

GROWING COMMUNITIES IMPACT REPORT 2023/24



WELCOME TO GC'S 2024 IMPACT REPORT



Julie and Zosia made the case for investment in organic supply chains, infrastructure and procurement to members of the GLA environment committee at Organiclea in Chingford earlier this year

Cover shows chef James Taylor with Janet and Miriam from his school kitchen team with dishes made from organic veg from the GC Better Food Shed for an after-school taster session for parents.

I've found writing these words harder than usual as I've been pondering the role of fossil fuels in our food and farming systems to the backdrop of COP29 taking place in Azerbaijan and the US elections reaching their conclusion – neither of which has provided any obvious laughs or uplifting messages to help with this endeavour....

It was only last year that COP28 first considered the impact of food and agriculture on climate change, and there was barely a mention of it this year. That's despite the food and farming sector accounting for up to 30% of climate emissions and 15% of global fossil fuel use.

We know that all our lives are inextricably bound up with fossil fuels – often in ways that are unclear and difficult for us as individuals to directly affect – so it's hard to extricate ourselves, no matter how much we might care.

Food is a good example of this. The part that fossil fuels play is complex and less apparent than for, say, transport and energy. This enables the oil and gas companies to hide there in plain sight.

But industrial agriculture is saturated with fossil fuels: from diesel for tractors and trucks, to the less obvious use of petrochemical pesticides and synthetic fertilisers (the Haber-Bosch process is highly energy intensive and uses gas as a feedstock) to food processing and plastics.

As pressure increases for transport and energy systems to be electrified and run on renewable energy, the fossil fuel industry is looking for new ways to sell its products. And it will use every opportunity to ruthlessly exploit the “hidden” route into our food that pesticides, fertilisers, processing and plastics provide.

But one clear and unambiguous way ➡

we can cut off fossil fuels' escape route is through organic food production.

No industrially produced chemicals or fertilisers are used in organic agriculture and, when supported by local distribution (as the Growing Communities model is), the use of packaging, refrigeration and transport are also greatly reduced.

The pages of this impact report beautifully illustrate the organic safe space we've all created via our involvement in Growing Communities. It's a fossil fuels no-go area and a microcosm of how the world of food could look, if we tackled the climate and nature emergency.

I personally find the idea of building a barricade against the expansion of fossil fuels quite empowering. When I popped out to my local shop for some

“You know the fossil fuel industry will not go quietly. It will keep dancing till the music stops. And it will obfuscate and lobby and mislead to survive.”

bits and pieces, I was surprised and pleased to spot a jar of organic capers on the shelf. Less surprised that they were almost twice the price of the non-organic ones. I wavered... but with the phrase “back off fossil fuels” in my mind – well, that’s the polite version – I bought the organic ones with amused satisfaction.

It’s great that a substantial chunk of the food you already buy is organic. I wonder if you might also be motivated



to use your agency to strengthen the barricade.

Do you work in a school, college, hospital, prison, restaurant or café or for a company or brand? Might there be opportunities for you to encourage sourcing of some food from organic suppliers for their canteens, events or products? Or perhaps you work for a retailer or a processor? Or what about where your kids go to school or the sports or leisure clubs that you and

your friends attend? Could you talk to them about sourcing some organic fruit and vegetables from the GC Better Food Shed?

Because you know the fossil fuel industry will not go quietly. It will keep dancing till the music stops. And it will obfuscate and lobby and mislead to survive. It will not stop by itself. It’s like the Terminator. So, we need to do all we can to stop it.

Building an organic barricade is one of the best ways I can see to close its escape route – while creating so many other great benefits for nature, health and our communities along the way.

So, thanks for everything you do. See you on the barricades!

**Julie Brown, Director
November 2024**

By supporting Growing Communities, you are building a barricade around a food system that's better for you, your community and your planet. Read on to see what amazing work you've done.

BETTER FOR YOU

Back off UPF!

