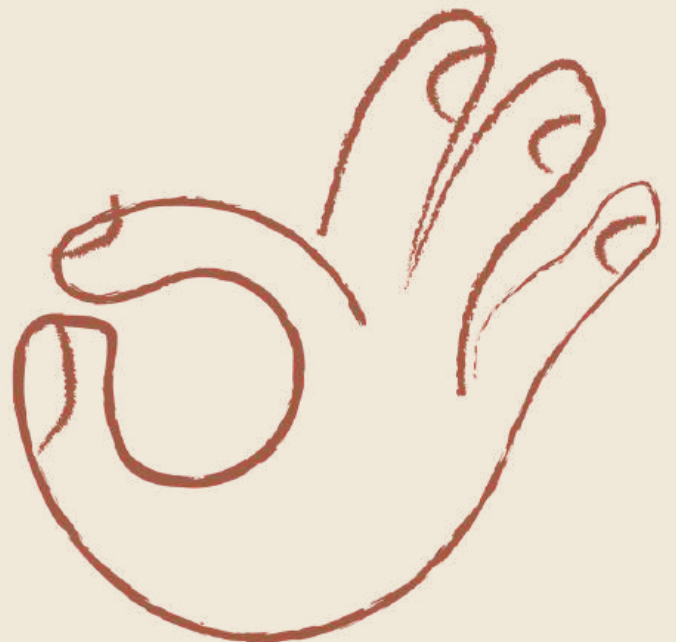


GROW IT, TASTE IT, QUESTION IT

The Future Food Lab — a modular method for youth work.

Nobody comes to an event because of sustainability. They come because they are curious, because they want to do something together, or because they want to eat something good. This is a handbook about what you can build on that.



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How to use this publication



This is not a project report. It is the method, written so that you can run a version of it without us — and without a laboratory, a kitchen or a budget.

It is organised so you can enter at the depth you need.

IF YOU HAVE	READ	YOU WILL GET
20 minutes	Parts I and II	The premise, the design logic and the four principles
An afternoon	Add Part III	A catalogue of fourteen stations you can run
A planning day	Add Parts IV and V	Hygiene, evaluation, embedding, and what we got wrong
A partnership to design	All of it	Including the sector framing and the recognition layer

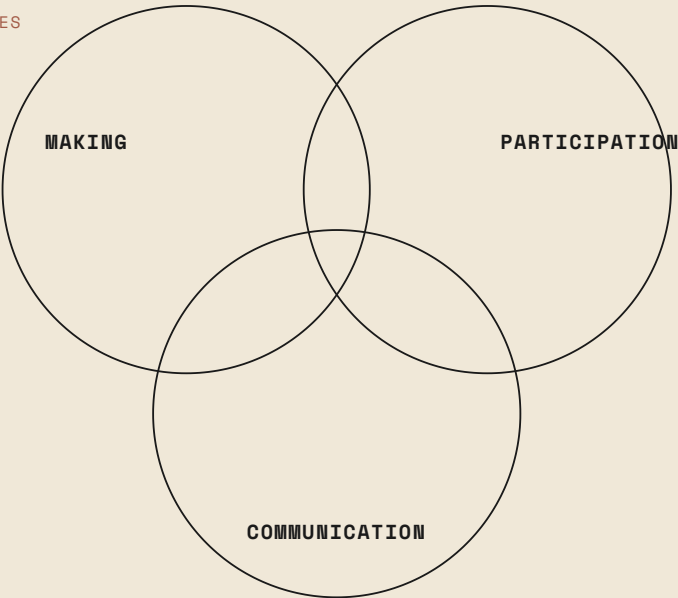
Everything referred to here is openly licensed and available through the Future Food Cookbook at

futurefoodlab.eu. Take what works. Change what does not. Tell us what happened.

DIAGRAM D1

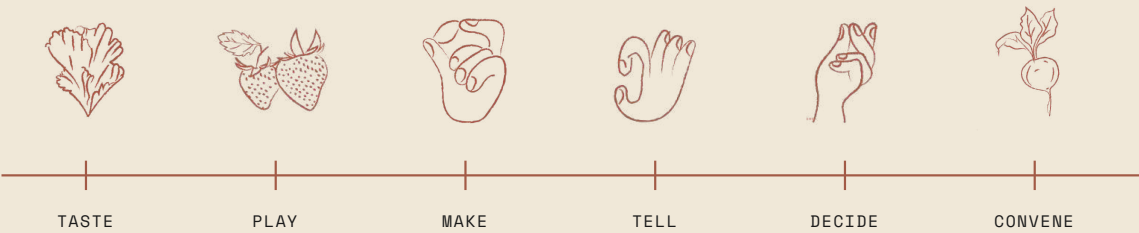
The Future Food Lab at a glance

THE THREE CAPABILITIES

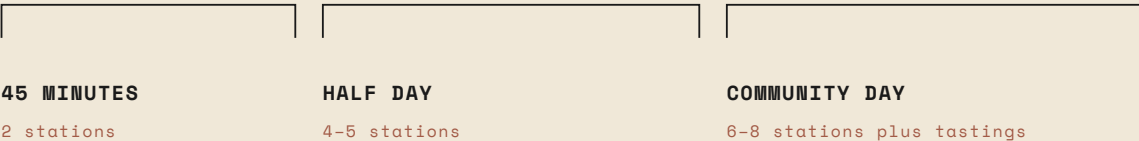


No single organisation holds all three.

SIX CLUSTERS OF STATION – THE CONSTANT



THE ASSEMBLY – WHAT CHANGES



The case



01

A challenge too big for a discussion round



Researchers at the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research have shown something that ought to be better known: it is physically possible to give ten billion people a balanced diet without breaching the planetary boundaries that keep the Earth system stable. The obstacle is not the biophysics of food. It is production methods, supply chains, consumption habits and, above all, what ordinary people understand about the system they eat from and feel able to do about any of it.

Youth work is well placed to work on that last part, and rarely does. When sustainable food appears in a youth programme it usually arrives as information — a session on the carbon footprint of beef, a slide on food miles, a discussion round about the Planetary Health Diet. The knowledge lands and evaporates, because nothing in the experience asks the young person to do anything with it.

What we hear from young people is not indifference. It is overload: too much information, too many contradictions, too much moralising, and

no obvious first step. Before designing this project we searched the Erasmus+ Project Results Platform for youth projects on future food. We found awareness campaigns and discussion formats. We found almost nothing that let young people produce food and then think about it.

Future Food Labs — an Erasmus+ KA210 small-scale partnership in the youth field, running from December 2024 to June 2026 — was built around a deliberately provocative answer to that gap. If we want young people to take the future of food seriously, why not help them produce it? Not metaphorically. Actually produce it: cultivate microalgae in a bioreactor assembled from low-cost parts, ferment vegetables that would have been thrown away, press a biscuit from alternative protein and argue about whether it counts as food.

Two years later the format we ended up with is not the one we applied with. That gap is the most useful thing we have to offer, and this handbook is organised around it.

02

Nobody comes for sustainability





A tasting at a community day. The politics arrive afterwards, carried by the taste. Messejana, January 2026.

Start here, because everything else in this handbook follows from it.

Young people rarely come to an event because of sustainability. They come because they are curious, because they want to experience something together, or because they want to try good food. If you get that entry right, conversations about food, health and climate change happen almost by themselves.

This is not a communications trick. It is a design instruction. It means the first decision you make about a session is not what you want to teach but what you are offering — and that the offer has to be genuinely attractive on its own terms, before any learning objective is attached to it.

Food is unusually good at this, for four reasons that are worth separating.

IT IS EVERYONE'S EVERYDAY

Everybody eats. There is no prior knowledge threshold, no vocabulary to acquire before you can

have an opinion, and no group in a youth centre that is excluded from the topic by definition. Compare this with almost any other sustainability entry point.

IT IS PLEASURABLE BEFORE IT IS POLITICAL

A tasting is a good time. The politics arrive afterwards, carried by the taste rather than announced in advance. The recurring practitioner rule across two years of labs is blunt: it has to taste good — then everyone listens to you. And its corollary: if the food tastes good, they also want to know how the food works.

IT CARRIES ALMOST EVERYTHING

Climate, health, technology, culture, migration, inequality, waste, land use, water, labour. You can hang all of it on food without wagging your finger at anyone. Very few subjects available to youth work have that carrying capacity.

DISAGREEMENT IS SAFE

Differences of opinion about food are fine, and saying so out loud early changes the temperature of a room. A young person can dislike insect protein, refuse to give up meat, or think the whole thing is overblown, and still be fully inside the activity. Formats that require agreement to function will lose exactly the participants you most wanted.

THE INVERSION THAT FOLLOWS

If nobody comes for sustainability, then the quality of your entry point matters more than the quality of your content. We spent more time designing the first ten minutes of a station than the twenty after it — and that ratio was right.

03

A partnership of equals, three blind spots covered



Future Food Labs brought together three deliberately mismatched partners, each indispensable and none sufficient alone. Saliko, a communication studio in rural Lower Bavaria, works on video, simple-language learning and the craft of making complex topics legible to people who are not already experts — over twenty years of communication, exhibition and experience design, applied to education for the first time. Lichen, a social-innovation laboratory in Barcelona, specialises in participatory methods and in building inclusive spaces with young people facing multiple disadvantages, particularly young migrant women. Buinho is a rural FabLab in Messejana, in Portugal's Baixo Alentejo, working for almost a

decade at the convergence of art, technology and society, with a maker, DIY, low-cost ethos.

Two of the three were newcomers to Erasmus+, finding their footing in European cooperation for the first time — itself a small act of capacity-building written into the partnership's design.

This points to the first methodological lesson, because it is so often ignored in practice. Building practical paths to more sustainable food draws on biology and electronics, on communication, and on the social skill of getting a sceptical group of young people into the room and keeping them there. An organisation that tries to deliver all of that alone almost always ends up delivering a thin version of each.

The most valuable competences in a sustainability project are rarely held by one organisation. Interdisciplinarity here is not a buzzword but a structural necessity.

Read the table below as a checklist rather than a description of us. If you are running a food lab alone, these are the three capabilities you need to

find somewhere — in your own team, in a partner organisation, in a local volunteer, or in the person who runs the community café down the road.

CAPABILITY	WHAT IT DOES	WITHOUT IT
Making	Digital fabrication, electronics, biolab practice, DIY. Turns an idea about food systems into an object that works.	Your labs stay illustrative. Participants discuss production instead of producing.
Participation	Inclusive facilitation, structured co-creation, question boards, evaluation of what people actually said.	Your labs inform without changing anyone's mind, and the quiet participants stay quiet.
Communication	Simple language, photography, visual identity, storytelling. Makes a complex topic legible to non-experts.	Good work happens and nobody outside the room ever learns it happened.

