

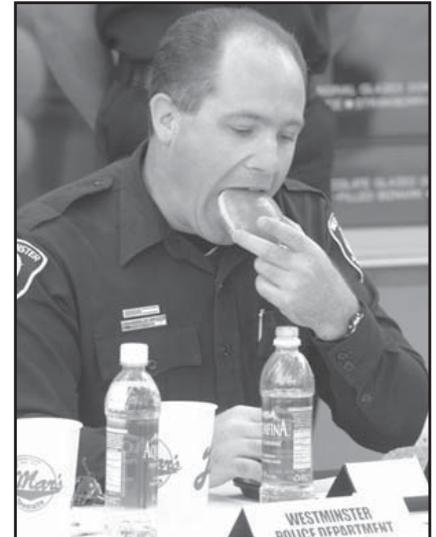
London Food Link aims to help producers, consumers and retailers make a positive choice for sustainable, local food. This means better access to affordable, high quality and seasonal food, shorter supply chains and campaigning for policies which promote a thriving local food economy and culture.

London Food Link is:

- establishing a local food network for London
- promoting a sustainable local food economy
- supporting new and existing food projects
- advising local and regional authorities on supporting the growth of a local food sector in London
- celebrating London's food culture

Improving the food on London's plate

In recognition of the need to develop a fairer and more sustainable food system in London, Sustain and the Food Commission have been awarded a contract for work that will contribute to a sustainable food and farming strategy for London. This work centres around two themes: increasing food access in communities where finding fresh and healthy food is difficult, and increasing the purchase of sustainably produced food by public sector organisations within London, including schools and the police.



America's answer to feeding its police force?

More information on the newly established London Food Unit is on page 3, and read on for details of our new project.

Improving food access for Londoners

Londoners living in deprived areas suffer not only from the more visible effects of poverty, such as high crime rates and poor housing. They also experience higher rates of disease - especially coronary heart disease, cancers and diabetes - with disease starting earlier in life than for their richer counterparts. Some London boroughs report a ten-year difference in life expectancy between communities living just a few stops away from each other on the underground line.

Local authorities working in London boroughs are responsible for the well-being of their residents, and are therefore increasingly concerned about these differences in health between poor and rich communities.

Such concerns have placed food access squarely on the public agenda, as a key factor that affects health inequalities. Sustain and London Food Link have frequently highlighted the fact that people's health is partly determined by how easy it is for them to buy healthy and affordable food locally. Food retailers have often deserted communities where households generally have a low income, such as areas with a high proportion of elderly people, and crime rates in run-down housing estates deter local shopkeepers. Meanwhile, large supermarkets are increasingly dominant in the food market, concentrating our food supply in large-scale shopping centres, which are most suited to customers with cars and secure incomes.

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Wriggle inside for...

Growing Communities project **p3**

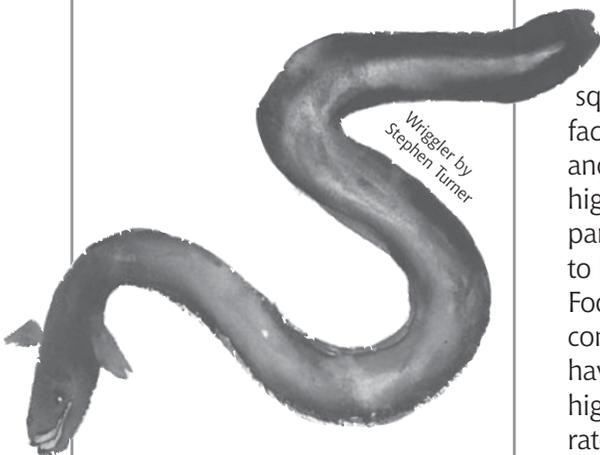
Bangladesh in the backyard **p6**

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Book competition **p12**



Wiggler by
Stephen Turner

LONDON FOOD LINK

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Members News

You say "Potato" I say "Delicious"

There will be a Potato Day and Seed Exchange Charity Event on Sunday 23rd of January from 9.00 am to 2.00 pm at the Shackelton Cloister in Dulwich College, London SE21. Highlights will include:

- A Potato Fair, featuring over 85+ potato varieties and experienced potato growers on hand to give growing tips,
- A Seed Exchange, providing an opportunity to try new potato varieties, and
- A Farmer's Market with in season fresh fruit and veg, along with other food products.

For more details please contact Lindsay Wright at 0776 2323812.

Eating well in Ealing

Cooking clubs have been set up in Ealing to work with local residents to increase their knowledge of the benefits of healthy eating, improve food preparation and culinary skills and help participants adapt traditional meals to tasty and healthy alternatives. To this end, five local people of various ethnic backgrounds were recruited and trained by a dietician to run cookery clubs in Southall and Acton. They were trained in food and nutrition, working with groups, First Aid, food hygiene and manual handling, which has given them new knowledge and useful employment skills.

Each cookery club has five sessions, each lasting two hours. In addition to teaching healthy cooking techniques, club leaders have also provided information to attendees on walking schemes and growing projects, thereby encouraging people to increase physical activity as well as improve their eating habits. Cooking clubs are free to participants and normally held at primary schools, or community and day centres, making them easily accessible. For more information please contact Melissa Arkinstall (07939 831896), Natalie Shepping (020 8893 0170) or Sonia Sharma (020 8893 0379).

