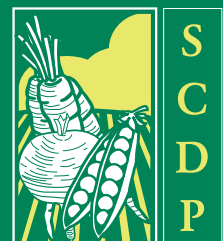


Growing Interest

*An opportunity to share news and views
with others working on community food
growing in Scotland*

Tuesday 30 April 2002

Oswald Hall
Scottish Agricultural College
Auchincruive



Scottish Community
Diet Project

*Supporting local
communities tackling
inequalities in
diet and health*

Thank you

A big thank you to Debbie, Susan and others who took notes, as well as the workshop leaders who prepared materials in advance and ensured the workshops ran on time.

Last, but certainly not least, we would like to thank all those who attended the conference. Everyone's opinions were not only welcome but essential in ensuring the event reflected the needs, concerns and hopes for the future of all those working in Scotland on issues of community food growing.

Other reports from SCDP

The Scottish Community Diet Project has published reports from all the conferences and seminars which it has run. All reports can be downloaded free from the SCDP website www.dietproject.org.uk or be ordered free by calling 0141 226 5261.

Overview

The Scottish Community Diet Project (SCDP) organised Growing Interest to launch Growing Interest: A Flavour of Community Growing in Scotland and provide a networking opportunity to those people working on or supporting community food growing projects.

The conference was designed to allow as much time as possible for participants to network and swap ideas. Nick Nairn helped set the scene with an introduction and Gillian Kynoch, the Food and Health Co-ordinator for Scotland, summed up the day. There were four workshops in the morning and four workshops in the afternoon for participants to choose from. These allowed a great range of issues to be discussed in small manageable groups.

About the Scottish Community Diet Project

The SCDP was set up in October 1996 as a result of recommendations in the Scottish Diet Action Plan published a few months earlier. It is funded by the Scottish Executive Health Department and operates under the auspices of the Scottish Consumer Council based in Glasgow.

The SCDP has the overriding aim of contributing to the government's national strategy to improve Scotland's diet and health, and the inequalities that exist within both, by increasing the effectiveness of those working within and with Scotland's low income communities to improve access to and take-up of a healthy, varied balanced diet.

To find out more about the SCDP visit www.dietproject.org.uk or call 0141 226 5261 and order a free information pack. The project publishes Fare Choice, a quarterly newsletter, which can be obtained either by downloading from the internet or calling the project to be put on the mailing list.

Conference Programme

9.45 Registration

10.15 Introduction by the Scottish Community Diet Project

10.20 Welcome to the Scottish Agricultural College

10.30 Nick Nairn

11.00 Community farms

Technical support for food growing

Growing in schools

Community growing on a croft

12.15 Lunch (from food grown on the college grounds) **and marketplace**

13.15 Jeremy Iles – Director, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
Tor Justad – Co-operative Affairs Officer (Highlands & Islands), Scottish Co-op.

13.45 Growing in the city

Horticultural therapy

Supporting sustainable community gardens

Starting a grow-your-own project

15.00 Summing up – Gillian Kynoch, Food and Health Co-ordinator Scotland

15.25 Tea and coffee

15.30 Finish

Keynote presentations

Dr Ivy Berkley – Scottish Agricultural College

Dr Berkley welcomed the conference participants by giving a brief history of the Auchencruive estate where the Scottish Agricultural College is situated, and indeed the significance of horticultural production to the estate, past and present:

‘Even before Richard Oswald, an 18th century city merchant, bought, shaped and transformed the estate of Auchencruive in 1764 into its present day splendour, the grounds of the now Scottish Agricultural College already had had a rich history of growing and feeding the local population of South Ayrshire. Prior to the estate being developed as it is today, much of the land around Auchencruive would have been divided into small rented strips of land and cultivated by the local community for crop production under the run-rig system of farming. Today, although these rigs have long disappeared, students of the agricultural college continue to cultivate the land as part of their horticulture and market gardening studies, making it a very appropriate choice of venue for the ‘Growing Interest’ conference.’

