

Policy Briefing - Creating resilient food economies and public goods through peri-urban agroecology

June 2022

Overview

- The Fringe Farming initiative is a collaboration between UK food, farming and land organisations to increase agroecological farming at the edges of cities: Glasgow, Bristol, Sheffield, London and Cardiff.
- Agroecological farming creates numerous social, ecological and environmental benefits via establishing resilient food systems, with the peri-urban being a strategic place for local fruit and vegetable production.
- National governments have the opportunity to support peri-urban farming through the new National Food Strategy, new Environmental Land Management Schemes, Scotland's Good Food Nation Bill and the upcoming Food (Wales) Bill. Regeneration and 'levelling up' funds could also provide valuable investment for peri-urban food sites and supply chains.
- This briefing explores the benefits of, and barriers to, fringe farming, and highlights which policy levers are needed to unlock more opportunities for peri-urban farming.
- We are calling for active and productive areas around urban conurbations that will provide ecological benefits, including **thriving biodiversity**, while **supporting jobs** and training in new **agroecological enterprises**, while delivering **healthy food** to markets and building **community wealth**.

Why support agroecological peri-urban farming?

The Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and inflated costs of living have highlighted the vulnerability of the UK's food supply chains. Many people have turned to community food organisations to ensure access to food, while local food producers and box schemes have been inundated with demand, showing the critical role they can play in building resilient food economies. To address this, agroecological peri-urban farming can be an important part of resilient, local food systems. Other benefits include:

- Improved diets resulting from increased access to affordable, local and culturally-appropriate foods.
- Creation of more jobs per tonne than conventional food production, and the creation of jobs and training in a regional economy.
- Access to green space and outdoor skills learning at the edge of built up areas.
- Increased biodiversity through diverse cropping patterns, including integrating agroforestry practices.
- Sequestration of carbon through farming approaches that work with natural cycles to effectively create 'carbon-sinks' surrounding urban space.
- Active building, improved health and protection of valuable fertile soils.
- Urban natural capital outcomes, such as water retention, reducing noise pollution and cooling cities.

Policy Recommendations

We emphasise the delivery of a comprehensive package that encompasses what is needed for peri-urban farming and new entrants in this sector to succeed. These are outlined in a longer Fringe Farming report¹ and some primary ones are to provide:

A. Financial assistance

- Remove any limiting eligibility criteria, such as minimum size, for accessing support schemes in all the four nations, so that peri-urban agroecological growers can provide numerous public goods.
- Provision of start-up grants for new entrants to assist with capital costs and/or revenue support. This could be through blended finance (public and private loans/grants) as peri-urban agroecological farms are well placed to generate multiple streams of income once up and running.
 - In England, this could be included in the soon to be launched New Entrants Support Scheme and via new public farm investment and technology funds. In Scotland, this could be part of the ongoing Farming Opportunities for New Entrants policy.

B. Land

- Ensure planning policy does not inhibit fringe farming enterprise and nature conservation opportunities.
 - Planning policies and guidance to prioritise safeguarding land on Grade 1 and 2 soils for peri-urban agroecological farming, rather than for other development.
- Support the expansion of county-owned farmlands and growth of land trust arrangements.
 - In the land trust model, governments provides long term and low interest loans to agroecological land trusts that meet certain criteria. These loans are then used to buy land to then be subdivided into 'starter farms' and leased to new entrants.

C. Training

- Traineeship schemes should be funded to attract farmers and new entrants wishing to apprentice and learn practical and theoretical farming knowledge.
 - An example is OrganicLea² farm in London, which runs apprentice and trainee schemes that have the potential to be expanded to a borough-wide or even regional scale.
- This should be combined with an ongoing mentorship program that provides practical support, such as in business planning, marketing and sustainable land management.

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Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional, and local level. www.sustainweb.org

¹ <https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/feb22-fringe-farming/>

² <https://www.organiclea.org.uk/we-help-you-grow-your-own/training-2/>