Public perceptions on the role and value of locally grown food

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Aims

This report looks at perceptions of the role and value of locally grown food. It is the second output of Objective 4 (Enquiry into local food growing) in RD3.3.2 Enhancing Food Security of the RESAS

Strategic Research Programme 2016-2021. It follows the first report, released in March 2017, which examined the nature and extent of local food growing in Scotland.

The objectives of this deliverable were to report around three areas of enquiry:

- Public perspectives on the role and value of locally grown food in day-to-day food purchasing and meal planning;
- Public perspectives about values, motivations and commitment associated with growing food for personal consumption; and
- The extent to which locally grown food can contribute to food security at the community and household level.

The report draws on data from interviews with 29 food growers in north-east Scotland undertaken between January and June 2017. It looks at the motivations and benefits of food growing, challenges and barriers of food growing, engagement between food growers and the wider community, and growers' perspectives on the potential of locally grown food to enhance food security at the household level.

Background

Food growing and enhancing household food security

- Local food growing has the potential to deliver multiple benefits including access to local and healthy food, creating a greener environment, enhancing health and wellbeing, building community resilience, and tackling climate change through for example, reducing food miles (Biel et al., 2014; Carolan and Hale, 2016).
- Local food growing faces challenges and barriers including start-up costs, knowledge and skills, land tenure, crime and vandalism, climate and season limitations and access to labour (Miller, 2015; Metcalf et al., 2012).
- Uncertainty remains over the potential of local food growing to address food needs in deprived areas and among low-income populations (Franklin et al., 2017).

The activity of local food growing has received renewed attention from policy makers and academics in recent years (Buser et al., 2014; Lambie-Mumford and O'Connell, 2015; Milbourne, 2012). Local or community food growing is sometimes referred to as urban agriculture (Adams and Hardman, 2013), although this concept can also include commercial or semi-commercial growing taking place in and around urban areas. In this report we focus on the views of local food growers, and use the term local food growing to refer to food that is grown, by individuals or groups, on private or public land, primarily or exclusively for consumption by those growing it or for exchange and gifting to others[1]. The key criteria here is that the food is not grown for commercial reasons and is not offered for sale to retailers. In this report, local food growing is only a part of the wider phenomenon known as urban agriculture because it does not include commercial growing and market gardening activities.

At the same time as this increased interest in local food growing has been occurring, there has also been political and public concern over the rise in the use of food banks and the upwards turn in

[1] For a description of different local food growing terms and definitions, and types of growing spaces please see the report into Local Food Growing and Household Food Insecurity, a copy of which is available from liz.dinnie@hutton.ac.uk

household food insecurity, or food poverty (Lambie-Mumford et al., 2014; Dowler and O'Connor, 2012; Douglas et al., 2015). These concerns centre on the twin issues of affordability and accessibility of healthy and nutritious food for all (Tait, 2015). Policy measures to address food poverty have been criticised because they place the emphasis on personal responsibility for health and economic wellbeing rather than on structural approaches to address poverty alleviation (Lambie-Mumford and O'Connell, 2015). Academics and food activists have called for the use of food systems approaches to tackle household food insecurity (HFI) (Lambie-Mumford and O'Connell, 2015; Group, 2016). Food growing can be seen as part of such an approach. While there is widespread support for community action to tackle food poverty (Scotland and Commission, 2018), there is uncertainty over the role food growing can play in community responses.

The twin issues of access and affordability which lie at the heart of HFI are difficult for individuals and households to tackle (Hallberg, 2009). A food systems approach focuses on the ability of low-income communities to access affordable, nutritious food, with development of more localised, affordable and sustainable food systems (Hinrichs, 2014). Such an approach has the benefit of connecting food poverty with other related societal challenges, such as environmental sustainability and community resilience, that are often left out of discussions on food and policy (Lambie-Mumford and O'Connell, 2015). Food systems are understood as having multiple actors and social implications that extend beyond agricultural policy to include policy and planning decisions concerning not only production but also processing, distribution and retailing of food and food products (Lawrence, 2017).

