

The Benefits of Food Growing in Schools: to Local Communities

Recent changes to Government policy on food culture are far-reaching, with the new School Food Plan, free infant school meals, and cooking in the curriculum for under-14s all on the menu. Local authorities need a proactive response, and many are already reaping the rewards of food growing. Vastly increased take-up of school meals, positive effects on public health, higher educational attainment, greener environment and a boost to local economy through employment and food-based enterprise are just some of the results of food growing. These benefits are maximised by starting in schools. Food growing supports young people to pick up a healthy attitude to food for life, with increased quality of life, employment skills and a stronger sense of community all linking to a bigger long-term cost saving.

The five key benefit areas for local authorities considering food growing are **Health, Economy, Education, Community** and **Environment**. Here's a summary of the mounting evidence for each:

Health: *Food growing improves health and wellbeing.*

- The Department of Health's latest obesity strategy prioritises food growing.¹ People engaged with or exposed to local food growing increase their intake of foods proven to prevent obesity.²
- Food growing is a tactical response to the obesity crisis – now at 27% nationally.³ Research shows that young people involved in food growing pick up healthy habits and choices that decrease health and social care costs for local authorities across the longer term.⁴
- Health authorities are now actively investing in food growing - **NHS Dudley** estimate the five spaces they funded will deliver annual savings of between £770 and £4,900 per head.
- The *Garden Partners* project – a partnership between **Wandsworth Council** and **Age UK** – demonstrated a health costs saving of £10,900 per participant.⁵ These outcomes help to meet the strategic aims of Health and Wellbeing boards for reducing health inequality.
- Growing food improves not only physical but also mental health, reported through outdoor exercise, social bond formation and increased sense of purposefulness.⁶

¹ *Healthy Lives, Healthy People; a call to action on obesity in England* (Department of Health 2011)

² CG43 NICE Guidelines on Obesity <http://www.nice.org.uk/nicemedia/pdf/CG43NICEGuideline.pdf>

³ Data from the National Child Measurement Programme 2011/12

⁴ The School Food Plan http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/School_Food_Plan_2013.pdf [accessed 12/06/2014]

⁵ "Getting the elderly gardening could save NHS £11,000 a year per person" *The Telegraph* <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/health/elderhealth/9291222/Getting-elderly-gardening-could-save-NHS-11000-a-year-per-person.html> [accessed 03/06/2014]

⁶ http://www.rspb.org.uk/Images/naturalthinking_tcm9-161856.pdf

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Education: *Food growing in schools bears fruit*

- Whether a school is large or small, rural or urban, when they place food at the heart of school life, and work to win pupil, parent, staff and management buy-in, they succeed.⁷ Local authorities can support this coordinated or **'whole school' approach** to food growing, shown to create demonstrable impact in just about every area.⁸
- Break-even on school meals does require 50% take-up but using food grown at school in meals has seen take-up rocket because young people are excited to eat food they have grown.
- The **Food For Life Partnership (FFLP)** evaluation showed a 13 percentage point increase in primary take-up of school meals, and 20 percentage point increase in secondary, following their participation. Twice as many primary schools received an **Ofsted** rating of Outstanding following their participation in FFLP.⁹
- Funding can be external: the Phoenix High School in **White City** has attracted £70,000 of Big Lottery funding a year for their flagship school farm, employing two full-time members of staff and selling produce to the public three times a week.¹⁰
- Sponsorship is available: Catering suppliers such as **ISS** are sponsoring equipment e.g. greenhouses in schools like Lowther School in **Richmond**, getting more school-grown vegetables on the menu at a lower cost.