You are turning the tide on the alarming stats about Ultra-Processed Food (UPF) and its toll on health. Latest UK figures find that [adults get 57% of their calories from UPFs](#), [adolescents 66%](#) and even [toddlers](#) get nearly half (47%) of their calories from food high in salt, fat, sugar and additives.

Whereas, you healthy folk tell us that shopping at the market and joining the box scheme have led you to eat more seasonally (75%), buy more organic food (46%), eat more fresh, unprocessed food and cook more from scratch (38%). You also waste less food (31%) and shop less at supermarkets (59%).

Smashing your five a day

On the veg scheme, three-quarters of you munch through 5+ portions of fruit and veg every day, pretty impressive given that the latest [National Diet and Nutrition Survey](#) found just a third of adults and 12% of children meet the 5-a-day recommendation.

Plating up your plants

We do our best to inspire you to cook healthy, low-carbon meals where fruit and vegetables take centre stage. There are enough [tasty recipes on our website](#) – for both familiar veg and new discoveries – for you to try a different dish every day for a year!

The lowdown

90,521 fruit and veg bags packed in the year to 30 September 2024

80% of veg in the bags came directly from UK farms

10,000+ people fed through GC's veg box scheme, Better Food Shed and farmers' market

42 farmers and producers supported

900 children at four schools in Hackney and Tower Hamlets given access to organic, veg-focused school meals, partly through our Bridging the Gap pilot

331 schoolchildren in Hackney and Dagenham visited GC's farms

5 new organic food growers graduated from GC's training

£966,935 paid to farmers directly at the farmers' market

£13k of produce supplied to food coops working with low-income communities in Tower Hamlets through a Bridging the Gap pilot project

1200+ visitors to GC's Hackney market gardens and Dagenham Farm

£4253 of salad and other Hackney produce sold to local shops and cafes

14 groups of corporate volunteers enjoyed days out on the farms and **51** regular volunteers clocked up over 2500 hours helping with the growing

60 full-time, part-time and casual GC staff paid at least the real Living Wage

BETTER FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

Transforming school meals

We now supply fresh organic produce for plant-rich menus at four schools, Harrington Hill and Sir Thomas Abney in Hackney and Phoenix and Chisenhale in Tower Hamlets.

As part of a pilot funded by [Bridging the Gap](#) – a programme exploring how to stimulate production of climate and nature-friendly food and increase its

affordability – [students also visited our Hackney market gardens](#) to learn about where their food comes from:

“When they have hands-on experience with food and seeing how it grows, they are then more likely to try it rather than just if they come in for lunch and there’s a shocking new ingredient on display,” said Hackney school chef James Taylor.

Dagenham Farm veg bags

For the first time Alice shared boxes of seasonal, farm-grown produce and flowers (left) with the nearby residents in Barking & Dagenham.

Organic – just for the rich?

More than a quarter (27%) of market customers in our recent survey consider themselves to be on a low income but still choose to invest in nature-friendly organic farming and

nutritious food bought direct from local growers.

Sharing the love

You generous veg scheme members donated over £13k worth of bags of fruit and veg when you went on holiday. We used it to buy fresh produce for food banks in Haringey and Hackney.

Our new team of collection point hosts redistributed many more uncollected bags, while surplus produce from the veg pack and the Better Food Shed was shared with various food projects around Hackney and Tower Hamlets.

Mutual appreciation society

A farmer’s life can be lonely, especially when you load your harvest on a truck and have no idea who will eat it.

At the market, the farmers get to hang out with the appreciative recipients of their thoughtfully produced wares, while shoppers can find out exactly how the food was grown, reared, caught or made, and pick up tips on how best to prepare and eat it.



Hanging out with the family

Keeping GC small and local allows more opportunities for community interaction.

Many of you joined us this year at our scrumptious Harvest Feast (thanks to all of you who shared your amazing culinary creations); took a wander round our farms on the Dagenham and Hackney open days; kicked off your growing at our Springfield plant sale; joined our gardening courses, or visited [Alison Bond](#) (above) – plus sheep and chickens! – to explore the arcane art of biodynamic preparations.



