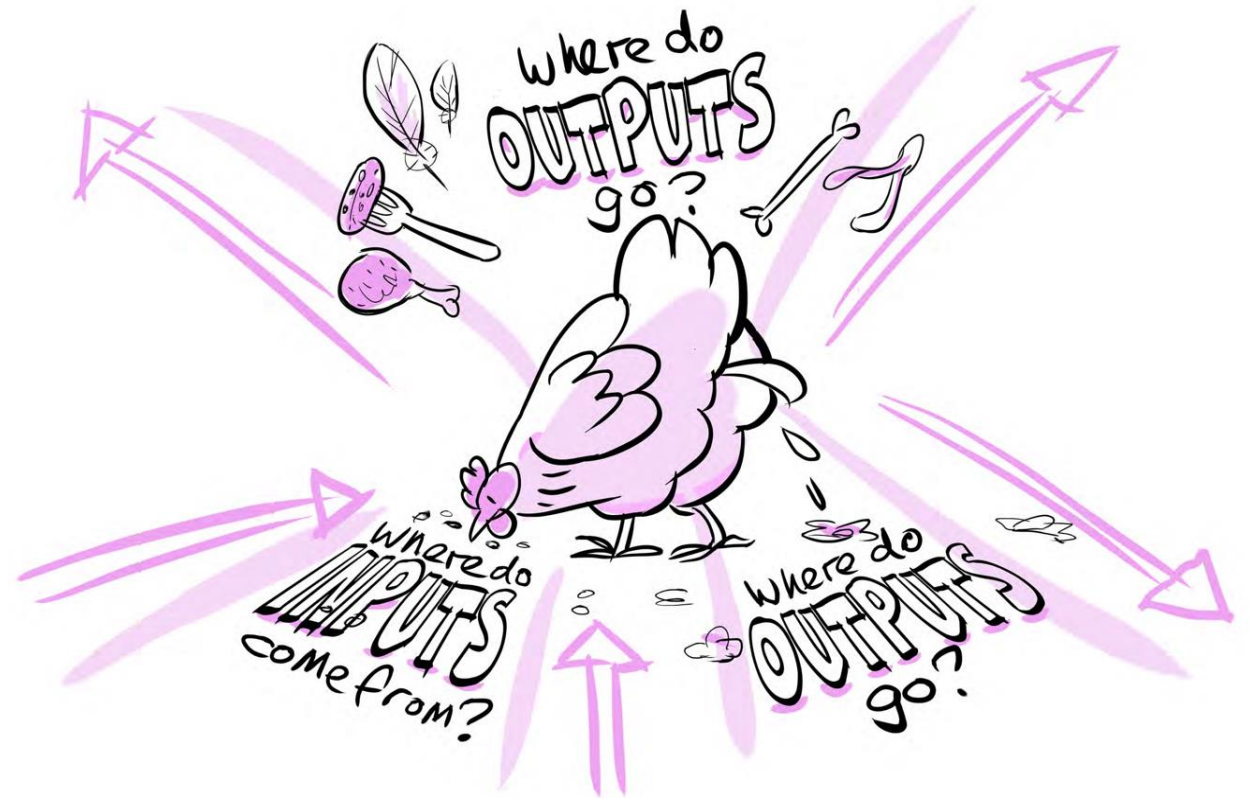
TRI-SoMe Chicken is a three-year project funded by UK Research and Innovation and Defra to strengthen the resilience of the UK food system. The project launched with a stakeholder workshop, hosted at the Royal Society of Chemistry, London, in December 2024

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1. The Problem

Around 1bn chickens are grown in the UK every year, and we rely on chicken to provide around 50% of the meat eaten in the UK. It has come to be seen as a cheap, healthy and sustainable protein source. Chicken is at once ubiquitous and invisible – grown in sheds hidden in the rural landscape but creating visible impacts on the environment (in the UK and internationally), a staple food of homes and takeaways but consumed in pieces or products that don't resemble the original bird.



There are growing calls for industrial chicken production to be made more resilient, as part of wider efforts to strengthen food system resilience in the UK. We need to find strategies for the food system to respond to, and to safeguard and recover from, a range of geopolitical, economic, and climate shocks, while providing the population with socially-just access to sufficiently nutritious food and protecting animal welfare and ecosystems.

