

GROWING COMMUNITIES IMPACT REPORT 2024/25



WELCOME TO GC'S 2025 IMPACT REPORT



Julie's Newbury Oak and her dog Cora at the Pear Necessities orchard, summer 2025

Cover photograph by Uyen Luu. Find her and her Vietnamese cook books on Instagram @loveleluu)

2025 is a 'mast' year.

Every few years, some species of trees and shrubs produce a bumper crop of their fruits or nuts. The collective term for these fruits and nuts is 'mast'.

And it seemed to me that this year, everywhere there could be fruit, there was fruit. And lots of it. Beautiful, bright and spectacular.

Ant (my partner) and I certainly noticed this at the orchard we manage in Kent. We were kept crazily busy harvesting plums, apricots, gages, apples and pears. And come the autumn, the sloes, blackberries, damsons, rosehips and chestnuts provided a feast for the eyes as well as for the birds, squirrels and other creatures we share the land with.

And then there were the acorns. This year the tree I call the Newbury Oak produced more acorns than ever before.

Grown from an acorn gathered in 1996

from the route of what would become the Newbury Bypass, and for which 10,000 mature trees were felled, the acorn I planted that spring put out its first leaves later that year. It grew slowly in its pot until we bought the orchard in 2007 and planted the young tree in its new home. Its first few acorns came a decade later and the 20 saplings grown over the last few years will be planted at the orchard this winter.

I realised recently – and with a jolt – that our Newbury Oak will be 30 years old this coming year; the very same time that Growing Communities will also turn 30.

Since realising that, I've felt compelled to collect acorns from the tree – 300 so far! For now, they're safe in my fridge as I'm not sure what I'm going to do with them all yet – but I had an inkling to link them to our 30th anniversary somehow.

30 years seems like a very long time for an organisation to exist, particularly ➡

in our sector. But then again, it's believed that an oak can live for over 900 years: 300 years to grow, 300 years to live and 300 years to die.

So in oak years we're only three!

I like the idea of GC as a toddler. Into exploring and testing boundaries. Defiant. Determined. Clear about what we (think we) want – and doing our very best to work out how we can get it. Acutely aware of what is not fair. Incredibly fussy about food and prone to screaming in supermarkets! Also, playful and creative and imaginative.

I've been having some fun growing a few of the acorns. I've been playing around with different containers, bits of wool, plasticine, glue, sticky-back plastic – experimenting with different ways to hold an acorn gently in the mouth of a bottle.

An acorn can live for up to a year this way – putting out roots and shoots while you observe and enjoy, before planting the seedling into soil. I'm already enjoying watching the tiny side



shoots starting to grow from the main tap root.

And I've learned about acorn weevils. (Look at close up film of these fascinating creatures who drill tiny, perfect holes into a few – but not too many – of the acorns and lay their eggs inside. The larvae eat the insides of the acorn and then chew their way out through the same hole.)



Your turn to grow a GC oak

Now I'd like to offer one of these acorns to you, to grow and observe and enjoy in your home, school or workplace. You can collect one from us or we can post it. And I can provide instructions for how to use a bottle or vase.

All we ask is that you're willing to join a conversation over the coming year

about where to plant the seedlings. You may have a fitting place, but perhaps we'll have a planting event here in London or plant them at some of our farms, or in Parliament Square, or where the Sycamore Gap tree or the Happy Man Tree stood....

And we want you to send us a photo along the way – or a timelapse or sketch or painting or poem. Perhaps we'll hold an exhibition to celebrate 30 years of GC.

Whatever your connection with GC, email us at celebrationoak@growingcommunities.org if you'd like a GC celebration acorn.

But right now, we very much hope you enjoy reading about what you've helped us achieve this past year.

In hope and celebration,
Julie Brown, Director, November 2025

Ancient people of Britain believed the oak tree was a 'door' to ancient wisdom or knowledge, and even entry to the otherworld, the realm of the faerie.

By supporting Growing Communities, you're sowing the seeds of a food system that's better for you, your community, your farmers and your planet. Read on to see what phenomenal work you've done.

BETTER FOR YOU

Hello South London!

South Londoners are now part of the GC family. When Local Greens decided to close its doors in May after 12 years feeding Lambeth and Southwark, Growing Communities stepped and GC South was born. We kept the same brilliant team answering your questions and packing and delivering your veg. New collection points have opened and, in September, orders were up 20% on six months before.

Five portions a day...

