

# THE PLOT

## Community Food Growing News

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COMMUNITY FOOD GROWERS NETWORK



## OUR LAND, OUR CITIES

by William Ronan

If we're going to grow food for ourselves then one thing is for sure- we're going to need land to sow, plant, and harvest.

Ownership of land and the resulting power it brings has a dark and bloody history from the colonisation of Africa, to the 'Enclosures Acts' (1604-1914) in the UK where common land was suddenly owned by individuals, and normal people were either forced off the land or made to pay higher rents.

- 0.6% of the UK population own 47% of the land in the UK
- 77.1% of people living in the UK lived in an urban area in 2010
- The Queen owns 120,000 hectares of agricultural land including the sea bed around the UK- this includes ownership of any whales washed ashore.  
(1 hectare is roughly the size of 2 football pitches)

In recent weeks there's been two major news stories related to land ownership in the UK; the MIPIM real estate conference in Cannes, France, and the Co-operative Group sell-off of 20,000 hectares of land due to financial difficulties (the biggest land-sell off in the UK for decades).

MIPIM is the world's largest real estate fair where 20,000 developers, local authorities, and banks, get together to have decadent parties and carve up cities across the world for more hotels, luxury flats, offices and shopping centres. It goes a long way to explain why London's sky-line is currently littered with cranes, and unaffordable 'affordable' housing is replacing council housing across the city.

One example of this is the Heygate Estate in Elephant & Castle (formerly a CFGN member) where long-term residents have been forced out and can no longer afford to live in the area due to rising rents. This with the harris fencing now surrounding the estate has a smell of a modern 'Enclosures'.

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## UPCOMING EVENTS

17th OF APRIL 2014

INTERNATIONAL PEASANTS DAY

12 Noon **Landworkers' Alliance Demonstration:**  
**'Feeding the Future'**

DEFRA Head office, SW1P

7pm **Peasants Struggle Pub Quiz**

The Ivy House Co-op pub, SE15 3BE

27TH APRIL 2014

2pm **Agro-Ecology Skill Share:**  
**'Sustainable Agriculture in Tanzania'**

OrganicLea, Hawkwood Nursery, E4 7UH

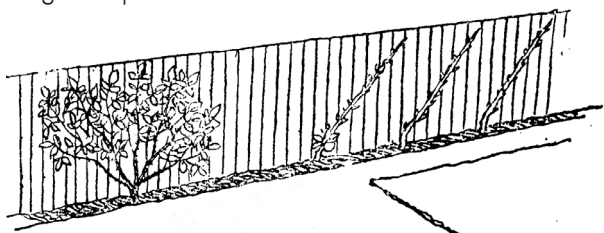
17TH MAY 2014

11am **Happy Seeds Festival**

-5pm Dig This Nursery Garden Centre, SE14 6AD

For so many of the UK population the city is our home and very quickly it is being sold off around us to the highest bidder- turning our land into space that we have no access to and corporations use to extract profit from.

On the 17th of April CFGN will be supporting the Landworker's Alliance demonstration outside DEFRA government offices to show that there is demand for people to have livelihoods through small-scale agriculture, and also for communities to eat healthy, local food. In the next weeks we could see the Co-operative Group sell off 20,000 hectares of land to private investors- what will they produce on this land? Will it be to our benefit? And most importantly it will be even more land that is out of our control- we will have no access to it except if we have high-salaries, or to be exploited as workers for large companies.



The Co-op land sell off is a prime example of how land ownership is becoming more and more unjust and unfair in the UK- reflecting the great divide between rich and poor. It's a key time for conversations and action so that we keep our land community-owned and for ordinary people to have access to housing, water, recreation and food.

CFGN joined housing groups from around London this month to protest city councils and Boris going to MIPI to sell off our city. How else can we respond to communities being forced out of our neighbourhoods by council-developer contracts? And what does community-controlled, co-operative land ownership look like on 20,000 hectares instead of the Co-operative Group flogging it for corporate profit-making?

