

Editorial

Welcome to your seventh quarterly edition of The Plot, brought to you by the Community Food Growers' Network and friends!

Having settled in, after the first edition under new editorial direction earlier in the year, we're excited to bring you a chunky edition packed full of political ideas, reflections and some stories of the highs and lows that the food growing community has seen in the past few months.

First and foremost we'd like to dedicate this issue of The Plot to Felicia Ruperti, a long time friend of the food movement who sadly passed away in March this year. Our thoughts are with her friends and family at this time and those who can, do plant a tree in her memory.

The Spring/Summer Plot, in memory of Felicia, will be bringing you an abundance of food for thought. Looking at the food sovereignty movement Adam Payne and Lynne Davis from the Land Workers' Alliance shed light on what the political landscape looks like and what we can do about it as consumers. Natalie Szarek of Audacious Veg takes on the sugar tax in her piece exploring who policy changes really need to target. Later, Mama D of Community Centred Knowledge takes on the concept of the consumer at its core, exploring our relationship with nature in the digital age.

The Community Food Growers Network is delighted to welcome on board our new Social Enterprise Worker who'll be working over the next year to support each and all of our member projects to become as robust and sustainable as possible. You can find out more about him on the back page.

We'd also like to thank Sutton Community Farm, the Ecological Land Co-op, Royal Hill, Growing Communities Patchwork Farms, Grow Heathrow and Edible Landscapes for sharing their stories with us for a great seventh edition of our Community Food Growing News.



What's the latest? Catching Up with the Land Workers Alliance and the Food Sovereignty Movement

The food sovereignty movement continues to grow across the UK, Europe and globally as farmers and activists persistent in demanding a better food system. To find out what's new we caught up with Land Workers' Alliance member, Adam Payne

An organic farmer based in West Dorset, Adam has spent years in the food sovereignty movement fighting for a localised and democratic food system. Food sovereignty, unlike food security, is not just about making sure everyone has food. Going further, food sovereignty looks at how food is produced or traded considering the social or sociological impacts of food. Addressing power and democracy within the food system, it offers a framework that will guarantee the rights of food producers, often the people who are most marginalised by the food system on a global scale. Via Campesina, the international organisation at the fore of the food sovereignty movement, represents 200 000 000 small farmers, including LWA members such as Adam. Other organisations in the movement represent fish people, pastoralists, hunter gatherers and are co-creating that framework that secures a better future for food.

Last month, the Italian Organic Farming Union in conjunction with the Italian Rural Association hosted the sixth annual general meeting of the European coordination of Via Campesina at the Citizens Alternative Economy in Rome. Twenty-eight unions which are Via Campesina members from geographical Europe including food growers from Turkey and Norway, as well as three UK delegates, came together for an inspiring few days of strategising for the next twelve months of actions and organising in Europe.

The event fell on the 16th anniversary of the treaty of Europe and of course, Via Campesina did not let this pass quietly. With strong mobilisation, protests were coordinated across the city to remind the EU that the modern implementation of the common agricultural policy might be working for big business but it isn't working for producers or consumers. From the EU's inception when agricultural policy was a central driving force, we now see an institution which has wilfully watched on as 33% of farms, predominantly small scale, have been shut down in the last ten years.

Of course, the topic of Brexit and what that means for the European farming landscape was certainly interrogated. Between chasing down escaped sheep, Adam tells me "Europe is bigger than the EU, much bigger. Europe is an idea of solidarity and cooperation. For us, as UK producers, that will continue, and there's much for us to gain as being a part of a wider geographical

European network.” As the biggest potential challenge or the biggest potential opportunity in the last few decades preparations for Brexit are crucial. In or out the struggle to redefine the way that trade and agriculture works has been key. The EU in its foundation was also a free trade deal which had devastating effects on small producers across Europe, such as land grabs in Eastern Europe as a result of membership. Whatever happens next few years between the UK and the EU, what’s important is that the UK-EU small scale producers are coordinated to meet more domestic demand from domestic production and shape those policies to protect interest of small scale producers.

Get in touch with the landworkersalliance.org.uk and find out more and help support lobbying and campaigning activities.



With festival season on the horizon Shambala’s Lynne Davis breaks down how to fight the food system

It’s troubling to think about how a growing population will be fed in the future, in the face of urbanisation and climate change. But perhaps the solutions we’re seeking are already on plates.

