



SPRING 2009
ISSUE 01

rhubarb

RIISING TO THE CHALLENGE

Real bakers back the
Real Bread Campaign

Carolyn Steel
describes *Sitopia*

London Borough takes
on the take aways

Manchester's new
seasonal food guide

Be WELFEHD in Scotland

Northern Ireland's
Organic Centre

local
ACTION
ON FOOD

Building Sitopia

Carolyn Steel

Few of us living in the increasingly obese society that Britain has become can be in any doubt that we are what we eat. What is less widely acknowledged, however, is that the places we inhabit are also shaped by food. The feeding of cities is arguably the greatest social force shaping the globe, yet it is one that we have failed to grasp. Indeed, post-war food policy in Britain and America has largely ignored food's social role, focusing instead on notions of 'efficiency'. The gleeful pursuit of economies of scale, monocultural production, and the removal of human contact have all driven down the price of food, while its true cost, in terms of ecological destruction, resource depletion, carbon emissions, pollution and ill-health, have been mounting. As a result, we now have a food system totally at odds with the core values - communality, sustainability, equality, health, happiness - upon which our society is based.

Clearly, industrial food systems are far from the global panacea they once seemed, yet finding viable alternatives is a daunting challenge, not least because five decades of government policy - summarised by Professor Tim Lang as 'Leave it to Tesco' - have left the supermarkets in virtual command of the food supply. The industrial giants' position can seem unassailable, until one realises that the job they are doing is about to become obsolete. Peak oil and climate change will soon force us to rethink the way we eat, but in the meantime, we urgently need to shift our entire approach to thinking about food. Instead of seeing it as a commodity subservient to our lifestyles, we need to understand its cultural role in shaping our society. Once we do that, it becomes clear that the most urgent question we need to ask is not how to feed cities most efficiently, but what sort of communities we want to live in. Only then can we design our food systems accordingly.

The theoretical concept of utopia - an ideal community - has long been a means of imagining a better world. Utopia allows us to dream, but as a practical tool for change, it is effectively useless. If we actually want to build a better world, what we need is not a model that aims at perfection, but one whose goals are human and attainable. That is why I would like to propose an alternative, sitopia (from the ancient Greek sitos, food + topos, place). Whether we realise it or not, we already live in a world shaped by food - so why not harness food's power to shape it better?

That is where local food networks have a vital role to play. Because they allow city-dwellers to become what Carlo Petrini calls 'co-producers' - discerning buyers who have a reciprocal, rather than passive, role in the food chain - they are, in effect, mini-sitopias, restoring a sociable, ethical, sustainable approach to food. Many such networks already exist; the trick is to find ways of joining them up so that together they form more than the sum of their parts - an entire society with food at its core. Rhubarb-readers everywhere, take heart: you are the vanguard of a better sitopian future.

Carolyn Steel is the author of **Hungry City**, available in paperback at £8.99, published by Vintage.

Rhubarb leaf photo © marmite Stock.XCHNG

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local
ACTION
ON FOOD

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: WELCOME TO THE FIRST ISSUE OF RHUBARB, THE MAGAZINE FOR THE LOCAL ACTION ON FOOD NETWORK.

RHUBARB is the quarterly magazine of the Local Action on Food network, coordinated by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming.

THANKS TO THE TEAM

Editor: Ben Reynolds **Contributors:** Maresa Bossano, Michael Dees, Ellie Garwood, Polly Higginson, Clare Horrell, Suzanne Natelson, Lucy Thompson **Design:** Ciara Devine **Front cover:** First rhubarb crop of 2009 **Photography:** James Gould www.jamesgould.com **Printing:** PUSH (ISO 14001 + FSC certified) **Paper:** 100% recycled

DISCLAIMER

Inclusion of information in Rhubarb does not imply that the product or service is endorsed by Local Action on Food or Sustain.

Local Action on Food, run by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming, is a network that has been set up to bring together the range of local groups, organisations and businesses that are trying to improve the food system in their community. If you are keeping heritage varieties and rare breeds from extinction, saving a local street market, promoting healthy food at a school, changing food policy or trying to put local produce on the menu - we want to hear from you.

We have witnessed an explosion of interest in 'local food' in recent months. Yet local food is more than just about people seeking to buy from local producers, as important as this is. It is also about people playing an active part in their local food system. In this magazine, we hope to show you how people around the UK are taking a stand and getting involved, through initiatives such as Making Local Food Work, those funded through the Big Lottery's Local Food fund (see page 7) or those that work on sheer enthusiasm.

At the same time, this magazine is about more than endless case studies - inspiring as they are. We aim to bring you the arguments on why this reconnection with our food is so important, from some of the biggest names in the sustainable food sector, kicking off in this issue with Carolyn Steel (see page 2, opposite).

It is vital that people reconnect with their food, and yet so many people take it for granted. It has a major impact on our health, our economy and the environment, let alone being fundamental to our survival, but food is criminally overlooked by government in favour of other issues. It is time for the local food movement and, more broadly, the sustainable food movement to start making a better case for why change needs to happen. The facts are there - now we need the right people to take notice of them.

Ben

sustain
the alliance for
better food and farming

Invitation to a seminar on local food policy action

If you are involved in local food policy and want to share your experiences then the next Local Action on Food seminar is the place for you! The free seminar will take place on 22nd April in Leicester and will focus on how local and regional authorities foster sustainable food in their area and how the Local Action on Food network can get more involved in supporting this work. Please feel free to extend the invite to your contacts in the local authority, Primary Care Trust, regional development agency and anyone else who may be interested in attending.

