



**GROWING COMMUNITIES
ANNUAL REPORT 2017/18**

FOREWORD BY JULIE BROWN

DIRECTOR, GROWING COMMUNITIES

Every year, around this time, I work myself into a knot of anxiety as I start to write this foreword.

In one way, I write it for myself and for GC staff – it’s a chance to review the year’s activities and check in with myself about how my thinking has moved on. The anxiety seems to stem from the fact that this foreword has come to represent a significant part of the agency I have in the world so I want the words I write to have an impact – on you. And while this may be hubris on my part, I feel a pressure to say something meaningful, uplifting and hopeful. Something that will help to keep you engaged with Growing Communities – because without your engagement we have nothing.

Seems like a particularly tall order this year, but now – more than ever – we all

need to be using whatever agency we have in the world to best effect; so I’m going to give it a shot.

The latest report from the IPCC (the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) contains a clear and unequivocal call for action – its most urgent yet. We need to cut annual global emissions of greenhouse gases by half in the next 12 years to have a chance of staying within a 1.5°C temperature rise.

This will require huge changes in the way we organise our society, and a staggering and coordinated effort by each and every one of us. The report makes it clear that a rise of 2°C or more will pretty much be game over.

I’m not sure why this news has affected me so much – after all, I’ve been saying my whole life that we are heading for

ecological catastrophe. But perhaps I never truly believed it. Until now. (How am I doing on the uplifting and hopeful front so far?)

What is it about this particular report? Well, I think it’s the coral reefs that did for me. The coral reefs are our ecological canary in the coalmine that indicates the health of all other ecosystems. So far we have lost 30% of them. The IPCC report states that even if we stay within 1.5°C, we will still lose 80% of the reefs. At 2°C, they’re gone.

So, I realise I’m grieving for all the animals, plants and eco-systems that we’re losing and will continue to lose – no matter what we do from now on. As for the impacts on humans? It is almost unbearable to think about.

We humans are currently the only species that can appreciate the magnificence of this extraordinary planet and the only ones who can put up a fight against this destruction. After decades of delay, this is our last chance to get it right.

We have the mother of all battles on our hands. And, somewhat curiously, I find myself filled with renewed determination in the face of that.

Do the maths

Ultimately, all greenhouse gas emissions can be linked back to each of us as individuals. As residents of the UK, our average carbon footprint in tonnes per carbon dioxide equivalent (tCO₂e) is 15. That compares to Malawi at around 0.1 tCO₂e and Australia at 30 tCO₂e.

The current consensus is that we need to get down to 2 tCO₂e or below if we are to enable any reasonable quality of life to

be sustained on planet earth. But there is simply no way we can get down to that level without collective and government action to create the systemic changes needed to enable that. As such it makes no sense to put all the responsibility to save the world onto us in our role as individual consumers.

But it does make sense for us to act on all the fronts that are available to us, using whatever agency we have in the most effective way considering – alongside our personal impact as consumers – the influence we can have at work, the collective action we can take, our wider influence with friends and colleagues, the work we do (GC are recruiting!), lobbying for the wider changes we can’t achieve by ourselves and, when circumstances allow, considering direct action.

On the other hand, individual actions *do* have an impact eg a return transatlantic flight is roughly 2 tCO₂e, a return flight to Spain is 0.7 tCO₂. Eating a plant-based diet saves 0.8 tCO₂e a year, turning your thermostat down by 1°C saves 0.4 tCO₂e a year and recycling comprehensively for a year saves 0.2 tCO₂e.

A system of personal carbon budgets or a carbon rationing system (a bit like in the war) that laid out the overall carbon costs of our activities could provide a fair and transparent framework within which to “spend” our allocation and enable us to work collectively for the common good. But we don’t have that – yet – and so are left as individuals struggling to work out what to do for the best.

The good news is that while food is a significant part of our carbon footprint (about 20%) it is also one of the major areas where demand side (ie

“This will require huge changes in the way we organise our society, and a staggering and coordinated effort by each and every one of us.”



consumer) action will be essential to create the change we need, according to climateactiontracker.org.

And by joining the collective effort of Growing Communities we are each able to magnify our individual impacts 1000 times or more (and growing) and direct it towards the organic farmers and growers we need to support.

Eating mainly plants, wasting less, eating seasonal, fresh, unprocessed food produced in a way that protects the environment and requires no air freighting – these are all contributing elements that we take into account every week when we prepare your bags and set up for the farmers’ market.