Agroecological farming is the most common way of living and farming to the global population and is the source of most of the world’s food. Also called peasant or subsistence farming, agroecological farming is a sustainable farming method in which small scale farms exist with a diverse range of fruits, vegetables, flourishing woodlands and a few animals. Surrounded by trees, hedges and flowers, they produce for themselves with surplus going to market. We might also know it as organic, permaculture or even indigenous farming.

Despite being 1) the most resistant style of farming to climate change 2) feeding more people, and 3) doing so in a way that is better for the planet: traditional and agroecological farming systems are disappearing. Increasing urbanisation has led governments to prioritise cheap and abundant food for urban centres. In turn, policies to support this provision have pushed down the price that farmers receive for their crops, making farming increasingly unviable, forcing more small farmers to migrate toward urban jobs.

Meanwhile, policies promoting industrial scale farming have led to a dramatic increase in the profits of fertiliser, herbicide and pesticide companies. It is in the interest of these corporations to keep this policy in place, so they employ lobbyists to persuade politicians and the public that we need technical solutions to solve the problems.

The industrial farming system accounts for 44-57% of all greenhouse gas emissions while agroecological farming creates biodiversity and sequesters carbon into the soil. If the whole world was agroecologically farmed we could put a significant amount of atmospheric carbon back into the soil where it belongs. With industrial farming, social impacts of forced migration, as small farms make way to big farms, are ignored. As is the loss of local, traditional knowledge on the subtleties of the landscape. But most importantly, it ignores that there is already enough food to feed everyone on the planet. It’s not the industrial and technological solutions feeding the world, it is the small, agroecological farmers.

Small ecological farms, distributing food in a fair way that puts people before profits can not only feed the world and restore the environment, it also creates community resilience; resilience that can in turn empower us to make direct decisions on issue that affect us. Finding this resilience will

take a redesigning of our markets and distribution, to be run co-operatively and transparently for people, rather than unaccountably for the benefit of any corporation. It will mean taking control and finding ways to access our food without supporting profiteers.

So how can we possibly change it?

My guess would be that we'll do it in the same way every right has ever been won by any group in history: through an enormous number of small acts, conversations and rebellions. Unthanked, inglorious deeds. Every day. We'll be open to challenges and learning from other people's ideas, whether we agree with them or not. We'll organise; linking with other networks and sharing resources. We can't do everything. But we can all do things that give us purpose; that make us feel alive; that make us feel like another world, with another food system is possible.

What Can You Do?

In the GLOBAL context, join the Food Sovereignty Movement and amplify the work of organisations such as La Via Campesina, a global union of small scale producers fighting for the right to produce food for people, not profit.

At the EUROPEAN level, write to your MEP asking for the EU Farming subsidy system (CAP) to be reformed to better support ecological farming and rural livelihoods. Sign and share petitions, they have an impact.

At the NATIONAL level, write to your MP asking DEFRA to implement our agricultural subsidies in a more equitable way. See The Landworkers' Alliance for more details of what this might look like. Boycott those with too much power in our food system, like the major supermarkets.

At a LOCAL level organise with your community (be they family, friends, book clubs, whoever) to source your food sustainably. Join a buyers group so that organic, fairtrade wholefoods become as cheap as the supermarket. Create ways to buy food you believe in. The Open Food Network UK can even help you do this!

In your everyday life: Cook with fresh and local ingredients. Eat with your friends! Experiment with stocks and using herbs to add flavour with less cheese and meat. Spend what you save on better quality cheese and meat from producers you trust. Spend time enjoying your food, whether at a community growing project, a local farm, a farmer's market or local co-operative. Celebrate the great food that we produce here and the fantastic farmers that produce it free of chemicals on mixed farms using sustainable practices.

This blog was written for Shambala by their very own permaculture guru, Lynne Davis, and edited and reprinted with permission. The original can be found on the Shambala website.

Find Lynne back in the permaculture field at Shambala this year to pick her glorious, green-fingered brain.



A closer look at the Sugar Tax. Attacking obesity at the root, or shifting responsibility off manufacturers?

