

GROWING COMMUNITIES' ANNUAL REPORT 2012/13

GROWING COMMUNITIES

Best Big Food Idea – BBC Food & Farming Awards 2012
Hackney Salad – winner, Soil Association Organic Food Awards 2013

How do we feed urban communities in a sustainable way in the face of climate change, ecological crises and fossil fuel depletion? Growing Communities is a social enterprise based in Hackney providing real community-led alternatives to the current damaging food system.

We believe that if we are to create the sustainable, re-localised food systems that will see us through the challenges ahead, we need to work together with communities and farmers to take our food system back from the supermarkets and agri-business.

Over the past 19 years, we have created two main community-led trading outlets: an organic fruit and vegetable box scheme

and the Stoke Newington Farmers' Market. They harness our community's collective buying power and direct it to farmers who are producing food in a sustainable way – allowing those small-scale farmers and producers to thrive.

Through our Start-Up Programme we are working with a number of groups who have set up community-led box schemes across the UK based on our model.



Growing Communities has also pioneered urban food growing and we produce our award-winning Hackney salad on our small organic market gardens and Patchwork Farm sites in Hackney. Our new Dagenham Starter Farm grows a wider range of produce.

Our achievements are all down to the energy of our staff, management committee and volunteers. Our 27 part-time staff are Kwame Appau, Adam Barnett, Paul Bradbury, Julie Brown, Liz Brownless, Marcus Cope, Nicole David, Nicki East, Phil England, Paul Harriss, Maria Hogdon, Alice Holden, Stephanie Irvine, Anita Lawrence, Fiona McAllister, Amy McWeeney, Shelagh Martin, Giles Narang, Kerry Rankine, Ximena Ransom, Rachel Stevenson, Alex Tugame, Sophie Verhagen, Susanna Wallis, Tim Watts, Alan Wilkinson and Richenda Wilson. Thanks also to Mike Gomez and Joe Short.

The members of the volunteer management committee are: Jayshree Bhakta, Kath Dalmeny, Sarah Havard, Nick Perry, Nick Saltmarsh and Penny Walker.

Among our volunteers, special thanks go to Imogen Magnus, Mireille Discher, Sue Long, Stephen Horne, Lee Delaney, Precious Martini-Brown, Liz Graham, Freddie Hinds, Dewi Matthews, Bernie Whelan and Melissa Demian for being such stalwart regulars at the gardens in Hackney. Thanks too to the Good Gym volunteers for valiant work. At Dagenham, Fred Harding, Jo Simon, Christie Byrne, Lesley Long, Ken Woodhead and Barbara Neal, Martin Astin, Pat Reagan, Vicki Griffith and the students from Barking and Dagenham College and Eastbrook School. Special thanks go to Dave Gore, who has become central to daily farm work and life.

Transforming food and farming through community-led trade



www.growingcommunities.org



Foreword by Julie Brown, Director, Growing Communities

In these pages, we've aimed to illustrate the interconnected web of local people, farmers, land, businesses, projects and food which together make up our work in Hackney and Dagenham.

Underpinning all our work is a wider vision of what a sustainable food and farming system might look like and a 'theory of change' for how we might get there.

The vision is based on human-scale, organic, mixed farms located in and around urban areas that are directly connected to the urban communities they feed and which enable those communities to source increasing amounts of food from closer to where they live.

The 'theory of change' that runs alongside that vision goes – briefly – like this:

- There's a big problem with the mainstream food system – it's neither sustainable nor secure and it leaves no space for farmers who try to farm sustainably.
- Those farmers – who should be the bedrock of our food system – need our direct support if they are to survive and thrive. Community-led trade can give them

an alternative route to market that pays them enough to make a decent living. And in the process we can help build community, create jobs and support our local economies.

- The more communities who do this, the more trade, the more sustainable farmers, the more change.

Well, that's the theory.... So is it working in practice? Hard to say, but there are signs that we and the growing network of community-led box schemes in our Start-up Programme are starting to have a positive impact on the overall supply chains that make up the wider food system. For instance:

- New box schemes Crop Drop and Field to Fork are seeing whether their combined buying power can make it more viable for Pete from Westmill Organics to deliver to London.
- Field to Fork have been in touch with us about buying our Hackney Salad, which would provide us with a much needed outlet to complement our box scheme at those times when we have lots of salad.
- Other box schemes following the GC model



Apprentices Paul and Leon in the glasshouse at Dagenham Starter Farm

Kentish Town VegBox and Local Greens are both now trading with Ripple Farm and Sarah Green Organics (long-standing GC suppliers) as well as finding and supporting their own farmers.

- Soon to launch Organic Ilford and Enfield Veg Co are planning to buy from the Starter Farm and OrganicLea.
- We're talking to farmers Martin of Ripple

Farm and Adrian of Wild Country Organics about their planting plans for next year so we can make sure they grow things that will complement rather than compete with the produce we'll be growing in Dagenham.

