AGRICULTURE SERIES

Enhancing your workforce nutrition programme

ACCESS TO HEALTHY FOOD

A practical guide to support agricultural organisations give farm worker access to healthy snacks and meals

WORKFORCE NUTRITION ALLIANCE

Food is the fundamental creator of our health and perception

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BACKGROUND

Introduction

About 75% of the global population depends on agriculture for food and income, making it a vital driver of economic and social development.[1] At the centre of this are smallholder farmers who produce 70 to 80% of the food consumed worldwide.[2] Yet, despite their essential role in food production, many smallholder farmers in developing countries - who mostly reside in rural communities are food insecure. Their diets are often heavy in staple foods that provides more of energy but lack the essential nutrients needed for long-term health.[3]

This limited dietary diversity challenge is influenced by several factors including limited access to varieties of food, affordability, lack of time for meal preparation, and limited access to knowledge about healthy diets. Over time, this pattern can take a toll. Without enough nutrient-rich foods, humans are more prone to illness, feel tired more often, and find it harder to maintain their health and productivity. For smallholder farmers, this can affect not just their ability to work the land, but also their capacity to care for their families and build a better future.

This guidebook responds to these realities. It is a practical tool to help design and implement simple and effective nutrition and wellbeing programmes to improve access to healthy food in agricultural communities. Whether an organisation is launching a pilot or strengthening an existing initiative, this guidebook helps to turn ideas into action.

Who is this guidebook for?

This guidebook is designed to support organisations that work with or support smallholder farmers especially those operating in agricultural settings where traditional workplace structures may not exist. It is not intended for direct use by farmers, but for organisational focal points overseeing, designing, coordinating, or managing the activities that support smallholder farmers nutrition and wellbeing efforts across the agricultural supply chain.

Who we are

The Workforce Nutrition Alliance was launched by The Consumer Goods Forum (CGF) and the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN) in October 2019. Since our launch in 2019, the Workforce Nutrition Alliance (WNA) has supported programmes reaching over 6 million farmers and workers. We aim to reach 10 million by 2030.

The WNA encourage organisations (e.g., supply chain actors, cooperatives, buyers, and implementing partners) that are committed to improving nutrition for smallholder farmers and workers to enrol in one of our implementation support programmes. These programmes offer tailored guidance, tools, and technical support to help design, scale, and monitor effective workforce nutrition initiatives across the four pillars.

This Smallholder Farmer guidebook is one in a series of four produced by the Workforce Nutrition Alliance, which complements the Smallholder Farmer Scorecard by offering actionable guidance to strengthen programme areas such as breastfeeding support, access to healthy food, nutrition education, and health checks. All four guidebooks are publicly available on our website with the aim of helping supply chain actors and smallholder farmers to enhance their nutrition programmes.

FIRST TASTE

Before you start

What is covered in this guidebook?

This guidebook provides strategies to improve access to healthy food for farmers and their households. It outlines practical steps to increase the availability and consumption of safe and nutritious foods and suggest simple, low-resource solutions, and case studies from those already implementing similar efforts. This guide is structured to support implementation, even with limited infrastructure, and adapt interventions to the realities of farming households.

Why is this guidebook important?

Many farmers want to eat well but face daily challenges like limited food options, high costs, or little time to prepare meals. When farmers have regular access to healthy food and consume safe, nutritious food, they are able to stay strong, support their families, and contribute to their communities. This guidebook offers simple, practical ways to improve food access in an agricultural setting. By taking action, organisations can strengthen farmer wellbeing and contribute to the nutrition targets of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) on Zero Hunger (SDG 2), Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3), and Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8).

A note on 'healthy food'

Healthy food is a nutritious and safe food that in the way it is consumed and by the individual that consumes it, provides beneficial nutrients (e.g., vitamins, minerals, proteins, essential fats, dietary fibres) and minimises potentially harmful elements (e.g., contaminants like lead, toxins like aflatoxin, anti-nutrients, high quantities of saturated fats and sugars).[4] A healthy diet is not built on one food group alone but rather 3 to 5 different food groups, include colourful fruits and vegetables, and reflecting national Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs) (see Annex A for more details).

A note on 'workforce nutrition programme'

Workforce Nutrition Programme is a term we use to describe a set of actions that aim to improve nutrition and wellbeing in diverse work environments. These programmes can be implemented in formal work settings (e.g., factories, offices) or agricultural settings (e.g., tea plantations, coffee farms, trading or buying centres of agricultural commodities where farmers sell).

Access to Healthy Food programmes are programmes which focus on increasing smallholder farmers' access to healthy and/or safe foods (i.e., fruits or vegetables, fortified grains, proteins or micronutrient supplements). Organisations may support improved access to healthy food directly (markets, government schemes or vouchers) or via home garden inputs, offered for free, with a subsidy, or at full cost. Access to Healthy Food programmes shape access to nutritious foods and encourage healthier choices.

2

Evidence of impact

TURNING INSIGHT INTO PRACTICE

The evidence of impact

Improving access to healthy food in farmer households brings measurable benefits for farmers, their families, their communities, and the organisations that support them. Some of the overall benefits include:

The benefits of farmers and their households

Improved health and wellbeing

Increased energy and productivity

Fewer days lost to illness

Greater resilience, especially for women and children

The benefits of organisations and partners

Increase productivity and efficiency

Stronger community relationships and trust

Alignment with sustainability and buyer standards

Increased morale and engagement

Although farmers are the primary producers of the world's food supply, they remain highly vulnerable to food insecurity and malnutrition. In Uganda, Kenya, and Nigeria, for instance, 52% of farmers experience food insecurity,[5] which increases the risk of malnutrition (particularly undernutrition and micronutrient deficiencies) that affect health, wellbeing, and productivity.

Prolonged inadequate nutrient intake often caused by food insecurity, skipped meals or consistent unbalanced diets increases the risk of diet-related health problems. For example:

- **In Brazil** food-insecure elderly farmers were more likely to suffer from anaemia.[6]
- **In India**, anaemia affects 34.2% of female and 14.8% of male farmers, with women in agriculture significantly more affected than those in other sectors.[7]
- **In Ethiopia** 50% of households relying on root crops had inadequate energy intake, while all root crop and maize-based farming households showed inadequate vitamin A intake.[8]

Anaemia directly undermines work capacity

Anaemia directly undermines work capacity by reducing oxygen transport in the blood, leading to fatigue, dizziness, and impaired cognition. These symptoms lower strength, focus, and endurance, especially in labour-intensive farming tasks.[9] A study in Indonesia reported that anaemic rubber tree tappers and weeders were 20% less productive than non-anaemic workers.[10] Also, anaemic tea workers in India harvested 2.02kg (9.1%) less tea in a three-hour session and earned 4% lower wages compared to the non-anaemic peers.[11]

Other nutrition-related issues further reduce productivity. Hypoglycaemia (low blood sugar) resulting from missed meals and high energy expenditure can cause weakness, confusion, and fainting, increasing accident risks. Likewise, Iodine deficiency impairs cognition and energy, slowing decision-making and work performance.