This research was commissioned to further understand public perceptions of the challenges, rewards and barriers of local food growing in order to better facilitate the role of local food growing in helping to deliver a fairer food system, healthier and more sustainable communities, and more environmentally friendly environments.

Methods

Between January and April 2017 we conducted 29 semi-structured interviews with growers in north-east Scotland. Interviews covered topics such as motivations to grow, barriers or challenges to growing and wider community engagement. The interviews were transcribed and coded using an iterative framework so that additional categories could be added as the coding progressed (O'Reilly, 2005). Interviewees included both male and female growers, with ages ranging from 20s through to 70s, and who grew in a variety of institutional settings including private spaces such as their own gardens, and public spaces such as allotments or community gardens.

Motivations and benefits of food growing

Motivations for growing food are closely related to what participants perceive as the benefits of food growing. For most participants there was not one single motivation to engage in food growing activities, but several motivations coming together. Environmental and health reasons featured strongly in motivations for people to grow their own food; economic and social reasons were generally given less importance, although many growers mentioned the sense of community they got from growing alongside others. Many participants had a family background in which they had been encouraged to grow food and had just continued this practice into their own adult lives. As well as the social aspects, the main benefits from food growing are access to more diverse and

better quality food that does not contain added chemicals, the enjoyment of growing, physical and mental benefits, and being more environmentally friendly.

Family background

One of the most common reasons for growing food appears to be people's background; many interviewees explained that when they were children, their parents or grandparents used to grow food, and that this influenced their decision to grow food themselves:

> *But both our parents had done gardening … Yeah we had gardens; we were used to seeing vegetables being grown and we thought "Well this is our chance; we'll just start".* [Interviewee 28]

> *I've always had an interest 'cause even when I was a kid I used to muck about in my parents' garden and grow lettuces and things like that … I've always lived in the countryside and my grandfather gardened – he just... it was natural and we had the space there; what else would you do with it?* [Interviewee 22]

Enjoyment and satisfaction

Many interviewees described the enjoyment and pleasure that they felt they got out of growing food; some people described it as a hobby. For many this was the main motivation for growing food in the first place:

> *I really wanted to grow stuff 'cause it makes me happy...* [Interviewee 4]

> *But it's something that I've always enjoyed... And it's like recreational for me as well: it's not just the fact that you're growing food; you enjoy the whole process of it* [Interviewee 16]

Some interviewees explained that one of the benefits they obtain is the sense of achievement, satisfaction or pride of producing food:

> *it's just that wonder of...digging over the soil and getting this lovely produce at harvest; it's very satisfying, definitely.* [Interviewee 19]

Linked to the enjoyment of growing, participants mentioned it as something that was a contrast to what they did for employment – things such as being outside or being physically active. For some interviewees this was one of the reasons to initially start gardening:

> *To be honest "food growing" wasn't my principle motivation; I just wanted to be out of doors doing physical things. … I just liked having somewhere to come that was out of doors, involved being out of doors, physical work out of doors, and I found it a very good corrective to sitting in an office in front of a screen for large parts of the day – while I was working* [Interviewee 24]

Some interviewees described food growing as an opportunity to enjoy time with their families, particularly when they have young children or grandchildren:

> *It's something we do as a family... we do spend that time outside and it's something you can do – even on a really rainy Sunday afternoon, you can just... we can get the kids out for a couple of hours … And sometimes in the summer we'll just go there in the evening and take a picnic...* [Interviewee 1]

For others it was the satisfaction of being able to eat something they had grown, and this made it taste better than food bought in the shops:

> *But you don't get the satisfaction of saying "I grew that". And you don't get the satisfaction of having that better flavour. I mean even things like strawberries: you go and buy strawberries in the shops; they are not as good as the ones you get.* [Interviewee 13]

