



Local Food Guides School Projects  
 Local Food Events  
 Garden Shares  
 Local Food Cooperatives

Allotments  
 Community Gardens

# LOCAL FOOD

Community Orchards  
 Community Supported Agriculture  
 Farmers' Markets  
 Food Cooperatives

## HOW TO MAKE IT HAPPEN IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Tamzin Pinkerton & Rob Hopkins



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## Tamzin Pinkerton & Rob Hopkins

Tamzin Pinkerton has an academic background in Social Anthropology and Human Rights. Soon after moving to Devon she became involved in setting up some of the early projects of the first Transition Town, Totnes. She has a strong interest in finding a balance between personal and environmental health, and is passionate about the importance of organic, local food. This book is part of her exploration into how, as community members, we can learn to shape our food culture.



Rob Hopkins has been a teacher of permaculture for many years. He is co-founder of the growing Transition Network and author of the best-selling *The Transition Handbook*. He is a lobbyist and national campaigner who is raising awareness of our need to build resilient communities in the face of peak oil and climate change. In June 2009 he won the Observer Ethical Award for Grassroots Campaigner.





# Introduction

by Rob Hopkins

The steady and relentless erosion of the idea that food is something that grows near where you live, by someone you have some kind of relationship with, and that you actually cook yourself, began after the Second World War and accelerated during the 1960s and 1970s. New subsidies and international trade agreements, accompanied by the rise of the supermarket and the dazzling idea that you could now have whatever food you wanted from anywhere in the world, meant that it became, perversely, cheaper and easier to buy food grown many hundreds of miles away than food grown up the road. Farmers and growers went out of business, orchards were grubbed out, our lives became saturated with processed foods and our waistlines started to bulge. The illusion of plenty came at a cost, as we discarded into the recycling bin of history a complex, highly skilled, adaptable and place-specific system that could be dismantled in a day but would take far, far longer to rebuild once it had gone.

## Food security or food vulnerability?

During the 1930s, Britain's national food self-sufficiency fell precipitously, leaving it very vulnerable by the outbreak of World War II. This led to a hastily introduced effort to build food security, with a combination of the Dig for Victory campaign and a huge increase in

agricultural productivity (still seen by some as the heyday of British farming). Places that hadn't been dug or ploughed disappeared under productive use: Hampstead Heath, the flowerbeds around Buckingham Palace, and meadows and pastures were all rapidly pulled in to the national effort to avoid starvation. By the end of the war, 10 per cent of the nation's diet was coming from allotments and back gardens, and agricultural input had increased greatly. Nutritionists argue that the nation had never been healthier.

Defra views any talk of food security as absurd. When it uses the word 'resilience' in the context of food, it is not talking about increased national production, about local markets and so on; rather it is talking about making the range of places the country sources its food from as diverse as possible. The broader the base, it argues, the less risk of any significant disruption to supply. Getting bananas from eight countries rather than four means we are less at risk. However, this attitude has started to shift. A recent Cabinet Office discussion paper on food security concluded that, in the light of the challenge posed by climate change, "existing patterns of food production are not fit for a low-carbon, more resource-constrained future". This book attempts to set out what 'patterns of food that are fit for a low-carbon, more resource-constrained future' might actually look like – and, indeed, are already looking like.



## Why change is inevitable

Three factors are converging on our current models for how we feed ourselves, and they are converging very, very fast. The first is the issue of peak oil. In essence, oil is a finite resource, yet we continue to use it with reckless confidence, based on the assumption that we will always have it, in abundant supply and at reasonable cost. We have built infrastructure, living patterns and economic models on the understanding that we will always have access to this amazing resource, yet increasingly its uninterrupted supply is looking very vulnerable. We now consume four barrels of oil for each new one we discover, and more and more oil-producing nations are passing their peak of production.

The core of the peak oil issue is the following observation: that during what we might call The Age of Cheap Oil (from 1859 to the present), our degree of economic success and sense of personal well-being and prowess has been directly linked to our level of oil consumption, yet we are rapidly moving into a time where our degree of dependence equates to our degree of vulnerability. That is as much the case in terms of our food system as it is with anything else.

