

GROWING COMMUNITIES



ANNUAL REVIEW 2020/21

25 YEARS OF MAKING AN IMPACT

“We have to make it possible for more organic and nature-friendly farmers to survive and thrive if we are to make our food and farming system fit for the future.”

JULIE BROWN, GC DIRECTOR



It's hard to believe it's been 25 years since Growing Communities was set up. Over that time, we've worked hard to develop real-world projects that provide viable alternatives to the current damaging food system and this year's annual review aims to showcase the range of that work.

While we've focused on the practical, we've kept our sights set firmly on the wider systemic changes needed to make food and farming more climate- and nature-friendly and have aimed to design our projects with that in mind.

So, it was incredibly gratifying in this our 25th year for the New Economics Foundation and the Soil Association to publish a report analysing the impact of all our projects. The report said many notable things, listed elsewhere in this review, but for me one of the most significant was the conclusion:

“Our findings suggest that much of the power of short, local supply chains

is that they **enable environmentally beneficial production and distribution to be economically sustainable**. By using short supply chains and working in partnership with farmers, Growing Communities are able to redistribute economic power to farmers, providing them with financial security to generate considerable social value for themselves and even greater benefits for the environment.”

To me, this is a key part of the systemic changes we seek: we have to make it possible for more organic and nature-friendly farmers to survive and thrive if we are to make our food and farming system fit for the future.

At GC, our approach has been to choose to work with farmers who produce food in a way that works for the land and nature and to make sure these organic and agroecological farmers get more, or in fact most, of the money in our supply chain. Then we work to help veg scheme and market customers understand ➡➡



Growing Communities is a quarter of a century old this year. We started in the autumn of 1996 and have grown virtually every year since. Check out the following pages to see some of what your support over the years has enabled us to achieve.

1

*We've packed nearly **1 million** bags of fruit and veg.*

“I sometimes wonder if we should set up a Seasonal Eating Support Group for when we fall off the wagon or it all feels like too much of an effort.”

that by eating seasonally you enable us to be flexible and supportive in the produce we buy from our farmers throughout the year.

In practice, what that means for each of us is that we need to adapt the way we cook and eat – to work with what we get, to be open to things we might not be familiar with or would not necessarily choose or even particularly like at first, or that might be less than perfectly proportioned.

Even after 25 years of seasonal eating, I still sometimes find it challenging. And it’s tricky when we are surrounded by a cornucopia of food from around the world, an endless array of “convenience foods” and an increasing selection of delicious takeaways delivered straight to our doors.

But the thrill when you manage to pack an unfeasibly large amount of vegetables into one meal!

OK, perhaps “thrill” is pushing it, but I am still feeling a certain glow from last week when a friend came to visit and I served up seven vegetables (seven!)

from the veg scheme and farmers’ market in one meal: Indonesian greens (spring greens from Sarah Green, chard from Ripple Farm), smacked cucumbers and mixed green salad (Dagenham) and tomato, green bean and basil salad (Brockmans, Bedlam, and a plant from Alison Bond). And I’m sure I could have got that damn kohlrabi in there somewhere if I’d only spotted it earlier. So, just rice, fresh coriander and limes to be bought from the local shop (and a takeaway planned for the next day!)

I sometimes wonder if we should set up a Seasonal Eating Support Group for when we fall off the wagon (“it’s been x months since I last bought some green beans from Kenya....”) or it all just feels like too much of an effort.

But jokes and difficulties aside – it’s important to approach feeding ourselves in this way and very much in keeping with a quote from the farmer and author James Rebanks:


“Our diets should be shaped by what works for the land.”

By eating this way you are helping over

30 amazing, committed, hardworking farmers to make a decent living for themselves and their workers while protecting and enhancing nature.

And through your involvement with the veg scheme and the farmers’ market, you make all the wonderful things we’ve achieved over the years and that are illustrated in this special 25-year annual review possible.

At the time of writing, COP26 grows near. While I’m hopeful of some decent outcomes, it seems likely that little will emerge that directly addresses the considerable impact of our food and farming system. So it’s all the more important that citizen-led initiatives like GC and the growing network of other Better Food Traders continue to flourish and provide workable models for the way ahead.

So, thank you for your support. It means a lot. And while it isn’t always easy being green, I hope you think it’s worth it – for you, your family, our farmers, our community and our planet. 