When a public campaign calls for measures to tackle childhood obesity and encourage healthy eating and physical activity, I expect to be in favour of it. You can't really go wrong with those goals, can you? When hearing about various "sugar tax" initiatives, my gut instinct is to support them- I'd be happy to pay a few extra pennies every time I indulge my sugar craving, and all the better if those pennies go towards school sports. But when we actually examine the social assumptions and attitudes that create these campaigns- and are in turn reinforced by them- we really have to rethink whether this is a "step in the right direction" or actually making it more difficult for us to address the real causes of childhood obesity.

What is the Sugar Tax?

In the UK, the Sugar Tax has expanded from a public campaign by health and food advocates such as Sustain (the parent organisation of Capital Growth) and celebrity chef Jamie Oliver into government policy. From April 2018, soft drink manufacturers will be taxed for drinks containing above a certain level of sugar. The cost is expected to be passed onto the consumer, and will come to between 6p to 8p per can of soda, which the government says will fund sports activities in schools.

Why is the Sugar Tax seen as a solution?

Although poor people are more likely to be obese than wealthier people, unemployed people are between 4 to 6 times more likely to be unhealthily underweight than employed people. With the knowledge that poor people are more likely to have unhealthy weights and diets, we have to carefully examine our proposed solutions to this crisis to see whether the people being asked to solve the problem are the ones actually responsible for causing it. Rather than addressing the root causes of unhealthy eating habits - first and foremost poverty, reinforced by aggressive advertising and inadequate regulation of what goes into the food in the first place - the sugar tax places the responsibility of a public health crisis on the shoulders of poor individuals. And I don't know about you, but making poor people pay for a crisis caused by mega corporations and left to run

unchecked by elite politicians leaves a gross taste in my mouth.

Does the sugar tax work?

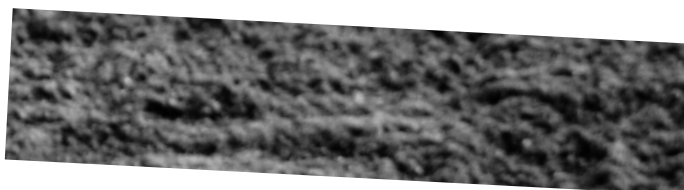
Proponents of the sugar tax claim that it is "tried and tested", but evidence from around the world returns mixed results. A tax on saturated fat in Denmark was dropped due to studies showing that it wasn't actually changing consumption habits for the better. Although in some countries a sugar tax resulted in decreased consumption of specific drinks, there's no evidence to suggest that this led to improved health outcomes. We all know that unhealthy food often offers the highest number of calories for your money, or an easily accessible source of energy in a time-poor and overworked lifestyle. So decreased purchases of sodas could simply correlate to increased consumption of crisps, cigarettes or sweets.

Health experts claim that the best way to reduce childhood obesity is by reducing the content of sugar in drinks- not through taxation, but by regulation of drink contents. Paired with education and physical activity, health outcomes are much more likely to improve, and stay that way. We know that supporters of the sugar tax also support education and regulation, but the bottom line is that a huge amount of time, energy and money has been channeled towards this outcome- and it is neither fair nor tried and tested.

At a time when food banks are desperately overstretched due to skyrocketing poverty, it seems that a "solution" which proposes making anything more expensive, rather than making healthier food less expensive, does not fully comprehend that poverty is a real, and grim, reality in Britain.

Implementing a sugar tax tells people that rather than regulate what goes into drinks in the first place, we'd rather implement a regressive tax that hits poor people the hardest. Rather than making sure that education, sports and healthy food are an integral part of our schools and communities, the sugar tax represents a largely symbolic gesture that punishes poor people and labels them as the problem, whilst the businesses that created this mess remain untouched.

It's time that we start offering solutions that place the responsibility squarely where it lies, and demands that the government muster the political will to implement the necessary changes. Too often a distrust of and disillusionment with politics means that we forego systemic analysis for an individual-based approach. If we continue to do this, we risk stripping the "good food" movement of its radical potential, and miss the opportunity to really change the role food plays in our communities.



Losing land and saving sites, the tale of three gardens.

Gentrification, airport expansion, luxury flats crushing communities in their construction. Such are the issues that keep so many Londoners up at night, threatening our way of life and our ability to remain in the city and maintain a good quality of life.

