



**GROWING
COMMUNITIES'
ANNUAL
REPORT
2015/16**

**2 MILLION
CARROTS
AND
COUNTING**

GROWINGCOMMUNITIES.ORG

FOREWORD BY JULIE BROWN, DIRECTOR, GROWING COMMUNITIES

Growing Communities recently turned 20. In October 1996, the first meeting of the small group of volunteers keen to help turn what was at that time known as 'North London Community Supported Agriculture Scheme' (yes, snappy I know) into a new organisation with a clearer mission and a wider vision took place.

Growing Communities was the result and we became a registered company (Limited by guarantee) the following year.

They say it takes a village to raise a child. Well, since 1996, when those founding mothers (and it was all women who came forward at that time) stepped up to help nurture that fledgling organisation, very many other people (men too!) have been involved in raising Growing Communities to adulthood: as customers, board members, staff, volunteers, mentors, advisors, funders and champions.

Like raising a child, it has at times been very far from straightforward, but it does feel as though we are quite grown up these days. And with our new-found maturity we hope to be able to play a proactive role

in joining some of the dots in the wider alternative food economy that we've been part of establishing over the past two decades.

So, we intend to consolidate the 10 enterprises that got up and running through our Start-up Programme into a collaborative and effective network of Better Food Traders. We want to make the supply chain to all of us London-based enterprises more efficient and resilient so are working to set up a new food distribution hub on the edge of London. And through our Radical Retail project, we're also exploring how we might be able to shine a light on the 'shadow' alternative food economy through the collection and use of trading data.

Alongside all of that, we aim to continue to influence policy in support of our wider aims while maintaining and building the commitment of all of our customers and members (ie you!), without whom none of this would be possible.

So, lots to look forward to in the future. But for now it would be good to pause for

Reiner Tegtmeier



With Marina O'Connell and GC co-founder Tash during a GC visit to Marina's orchard this year

breath: let's celebrate where we've got to so far and appreciate all the amazing things we achieve through our veg scheme, farmers' market, patchwork farm and Dagenham Farm. I hope you read the rest of this annual report and feel proud

of the unique, complex, self-sufficient and beautiful entity that Growing Communities has become and which each and every one of us has been part of creating.

Julie Brown, November 2016

CHANGING THE FOOD SYSTEM ONE CARROT AT A TIME

Since Growing Communities launched in 1996...

We have employed **57** people in Hackney and Dagenham.

We have trained **42** people in food growing, preparation and selling in Hackney and Dagenham. Most are still working as farmers and growers - in Essex, Herts, Wiltshire, Zimbabwe, Hereford, Devon and here in London.

We have supported over **50** farmers, growers and food producers.

We have grown more than **20** tonnes of salad and other fruit and veg.

We have won awards for Best Big Food Idea - BBC Food & Farming Awards; London Leaves - Urban Food Awards; Roots to Work training programme - Urban Food Awards; Best Independent Retailer - Observer Food Monthly Awards; Best fruit, veg or salad - Soil Association Organic Food Awards; and won or been shortlisted for Hackney in Bloom awards several times.

We have packed more than **437,000** veg bags...

... which have included at least **2,000,000** carrots*

* not including hundreds of thousands more sold through our weekly farmers' market

See the other side of this report for our Recipes for Life guide: seven super-tasty meals you can cook with carrots or any other veg you like.

WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED IN 2015/16

It has been a joy this year to reflect on how far we have come over the past 20 years, thanks to the vision, energy and commitment of our founder and director Julie, the people she has chosen to surround herself with and the members of our community who have supported that vision. We've come a long way from the days when 50 families collected a weekly bag of veg from Julie's garage in Stoke Newington.

Our original mission was (deep breath...) "to break down the barriers between food producers and consumers to provide nutritious food in a sustainable way that avoids exploiting the land or the people involved". That remains as true as ever. But the ways of delivering it have adapted and grown.

Our newest venture is the Grown in Dagenham programme. Funded by the Big Lottery, the three-year project is already making a difference in one of the UK's most deprived boroughs. This September it won the "Roots to Work" Urban Food Award for best training programme; the judges called it "a glowing example".

This year's four paid trainees have learned how to sow, grow and harvest fruit and veg as well as how to transform them into delicious DagenJAMs, chutneys and ketchup.