Julie Brown, GC director, October 2021

2 *Well over half the produce we’ve traded – more than 2000 tonnes, or **the weight of 10 blue whales** – was produce that supermarkets would not have accepted. Too big, too mottled, too wonky, too unfamiliar, too seasonal – or simply from farms too small to be bothered with. You have prevented a mountain of food waste.*

3 *The veg scheme started with **30 members** and now has about **1400**.*



Rae, Ashlea and Gemma at Dagenham Farm

2021: WHAT'S BEEN GOING ON

Most businesses change, develop and finesse their model during the course of their lives.

And many wouldn't last long if they didn't. Think Blockbuster, Yellow Pages and MySpace. Consider Coca-Cola's original formulation: the drink featured sweet wine and cocaine until one of its ingredients was made illegal – yes, the alcohol was banned during Prohibition, so the cocaine was mixed with non-alcoholic syrup instead.

One indicator of the resilience of Growing Communities is that we still do exactly what we set out to do back in 1996: harness the collective buying power of our community to support the

sort of farmers who we believe are the key to a sustainable agriculture system.

Essentially, we still sell fruit and veg. And we still do it in a way that's fair to farmers, low-carbon, not-for-profit and fits with all our other key principles.

A DIFFERENT AND BETTER MODEL

We have grown in a way that's different from most conventional models (even some "alternative" veg schemes). While conventional start-ups rely on venture capital or shareholders who demand rising dividends and growth, growth, growth, what we do is based on organic growth and cooperation.

Our Start-Up Programme (the ➡➡

"Thank you for this incredible scheme. I absolutely love it. My partner jokes that all I talk about is the veg bag, which is only partly true!"

VEG SCHEME MEMBER 2021

4

*By packing veg scheme produce loose, bunched or in paper bags, we save more than **250,000 pieces of plastic packaging** each year, compared with shopping at a supermarket.*

5

*We have worked with **26 farmers** at the market, and **38 other food producers**, many of whom we gave a safe place to develop products, test recipes and build their businesses from scratch.*

Right, James from Re:Organics. Far right, GC's Kwame checks out Nettle's vegan cheeses, made and sold by Sam.



foundation of the Better Food Traders) chose a diverse growth model that gave agency and control to other community-led groups, allowing them to design schemes that worked well for their area.

We share our model, our methods and our tech – and we mentor other groups to succeed. This model has strength, resilience and kindness built in.

CHANGE IS INEVITABLE

But we haven't stood still. We've even reformulated the core product since the early days when you could have any product you liked as long as it was a standard veg bag!

In the past year, the veg scheme has

opened four new collection points: Green Lanes, Clissold Park, Upper Clapton and Hackney Wick.

We've reduced our carbon emissions by delivering to all our new collection points, as well as some of our older ones, by bike. Thanks to Zoltan from Pedivan (and Zedify in the early trials).

Our collection model is very low-carbon already – with 98% of you picking up your bags on foot or bike or public transport. But this latest change has enabled us to reduce the amount of time our van is on the road by 20%.

As recent supermarket food shortages have shown, when you're dealing with

fresh produce that has to be ready for harvest, then picked, packed and distributed at just the right time, there is no such thing as a "normal" week on the veg scheme. Fire-fighting and problem-solving are our normal.

Jo, Ellie and Dom have done an excellent job of keeping calm, making quick and inspired decisions and getting your bags to where they should be – in spite of lockdowns, floods, crop failures, road protests and fuel shortages – while Chen, Rach and Nicole have kept you informed about any changes.

BROADER AND STRONGER

While selling fruit and veg has remained at the heart of what we do, launching

the farmers' market in 2003 allowed us to expand the range of farmers and producers we could support, and the range of ethically produced organic food available to our community.

The market has continued to expand this year. We welcomed three new traders: Nettle vegan cheese; Becontree Bees; and Re:Organics, who make seasonal kimchi, kefir and kombucha.

