

Distribution Case Studies:

Local Supply Chains

Growing Communities

Growing Communities (GC) began in 1996, with the aim of building a better, fairer food system that brings communities together, supports local, organic, small scale farmers with fair prices and looks after people, the soil and the planet. Twenty-one years later, 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. They have also supported 50 producers, employed 57 people in Hackney and Dagenham and trained 42 people in food growing, preparation and selling, by using fresh, organic vegetables and fruit, supplied from GC's own market garden in Dagenham and urban "patchwork farm" in Hackney, and a network of about twelve market gardens and field scale growers within 60 miles of London. The 2017 turnover for fruit and vegetables was £750,000, including produce bought in wholesale during the hungry gap. They have also trained and mentored nine other community groups around the UK – the "Better Food Traders" - to set up their own local veg schemes using the same integrated supply model. Specific elements of GC include:



Fruit and Veg Scheme – Weekly vegetable bags range from £7.50 for a small box (designed to feed one person) containing five varieties of regionally produced vegetables, to £16.50 for a large bag containing ten varieties of vegetable (to feed 4-5 people). Customers are told which farm their produce comes from. Fruit bags are also offered (£4.75-£8.75), which contain seasonal UK fruit, but may also contain imported organic fruit.

Farmers' Market – A weekly Farmer's Market in Stoke Newington is attended by 30 stallholders – both producers and processors - all of whom are organically/biodynamically certified. These include several fruit and vegetable producers, as well as meat, dairy, mushrooms, honey and processed goods such as a bakery and cheese-maker.

Urban market garden and Patchwork Farm – Dagenham Farm opened in 2012 on an ex-council nursery site, and now supplies about 5 tonnes of vegetables per year from 0.23 ha (0.6 acres) of glasshouses, polytunnels and outside areas. The project was initially funded by the Local Food Fund, part of the Big Lottery, from March 2012 to March 2014, but the grower's salary is now fully financed through sales of produce. As well as supplying the Growing Communities Fruit and Veg Scheme, Dagenham Farm is home to "Grown in Dagenham", a project to involve more local people in the life of the farm and help them develop new skills in growing, food preparation and selling. As well as Dagenham Farm, Growing Communities also operate a "Patchwork Farm" on nine market garden sites of up to 150 square metres, utilising underused spaces on estates, private gardens and church land across Hackney. These "micro-sites" give graduates from GC Urban Growing Training Scheme an opportunity to grow salad to sell to weekly veg box scheme and at other local outlets, thus increasing the amount of locally and sustainably grown food in Hackney and helping growers generate an income from food production.

Regional Suppliers – While urban market gardens and "micro-sites" are appropriate for growing high value salad leaves and other produce with a short-shelf life for which a high price can be obtained, bulkier field scale crops and fruit are supplied from a network of ten farms from Kent, Essex and Suffolk. These farms range from thirty-acre field scale vegetable producers to soft and top fruit growers on smaller acreages. Some veg scheme produce is also bought through local wholesalers – especially in April to June, when local veg is scarce. Overall 63% of the veg sold through the veg scheme comes direct from local farmers and 90% is grown in the UK:

<https://www.growingcommunities.org/about-us>

Tamar Grow Local

The Tamar Valley has a strong heritage of market gardening. In its heyday in the 1950s horticulture employed eight to ten thousand people, with a growers' co-operative of 600 members. Many local varieties of fruit and flowers are well adapted to its warm microclimate. In 2007, Tamar Grow Local (TGL) was established, as 'not for profit' Community Interest Company (CIC) run on co-operative principles for the benefit of the community. Their activities focus on three main areas:

Community - Providing opportunities and support for local people to grow their own food including allotments, growing plots and orchards

Education - Raising awareness of the benefits of local produce and the unique market gardening history of this area.

Commercial - Working with commercial growers and supply chains to increase the availability & consumption of local food and produce.

They are also home to a number of other projects which in turn support these community groups and other food producing businesses, including local markets, a food hub and an equipment bank.

Tamar Valley Food Hub - Tamar Valley Food Hub (TVFH) aims to make the area well known once again for the quality and range of its local produce. They distribute produce from local food and drink producers to retail and wholesale customers across the Tamar Valley. Products from over 60 local producers are displayed for sale on the online shop front each week. Customers must order by Wednesday for free delivery to local pick up points, or home delivery for a small fee, each Friday. Producers have the flexibility of adjusting their availability from week to week, and as they supply to order they benefit from greater consistency and lower wastage than a farmers' market. Twenty of the producers are horticulturalists, producing salad and other vegetables, cut flowers, apples, soft fruit, wine and forest garden products.

The Food Hub links together innovative local projects such as the Tamar Grow Local Honey Cooperative and Apple Cooperative. It provides outlets for their Farm Start projects and CROP Horticultural Therapy Gardens. Their wholesale service links producers to enable them to supply larger contracts. And through the Open Food Network they link with other food hubs across the country to facilitate the import of organic citrus from Spanish farming cooperatives. Producers are able to set their prices, and TVFH put on an 18% mark-up (of which 2% goes to the Open Food Network, who provide technical support for the online ordering system). Compared to most retailers, who take a 30-50% cut, this is low, and enables producers to get a better price, while prices to customers are sometimes cheaper than the local supermarket for equivalent products.

TVFH started with low overheads, receiving funding of £12,000 to fund their first year's wages until the project became viable. Most overheads, such as packing space and their delivery vehicle, are shared enabling them to operate on such a narrow margin. Since starting in 2013, TVFH is growing year on year, currently distributing £50,000 of local produce annually. While demand would have made it possible to grow turnover more quickly by buying additional produce from outside the local area, the policy has been to balance demand (through limited promotion) against local supply to maintain the focus on supporting the development local production.

Farm Start – In 2015 Tamar Grow Local started offering starter units for new farmers and growers. These 1-3-acre plots are offered for rent (£500 annually), along with infrastructure, access to tools and business advice, and a guaranteed wholesale market. Their initial site has seven tenants, including traditional market gardens, an orchard, a vineyard and a cut-flower growing business.

www.tamargrowlocal.org