WHAT THE EXCHANGE ACTUALLY PRODUCED

The transfers between partners were concrete, and they went in every direction. Saliko learned from Lichen how to build and — more importantly — how to read a participatory question board: how you phrase a question so that the answers tell you something, and what you do with the pattern once it appears. Lichen learned from Saliko how a set of design templates becomes a physical station, an event and a communication object. Both learned from Buinho how to build and run a bioreactor,

and what a lab mindset feels like from the inside. Buinho took back participatory methods that, in its own words, simply do not exist in the rural area.

The filming of the project's introduction videos doubled as a skills-transfer session: teleprompter use, lighting setups, background design, working in front of a camera. This is worth copying. A production task with a real output is a better training format than a training session about production.

THE RURAL ARGUMENT, STATED PLAINLY

The structural problem of the rural periphery is the chronic absence of critical mass: too few neighbouring organisations doing comparable work, too few international opportunities reaching local young people, and a slow, almost invisible exclusion from the European conversation. Erasmus+ is, in practical terms, the mechanism that manufactures the critical mass that geography otherwise denies.

The method



From a workshop programme to a modular lab



We applied with a series of workshops. Five video workshops, eight communication design workshops, four zero food waste workshops, two community events. Fixed formats, fixed lengths, fixed content.

What we ended up with is a modular Future Food Lab: a toolkit of tastings, learning stations, games, experiments, creative tasks and participatory methods, from which an organisation assembles its own lab — from a short workshop to a whole community event.

The change was not a retreat. It was the single most important design decision of the project, and it came from iterative feedback: from participants, from youth workers, and from partners watching each other work.

WHY THE SERIES FAILED AND THE LAB WORKED

Three pressures pushed in the same direction.

The first was time. Youth workers told us plainly: find shorter formats, it must not be so time-intensive; in a youth centre, formats have to be

shorter. And the deeper version of the same point — if young people see that something takes forever, they will not join in at all. A modular lab lets someone enter after it has started and leave before it ends without breaking anything.

The second was venue. A workshop series needs its own room, its own audience and its own logistics. A lab travels. The same set of stations ran at an innovation festival, in a school for health professions, in a social café, at a community dinner and in a teacher training — four genuinely different educational contexts, without redesigning the concept each time.

The third was the subject itself. Future food is very broad. We deliberately designed different stations, each one standing for a different climate-and-food goal, so that the many-sidedness of the problem becomes visible and sustainable eating is not reduced to a single solution. A linear workshop implies there is one answer at the end. A room of stations says the opposite, structurally, before anyone speaks.

It pays off to think in learning stations.

WHAT "MODULAR" MEANS IN PRACTICE

It means four things, and all four have to hold or the format collapses back into a workshop.

Each station is self-contained. It has its own entry, its own payoff and its own artefact. Nothing in station four depends on having done station two.

Each station can be run alone. If you only ever run the fridge game, you have run a Future Food Lab.

Participants choose. They decide where to start, what to go deeper into and how long to stay. This

produced many individual learning paths and many conversations — and it is also why dwell times were long. At the social café lab, many visitors stayed over an hour.

The set is reusable. Posters and exhibition materials were built to be used across events. Station props, furniture and the project mascot were made from upcycled materials and built to survive many hands. A station you have to rebuild every time is a station you will run twice.

Learning Experience Design: ask the right question first



This is the part we would most want another organisation to copy, and it costs nothing.

Before designing any station, we did not ask what information should we convey. We asked what experience should the participants have, and what should be conveyed between the lines.

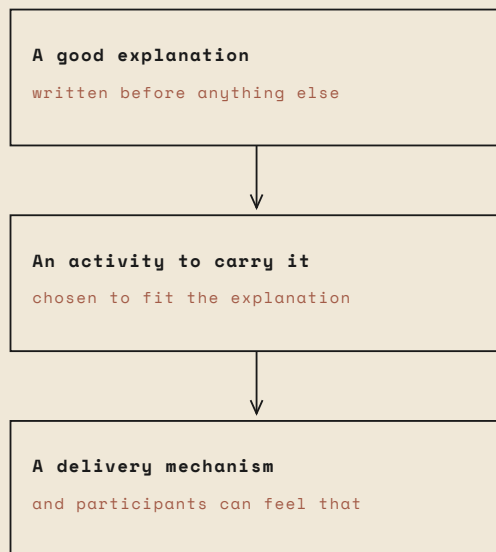
We wrote the answers down. Each station got an entry in a learning experience guide specifying which experience belongs where and which messages sit under the surface of it. In hindsight, exactly that order was decisive.

DIAGRAM D2

Experience before content

CONTENT FIRST

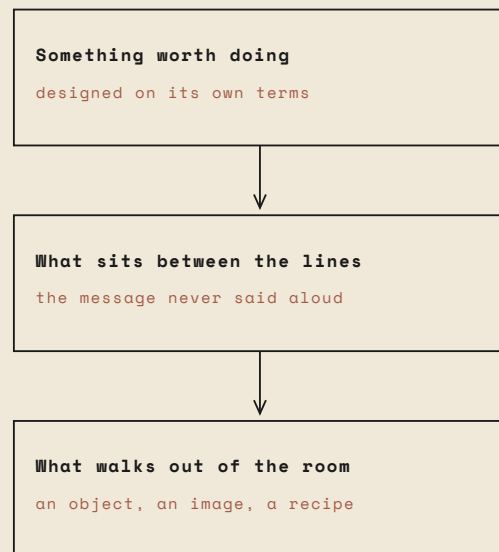
What should we convey?



Received.

EXPERIENCE FIRST

What experience should they have?

Found.
And arguable.

THE THREE QUESTIONS, IN THIS ORDER

- 01 What is the experience? Not the topic – the thing they tell someone about afterwards.
- 02 What sits between the lines? Saying it out loud would flatten it.
- 03 What does the participant walk out with? If the answer is “an insight”, design it again.

Design the experience. Then ask what it already teaches.

WHY THE ORDER MATTERS

If you start from content, you will design a good explanation and then look for an activity to carry it. The activity becomes a delivery mechanism, and participants can feel that. If you start from experience, you design something worth doing and then ask what it already teaches — which is usually more than you would have put in a slide, and lands differently because the participant found it rather than received it.

Rather than explaining information as completely as possible, we put curiosity, hands-on trying and conversation at the centre. The varied interplay of tastings, games, creative tasks and discussions made people happy to engage with the topics.

THE THREE QUESTIONS WE NOW ASK FOR EVERY STATION

1. What is the experience? Not the topic. The thing a participant will tell someone about afterwards. Tasted something they had never heard of. Built a thing that lights up. Put a dot on a board and watched the pattern change.
2. What sits between the lines? The message you are not going to say out loud. At the umami buffet, it is that you can reduce meat without losing pleasure. At the fridge game, it is that most food waste is a storage problem, not a moral failing. Saying these out loud would flatten them; building them into the experience makes them arguable.
3. What does the participant walk out with? An object, an image, a recipe, a photograph, a licence. If the answer is "an insight", design it again.

A TEST YOU CAN APPLY TODAY

Take a session you already run. Write down, in one sentence each, the experience, the message between the lines, and the object that leaves the room. If any of the three is hard to write, that is where the session is weak — and it is almost always the third one.

06

Four principles



Four principles held across every station, in three countries, over two years.

START FROM THE PLATE

Begin with food participants can touch and taste; bring the theory in afterwards. This is the single most reliable finding we have. Engagement rises sharply when learners eat before they analyse, and conversations about climate, health and

technology then start on their own, without being announced.

It also has a sequencing consequence that is easy to miss. If you want people to eat fewer animal products, you first have to explain what umami is — and that you can get that same taste experience another way. The argument for change has to arrive after the demonstration that nothing is being taken away, not before.

LOW-THRESHOLD, HIGH-CEILING

Every activity has to work with minimal kit and still stretch for advanced groups. A spirulina session runs with a bowl and a spoon; the same topic extends to a microcontroller reading pH. If the entry point requires equipment, you have already excluded the young people you most wanted to reach.

The same principle applies to time. We ended up with approaches for whatever time resources you have — and youth workers named that, specifically, as the most useful property of the whole toolkit.

SAFE TO FAIL

A flopped ferment is a learning result, not a failure. Say this out loud at the start and mean it.

The effect is measurable in behaviour. When people experiment together, performance pressure drops. Participants were more willing to ask questions, contribute their own ideas and try new things than in formats where there is a right answer to be found. This is also why the lab framing matters: a laboratory is a place where things are supposed to not work yet.

Nothing is finished. Participatory boards, the game, the food, the spirulina reactor. Everything is in flux — just like the real conditions.

MAKE SOMETHING THAT STAYS

Each session leaves a recipe, a sample, a photograph or a piece of documentation behind. This is not administration. It is what converts an afternoon into something the participant can show, repeat and build on.

It also travels further than you expect. Motifs designed at the pen plotter workshops were hung up at home by participants, who later sent photographs of the prints in their kitchens. A poster on a kitchen wall is a longer intervention than a workshop.

07

Six approaches, and how they combine



Across the partnership we combine six complementary approaches. None stands alone; a

single lab usually blends two or three.

APPROACH	WHAT IT IS	BEST FOR	WHAT YOUNG PEOPLE GAIN
Maker and lab-based learning	Hands-on prototyping of food and food systems in short iterative sessions	Tangible engagement; STEAM links	Experimentation, confidence
Inquiry and food-systems thinking	Tracing a food from source to waste	Connecting cause and effect	Systems literacy
Sensory and cultural exploration	Tasting, comparing and cooking across cultures	Lowering barriers; inclusion	Openness, curiosity
Challenge and design sprints	Teams solve a brief, for example a zero-waste snack or a use for a local residue	Motivation, ownership	Creativity, teamwork
Participatory facilitation	Structured co-creation; mentors, not judges	Including young people with fewer opportunities	Voice, belonging
Peer and intercultural exchange	Cross-country sharing of recipes, rules and results	The European dimension	Communication, perspective

THE COMBINATIONS THAT WORKED

Sensory plus making was the strongest pairing, and it is the one we would recommend to anyone starting. Tasting alone produces a pleasant afternoon and little else; making alone can feel like a technical exercise disconnected from anything a participant cares about. Together they close the loop: you eat the thing, then you build the thing that makes it, then you have an opinion about the system that produces it.

Methods that addressed several competences at once consistently outperformed single-purpose ones. Photographically staging a vegetarian recipe wove together nutrition, creativity and digital media completely naturally – the participant is not being taught three things, they are doing one thing that happens to contain three.

Sensory plus participatory is the pairing for a mixed or intercultural group. The umami buffet turned out to be integrative in a way we had not planned: participants recommended ingredients to each other, swapped recipes and told stories about typical umami foods from their countries of origin. Talk about allergies and personal eating habits came with it, and all of it fed back into the design of the next lab.

