

GROWING COMMUNITIES' ANNUAL REPORT 2014/15



CHANGING THE FOOD SYSTEM ONE CARROT AT A TIME

GROWINGCOMMUNITIES.ORG

GROWING COMMUNITIES

If we are to make the food system more sustainable, we need to change the way that food is traded as well as the way it is produced. Growing Communities' mission is to create a fair and sustainable food system by providing people with real, practical alternatives to the current damaging one: transforming food and farming through community-led trade.

We use the power of our community to create and support practical alternatives – farms, projects, trading schemes and enterprises – and ensure they multiply.

Our organic fruit and vegetable scheme and our farmers market direct our community's buying power towards farmers who are producing food in a sustainable way – allowing those small-scale farmers and producers to thrive.

Our Start-Up Programme helps other UK groups to set up veg schemes like ours.

We have also pioneered urban food growing. We produce award-winning salad on our Hackney Patchwork Farm and grow more varied produce at Dagenham Farm.



Helena Smith

Our achievements are all down to the energy of our staff, freelancers, Patchwork Farmers, Board and volunteers. Our staff and patchworkers are Alex Tugame, Alice Holden, Amy McWeeney, Anita Lawrence, Caroline Ada, Damon Boyle, Farook Bhabha, Fiona McAllister, Giles Narang, Julie Brown, Kerry Rankine, Kwame Appau, Marcus Cope, Matthew Robinson, Nicki East, Nicole David, Paul Harriss, Phil England, Sarah McFadden, Shelagh Martin, Rachel Stevenson, Richenda Wilson, Sarah Alun-Jones, Sonia Cropper, Sophie Verhagen and Ximena Ransom. Thanks also to Chris Adams. This year's apprentices were Finn Smith, Giovanni Colapietro, James Turner, Sabine Lenggenhager and Talia Chain.

The members of the volunteer Board are: Geraldine Gilbert, Guy Rickard, Kath Dalmeny, Nick Perry, Nick Saltmarsh, Richard Dana, Sarah Havard (chair) and Victoria Harud.

Among our volunteers, special thanks go to Sue, Imogen, Lee, Stephen, Dewi, Mohammed and Connie for being such dependable regulars at the gardens in Hackney. At Dagenham, many thanks to Dave, Sue, Hannah, Lesley, Cal, Gill, Ian, Ken and many, many others.

FOREWORD BY JULIE BROWN, DIRECTOR, GROWING COMMUNITIES

The year's particular combination of weather conditions seems to have encouraged Hackney's trees to produce an especially lovely display of red, gold and brown leaves this autumn.

We have a beautiful tree at the centre of this year's annual report too – an updated version of the illustration Lucie Galand produced for us last year to say thank you to Penny when she stood down as chair of the GC Board – and which we very much wanted to share with you all.

Many different conditions produced each of the leaves on the tree and I am trying hard to resist the temptation to take the metaphor already presented and draw it out even further in a no doubt biologically dubious and slightly sickening way. ("We sow the seed, nature grows the seed and then we eat the seed" as Neil from *The Young Ones* once memorably and succinctly said. It's here if you'd like to have a look: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0X2GD5C_wHY.)

But what the hell – here I go...

Widening the roots of the tree

We're coming up to our 20th year and while

we take nothing for granted, our longevity is testament to how embedded we are in this community. The pages of this report illustrate that further, as do the words and names written on each of the tree's leaves.

The annual cycle of leaves and fruit

But this community is not a static thing. We need to stay alive and alert to the changes around us and keep reaching out. And we need to understand that people join and leave the bag scheme as they move through different stages of their life. So we need to appreciate when people are with us and hope they take something of GC with them when they move on. In the meantime, we need to keep recruiting, because the fruit and veg scheme provides us with the sound financial basis and security from which to explore new projects.

Branching out

This year I would personally like to branch out a bit by launching a project I'm calling "Travels in the Food Zones". You may be aware that GC has a vision for a sustainable and fair food and farming system which can be illustrated by a diagram we call the Food Zones.

This vision informs everything we do and



is being put in place right now by all of us – both here and in our Start-up groups.

I recently spoke to Rob Hopkins for a piece for his Transition blog, where he described our work as "a research project with its sleeves rolled up". I love that description as it captures both the theoretical and the practical sides of what we do.

I now want to see how we might model and map this alternative food system we are creating: bring it into the light, prove its impact and show how it's growing.

It's a grand ambition in its very early stages. I'll be looking for lots of help to illustrate my journey online and to fine

tune the research methodology. I'd like to see if we can promote useful dialogue and debate along the way via blogging and tweeting. And as well as doing that virtually, I'm hoping to get out and actually visit some people and farms!

I'm committing this to paper now –

- so that I don't bottle out
- so that I can ask for support from those of you who may be in a position to offer advice and skills (in blogging, audio and video recording, web design, infographics, animation and mapping).
- and so that I can thank you all again for your continued support.

