

# GROWING COMMUNITIES



ANNUAL  
REPORT  
2016/17

# FOREWORD BY JULIE BROWN DIRECTOR, GROWING COMMUNITIES

Earlier this month I attended the 'Veg Summit' - an event organised by the Food Foundation as part of their campaign to increase both the amount of vegetables we eat as a nation and the amount we grow in this country.

The event was hosted by Sheila Dillon (of Radio 4's Food Programme) who announced in her introduction that the average weekly spend per person on vegetables is currently £1.71.

Sheila expressed her amazement at those figures - which come from the ONS Family Spend Survey - not least because she had just worked out that she spent around £17 a week on fresh vegetables.

I was thinking about it on the way home

and worked out that my household probably spends around £9.75 a week each on fresh vegetables: we get a medium veg bag each week (£14.25) which forms the core of our weekly shop. Then we shop at the farmers' market most weeks: I nearly always buy extra spinach, potatoes and mushrooms and a couple of other things, so say an additional £10 a week. Then, throughout the week we usually top up with around £5 of vegetables: mainly fresh herbs, illicit tomatoes (I blame my husband...), garlic, ginger, that kind of thing.

With my son now at university we are a three-person household most of the year. So, I may need to revise that £9.75 down to allow for the fact that we no longer cook for him - although I



Ben Dwyer

**“Sometimes I get a bit carried away at the farmers' market and have to smuggle the extra veg into the house and hide it around the kitchen”**



Ben Dwyer

sometimes still forget. Not only does he eat a lot - but he was fantastic at eating up leftovers. Leave them out at the end of the evening and they'd be gone by the morning.... just a few crumbs left with which to try and trace his movements. I loved that: no leftovers oppression!

Anyway, I digress - so probably something more like £8.50 per person per week. Sometimes I get a bit carried away at the farmers' market and then have to smuggle the extra veg into the house and hide it around the kitchen. For the rest of the week I have to make a supreme effort to use it all up. If I fail - I like to think the residents of our wormery will particularly appreciate those rotting greens - but I still feel guilty as I feed them Ripple Farm's lovingly grown kale or worse still our own award-winning Hackney salad (It's only ever happened once - I promise! #vegconfessions)

Blimey - I wonder what on earth Sheila

Dillon is doing with that additional £8.50 of vegetables!

But, unlike Sheila, I wasn't shocked by that original figure from the Family Spend survey as I'm already familiar with it. I've been keeping track of it for a while now. I compare how the money we all spend on veg through Growing Communities' veg scheme and farmers' market compares with the overall money spent on veg across Hackney.

That analysis showed that last year GC and our members were responsible for 2.96% of the money spent on fresh vegetables in Hackney. This year we account for 3.64% of that spend.

I find numbers and data and how they can be used (and misused) to tell a story very interesting. And I'm excited by that 4% figure (see what I did there...!) because it feels like a small but significant proportion of the money spent in this borough. And it's more



than last year. And many small numbers can add up to a lot (duh! I can visualise my son's scathing look at this point – did I mention that he is studying maths?)

So, if we collected and aggregated data from all the Better Food Traders – we could start to demonstrate the scale and nature of this work, enabling us to better tell our story and command the influence, respect and investment that this vital work deserves. That's why we're currently fundraising for our 'Food Bytes' project which we hope will enable us to do just that.

And of course, alongside the data, the wonderful photographs and case studies in this annual report also help to tell that story. But I wonder what else that 3.6% figure can tell us?

Well, for one, that people who shop via GC eat a whole lot more vegetables than the average person. Current national targets are to increase veg consumption from 7.2% of the diet to 20% in order to

benefit the nation's health and help to offset the £1,300,000 spent by the NHS every hour to combat the effects of type 2 diabetes - a largely diet-related disease. So you must be some of the healthiest people in the UK!

But the second part of that story is that GC people spend more on their veg for an equivalent weight of produce. And although it may be counter-intuitive in today's low-price culture, that too is to be celebrated because it means we pay the ecological farmers who grow our amazing food a fair price for farming food in a way that protects the soil and biodiversity.

