

FROM INTEREST TO DEEPER ACTION

A Starter Toolkit for Young People
in the Food System

Edition 1



“commutiny”
the youth collective



INTRODUCTION

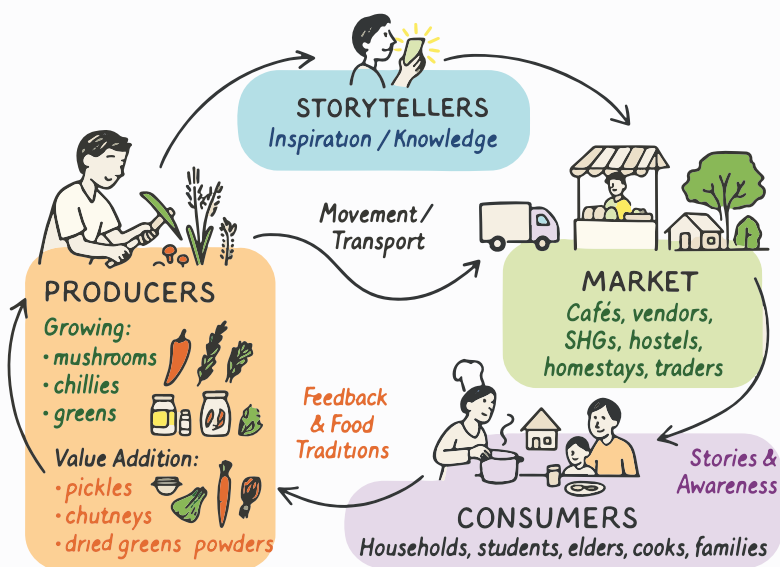
Across Northeast India, a lot of work is already underway to build a just and equitable food system — from civil society organisations working with deep community vision, to government schemes supporting local livelihoods, to the everyday resilience of farming and indigenous communities. The movement is alive.

Young people are already part of this movement in many ways: doing research, conducting transect walks, exploring diet diversity, documenting local foods, foraging, learning from elders, and reconnecting with the ecology around them. These experiences spark interest, confidence, and a sense of possibility.

To keep this momentum strong, young people need spaces and tools that gently guide this early interest into deeper action — in forms that match who they are. Across the food system, youth are already engaging as:

- ✿ **Producers** — growing mushrooms, chillies, millets, greens, or making pickles.
- ✿ **Participants in the market** — mandis, cafés, hostels, homestays, SHGs, local traders.
- ✿ **Consumers** — households, students, families, elders, cooks, and the wider community who finally eat the food.

Within these everyday spaces, there are many pathways: to grow food, cook it, organise communities, tell stories, support markets, observe ecologies, move food ethically, or simply be conscious consumers who care where their food comes from and where it goes. The food system holds space for many roles, and each one matters.



When we look at the food system simply — from producers to markets to consumers — we begin to see where young people already play a role. Within these spaces, we are exploring two simple levers that help young people take their first real actions in the food system:

Telling stories that help communities and markets understand and value their work.

Producing something and learning how to sell it.

This toolkit is for those youth who are ready to level up — to move from awareness to action, from concern to creation, and deepen their journeys as **Doers for life | Jeevan Jagriks** — co-creating food systems rooted in justice, regeneration, and community.

WHAT'S INSIDE THIS TOOLKIT

We are starting with two simple tools — each designed to help young people take the next confident step in the food system.

TOOL SET 1 — Telling Effective Stories

A practical guide to help youth communicate their journeys clearly and creatively.

This section includes:

- ✿ Why stories matter
- ✿ Hot vs Cool stories
- ✿ The 5C storytelling model
- ✿ The Vidushak Way (Birbal Khichdi Story)

Stories help communities, elders, buyers, chefs, and peers feel the value of your work.

TOOL SET 2 — Producing Food... and Selling it

A step-by-step guide for young producers to take their first real action in the market:

This tool covers:

- ✿ How to decide what to grow or produce
- ✿ Simple pricing
- ✿ Finding and approaching nearby buyers

This helps youth turn small experiments into something real.



DIRECTORY — People, Places & Schemes That Can Support You

A growing list of:

- * Local organisations
- * SHGs & farmer groups
- * Government schemes
- * Mentors and elders

This directory gives youth a starting point to connect with real opportunities and real people



01 TOOL: TELLING EFFECTIVE STORIES

Why Stories Matter

In food system transformation work, **stories are just as important as seeds.** Why? Because stories move people — markets, communities, elders, and even ourselves.