BETTER FOR FARMERS

Blessed are the cheesemakers

We've had a conundrum with cheese at the farmers' market. Organic makers tend to be far away – making it uneconomic for them to come to Hackney – while nearby cheesemakers aren't organic.

But in February, we found the [Organic Cheesemakers Network](#), created to get more recognition for organic cheeses by Penny Nagle of [Feltham's Farm](#) in Somerset.

Working with Penny to set up the Organic Cheesemakers stall enabled organic producers in Somerset, Sussex and Inverness to sell directly at the market, without having to travel there every week, while offering customers a broad range of delicious all-organic cheeses including [Renegade Monk](#), [Rebel Nun](#), [Brighton Blue](#) and [Connage gouda](#) – with more to come next year.

Altogether, a grate result!



“The best cheese starts with the best milk, which is organic.”

PENNY NAGLE, ORGANIC CHEESEMAKERS NETWORK, 2024

Fair pay for hard work

Paying farmers fairly so they can produce food sustainably and pay their workers decently is one of your key reasons for shopping with us. Some other retailers try to fix prices up to a year in advance, leaving farmers to shoulder the cost of rising expenses or extreme conditions, such as this year's slugfest brought on by heavy rain.

Two-way traffic

Our wholesale arm, the [Better Food Shed](#), helps farmers in two ways: making it easier for them to sell to box schemes, shops and schools in London, and enabling them to buy produce to supplement their own veg boxes. The Shed also supplies [13 Acre Orchard](#) with produce for their new organic fruit and veg stall in Borough Market.

Zero-waste warriors

Up to 10% (3 million tonnes) of produce grown in the UK is [wasted before it leaves the farm](#). By eating whatever wonky, weird and wonderful fruit and veg the farmers have each week, you eradicate waste before it happens.

“It's a movement more than a market that supports a collection of farmers and the community around it. Buying straight from the farms means your veg will still contain all its nutrients and they won't have been sprayed so you are not only saving yourself but also doing your bit to save the soil too. You will feel it in the flavour as well.”

CHEF JOHNNIE COLLINS, INSTAGRAM, 2024

BETTER FOR THE PLANET

Better from the ground up

A recent study in Wales found that organic broccoli from a local farm produced around 70% less carbon emissions than the industrial version – production impact was 57% less; transport was about 90% less.*

Organic farming methods reject artificial carbon-intensive fertilisers and pesticides, and local farming means your produce covers shorter

distances from the field to your fork – and your produce is never air-freighted.

Cutting out the carbon

The veg box scheme is already very low-carbon because of its use of collection points, removing the “last-mile” deliveries to your home, estimated by another veg scheme to be responsible for a quarter of its total emissions across the supply chain. Some 97% of members cover that “last

mile” to the collection point on foot, bike or public transport, and the figure for the market is similar with 94% of customers walking, cycling or coming on the bus.

Driving towards zero emissions

We moved another step closer to our zero-emissions target by using the Better Food Shed’s electric van to deliver to nine collection points on top of the five we already deliver to by bike. So now, 59% of you collect veg bags delivered using no fossil fuels.

Binning the packaging

GC delivers your fruit and veg loose, bunched or in paper when it won’t compromise quality and freshness. This saved over 250,000 plastic bags, wraps, nets and punnets in the year.

Much of the produce at the market is sold unpackaged too. Remember to bring bags, boxes and bottles with you.

* Study funded by Welsh Government Foundational Economy Division, commissioned and arranged by BIC Innovation. Analysis delivered by researchers at Swansea University.

“The opportunities you’ve provided for our students to visit the farm have been incredibly impactful. These hands-on experiences deepen their understanding of where their food comes from and foster a greater appreciation for the hard work and dedication of farmers like yours.”

