



Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

Newsletter Summer 2008

growing communities ~ growing opportunities



Supporting, representing and promoting community-managed farms and gardens

Patron
HRH The Prince of Wales

Variety - the spice of farm and garden life!

We have been busy working on five year plans for our UK regions and countries recently. These plans will ensure that the direction and focus of our work brings maximum benefit to our members as we move into the next decade. Reflecting on the future has also created an interesting side-effect - it has really brought home the ever-growing diversity of our movement and the array of benefits it provides for local communities.

Some people may assume that city farms and community gardens are simply nice places to visit where plants are grown and animals kept. But that is far from the whole picture. Our movement is about growing communities and growing opportunities. We support and empower local people to make positive changes.



At city farms, community gardens and allotment sites across the UK, local people can not only find a patch of welcoming green space to visit, but can also benefit from education programmes, play schemes, healthy living initiatives, work and skills training, social enterprises, volunteering and much, much more. These are places where people of all ages, all ethnic backgrounds and all abilities are made welcome. Once involved, people are often inspired to take action on wider issues such as global climate change.

True value research

The true value of city farms and community gardens has been highlighted in a research study funded by Northern Rock Foundation. The aim was to assess and document the impact and value of community farms and gardens to individuals and communities, focussing on opportunities for engagement, volunteering, training, capacity building and empowerment. Research was carried out across the North East and Cumbria in partnership with the Regeneration Exchange at the University of Northumbria.

The findings clearly demonstrated that community-managed farms and gardens:

- Provide important social opportunities and can tackle social exclusion.
- Restore feelings of worth and rebuild the confidence of clients and volunteers.
- Can instil a sense of responsibility through the nurturing of animals and plants.
- Act as stepping stones, opening up future possibilities to disadvantaged young people.

Could help tackle growing obesity problems through exercise opportunities and wiser dietary choices. A copy of the full research report and an attractive summary/poster are available to download from the FCFCG website at: www.farmgarden.org.uk/true-value

Diary of events

- Bristol Summer Show 19 July**
Following the success of last year's inaugural Bristol Summer Show, a second event will be held on the green space opposite FCFCG's head office, The GreenHouse, in Bedminster. There will be farm animals to see, produce stalls and displays from a variety of FCFCG member groups based in Bristol and surrounding areas.
- FCFCG Annual General Meeting 27 September**
This year our AGM will take place at Heeley City Farm in Sheffield. The AGM provides an opportunity for members to air any views about the work of the Federation and help influence decisions about our future direction.
- FCFCG Scottish National Networking Event 2 October**
Bringing together Federation members, policy-makers and representatives of organisations related to community gardening and farming in Scotland, this annual event (organised in association with Trellis and ARI) is now in its fourth year and will be held at the Scottish Natural Heritage Offices at Battleby, near Perth.
- National Allotments Week 11-17 August**
Allotment sites will be open to the public for visitor days and events during the week. The aim is to promote awareness about allotments, show both the public and local authorities the strength of support for the heritage of allotment culture and highlight the social benefits of allotment gardening, which include health, education and community well-being.
- City Harvest Festival 20 September**
Held in the attractive grounds of Capel Manor in Enfield, the festival celebrates its 10th anniversary this year. It provides a showcase for community run farms and gardens in the London area to celebrate the work done on their sites. The festival is as



Partnerships & initiatives

SPAN Partnership (Sustainable Production in Active year SPAN partnership programme) That was the conclusion of the three-year SPAN partnership programme endorsed the manifesto - details are available at: www.spanpartnership.org.uk

Community gardens which work together to grow, eat and distribute their own food feel happier, healthier and take more positive steps to improve the environment - both local and global. Organisations are being encouraged to endorse the manifesto - details are available at: www.spanpartnership.org.uk



Around the UK

Wales: These are exciting times in Wales after FCFCG's bid to the Big Lottery Fund was given the green light. The funding will be used to increase support and networking opportunities for community farms and gardens through a programme called Growing Together in Wales. This will concentrate on the key areas of community enterprise, community inclusion and enhancing local environments. To deliver the programme, FCFCG has established an office in Wales and recently appointed a new staff member who will recruit fieldworkers, and organise events and networking opportunities. In addition, we hope to produce a map featuring Welsh city farms and community gardens.

Scotland: Community gardeners across Scotland will benefit from a lottery windfall after the Big Lottery fund announced a grant of nearly half a million pounds to the Growing Communities in Scotland partnership. Included in the partnership are the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, the Scottish Therapeutic Gardening Network (Trellis) and the Allotments Regeneration Initiative (ARI). The lottery funding will help the partners continue their work with the blossoming Scottish community garden and allotment network. At least 350 community, therapeutic and allotment gardens across Scotland will benefit from improved and comprehensive support services. FCFCG is also hoping to benefit from a three year funding programme from the Scottish Government.