...really can ward off illness and keep you out of hospital, according to latest research. So you're doing the absolute best for your health. Over 80% of you eat five or more portions of fruit and

veg a day, compared with just 9% of children and 17% of adults nationally (National Diet and Nutrition Survey).

Better connections

Nearly two-thirds of you tell us you feel more connected to your community after joining GC. Connections like this have been shown to have massive health benefits, not only reducing stress and improving mental health, but increasing cancer survival, control of blood sugars and heart health.

Living pesticide free

Eating organic means you can trust your food is natural and doesn't come drenched in the cocktail of pesticides

widely used in conventional farming – one government study found up to nine different pesticides on imported oranges, and discovered traces of several that are banned on UK farms.



Market delights

Farmers' market visitors have been lucky to welcome back mushroom man William with his apprentice Freddie (above) this autumn. They have brought us a huge array of wild mushrooms and a dried mix that

"I really appreciate local shout-outs in the emails each week. It's great to see information about farming and food producers. I like that I can go for a little walk and collect my veg rather than waiting for a delivery. I love knowing how many other people get these veg bags from my collection point too!"

GC SOUTH MEMBER SURVEY, 2025

makes perfect risotto. And Tekuam at Liemat expanded the range of hot, plant-based food available at the market with her spread of delicious Eritrean and Ethiopian dishes made from seasonal vegetables. Our most local food producer ever, she lives a (plum) stone's throw from the market.

BETTER FOR YOUR COMMUNITY

An education hub at Dagenham

Our Dagenham farm has had over 1000 visits from local school students this year. They go home with fresh air in their lungs, greater knowledge



of where fresh food comes from and increased enthusiasm for eating it.

We're thrilled that Ackroyd Lowrie architects' design for our new Dagenham learning space has got planning permission. This will enable many more local children and adults to learn about food growing in a warm, bright and beautiful space. We're now exploring options for raising at least £150k for the build – if you can support (or know others who can) get in touch!

Passing it on

Veg scheme members going on holiday generously donated over £14k worth of bags of fruit and veg. This bought fresh produce for food banks in Hackney, Haringey and Lambeth. Surplus produce was shared with community food charities including NLAH and Claudia Jones Organisation. Our collection point hosts redistributed many more uncollected bags.

Better school meals

School chef James Taylor used organic veg from GC in meals for hundreds of children in two Hackney schools. Although the Bridging the Gap pilot programme – which subsidised the food to make it more accessible – has now ended, James is still buying fruit and veg from our local farmers to cook at school. So is Tower Hamlets school chef David Latto.

As a result of this work, James won a prestigious Soil Association Best of Organic award for providing the best organic food “Out of Home”.

Better together

As well as meeting at collection points and at the market every Saturday, members of our community got together at our Harvest Feasts (thanks to all of you who shared your amazing culinary creations) and our first pizza and cocktail night at Flat Earth Pizzas.

You also bought plants and explored our farms on the Dagenham and Springfield open days; took tractor rides on our trip to Hook & Son's



farm; made sauerkraut with Clare Heal; shared skills at our food-growing workshops; and hunted for plants and creatures at our Clissold open day.

A welcoming garden space

Dee and Susy, the patchwork farmers at Allens Gardens, wanted more members of our community to be able to visit this fantastic local space, especially at weekends. So they created Allens Community Garden and have since welcomed local residents to workshops on growing Caribbean vegetables; making herbal balms, foraging, flower photography and more.

BETTER FOR FARMERS

Better pay and conditions

Your commitment to paying a fair price for your food enables three-quarters of the farmers and producers we work with to pay their staff the Real Living Wage or more. (None pay less than minimum wage.) Many offer perks on top, such as subsidised accommodation and food – at High Weald Dairy, it's cheese! Martin and Sarah at Ripple Farm offer free vegetables, fruit at break time, cycle maintenance, free osteopathy and generous holidays.

Decent pay and conditions should be a given in every job, but a look at the impossibly low prices in some supermarkets or a search for “worker exploitation on UK farms” throws up dozens of examples where these are far from guaranteed.

Better supply chains

Long supply chains can not only obscure the treatment of the workers who grow your food, but also how and

where it grows, the fossil fuels and toxic chemicals used in its production and its complex journey to your plate.

In contrast, the veg scheme produce almost all comes directly from farmers to our Better Food Shed. And at the farmers' market, it comes straight from the producer into your hands – the shortest supply chain of all.

Better on food waste

Globally, 15% of food is wasted before it makes it off the farm (WWF). This has a huge impact on climate, food supply and farmers' incomes.

