Introduction
It is widely recognised that gardening and food growing has a positive impact on people's health and wellbeing and there is a growing body of evidence to support this (Schmutz et al., 2014). Regular contact with plants and the natural environment can improve mental wellbeing and combined with the activity of growing food it can help improve physical health for wide range of abilities and ages.

Summary of evidence
Regular involvement in gardening can
• Improve psychological health, by reducing stress, the severity of stress and associated depression
• Increase physical activity, burn calories and contribute to maintaining a healthy weight and reduce the risk of obesity
• Help with rehabilitation or recovery from surgery or other medical interventions
• Improve the quality of life for people with dementia and Alzheimer’s disease and help alleviate symptoms such as agitation and aggressive behaviour
• Contribute to improved social interactions and community cohesion
• Provide access to locally grown, fresh produce and help increase the consumption of fruit and vegetables, as well as improving attitudes to healthy eating
• Introduce people to a way of life that can help them to improve their wellbeing in the longer term.

Food growing and the wider determinants of health
As the wider determinants of health model shows there are many social, economic and environmental factors that impact on health.

Figure 1. The Wider Determinants of Health (Barton and Grant, 2006)

Food growing and the wider determinants of health projects can have positive benefits on these:

Individual lifestyle: supports a healthy lifestyle with regular outdoor activity and contact with nature which helps improve physical and mental health. Provides access to healthy, affordable, locally grown food

Social and community: engages the community and enhances mechanisms for getting people involved in things that matter to them

Activities: promotes health and wellbeing as well as an opportunity for learning new skills

Built environment: physical exercise is designed into the local area

Natural environmental factors: enhances the natural environment and engages people with nature

Growing Health commissioning
The project ‘Growing Health’ (www.growinghealth.info) identified examples of public health commissioning and supporting community food growing to deliver health and wellbeing outcomes. Many projects have links with public health and five of the selected thirteen case studies of community food growing projects, documented so far, are supported by public health.

Table 1. Public Health Commissioning of Community Food Projects

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Type of Project</th>
<th>Commissioned</th>
<th>Focused on Health and Wellbeing</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
<th>Evaluation Methods</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London borough of Tower Hamlets</td>
<td>Community Food Growing</td>
<td>Yes, commissioned</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing: improving health through social interaction</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>External evaluation, health questionnaires, x2 questionnaires, scale</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sandwell and the Black Country</td>
<td>Community Food Growing</td>
<td>Yes, plus other funding sources</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing: improving mental and community resilience</td>
<td>500</td>
<td>Evaluation of community food growing, Wellbeing Scale (MINDPOP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brighton and Hove</td>
<td>Community Food Growing</td>
<td>Yes, commissioned</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing: improving physical activity and mental wellbeing</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>Independent evaluation by Sheffield Hallam University and Brighton plus case studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Community Food Growing</td>
<td>Yes, commissioned</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing: improving the wider determinants of health and health improvement</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>Evaluation of community food growing, External evaluation of Community Food Growing projects, Gardens Organisers, Return on investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UK</td>
<td>Community Food Growing</td>
<td>Yes, commissioned</td>
<td>Health and wellbeing: improving outcomes for communities and sites using an asset based approach</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Independent evaluation of community food growing, Independent evaluation of Community Food Growing projects, Gardens Organisers, Return on investment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Opportunities
• To build upon the good self reported benefits
• To develop ‘action-based’ research to show the cost-effectiveness of food growing programmes compared with other interventions
• To build confidence in the public health team by promotion, knowledge sharing and training
• In addition to health outcomes, food growing provides significant added value, including an increase in biodiversity and ecosystem value, development of skills and learning opportunities, production of accessible healthy food

Challenges
• Collecting evidence of health outcomes by often small volunteer run food growing projects can be difficult
• Difficulty of comparing gardening and food growing to other programmes
• Levels of awareness within public health of the benefits of gardening are still relatively low
• Growing food doesn’t fit the standard public health delivery model, as activity can be limited by the growing season and the weather

Conclusion
The Growing Health project has reviewed how public health are using food growing to meet their outcomes. Investing in and supporting community food growing can provide an effective way to improve health as well as prevent ill health. Examples include:
• Commissioning community food growing projects to deliver health outcomes
• Supporting the setting up or development of projects, including funding
• Providing access to land and other resources such as staff support

Growing Health
Growing Health is a joint project between Garden Organic and Sustain funded by the Tudor Trust. It has created an active industry advisory board and network of healthcare professionals, academics and representatives of community growing initiatives. It is developing a comprehensive UK network to see how community food growing can be routinely used by the health service as a way of promoting health and wellbeing.

References

Image 220x1043 to 938x1760