Socialising and sense of community

Although social aspects are not usually the reasons why people start growing their own food, it is reported as one of the main benefits from food growing; many people described how it provided opportunities for meeting people with similar interests and socialising**:**

> *Yeah, it's lovely. As I say, I mean you can wander round... There's always been that sort of unofficial rule: for every hour of gardening you have an hour of chatting! [laughs] … It's good for your health: it's good for your physical health, it's good for your mental health. But I actually think it's the kind of the social side of it that's as good as any physical activity that you do* [Interviewee 5]

Many interviewees described how working on an allotment makes them feel part of a community, or how a sense of community has developed from the gardening activities:

> *And that's what allotments do. People come here who know nobody and very soon they've got this little village community going on ...* [Interviewee 5]

> *And, I think there's the social side as well: it's very good for making community connections. When I first moved in here I didn't get to know my neighbours for ages and it wasn't until I went and dug over a bed out the front and started planting things that everyone started sort of stopping and talking over the fence. … And now it's kind of spread across almost the entire neighbourhood; it's become really popular. And that seems to have really helped a revival in all kinds of community organisation in the area. So I think it provides a really useful lubrication for social cooperation ...* [Interviewee 14]

Other people described how working in their allotments provided opportunities for spending time with friends and for strengthening their friendships:

> *if like for instance we have friends over and we say "Oh we've got a great crop of raspberries on the allotment; come on up"; and we have friends come up and we do sort of picking... And that's brilliant.* [Interviewee 19]

> *I'm really enjoying it, especially, it's also brought out, this family, who I considered friends, and I didn't realise just how good friends they were until they stepped up to really help me out.* [Interviewee 26]

Others still described how food growing led to social interactions between people from different generational groups:

> *we've got one plot is rented out to XX Primary School... … And they employ a retired teacher who's also a very keen gardener and has got his own allotment elsewhere in Aberdeen; he brings a group of kids up every Friday and they work their own plot. And when they're finished*

on the plot, if there's anybody there, he generally brings them round for a chat and you tell them what you're doing on your plot. So it goes from them right up to people that are retired... [Interviewee 13]

Did I meet other people? And, yes, several of my neighbours stopped – elderly people – and talked to me while I was in the garden, and that was great. And it made me feel a bit more like I was part of a community. [Interviewee 4]

Although socialising and having a sense of community are some of the most commonly reported benefits, these are not usually among the reasons why people grow food.

Environmental reasons

Participants saw food growing as part of contributing to a positive impact on the environment through increasing the proportion of local and seasonal food they consumed:

I wanted to eat in a particular way – in a way that is...both ecologically sound and socially fair ... And then finally I was able to put that into action by growing my own food. I want local organic food, … growing your own food is important because you're taking responsibility for your impact in the world and for your basic needs, you know, and...eh... That's really one of the first things, is to take responsibility for yourself – for how you meet your needs and how your wastes are dealt with. That's another part of my garden is I have a compost in there, and I feel quite strongly about composting my own waste [Interviewee 4]

This participant also speaks about other positive environmental impacts of food growing, such as composting waste. For another person, being able to grow their own food was an important part of living a more sustainable lifestyle:

I do...aspire to green living to a degree and more environmentally-friendly living than I've done in the past, and food growing and local food growing is a part of that for sure. [Interviewee 24]

For this participant there was a link between growing and biodiversity. Through growing they became more aware of nature, ecology and the effects of different actions on other species:

We're becoming more aware of the fact that this is a site for species other than ourselves ... We do what we can to encourage birds onsite... Small birds, song birds … We have moved to be more conscious about how we can manage things around here for the good of the wider environment and other species. [Interviewee 24]

Other people saw allotments as an opportunity to increase recycling and reuse, thus encouraging the development of a circular economy:

Allotments are great sort of places for recycling … So reusing things like corrugated iron or reusing wood and materials; recycling; making new things out of things that people are throwing away ... That appeals to me [Interviewee 19]