By embracing what the farmers have ripe and ready each week and accepting produce that's sometimes wonky, blemished or home to a small creature, you massively reduce this. Some 65% of our farmers estimate that less than 5% of what they grow is wasted and 82% say it's less than 10%.



Better public sector food

We are partners in the four-year Procurement for Good project with Coventry University, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council. This aims to make it easier for food buyers in schools, hospitals and other public sector organisations to fill their menus with sustainably grown food from local farmers and suppliers.

“We spend a lot of time and energy making our products, so it's great to hear how important they are to customers.”

NICOLE, HOOK & SON, QUOTED IN URBAN ACTIVIST MAGAZINE

BETTER FOR THE PLANET

Slashing delivery emissions

We bought a new electric van and carbo bike to bring us closer to our zero-emissions target. Together with the Better Food Shed's electric van, they deliver most of your orders. So now, nearly three-quarters (73%) of you collect veg bags delivered using no fossil fuels, up from 59% last year.

Walking the 'last mile'

The veg box scheme uses collection points both so you can meet each other and to remove 'last-mile' deliveries to your home, a substantial chunk of costs and emissions for other suppliers that deliver to the door.

Some 98% of members cover that 'last mile' to the collection point on foot, bike or public transport, and the figure for the market is similar at 97%, both even higher than last year.

Better on packaging

Your fruit and veg comes loose, bunched or in paper when that doesn't compromise quality – even the cherry tomatoes, radishes and green beans. This saved over 250,000 plastic bags, wraps, nets and punnets in the year.

Better together

You're supporting GC's active partnership in the UK Fruit & Vegetable Coalition, aimed at creating a future in which more fruit and vegetables are produced in the UK. This will reduce our reliance on imports, help agroecological growing become a more rewarding, valued and accessible career path, and help everyone to enjoy food produced without wrecking the planet.

We're meeting MPs to lobby for policy changes, as well as catering a lunch with our veg at the House of Commons.

The lowdown

97,343 fruit and veg bags packed in the year to 30 September 2025

87% of veg and **31%** of the fruit in the bags came directly from UK farms (up from 80% and 21% last year). In the UK as a whole 53% of veg is home grown and 17% of fruit, according to Defra.

11,500+ people fed through GC's veg box scheme, Better Food Shed and farmers' market (up 15% on last year)

47 farmers and producers supported with a viable route to market

£979,955 paid to farmers directly at the farmers' market

80 low-income customers a week collected discounted veg from the Teviot Centre food coop in Tower Hamlets through a Bridging the Gap pilot project, which has now been extended

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

1275 visits from local schoolchildren to GC's Hackney and Dagenham farms

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

4 new food growers graduated from GC's training, extended from the usual 6 months in Hackney to include an extra 2 months at Dagenham Farm

3443 volunteer hours clocked up by regular and occasional volunteers as well as corporate groups enjoying away-days



Heartfelt thanks to everyone who joined us for volunteering sessions at our Hackney market gardens and Dagenham Farm this year, including this group from We Out Here.




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 don't just enjoy fresh, high-quality, pesticide-free food; you ensure that climate-conscious farmers are paid fairly for their vital work caring for the soil that later 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, you help GC advocate for a fairer, more sustainable food system – one where communities have better access to healthy food, where the people who grow it are paid fairly and treated with respect, and where the land, soil, water and nature we depend on are protected.

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

 @growingcommunities

 Growing Communities

 @growingcommunitieshackney



GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2025

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

	2024 (£)	2025 (£)
TURNOVER	2,545,152	2,640,105
Cost of Sales	2,427,825	2,496,616
GROSS PROFIT	117,327	143,489
Administrative expenses	106,797	162,909
	10,530	(19,420)
Other operating income	3,657	-
OPERATING PROFIT	14,187	(19,420)
Interest receivable	2,953	2551
(LOSS)/PROFIT BEFORE TAXATION	17,140	(16,869)
Tax on (loss)/profit	-	-
(LOSS)/PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	17,140	(16,869)

“The farm is a calm and tranquil place and has helped my mental health immensely. You can forget about your worries, immerse yourself in just listening to the sound of insects and birds.”

MARIA, DAGENHAM FARM VOLUNTEER, 2025

BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2025

	2024 (£)	2025 (£)
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible assets	83,565	71,568
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	64,949	60,394
Cash at bank and in hand	236,699	243,429
	301,648	303,823
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	(118,457)	(125,504)
NET CURRENT ASSETS	183,191	178,319
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	266,756	249,887
CAPITAL AND RESERVES		
Retained earnings	266,776	249,887
MEMBERS' FUNDS	266,776	249,887

“Public sector food and school meals are a really powerful tool for change. It’s one of the key ways that we could really kickstart a transition in our food and farming system.”