And with your support we’re also able to campaign on issues that will have a wider impact (see main report for details).

So thank you.

A call for skilful action

Some of the wider systemic changes we need are underway – the renewables and tech revolutions are helping to create the globally networked but locally distributed systems we need. Cleaner air, warmer homes, more forests are all within our grasp.

But it feels important to get our heads and hearts around the reality of the current situation: face up to the scale of the challenge, give ourselves the space to grieve and accept and then be skilful about the actions we choose to take.

Being part of Growing Communities is one of the skilful actions you are taking. And hopefully, by taking on much of that side of things for you, we are helping to free up some of your time and headspace

“Perhaps, facing up to these enormous planetary challenges, while knuckling down to the work in hand, can help us feel alive with purpose and possibility.”

to get involved in other areas where you have influence and agency.

And while we know we all need to do more to increase our impact and reduce our consumption, it also feels important to consider how to live well in the here and now – it doesn’t do to live in a perpetual state of anxiety.

Perhaps, facing up to these enormous planetary challenges, while at the same time knuckling down to the work in hand, can help us feel alive with purpose and possibility. Perhaps it can help us get a better perspective on what is important in our lives and feel gratitude for that.

Uniting in a common effort is the best shot we’ve got. It might also help to create the best conditions for a future society to emerge: one that in some ways is better than what we have now – with new livelihoods, new communities and new ways of connecting to each other.

So let’s roll up our sleeves and get on with it.

And when our children rightly call us to account (Granny - what did you do when the climate was breaking down?), we’ll be able to tell them.

Julie Brown, October 2018



Ben Dwyer @cultivamedia

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, Andy Paice, Ben Dwyer, Caroline Ada, Dominic Stewart Barton, Ellie Virk, Giles Narang, Hannah Schlotter, Helen Bredin, Isabella Nelson, Jo Barber, Julie Brown, Kerry Rankine, Kwame Appau, Michèle Van Veerssen, Nicole David, Paul Harriss, Phil England, Rachel Dring, Rachel Stevenson, Richenda Wilson, Sarah McFadden, Shelagh Martin, Sophie Verhagen and Ximena Ransom. Our patchworkers are Andrew Ferguson, Ciara Wilkinson, Hari Byles, Jack Harber, Linda Hawes, Louis Hudson, Raymond Lyons, Sara Barnes and Zosia Walczak.

Thanks also to Ambreen Raja, Bren Bedson, Caroline Weekes, Daniel Azavedo, Emma Gaines, Neli Angelova, Nicki East, Emma Gain, Georgina Sutton, Toni Lötter and Michael Calwell at Boxmaster Systems. This year’s trainees were Ashlea Wane, Jaseena Abdul Hakkeem and Sohefa Chowdhury (in Dagenham) and Daniel Shannon-Hughes, Dave Evers, Kim Davies, and Maddie Haworth (in Hackney). This year we said good bye to Alice de Grey and Jack Agnew and patchworkers Michal Hillel and Giovanni Colapietro and Claire Ratinon, who both moved on to other growing projects.

The members of the volunteer Board are: Sarah Havard (chair), Richard Dana (treasurer), Deborah Handforth, Geraldine Gilbert, Karla Berron, Kath Dalmeny and Nick Saltmarsh.

Among our volunteers, special thanks go to Dewi, Imogen, Stephen, Joanne, Teresa, Jim, Amy, Leo, Siobhan, Michael, Mark, Sanjay, Malou and Liz for being such reliable regulars at the gardens in Hackney. At Dagenham, many thanks to the wonderful Spencer, Paula, Cliff, Peter, Paul, Colin, Jimmy, Lindsay, Cal, Christine, Alison, Dave, Pete H, Toney-Ann, Mark, Will, Ricky, Michael, Steve and many others.

GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2018

PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018

	2018 (£)	2017 (£)
TURNOVER	841,081	840,096
Cost of Sales	<u>761,459</u>	<u>775,272</u>
GROSS PROFIT	79,622	64,824
Administrative expenses	<u>72,883</u>	<u>86,335</u>
OPERATING PROFIT/(LOSS)	6,739	(21,511)
Interest receivable	688	570
PROFIT/(LOSS) ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	<u>7,427</u>	<u>(20,941)</u>
Tax on profit/(loss)	-	(1,000)
RETAINED PROFIT/(LOSS) FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	<u>7,427</u>	<u>(19,941)</u>

BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2018

	£	2018 (£)	2017 (£)
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible assets		12,280	16,992
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	14,549		18,616
Cash at bank and in hand	<u>240,153</u>		<u>251,118</u>
		<u>254,702</u>	<u>269,734</u>
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	<u>(45,703)</u>		<u>(68,039)</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS		<u>208,999</u>	<u>201,695</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>221,279</u>	<u>218,687</u>
CAPITAL AND RESERVES			
Retained earnings		175,725	168,298
Other reserves		<u>45,554</u>	<u>50,389</u>
MEMBERS' FUNDS		221,279	218,687

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2018

Growing Communities' turnover was broadly flat at £841k in the year to 31 March 2018. Despite this, the fruit and vegetable bag scheme continued to go from strength to strength with a 3% rise to £640k during the year. Our farmers' market and urban market gardens also continued to perform well during the year. The Dagenham Farm has continued to develop well and continued to receive grant funding from the Big Lottery Fund for the Grown in Dagenham programme.

We managed our costs carefully during the year and as a result our gross profit increased by 23% to £80k. Administration expenses were also reduced by £13k during the year. As a result, the overall profit improved by £27k to a surplus of £7k. We continue to have strong reserves, with £240k cash held in the bank and members' funds of £221k.

	£	2016/17	2017/18
Bag scheme		619,419	639,735
Farmers' market		59,083	58,445
Urban market gardens		8,520	10,647
Café sales		9,315	10,469
Dagenham Farm sales		27,926	29,602
Grant income		91,997	82,842
Other		23,836	9,341
Total turnover		<u>840,096</u>	<u>841,081</u>



"It's fresher food and it keeps longer in the fridge, so I'm not shopping as much now as I used to in the supermarket. And you can try new things too - broaden your mind, broaden your tastes."

FARMERS' MARKET CUSTOMER

WHAT WE HAVE BEEN UP TO THIS YEAR

FRUIT AND VEG SCHEME

The total veg scheme numbers have been really buoyant this year – thanks in large part to you recommending the scheme to your friends.

More than 40% of new joiners say they joined because a friend or neighbour told them about GC.

So at the end of September we had 1139 of you on the scheme (up 13% on last year), who were feeding a total of more than 2000 people in Hackney every week and picking up bags from 15 collection points, including new ones at Core Clapton and the Round Chapel.

This meant that we were able to direct more than £350,000 to small-scale farmers and suppliers who are producing food in sustainable ways.

But this has been a tough year for UK farmers. The harsh wet winter led swiftly to that long hot summer. The spring – a crucial time when farmers prepare seedlings, plant them into the fields, and hope for some gentle rain and warmth to speed them on their way – was virtually non-existent.

Martin Mackey at Ripple Farm lost fields of leeks to the drought. Sarah Green lost plantings of sweetcorn. The crop of UK onions (a staple in our veg bags) has been devastated.

This meant we have had to look further afield for fruit and veg to fill the bags so we used imported produce for more of the year than usual. This year, 85% of the veg we packed was grown

in the UK (down from a record 91% last year) and 34% of the fruit. This still substantially beats government figures which show that just 57% of the veg and 16% of the fruit eaten across in the UK in 2017 was grown in this country.

And the amount of veg we bought direct from UK farmers (rather than via wholesalers) was slightly up on last year at over 63%.

Aside from your direct impact on the farmers we work with, you tell us that being on the veg scheme has made a difference to how you shop and eat. More than 45% of you also have shopped at our farmers' market, while 88% of you eat more seasonally, 63% use less packaging, 45% eat more veg and 21% eat less meat. Also 28% of you waste less food.

And your membership of the scheme crosses over with another significant segment of our carbon impact – transport. Over 95% of you collect your fruit and veg bags on foot, bike or public transport.

For the first time last Christmas we gave you the option to donate fruit and veg to Hackney Food Banks, and many of you chose to do that.

We're now working on a tech fix that will make it easy for you to donate your produce to the food bank if you'd prefer to do that some weeks rather than booking holiday from the scheme.

“Even my Cornish pasty eating and Red Bull drinking partner has started cooking from scratch and thinking about reducing waste...”

VEG SCHEME MEMBER



THE BIGGER PICTURE

We have worked hard (and, we hope, skilfully) over the past year to advise and support external campaigns, groups and channels that we believe are the best hope for building a better food system and radically reducing our climate impact.