Secondly, the climate change issue means that the UK needs to begin driving its carbon dioxide emissions down with an unprecedented sense of urgency. The most recent science on climate change shows that the world has reached some of the 'tipping points' predicted by climate scientists. Indeed, James Hansen of NASA has stated that the tipping point for the world's climate was actually 350ppm (atmospheric concentration of carbon dioxide, by volume, in parts per million) – the fact that we are now at 387ppm being no reason why 350ppm should not remain the target. The important question is what the world

would look like if we went to bed at the end of a day having sequestered (i.e. locked up in some way) more carbon than we emitted during that day. Some of the food strategies we will explore here are a part of that discussion. Making food and farming 'carbon positive' would mean that it would be at the very least organic (emissions from the use of nitrogen fertilisers are huge and are entirely unnecessary), as well as being more local, featuring more perennial crops such as productive trees, and, inevitably, employing more people.

The last factor is the economic contraction the world is presently experiencing, popularly known as 'the Credit Crunch'. The whole idea of perpetual growth was, if we're honest, absurd to start with. If we gauge the success or otherwise of our economies on whether year on year we consume more, buy more stuff and spend more money, we pretty soon hit up against the reality that the world is a finite resource, that there is no such place as 'away'. The economic recession we are now experiencing will differ from previous recessions in that it is the first one underpinned by an energy peak. Economic growth was made possible by a model that assumed that next year we would have more productivity, more cheap energy and therefore more economic activity than this year. With the growing acknowledgement that the age of cheap energy is behind us, the concept of growth is now looking increasingly absurd. And growth has come at huge cost – social, environmental and personal. A recent study showed that the last year that increased consumption made us any happier was 1961.<sup>1</sup> The sooner we are able to start designing for more realistic expectations of the future the better, as a more localised, diverse food system can't be cobbled together overnight: it takes design, forethought, money and a lot of work.





## Chapter 5

# Garden shares



A garden share plot in the centre of Totnes, cultivated by Chris Watson and Trich Gilson. Photograph: Transition Town Totnes

There are various estimates for how many private gardens we have in the UK, ranging from 10 million to over 20 million. Guesses as to how much land these gardens cover are just as wide – from 150,000 hectares to over 400,000 hectares (based on gardens having an average size of 190m<sup>2</sup>).<sup>1</sup> Taking the most conservative of these estimates (150,000ha), and figures suggesting that one hectare of agricultural land can feed between 7.5 and 10.6 people when farmed organically,<sup>2</sup> then the combined land area of the UK's gardens could potentially feed between 1,125,000 and 1,590,000

people. This is obviously a very crude calculation that doesn't take into account the quality of the land, the type of crops that produce the best yields, nor the complexities of the fact that one back garden growing a diversity of crops could potentially have a greater yield than the same land within a large-scale, monoculturally-farmed field.<sup>3</sup> But it does give a rough indication of the potential for home-garden food production that could be harnessed around the country.

So-called garden-share schemes work by match-making available private land (and its owners) with land-seeking others, thereby helping to put unused gardens to good use, while taking the miles out of food and forging links within the community at the same time. Garden owners partaking in these projects are keen to help local food-growing efforts in their neighbourhood, and they either have spare plots alongside what they cultivate themselves, or, for whatever reason, they are unable to use their garden but are happy to let a neighbour tend the space instead. In return, these neighbours have a place to hone their gardening skills and grow their own food. With most garden-share projects, arrangements are made between owners and gardeners that suit their mutual needs, so that some gardeners may pay a nominal rental fee, others may share part of their produce with the owners, and others might have land access simply in exchange for the owner's pleasure in seeing food growing outside the kitchen window.





As a practical solution to land-access problems and the tedium of the allotment waiting list, it is not surprising that the popularity of garden-share schemes has flourished in recent times, spawning initiatives such as the Tavistock Garden Share Alliance, the Isle of Wight's Adopt-A-Garden scheme, London's Capital

Growth project (see Rosie Boycott's Foreword) and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's Landshare website (see below). Transition initiatives have been enthused by the garden-share concept too, and groups in Falmouth, Cambridge, Lewes and Farnham (among many others) are busy shaping similar schemes.