KILORAN O’LEARY, SUSTAIN, SPEAKING ON THE CARBON COPY PODCAST, 2025

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2025

This financial year we saw a small increase in revenue from the previous year, driven primarily by retail sales from the Better Food Shed. We also saw some growth in the farmers' market and veg bag sales, though these were less pronounced than previous years.

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 enables GC to operate in a financially sustainable way. We chose to make a large investment in an electric van, enabling us to expand our operations while keeping our carbon footprint low. We also began preparing for expansion south of the river, which will be reflected in next year's reporting.

We were able to keep our administrative costs low relative to the growth in sales, with the exception of rent, which increased significantly. After depreciation on our fixed assets at the end of the year we posted a loss of £17k. Despite this, our financial position continues to be strong with 3-6 months of operating costs in reserves, increasingly low and stable fixed costs, and steady growth across diverse income sources.

	£ 2023/24	2024/25
Veg scheme/Better Food Shed	2,283,508	2,450,138
Farmers' market	65,442	72,210
Urban market gardens	10,414	9,493
Dagenham Farm sales	38,090	28,428
Grant income and other	147,698	79,836
Total	<u>2,545,152</u>	<u>2,640,105</u>

THANK YOU FROM ALL OF US

Keeping all the parts of GC flowing is a big team effort, involving staff, Board members, freelancers, patchwork growers and volunteers – as well as all our members and customers. Our staff and freelancers over the year were Ailbhe Murphy, Alex Pomeroy, Alice Holden, Amina Usmani, Ashlea Wane, Bartley Chipchase, Ben Whitaker, Calum Handovsky-Boyd, Cath Goldstein, Dan Lipman, Danny Fisher, Dave Cooper, Dave North, David King, Dee Pascal, Deva Thackray, Dominic Stewart-Barton, Elizabeth McLeod, Ellie Virk, Elysia Krishnadasan Torrens, Emily Vanns, Evie Baldwin, Fred Bret-Day, George Readshaw, Georgina Sutton, Helen Bredin, Helen Freudenberg, Helena Buckley, Holly Gould, Ian Atkins, India Martin, Jake McLellan, Jazz Noble, Jessica Wiper, Jo Barber, Joe Haines, Julie Brown, Juliette Nivelle, Katy Barker, Katy Muddyman, Kerry Rankine, Kwame Appau, Laurie Lyon, Liza Konash, Maddy Hartley-Salim, Mark Courtney, Mathew Day, Michael Nutley, Michelle O'Mahoney, Morgan Bakinowski, Nick Sen, Nicole David, Noah Birksted-Breen, Noémi Dignat, Oliver Haines, Oshin Biswas, Paul Harriss, Paul Kirby, Paul Nelson, Philippa Ghosh, Rachel Stevenson, Richenda Wilson, Ry Simsek, Sam Crofts, Shelagh Martin, Sinead Savannah, Sophie Verhagen, Tracy Sharp, Vince Mackay and Zosia Walczak.

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

This year's trainees were Carys, Fran, Holly and Jess. Our patchwork farmer is Jack. Thanks also to Aneesh and other Pedivan bike riders; Martin at Natty Web Development; and Steve, Renee, Martin and the team at Growing Good. Huge gratitude to the 56 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 Julie, Joanne, Richard, Fiona, Hannah, Lee, Imogen, Ire, Mel, Shyam, Selin, Lucy, Andrea and Dewi for regular volunteering on the Hackney gardens. At Dagenham, we're especially grateful to Marie, Dave, Cal, Niko, Toni, Luke and Lisa.

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR IMPACT

Keep shopping

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

Help us build our new Dagenham education hub. Support our wider work advocating for organic farming and sustainable supply chains by helping our voices to carry further.

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.

Be the change

Keep listening, learning and calling out inequality. Join conversations about fair food, climate justice and environmental protection.

Volunteer

Get your hands dirty at our Hackney or Dagenham farms. Enjoy good company, physical activity and the chance to slow down and feast your senses.

Book a corporate or school visit

Bring your team or class for a fun day out. Grow food, bond and leave with a glowing sense of achievement.

Share on social media

Talk to GC on Instagram, LinkedIn or Facebook. Show us what you've cooked. Tag us if there's an event, action, campaign or group of inspiring changemakers doing things you think we and the world should know about.