GC is a founder member of the new Fruit and Vegetable Alliance, which aims to create a united voice from the edible horticulture sector to lobby for increased UK production of fruit and veg. We also contributed advice, energy, support and hard cash to the Landworkers' Alliance Horticulture campaign.

We have contributed to Sustain's campaigning work on the Agriculture Bill and Julie sits on the recently set-up Defra Horticultural Round Table, which aims to outline how the Government and its agencies can best help grow the value of fruit and vegetables in the UK.

We gave financial support to the Ecological Land Coop - to help them in their successful bid to secure land to offer smallholdings to new entrants to farming.

Julie was shortlisted for the Organic UK's first-ever Oak Award, recognising heroes in the organic world.

Plans are well underway for setting up the Better Food Shed, our distribution hub for small and medium local organic food producers. It will provide efficient access to the London consumer market, predominantly via community-led box schemes like Growing Communities and the other Better Food Traders.

This coming year, we are hoping to be able to further increase our impact through the BFT network. Our funding bid to expand the network is through to the final stage and we are feeling very optimistic about it.

"I tell everyone I work now. You've changed my life. Before I was surviving day to day and now I'm thriving rather than surviving."

GROWN IN DAGENHAM TRAINEE



FARMERS' MARKET

The farmers' market celebrated its 15th birthday in May. That's 15 years of supporting local organic and biodynamic farmers; 15 years of helping new food producers to set up businesses and see face to face how their products go down with customers and how they might be improved.

We marked the day by hosting cooking demos, seed-sowing workshops and making a new film about the market, which you can see on our website or the market's Facebook page. And of course, there was cake.

Overall, the weather this year took a toll on the farmers' yields, so total takings for the market were down on the year before at £634,000.

It's been a particularly difficult year for raw milk farmers Hook & Son as they are still trying to weather a TB scare that is threatening the farm's survival.

On more positive news, earlier this year we were able to help Adrian Izzard win his battle against local proposals for a giant Park and Ride car park that would have resulted in the majority

of his organic farm being concreted over!

Matthew Unwin from Longwood Farm, who had been selling organic meat and dairy at the market since 2013, retired from farming in April. We have welcomed new livestock farmers Simon and Fabienne Peckham of Galileo Farm in Warwickshire. They have a passionate concern for animal well-being. Their cattle and sheep are grass-fed as well as organic.

We were pleased to find a new fishmonger too. David Price of South Coast Seafayre brings fresh seasonal fish and seafood caught by day boats off the Kent coast near Rye.

As ever, the annual customer survey makes for encouraging reading: almost half of customers come every week, rain or shine, relying on the market for their weekly shop; almost a third of customers are vegan or vegetarian.

Key features that keep them coming are the quality and taste (82%), the food being organic (79%) and local (66%) and the chance to buy food with less packaging (51%).



DAGENHAM UPDATE

Our Dagenham head grower Alice left to have her second baby in July 2018. Ex-patchworker Ximena is covering Alice's maternity leave and, alongside Shelagh, is doing a great job at keeping the farm producing.

The farm also felt the impacts of the hot weather so the lettuces and summer leaves definitely suffered. However, we had a good year for tomatoes and a very productive year for cucumbers (enabling our trainees to create their excellent "Sweet As Pickle"). We now have bees at the farm in collaboration with Participatory City, who are funding bee-keeping courses for local people.

The third and final year of our Lottery-funded Grown in Dagenham programme is going really well.

This year's trainees, Jaz, Ashlea and Sohefa (in pic above, with their trainer Hannah on the left) have proved themselves to be fantastic retailers (as well as cooks), so the weekly stall at Dagenham East tube station has been very successful. We now feel confident that we should be able to continue to run the stall selling Dagenham Farm organic

produce to local people during the summer season in 2019, after the Lottery funding comes to an end.

The trainees also enjoyed visits to Tiptree Jams (who grow almost all of the fruit for their preserves on site in Essex) and to farmers' market regular Alison Bond.

RECIPE FOR LIFE

We were grateful to receive £59,000 from Barking and Dagenham Council for our Recipe for Life project to refurbish the disused pavilion on the old bowling green next to the farm.

We are converting the site into a welcoming space for pop-up food and growing events and a community hub for older people and local families. With help from local volunteers we will also be planting a new orchard of apple and cherry trees and growing flowers and herbs there.