For more information or to book a place please contact suzanne@sustainweb.org. Hurry - spaces are limited!

Find a food co-op

Food co-ops are a great way for people to get together and use their collective buying power to buy good, healthy food direct from the grower or wholesaler at bargain prices. Now there is a website where you can find out lots of information about what food co-ops do, where to find your nearest one and how to set one up yourself.

As part of the Making Local Food Work programme, Sustain has just launched www.foodcoops.org to raise the profile of food co-ops and make it easier for people to find their nearest outlet. You can search by putting in your postcode or clicking on the interactive map.

The food co-ops finder lists community-run food outlets across the UK including buying groups, stalls, bag or box schemes, shops, or mobile stores. All you need to do to be listed is log on via the website and add your details to our database - just go to www.foodcoops.org and go to the 'Add your food co-op' page.

www.foodcoops.org
Maresa Bossano
maresa@sustainweb.org

RIVER COTTAGE TAKES TO BATH

Sustain's Eat Somerset project has recently been working with Gideon Hitchin, head chef at the brand new River Cottage Bath Canteen to buy local organic produce. The restaurant opens at the end of March, based in Komedia, a new comedy club in the heart of the city. Eat Somerset links local food and drink producers with new buyers in the retail and catering sectors. Contact alison@sustainweb.org for more information.

Open Farm Sunday 7th June 2009: Why get involved?

If you want to improve sales, learn new marketing skills, build staff morale and sense of pride, gain new contacts, or simply just want to improve your neighbours' and friends' understanding of why farming matters, then get involved with Open Farm Sunday. To help you organise an Open Farm Sunday event, LEAF will provide you with a pack that includes posters, flyers, postcards, roadside banner and arrows, suggested activities, H&S guidance, polo shirts and lots more! These packs will be sent out from the middle of March.

To order a pack, please register your event on www.farmsunday.org or if you would like to know more first, please telephone LEAF on 0247 6413 911.

Boost to UK's allotments

One thousand new allotment plots will be created on National Trust land in the next three years. These plots will be set up across 40 sites throughout England, Wales and Northern Ireland, including restored kitchen gardens, agricultural land or on vacant land near to Trust properties.

One example is Gibside, in Northumberland. Just five miles from Gateshead, Gibside was once a grand estate built on money from coal. The Trust is currently restoring the historic four acre walled garden and turning it into a

community allotment scheme. Another is Minnowburn in South Belfast. With allotment waiting lists of three to five years, this site has created a number of plots, many of which include raised beds.

In more good news for allotments, the Allotments Regeneration Initiative has been given a new lease of life courtesy of the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund. The funding will establish a network of mentors, who offer expert advice and support to local communities wanting to set up or rejuvenate allotment plots. Meanwhile, allotment managers will also benefit from regional groups to spread good practice in allotments management and build supportive networks.

www.nationaltrust.org.uk
www.farmgarden.org.uk/ari



CARE ABOUT YOUR GREENBELT? WANT TO SEE MORE FOOD BEING GROWN THERE?

From March, Sustain and the Campaign to Protect Rural England are looking at the green belts around London, Bristol and Liverpool. If you live in one of these areas and want to tell us about this bit of land that protects you from the countryfolk (or should that be the other way around?!), please get in touch. London: suzanne@sustainweb.org Bristol: alison@sustainweb.org Liverpool: paulm@cpre.org.uk

The Sustainable Communities Act in a nutshell

What is the Sustainable Communities Act? It is a new law which gives local government and citizens more power to decide how to shape their local area.

How does it work?

- 1) Councils 'opt in' to the process.
- 2) 'Citizen panels' are formed comprising local residents in the local authority area that has 'opted in'.
- 3) Suggestions for change will be discussed between the citizen panel and the local council, hopefully reaching agreement about which ones to propose to the Secretary of State.
- 4) These suggestions will be sent to the Local Government Association.
- 5) The LGA will put all the suggestions in priority order and send them to the Secretary of

the process by checking out www.localworks.org. 2) If they haven't joined, encourage them to sign up and you can use the sample letter which can be found at www.localactiononfood.org. 3) Join a citizen panel - armed with suggestions!

www.localworks.org
suzanne@sustainweb.org

Fresh Ideas ... for healthy eating on a budget

Over 80 community food projects and organisations from all over Kent and Medway met this March to explore how to eat healthily on a budget. The meeting, organised by the Fresh Ideas Network, heard from projects addressing this issue, including the YWCA (Young Women's Christian Association)

and affordable to local communities in the South East of England. Fresh Ideas is a project of the Common Cause Cooperative Limited and is funded for three years by the Big Lottery Fund as part of the Chances4Change regional Wellbeing programme.

www.freshideas.org.uk
Call Monday to Thursday:
01273 431 710 / 431 711

- Chiara Vagnarelli
chiara@freshideas.org.uk
- Louisa Greenbaum
louisa@freshideas.org.uk

New programme to tackle obesity

The Improvement Foundation is supporting the implementation of a co-ordinated obesity strategy working with



National Trust allotments at Minnowburn and Hughenden (l-r) photo © David Levenson, National Trust

State, who will then reach agreement with the LGA over which suggestions to fund. 6) The deadline for submissions from councils is 31st July.

