

The Plot.

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cfgn.org.uk
info@cfgn.org.uk
[@cfgn_growers](https://twitter.com/cfgn_growers)

The seasonal newsletter of The Community Food Growers Network. A network of radical farms, market gardens and food growing projects in the U.K.



Editorial note

Welcoming in the sunshine (and the rain!) Community Food Growers Network has been busy this season with new members, new events and a number of exciting new announcements to make. Introducing our new online and printable toolkits, we have been working hard to keep providing community food growers with the tools needed to build resilient and sustainable projects. Find out more about the Working With Your Local Council Toolkit and Guide to Resisting Eviction in this edition's political updates. Tucked around those details are updates on the London Food Board, the Greater London Assembly and local coalitions from Lambeth to Waltham Forest as we offer an overview on what the city as a whole is doing to expand and develop food growing policies and practices. We are also taking some time in this edition to welcome two new members to the network: Cultivate London, who are based in West London, and Stepney City Farm on the other side of the city. Read more about them on our back page. Finally a massive thank you to Mel Strickland from Organiclea and the amazing team at People's Food Policy for some great food for thought in this edition as Mel explores the role of food growers in the fight for justice for migrants and we report on the People's Food Policy's recently released framework for a national food policy.

As always, thanks to all of our members and contributors for making The Plot possible and we hope you enjoy this season's latest in community food growing news.

Granville Community Kitchen's Dee Woods makes it onto Sadiq Khan's London food board

Earlier in the year Dee Woods became one of the new London Food Board's 19 advisors to the mayor on food growing and all food issues that affect Londoners. A member of CFGN's Staff Support Committee and a long time active member of the network, Dee's voice on the London Food Board could mean great things for community food growing. The main task of the board will be to develop a 10 year strategy on food for the Mayor of London's office. The content of the strategy won't be available for some time but it does seem that the inclusion of a community food practitioner is a step towards better participation of those embedded in the community in decision making.



Stepney City Farm

Building on the work of the last Food Board, out of which Capital Growth was born, the smaller, newly appointed team hope to develop a strategy with a more integrated approach that covers health, children and education and focuses on the needs of the marginalised and vulnerable. Of course it will also bear the weight of Brexit and will need to adapt the strategy around the decisions and negotiations that arise from it, whilst fighting for more devolution for London as a city. For Dee, “community food actionists finally have a space to impact change on a London-wide scale and to some extent on a national scale”. As a non-statutory board, there is potential for the Food Board to build on more progressive issues and concepts such as food sovereignty, and the positive ripples of this could be felt across the country.

GLA roundtable on the Economic Development Strategy

Back in May this year CFGN were invited by Just Space to attend a GLA consultation on the Mayor’s Economic Development Strategy. With London Grown’s Rob Logan taking a seat at the table the discussions were fruitful but perhaps not taken to the end of their course.

Once the canapes were down, it became clear that Just Space had done a brilliant job of bringing together different people and diverse groups, and plenty of potentially exciting links were brokered.

During the discussion, career-long tenancies for community food growers on GLA and council land was suggested as a policy to go into the London Plan and Strategies. With procurement being raised by the staff themselves, Rob took it one step further suggesting that GLA and Local Authority procurement of food should prioritise community food groups in order to generate income which can be invested back into programmes and apprenticeships. He also brought into the conversation contracts from borough councils to run volunteer programmes, work with people with mental health and physical disabilities and run traineeships.

Although it was acknowledged that the current Mayor’s office had gone a step further than the former Mayor, who didn’t invite consultation at all, there was still a sense that the inclusion of the

voices in the room needed to last longer than the 120 minute slot they were given. A one-off consultation is of course a first step but there is still a journey to go in interweaving these voices into a sustained conversation on policy and decision making.

Community Food Growers Network toolkits have launched!

Without further ado the Community Food Growers Network is proud to present to you our two online and printable toolkits “Working with Your Council” and “Resisting Eviction”.

These toolkits are intended to be useful reference tools for projects to help them become more secure, more robust and better equipped for any challenges that they may face. The “Working with Your Council” toolkit outlines how to build better relationships with councils and just how much this can benefit the security and sustainability of a project. The “Resisting Eviction” toolkit similarly focuses on keeping sites safe, looking into what actions or inactions affect the stability of a project and their tenure on the land.