There are huge personal and planetary benefits to shopping and eating in this seasonal way, but I also know that it is not always easy... So thanks so much for sticking with us and for helping us to keep those good numbers growing year on year.

**Julie Brown, October 2017**

**“Growing Communities and the other Better Food Traders have the altruistic ideals that underpin my growing practices.”**

**MARTIN MACKAY, RIPPLE FARM,  
QUOTED IN JELLIED EEL MAGAZINE**



Our achievements are all down to the energy of our staff, freelancers, patchwork farmers, Board and volunteers. Our staff and patchworkers are Alice de Grey, Alice Holden, Caroline Ada, Claire Ratinon, Dominic Stewart Barton, Ellie Virk, Giles Narang, Giovanni Colapietro, Hannah Schlotter, Hari Byles, Helen Bredin, Jack Agnew, Jack Harber, Jo Barber, Julie Brown, Kerry Rankine, Kwame Appau, Michal Hillel, Michèle Van Veerssen, Nicole David, Paul Harriss, Phil England, Rachel Dring, Rachel Stevenson, Richenda Wilson, Sarah McFadden, Shelagh Martin, Sophie Verhagen and Ximena Ransom.

Thanks also to Alex Tugume, Andy Paice, Ben Dwyer, Ruby Wild, Susi Traenkner, Neli Angelova, Imogen Magnus, Nicki East, Emma Gain, Toni Lötter, Michael Calwell at Boxmaster Systems and Chris Collins at Peritus Digital. This year's trainees were Jill Asemota, Layla Mosengo, Nikky Salami and Paul Kirby (in Dagenham) and Ciara Wilkinson, Linda Hawes, Raymond Lyons and Sara Barnes (in Hackney). This year sadly we said good bye to Amy McWeeny, Lucy Nacson-Jones and Sonia Cropper, and patchworkers Hannah Mackie, James Turner and Sarah Alun-Jones, who have all moved on to other growing projects.

The members of the volunteer Board are: Sarah Havard (chair), Richard Dana (Treasurer), Deborah Handforth, Geraldine Gilbert, Guy Rickard, Kath Dalmeny, Nick Saltmarsh and Victoria Harud.

Among our volunteers, special thanks go to Finn, Ann, Stephen, Imogen, Joanne, Dewi, Andy, Hannah, Vander and Lorena, Amy and Leo for being such dependable regulars at the gardens in Hackney. At Dagenham, many thanks to the wonderful Peter, Paul, Colin, Jimmy, Lindsay, Cal, John, Christine, Alison, Dave, Pete H, Toney-Ann, Chi, Mark, Will, Ricky, Michael, Steve and many others.



## GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2017

### PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2017

	2017 (£)	2016 (£)
TURNOVER	840,096	761,361
Cost of Sales	<u>775,272</u>	<u>684,982</u>
GROSS PROFIT	64,824	76,379
Administrative expenses	<u>86,335</u>	<u>88,157</u>
OPERATING LOSS	(21,511)	(11,778)
Interest receivable	570	1,310
LOSS ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	<u>(20,941)</u>	<u>(10,468)</u>
Tax on profit on ordinary activities	<u>(1,000)</u>	<u>3,677</u>
RETAINED (LOSS)/PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	<u>(19,941)</u>	<u>(14,145)</u>

## BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2017

	£	2017 (£)	2016 (£)
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible assets		16,992	20,385
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	18,616		21,572
Cash at bank and in hand	<u>251,118</u>		<u>275,641</u>
		<u>269,734</u>	<u>297,213</u>
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	<u>(68,039)</u>		<u>(78,970)</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS		<u>201,695</u>	<u>218,243</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>218,687</u>	<u>238,628</u>
CAPITAL AND RESERVES			
Profit and loss account		168,298	188,239
Other reserves		<u>50,389</u>	<u>50,389</u>
MEMBERS' FUNDS		218,687	238,628

## TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2017

Growing Communities generated a 10% increase in turnover to £840k in the year to 31 March 2017. The fruit and vegetable bag scheme continued to go from strength to strength with a 4.5% rise to £620k during the year. Our farmer's market and urban market gardens also continued to perform well during the year. Dagenham Farm is continuing to grow and develop, accelerated with support from the Big Lottery Fund which totalled £80k in the year to March 2017.