Here, land is of a huge capital value and for those of us whose work and lives are built around the ability to access it in its natural state, to-be-constructed glassy high-rises are a looming threat to the existence of the farms, gardens and food growing projects which we have nurtured.

So how do we secure our land and resist the will of the powers-that-be? How do we know our rights on uncertain tenures? Where do good-will leases leave us in the eyes of the law? Having secure tenancy on the land is more crucial than ever, and sadly this is a lesson that a few of our projects have learned the hard way.

The Community Food Growers Network caught up with Royal Hill Gardens, Patchwork Farm: Kynaston and Grow Heathrow, three very different projects at different ends of the city; all who have faced the threat of closure in recent months. Some have fared better than others and for some, the battle continues. But each story reveals the inevitable hardships and labour that comes with defending land and trying to maintain green and community spaces in today's London.

Growing Communities Patchwork Farm at Kynaston, Stoke Newington

Since 2012 a team of growers and apprentices from Growing Communities had worked on this overgrown, underused patch of land, converting the rubble and beer cans into a community hub. The site not only grew salad for the Growing Communities box scheme, it also welcomed locals and volunteers who went on to become apprentices at Growing Communities themselves.

Nestled away in the garden of a high street bank, the garden was given to Growing Communities on a five-year lease of a space around 80-100 square metres, free of charge. In hindsight, this was one of the lessons that has marked Hannah, from Kynaston, the most. "The problem with meanwhile spaces, where you're allowed to go there by some kind of corporate tenant or landlord [is that] you have an agreement but it's not really worth the paper it's written on. You have no legal standing, you don't own the land and you haven't got any rights to it. When you're gifted land, [it's not by] people that are going to protect spaces for community benefit because their priority is making money."

After three full seasons of growing, a letter from the bank arrived in Autumn 2016. As they were closing down high street branches their tenancy would come to an end and the garden would no longer be under their jurisdiction. "At that stage it was really unclear, we didn't know who was going to take on the lease. It could have just transferred over and we thought flats or a café would want it. The head grower at Growing Communities was calling and calling to get info and try to find out who was in charge but it was a nightmare. It felt like the strategy was not to put a face to a name, they wouldn't sit down for a meeting or anything."

In January, they finally heard back from the landlords who decided they were using the opportunity to kick everyone out of the building as well and convert the whole building into expensive flats. They had two weeks to leave.

Looking back, Hannah reflects "we should have acted in autumn. We didn't want to kick up a stink [but] that was when we could have tried to galvanise local people and get in the paper, because by the time it came round it was too late to campaign."

As a grower, she had no direct contact and eventually no power to influence the decision at all, despite putting the work in to make the garden function and manage the upkeep of their five kinds of salad, apricot, apple, pear and fruit trees.

As the gentrification of Stoke Newington continues another block of luxury apartments will mean the end of a vibrant community space where local kids spent time after school, cutting out the light and space for other growers in the area and perpetuating the increase in local property prices. The plants, like the people, were decanted out of the area finding new homes in growing projects in Chingford, Kilburn and Stepney.

Royal Hill Community Garden, Greenwich

After three years of watching a decrepit former police station carpark sit idle in the heart of Greenwich, the members of Royal Hill Community Garden came together to convert it into an open green space. Acting as a garden for those who were getting nowhere on the allotment waiting list of over a hundred years and a quiet space for locals, especially families with young children and older people in the area who prefer it to the hugely touristy Greenwich Park.

Two and a half years before they'd started working on the council-owned land, a planning application to build on the area was unanimously rejected due to local resistance, leaving the gardeners secure in the belief that even without a lease, it was likely to remain untouched. But less than a month after a discrete visit from an Evaluations Officer who, at the time, didn't make himself known, a new planning application

appeared in the council which would mean the end of the garden.

Luckily, the garden's members acted immediately after seeing the laminated planning application tacked around lampposts in the area. The plan was to put two houses and two apartments with a carpark in the middle with one car parking space for each unit.

The garden was incredibly lucky to have amongst its members and supporters a lawyer who was able to advise on their objection and a journalist who was able to get an Evening Standard journalist to come and report on the story. The editor of the local newspaper was also very supportive in covering the story and they were able to whip up a campaign at speed. They submitted an application in a thousand characters to the website (having learnt that objections by post had previously been ignored) and immediately went to councillor surgeries seeking support.