To download the toolkits and see what you can do to keep your site stable and secure, check out the resource section of our website at cfgn.org.uk.



Free The Water by Tanya Moutzalias for Mlive

Building a food alliance in Lambeth

In addition to Waltham Forest, communities south of the river have also been building food alliances in recent months. Food growing projects and food campaigners in Lambeth have begun collaborating to get more of the local food community involved in producing and consuming affordable, nutritious locally grown food.

Headed up by Transition Town Brixton through Open Project Nights at Impact Hub Brixton, discussions on how different local partners can develop and work together have sprung into more regular meetings and closer contact. Responding to Lambeth Council's slashed budgets—which have impacted a number of projects in the area including friends of CFGN Myatt's Field and Loughborough Farm. The space intends to find ways to navigate local struggles together. From volunteer retention to distribution and finance management, this alliance of active community groups and members has plenty to get its teeth stuck into, and we hope participating projects will get just as much out of it.

Breaking bread abroad: Insights and reflections with activist and farmer Antonio Cosme

This summer Community Food Growers Network welcomed Detroit activist, food grower and artist Antonio Cosme to London.

As rain drizzled on, without relent, for the hours and days that led up to our open-air event, morale dipped as it looked unlikely that after weeks and months of ideas, collaborations and enthusiasm we would be able to run this event. But after two hours with City Airport security and a huge save from the incredible Cafe Cairo in Clapham North, we made it happen.

With dampened clothes but high spirits, we piled onto the comfortably laid out cushions and stools, with the soft scent of burning herbs characterising the back room of the South London bar. Antonio was welcomed to a room of food growers, academics, students and activists from a breadth of different movements and schools of thought who had come together to get to grips with the resources that govern the body and hence, unite all struggles: land, food and water.



Access to land and water couldn't look more different from Detroit to London. In Detroit, a city where supply and demand for land can be artificially engineered to combat its historically low value, home ownership is no indication of a higher class. Yet, water bills which cost thousands of dollars per year deny running water to those who can't afford to spend around a third of their salary on it. Meanwhile in London we rarely fear for our access to water, and for many buying land is as much a myth as owning a home.

Yet exploring the root causes of Detroit's water shut-offs alongside those of the UK's land distribution structure and its resulting nationwide housing crisis, it's clear to see that whilst the battles are different, the wars waged upon the poor, on people of colour and on migrants, are the same the world over. Privatisation in the UK doesn't mean inaccessible running water—yet—but we can see from the story of Detroit that the effects of neoliberal approaches to public services can be life threatening.

Whilst in Detroit access to land means that food growing projects can capture the land and comfortably settle in, in a global system of artificially cheap food and rising costs of living, making living wage as a farmer still seems out of reach. Projects such as Feedom Freedom Growers were highlighted to show that community food growing is thriving in the city, but the threat of gentrification looms over Detroit just as it does London.

In a capital city whose wealth sprawls obnoxiously across the world market, drawing parallels to a neglected town like Detroit may seem obscure. Yet after hours of conversation and reflection with Antonio Cosme, it seemed clear that from gentrification to climate change a colonial, capitalist mindset lay at the root of our issues internationally. Celebrating and reinforcing the work of international allies is essential to fighting these battles on the micro and meta levels, and we hope that more exchanges can be facilitated so that we can continue to learn from our counterparts in the US and beyond.

Check out Feedom Freedom on Facebook and find out more about Antonio's work on the Urban Innovation Exchange.

A special thanks goes out to May Project Gardens, Loughborough Farm, Skin Deep Magazine, Take Back The City and New Economy Organisers Network for helping make this event possible.



Brixton Impact Hub.

The community food movement and migrant solidarity

Melanie Strickland, Community Food Movement Builder, Organiclea

The Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) launched the campaign, Against the Walls of Capital, earlier this year. The group, whose coffee we sell at Organiclea to support their liberation struggle, called on supporters all over the world to “organize with autonomy, to resist and to rebel against persecutions, arrests and deportations” because “every human being has the right to a free and dignified existence in the place that seems best to them, and they have the right to fight to remain there.” The Zapatistas’ call was made in response to Trump’s proposal for a massive border wall with Mexico, but their campaign expands far beyond the borders of the USA. Walls—physical, legal and psychological—are being erected all over the UK, Europe and beyond.