Our costs increased in the year due to a number of factors – some planned and some unexpected. On the planned side, we invested heavily in our software platform – the outcome of which has been a new and improved bag scheme management system. So far this new and easier to use platform has been well received by our members, so the investment has been well worth it. In terms of unplanned costs – there were a number of staff costs that were higher than anticipated. In addition, the cost of produce increased more than we had expected, resulting in lower profit margins.

The overall position was a loss of £19k for the year. However, the fundamental financial position of Growing Communities remains strong – with growing bag scheme sales and sufficient cash reserves in the bank (£238,628) to fund our future plans.

	£	2015-16	2016-17
Bag scheme		592,649	619,419
Farmers' market		61,049	59,083
Urban market gardens		10,604	8,520
Café sales		12,047	27,926
Grant income		44,571	91,997
Other		<u>15,779</u>	<u>23,836</u>
Total turnover		<u>761,361</u>	<u>840,096</u>



**“You have totally changed the way I approach food and eat seasonally - something I didn't realise before, with the perpetual all-season supermarket. The veg is delicious, a quality way above anything else I could easily access.”**

**VEG SCHEME MEMBER**



# WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED THIS YEAR 2016/17

Like the best systems in nature, Growing Communities' success is in large part down to its variety – people from all over the world coming together to share skills, pool ideas, work incredibly hard and make beautiful things happen. Sometimes these things arise as the result of happy accident: more often they are the result of design. (Well, we like to think so anyway!)

Here are some snippets and stories about what we and our farmers, traders and partners have been up to this year.

## GOOD TO MEET YOU, BEN

One stroke of luck was Ben Dwyer joining us on placement during his apprenticeship with OrganicLea. He spent Mondays with Sophie at our Clissold market garden, and soon became a valuable member of the veg-packing team. His skills with a camera led to him becoming GC's photographer at large– he took many of the pictures in this report, including the cover image at Dagenham Farm and the veg delivery team below. You can find Ben on Instagram @cultiv8media



## REVIEWING OUR PRINCIPLES

We constantly monitor our activities against a set of principles that guide how we work. As part of our focus on creating a network of Better Food Traders and criteria to identify who should be eligible, we reviewed and rewrote them. Here they are:

- We are mission-driven - trading for social purpose, not to maximise profit.
- We are committed to transparency, trust and cooperation throughout the food supply chain.
- We source food sustainably, using the food zones as a framework.
- We trade fairly.
- We champion ecological food and farming.
- We promote ways of eating and cooking that are good for people and planet.
- We distribute food in a low-impact and low-carbon way.
- We build a strong community in support of our work.
- We strive to change the big picture.

**“GC are so appreciative of the contribution made by the volunteers and no job is seen as too small or insignificant. The communal lunch initially terrified me but it is now one of the highlights of my week.” DAGENHAM VOLUNTEER**

## FRUIT & VEG SCHEME

We had a year of changes on the veg scheme. Our brilliant veg scheme coordinator for the past five years, Amy, left in April to start a new veg-related life in Suffolk. Then Sonia, assistant coordinator and patchwork farmer, secured her dream job at Sutton Community Farm – getting out of the office and into the great outdoors.

Their shoes have been expertly filled by Jo and Ellie, who took up the reins at a fairly turbulent time of change behind the scenes, as we implemented our new Boxmaster customer management system.

We're thrilled that the vast majority of veg scheme members are happy

with the new website and the control you have to manage your veg scheme accounts. Thank you for your patience during the teething problems.

We have made great advances in sourcing local produce. Over 91% of the veg sold through the veg scheme last year was grown in the UK – the highest figure we have ever achieved. Likewise 37% of the fruit was UK-grown – up from 29.5% last year.

We also had a record year for produce from peri-urban farms around the edge of London. As well as lots of fruit and veg from our Dagenham Farm, we distributed food grown at Organiclea in Chingford and tasty potatoes and kale from Forty Hall Farm in Enfield.