In December 2024, the development of a New National Food Strategy was announced, building on the 2021 National Food Strategy and the UK Food Security Report 2024 to address Food Security, Health, Environment, and Economy. It is clear that a food systems approach is necessary to understand the big picture of food – its production, its processing and its consumption - and how chicken fits into this.

2. The Project

In 2024 UK Research and Innovation ran a call for research projects that would strengthen the resilience of the UK food system, by taking a food systems approach and considering cascading risks. TRI-SoMe Chicken (Towards Resilient Industrial Socio-Metabolics of Chicken) was awarded £1.7m as part of this, to bring together researchers (from Universities of Southampton, Gloucestershire and Bristol, and City St George's University of London) with industry partners (Applied Group and FAI farms) for a three-year project.





What if we thought
of **LONG TERM**
food system resilience as
RESTORING METABOLIC
BALANCE?

...Getting
metabolic
relations
(& regulatory
bodies)
IN TUNE...



...so that all life is
HEALTHIER & MORE
RESILIENT
(which includes US!)

TRI-SoMe Chicken aims:

- i. To understand human and chicken vulnerability and resilience in relation to natural, socio economic and geo-political shocks
- ii. To model past, present and future chicken production and processing in relation to welfare, environments, markets and trade, to enhance human and ecological resilience
- iii. To develop an ethical policy-instrument and framework to address UK food system resilience risk-management.

3. The Workshop

In December 2024 TRI-SoME Chicken was launched at a stakeholder workshop in central London. It brought together 25 delegates including researchers, project partners, and representatives from the poultry industry, food business, and from food, animal welfare and environmental NGOs.

The workshop included presentations and sessions led by team members and stakeholder representatives. A lot of time was spent in small group discussions, which were documented in artist and scribe Sam Church's illustrations, some of which are included in this report.

The aims of the workshop were to:

- build new connections between people and organisations
- hear different perspectives about food production, consumption and resilience, in relation to chicken
- develop research questions that are relevant to stakeholders
- shape the next steps of the TRI-SoME Chicken project

4. What we heard

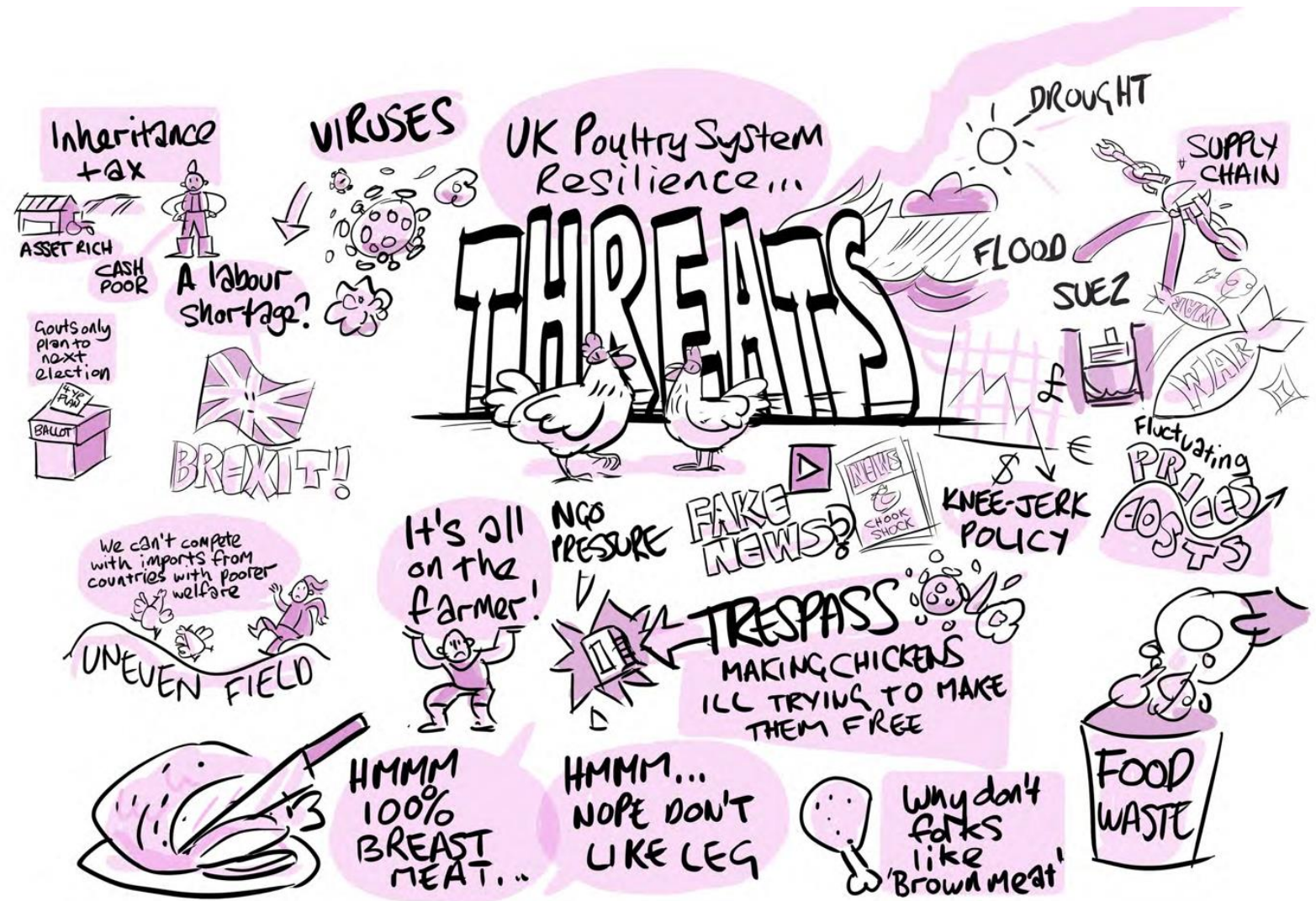
The workshop kicked off with an introduction and overview by **Prof Emma Roe**, School of Geography and Environmental Science, University of Southampton, who is Project Lead. This set the scene for the research and policy context of the topic, and the interdisciplinary food systems approach that the project is taking.