Nick Nairn

With a close personal interest in growing, particularly organic growing, Nick was delighted to lend his support to the event. He began by reminding delegates that

*‘Growing is one way
for Scotland to move
ahead and look
forward to a brighter
future!’*

despite Scotland having one of the most notoriously unsound diets in Western Europe, it is also the larder to some of the best and most nutritious produce in the world. This dichotomy is furthered heightened by the fact that Scotland also represents only 10 percent of the UK’s population, yet makes up 40 percent of the UK’s land mass. According to Nick, reinforcing Scotland’s ‘Scottishness’ and cultural food identity in

any way is crucial for lasting dietary change in Scotland, and one important way is by putting quality back into Scottish gardening and growing.

Farmers’ markets are one approach to getting produce to the public, and the growth in the number of these in recent times is encouraging. Nick, however, has observed that these tend to be dominated by meat producers rather than by fruit and vegetable sellers and feels that this is a missed opportunity to increase fruit and vegetable consumption in Scotland. He would like to see this imbalance addressed.

‘One barrier to this, however, is getting local-grown produce to the marketplace and onto people’s plates. One radical solution perhaps would be to make supermarkets legally bound to sell community grown local produce in their forecourts to create healthy competition as well as provide a point of sale for local growers.’

As a committed organic gardener, Nick is keen to embrace and spread organic principles more widely across Scotland – could Scotland be the world’s first organic nation?! he suggested. However, he also recognises that more fundamental to community-growing projects than their take-up or not of organic principles is the wider role that these projects play. Nick highlighted the enormous social dimension played by growing projects across Scotland.

‘As demonstrated by the range of initiatives represented at the event, these projects help better unite communities through growing as well as helping communities get in touch, perhaps for the first time, with the land and the very origins of food. The health spin-offs are also many from better nutrition, particularly for children, to the building of stronger, more robust and active communities of purpose.’

A short question session followed, which raised a number of important issues. It was noted that the seasonality of organic produce is in conflict with today’s ‘cuisine culture’ where chefs want produce in and out of season. He felt that this ‘all-year-round availability’ mindset can be altered by a gradual process of re-education about seasonality, not just for the public, but for chefs and food producers too.

Nick noted that there are many lessons to be learned from other countries too. In France, education about ‘real’ food is central to the pupils’ wider social and personal development he felt. The fast-food industry, sadly, is the main educator about food to many of Scotland’s children. He recognises that no single agency or person can achieve lasting and meaningful change to the multifactorial problems of Scotland’s eating habits, but like the Scottish Executive, he recognises that change is possible if all sectors of the food chain are working more effectively together.

‘In contrast to other European countries, Scotland historically has eaten to survive and continues to have less of a passionate gastronomic relationship with food.’

‘Ramming a healthy-eating message down children’s throats will do nothing to enthuse them.’ Instead Nick maintains that the government should plough more resources into challenging the multimillion pound fast-food machine and invest in Scotland’s long-term health.

Jeremy Iles – Director The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

‘City farms are free, flexible, fluffy, fun and difficult to quantify’

Jeremy outlined the scale and range which of the membership of the Federation enjoyed, and went on to outline its structure. It represents 65 city farms, 100 school

farms and 523 community gardens. Jeremy concentrated on the many and varied benefits achieved as a result of its members activities which include:

'Farms and gardens managed by the community for the community'

social inclusion
informal and formal education
knowledge of animals and plants
active involvement in community
healthy exercise
growing food at a local and sustainable level
growing sense of place and local pride
contribution to urban regeneration
contributing to well-functioning communities
bio diversity
recycling and innovation
a diverse user group and a multi-cultural base

'These farms and gardens are a catalyst for change'

Jeremy went on to describe ongoing initiatives south of the border, their commitment to partnership working north of the border, and their current efforts to seek funding for a lay worker network in Scotland similar to existing lay worker schemes in England. For more information about how you can get involved contact: The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, www.farmgarden.org.uk or call 0117 923 1800.

Tor Justad – Co-operative Affairs Officer (Highlands & Islands), Scottish Co-op

'Retailing is our most well-known image but we are also one of the largest farmers in Britain as well as burying the most people'

Tor spoke about the Scottish Co-op's support for local food initiatives which community growing initiatives should be able to benefit from.

