



Arsyllfa **Wledig** Cymru
Wales **Rural** Observatory

COMMUNITY GROWN FOOD IN WALES

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Llywodraeth Cymru
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This executive summary provides an overview of research carried out by the WRO between July 2010 and December 2011 to investigate activities relating to the production and distribution of 'community grown food' in Wales.

In 2010 the Welsh Government commissioned the Wales Rural Observatory to undertake a review to identify what could be done to promote and encourage 'Community Growing' in Wales. This research report provides an in-depth examination of current activities relating to the production and distribution of 'community grown food' in Wales, focusing specifically on four areas of activity, namely Community Supported Agriculture [CSA], community gardens, allotment gardening and activities relating to communal food growing in schools. As well as highlighting existing best practice, the research sought to identify existing barriers to the adoption of community grown food activities, drawing on detailed analyses of interview and survey data.

There were five phases of research undertaken during the course of this project. First, interviews were conducted with the key stakeholders and Welsh Government officers who constituted the Community Grown Food Task and Finish Group, and with representatives of local authorities in Wales. The first phase also involved a desk-based review of any completed and ongoing community growing activities supported under the Rural Development Plan for Wales (RDP) 2007-2013. Second, a comprehensive survey of all known community growing projects in Wales was undertaken. Third, and following on from the survey, 20 community growing projects were selected for further in-depth examination. As part of

this in-depth case study work, a series of interviews was also undertaken with representatives of national community growing organisations in England and Scotland to provide comparative data and examples of best practice in community growing elsewhere in the UK. Fourth, a comprehensive examination of existing levels of communal food growing in schools was undertaken by means of a questionnaire survey to all schools in Wales. Finally, a focus group was conducted with members of the Task and Finish Group and a series of workshop discussions undertaken with representatives of community growing projects across Wales.

KEY FINDINGS & RECOMMENDATIONS

Allotments, Community Gardens and CSA schemes

The survey sample

In total, 196 community growing projects responded to the survey, which represents a 34% response rate. Almost three quarters (73%) of the sample were allotment sites, just under a quarter (24%) were community gardens and the remaining 3% (5 projects) were classified as CSA schemes.

Demographics

The age profile and gender of individuals involved in the different modes of community growing varied significantly. About three-quarters of participants on allotments sites were male and 43% were aged 60 and over. However, interviews with local authority representatives indicated that the demography of allotments was changing, with greater interest from community groups, families, and individuals with particular needs or mental health issues. As a result, it was recognised that allotment sites should

adapt to meet changing needs - for example, by providing communal areas for group and community activities and children's play areas.

For community gardens the gender ratio was more even, with 52% of participants male and 48% female. A higher proportion of younger people were also participating in community gardening compared with allotments. For example, two out of every five participants on community gardens were aged between 16-34 years.

Site use and activities

The survey provided evidence of a variety of growing activities – growing vegetables, fruit and flowers, as well as semi-tropical crops and nuts; and other activities such as keeping chickens and ducks, and bee-keeping. Across the whole sample, 59% of projects stated that their site was also managed to encourage biodiversity and wildlife. This was particularly the case with CGs and CSA schemes. Additional uses included education visits (29%), open days (24%) and community events (23%).

Networking and collaboration

Just under half (48%) of all community growing projects surveyed were affiliated to professional or representative institutions or organisations. The principal organisations were the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens (FCFCG), the National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG), Groundwork and Environment Wales.

An average of 44% of site representatives rated the provision of support and advice for community growing in Wales as either 'very good' or 'good'. CGs were most positive about this provision.

There was also evidence of a wide range of collaborative working - 53% of the community growing projects surveyed indicated that they worked with local authorities in their area, just under a third (31%) were involved with schools and a further 29% worked with other community growing projects. Other notable

collaborative partners included youth groups (15%), local charities (14%) and health organisations (10%).

Overall, the principal motivations for collaborative working were to share experiences and best practice (40%), to share expertise (38%) and to undertake complementary activities (27%).

Key motivations

The main motivations for people becoming involved with community growing were 'to improve personal health and well-being' (84%), 'to meet other people' (67%), 'to develop an alternative food system' (56%), 'to increase local food production' (42%), and 'to provide open access to land' (35%).

Key achievements

The main achievements of projects identified by respondents related to health benefits (53%), local food production and consumption (49%), social inclusion (39%), local environmental improvements (35%), and increased environmental improvements (35%). In addition, 21% of the community growing projects surveyed had received prizes or awards.

Key obstacles

The research pointed to four key obstacles that were perceived to stand in the way of community growing activities achieving greater significance across Wales.

First, the lack of available land in recent years has become a major barrier to the creation of community-based food growing activities across Wales, with demand for land from the community sector far outstripping traditional sources of supply. Where land was being made available, the survey and case study work uncovered evidence of community growing projects encountering problems with the planning system and land tenure security.

Second, participants were critical of the highly complicated and fragmented nature of funding streams and processes, which

they felt were complicating the development of existing projects and deterring the creation of new activity.

Third, the research evidence indicated that the provision of guidance and support services for community growing projects was highly fragmented and there appeared to be a lack of strategic coordination at a national level.