These combined health challenges reduce individual wellbeing, lower household income, and weaken the resilience of rural food systems. Therefore, improving farmers' nutrition through better access to healthy foods can enhance health, reduce illness, increase wages and productivity.[10,11]

Good practice

CASE 1

Delivering more nutritious food options through healthy line shops[12]

Country
India

Sector
Tea

Case
Tea estate workers in Assam, particularly women, face persistent malnutrition due to poor market infrastructure and limited access to diverse, nutritious foods. Most households rely on small local retailers (called line shops) that are understocked and disconnected from efficient supply chains.

To solve this, GAIN and Ecociate introduced a new business model called Healthy Line Shops (HLS) - a partnership with local line shops that sold nutritious foods, such as fortified oil, lentils, eggs, and milk. Shopkeepers received training on how to manage their stock, improve their business, and promote healthy eating. They were also connected to a reliable distributor who could deliver these nutritious foods directly from bigger markets to their shops.

Outcomes

- Increased demand for and consumption of nutritious food products among workers and their families.
- Monthly combined sales of nutritious products across HLSs grew from USD 99 to USD 5,763. Nutritious foods made up about 60% of total order value.
- Shop owners improved their inventory management, expanded product lines, and reduced costs through bulk ordering and doorstep delivery .
- The business model transitioned into a self-sustaining supply chain expanding to 120 additional HLSs across new districts and serving approximately 120,000 people.

CASE 2

Healthier diets in Malawi's tea communities[13]

Country
Malawi

Sector
Tea

Case
Malnutrition remains a major public health challenge in Malawi. Among women aged 15–49, 36% have been diagnosed with anaemia, 15% are overweight and 8% are underweight. Particularly in tea-growing regions, diets are often dominated by staple foods and lack essential nutrients, leading to poor health and productivity among workers and smallholder farmers.

From 2020–2023, the Healthy Diets for Tea Communities programme supported both tea estate workers and smallholder farmers by improving access to and awareness of nutritious foods. The programme reached 6,556 registered smallholder farmers, and 118,224 family and community members, through locally tailored activities through community-based channels. These channels included:

- Nutrition clubs and home gardens to encourage planting of diverse and biofortified crops (e.g. orange-fleshed sweet potatoes)
- Cooking demonstrations, competitions, and awareness campaigns to promote dietary diversity and healthy eating habits
- Tip-tap handwashing facilities and hygiene education to improve sanitation and food safety

Outcomes
- Increased diversity in diets: The share of women meeting minimum dietary diversity (≥5 food groups) increased from 36% to 71%; dietary diversity scores rose from 4.1 to 5.8. Dietary diversity refers to a diet that contains a higher concentration of micronutrients. Women who consume a minimum of 5 out of 10 possible food groups are considered to have achieved the minimum adequate diet diversity.
- High adoption of biofortified crops: 86% of smallholders grew orange-fleshed sweet potatoes in their gardens (up 20% from baseline). 72% agreed that biofortified crops improved nutritional quality (up from 36%).
- Improved sanitation and food safety: 25% more people reported handwashing before food preparation, supported by COVID-19 hygiene awareness.

3

Assessing the needs

PREPARING YOUR PROGRAMME

NEEDS ASSESSMENT

Defining the need for access to healthy food

Before designing an Access to Healthy Food programme, it is helpful to gather information about the current situation in the community including the existing cultural practices, food habits and the available resources. This helps ensure the programme is practical and designed to address real challenges faced by farmers.

Start by exploring these key questions

- What information do we need to know before starting the programme?
- What is the objective or change we want to achieve?
- Who should be involved in collecting or giving this information?
- How will the information be used?

A well-planned needs assessment helps align activities with local realities, identify gaps and opportunities, and includes farmer perspectives in the process.

Sample key assessment areas

Table 01

This table offers sample areas to explore during your assessment. It can help to identify what to assess based on the objective, and determine who to involve and choose appropriate methods for collecting the data. Adapt it as needed to fit a specific context.

What to assess?	Objective or desired change	Who to involve?	How to collect information?
What are the characteristics of our target group? How can we reach them?	To understand the culture and effective communication line available in the field	Farmer organizations, community leaders, cooperatives, Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA)	Community mapping, group interviews
What are the farmers' work patterns? (e.g., lean seasons, working hours, incentive structures)	To align activities with farming cycles and avoid disruptions to livelihoods	Farmer organizations, community leaders, cooperatives, VSLA	Seasonal activity calendars, group discussions, observations
Where do farmers currently get food from? (home production, markets, vendors, food aid)	To understand food access pathways and to identify relevant entry points for interventions (markets, etc.)	Field facilitators, community leaders, cooperative reps, extension workers	Surveys, short interviews, observations
What nutritious, safe foods are available locally and seasonally?	To identify gaps and opportunities to offer healthier and accessible foods (see Annex A: What is considered healthy food)	Local vendors, farmers, agricultural extension staff	Market scans, seasonal calendars, focus group discussions
What are farmers' typical eating patterns during work?	To identify dietary patterns and potential health risks	Farmers, especially women and caregivers	Short surveys, recall interviews (e.g., 24-hour food recall, Minimum Dietary Diversity-Score)
What nutrition-related health concerns are most common among farmers? (e.g., anaemia, underweight, high blood pressure)	To link dietary habits to health outcomes and target nutrition priorities	Community health workers (CHW), NGOs, local governments	Database and health screening (if feasible), observations, interviews
Is there any programme available related to provide access to food? Who are the key stakeholders related to the current programme?	To assess opportunities for improving existing programme	Community leaders, local organisations, health provider	Observations, key informant interviews
What are the main and potential barriers to offering healthier food? (e.g., affordability, storage, time, preferences, cultural norms)	To anticipate challenges and address practical or social barriers to uptake	Farmers, household members, local vendors, local governments	Informal discussions, participatory tools (e.g., problem tree), simple cost comparisons
What do farmers suggest for improving food access and diversity?	To ensure interventions reflect farmers' needs and preferences	Farmers, household members (especially women and youth)	Suggestion boxes at cooperatives, community meetings, simple feedback forms

4

Improving access to healthy foods

BUILDING YOUR PROGRAMME

Cross-cutting factors to consider

Given the realities of rural life, improving access to healthy food can be challenging in farming communities. However, with the right approach, lasting change is possible. Programmes should be designed to operate for at least two years to allow time for habits, infrastructure, and supply systems to change sustainably.

The following factors highlight what contributes to success and the common challenges to anticipate when implementing access-to-healthy food initiatives in agricultural communities. This will help guide your efforts.

Key success factors

To successfully improve access to healthy food in farming communities, consider integration of the following elements into the programme design and implementation:

- **Local relevance**
  Based on the results of the needs assessment, set clear and realistic goals that fit the daily lives of farmers. For example, schedule activities around peak agricultural periods such as planting and harvest seasons.

- **Build community support**
  Share programme goals with farmer groups, cooperative leaders, and families. Be open about what is planned and ask for their ideas. When people feel involved, they are more likely to stay committed and help the programme succeed.

- **Keep it clear**
  Ensure the programme is easy to explain and remember. Use slogans to help spread awareness.

- **Start small, build steadily**
  Begin with simple, visible actions that are easy to maintain and require minimal time or resources. Small wins can build trust and create momentum as more long-term activities are being planned.

- **Designate local programme partners**
  Assign community focal persons (e.g., lead farmers, cooperative reps, women's group leaders) to help coordinate food access efforts and gather community feedback.