In 2019, we launched our wholesale operation, the Better Food Shed, to enable the London Better Food Traders to pool their orders and support a wider range of organic farms. The Shed now supplies 12 London retailers and we added three new direct suppliers in ➡

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"Without the support from Growing Communities, PAMA would not exist. We are so grateful for the support that we've received through the GC network. It enabled us to completely change our careers to pursue our dreams." Martin from PAMA Raw Food

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*Our farmers' market has always championed local **black- and Asian-owned businesses** including Colga Parker at Global Fusion, Anthony Ferguson at Niko B Chocolates, Suminder and Shadi at Mr Prempy's. Do you remember Ally of Green Bean's wonderful salads, Flo's perfect meringues, Rafe's pakoras and Anshu's Bombay Burgers?*



“Food is not just a commodity, something to be consumed. Food is an experience, something we’re connected to. It’s not passive: it’s intentional.”

**WARAMI JACKSON
GC ECOTALENT TRAINEE**

the past year including the small-scale start-up Wye Orchard in Kent.

We started growing some food ourselves in Hackney in 1997 and Dagenham in 2012. We took on our first two “urban growing apprentices” in 2007 and have now trained 70 people.

GROWING THE GROWERS

This year we stepped our training up a gear. We had long recognised that not everyone can afford to be an unpaid trainee and that this was a barrier for some applicants. So we were excited to join food campaign group Feedback’s EcoTalent programme, which aims to increase access to jobs in farming and the environment for people who have traditionally been under-represented in those sectors.

Our three paid EcoTalent interns – Marlon, Larissa and Warami – made great contributions to life on our sites as well as writing recipes, posts and reviews for our website. Warami made a brilliant film about her experiences.

We have employed three trainees on the government Kickstart programme. Kaya, Rae and Gemma have not come to love growing food – it’s tough, dirty, all-weather work that doesn’t suit everyone

– but they have gained confidence and valuable skills, including how to run a stall selling food grown in Dagenham with help from DeeDee from the Shed.

ACCESS TO GOOD FOOD

While sticking assiduously to paying farmers fairly for the hard work they do, we have always tried to keep our costs and prices as affordable as possible. And we share whatever surplus we have with people who need it most.

Uncollected fruit and veg bags go to various charities and cooking projects around Hackney. Our Food Credit Scheme enables veg scheme members to donate the value of their bags when they go away. Altogether about £70,000 worth of produce went to Hackney Foodbank and other charities this year.

We have run various projects to share food and cooking skills with our community, such as our Covid-response FoodNet project (see next page). We have also done our best to give our local communities access to green space and growing opportunities, through our volunteering programmes, school visits and other projects.


WHAT’S NEXT

Our plans for the next year or so

continue to develop and expand on several of these ideas:

- Training workers and creating jobs for our farmers, producers and traders.
- Increasing access to good, fresh food for people on low incomes, working in partnership with other community-based groups.
- Identifying areas for active intervention in the food supply chain, supporting shorter, fairer, less-wasteful routes to market through Food Sheds and the Better Food Traders network.
- Increasing diversity and community inclusion on our growing sites and within all areas of work.

In the face of the climate emergency and increasing national and global inequality, we all need to be reminded that fairness and sustainability can win through.

We do our best to make GC a shining example of what is possible. We’re so glad you’ve found us. With your support we will strive to keep on shining for many years to come. 

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*We have trained a total of **70 people** in food growing and other skills such as food prep and marketing. Most of our alumni have continued to work in food and farming.*

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*Special mentions for graduate trainees **Sarah Bentley**, who founded the life-changing Made in Hackney; **Chloe Dunnnett**, who set up Sitopia Farm in Greenwich; **Claire Ratinon**, who published her first book, How to Grow your Dinner: Without Leaving the House; **Sarah Alun-Jones** of Barnet food education programme Grow; and **Ashlea Wane**, who has blossomed as a grower and trainer at Dagenham Farm.*

DAGENHAM FOODNET PROJECT

“All the residents enjoyed the meals and most learnt new cooking skills as well as eating more healthy veg and fewer ready meals.”

KERRY, FOODNET PROJECT LEAD



Above, Hannah making a recipe video. Right, Shelagh with a batch of ready meals.

The early weeks of the pandemic saw a huge increase in households around Dagenham Farm suffering financial hardship and social isolation. William Bellamy Children's Centre experienced a 37.5% increase in demand for food after the onset of lockdown.

GC designed the FoodNet project to give Dagenham residents on low incomes healthy ready meals made from farm produce, plus meal kits, recipe cards and online cooking sessions.