AND THE RULE ABOUT DIGITAL TOOLS

Digital tools were never used for their own sake. They earned their place when they supported a concrete task: documenting a lab, controlling a culture, designing a poster, telling someone what you made. A digital activity with no non-digital purpose reads, correctly, as filler.

Designing a station



Eight properties separate a station that works from an activity that happens to be in the room.

1. IT WORKS WITHOUT YOU

Build the station so that it also functions unstaffed: a clear description, supplementary text, a self-guided route through it. At the community days the stations were deliberately designed so that everything works without us — you could walk through alone and discover things yourself, and getting up and looking around was actively encouraged.

This is an inclusion measure, not a staffing economy. It is what makes the format usable by people who do not want to be talked at: we named homebodies and neurodivergent participants explicitly when designing for this.

2. BUT IT IS BETTER WITH YOU

Open learning stations invite independent discovery. It also became clear that an accompanying facilitator deepened many conversations and enabled additional reflection. Design for unstaffed; staff it anyway when you can. Unstaffed stations inform; staffed stations change minds.

3. IT IS HAPTIC

The strongest stations were the ones with something to pick up. A second-hand fridge. A jar of culture. A pen plotter drawing in front of you. Adhesive dots. We came to call these haptic

conversation starters, and they work across age groups in a way that printed information does not.

4. IT HAS AN EASY ENTRANCE AND AN EASY EXIT

Someone should be able to join three minutes in and leave four minutes later having got something. If a station only pays off for people who were there from the beginning, it will filter your audience down to the already-committed.

5. IT STANDS FOR ONE THING

Each station represents one climate-and-food goal. Not two. The clarity of a station is what lets a participant assemble a picture of the whole subject by walking around a room.

6. IT PRODUCES AN ARTEFACT

See principle four. Decide the object before you decide the timing; the object will tell you how long the station actually needs.

7. IT IS BUILT TO BE REBUILT

Upcycled, reusable, robust. Our zero waste game was a second-hand fridge given a second life as a learning station — which is also, conveniently, the message.

8. IT CHANGES WHEN PARTICIPANTS TELL YOU TO

Participants asked for recipe cards they could photograph with their phones, so the recipes could go home with them. We made the change. Small hints produce real changes, and participants notice when their feedback visibly feeds into the project — many were positively surprised that it did.

DIAGRAM D3

The station sheet

THE STATION SHEET

Copy this page. Fill it in before you design anything.
If a line is hard to write, that is where the station is weak.

STATION the name a participant would use

CLUSTER taste · play · make · tell · decide · convene

TIME

GROUP SIZE

KIT

THE HOOK why someone walks over

THE OBJECT what they pick up

THE TASK what their hands do for twenty minutes

BETWEEN THE LINES the message you will not say out loud

THE ARTEFACT what leaves in their hands

IT STANDS FOR one climate-and-food goal. Not two.

ENTRY AND EXIT Can someone join at minute three and leave at minute seven? Y ☐ N ☐

UNSTAFFED Is there a printed description that lets it run without you? ☐ Y ☐ N ☐

REBUILDABLE Could you rebuild it from second-hand parts next year? Y ☐ N ☐

CHANGED AFTER THE FIRST RUN what participants told you to do differently

Assembling a lab



Four decisions, in this order — and then three things to prepare. The catalogue is the easy half. Assembly is where labs fail, and they fail in ways that are predictable enough to list.

1. CHOOSE THE ENTRY POINT BY GROUP, NOT BY TOPIC

For a group that has never met the subject, open with taste. For a technical or STEAM-oriented group, open with the build and let the tasting land afterwards. For a group with low trust or low confidence, open with a participatory station where nobody can be wrong.

Notice that the topic did not appear in any of those three sentences. The subject of the lab is the same in all cases; what changes is the door you open first.

2. ADD EXACTLY ONE MAKING STATION

One is enough. Two making stations in a single session almost always means neither is finished, and an unfinished build is the one outcome that reliably deflates a group. If you are tempted by a second, you are designing for yourself rather than for the room.

3. DECIDE WHAT STAYS

Before you plan the timing, decide what each participant walks out with. Work backwards from that object: it will tell you how long the station actually needs, and it is the only reliable defence against a session that runs long and ends with a tidy-up instead of a result.

4. PLAN THE CONVERSATION, NOT JUST THE ACTIVITY

The activity is the reason to be in the room. The learning happens in what gets said over it. Prepare

two or three questions you want the group to reach — where does this come from, what would it take to do this at scale, who is not in this conversation — and let the making carry them.

THEN: CHECK THE ROOM AGAINST THE FOOD

This decision is made for you by the venue, and it is worth making early rather than discovering it on the morning. A room with a compliant kitchen opens the whole catalogue. A room without one is a pre-portioned, no-cook site — which is not a lesser lab, but it is a different shopping list. Weighing and cupping ingredients in advance lets any youth space run a food lab without a kitchen, and it removes the moment where twelve people queue for one set of scales.

Adapt hygiene guidance to the host country before the event, not during it. If you are hosting international partners, send them your rules in advance rather than discovering the mismatch over breakfast.

THEN: DECIDE WHERE YOUR FACILITATORS STAND

Design every station so that it works unstaffed. Then staff the two where you most want minds changed, because unstaffed stations inform and staffed stations change minds. With two facilitators and five stations, the making station and the question board are almost always the right two — one because it is where people get stuck, the other because the conversation is the output.

In challenge and sprint formats, facilitators support teams rather than score them. The moment a facilitator becomes a jury, teams start optimising for approval instead of for the problem.

THEN: BUDGET THE SECOND HALF

At least as much work goes into preparing a lab for other people as into developing it in the first place. If you intend the lab to travel — and the whole argument of this handbook is that it should — then the recipe card, the printed station description and the photograph are not administration after the

event. They are half the design, and they need to be in the plan from the start.

THREE ASSEMBLIES WE WOULD RUN AGAIN

The stations do not change between these. Only the number and the sequencing do.

SHAPE	TIME	STATIONS	WHAT LEAVES	WHERE IT FITS
Drop-in	45 minutes	One tasting plus one short station — umami plus the protein race, or the fridge game alone	A recipe card, or a fridge licence	A youth centre afternoon, a corner at someone else's event
Half day	3–4 hours	A tasting, then one making station, then the question board, then a share-out	An object from the build, plus the group's own dot pattern	A school class, a vocational group, a training day
Community day	A full day, open door	Six to eight stations around a room with a tasting table at the centre, all of them capable of running unstaffed	Whatever each visitor chose to make	A festival, a community event, an open house. Observed dwell time: over an hour for many visitors

THE WEEK BEFORE: SEVEN THINGS TO HAVE DONE

Confirm whether the venue has a usable kitchen, and design as though the answer is no. Pre-portion. Print the recipe cards at a size a phone can photograph. Write the board questions, then ask yourself what you would do differently depending on how the dots fall — if the answer is nothing, rewrite them. Test the plotter, charge the batteries, run the reactor for a day first. Agree who photographs, and ask permission before rather

than after. Open the group chat before the first session, not after it.

AND THE THREE WAYS IT GOES WRONG

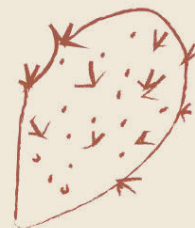
Two making stations, so neither finishes. A station that only pays off for people who were there from the beginning, which quietly filters the room down to the already-committed. And no artefact, which turns an afternoon into a memory instead of into something a participant can show, repeat and build on.

The station catalogue



10

Fourteen stations



What follows is the working catalogue. Each entry is written so you can run it, not so you can admire it. Times are working estimates for a group that has not done it before; group sizes are what we would recommend, not a limit.

Three of these stations were not in our application at all. They emerged from running the thing, and two of them turned out to be the best we have.

They are grouped into six clusters. The clusters are not categories of subject — every station is about food — but categories of what the participant is doing: tasting, playing, making, telling, deciding, convening. Assemble a lab by taking one from TASTE and one from anywhere else, and you have a working session; the rules for going further are in chapter 09.

TASTE

THE ENTRY POINTS

No kit, no threshold, nothing to go wrong. These are where a lab starts, and for many groups they are the whole lab. Everything else in the catalogue works better after one of them.

10.1

Umami buffet

45-90 min · 8-30 people · no equipment · leaves: recipe cards, photographs, an argument

The most successful format in the whole project, and it was not in the plan.

What it is. A tasting buffet of umami-rich, largely plant-based ingredients, presented not as one recipe but as a spread of many examples. That choice is the method: at the umami buffet we did a lot, not just one recipe that many people then do not like. With twelve things on the table, everyone finds something, and nobody has to perform enthusiasm for a dish they dislike.

Why it works. Umami was unknown to almost everyone we met. That is a gift: you are not correcting a belief, you are handing someone a new

word for something they have tasted all their lives. The pitch we used, and would use again, is a single sentence: *if you like eating savoury food but want to eat less meat...* Everything follows from that.

What to put on the table. Work it out with a nutritionist if you can — we did, and the question we asked them was how do you cover all the taste directions. What ended up on our tables: mushroom oil, algae salt, hummus, mushroom pâté, fermented items, roasted mealworms, energy balls. Mushroom pâté and roasted mealworms drew the biggest interest. Everyone wanted the energy ball recipe.

The intercultural move. Explain umami triangles from different cuisines — Italian, Japanese, Turkish — and the station becomes a conversation about where people are from. Participants recommended ingredients to each other, swapped recipes and told stories about typical umami foods from their countries of origin. Talk about allergies and personal eating habits came with it. All of that fed back into the design of the next lab.

Facilitator notes. Have recipe cards on the table that participants can photograph with their phones — this was a participant request and it is the single change that most improved the station. Do not open with the climate argument; let the taste do that work. Expect the conversation to last longer than the tasting.

Through taste, conversations about sustainable eating arose almost by themselves.

10.2

Tastings as a method in their own right

30–60 min · any size · no equipment · leaves: the loss of a fear

Beyond umami, tasting is the general-purpose opener of the whole toolkit.

What we served across the labs. Spirulina and other algae, plant-based umami ingredients, roasted mealworms and other edible insects, mushroom pâté, ferments, energy balls, climate-friendly dishes.

Where the food came from. A permaculture farm, regional and seasonal — which then doubled as teaching material about growing methods, preservation and storage. Carrots stored in sand is a better lesson about food systems than a slide about food systems. The farm also hosts seasonal

photo tours, which is how one of our photography workshops came into being.

What it does. Shared tasting created a relaxed, informal atmosphere and encouraged exchange between people with different backgrounds. More concretely, it removed fear: many tried foods they would otherwise never have tested, and lost their inhibition about experimenting with new ingredients or ideas. For most participants, insect protein and microalgae were a first.

Facilitator notes. Small portions, many of them. Label allergens visibly. Let people opt out of any single item without comment — the ability to refuse is what makes the rest safe to try.

