

# A Market Garden Renaissance

**The Case for a Fruit and Vegetable Aid Scheme based on Food Zones Principles**



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# A Fresh Look at UK Fruit and Vegetable Supply

We need to produce more fruit and vegetables in the UK.

A bold policy is necessary to revitalise our edible horticulture sector, increase the resilience of domestic supply, improve sustainability, and attract a new generation of growers. The future could involve market gardens having a larger role in fresh produce production than they do at present, contributing to import substitution and stimulating the transition to net zero, nature-friendly and community-centred horticulture. Our vision includes the following:

- Every city, town and village has access to a supply of fresh, organic fruit and vegetables, with at least 60% being produced either locally or regionally, and 80% produced in the UK.
- City box schemes and food hubs supplied directly via urban, peri-urban and rural hinterland producers (within 50-100 miles), supplemented by national, European and global produce from wholesalers (See the Food Zones diagram on the following page).
- Direct sales and shorter farmer-focused supply chains would ensure that more of the shoppers' pound goes to the grower, helping them invest in the future of their businesses.
- Growers are at least net zero, if not carbon negative by several tonnes, through land management practices that build soil organic matter, maintenance of hedgerows and field margins and adoption of local, low carbon distribution systems.
- They avoid pesticides and herbicides, and use biodiversity enhancing practices, such as nectar and seed forage cover crops and integration of

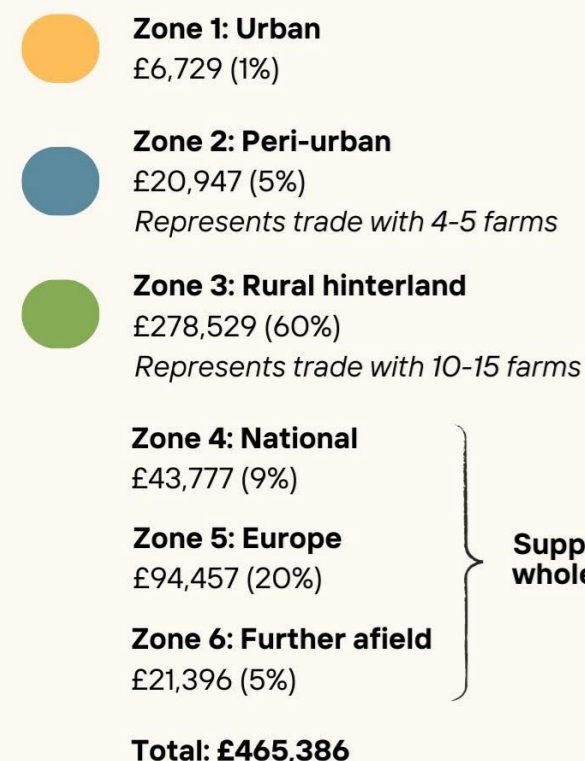
wildlife habitat with cropped areas.

- Horticulture attracts young people and career changers due to its potential for fulfilling, skilled, environmentally and socially impactful livelihoods and vocational training.
- Money is kept in the local economy, instead of being spent on imported produce. If just 1% of the £6.1billion worth of F&V currently imported was produced in the UK, this would keep £61 million in local economies. Our aim of creating 1-3 food zones systems per city or London Borough and 1-5 market gardens per village or town would result in the substitution of 20% of imports, keeping £1.22billion in the British economy.
- Widespread public access to horticulture through peri-urban farming and community supported agriculture inspires people to eat more fresh produce and make food choices that benefit the environment.

This vision aims to be complementary to, rather than in competition with, large scale production of vegetables and fruits. If everyone in the UK were to eat the recommended 5-7 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, we would need 10,856,497-15,199,096 tonnes of vegetables and fruit.<sup>1</sup> At present we only produce 3,124,500 tonnes.<sup>2</sup> We need the whole horticulture sector to act together with the Government to create and implement a joined up strategy to produce the fresh produce that we all need.



## Value of produce currently supplied from each zone for the Growing Communities Fruit and Vegetable Box Scheme



The Food Zones model reflects principles developed from over 20 years of practical experience of running Growing Communities, a successful, community led trading scheme, which provides 1,600 households in the London Borough of Hackney with fresh locally sourced vegetables and fruit.

The Food Zones model aims to show where our food might come from, if we are to meet the challenges of climate change and resource depletion, and represents a hierarchy of priorities. Ideally, at least 2.5% of produce would be grown in home gardens, 5% in urban commercial gardens, 17.5% in peri-urban farms and 35% from the rural hinterland within a 100 mile radius of the city (or settlement). The model accepts that some produce will come from further afield and will be sourced by wholesalers who buy produce from growers in the rest of the UK (making up 20%), Europe (15%) and further afield (5%).

This graphic illustrates the Food Zones Model, using the example of Growing Communities and showcases some of the producers who supply the scheme, and highlights the social, economic and environmental benefits they provide. Since 2019 Growing Communities has sourced much of its produce from its subsidiary, the Better Food Shed. The Better Food Shed is a not-for-profit warehouse and trading hub which enables food suppliers from outside London to deliver produce to a single drop-off point, from where it is then redistributed to nine box scheme providers across London, of which Growing Communities is the largest.