Last, concerns were raised about the provision of education and training in horticultural skills and the fact that it was not always accessible and readily available to all projects across Wales.

Future activities

Slightly more than one quarter (27%) of participating projects planned to expand their activities in future years, a further 10% intended to broaden their activities by diversifying into other areas, and 44% of projects indicated that their activities would remain about the same. A higher proportion of community gardening projects and CSA schemes intended to expand their activities in future years (42% and three projects respectively).

Communal Food Growing in Schools

Survey Sample

In order to access information on the nature and extent of school gardening activities across Wales, a questionnaire survey was distributed to all government-maintained and independent schools in Wales.

Of the 1844 schools that were contacted, 692 responses were received, which represents a response rate of 38%. The majority of schools (78%) that responded to the survey were Primary schools, while 12% of the survey samples were Secondary Schools. The remaining 10% were Special Educational schools (3%), Independent schools (3%), Nurseries (2%) and Pupil Referral Units (1%).

Popular activities

The survey indicated that schools provided a wealth of gardening activities that were undertaken both within and beyond the schools grounds. The most popular gardening activities were growing vegetables (92%) and flowers (84%). A further 67% had developed a wildlife area on the school grounds and 62% ran a gardening club. Just over half of all schools arranged visits to the community and other site and a third invited members of the community to assist with gardening activities.

Coordination of gardening activities

School gardening activities were predominantly initiated and coordinated by teaching and support staff, as well as pupils. There were, however, indications that in many schools gardening activities involved active participation by all members of the school community - from parents, grandparents and school governors, to school caretakers, cleaning assistants and cooks.

Key aims

A significant majority (93%) of respondents indicated that school gardening activities were primarily aimed at enhancing students' environmental awareness, while an equally high number (87%) used these activities to provide opportunities for students to acquire and further develop gardening skills. A large number of respondents (92%) also felt that gardening activities contributed to improving the wider school environment.

The role played by schools in raising awareness of the importance of healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle was also reflected in the survey results, with 87% of respondents stating that their gardening activities were aimed at improving students' overall understanding of healthy eating issues and nutrition.

Gardening as a school-wide and cross-curricular learning resource

Many schools were using their school gardens as a cross-curricular creative learning resource that was being incorporated into a wide range of National Curriculum subjects, as well as more informally through personal, social and health education, work-related learning and leisure activities.

Increasing importance of school gardening

Nine out of ten of schools had increased the provision of gardening in their school during the last five years. The most frequently cited reason for this increase was a heightened awareness among teachers and school staff of the potential benefits of school gardening (58%). Other reasons mentioned were the increased availability of school gardening opportunities (51%) and staff to conduct gardening activities (47%).

Advice and support for school gardening

A quarter of schools indicated that they had received information on the benefits of school gardening from their local authority, and 22% had received outdoor learning resources and equipment to assist with the delivery of gardening activities.

Schools were more likely to access additional help and assistance from sources outside the school environment, including local businesses (33%), other schools (32%) and other growing projects (21%). Additional sources of volunteer help included local health organisations and local charities. Some schools were also working with national environmental and gardening organisations.

Key obstacles

Two key obstacles to the development of school gardening were mentioned by respondents. The first was funding with most schools relying on small amounts of money from existing school budgets to undertake gardening activities. Second, respondents pointed to problems with

teacher workloads, with gardening activities often reliant on the good will and enthusiasm of individual staff members and students.

Future activities

When questioned about their plans for the future development of gardening activities, schools were overwhelmingly positive, with 78% stating that they intended to increase the level of gardening activities within their schools in future years.

Recommendations

Nine key recommendations flow from the research findings:

1. The Welsh Government should provide strategic leadership in promoting and supporting community growing activities in Wales. This will also involve working in partnership with local authorities and other relevant organisations, both at a national and local level, to develop and realise the potential of community growing in Wales.
2. There is a need for joined-up policy responses to the findings presented in this report. It is clear that community growing activities have relevance to a broad range of Welsh Government policy areas, including education and skills, health and physical activity, housing, planning, community regeneration, sustainable development, social justice and social enterprise.
3. Local authorities should develop formal strategies for community growing, with formal linkages made to local authority strategic plans, land use planning policies and other policies and strategies.
4. The Welsh Government should provide clear guidelines to local authorities, setting out their role in promoting and supporting community growing activities.

5. The Welsh Government should award high priority to the release of land for community growing, through (i) the creation of a community land bank service to facilitate access to land, and (ii) the initiation of a survey to identify all public land with the potential for food growing in Wales.
6. The Welsh Government should provide a dedicated funding stream for community growing, which covers start-up costs, assists in setting up new sites and supports the temporary use of land to meet the basic needs of projects.
7. Training and education in horticultural skills should be better coordinated to improve its quality and accessibility to all types of community growing activities.
8. The Welsh Government should actively encourage and support schools across Wales to develop school gardening activities as a resource for enhancing cross-curricular learning.
9. Existing gaps in support and guidance should be addressed through the establishment of a Wales-wide support network for community growing that links different types of community growing across Wales, signposts information and provides a forum through which growing groups can communicate.