10.3

Cooking with spirulina

45 min · 4–20 people · no heat, no equipment · leaves: ≈24 bites and a recipe card



Spirulina powder before mixing. Never cooked – heat destroys the phycocyanin. Messejana, January 2026.

The one rule. Never cook it. Spirulina's most valuable compound, the blue pigment phycocyanin, is destroyed by heat. This is why every recipe here is no-cook, and it is the first thing to say at the station.

The second rule. Start small. Around 3 g a day, a teaspoon, increasing slowly; a common upper limit is 8 g. For children over one year, about half the adult amount. Spirulina is a supplement, not a staple.

The trick that makes it edible. It clumps in liquid. Mix it first with a little oil, nut butter or a splash of the liquid into a smooth paste, then add the rest. It tastes earthy, a little like the sea; strong sweet flavours hide it almost completely — mango, banana, dates and cacao are the best partners. This is why our standard opener pairs cocoa with spirulina, and it is a specific case of the general rule: mix the familiar with the strange.

The recipe we use. Spirulina "Green Power" energy bites. 200 g rolled oats · 150 g pitted soft dates, or 120 g date paste · 60 g smooth nut or seed butter · 2 tsp food-grade spirulina powder, about 6 g · 2 tbsp honey or maple syrup · 1 tbsp cocoa powder · 2–3

tbsp water as needed · a pinch of salt · optional coating of desiccated coconut, sesame or extra oats.

Soften the dates in warm water for ten minutes and drain if they are not already soft. Pulse the oats fifteen to twenty seconds to a coarse flour with some texture left. Add everything else and process thirty to forty-five seconds until it looks like damp dark crumbs that clump when pressed. Add water half a tablespoon at a time until a squeezed handful holds together — sticky, not wet. Scoop about 20 g and roll into balls; you should get around twenty-four. Chill at least thirty minutes. Keeps a week refrigerated.

The no-blender workshop version. Use date paste and quick oats and mix by hand in a bowl, adding water gradually. This is the version that makes the station run in a youth centre with no kitchen — and it is a good illustration of the pre-portioning rule in chapter 09.

Variations. Start first-timers at one teaspoon of spirulina, not two; the flavour builds quickly. Nut-free: sunflower-seed butter and an oat or seed coating.

Safety note to read out. Use only food-grade spirulina from a reputable, tested source — poorly sourced algae can carry microcystins or heavy metals. Portions modest; it can cause mild bloating

or headache at first. Anyone pregnant or breastfeeding, with an autoimmune condition or PKU, or taking blood thinners should seek medical advice first. Label allergens: nuts, sesame.

PLAY

THE SHORT PULLS

Fifteen to ninety minutes, something to pick up, a result you get immediately. Their job is not depth. Their job is to walk somebody across the room towards a heavier station — and, in the fridge game's case, to send a habit home with them.

10.4

The Zero Food Waste fridge game

60–90 min · 6–25 people · a second-hand fridge · leaves: a fridge licence, and habits that go home

What it is. A second-hand fridge given a second life as a learning station. Participants work out what goes where, why, and what it costs when it goes wrong. The rules cover correct storage, shopping planning and simple everyday habits.

Why the object matters. It is a haptic conversation starter that works across age groups — one of very few stations that a twelve-year-old and a sixty-year-old will both walk up to. The fridge being second-hand is not incidental; the station embodies its own argument.

The fridge licence. We issue a small certificate-style "fridge licence" at the end. This sounds like a gimmick and is not, for one reason: a family has only one fridge, and the children pass this on. It is a far-reaching effect, possibly lifelong. Many participants said they wanted to take the knowledge straight home to their families. Very few youth work outputs have that transmission path built in.

The fact that lands. Roughly 59 million tonnes of food are wasted per year in the EU, about 132 kilograms per person. Participants were consistently surprised by this. Use it after the game, not before.

Widen the frame. Waste is not only about throwing away, it is also about transport routes and the

whole food system. The station is a good place to make that jump, because participants have just spent an hour thinking about where things physically go.

Available to reuse. The Zero Waste Game instructions plus four templates are published in English and German, together with a setup guide for rebuilding the station from second-hand components.

10.5

Protein race and guessing rounds

15–30 min · any size · minimal · leaves: a corrected intuition

What it is. Deliberately silly games. A protein race with mealworms. Estimation rounds on the protein content of lentils, beans and other foods, where participants guess and then find out.

Why it earns its place. These are low-threshold entries into complex subjects, and they belong in the same family as the fridge game: something to pick up, a low stake, an immediate result. Use them as the thing that pulls someone across the room towards a heavier station.

MAKE

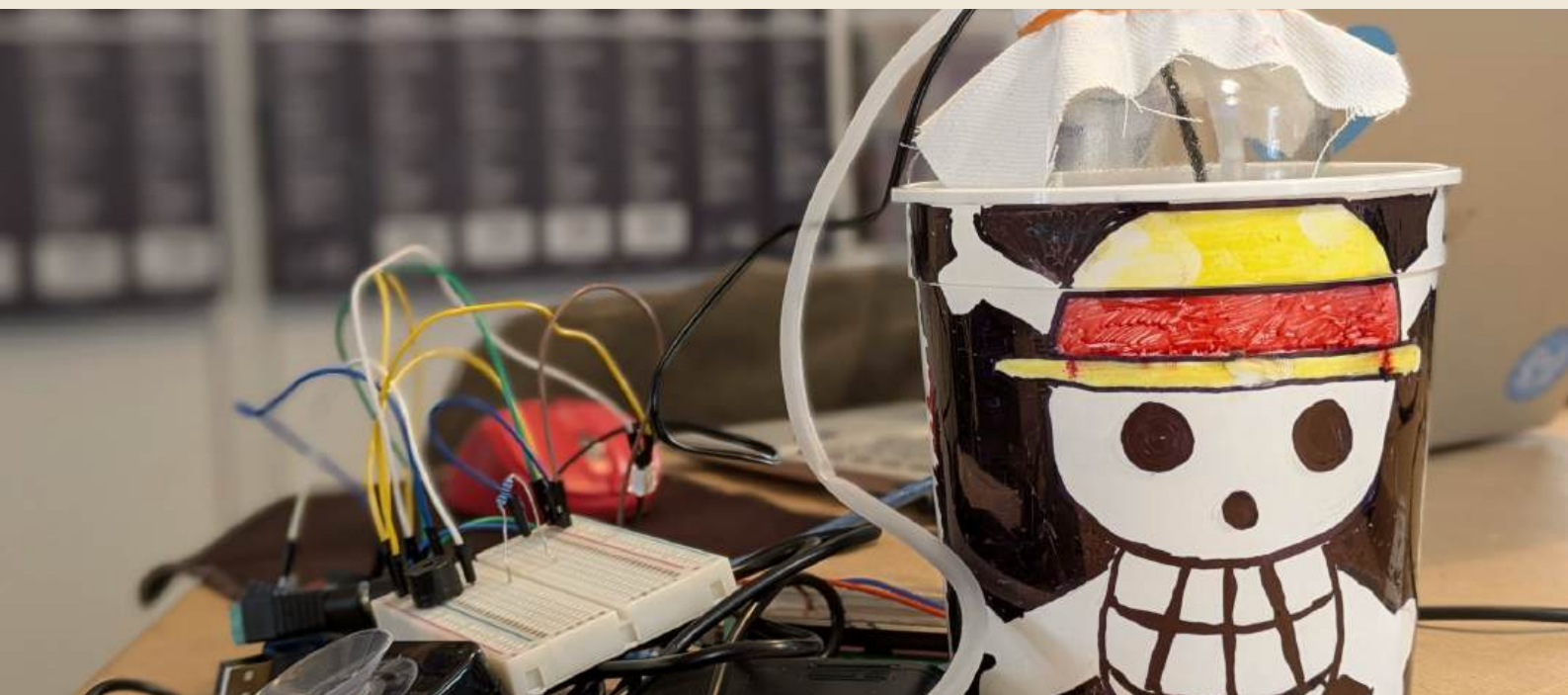
THE BUILDS

One per lab, never two. These are the stations that convert an opinion about food systems into an object that works, and they are the reason a food lab is a lab rather than a workshop.

10.6

DIY photobioreactor — low-tech

One afternoon · 4-12 people · no code · leaves: a working reactor and a living culture



A low-tech photobioreactor, decorated by the group that built it. Messejana, December 2025.

What you are building. A controlled environment — light, temperature, CO₂ and nutrients — that lets spirulina grow indoors, year-round, from parts bought at an aquarium shop and a hardware store.

Core parts. One PET bottle with cap · a 12V LED strip, warm white around 3000K · a 12V power

supply for the strip · aquarium tube · a white bucket or vase that holds the bottle inside. Optional but recommended: an aquarium air bubble stone, a one-way air valve, and an outlet timer for the light hours.

Build sequence. Drill a hole in the bucket large enough for the LED strip's power cord, plus a few extra holes near the bottom in case of leaks, away from the strip. Pass the cord through and knot it on the inside so it cannot be pulled out. Glue the LED strip to the inner surface in a spiral, going round more than one full turn so the light spreads evenly — add hot glue even if the strip is self-adhesive, and insulate the power connection with tape. Insert the one-way valve into the air circuit; if you are unsure which way round it goes, blow gently through it to find the open direction. Cut the tube and connect it along the path air pump → valve → bottle cap → bubble stone. Pour in the living culture, put the bottle in the bucket, switch on light and pump. Bubbles rising means it is working.

Keeping it alive. Around twelve hours of light per day, best at about 20°C — room temperature. The LED strip adds a little useful heat. An outlet timer makes the light schedule effortless.

