

# GROWING COMMUNITIES' ANNUAL REPORT 2013/14



Photo by Helena Smith @eathackney

## Transforming food and farming through community-led trade



[www.growingcommunities.org](http://www.growingcommunities.org)

# GROWING COMMUNITIES

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 20 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 nine groups who have set up community-led box schemes across the UK based on our model and are aiming to recruit four more this year.



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 Starter Farm in Dagenham grows a wider range of produce.

Our achievements are all down to the energy of our staff, freelancers, Board and volunteers. Our part-time and freelance staff are Kwame Appau, Paul Bradbury, Julie Brown, Liz Brownless, Marcus Cope, Nicole David, Brendan Devlin, Nicki East, Phil England, Paul Harriss, Alice Holden, Stephanie Irvine, Anita Lawrence, Fiona McAllister, Amy McWeeney, Shelagh Martin, Giles Narang, Kerry Rankine, Ximena Ransom, Rachel Stevenson, Alex Tugame, Sophie Verhagen, Tim Watts, Alan Wilkinson and Richenda Wilson. Stephanie Irvine and Susanna Wallis left this year. Thanks also to Chris Adams and Joe Short. This year's apprentices were Sarah Alun-Jones, Farook Bhabha, Sonia Cropper, Iuliana Simion and Sam Wild.

The members of the volunteer Board are: Richard Dana, Victoria Harud, Sarah Havard, Nick Perry, Guy Rickard, Nick Saltmarsh, Fiona Shaw and Penny Walker.

Among our volunteers, special thanks go to Imogen, Frederic, Stephen, Lee, Sue and Giovanni for being such stalwart regulars at the gardens in Hackney. At Dagenham, many thanks to Shelagh Martin for many forms of support and to all our volunteers, in particular Dave, Sue, Ken, Ian, Caroline, Lesley, Hannah and Jacob, who have helped to transform the farm into a beautiful and productive space.

## Foreword by Julie Brown, Director, Growing Communities

My foreword this year is dedicated to Penny Walker, who after 18 years as a volunteer on Growing Communities' Board and 13 years as chair, will be standing down at the AGM this year.

As well as chairing the Board, Penny has also played an active role in our annual planning cycle – helping to design the overall process and facilitating workshops with considerable skill, insight and humour (and a killer array of Post-it notes).

One of Penny's favourite quotes over the years comes – somewhat incongruously – courtesy of General Eisenhower: *“Plans are useless, but planning is indispensable.”*

Not sure I entirely agree with Ike – as Growing Communities does in fact have a plan. The latest was developed back in 2008 alongside our vision for where we're trying to get to – illustrated in the Food Zones diagram on the other side of this report.

Along with continuing to develop our box scheme, farmers' market and urban market gardens, our plan then was to further increase the number of farmers and growers and the area of land producing organic food in and around Hackney. We wanted to create

a Patchwork Farm in Hackney, establish 'Starter Farms' on nearby peri-urban land and find ways to make more land available for small farms and those wanting to get into farming. We also wanted to use what we had learnt to help other communities set up similar projects and we wanted to influence the debate concerning what is meant by sustainable food and farming.

We've monitored that plan over the years to see how we're doing. This year's results, reflected in the pages of this report, show that we're trading more produce than ever from small sustainable farmers in our 'target' zones i.e. our rural hinterland, the peri-urban zone and right here in Hackney.

And on the more qualitative side – we've had some amazing feedback from people about the impact of what we do on their lives. One of those quotes has really stuck with me: *“It's made us want to initiate other changes in how we do things, and live with a more considered and optimistic approach.”*

That feedback in turn made *me* feel more optimistic and determined to do more; it had a similar effect on others here in the office. On one level, we're selling bags of fruit and veg, but on another level we're providing



Sarah Green's stall at the farmers' market – packed with produce grown close to Hackney

a way to create real change at a time when many people feel massively disempowered in the face of the challenges ahead.

Who would have thought that a bag of vegetables could do all that!

So, we seem to be heading in the direction we want to go in. But we're also very aware that what we do is small in the grand scheme of things, that time is tight and that the issues are urgent. Is there more we could be doing to increase our impact?

I'm really looking forward to the opportunity over the next year to reflect, adjust, work out what else we might be able to do.

And I'm looking forward to taking Penny up on her very generous offer to continue to help us with our planning process – even after she's stepped down as chair of the Board. (Putting it in writing, just in case!)

So, here's to Penny. For everything you have done for Growing Communities – for your love of planning, your integrity, your sense of responsibility, your insight, your hard work and your kindness. You will be hugely missed on the Board but we look forward to you being involved with us in different ways over the coming years. With love and gratitude.

Julie Brown, November 2014

### Did you know?

Dagenham Farm is taking around a tonne a week of pulp from fresh juice makers Crussh (based in Barking) to make into compost – diverting it from landfill.