Spending reports Central government will produce spending reports in April which show how local and national public money is spent in each local area. Councils then have the power to make proposals for a transfer of public money and powers from central or regional control to local control.

Act now! To meet the deadline for submissions we will need to act quickly! 1) Make sure your council has opted into

Food for Thought Programme, Whole School Meals Limited and the Windmill Community Allotment Project in Margate. The meeting also included advice surgeries on funding, catering, food safety, social enterprise development and working with vulnerable groups.

This event was one in a series of networking events that will be taking place across the South East over the next 18 months, including a South East regional wide event later this year. The Fresh Ideas Network supports community food projects which aim to make healthy, local food more easily available, accessible

Primary Care Trusts across the country. This programme, which will begin in late Spring, will focus on helping GPs and Primary Care providers, Local Authorities and local people work in partnership on a number of issues. These include: closer links between GPs and obese patients, support for pregnant and new mothers, and increasing knowledge about breastfeeding, diet and health among professionals and in communities.

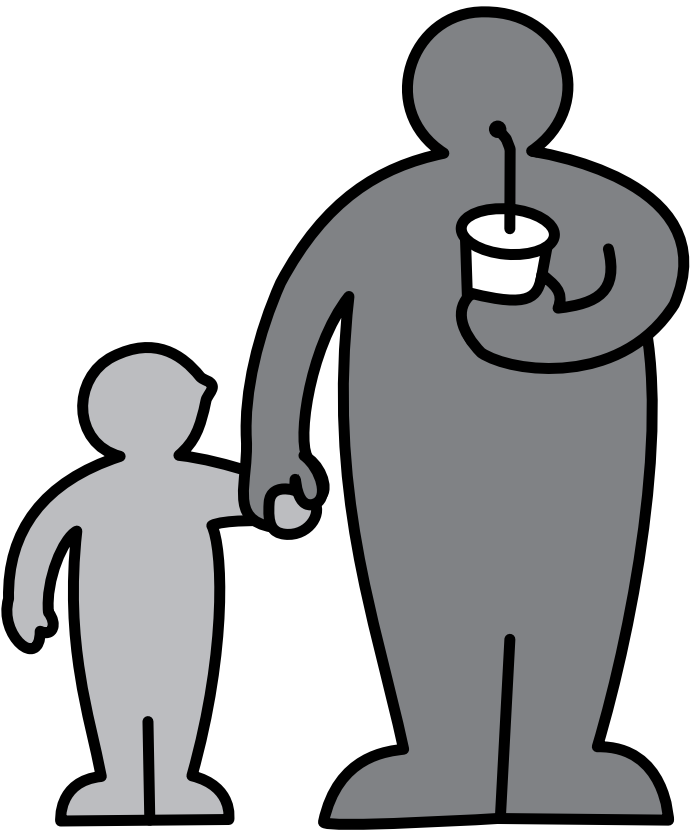
www.improvementfoundation.org
Jenny Drew 0161 236 1566
jenny.drew@improve.nhs.uk

Will Change4Life really change people's lives?

In this regular feature, we aim to put the organisations that make decisions affecting both our food system and the work of groups like yours, 'under the grill'. This issue we asked the Department of Health about their new Change4Life campaign. However, despite several phone calls and emails they were not willing to answer our questions, so Sustain's **Maresa Bossano** has had to respond.

What is Change4Life?
The initiative, supported by the Department of Health, aims to prevent people from becoming overweight by encouraging them to eat better and move more. Change4Life follows social marketing principles - 'using marketing, alongside other concepts and techniques, to achieve specific behavioural goals, to improve health and to reduce inequalities.' The Change4Life advertising campaign, which began on 3 January 2009 - on TV, in the press, on billboards and online - is initially targeting young families.

Will a few adverts and stickers really help people change their lifestyles?
Change4Life may help to reach to families that are already at the stage in the 'behaviour change' cycle where they are thinking about what their children should be eating. We're not sure it will have any impact on the most disadvantaged groups, who will be much less likely to pick up the phone to get a pack, or get information via a website.



Do you not think some of the messages are a bit too simplistic?
Change4Life, as with other government health advice, continues to promote sugar-free drinks, low-fat spreads, and other processed foods, that many people think are not truly healthy. What's needed is more pressure on the food industry to reformulate their products, and to make it easier for people to see at a glance what's in them, for example by using the Food Standards Agency's traffic light labelling.

Your recent project with convenience stores in the North East was very successful with a fourfold increase in fruit and vegetable sales in some shops. So why is this scheme only receiving a relatively small amount of funding, compared with the Change4Life advertising budget?
If Change4Life is really going to have an impact we feel there should be a lot more support at a local level for projects that make it easier for people to buy fruit and vegetables and know what to do with them, for example by providing cookery demonstrations. We hope that this convenience store scheme will provide free promotional materials and equipment - and include independent shops and community-run food outlets, like food co-ops, which can often provide affordable fresh produce.

Change4Life has been criticised for being partially funded by food companies whose products contain high amounts of fat, salt and sugar. Why did you decide to involve them?
Just how enthusiastically are Coca-Cola and Pepsi, for example, going to try to help children swap away from sugary drinks to fruit juice? These are the same companies that still target children with wall-to-wall marketing for unhealthy food. By not attaching any conditions to the involvement of industry in Change4Life, the government has lost a glorious opportunity to persuade companies to change their behaviour.