COMMUNITY PARTNERS

We secured £27,000 grant funding from the National Lottery's Coronavirus Community Support Fund. Then we worked in partnership with the London Borough of Barking & Dagenham's Community Solutions team and WBCC to deliver the programme.

The FoodNet project enabled local residents to receive weekly deliveries of healthy ready meals made by Shelagh from fresh, organic ingredients.

The participants were also given easy-



to-follow photo recipes and a meal kit of the ingredients they needed to recreate the meal from scratch.


They were invited to tune into live-streamed cooking classes with our trainer, Hannah, to make the meal themselves – and enjoy the results.

ENABLING PARTICIPATION

All meals were designed to be easy to cook with just a microwave and a kettle – to take account of different families' access to cooking facilities. Participants were also given a basic cooking kit

including chopping board, mixing bowl and veg knife.

Kerry, who led the project, said: “We reached families and individuals who are under pressure both financially and from the absence of our usual social contacts. We supplied delicious healthy meals and helped them to try out their cooking skills with others in relaxed and fun online sessions.”

In total we supplied 484 healthy ready meals and meal kits and we hosted 15 online cook-along sessions. 

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Our 3-year Lottery-funded **Grown in Dagenham** programme enabled us to help local lone parents, residents, young people and students to learn how to grow food and cook with others. We worked with 11 trainees, 790 school children (three-quarters of the pupils at William Bellamy School), and another 2000 local residents who visited the farm.

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About **£70,000** worth of donated, surplus or uncollected produce went to Hackney Foodbank, NLAH, Akwaaba, Hackney Migrant Centre, Made Up Kitchen, 2nd Chance Cafe, Urban Table and others in the past year.

THE MANY BENEFITS OF BUYING FROM GC

EVERY **£1** YOU SPEND WITH
GROWING COMMUNITIES
GENERATES **£3.70** OF VALUE FOR YOU,
FOR FARMERS & FOR THE PLANET

We collaborated with the New Economics Foundation and the Soil Association on a research project to see if we could quantify the huge amount of value that we knew our alternative farmer-focused and community-based food system generates for the people that eat the food, grow the food and the environment.

The results were fantastic!

As Julie mentioned, the report concluded that our model is both environmentally beneficial and economically sustainable, generating

lots of social, environmental and economic value.

Christian Jaccarini of the New Economics Foundation even described our model as “more efficient than the industrial food system”.

A lot of these benefits are achieved by focusing on climate-friendly farmers, prioritising locally grown food and paying farmers properly.

In contrast with the huge value we generate, in the supermarket-driven system every £1 UK consumers spend

on food costs global society the same amount in environmental and social damage ranging from diet-related ill health to damaged ecosystems (Sustainable Food trust).

GOOD FOR YOU

The report found that the main benefits are enjoyed by the people who eat food sold by GC through the veg scheme or farmers’ market.


- You eat more fresh seasonal produce and less processed food than you did before and you feel healthier.
- You waste less food by cooking from scratch and becoming more adventurous cooks.
- You feel more involved with your community.

GOOD FOR FARMERS AND THE PLANET

Buying food through GC has many benefits.

- It has a positive impact on wildlife, biodiversity and soil health.
- It produces fewer greenhouse gases in production and distribution.
- It allows local farmers to survive and thrive.
- It cuts on-farm waste – no veg is too wonky for us!
- It creates secure, local, Living-Wage jobs.

Read the full report:

www.nefconsulting.com/growing-communities-evaluation/ 

WHEN YOU SHOP AT THE **GC FARMERS' MARKET**,
ALL YOUR MONEY GOES DIRECT TO THE FARMER.
WHEN YOU SHOP AT A SUPERMARKET, LESS THAN
15% OF WHAT YOU PAY GOES TO THE FARMER

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*Some 85% of our farmers report increased turnover and each of them employs **four more people** thanks to working with Growing Communities.*

13

*Almost all GC customers eat more seasonal produce, less processed food and less meat than they did before shopping with us. They cook more and generate **less food waste**.*

“Rather than battle against nature, you have to know where to persevere and where to let go. I coin it ‘flow farming’. Motherhood and farming are both great teachers on where to focus energy with limited resources.”

ALICE, DAGENHAM GROWER



A MIXED YEAR ON GC'S FARMS

It has been a difficult year for growers. Farmers across the UK have struggled with unpredictable and untimely weather.