Economic reasons

For a few people the motivation to grow included saving money, especially if they could grow things that were expensive to purchase in the shops. Interestingly, not many people thought that growing

food staples, such as potatoes, carrots and onions, was economically very viable; it was the ability to grow unusual or exotic foods that were cited as the main ways to save money, or spend less. Overall, growing your own food was felt to be an economic activity once you got over the start-up costs. As one participant described it:

> *it is nice getting something for free. I know it's your time and everything but, when you come in here, and you can pick, you know, three, four pounds of cherry tomatoes, that cost me one pound fifty for six of them in Tesco's or something. … it's been quite interesting, about working out what is the most valuable to grow. … Compared to what you have to pay, you know, if you planted your, your raised bed of potatoes, then, it's not going to save you a lot of money. But if you eat a lot of salads, you know, you're paying one pound twenty five, aren't you, for some squished up leaves that have been treated with all sorts of nastiness.* [Interviewee 25]

Access to greater diversity and quality of food, and taste

As also mentioned in the previous quote, for many growers one of the benefits of growing was access to better tasking and fresher food, although only a few people mentioned this as their motivation for growing food:

> *I prefer the taste of them, by a country mile! And it's just pure pleasure, regardless of the hard graft involved.* [Interview 17]

Another benefit people described was knowing where that food had been and that it didn't have lots of chemicals in it. For some this was the main reason for growing food. The desire for chemical-free food was often contrasted with the 'chemical-laden' food that is all that is available in the shops:

> *To know, personally, where our food came from... Quite disenchanted with supermarkets, you know. … to control... you know, have some control anyway over what you consume, yeah yeah.*[Interviewee 10]

As well as the quality of food, and the taste, people mentioned the diversity of food they were able to grow and compared this favourably to limited availability in the shops, and the cost of some fresh food, thus tying taste with access and economic benefits:

> *In some ways, I'm producing stuff that money can't buy ... Fresh salad greens, ehm ... You can't buy them! You know, they're not available in shops: the stuff you buy in shops is at least a couple of days old, if not more ...* [Interviewee 4]

However, diversity, quality and taste were more often mentioned as benefits of food growing, rather than motivations.

Health and wellbeing benefits

Health benefits from food growing include both mental and physical health from the activity of growing and being outside, and the health benefits that were perceived to come from eating a fresher, less chemically-treated diet and increased fruit and vegetable consumption:

I hadn't really done an awful lot of vegetable or fruit growing before I took it on, and I found it to be something that now that I was retired, I was actually wanting to have a physical activity, as well as trying to keep mentally attuned with things! [Interviewee 6]

For one particular interviewee, growing food was therapeutic and a way to become closer to nature. This was expressed as an almost spiritual-like motivation for engaging in food growing activities:

What keeps me involved... It has a very positive effect on your feeling of wellbeing, I think... As well as the health benefits of activity and fresh air and sunshine and exercise ... Just being able to be out there and growing things, you feel very connected with... you know, with the soil. [Interviewee 19]

I've got a very strong motivation to cultivate, to grow things; I think it's a part of a sort of creative, part of a kind of nurturing connection with the land, almost a spiritual sort of connection as well with creation [Interviewee 19]

Being outdoors was a reason for some people to start growing and this links also to environmental motivations. Others mentioned the therapeutic benefits they received from growing and the benefits for mental health. Some described it as a way of relieving stress:

It seems to kind of ground me. You know, when I get particularly stressed about something … I've found, personally, has really helped me … it completely switches me off from everything else I've got to think about all the time, and just concentrate on looking after these plants. [Interviewee 26]

Well before I came here, I suffered a bit of depression and that. But since I've been here, that's more or less gone. … No it's really a calming place this. Really nice... … Therapeutic: that's the word [Interviewee 8]