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www.nhs.uk/Change4Life
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THE TIME IS RIPE FOR A SEASONAL FOOD GUIDE

Over the next few issues, we'll be looking at some of the initiatives supported by The Big Lottery's £50 million Local Food Fund. **Ellie Garwood** takes a look at one of the first to receive funding, The Kindling Trust, and their work in Manchester.

The Kindling Trust is a non-profit organisation aiming to create an ecologically sustainable society. It was awarded a grant to distribute a pocket-sized seasonal food calendar to help shoppers to buy in a more sustainable way.

10,000 calendars were distributed via fruit and vegetable outlets across Manchester informing shoppers about current seasonal, local produce, with an online version also available at www.thetimeisripe.kindling.org.uk.

The guide also offers a range of quirky and handy tips (did you know that if the pips in a Cox's apple rattle it is perfect for eating?), as well as guidance on where and how to store produce. Organisers hope the idea will be picked up by regional groups across the UK, inspiring members to produce their own local variations.

Mark Wheddon, Local Food Programme Manager said: "It is projects like this that

have a wide impact on people's attitudes to local food and we are happy to support them. The Kindling Trust's The Time is Ripe project marks just the beginning in terms of Local Food grants. With a record £50 million to distribute to various groups we will begin to see a real change in the

Did you know that if the pips in a Cox's apple rattle it is perfect for eating?

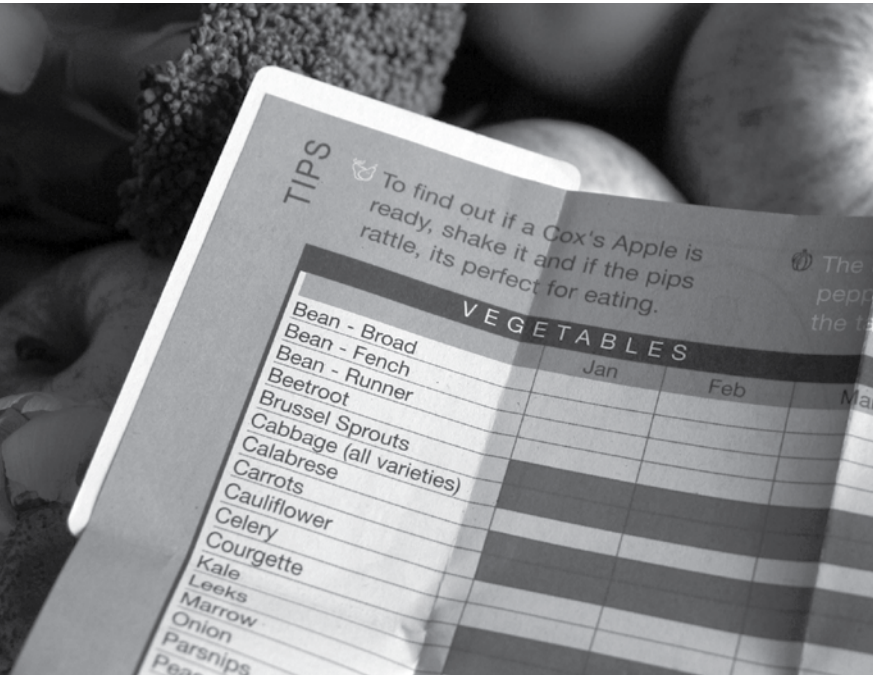
accessibility of local food." The Local Food Fund is encouraging and supporting a range of sustainable food related projects over the next five years. Numerous projects have already received funding since the initiative's launch in 2008, ranging from community projects involving school children, to non-profit organisations promoting sustainable produce.

In Manchester, they hope the increased awareness of seasonal produce will provide a massive boost for local farmers across the region.

Helen Woodcock of The Kindling Trust said: "We all want to be greener and healthier, but are busy with so many other things. This guide takes the hassle out of shopping in a more sustainable way. Simply by buying more local, seasonal and organic fruit and vegetables we can both improve our diet and make a positive contribution to our local and global environment."

The calendar can be picked up from Manchester's Farmers' Markets, Herbie mobile fruit & veg van in East Manchester, Unicorn Grocery in Chorlton, On the 8th Day on Oxford Road, Hulme Community Garden Centre, as well as numerous other sustainable food projects across the city.

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www.localfoodgrants.org
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Surviving and Thriving on the Land

This book sees Rebecca Laughton, ex-resident of eco-community Tinkers Bubble, travel around a number of smallholdings in the UK and France to see what makes them tick. The focus of this book is unusual and important, in that a lot of emphasis is put on the people behind the projects.



Many will know how hard it is to find replicable models for sustainable food projects, largely because the people behind them are key to their success, and it is this element which is usually missing when a project is evaluated. The author encapsulates this element in the term 'human energy', and argues that the sustainability of a project comes down to much more than its environmental impact and economic viability. The book points out the all too often overlooked fact that enjoyability is a major part of the sustainability of any project. This book is a useful text for anyone thinking of embarking on running a smallholding and what it takes for the enterprise, and those running it, to not only survive but to thrive.

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Surviving and thriving on the land: how to use your time and energy to run a succesful smallholding by Rebecca Laughton is published by Green Books and is available now for £12.95
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Great British Cheeses

Possibly the most comprehensive guide to the burgeoning movement of artisan cheese producers in Britain and Ireland. This book tells you everything you want to know about over 300 cheeses from classics such as Cheddar and Stilton through to modern cheeses such as Stinking Bishop.