We were shortlisted as Best Retailer in this year's Observer Ethical Awards and were named one of The Independent's top ten box schemes.

Phil Hook of Hook & Son is sometimes a bit late getting to the market because he milks the cows before he comes in the morning – you'd be hard pressed to find fresher milk than that.

Two of the box schemes on our Start-up Programme, Field to Fork in Queens Park and Crop Drop in Haringey, celebrated their first anniversary by distributing 100 veg bags a week each. We have now helped nine groups to get up and running and are hoping to launch another four in London in the coming year.

Holding the market at St Paul's Church has increased hiring of the church hall – raising more money for the church and the projects it supports, including NLAH.

Volunteers visited the market gardens 630 times over the past year, clocking up 1658 hours between them – 13% up on last year.



# What we've achieved in 2013/14

We've always said Growing Communities is about more than just vegetables. Behind what we do is a theory of change that aims to develop a food system that is fairer, more sustainable and more resilient.

Six years ago our founder and director Julie created the Food Zones, one way of explaining our vision for this better system. It has been borrowed by many people since – you may have seen Rob Hopkins of Transition Town use it, and it appears (in glorious animation) in the film *Best Before*.

Alongside our key principles, the Food Zones is a helpful way to check that we're moving along in the right direction. It starts with working on small plots close to home, sourcing food from as near as possible to where it will be consumed, maintaining freshness and cutting fuel use. Have a look at it on the back of this report.

Our Patchwork Farm in Hackney is a great addition to our work in Zone 1 – urban-traded food. Many thanks to Stephanie Irvine, who spent three years wrestling with land footprints, greenhouse blueprints and council small print to secure the sites and get them ready for growing.

So, as well as our three urban market gardens, we now have nine flourishing plots of around 100 square metres each, where many of our graduate apprentices are raising Hackney Salad, as well as herbs, vegetables and soft fruit. Two of the plots – Hackney Tree Nursery and the Castle Climbing Centre – also took on their own apprentices this year.

Several other recent apprentices have secured jobs in growing this year: Matthew Robinson is now assistant grower at Forty Hall Farm; Sean Gifford is running rooftop

growing sites in Holborn; Hannah Mackie is working at Stepney City Farm; Mike Logan worked as a Hackney Parks ranger; and Louise Wells is setting up a growing space for ex-offenders at Katherine Price House.

This year, a combination of hard graft and kind weather ensured yields were record-breaking, with 2.5 tonnes of salad and other produce grown on the market gardens and Patchwork Farm (up from just under 2 tonnes last year).

Our head grower Paul summarised his experience of training new growers in the report *Future Farmers: a guide to running an urban food growing traineeship*, published by Capital Growth. This should help more people learn how to produce food really close to home. Paul also found time to run harvesting workshops with Capital Growth, introduce 80 children from Mill-fields Primary School to food growing, show teenagers how to construct wildlife habitats, and help the Red Cross Destitution Centre in Dalston to plant a salad garden.



Paul at the Red Cross Destitution Centre

Our Dagenham Starter Farm is a key addition to Zone 2 – what we call peri-urban – roughly the area within the M25. Yields this year are well on target to substantially outstrip the 5 tonnes produced last year. Growing veg for the box scheme here, as well as buying more produce from Organic-Lea in Chingford, meant that we bought 5% of our veg from Zone 2 this year – more than double last year's total.

The Big Lottery funding for Dagenham came to an end this year, leaving our grower Alice with the challenge of making the farm viable. Susannah Wallis also did amazing work at the farm, coordinating volunteers and visits from over 600 school-children, many of whom took part in the Grow Wild project, helping to plant native flowers. We're hoping to secure more external funding for next year to build on the excellent community links we've established in this very deprived borough.

Our Start-up Programme – helping other groups to set up community-led box schemes – is also helping to ensure there's a market for peri-urban produce. Organic Ilford, which started in the spring, is buying produce grown in Dagenham, while Enfield Veg Co, launched in November 2013 at Forty Hall Farm, uses produce grown there. Several of the London Start-up box schemes are buying from Calabaza Growers in Sutton, enabling this small venture to look into taking on another 40 acres to add to its existing space.

Zone 3 is the rural hinterland – the area where most of our box scheme suppliers and the farmers that come to the market (often the same people) are based. This year we sourced 54% of our box scheme veg from this zone. One of the farmers from this area, Adrian Izzard of Wild Country Organics, increased the size of his farm near Cambridge from 10 acres to 40 acres

*“ I just want to say how much enjoyment being on the box scheme is bringing to us – it's wonderful for me on a daily basis to feel so positive about the food I eat. The flavour, the way it is grown, and the way that I buy it as a consumer. It's made us want to initiate other changes in how we do things, and live with a more considered and optimistic approach. ”*

## Esther & Adam, box scheme members

this year and now employs 57 people – as well as winning the Soil Association award for Best Fresh Food for his salad leaves.