London 5-a-day workshops

Networking/partnerships and exit strategy training:

- Tuesday 15 February 9.30am-4pm

Working with schools:

- Wednesday 23 February 9.30am-4pm

These workshops are relevant not only to 5-a-day but also the wider food and obesity agenda. Both workshops will be held at Government Office for London. Please e-mail Alison Stafford <Alison.Stafford@dh.gsi.gov.uk> by Friday 4th February. No charge will be made for the workshops, but a £10 cancellation fee will apply if you give less than 48 hours' notice of cancellation.

"Profitable growth in the food industry"

On Wednesday, 9th February the London Innovation Relay Centre, (part of London Technology Network) will host "Profitable Growth in the Food Industry". There will be speakers from Unilever Food Research Centre, Benjys, Organic India, London Food Centre and a representative of a major retailer group. It will take place at the Lecture Theatre in the Keyworth Centre, London South Bank University. This event is by invitation only from the London Innovation Relay Centre. For an invite contact Elizabeth Evans at ej.evans@ltnnetwork.org or tel: 0870 730 8683

Lecture on healing gardens

On 24th February at 7pm the organisation Roots and Shoots is holding a fundraiser featuring a lecture by Gay Search, a well-known garden writer who recently collaborated with Delia Smith on her latest book, *Delia's Kitchen Garden*. Gay will be talking about healing gardens and the event is taking place at the Museum of Garden History, next to Lambeth Palace. For more information contact Jo on 020 7582 1800.

Bread Street exhibition

Half of the Bread Street photographic exhibition exploring the richness of London's bread culture is now on display at The Crown organic pub in the East End until the end of January. The Crown is near Mile End Tube at 223 Grove Road, London, E3 5SN. The Crown is open from 12 - 11pm all week except Sunday when it closes at 10.30pm and Monday when it is closed for lunch. If you would like any more details about opening times please contact Jon Smart on 020 8981 9998. More details on the exhibition's location after this date are available from LFL. The exhibition is available for hire.

"Would you like food-poisoning with that?"

On Wednesday, 2nd March Professor Tim Brocklehurst will give a lecture entitled, "Would you like food-poisoning with that?" He will look at how we apply science to food to ensure safety and shelf-life. Light refreshments will be provided after the lecture. It will be held at the Lecture Theatre in the Keyworth Centre, London South Bank University. Everyone is welcome to attend and the meeting is free. Contact the London Food Centre at lfc@isbu.ac.uk

London Food Link would like to thank the following volunteers for their help over the last month: Caitlin Boon, Gemma Elwin Harris, Donald Lunan, Chris Peck and Laura Wiles.

LDA Food Unit

The London Development Agency's dedicated Food Unit is up and running. It will be working with partners, including London Food Link, to develop activities and policies to support a sustainable food and farming strategy for London.



From left to right: Mark Ainsbury, Jenny Jones, Niall Machin & George Raszka

The Food Unit provides support to the London Food Board, established by Ken Livingstone and chaired by Jenny Jones, London Assembly Member, to advise on ways to maximise the potential of London's food sector. The Unit is leading on the development of a London Food Strategy to be published later this year.

The Unit has commissioned projects looking at farming in London's green belt, food access and procurement, and the local food infrastructure in and around London. It will soon be looking at the economic impact of street produce markets and farmers' markets.

Jenny Jones said "Early priorities for the Food Unit and London Food will be to re-connect the capital's 200 farmers, and those in adjacent counties, to the London market. This will help ensure a safe and secure supply of food, reduce the ecological footprint of our food system and help improve access to healthy, affordable food for those on low incomes. Improving meals in schools, hospitals and other public sector organisations is part of that process."

The London Development Agency's full-time Food Unit staff are Niall Machin, who previously worked on sustainable development issues at the Greater London Authority, and Mark Ainsbury, formerly of the Food Standards Agency. Part-time support is provided by George Raszka, seconded from the London Assembly. For more information contact LFU on 020 7954 4218 or email Mark Ainsbury at markainsbury@lda.gov.uk.

London Sustainability Weeks

Following the success of London Sustainability Weeks in June 2004, the Weeks have now received funding for the next three years and will take place in 2005 between 5th and 19th of June.

London Sustainability Weeks celebrate the action of local people to make their neighbourhoods, greener, healthier, more sustainable places to live. In 2004, the Weeks coordinated 300+ events, a launch by Environment Minister Elliot Morley, and highlighted events on theme days and a final pledge event.

The Weeks are organised by a partnership supporting community-based action for sustainability and are coordinated and managed by London 21. For more details, visit www.londonsustainabilityweeks.org and check 'Useful Information'.



Member Feature

Growing Communities: putting down roots in the city.

Growing Communities is a small social enterprise based in Hackney, North London. We see ourselves as putting down roots in the city - in the literal and the metaphorical sense. We are working to improve the food we eat, the community where we live and the environment, through our different projects which are all concerned with food. We have three main project areas.

- The box scheme, which now provides organic fruit and vegetables to over 200 households in Hackney.
- Our Hackney Food Growing project, which grows organic fruit and vegetables on three sites and provides an opportunity for local people, schools and groups with special needs to find out more about where food really comes from.
- The Stoke Newington Farmers' Market, which was set up by Growing Communities in May 2003 as the first Farmers' Market in the UK where all the farmers and producers sell organic, biodynamic or wild produce.

To find out more about our projects look at our web-site: www.growingcommunities.org

Bulletin

Net guide to food and religion

In November, Tolerance Limited, a social enterprise promoting religious tolerance in a variety of ways, launched the website www.faithandfood.com. The site describes the major dietary practices and beliefs of the nine major faiths in the UK, and has a directory of food outlets where people can eat in accordance with their faiths. Future plans for the organization include exploring 'faith-friendly' food labelling and other prominent issues in the area of religion and food.