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Great British Cheeses by Jenny Linford is available now in hardback for £12.99, published by Dorling Kindersley
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FLOUR POWER

You can get it sliced, diced, half-baked, crust-less and even with added omega-3. What you can't get so easily these days, however, is bread using minimal ingredients, free from additives and preservatives, hand-crafted by trained, skilled bakers. Ellie Garwood reports.

Only 5% of bread sold in the UK today is made using traditional methods and simple ingredients; industrial bakeries, in contrast, account for a massive 80%, and in-store bakeries (that use similar ingredients, additives and intensive processes) produce the remaining 15%. Since the introduction of intensive breadmaking, or the Chorleywood Bread Process (CBP) as it is known in the industry, UK bread consumption has considerably declined, slumping by a staggering 50% per capita since 1960. It seems the days of lovingly crafted, nutritious artisan bread have disappeared - and with it our national love of the loaf.

Sussex based family the Tennysons were so dissatisfied with state of British bread they decided to open their own bakery. Laura Tennyson, one fifth of the Tennyson family and co-owner of East West Bakery explains: "We started our company in 2006, and we had no family history or background in baking. My parents, Sue and Guy, were both recently out of work, and my brother and sister, Sean and Jenny, had just finished their A-levels. Sean and Jenny were thinking of going into catering, but we started to talk about bread and research it. We didn't know much about bread then - simply that bread in this country tasted pretty bad, was spongy, fatty and unsatisfying - and we wondered if we could do better." Three years later and East West Bakery is flourishing; an indispensable supplier of artisan bread to outlets throughout the south.

The Tennysons are also keen supporters of sustainable practices. "We use the minimum ingredients and intervention - raw, natural, organic ingredients direct from Shipton Mill in Gloucestershire,

hand-methods rather than machinery, and local distribution ... In addition to Shipton Mill we now source half of our flour from a smaller, stone mill in Dorset - Cann Mills. The mill is water-powered, and because of its small size, they are able to grind locally grown batches of wheat and rye rather than relying on imported grain."

Maintaining such a strong company ethos is no mean feat and the life of a baker is one of minimal sleep and long hours. Bread is made and cooked throughout the night ready to be delivered fresh in the morning, but the Tennysons are passionate about their trade, their industry and about changing British baking practices.

"The commercial ingredients available for baking are shocking - and not something the public are generally aware of"

"As soon as we started to research things a bit more seriously, including reading Andrew Whitley's book Bread Matters, we became horrified at the world of modern baking and the standard additives and ingredients," says Laura. "We've subsequently become quite militant campaigners for real bread. The commercial ingredients available for baking are shocking - and not something the public are generally aware of; improvers, enzymes, pumpable fats, even things like 'crust flavouring'...We are passionate about slow-fermentation methods. The better flavour and texture they produce can't be beaten."

Valued and avid supporters of Sustain's Real Bread Campaign, the Tennysons spoke at its opening launch in London in November 2008. The campaign promotes nutritious bread, the importance of local bakeries and celebrates the craft of breadmaking. It has already gained much needed public support. Massive shifts won't happen overnight but for now, loaf by loaf, establishments like East West Bakery are helping the UK put real bread back on the table.

.....
www.sustainweb.org/realbread
.....



East West Bakery, Sussex



Use your loaf and find a real bread supplier near you:
www.sustainweb.org/realbread

Growing Together

BUILDING PEACE THROUGH GARDENING

Clare Horrell finds out more about the project that is working with communities on both sides of the Irish border.

County Fermanagh in the westernmost part of Northern Ireland is a land rich in natural beauty and steeped in history. Forests, lakes and mountain abound and many of the settlements have names derived from the Irish language:

Centre is a remarkable initiative serving as a focus for research, education and training in organic food production and rural development. It also has a long and successful record of cross border and community outreach.

One of the Centre's projects - Growing Together - was launched in October 2008. It is structured around two sets of community 'clusters', which twin



Belcoo, Belleek, Mullycovet, Derrygonnelly ... But it is also a place whose people have been at the sharp end of Ireland's troubled history. The partition of Ireland in 1922 led to strict customs control on the roads between Northern Ireland and the Irish Republic. These controls remained until 1992 and made social interaction between people from different sides of the border very difficult.

In many ways, all seems peaceful now although memories of the conflict remain, as do strongly held views about whether or not Ireland should be united.

Crossing the border now is easy. About 45 minutes walk from the northern border town of Garrison - a town whose name reflects the region's long history of military occupation - brings you to the Organic Centre at Rossinver. Founded in 1995, the

communities in Fermanagh in Northern Ireland with neighbours over the border. The main gardening sites are based at the primary schools, with separate, but linked, community gardens in some localities.

The principal funding body is the International Fund for Ireland, with other contributions from the government department of agriculture and the Polden Puckham fund.