1. A **membership team** with head office in Glasgow (& satellite offices in Inverness and Fife) which supports Co-op member's activities and works with organisations sharing similar values and principles.
2. **Community Dividend Scheme** providing grants of up to £5,000 for local community initiatives involving young people, the elderly, the environment, and other activities.
3. A **Community Food Dividend Card** available to community stores, food co-ops and other local food initiatives wishing to spend an average of £50 per week in a neighbouring Scottish Co-op *buddy* store which gives 10% off retail store prices, and includes membership team and retail support.

4. **Corporate Membership** for community stores and other co-operatives wishing to purchase in bulk using the stock and distribution system used by Co-op stores.
5. Access to **Co-operative Action Grants and Loans** from £5,000 to £200,000 for larger co-operative projects.

In addition the Co-op Group has supported the Organic Target Bill, debated in the Scottish Parliament and has developed a range of ethical and healthy eating initiatives, with a leading position in relation to Fair Trade.

'In Britain we think of public and private but rarely consider the co-operative option'

'We have examples of local shops buying direct from local suppliers'

For more information contact: Scottish Co-op, Membership Department, Robert Owen House, 87 Bath Street, Glasgow, G1 2EE. Visit www.co-op.co.uk, call 0141 304 5400 or e-mail membership@scottish.co-op.co.uk.

Workshops

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Community farms

This workshop took a closer look at what it means to grow organically in a community food initiative context. Sourcing funding for and making a community food initiative sustainable were also discussed.

Workshop leaders:

David Gallacher, Project and Volunteer Co-ordinator, Knowetop Community Farm

Participants:

Greg Piley, Soil Association

Jeremy Iles, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

David Kelso, Scottish Co-op

Mary McLean, Cearns Community Development Project

Norrie Smith, Slammanan Producer Co-op

Janet McComb, East Ayrshire Council

Jean Fraser, North Ayrshire Council

Iain Sanders, C.R.O.P.

Bert Cook, SAGS

Sally Roach, The Turner House

Annie Seeley, Sustain

Stephen Dann, Gowanbank Sustainable Village

David Gallacher began the workshop session with some background about the project, its aims and objectives.

'I have been employed at Knowetop Community Farm Project since August 2001, and do not claim to have all the answers, but thanks to a dedicated and hard-working staff and management committee we all feel that over the last few months we are all working towards the same targets and objectives, and for the first time we feel that we have a project that could be self-sustainable and achievable.'

Knowetop is the second longest-running city farm in the west of Scotland and opened over 21 years ago within Castlehill, an area of high unemployment and social deprivation in West Dunbartonshire.

The project aims to promote organic fruit and vegetable production and animal husbandry techniques, preserve rare and unusual animals, protect wildlife, promote education and provide recreational facilities to the local surrounding communities. The farm currently has a small organic vegetable-growing area of approximately 200m x 15m, which it is hoped will expand in the near future. The farm increasingly is working in partnership with other local community growers, the local community shop as well as local statutory bodies to develop its organic growing potential and open itself up to a wider market base.

David discussed with the group what organic farming means. He described it as a system of farming which encompasses: management practices which sustain soil health and fertility; the use of natural methods of pest, disease and weed control;

and maintaining high standards of animal welfare. Knowetop currently is not certified with an organic certification body as an organic grower but, using Lottery funding, the project is considering making an application to the Soil Association (one of the organic certification bodies) to become registered. David was keen to hear the views of the group as to whether Knowetop should pay for organic certification. The local surrounding area has high rates of unemployment, so the premium on certified organic produce may not be met. However the extra employment and training opportunities provided by a commercial oppotation may be welcome.

The group then moved onto a fuller discussion about funding and the need to ensure that projects first have a strategy and forward plan in place before seeking funds. Without such a plan, it is too easy for funders' agenda to drive the types of activities undertaken by community-growing projects. *'There is a need to source funding and know what you first want to fund. To just go for funds because they are available is simply a waste of time, energy and resources. Haphazard, reactionary activity is unlikely to be successful or sustainable.'*

Sustainability of growing initiatives was further explored during the workshop session. *'To be sustainable you need to know what you first want to sustain.'* Again the group highlighted the importance of forward planning to help improve the sustainability of growing activities.