- **Monitor over time**
  Use the initial assessment as a baseline. Regularly check progress and gather feedback to learn, adapt, and report results over time.

A note on rural communities

In most farming communities, smallholder farmers live in rural areas where houses are spaced far apart, often surrounded by their own plots of land or fields. Villages may consist of scattered compounds rather than densely built neighbourhoods. Others live in company-owned housing estates or controlled environments provided by employers, usually far from main towns.

Despite these differences, farmers maintain close relationships through regular community events such as weekly markets, religious gatherings, harvest celebrations, and cooperative meetings. These gatherings are not only social occasions but also serve as vital spaces for sharing information and ideas. While some farmers use mobile phones or platforms like WhatsApp or Facebook to stay in touch, face-to-face conversations remain the most trusted and widely used way to exchange news, advice, and updates.

Common challenges and how to respond

To successfully improve access to healthy food in farming communities, consider integration of the following elements into the programme design and implementation:

Table 02

Challenge	Why it matters and how to respond?
Food habits	Diets are shaped by culture, income, and availability. Given that behavioural change is a gradual process, interventions should focus sequentially on one priority issue to establish a sustainable basis for further progress.
Limited infrastructure	In some areas, poor roads, lack of refrigeration, or low market access can make food-related programmes hard to run. Use what is locally available and partner with government or local groups to share resources.
Cultural preferences and dietary norms	Some traditions influence who eats what or how food is shared. Respect these norms while introducing gradual, practical alternatives.
Perceived extra cost or workload	Farmers may see nutrition as “extra work” or unaffordable. Consistently communicate and emphasise health benefits they can relate to (i.e. more energy, healthier children, lower healthcare costs).
Monitoring progress	Without tracking data, it is hard to know what initiatives are working. Use simple tools to track food diversity, frequency of support, or satisfaction with changes.

Implementation of your programme

Before launching any programme, it is essential to develop a solid foundation that answers the key questions:

- What are you trying to achieve?
- Why is support needed?
- Who are you trying to reach or impact?
- How, where, and when, activities will take place?
- With whom will support be delivered?

The following steps will guide you to move from planning to implementation:

1. Define your goal(s)

Use the needs assessment data to clearly state what you want to achieve. It is recommended that goals should follow the SMART criteria: Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant to your context, and Time-bound. For more information on SMART criteria, see Annex C.

2. Make clear priorities

After defining the goal(s), decide which actions should come first. Prioritise based on urgency, feasibility, and potential impact, especially if resources are limited. Where possible, align your programmes with national policy frameworks, nutrition action plans, or agricultural strategies to strengthen legitimacy and sustainability.

3. Define the target group

Using the available needs assessment data, be specific about who the programme will benefit. It could be individual farmers and their households, or the wider farming community.

4. Determine the right pathway

Based on the community context, needs, and goals, decide which programme best improves access to healthy food. Spend time and discuss options with community members and local leadership to ensure consensus. The aim is not to present a finished idea, but to co-create a plan that fits local realities and complements existing programmes.

Possible programme pathways include: *Last mile delivery, Home gardens, Door-to-door delivery, Food vouchers or packs or Micronutrient supplementation.*

Quick roundtables or informal community meetings can be effective for gathering input and confirming preferred options.

5. Map potential collaborators and connect

Once the intervention pathway is decided, identify and engage stakeholders who can help achieve success. Collaboration not only shares the workload but also increases reach and sustainability. Below is a typical example of stakeholders that can be mapped:

Influence: Local government, local leaders
Relevance: Community health workers, extension agents, VSLAs, farmer cooperatives, NGOs, etc.

These relationships should be built early through meetings, joint planning sessions, or partnership agreements. Clear roles should be established so that each collaborator understands their contribution and benefit.

Note: Building an effective access to healthy food programme takes time, coordination, and trust. By grounding plans in local realities, starting small, and strengthening partnerships, practical solutions can last.

5

Run your programme

PUTTING YOUR PLAN INTO ACTION

TIME FOR ACTION

Run your programme

Choose and apply approach

To make healthy food accessible in farming communities, it is best to adopt one or combine several of the five approaches that we present in this chapter. Effective programmes take the community context, farmers need, existing systems, and available resources in to account. Focus on what already exists in the community and aim to strengthen or adapt those systems rather than starting something entirely new. If resources allow, combining multiple approaches can lead to greater impact.

1. Last mile delivery

This programme works well for farming rural communities that live far from major markets or supply centres, where access to nutritious food is limited. It is especially effective in settings such as tea estates where households rely on small local shops, informal vendors, or kiosks for their main sources of food.

Building on the evidence from the *Healthy line shops* initiative in Assam, India,[12] this programme connects small local retailers to reliable distributors of affordable, more nutritious foods (see Annex B for more information). These local healthy line shops and their owners receive formal training in business management, record keeping, and nutrition awareness. By improving delivery logistics, supporting shop owners, and engaging communities to purchase and consume nutritious foods, last mile delivery helps ensure that healthy food options become more available, affordable, and consistently stocked even in remote locations.

Getting started

Successful implementation of a last-mile delivery approach starts by strengthening the systems that bring food from suppliers to communities. The steps below outline how to design, launch, and sustain it.

- **Assess the local market and supply chain**
  Map existing food shops, vendors, and supply routes. Identify transport barriers, storage limitations, and the types of food currently available. This helps understand the accessibility gaps and identify where improvements are needed.

- **Define a healthy food basket**
  A selection of nutritious foods should be prioritised based on the farmers' dietary needs, preferences, and the feasibility of local sourcing. These prioritised foods may include fortified staples (which have extra nutrients added to them to help mitigate health problems, such as anaemia, goitre, or weak immunity), legumes, milk, eggs, and vegetables. This basket guides what the participating shops will keep in inventory and promote.

Reality for most farmers

Many farming families depend largely on what they grow or raise themselves. It is common for them to prioritise selling their produce first to generate income before setting aside portions for household consumption. In some cases, they consume only what is left after sales — foods that may be less fresh or less nutritious. As a result, families may not experience hunger but still miss out on essential nutrients.

- **Select and train trusted shop owners**
  Choose local shop owners who are respected in the community, have reliable storage space, and are willing to participate. Provide comprehensive training on stock management, record keeping, customer service, and basic nutrition messages. This enhances the store's capacity to effectively promote diets.

- **Set up a reliable distribution link**
  Connect shops to a central distributor or aggregator who consolidates orders, bulk purchases from wholesalers, and delivers stocks directly to the shops. This reduces transport costs and keeps supply consistent, even in remote areas.

- **Brand and promote the shops**
  Brand participating outlets as "Healthy Line Shops" for easy recognition. Use posters, community meetings, or radio to raise awareness so families know where to buy nutritious foods.

- **Support logistics and coordination initially**
  In the early stages, programmes may need assistance with transport costs or order consolidation until demand and sales volume grow. Over time, this system should become self-sustaining.

- **Engage the community and build demand**
  Organise community events, cooking demonstrations, or cooperative meetings to promote the benefits of nutritious foods. Encourage families to purchase healthier items regularly and share recipes with them.

- **Monitor and adapt**
  Track sales, stock levels, and customer feedback to identify what is working and what needs adjustment. Use the data to refine the food basket, add new products, or expand to more shops and communities.