Initially, they were unable to get any councillors on side as all three were on the area planning committee. As resistance amped up however, the decision went to the borough planning committee and the councillors were freed of the conflict of interest to come out in support of the garden.

The absence of democracy in the process was clear, with no public consultation proposed and a farcical meeting with the members of the garden, which the council never followed up. They stuck to their argument pointing to Greenwich park – a tourist attraction – and Gloucester circus – a privately owned properly, as alternatives. Accessing the council and trying to find the right person to speak to was wildly complicated as staff rotation is so high and the local councillors link to the planning committee made things even more difficult.

Nonetheless, on the day of the hearing the council amazingly voted against the planning application that they had submitted. A hard campaign and some thorough research meant that the garden was saved by some Sycamore trees(!) which would have been lost and a car park which meant that cars crossing a busy footpath would be a danger to the community.

*Grow Heathrow, West Drayton,
Uxbridge*

Grow Heathrow, like Royal Hill, started working on the land with no lease in place and like Kynaston Garden, sits on privately owned land. Unlike either of them however, Grow Heathrow's future still hangs in the balance as its occupiers sit on trial against Lewdown Holdings, the landowners.

Grow Heathrow was initially set up in 2010 by a collective of climate activists to resist the proposal to building a third runway at Heathrow. Intending to have a sustained presence in the area they took over what was then an illegal dump site and converted it into a community space and

started growing fruit trees, bushes, potatoes, garlic, tomatoes and harvesting to minimise consumption.

The site occupies three and a half acres owned by a company who have repeatedly failed in securing planning permission due to community resistance on ecological grounds and the fact that the land sits on the green belt. Since their arrival the members of Grow Heathrow have focused on developing a space that welcomes workshops, sharing circles, harvest festivals and is a model of sustainable living from their compost toilets to biochar and grey water systems.

The court case has been a long time coming after Lewdown discovered the occupation in 2014. As well, plans for the third runway changed taking them out of the runway path and the airport has spent millions on lobbyists to secure support those in parliament. With the Conservative party in government in power plans to halt expansion simply disappeared. Heathrow now looks set to be the biggest point of emissions in the UK from its construction in 2030, bringing with it more hotels and infrastructure, increased noise and air pollution, which is already breaking limits.

For the site itself the struggle continues as Lewdown Holdings will likely turn it into luxury flats should they win the case. The first day of the court case was met by a demo on April 3rd and Grow Heathrow continue to demonstrate the community benefit of their work both in food growing and in the use of the community space.

Resisting eviction and holding on to space is certainly one of the greatest threats to a community food growing movement up against the absurd levels of financial gain which incentivise property development in the capital. Knowing your rights and understanding your tenure is crucial but even in the midst of a broken system, fights can and will be won.



Introducing the Ecological Land Co-op, securing the future of farming

Who are the next generation of growers? Unemployment, home ownership, careers: these are just some of the concerns we face as individuals, including those getting into farming.

New entrants to farming have almost no possibility of buying a farm in England: the cost of land and rural housing is just too high. New farmers have the passion and skills needed to change how farming is done, and how society is fed, but the route into agriculture is a tough path for those seeking to create a land-based livelihood.

Creativity, however, is the preserve of small-scale agro-ecological farmers and organisations looking to shake up the system. From micro-dairies to community supported agriculture, the culture of agriculture is riotously beautiful. Food Assemblies and the likes of Farm Drop and the Open Food Network seek to shorten supply chains bringing producers and punters closer together.

And what about the producers who steward the land with an ethic of ecological awareness, a respect for biological limitations with a view to produce fine, fresh food? So many small-scale farms nurture such creativity but their existence as sustainable businesses is tough in a system where bigger equals better.

Organisations such as the Ecological Land Co-operative (ELC) and the Kindling Trust work around food and agricultural practice as a way of addressing social, economic and environmental problems. Creating alternatives to the dominant model of industrial production, by focusing on food, both organisations work to create opportunities and sites for ecological farming and as genuine opportunity for future farmers.