The importance of working together was a further theme that emerged from the workshop. *'Taking the farm out to the community is as important as bringing the community into the farm.'* Forming links with local agencies, groups and individuals was recognised as being vital to the survival of Knowetop and other community-growing schemes.

David concluded the session with the Knowetop project's motto, which summed up many of the ideas explored during the workshop.

*We the willing
Led by the unknown
Are doing the impossible
For the ungrateful,
We have done so much for so little,
We are now qualified to do anything
With Nothing.*

Technical support

All community food projects, however big or small, will at some stage need to source technical information on food production. Technical information can often be baffling and expensive. This workshop gives groups some options.

Workshop leader:

Mark Sutton, Horticultural Advisor, Scottish Agricultural College

Participants:

Lesley Scott, Forward Scotland

Gillian Kynoch was present for part of the workshop

So how would community groups growing food access technical advice?

Unfortunately barriers exist:

The terminology can be off-putting, for example agriculture is often interpreted to mean farming.

In the past, government-funded agencies were able to provide advice, free of charge, to growers. However since cuts to funding in 1987, advice on growing has been chargeable by organisations like the Scottish Agricultural College.

Examples of potential sources of information were given by the workshop leader and these included books, commercial catalogues, internet sites, on-site visits by experts, email exchanges with experts, telephone calls to experts, training courses, demonstrations and open days.

The workshop focused on discussing the strengths and weaknesses of various sources of information.

E-mails can include digital photographs, which are helpful for diagnostic purposes.

The setting-up of community chat rooms, which could result in visits. However internet access is still limited.

Advice found in books and on the internet cannot completely replace personal experience.

There are internet sites and telephone helplines set up by gardening programmes, like the *Beechgrove Garden* and *Gardeners' Question Time*.

There are barriers to community groups getting involved in technical training which is often designed for full-time commercial growers. However childcare provision and distant learning can get around these.

Open days at individual gardens, other community projects, commercial farms and colleges are a great opportunity to network and find out what other producers are doing.

Site visits by experts are expensive.

Taking one community food group to meet another food group and taking experts to meet those groups, on their own territory, is often one of the best methods of delivering technical advice.

Advice on the www

1. Government-funded projects e.g. www.horttips.co.uk
(Horticultural Technology Into Profits)
2. Relevant organisations e.g. www.sags.org.uk
(Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society)
3. Commercial organisations e.g. www.biological-crop-protection.co.uk
(Biological Crop Protection Ltd)

It was suggested that learning can be two-way and it would be beneficial for Scottish Agricultural College students to have the option of placements with community groups so that they can learn about the technical advice needs of community groups.

Growing schools

Using an example presented by the deputy head teacher of a school which has started a growing project, the Grounds for Learning team showed the benefits of growing projects in schools and how they can be supported in Scotland.

Workshop leaders:

Joyce Gilbert, Project Manager Grounds For Learning
Penny Martin, Project Manager Grounds For Learning
Fiona Dunlop, Deputy Headteacher Lawthorn Primary School

Participants:

John Butterworth, Food Connections
Kay Johnson, South Coatbridge SIP
Heather Sloan, Have a Heart Paisley
Bill Kerr, Growing Abilities
Linda Boodhna, Fife Primary Care NHS Trust
Sharman Kirkwood, Voluntary Action Resource Centre
Helen Cairns, Forward Scotland
Jennifer MacVicar, Argyll and Bute Education
Tommy Lusk, Phoenix Health Project
Jean Fraser, North Ayrshire Council
Theresa Doherty, Student
Bob Bull, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
Iain Goodbrand, Edinburgh Community Food Initiative
David Black, Communicable Health
Bill Gray, Scottish Community Diet Project
Nick Nairn

The large attendance at this workshop, from a range of settings and with varied levels of experience, had two main interests. One was generally to gather information on good practice from elsewhere and the second to look specifically at how to engage with teachers, parents, education departments and local communities.