The last-mile delivery approach offers a practical solution for bridging the gap between nutritious food supply and rural demand. By transforming small local shops into reliable, community-trusted sources of healthy food, this model strengthens both local businesses and household nutrition. When designed around existing market systems and community participation, it not only improves access but also builds a foundation for long-term sustainability.

Over time, last mile delivery can be complemented by other pathways such as home gardens to further expand the range and resilience of healthy food options available to farming families.

2. Home garden

Smallholder farmers' dependence on their crops is often complicated by the prioritisation of staple cash crops such as tea, maize, or cashews, restricting the cultivation diverse foods for home consumption. Home garden programmes help households maximise the small plots around their homes to grow vegetables, fruits, and sometimes, rear small livestock. By strategically promoting household food security, this programme improves year-round accessibility to safe and nutritious foods, enhances dietary diversity, and reduces vulnerability from distant or unreliable market supply chains.

When designed well, home gardens strengthen both nutrition and resilience, providing fresh produce even during lean seasons or times of food price fluctuation.

Getting started

Implementation of a home garden programme requires strong community entry, technical guidance, and a sustainable support system. Below are key steps to guide implementation.

- **Engage the community and local leaders**

  Begin with community entry where the purpose of home gardens is discussed with local leaders to gain their endorsement. Involve interested women and youth early, as they are often central to household food preparation and can sustain participation.

- **Work with experts and identify suitable crops**

  Partner with agronomists, agricultural officers, experienced lead farmers, and other key stakeholders to assess soil texture, rainfall patterns, and local crop performance. Use stakeholder expertise to select nutrient-rich species that thrive under local conditions, such as amaranth, okra, spinach, and tomatoes. Where possible, prioritise biofortified crops (bred through conventional breeding or biotechnology to have higher levels of essential nutrients) such as:

  - Orange-fleshed sweet potato Rich in vitamin A
  - Iron-rich beans Help prevent iron-deficiency anaemia
  - Zinc-rich rice or wheat Support immune function and growth
  - Provitamin A maize Supports eye health and immune function

  Since these crops may be new to the community, behaviour-change communication should be integrated into home garden intervention to build understanding and encourage acceptance.

  The below table gives you an overview of other nutritious climate-adapted, fast-growing, and familiar varieties that are suitable for your setting:

Table 03

Food groups	Example crops	Why it matters
Dark green leafy vegetables	Amaranth, spinach, mustard greens, moringa leaves, cassava leaves	Rich in vitamin A and folate, fast-growing and harvested repeatedly
Vitamin A-rich fruits and vegetables	Orange-fleshed sweet potato, pumpkin, carrots, mango, papaya	High in Vitamin A and C, boost eye health and immunity
Other fruits and vegetables	Eggplant, cucumber, radish, onion, guava, banana	Provide fibre and minerals
Grains, roots, tubers, and plantains	Potato, cassava, plantain, yam	Provide energy
Pulses (beans, peas, and lentils)	Chickpea, soybeans, cowpea, pigeon peas, lablab bean	Source of protein and vitamin B
Nuts and seeds	Groundnuts (peanuts), sesame, pumpkin seeds, jackfruit seeds	Provide good fat, source of protein, fibre and mineral

- **Provide inputs and technical training**
  Supply basic gardening materials such as seeds, vines, compost, or watering cans either for free, at a subsidised rate or through a mutual beneficial arrangement with farmers. This should be paired with hands-on Good Agricultural Practices (GAP) training on soil preparation, planting, pest control, and water management. Peer-to-peer learning and regular coaching from extension agents should be encouraged.

- **Link gardening to nutrition and food safety**
  Pair training sessions with nutrition education and hygiene messages on washing produce, safe food storage, and healthy cooking.

- **Promote year-round production**
  Support farmers to plan for seasonal rotation, crop diversity, and organic soil fertility management.

- **Monitor and celebrate progress**
  Collaborate with extension officers and community leaders to track progress - number of active gardens, types of crops grown, and household diet improvements. Celebrate milestones through community exhibitions or harvest fairs to recognise achievements and inspire others.

Environmental tips

- ☐ Reuse household organic waste for compost (e.g., vegetable peels).
- ☐ Choose drought-tolerant or local crop varieties adapted to your climate.
- ☐ Rotate crops to keep soil nutrients balanced.
- ☐ Plant shade trees or shrubs around the garden to protect soil and provide extra food or fodder.
- ☐ Encourage water-saving methods such as drip irrigation, mulching, and recycling detergent-free (for food safety purpose) household wastewater for gardens.

Do's and dont's

Do's

- ✓ Start small
- ✓ Choose low-maintenance, climate-adapted crops
- ✓ Use local seeds, natural compost, and simple tools
- ✓ Build ownership: involve households in design and crop choice
- ✓ Pair gardens with nutrition education and cooking demos
- ✓ Grow a variety of small and large crops to create layers

Don'ts

- ✗ Start with everybody – start with someone who is willing to participate
- ✗ Introduce unfamiliar seeds unless long-term support is available
- ✗ Forget follow-up - check in quarterly to troubleshoot and motivate

The home garden approach empowers farming families to grow more nutritious food options for their own consumption. Through collaboration with relevant stakeholders, it strengthens local food systems, improves dietary diversity, and builds climate-resilient livelihoods.

Did you know?

Growing food at home is good for your health and for the environment. A small home garden can:

- ☐ Cut your food's travel distance from kilometres to just a few metres.
- ☐ Save money by reducing what you need to buy from shops.
- ☐ Protect the planet by lowering carbon emissions from transport and packaging.
- ☐ Boost biodiversity by providing a home for pollinators and beneficial insects.

3. Door-to-door delivery

During peak farming seasons, farmers typically start their day very early and return home late. This makes it a challenge for many to go to the market or get the freshest, healthiest food. In many rural farming communities, households are far from markets or have limited time to travel due to long working hours in the fields. The door-to-door delivery of healthy food helps bring essential and nutritious foods directly to households through trusted community agents, youths, cooperatives, or women's groups.

This model builds on lessons from Unilever's Shakti model in rural India, which demonstrates how small businesses can generate income and stimulate the local economy while providing communities with essential items. The Shakti model trains local individuals, often women, to run small businesses that deliver everyday products door-to-door. This not only helps them earn an income but also makes essential goods more accessible to their communities, supporting both livelihoods and local development.[14]

Why this helps?

- Farmers save time and energy by accessing food without travelling long distances.
- Families still get fresh and healthy food, even during busy times.
- Local youths, women, or cooperatives generate income through delivery services or small trading margins.
- Money circulates within the community, strengthening local markets and reducing reliance on distant suppliers.
- Small-scale delivery enterprises can grow over time, creating stable livelihoods and encouraging entrepreneurship in rural areas.

Implementation tips

- Use simple, low-cost packaging (e.g., woven baskets, reused containers). Ensure containers that are promoted that directly touch food can be washed using clean water and soap to prevent contamination.
- Help the group plan delivery routes and schedules.
- Prioritize more vulnerable households such as elderly farmers, pregnant women, or families without transport .

When designed with community ownership, door-to-door delivery can do more than improve food access. It offers a practical way to link nutrition, livelihoods, and local economic activity thereby ensuring that healthy food reaches households while creating income opportunities within the community.