## Sharing land, community and food

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall

Photo: Tom Beard



Growing a few potatoes in a back garden, tending a little fruit tree, perhaps digging a shared allotment patch – these things don't sound particularly revolutionary or innovative, do they? But these small acts of domestic agriculture can be part of something exciting, progressive and, if you'll excuse the pun, ground-breaking.

For decades now, we have been moving away from the land, away from self-sufficiency, away from even knowing where our food comes from, let alone growing it ourselves. That leaves us with significantly less power, less influence and less knowledge when it comes to choosing the food we want to eat. It leaves us heavily reliant on large-scale producers, often in other countries, and on massive commodity crops – which, if they fail, leave nothing in their place. And of course it means that much of the food we eat comes freighted with a rather large environmental price tag.

Sourcing your own food locally whenever you can is a simple way to redress the balance. Producing some of it yourself is even better, in my book. Combining these two approaches by working cooperatively with other local people to grow fruit and veg is perhaps most exciting

of all – because you're not just feeding yourself. Such cooperative schemes help to sustain a whole community. And if the family that eats together stays together, just imagine what the community that eats together can do.

Garden-share schemes are now cropping up (literally) all over the UK. The Landshare project is one I'm heavily involved in myself. We know that many people who want to grow their own food struggle to find the land they need to do it. Landshare brings together people with land to spare (anything from a postage-stamp back garden to a few acres) and people who want to start digging and planting. The scheme has already met with an incredibly enthusiastic response, and in back gardens, rooftops, car parks, derelict plots and country estates all over the UK people are taking small but incredibly important steps towards a more sustainable, secure, vibrant and varied way of producing food. Such projects are living proof that the future of our food is in our own hands.

*Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall is a writer, broadcaster, chef and campaigner committed to promoting seasonal, ethical food. He is the author of The River Cottage Cookbook and many other publications, and presenter of the River Cottage TV series (see [www.rivercottage.net](http://www.rivercottage.net) and [www.landshare.net](http://www.landshare.net) for details of his own garden-share-inspired scheme).*





## Chapter 8

# Community Supported Agriculture

In the UK and around the world, Community Supported Agriculture schemes (often referred to as CSAs) are fast becoming recognised as key elements of local food networks, and as efficient, resilient ways of feeding communities. CSAs come in many shapes and sizes but they are in essence farms (often set up as limited companies) in which community members become involved by buying shares, making decisions and even helping to grow and harvest the food they eat. A CSA can be a big project to set up, requiring much groundwork, knowledge and community support before it can take off. But because the CSA model strengthens relationships between the farmer, the community and the wider environment, there are many benefits that come with the start-up and long-term effort it requires. For the farmers, there is a secure market for the food they produce. For the community members that support them, there is access to local, often organic food, the opportunity to develop their own growing skills and the space to have a say in what is produced and how.

Because the food producers are growing for a defined, local market rather than for the unpredictable, global food market, the food miles that their produce travels are drastically reduced and they are able to support wildlife and biodiversity by growing a varied selection of crops. So although the term 'Community Supported Agriculture' implies a one-way relationship of support from the community to the farmer, the relationships are actually three-way (between growers,

community and the environment) and the benefits flow in all directions. Gaps between the three recipients are closed, understanding is fostered, and each receives the nourishment it deserves. Because CSAs prioritise ethics over profit they can be described as a type of social enterprise. This means that even if they choose to operate as profit-making businesses, any surplus that is made is put back into the initiative to help further its community- and environment-focused aims.

The CSA approach to farming first emerged in the 1960s as an early reaction to the increased industrialisation of agriculture and the stretching of food supply chains. As a way of bringing farming back in touch with the communities it feeds, groups in Germany, Switzerland and Japan began setting up direct and supportive relationships with local farmers to source their own fresh, safe food. In Japan, this model is known as *teikei*, which translates as 'putting the farmer's face on the food', an apt description for a model that narrows the otherwise ubiquitous consumer-producer divide.

In the 1980s CSA schemes spread to the USA, where they have since grown to include more than 1,500 farms and surrounding communities. In the UK their uptake has been slower, but recently the numbers of CSAs have steadily increased to over 100 and, because the model effectively addresses the pressing issues of rising food prices, environmental damage and community disconnection from farming, more and more CSAs are expected to spring up in this country in coming years.