Knowledge and education

Another motivation for food growing was described as a way to involve children, either to teach them where food comes from, or for them to become more interested in vegetables:

But, you know, I think also we were hoping that... our kids are reasonably veg friendly, but it seems to be getting less so, you know, by the day, so we were kind of hoping that if they are involved in growing it and harvesting it, they'll be more enthusiastic about eating it. So there's a little bit of an ulterior motive there [Interviewee 2]

However, participants also mentioned the positive impact that growing has on their own knowledge and learning:

Your knowledge increases dramatically. You have to because you're dealing with success and failure, and that's variable dependent upon a number of factors: weather, conditions. So you start to learn more about the habits of different plants and types and how to progress those so you get a higher yield. [Interviewee 16]

Finally, some people said that growing food can provide benefits for other people in the community by donating food to food banks, although only one person mentioned this as their motivation for growing food.Other motivations mentioned by growers, but less so than the ones mentioned above, include, a general interest in wanting to understand more about growing.

Challenges and barriers to food growing

Challenges around food growing mentioned by the participants in this study include things like having access to land, tools and a water supply, unreasonable rules and regulations if they were part of a gardening society or association (or sometimes stemming from a funding body), as well as cultural and economic barriers, which leads to people preferring to buy their food instead of grow it themselves.

Access to land/tenure and equipment

Many people mentioned the difficulty of getting a plot in an allotment to grow food, and thought the local authority, who have responsibility for allotments, should provide more spaces for people to grow their own food, and different routes into food growing, not just through allotments:

> *Because allotments are quite protected spaces, as you've already got an inkling of. It's difficult to get some space to grow your own food; there are waiting lists; there are already communities of people there that quite jealously guard their own patch, as it were! Because it's taken quite an effort to get an allotment. So you're not gonna give it up very easily. So I think the Council, if they were really serious, would have to take a more radical approach* [Interviewee 19]

> *So it was about five years, waiting. So obviously that's one of the first barriers is the accessibility to the allotments. … To me the initial challenge was getting access to green space ...* [Interviewee 16]

For those new to food growing, start-up costs can be a barrier. This can include things like rent for growing space, seeds, compost and tools. Some allotments have some of these tools which people can borrow, helping those who want to start growing food but perhaps do not have access to a wide range of equipment:

> *I have all my own equipment but the Association which sort of runs the administration side of the allotments, they have a container down at the bottom there with... it's got loads of tools in it. They're rather old ones but you can borrow those if you don't have your own, you know. So you can get... I did that to begin with when I first took on an allotment: I didn't have certain tools so I just borrowed those* [Interviewee 22]

Rules and regulations

For some people the rules concerning allotment growing were perceived as heavy-handed, and subject to the whim of the allotment association/committee rather than being useful to managing the growing space:

> *And it all started, but it was all very relaxed and people helping each other, and things like that, and learning on the job and, things adjust as, you know, things come in. And that was fine and good, and then you get a change of committees and then, new people adding their ideas and then you get another change of committee and they add in what they think should be in there, and I personally (...) quite a lot of rules and regulations. I feel, I'm only talking from my own personal point of view, I do feel some of them are just rules for the sake of being rules* [Interviewee 26].

Perceptions of the rules and organization of collective growing are interesting because they call into question the governance of local food growing and the ways in which people are collectively organized (or not). The way in which any group chooses to organize itself is a reflection of both its own aims and values, and the constraints imposed by the landowner and in some cases an external funding body. An area for further investigation would be the governance of community food growing projects to understand the opportunities and limitations that this provides in different places.

