Well, you wait 20 years for an award and then three come along at once! First up: Hackney in Bloom Best Food Growing (professional) for our Urban Market Gardens. Next, we’ve just collected our Observer Food Monthly award for Best Independent Local Retailer and last month we had a visit from the judges of the BBC Food and Farming Awards – we’re in the final three in their ‘Big Food Idea’ category. All three awards feel significant in their different ways. It’s wonderful that our market gardens have been acknowledged by Hackney Council. And we’ve won the OFM award because you, our members and market customers, voted for us. That makes us feel not only proud that you understand and appreciate what we do, but reassured that you’ll stick with us on the bumpy road that lies ahead.

And it seems that the BBC judges recognise that the work we are doing to help other groups set up their own Growing Communities type enterprises is a ‘big food idea’ and has the potential to make a significant contribution to transforming food and farming. Our Start-up Programme offers active support to groups setting up their own community-led box schemes using the financial tools, systems and thinking we’ve developed over the years. Our model is designed to be an economic seed that other groups can adapt to their own situations. Vegbox in Kentish Town and Local Greens in Herne Hill, for instance, are using it to create something similar – but also different. And we want to help more communities – not just because it will enable them to create something as vibrant and as rich as we have here in Hackney but because the more groups there are pulling in the same direction, the more impact we can all have. So, the Start-up Programme is our contribution to creating wider change in the food and farming system, our contribution to tackling climate change and resource depletion, our contribution to dealing with the enormous environmental and economic challenges we face.

It is indeed a ‘big food idea’, which at times can feel overwhelming – the scale of the challenges we face, the contrast between our ambition and the daily reality of packing and selling vegetables week in week out, year in year out. Which brings me back to our members and customers. You have stuck with us over those years and helped to create what’s in the pages ahead. Just under half of members have been on the box scheme for four years or more. Last month we said goodbye to Gill, who had been with us for 16 years! And you have helped us to grow: ‘word of mouth’ consistently comes out as the top reason for joining the box scheme. But did you know that the top reason people leave the box scheme is because they are moving or going travelling? So, if you have to leave us – now you can take the seed of Growing Communities with you and plant it in your new place. Find out if there’s a scheme like ours and if not, why not think about starting one up? We’ll be here to help you.

Julie Brown, November 2012

Penny and Tom from the latest Start-up box scheme, Vegbox in Kentish Town

Transforming food and farming through community-led trade

www.growingcommunities.org

What you say about us

Just wanted to drop you a line to say how happy I am to be getting Growing Communities veg again, having been eating S******’s Organic veg for two months while I was moving. It’s so noticeable how much better quality and tasty GC veg is and to be supporting a local business is just a bonus. I’ve had loads of tasty meals and it’s really convenient to get a week’s veg at once. Returning member, March 2012

Thank you very much for the great chance I enjoyed of consuming such quality of organic vegetables. I would like to encourage you to carry on with your work. You are building a new world made for humans. Member leaving to live in Spain, summer 2012

We had a problem with our bags on our first trial week and rang straight away. The next day you rang to apologise (again!) and met me very close to home with a huge bag of goodies. You’ve always been easy to contact and very helpful. Member, autumn 2012

Yours were really great workshops getting our pupils to think about where their food actually comes from and why the choices they make are important! Anna Alikaj, secondary school teacher, spring 2012
It’s been an extraordinary year, with amazing highs and lows. We moved our Starter Farm in Dagenham, opened two new pick-ups, found new Patchwork sites, welcomed a new Start-Up box scheme into the fold, starred in some online food, published our first comic book and, of course, won a string (well, nearly) of awards. But the year also had its fair share of challenges. And if anyone was in any doubt about the hard work and ingenuity that farmers do, then it was a year in which they had to prove it all over again.

This year was also the year that the box scheme now supplies fruit and veg bags – it also gave us a chance to start working long hours in muddy fields. The box scheme now supplies fruit and veg bags – it also gave us a chance to start working long hours in muddy fields.

We estimate that the box scheme and market combined provide sustainably grown veg, fruit and salad to a wider range of outlets. Local growers are now selling salad to local markets, and other communities around the country are using our model of community-led trade.

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We've tried new ways to explain why buying food direct from producers matters. This year, we commissioned a comic book from artist Mike Georgiou, Super Stocks Bros. The first issue sold out before it was even printed, and we've got nine different veg and a variety of bright cheerful colours. I told myself it would all be beige root but, surprisingly, it was a huge success!

The time has come to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes. We're looking for more communities who want to set up their own box schemes.