How can we scale up Bristol urban food production?

Photo report and summary of discussions, 3 Oct 2012, Hamilton House

(Scaling up might actually mean connecting up – findings of the national Making Local Food Work programme to support community food enterprises)

Purpose

Summary of what we have in Bristol:

‘Bristol offers a very contrasted picture: a strong “disengagement with food” among population groups with low incomes and a community of food activists developing what is certainly one of the most dynamic panorama of initiatives towards sustainable food in an urban context.’

(François Jégou, Lead expert for URBACT Project on sustainable food in urban communities, July 2012)
Bristol City Council is a partner in an EU URBACT city project - **Sustainable Food in Urban Communities** - a project involving five European cities that wish to grow, deliver and enjoy more sustainable food: they are looking for joint, effective and sustainable solutions to develop low-carbon and resource-efficient urban food systems. This project has funded our meeting.

**Bristol Food Network** – the website and newsletter; the Get Growing Trail and map of growing spaces; the **Bristol Independents campaign**

**Plenty of experience and enthusiasm** – Bristol food links was established in 1997 and has gone through many stages of evolution, now the current Bristol Food Network.

The new **Bristol Pound** to support the local economy – get your account set up!

The new **Bristol Food Policy Council**, which was a recommendation of the **Who Feeds Bristol report**: a multi-stakeholder group including Bristol City Council and NHS, with the ability to influence and to help work toward the recommendations of the Who Feeds Bristol report to make Bristol’s food system more sustainable and resilient. It is working towards these aims:

**BFN is represented on the Bristol Food Policy Council** and enables the groups on the ground to feed into a city-wide food plan.

**Who Feeds Bristol? Towards a resilient food plan** – report published in 2011 making the above recommendations for a Bristol food plan.
What we don’t yet have

A ‘scaling up food production’ plan; a group to lead it and coordinate action; finance; access to larger areas of land; markets; sources of compost, fertility and seeds in the city; apprenticeship schemes and training programmes

‘Scaling up’ challenges set out by some of the speakers:

Skills to make a social enterprise business work; effective communication and recruiting support for urban food production; weather issues; costs of resources and inputs; energy and power sources; transport and distribution.

Other challenges
Key points from speakers – ‘calls to action’

- Make use of CLTS – help with land legalities
- Knowledge ERM
- Smart phone, digital system to share
- Help with sales
- One or more social enterprises to take a lead with a clear plan
- Strategy
- Create food growing learning opportunities and apprenticeships
- Centralising the whole city provision of seeds, fertility, compost
- Open a BF account and use it to support more local food buying
- Share knowledge, cooperation
Small group discussions & practical ideas

i) ‘Bristol grown’ brand and markets

**Next steps:** group left email addresses and will continue discussion
ii) Digital tools for supporting community level cooperation

Idea for Action

Develop/use a digital tool to manage supply/demand between generar/sellers.

- Cloud XC - web-based software to connect consumers with local producers
- CEX - connects consumers with local producers
- Can be adaptable to Bristol market
- Wired for Food - connecting up to resource
- ELM - connects producers up to consumers
- Walled Garden - who’s doing what where
- Nap - scaling up BFN mapping

Tools:
- Connection to land
- Encouraging giving
- Shop locally
- Produce
iii) Learning and skills

- lots of possible projects
- formalising skills learned into tradable/recognised qualifications
- potentially partnering with universities to fund apprenticeships
- the potential funding from government for skills training esp. for NEETs non-traditional groups
- issues with legitimising labour in conventional fields growing
- link with vocational tools armies in schools to source local
- Skills not only in growing so much more.
  - cooking, marketing, enterprise
- Skills exchange? Like timebank?
- Intergenerational, already happening on allotments.
iv) A plan & central coordinating strategy

- Added value options
- Holistic use of waste
- Climate modification
- Carbon diet + waste heat
- Increase in property prices
- Meaningful work for excluded groups
- Social prescribing
- Volunteering for unemployed
- Exercise
v) Bristol grower cooperation

Your ideas for action

Coop of specialist knowledge to be able to dip into juice at peak times.

**Machine-coop**

- tractor
- balancer
- seed drill etc.

Local food wholesale system linking into retail & catering

Focus on labour & land-intensive foods for growing & Bristol & develop direct supply links with small-scale farmers (especially for other communities).

**Growers co-op**

- Fruit trees - collect fruit that owner cannot use, e.g. cherry trees. Sheffield Abundance.
- Digital tool to manage supply + demand to retail + wholesale.

Twin unused land with keen growers - gardens, compost, land, greenhouses etc.
Next steps: A grower group is suggested - to look at how they might cooperate more, e.g. with seeds & machinery; maybe also with buyers. The group will get together again to plan a 'meet the grower event'. They also suggest regular grower get-togethers. Steve Glover of Severn Project offered to host the first one in a couple of weeks time. date & time tbc.
Additional important issues - Land access & campaign to protect agricultural land on Rapid Transport Route through Frenchay

Idea for action

- Local land holding + dating agency

Connect community groups, commercial growers, allotment etc. to share knowledge, distribute excess produce to needy etc.

Education - support those wanting to learn to grow food and educate people into how to cook with less waste, use leftovers, preserve etc.

add suggestions

add comments
Final comments

This was a great start to our discussions and we covered a lot of ground in a short amount of time. We know what the challenges are and we know what resources are in place. There are some ideas beginning to emerge, which hopefully will take us in a new direction as a network. There are two specific ideas to build up – the growers cooperation meeting to be hosted by Severn Project & a group to think more about a possible Bristol Grown brand and markets idea.

Thanks to all for participating. Please watch the BFN website and newsletter for updates. If you have an idea that you’d like to put forward please contact BFN and make use of the newsletter or website.

Reminder: Bristol Food Network provides all the food-related work at a community level around Bristol with an umbrella structure, but at present has very little resources. It needs to set up a larger steering group and is seeking volunteers. It is currently coordinated by three volunteers: Jane Stevenson, Kristin Sponsler and Joy Carey.