Further information about Tolerance Limited can be found at www.tolerancelimited.com.

Cultivating a co-operative?

The Cultivating Co-operatives project is run as a partnership between the Soil Association and Plunkett Foundation in association with Co-operativesUK. It can advise a limited number of developing community food enterprises and assist them with their organisational development. The project has a small grant scheme to cover incorporation costs, if needed. If you are supporting the development of a new community food enterprise and would like assistance please email gpilley@soilassociation.org with a little detail about the initiative you are trying to develop.

Hop-A-Shop scheme

This project will promote food access for people living in Brent as part of the 5-a-day community initiative (funded by the Big Lottery Fund). It works in partnership with Brent Community Transport to provide three trips per week to local retailers that have a good range of affordable fruit and veg. Trips start from March 2005 and are organised via community groups in South Kilburn, Harlesden and Wembley. Please contact 5-a-day Co-ordinator, Fahmida Din for more details on 020 8795 6235.



Keep an eye on [foodvision.gov.uk](http://www.foodvision.gov.uk)

A partnership between the Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services (LACORS), the Local Government Agency (LGA) and the Food Standards Agency has gathered together many examples of work being carried out by local authorities on improving local community health and well-being. This year saw the creation of the website "Food Vision", www.foodvision.gov.uk, which presents what they have found.

Written for local authority employees but useful to all, this public site has over 60 detailed case studies ranging from Men's Health to School Theatre. In addition, there is information about various central and local government policies and useful websites, research papers and documents. Several tool kits have also been included providing guidelines on how to set up projects. If you know of any case studies that could be added to the site please either use the submission form on the site or contact Joanna Stokes at: joanna.stokes@LACORS.gov.uk
Tel: 07986 904 693

Conference on obesity and malnutrition in the UK

A one day conference on Tuesday 1st February 2005, this event will cover topics such as: the epidemiology of obesity, socio-cultural factors leading to changes in prevalence of eating disorders, and the dietary treatment of obesity: fact, fad, fiction. It will be held at The Royal Society of Medicine, 1 Wimpole Street, London, W1G 0AE. For more information go to: <http://www.rsm.ac.uk/academ/810-sizeuk.htm>

BigBarn a big help to consumers

www.bigbarn.co.uk is a website that makes it easier for people to buy and use locally produce food. By typing in their postcode, visitors to the website can use a map that shows retail outlets selling locally produced food near them. In addition, BigBarn provides seasonal recipes and food related articles.

Work by LDA to make access to procurement contracts easier for small businesses

The London Development Agency recently launched its flagship Procurement Development Programme (PDP) which will make the millions of pounds of procurement contracts offered by the GLA family each year more accessible to small businesses and businesses run by people from BME backgrounds in particular.

A key element of PDP is the provision of a training and support package for small businesses, including a new procurement accreditation officially recognised by the GLA family. The content of the business support programme will directly emerge from a year long period of in-depth research which is due for completion in spring 2005. The research is focused on both the decision making processes of procurement managers within the GLA family, as well as the views of small businesses about the tendering process and the types of training and support which would help them compete more effectively for contracts.

Businesses wishing to participate in the programme should first complete a procurement questionnaire which can be completed online at <http://www.csclondon.co.uk>. Once there, click the blue "Log in" button on the right-hand menu bar then enter the Username: PROCUREMENT and the password: PDP4 (these are both case sensitive). Then follow the on screen instructions.

Completing a questionnaire is the first step in helping your business compete more effectively for public sector contracts and you will also be entered into a prize draw to win equipment worth £500 for your business. If you require a hard copy of the questionnaire or have any further questions about PDP please contact Daniel Partridge at CSC Regeneration & Research Consultants (Tel: 020 7512 2345, e-mail: dpartridge@csclondon.co.uk).

More Member News...

Croydon's Culture Kitchen

Cultural diversity was celebrated in style at WEN's Culture Kitchen event at the end of September. Over 70 women and men gathered at East Croydon United Reformed Church to take part in the colourful fun-packed day. The Rangoli art, made entirely of food and compostable materials was a visually stunning centre-piece for the event.



Fun with food at the Culture Kitchen !

Councillor Brenda Kirby, the Mayor of Croydon, welcomed participants to the event and tucked into the ample lunch. For many participants the different workshops on singing, herbal remedies and fruity beauty were the highlight of the day. One participant said, "If only we had more time for the fun workshops." Funding for the event came from Awards for All and Croydon Council. Plans are already afoot for Culture Kitchen 2005. For more information go to: <http://www.wen.org.uk>

The Kids' Cookery School joins forces with ASDA

The Kids' Cookery School (KCS), a registered charity, has joined forces with supermarket giant ASDA. The Kids' Cookery School promotes healthy eating and food awareness through hands-on cookery lessons from its base in Acton, West London.

The supermarket's chefs will work hand-in-hand with the KCS team and children who attend the school to design kid-friendly meals that are tasty and nutritious. The new range will contain naturally healthy ingredients and will be simple for

children to prepare and cook themselves. Founder of KCS, Fiona Hamilton-Fairley met Secretary of State for Health, John Reid, and Melanie Johnson from the Department of Health at the ASDA store in Park Royal, London.

Fiona Hamilton-Fairley, Principal and Chief Executive of The Kids' Cookery School said:

"Our ethos at KCS is to encourage children to learn about nutrition and the need for a healthy and balanced diet through cooking food themselves. We offer children from all types of disadvantaged and underprivileged backgrounds the opportunity to take part in the practical experience of preparing food using fresh ingredients - a vital life skill that sets them in good stead for a healthier future."

