

**To: The Scottish Parliament  
Local Government, Housing & Planning Committee  
Re: Inquiry - The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Part 9**

The Community Growing Forum Scotland presented evidence to the recent Scottish Parliament Inquiry of The Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015, Part 9 ['The Act']. We are following up with a range of solutions that will strengthen the aims of the Act, to empower people to grow food in their communities.

Growing food in our communities has proven benefits, potential and demand. It provides a wide range of opportunities for people to connect with food and nature and develop the skills and assets for resilience, community action and wealth building. This broad sector provides local solutions to a range of social and geo political issues, and more can be done now if we can strengthen our collaboration.

The Forum have the expertise to lead or partner in delivery of these solutions. We can address system and equity issues, empower more communities, and support the development of community led local food systems across Scotland, including working intentionally with local authorities, SAGS and the wider community growing network. However, this work needs to be acknowledged for its multiple benefits, coordinated more effectively as a sector, undertaken with all levels of government and appropriately resourced to do so.

The issues we are addressing are urgent, and we need to accelerate action for community led locally grown food employing multiple models of engagement. Along with the immediate crises of food security and cost of living, our diets are and will continue to have to change to eating more local and more fresh fruit, vegetables and grains. If we are to meet climate and nature targets, we will need to grow more and support people to engage in a local food system.

A 'myth to bust' is that Scotland cannot in fact grow a significant amount of fresh produce to make a difference. Research in the UK and countries with similar characteristics shows this to be false. Scottish Government support, for policy implementation and development and resource, for a mix of models, including community and market gardens, home gardens and allotments, will help enable this to happen.

The good news from our sector, represented by the Forum, is that we have the knowledge, grassroots support and partnerships ready to fully activate, so we can release the latent demand, and promote, encourage and support citizens in all our community to 'get growing'. Intermediary organisations, that include the voice and experience of the grassroots are integral for this system to grow and flourish, and with appropriate resource they can work in partnership sharing learning and experience whilst still addressing bespoke community needs. In partnership these barriers and opportunities can then be fed back to government.

- **Wider vision and models** – food growing in the community is represented by a wide range of models. ACTION: To promote and support more engagement and equity, expand the allotment focus of Part 9, including wider models for all levels of engagement and commitment, from home to market gardens, community gardens and allotments. Part 9 can support this through more land for growing connecting more organisations and communities Scotland wide and local.
- **Community Growing Forum** – collaboration to represent and support all forms of growing in the community, with representatives from the community, intermediary organisations, local authorities and other national and local partners. Currently working together and refining approaches- advocating for and raising the status of the sector and promoting best practice covering Scotland and wider linked into secondary

networks, and hosting [www.getgrowingscotland.org](http://www.getgrowingscotland.org) Scotland's new growing in the community hub and connected advisory service, sharing our combined knowledge and inspiring others. Together our combined membership covers Scotland. ACTION: with additional support [as per successful COSS model on asset transfer], the advisory service can be more proactive and manage higher demand, and enable the approach to address system issues, implement policy and promote mass engagement to accelerate, working with urgency to capture opportunities and address issues. Paid to collaborate, intermediary collaborations have limited access to funding. [See Appendix for examples of the communities we support and the services, skills and knowledge of Forum members.]

- **Local Authority Forum** sharing knowledge and practice with each other – intra and inter Council, and with partners and community representatives, working together to implement Community Empowerment Act part 9A. Learning about the growing in the community ecosystem and how it addresses a wide range of policy and objectives, empowering people and departments to support and promote community empowerment through growing and greenspace local activities.
- **Fife Allotment Model** addressing capacity and fairness in the allotment model and processes. Including supporting existing and models to be accessible and sustainable through standardisation; promoting and developing alternative allotment models and opportunities, for example waiting lists as expressions of interest and community space in allotments. ACTION: GrowGreen Scotland and Social Farms & Gardens Scotland are partnering with Fife [See Appendix SF&G Wales]
- **Pockets & Prospects Model** for effective, efficient funding where and when it is needed, with the representative organisations, through the Forum and the Scottish Communities Alliance, use their expertise to process, endorse, distribute, and continue to support projects and organisations. Funding is effective, value and targeted when and where needed. ACTION: Additional funding for this fund.
- **Welsh model** system change community and government- the potential of unified approach and methods. [See Appendix]
- **Mayfield and Easthouses Model** local growing and food hub, asset focused, providing various opportunities for community empowerment and engagement through development and delivery of a local food system, in an area with poverty and food insecurity. Delivers to a range of policy measures and approaches including Good Food Nation, Community Empowerment, community resilience and wealth building, Net Zero, 20-minute neighbourhoods. ACTION: Demonstrate and duplicate, for existing and new projects to recognise and grow this approach.
- **Lauriston Model** another version of a model that can be used to develop the market garden end of the growing in the community sector.
- **Land Access** remains a key barrier. Sufficient, appropriate land for growing where and when it is needed. In our dense urban areas creative thinking is required to assess and address allotment provision, and provide alternative models for more immediate access, in some areas this about making the case for investment and/or investing In alternative models and exploring and promoting more public and private

land access. Growing in school grounds, NHS land, housing associations and on private land. ACTION. Promotion of various models through getgrowing hub.