After introducing the Grounds for Learning organisation and promoting School Grounds Week 2002¹ (16th to 20th September), key aspects of school growing projects were illustrated by slides showing activity from around the country.

*'School gardens act as a
bridge to the wider
community'*

The experience of an Ayrshire school was given, emphasising the importance of starting small and building. Not being over-ambitious and recognising the importance of consultation and partnership working was highlighted, along with generating a feeling of ownership and involvement by pupils and staff. Differing starting points were also raised, exemplified by the presenter's school having got into growing via literary activity funded by an Arts Council grant.

¹ www.ltl.org.uk/scotland

The workshop discussion confirmed that time and careful planning were key factors in developing a feeling of ownership by pupils, targeting excluded groups, minimising vandalism, building teachers' confidence, tackling parental obsessions with cleanliness and dealing with local authority knee-jerk reactions to the current culture of litigation.

*'Growing, cooking and
then eating the food is a
celebration'*

Sharing good practice was not only an outcome of the workshop itself but also identified as a crucial role for national agencies to play in ensuring local practitioners get all the help and support they require to sustain and develop their achievements.

'It is enthusiasm you require not green fingers'

Community growing on a croft

An overview of both the box scheme's evolution and operation as well as talk on the parallel evolution of the Horticultural Development Association - its constitution, achievements and ambitions.

Workshop leader:

Chris Marsh, grower supported by Skye & Lochalsh Horticultural Development Association

Participants:

Fiona Thackeray, Thrive

Mick Marston, The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

Alan Carter, Healthy Roots

Angus Rice, IDEA

Eleanor Mitchell, Knowetop Community Farm

Victoria Williams, Sustain

Tor Justad, The Co-op

And Gillian Kynoch for a time

Chris explained how he ended up tending a croft on Skye. He is a trained forester who worked for the Scottish Crofters' Union which lobbied for support for small-scale agriculture. He took on a croft because he believed it was a modern sustainable way of life. He tops up his income in the winter months by drawing from this experience as a forester and felling and pruning trees.

His croft is on the coast and exposed to strong winds and sea gales which can burn the foliage but also protect crops from frost in the winter. Skye has long summer days and short winters.

Chris uses chicken droppings from a RSPB chicken keeper next door. The farmer used to spread the waste on the beach before. Chris explained that he didn't want to grow just potatoes and turnips but was keen to provide a range of fruit and vegetables such as lettuces, herbs and tomatoes. To do this he needed a polytunnel.

He is an organic grower certified by the Soil Association. This means he has to rotate the crops like a traditional kitchen garden. One of the main problems he came across was the need for compost. However he has since constructed more compost areas. He grows: globe artichokes, sage, borrag, cucumbers, potatoes, carrots, beetroot, lettuce, Savoy cabbage, oregano, garlic and chillies.

He runs a box scheme for the local community. Although there is a long waiting list of people who would like to receive a box he has not inflated his prices and charges at Co-op store prices for non-organic produce (sixteen miles away). There is an ageing population which doesn't have a significant amount of money to spend on food. He cross-subsidises by selling at top whack to restaurants makes a profit from selling to tourists.

Lettuces sold to hotels and restaurants provide a substantial cash crop which can be used to develop the business. Chris explained how different varieties of fruit and vegetables were popular with the community and he now grows fourteen different varieties of potatoes including Shetland black.

The box scheme only runs between June and September and supplied fifty boxes, compared to thirty boxes last year. In answer to questions from the group he explained that he has never devoted time to publicising the scheme whatsoever. In the small community word travels fast and he has a waiting list as long as the number of boxes.

The Horticultural Development Association (HAD) was started eight years ago. HAD is looking to support new growers and can provide training and mentoring schemes. The HAD is funded by the Highland Council and local enterprise company.

Growing in the city

This workshop was jointly facilitated by Sheila Richard, Manager of the Belmont Lane Project with the Coach House Trust in Glasgow, and Poppy Gibson who also works at the Belmont Project. The session explored the potential for food growing in urban and city areas throughout Scotland.