ASDA supports the school by providing all the ingredients used in lessons each week. The supermarket will also be donating a proportion of the profits from its new kids' range back to the charity. As a result of this support KCS hopes to expand and develop additional Kids' Cookery Schools throughout Britain in the next few years. Fiona added: "By working together we aim to raise the importance of healthy eating to both children and parents nationwide, whilst campaigning to the government to get practical cookery back on the national curriculum where it belongs."

For more information contact Maria Earle, The Kids' Cookery School: 020 8992 8882

London-Scotland exchange visit

London Food Link is organising an exchange visit with the Scottish Community Diet Project (SCDP). The Scottish crew will be doing the first leg and coming down to London in March. We are looking to organise a series of site visits and events for them. If you would like to be involved and meet some of those from SCDP, as well as a chance to meet up with other LFL members, please get in touch with Ben Reynolds.

Diary

Until end of January

Bread Street exhibition at the Crown Organic Pub, East End - page 3

23rd January

Potato Fair and Seed Exchange
Dulwich College - page 2

1st February

"Obesity and malnutrition in the UK" conference - page 4

9th February

"Profitable growth in the food industry" event - page 2

15th & 23rd February

5-a-day training at Government Office London - page 2

24th February

Lecture by Gay Search
Museum of Garden History - page 2

2nd March

"Would you like food poisoning with that?" lecture - page 2

March TBC

Series of project visits and events to tie in with the SCDP visit - page 5

The SCDP has just released its Directory of Community Food Initiatives for 2004. With over 300 entries detailing community groups with an interest in food, this is invaluable for those interested in food-related work taking place in Scotland, and as models for good practice elsewhere. Although too large to be available for download on the Internet, copies are available by emailing scdp@scotconsumer.org.uk.

Farm Gate

I feel a fraud writing 'Farm Gate' as I'm not a farmer and rarely get to stand by a gate let alone be in charge of one. Yet sometimes I wish I were, as I stare sadly at my screen displaying the latest agricultural policy reform and Entry Level schemes implementation updates from DEFRA. At least if I had a field I would be in the fresh air and could ignore the complex and confusing new arrangements. But of course that's not true. The draft 'booklets' (books is a better word) that arrive for comment, which will ultimately be sent to farmers, add up to over 300 pages and DEFRA is not even done yet. Which farmers have time to read and absorb all this? At a recent DEFRA meeting I raised this issue and asked whether all farmers would have access to some training. Sadly not, it appears, as DEFRA does not have the money. I was told that they are hoping instead to reach all the 'intermediaries' i.e. consultants and advisory bodies like Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and Agricultural Development Advisory Service (ADAS).

More details trickle in as issues are decided on orchards, cross compliance, the national reserve, cross border eligibility and so on and so on. Lord Whitty at DEFRA says 'we recognise that they do not yet have all the pieces of the jig-saw' and I appreciate that they are working hard to sort it out before the 2005 start date. Yet, doing a jigsaw in a rush has always seemed to me to be a big mistake...and whilst all this is going on there is a reform of EU-funded rural development being discussed, pretty much in isolation. Keep an eye out for the updates in the next London Farmers newsletter.

Lastly, I'm sad to say that I'm leaving Sustain and London Food Link. I am moving on to work for Friends of the Earth. They have important initiatives on food and farming such as on GM, pesticides, local food and on the power of the multiple food retailers. The latter is particularly useful as we contemplate yet more mergers (114 Jacksons stores bought by Sainsbury's last month) and buy-outs in the food retailing sector. Friends of the Earth is coordinating a campaign called 'Breaking the Arm lock' which has, at its roots, the desperate need to bring fair play into the food chain. Official investigations have confirmed that the trading practices of the four biggest supermarkets are damaging. They are leading to the loss of smaller suppliers, farmers and smaller retailers and the reduction of quality and choice to consumers. The campaign calls for a new investigation of supermarket domination of the grocery market, a strengthened and legally-binding retailer code of practice and the appointment of an independent watchdog. See www.foe.co.uk/supermarkets for more details.

Vicki Hird, Senior Campaigner - Food and Farming,
Friends of the Earth

Question of food miles leaves Blair speechless

This September, when asked by Andrew Turner, the Tory MP from the Isle of Wight "What are you doing to cut food miles?" Mr. Blair said he had no idea what his Government was doing to combat the problem. As reported in *Metro*, 16/10/04

Bangladesh in the Backyard

When Mr Shah, a former restaurateur from Ilford, took his first crop of Bangladeshi vegetables to the markets of East London, he had a tough time convincing buyers that the produce had been grown on English soil.

"People didn't believe that it had grown here. So I'd say, 'Think about it, is this in season now in Bangladesh?' And they'd realise that it couldn't have been grown in Bangladesh," says Shah, "because it was winter over there at the time." He soon realised he was filling a gap in the market: "They were amazed, and very happy to have these vegetables out of season when they weren't able to get hold of the imported produce."

Shah began experimenting with vegetables from his native Bangladesh four years ago, mixing them 50-50 in with English vegetables on his council allotment. He started with lau, or bottle gourd (a member of the pumpkin family) and built a six foot trellis for the climber. Encouraged by a bumper crop and a hot summer, he went on to grow khira, an egg-shaped fruit, which Shah describes as similar to cucumber but much, much tastier, and dugi, a green leaf vegetable, which grew three or four feet high, with a one-inch stem, even in the inclement English climate. Meanwhile, in his greenhouse he planted sheem - Bengali mange tout, with a pretty purple-red tinge round the edges.

