Enquiry into local food growing activities: Summary

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1. Key points

- Policy interest in local food and food growing has increased recently due to concerns about food safety and security, its potential contribution to local development, and environmental and social benefits
- Different terms are frequently used interchangeably to describe different activities, contributing to a lack of clarity about which activities are being referred to
- The benefits of local food & food growing include social, political, economic and environmental impacts, but these appear to stem from the activity rather than the output; little research has been conducted into the relationship to tackling food security
- Geographical information on local food growing activities is currently spread between several different sources; consolidating this could identify activities and regions where local food growing activities are (or could be) taking place, and regions where the frequency of these activities is high relative to population size or geographical area.
- Recent Scottish food policy highlights local food growing as an area of action, and since 2014 has placed food poverty on the agenda, but the link between the two is not made explicit in policy terms.
- Most local food growing activity is managed by local authorities through the provision of allotment sites; recent years have seen increased involvement of voluntary, third sector and charitable organisations to manage community-led food growing activities.
- There is a lack of research on how local and community food growing contributes to local food networks, the socio-economic characteristics of those involved in growing, and the barriers to becoming involved.

2. Background

This is a summary an initial enquiry into local food growing conducted as part of Theme 3 of the RESAS Strategic Research Programme, 2016-21. The aims of this deliverable are:

- To understand the role and extent of local and community food growing in Scotland;
- To explore links between local/community food growing and the local food network, and the role the food growing could play in tackling household food security.

The policy relevance of local food and community growing has increased recently due to rising food prices, concerns over food security (Revoredo-Giha et al.), and public health scares about the safety of the food supply chain. Local food growing is also a relevant area for policy because of the contribution it can make to regional and rural development. The link between local food growing and addressing household food insecurity is not well developed although there is a long social and cultural history of food growing being used to tackle a range of social 'problems' such as social inequality, food security and public health (McKay, 2011). Recent interest in food growing has focused on the social, environmental, health and ecological benefits of urban gardening and urban agriculture, including the illegal activities of guerrilla gardeners (Adams and Hardman, 2013; Dennis et al., 2016).

3. Terms and definitions

The term '**local food growing**' is used to refer to both commercial and non-commercial activities, which can be managed by individual(s) or by a community. Table 1 shows how these criteria create a four-fold classification for understanding local food growing activities:

	Commercial	Non-commercial
Privately managed	Market gardening, horticultural enterprises	Allotments, home growing
Communally managed	Community-supported agriculture (CSA)	Community gardens and orchards

Table 1: Local food growing classification

Local food growing activities are often included in academic studies of "**alternative food networks**" (AFNs) because modes of food production that forge closer links between food producers and consumers differ from, and challenge the conventional food supply system.

The term '**community growing**' is often used interchangeably with local food growing where it tends to be used to refer to activities taking place in community gardens and orchards, as well as to community-supported agriculture schemes. 'Community growing' is also often used to refer to allotments, although the latter are usually composed of many individual plots, which may or may not be managed collectively through a members association (Greenspace Scotland, 2011). Allotment plots are the most popular form of growing outside the private garden; in 2007 there were 6,341 plots in Scotland and 3,000 people on allotment waiting lists (Greenspace Scotland, 2011)

'**Local food**' refers mainly to commercial non-horticultural production such as dairy, eggs or meat, and can extend to include processing and retail. Local food is not only about geography; it is also concerned with social proximity and trust between producer and consumer. The term 'short food chain' is increasingly used instead of local food to draw attention to the social relationship through the proximity of the producer and consumer, rather than geographical distance covered (Scotland, 2014; Marsden, 2000). Local food is distinguished from '**locality**' food in that the first are foods that are produced, processed and retailed within a defined area, usually 30-50 miles radius of retail, while the second are foods that are produced and processed in a particular place but often circulate more widely (e.g. Stilton cheese) (Ilbery et al., 2006). Even in the peer-reviewed literature, unclear and inconsistent usage of terms and concepts remains problematic (Tregear, 2011).