The Zapatistas further go on to call for “support in and with activities of those who resist and rebel against expulsions. Whether they are supporting them to return to their homes, creating ‘sanctuaries’ or supporting existing ones, with legal advice and support, with money, with the arts and sciences, festivals and mobilizations, commercial and media boycotts, be it in cyber space, wherever and however it may be. In all the spaces where we move it is our duty to support and show solidarity.”

The community food movement has a role to play in this campaign, and many of us are already playing our part in various ways. There is clear alignment between the goals of community food movement and the Zapatistas’ ‘Anti Wall’ campaign.

As set out in the Community Food Growers Network manifesto, we believe in community development and social cohesion, in creating vibrant spaces for diverse individuals and communities to meet on a level playing field with the common goal of food. Many projects explicitly state on their websites that they aim to create inclusive spaces, to work with all sections of our communities and to foster solidarity and co-operation. In a society where the political establishment is bent on creating a ‘hostile environment’

for migrants, this radical inclusivity in itself can be a powerful form of solidarity. Not only do we welcome all people in our community, but we particularly value marginalised people. As noted on the May Project Gardens website, sustainable and ethical solutions can only come from drawing on and working with the marginal —both in terms of people and places. Right now migrants, and particularly those without secure immigration status, are amongst the most marginalised groups in society.

Organiclea has supported migrants to volunteer with us, and a member of the co-op has supported applications for secure status to remain. This was important to us as a workers' co-op, because we believe in social justice and are opposed to discrimination of all kinds. We apply the same principles in our interactions with people as when we are tending the land. In people as in plants, we know everything has value and we celebrate diversity. And just as in nature everything is interconnected, we believe that in the human community, a strong web of connections and relationships between all peoples is what keeps the system healthy and balanced. By building this kind of non-hierarchical community of self-reliance, we reduce dependence on exploitative structures and develop a secure base from which to challenge oppression and injustice.

There are many migrants in London and the UK living precariously, both in terms of poverty and immigration status, and community projects have been set up all over to address this need. But it's still not enough. One such example from the growing movement is the Mulberry Tree Community Garden, a Quaker project in Tottenham, which specifically welcomes migrants. Such projects promote community harmony and can be a safe space away from the hostile spaces enforced by the State.

As community food projects we are committed to promoting and implementing food sovereignty. Food sovereignty is a political concept: it is about taking back control of our food system at every level. The concept was put forward by La Via Campesina and small food producers largely in the Global South. Globally, small food producers are marginalised and exploited. Both in the UK and abroad, migrants working in agriculture, food processing and catering experience out of control levels of exploitation. The food sector is

well-known for its use of slaves, and this is a problem in the UK not just abroad. This is the human price of cheap food sold in supermarkets.

La Via Campesina (LVC) has written numerous solidarity statements with migrants and the European Coordination of LVC has said:

"We would like to denounce the current cruel European migration policies, as well as all measures put in place to prevent or to complicate the free access to Europe... we want to remind that once more civil society as well as peasants have reacted faster and much better than most of our governments. With our commitment and solidarity we aim to build a Europe where human beings are more important than neo-liberal economic interests."

We are united in our struggle against neoliberal policies that fix the food system and keep people off the land, permanently impoverishing us as food producers and consumers. We are also united by common humanity. Another statement from the African Region of LVC states:

"We farmers, we, who live permanently impoverished, in conflict-ridden areas and under threat by armed groups, We, who are unemployed and desperate, We, who leave our land and our families, we who face all possible risks including death because we are left with no other choice than to believe that El Dorado can be found on the other side of the Mediterranean. We have no need for your increasingly repressive, inhumane and humiliating measures when reaching your borders. We do not need you to increase your budget to better turn us back, to detain us in your detention centers, to criminalize us... What we need is for you to let us improve our lives in the context of food sovereignty."

Commitment to food sovereignty implies supporting people in their struggle to live a decent, autonomous life in spite of the humiliations imposed by neoliberalism. And we provide this support in the context of our work, in the gardens and in all our interactions with migrants.