Julie Brown, November 2015

TASTY NIBBLES

We launched **Discovery Days** and **Seasonal Feasts** this year – to celebrate and explain our work to our community and share really delicious meals made with local, seasonal food from our farms, veg scheme and market.

Dagenham has grown over **a tonne of salad** this year, over half of which was **delivered by tube** thus used no fossil fuels to produce and deliver. In Hackney, we harvested 2200kg of salad plus **over 300 cucumbers!**

The total value of sustainable produce traded this year through the fruit & veg scheme and farmers' market was **£1,199,898** (16% up on last year).

We'd been looking for an **egg producer** for the market, so our fruit farmer Marina O'Connell has started keeping **chickens in her orchard**, who are keeping us supplied with delicious organic eggs.

Our **Dagenham seed bank** increases annually, helping the farm's resilience. We have 20 varieties of tomato as well as lettuce and brassica salad seed.

GC and the other "**entrepreneurs with dirty fingernails**" on our Start-up Programme together have created 40 jobs and support 50 farmers, feed 7000 people a week and generate £1,000,000 of revenue a year for local farmers.

Growing Communities is now on **Twitter, Facebook and Instagram.**

WHAT WE'VE ACHIEVED IN 2014/15

The tree on the other side of this report celebrates how far we've come since we launched in 1996: the projects we've started, the connections we've made and the people who have helped us get here. And, like a tree, we keep growing: we add extra leaves and branches as we expand what we do and develop new ideas.

We've added several more leaves since Penny left in January – and even a new apple to our heavily laden food-growing branch! Hackney Salad won best London Leaves in the Urban Food Awards in September.

And there has been exciting news for our Dagenham Farm: we've been awarded three years' funding from the Big Lottery for our Grown in Dagenham project. Starting in January, the project will train Dagenham residents in food-growing and food-prep skills, making Dagenham ketchup and other foods from the fruit and veg grown on the farm. We'll be expanding our volunteer programme and working with more local school and college pupils, running after-school and holiday clubs focused on growing and food.

The growing in Hackney and Dagenham has been mixed this year. An incredibly productive spring produced a record 'peak salad' in April, but a disappointing summer meant that our glasshouse and polytunnel crops didn't do as well – not helped by a fox in Dagenham laying waste to an entire crop of beans. But both Hackney and Dagenham are supplying more restaurants and shops. Our plant sale in Springfield Park this year was our most successful ever – raising more than £600 – and selling fresh-picked produce direct from our Clissold Park site on Mondays has proved very popular.

We've added to the branch of farmers and food producers who come to our all-organic farmers' market every Saturday at St Paul's Church in Stoke Newington. Most recently Mrs Pepys' Pies has started selling pies

made with meat from Matthew at Longwood Farm. John, who works at Ripple Farm but also has his own orchard, has started Sunshine Smoothies, made with Marina's apple juice and his own produce – solar-powered and served from his vintage caravan.

The farmers and producers at the market are helping each other too: Patrick Brockman is growing Chinese leaf for PaMA to use in their incredible pickles and sauerkraut, while Marina O'Connell is now supplying fruit to Brockmans for their wholesale trade. Whey from Hook & Son is now going to Syd Aston's bakery – rather than being disposed of as waste.

We ran our first moo-vie and cocktail night at St Paul's Church Hall in September, which was a huge success. We laughed (and cried) at *The Moo Man*, a beautiful film made by Andy Heathcote about Steve of Hook & Son (the raw milk people at the market). It shows



Shyamantha Asokan

the ups and downs of life for small-scale family farmers, as they struggle to survive against the power and price wars of super-markets.

Ieva and Simon of Blake House Creative Coop made a new film about the market highlighting the joys of buying direct from local farmers and celebrating the market's role at the heart of the community.

The fruit and veg scheme is still going strong. We reintroduced a small fruit bag this year and 30% of our members now get a fruit bag with their veg. We've opened new collection points at the Redmond Community Centre in Manor House, and the fantastic E5 Bakehouse in London Fields. We've also enjoyed working with Theresa and Jack of Soleshare, who have introduced their weekly fish box scheme at some of our collection points.

A new start-up has joined this year. Lee Greens launched in south-east London in May and already has 55 members. We also have several new buds on that branch, who are wrestling (metaphorically) with local landlords and other start-up niggles but hoping to launch in the next few months.

All the groups on the programme came together in early October for our first 'Gathering', an inspiring day of celebration and consolidation – and great cake. We discussed the challenges we're facing and shared ideas about how to tackle them; we started mapping how we're changing the landscape of food and farming where we all are; and we talked about how we can work together more closely to support and sustain each other.

There have been some changes down in the roots of our tree this year too – with more to come. Our office life in Stoke Newington has been transformed by Sarah McFadden, in the new role of operations manager. She is streamlining our systems, reorganising our packing yard and helping us run everything more smoothly. (And the stationery cupboard is now a total joy to be-

Without volunteering at GC, I would not be doing the work I am now. It has also made me think hard about my own future plans, and has helped me with my planning around a future piece of land.