- **Planning-** NPF4 opportunities however planning not resourced to do the wider work. How can communities take this up and how can land for food growing be prioritised. This needs urgent leadership from govt at national level to safeguard land for more localised food systems and integrate land for food growing into our national planning system. ACTION: In a more enabling environment, we can start to work on solutions from the grassroots and intermediaries- building relationships with SULU, Scottish Land Commission, Planning Aid Scotland. Local Authorities on consistency for local development planning. Train community groups in influencing Local Place Plans (SCDC) and feeding into Local Development Plans. Disseminate and share info and good practice through [getgrowingscotland.org](http://getgrowingscotland.org)
- **Skills** Land skills are key. The opportunities to embed local food into our educational system at every level learn to promote food growing, market gardening and farming. To address the urgent need to understand the need to develop our food system and develop the skills to participate in the solutions. ACTION: Work with local and national government to address the gaps and stimulate demand. At every level. For e.g Fund existing growers to learn how to expand, get higher yield, to store at Forum level raise the profile of growing local, but horticultural sector needs wider recognition and support at SG with more funding made available for market gardening courses etc. We can provide more information on this from partners including the UK Urban Agriculture Consortium and the Land Workers Alliance.
- **Role of Scottish Government: intentionally link to other policies including Good Food Nation: where the Act can support** people to engage with food through growing. If people gain understand food and the soil that nourishes it, they are likely to make more healthy and sustainable food choices and support a local food system.
- **Raise profile, status, and capacity of growing in the community in Scotland.** The resource and coordination to have the data, evidence, evaluation, development, growth and sustainability. Promotion of opportunities and skills – mass engagement . Action: Forums, as above, working with and connecting Scottish Government departments, working together with a more intentional approach to policy implementation and development, funding, evidence

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### **Social Farms & Gardens - Allotments work in Wales**

**Note:** We received this summary just before submitting our paper to the Committee, therefore there it has not been discussed with the Forum, including SAGS. However SF&G Wales did present to this work to the Forum at our meeting in December 2021.

#### **Current**

1/ Resilient Green Spaces – Resilient Green Spaces is a £1.27m partnership project led by Social Farms & Gardens to pilot alternative re-localised food systems using communities and their green spaces as the driving force for change across Wales until June 2023. This project is funded through the Welsh Government Rural Communities – Rural Development Programme 2014-2020, which is funded by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the Welsh Government. Six collaborative workstreams delivered by partners, are testing what communities can achieve, given the right support, access to land

and freedom to do what they do best. Workstream 1 focuses on the Building a National Allotment Development Team which includes;

- Creation of up to 600 new allotment plots and regeneration of up to 200 plots across 10 sites in Wales (ideally urban/ peri-urban locations), ideally 5 of those sites should be on farm land. Limited capital funding as well as access to an allotment toolkit containing template lease agreements, support with health and safety etc.
- Creation of Wales' first Allotment Development Team that support landowners and managers to meet the growing demand for adequate allotment provision and to improve access for those who are often marginalised from green spaces and healthy food.

<https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/resilient-green-spaces/national-allotment-development-team>

2/ Working with Welsh Government to deliver their Allotment Support Grant; Each Local Authority area in Wales (24 areas) is given an offer by Welsh Government of a grant of around £25k to invest in their statutory allotment sites. The funds are to creation of new allotment plots, to regenerate overgrown/ un-usable allotments, and improve infrastructure including access, security and access to water. The grants were piloted\* in 3 Local Authority areas by Social Farms & Gardens in 2020/21, and funding was rolled out to all Local Authorities in 2021/22, with SF&G supporting some regions to negotiate/ create the work plans necessary to secure the funding in each area. The programme has now been confirmed for a further 3 years with each year investing a similar value in each region.

### **Historical work**

3/ Creation of (2016) and revision of (2020) the Allotments and Community Growing; guidance for groups and Local Authorities <https://gov.wales/allotments-and-community-growing-guidance-growers-and-growing-groups>

4/ In 2019 Social Farms & Gardens (SF&G) was commissioned by the Landscape and Outdoor Recreation Branch of Welsh Government (WG) to carry out research on the provision of community food growing sites across Wales, particularly collation of statistical data to enable the mapping of the current provision of community food growing sites across Wales including; Statutory, Temporary, and Community led allotment sites, community supported agriculture sites, community gardens, community orchards and Incredible Edible Landscapes. Data collected was also ranked to demonstrate the number of plots per local authority area and how this correlated to population size. The National Society for Allotment and Leisure Gardeners recommends that there are 20 allotment plots available per 1000 households, so areas were ranked based on the total number of plots that they had available and whether this was above, in-line or below this guidance.

5/ The 2019 study also provided a clear set of recommendations including;

- The need for a legislation review as allotment legislation is overly complicated, much of it is vastly out of date and it appears to have only been added to, rather than re-written.
- The need for a simple guidance document created for Local Authorities and Town and Community Councils to re-affirm their duties of allotment provision.
- The creation of a centralised system for allotment waiting lists; Gaining data on waiting lists is extremely hard to come by. Almost every local authority approach allotment waiting lists in a different way. Some hold good data and have clear procedures, whilst others appear to have more complicated and less publicly accessible information. We would advocate for exploring a centralised, more transparent, waiting list system for people to register their interest in obtaining an allotment plot. We feel this could be centrally administered and feed out requests to

each Allotment Authority and would enable Governments to have an instant picture of demand and how that demand is being met.