

# GROWING COMMUNITIES' ANNUAL REPORT 2009/10



## Transforming food and farming through community-led trade

[www.growingcommunities.org](http://www.growingcommunities.org)

### Foreword by Julie Brown, Director, Growing Communities

I was thinking about what I might write for this year's annual report as I was cooking a pasta sauce a few weeks back.

I started chopping onions from my veg bag (Ripple Farm in Kent) and frying them in olive oil (from trees growing at our neighbour's family home in France). I added some sliced garlic (grown by my sister-in-law and proffered when she last came to stay). Then tomatoes from the farmers' market – beautiful plum tomatoes (Adrian Izzard in Cambridgeshire) and a Marmande variety (Sarah Green in Essex). I added a handful of cherry tomatoes (from some friends' allotment) and finished off with a few that I had grown myself – not from seed though. Some of my plants had come from the Growing Communities' plant sale we held earlier this year at our Springfield

market garden; most of those plants were raised at Organiclea's new food-growing project in Waltham Forest, where a number of our staff and trained urban apprentices also work. One had come from Stewart, one of our volunteers, who had raised plants at home. Another came from a sale at Butterfield Green, where we donated trees and skills to help get the community orchard up and running a few years back.

I added a grated carrot from my veg bag (Ripple), finished off with a bay leaf (my own) and let the whole lot simmer while I got on with preparing the salad (grown on our own market gardens here in Hackney) and the pasta (hand made from flour I had milled myself using a machine run on renewable energy)... OK, the pasta bit is completely made up – but if by this point the unbearable smugness is starting to really get to you, please



Left, Martin Mackey at Ripple Farm. Right, this year's Springfield plant sale

be reassured that not all the meals I cook can make such claims!

But what a powerful brew for really a very simple sauce: the people involved, the farmers supported, the connections made, the integrity of the food itself. Nourishment in every sense of the word.

It seems that all that stuff I wrote in the annual report back in 2007 about "*creating an interconnected web of local people, farmers, land, businesses, projects and food which together have the potential to sustain us: a vibrant, community-based system which enriches our lives, providing us with good food, good friends and increasing numbers of us with good work*" turns out to actually be true! And all reflected in a bowl of sauce.

It's hard to put your finger on what exactly keeps this whole thing together, but pumping through this interconnected web is food and what keeps that food flowing is the support of this community – our money, our time, our skills and our commitment.

As members of Growing Communities, you are choosing to prioritise the food that is the lifeblood of this system – to continue to buy it, to understand that it is not a luxury or a lifestyle choice but a positive and political act for a better, more sustainable future.

And continuing to make this web, that we are all part of, more and more connected will make it stronger and more resilient in the face of the undoubted challenges we face in the months and years ahead.

And speaking of challenges – I like this quote from Richard Heinberg, author of *Peak Everything*: "*People who are capable of generating hope are those that understand the difference between wishing for stuff and making stuff happen.*"

Well, this report is packed with stuff. So, let's celebrate the amazing growing community – illustrated in the following pages – that we've all helped to create.

**Julie Brown, November 2010**

*“On top of providing us with great quality fruit and veg and pushing us to be creative to cook veg that I didn't even know existed, the box scheme and the farmers' market made me realise that there actually is another way out of the supermarkets. Signing up to the box scheme and buying at the market are in fact the most important political acts I have done in the last years. Thank you for making that possible.”*

**Box scheme member**



## What we've achieved in 2009/10

The box scheme and farmers' market together provide a key outlet for 29 small-scale, local, organic producers and processors.

The box scheme supplies fruit and vegetables to 616 households across Hackney – 20% up on this time last year. We estimate that the box scheme and market combined provide sustainably produced food to around 3,000 people in our community every week. More than 950 bags of fruit and vegetables are packed each week – over 100 tonnes annually.

Being a member of Growing Communities is about much more than just joining a box scheme. We want members to feel a sense of involvement in what we do. Over the year, this has been demonstrated in many ways, including the amazing response to the box scheme survey, when well over 40% of members took the trouble to respond and give us detailed comments.

When our Victoria Park community pick-up point had to close, local members gave useful suggestions for alternative collection points. One member, Mary Julian, even provided a temporary home for the scheme for those vital months while we sorted out a new permanent pick-up point – now at St John of Jerusalem church on Lauriston Road.

*“There is a level of trust and involvement that is totally unique. The human element – to be greeted by name when I pick up a box, for my daughter to be given as many over-ripe plums as she can eat, to be given extra basil leaves and told how to make a good pesto with sunflower seeds – these are the things that make Growing Communities about much more than fiscal value but about social value.”*

### Box scheme member

We added another new pick-up point this year at the Castle Climbing Centre on Green Lanes, where we also launched our latest micro-site in January 2010. Graduate apprentices Ida Fabrizio and Sophie Verhagen (below) transformed a jumble of trees and scrub into a thriving growing site. The land is now in organic conversion and is already contributing to the box scheme.