Workshop leaders:

Sheila Richard, Fundraiser and Project Manager, The Coach House Trust

Participants:

David Kelso, Scottish Co-op

Bert Cook, Scottish Allotment and Garden Society

Annie Seeley, Sustain

Gillian Kynoch, Scottish Executive

Mick Marston, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

Iain Goodbrand, Edinburgh Community Food Initiative

Alan Carter, Healthy Roots

Sheila began by explaining the work of the Coach House Trust in Glasgow and her experience with food growing in cities. The Coach House Trust seeks to challenge the economic and social exclusion of adults who are recovering from problems associated with mental health, addiction and learning difficulties. Horticulture is one of the project's most successful approaches to rehabilitating adults experiencing such problems and at the same time helps regenerate some of Glasgow's unsightly gap sites. Glasgow has 1400 hectares of derelict land from previous usage, usually in the form of vacant and unsightly gap sites throughout the city. The Coach House Trust has been granted planning permission from Glasgow City Council over the last few years to restore eight such gap sites by transforming them into green spaces. One such project has involved the refurbishment of the coach houses and the surrounding ground in Belmont Lane, West Glasgow.

Sheila and Poppy shared with the group an album of stunning photographs charting the transformation of the waste ground and dilapidated coach houses into what is now an oasis of green and a hive of activity, which has drawn together a team of committed volunteers from all walks of life.

Finding words to describe not only the physical transformation of the environment, but also the transformation experienced by many of the project's volunteers is something Sheila and Poppy can only begin to convey: *'If you could only just bottle a tiny amount of what's happening in that garden you would make a fortune! The community buzz and spirit is just awesome.'*

The discussion explored the difficulties encountered in gaining planning permission from local authorities in order to make these radical changes happen. Sheila commented that they also had at times hit difficulties, but problems in gaining access to areas was largely overcome by persistence and developing a positive mindset: *'Even although planning permission may only be granted to the Coach House Trust for five years to re-develop a site, then that is five years more than*

never having a community garden for local people to enjoy at all. There is pleasure to be shared and enjoyed even if just in the short term. Nothing is ever set in tablets of stone when it comes to land use and ownership, but it is always worth running with your ideas as you can only be told no.'

Poppy listed a number of issues that the project had come across as things that they needed to get right. These included: committed people (staff and volunteers); the support of the local community; a gap site that is available with planning permission granted; support from the local authority; start-up costs; lots of hard graft and elbow grease; multiskilled people as well as people who think that they have no particular skills to offer but are willing to learn and are enthusiastic to do so; networking and open days to get the local community more involved.

Sheila concluded by discussing the difficulty in evaluating the soft and fluffy indicators that accompany growing projects. *'It is not easy to quantify changes in people even though you can see and feel them happening after they begin to get involved.'* The group suggested positive indicators of success could include evidence such as increasing project attendance or comparing the number of visits to a GP before and after volunteering. The group concluded that convincing funders of the worth in growing projects is an ongoing task, but health improvement, even though not always easy to express as a pie chart or percentage, still is a major outcome of the activity and should not be overlooked or trivialised.

Horticultural therapy

Thrive supports a network of specialist projects that run programmes of horticultural activity for training and employment, therapy and health. A development officer has recently been appointed and outlined her programme of activity in the workshop. The Todd Hill Centre which has already received support from Thrive explained how they provide employment opportunities for people with learning difficulties.

Workshop leaders:

Fiona Thackeray, Development Officer Scotland, Thrive

Jimmy Wilcox, Todd Hill Centre

Participants:

Tommy Lusk, Phoenix Health Project

David Gallacher, Knowetop Community Farm

Janet McComb, East Ayrshire Council

Joyce Gilbert, Grounds for Learning

Penny Martin, Grounds for Learning

Gillian Kynoch was present for part of the workshop

Thrive has recently appointed Fiona to build a network and support gardening in Scotland. She will be setting up training and mentoring schemes and raising awareness among policy-makers and the public. The idea of gardening as therapeutic is not new. Thrive was originally established in 1978 as the Society for Horticultural Therapy. It is a nationwide charity aiming to use gardening to change people's lives. It supports 150 projects in Scotland and 1600 in the UK. It supports a huge variety of initiatives and only stipulates that gardening is used to help someone who is marginalised or disadvantaged. Those who benefit include people rehabilitating from strokes, blind gardeners, those with other sensory disabilities, those with behavioural problems, those with mental health and learning disabilities and people with neural trauma. Settings include prisons, hospitals, care homes and schools. The initiatives supported share the same broad aim but their formats differ hugely.

