Commercial Food Production-
The Urban Market Garden 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
• 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