We held our annual DagenJAM event in the bowling green space and started running cooking sessions in the pavilion in August, working with Lifeline Group and grassroots group Moms On a Mission.

HACKNEY PATCHWORK FARM

The tough weather and dastardly foxes hit our Hackney sites hard this year, with total produce harvests of 1.5 tonnes our lowest for several years.

Building works in Springfield Park prevented us using the park's

glasshouses (now demolished) but we built our own new one after a slight redesign of our site.

We were grateful to have our four trainees and volunteers to help in the market gardens. Volunteers say they appreciate the support they receive from our grower Sophie, the chance to get their hands dirty, do something productive and "play a small part in changing the current food system".

The volunteers have built community too: two now share a house (they would not have known each other otherwise); several attended Capital Growth's Roots to Work conference, which they all found really useful and one of them got some work as a result of going to it. Others have used volunteering with us as a stepping stone to attend horticultural courses or volunteer elsewhere.

Fans of local beer might be pleased to hear that we donated organic hops grown in Clissold Park to Deviant and Dandy, a local micro-brewery that is just becoming established.



"Just registering just how valuable is a day of productive manual labour under an open sky with goodhearted company."

HACKNEY VOLUNTEER

HOW WE HAVE TACKLED WASTE

We work on a basis of Remove, Reuse, Reduce, Recycle. This helps us to prioritise actions with the most significant impact. Stopping doing things altogether has a bigger impact than doing them in a different way.

REMOVE

We have packed more veg items loose into the bags this year, including green and broad beans, spring onions and radishes. Our celery now comes “naked” from our wholesaler Langridge. We tried bunching greens such as chard and kale, but they wilted too quickly, increasing the likelihood of the food going to waste.



We encourage farmers’ market customers to bring their own shopping bags and trolleys (75% of them already do this) as well as bags for veg, fruit and mushrooms (41%), boxes for eggs, bottles for milk and containers for sauerkraut, chocolates and the like. This substantially reduces the amount of packaging the producers need to use.

REUSE

We encourage all veg scheme suppliers to send produce in reusable packaging wherever possible and to take that packaging back, for example Adrian Izzard at Wild Country Organics now supplies veg in robust plastic crates rather than cardboard ones. Paper and netting veg sacks and plastic crate liners are returned for reuse or used as bin bags.

Langridge cardboard boxes that used to be sent for recycling are now reused by Sarah Green.

When selling salad direct from our Clissold Park market garden, we have stopped sealing the plastic salad bags with a Hackney Salad sticker as this meant the bag tore when opened and couldn’t be reused. We reuse plastic plant pots for our own potting on and for selling plants to customers.

We introduced old-fashioned reusable mugs at the farmers’ market, reducing paper cup use (and celebrating our excellent producers at the same time).



Empty ziplock Wild Country bags have been given to Jack Agnew to be washed and reused for Get Loose, his new unpackaged shop at Hackney City Farm, and veg scheme members have contributed Tetra Pak cartons for the roof of a new building at the farm.

REDUCE

We accept wonky, small and oversized produce from our farmers that supermarkets and many other buyers would reject. Veg scheme and farmers’ market customers tell us that you waste less than 3% of the food you buy from us – that’s a fraction of the amount wasted in households across the UK.

We now have more than 250 recipes on the GC website, almost all plant-based. Many offer advice on wasting less and using parts of the veg you might have thrown away eg carrot top pesto, fennel frond raita, spiced cauliflower stalks.

We continue to offer uncollected veg at the Old Fire Station to NLAH (North London Action for the Homeless) and other surplus veg to refugee project Akwaaba. Most collection points have local arrangements to distribute leftover veg to volunteers or local charities.

RECYCLE

The Evering Road Kitchen Garden next to the market has built new compost bins – allowing us to compost coffee cups on site immediately after the market (with no transport impact). The compost is used to help NLAH, who run the garden, to grow food to feed Hackney’s homeless.

ALL OF THE ABOVE

We have done massive amounts of research into the best materials to use as the veg scheme carrier bags and as packaging for salad and leafy greens. The more we dig down, the more complicated we discover it all is. Read our blogs to keep up to date with our latest findings. In the meantime we endeavour to reuse every bag as many times as possible before consigning it to the recycling or waste bin. All the carrier bags used on the veg scheme are either reused bags (please keep sending all the carrier bags you have back to us) or they are made from recycled plastic.

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 whom 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.