Northern Ireland: FCFCG continues to work with its partner Northern Ireland Environment Link to help support the development of the community farming and gardening movement in Northern Ireland, as well as helping local people connect with real food and community green spaces.



to land, sustainable growing and better support for practical food initiatives that improve health and wellbeing. A manifesto has been created which aims to inspire wider recognition and better support for community food growing. This has been sent to government ministers, funders and a number of community sector and environmental bodies. Interested organisations are being encouraged to endorse the manifesto - details are available at: www.spanpartnership.org.uk



News update

Virtual city farm
FCFCG is celebrating the launch of the UK's first 'virtual' city farm. The farm features on the BBC's newest soap opera Silver Street - a fast-moving portrayal of modern British Asian life. FCFCG was lead partner in a consortium which brought the scheme to fruition. The programme will help build on the growing enthusiasm for locally produced food and its environmental benefits. Grants up to £500,000 will be awarded to not-for-profit groups and organisations in England delivering such projects as growing, processing, marketing and distributing local food: composting and raising awareness of the benefits of such activities.

State secretary visit
Young farmers from Muddhute Park and Farm in East London, a member of FCFCG, played host to Delta Secretary Hilary Benn in April, as part of the work of its successful mentor network. Benn said: "One of the aims of the Year of Food and Farming is to increase pressures on health and social care providers, offenders management services and educational bodies, according to new research. The recently published University of Essex research findings, based on clearly show that spending time participating in care farm activities is effective in enhancing mood and improving self-esteem. FCFCG serves on the steering group of the National Care Farming Initiative."



Care farming research

Local food programme
The Local Food grants programme, funded by the Big Lottery Fund, officially opened in spring 2008. FCFCG was lead partner in a consortium which brought the scheme to fruition. The programme will help build on the growing enthusiasm for locally produced food and its environmental benefits. Grants up to £500,000 will be awarded to not-for-profit groups and organisations in England delivering such projects as growing, processing, marketing and distributing local food: composting and raising awareness of the benefits of such activities.

Care farming research
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Care farming is a valid solution to increasing pressures on health and social care providers, offenders management services and educational bodies, according to new research. The recently published University of Essex research findings, based on clearly show that spending time participating in care farm activities is effective in enhancing mood and improving self-esteem. FCFCG serves on the steering group of the National Care Farming Initiative."

FCFCG would like to thank our funders, which include:

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Please return to FCFCG Head Office at:
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This newsletter is also available in large print, braille or on audio tape from our Head Office

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Our work: urban & rural



Gardening available to all

Prudhoe Community Allotment Group, Northumberland

The field of dreams

Chyan Community Field, Cornwall



Northumberland, who is President of Prudhoe Gardeners' Association.

Creating the site and getting funding has not been the only challenge facing the Community Allotment Group. Convincing the Town Council to support the site and recognise the group's achievements has not always been easy, according to Joan.

"We have saved them huge amounts of money, but we still don't get the right level of support. We have regular meetings with the Mayor and representatives of the council but it can be hard work."

National recognition

Thanks to the success and dedication of the scheme - and its national recognition with organisations like the Allotments Regeneration Initiative and The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners - it would be difficult for the council to completely ignore the benefits of the site to both its regular users and the surrounding community.

"Before we came to the site, many of the allotments were overgrown and an eyesore. We spent a lot of time clearing the rubbish and junk from the plot. As a result, the local residents appreciate that we are making their immediate area more attractive," Joan explained.

"They also have the opportunity to buy fresh fruit and vegetables on their doorstep because allotment rules mean we are allowed to sell produce to the public for the sustainability of the association but not for personal gain.

"We are also promoting allotment gardening to the community, which supports healthy living, fresh good, wholesome food and exercise for a healthier lifestyle."

"And it has helped the whole town too. The facilities we provide have enhanced the town's performance with the Northumbria in Bloom judges and we have regularly received top awards."

Eclectic mix

What of the community allotments users themselves? They are an eclectic mix including members with physical disabilities, mental health problems, those without a garden of their own at home, plus able-bodied users who can support others with some of the more demanding physical work.

"We have found that the members enjoy the challenge and therapy of working with the soil, learning new skills at their own rate and then enjoying a cup of coffee and a chocolate biscuit - it has to be chocolate to replace their energy! - and chatting to the other members," says Joan.

"In fact, this part of the day, which provides a lot of social interaction, has proved equally as valuable as the gardening sessions themselves. Everyone talking to each other has proved a very interesting and stimulating part of the therapy. And we learn a lot about gardening just by talking to each other and passing on tips and information.

"We hope this feeling of community will go further - we're encouraging all of our plottolders to work together on joint projects supporting each other and the wider community."

many other facilities for the older and less mobile in the community," said Joan.

The early development of the site culminated in the grand opening in 2006 by the Duke of

Looking Ahead

Prudhoe Community Allotment Group are not ones to rest on their laurels, so there are plenty of plans to develop the project and provide even further benefits to the site's users, as well as people in the surrounding community.

Links have now been established with the local junior school and there are plans to help cultivate their interest in growing fresh food to eat. Groups from the school will visit the allotment each week as part of the curriculum to encourage their horticultural skills and give their teachers a way of passing on knowledge outside the normal classroom environment.

