

The Need for Allotments and Community Growing



The Scottish Government has set out its ambition that Scotland becomes a Good Food Nation, a country where people from every walk of life take pride and pleasure in, and benefit from, the food they buy, serve, and eat day by day. To deliver this vision the government will launch a consultation on a Good Food Nation Bill during 2017. As part of this process, it has committed to drawing on the expertise of civic society to develop and implement its good food policy.

This discussion paper has been produced by the **Scottish Allotments & Gardens Society** and the **Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens Scotland**, as part of our work with the Scottish Food Coalition. We believe the Good Food Nation Bill has the potential to deliver real change in the food system; one that delivers high levels of well-being, social justice and environmental stewardship now and for future generations. This discussion paper focuses on **the needs for allotments and community growing** and how this can contribute to the delivery of a just transition to a better food system. Following on from the Scottish Food Coalition's publication, [*Plenty: Food Farming and Health in a New Scotland*](#), this is one of a series of discussion papers which explores cross-cutting issues relating to food, forming part of the Scottish Food Coalition's contribution to a national Good Food Conversation.

Where are we now?

Growing communities

There are now diverse social models of growing our own food that add value and input to many areas of government policy including health, education, equality, skills development and local democracy. There is a growing diversity of locations and opportunities for growing our own food, including through school programs, community gardens and allotments, city farms and community orchards.

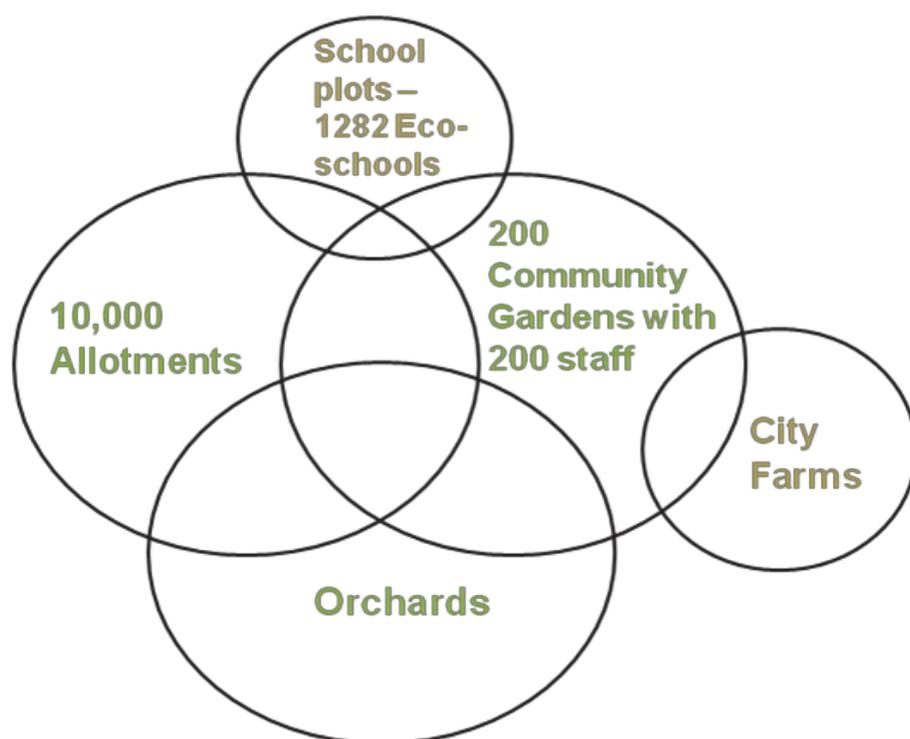


Figure 1: Diagram showing diverse and overlapping types of land and opportunities for community growing and gardening in Scotland.

Over the past 10 years in Scotland there has been an increase in the popularity of the Grow Your Own movement, which has led to significant impact in local communities. The amount of land and number of people involved has grown from strength to strength, and we now have:

- Over 10,000 allotment ploholders;
- Approximately 200 hectares of land, both public and privately owned, which are used as allotments and community gardens, including in schools;

This growing movement is supported by much of recent Scottish Government policy and legislation:

- Part 9 (Allotments) of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 includes the requirement for local authorities to complete Food Growing Strategies. The Act also includes parts on Participation Requests, Asset Transfer and Community Ownership, all of which could support Allotment Gardens.
- Wellscotland, and the forthcoming Mental Health Strategy acknowledge a growing body of research that demonstrates the links between interacting with the natural world and improved well-being.
- The Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2016 includes the right to buy in urban areas and the participation in decisions regarding land.
- Scotland's Zero Waste Plan includes composting and recycling. Allotment and Community Gardens contribute towards composting targets, awareness around food waste, and support a recycling culture.
- The 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity acknowledges the positive effects of gardening and use of green spaces on physical and mental health. Allotments and community gardens contribute significantly to increasing biodiversity and raising the public awareness of the connections between plants, wildlife and soil.