Bought produce versus home grown

While food growing was seen to have economic benefits, especially for some kinds of produce, people also mentioned that the low price of food in the shops may deter people from growing their own. For another participant, it was the kind of produce available and how it was packaged that was thought to put people off home-grown fruit and vegetables:

> *Supermarkets have got a lot to answer for, they expect that a leek, for example, should be mostly white and it's gonna be about this size and then you'll have a little bit of green on the top of it. But I grow something called Musselburgh leeks and... you will never see the Musselburgh leek in a shop, and the reason for that is that it's quite stumpy and the white part of it is maybe only around about that size... every element of that can be eaten …But people's perceptions have been "a leeks needs to be like that" [little laugh] … But it's trying to encourage people and educate people really that it's important that you shouldn't be drawn by the perceptions that large organisations have given to you; you should be really looking at local markets* [Interviewee 6]

This participant thus hints at the need for education and awareness around different kinds of produce, and especially that home-produced fruit and vegetables may be different in size, quality and appearance to the produce that people have got used to seeing in the supermarkets. There was also thought to be a cultural shift needed in order to promote more locally grown produce as healthier and more environmentally sustainable:

> *So I think there's just this attitude, you know, even amongst supposedly intelligent adults, that what comes out of the soil can't be good for you and because it's in plastic at the supermarket it's better* [Interviewee 12]

Also mentioned as barriers to successful food growing was the weather at this latitude, and the consequential short growing season, and having to constantly guard against pests and diseases,

including wildlife such as deer, and how to deal with a glut of produce. The challenges were therefore about successful growing and this is a reflection of our study design in which we spoke to growers. An area for further investigation then is to understand the barriers to growing faced by those who would like to grow their own food but are not doing so.

Engagement with other groups

While many people we interviewed just wanted to grow their own food, there was also an element within our sample advocating for food growing to be used as a means for engaging with other groups within their local community. The reasons for this were varied – for some it was about education and skills, for others it was health and well-being and another person spoke about justifying their use of land that might otherwise be used for development. Food growing itself thus can be an engagement tool between growers and other community groups. However, growers also face difficulties sometimes in trying to engage with non-growers.

The growers we spoke to in this research were keen to reach out to other groups but sometimes struggled to do this either through lack of confidence in engaging with hard to reach or marginalised populations, or because other community groups were not interested. While growers seemed to be able to engage with pre-school nursery groups, they had less success with primary school groups. Growers also had links with local universities, charities and vulnerable individuals but these varied greatly and seemed to be established and maintained on an ad hoc basis and through individual relationships:

> *We offered it out to various...organisations, didn't we? We've offered it to all sorts of groups to have a free plot to involve different members of the community – a self-help group, Brownie...all sorts of things! Adult ed, special needs... But, they've never taken it up ... It's a logistics thing and a staffing issue* [Interviewee 10]

> *… is effectively that we can allow the schools to get a plot. The reason X School is involved is because I think the head was quite keen that they have a plot for their primary seven children. We've tried time and time again to get Primary School Y, which is actually the nearest one, involved, and I think it depends very much on the attitude of the head teacher* [Interviewee 13].

> *We go out into the community. So we have, through fundraising, disabled access for people that want to come along and learn about planting. We've got links with Z Primary; so we have P2s and P4s coming down throughout the year, every Tuesday, and they have their own plot where they do planting and learn about food growing. And we have the University who come on site; we've developed a polytunnel and there's micro-plots where they learn about planting and environment... And not only just about planting; it's things like study on bees and the wildlife and nature. And we're just at the moment have received funding to build a field study centre for the children and to, you know, do some formal education about the environment and growing and sustainability in food.* [Interviewee 16]

Some participants also mentioned political aspirations of growers through their involvement in campaign groups such as the Slow Food Movement. This movement takes a food systems approach to tackling what is perceived to be an unsustainable food culture. The involvement of non-commercial food growers is limited at the moment but growers were aware of the movement and the ways in which it connected different parts of the food system locally:

The Slow Food group in particular because it's got quite a range of people in it, so, you know, you're talking about having producers, chefs and then restaurant owners, and then you've just got people who are foodies who are just really interested in food and just like eating different things and techniques. [Intervewee 6]