4. Benefits and drawbacks of local/community food growing

The benefits of **local food** include reduced food miles and carbon emissions, creating a stronger local economy, connecting producers and consumers and better understanding of how food is produced. Criticism of local food lies along several lines of academic enquiry including that of political economy, rural sociology and 'modes of governance and networks'. There is relatively little research on the nutritional benefits of a local diet, affordability or accessibility (in an urban context). The general perception of local food outlets is that they stress the quality of produce, and prices are higher than those in supermarkets, but we have little empirical evidence of this – one exception is the study by Lucan et al (Lucan et al., 2015) in the US which concluded that 'farmers' markets may offer many items not optimal for good nutrition and health, and carry less-varied, less common fresh produce in neighbourhoods that already have access to stores with cheaper prices and overwhelmingly more hours of operation' (p.23).

The benefits of **food growing** are closely linked to benefits of gardening and greenspace use, and focus around health and wellbeing, including mental health, (Buck, 2016; Nordh et al., 2016; Ohly et al., 2016), politics and urban transformation (Certomà and Tornaghi, 2015), environmental benefits, cohesive neighbourhoods and enhanced food security and food justice (Miller, 2015), and economic impacts (Quayle). Authors have also critiqued food growing projects, particularly in urban contexts,

for the ways in which they reproduce exclusions and neoliberal regimes (Miller, 2015; Barron, 2016). Often positioned as 'alternative' systems of food production, authors have argued that the differences in 'local' food growing schemes might make it difficult to challenge social justice (Allen et al., 2003). With few exceptions, little academic study has been carried out to examine the relationship between food growing and household food security, although studies in the US have looked at food growing and diet, local networks, and land requirement to address poverty alleviation (Allen et al., 2003; Napawan and Burke, 2016; Badami and Ramankutty, 2015). The focus is on urban gardening and agriculture rather than rural areas (Partalidou and Anthopoulou, 2016), (Nordh et al., 2016).

5. Mapping Local Food Growing

Anecdotal evidence indicates that there is an increase in community growing activity (across the UK). There are some particular 'hotspots' for community growing activities, namely Edinburgh and Glasgow. Two areas also appear to have no such activities – namely East Dunbartonshire and Falkirk. In Central Scotland there are around 233ha of community growing space, in 2015 (Network, 2015). The vast majority of this is allotments (72%) with the rest taken up as community gardens (12%) and orchards (16%). Nearly three quarters of community growing sites are in urban areas, and nearly one fifth in accessible rural areas. This raises questions about the extent of community growing activities in remote rural areas (Greenspace Scotland, 2011).

Although some geographical analysis has been carried out on community growing in Scotland (Greenspace Scotland, 2011a; Central Scotland Green Network, 2015), information on the locations where local food growing activities could be taking place is spread across different sources. Consolidation of this information could identify activities and regions where local food growing activities are (or could be) taking place, and identify regions of Scotland where the frequency of these activities is particularly high relative to population size or geographical area. Inevitably, the work produced is likely to be a partial overview of all activities; however, it would complement the qualitative research by providing a broader overview of food growing.

6. Policy and local/community food growing

Food growing contributes to a wide range of policy priorities including food, healthy eating (Scottish Diet Action Plan), physical activity (Let's Make Scotland More Active), wellbeing (Towards a Mentally Flourishing Scotland), tackling health inequalities (equally well), sustainable communities and climate change, regeneration and placemaking, and biodiversity and integrated habitat networks (Greenspace Scotland, 2011). Here we focus on the two main Scottish government food policies in the past decade, "Recipe for Success" (Scottish Government 2009) and "Becoming a Good Food Nation" (Scottish Government 2014).

6.1 Recipe for Success

This policy highlights the importance of food in Scotland, arguing for the economic, social, cultural and health aspects of diet and nutrition. The policy mentions local food growing in the context of 'Access and Affordability'. However, the link to household food insecurity is not made explicitly, with emphasis placed instead on health, wellbeing and the environment.

Two action points are identified:

"Ensure that allotments and 'grow your own' projects are strategically supported."