However, there is a clear gap in access to gardening, despite above legislation. In 2009, the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS) and Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) analysed the access to allotments in Scotland against the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation.¹ This confirmed that with fewer plots accessible per person, there is less opportunity to garden in deprived areas such as parts of Bridgeton, Glasgow (SAGS, 2007; see Table 1). Lack of access to land and areas for food growing in deprived areas is clearly a social justice issue.

Table 1: Access to gardening in Glasgow: Bridgeton vs. all of Glasgow (Source: SAGS, 2007).

Area	Population	% Children	Flats	Without car	No. in houses with gardens	Access to gardening
Glasgow	609,370	20.4%	73%	67%	162,000	27%
Bridgeton	7,113	19.2%	88%	84.2%	435	6%

¹ More information on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation: <http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/SIMD>

As a result, we have a long way to go before allotments and community gardens are available to everyone who would like to use them.

Current benefits of community gardening

Community growing in its different forms contributes to a diverse array of benefits. The overarching benefits of increasing health and well-being and reducing inequality are realized through a wide range of outputs, including home-grown produce that contributes to a local economy; outreach to various communities and providing education and skills; and maintenance of minority cultures through growing produce from around the world. These outputs are explored in more detail below:

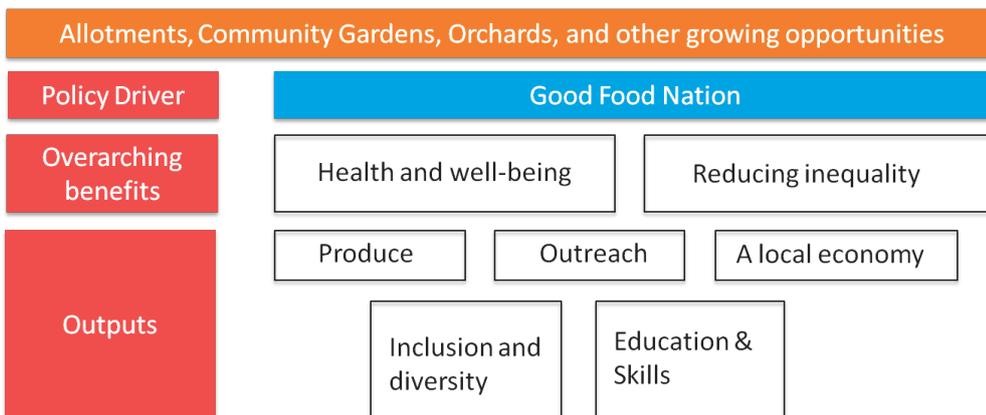


Figure 2: Policy drivers and benefits from community gardening and allotments

Produce:

Allotments and community growing projects produce a wide range of fresh produce.

Allotments enable families to produce a lot of their own food. Peter Wright MBE is an Edinburgh-based plotholder and retired engineer. In 2008, he weighed all his produce and showed that he could sustain a family of four with fruit and vegetables during the year (Wright 2008).

In addition, allotments and community growing projects help people to learn about what produce is seasonal and local, and can connect people to local small scale produces, thereby supporting other local growers, producers and retailers.

Inclusion and diversity:

Allotments and community growing projects can help to build more inclusive communities and celebrate diversity for instance through growing produce from other countries. Community growing projects, such as the Maryhill Integration Network's community garden, create opportunities for a wide range of people including people with disabilities, refugees and asylum seekers, and people recovering from problems with their health (Maryhill Integration Network, n.d.). They create open spaces where people start to recognize each other, start up conversations and get to know each other, and shape their local community spaces.

Outreach to local communities:

The assessments from sites participating in Glasgow's Sustainable Allotment Site Awards (SASA 2016) show that activities undertaken by allotment associations do a very good job of reaching local communities. For instance, growers from these sites host open days where people from the local community can visit the site, talk to plot-holders and buy fresh produce; attend local events;

host visits; supply produce to local hospitals and care homes. Many sites have plots for local schools and community groups.