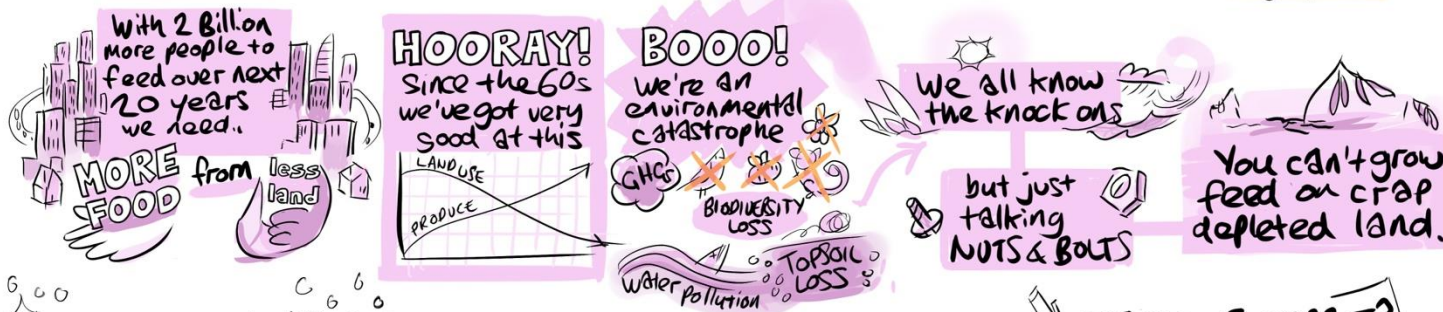
The project brings together specialists from industry and from different academic disciplines (geography, social science, animal welfare, public health) to create new understandings and solutions for complex challenges.



There followed three presentations from expert practitioner perspectives.

The first was from **Matt Donald**, a pig and poultry farmer and member of the NFU poultry board, who spoke about the challenges and opportunities facing UK farmers including biosecurity, extreme weather, imports and new technologies.





The second presentation was from **Chris Docherty**, Senior Fellow, World Wildlife Fund, and Managing Director, Windward Commodities, who presented about global markets, agricultural land use, impacts and solutions. These included WWF's Codex Planetarius, a proposed system of minimum environmental performance standards to improve the sustainability of globally traded food and soft commodities.

The third presentation was from **Richard Griffiths**, Chief Executive of the British Poultry Council, who outlined the industry's priorities as providing nutritious food for all, ensuring smooth and fair trade, managing avian influenza, and striking a balance between animal welfare and the environment. He also responded to questions about food (in)security and the potential role of the poultry industry to be more involved in discussions about hunger, food poverty, and school meals.