**“Since I've been involved at GC, the majority of food that I'm eating at home I've either helped to grow or I personally know the grower. Before that my diet was the simplest, least perishable food I could get, so it's been a huge change.”**

**DEWI, VOLUNTEER AND MARKET STALLHOLDER FOR BETTER HEALTH BAKERY**

## PATCHWORK FARM

Our Hackney Patchwork Farm had a bumper year, producing well over 2 tonnes of salad and other produce, up 16% on the year before.

This is all the more satisfying given that the harvest was gathered from nine plots - two fewer than last year. We lost our beloved Kynaston plot, when the TSB bank closed and the landlord decided to develop the site for private use. And we handed the Castle site back to the growers there to manage as part of the garden.

Head grower Sophie says we were lucky that the dry spring kept snail and slug numbers down and the beneficial insects were out at just the right time to feast on the aphids. Coupled with warm weather, this brought hefty harvests.

Selling produce directly from Clissold on Mondays proved even more popular this year. We sold 32 kilos of salad fresh from the farm gate as well as tomatoes, crystal lemon cucumbers, herbs and more.

## LITTLE GROWERS

We were very lucky to have Ciara as one of our Hackney trainees this year. Already an experienced forest school teacher, she ran a series of very popular sessions for toddlers (and older kids over the summer holidays) at our Clissold Park market garden, encouraging them to craft, sow, plant and grow. We're hoping she'll be back for more next summer.







## GROWN IN DAGENHAM

Dagenham Farm continued to go from strength to strength over the year, selling over £11,000 worth of produce to the veg scheme, almost £1000 direct from the farm on our weekly Open Farm Sundays, as well as £12,000 worth of produce to restaurants including Sodo Pizza Cafe and Moro.

One triumph was opening the first (we're pretty sure) local farm shop in a London tube station with a weekly stall at Dagenham East station. It clocked up sales of over £450 in August and September, while spreading the word about the farm to local commuters. We've seen a real increase in local volunteers and visitors as a result.

The Big Lottery funded Grown in Dagenham programme continues to create real change for local young people and residents. The first four trainees – all previously unemployed lone parents – completed their 9-month traineeship

in December 2016. Three of them, Emma, Glory and Fiona, have now secured paid jobs working in food and retail.

This year's trainees – Jill, Layla, Nikky and Paul – have also made huge contributions to the life of the farm, becoming confident growers and creators of innovative recipes, such as Rhubarb & Chai DagenJAM (really delicious!) and chilli sauce. Many veg scheme members can look forward to trying the preserves in the bumper Christmas veg bags.

We were sorry to say goodbye to Lucy, who got the GID education programme off to such a brilliant start designing and running the schools programme and holiday clubs. She decided to train full-time as a teacher. Her role has been taken by Michèle, a qualified teacher who previously volunteered at the farm.

## FARMERS' MARKET

The farmers' market in Stoke Newington had its best year ever, with total takings for the farmers and stallholders of £680,000 (up 6% on last year). This is despite having slightly fewer stalls and more local competition. There has been a proliferation of other food markets across Hackney (mainly offering street food). However, we remain the only all organic farmers' market in London and somewhere you're guaranteed to meet some of the people who actually grew your food.

Jed's Food left a brunch-sized hole when they left the market, and various other hot food stalls have come and gone, but we have plans for more to open soon.

We've said good bye to some great stallholders who have moved on to bigger things after developing their food businesses with our market. Raw cake makers Mr Prempy's now have a thriving business selling through Planet Organic and other shops. Mrs Pepys the pie-maker is developing her business as a social enterprise offering slices of employment for people who have had mental health problems.

We were sad to say goodbye to Marina

O'Connell, who had been coming to the market for over 10 years. She moved to Devon to run a brilliant new large orchard and farm on the Dartington estate. We were then very happy to welcome Rebecca and Ian of Peach & Pippin, who took over Marina's Essex smallholding in August. Their stall is bountiful and their sales have been excellent.

It has also been a joy to see more local honey at the market. Alongside stalwart Eric Beaumont, we had visits from Barnes & Webb, Oisín Hanrahan and Tim Cowen.

We have also sold products from Dagenham Farm at the market this year, allowing customers to discover more about the other work that we do and taste wonderful preserves as well.