Education & skills

1282 Schools across Scotland are engaged in food growing through the Eco-schools programme, teaching school-age children how to sow and grow food.

In addition, many plot-holders have skills and information that are shared within the growing community. Sarah Robinson of the NG Homes housing association describes the benefits of a housing association allotment plot (Mollison, Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2014: 43). “It acts as a training route to support learning for new growers and helps increase confidence in their ability if they want to take it further.” The housing association helps the allotment committee to “ensure that new plotholders will go on to be productive and have successful plots, encouraging support for new plot-holders and developing resilience” (Mollison, Wilkinson & Wilkinson, 2014: 43).

Local economies:

Although not a mainstream input into the economy, community gardens and allotments support many local groups and small local enterprises.

- There are approximately 200 community garden staff employed in projects across Scotland.
- There have been a number of social return on investment (SROI) assessments carried out for community growing projects, showing that for every £1 invested in community growing at Bridgend Growing Communities, there is a return of £11-£25 (Greenspace Scotland, 2011). The Allotment Market Stall sells excess produce from allotments across Aberdeen to Aberdeen City residents (TAMS 2016). The proceeds are split. 75% goes back to the allotment sites to improve them for the following season and 25% stays with TAMS to go towards running the stalls next season. This social enterprise model ensures that market stalls and allotments remain viable, and that local produce is available outwith the growing community.

In addition, allotment gardens are part of local green networks and ecosystems, which support ecosystem services¹ that benefit us all, More information, and an analysis of the contribution allotment gardens make to ecosystems can be found in Bell *et al.* (2016).

Health and wellbeing:

Allotments and community growing projects help to address a wide range of issues regarding health and wellbeing, including diet and physical and mental health. A lack of fruit and vegetables in people’s diets is a risk factor for serious health problems such as heart disease, cancer, type-2 diabetes and obesity. The other side of this coin is physical activity, and the Scotland health survey (2012) showed that less than half of adults met physical activity guidelines, and that there had been no significant change since 2008. In addition, mental health problems can be a major cause of isolation, poor physical health and poverty. Growing can help to address these all of these problems through providing afresh and local source of produce, and through the therapeutic benefits of gardening, taking part in activities with other people, or learning new skills to build self esteem. For individuals an allotment plot can often offer a place of peace and respite, where they engage with the natural world and can find a spiritual focus for their lives.

*Ecosystem services: the processes by which the environment produces resources utilised by humans such as clean air, water,

What are others doing well?

There is an increasing awareness at national and regional government level across Europe of the importance of allotments and community growing. A program under the European Cooperation in Science and Technology project (COST) has studied allotment gardens in European cities over a four-year period. The COST research resulted in a comprehensive publication (Bell *et al.*, 2016), showing that allotments and community growing are in a unique position straddling the urban economy, ecological and ecosystem services.

The COST research has also produced a series of factsheets for allotment gardeners and interest groups, including information on the [contribution of allotments to ecosystem services](#), advice on [developing urban gardens as learning spaces](#), and [practical tips on gardening and growing your own food](#). In addition, the project has resulted in a number of case studies. For instance, Hanover, Germany, provides one example of a well-established allotment garden culture. In Hanover, about 5% (1000 hectares) of the urban area is made up of allotments; 90% of these gardens are legally protected through binding land use plans, or through the Federal Law on Small Gardens (Urban Allotment Gardens, 2016).

For these allotments, Transition Town Hanover, an organization to promote urban agriculture, provides support. They cooperate with schools, allowing children the opportunity to learn about growing and linking up with school canteens; and run “wandering gardens” that are moved around the city to give people a chance to grow their own food. They also train and employ workers previously receiving unemployment benefits, providing skills and jobs which benefit people and the economy.

However, the same pressure for space is faced across many countries and societies. Norway, for instance, faces similar challenges to Scotland. For example, in the next 20 years, the number of inhabitants in Oslo is expected to grow by approximately 30%. This increase in urban population has resulted in a need for new land to build on. Coupled with a high interest in allotment gardens among the urban population (and waiting lists of 10-20 years) there are implications for urban planning.

What do we want?

- Every person who wishes to grow their own produce has a place to do so.
- Growing is recognized and integrated into policies and strategies such as health, land reform, education, climate change, etc
- Scotland becomes a leader in the promotion and implementation of allotments and community growing in the planning process, learning from the examples of Denmark, Germany, Poland, Greece and many other European countries.