"Produce practical advice and best practice guidance that will appeal to public bodies, communities and individuals to help them develop local 'grow your own initiatives." (p. 29)

These aims are being addressed through the Climate Challenge Fund (CCF), which has been the most important funder of community-based growing activities since its inception in 2008, providing grants to community groups supporting 59 growing projects in 24 local authority areas (Greenspace

Scotland, 2011). The driver behind the CCF however is reducing carbon emissions, rather than tackling food insecurity. But perhaps lessons can be learnt from CCF projects that can be applied to other growing projects.

In June 2009 the Grow Your Own working group was created to liaise with public sector bodies and Allotment organisations. A report (Mollison et al. 2011) made 27 recommendations to encourage 'Grow your Own' activities across Scotland. Simultaneously, Greenspace Scotland were commissioned to research the state of community growing in Scotland (Greenspace Scotland 2011b) as well as to develop a range of support materials for individuals interested in starting new community growing projects (Greenspace Scotland 2011a).

Overall, "Recipe for Success", the Climate Challenge Fund and the Grow Your Own working group were the main Scottish Government-led policies to support local food growing activities in the period from 2009-2011. They were mainly focused on "the potential health, wellbeing and environmental benefits" (Scottish Government 2009, p.28) of these activities and did not explicitly make the link to household food insecurity.

6.2 Becoming a Good Food Nation

The successor to Recipe for Success, this policy outlines 5 priorities to make Scotland a 'good food nation' by 2025:

- Food in the public sector
- A children's food policy
- Local food
- Good food choices, and
- Continued economic growth

Consultation showed strong support for the priority areas of "food in the public sector" and "local food", and highlighted tackling food poverty as an additional priority area (Platts & Waterton 2015a, p.1), the first mention of food poverty in a food policy context. Many suggestions were put forward as to how local food growing could be encouraged and food insecurity could be addressed. However, the responses do not seem to make a strong link between these two areas.

The Scottish Government has not published a new food policy document to replace "Recipe for Success" but the creation of the Scottish Food Commission following consultation on Becoming a Good Food Nation led to a report which outlines three aims: Re-write the vision, develop progress indicators and create a 'movement for change' (Scottish Food Commission 2016, p.5). The vision, the indicators and the "Good Food Nation" are all still under development as of July 2016.

In addition to the Scottish Food Commission the Scottish Government also set up an Independent Working Group on Food Poverty which made a number of recommendations relating to how the income of people living in food insecurity can be increased, the quality of food provision can be improved, while it is still required, and more transformative community food models can be established" (Johnstone & Independent Working Group on Food Poverty 2016, p.3). Local food growing is given several mentions as a possible 'transformative community food model' but always in the context of other actions.

7. Governance of local food growing

Most local food growing activity is managed by local authorities through the provision of allotment sites. In recent years voluntary, third sector and charitable organisations have either emerged or have been co-opted into managing food growing activities as public funding has become tighter. Allotments, community gardens and community orchards are often/usually organised as independent associations, with their own constitutions and articles of agreement; they are

supported in this management through network organisations such as the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, a nationwide organisation of around 80 members. Network organisations offer support with legal advice (e.g. over tenure and leases) as well as horticulture and peer-to-peer advice. In 2011 Greenspace Scotland identified over 100 organisations that support community growing. While local authorities are obliged to provide space of allotments, the same does not apply for community growing, which therefore tend to have a wider range of organisational forms. The lack of formal protection of sites means it is important to have strong agreements with the land owner, especially for temporary spaces.

8. Further research

Local food and food growing is a niche activity – a bit of a mystery to those not involved. There is a lack of research about why people do not engage in community growing. Tregear (2011) notes that the concept of 'staged authenticity' could offer insights into critical perspectives of local food production and peoples interaction with local food. Similarly, there is a lack of understanding of the views of the consumer of local food because research focuses on the (high-end) producers or the supply chain. There is little evidence (in Scotland) of the socio-economic characteristics of those involved in local food growing, what they are growing and where this food is sold or distributed.

9. What next?

Identification of and interviews with a range of stakeholders (growers, community food organisations, local authorities, networks) in NE Scotland to understand the motivations, barriers and intentions of local/community food growers, the role community food growing could potentially play in tackling food insecurity at household level and the role of community food growing in the development of local and alternative food networks.

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