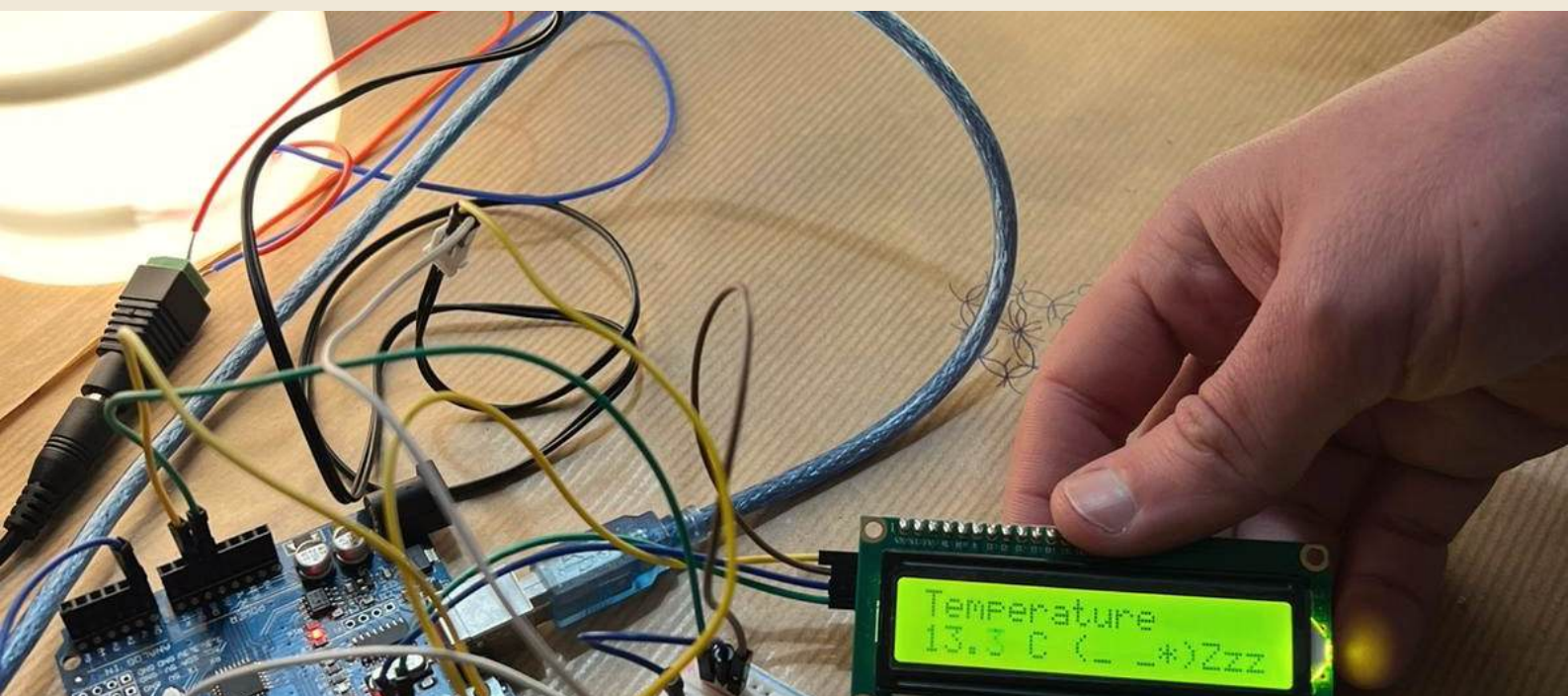
Why it teaches. Growing spirulina well asks the learner to measure pH, regulate light and keep the culture moving. It is at once a food, a biology lesson and an engineering problem — and a demonstration that sustainable production can be brought within arm's reach of people normally kept outside it.

Facilitator notes. The build is one afternoon; the result is a fortnight. Plan a return visit, or place the reactor somewhere the group passes anyway. Watching a culture deepen in colour across a week is half the learning.

10.7

Smart photobioreactor — Arduino

One afternoon · 4–10 people · builds on 10.6 · leaves: an automated reactor and a first sketch



The automated version: an Arduino reads temperature and pH and drives the light cycle. Messejana, January 2026.

What it is. The same reactor, automated. An Arduino takes over the light cycle, bubbles the pump on a schedule and watches temperature and pH. It does not replace the low-tech build — it is layered onto it, which is exactly why it works

pedagogically: the participant hands a routine they already understand to a machine, and then reads back what the machine sees.

Prerequisite. The low-tech reactor should already exist. Do not run this as a first session.

The four steps. Install the Arduino IDE and say hello with "Blink". Wire the sensors one subsystem at a time, with clear diagrams. Read the sketch block by block — no wall of code. Run it and watch live readings and the pump bubbling on cue.

Safety, non-negotiable. Electronics and water do not mix. Keep the Arduino and every connection outside the bucket, in a closed box, well above the water line. Only sealed probe tips go into the liquid. Never touch the 12V wiring with wet hands, and always unplug the adapter before changing any connection.

Why it belongs in youth work and not only in a makerspace. Automation here is not an end in itself. It produces steadier cultures, real data the group can argue about, and a gentle first step into electronics and code explained from absolute zero — for participants who would never sign up for a coding workshop.

10.8

Biomaterials from food waste

3 h plus a wait · 4-12 people · patience · leaves: samples, and a different view of waste



A cast sheet of bioplastic drying. Results take days; plan the reveal as a separate session. Messejana, January 2026.

What it is. Turning a local food residue into a material rather than a bin bag — bioplastics and biocomposites made from what the neighbourhood already throws away.

Find your local residue. Ours came from a field visit: whey from small family goat-cheese producers across the Baixo Alentejo, a genuine regional by-product that a nearby research centre was already investigating on behalf of farmers.

Yours will be different — spent grain from a brewery, coffee grounds from a café, peel from a juice bar. The territorial specificity is the point; a generic biomaterials workshop teaches chemistry, a local one teaches a food system.

Facilitator notes. Results take days. Plan the reveal as a separate short session, or you will end the workshop on a tray of wet material and a shrug.

TELL

THE COMMUNICATION STATIONS

Here the participant makes the project's own material, and is told so. These were the most requested stations of all, and the ones professionals most wanted to copy — partly because the output is real and partly because the brief is honest: we need your help.

10.9

Be a Future Food Photojournalist

2–3 h · 6–15 people · a phone each · leaves: images the group actually uses

This station replaced the video workshops we had planned. The reasons are in Part V; here is how to run it.

Variants we ran. "Be a Future Food Photojournalist" (documenting an event as it happens). "Design a Recipe Photo". "Food and Plant-Based Umami Ingredients Photography". And one that grew out of a permaculture workshop, where the combination of nature, food and visual communication proved especially motivating.

Content. Climate-friendly eating, the Planetary Health Diet and foods of the future, combined with image composition, lighting and visual storytelling, shot on smartphones, plus digital image editing.

The pedagogical core is the framing. Participants were addressed as collaborators, not students. The actual words: *hey, we need your help — we have to photograph umami ingredients for the website. And: we have to document the Future Food Lab, please share your moments too.* This is learning by doing with a real brief, a real deadline and a real client, and the balance matters — you are asking for help as well as offering to teach.

Choice as participation. Participants chose which recipes and which foods to shoot, and wrote their own labels and caption cards. Co-creation and problem-solving happened on set, not in a briefing.

The aftercare is the method. The communication workshops often kept working beyond the actual event. Results were shared over a group chat, questions were asked, new ideas were tried. We ran photo review and feedback in that channel, not tied to a fixed appointment, so everyone could fit it in — and participants who had missed a session still benefited. We even ran a photo consultation hour using participants' own images. The topic of future food stayed present for much longer.

Permissions. Ask participants whether their results can be shared, and then actually show them where their work ended up. Photographs from these sessions went into project articles, social media, the videos and the Cookbook. Being published is a form of recognition, and for many participants it is the part they remember.

10.10

Pen plotter and communication design

2–3 h · 6–15 people · a pen plotter or a printer · leaves: a poster that goes on a wall at home

The motto we used. "What we eat in 2050 — say hi to the Planetary Health Diet."

What it is. Knowledge about sustainable eating combined with 2D design for pen-plotter prints, framed openly as digital fabrication for beginners, plus communication hacks and exhibition planning.

What participants did. Designed umami motifs and future food giveaways. Dozens of umami formats were plotted. Participants themselves chose format and size, paper and pen, and assembled the posters — and we added a "choose your Future Food Lab giveaway" step, which turns the selection itself into a participation exercise.

The afterlife. Over 160 people saw the pen plotter. More interestingly, motifs created in the workshops

were voluntarily hung up at home, and participants later sent us photographs of the giveaways in their kitchens. The favourites were the "Yummy Umami" and "5 taste directions" designs.

If you have no plotter. The plotter is theatre as much as tool — people stop to watch a machine draw. A printer works for the output; if you have neither, screen printing or hand-lettering keeps the co-design intact.

DECIDE

THE ROOM'S OPINION, MADE VISIBLE

One station, and the one that most changed how we work. It is also the cheapest thing in this catalogue: paper, dots, and a question worth asking.

10.11

Participatory question boards

20 min to half a day · any size · dots and paper · leaves: a visible collective opinion

Adopted from Lichen's participatory practice, and the station that most changed how the German team works.

How it works. Boards carry food-related questions. Participants answer with adhesive dots. That is the whole mechanic, and its power is in what happens next: even after the first group, tendencies became visible, which could then be discussed directly with participants while they were still in the room.

What to put on them. Do not limit yourself to opinions. Our boards carried concrete civic action options: foodsharing, communal cooking evenings, raised beds with neighbours, bulk organic group orders split between people, joining in at the permaculture farm. Young people directly experience that their voice counts, and they leave with things they could actually do on Saturday.

Four shapes, one method. We ran the same method in four physical forms across three countries: A0 large format at the Portuguese hackathon, combined with climate-impact estimation and idea development; booklet form in Barcelona; table cards as a "question menu" at the community café; and a shortened version at the dinner evening. The method survives the change of medium — choose the medium that fits the room.

The skill nobody teaches. How you phrase the question determines whether the answers tell you anything. This is the specific competence Saliko learned from Lichen, and it is worth budgeting time for: write the questions, then ask what you would do differently depending on how the dots fall. If the answer is nothing, rewrite the question.

Second use. The boards were also our input channel for designing new stations. What people voted for is a backlog.

CONVENE

THE WHOLE-EVENT FORMATS

You run these once or twice a year, not weekly. They need a kitchen, collaborators and a guest list, and they do something the other clusters cannot: they put your work in front of people who can carry it somewhere else.

10.12

The speculative dinner

An evening · 12–20 people · a kitchen and collaborators · leaves: a documented shift in opinion



Cups moulded from spent coffee grounds, used as serving vessels at a tasting. Messejana, January 2026.

Lichen's format, and the most ambitious thing in this catalogue. A four-course speculative menu in which each dish opens a station and each station opens a debate. The meal is the sequencing device.

Station one — biotech elixirs and micro-algae. Freshly harvested spirulina infusion, served in laboratory glassware. The theme is automated closed-loop urban agriculture, and the purpose is to challenge the cognitive boundary participants hold between science and "natural" food.

Station two — zero-waste gastronomy and circular preservation. Lacto-fermented root vegetables, dehydrated peels and skins, plant extracts. Ancestral preservation techniques used to argue that food waste can be eliminated entirely.

Station three — speculative "Future Food?" biscuits. Crisp alternative-protein biscuits pressed in 3D-printed moulds that stamp the question FUTURE FOOD? into the surface. The purpose is to make participants interrogate what counts as future and what counts as tradition.

Station four — marine permaculture and synthetic-organic textures. Seaweed gels, kelp sheets and marine infusions, served in tall laboratory beakers, presenting soil-free marine agriculture as a resilient route to dietary change.

