

## Zoe Collins

Location: Sevenoaks, Kent, South East England



### Hopes for the Future



More opportunities for graduates



Focus on sustainability



The UK will grow more food

### Rural Youth Project Involvement

Zoe attended the Rural Youth Project's Kent & Medway Ideas Hack in May 2022, as it aligned with her PHD topic.

She loves the work of the RYP and is keen to get involved in future events.

### Background

Having grown up in zone 6 of London and moved to Kent, Zoe Collins sees the lack of young people in rural areas. Her community comprises of mainly retired people or families with young children. Passionate about the UK's food security and sustainability, she is currently undertaking a PhD focusing on labour rights and shortages in the UK food system. Previously she completed an undergraduate degree in geography followed by a masters focused on the environment.

Zoe attended the Kent & Medway Ideas Hack because it aligned with her PhD topic and was a good opportunity, close to home, to meet other local people.

"I think it was a brilliant event. It was great to meet like-minded people outside of my PhD cohort and talk about food and work, rather than just food."

Zoe found the hack to be a hopeful weekend but is wary that labour issues are often seen as an issue of the past when this is not the case. She emphasised the importance of saying no when your safety and workplace rights are comprised. Zoe would like to see more opportunities for graduates rather than a strong focus on entry level jobs.

"There needs to be more apprenticeships and graduate roles available, with a focus on green jobs and sustainability. We're a generation that cares about the planet. Our morals need to align with our career and as a result we are more willing to accept lower pay."

Of the ideas generated by the hackers, Zoe favours the idea of start-up land release, where young people could take on 10 acres of land on a five-year tenancy to develop their skills and have a real chance of starting a career. "There is a lack of start-up space, particularly land, there is start-up schemes for shop fronts but rarely land is offered." To make this idea feasible, there needs to be strong support during the transition period where costs are high, and return is yet to be seen



“There’s a real attitude of ‘why won’t young people work?’ but in reality it’s intersectional, it has a lot to do with the community infrastructure.”

- Zoe Collins

## Background

Zoe has concerns for the fresh and food opportunities in Kent, she feels the industry should be building infrastructure not only offering jobs.

“There’s a real attitude of ‘why won’t young people just work?’ but in reality, it’s intersectional, it has a lot to do with the community infrastructure.”

She highlighted the importance of growing and maintaining a strong fresh and food sector in the UK. “Energy and fashion can be consumed less but food can’t – we will always need to eat.”

Zoe remains mildly optimistic for the future. “Young people do care but they’re tired of being told that change isn’t possible. I really believe in the power of young people.” Looking to the future, she believes, the UK needs to be growing more food and the labour shortage needs to be recognised and dealt with.

Zoe loves the work of the Rural Youth Project and would like to see another hack in the future along the lines of a youth citizens’ assembly – talking about housing, food, energy, security, and sustainability - building on the knowledge from the previous hack.

## Solutions

1. Employers need to consider roles they can offer to University graduates and appeal to this generation.
2. The industry as a whole has to prepare for the future by doing their bit to be as sustainable and green as possible.
3. In order to have better food security, the UK will need to grow more food and import less.



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