HACKNEY VOLUNTEER, 2015

hold!) Our Board has a new chair too: Sarah Havard has taken the 'carrot of destiny' from Penny Walker and carried it with pride, passion and aplomb. Our head grower in Hackney, Paul Bradbury, left to start a new life in Devon, and long-time GC staffer Sophie Verhagen took over his role.

We have a flurry of people heading off on maternity leave at the end of the year. Alice Holden, our Dagenham grower, will be covered by Shelagh Martin, one of the first crop of apprentices in Dagenham, who was instrumental in getting the farm up and running. (She's a Hackney Patchwork farmer too.)

Fi and Nicki will also be taking maternity leave from December. We wish them all luck and look forward to welcoming some new faces to the GC family in the coming months.

In Hackney, three of last year's volunteers applied successfully to this year's apprenticeship – Sabine, Talia and Giovanni. Of this year's five apprentices, Sabine has returned to Switzerland and James, Talia and Giovanni have become Patchwork famers. Giovanni is also starting his Level 2 Horticultural qualification at Organiclea. Our other apprentice this year, Finn, is still working with us too.

Deep and strong roots are critical to the life of any tree. You, our members and customers, provide vital support to the work that we do. Thank you for keeping us growing.

GROWING COMMUNITIES ACCOUNTS 2015 PROFIT AND LOSS ACCOUNT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2015

	2015 (£)	2014 (£)
TURNOVER	730,263	760,023
Cost of Sales	<u>606,611</u>	<u>656,018</u>
GROSS PROFIT	123,652	104,005
Administrative expenses	<u>73,852</u>	<u>59,939</u>
OPERATING PROFIT (LOSS)	49,800	44,066
Interest receivable	1,056	231
(LOSS)/PROFIT ON ORDINARY ACTIVITIES BEFORE TAXATION	<u>50,856</u>	<u>44,297</u>
Tax on profit on ordinary activities	<u>4,000</u>	<u>500</u>
RETAINED (LOSS)/PROFIT FOR THE FINANCIAL YEAR	46,856	43,797
Balance brought forward	<u>155,528</u>	<u>111,731</u>
BALANCE CARRIED FORWARD	<u>202,384</u>	<u>155,528</u>

BALANCE SHEET 31 MARCH 2015

	£	2015 (£)	2014 (£)
FIXED ASSETS			
Tangible assets		11,941	21,869
CURRENT ASSETS			
Debtors	30,805		44,760
Cash at bank and in hand	<u>290,081</u>		<u>191,061</u>
		<u>320,886</u>	<u>235,821</u>
CREDITORS: amounts falling due within one year	<u>(74,343)</u>		<u>(46,062)</u>
NET CURRENT ASSETS		<u>246,543</u>	<u>189,759</u>
TOTAL ASSETS LESS CURRENT LIABILITIES		<u>258,484</u>	<u>211,628</u>
CAPITAL AND RESERVES			
Profit and loss account		202,384	155,528
Other reserves		<u>56,100</u>	<u>56,100</u>
MEMBERS' FUNDS		258,484	211,628

TREASURER'S REPORT FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31 MARCH 2015

Growing Communities continued to perform strongly in 2014-15 generating a surplus of £46,856 on turnover of £730,263, equating to a 6% profit margin. The key driver for this continued success is the Fruit and Veg Bag Scheme, which grew by an impressive 18% to £584,307 during the year. There was continued strong demand with a net 90 new members joining the scheme during the year. The Farmers' Market also had strong performance during the year, with a 14% rise in turnover compared to 2013-14. It is very encouraging to see that both the Bag Scheme and Farmers' Market continue to demonstrate their financial sustainability, having been fully self-funding for a number of years now.

In addition to these commercial activities, Growing Communities also receives grants to fund specific projects. During 2014-15 our Grant funding totalled £36,200, which was £131,724 less than received in 2013-14. This was due to the funding from the Big Lottery and Local Food Funds for the Patchwork Farm and Dagenham Farm coming to an end. As was announced in August 2015, Growing Communities has now been successful in getting a further £255,000 grant funding for the Grown in Dagenham project, which will enable us to fund a community outreach and skills training programme for local people. Overall, 2014-15 was a good year for Growing Communities leaving us in a strong financial position.

	£	2013-14	2014-15
Bag scheme		495,802	584,307
Farmers' market		51,239	58,475
Urban market gardens		12,010	11,175
Café sales		10,190	11,113
Other		22,838	28,973
Grant income		<u>167,944</u>	<u>36,220</u>
Total turnover		<u>760,023</u>	<u>730,263</u>



Thank you so much for providing us with amazing fruit and vegetables, as well as an actual sense of community in a city that often feels very anonymous! It's been the highlight of our week, coming home with all the produce, working out how to cook turnips and celeriac and swede. We both feel really grateful to have been able to start cooking for ourselves.

FRUIT & VEG SCHEME MEMBER, 2015