

GROWING COMMUNITIES' ANNUAL REPORT 2018/19



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FOREWORD BY JULIE BROWN, DIRECTOR, GROWING COMMUNITIES

I've been pondering when we all got drawn into believing that we could change the world through 'green consumerism'. The concept first raised its head back in the 1980s when I started work at Friends of the Earth. We were wary of it then because – at the risk of sounding like an Einstein misquote – you can't solve a problem using the same approach that caused the problem in the first place. Moreover, you run the risk of shifting responsibility away from governments and corporations.

And then when did green consumerism mutate into something that left *all* the responsibility (and the guilt) for saving the world resting squarely on individuals and how they spend their money? (Hmm, I wonder if there's a link there. Sadly I only have 800 words so my rant about neo-liberal economics and the power of corporations will have to wait....)

Don't get me wrong: the fate of this phenomenal planet does ultimately come down to how much stuff each of us consumes. But it seems that most of our impact is embedded in the systems that provide the basis of our society – the infrastructure, processes and worldviews that dictate how our energy, transport, agriculture, industry, housing, education and healthcare work. These aren't things we can directly control through our personal consumer choices. (And pitting zero-wasters, anti-plasticers, flight-shamers and vegans against each other is as likely to divide and conquer as it is to achieve effective positive change.)

That's one of the reasons I've welcomed the emergence of [Extinction Rebellion](#) as it recognises that we are all embedded in the 'system' (we are all hypocrites!) and that we need to start directing more of our energies towards government to create the

conditions to change that system, through policy, regulation, taxation, standards, incentives, investment – whatever it takes.

That whole individual versus systemic is a tricky thing to define never mind quantify (if anyone out there has some good stats I'd love to hear from you) but the difference can perhaps be illustrated in the following reports:

According to [Lund University](#) the most effective individual changes are:

- Flying less
- Living car-free
- Using green energy for your home (or business)
- Eating a mainly plant-based diet

While [Project Drawdown](#) ranks the impact of systemic interventions (of which two of the most significant – fascinatingly – are educating girls and providing access to affordable contraception):

- Top of the list comes (surprisingly, but a bit uninspiringly if I'm honest) refrigeration – specifically replacing the HFCs that replaced the ozone-depleting CFCs in the 1990s but turned out to have a much higher greenhouse impact
- On-shore wind power (getting more interesting)
- Reducing food waste (now you're talking)
- Moving to plant-rich diets (yay!)

Interestingly, GC operates in the space *between* the individual and the systemic. We recognised back in the early 1990s that we needed radical change in our food system. But we had no confidence that government would legislate for that change or that the food and agriculture industry would voluntarily reform and regulate itself. So, we set about creating a viable alternative

“Over the past 20 years, using the collective buying power of our community (you!), we've been able to shape the food and farming systems that feed us.”



to that system (albeit on a very small scale) that could aggregate and focus individual choices towards the systemic changes we were seeking.

Over the past 20 years, using the collective buying power of our community (you!), we've been able to shape the food and farming systems that feed us: providing organic and agroecological farmers with fair and sustainable routes to market; creating new and ethically based supply chains; championing an alternative approach that designs out waste and pollution and designs *in* environmental protection and community-building, while supporting plant-rich diets right from the start.

In an ideal world, this alternative system would grow and eventually replace the old, obsolete system. But it's clear we don't have much time left to avert catastrophic climate breakdown, so we are increasingly doing what we can to lobby and campaign for the changes needed.

This year we've worked on the Agriculture Bill, the Environmental Land Management Scheme designed to replace the European Common Agricultural Policy, the National Food Strategy and we have developed a joint Horticulture Campaign with the

[Landworkers' Alliance](#). We've been active in the [Fruit and Veg Alliance](#) and on the Defra-based Horticulture Roundtable. Recently we started a project with the [New Economics Foundation](#) and the [Soil Association](#) to measure and monetise the impact of GC's supply chain in terms of its social, financial and environmental benefits – the triple bottom line.

Fortunately, XR, Greta and the Youth Climate Movement are shifting the tone of the conversations possible and – I very much hope – helping create a policy environment more receptive to change.

And importantly we can base our work on a 20-year track record of practical action and plenty of evidence of our impact. And that's down to your continued support.

As we all continue to take action in support of this incredible planet, we commissioned a wonderful illustration of where we might get to (overleaf). Thanks to [Imogen Foxell](#) for bringing our vision to life. You'll recognise some elements as they're already in place: a testament to action already taken.

Hope springs from action. And action can be a powerful antidote to despair and fear. Thank you for continuing to act.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO IN 2018/19

As Julie says in her foreword, we've spent 20 years honing our model of community-led trade and we like to think it's pretty good. It champions small-scale, low-impact organic farming and local food. It puts people and planet before profit. And it works.

Most of the new initiatives we've focused on this year have been all about rolling that model out more widely: strengthening alternative routes to market, leveling the playing field for farmers and traders who are doing things in better ways, and lobbying at the highest levels for systemic change.