If we believe that all communities should have access to fresh, healthy foods- then surely we must fight for access to the land we want to grow on before we find fences and enclosures on all sides.

## GROW HEATHROW IS 4!

Grow Heathrow, the squatted community garden by Heathrow airport, celebrated its 4th Birthday on Saturday the 1st of March.

People came from Bristol, Cambridge and France to kick off the celebrations with 'Three Acres and a Cow' on the Friday evening- a people's history of Britain through folk songs, stories and poems connecting The Norman Conquest and Peasants' Revolt with the 80's road protests via the enclosures and Highland Clearances.

The world-famous cake competition was followed by some top speeches from local campaigner Tracey, John McDonnell MP, Grow Heathrow Sam and supporters of the project.

As the blight of the Heathrow Third Runway still threatens the village of Sipson, and the Con-Dem government continues its mania of austerity cuts, it was once again inspiring to see Grow Heathrow thriving- putting politics into practice and building community power in the face of economic, ecological and democratic crises.

To find out more about Grow Heathrow visit [www.transitionheathrow.com](http://www.transitionheathrow.com).

## KEATS CROWD FUNDER

'Keats Community Organics' are setting up on 5 acres of disused land in Welling, South East London, and need your support!

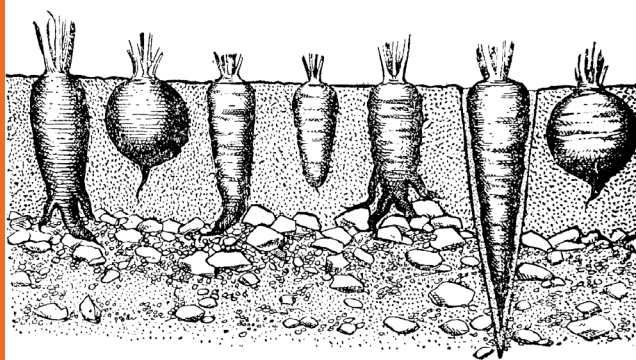
Run by former growers from the 'Food from the Sky' the project will be growing and selling food as well as running training, an apprentice programme and horticultural therapy. A community garden and allotments have been created for local people to use.

The group is partnering with two local organisations Dig this Nursery – a plant nursery and community project operating in New Cross Gate and Animal Days Out a – therapeutic charity - who will both also be using the land and helping them get established in the local community.

THE BIG NEWS is that they have launched a crowd funding campaign to raise £10,000 capital to kick start the project and it would be brilliant if people could help spread the word.

To show your support and find out more about the project visit: [www.crowdfunder.co.uk/keatscommunityorganics](http://www.crowdfunder.co.uk/keatscommunityorganics)

If people want to get involved with the project (they are looking for volunteers, potential apprentices and collaborators) then get in contact by email on [keatsorganics@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:keatsorganics@yahoo.co.uk).



# FOOD AS THERAPY

by Martina Schliessler

Bringing food production closer to people is what city farms and community food are all about. But for those that engage in urban food growing, the practice is about a lot more than just vegetables- it's the concept of 'community', the promise of closer social bonds mediated by the common focus of food growing that gives way to such practices as urban food growing.

Unlike urban farming projects in Cuba, for example, we in London are not necessarily driven by the necessity to avert food shortages through urban and peri-urban production. Rather, a whole set of values is being evoked in the act of 'growing together'. Through spending time outdoors, getting exercise and being in the company of others, many of us may have already experienced these therapeutic benefits firsthand.

The idea that community gardens are a way for individuals to overcome the alienation and misery of city life has been recognised beyond the communities which practice urban gardening, to the point that many urban food growing projects are now being funded for these therapeutic aspects. While it is well known that these therapeutic effects are inherent, the question is whether and how to get paid for them, and what is being asked for by those awarding grants?

These therapeutic aspects become one of the main reasons for which community gardens are funded by bodies such as the Big Lottery fund and Mind, the charity for mental health. This of course proves to be a valuable subsidy in an environment where urban food growing arguably would struggle to exist without some sort of funding.