What the evening produced. Perception shifts were measured across the meal. After working through the biscuits, 92.8% of participants concluded that the way we eat directly defines who we are, and 92.3% that eating is an inescapable political act. The zero-waste station drove the sharpest social finding: 76.9% concluded that healthy nutrition is a socio-economic and territorial privilege, and 71% identified information barriers as a key driver of exclusion. 85.7% rated technological innovation positively as an ethical ally of change — a result the

team attributes partly to the hands-on bioreactor build that preceded it.

Facilitator notes. Fifteen people, mixed backgrounds, interdisciplinary by design — educators, designers, researchers, artists and sustainability professionals in one room. The format needs collaborators in a kitchen and it needs the questions written before the menu. Run the survey at the table, between courses; afterwards is too late.

10.13

The future food challenge

Two intensive mornings · 6-20 people in teams of three · a real local problem · leaves: concepts defended in public



Pulp trays drying after a challenge session. Messejana, January 2026.

What it is. A short, sharply framed challenge built on a residue or a problem that belongs to your territory. Ours ran with a regional agri-food biotechnology research centre and a polytechnic institute, around building opportunities out of food waste.

Shape. Morning one: a field visit to a real project working on the problem, so that the abstraction of a circular food economy becomes something participants can see and smell. Morning two: structured ideation in teams of three, using large-format canvases — collective ideation and stakeholder mapping at A0, printed on a plotter.

Why two mornings and not two days. We designed a continuous multi-day event and rebuilt it once it became clear that students could not commit to forty-eight hours. The shorter format produced a smaller but far more committed group.

Facilitator notes. Mentor, do not judge. The moment a facilitator becomes a jury, teams start optimising for approval instead of for the problem. Bring one person from the research or business side into the room on the second morning — not to assess, but to answer questions.

10.14

The discovery dinner

An evening · 15–30 invited guests · a kitchen ·
leaves: a network that now knows what you do

Not a youth format. A networking format, and the one we would recommend to any organisation that needs local partners.

What it is. A dinner that combines future food tastings, short workshops and expert exchange, used to present the project, how it works and what it found, to your own local network. Our EU partners attended.

Who to invite. Deliberately well-connected local actors from different sectors. Not the people who already agree with you.

What to do with the participatory method. Use it in shortened form. At the dinner, our question boards became table cards — a "question menu" sitting between the plates. Dinner plus workshops works well; dinner plus a presentation does not.

Running it



Hygiene, the cold chain, and what food actually costs you



Eggshells kept for biocomposite tests. Food handling rules apply long before anything is cooked. Messejana, January 2026.

Be honest with yourself before you commit to food: it is demanding. The cold chain is real, the responsibility is real, and some venues will be ruled out by it. We still think it is worth it, and we think we get that across. But plan for it.

THE SHARED EU BASELINE

All three of our countries apply the same framework — Regulation (EC) 853/2004 and HACCP

principles — so the foundations are shared. Identify hazards, control critical points and keep simple records, with built-in flexibility for small operators. Keep chilled food cold and hot food hot, and reheat to a safe core temperature. Clean hands, clean surfaces, no cross-contamination. Allergens and labelling under Regulation (EU) 1169/2011 apply EU-wide.

WHERE THE THREE COUNTRIES DIFFER

COUNTRY	WHO OVERSEES	WHAT MATTERS FOR A YOUTH WORKSHOP	COUNTRY	WHO OVERSEES	WHAT MATTERS FOR A YOUTH WORKSHOP
Portugal	ASAE (enforcement) and DGAV	HACCP-based procedures required; ASAE allows simplified HACCP for small or non-transforming settings. Good practice reheats to a core of about 70 °C. Food handlers must be trained, though generally no separate State-issued licence is required.			and providers need no State accreditation, but workers must be trained and the business must be able to evidence it on inspection.
			Germany	Local Gesundheitsamt, under §43 Infektionsschutzgesetz	An instruction (Belehrung) is generally needed before first working with food, repeated and documented every two years. Many local authorities treat volunteers at occasional association events as exempt — but this varies locally.
Spain	AESAN, with regional bodies such as ACSA in Catalonia	Since Royal Decree 109/2010 there is no official "carné". Training is the food business's responsibility			

Rule of thumb: treat every workshop as if you were serving the public. Clean hands and surfaces, refrigerate perishables, label allergens, and keep a short note of what you made and from what. For anything sold or served beyond the participants, check the host country's registration rules first.

This is general guidance, not legal advice. Verify current national and regional requirements before each event. If you are hosting international

partners, send them your country's rules in advance rather than discovering the mismatch on the morning.

THE VENUE CONSEQUENCE

Hygiene requirements meant that some venues we wanted were unusable. Solve this early: find one venue with a compliant kitchen and treat everywhere else as a pre-portioned, no-cook site. A social café with an attached kitchen, or a training centre with a public auditorium next to a kitchen, is the ideal combination — it lets you run talks, hands-on offers, tastings and exchange formats in the same visit.

12

Where to run it: embed rather than organise



Spent coffee grounds collected from a local café – a residue, and an invitation to a partner. Messejana, January 2026.

This is the recommendation that saved us the most effort and produced the most reach, and we arrived

at it by accident.

Embedding in existing events is often more effective than organising your own formats.

People already came, with interest, to an education, innovation or sustainability event, and met the lab there in an open frame. Very different groups were reached without having to organise a large event of our own, and thematically related events generate baseline interest before you have said a word.

The same set of stations ran in four distinct educational contexts: an innovation festival, a teacher training programme, a vocational training centre for health professions, and a community dinner. Around fifty active participants at the festival alone.

A LADDER OF VENUES, EASIEST FIRST

1. **An existing event with an adjacent theme.** Sustainability, innovation, education, food, community. Ask for a corner and a table, not a slot in the programme.
2. **An institution with a captive group and a stake in the topic.** A vocational centre training future carers has an obvious reason to care about nutrition — and the teachers there will tell you, as ours did, that food is not yet a fixed part of the curriculum.

3. **A social café, community kitchen or youth centre.** Train the staff in the stations and let them help run them; ours did, and it became the largest joint project we had done with that café.
4. **Your own event.** Last, not first, and only once you have a network to invite.

THE NUMBER THAT SHOULD CONVINCE YOU

Our second community day drew around 165 visitors — almost three times what we had planned for. It worked because by then we were known, and we were known because we had spent a year showing up inside other people's events.

13

The space between sessions



The simplest finding in this handbook, and the one we did not design for.

A group chat between sessions turned out to matter more than expected. Photographs got shared, questions got asked, feedback was given, and later the Cookbook was published there too. Two properties make it work: everyone in the group learns from what one person asks, and it removes the tyranny of the fixed appointment — people fit it

in when they can, and participants who missed a session still benefit.

We ended up running photo review, feedback rounds and even a photo consultation hour in that channel. The topic of future food stayed present far longer than the workshops themselves.

If we designed the method again, this channel would be in the plan from day one, with someone responsible for it, rather than being an accident that worked.

Evaluation: what we counted and what we watched



Quantitative counting alone will tell you almost nothing useful about a station-based format. We used both, deliberately.

WHAT WE COUNTED

Participant numbers and group sizes, participant lists, photographs, short activity reports after each session.

WHAT WE WATCHED

Which stations were used for a long time. Where conversations formed. Which topics triggered curiosity. Dwell time turned out to be our most honest quality signal — at the social café lab, many visitors stayed over an hour, and that told us more than a satisfaction score would have.

WHAT WE ASKED

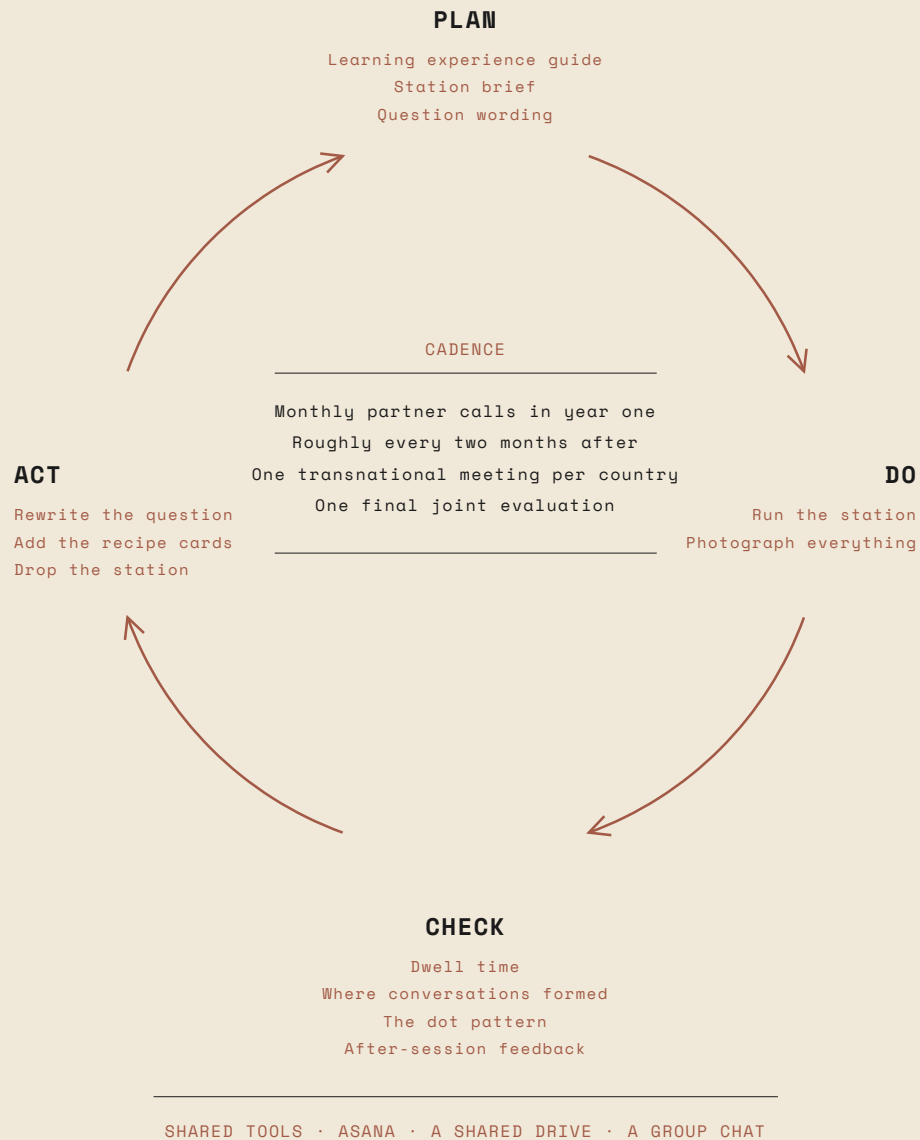
Feedback from everyone after workshops, and improvement potential collected from every group. Small hints produced real changes: the photographable recipe cards came from exactly this. Participants were positively surprised that their feedback visibly fed into the project, which is itself a participation outcome.