We marched for good food and joined the [Global Climate Strike](#). We spoke at the [Oxford Real Farming Conference](#), the [Permaculture Festival](#), [Urban Food Fortnight](#) and XR's [East London Uprising](#), and were interviewed by BBC London News. And when we weren't lobbying for change, we fuelled those who were, donating £1000 of fruit and veg to XR's October Rebellion.

STRENGTHENING THE NETWORK

We launched a new wholesale business. The [Better Food Shed](#) helps 10 London-based veg schemes by pooling our orders to farmers, giving us greater buying power. It makes life easier for farmers by giving them an alternative route to market, not just in a business sense but in a purely practical way too: they now deliver to one warehouse in Barking, rather than 10 different destinations inside the M25.

The farmers we work with say the Shed has improved their wholesale business. Adrian Izzard from Wild Country Organics appreciates how it puts farmers first and doesn't try to shoehorn him into growing produce that doesn't work for him: "The Shed team are adaptable each week to what

we have, which makes it work for us, unlike normal wholesale."

The Shed's going really well. It has expanded the number of farmers who directly supply our veg scheme. It has created four new jobs – one of which went to Paul, a graduate from our [Grown in Dagenham](#) training programme. And in its first six months the Shed traded 170 tonnes of fruit and veg, while producing almost no waste. The next step will be to use data from the Shed to help farmers with crop planning. Eventually it will spin off into a separate business.

Natasha and Nicki joined us (or circled back through GC's revolving doors) to support and expand the network of [Better Food Traders](#) beyond the veg schemes set up through our Start-Up Programme. With the help of funding from the [Esmée Fairbairn Foundation](#), the network will shine a light on ethical veg schemes and shops across the UK, enabling more people to direct

their money towards trustworthy traders building a better, kinder food system.

Another new venture is our [Dagenham flowers](#) project. We took over the former bowling green next to our farm and Shelagh grows local seasonal flowers, from daffodils and cherry blossom in spring to cosmos and chrysanthemums in autumn.

As with food, the UK's mainstream flower supply is incredibly carbon heavy, with pesticide-laden, out-of-season imports flown thousands of miles. Dagenham flowers provide a spray-free haven for pollinators on the farm and have given veg scheme members and market customers the chance to collect beautiful seasonal bunches.

Two externally funded and very successful projects came to end this year. The Big Lottery-funded [Grown in Dagenham](#) (GiD) project trained residents in food-growing, food-prep and product development skills, making DagenJAM, Tommy K ketchup, Sweet As cucumber pickle and other foods from the fruit and veg grown on the farm. Over the three years of the GiD programme

we worked with 11 trainees, 790 school kids, and another 2000 local residents who volunteered or visited the farm.

The intergenerational [Recipe for Life](#) project, funded by Barking & Dagenham Council, brought together local families on low incomes from many different backgrounds to cook and eat together at Dagenham Farm. The project was featured on [Jamie Oliver's TV programme Meat-Free Meals](#), when he described it as a "culinary United Nations" and an "incredible community project with veg at its heart".

We're actively fundraising so we can continue opening the gates of Dagenham Farm to welcome our neighbours, including vulnerable and marginalised members of the community – so we hope to have another feast of good outcomes to dish up next year.

NOT FORGETTING THE BASICS...

None of the lobbying and investment in new projects would be possible without our core work, which remained strong this year. Our fruit and veg scheme ➡➡

One small step for a crate of veg; a bigger step for veg wholesale. Paul, Nicole and Danny arrive at GC HQ with the first delivery from the Better Food Shed



hit its highest ever number of members – over 1600 at the end of September, with a record £400,000 going to organic farmers during the year. Some 88% of the veg traded was UK-grown, with 65% coming direct from farms less than 100 miles away, including GC's Dagenham Farm and our peri-urban neighbours Organiclea and Forty Hall Farm. A record 39% of our fruit was grown in the UK, compared with just 17% of the UK's total fruit consumption (according to Defra).

The farmers' market carried on strong with a new hive/buzz (what's the collective noun?) of beekeepers allowing us to sell honey almost every week. Our new fishmonger, Martin Yorwarth, brings ultra-fresh catch from Newhaven every week (weather permitting). Sometimes its sea-to-stall time is under five hours! Customers increasingly bring their own containers and shop unpackaged. Livestock farmer Fabienne Peckham has increased her flock of hens to bring more eggs to market and supply our Wednesday urban farm shop at the Old Fire Station.

The salad and veg growing has gone well. Two of this year's Hackney graduate trainees, Davina and Tom, have joined our patchwork farming team. Meanwhile, Dagenham has been so productive that we were able to keep Ximena on after Alice returned from maternity leave to help with some bumper harvests.

Ultimately, everything we do comes down to the support, loyalty and generosity of our community (yep, you!). We introduced our [Food Credit Scheme](#) this year, allowing veg scheme members to donate the value of their veg bag when they go away. Members donated over £5000 worth of bags in nine months, so Hackney Foodbank users could collect fresh fruit and veg – a rarity at food banks. Another

bonus of the scheme is that it maintains steady orders and income for farmers over holiday periods.