4. Food vouchers or packs

One of the biggest challenges rural farming communities' faces is the affordability and accessibility of nutritious foods. A practical way to close this gap is through food vouchers programmes or nutritious food pack distribution. These programmes would help ensure that farmers and their households can access essential, healthier foods even when supply or income is limited.

Food vouchers can be distributed through cooperatives, farmer associations, or company payroll systems and redeemed at designated shops or vendors for selected nutritious items such as fortified staples (see Annex B), pulses, fruits, vegetables, or animal-source foods. Alternatively, pre-packed food baskets can be provided directly to households on a regular schedule. For instance, quarterly, to supplement diets during lean periods or emergencies. This approach is particularly useful for short-term support or when other access pathways (like home gardens or local shops) are still being established.

Implementation tips

- Partner with trusted local vendors or cooperatives to manage voucher redemption or pack distribution.
- Clearly define the food items covered, prioritising those that are nutrient-dense, locally acceptable, and easy to store.
- Plan for regular distribution cycles (e.g., quarterly or bi-monthly) and keep simple records for transparency.
- Communicate clearly about how and where to redeem vouchers or collect food packs.
- When distributing fortified foods, always explain their benefits clearly. Also, share simple guidance on how to consume them safely and in appropriate amounts.
- Where possible, link the scheme to broader nutrition education or cooking demonstrations to encourage healthy food choices .
- If needed, consider sharing testimonials from local community members who have already used fortified foods. Hearing positive experiences from people they know, and trust can help build confidence and increase acceptance.

When well designed, food vouchers or nutritious food packs can provide a reliable safety net for farming households, especially during lean seasons, income shocks, or programme start-up phases. By easing the cost barrier and directing support toward nutritious foods, this programme helps protect household diets while creating a bridge to more sustainable, long-term food access solutions such as home gardens, or market-based approaches.

5. Micronutrient supplementation

In some cases, improving diet diversity alone may not meet the micronutrient needs of farmers and their families, especially where deficiencies such as anaemia or vitamin A deficiency are common. Micronutrient Supplementation provides targeted support through vitamins and mineral supplements to close these nutritional gaps quickly and effectively. Supplements may include iron

and folic acid tablets, vitamin A capsules, or multiple micronutrient powders. One practical step is to identify farmers who may need the supplementation and work with CHWs to ensure regular and safe distribution. Implementation should always align with national health and nutrition guidelines, ensuring the right product, dosage, and delivery channel are used.

This approach is most appropriate when dietary improvement efforts (such as home gardens) are still expanding, or when rapid correction of deficiencies is required. For example, among pregnant women, adolescent girls, or young children.

Implementation tips

- Partner with local health authorities or primary healthcare facilities to manage procurement and safe distribution.
- Ensure training for community health workers or extension agents on correct dosage, storage, and counselling.
- Integrate supplementation into existing farmer health checks, community meetings, or mobile clinics for convenience.
- Communicate clearly about the importance of adherence and potential side effects to build trust and compliance.
- Monitor uptake and follow national reporting formats to track coverage and outcomes.

Please note that, micronutrient supplementation should complement and not replace other efforts to improve diet quality and access to nutritious foods. It works best when combined with nutrition education and other programmes.

Improving access to healthy food extends beyond simply making food available; it also involves empowering individuals to understand, select, and incorporate nutritious foods into their daily routines. For smallholder farmers, providing education on the importance of balanced meals and how to prepare them with healthy, nutritious alternatives is key to fostering sustainable and meaningful change. Incorporating elements of nutrition education or behavioural change communication, such as cooking demonstrations, into these initiatives can significantly enhance their impact.

6

Monitoring and learning

MONITOR YOUR PROGRESS

TRACKING CHANGE

Monitor your progress

Monitoring

Monitoring is a key success factor for any programme to understand whether food access efforts are reaching farmer households. Collecting data and evaluating outcomes can help quantify the programme's impact and inform future decisions. Monitoring can also help identify emerging challenges early.

Sample indicators summary

Table 04

Monitoring area	What to track	Simple indicators	Frequency	Data collection tool
Dietary diversity	Household diet quality	Percentage of households eating at least 5 out of 10 food groups in past 24 hours	Every 4 months	Minimum dietary diversity recall form (Diet quality questionnaire)
Home garden use	Households actively growing diverse crops	Percentage of households with an active garden producing at least 3 food groups	Every 3 months	Garden checklist
Food pack or voucher reach	Households receiving diverse food assistance	Number of households receiving food packs/vouchers with 3+ food groups	Per cycle	Distribution log
Food access frequency	Frequency of market or delivery access (e.g. mobile market, bulk buying)	Number of times nutritious food was made accessible per community per quarter	Quarterly	Vendor log or mobile market calendar
Beneficiary satisfaction	Community perception of the food access programme	Percentage of households reporting satisfaction with food quality and usefulness	Twice a year	Short feedback survey or suggestion box summary
Micronutrient supplement access	Reach of targeted nutrient interventions	Number of households receiving micronutrient supplements	Per distribution	Distribution log

Tips for success

- Aim for simplicity. Track the most important metrics, not everything.
- Use tools that match the community literacy level and communication style.
- Share results, celebrate successes and adapt where needed.
- Encourage women, youth, and other vulnerable groups to speak openly about what support has helped and where gaps remain.

What to do with the data?

- Share updates
- Map progress
- Assess needed support
- Success stories in reports, social media, or donor updates
- Scale and reach
- Course correct if the project is not achieving the desired objectives

Key elements of access to healthy food in agricultural settings

Table 05

Area	Indicator	Basic	Better	Best
Availability of food ***Access support***	Access to nutritious food through external channels	Nutritious, safe foods are made available via community distribution, mobile vendors, or transport to local markets at least 4 times per year.	Nutritious, safe foods are regularly distributed as part of food packs, vouchers, or via local vendor partnerships; minimum 4 times/year.	Nutritious, safe foods are made available more than 4 times/year through multiple channels tailored to local needs (vouchers, vendor outreach, group purchasing schemes).
Availability ***Food production support***	Inputs to support home or communal food production	Basic inputs like seeds or tools are provided for kitchen gardens or small livestock.	Ongoing support is provided alongside inputs, including training, peer groups, or extension visits at least 4 times/year.	Continuous support with technical assistance, input access, and peer-led extension systems provided more than 4 times/year.
Quality scope	Diversity and nutritional value of food provided	At least one food type (e.g., fruits/vegetables or protein is supported through access or production.	At least two food types are covered, such as vegetables and legumes, or fortified staples and eggs; may include supplements.	All three food types—vegetable/fruits, protein, and fortified staples—are made available, with targeted supplements for vulnerable groups.
Reach	Inclusion and coverage	Support reaches smallholder farmers involved in a specific programme or buyer group.	Support reaches farmers and their families, including household members and school-age children.	Support reaches farmers, families, and broader community members (e.g., through community kitchens or school meal integration).
Affordability ***Food***	Cost of food to the farmer	Food is purchased at market prices.	Food is offered at subsidized rates through voucher schemes or cooperative discounts.	Food is provided at no cost (e.g., during lean season, for vulnerable groups, or through social protection integration).
Affordability ***Food inputs***	Cost of food production inputs	Inputs (e.g., seeds, chicks) are bought at full market price.	Inputs are made available at discounted prices via cooperatives or NGO schemes.	Inputs are distributed for free through support programmes or agricultural partnerships.
Monitoring and evaluation	Tracking progress and impact	Output-level activities (e.g., number of food packs distributed) are tracked internally once per year.	Output-level data is tracked and shared externally (e.g., with funders or partners) annually.	Output and outcome data (e.g., diet diversity improvements) are tracked, shared, and independently audited to guide programme improvement.
Longevity	Duration and sustainability of initiative	Initiative has been implemented for at least 6 months.	—	The programme has secured resources and partnerships to continue for at least 24 months, with embedded exit or sustainability planning.