The ELC is a social enterprise, co-operative in structure, and was set up to address the lack of affordable sites for ecological land-based livelihoods in England. Helping create 'starter farms', the ELC focuses on removing barriers to accessing land. For many, access to land may come in the form of tenancy or community supported agriculture which is a great way to get people and land together. But for many having security of tenure is paramount. For those seeking to develop a land-based livelihood, the ELC opens up such an option.

Set up in 2009, the ELC purchases agricultural land, obtains planning permission, and installs shared infrastructure to create clusters of affordable residential smallholdings, or 'starter farms'. Costs of land are kept low and the holdings are sold on a long and secure leasehold, well below market value.

Small-scale agro-ecological farming needs to

have a secure place in the future of farming if we want to provide good food, for everyone, with as little impact to the biosphere as possible, facing up to challenges of climate change and toxic economics.

According to the UN 75 percent of the world's food come from 12 plants and five animal species. This makes the global food system incredibly vulnerable to the shocks of climate change and imbalances in nature. For smallholders biodiversity is the cornerstone of good farming practice; polycultures with climate-resilient, unique, genetically diverse varieties of plants and breeds. Despite the force of the global food system many of the world's farmers work on ten hectares or less employing low-impact mixed agriculture. For example, around eighty percent of farmland in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia is managed by smallholders.

Current trends in UK agriculture show an increase in farm consolidation: small farms that are no longer deemed viable are being consolidated into larger farms. Over a third of farms in England are less than 20 hectares but they have access to only 3.5% of agricultural land. Added to this, the average age of today's farmer in the UK is 59.

Small-scale agro-ecological farms are hubs for re-ruralisation helping create a range of benefits to communities (employment, rural skills, access to local sustainable food) and ecosystems (reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, protecting biodiversity).

This is why starter farms have to work. The ELC's 2017 share offer aims to generate funds for the development of two new clusters of small farms. They are looking to raise between £120,000 to £340,000. Working with Ethex — the positive savings and investment platform that makes it easy to make money do good — investors are offered 3% in interest on share capital annually.

The ELC is the only organisation in England to offer affordable residential smallholdings for ecological land users. As a co-operative they rely on the support of their members and the public. Withdrawable community shares are a great way for people to back projects financially whilst getting a return on their capital.

Funding future farms is vital for the continuation of ecologically minded agriculture which puts people before profit and seeks to redress the wrongs of runaway industrial farming.

To find out more about the ELC and their share offer please visit www.ethex.org.uk/ecologicallyland Phil Moore, of the ELC, works in film and communications. He tweets at @permapeople

Who is a Consumer?

Food relationships and power: a look at human paradigms of consumption.

Whilst at school we learn about food webs and food chains defined as hierarchies of consumption. Each plant, and then each animal species obtains their nutrition through ascending layers of energy, becoming increasingly complex as it passes up the chain or across the web.

Primary producer species, such as grass: wheat or sugar cane, trap the energy of the sun through photosynthesis and converts it to starch or sugar. A primary consumer, a herbivore, say a buffalo or a gorilla comes along and eats the grass and converts it into mainly protein and fat. A secondary consumer, a carnivore or omnivore, perhaps a tiger or a human comes along and eats the herbivore and also converts it into protein and fat and possibly also, an aptitude for speed or intelligence.

All the above may be feasted upon by consumers such as bacteria, fungi or viruses. Different food chains or webs are found in different ecologies and are fine tuned for positive feedback unless a natural disaster or humans affect their environments and in such cases the system tries to re-equilibrate, where possible.

Living species are part of a complex web of interactions in which there are multiple interdependencies and balances. A food chain is really just a model to understand the link between species of different 'trophic levels' (the distinct group of species with similar eating habits and position in a food chain). It helps explain biomass at the different trophic levels and the energy passing through the system.

Humans are unique in being a species which can consume at every level of the chain and who live in ways which distort the delicate balance of a food web. In fact we can upset several food webs existing in multiple biomes simultaneously and we attempt to live in such a way as to remove all potential predators which would otherwise keep our numbers in check. We also regularly decimate numbers within our own trophic level for no other purpose than, ultimately, greed. Greed in the service of more greed.

Yet humans studying the intentional production of biomass, specifically geared towards our consumption, carried out in human-constructed systems of production, refer to some humans in such a system as consumers and another set as producers. How much sense does this really make?