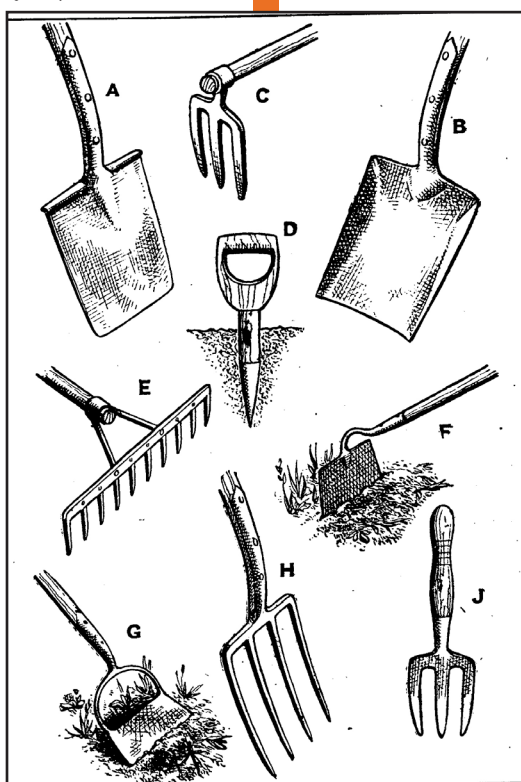
However, how does one quantify these therapeutic benefits into a way that can be used to determine whether the funding received is producing the desired outcomes? Donors require evaluation procedures and tangible outcomes in order to be convinced that an organisation should continue to receive funds. When a funding body requires that one have a certain number of people that are coming through the therapeutic 'programme', such structuring may undermine the communitarian elements of activities where all enter as equals, rather than as service recipients or providers.

Nevertheless, community food is therapeutic, and the fact that this is being recognised is a great opportunity

for reaching out to those around us. For those considering to incorporate therapeutic elements into growing projects, there are a number of resources available, including the charities Thrive and Mind as well as the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens. Some projects which have been running assisted volunteering schemes include Organiclea and Forest Farm Peace Garden.

## GROUNDBREAKING WITHOUT BREAKING THE GROUND

Forest gardening is growing plants in a polyculture that incorporates every height of plant, from trees down to mycorrhizal fungi. It is an approach which is largely no-dig, high mulch and mostly perennial.



Edible Landscapes London (ELL) has been propagating forest garden plants and teaching people informally since 2012. Last year, ELL used money from the lottery-funded Manor House PACT project to pioneer the new training which takes students through an intensive 15 days of training over 4 months. The course will run at least two more times between now and 2015 and priority places are given to Manor House residents. They will come out of it with 16 credits and a level 2 nationally recognised qualification. Not bad.

The second group of students to take the new accredited course, Creating a Forest Garden, are doing some amazing

work. Recently the 16 students learned about 5 different types of propagation and visited Martin Crawford's garden in Devon at the Agroforestry Research Trust.

In addition, now that ELL is part of the Permaculture Association's LAND project, other LAND centres will easily be able to replicate the course at their training centre.

For more information see:  
[www.permaculture.org.uk/land](http://www.permaculture.org.uk/land)  
[www.manorhousepact.org.uk/](http://www.manorhousepact.org.uk/)





## EU SEED UPDATE

by Tim George

Seed swapping is a practice that has taken place for millennia. As growers save and give away seeds from good harvests, others get to experiment with these seeds and how they fare in different soil and climatic conditions. During this process varieties cross-pollinate and new varieties come about that offer different characteristics – such as improved yield or resilience to diseases.