**SCHOOLTEACHER, BARKING & DAGENHAM,
2024**



GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2024 INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

	2024 (£)	2023 (£)
TURNOVER	2,545,152	2,060,464
Cost of Sales	2,427,652	1,941,879
GROSS PROFIT	117,500	118,585
Administrative expenses	106,949	115,714
	10,551	2,871
Other operating income	3,657	3,657
OPERATING PROFIT	14,208	6,528
Interest receivable	2,953	686
(LOSS)/PROFIT BEFORE TAXATION	17,161	7,214
Tax on (loss)/profit	-	-
(LOSS)/PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	17,161	7,214

“The traineeship has allowed me to expand my network of local people/organisations who are as motivated as I am to make our food systems work better for us, our planet and our farmers.”

HACKNEY TRAINEE, 2024

BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2024

	2024 (£)	2023 (£)
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible assets	83,180	82,780
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	65,175	52,126
Cash at bank and in hand	236,699	281,095
	301,874	333,221
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	(118,277)	(166,385)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	183,597	166,836
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	266,777	249,616
CAPITAL AND RESERVES		
Retained earnings	266,777	249,616
MEMBERS' FUNDS	266,777	249,616

“I feel really happy to be able to feed my son and us such good quality, local, organic food that is sustainable and fair to farmers – plus it is super easy to collect each week.”

VEG SCHEME MEMBER, ANNUAL SURVEY, 2024

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2024

The year to March 2024 saw a 23.5% increase in revenues at Growing Communities. The key driver for the growth was the box scheme and the Better Food Shed wholesale operation. It was really positive to return to growth in sales in 2024.

As always, one of the core focuses of Growing Communities is to remain financially sustainable. Costs were managed carefully, and we generated a small surplus in the year.

We continue to invest any surplus funds into projects that further the cause of Growing Communities. However, we want to do this in a way that continues to enable GC to operate in a financially sustainable way.

Overall, there was a £17k profit in the year. We remain in a robust financial position, with strong net reserves in line with our policy of retaining 3-6 months of operating costs.

	£ 2022/23	2023/24
Veg scheme/Better Food Shed	1,802,144	2,283,508
Farmers' market	62,422	65,442
Urban market gardens	10,062	10,414
Dagenham Farm sales	33,252	38,090
Grant income and other	152,584	147,698
Total	<u>2,060,464</u>	<u>2,545,152</u>

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR IMPACT

Keep shopping

Strengthen the organic barricade and support the type of farming we desperately need. Keep buying and eating the good stuff.

Lobby your school or business

Are you a parent, teacher, cafe owner or chef? [Talk to us](#) about providing healthy, unprocessed, pesticide-free fruit and veg for your kitchen.

Donate to GC

[Support our wider work](#) advocating for organic farming and sustainable supply chains, by helping our voices to carry further.

Volunteer

Come and get your hands dirty at our [Hackney market gardens](#) or [Dagenham Farm](#). Enjoy good company, physical activity and the chance to slow down and feast your senses.

Book a corporate or school visit

Bring your team for a [fun day out](#) on our farms. Grow food, bond and leave with a glowing sense of achievement. All our team days were given a 10/10 rating this year. We welcome [school trips](#) to see food growing in action too.

Tell a friend

Talk to your friends and family about the food choices you make and why they matter. Invite them to discover if there's a GC collection point or [Better Food Trader](#) near where they live.

Share on social media

Join the conversation with GC on [Instagram](#), [LinkedIn](#) or [Facebook](#). Show us what you've made with the food you've bought. Tag us if there's an event, article, action, campaign or group of inspiring changemakers doing things you think we and the world should know about.

