

THE PLOT

Community Food Growing News

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COMMUNITY FOOD GROWERS NETWORK



FANCY A PIECE OF CHLORINE WASHED CHICKEN?

by Morten Thaysen

What are the biggest threats to our food today? Is it corporate control? Chemicals? Pesticides? Or maybe GM crops?

The EU and the US are negotiating a new secret trade deal that could not only boost corporate control of our food systems, but also undermine environmental and food safety regulation to allow more chemicals and lower food safety standards. Sound scary? It is!

Do you fancy a piece of chlorine washed chicken? Or a hormone-pumped beefsteak? The Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP) – a new trade deal between the EU and the US – is set to 'harmonise' European food safety and environmental regulation down to US levels. In practise that means less animal welfare, more chemicals, less focus on food safety and more focus on corporate profits.

Over 90 % of US beef is produced with the use of growth hormones which have been linked to cancer in humans. They are currently illegal in the EU, but TTIP could change that.

GM crops are also widely used in the US. 70 % of all processed food sold in the US now contains genetically modified ingredients, and TTIP could make that the case in Europe as well by removing restrictions on GM products and pesticides.

Currently the EU employs the so-called precautionary principle to food. This means that if there is a risk that food can pose a danger to human health, it will be removed from the market until lengthy scientific experiments have been conducted. The US does not employ this principle and TTIP could make the same the case in the EU – as well as transferring the considerably lower US food safety standards to Europe.

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UPCOMING 2014 EVENTS

12TH JULY

TTIP Day of Action

1 Victoria Street, SW1H 0ET
12 Noon

9TH AUGUST

Tomato Harvest Bonanza!

New Cross, SE14 6AD
11am

15TH AUGUST

A Harvest of Stories

OrganicLea, E4 7UH
6pm

8TH SEPTEMBER

**'Concrete Heart Land'
Film screening & discussion**

Papa's Cafe, SW9 8AF
7pm

See www.cfgn.org.uk for more info

But can't countries just reverse these changes later?

Potentially yes, but TTIP is also set to include a so-called Investor State Dispute (ISDS) mechanism that would allow companies to sue countries over such policy changes. In that scenario countries could end up having to pay companies the equivalent of their potential lost profits.

What can we do about it? Public protest against TTIP is already mounting in Germany and as a result the EU has been forced to put ISDS on hold while they conduct a public consultation. While the consultation is not going to achieve much, it has shown that public protest can influence politics and that we can beat TTIP – as we beat other similarly damaging agreements such as SOPA, ACTA, and GATS before.

If you want to take part in protesting TTIP, join us and more than 20 other organisations for the #noTTIP national day of action on 12 July: www.noTTIP.org.uk

GETTING SKILLED UP IN THE GARDEN

by Wren Ray

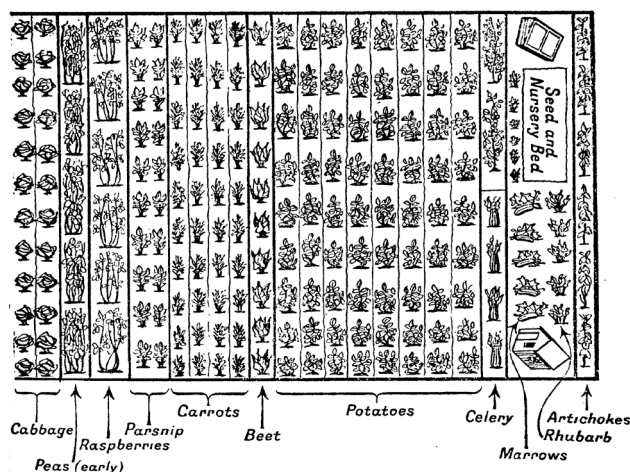
Since early Spring 'Grow Heathrow' community garden has been hosting a monthly growing course guiding a mixed group of people through the basic principles and practices of organic growing. The last session is coming up this July and reflections are flowing on the format, style and content of the course.

Born out of a growing review back in the dark depths of winter – the perfect time to huddle round with a cup of tea to decide the following years planting plan and set out to imagine what will be needed when the plants decide to emerge in full spring force and the busyness in the garden gets going again! The growing collective at Grow Heathrow were discussing how best to boost the gardening skills and confidence of both people living and working on the site, local residents in the Heathrow villages and others wider afield- when it was decided some more organized skill sharing was needed. So it came to be that an 'Introduction to Gardening' course was started in March 2014 spanning five sessions.