Delivered by new staff Hannah and Lucy, the GiD programme has also run school holiday clubs and gardening sessions for vulnerable adults and local volunteers, and given hundreds of children from the local primary school a chance to learn where their food comes from.

But, Dagenham Farm isn't just about training. It is also a viable working farm. It produced over 3 tonnes of tomatoes, salad and other veg this year – sold direct from the farm on Sundays and through the GC veg scheme – as well as hundreds of jars of jam and other things. (Veg scheme members will have a chance to try some this Christmas.)

Meanwhile, in Hackney, our Patchwork Farm yields and income were slightly down this year, though our growers still produced nearly 2 tonnes of salad and other veg in the year to September. The warm winter failed to kill off pests, then a damp June delayed the salad season and encouraged a plague of slugs and snails. This was compounded by pigeon and fox damage. That said, our grower Sophie sold a lot more produce direct from the Clissold site on Mondays – including cuttings and seedlings.

This year, we're very sorry to say goodbye to long-term volunteer Sue Long, who is moving out of London. She raised hundreds of seedlings for our plant sale in May. Those – and the dozens of tomato plants grown by Shelagh in Dagenham – contributed to our most successful sale yet.

The eco-classroom at our Allens Learning Garden is having a much-needed make-over this year and will once again be a beautiful location to hire for meetings, brainstorming and courses. We hosted two successful



Hannah and Glory harvesting at Dagenham

workshops there with Hackney Herbal, who showed us how to make cosmetics and teas from herbs grown in the garden.

Our farmers' market has remained strong this year, but also had its fair share of hellos and goodbyes. We've been delighted to welcome Hempen Cooperative and their organic hemp products, The Green Bean café's colour-drenched salads and several local honey producers. Market customers bid a very fond farewell to Kwame, who had been running our café for almost 10 years.

We were also sorry to lose delivery worker Anita as well as Fi, who worked tirelessly on the veg scheme and promotions teams.

Meanwhile Maisie the milkfloat has been put out to grass at St Paul's Church where she will provide storage and remain the base for our coffee stall. Our hunt for the perfect new eco delivery vehicle continues.

Our fruit and veg scheme remains the heart of Growing Communities. That first plank of the social enterprise that started in Julie's garage over 20 years ago still supports all the other activities we do.

But this year has been tough. Yields for many crops have been low and prices have been rising. The Brexit vote and the uncertainty it brings have made imported produce more expensive and harder to procure. The introduction of the national living wage – while good news – puts disproportionate pressure on small-scale, labour-intensive growers, who are not eligible for the same subsidies as larger, more environmentally damaging landowners.

Now, more than ever, we need to support those small farms that are the basis of a fair, sustainable and resilient food future.

Let's take a look at what we've achieved by examining Julie's original aims for GC:

1. To play a part in making small-scale organic farming once again economically viable and through that to help restore the land to health.

Growing Communities, you listen, you share my values, you are innovative and exciting. I trust you completely to get the best produce you can for a fair price and that you will do this with care for the people involved, the environment and the wider world. Thank you.

FRUIT & VEG SCHEME MEMBER, 2016

2. To provide people with better and fresher food.

3. To help revive our own community here in the city, while supporting rural communities and helping to build a positive relationship between the two.

The veg scheme directly worked with 11 farms this year (covering 250 acres), as well as wholesalers. The market gave space to 30 farmers and producers. Thanks to GC's support, three of the farmers we work with are putting more land into organic conversion – Sarah Green (10 acres), Adrian Izzard (8.5 acres) and Marina O'Connell (10 acres).

Almost 1000 households (2000 people) are on the veg scheme, while another 3000 people eat food from the market. Over 80% of members have changed their cooking and eating habits to eat more seasonal, local, fresh food since joining GC.

Many say they have an increased sense of community as a result of our activities. Half of market customers mention the community feel and the friendly stallholders as among their top reasons for shopping there.

Not bad for 20 years' work; with your continued support, just imagine what we can all achieve in the next 20.

GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2016 PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2016

	2016 (£)	2015 (£)
TURNOVER	761,361	730,263
Cost of Sales	<u>684,982</u>	<u>606,611</u>
GROSS PROFIT	76,379	123,652
Administrative expenses	<u>88,157</u>	<u>73,852</u>
OPERATING PROFIT (LOSS)	(11,778)	49,800
Interest receivable	1,310	1,056
(LOSS)/PROFIT ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	<u>(10,468)</u>	<u>50,856</u>
Tax on profit on ordinary activities	<u>3,677</u>	<u>4,000</u>
RETAINED (LOSS)/PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	(14,145)	46,856
Balance brought forward	<u>202,384</u>	<u>155,528</u>
BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD	<u>188,239</u>	<u>202,384</u>

BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2016

	£	2016 (£)	2015 (£)
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible assets		20,385	11,941
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	21,572		30,805
Cash at bank and in hand	<u>275,641</u>		<u>290,081</u>
		<u>297,213</u>	<u>320,886</u>
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	<u>(78,970)</u>		<u>(74,343)</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS		<u>218,243</u>	<u>246,543</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>238,628</u>	<u>258,484</u>
CAPITAL AND RESERVES			
Profit and loss account		188,239	202,384
Other reserves		<u>50,389</u>	<u>56,100</u>
MEMBERS' FUNDS		238,628	258,484

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2016

Growing Communities has had a satisfactory year in 2015-16. While income grew by 4% to £761,361 during the year, a number of both planned and unplanned factors resulted in us generating a loss of £14,145, compared to a £46,856 profit the year before.

Veg scheme income increased by 3% in 2015-16, but due to higher costs of vegetables from suppliers, the gross profit that the veg scheme generated fell from 27% in 2014-15 to 23% in 2015-16. We have chosen not to increase the prices of bags to reflect the increase in costs, so there has been a significant reduction in the overall contribution from the veg scheme. This is the key reason for the reduction in surplus in 2015-16. We also invested in improving some of our equipment – including the coldstore and bag scheme storage areas.

The farmers' market and café, urban market gardens and Start-up Programme continued to perform well. We also received additional grant income from the Big Lottery Fund for the Grown in Dagenham project.

Overall Growing Communities continues to be in a strong financial position. We have cash reserves of £238,628 and do not expect further significant losses in the coming years.

	£	2014-15	2015-16
Bag scheme		584,307	603,950
Farmers' market		58,475	61,049
Urban market gardens		11,175	10,604
Café sales		11,113	12,047
Grant income		28,973	44,571
Other		<u>36,220</u>	<u>29,140</u>
Total turnover		730,263	761,361



Thank you for creating such a wonderful farmers' market. It was the first we did and they are now our main focus. We've streamlined the business to give everyone more work/life balance. Apart from your veg scheme and handful of others we will be relying on markets for our sales.

ADRIAN IZZARD, WILD COUNTRY ORGANICS, 2016

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.

Our Start-Up Programme has helped other UK groups – the Better Food Traders – to set up veg schemes like ours across the UK.

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.



Elisa Proggatt-Brown

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, Amy McWeeny, Caroline Ada, Giles Narang, Giovanni Colapietro, Hannah Mackie, Hannah Schlotter, Ilana Estreich, Jack Agnew, Jack Harber, James Turner, Jo Barber, Julie Brown, Kerry Rankine, Kwame Appau, Lucy Nacson-Jones, Nicole David, Paul Harriss, Phil England, Rachel Dring, Rachel Stevenson, Richenda Wilson, Sarah Alun-Jones, Sarah McFadden, Shelagh Martin, Sonia Cropper, Sophie Verhagen and Ximena Ransom. Thanks also to Chris Adams, Jane Gray and Nicki East. This year's trainees were Emma Gain, Fiona May, Glory Benjamin and Tanya Jury (in Dagenham) and Claire Ratinon, Lils Gunn and Michal Hillel (in Hackney). This year sadly we said good bye to Alex Tugame, Anita Lawrence, Farook Bhabha and Fi McAllister.

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

Among our volunteers, special thanks go to Sue, Imogen, Stephen, Dewi, Sara, Iona, Finn and Joanne for being such dependable regulars at the gardens in Hackney. At Dagenham, many thanks to Sue, Lesley, Cal, Ken, Gill, Ian, Jimmy, Lindsey, Colin, Paul, Megan and many others.