Jimmy Wilcox from the Todd Hill Centre, an initiative supported by Thrive, gave an overview of the work done there. Todd Hill Farm was originally set up in 1897 to get youths off the streets of Glasgow and provide training for employment. In 1940 it began targeting people with learning disabilities rather than the long-term unemployed. Agriculture became more mechanised and this posed problems for those with learning difficulties. Agriculture tailed off and horticulture became the focus of work. Horticulture is enjoyed more as people are able to enjoy showing off their plants. The work gives adults with learning disabilities the opportunity to try out new skills and interact with people from the community. There are learning opportunities for those who do not do well in formal educational settings. All the work is done on site with the exception of some small gardening maintenance projects.

The workshop participants drew up a list of the benefits of gardening: health benefits associated with activity and fresh air, social interaction from a shared interest,

improved self-esteem, experience of success, local biodiversity/pride in local area, relaxing and stress-relieving, cheap, family orientated, breaks down barriers and can involve anyone. Participants spoke of evidence of the benefits of gardening to those with arthritis, depression and obesity and evidence that gardening results in shortened healing times. It also can result in the production of fresh, cheap food, give people the opportunity to be creative and give people a sense of responsibility. It is a very flexible activity that can serve as a hook to other interests such as cooking. It can be done on any scale.

Thrive has recently won an award to look at the benefits of gardening through research with adults. There are problems in measuring the benefits of gardening but a measure would be useful when applying for grants.

Workshop participants drew up a list of current political buzzwords – these included, *joined-up thinking, sustainability, capacity-building, biodiversity, community, empowerment, social inclusion, lifelong learning, active participation, citizenship and stakeholder.*

Fiona pointed out that the benefits of gardening which had previously been outlined fulfilled all of the aims within current political thinking. This has implications for funding applications. It was also pointed out that successful projects require time and the necessary five to ten timescales do not produce outcomes quickly enough for funders.

Supporting sustainable communities

Forward Scotland² gave a presentation on how sustainable development could be promoted through supporting community gardens and the importance of applying their organisation's principles of empowerment, partnership working, integration and equity. This was followed by a look at the experience of a project in Aberdeen supported by Forward Scotland.

Workshop leaders:

Lesley Scott, Forward Scotland
Alan Carter, Volunteer, Healthy Roots

Participants:

John Butterworth, Food Connections
Kay Johnson, South Coatbridge SIP
Heather Sloan, Have a Heart Paisley
Bill Kerr, Growing Abilities
Linda Boodhna, Fife Primary Care NHS Trust
Sharman Kirkwood, F.R.A.C
Jean Fraser, NAC
Steven Dann, The Turner House
Fiona Dunlop, Lawthorn Primary
Sally Roach, The Turner House
Tor Justad, The Scottish Co-op
Jeremy Iles, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens
Greg Piley, Soil Association
Bill Gray, Scottish Community Diet Project

This well attended workshop involved participants with a wealth of experience keen to explore the ups and downs of developing sustainable community gardens.

Discussions centered around what was needed to build as effective and sustainable community gardens as possible, with time, planning and involvement all highlighted as key factors.

*'With a growing initiative,
the first thing you need isn't
land it's a plan'*

*'There isn't one
community...there are lots of
communities and some people
feel part of none'*

The need to think long term was stressed, but publicising and celebrating short-term achievements was also recognised as useful, both for the local community and relevant agencies and funders.

It was felt a skills audit was a good starting point to ensure local skills and experience were not being overlooked and as a way to involve more people.