- And when people leave the scheme because they are moving, we are now sometimes able to put them in touch with another community-led box scheme (which makes us feel a lot better).

We're very far from complacent about what we've achieved, but as we approach our 20th birthday I feel increasingly excited about the potential to build the market, affect the supply chains, and really make a difference to the lives of farmers – those things that can increasingly connect what we're doing with the bigger picture and bring about real change.

There are two very different approaches to how we will feed ourselves in the future – an increasingly industrialised and globally controlled version and a more sustainable, locally controlled version.

Government is firmly behind the first. It seems to me that as citizens and communities we have a critical part to play in nurturing and supporting the emergence of the second. It's a long shot but thank you all for helping us to shorten the odds a bit.

Growing Communities in 2013 – the numbers

<p>Volunteers this year Hackney = 112 (including 98 new) Dagenham = 40</p> <p>Graduate apprentices now working as patchwork farmers.....15</p> <p>People eating food from box scheme or farmers' market each week.....5000</p> <p>Percentage of box scheme veg that were UK-grown (2012/13).....85%</p> <p>Percentage of vegetables consumed in UK that are UK-grown (DEFRA).....55%</p> <p>Percentage of box scheme fruit that was UK-grown (2012/13).....29.4%</p> <p>Percentage of fruit consumed in UK that is UK-grown (DEFRA).....10%</p>	<p>BS and FM customers walking, cycling or taking public transport to collect.....93%</p> <p>FM/BS customers considering themselves to be on a low income.....33%/25%</p> <p>Members rating veg bags as good value for money.....95%</p> <p>Members who have changed their shopping or cooking habits since joining.....95%</p> <p>Box scheme members rating Hackney salad as excellent or good.....97%</p> <p>Percentage of market customers who would recommend it to their friends.....100%</p> <p>Number of people following @growcomm on Twitter (November 2013).....2700</p>
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What we've achieved in 2012/13

We believe that our box scheme is different from many others out there in that it's truly rooted in the local community in Hackney. Our customers are members of Growing Communities, who can have a say in how it's run, come to the AGM and stand for the management committee.

Our Hackney salad is grown right here on our three market gardens and nine Patchwork Farm sites. Stellman Close, Clapton Square and St Matthew's in Upper Clapton started harvesting this year and Kynaston is almost ready for planting. This year's graduate apprentices, Damon Boyle, Mike Logan, Matthew Robinson and Louise Wells, have already started work on their own Patchwork sites.

The market gardens produced 790kg of salad, plus 260kg of other veg including tomatoes, cucumbers and beans, and the Patchwork Farm another 780kg of salad, distributed through the box scheme, sold by local shops or served in local restaurants. Our Dagenham Starter Farm harvested a mighty 5 tonnes of fruit and vegetables over the year, including tomatoes, aubergines, strawberries, squash and melons: it will keep producing winter salad and other greens over the coming months.

The fact that what we do is so immersed in the community allows us to build great relationships with other individuals and groups. We have many volunteers in Hackney and Dagenham who play an invaluable part in growing the produce. The Dagenham Starter Farm won an award from Barking and Dagenham Council for Volunteer Innovation this year.

Our efforts were recognised by other bodies too. Hackney salad beat competition from many other UK growers to win the top prize

in the fruit and vegetable category at the Soil Association's Organic Food Awards and the Patchwork Farm has been shortlisted for the Local Food Enterprise Award 2013.

Our pick-up points in churches, community centres, cafés and shops form another patchwork – of organisations holding similar values to ours. We're hoping to open a new pick-up in London Fields soon. Some 40% of respondents to this year's box scheme survey said that being on the scheme has strengthened their relationship with their pick-up. Many use the café, or shop, where relevant; one member is even getting married at their pick-up, Hackney City Farm!

Well over half of members (55%) tell us that being on the scheme has changed how they feel about where they live, enhancing their sense of community and connection. One respondent to the survey said: *"It makes me feel part of a community of people who actually care about the world and our impact on it – which is very heartening."* Another said: *"Sharing produce with my neighbours has brought us closer together."*

"The Starter Farm has very kindly accommodated two of our student groups. The staff are very friendly and work well with our learners. Our students look forward to attending each week where they carry out a wide range of tasks within the project. Not only is this a valuable resource for the local community, but it also allows our students to integrate with members of the public who visit, and staff who work there. Being organic, it also teaches them to respect the local environment."

Teresa Byrne, Lecturer from Barking and Dagenham College

Stoke Newington Farmers' Market is equally rooted in our local community – 80% of visitors come from Hackney and nearby. Over 70% of people who responded to this year's market survey say they feel differently about the area as a result of the market, with many mentioning the friendliness of the stallholders.