Some 98% of people on the box scheme walk, cycle or use public transport to collect their veg.



Sophie and Ida with Castle salad



Bombay Burgers at the market

42% people on the box scheme and 31% of people who visit the farmers' market consider themselves to be on a low income. Our pensioner's discount continues to be popular.

The cold winter and very dry summer made the past year very difficult for organic farmers. As a result, the box scheme was unable to buy as much produce directly from local farms and had to top up the bags with more veg from co-ops and wholesalers. Despite this, overall 88% of our veg came from the UK, slightly more than last year. Over the past year, 62% of the veg and 23% of the fruit in our bags came directly from local farms.

The challenging weather created difficult trading conditions for all the livestock farmers at the market. Amanda and Nigel Barham of Muck and Magic had been selling their organic rare-breed meat at the market for two years. Sadly the costs of extended winter ration feeding and no grass in the summer combined with a tougher financial climate meant

they went out of business in July. We did everything we could to help them but it wasn't enough, demonstrating just how hard life is for small organic farmers in general – and in particular for new entrants to farming.

The difficult trading and economic conditions have been reflected in the overall turnover figure for the producers at the market, which is down 13% to £430,500. However we have been able to help a further three local producers start trading at the market. This year we introduced Bombay Burgers, who make vegan burgers using potatoes from the market; Primo e Ultimo, who make pasta and sauces; and new grower Sheila Poole, who produces organic herbs in Harpenden and sells at the market as Say it with Herbs.

Sara Davies took over as grower in November 2009 then faced a year of upheaval and loss of growing space. We had to stop using the Springfield Park glasshouses, and split propagation between Allens Gardens and the polytunnel at Springfield. We also had to move our

*“My favourite things about volunteering on the growing sites are: watching the plants and wildlife change every week; learning about organic salad production; meeting like-minded people who are equally passionate about food growing.”*

### Site volunteer, 2010



Market customers explore the orchards on the Stocks Farm trip

Clissold Park site as a result of the park development plans. Loads of work from Sara, our new assistant grower Pip Bromley and volunteers, plus our new polytunnel, combined to produce a whopping 795kg of salad during the season from a growing area of 268m<sup>2</sup> – about the same total crop as last year but grown on 60% of the space. This is equivalent to 26.3 tonnes per hectare per year.

Over the past year, we have trained two apprentice growers on our urban apprentice scheme, Ximena Ransom and Emma Brodrick. They are going on to manage our newest micro-site at Hackney Tree Nursery.

We continue to try and give people

*“Thank you all for organising the trip to Stocks Farm. We had a great time and learnt something to boot. I think the best thing about it was that it really achieved one of your key aims to get people connecting with where food comes from (well it did with us anyway!) and to value it that much more. I still have a mental picture of the orchards every time I take an apple from the bowl.”*

### Box scheme member

an insight into what we do and why we do it. On Apple Day last October we took box scheme and market customers to Stocks Farm in Essex to show them where their apples come from.

Our plant sale at the Springfield site in May allowed people to explore the site and find out more about organic growing – as well as buying plants.

During the summer, two of our regular Marketchefs, Nick Furrow and Elizabeth Reeds, cooked seasonal produce from the market at the Parks for Life events in London Fields and Springfield Park.

*“With Growing Communities' help, we've grown to put more land into organic conversion, which has enabled us to do the pigs, the beef, expand the flock of sheep and plant another orchard.”*

### Iain Learmonth, Stocks Farm



Ben and Richenda at Parks for Life

On September 18th we launched our new map of Hackney by local artist Michael Georgiou, showing our pick-up points, the market and growing sites. On the same day we ran a guided walking tour of all the sites which were also open to the public – with over 200 people visiting throughout the day. In all, we had 1,200 visitors to the sites last year.

We relaunched our website with a new design, information about the market producers and links from the list of veg in this week's bag straight to relevant recipes.

We have been shortlisted for two awards this year, as Best Food



Pip, Emma and Ximena packing salad

Market in the BBC Food and Farming Awards and as Best Local Retailer in the Observer Ethical Awards. Growing Communities' director, Julie Brown, was listed as one of George Monbiot's 50 green heroes in the Guardian.

We launched our Start-Up programme earlier this year to enable other communities across the UK to set up community-led box schemes. We held the initial workshops in July 2010 and will be working with at least five groups over the next year. A pilot box scheme, following the GC model, launched in Hastings in March 2010 and now supplies over 30 households.



## GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2010

### GROWING COMMUNITIES PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2010

	2010 (£)	2009 (£)
<b>TURNOVER</b>	<b>394,510</b>	<b>348,228</b>
Cost of Sales	<b>321,059</b>	264,858
<b>GROSS PROFIT</b>	<b>73,451</b>	<b>83,370</b>
Administrative expenses	<b>50,264</b>	65,183
<b>OPERATING PROFIT</b>	<b>23,187</b>	<b>18,187</b>
Interest receivable	<b>292</b>	1,528
<b>PROFIT ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION</b>	<b>23,479</b>	<b>19,715</b>
Tax of profit on ordinary activities	-	-
<b>RETAINED PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR</b>	<b>23,479</b>	<b>19,715</b>
Balance brought forward	<b>131,682</b>	111,967
Balance carried forward	<b>155,161</b>	<b>131,682</b>

The transformation of Clissold: (left to right) the old growing site and butterfly tunnel in February before we bagged up the soil in the raised beds ... and after; putting the cover on the new polytunnel in March; seedlings in the tunnel in July; thriving salad beds one month later



### GROWING COMMUNITIES BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2010

	2010 (£)	2009 (£)
<b>FIXED ASSETS</b>		
Tangible assets	<b>11,759</b>	15,431
<b>CURRENT ASSETS</b>		
Debtors	<b>11,610</b>	11,400
Cash at bank and in hand	<b>156,461</b>	116,943
	<b>168,071</b>	128,343
<b>CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year</b>	<b>(24,669)</b>	<b>(12,092)</b>
<b>NET CURRENT ASSETS</b>	<b>143,402</b>	<b>116,251</b>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES</b>	<b>155,161</b>	<b>131,682</b>
<b>CAPITAL AND RESERVES</b>		
Profit and loss account	<b>155,161</b>	131,682
<b>MEMBERS' FUNDS</b>	<b>155,161</b>	<b>131,682</b>



### TREASURER'S REPORT

2010 has been another successful year for Growing Communities. Income has increased 13% to £394,510. This is made up of:

	2010	2009
Box scheme	333,124	286,914
Café sales	14,111	14,961
Farmers market	37,991	37,327
Other income	9,284	8,626
<b>Turnover</b>	<b>394,510</b>	<b>348,228</b>

Box scheme sales have more than trebled over the past five financial years with the following rates of increase:

2010	2009	2008	2007	2006
16%	28%	35%	27%	35%

This increase of income has given Growing Communities an increased financial security which is not grant funded and allows us to invest in further urban growing schemes and the expansion of the Start-Up Programme currently being undertaken. The company has not paid corporation tax as the principal trade, the box scheme, is regarded as mutual trading and not taxable.

These financial statements were approved by the board on 21 October 2010.





Growing Communities can only do what it does because of the energy and hard work put in by our staff, management committee and volunteers. We employ 21 part-time members of staff. They are Kwame Appau, Pip Bromley, Julie Brown, Helen Carey, Marcus Cope, Nicole David, Sara Davies, Nicki East, Philip England, Maisie Kendall, Fiona McAllister, Giles Narang, Frank Newby, Kerry Rankine, Ximena Ransom, Annie Stables, Rachel Stevenson, Sophie Verhagen, Tim Watts, Richenda Wilson and Alan Wilkinson, with extra support from Amy McWeeney and Ebe Oke. This year we said goodbye to Stephanie Gill and Ben Tajima-Simpson.

Our volunteer management committee are: Esther Boulton, Kath Dalmeny, Andrew Ferguson, Emma Gittens, Sarah Havard, Nick Perry, Nick Saltmarsh, Piers Vimpany and Penny Walker.

Over the past year, 166 volunteers worked with us as part of our volunteer work team on the sites. We would particularly like to thank Lesley Harrison, Precious Martini-Brown, Sue Long, Lee Delaney, Shelagh Martin, Matt Parry, Julie Porter, Joe Coquelle Di Lecce, Poppy Nichol and Pilar Lopez.

*“It’s a fantastic enterprise: in addition to providing fresh, seasonal vegetables, Growing Communities is also a neighbourhood focal point. Cookery demos, the farmers’ market, lessons in how to grow veg and the community spirit generated by belonging to the scheme are just some of its benefits. The fact that [Julie Brown] has also created jobs in a tough market gives real meaning to that much over-used word sustainability.”*

**Rosie Boycott, May 2010**

# GROWING COMMUNITIES

## Transforming food and farming through community-led trade

How do we feed urban communities in a sustainable way in the face of climate change, ecological crises and fossil fuel depletion? Growing Communities is a community-led organisation based in Hackney providing real alternatives to the current damaging food system.

We believe that if we are to create the sustainable, re-localised food systems that will see us through the challenges ahead, we need to work together with communities and farmers to take our food back from the supermarkets and agri-business. Over the past 10 years or so, we have created two main community-led trading outlets: an organic fruit and vegetable box scheme and the Stoke Newington Farmers’ Market.

The box scheme and market harness our community’s collective buying power and direct it to farmers who are producing food in a sustainable way – allowing those small-scale farmers and producers who we feel are the basis of a sustainable agriculture system to thrive.

Growing Communities has also pioneered urban food growing and we produce salad for the box scheme on our small organic market gardens and micro-sites in Hackney.

We have launched a Start-Up Programme and are working with a number of groups interested in setting up community-led organic box schemes across the UK based on the Growing Communities model.



**The Allens Gardens market garden**