7

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TOOLS TO LEARN MORE

LEARN MORE

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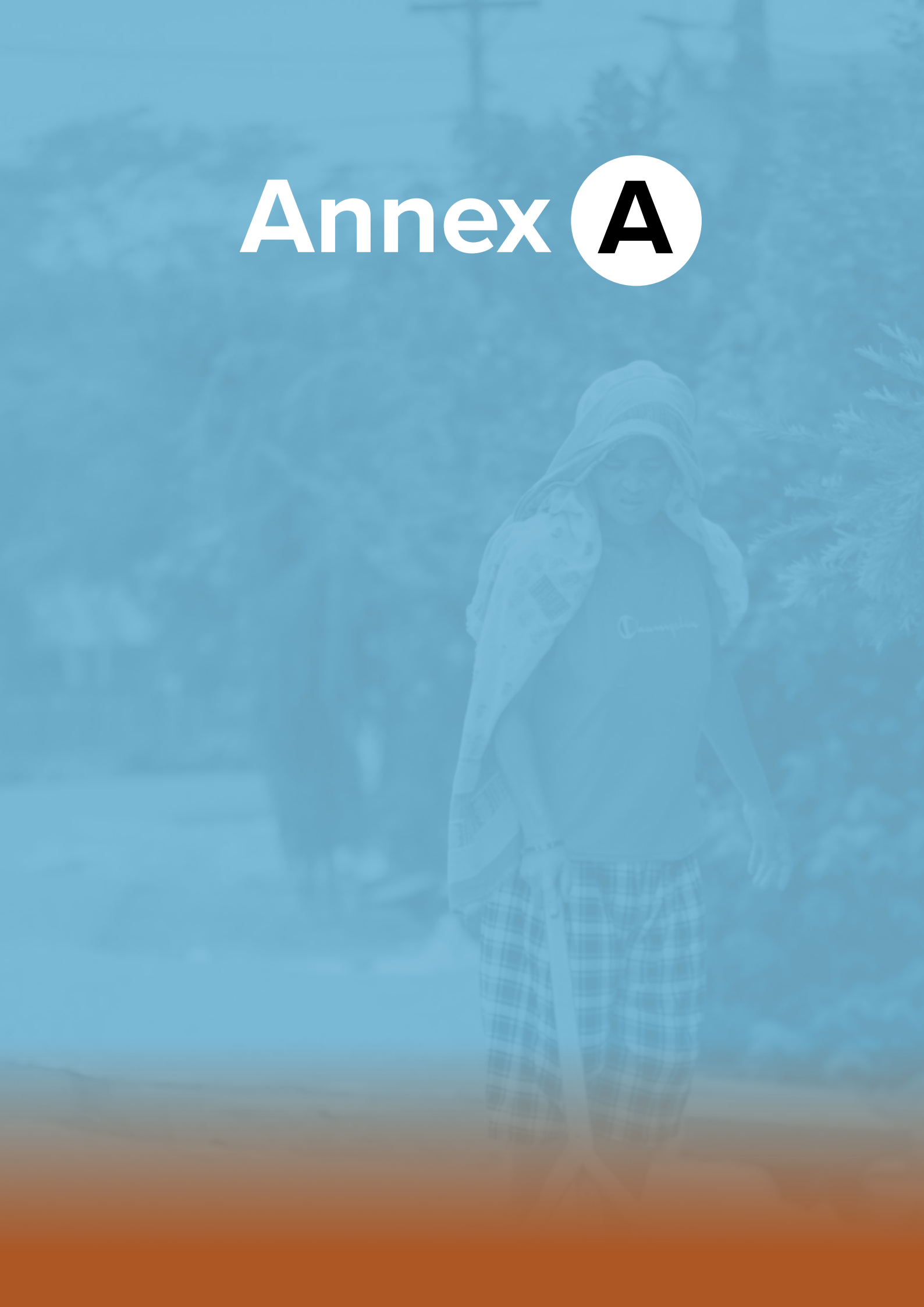
Annex A



ANNEX A

What is considered healthy food?

In this guidebook, a healthy food is a nutritious and safe food (food that does not contain a contaminant or other attribute that increases the probability of poor health outcomes) that in the way it is consumed and by the individual that consumes it, provides beneficial nutrients (e.g., vitamins, minerals, proteins, essential fats, dietary fibres) and minimises potentially harmful elements (e.g., contaminants like lead, toxins like aflatoxin, anti-nutrients, high quantities of saturated fats and sugars). We focus on locally available, seasonal, and nutrient-rich ingredients that farming families can grow, access, or prepare with ease.

A healthy diet isn't built on one food group alone. Like building a house, it needs multiple "materials." That's why we encourage meals that combine 3 to 5 different food groups, include colourful fruits and vegetables, and reflect national Food-Based Dietary Guidelines (FBDGs), which provide trusted advice tailored to local habits, preferences, and availability. For example, a healthy meal might include rice (grain), spinach (leafy green), lentils (legume), a boiled egg (protein), and papaya (fruit).

Why 'eating the rainbow' matters

Different colours of fruits and vegetables contain different nutrients:

- **Green** (spinach, moringa): Vitamin A, iron
- **Orange and yellow** (carrots, pumpkin): Beta-carotene for vision and immunity
- **Red** (tomatoes, red peppers): Antioxidants like lycopene
- **White** (onions, garlic): Boost heart and immune health

Encourage families to mix colours during the week—even if it's just in small amounts.

Food-based dietary guidelines

Food-based dietary guidelines (FBDGs) are simple, practical messages developed by each country's government and nutrition experts. They provide guidance on recommended dietary intake, portion sizes, and the principles of building balanced meals using foods that are locally available, culturally appropriate, and affordable. Access these guidelines on the: FAO website.

Most FBDGs include:
Visuals of recommended food like a food plate, bowl, or pyramid
Tips for portion sizes in one meal or one day
Suggestions for healthy eating based on local meals

Example	
Nutrition education	Use as visuals to show recommended diets
Garden planning	Choose crops based on the recommended food groups and ensuring diversity
Ready-to-cook kits and food packs	Find inspiration on what to give based on the common consumed food and recommended food
Monitoring	Calculation of the needs/intake recommendation

What to prioritise?

Given the variety of food groups and recommendations out there, it's easy to feel overwhelmed.
Here are the food groups that can be prioritised for agricultural communities.

Fruits and vegetables

- Many families don't eat enough. Help them gradually increase both the amount and variety.
- Even when these foods are grown, they're often sold for income instead of eaten. Encourage agricultural workers to keep a portion for their consumption.
- Focus on seasonal and local options.

