

# Commercial Food Production- The Urban Market Garden Returns

Adam York, Glebelands Market  
Garden Ltd and founder member at  
Unicorn Grocery Ltd, Manchester.



# Unicorn Grocery Ltd

- Opened in 1996 in 5000sq.ft unit to public
- Competitive prices and steady growth
- Social agenda but trading first
- Supermarket standards with ethics.....
- Not a hobby, it's a job. Pay at mkt rate
- High rate of productivity
- Fruit+Veg are 26% of sales



# Glebelands Market Garden Ltd

- Started 2001 producing crops for Unicorn
- 3 acres in suburban Sale
- Specialists in leafy short life-high value crops, sometimes at short notice
- Polytunnel/glasshouse-protected cropping
- Seasonal extension-dark months gap
- Fertility-manure, compost and green “manure” crops



# Unicorn-Glebelands Model

- x100 less energy salads than Spanish Lettuce
- Viable commercially with oil at \$50/barrel
- Mutual benefit, for a decade and counting
- Very popular with public
- High standards, good presentation
- Planned growing programme



# Why Does It Work?

- Few other success stories?
- Methodical approach, homework
- Tenacity, lots of sceptics at outset(s)
- Products people want at right price
- Training/recruiting new blood
- Investment in buildings and machines
- Commercial, no grants(!)

David Brown is our friend



# Can We Leave Tesco To Sort It Out?

- Palm Oil experience, alcohol selling
- Town and district centres
- Dying soils and “big arable”
- Oil will be \$200/barrel, nitrate fertiliser...
- Jared Diamond/End of Suburbia film
- Laissez-faire opt outs or getting stuck in?



# Opportunities

- Urban land pockets
- Allotment selling and centres Havana style
- Nutrients per acre
- Markets with full offer Eg Riverside, Cardiff
- Empty white elephant “big sheds”
- Reserve army of young people
- [www.organicgrowersalliance.co.uk](http://www.organicgrowersalliance.co.uk)
- Land still cheap!!



# Challenges

- Fertility, sewage issue
- Water
- Training and skills
- Lack of specialist kit
- What is the optimum size holding?
- Permaculture/transition millstones?
- Planning and legislation
- Recognition and pioneers dilemma