At Dagenham this manifested in crazily early tomato blight in July after weeks of summer rain. This airborne fungal disease usually hits around October. The team held their nerve, took out the worst-hit plants, pruned heavily and most gave a crop.


With the rain came the slugs. “For a while we harvested more slugs and snails than crop!” says our grower Alice. “This uncertain climate requires perseverance and adaptation.”

Alice has continued trialling potential new subsidy mechanisms for Defra’s environmental land management scheme. “Our goal is to try and get the most sustainable types of farms like ours recognised for their positive impact on the environment and community as well as growing food.”

Since Covid began Dagenham has not been fully open to volunteers but Alice hopes this will change soon.

Sophie, our Hackney grower, has been able to welcome volunteers, both new and old, to the gardens. “I hear time and again how good people feel for being outdoors and away from their screens,” she says. “One of my volunteers says what a good start to the week it is to spend the morning outside with her hands in the soil and that her mental health has really improved as a result.”

PICK-UP VEG SCHEME

Next, Alice is going to trial a “pick-up” scheme at the children’s centre her son attends in Newham. “So much of children eating healthily is about making things accessible and easy for parents. I know that pick-up time is when my children are most hungry and likely to eat fruit and veg, so we’ll offer produce in bowls that children can eat raw.” A graded pay scale will make the scheme affordable and accessible. 

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*We grow well over **100 types of salad leaves**, herbs and flowers on our patchwork farm, including Little Leprechaun, Sweet Cicely, Flamingo and Marvel of Four Seasons.*

15

*Over the years, we have grown food at **13 different sites** across Hackney, including Oak Tree on Bethune Road, and our first patchwork sites at St Paul’s Church and the Castle Climbing Centre.*

NEWS FROM THE BETTER FOOD TRADERS

“As a citizen, choosing to spend your money on locally grown food is one of the most emphatic political statements you can make.”

**DUNCAN CATCHPOLE,
CAMBRIDGE ORGANIC**



The Better Food Traders network that we set up and run has continued to gather momentum, rising from eight members this time last year to 40 now.

It's hard, frustrating work for small independent ethical food retailers to compete with the might and marketing budgets of the big supermarkets. So it's valuable for them to have a forum to discuss their difficulties, share expertise and pool resources.

All network members have access to a library of materials – from anti-racism resources to marketing flyer designs – and networking events from the annual gathering to chats over a cuppa.

BECOMING A MOVEMENT

“The most rewarding thing for me has been seeing the number of new members getting involved in training sessions and our annual gathering,” says project leader Natasha Soares. “People appreciate the opportunity to

talk to businesses like theirs to discuss their challenges and share what has worked well for them.”

The network has organised training sessions on customer retention, social media, writing for newsletters, using data, SEO and social impact as well as individual training and mentoring.

It has also organised Do Better Food sessions to encourage people to lead conversations around food and help create a network of active food citizens.

Many members starred in a new Better Food Traders film, *Not on My Patch*, made by Improper, which explains how we prioritise fair pay and the planet over the dominant, damaging, profit-hungry status quo.

Natasha has spoken at events including the Oxford Real Farming Conference, Groundswell, Sustain events and Ethical Consumer Week. 

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*“I am delighted that you train other groups to set up similar schemes. I believe this is part of the **vital national revolution** in how we source sustainable food. This needs to happen everywhere.” Veg scheme member, 2021*

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*The **Better Food Traders** network now has 40 members, spanning the country from Glasgow to Jersey and Cornwall to Kent.*

GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2021

INCOME STATEMENT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

	2020 (£)	2021 (£)
TURNOVER	1,559,803	2,156,711
Cost of Sales	<u>1,447,640</u>	<u>1,935,725</u>
GROSS PROFIT	112,163	220,986
Administrative expenses	<u>101,112</u>	<u>139,529</u>
OPERATING PROFIT	11,051	81,457
Interest receivable	<u>1,021</u>	<u>446</u>
PROFIT ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	12,072	81,903
Tax on profit	-	-
RETAINED PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	<u>12,072</u>	<u>81,903</u>

BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2021

	2020 (£)	2021 (£)
FIXED ASSETS		
Tangible assets	12,413	12,405
CURRENT ASSETS		
Debtors	44,121	67,386
Cash at bank and in hand	<u>268,144</u>	<u>439,969</u>
	312,265	507,355
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	<u>(87,500)</u>	<u>(200,679)</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS	224,765	306,676
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES	<u>237,178</u>	<u>319,081</u>
CAPITAL AND RESERVES		
Retained earnings	191,179	273,643
Other reserves	<u>45,999</u>	<u>45,438</u>
MEMBERS' FUNDS	<u>237,178</u>	<u>319,081</u>

“Growing Communities is an example of what can happen when a dream becomes reality.”