Fortified grains or oils

- Grains and oils are the most common consumed food groups.
- Some types of grains and oils are fortified, which means additional nutrients have been added during processing.
- These are affordable ways to boost vitamin and mineral consumption without changing how food is prepared or consumed.

Proteins *(incl. beans, peas, nuts, seeds, dairy, eggs, fish, meat)*

- Protein supports strong bodies and minds.
- Offer a variety across the week—beans, eggs, dairy, fish, or meat. For budget-friendly options, pulses and eggs are great choices.
- Combining small amounts of animal and plant proteins.

Micronutrients supplements

- Long-term poor diets can lead to deficiencies like anaemia, which sometimes need more than food alone.
- In remote or high-risk of food-insecure areas, include micronutrients supplements (e.g., iron, vitamin A, zinc, iodine) as needed, especially for pregnant women and children.
- Always explain that supplements are boosters, not replacements.

Supportive practices for healthy meals

Building healthy meals is also about the routine and ritual around household consumption.

Provide meal breaks

Provide regular meal and snack breaks for agricultural workers (especially during long workdays or peak seasons). Workers are more productive and less likely to fall ill when they eat and rest consistently.

Drinking water

Clean and safe drinking water should be available to agricultural workers. Offer water at mealtimes and throughout the day. Avoid offering sugar-sweetened beverages which provide no nutritional value.

Practice good hygiene

Encourage handwashing before meals and food preparation

Proper portion size

It is crucial to consume the appropriate quantities and varieties of food to be considered healthy. For example, measuring portion size for vegetables, starchy staples, and protein foods is a simple way to attain this objective.

A handy technique

Our hands can serve as a useful guide for measuring portion size. Use this system to educate farmers on proper portion size and to empower them to make healthy choices at home.

Palm-sized

Meat
Poultry
Fish

Size of a fist

Cereals
Rice (cooked)
Starchy vegetables
Pulses (cooked)

Size of two fists

Leafy greens
Red vegetables
Orange vegetables
Other vegetables

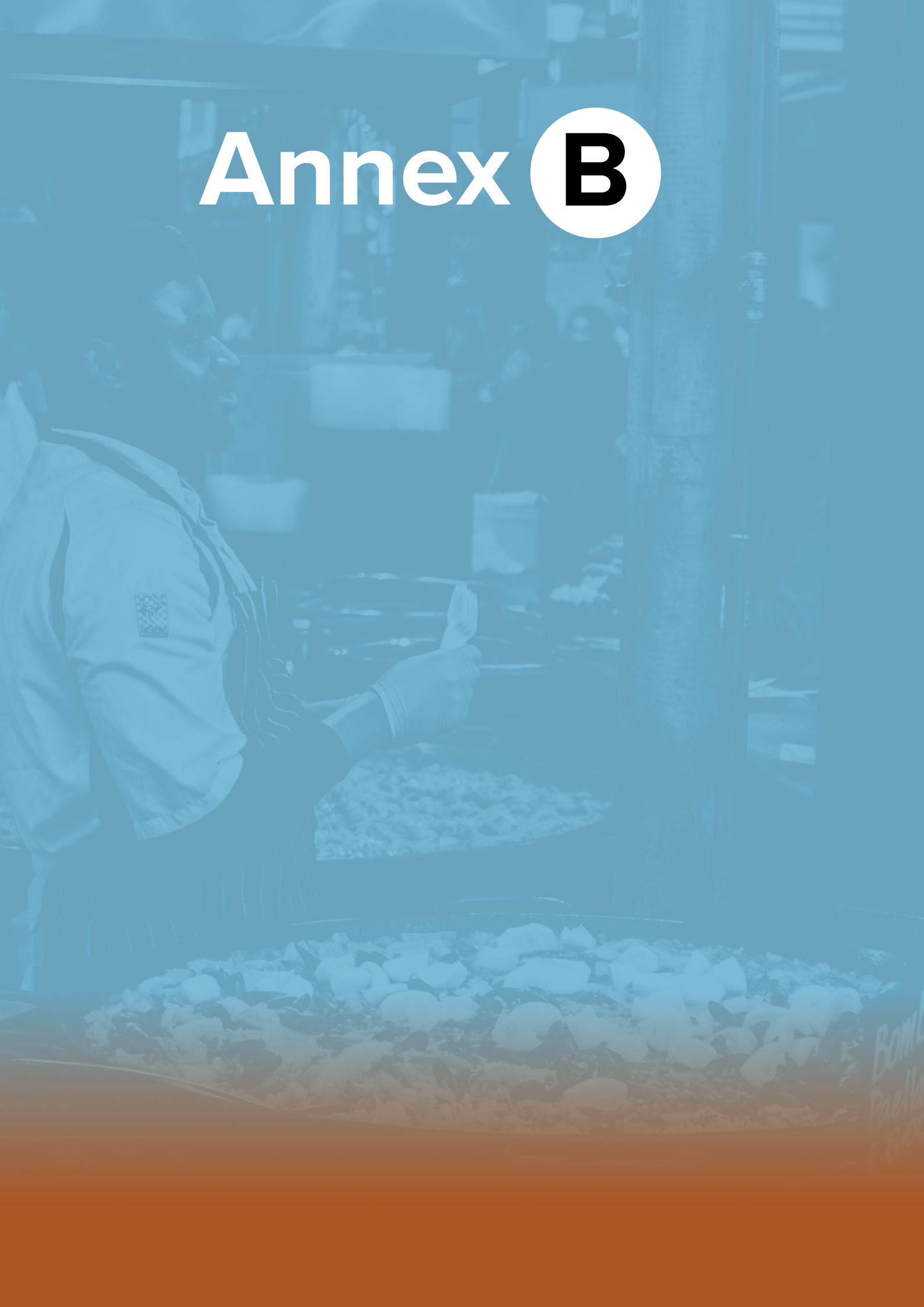
Food safety

Safe food is that for which levels of contaminants remain below certain limits at all steps along the Food supply chain, and thus avoid exposure and prevent food-borne illness. Encourage food safety practices at home, in meal prep, and during group food events:

- Keep raw and cooked foods separate
- Cook food thoroughly
- Store food properly
- Use clean water and hands
- Keep cooking surfaces clean

Learn more about food safety in this Factsheet[15] developed by the WHO, and use their Five keys to safer food[16] when handling and preparing food.

Annex B



ANNEX B

Food and drink items classification

Use available food lists from cooperative sales, group food packs, mobile markets, or community-supported food schemes to review what farmers and their families are regularly receiving. Classify items using the green-amber-red system below to estimate the diversity and quality of available food. This helps identify where improvements can be made and ensures that at least 70% of foods are nutritious (green) and less than 10% fall into low nutrition (red).[15]

Note: Always ensure food is handled and stored safely to prevent spoilage or contamination, especially in hot or remote conditions.