In terms of promoting and encouraging our sustainable existence as one of the species of planet earth, how does such nomenclature assist? Does it promote a sense of balance between ourselves or even between ourselves and the food webs of which we are supposed to be a part? Have we evolved beyond being a part of a planetary food

web and if so, what are the consequences?

It would seem to be apparent that humans have replaced the food webs in which they were formerly part of, and dependent upon. We have constructed whole new systems, called agri or horti -culture or even agroforestry and forestry, fisheries and such like. We occupy them as if they were completely independent of any natural, earth based systems and we absolutely minimise our impact upon the 'parallel' natural ecosystems.

This is not however true. We have been evolving slowly and then at an increasingly rapid pace away from being a part of natural food webs. From forager, hunter and trapper, where we too were hunted we have become beings which create digitally automated systems to coerce nature into obeying our time frames, our sources of nutrients within massively altered environments and by using increasingly altered genetic material to wild type equivalents. We are doing so as if pushed by an imperative based upon rational and reasonable interpretations of data that are uncontested and for which we have received a global democratic mandate.

Such is the situation in which we find ourselves, in contradiction with nature, science and each other that we seek arguably more and more false solutions to the cul-de-sacs we head towards. We colonise other people's lands, water and energy; intensify farming systems; seek to constrain and alter human diets and gradually demolish wildlife and wildspace. We rely on robots and nanobots and 3D technology. We cultivate vertically, abandon rotations and grow underground.

Have nature's tertiary consumers now become primary producers under an artificial sun?

Who then are the consumers we speak of who are now disempowered by supermarket and farmer alike to occupy niches of consumption more attuned to pocket than to participatory democracy?

In more human-centred systems, the world over, people struggle to retain ways of relating to earth in time honoured ways. Ways in which the pace of production is something the ecosystem has a chance of 'keeping up with', ways in which the Earth is respected and engaged with as a being. These are ways in which farmers and agriculture are not labels to be studied but part of a way of being and inhabiting space. Will these ways wither in an age of technological dominance and the arrogance of knowledge, digitally generated?

Maybe we need to reconsider our role as consumer in the widest sense of the word. To reconsider and reflect upon the way in which we consume all of earth's resources in the name of production. Maybe we need to reconnect with natural ecosystems and respect those who still seek to and their ways of being and doing. Maybe we need to rename ourselves and our sciences, our knowledge and rationalities. Maybe the way forward is to co-produce more and study the food

webs and food chains we used to be part of and reconsider what it is to be a balanced co-consumer, a part of and not separate from Mother Earth.

Mama D, Community Centred Knowledge



Eighteen Months On at Sutton Community Farm, A Growing Apprentice's Review

The Growing Apprentice at Sutton Community Farm (SCF) is an integral part of the farm's framework. Both practically and ideologically, this role is key in achieving the farm's mission to inspire people to engage with an alternative, sustainable food system. Not only does it increase access to local food through production but provides a fairly paid opportunity for beginner growers to build on skills on a sufficiently large scale.

Paying London Living Wage really sets the scheme apart as so many community food projects are only able to pay in surplus veggies. If we want to change broken system, we have to ask what we're doing to attract new entrant farmers; can we expect people to work entirely for free? A London Living wage allows a more diverse range of people to apply and not just those potentially privileged enough to survive life in London with an unpaid job.

The apprentice scheme spans two summer seasons on our 7.1 acre site with a crucial winter of planning in between. The initial summer was a whirlwind of fairly clueless hard graft, whilst I attempted to absorb as much as possible for the year ahead. Winter marked the time to sit down and get our head round the intricacies of our three main crop rotations and was extremely helpful as a way of properly getting to grips with the extensive planning.

The early sowing of our beloved Florence Long onions marked the beginning of my first full year as a small-scale farmer and the pressure was on to build on everything I had learned the year before. A relentlessly wet spring pushed my life-long vegetarianism to new extremes – taking to miserable morning massacres of record-breaking slug populations!

Once the clouds cleared and the soil firmed up I was finally able to jump onto Rosa, our rusty Massy Ferguson and put my juvenile tractor skills to work alongside developing my skills clearing beds, spreading compost and practicing tilling and rotavating. With the London skyline in view, tractor work is another fairly rare experience for other London-based growers. Although we prioritise people power over firing up Rosa, it's necessary for some tasks and also provides apprentices with a core skill if moving on to larger sites.