PODCASTER GILLY SMITH, RIGHT 2 FOOD PODCAST

“I love this market. It is a huge part of my life and sense of community. It has shaped my choices.”

FARMERS' MARKET CUSTOMER

18

*A total of **33 voluntary board members** have given up their time and expertise since the founding management committee came together in 1996.*

19

*Over the years there have been **30 veg scheme collection points** of which 16 are still open. Who remembers collecting from Pogo, Nicola and Pete's garden, the Pavilion café or, in the very earliest days, Julie's shed?*

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2021

It's encouraging to see that over the past two years the sales for Growing Communities have more than doubled. In the 12 months to 31 March 2021, overall sales grew 38% to £2.1m. This growth was driven primarily by increases in the veg scheme and the Better Food Shed wholesaling operation, which due to their short supply chains, were able to deliver high-quality vegetables throughout the pandemic. This resulted in a significant increase in members and a resulting growth in sales.

Despite the obvious challenges throughout the year the farmers' market performed remarkably well, although the café was closed, resulting in lost income. We were also fortunate to continue to receive grant funding for various projects including the Better Food Traders. We continued to manage the finances responsibly, generating a 4% surplus which has been invested into our cash reserves. We use any excess funds to invest in relevant projects that continue to further the aims and objectives of Growing Communities.

	£	2019/20	2020/21
Veg Scheme		782,814	1,004,428
Farmers' Market		62,486	54,540
Urban Market Gardens		7,884	8,507
Café sales		11,296	-
Dagenham Farm sales		41,671	38,261
Grant income		94,171	167,534
Better Food Shed		556,350	883,441
Other		3,131	-
Total		1,559,803	2,156,711

"I get lots of my vegetables from a brilliant cooperative called Growing Communities. If people could taste the incredible difference between a supermarket salad leaf and one of Alice's leaves, they would be persuaded to pay the extra."

ANNA JONES, COOK & WRITER, ON THE SUSTAINABLE FOOD TRUST PODCAST

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*There are **344 recipes** on our website: that's nearly enough for you to eat a different seasonal plant-focused meal every day for a year.*

21

*Our volunteers often mention the mental and physical **health benefits** of working on our market gardens – the sense of wellbeing that comes with gardening, screen-free time, and doing something that is directly positive for the environment.*

25 YEARS OF MEMORIES

We asked the longest-serving veg scheme members for their memories of GC. Here's what they told us.

GILL ROBINSON

"I was there right from the beginning. It felt very exciting to be part of something so thoughtful, and also radical, which was attempting to bring about real change to the way we live. We would line up outside Julie's shed and collect our bags. There was a feeling that we were participating in something meaningful.

"When the farmers' market opened at the Old Fire Station, it became part of our family routine. I have many fond memories of having a coffee and catching up with friends.

"My daughter has grown up with GC being an integral part of her life. During her A levels she undertook a photo shoot of the Clissold and Springfield sites. She began to appreciate for herself what an amazing resource this was for the local community. She



learned first hand the care taken to produce the Hackney salad that we all love."

ANTHONY SMITH

"What a big part of our lives the veg scheme has been. Both our tall, strong children are 100% Growing Communities born and reared!"

Left, William Smith, aged 6, cooking for the Great Food Swap in 2006. Right, Dai Yamagishi, aged 10, with grower Jack

OLIVIA WOODWARD

"I've been a member since I moved to London after university. Your veg bag has come with me to different addresses and shared households over the years and fed so many people! I learned to be a more confident and creative cook thanks to the range and seasonality of the veg you provide and it's shaped my diet and approach to food to be healthy, local and seasonal."

SOPHIE VERHAGEN


"I remember one Apple Day at the farmers' market when our kids were still in primary school and got so stuck in to the apple bobbing that they took their tops off, so that it didn't matter how wet they got!"