In our ideal vision of a future food system, there would be no need for food banks. Fairer distribution of wealth is part of the systemic change we need to see. But until that vision becomes a reality, the foodbank team are very appreciative of all you have given them. As always, thank you.

“We are deeply grateful to GC for nourishing our bodies with sustainable, delicious and just vegetables. Thank you for all your hard work; projects like yours change the world.”

VEG SCHEME MEMBER, 2019



Ben Dwyer @cultiv8media

We couldn't do what we do without the energy of our staff, freelancers, patchwork growers, Board and volunteers. Our staff are Alex Tugume, Alice Holden, Bren Bedson, Cath Goldstein, Dominic Stewart Barton, Ellie Virk, Farook Bhabha, Georgina Sutton, Giles Narang, Helen Bredin, Jack Harber, Jo Barber, Johanna Valeur, Julie Brown, Katy Barker, Kerry Rankine, Kwame Appau, Natasha Soares, Nicki East, Nicole David, Paul Harriss, Phil England, Rachel Dring, Rachel Stevenson, Richenda Wilson, Shelagh Martin, Sophie Verhagen, Ximena Ransom and Zosia Walczak. This year's trainees in Hackney were Chloe Dunnett, Davina Pascal, Mark Welch and Tom Richardson. Our patchworkers are Davina, Tom, Jack, Shelagh, Ximena, Zosia and Rachel Jones.

Thanks also to Danny Fisher, Deedee Aitken, Paul Kirby and Ellie Stewart at the Better Food Shed; Adam Macdonald, Ambreen Raja, Andy Ferguson, Caroline Ada, Frances Morgan, Hari Byles, Neli Angelova and Michael Calwell. Thanks to formers staffers Andy Paice, Ben Dwyer, Hannah Schlotter, Ian Atkins, Isa Nelson, Michèle Van Veerssen and Sarah McFadden. We miss you! Our volunteer Board members are: Sarah Havard (chair), Richard Dana (treasurer), Geraldine Gilbert, Karla Berron, Kath Dalmeny, Maria Hayden and Natalie Silk.

Among our volunteers, special thanks go to Ann, Sanjay, Stephen, Liz, Amy, Dewi, Imogen, Joanne, Teresa, Jim, Elaine, Robert and Melodie for being such stalwarts at the gardens in Hackney. At Dagenham, many thanks to the wonderful Simi, Binta, Tessa, Spencer, Cliff, Peter, Paul, Colin, Jimmy, Cal, Dave, Pete H, Will, Michael, Steve and many others.

GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2019 INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2019

TURNOVER	2019 (£)	2018 (£)
Cost of Sales	966,048	841,081
GROSS PROFIT	887,266	761,459
Administrative expenses	78,782	79,622
OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS)	76,286	72,883
Interest receivable	2,496	6,739
PROFIT/(LOSS) ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	886	688
Tax on profit/(loss)	3,382	7,427
RETAINED PROFIT/(LOSS) FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	3,382	7,427

BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2019

	£	2019 (£)	2018 (£)
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible assets		14,855	12,280
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	23,911		14,549
Cash at bank and in hand	363,893		240,153
	387,804		254,702
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	(177,998)		(45,703)
NET CURRENT ASSETS		209,806	208,999
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		224,661	221,279
CAPITAL AND RESERVES			
Retained earnings		179,107	175,725
Other reserves		45,554	45,554
MEMBERS' FUNDS		224,661	221,279

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2019

Growing Communities' revenue increased 15% in the year to 31 March 2019. The bag scheme continues to go from strength to strength; despite an array of potential competitors we were able to achieve 10% growth compared with last year. We also saw solid growth in the Farmers' Market and Dagenham Farm during the year. The accounts this year include the net sales from Better Food Shed, our organic wholesaler which primarily supplies 10 community-led box schemes across London. Better Food Shed launched in February and generated £42k in the two months to March 2019. Over time it's our plan for this business to operate as a standalone entity. We received £94k Grant Income during the year primarily for the Grown in Dagenham and Recipe For Life projects.

We continued to manage costs carefully with Growing Communities achieving a profit of £3k in the year. This is after taking into account £15k of costs in relation to the set-up of the Better Food Shed. The overall financial position of Growing Communities is positive with reserves of £179k and a cash position at the end of March 2019 of £364k.

	£	2017/18	2018/19
Bag Scheme		639,735	704,565
Farmers' Market		58,445	61,373
Urban Market Gardens		10,647	9,615
Café Sales		10,469	10,992
Dagenham Farm sales		29,602	34,310
Grant income		82,842	93,672
Better Food Shed			42,981
Other		9,341	8,540
Total		841,081	966,048



“Commercial scale growing and a community-based patchwork project both hugely inspirational. Highly committed to the organic ethos. A pleasure to inspect.”

**MARK OXLEY,
SOIL ASSOCIATION INSPECTOR**

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 provide more secure and fair markets for the farmers and producers who are the foundation of a sustainable agriculture system.

Our pioneering and award-winning urban farms in Hackney and Dagenham produce fantastic local

salad, fruit, herbs, flowers and veg.

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're 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.