Stories help us:



Make people care



Build trust with elders



Talk to buyers & chefs



Share your learning



Explain your farm experiments



Connect with your community



Inspire others

Before we learn how to tell stories, let's explore what makes a story stick.



ACTIVITY: “A Scene I Can Never Forget...”

Think of a movie, reel, or local story you remember clearly

1. What was the scene?

2. Why do you remember it?

- It made me feel something
- It surprised me
- It was funny
- It was emotional
- It left a question in my mind
- It reminded me of home
- Something else: _____

Takeaway:

We remember feelings more than information.

Mini Case Story — “The Farmer Who Spoke Slowly”

A young farmer in Karbi Anglong once stood up in a village meeting. He didn't use English. No slides. No big technique.

He simply said:

“Half our crop got washed in the rains. We almost gave up. Then my mother told me to mulch with dried leaves. It saved the rest.”

People leaned in. Some nodded. A trader even offered him a better rate.

Reflection: Why did people connect?

- Honesty
- Emotion
- Relatable
- He spoke like one of them
- Real problem + real learning



Hot vs Cool Stories

Now that we've seen how a simple story can touch people, let's look at the difference between two types of stories we tend to tell - one that's only information, and one that carries feeling.

Four youth leaders in Assam recently started an agroecology model farm. Their first successful produce? **Mushrooms!** (TRUE STORY)

Now imagine they're sharing this with you.

Version 1 — Cool Story (Only Facts)

"We harvested 18 kg.
Sold at ₹120.
Earned ₹2,160."



Version 2 — Hot Story (What is special + Feelings + Moments)

"The shed almost collapsed during a storm.
We thought the mushrooms were gone.
But the next morning... they had doubled.
Maybe they like storms more than we do."

Version 2 — Hot Story (What is special + Feelings + Moments)

(Write or doodle your thoughts)

Takeaway:

-  Hot stories = feelings, moments, surprises
-  Cool stories = only facts and numbers

Both are useful — but **hot stories help youth connect with buyers, teachers, elders, chefs, journalists and community members.** People connect to **what they can feel.**



Your Turn: Tell Your Own Story in Both Ways

Choose one moment from your journey:

- Your first farm experiment
- A plant you observed
- A mistake you made
- Your first sale
- A funny day on the field
- A moment nature surprised you
- Other: _____

Cool Version:

Hot Version:

What did you notice?

- Hot version feels more alive
 - More emotional
 - Easier to remember
 - People would listen to this
-



The 5C Story Model

The 5C Story model is a simple, powerful tool to help you craft stories that land.

1. COMMENCEMENT (The hook)

Start with something interesting.

Examples:

“We almost lost our entire crop that day...”

“My grandmother laughed when she saw what I was doing...”

2. CONTEXT (Why this matters)

Give a little background.

“Our village was losing this local vegetable.”

“I had never grown anything before.”

3. CHARACTER (Who is in the story?)

A person, plant, or even the land.

“My friend Rabi, who knows wild greens.”

“The stubborn chilli plant.”

4. CONFLICT (The challenge)

What went wrong?

“The soil was too acidic.”

“No one believed it would grow

5. CLIMAX (Learning or insight)

End with a feeling or thought.

“The soil became my real teacher.”

“Now I know why my grandmother saves seeds.”



Write Your Own 5C Story

Use this page to create your own agroecology story using the 5C Model. Choose any real moment from your journey — a small success, a mistake, a learning, a moment with nature, anything that stayed with you.

What moment do you want to write about?

(Write a short title)

1. COMMENCEMENT (Hook)

How will you begin your story? A moment, feeling, image, or surprise that pulls the listener in.

2. CONTEXT (Why this matters)

Why is this story important? What is the background?

3. CHARACTER

Who is this story about? (You, a farmer, a friend, an elder, a plant, the land...)

4. CONFLICT

What challenge or problem came up? What went wrong?

5. CLIMAX (Learning / Insight)

What changed? What did you realise? What is the takeaway?



Would you like to share it aloud with someone?

- Yes
- Not yet
- Maybe later

One line from my story that feels important:

ACTIVITY: “A Scene I Can Never Forget...”

Sometimes people don't understand when we explain something directly — whether it's a new farming idea, a small experiment, or a different way of doing things.

Use this tool **whenever your words aren't landing**. Instead of repeating yourself, **show** your idea through a small demonstration, example, or indirect story that helps the other person realise the truth on their own.

The **Birbal Khichdi** story below shows how simple and powerful this method can be.