"I always bump into like-minded people," said one. "It's a great place to start with organic eating and a great place to shop. It has good vibrations."

As well as allowing us to meet the people who grew or reared our food, buying directly from the farmers at the market increases transparency in the food chain (a point whose relevance was highlighted by this year's horsemeat revelations) while also increasing the amount of money that goes directly to them.

The links we make with the farmers who come to the market and supply the box scheme help people to feel more connected to where their food comes from – as well as connecting farmers to the people who eat their produce. This summer we organised a trip to Stocks Farm in Essex so residents could see where the meat they buy at the market comes from. It was a great day, made poignant in retrospect when Stocks Farm announced they were leaving the market after 10 years following a family break-up. We will miss Chris and Iain very much but we're pleased to have welcomed our new livestock farmer, Matthew Unwin of Longwood Farm, to the market in November.

Our Start-up Programme, which mentors other groups to set up community-led box schemes based on our model, is helping to support more farmers around the UK too. There are now seven schemes up and running across the country, with two more due to launch in the next few months. This



Seasonal taster at The Old Fire Station

year's new start-ups, Field to Fork in Kilburn and Crop Drop in Haringey, are already flourishing – creating new relationships between people in their communities and the farmers who provide their food.

And alongside all this, there are other relationships being forged. This year, with support from Capital Growth, we opened up our apprentice tutorials to groups including OrganicLea, Food from the Sky and Cultivate London. Funding from the Ernest Cook Foundation allowed us to run seasonal tasters at our pick-ups, family sessions at our market gardens, a growing project at Rushmore School and to build cob ovens with Stoke Newington School. Uncollected veg from our pick-ups goes to community cooking projects such as People's Kitchen, Urban Table and North London Action for the Homeless. Through NLAH we met Lucie Galand, who turns out to be a fabulous artist: she designed the seasonal veg poster on the other side of this report. We hope you'll put it up to give you an idea of what produce you can expect to see in your bag through the seasons. 🌿

GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2013

PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2013

	2013 (£)	2012 (£)
TURNOVER	657,658	522,352
Cost of Sales	606,950	507,155
GROSS PROFIT	50,707	15,197
Administrative expenses	53,793	48,596
OPERATING PROFIT (LOSS)	(3,086)	(33,399)
Interest receivable	131	179
(LOSS)/PROFIT ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	(2,955)	(33,220)
Tax of profit on ordinary activities	-	-
RETAINED (LOSS)/PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	(2,955)	(33,220)
Balance brought forward	114,686	147,906
Balance carried forward	111,731	114,686

BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2013

	£	2013 (£)	2012 (£)
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible assets		32,007	12,974
OTHER ASSETS			
Loans receivable		12,000	-
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	15,254		55,237
Cash at bank and in hand	181,092		99,400
	196,346		154,637
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	(128,622)		(52,925)
NET CURRENT ASSETS		67,723	101,712
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		111,731	114,686
CAPITAL AND RESERVES			
Profit and loss account		111,731	114,686
MEMBERS' FUNDS		111,731	114,686

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2013

This has been another successful year for Growing Communities. Income has continued to increase, being made up of:

	2013	2012
Box scheme	426,484	400,241
Market garden sales	8,847	10,914
Café sales	9,797	10,557
Farmers' market	35,842	38,617
Other trading income	5,886	4,596
Expenditure offset by grant income*	170,932	57,427
Turnover	657,789	522,352

Box scheme sales continued to increase, up 7% on the previous year.

	2013	2012	2011	2010	2009
7%	7%	10%	9%	16%	28%

*Overall £170,932 in grant income was allocated towards projects in the year including £28,833 from The Tudor Trust towards the Start-Up Programme; £35,921 from the Local Food Fund to help with the expansion and management of the Patchwork Farm; £2,301 from Surestart towards buildings works depreciation charge; and £102,827, partly from the Local Food Fund and partly from Transform - Groundwork for the Starter Farm in Dagenham.

Our core operations are self-financing, as in previous years. The organisation made a small operating loss (0.4% of turnover), which was planned and budgeted for. The organisation remains robust and financially sustainable. The cash balance is very strong, as can be seen on the balance sheet.

These financial statements were approved by the Board of Directors on 23 October 2013.



Autumn produce at the farmers' market

“ I cook for North London Action for the Homeless. With the help of volunteers we provide free meals to anyone who needs them in the community. Using GC leftover veg not only saves us a lot of money but it enables us to prepare really healthy meals. We also run gardening sessions at St Paul's next to the farmers' market. Sharing the space has meant having conversations between us, service users and GC staff, customers and producers. This informal networking has had many great outcomes: meeting Sarah Green, who now donates veg and clothes to us, our service user Stevie selling the Big Issue at the market, getting top tips on food growing and many more. ”

Lucie Galand, NLAH