THE SIGNALS WE CAME TO TRUST MOST

Being asked back. A festival inviting us to return. A design school asking to collaborate. Press coverage. Thank-you gifts. And the fact that a participant from the very first lab is what opened the door to our most important institutional partner.

DIAGRAM D5

The loop we actually ran



The artefacts are the method.
The abstractions are not.

Working with partners you do not yet have



Almost every strong element in this project came from someone outside the consortium. That is not a confession; it is the operating model, and it is the cheapest capability you can add.

A local mushroom expert. A permaculture farm that supplied the food and then taught growing and preservation. Nutrition experts who helped us work out how flavour is composed. A regional biotechnology research centre that hosted a lab visit and then promoted the project harder than we did. A polytechnic institute's agrarian and

technology schools. The municipal integration officer working with a social café. A youth centre whose youth workers gave us the single most useful piece of design advice we received — make the formats shorter.

SIX KINDS OF PARTNER, AND THE ASK THAT WORKS ON EACH

Read this as a checklist of what you are missing rather than as a description of who we happened to meet.

WHO	WHAT THEY GIVE YOU	THE ASK THAT GETS A YES
A producer — a farm, a brewery, a cheese maker, a café	The food itself, and then a second lesson about growing, preservation and storage that no slide can deliver	"Can we buy a box, and bring ten young people to look at how you do it?"
A specialist — a mycologist, a nutritionist, a food technologist	The one fact your station turns on, and the confidence to say it out loud	"Can you look at our tasting table and tell us what is missing?"
A research centre	Credibility with institutions, a site visit, and a real local residue to work on	"Can we visit for a morning?"
An education institution — a polytechnic, a vocational centre, a teacher training body	Participants, a room, and direct access to the multiplier audience	"Can we run a station inside something you already do?"
A municipality or an integration officer	Reach into groups you cannot reach by advertising	"Who should we be talking to?"
A youth centre or social café	The room, the regulars, and blunt design advice you will not get anywhere else	"Can we borrow a corner and a table?"

THE SMALL ASK

Every one of those asks is smaller than the thing you actually want. That is deliberate. A food actor will usually say yes to a tasting when they would say no to a workshop: the commitment is legible, the visibility is obvious, and nothing has to be scheduled twice. Ask for a corner and a table, not a slot in the programme. Ask for one morning, not a partnership.

The partnership, if it comes, will be proposed by them.

WHAT TO GIVE BACK, SO THAT THE SECOND ASK IS EASIER

Photographs they can use, taken properly and sent without being chased. Named credit wherever the work appears. The finished guide, in a form they can hand to someone else. And an invitation to something — which is what the discovery dinner is

for. Invite a prospective partner to a dinner rather than to a meeting; a meeting asks for their time, a dinner offers them something.

THE SEQUENCE, AS IT ACTUALLY RAN

Show up inside somebody else's event. Make a small ask. Deliver something visible, and make sure they see where it ended up. Invite them to a dinner. Then propose the thing you wanted in the first place — by which point you are known, and being known is what converts a request into a collaboration.

One honest note about how this really works. The door to our most important institutional partner was opened by a participant from the very first lab. You cannot plan that. You can only run enough labs, in enough of other people's rooms, that it has somewhere to happen.

What we learned



What worked, and how we know



FOOD IS AN UNUSUALLY GOOD ENTRY POINT FOR YOUTH WORK

Because eating is part of everyone's everyday life, conversations about sustainability, health and the future of the food system started quickly and without a warm-up. This is the finding underneath all the others.

LARGE INTERACTIVE LABS BEAT MANY SMALL WORKSHOPS

Counter-intuitively for a small organisation, the bigger open format was the more efficient one. It reached more people, reached more different kinds of people, and generated more conversation per hour of preparation than a series of closed workshops did.

SHORT PLAYFUL STATIONS BEAT CLASSIC WORKSHOP FORMATS

More participation, more exchange, lower barrier to entry, easier to embed in someone else's event.

PARTICIPATION IS VISIBLE, AND BEING VISIBLE IS THE POINT

Participatory elements worked especially well, and many participants were positively surprised that their feedback visibly fed into the project. The visibility is not a nicety — it is what converts a consultation into an experience of agency.

THE LAB FRAMING CHANGES BEHAVIOUR

When people experiment together, performance pressure drops. Participants dared more readily to ask questions, contribute their own ideas and try new things.

SOLO JOURNEYS MATTER AS MUCH AS SHARED MOMENTS

There were shared moments, but also exploratory solo journeys, and both were designed for. Stations that work unstaffed are what make the second kind possible — and they are an inclusion measure for people who do not want to be part of a group activity.

THE EVIDENCE, IN ONE PLACE

- 2 community future food days, around 240 visitors in total; the second drew around 165, almost three times the plan.
- 17 practical Future Food Lab workshops with around 150 participants, against a plan of 17 workshops and around 110 participants.
- 8 interactive learning stations developed and tested.
- Delivered in 4 distinct educational contexts, with over 270 active participants directly reached in Germany alone.
- Over 60 trainee teachers reached through a teacher-training programme; 160 young people and 9 teachers at one vocational centre; around 50 active participants at an innovation festival.
- Barcelona: 15 at the speculative dinner, 10–12 per session at two open neighbourhood workshops.
- Portugal: a two-morning challenge with students from a polytechnic institute, run with a regional research centre.
- Over 160 people saw the pen plotter; average dwell time at the social café lab was over an hour for many visitors.

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What we got wrong



A method is more useful when the failures come with it. These are ours, with the reasoning.

WE PLANNED VIDEO AND SHOULD HAVE PLANNED PHOTOGRAPHY

We applied with five video workshops. We ran photography instead. Photography proved markedly lower-threshold and more motivating: participants produce their own results faster, share them more readily, and can actively contribute to the project's communication. With photos you get more results per session than with video, and it is easier to get young people genuinely involved. The one central project video remained, professionally produced — but as a project asset, not as a workshop format. Adults, incidentally, were more interested in documentation for its own sake than young people were.

WE PLANNED COOKING AND HAD TO SCALE IT BACK

Three separate reasons converged. We could not always cook. Cooking activities actively deterred registrations — the commitment reads as larger than it is. And hygiene requirements meant some venues were unusable. What replaced it worked better: tastings, interactive stations and short hands-on offers, which gave much easier access and were better received. If you want cooking in your programme, put it in one venue with a compliant kitchen and design everything else around pre-portioning.

WE DESIGNED A CHALLENGE NOBODY COULD ATTEND

The future food challenge was designed as a continuous multi-day event and rebuilt as two intensive mornings once it became clear that students could not commit to forty-eight hours. The shorter format produced a smaller but far more committed group. Design for the time your participants actually have, not the time the concept would like.

WE WENT WIDE BEFORE GOING DEEP

The Portuguese activity was designed around two parallel production systems, spirulina and hydroponics. A field visit to a regional research centre opened a third and more local line — dairy whey from small family cheese producers. We chose depth over breadth: one system built, documented and taught properly proved worth more than two left half-finished. Make that choice early rather than late.

WE WERE WRONG ABOUT WHO THE MULTIPLIERS WOULD BE

This is the most important thing in this section.

We planned on the assumption that young people would spread the results through their own social media. They shared far less online than we expected. The real multiplier effect came from somewhere else entirely: teachers, youth workers and other educational actors, who attended in far greater numbers than we had planned for and who wanted to adopt the stations and methods themselves.

Their interest was not only in the content. They were interested in the learning experience design and the station design behind it, and they kept coming back with questions about that. Teachers experienced the lab once actively — but they also read it as a piece of design, and that is what they wanted to take away.

This changed how we wrote everything afterwards. The Cookbook is documented so that others can adopt and adapt, because the people most likely to carry this forward are professionals, not participants. If you are planning dissemination for a youth project on a technical or design-heavy topic, budget for the multiplier audience from the start.

WE PRODUCED FAR MORE THAN WE COULD DOCUMENT

Within a small-scale partnership you have to decide which stations get documented properly instead of producing many thin write-ups. We deliberately decided against completeness and in favour of quality — including for the photographic material, where a selection was made so that it stays graspable. Decide this in the first months, not the last.

TWO MORE, ALREADY COVERED

We planned a workshop series and had to build a system; youth workers had to tell us twice before we changed it. And we underestimated the space between sessions so completely that it stayed an accident instead of becoming a plan. Both are set out in Parts II and IV.

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What people took away



A participant sewing a sheet of biomaterial made from food waste. Messejana, January 2026.

The people who carry this method forward are not, as we assumed, the participants. They are the professionals who came to watch. That finding is set out in the previous chapter; this one records

what each group actually left with, because the two lists are different and the difference is the whole design lesson.

WHAT PARTICIPANTS TOOK

Taste, and a vocabulary for it. Umami was unknown to almost everyone we met. Participants learned why savoury plant-based dishes can taste so intense, and that climate-friendly eating can be pleasurable rather than restrictive. Tastings of spirulina, algae and edible insects removed inhibition about unfamiliar food — for most, insect protein and microalgae were a first.

Future food knowledge with edges on it. Algae farms and their CO₂ potential. Algae as an alternative to nutritional supplements. Four insect species approved in Germany against more than two thousand worldwide, which is what makes the development potential visible. And the reframing that waste is not only about throwing away but about transport routes, production and resource consumption.

A fridge licence, and a transmission path. Correct storage, the reasons fresh goods perish, and surprise at the scale of the problem. A family has one fridge, so the knowledge travels home on its own — one of very few youth work outputs with that path built in.

Things to do on Saturday. Foodsharing. Permaculture. Community raised beds. Group orders of regional organic products, split between people. Our local community fridge became visible and better used because we ran guided visits to it during an event.

Competences that were not the subject. Presentation skills from pitching ideas. Project management from the spirulina work, because a longer planning process was needed. Digital fabrication encountered for the first time by many. And the lab mindset itself — experimentation understood as a learning method rather than as a

risk. For most participants this was also their first European educational project, and a positive experience of Europe.

WHAT YOUTH WORKERS AND TEACHERS TOOK

They wanted something else, and they asked for it explicitly.

The format, for whatever time they have. A practice-oriented, easily transferable structure with approaches sized to different time budgets. Future food as a positive entry point into change rather than an argument for renunciation — you give people something to work with, because people are solution-oriented. As one of them put it: look, we can do this ourselves.

The design behind the methods, not just the methods. "Be a photojournalist" was named repeatedly as the most illuminating single method — a focus on the learner rather than only on the content, serving their everyday need to document something in passing. But the questions kept coming back to the station design and the learning experience design underneath it. Teachers experienced the lab once actively, and then read it as a piece of design.

Materials that are usable without us. One address where everything lives. Workshop materials directly reusable. And a strong visual language, which mattered more than we expected: photographs showing that something is actually happening read as contemporary and credible in a field where most documentation does not.