Food is on the menu too. The group hopes to secure funding from the Big Lottery's Local Food programme as part of its ongoing involvement in encouraging local people to grow fresh fruit and vegetables.

To accommodate this extra work, the group is expanding the size of the community plot, having already moved onto an adjacent piece of land after a major clean-up operation.

You can catch up on how things develop and see more pictures of the group via the web at: www.prudhoe.org/allotment or www.northumberlandlife.org



Nestled in a quiet corner of Cornwall, among patchwork fields stitched together by thickly tangled hedgerows, is the site of a unique community project.

Chyan Community Field, near the tiny settlement of Halvasso, is devoted to giving people from the surrounding area access to a piece of the countryside where they can play, grow food and learn about the environment around them.

It may seem strange to find project like this in such an obviously rural area, but community green space with facilities and activities can be as hard to find in the countryside as it can be in urban areas.

Back in 2002, when the project was just getting off the ground, the site was simply an empty, overgrown field that had been left fallow for five years (gaining Soil Association Organic Certification) and was peppered with clumps of dock, thistles and couch grass.

Popular with families

It didn't stay empty for long. Through subsequent years the range of activities and opportunities has multiplied. A sizeable segment of the field is now devoted to allotments. This section is equipped with its own supply of tools and has proved popular, with a number of families involved. There are regular allotment days with specific activities for children, encouraging them to plant vegetables and take charge of their own bed.

A variety of courses are offered including permaculture, bee keeping, dowsing, creating your own herbal first aid kit and willow basket making, where course participants cut their own willow then weave it six weeks later to make their baskets.

The facilities at the site have also grown. Chyan Community Field boasts a pond, a straw bale building, a sensory garden with Braille signage, two playgrounds composting toilets, an education space, tea-shed and composting area.

There is also the start of a central walled garden/theatre space. Arts and music play a big part in the Chyan Field culture, as Stephanie Jackson, one

of the Field's management committee, explains:

"We hold open days and celebration days to connect us back to the seasons and cycles, with crafts, music, arts, meditation and theatre.

"These can be powerful experiences with 60-70 people sitting in silence and fully experiencing the richness of their present reality - if only for a few minutes, offering an alternative to fast paced modern life."

Diverse age range

The variety of activities that take place at Chyan results in a diverse age range of visitors and users, according to Stephanie: "We get all ages. There's often a predominance of children. Young people enjoy being given responsibility for practical jobs like cutting willow, lime rendering and digging and wheelbarrowing! And the smaller children delight at finding new potatoes, playing in willow sculpture, trying out the smells and tastes of the sensory garden and playing on the swings.

Responses & reactions

"Washing our hands was absolutely great because I found out that a type of flower called a ceonothus would turn into soap"

"I learnt a great deal about plants that I can find and eat, how the land works and how to work with nature in the simplest way"

"Relaxed, communal, beautiful, insightful"

"Great day out and fun to be part of a group and be in a semi wild place"

"An inspiring outdoor place, teaching important values of sustainability and permaculture - education is the key"

"A space to meet both like-minded and different people, share knowledge, skills and food! To test ideas and hopefully help to contribute to something which will be of value to generations to come"

"Students like to come and find contact with local people outside of their campus life and also to put into practice some of the things they are learning, for example those who are doing a garden design course.

"Mums and dads like to be able to do some gardening knowing the kids are entertained - either through structured activity or in free play on either of our two playgrounds on site.

"Meanwhile the older people love to come and see their grandchildren enjoying playing outside in a natural environment, just like they did when they were children.

"All of our users benefit from being in the fresh air, away from traffic, mobile phones (there's no reception) and being surrounded by green, enjoying the sunshine or a cuppa in the tea shed. It gets people together to meet old friends and make new ones."

Local partners

Increasingly, Chyan Community Field works with local partner groups, offering tailor made days to suit their needs, such as Dreadnought (a voluntary sector youth organisation), local primary schools, out of school groups and local morris dancers.

This partnership working approach is something the management committee are keen to continue. Currently they are making connections with the Family Information Service and also the student volunteer officer at the University College Falmouth.

Like all community groups, funding is important. The volunteers who run Chyan Community Field have managed to source grants from various sources including BTCV, Living Spaces, Cory Environmental Trust and the Local Network Fund. Membership has raised additional funds, while extra cash comes via open days, courses and some plant sales.

Inevitably, there have been challenges to go alongside successes. Sustaining work days with a mix of regular and new volunteers is something of a juggling act, but inevitable given the outside pressures of work and home life.

And the growth of the project has also brought with it increasing amounts of administrative work - plans are underway to employ a part-time worker in the next funding application. And there is plenty to learn about volunteer and project management.

There are also more unique challenges: "Engaging the very immediate local farming community is a challenge. We are in the middle of rural farmland and a lot of members come from towns and villages up to four miles away."

But there is confidence that efforts at profile raising and good publicity in the local press will help. And Stephanie feels the range of people using the site is already growing: "At one of our recent open days we had someone come along in high heels - which suggested the diversity of our participants has grown from the hardcore environmentalists we started with at the beginning!"

There is further information about Chyan Community Field at its website: www.chyan.org.uk