The following year, Shah rented an acre from farmer Jim Collins, at Ashlyns Organic Farm near Ongar in Essex. What he had started as a hobby to keep constructive during a period of unemployment was now the seed of a business venture. The first year at Ashlyns, he grew khira on the one-acre patch, and the vertical-growing lau economically filled in the spaces around the border.

BANGLADESH IN THE BACKYARD



Solar Dome. Freightliners Farm, Islington

them like spinach," he says. Showing that he knows his customers, Shah adds "Bangladeshi restaurants won't be interested in jute because it's too labour intensive, but the ladies like to buy it [in the markets], because they know how to cut it very finely and they like to cook it at home."

Mr Shah's forays into Bangladeshi produce prove that growing exotic fruit and veg can be done out of doors in this country, a fact that Peter Hall, the horticultural project leader at the Freightliners Farm, Islington, is also keen to point out. Although Freightliners' impressive new plastic-glass solar dome (www.solardome.co.uk) has recently sheltered peppers, sweet potatoes, chillies, aubergines, fenugreek, and callaloo - not forgetting some rampant cape gooseberries that started off mild mannered and then ran amok - Hall says you don't need a big greenhouse to try your hand at exotics.

"Try things out outside," he advises, "because many plants we used to grow only in greenhouses are now known to be reliably hardy in the south. Your garden may be or may contain a microclimate warm enough to risk exotics outside - on a south facing wall or slope with good drainage, for example."

And what's the horticulturalist's top tip for exotics, apart from to beware the bullying cape gooseberry? "Start exotics early", as many varieties have a long growing season, like chillies. "Start seeds off early in a propagator or buy young plants; protect tender plants with cloches well into the growing season, and try to ensure they don't get a cold shock by planting them out too early," advises Hall.

Although he admits that even under the dome, the okra, cotton and quinoa were "minor disasters" the Freightliners team and volunteers will be trying cotton again next year, with bitter gourds and melons added in to the mix. Experimentation is the name of the game, and there are even some advantages to these plants from far-flung places that can make a gardener's life easier, as Hall explains: "On the plus side, many exotics have fewer pests than traditional veg."

Ashlyns Organic Farm
Epping Road, North Weald
Essex
CM16
Tel. 01992 525 146
www.ashlyns.co.uk

Freightliners Farm Ltd
Sheringham Road
London
N7
Tel. 020 7609 0467
www.freightlinersfarm.org.uk

Even though the rains of summer 2004 put a damper on things--with fewer lau and the khira so late there was only time for one crop in September before the frost hit - Shah is nevertheless weighing up the idea of making his exotic plan bigger. He wants to sell to more markets, and to restaurants, who, he estimates, will particularly like the khira. To start making this a sustainably profitable business he figures he'll need at least 20 acres, a gamble that might just pay off.

With that much land, what other exotics might be in the pipeline? Misty lau, the green and orange variety, might work, says Shah, and jute, for making clothes and sacking. "And when the jute plants are small, about 12 to 15 inches long, you can take the top leaves off, cut them fine and cook

Help let the sun shine in

The picture of the Solar Dome at Freightliners Farm shows how impressive the structure is... but unfortunately it has not stayed that way.

The victim of recent vandalism, the dome now needs to be dis-assembled and reconstructed. If you would like to help, donations of time or money would be greatly appreciated by the farm.

Allotment Slot

Foreign plots ...

The first frosts find my miserable potato crop still hiding in the soil: the neglect of carrots and riddled broccoli is an embarrassment to see, and I fear the postman's footsteps and the dull thud of the non-cultivation notice as it hits the floor. You know you're in trouble when you can't even tell whether the vandals have been at work, and there's a JCB on your list for Santa. If you're an allotment gardener never, ever, go away, for hell hath no fury like ten rods scorned, and the rods break your back if you dare return. But that's the price of foreign travel, so if you really must indulge, at least take in other peoples' plots along the way.

In May, when I should have been hoeing for Britain, the day job took me to Scandinavia, where they do strange things with flagpoles on allotments. On the appointed days, (and you can check them on the net), up go the sky blue and custard streamers in Stockholm, and our own Cross of St George in Copenhagen (though they get the colours the wrong way round). And in one Swedish suburb, gold and beige, the standard of Assyria - or so I was assured by a gardener from Babylon, who should know. And sheds too: one overlooking a Stockholm lake doubled as a sauna, from which you could spy red-funnelled ferries through the steam - and the tree house on the plot next door. Another a recycled ticket booth from the exposition of eighteen ninety something. And on the remarkable Vennelyst site, a short swim across the moat from Copenhagen's hippy quarter, a hundred cottages in a psychedelic array of styles and colours, the oldest bearing a spire topped with a crescent moon. I worry about the Danes and colours: nice people, but when they were rampaging through Saxon Britain, what were they after: the plunder, the maidens, or the crayons?

Meanwhile, ancient mollusci were laying waste to my plot, and I had scarcely come to grips with them (fleeting, on the swift and final journey between the leaf, the sky and the shed roof, or Valhalla as they call it), than I was off again, to a place that will surprise us all with its allotment gardens. These were in the Alps, home of Winter Olympics and clear mountain streams, but not the Alps of Austria or Bavaria, (where, incidentally, I once spied a shed in Bavarian sky blue and white, with an enamelled coat-of-arms of Freistat Bayern on one side of the door and a bust of Mad King Ludwig II on the other), but the Southern Alps of Japan, to which I had been summoned to speak to four hundred gardeners at an International Symposium, on the subject of German-style allotments. I was (the larger) half of the International; fortunately, a congenial German park-keeper was the other half, so at least one of us had relevant knowledge, while I stuck to the safer ground of amusing our hosts with bad Japanese, cheerfully spoken. The Symposium over, hot spring vacated, and Union Jack rolled up, I wandered off to meet the plottolders - one of whom offered to fly me over the site, and twice around Mount Fuji, in his little plane. As you do. Prepare for the unexpected amongst the rice fields - next time.