The workshop also involved short presentations and provocations from the TRI-SoMe academic team:

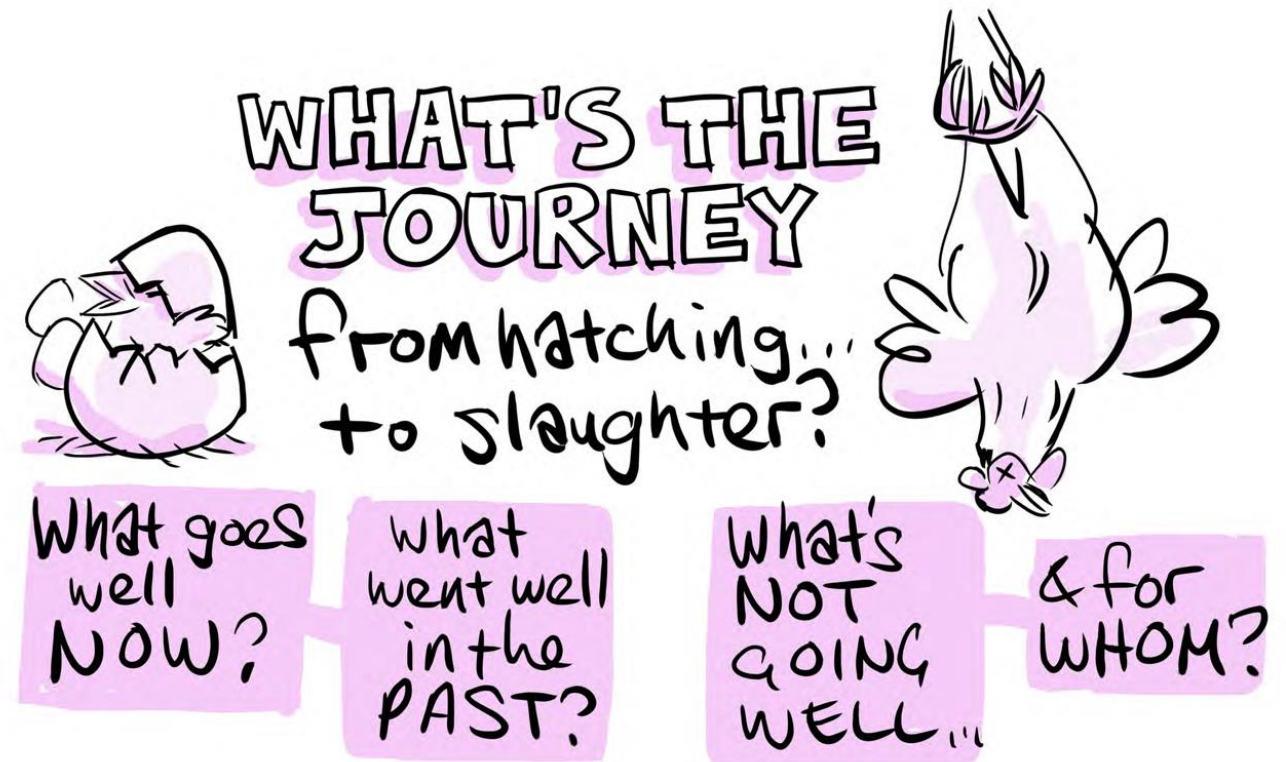
- **Dominic Watters** spoke about living experiences of food poverty and food insecurity, and how the needs of the most vulnerable humans and communities are included in the system;
- **Prof Damian Maye** talked about how the chicken body has changed through genetics and food, and about the power dynamics between producers, consumers and intermediaries;
- **Dr Sarah Lambton** presented on the idea of sentient animals and animal welfare, including existing frameworks like the ‘five freedoms’;
- **Prof Christina Vogel** spoke about the role of the food environment and processed foods in public health, and the need for joined up approaches to food policy solutions.
- **Dr Theo Stanley** reflected on what the concept of resilience has meant over time, and how it has recently been mapped onto food systems;
- **Dr Ali Parsa** gave an introduction to Systems Dynamics Modelling, which will be used to understand causal relations and feedback loops in the food system.

5. What we discussed

The rest of the morning was spent in small group discussions responding to prompts from the project team.

Discussion 1: Industrialised Chicken Journeys

The first of these discussions explored what knowledge was in the room about industrialised chicken, from its origins to its destinations. Participants mapped the different journeys of chicken across times (days, weeks, months, years, decades) and spaces (hatchery, units, fields, abattoir, processing plants, rivers, high streets, supermarkets, plates, stomachs).