The main intention is to develop peaceful relationships between people from different religious and political traditions either side of the border. This will begin with some modest steps - simply sharing experiences with each other. Cooking sessions will be an important part of the programme helping people to meet and share not only their gardening

There was great enthusiasm from locals at the launch. Children from St Martin's Primary School, Garrison read a poem they had written about "Gardening with Ciara" (one of the gardening trainers):

*We know a girl called Ciara
She's a special friend to us
She started up our Organic garden
And she never made a fuss!*

*We just love to plant some vegetables
Like potatoes, carrots and herbs
Sometimes we make soup from these
And it always tastes superb!*

*When we go outside with Ciara
We always wear our wellies!
We enjoy the freedom of
The great outdoors
And we look around for berries!*

*Ciara loves her gardening
And now we do too
Planning, watering, clearing beds
And watching them grow too!*

*We now look on life in
A different way,
We know how to eat
A healthy 5 a day!*

*It's really easy
When you know what to do
We can do it
So should YOU!*

experience, but also the fruits (and vegetables!) of their labours and more broadly their thoughts and concerns about the issues of living in the border counties in the 21st century.

The work is only beginning. My privilege, together with that of a colleague in Queen's University Belfast, is to keep an external - but friendly! - eye on developments, to encourage networking and to develop wider understanding of sustainability.

.....
www.theorganiccentre.ie
tony.weekes@gn.apc.org
.....

Filling a Hole in Hull



Arthur Street Trading is a vegetable box scheme offering that little bit extra. Lucy Thompson finds out how: by incorporating strong ethical principles with a holistic take on sustainability issues, they have managed to fill a gap in the market.

The organisation is an award winning workers' cooperative based in Hull delivering organic fruit, vegetables, groceries, household goods and their very own homemade hummus. The hummus has been a real success story and is sold nationally through the wholefood supplier Suma. Arthur Street Trading was formed 10 years ago, spurred on by the desire to provide 'affordable high quality organic foods'. They were inspired by the example of Gioscope, a local workers' cooperative providing affordable housing, and were also developing a previous enterprise undertaken by some of Arthur Street Trading's founders; a shop specialising in fresh vegetarian and ethical foods.

Based from their shared residence on Arthur Street, they deliver to customers in the Hull area and surrounding villages. Their ethical philosophy permeates the organisation. By buying local produce they support independent businesses and this, combined with their free weekly deliveries, minimises food miles. Much of the delivering itself is done by a milkfloat converted to charge on solar power. The requirements of customers means that although produce will be local wherever possible, there are items that need to come from further afield. Where this is the case, with items such as exotic fruit, Arthur Street Trading ensures that it has been produced organically and according to the principles the cooperative espouses.

The success of Arthur Street Trading is partly due to a society increasingly aware of the implications of industrial agriculture. Graham Brooks (right), a director of Arthur Street Trading, sums up their success as being due to a combination of

issues: "We've had tremendous support from customers who want to support small scale local production, and some worry about the threats posed by industrial agriculture. Additionally, as more and more people become health conscious they want to enjoy pure tasty food and want to eat it when it is fresh and natural. Also some of our customers don't drive or don't want to."

Arthur Street Trading did see a small downturn in sales with the onset of the economic crisis, but their decision to launch an online buying service in September last year saw a 20% increase in sales. Supplying their produce in a variety of ways - from the seasonal vegetable box to selling individual items - means that they can adapt to customer demand, offering the consumer a viable alternative to the supermarket. Brooks says that the upturn in their product sales is a result of the online payment option and that they cater for people wanting "an increased variety of organic produce to choose from".

Looking to the future, Arthur Street Trading is planning to get involved with a couple of community initiatives with FEAST, a local organisation dealing with Food, Education and Social Transformation. The first of these initiatives is to offer vegetable boxes to people on lower incomes using a voucher scheme. The second is a project funded by the Lottery grants scheme Awards for All, where Arthur Street Trading and FEAST will go into schools in the Hull area to run workshops on organics, healthy eating and environmental issues.

Arthur Street Trading uses a successful formula, harnessing the desire of people to engage locally and sustainably with what they eat and using this power to have a transformative effect on the local community.



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www.arthursorganics.com
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Local Food Links leads the way on School Meals

Local Food Links in Bridport, Dorset, has become the first caterer in the country to achieve the Food for Life Gold Mark. Clare Horrell finds out how they got where they are today.

All eight of Bridport's schools are signed up to the Food For Life programme and are working towards the Bronze Award. The Food for Life programme helps schools to see school lunches as an educational opportunity and a central part of the school day - and links school meals with cookery classes, gardening activities and farm visits.

As the schools' caterer, Local Food Links was encouraged to apply for the Food for Life Catering Mark. Emma Noble, Director of the Food for Life Partnership, praised Local Food Link when presenting them with the award: "The eight schools in Bridport are reaping the benefit of your hard work - you are pioneers, showing the way things should be done."

To receive the award, Local Food Links needed to prove to inspectors that all dishes on the menu are freshly prepared, using mainly local, organic and in-season produce. At least 50% of ingredients had to be local and 30% had to be organic, but Local Food Links actually exceeded

these targets. No additives or hydrogenated fats are used, eggs and poultry are free range and certified organic dairy products feature on the menu. Most of their vegetables are organic, and from local growers. They have even changed over to Marine Stewardship Council suppliers of fish to ensure they are using fish from sustainable sources.

Local Food Links set up the school meals service in the Bridport area three years ago, when the government announced new standards for school meals. This was a real challenge for Dorset's primaries, which have not had kitchens since 1981. Dorset County Council put in place a contract with a national company which produces meals in Nottingham for re-heating in Dorset. However, they also supported a number of pilot schemes, with the aim of testing approaches which could be adopted in the longer term.