Across the country in allotments, community gardens and orchards more people are involved in growing their own food. stimulating an inclusive and exciting culture around food. Supported through government policies, these activities are playing an important role in developing knowledge and skills for living; encouraging a healthy lifestyle, as well as improving local connections and support mechanisms, and involving those generally excluded from society into community networks.

How do we get there?

Stimulating growth

Land
 Equality
 Education
 National Recognition
 Legislation

Developing potential

Planning process
 Empowerment
 Support, training and funding
 Channels Collaboration

Measuring progress

SIMD indicators
 Tri-partite report on waiting list
 CSGN ambition for land and engagement

Stimulating Growth

Land

The Central Scotland Green Network Trust has an ambition to triple the land for the allotment, community garden and orchard provision across the central belt. The Community Empowerment (Scotland) 2015 and the Land Reform Act give hope that land will be identified in Local Development Plans and Master Plans for allotments and community gardens.

Equality

Priority must be to provide allotments and community growing sites in some of the most deprived areas of the country (SAGS 2014).

Education

Ensure that every school has links to community garden or an allotment, and growing is embedded in the National Curriculum.

National recognition

There is growing recognition of allotments and community growing, but still a long way to go so that they are recognised for the contribution they make to other sections of national and local Government. We need cross-departmental commitment in Scottish Government to make the promotion, implementation and sustainability of allotments and community growing part of all relevant policies and strategies. We need true partnerships to be forged with local authorities so that growing opportunities are part of every LOIP (Local Outcomes Improvement Plans) and land for community growing identified on all local development plans and planning briefs.

Legislation

We need to build on the Food Growing Strategies with a statutory requirement that everyone who wishes has access to a growing space within their local area.

Developing Potential

Inclusion in planning process

The SAGS submission to the original consultation on the Community Empowerment Bill in 2013 estimated that to make 1 plot available for every 100 people only requires about 600 ha or the but, of course, this should be found in the relevant areas (SAGS, 2013). This requirement should be integrated with a simple and clear planning process so local groups can implement schemes without undue stress and cost.

Empowerment of those in socio-disadvantaged areas

Community growing works best when it is led by local communities. A forthcoming report by the Grow Your Own Working Group contains a summary of the barriers which exist to community and allotment growing in areas of deprivation. There should be an active programme for truly listening to the voices of people in these areas.

Funding for training, support for community garden staff

Short term funding does not provide the stability and input that is needed for supporting community gardens and communal growing initiatives. While many plot-holders just need time to learn on their plots and may not want or require formal training, community gardens provide skills and information networks which everyone in a local community can benefit from. We need long term and sustainable funding from across the agency spectrum, (including the NHS) so those delivering the outcomes have a living wage and security of contracts. Funding and support for the national training programmes for professional horticultural qualifications is also necessary. Local conferences and workshops on practical horticulture, the culture of communal growing and site management available for those who wish to benefit from them.

Development of robust channels of communication and movement

There is a great the diversity of the needs of allotments and community growing. Those who have the interest should be able to move easily between community gardens, allotments and market gardens. Information about related social enterprises such as community cafes and local markets should be easily accessible. For example The Allotment Market Stall in Aberdeen have recorded their progress over the 4 years they have been developing and would welcome the opportunity to share what they have learnt.

How do we measure progress?

- Use the [eco-system service approach](#) to capture and measure the multiple benefits and assess the multi-functionality of urban Allotment Gardens.
- The Allotment Tri-partite group² will be monitoring the waiting lists and creation of new allotments particularly in areas of multiple deprivation. The SIMD analysis would support this.
- Evaluation of the CSGN progress to wards increasing provision of allotments, community gardens and orchards.
- Engage with the Health Improvement Service and agree performance measurement and indicators for local communities.

²Set up with representatives from Scottish Government, local authorities and SAGS to monitor Part 9 (allotments) of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act

- Develop measured for demand for community growing
- Undertake an annual survey of existing community growing projects

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About the Scottish Food Coalition

We are a civil society coalition working on food in Scotland. We are made up of established organisations working on the environment, poverty, health, workers' rights, food production and animal welfare. We have come together in recognition that the problems in our current food system are interconnected and cannot be changed by focusing on a single issue.

We are calling for a just transition to a better food system.

This coalition wants to see a vibrant and thriving food sector and food culture that puts people and the natural environment at its heart. We believe a successful food system is one that delivers high levels of well-being, social justice and environmental stewardship now and for future generations, in Scotland and abroad.