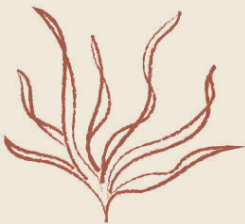
Each other. The lab connected a social café, a youth centre and a vocational training centre in a town where they had not previously worked together. That was not a project objective. It may outlast the ones that were.

If the staff room finds a topic relevant, they will organise it — they will get a whole year group run through it.

Where this sits, and where it goes



The Bonn process and the European Youth Work Agenda



The Bonn process and the European Youth Work Agenda ask the sector to become greener, to strengthen the quality and innovation of digital youth work, to create innovation hubs for pioneering practice, and to reach young people whose voices are not heard.

A food lab is a concrete, appetising vehicle for all four at once: green by subject, digital by method,

experimental by design, and low-threshold enough that a young person with no technical background can produce something on the first afternoon.

The wider Education for Sustainable Development agenda that the Bonn process feeds into gives the "why". This method is one answer to the "how".

ESD PRINCIPLE	HOW A FOOD LAB DELIVERS IT
Action-oriented learning	Learners make and test real food rather than discussing it
Whole-system view	Each station links a dish to land, water, energy and waste
Participation and ownership	Young people set the menu, place the dots, and lead their own experiments
Local-global connection	Cross-country comparison of diets, ingredients and rules — and a local residue at the centre of the challenge
Transformative competences	Anticipation, critical thinking and collaboration are built into the tasks

A NOTE ON THE INCLUSION CLAIM

It would be easy to write "inclusive" here and move on. The specific mechanisms were these. Stations that work unstaffed, so that participants who do not want to be talked at can still take part — we named homebodies and neurodivergent participants explicitly when designing this. Entry and exit at any point, so that time-poor or anxious

participants are not committing to a block. No prior knowledge threshold, because everyone eats. Explicit permission to disagree. Tastings that can be refused item by item. Pre-portioning, so that a venue without a kitchen is not a venue without a lab. And diversity of entry points as the mechanism itself: to talk about food you have to meet different interests.

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Recognition



The competences a participant builds in a food lab map cleanly onto the Youthpass key competences — systems thinking and problem-solving, digital and technical skills, cultural awareness and expression, personal and social competence, entrepreneurship, communication.

What makes recognition easier here than in most non-formal settings is the artefact rule. A participant who leaves with a jar of culture, a poster, a set of photographs and a fridge licence has physical evidence of what they did, and a self-

assessment conversation built on objects is a substantially easier conversation than one built on memory.

Two practical suggestions. Photograph each participant's own output and give them the file — it becomes their portfolio item, not yours. And write the reflection questions into the station description rather than saving them for a closing round; the moment to ask what surprised you is while their hands are still busy.

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Designed to be given away



A project like this could quietly end the day its funding does. The mechanism built to prevent that is the Future Food Cookbook — an open repository gathering the consortium's outputs in one place: workshop cards, step-by-step tutorials, canvases and templates, games, participation formats, communication materials and short videos, all openly licensed and made to be reproduced with modest resources.

Three decisions shaped it, and each is transferable.

IT GREW AS A BLOG, NOT AS A DELIVERABLE

During the project the website worked as a project diary — activities, articles, results as they happened. That is why it is usable: it was written while the memory was fresh, by the people who

ran the sessions, rather than assembled at the end from notes. It continues to grow after the project closes.

PARTICIPANTS' WORK SITS INSIDE THE ACTIVITY THAT PRODUCED IT

We had planned a separate "digital hall of fame" for participant outputs, and dropped it. Photography, recipes, posters and pen-plotter works went directly into the corresponding workshop pages and project articles instead. This keeps the work connected to the activity that produced it, documents the learning process rather than just the highlights, and produces a more authentic and more useful resource. It also means a youth worker reading a workshop page can see what a real group actually made, at a realistic standard.

THE GUIDES WERE WRITTEN FOR STRANGERS

Not a record of what we did — a kit for what you might do next. Plain language, low-cost

replicability, honest documentation of what failed as well as what worked, and an explicit invitation to combine activities from all three countries into a lab that none of us ran.

Nothing like the Future Food Lab existed before. We took over no existing format — we developed our own and threw our own tools together.

For the youth sector specifically this may be the most important takeaway, and it generalises far beyond food. Good practice that cannot be reproduced empowers no one beyond the room in

which it happened. Designing for distribution is what converts a local success into a European one, and a one-off project into infrastructure others can build on.

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What it adds up to



A cup made from food waste, held by the participant who moulded it. Messejana, January 2026.

Future Food Labs set out to close the distance between a problem of planetary scale and the everyday capacity of young people to act on it.

For the partner organisations it gave years of scattered experimentation a coherent educational form, with structured learning outcomes and a tested methodology. For the territories involved it offered a quiet but real demonstration that frontier experimentation in food technologies need not be confined to metropolitan hubs — that it can happen on a workbench in the Alentejo, in a Bavarian village, in a Barcelona neighbourhood, in a jar of slowly deepening green. It also changed the organisers: we eat much better since the project, and our own meat consumption has dropped drastically.

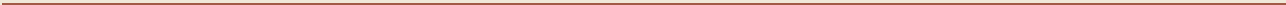
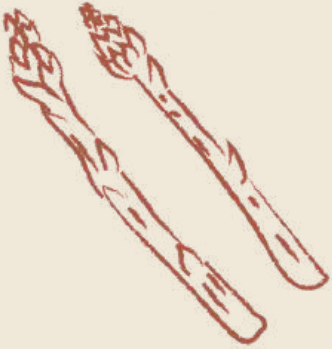
The format is not finished, and is not supposed to be. A design school is developing new stations for

it. A teacher training organisation is carrying it towards its schools. Participatory methods have arrived in a rural area that did not have them. And the clearest signal that it worked was not in any evaluation form — it was participants asking, after the project ended, when the next Future Food Lab is happening.

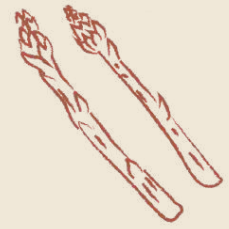
For the wider community of youth workers it leaves a compact, portable argument. Make the abstract concrete by letting young people produce. Cross disciplines as a matter of course, because no single field holds the whole answer. Design the experience before the content. Treat European cooperation not as a funding formality but as the realistic way for peripheral organisations to reach the critical mass that genuine innovation requires. And design everything, from the first day, to be given away.

Future food is not a distant scenario. It is something young people can cook, taste and shape today.

Reference

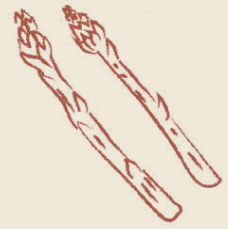


Station quick reference



CLUSTER	STATION	TIME	GROUP	KIT NEEDED	LEAVES
TASTE	10.1 Umami buffet	45–90 min	8–30	None	Recipe cards, photographs
TASTE	10.2 Tastings as a method in their own right	30–60 min	Any	None	Loss of a fear
TASTE	10.3 Cooking with spirulina	45 min	4–20	A bowl	≈24 bites and a recipe
PLAY	10.4 The Zero Food Waste fridge game	60–90 min	6–25	A second-hand fridge	A fridge licence
PLAY	10.5 Protein race and guessing rounds	15–30 min	Any	Minimal	A corrected intuition
MAKE	10.6 DIY photobioreactor — low-tech	One afternoon	4–12	Bottle, LED strip, pump, bucket	A working reactor
MAKE	10.7 Smart photobioreactor — Arduino	One afternoon	4–10	Arduino, sensors	An automated reactor
MAKE	10.8 Biomaterials from food waste	3 h plus a wait	4–12	A local residue	Samples
TELL	10.9 Be a Future Food Photojournalist	2–3 h	6–15	A phone each	Images the group uses
TELL	10.10 Pen plotter and communication design	2–3 h	6–15	Plotter or printer	A poster for home
DECIDE	10.11 Participatory question boards	20 min – half day	Any	Dots and paper	A visible collective opinion
CONVENE	10.12 The speculative dinner	An evening	12–20	A kitchen, collaborators	Documented opinion shift
CONVENE	10.13 The future food challenge	Two mornings	6–20	A real local problem	Concepts defended publicly
CONVENE	10.14 The discovery dinner	An evening	15–30 guests	A kitchen	A network that knows you

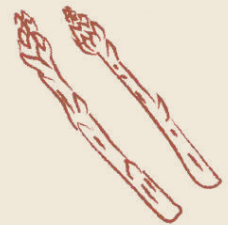
Materials you can download



All openly licensed, through the Future Food Cookbook.

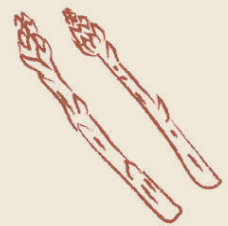
- Zero Waste Game: instructions, four templates and a setup guide for rebuilding the station from second-hand components, in English and German.
- Participatory boards: "What's Your Flavour?" workshop guide, in English and German.
- Participatory process: Food System Canvas (A3), Collective Ideation and Stakeholder Mapping canvases (A0), printable Future Food postcard (A5).
- Spirulina: DIY PhotoBio Reactor tutorial, Smart PhotoBio Reactor (Arduino) tutorial, Cooking with Spirulina, and the "Green Power" energy bites recipe card.
- One-pagers: FFL in youth education and the Bonn process · our approaches and methodologies · best practices and vision · food hygiene rules in Portugal, Spain and Germany.
- Communication: design guide, social media templates, pen-plotter motifs, presentation materials.

Where to read further



THEME	RESOURCE	WHY
ESD and the Bonn process	UNESCO Education for Sustainable Development; the ESD for 2030 toolbox; the UN Sustainable Development Goals, notably 2 and 12	The framework this method operationalises
Food policy and science	EU Farm to Fork strategy; the EUR-Lex plain-language summary; EUFIC's explainer	The policy context, in three levels of difficulty
Non-formal youth methodology	SALTO-YOUTH Toolbox; SALTO Green Resource Centre; Youthpass	Ready-to-use tools, green transition resources, recognition
Food hygiene	ASAE (PT); AESAN (ES); RKI §43 IfSG (DE); EU Regulation 1169/2011	The country rules referenced in Part IV
Dissemination and inspiration	Erasmus+ Project Results Platform; European Youth Portal	Where to publish, and where we found the gap this project addressed

About the project



Future Food Labs — "Connecting food cultures with green goals using future-oriented learning activities" — is an Erasmus+ KA210 Small-scale partnership in the youth field (KA210-YOU-D7873251), coordinated by Saliko Lichtmann Spieske (Germany) with Buinho Associação (Portugal) and Associació Lichen Innovació Social (Spain). It ran from December 2024 to June 2026, with a total grant of 60,000 EUR.

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All outputs are openly licensed and available through the Future Food Cookbook at futurefoodlab.eu. Take what works. Change what does not. Tell us what happened.



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