Tim Crabtree, Director of Local Food Links, worked with the head teachers and governors at the eight Bridport area primary schools to develop an alternative to the Nottingham-made ready meals. He explains: "Our aim was to create a service that not only delivered healthy, freshly made meals, but also created local employment and opportunities for local producers. The County Council supported us in developing the Bridport service as a pilot project, and now want to spread the approach to other areas."

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Many community food projects have large numbers of small customers. This results in high operational overheads for processing orders, which in turn has a negative effect on the sustainability of the enterprises. Good IT systems play a critical part in the effective operation of a food hub, but many community-led projects lack the skills or money to develop them.

Local Food Links, Dorset, has developed an IT system which consists of two elements. One operates as a scalable food buying co-op and the other is able to handle complex orders such as individual school meals, restaurant and café orders. Integration of the two systems enables the project to have very accurate information about both its customers and suppliers.

The Making Local Food Work programme is now looking at developing Local Food Links work to create a modular web-based system. This would consist of a central core of common elements like purchasing, invoicing and production planning and a number of customised modules which could be added on to streamline administration of, for example, veg box schemes, market stalls, food co-ops, catering operations, distribution.

If you are interested in being involved in this project, please contact clare@sustainweb.org.

www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk

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www.localfoodlinks.org.uk
www.foodforlife.org.uk
.....

School Food takes on the Take Aways

Michael Dees reports how the London Borough of Waltham Forest is aiming to prevent fast food outlets from opening within 400 metres of schools and parks with new planning guidelines currently being approved.

The proposals aim to limit the number of fast food outlets, including fried chicken restaurants, burger bars and kebab shops that can be opened in town centres and shopping parades, and also restrict their opening hours. The rules are being introduced after a council consultation found many people disliked the noise, litter and anti-social behaviour associated with the outlets.

Council Leader, Councillor Clyde Loakes said: "We have too many fast food outlets in this borough and we've had enough. We don't want to tell people how to live their lives - but at the moment residents simply don't have enough choice because of the amount of fast food takeaways." A recent consultation found 90% in favour of the plans which are expected to be approved by the council's cabinet in March. A spokesperson for the council said that the measure is a first step to controlling fast food outlets as part of a whole council approach. This may

include asking outlets to brand packaging to monitor litter, and advising outlets on healthy options.

The plans are a step in the right direction according to Tay Potier, London Policy Officer of the Chartered Institute of Environmental Health. Potier claims that healthy school meals alone will not stop the rising tide of obesity: "Local authorities should use all powers at their disposal to protect the health of the communities they serve - even if this means restricting access so that fast food outlets cannot be opened next to schools."

A recent study in nearby Tower Hamlets found that 97% of households are within a ten-minute walk from a convenience food seller and that, in some areas, there are more fast food outlets than shops. The study, conducted by London's City University Centre for Food Policy, found high levels of after-school activity in fast food outlets, with some students reporting skipping lunch and waiting for the end of the school day to eat there.

"We were shocked by the lengths students will go to, to avoid healthy food in schools and by the extent to which they are

surrounded by a culture of fast food outside the gates," says the report's author Dr. Martin Caraher. "What message are young people getting when there are more fast food outlets in their area than shops? To change this fast food culture we need to change both attitudes and the physical environment. The government needs to introduce planning guidance for the location of fast food outlets and we must ensure that parents and children know the impact that eating from takeaways can have on their health."

Dr. Caraher fears that unclear planning regulations may not stand up to a legal challenge and warns that small to medium enterprises (SMEs), with no money for an appeal, may lose out while multinational chains, who have the cash and the staff time to sit it out, will come in and fill the gap: "Rather than having SMEs supporting the local economy, it might have a negative effect," added Dr. Caraher.

He suggests legislation is required to give all local authorities the same powers, either through the London Local Authorities Bill or by using national regulation such as Planning Policy Statement 6 (PPS6) which sets out the Government's policy on planning for the future of town centres. Dr Caraher points to other local

authorities, such as Westminster, which uses a joint planning/licensing approach to address the issue. In Tower Hamlets environmental health officers spend time with businesses and can refer them for advice on nutrition. The local Primary Care Trust plans to support local food outlets to provide healthier options through an award scheme and business advice to stimulate change.

"Three meals eaten from fast food outlets each week can account for up to 25% of your estimated average requirement for energy for the whole week, as well as being high in saturated fat and salt," warns Dr Caraher. "The public health legislation should be leading on these issues."

It is clear that the battle for healthy food has moved beyond the school gates and onto the high streets of Waltham Forest. How long before the rest of London follows suit?

* A version of this article first appeared in Issue 23 of The Jellied Eel.

Suzanne Natelson 020 7837 1228 suzanne@sustainweb.org

MEMBER FEATURE

WELFEHD, Scotland

Polly Higginson sought out Local Action on Food member, WELFEHD (West Lothian Food and Health Development) to find out more about their work.

What is WELFEHD Scotland?

We are a young, bold and rapidly growing social enterprise that aims to reduce the barriers associated with eating a healthy diet by supplying fresh fruit and vegetables to a range of retailers.

What inspirations are behind the project?

In February 2005 the local authority and NHS funded a post to support the development of food co-ops as part of the national healthy eating initiatives. The main role of this post was to work with existing food co-ops and to establish an organisation that would support their aspirations to buy and distribute fruit and vegetables collectively.

Who do you work with?