Grains, white roots and tubers, and plantains

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Whole grains: brown rice, millet, maize, sorghum, teff, fonio	**Refined grains:** white rice, white bread/ pasta	Deep-fried or sweetened doughs: mandazi, donuts, cakes, samosas
Boiled/steamed cassava, yam, sweet potato, cocoyam	Processed/frozen versions with salt/oil	Fried plantains, commercial chips, packaged cassava chips
Fortified maize/wheat flour	Low-fibre refined flours	Flavoured or instant starchy snacks

Pulses (beans, peas and lentils)

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Fresh/dried beans, lentils, cowpeas	Canned beans in brine	Fried or sugary bean snacks
Pigeon peas, soybeans, Bambara groundnut, chickpeas	Salted or sweetened pulse-based products	Ultra-processed pulse snacks

Nuts and seeds

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Unsalted roasted groundnuts, sesame seeds	Salted or sweetened nuts/seeds	Flavoured or fried nut mixes
Peanut/sesame paste (unsweetened)	Nut spreads with added sugar/oil	Candied nuts

Dairy

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Fresh milk, plain yogurt, local fermented milk	Flavoured or sweetened milk products	Ice cream, dairy-based desserts
Low-fat cheeses	High-sodium or high-fat cheeses	Cheese spreads, fried cheese snacks

Meat, poultry, and fish

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Fresh or frozen lean meat, poultry, fish	Smoked, salted fish or fatty meats	Fried or highly processed meats/fish
Boiled or grilled meat/fish	Canned meats in brine	Sausages, tinned meats, nuggets

Eggs

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Boiled or lightly scrambled eggs	-	Fried or processed egg-based snacks

Fruits and vegetables

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Fresh fruits and vegetables (mango, guava, banana, papaya, moringa, okra, spinach, amaranth, pumpkin leaves)	Canned or preserved in salt/vinegar/ syrup	Fried banana chips, packaged vegetable crisps
Dried vegetables without salt	Salted or oiled dried produce	Fruit candies, artificially coloured fruit snacks

Fats and oils

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Fortified vegetable oil (sunflower, soy, groundnut)	Unfortified or unlabelled oils	Margarine or reused deep-fry oils
Olive oil (if available)	Coconut or palm oil	-

Condiment and seasonings

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Fresh herbs, lemon, vinegar	Salt, traditional sauces (e.g. pepper sauce, tomato base)	Highly processed sauces (BBQ, mayonnaise, cheese sauce, bouillon cubes in excess)

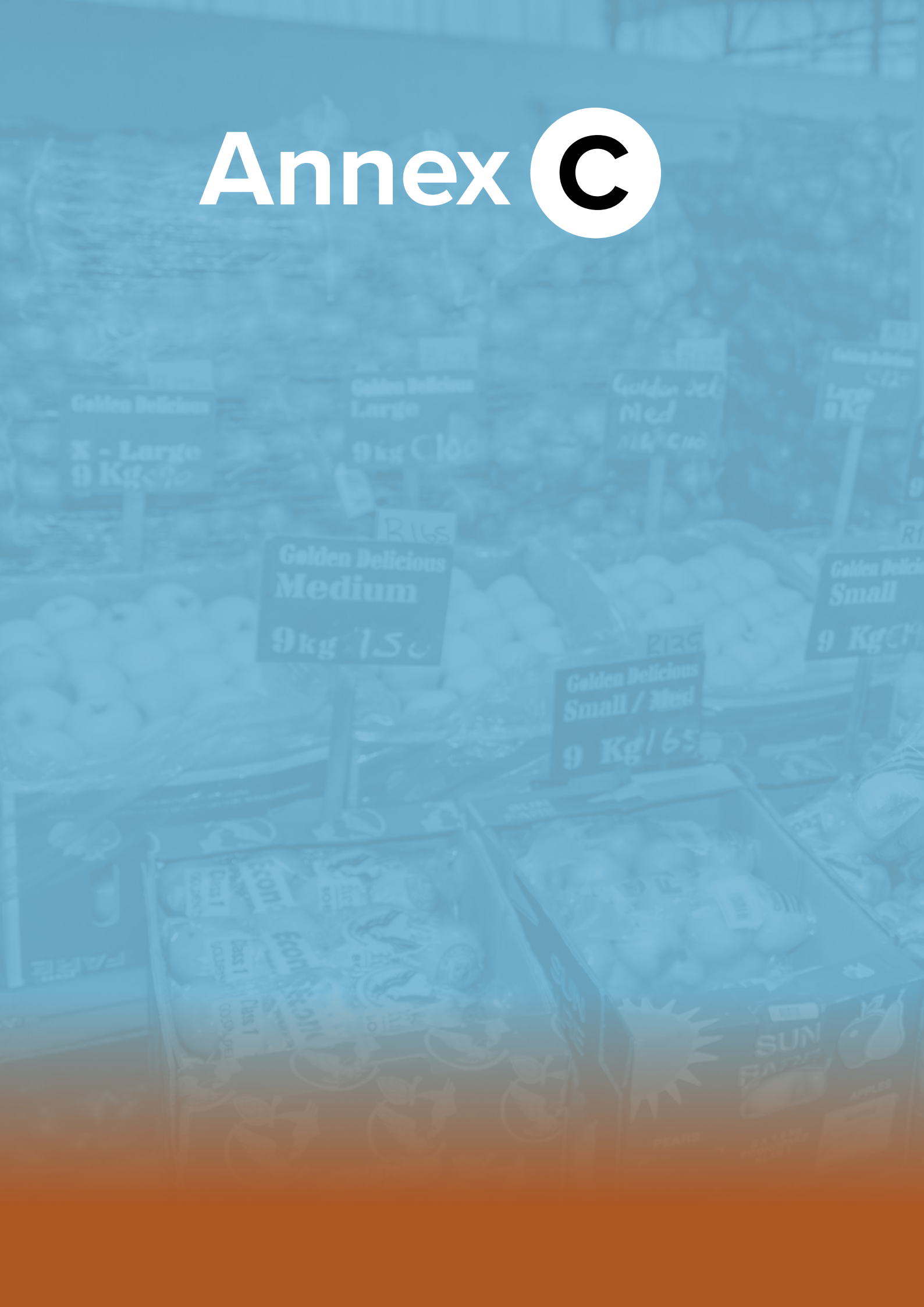
Sweets and sweeteners

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Low-sugar jam, dried fruits (e.g., dates, baobab)	Local honey, sugar	Candy, sugary spreads, chocolate drinks

Beverages

GREEN FOOD ITEMS	AMBER FOOD ITEMS	RED FOOD ITEMS
Clean drinking water, unsweetened tea/ herbal drinks	Fruit juice (100% or diluted), low-sugar cocoa	Sodas, sugary juices, alcohol

Annex C


Golden Delicious
Medium
9kg
Golden Delicious
Small / Med
9 Kg
Golden Delicious
Small
9 Kg

ANNEX C

SMART criteria

Examples of goals following a SMART criteria:

Example 1

By Month six, 300 farming households will have established home gardens with at least three types of vegetables grown regularly.

Example 2

Over a six-month period, 500 low-income farming households will receive monthly subsidies enabling them to purchase at least three healthy food items/week from participating local vendors.

Once your goal(s) are defined, use the following questions to check if they follow the SMART criteria:

- Is the goal clearly focused on one specific outcome or change?
- Can you track progress and know when the goal has been achieved using numbers or indicators?
- Is the goal realistic given your available time, resources, and capacity?
- Does the goal align with your broader programme objectives and the needs of the target group?

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