



6 April 2020

Like many other organisations London's City Farm's and Community Gardens are facing unprecedented challenges in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. The necessary sudden shut-down of our sites and associated support services has placed massive pressure on the organisations, our staff, volunteers and beneficiaries.

We are extremely grateful to our funders and partners who have been quick to react and understand the challenges facing the sector as a whole and the farms and gardens they work with individually. In this time of uncertainty the assurance that expected grant payments will be made on time, that outcomes can be adapted and that timescales can be adjusted has been invaluable. As we continue to address the challenges our organisations and beneficiaries face over the coming weeks and months we are seeking support from our funders, friends and partners and wanted to update you on our current position and the help we need.

At what would usually be the start of peak season, closure has resulted in fundraising events being cancelled and significant trading revenues drying up overnight causing immediate cashflow problems.

Whilst most of the farms and gardens are registered charities the nature of our work has provided good opportunities for the development of social enterprise to support our charitable outcomes. We have made good use of these opportunities, helping us provide unique spaces and services for our urban communities. At the current time city farms generate between 50% and 80% of their annual income through services like school visits and enterprise initiatives including markets, café sales, teambuilding /experience days, horse-riding and community events. Most of this income is derived in the months of May to July. With the rapid shutdown of usual daily life this activity has been affected in the same way as other small businesses in retail, hospitality and leisure. However, as registered charities we fear that we will not currently receive the same support to protect and maintain our operations for the future. We receive charitable rate relief rather than the small business rate relief which is being used to identify businesses needing support, and we are concerned that this oversight will leave farms and gardens at risk of permanent closure.

In addition, at a time where social distancing is important to maintain public health, farms and gardens are taking our role in limiting the transmission of COVID-19 very seriously. Many of the volunteers and participants who usually play an active role in caring for animals and maintaining sites and gardens are vulnerable. We understand people are required to stay at home following the government advice. However, to provide for animal welfare and maintain sites in a safe and secure manner during this period city farms especially require staff to continue to work. We are worried both about the cost implication and the status of those staff, and experienced volunteers under the necessary restrictions on the movement of people.

We have written to government and local government asking for their support to ensure that our facilities are ready to provide for the needs of our communities in response to the COVID-19 pandemic both immediately and in the longer term. In particular we have asked for guidance and support from government and local government with the following:

- Confirmation that our social enterprises will be given at least the equivalent financial support of similar for-profit small businesses ie through the small business grant fund of £10,000.
- Recognition that farms, gardens and other charities that have ongoing operations with reduced volunteer labour face increased costs in their basic operations and financial support towards this.
- Assurance that our staff and potentially a limited number of volunteers will continue to be able to travel to care for animals and sites in all circumstances.
- Advice on whether charity staff on furlough can volunteer to carry out essential work with the charity they work for. Support in securing dispensation for this to happen or access to an alternative source of financial support if this is not the case.

At this time, farms and gardens are asking for funders, current and new, to continue to support the important work that is delivered through the sector. Farms and gardens are keen to use the resources they have available to support their communities in any safe and possible way they can. Though face-to-face delivery is an important part of what farms and gardens do, at this time it has become clear that remote delivery and access through social media is increasingly important. Many farms and gardens have already started delivering growing guides and animal discovery sessions online.

When the immediate crisis abates, city farms and community gardens will be places for people to recover from issues caused and worsened by this crisis, including disengagement with education, trauma, anxiety, depression, isolation, fear of going out, and loss of work. We are skilled in volunteer management, education, career development and promoting positive mental health. Our sites provide fresh food, fresh air, and opportunities to connect with nature and farming. We have space for social distancing, outstanding handwashing provision, highly qualified staff and unique sites and opportunities in a busy city. We are preparing to respond to and provide the services our communities need.

Farms and gardens can only continue to deliver and adapt our services with support of funders, especially in these tight timelines that we are currently all living through. Your support currently is not only beneficial, it is essential.

Please do not hesitate to contact us for further information about the issues we have raised and how you may be able to support our delivery. Managers of the farms and gardens would be very happy to talk to you in detail about the extreme financial challenges they face and the opportunities for community support which they would love to explore.

Signed by the Chairs, Trustees, Staff, Volunteers and service users of:

Calthorpe Community Garden; Core Landscapes, a Core Arts Project; Culpeper Community Garden; Deen City Farm and Riding School; Freightliners City Farm; Hackney City Farm; Hammersmith Community Gardens Association (HCGA); Kentish Town City Farm; Lambourne End Centre; Mudchute City Farm; Mudlarks Community Garden; Newham City Farm; Social Farms & Gardens; Spitalfields City Farm; St Mary's Secret Garden; Stepney City Farm; Surrey Docks City Farm; Sydenham Garden; Vauxhall City Farm; Wellgate Community Farm; William Hobbayne Community Gardens; Woodlands Farm Trust.

Please contact London@farmgarden.org.uk