However, connecting different groups and parts of the food system locally was felt to be a problem because there was not enough networking and information sharing between growers and other people involved in different parts of the food system:

I found that there's lots and lots and lots of things going on in Aberdeen – I mean amazing amounts of things, fantastic things. But it's very difficult to find out about them: you usually find out about them after the event. But I genuinely think that there's no natural mechanism for doing it; I don't think there is a connectivity – there's no natural connectivity … That's one of the things that we're challenging ourselves through the Slow Food group in Aberdeen is like "how can we take all these different elements out there and make people aware of it?". [Interviewee 6]

However, this interviewee was hopeful that the recent formation of a local food council (known as a Sustainable Food City in the UK) would make a difference to the food culture and local food system across the region:

There is the Aberdeen... what's it called? The Aberdeen City Food Network... Yeah? And so I think that's something... It's relatively new, yeah, I think it's relatively new. So it'll be interesting to see how that works out. Conceptually it's good – conceptually it's what we're saying... I'm saying we should have. [Interviewee 6]

A number of interviewees expressed that they would like to help reach out to groups in their community but felt that they lacked the skills to do so, and that mechanisms to help them build these skills would be useful but are currently unavailable:

a number of the volunteers who have come to us in the past have got support needs – they are vulnerable to one extent or another. And we have gone looking for help for us to help them better, and I'm afraid we found that we cannot find that help: the organisations that we hoped would be able to help us, can't. And we've literally had to make up our own practice as we go along. And I wish it wasn't like that... I wish that we could have more training and help in supporting vulnerable individuals when they're working with us here. But that help doesn't seem to exist or we haven't been able to find it at least [Interviewee 24]

Another view expressed that sometimes engagement with vulnerable groups was difficult because of the limitations or constraints placed on groups; although the growing spaces were willing to have vulnerable groups the difficulty was the special needs group having to use another centre:

we used to be involved with the...centre at Ellon, … for people with learning difficulties and that sort of thing. Now they used to come twice a week; And they were fabulous to work with as well; I mean you'd set somebody up hoeing and they would just keep hoeing until you told them to stop... [little laugh] You got them to sow seeds and... They were so easy to deal with... But, there was some kind of initiative or some kind of thing happened amongst the high heejins and they stopped it. And they had to go to Esslemont School, which isn't a school anymore but it's a centre where they have all kinds... But they didn't have access to a greenhouse, they didn't have access to a garden and all that … And, you know, they loved it. And we loved it 'cause they were great to deal with it. But, on the back of them being

involved, we could apply for money for the Lottery Fund. But you need to have some kind of... aye, interest in children or the elderly or whatever, in order to boost your application [Interviewee 3]

this interviewee suggests at the end that the benefits of engaging with vulnerable or special needs groups are not limited to the groups themselves; they also enable growing spaces to be multi-functional spaces, and to enhance the chances of receiving public funding.

Another interviewee suggested that embedding food growing within a local food system would need more than voluntary input due to the time involved:

Teaching others about growing, cooking, donating unused food to charity... was something that I was involved with a lot when I was a student. But I found as a... working full time, I spend a third of my time sleeping, a third of my time either travelling to or from work or at work, and then I only have a third of my time to do the rest of my life, so... I find it very hard to give back to my community in that sense ... it's just a lack of time. If I had more time, I could... I would get involved in the allotment association, There are private allotments nearby as well; I'd get involved with that.[Interviewee 4]

Food growing and food poverty

In this research we found that the links between food growers and tackling food poverty were not well established. Perhaps the strongest link was through an organisation called The Allotment Market Stall (TAMS), which collects donations of surplus produce from allotments and community gardens during the productive months (approx. June – October) and sells this at reduced price around the city. The money collected is then used to cover costs and anything left over is distributed back to the growers.