It was affirmed at the most recent CFGN gathering at Grow Heathrow that we want to maintain our radical edge and participate in direct action—where there is capacity and on issues relevant to our work. This could include issuing solidarity statements of our own.

There is little reporting in the mainstream media on the injustices faced by migrants—or worse—where migrants are discussed, they can actually be demonised. By issuing a solidarity statement we can help make visible some of the ‘invisible’ injustices faced by the migrant community, and be a voice for our comrades in LVC at the London level.

Waltham Forest gives a local food system in global city a go!

We all know that London is a beast of a city—and as a global capital, it can seem like “localising” anything about the city is impossible.

But all across the city, Londoners are building local economies rooted in their communities and a vision of a fairer food system. These kinds of projects are happening in lots of different neighbourhoods. A particularly interesting example is Waltham Forest, where a range of food projects are building relationships so they can work together and have a bigger impact in the borough.

Waltham Forest Local People’s Food Forum brings together groups whose missions relate to food. This includes food growers like Organiclea, but also food waste projects like This is Rubbish, Christian Kitchen food bank, Leytonstone community garden, the Hornbeam community cafe and others. Working together from shared principles of food justice, the Food Forum produced a Manifesto declaring food as a “tool for change” and healthy, sustainable food as a right. The Forum launched at a community “Disco Soup” event in April, and dozens of local residents came to enjoy some delicious food (saved from landfill!), performances and seed sowing.

By bringing together producers, retailers and consumers, a Food Forum can show how a sustainable food system is relevant to everyone. Too often food issues get ring-fenced into a particular interest, so that food poverty is seen as entirely separate from using sustainable growing practices that don’t harm the planet, or from having food systems that don’t rely on shipping produce across the planet. In reality all of these issues are connected, and by working together, groups can take action and make change happen more effectively.

The vision behind the Local People’s Food Forum is to be an independent force for change in the local area, applying pressure onto the local council and creating opportunities for knowledge exchange. The Forum is currently functioning as a place for information sharing and making connections, and hopes to grow into a more active network that encourages the Council to provide more support and funding to relieve food poverty, fund healthy food initiatives, and support community food growing.

The Community Food Growers Network is interested in supporting groups in other boroughs to set up networks of groups working for a more sustainable local food system. Get in touch if you’d like to explore this idea more.



Putting people first: coalition of growers and campaigners release a food policy built on voices from the ground

A People's Food Policy is an extensive report formed of 9 thematic chapters from governance and food production to health and environment —each with an in-depth analysis and policy proposals for transforming the food system in England.

Following in the footsteps of many countries in Europe, including Scotland, a People's Food Policy (PFP) is working towards a progressive framework to create a more stable and just food system ahead of the UK's exit from the EU. The policy, which was launched in June this year, was supported by over 80 food and farming organisations including the Community Food Growers Network and a number of our member projects, and draws on 18 months of extensive, nationwide consultations. For many, this feels like a long overdue step in the right direction.

In the words of PFP coordinator Dee Butterly “The lack of a coherent, joined-up food policy framework in England is becoming increasingly problematic. In this country we have shameful levels of food insecurity, with food bank usage rising year on year, and an estimated over eight million people now in a state of such financial precarity they can't afford to eat. The way our food system functions and is governed needs to radically change. We need to develop a national food policy in the coming years that transforms our food systems and that puts equality, resilience and justice at the forefront.”

Brexit will undoubtedly leave the agricultural industries in great uncertainty. Well-founded fears on what it will mean for the quality and price of food remain in the ether with no adequate response offered by our government. But seeing this as a potential for a positive reflection on what our food system should look like the PFP argues that what is needed is policy, a legislative framework and a food act which “integrates the compartmentalised policy realms of food production, health, labour rights, land use and planning, trade, the environment, democratic participation and community wellbeing.”

Brexit needn't mean sacrificing environmental

and social standards at the expensive of sustained, artificially cheap food. A new food policy could challenge corporate control of agriculture in the UK and support small and medium farms to provide the nutritious, organic food that communities need. Holistically looking at the issues our food system has created, we can think innovatively about how to find our way out of them. Thinking in terms of agro-ecology and food sovereignty we can build a food system which “has secure access to enough good food at all times, without compromising on the well-being of people, the health of the environment, and the ability of future generations to provide for themselves.”