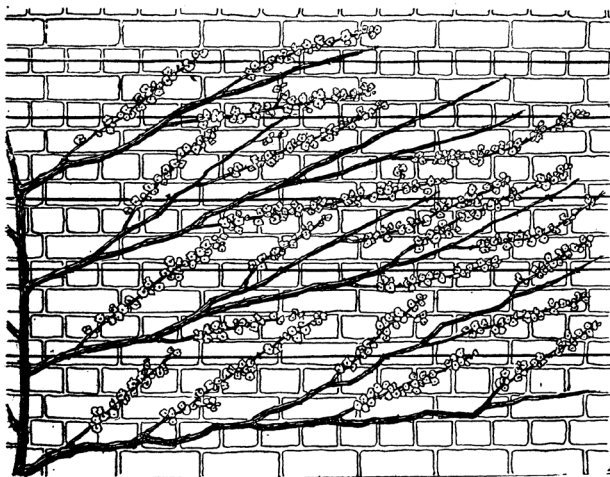
Research laboratories do essentially the same thing; however their objectives often go beyond the purpose of developing better seed. Many seed breeders are now funded by multinational seed companies whose primary interest lies in ensuring continued profitability by preventing farmers, growers and gardeners from saving their own seeds and ensuring they buy stock from the industry year on year.

### The EU Plant Reproductive Material Law (PRM)

In light of this the EU drafted a bill to legislate against the free sale and distribution of seeds, termed by them as Plant Reproductive Material (PRM). Both the Environment and the Agriculture Committees of the European Parliament voted by majority earlier this year to block the controversial seed bill, this is now being redrafted. However this takes place in the context of ongoing Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) free-trade talks between the US and the EU and there is a very real threat of these debates being drawn into these decisions.

Movements to include the PRM law in the TTIP talks is symptomatic of a wider international move towards taking decisions about plant genetic resources away from public decision making which will make it even harder for farmers organizations to get their voices heard.

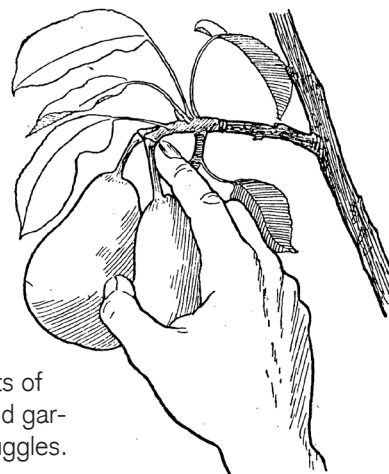
Under TTIP agreements companies could by-pass national/European court systems and go directly to international, investor-biased tribunals. If a government



bans genetically modified foods, or calls for a stronger regulation against patented seed varieties, companies could sue for loss of profits. Furthermore, if elements of the PRM Law are included in these free trade talks then it is possible that under non-discrimination regulations covering products of different origins, farmers may not be able to make the free choices over the type of seed they grow due to fear of prosecution in international courts and tribunals.

Organisations such as La Via Campesina and the Landworkers' Alliance highlight that this is in contravention of the International Seed Treaty, put in place to ensure plant genetic resources are protected and the benefits derived are equitably distributed. They argue that freely reproducible seeds are an inalienable part of our heritage, biodiversity and food security. What we need is a seed law that puts their rights to grow, save, and sell plant reproductive materials at the centre of the debate.

A lot of momentum has been built through coordinating campaigns for better regulation around seeds in recent years, and it is important that we keep this momentum going so we can defend the rights of farmers, growers and gardeners in future struggles.



See [www.viacampesina.org](http://www.viacampesina.org) and [www.ifoam.org](http://www.ifoam.org) to find out how to take action.

## COMMUNITY FOOD GROWERS NETWORK

CFGN is a network of community gardens around London actively engaged in growing food plants, taking land back for community use, and supporting others to grow food, in healthy, sustainable ways.

We have four seasonal gatherings a year to share news, plans and to organise on relevant issues.

Membership is free and you can read our full manifesto and see updates on the web:

[www.cfgn.org.uk](http://www.cfgn.org.uk)

[cfgn@riseup.net](mailto:cfgn@riseup.net)

@cfgn\_growers

[facebook/cfgnetwork](https://facebook.com/cfgnetwork)