The story

On a cold winter day, Akbar and Birbal took a walk along the lake. A thought came to Birbal that a man would do anything for money. He expressed his feelings to Akbar.

Akbar then put his finger into the lake and immediately removed it because he shivered with cold. Akbar said, “I don't think a man would spend an entire night in the cold water of this lake for money.”

Birbal replied, “I am sure I can find such a person.”

Akbar then challenged Birbal into finding such a person and said that he would reward the person with a thousand gold coins. Birbal searched far and wide until he found a poor man who was desperate enough to accept the challenge.

The poor man entered the lake, and Akbar had guards posted near him to make sure that he really did as promised. The next morning the guards took the poor man to Akbar. Akbar asked the poor man if he had indeed spent the night in the lake. The poor man replied that he had.



Akbar then asked the poor man how he managed to spend the night in the lake. The poor man replied **that there was a street lamp nearby and he kept his attention affixed on the lamp and away from the cold.**

Akbar then said - **“there would be no reward!”**, as the poor man had survived the night in the lake by the warmth of the street lamp.

The poor man went to Birbal for help.

The next day, Birbal did not go to court. The king, wondering where he was, sent a messenger to his home. The messenger came back saying that Birbal would come once his Khichri (Rice) was cooked.

The king waited hours but Birbal did not come. Finally, the king decided to go to Birbal’s house and see what he was up to.

He found Birbal sitting on the floor near some burning twigs and a bowl filled with Khichri (Rice) hanging **five feet above the fire**. The king and his attendants couldn’t help but laugh.

Akbar then said to Birbal, **“How can the Khichri (Rice) be cooked if it is so far away from the fire?”**

Birbal answered, **“The same way the poor man received heat from a street lamp that was more than a furlong away.”**

The King understood his mistake and gave the poor man his reward.

Reflection Box: How Can You Be a Vidushak?

Think of a time when someone didn’t understand your idea.

1. What was the scene?

2. Why do you think they said ‘no’?

- Worried
- Past experiences
- Didn’t see value
- Didn’t understand method
- Other: _____



3. If you were Birbal, how would you show your idea instead of explaining it?

(Draw or describe your “khichdi moment”)

4. What small demonstration could you use?

- Mini experiment
- Taste test
- Before–after comparison
- Small prototype
- Personal story
- Other: _____

5. Who do you want to try this with next?

Note

Stories don't need perfect English. They don't need fancy words. They only need:
honesty, feeling, and one moment of truth.

Your land, your people, your mistakes, your learnings —
These are your strongest storytelling tools.



02 TOOL: PRODUCING FOOD AND SELLING IT

Deciding what to grow or make

1. What grows easily in your area? (Fresh produce)

Tick 3–5 items that match your local ecology and season.

Greens & vegetables

- Lai xaak
- Pumpkin leaves
- Colocasia leaves
- Pui xaak
- Beans/long beans
- Okra/brinjal

Other: _____

Spices & rhizomes

- Ginger
- Garlic
- Local citrus
- Turmeric
- Local chillies (bhut jolokia/morich)

Other: _____

Grains & pulses

- Sticky rice
- Black rice
- Millets
- Local pulses

Mushrooms & forest

- Paddy straw
- Known wild mushrooms
- Oyster mushrooms
- Foraged greens (safe & known)

My top three options for growing:

1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____



2. What do you enjoy working with? (Your interest and strength)

Tick whatever feels true.

- Growing & observing plants
- Foraging/working with elders
- Cooking/recipe experiments
- Drying or preserving
- Pickles/chutneys
- Packing and organising
- Speaking to buyers
- Documenting through photos/notes
- I enjoy working with: _____

3. What does your community regularly need? (Local demand)

Ask 3–5 people (hostel cook, SHG member, neighbour, café, elder).

Person	What they need	Reason
1.	_____	_____
2.	_____	_____
3.	_____	_____
4.	_____	_____
5.	_____	_____

Common needs in my area: _____

Choosing my product (Fresh or Value-Added)

4. What can you supply weekly without stress?

- 1–2 kg
 - 5–10 pickle
 - 8–15 bundles
 - 10–20 dried-green packets
 - 1–2 batches of local snacks
 - Other: _____
- My realistic weekly limit: _____



5. What makes your product special here? (Uniqueness)

Tick 2-3.