THANK YOU FROM ALL OF US

Making the GC magic happen is a big team effort, involving staff, Board members, freelancers, patchwork growers and volunteers - as well as all members and customers. Our staff and freelancers over the year were Ailbhe Murphy, Alex Pomeroy, Alice Holden, Amina Usmani, Ashlea Wane, Bren Bedson, Cath Goldstein, Ciara Bains, Dan Lipman, Danny Fisher, Dave North, David King, Dee Pascal, DeeDee Aitken, Denise McNeill, Deva Thackray, Dominic Stewart-Barton, Ellie Virk, Emily Vanns, Ged Boden, George Readshaw, Georgina Sutton, Hannah Green, Helen Bredin, Helen Freudenberg, Helena Buckley, Ian Atkins, Jazz Noble, Jessica Wiper, Jo Barber, Julie Brown, Katy Barker, Kerry Rankine, Kwame Appau, Kyra Hanson, Liza Konash, Maddy Hartley-Salim, Mark Courtney, Mathew Day, Michael Nutley, Michelle O'Mahoney, Millie Sandy, Nick Sen, Nicole David, Noah Birksted-Breen, Noémi Dignat, Oshin Biswas, Paul Harriss, Paul Kirby, Philippa Ghosh, Rachel Giambrone, Rachel Stevenson, Richenda Wilson, Ry Simsek, Sam Crofts, Shelagh Martin, Sophie Verhagen, Val Gwyther and Zosia Walczak.

Our volunteer Board members are: Sarah Havard (chair), Richard Dana (treasurer), Amanda McDonnell, Anna Khalfaoui, Clare Hitchcock, Geraldine Gilbert, Kath Dalmeny and Natalie Silk.

The patchwork farmers are Dee, Jack and Susy. This year's trainees in Hackney were Jo, Laure, Michaela, Morgan and Sofia. Thanks also to Leo, Teddy and other [Zedify](#) bike riders who have delivered your bags this year; Steve, Renee, Martin and the team at [Growing Good](#); Michael Calwell at Boxmaster, and Martin Jones at Natty Web Development. Huge gratitude to the 30 shops, community centres, churches, pubs and other businesses that host our veg scheme collection points and to the volunteer members who help them all to run smoothly.

Special thanks to Imogen, Dewi, Ire, Mel, Pulama, Selin, Chas, Lucy, Julie, Joanne, Juliana, Carys, Aine, Kirsty, Krists and Chris for regular volunteering on the Hackney gardens and to Ben at Groundwork for polytunnel help. At Dagenham, we're especially grateful to Dave, Cal, Peter, Anu, Danielle, Zion, Paul, Joan and Zoe for all their hard work.



We were deeply sad this year to lose friend of GC and committed nerd Nick Perry, and pioneering and insightful farmer and teacher Marina O'Connell.

Nick was a volunteer GC board member for a decade, generously sharing his planning and tech wizardry. He was an entertaining and knowledgeable host of various market events and an adventurous foodie - whose homemade salami wowed everyone at GC's Good Food Swap back in 2006!

During Marina's 10 years selling at the market, she gave us joy, literal nourishment and many fruitful conversations about plants, soil and growing with customers and other producers - many of whom became friends. It was an honour to have her take part in our market 20th anniversary celebrations last year, discussing her inspiring and practical book on regenerative farming. We miss them both very much.



To our incredible members and customers, your support is the heartbeat of everything we do and we can't thank you enough. When you choose to buy from Growing Communities, you're not just enjoying high-quality, fresh food: you're ensuring that climate-conscious farmers are paid fairly for their vital work caring for the soil that future generations will rely on.

But your impact doesn't stop there. Our wholesale arm, the Better Food Shed, enables box schemes, shops, school chefs and council services to source the best fresh organic food from local farms. Take a stroll through our urban farms in Hackney and Dagenham, and you'll see aspiring farmers and changemakers being nurtured alongside the vegetables.

Beyond the veggies, GC advocates for a fairer, more sustainable food system. We work to ensure that communities have better access to healthy food, that the people who grow it are paid fairly and treated with respect, and the land, soil, water and biodiversity we depend on are nurtured and protected.

This report is a tribute to the strength and spirit of this community. Thank you so much for being part of it.



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