## CSA stories

**Project name:** Stroud Community Agriculture (SCA)

**Location:** Stroud, Gloucestershire

**Aim:** To provide local, organic food for local people, encourage mutual cooperation between farmers and consumers, and reduce the community's dependence on fossil-fuelled food.

**Started:** 2001

**How many people involved:** Four paid farmers, one paid administrator, one paid treasurer and nearly 200 members, of whom nine are elected to sit on the management group.

**On the web:** [www.stroudcommunityagriculture.org](http://www.stroudcommunityagriculture.org)

### The idea

The Stroud Community Agriculture scheme (SCA) was one of the first and most productive CSAs to have started up in the UK, and it has since gone on to support and inspire a number of newer CSA initiatives around the country. In 2001 a group of four Stroud residents got together to discuss ways of supporting food resilience in their area and of providing local, organic food for their families. They came up with a plan to start a CSA on the site of a local farm that would benefit from community support. The first step was to hold a public meeting about the idea so that they could gauge community opinion. The group got in touch with the Soil Association, who helped plan a presentation about why there was a need for a CSA in Stroud, and a local farmer was invited to come and discuss the struggles that small farms can face in the UK. The meeting was a resounding success, with over 80 people attending and much support being given to the plan.

### The action

Although from its first meeting SCA was established with a wide ownership base – shaped and determined by all the community shareholders who supported it – it was initially run by the core group as an unincorporated association. This meant that it was the core group who would be held legally responsible if anything went wrong. So, to spread the burden of responsibility more evenly, SCA was set up as an industrial and provident society in 2002, and principles of democratic decision-making and cooperation were more formally built into the organisation's structure.

### The funding

The group agreed not to apply for funding initially because it wanted the project to achieve financial viability without relying on external assistance.



Pitching in on the SCA fields. Photograph: SCA





## Chapter 10

# Food cooperatives

The theme of shared decision-making that cuts across many of the initiatives featured in this book is most clearly demonstrated by food cooperative projects, which have a concern with organisational structure at their core. These projects emphasise the importance not only of 'what' we eat but also 'how' we organise ourselves around access to it.

In its simplest form, a cooperative is a group of people who draw together, in equal capacity, with a common purpose – whether it is to sell, buy or provide a service.<sup>1</sup> At the heart of the cooperative approach is an ethic of respect for fellow members, be they workers, customers or both. Responsibility, ownership and power are shared among members for their mutual benefit, helping to nurture a strong sense of commitment to the enterprise and the principles it upholds.

The way cooperatives go about achieving this varies a lot. Smaller cooperatives with simpler aims (such as a chicken co-op owned and run by five families) do of course have far less need for formality and have more direct access to decision-making procedures than, say, a national bank that has millions of customers. Some have consensus-based, 'flat' structures while others are more hierarchical but democratic (where, for example, a management committee is elected by other members). But they are all set up to serve people rather than stock-exchange listings, shareholder profits and the odd swollen pension – they are about striving for true worker and/or customer satisfaction.

## Food cooperative stories

**Project name:** Food For All

**Location:** Hartcliffe, Bristol

**Aim:** To provide local residents with affordable, local, largely organic food.

**Started:** 1991

**How many people involved:** Over 200 household members.

**On the web:** [www.foodforallbristol.org.uk](http://www.foodforallbristol.org.uk)

### The idea

The Food For All cooperative, which operates in Bristol's Hartcliffe area, is an example of a well-established co-op committed to supplying affordable food to local residents. It has recently transformed its procurement policy to favour local and organic produce. Back in 1990, Hartcliffe was the subject of a survey conducted by local health authorities, who concluded that the area was seriously deprived; that, among other issues, unemployment was worryingly high and shop closures were making it very hard for residents to access affordable, nutritious food. These observations made by objective onlookers struck a community chord and inspired change from within, triggering the formation of the Hartcliffe Health and Environment Action Group (HHEAG), set up and run by local residents.