### Zone 1

#### Patchwork Farm, Hackney

- Four growing sites totalling 300 square metres
- Salad leaves and other high value crops, such as cucumbers, tomatoes, beans, sold mainly via the Growing Communities scheme.
- Some produce is sold at the farm gate.
- Previously underused spaces in council parks and on a housing estate have been transformed into beautiful gardens, containing raised beds, polytunnels and fruit trees.
- Patchwork Farm offers free, six month long traineeships and volunteering opportunities for the local community.
- Regular volunteering at urban or peri-urban farms brings significant benefits for mental and physical well-being.

A recent study found that for every **£1** spent on the Growing Communities Fruit and Veg scheme, **£3.70** is generated in social, environmental and economic benefits.<sup>3</sup>

### Zone 3

#### Bagthorpe Farm, Norfolk

- This 700 acre farm is the main supplier of onions and carrots to Growing Communities, and also supplies other national box schemes.
- Their light, free draining sandy loams are ideal for growing root crops.
- Soil fertility is maintained by long rotations, which integrate vegetable and arable crops with nitrogen fixing grass and clover-leys on which their herd of grass fed Aberdeen Angus cattle are grazed.

### Zone 2

#### Dagenham Farm, East London

- Since 2012, GC has been producing organic vegetables at this 1.7 acre council owned site in Dagenham. Previously a council plant nursery, the site has both a glasshouse and polytunnels, as well as outdoor raised beds.
- A range of salad leaves, summer crops such as tomatoes, french beans and cucumbers, and winter leafy crops are grown mainly to supply the Growing Communities scheme, but also for local markets, including a stall at the local tube station in some years.
- Dagenham Farm employs 2 FTE staff, and each year trains up new market gardeners.
- Extensive public outreach includes gardening and cooking sessions for local schools and colleges and others that benefit from time spent in a garden.

### Zone 3

#### Peach and Pippin, Essex

- 4 acre permaculture holding and teaching site in Essex.
- Produce diverse soft and top fruits, flowers, some vegetables and eggs.
- Seasonal fruit and other produce, as well as homemade jams and chutneys are sold weekly at the farm gate, wholesale to box schemes, restaurants and independent shops, and via the Growing Communities scheme and farmers market.
- The Orchard Room provides a venue and kitchen, enabling community outreach to schools and local groups about the importance of local organic food as a vital component of health and wellbeing.

### Zone 3

#### Ripple Farm Organics, Kent

- A wide range of organic vegetables grown on 110 acres
- Sold via a blend of outlets including Ripple's own box scheme, the Growing Communities scheme and farmers market and various other farmers markets and specialist food shops, cafes and pubs, locally in East Kent and in London.
- Employ 10-12 local people throughout the year.
- Central to Ripple Farm's ethos is working with nature, reducing food miles and providing a direct link between farmers and consumers reusing packaging wherever possible.
- Practices such as building soil organic matter through the use of green manures and hedgerow maintenance also contribute to the farm sequestering carbon.

# How are we going to get there?

We are already working in multiple areas, such as:

- Training and skills, including accredited courses, incubator schemes and mentoring.
- Land matching with private landowners and local authorities, and land co-operatives/ community land trusts (e.g. The Ecological Land Co-operative)
- Connecting with Sustainable Food Places to enable collaboration between the existing local food partnerships and growers in the rural hinterland.
- Participating in the Fruit and Vegetable Alliance to build understanding about wider horticultural issues and push for a coherent and well funded horticulture strategy.



# What do we want national and local government to do?

- Codesign the Fruit & Vegetable Aid scheme with us, so that it helps achieve our vision of a Food Zones Supply system in every city, and a CSA in every village and town, as well as enabling larger scale growers to survive and thrive.
- Horticulture E.L.M. scheme must be accessible to holdings of less than 5ha, and well enough funded to incentivise transition towards agroecological production. Helping CSAs and peri-urban farms cover the cost of public goods delivery will enable more to start up.
- Build capacity for peri-urban farming, close to where people live, by making public land available and providing infrastructure grants for start ups and scale ups.
- Catalyse a dramatic increase in the number of new and scaling up growers, by building on the success of the New Entrant Support Scheme.
- Make trading facilities and land available at local authority level in recognition of the multiple social, environmental and economic benefits delivered by food schemes operating according to food zones principles.

## Challenges to overcome

Current challenges demand a more rapid response than we are able to deliver without support. We can help achieve net zero, boost biodiversity and encourage people to eat more fruit and vegetables, but we face barriers including:

- Access to land, investment capital and training.
- Inadequate investment in trading infrastructure, such as warehouses, chiller units and distribution hubs to provide a significant alternative to the supermarket supply chain.
- Most agroecological market gardens are excluded from E.L.M.S, due to being less than 5ha, meaning that despite delivering significant public goods they are unable to claim public money to contribute to costs.

- The current Fruit and Vegetable Aid scheme is only accessible to growers who are part of a Producer Organisation (P.O.), which requires members to sell 75% of their produce through the P.O. This excludes most agroecological market gardens who sell to a range of local markets.

Supportive policies and financial help from the Government will help us achieve this faster, so we can contribute to net zero before it is too late.



For more information on the Landworkers' Alliance  
Horticulture Campaign please visit our website:

[landworkersalliance.org.uk/horticulture](https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/horticulture)

Growing Communities website:

[growingcommunities.org](https://growingcommunities.org)

More information on the Food Zones model can be  
found here:

[growingcommunities.org/food-zones](https://growingcommunities.org/food-zones)

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