

# *The economic viability of urban agriculture*

*Gardening beyond voluntarism. Successful projects that  
make urban food works*

10<sup>th</sup> July- Burley Lodge Centre, Leeds

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# Agenda

10.00-10.15    **Chiara Tornaghi** (University of Leeds): Welcome and Introduction

10.15-11.15    **Helen Woodcock and Katie Brandon** (Kindling Trust and Manchester Veg People): “**Making sustainable food pay (Fairly)**”

11.15-11.30    Coffee break

11.30-12.55    **Workshop: Discussing a Leeds’ Food Hub.** Helen and Katie will guide discussion with local participants interested in setting up a “food hub” In Leeds

# Urban Food Justice

1. Launch and envisioning UA (20<sup>th</sup> September)
2. Land access (November)
3. Soil quality (December)
4. Edible landscapes, food for free (February)
5. Community cohesion (April)

Interim public evaluation (April)

6. Urban agro-ecology (June)
7. Economic viability of urban agriculture (July)

# Urban Food Justice

8. Leeds Food Strategy workshop (5<sup>th</sup> September)
9. Concluding event (16<sup>th</sup> October, world food sovereignty day)

# Background

September 2010 – Edible Public Space launch

March-April 2011 – Hyde Park neighbourhood food growing opportunity

November 2012 - **U**rban **F**ood **J**ustice social platform (workshop 2)

2013 - Feed Leeds 

# Urban agriculture in the UK

- Mostly a grassroots phenomenon: gardens' and allotments growing, schools growing, public space growing, community gardens
- Excellent learning device: re-skilling, community building, healthy behaviours,
- Currently they rely on volunteers, grants, subsidies
- Still very little impact on the food we eat



# What is the “economic viability” of urban agriculture?

A urban agricultural project can be defined “economically viable” when:

- it can remunerate (fairly?) the time (all or part of it?) that people spend working on the project;
- It can maintain the infrastructure necessary for running the project (rent, machinery, etc.)

Different projects might have different expectations and more precise definitions of “viability”, which include long term costs

# The economic viability of urban agriculture(or lack of): when it is a problem

- Some projects aspire to grow in size and impact (or are already growing): grow more food, collect more wasted food, etc.
- They would like to pay some of the work of their volunteers or the facilities they use, create jobs
- They need to secure the skills (and the people) that keeps them running
- Examples: Growing Communities, SIMs Hill CSA, Kippax, Nurture, LUH, Fresh and Fruity



## Sims Hill Shared Harvest - Bristol



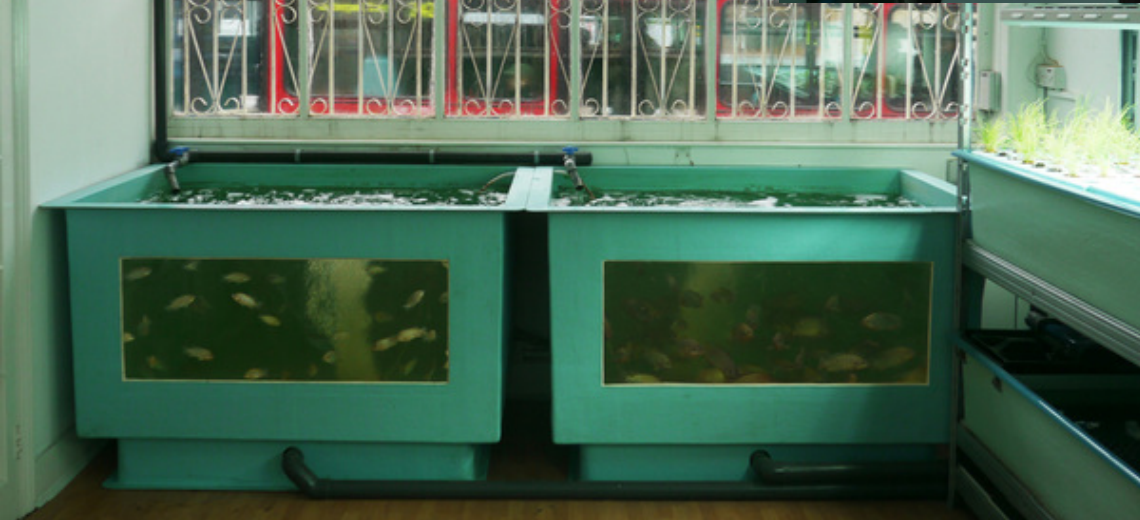


## Leeds Urban Harvest





Farm:Shop, London



# Constraints to economic viability/ sustainability of these initiatives

- 1) Lack of time or capacities to raise funding or to develop a market/business, to develop the project further (small and un-experienced community groups, or projects that used to be well funded, now hit by austerity cuts)
- 2) Too little demand for local, seasonal, organic food, (CSA)
- 3) Lack of aspiration/need to become economically sustainable (LUH today, volunteers-turnover is constant, no need to remunerate time,

(cont.)