So often at the base of progressive thought and policy lies an active grassroots movement. The importance of centring the voices of those who live the effects of the policies created cannot be underestimated. A People's Food Policy has set an incredible precedent in paving the way for a national, progressive framework for food and farming that is built on outreach, co-operation and collaboration.

Building power from the bottom, a People's Food Policy have outlined an unabashed manifesto that calls for a progressive Brexit and a national food system that works for the most marginalised and not just for the corporate class.

For a full version of the document go to peoplesfoodpolicy.org.



Graphic design by joel colover – JCOLOVER.EU

Cultivate London

Cultivate London (CL) is a horticultural social enterprise based across three formerly derelict sites in west London (Acton, Brentford, Isleworth). We operate a community-based landscape gardening enterprise and a community kitchen garden, and in this context, offer a range of youth and community training programmes.

CL works to both provide training opportunities in practical horticulture for disadvantaged young people and the greater community, and to engage our local community to improve the physical environment and build social cohesion through the creation of food growing and/or biodiverse green space. Through this work we aim to help young people progress into sustained employment, to re-connect Londoners with food and where it comes from, and to improve the health of our community members and our environment.

Formally set up in December 2010, CL is a registered charity, and are thus not for profit; all income generated from our enterprise activities is directed back into our training programmes. Since 2013, over 80 youth have taken part in our Traineeships and Apprenticeships, and more than 300 work experience students and local volunteers have worked with us. Training is integral to our enterprises.

We are excited to join the CFGN because we love connecting with other food growers around the capital. We really believe in the power of sharing knowledge, resources and energy, and in working together towards the common goal of getting people growing food in every corner of London!

If you would like to come see what we do, please come along to any of our upcoming events at Salopian Garden, our community kitchen garden in Isleworth.

9th September: Family Harvest Festival – a celebration of the beginning of harvest season. Come enjoy all the produce Salopian Garden has to offer, make your own pizzas, try your hand at apple pressing, and learn how to make flour.

20th September: Salopian Garden's 1st birthday party with hog roast, birthday cake and homemade cider.

Information about all of the above can be found on our website. You can also come volunteer with us every Thursday at the Salopian Garden, 10am – 3pm. Everybody is welcome!



cultivatelondon.org

689 London Road
Isleworth TW7 4ES

Stepney City Farm

Stepney City Farm is a community farm in London's East End. We want to connect people in Tower Hamlets (and the wider world!) with where their food comes from, inspire ecological and ethical choices, and to provide a free and green open space for people that live in the inner city. We see people blossom as they work with nature and connect to the land and want to provide opportunities for learning and provide nourishment for people's wellbeing as well as their bellies. We are a mixed farm so the animals and the plants interact in a beneficial symbiosis of fertiliser and weed eating. We follow permaculture principles, organic guidelines and heritage seed preferences in our planning and plantings. We work with local schools, pupil referral units, community groups, nursing homes and as many members of our community as we can. We grow wheat and make bread with primary schools, connect with elders through our Furry Tales project and provide allotments for local people to grow their own.

We promote high welfare and agroecological farming, and try to share the big bad news about industrial agriculture with our visitors while inspiring them about the nourishing and delicious nature of small scale community food sites. Volunteers are a key part of our work here at the farm and do amazing work supporting us, the animals, the plants and the soil while learning and enjoying the site.

Our cafe makes delicious food using our produce and other ethically sourced ingredients, and we sell our produce in both fresh and jam/chutney form in our shop. We also sell our produce to local outlets and we're looking for more!

We are excited to join the network to connect with the flourishing urban food movement in London, to share stories, experiences and seeds, and to work together to help push our food system to be more life-sustaining, bee-protecting and people-connecting. CFGN does great work linking up food growing projects to provide a voice and an outward facing platform for those who spend most of their time connecting with the watering rota and the soil right in front of them.

We love volunteers, especially keen bean growers... if you can come for a few hours every now and then come to our Open Volunteering sessions on tuesdays and thursdays, or if you can commit to a longer time that's great too.



stepneycityfarm.org

Stepney Way
London E1 3DG