And people coming to the stall as well who are living on low incomes ... And also, if we do do any advertising, we advertise in the special needs areas of the city...– so we do kind of prioritise areas where we know that there is food poverty [Interviewee 27]

Food poverty, or the risk of food poverty, was not a motivation for food growing, indeed most of our participants thought it unrealistic for local or community growing to be able to tackle food poverty, especially amongst those who were actually already experiencing it. However, some did think that food growing could contribute to enhancing local food security for those on low incomes, through an intermediary organisation such as TAMS:

People have not got that money to provide food, therefore they're not gonna be able to sustain their own growing. Unless... unless there's an area been made available, and then there's contributions, that then people can grow food and come and go, a bit like the fridge initiatives that are out down in England where people bring excess food from their fridges into fridge banks and people can come and access it and take it: you could have a growing initiative where then there's food available at certain times, but again that would probably need a volunteer organisation to surround it [Interviewee 16]

Another view was that locally grown food could be used in cooking classes, which could then function as a mechanism to engage those in poverty and to discuss and get help with other financial

and legal issues that they are experiencing and that could be preventing them from moving out of poverty:

> *it's not just about cooking, but they'll have somebody else in there to talk to you. So they'll have someone from like the Credit Union and they'll have somebody from the Housing Association, or someone can talk you about benefits or legal help or whatever. … And so it's like what I was saying about how do you actually help with food poverty: that's actually using food as a mechanism to find out about other areas, and maybe what we need is a better integration; is actually for the people in the other areas to then concentrate on how you can actually address food poverty.* [Interviewee 6]

However, tackling the issue of food poverty through programmes around food education and wider financial assistance was seen as the responsibility of the State, possibly through local organisations delivering the actual programmes. Rather than tackling food poverty through the use of emergency food aid, food donations and food banks, this interviewee thought more resources should be put in to education and learning how to manage finances and not necessarily encouraging people to grow their own food.

Conclusions

This report has looked at motivations and benefits of local and community food growing amongst food growers in north-east Scotland. It has also examined the challenges and barriers to food growing amongst food growers, engagement between food growers and other social groups, and the potential of local food growing to address food insecurity at a household level.

Local and community food growing has seen increased interest from academics and policy makers in recent years, as has the rise in the use of food banks by those experiencing food poverty. However, the links between food growing and enhancing food security at the household and community level are poorly understood. This report aims to fill this gap by looking at the role and value of locally grown food in day-to-day food practices, the values and commitment associated with growing food for personal consumption and the potential of locally grown food to contribute to household food security.

The main findings indicate that growers are motivated to grow their own food through a family history of food growing, by the enjoyment and satisfaction generated by growing and eating their own food, for environmental reasons such as taking responsibility for basic needs and for raising ecological awareness, and for increasing knowledge and skills, especially between generations. The benefits of food growing include the social aspects and sense of community with other growers, the economic benefits that were possible especially through growing certain kinds of produce, and access to greater diversity and quality of fresh produce. Health and well-being benefits, both physical and mental, were mentioned by interviewees as both motivations and as benefits of food growing activities.

The challenges to food growing include access to land for growing, and start-up costs for equipment, overly bureaucratic regulations or restrictions governing shared growing spaces, and overcoming cultural preferences amongst some people for standardised, pre-packaged supermarket produce.

Many of the interviewees expressed the need for food growers and food growing organizations to engage with other community groups, but many felt that they lacked the skills or the structural

mechanisms to do this effectively. Where there was good engagement with other social groups this was usually due to personal interest and relationships, rather than institutional models.

On food growing and tackling household food security, interviewees thought this was possible through structured programmes around food and other measures to tackle household poverty more generally, and through intermediary organizations to distribute surplus produce to low income communities, thereby enhancing local food security. However, it was thought that this could not be left to volunteers to organize, and that it should be orchestrated by State actors rather than the third or voluntary sector.

In short, there is potential for local and community food growing to contribute to enhanced household food security but this will need to be supported through a more structured programme addressing poverty more widely, and greater resources to coordinate and distribute locally grown food to low income areas.

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