BELINDA YAMAGISHI

"We have picked up from The Fire



Station then Pogo café then Chat's Palace and now Hatch. We have raised Dai (18) and Renzo (14) on GC fruit and veg. Dai was lucky to be involved in the project that Fi ran at Rushmore School.

"He now works at the West Reservoir as a kayak-based life guard and paddle-sport instructor. Renzo is learning to coach tennis in London Fields. So the vegetables and fruit have certainly built strong, healthy, active children." 

22

*Our farms in Hackney and Dagenham have grown more than 75 tonnes of organic food – that's more than the weight of **15 elephants!***

23

*Our delivery vehicles have come full circle, from the Brox bike of the early days to the Pedivan we use now, with bikes, trailers, two **Maisie milkfloats** and hired vans also in the mix. The Better Food Shed is buying an electric van, which should be in use by Christmas.*

A BIG THANK YOU

The GC magic happens because of the commitment of our staff, freelancers, patchwork growers, Board and volunteers. Our staff are Ailbhe Murphy, Alex Bloomer, Alex Nutley, Alex Tugume, Alice Holden, Ashlea Wane, Bren Bedson, Cath Goldstein, Chris Murphy, Danny Fisher, David North, DeeDee Aitken, Denise McNeill, Dominic Stewart-Barton, Ellie Virk, Georgina Sutton, Helen Bredin, Ian Atkins, Jo Barber, Johanna Valeur, Julie Brown, Katy Barker, Kerry Rankine, Kwame Appau, Mark Courtney, Natasha Soares, Nicki East, Nicole David, Paul Harriss, Paul Kirby, Rachel Dring, Rachel Stevenson, Richenda Wilson, Sam Brooke, Sarah Warren, Shelagh Martin, Sophie Verhagen, Val Gwyther and Zosia Walczak.

Our patchworkers are Dee, Jack, Shelagh and Zosia. This year's trainees were Kaya, Larissa and Warami in Hackney and Marlon, Gemma and Rae in Dagenham.

Thanks also to Ambreen Raja, Antoinette Berte, Kate Ford, Rob Alderson, and Michael Calwell and the Boxmaster team for essential support; former patchworkers Rachel and Tom; extra support workers Calum Handovsky-Boyd, Elsa Froggatt-Brown, Michael Nutley, Stella Smith and Ursula Russell.

Our volunteer Board members are: Sarah Havard (chair), Richard Dana (treasurer), Geraldine Gilbert, Kath Dalmeny and Natalie Silk.

Special thanks go to Dewi, Emily, Fran, Imogen, Joanne, Julie, Laura, Melanie, Noah, Rachel and Stephen for regular volunteering at the market gardens in Hackney. At Dagenham, we were unable to support a large volunteer programme this year, but we're very grateful to Dave and Cal for their support and kindness.

Thanks to Sara @Shisodelicious for inspiration and help with the cover photo.

Also a special shout-out to Ximena Ransom, one of GC's longest-serving and most versatile staff members. From 2009 to 2021 she variously worked as a veg packer, delivery worker, growing trainee, patchwork farmer, barista, Dagenham grower, team lunch chef, TV star and cake maker extraordinaire at the farmers' market. Good luck with your next adventures, Ximena.



We miss you, Ximena (and not just because of your sublime cakes!)

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*We have gone from just two paid staff in 1996 (Julie and our first grower, Brian) to **43 paid staff** in September 2021, with dozens of others being part of the journey.*

25

*The veg scheme and farmers' market between them feed well over **5000 people** each week.*

25 GROWING COMMUNITIES YEARS

Growing Communities is reshaping the food and farming systems that feed us so they work better for us, our community and our planet.

Our organic fruit and vegetable scheme and our farmers' market provide fairer, more secure markets for the farmers and producers who are the foundation of a sustainable agriculture system.

We produce fantastic local salad, fruit, herbs and veg – and new food growers – on our pioneering and award-winning urban farms in Hackney and Dagenham.


Our wholesale arm, the Better Food Shed, connects agroecological farms with local routes to market, while the Better Food Trader network supports those ethical retailers to change the food system together.

We also consider the bigger picture and work to create wider change: articulating our vision and advocating in support of our aims.

WWW.GROWINGCOMMUNITIES.ORG

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