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local/traditi | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemical-free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grown/made by youthgreens | <input type="checkbox"/> Elder-taught recipe |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Seasonal & fresh | <input type="checkbox"/> Local techniques (drying, fermenting, smoking) |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Reduces waste (surplus leaves/harvest) | |

My product is special because: _____

6. My decision: Start with ONE product

A. Fresh product I will grow: _____
(Example: mushrooms, greens, chillies)

OR

B. Value-added product I will make: _____
(Example: pickles, dried greens, chutneys, powders)

Why I chose this product:

It grows well / easy to source: _____

I enjoy working with it: _____

My community needs it: _____

Selling your product

Simple Pricing Formula

Most youth underprice. Use this:

Your cost per kg onal

- * Your labour value
- * ₹20-₹40 margin = Selling price



Example (mushrooms):

Cost: ₹80

Labour: ₹10

Margin: ₹30

Price = ₹120/kg

(Restaurants may pay ₹140–₹180)

Where to Find Buyers

Tick the ones near you:

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Local vegetable market | <input type="checkbox"/> Hostels |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restaurants/cafés | <input type="checkbox"/> Homestays |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHGs | <input type="checkbox"/> Tiffin centres |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Health-conscious families | <input type="checkbox"/> Traders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nearby towns (bigger demand) | |

List 10 potential buyers within 5 km:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____

Prepare Before You Visit

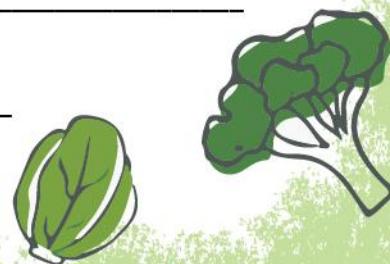
Buyers take you seriously when

Before approaching anyone, write these 5 points clearly:

Your product:

Your product:

Your product:



Your product:

Your product:

Your uniqueness (2 reasons):

* _____

* _____

This takes **5 minutes**, but changes the entire conversation.

Scripts You Can Use Word-for-Word

To a Vendor

“Dada, these greens were harvested just after sunrise today — you can smell the difference.

If they sell well, I can bring the same fresh quality every ___ days.”

To a Chef

“Chef, this chilli is from a small patch we are reviving in the village. The aroma stays even after cooking —you’ll taste the difference immediately. If it fits your menu, I can supply weekly.”

OR

“This is a local variety used during Bihu/Wangala/Losoong meals. The flavour is very rooted to our soil.

Can I leave a small sample for you to test with your kitchen team?”

To Customers

“This pickle tastes exactly like the ones made in our village during winters. Clean ingredients, no colours. If you’d like, I can prepare a smaller batch for your family.”

Or create your own using Tool Set 1 (Hot media, 5C model, Vidushak Way)

Weekly Follow-Up (very important)

Ask buyers every week:

1. “How was the quality?”
2. “How much do you need next week?”
“Any feedback?”

This one habit turns youth into professionals.



Small action (1-week experiment)

Choose one:

- Visit 2 buyers
- Carry 1 sample + ask for feedback
- Take photos + create a 5C story + share
- Ask 1 homestay/hostel their weekly needs
- Track your costs → calculate price

I will do this action: _____

Reflection

What surprised me: _____
Who gave me the first real feedback: _____
What I will do differently next time: _____
Who might be my first steady buyer: _____

Level-up directory

People, organisations, schemes & spaces that can support you as you level up in agroecology.

This directory gives you a starting point. It is NOT complete — and that's the best part.

You will keep discovering new people, new spaces, new support systems as you grow.

Scan for live directory



The QR code will take you to:

- * A google form where anyone can add new names
- * and a google sheet with the details of organisations, cafes, individuals, SHGs, FPOs who can support you in your journey.



A letter to our Young Doers,

Dear young doers,

Transforming food systems is hard. It asks for patience, courage, long conversations and many small steps that don't always show results. Some days will feel confusing, others joyful — and that is normal.

Still, this work carries a quiet hope:

in a seed saved,

in an elder's story,

in a tiny experiment that works,

in a community beginning to listen,

and most of all, in you, for daring to show up.

You are not doing this alone. Farmers, cooks, elders, neighbours, youth groups, SHGs — your community walks with you. That is where the joy is!

Keep asking, listening, sharing, supporting and inviting others in.

The tools in this booklet are simple seeds. They are only a beginning. As you grow, these tools will grow. As you experiment, this toolkit will evolve. Please tell us what else you need, what worked, and what didn't — so we can build this together.

Your pathway matters. And this journey is just beginning.

With hope and belief in you,

— The team behind this toolkit



CREATED BY:

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