Economy: *Food growing boosts business*

- Food growing employability and enterprise programmes help build a stronger local economies for the future. The Soil Association's **London Farm Academy** engages ten schools over three years to fully integrate farming, growing and food careers into the curriculum. It has already delivered over 100 school farm markets.
- Urban food growing also shows increased employability statistics and economic development for school leavers, as with **Stoke-on-Trent's Urbivore** scheme, where a city farm on a disused golf course created five jobs, 26 apprenticeships and 55 mentoring and volunteering roles.¹¹
- Food growing start-up economy remains small nationally but significant for communities where these initiatives flourish, with commercial sales of locally grown food increasing through the establishment of allotment/city farm-based community businesses e.g. local food provision through 'veg box' phenomenon.¹²
- A Greener local environment provides a general boost for businesses in areas where planting and food growing takes place.¹³

⁷ The School Food Plan http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/07/School_Food_Plan_2013.pdf [accessed 12/06/2014]

⁸ <http://www.foodforlife.org.uk/Whygetinvolved/WhatisFoodforLife/Wholeschoolapproach.aspx>

⁹ Good food for All – The Impact of the Food For Life Partnership (2011)

¹⁰ <http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/phoenix-farming/> [accessed 12/06/2014]

¹¹ "Can an urban growing project cure a 'sick city'?" The Guardian – 11/06/2013 <http://www.theguardian.com/society/2013/jun/11/urban-food-growing-project> [accessed 04/06/2014]

¹² *A Growing Trade: A guide for community groups that want to grow and sell food for our towns and cities* (2013) Local Action on Food

¹³ *Green Infrastructure's contribution to economic growth* (DEFTEC 2011)

http://randd.defra.gov.uk/Document.aspx?Document=11406_GI_Economic_Catalyst_Final_Report_July2013.pdf

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Community: *People come together through food*

- **Metropolitan housing** in **Tower Hamlets** reported that food growing helped build a stronger sense of community on their estates and reduced anti-social behaviour. Residents and neighbours who previously did not talk to each other became friends.¹⁴
- Food growing is being pushed up the development agenda and embedded into policy frameworks. **Lambeth Council** recognises in its Draft Local Plan for future development¹⁵ that growing spaces are part of “promoting community cohesion and safe, livable neighbourhoods.”¹⁶
- New communities are now being designed around food growing. The amended **Planning Practice Guidance**¹⁷ requires the protection of existing growing spaces as well as the development of new ones.

Environment: *Growing food lessens the impact of climate change*

- Growing food helps communities vulnerable to food poverty become more self-sufficient. **Garden Organic**'s Master Gardener project trains people in the skills needed to grow locally and reduced overall spends on food in participating households by 29%.¹⁸
- Food growing contributes to the ‘green safety net’ - increased planting compensates for rising temperatures. In **Manchester** a planting increase of less than 10% would compensate entirely for the projected temperature rise of 4% over next 80 years.¹⁹
- More planted spaces helps reduce the impact of flooding in urban areas by improving overall ecosystem services.²⁰ In a similar way, the shelter from cool winds and shade in summer provided by planting and growing reduces energy consumption.²¹
- Food growing also reduces landfill through increased composting and encouraging pro-environmental behaviours.²²

Taking Action:

- **Nurture** and support existing growing initiatives in local schools and create local flagships.
- **Develop** a local action plan for delivering a borough-wide ‘whole school’ approach to food.
- **Identify** existing community food growing groups and enterprises to engage with and support.
- **Consult** with local people, community groups, businesses and social landlords about food growing ideas and encourage them to work with their local school on food growing.

¹⁴ Case study on Metropolitan housing <http://www.neighbourhoodsgreen.org.uk/resources/FoodGrowing/CaseStudyMetropolitan> accessed 03/06/2014]

¹⁵ <http://www.lambeth.gov.uk/consultations/draft-local-plan>

¹⁶ Local Plan Proposed Submission November 2013, London Borough of Lambeth

¹⁷ National Planning policy framework <http://planningguidance.planningportal.gov.uk> [accessed 03/06/2014]

¹⁸ Coventry University evaluation of Behavioural Change through Master Gardener programme (2013) <http://mastergardeners.org.uk/2013/12/08/helping-communities-grow-the-impact-of-master-gardener-volunteers/> [accessed 04/06/2014]

¹⁹ *Horticulture Matters* <http://www.rhs.org.uk/Education-Learning/PDF/Training/1016-RHS-Hort-Careers-Brochure-V8> [accessed 03/06/2014]

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

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