The market continues to attract a loyal band of weekly regulars plus a constant flow of newcomers. Our annual survey this year showed customers continue to value the great quality and taste of the produce, and the security of knowing it is all organic and locally sourced and that the money is going directly to the small farmers and producers.

**“GC has given me a purpose and helped me grow. I have so much love for what GC does and I'm so proud that I was part of it. I now have my dream job, I am almost certain I wouldn't have it if I hadn't done the stall.”**

**JAMES DUNN OF JED'S FOOD**

## FARMER FOCUS

Sarah Green farms organically on 42 acres on the Dengie peninsula in Essex – land that her family has farmed for almost 70 years. Thanks to the continued support of the veg scheme and her fortnightly visits to the farmers' market since 2006, she has put 23 further acres into conversion in recent years and is putting another 4 acres into conversion this autumn.

## BUILDING A BETTER FOOD SYSTEM

It's clear that Brexit is already having an impact on GC and the farmers we work with. Adrian Izzard in Cambridge relies on a skilled team that includes Lithuanian farm workers and managers, many of whom have been with him for years. They are feeling understandably insecure.

The continental fruit and veg we rely on to keep our veg bags stocked with more than just kale and swede during the Hungry Gap are starting to creep up in price and becoming harder to source. This will continue.

We also know that a significant number of veg scheme members and market customers and stallholders come from elsewhere in Europe and may be rethinking their future plans.

But, on a positive note, leaving the EU offers a chance to rethink the way food and farming are managed in the UK. There is a real opportunity to support small farms, strengthen environmental standards, eliminate unethical animal rearing practices and build a better food system.

We have contributed ideas and welcomed the various reports on how UK farming could be made fairer and more resilient, such as the People's Food Policy. It's vital now to keep up the pressure to protect and improve standards, rather than let them be assaulted and diluted by profit-hungry global corporations. We will continue to champion fairness, embrace diversity and strive to make everyone feel welcome here at GC and beyond.

**"It's opened my eyes to a lot more different opportunities and ways of life that I didn't think I'd get."**

**DAGENHAM TRAINEE, 2016**

## PAMA FOCUS

Martin and Patka, sauerkraut, kombucha and pickle-makers extraordinaire, moved this year from Hackney Wick to Sheepdrove Farm in Berkshire. This has given them space to expand the business (and get a puppy!). They will continue to work closely with other farmers at the market – pickling cucumbers grown on Dagenham Farm, and using cabbage and other veg from Ripple Farm in their amazing sauerkraut.



**"So happy to have found you guys. You really improve the quality of my life."**

**@SHISODELICIOUS ON INSTAGRAM**

## WHAT YOU TELL US

It's always a joy to read the results of our annual veg scheme survey, hear your great ideas and see the shape of the better food system we're building.

Members are definitely adopting more sustainable diets as a result of shopping with us: 85% are eating more seasonally and around a third are cooking more from scratch, wasting less food and buying more organic and ethical products in general. Over 90% of you walk or cycle to collect your veg, while just 2% drive.

Also, three-quarters of you feel more connected and involved in your local community as a result of being on the scheme. That's great to hear.



# GROWING COMMUNITIES

Growing Communities works to harness the collective buying power and skills of our community to reshape the food and farming systems that feed us, providing people with real, practical alternatives to the current damaging system.

Our organic fruit and vegetable scheme and our farmers' market aim to provide more secure and fairer markets for the farmers, growers and producers who we believe should be the foundation of a sustainable agriculture system.

Our pioneering and award-winning urban farms in Hackney and Dagenham produce fantastic local salad, fruit, veg, jams and sauces, while also training local

residents, including children and lone parents, in food growing and production.

We also consider the bigger picture and work to create wider change: articulating our vision, advocating in support of our aims and replicating our projects.

We have helped other groups around the UK to set up similar veg schemes to ours. Together we are the Better Food Traders.

We monitor and measure all our activities against our key principles to track our impact on the food system and to ensure our activities and practices are fair and transparent.



[WWW.GROWINGCOMMUNITIES.ORG](http://WWW.GROWINGCOMMUNITIES.ORG)