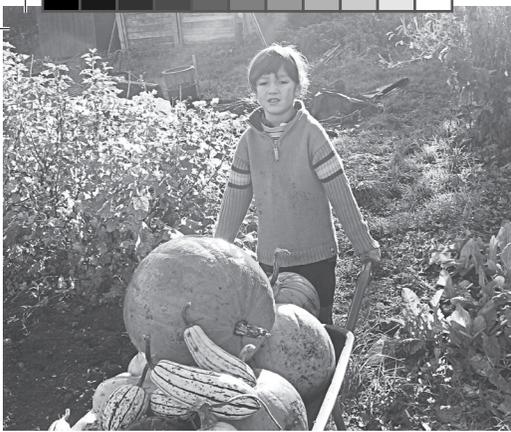


## Tips on setting up a food co-op

As suggested by Sue Walker (Food For All), Eleanor King (Fruit and Veg Together Co-op), and Holly Regan-Jones (Wellington Food Cooperative).

- 1.** Building a community-run project such as a food co-op is about forging connections and strengthening relationships within a community – which can take a great deal of time. So patience is required in preparing the ground (for example, through community Open Space events or workshops) and nurturing further growth of the project (until the membership limit is reached and workers can then consider helping other co-ops to set up too!).
- 2.** Internet research is one way of identifying local producers to work with, and some countries and regions are lucky enough to have websites listing local food businesses in their area. But it is also worth exploring other ways of finding them, as some smaller businesses may well not be listed on the web. Check out local food directories and ads in local papers, and chat to other residents, independent shopkeepers and stallholders at nearby farmers' markets.
- 3.** You can also be creative about ways of recruiting customer-members – by, for example, holding food events where people can come and meet the co-op farmers and sample their produce, having a recruitment stall at a farmers' market or providing the food for another public event (such as a Transition Town talk or film screening). Places and groups to advertise through include health-food shops, doctors' surgeries, churches, restaurants, alternative health clinics, crèches, and any Transition-, peak-oil- or climate-change-related organisations.
- 4.** Experience in setting up a co-op is helpful, but certainly not a prerequisite for running a successful food co-op initiative. Check out other nearby co-ops for advice, tips and maybe even ongoing support. And don't underestimate the willingness of members to chip in with ideas, labour, materials and venues – it is their co-op and they have a vested interest in seeing it thrive.
- 5.** Regularly consult members on their opinions of the co-op's work so that they can have input into, and ownership over, the project. Be flexible enough to be able to respond to members' desire for change, which may include anything from switching to more local producers, asking co-op farmers to certify their land or extending the range of products.
- 6.** If you choose to operate a collection scheme, be sure to research possible venues and time slots carefully by visiting the area at the times in question to see how much passing pedestrian traffic there is. You can also check out whether times coincide with any other weekly happenings in the same venue or nearby, and canvas potential or existing members to find out what time and location suits them best.
- 7.** Co-ops can be a useful mechanism for spreading information about related local projects, such as Transition initiatives, gardening workshops, etc., and thereby helping to link local food work in the area. Because local food co-ops can be an effective entry point into a wider appreciation of food security issues, you can help to nurture this awareness among members by providing information on home growing, sharing listings of related local workshops and courses, and directing them towards other ways of accessing organic local food.





*Local Food* provides inspiration and practical advice for creating local food initiatives — showing how to restore and establish community networks to generate healthy, locally produced food.

Many people already buy their vegetables as locally as possible, eat organic and seasonal food when they can, and are perhaps even getting to grips with managing an allotment. However, with current economic pressures and mounting concerns about climate change and peak oil, there is a growing feeling that we need to do more to reduce dependence on the global market.

Local Food offers an inspiring and practical guide to what can be achieved if you get together with the people on your street or in your village, town or city. It explores a huge range of local food initiatives for rebuilding a diverse, resilient local food network – including community gardens, farmers' markets, Community Supported Agriculture schemes and projects in schools – and includes all the information you will need to get ideas off the ground.

Drawing on the practical experience of Transition initiatives and other community projects around the world, Local Food demonstrates the power of working collaboratively. In today's culture of supermarkets and food miles, an explosion of activity at community level is urgently needed. This book is the ideal place to start.



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