Stoke Newington Farmers' Market, held every Saturday in the forecourt of St Paul's Church, West Hackney, has gone from strength to strength this year. Thanks to Lottery funding, Niall Weir, the rector, was able to redesign the forecourt, the Evering Road Kitchen Garden (run by North London Action for the Homeless) and West Hackney Recreation Ground. The market had a brief spring break in the Rec while the work was completed in front of the church.

There is now an expanded (and mud-free!) space for stalls, which has enabled Kerry, the market coordinator, to welcome our new butcher Matthew Unwin of Longwood Farm, as well as many new small food producers from Hackney and nearby, selling gluten-free cakes, raw cakes and chocolate, salads, honey, pickles, burgers and all-day breakfasts – made with produce from the farmers and growers at the market.

By buying food through the market and box scheme over the past year, our community has channelled about £1 million to the small-scale farmers and producers who are essential drivers of the better, more sustainable food system we want to see. Thanks for helping us create real change.

# GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2014

## PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2014

	2014 (£)	2013 (£)
<b>TURNOVER</b>	<b>760,023</b>	<b>657,658</b>
Cost of Sales	<b>656,018</b>	<b>606,950</b>
<b>GROSS PROFIT</b>	<b>104,005</b>	<b>50,707</b>
Administrative expenses	<b>59,939</b>	<b>53,793</b>
<b>OPERATING PROFIT (LOSS)</b>	<b>44,066</b>	<b>(3,086)</b>
Interest receivable	<b>231</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>(LOSS)/PROFIT ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION</b>	<b>44,297</b>	<b>(2,955)</b>
Tax on profit on ordinary activities	500	-
<b>RETAINED (LOSS)/PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR</b>	<b>43,797</b>	<b>(2,955)</b>
Balance brought forward	<b>111,731</b>	<b>114,686</b>
<b>BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD</b>	<b>155,528</b>	<b>111,731</b>

## BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2013

	£	2014 (£)	2013 (£)
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>			
Tangible assets		<b>21,869</b>	<b>32,007</b>
<b>OTHER ASSETS</b>			
Loans receivable		<b>17,754</b>	12,000
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>			
Debtors	<b>27,006</b>		15,254
Cash at bank and in hand	<b>191,060</b>		<b>181,092</b>
	<b>218,066</b>		<b>196,346</b>
<b>CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year</b>	<b>(46,061)</b>		<b>(72,522)</b>
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>		<b>172,005</b>	<b>123,824</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>		<b>211,628</b>	<b>167,831</b>
<b>CAPITAL AND RESERVES</b>			
Profit and loss account		<b>155,528</b>	111,731
Other reserves		<b>56,100</b>	<b>56,100</b>
<b>MEMBERS' FUNDS</b>		<b>211,628</b>	<b>167,831</b>

# TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2014

Financial sustainability is key to the ongoing success of Growing Communities while ensuring suppliers are paid a fair price and staff are paid at least the London Living Wage. A revamp of the box scheme alongside a major change in our IT systems means that, after two years of losses, we made a surplus in 2013/14 of £43,797 (5% of total turnover). The box scheme and the farmers' market continue to be self-financing, so we aren't dependent on fluctuating and uncertain grant income to supply your daily fruit and veg.

Out of the surplus for the year, £22,483 arose from and has been set aside to enable us to continue some of our special activities on the Starter Farm and the Start-up Programme when the grant funding for these finishes. There is also a special reserve of £56,100 from grant funding to provide a revolving loan fund to support other groups to start up.

Income increased again this year and is made up as follows:

	2014	2013
Box scheme	495,802	426,484
Market garden sales	12,010	8,847
Farmers' market	51,239	35,842
Café sales	10,190	9,797
Other trading income	22,838	5,886
Grant income	167,944	170,932
<b>TOTAL TURNOVER</b>	<b>760,023</b>	<b>657,789</b>

Grant income was spent on the following projects: Start-Up Programme £18,274 from the Tudor Trust; Dagenham Starter Farm £85,108 from the Local Food Fund; Patchwork Farm £52,462 from the Big Lottery Local Food Fund; Education work £9,800 from Ernest Cook; and £2,300 from Surestart being the final depreciation charge on building works.



*“ I feel very blessed that the market now feeds three generations of our family. I hope when Jahari gets older and is responsible for buying his family's food that the veg box scheme and farmers' market become the norm and his generation laugh at how their elders mainly relied on supermarkets. We loved our visit to Dagenham too. Jahari was still raving about the compost loo when he got home! Thank you to everyone for hosting us. ”*

**Simone, market customer**