Richard Wiltshire - QED Allotments Group

Winter greens and root vegetable soup - Serves 4

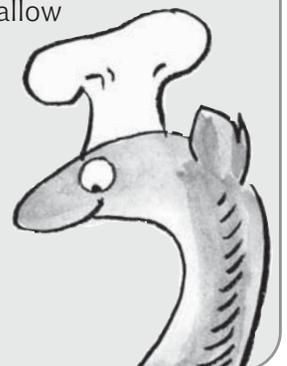
This is the sort of soup that can sustain you all winter long, changing the root vegetables and winter greens as you see fit. The curly kale could be swapped for cavolo nero, ruby chard or just plain old cabbage. To turn it into a more substantial meal, serve the soup over thick slices of country bread or ciabatta, grilled and brushed with garlicky olive oil.

2 leeks
2 turnips
2 parsnips
4 smallish carrots
2 tbsp olive oil or butter
1.5 litres hot water or chicken stock
2 tbsp tomato puree
2 bay leaves
sea salt and pepper
750 g curly kale or other
2 celery stalks, finely sliced
1 tbsp extra virgin olive oil, 2 tbsp grated parmesan

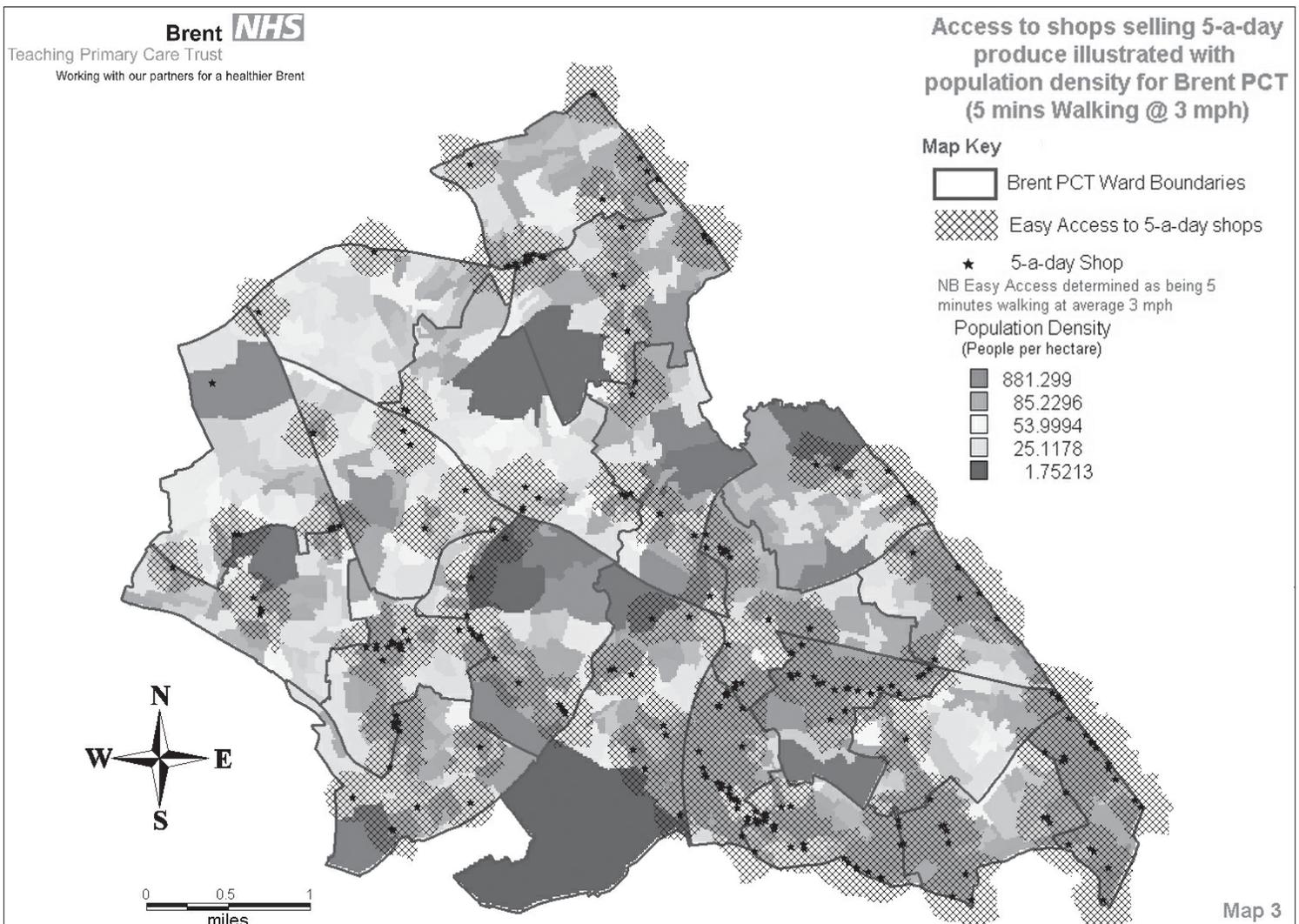
Peel the leeks, turnips, parsnip and carrots, and finely slice. Melt the oil or butter, add the sliced vegetables, and cook for 3 minutes, tossing well. Pour on the boiling hot water or stock, and bring back to the boil. Add the tomato puree, bay leaves, salt, pepper, and simmer for 30 minutes or until the vegetables are tender.