Questions about industrialised chicken journeys included:

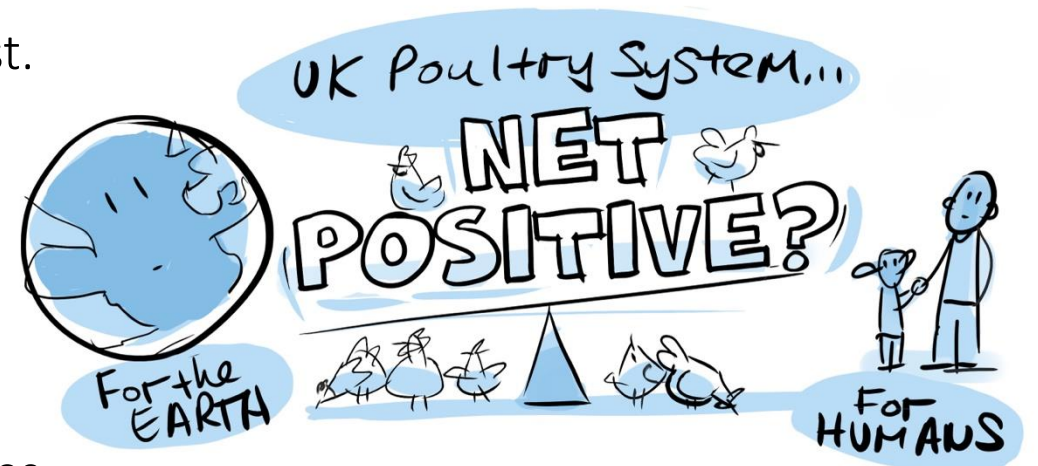
- Where do the inputs come from that support industrialised chicken life?
- What is the journey of the chicken from hatching to slaughter?
- Where do the outputs, the waste from producing industrialised chicken life go?
- Where do the outputs, where does the meat, the feather, the bone from producing industrialised chicken life go?

Discussions were in depth and expansive, and touched on wide-ranging topics that included industrial efficiency, political decisions, marketing, imports, deforestation, flavour preferences, food safety, breeding technologies, slaughter age, fast food and healthy food.

Discussion 2: Identifying strengths and weaknesses of chicken for UK Food System Resilience

The second discussion identified points where things are and are not going well for making a resilient UK poultry food system, and where they have or haven't gone well in the past.

Strengths discussed included the development of safer and more efficient housing for chickens, the shift from chickens being valued for eggs to being valued for meat, the affordability of chicken meat, innovations in genetics, feed and husbandry. Weaknesses identified included welfare issues associated with intensification, consumer health concerns around processed and fast food, and the lack of UK self sufficiency around chicken feed.



6. Research questions

The final session was spent co-developing research questions for the project – identifying stakeholder’s priorities and how they might be addressed. These have been clustered around the following themes:

Consumption

- What role does education (of consumers, of industry members) play in this conversation?
- How much does a consumer of chicken care what a chicken consumes?
- What viable, accessible, palatable alternatives are there to chicken-based meals?
- How can chicken shops be opportunities for agriculture and for health, as well as for community and culture?

Production

- How can we change the assumption that UK consumers don’t eat dark chicken meat?
- How can we challenge the ‘go big or go home’ approach of poultry intensification?
- What will happen to chicken consumption in the medium and long term future?
- How can we move away from imported soy feed in the UK?

Chickens

- How can we make sure that birds have a life worth living, and a humane death?
- Is it farmers' responsibility to ensure that children are fed?
- Is improved animal welfare for the benefit of humans or chickens?
- How can we address carcass balance and welfare challenges together?

System resilience

- How can UK food system resilience be part of global food system resilience?
- What can we – as food citizens, not just consumers- do to help shape better systems?
- Why does chicken have to address issues of food poverty and inequality, more than other food or sectors?

7. What's next

The project will continue until 2027, during which time it will continue the conversation with its expanding stakeholder group, to develop routes to impact in industry, policy and among consumers.

This will take place through six-monthly meetings across the UK, and through a programme of research interviews and site visits with industry, government and third sector stakeholders across the supply chain.

If you would like to get involved, please get in touch with E.J.Roe@soton.ac.uk