We work with The West Lothian Business Gateway who provide advice and support to both staff and the Board of Directors and link these groups to training. We also work with the Social Enterprise Network in West Lothian to identify gaps in this sector and how we can fill them. And we work with a range of national organisations to inform policy and share good practice.

What action are you taking on local food?

Since October 2006 we have been working with local farmers to increase the amount of local produce being sold. We have achieved this and in the first full reporting period 22% of all produce was grown and sold within West Lothian.

What have your recent developments been?

In 2007 we introduced a returns system for food co-ops. The food co-ops had difficulty increasing sales due to the fact that their sales were unpredictable and anything unsold had to be paid for. After introducing the returns system food co-ops sales grew by nearly 200%.

In April 2007 the Scottish Government introduced a new schools act that set strict nutritional guidelines and prohibited the sale of confectionary. After securing a small grant we built a food preparation area in our warehouse and employed someone to prepare and package fruit and vegetables into small, ready to eat portions for children. This proved to be very successful and we now supply 30 schools.

Have you had any difficulties so far?

Our main difficulties have been identifying the appropriate support required at each stage of development and the best organisation or individual to provide it. Other difficulties have included finding local farmers that can supply us with the quality and quantities that we require at the right price. It has also been tricky finding staff that understand the social aim and can also operate the business side.

Do you plan to do any work outside of Scotland?

We have recently contacted colleagues in England and Wales to expand our work through Sustain. We have a vision where we collaborate on a large scale with farmers' co-operatives here and abroad; reducing prices for our customers, increasing our business and increasing the number of community-led organisations.

www.welfehd.co.uk

Spring 2009

APRIL

18th April

Viva! 's Incredible Veggie Show 2009, London
The biggest vegan and vegetarian celebratory festival in Europe featuring ethical food stalls, cookery demos, food tasting and a vegan café, at the Royal Horticultural Halls in Central London.

22nd April

Local Action on Food Seminar, Leicester
The first Local Action on Food seminar is going to be held on local food policy. suzanne@sustainweb.org

22nd April

Food Policy for Scotland: A Recipe for Success, Edinburgh
Holyrood's second annual food policy conference. www.holyrood.com/foodpolicy

25-26th April

Mid Wales Mouthful Food Festival, Wales
The Mid Wales Mouthful festival will be showcasing the best of Welsh produce. Look out for organic Welsh Black beef and local beer and cider. www.wonderwoolwales.co.uk/mouthful

April date TBC

Setting up a Food Co-op event
The first in a series of regional training events run by Sustain for those involved in establishing a food co-op. To book a place, email maresa@sustainweb.org.

MAY

2nd May

Willowbrook Organic Farm open day, 10-4pm
First Saturday of every month this farm in Oxfordshire is open to the public. www.willowbrookorganic.org

1-10th May

Spirit of Speyside Whisky Festival, Scotland
Visitors will enjoy a mix of events in celebration of this traditional drink including master classes, visits to distilleries, open days, walks and dinners. www.spiritofspeyside.com

9th May

Keeping Pigs Course, Somerset
A one day course run by the Low Impact Living Initiative on the basics of keeping pigs for meat. www.lowimpact.org

JUNE

7th June

Open Farm Sunday, UK wide
Selected farms across the UK will open their gates to visitors. See the website for an event happening near you or to sign up as a host. www.farmsunday.org

13th June

Permaculture Gardening Course, Manchester
This is a one day introduction run by the Low Impact Living Initiative. www.lowimpact.org

27-28th June

Children's Food Festival, Oxfordshire
Celebration of food and cookery with hands on educational activities for children at Northmoor Trust Farm. www.childrensfoodfestival.co.uk

**Local
ACTION
ON FOOD**



SUBSCRIBE

If you want to get this magazine every quarter, you can subscribe by joining Local Action on Food, the network that supports local and regional activity to promote healthy and sustainable food.

The network aims to:

- improve the security and sustainability of the nation's food system
- improve everyone's

- access to healthy and sustainable food
- protect and promote a diverse food culture.

The benefits of membership include:

- Free quarterly copy of Rhubarb
- Membership of our email news groups, such as on urban agriculture, sustainable catering, food co-ops and much more
- Regular information on national, regional and local sources of funding
- Contact with and support from other members, with a wide range of expertise, through our series of seminars + project visits
- Discounted rates on our forthcoming network events

- Advice on sustainable food, including specific advice for food coops, and on distribution and supply issues
- Influence on national policy making processes, through Sustain's extensive contacts and policy development experience.

To join Local Action on Food, fill in the slip below, or download a membership form from www.localactiononfood.org.

I would like to join Local Action on Food (please tick the relevant annual membership rate):

- ☐ £20 - Community projects, small farmers and growers and individuals
- ☐ £40 - Voluntary organisations, social enterprises and commercial bodies with a turnover of under £100,000 per year
- ☐ £75 - Commercial bodies with a turnover of between £100,000 - £1,000,000 per year, or statutory organisations (health authorities/councils /educational institutions)
- ☐ £100 - Commercial bodies with a turnover of over £1,000,000 per year

NAME

ORGANISATION

ADDRESS

POSTCODE

Please make cheques payable to **Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming** and return to: **Polly Higginson, London Food Link, Sustain, 94 White Lion Street, London N1 9PF**

If the fee is not, for whatever reason, a fair reflection of your ability to pay, please get in touch. We never refuse membership on the grounds of inability to pay the full membership fee.

TEL

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