Wash and dry the kale or equivalent, and chop across the leaves into 1 cm slices, including most of the stems. Add to the pot with the celery and cook for another 20 minutes until tender. Serve in big shallow soup bowls, drizzle with extra virgin olive oil and scatter with grated parmesan.

Recipe by Jill Dupleix,
Cookery Editor, *The Times*



Improving food access for Londoners



Copyright Brent PCT Public Health Department

[Continued from Page 1]

Such problems have long been noted by local authorities and health organisations, and were acknowledged in the 2004 Public Health White Paper from the Department of Health, which noted that "Deprived communities often lack good local access to places to buy fresh fruit and vegetables."

The Food Unit of the London Development Agency (see p3) has therefore commissioned research into how local authorities could help their disadvantaged residents by improving access to healthy and affordable food, and intervening where the market has failed to deliver. Specifically, the researchers (the Food Commission, working in partnership with Sustain and London Food Link) are investigating how local authorities could improve local infrastructure to improve food access. The main aims are to:

1. Produce guidance for borough planners on how to improve access to healthy and affordable food for low-income communities.
2. Produce guidance for housing associations working in the London area on how to develop, implement and sustain work to improve food access.
3. Support at least one borough working towards a neighbourhood retailing strategy, to improve food access in their area.
4. Help disseminate the food access guidance to relevant policy officers, local government officials, and public

and private sector organisations.

5. Promote, and support the promotion of the Open College Network food access course, which is coordinated by Community Food Enterprise (Newham)

The research, which began in August 2004, has already shown up many obstacles to improving food access, which may help to explain why a problem that has been urgent for many decades has not yet been solved. But the research has also identified ways in which some of the obstacles could be overcome.

At a strategic level, we have found an astonishing lack of reference to food as a key determinant of health. Whilst government policy acknowledges this, and many local projects are underway to improve food access (usually run by the community themselves), there is little commitment to practical ways of solving food access problems in key documents such as the London Health Strategy. Such concerns might seem arcane, were it not for the fact that priorities highlighted in such strategy documents cascade down through Sub-Regional Development Frameworks, Unitary Development Plans, Primary Care Trust health policies, Local Strategic Partnerships and local authority Community Strategies. Put simply, if food is not identified as a priority in top-level strategies, by the time the strategy

IMPROVING FOOD ACCESS FOR LONDONERS

reaches local level, communities cannot call on their local authorities to improve food access. Spending council officer time and budgets cannot be justified.

However, there are also good examples of where strong partnerships can overcome such problems, where food access lies at the heart of borough policies to improve well-being. We have met with representatives from these boroughs to learn from their experiences. Strong partnerships usually involve enthusiastic individuals championing the cause and engaging creatively with people working in many areas - e.g. transport, housing, health, planning. It is a long process and demands good relationships, brokered by people who understand the complexity of food access issues.

In areas that do not support food access improvements at a strategic level, the communities themselves have often picked up the task of supplying healthy food to families and elderly people living on a low income. Food co-operatives, food delivery vans and vegetable box delivery schemes are just some of the projects run on a voluntary basis. However, these are often stuck in the never-ending cycle of competing for funds to survive.

That is why the London Development Agency project is also looking at ways to encourage social housing organisations to engage with food access. They understand the needs of their residents and, as one housing association officer said, "We are the rich end of the voluntary sector and we're going to be around for at least the next 100 years." They acknowledge what the LDA has already recognised - that the food access problems of deprived communities need to be fixed permanently, to ensure that future generations benefit from improved food access and improved health.

For further information about the Food Access project, contact: Kath Dalmeny, Senior Policy Officer, The Food Commission; tel: 020 7837 2250; email: kath@foodcomm.org.uk

Reducing food miles with Transport for London

The public sector in England spends £1.8 billion on food and catering services, not a small sum. As part of the project with the London Development Agency (see front cover) Sustain and London Food Link are investigating the environmental and social benefits to be gained by using some of this extraordinary buying power to purchase sustainable food. In particular, we are exploring the challenges and opportunities for sustainable food procurement by public organisations in London. The project is primarily working with the Metropolitan Police Authority (MPA) and Transport for London (TfL), and will also assess the current food procurement practices throughout the Greater London Authority (GLA) family of organisations, i.e. the GLA at City Hall, the London Development Agency (LDA) and the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority (LFEPA), in addition to the MPA and TfL. Working with the MPA and TfL should give a useful contrast, as the MPA have in house catering operations, whereas TfL have contracted out its catering operation to catering services provider, Sodexo.

Preliminary meetings with the police and transport staff have identified how the project could best deliver useful outcomes, such as developing sustainable food policies, marketing sustainable food, and identifying and choosing sustainable food options. Over the next few weeks the project will be collecting baseline data on current food spending patterns across the GLA family, such as how much food procured is organic, fair-trade, free-range etc. After this, tailored training sessions will be delivered to the MPA and TfL, based on their training needs and areas of interest. During the course of the project we hope to demonstrate through training and guidance that sustainable food makes good business sense, and we also aim to provide the capacity to further develop sustainable food procurement in the MPA and TfL. Contact fiona@caimcross.fsworld.co.uk



Serving up sustainability in schools

Local food in London schools

We have also been working with Camden Local Education Authority (LEA) to find ways to improve the sustainability of the food used in school catering. A best value review team has been set up to identify the different options for providing Camden's school catering services as the contract will be due for renewal in April 2006. The contract is currently with Scholarest who are part of the Compass group of companies. Sustain/London Food Link has been invited to sit on the review team and we are arranging training workshops with key personnel from the contracts department, the procurement team, councillors, heads and governors of Camden schools, amongst others. This training will inform all those involved in the decision making: why sustainability is something that should be incorporated; who the responsibility lies with to act on the quality of the catering; and how to understand and work with the complexities of contract specifications. This training will take place at the start of February.

