



Food Exeter

Working for sustainable and healthy food for all in Exeter

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Community Growing – the future?

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1. Introduction

Food Exeter is a multi-agency partnership working for sustainable, healthy food in Exeter. Supporting and increasing opportunities for people to connect with local food and nature through growing, cooking and sharing food are part of our core vision for a re-localised food system.

Food Exeter invited community growing initiatives in and around Exeter to meet up and discuss areas of mutual interest and any shared vision for the future.

This note summarises the ideas generated at that meeting in September 2018.

2. Definition of ‘community growing’

For the purposes of this audit, Food Exeter takes ‘community growing’ to cover any group, organisation, project or initiative, temporary or permanent which seeks to achieve one or more of the following aims:

- Support members of the public, whether adults, children or both, to experience growing food, with others and in a way that supports the environment
- Build understanding and awareness of the natural environment and its links to food production
- Provide therapeutic, personal or group benefits, of whatever kind, from supporting people to grow food together
- Build a sense of place and/or community through growing food, or assisting in growing food in a locally accessible space

NB We do not currently include allotments within the range of projects listed, as on the whole, allotments are places where people grow food for themselves / their family, rather than as a collective activity.

3. Community Growing – issues for projects

- There was agreement that for community growing to become a wider movement, projects have to find ways to be financially sustainable or else it is always a 'hand to mouth' existence
- It was felt that community growing initiatives could be profitable – although it is not easy - and that not for profit models are the ideal approach
- Acknowledged that there is no shared definition of terms like 'therapeutic' objectives, nor of the term 'care farming'. Care must be taken when using these terms therefore, with clear explanations of what is meant.
- Each project will have different priorities and this is fine ie there is no need for a one size fits all model for community growing. Acknowledgement that it can be difficult to try and fit too many objectives into one project because there can be clashes between the needs of different users and activities eg between a community / local people focus and for example, therapeutic 'care farming' models
- Agencies and local government have to be helped to see the great benefits flowing from community growing and how these fit with their own policies eg on health, obesity, being active, community cohesion, mental health, environment, etc. This includes the huge potential of 'social prescribing'. In Exeter, this also means linking to the Community Connectors.
- Where a community growing project is on truly public space, volunteers need to accept that the food will be taken and eaten by 'the public' and that this is very different to a privately accessed community growing project.

4. Community growing – vision for the future

- All of Devon's Councils have policies that support community growing, because the environmental, social and economic value is recognized
- It is easy for interested members of the public to find out about potential plots of land and other potential places for community growing initiatives
- Agencies (councils, charities, NGOs) provide guidance & support for people who want to find out about and who are engaged in community growing, and are able to signpost people to support
- Community growing projects are well networked with each other, sharing resources and knowledge for mutual benefit
- The community growing projects provide a softer way of building skills training for employment than formal college based education
- There is a network of community growing projects in and close to Exeter, that in addition to achieving other objectives (health, wellbeing, community cohesion etc) are producing modest surpluses for sale, thus providing more local, sustainably grown food for local consumption
- Every school in Exeter has or is connected to a food growing project of some kind
- Community growing projects provide significant additional habitat for wildlife, whether within or outside the city