

GETTING DOWN TO BUSINESS:

How to make your community food project economically viable

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FACTORS

- Situations are always different
- It makes sense to avoid re-inventing the wheel
- What you know can only ever really part of the picture
- That the global situation is serious and we need to inject a level of urgency!

Economic Viability

- Our urban food growing is not economically viable
- But our food trading system overall is
- Our own food growing is able to be viable within that overall system.

GROWING COMMUNITIES



















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	2006/7	2007/8	2008/9	2009/10	2010/11
Income from sales of own grown food	5400	7250	8400	9950	7000
Direct costs	14200	16700	18250	15200	18700
salaries	12500	14400	14800	12200	16000
other	1700	2300	3450	3000	2700
% economic viability	38%	43%	46%	65%	37%
If growers paid LLW ie £7.60, not £11.30				8205.31	
				89%	
If growers paid min agricultural salary £5.81				6272.743	
				107%	

HOW WE GOT HERE

- Started back in 1993: one farm in Buckinghamshire. All the work was done voluntarily.
- 1996, launched Growing Communities. Started buying in produce from organic wholesaler. Began to pay for some of the work.
- In 1999 we moved into our first office.
- By 2000 started to supply fruit and to make direct links with farms in Norfolk. First tranche of external funding.
- By 2002 the first certified organic Hackney produce came on line.
- 2003 - second tranche of funding. Launched our farmers market. Began to employ packers. 7 part-time staff in total.
- 2005 - economically self-sufficient. Employing 11 people part-time.
- In 2007 - community orchard, Good Food Swap.
- In 2008 launched our urban apprentice scheme.
- 2009, first micro-site in production.
- This year we launched our Start-up Programme. Employ 22 part-time members of staff.

What we have learned

- If you are selling food it's good idea to be able to supply people all year round.
- Box Schemes are a really useful way to sell fresh fruit and veg
- Growing some of our own food is important to us.
- We have clarified *why* we want to grow some of our own food.
- Productive growing is for us, key.
- Even when focussing on production, making the growing financially viable is pretty tricky!
- You need to think carefully about what will happen to the produce you grow and where it will be sold
- And you need to think carefully about what to grow.
- Diversifying to increase income can be a distraction and culturally not suited to your organisation.
- The customer doesn't always have to be right and the right to 'choose' whatever you want whenever you want it is worth challenging.
- External funding – it can be a poisoned chalice!
- Community-led trade is good thing!

We need to act!

Growing Communities' Key Principles

- The food traded should be:
 - • Farmed and produced ecologically
 - • As local as practicable
 - • Seasonal
 - • Mainly plant based
 - • Mainly fresh and minimally processed
 - • From appropriately scaled operations (which gravitate to the small rather than to the large scale)

- And the system as a whole needs to:
 - • Support fair trade
 - • Involve environmentally friendly and low-carbon resource use
 - • Promote knowledge
 - • Strive to be economically viable and independent
 - • Foster community
 - • Be transparent and promote trust throughout the food chain

What we need to do to make the systems that feed our cities more sustainable and resilient

Produce food in a way that:

- Does not depend on fossil fuels, artificial fertilisers and pesticides.
- Uses renewable energy plus more animal and people power.
- Backs this up with the appropriate technologies and machines.
- Restores the birds and the bees, the soil microflora and fauna.

What we need to do as a society

Adjust our diets to reflect how much of what kinds of foods we can best produce.

Shorten supply chains and dramatically increase production based on human-scale, mixed farms located in and around urban areas.

Build appropriately scaled trading relationships – starting from the local and working out to global.

Re-connect people with food and farming – involving them in the consumption, production, trading and celebration of sustainable food.

Through community-led trade we can:

- Create a practical way for our community to tackle the issues of climate change and resource depletion,
- Support small sustainable farmers and help them to thrive.
- Generate income with which to create jobs for our community and to become financially viable
- Increase/stimulate sustainable food production in and around urban areas
- Build community
- Provide our community with affordable, great food

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