Set in the beautiful straw bale house at Grow Heathrow, with different experienced growers coming to assist the class each month bringing their own flavour and passion to share, we run the course with a morning of theory on organic methods and afternoon practical out and about on the site putting into practice what was learnt earlier in the day. Of course a delicious lunch is provided Grow Geathrow style – massive pot and ladel! Each session leads on from the last taking the participants through a journey from seed to harvest.

Sessions have included soil type and compost making, propagation, planning a growing space, weeds, plant deficiency and disease – how to make organic plant feeds and inviting wildlife into the garden to help with pest control. We always allow time for Q&A's for each person's growing space whether a back garden, allotment site, community growing plot, window sill pots or primary school garden – the group has brought a right mix of spaces along with an array of soil types, weeds and pests to deal with! We've had a lot of fun together and from it we hope the 16 people who have taken part in this community growing experiment will feel better equipped and supported in their beginnings of becoming urban food growers.



Skilling up, sharing knowledge and getting people together in our communities to learn the basics of organic food growing is a strong way to build a movement of confident growers. When growing up in the city, starting a garden, taking that leap to plant your first tomato seed, make a compost area, dig into that heavy clay soil – not knowing what obstacles may lie ahead in the coming season – that can be scary. But knowing you've got a space to air some of those problems as well as share your successes, learn some new tips and get a foundation of knowledge of why its so important for us to stick to organic- is ground breaking. I hope this group of new enthusiastic growers who are just about to complete their last session at Grow Heathrow agree.

We've got the patches and plots to grow in London now its time to get our communities skilled up!

www.transitionheathrow.com

THREE ACRES & A COW

by Robin Grey

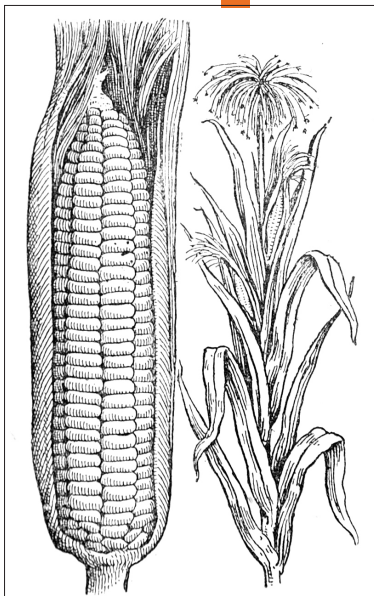
Back in 2011, Clare and Ru from Organiclea gave a talk at one of the quarterly Community Food Growers Network (CFGN) meetings on the history of land rights in England. It was the first time that I had encountered concepts such as enclosure and common land, and a narrative framing and explaining how most of us have ended up bundled into tiny amounts of land, many of us in debt up to our necks or paying absurd amounts of money to absentee landlords for the pleasure of a place to rest our heads.

Fast forward a year and I was inspired to take part in my first ever protest action at Rothamstead over government funding of GMO experiments. A choir from France lifted our spirits with their beautiful songs as we came into close contact with walls of police. After they finished singing, I was struck by my lack of knowledge of traditional English songs of resistance and did not feel that our reworded football chants were sufficient by themselves as a way of vocalising our group energy in such situations.

I decided that day to make it my mission to find, learn and teach as many people as possible the songs our ancestors would have sung to raise their spirits when challenging unjust laws and actions which threatened their lives, livelihoods, health and communities. It also seemed worthwhile to explain the songs' context, using them to illustrate the historical narrative mentioned above. It was with these motivations that 'Three Acres And A Cow' was born; the show taking its title from a name given to the 19th century land reform movement.

Over the last 18 months, since its inception as part of the first CFGN events series, the show has been performed fifteen times to just shy of a thousand people. Performances have taken place in pubs, community centres, a church, squats and universities around the country, and featured over forty guest performers bringing their local songs, stories and networks to the performances.

Recently I have started to devise an open-source, creative-commons performers kit which will enable any group or individual to take ownership of the show, give it added local relevance and allow them to freely perform it in their communities.