Options for avoiding vandalism were raised, including garden design, plant choice and CCTV. However it was generally agreed that maximising the feeling of local

² www.forward-scotland.org.uk

involvement and ownership, targeting excluded groups and not giving up at the first setback, would yield benefits over time.

Innovation, imagination and fun were highlighted as important and no better exemplified than by the *Healthy Heart* growing tub aimed at healthy eating and its *Wind in the Willows* companion designed to reduce flatulence.

*'I look on stolen
fruit as a
contribution to
local healthy
eating'*

'Grow your own' horticultural project

The Cearns project is situated in the most populated area of Lewis. It has brought fresh fruit and vegetables to a community that had suffered a limited choice of produce brought by ferry from the mainland. The project is considering how it can benefit some of the other areas of the island and cope with success.

Workshop leaders:

Mary McLean, Cearns Project Co-ordinator, Stornaway

Tina Macdonald, Senior Health Promotion Officer, Isle of Lewis (not able to attend on the day)

Participants:

Victoria Williams, Sustain

Angus Rice, Islay Disabled Endeavours & Actions

Chris Marsh, organic crofter

Mark Sutton, Scottish Agricultural College

Bob Bull, Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

Jeniffer MacVicar, Argyll and Bute Education

Theresa Doherty, student

Eleanor Mitchell, Knowetop Community Farm

Iain Sanders, C.R.O.P

John Butterworth, Food Connections

Norrie Smith, Slammanan Producer Co-op

Mary explained that Tina Macdonald - senior health promotion officer, Isle of Lewis was unable to attend the conference and help lead this workshop.

The growing project is situated near the largest housing estate in the Western Isles. Through the results of a Health Needs Assessment a sub-committee was set up to look at the possibility of growing fruit and vegetables for the community.

Mary explained *'If you're approaching funding organisations, they like you to have models and documents so we produced a Venn diagram.'* Mary talked through the issues on the Venn diagram and explained that *'We have some issues which are similar to the mainland and some which aren't.'*

Capital funding was relatively easy to find compared to revenue funding. The project was turned down by Sustainable Scotland to cover the wages of two people for a year. However the project worked out that they could be employed on other environmental initiatives at other times in the year and this would be a way round having to look for full-time wages.

Two beautiful polytunnels are up and a mass of fruit and vegetables growing. The project sells produce through the community shop. Hotels have shown interest in buying produce. Children from the community visit the site to learn about growing. The kids are encouraged to pick berries themselves and learn about how berries grow and when they are ready to eat.

Mary also talked about the sheep culture on Lewis. Raising sheep was seen as a lifestyle and few crofters could visualise other uses for a croft such as fruit and vegetable production. The crofting community has however thought about selling soap, made from the by-product of sheep husbandry, on the internet as a form of croft diversification.

A discussion followed about why this project had sprung up in the most urban area on Lewis when similar projects on other islands were in isolated villages. Mary explained that although the growing started in the most densely populated area, remote crofts are now considering horticulture as a form of diversification. A retired crofter wished to donate a croft to the project as it wasn't being used.

Mary concluded by saying that the problem on Lewis was the need to harness the physical ability of the youngsters and the knowledge of the elderly and combine it.

Closing remarks

Gillian Kynoch, Food and Health Co-ordinator for Scotland

Gillian began by commenting on the *'sheer joy and enthusiasm of participating in a day with the people who are already undertaking the turning around of Scotland's food and health policy.'*

A flip-chart was used from a workshop group to show the discussions which had taken place during the day.

Projects such as those represented at the event are making a real difference on so many different levels to Scotland's food and health problems.

Gillian concluded the session by asking the participants to share their *take-home messages*. These included:

- Growing projects work across generational gaps and help bring communities closer together
- Growing projects are helping to change and challenge Scottish food culture
- Strength in numbers and shared experiences at the event highlight the importance of the need to continue networking and keep the communication links between groups and agencies alive
- Joined-up working is not free – the cost is that action is needed too
- Growing could be a real alternative to Scotland's currently failing food economy – projects at grassroots are already actively participating and making a real difference.

Participants' contact details

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- Notes -



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