The Sustain project will also develop technical guidance for sustainable food procurement in LEAs. We are keen to make contact with relevant people from other Boroughs/LEAs so this training and guidance can be offered to other parts of London. Please get in contact with Ben Reynolds on 020 7837 1228 if you want to find out more.

Hospital Food Project

Distribution - friend or foe to sustainable food in London?

A piece of research carried out by Westley Consulting on behalf of the London Food Link Hospital Food project has identified that a series of barriers face the local food sector in London. The study focuses on the distribution barriers which exist for local and local organic food producers and suppliers in the South East to sell to London, and for purchasing organisations, such as the hospitals involved in the project to buy locally produced and distributed food. The research focuses on 'distribution' in terms of the steps that producers need to take to get their produce to the customer, rather than issues such as the agronomic aspects of production, or production standards.

London has some specific issues in terms of size and diversity, but in many ways it was found that these are similar to those which arise in other marketing situations. The major barriers to supply of local and local and organic food to London were found to be:

- Infrastructure
- Information
- Organisation
- Management standards and efficiency
- Perceptions of London and the public sector
- Government bureaucracy

The research highlighted the fact that to succeed, local food must be more sustainable than the mainstream alternative, and therefore needs to be defined by more than merely location. Work will need to be done to develop a sustainable standard for local food. Meanwhile, local food producers will need to focus on the needs of customers, and will require a high level of information and technical support.

One of the most effective ways of beginning to enter markets such as hospitals in London is via some of the existing wholesalers and suppliers, at least at the beginning, as many good working relationships have already been formed. In the long term though, it will become necessary to manage



amalgamation and consolidation of supplies on a larger scale.

Research is also being carried out by Eco-Logica to draw up a business plan for the development of a sustainable food centre in London. Such a centre would seek to improve the supply of food into London from surrounding counties.



New Covent Garden Market

The Eco-Logica team made a number of recommendations for action in the future; these included drawing up a definition for local food in London, and suggesting the establishment of a consumer-orientated centre to promote the concept of local food. They suggest that groups with interests in local food should campaign for the NHS to give more consideration to sustainable procurement at a local level. The perception that organic food is too expensive for the public sector should be challenged, since within hospitals there are some outlets where organic food can be marketed at different prices. The final recommendation is for the government to match its rhetoric on local food with enforcement measures for official agencies and the NHS at all levels, to give higher priority to local food and sustainable procurement. The relevant strategies need to be devolved and those at ground level should be given the power to implement them.

The full report is available at:
www.sustainweb.org/pdf/hosp_dist_rep.pdf.

Reads for a book-eel

Oranges and lemons: food and art with recipes from around the world

This book is the result of a project by the pupils, staff and parents at Rushmore Primary School in Hackney.

Oranges and Lemons encourages home cooking by making food fun and interesting. There are sections on balanced meals, food maths, London food history and food science; as well as tested community recipes. In addition to recipes, the book features artwork produced by students, the result of an effort to bring together food and art and explore the art and food traditions of different cultures.

To order copies at £5 each, please contact the Rushmore school office at 020 8985 3175.

Seasonal food: A guide to what's in season when and why by Paul Waddington

This book explains, month-by-month, what food is in season. Waddington has done more than create a simple directory or reference book. He has included culinary history, notes for preserving and storing, supplier advice and suggestions for what will work with what.

Soft Cover, 160 pages, Eden Projects Books, £10.99

If you want to get your hands on a copy of *Seasonal Foods*, email ben@sustainweb.org with an update on what your project/organisation has been doing for inclusion in the next Eel by the 1st of April. The first one out of the hat wins.

Join London Food Link Now!

The benefits of membership of London Food Link include:

- *The Jellied Eel*, our quarterly members' newsletter.
- A chance to influence policy-making on food issues including contributing to food and nutrition strategies, government and GLA consultations on food, farming, planning and the economy.
- Membership of an interactive e-mail group with news, events, jobs and developments around food issues in London.
- Discounts off London Food Link events, conferences, seminars and publications.
- Access to online members' area with membership directory.
- A free copy of ***Growing Food in Cities*** to new members and 50% off all London Food Link publications.



To join London Food Link or for further details contact:

Ben Reynolds, LFL Co-ordinator, c/o Sustain, 94 White Lion Street, London N19PF. Tel: 020 7837 1228. Fax: 020 7837 1141.

ben@sustainweb.org

www.londonfoodlink.org

London Food Link members and supporters include:

Primary Care Trusts, London boroughs, business associations, retailers, farmers, environment and community groups, food access partnerships, allotment groups and food writers. Our work is guided by a working party of key London-wide agencies and groups representing food issues from farm to fork.



THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THIS MAGAZINE ARE NOT NECESSARILY THOSE OF LONDON FOOD LINK.

ILLUSTRATIONS: 'WRIGGLER' EEL BY STEPHEN TURNER. ALL OTHERS BY BEN NASH.