With the support of Arts Council England, I have been working with critically acclaimed storyteller Rachel Rose Reid and a team of eight musicians, poets, actors and actresses from Peterborough to test and develop the kit. So far we have spent four days working together and the fruits of these workshops and other rehearsals will culminate in a performance which I will watch as part of the audience. This is taking place on 30th August at a wonderful community food growing project called 'The Green Backyard' during the Peterborough Festival.

www.threeacresandacow.co.uk

COURGETTE DEFENCE TACTICS

by Joseph Blake

I get up, put some coffee on, spread butter on my toast and take my breakfast into the glorious morning sunshine that has taken over my back garden. I sit down comfortably, everything seems well when all of a sudden a combined feeling of rage and horror comes over me. My poor courgette plant has been attacked in the night. Half of its leaves have been eaten with the last of the slugs still munching away on the one remaining leaf, I can't believe it. Three months I have been taking care of those courgette plants. I haven't had kids yet but if I am to show even half the love I showed to those courgettes to my future children then I'll be well on my way to being a great father.

What is to be done? I ponder as I lob the last remaining slug as far as I can throw it. I call up a friend who happens to be an organic food grower and ask for some advice. "Whatever you do, don't use the poison"

she says. At this point I'm still feeling like I would do anything to stop the pesks. "The poison destroys the soil and is really bad for the environment" she says and suggests beer traps as an alternative option. Not the most humane way of killing something (they drown in the beer) but I give it a go anyway. 'Beer traps' are easy to make by using recycled bottles or jars and the yeast in the beer attract slugs away from the plants. This works well for a few days until a particularly sodden night when I find at least 20 slugs and snails circling the courgette plant at midnight. This, I am told, is the peak time for slug raids and the perfect moment to remove them from their feasting.



In an effort to sleep easier and not have to make too many midnight-slug-dashes I take the advice from my neighbour having similar troubles who suggests using old coffee grounds, wood ash and egg shells. I start collecting these up and she's right, this does work fairly well in keeping them at bay although they regularly need topping up.

Slug populations have risen this year due to the wet spring and warm winter and as I have learnt can be disastrous for the garden. If you like me don't want to pour chemicals in the soil and want to eat organic produce then hopefully some or all of these methods will prove useful to you in protecting the plants so they make it to your plate and don't end up as slug feed!

MAY PROJECT GARDENS

In May this year *The Plot* went to meet KMT who lives and works at 'May Project Gardens' in the suburbs of Morden in South London.

We'd heard a lot about the project as KMT, a freedom teacher with a background in music, has turned his house and garden into a living permaculture space.

May Project Gardens was founded in 2009 on the site which has approximately 250sqm of growing space

where a variety of fruits and vegetables are grown by individuals who volunteer their time to help maintain the project.

On arriving at the gate it's clear to see how much work has gone into the garden as it bursts with colour, plants and permaculture design utilizing all the different edges in the area. There is a medium sized polytunnel, a small herb garden, two large main crop beds, a wildlife zone (which includes a pond and a wild flower bed), a small food forest garden and four different composting systems.

Perching by the pond KMT explains: "The main aim of May Project Gardens is to bring communities closer together to act collectively. The project provides practical examples and

explores the practical challenges it takes to be green. Accessing tools necessary to educate communities about the issues that affect the environment and as a result the effects they have on those inhabiting the planet."

"There has to be a balance of maintaining the garden (earth care) my well being, my home (people care) and fair share (business and finance). Each permaculture space will different but I tend to think resources and finance will be the most dominant themes for those living in city environments especially as for the first time 50% of the world's population live in urban environment and this is set to increase."

He continues: "There exists a real opportunity for a way of living Green in a City, one which is more in keeping with the land. Working with nature, technology, resources and people are all-available to move away from the existing model of us as city folk as only consumers, which places a premium on the basics of living such as food, water, shelter and heating."

"Yet my voice and the countless of others that would reap the most benefit from these transitions are not the voices that are heard or define the way the city's are greened, they are not the voices of power, they are not the voices of privilege. They are not the voices of women, voices of color, voices of marginalized. The voices that need to be in the forefront of any green movement that really wants to change."

Volunteer days at the site are Fridays and Sunday 11am-5pm. The project also runs Permaculture and Hip-Hop courses courses and engages with Training for Transformation popular education practices.

E-mail mayprojectgardens@gmail.com for more info

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
cfgn@riseup.net
[@cfgn_growers](https://www.facebook.com/cfgnetwork)
[facebook/cfgnetwork](https://www.facebook.com/cfgnetwork)