- 4) High costs of maintenance of infrastructure  
(Farm:Shop)
- 5) Consumers used to artificially low food prices  
– not remunerative of the work of small  
(organic) producers

# When is this a problem?

1. When there is a personal aspiration to bring gardening beyond a hobby, recognise the importance of food production for the community and the environment, and remunerate the time dedicated to this work.
2. Stability of a projects that deliver services (fluctuation of volunteers or market limit productivity, create waste, discontinuity in services, endanger the long term life of projects
3. When the projects want to become viable and reliable alternatives /sources of local food

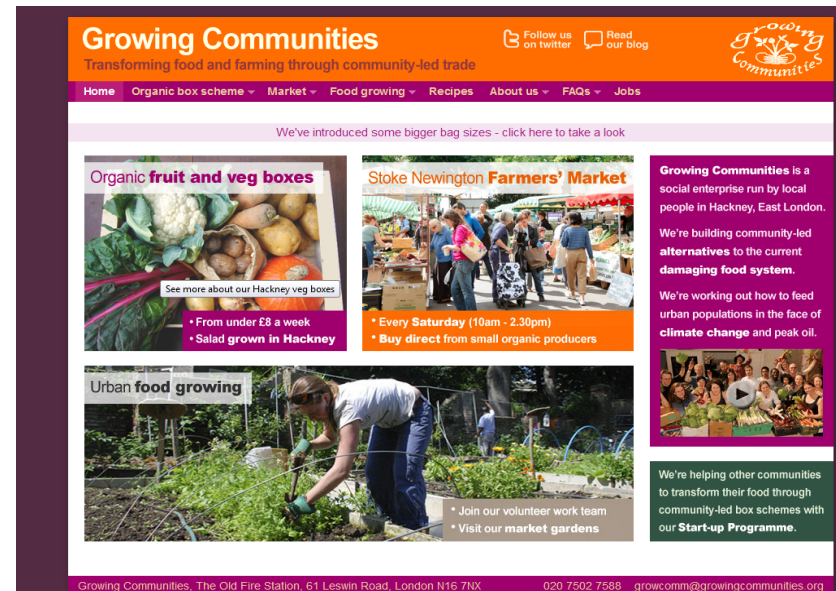
# The challenge: identify best practices

- Rationale: symbolic as well as practical need to identify and demonstrate the viability of local urban and periurban food production
- Making local food work (Plunkett Foundation and Lottery Fund)

→ *Organic Lea*

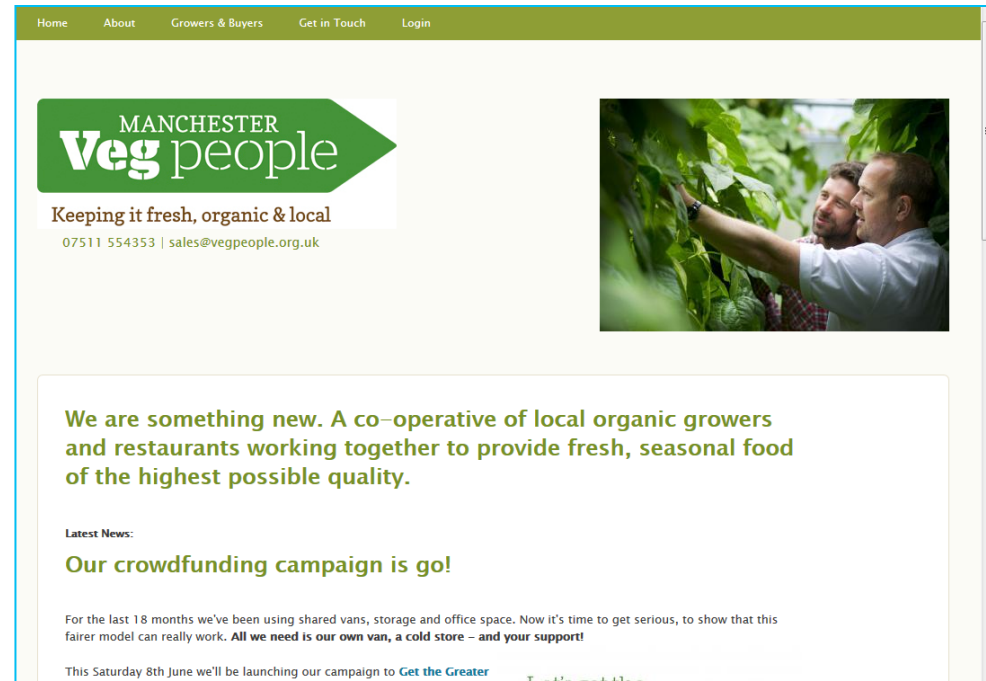
→ *Growing Communities*

→ *Cultivate London*



# Learning from Manchester

- A successful example
- Contextual
- Transferable?



- Opening the discussion for a Leeds Food Hub



# Food Hubs and Sustainable food systems

- Different types of food hubs (i.e. veggy box schemes, CSAs, community shops, food coops)
- Generally food hubs are intermediary, pooling together producers, distributors, sellers and consumers, that *add value* to the exchange of goods and promote the local supply chain (Sustain and University of Glamorgan).
- Aimed at developing alternative (more healthy, sustainable and ethical) food systems