During the 18 months I set up irrigation systems, organic pest control and so many other tasks associated with growing over 150 cultivars of vegetable! The myriad of other tasks included: community engagement, tractor maintenance, event organising, volunteer co-ordination, farm tours, school visits, infrastructural improvements, restaurant sales, making (and changing!) decisions

by the hundred, and even a day or two of plumbing! It's a hugely diverse job and I've been exposed to many of the challenges and successes involved with running such a multi-faceted social enterprise.

Future applicants should be aware this is not for the faint-hearted! Highlights included harvesting kale with numb hands in the pouring rain, planting out cucumbers in 45°C polytunnel heat and spreading compost for hours on end. Nonetheless, working outside is definitely something I've loved and it certainly leaves you feeling fit and energised, unlike many of my piers stale office jobs.

When you reach peak harvest time, it's incredibly rewarding seeing, and tasting, what everyone's efforts have amounted to. With the harvest festival display bursting with incredible colours, flavours and smells, the memories of toil seem to fade away. Besides, at the heart of SCF is its community members, a significant number of whom are dedicated volunteers, some who have been coming since day one back in 2010! Since our first community share offer in 2015, the farm is now co-owned by over 170 invested members, securing the farms future stability.

Furthermore, studying the Level 2 Extended Certificate in Horticulture at Organiclea has enabled me to add a theoretical framework to my practical experience at SCF and I highly recommend the cohesion of the two. The Real Oxford Farming Conference, an exchange visit with apprentices at Keats Community Organics and the Land Workers Alliance's 'Matter of Scale' gathering were all hugely valuable experiences in expanding my knowledge of different crops and farming techniques. Moreover they really helped me to feel a part of a wider network of new entrant small-scale farmers, igniting the feeling of being involved in a hugely important social, environmental and political movement.

My time as Growing Apprentice has been a hugely enjoyable, rewarding and inspiring experience. I have learnt so much and had the pleasure of sharing my time with so many marvellous people! I highly recommend any food and farming enthusiasts to apply or at the very least continue to involve themselves in the sustainable farming movement at a time when it's more necessary than ever.

*Find out more about Sutton at
suttoncommunityfarm.org
and become a member with their
community share offer at
suttoncommunityfarm.org.uk/join-in/buy-a-share/*



If You Don't Know, Now You Know, Welcoming Stuart Taylor CFGN's New Social Enterprise Worker

Dear Colleagues

It's a real pleasure to introduce myself to you as the new Social Enterprise Worker (SEW) with Community Food Growers Network (CFGN). I began in March this year in my 2 days per week post, alongside my Network Coordinator colleagues Natalie and Zahra. The principle focus of my time with CFGN will be on establishing the existing capacity, expertise and strengths within individual member projects and collectively across the Network and looking at leveraging these from an enterprise perspective.

I recognise that not all projects have the ambition to become market-facing trading entities in the conventional sense of a market economy. However, it's pragmatic to begin with the premise that all members across CFGN need to have a focus on their individual resilience, sustainability and long term community-connection. To this end an 'entrepreneurial mind-set' is of real value. Without doubt, in each member project there will be areas of community / professional connection, expertise, resourcing and knowledge regarding the locality or area within which each growing project is located. I see a big part of my role as being to help facilitate making these resources and their income-generating potential transparent and actionable to members. I suggest that it is of collective benefit to be able to trade services and products within the local community, be that with other community-oriented social enterprises, the education, social welfare, civil society, local authority and commercial sectors too. Each has a credible role to play in maintaining a sustainable balance socially, economically and environmentally.

Prior to joining CFGN I've worked for around twenty five years across the public, private and third sectors. I've completed formal trainings in: Systemic Constellations, Facilitation, Project management, Systemic leadership, Digital media production, Film-making, Contemporary dance and Design. I've got quite extensive international travel experience and have lived in rural and urban UK locations. Currently, home is north London; I've previously been an Allotmenteer at the Hampstead Heath allotments.

In recent years I've worked in participatory arts, strategic advising and with sufferers of substance misuse at Macmillan Cancer Support, The RSA, Southern Housing Foundation and the Ubele Initiative; an intergenerational leadership