

Fringe Farming

Peri-urban agroecology towards resilient food economies and public goods



Fringe Farming

The Fringe Farming initiative is a collaboration between UK food, farming and land organisations to increase agroecological farming at the edge of cities. Agroecological farming creates numerous social, ecological and environmental benefits through creating resilient food systems, with the peri-urban area being a strategic place for market garden scale farms to connect rural and urban economies.

With a new generation of farmers and growers looking for suitable sites to meet increased demand for regional, ecological, and culturally-appropriate foods, the project aims to connect the dots through collaborative work with local and national government to unlock land and resources to increase peri-urban agroecology. In 2021, the Fringe Farming collaboration has produced a series of action-planning events, place-based research, and policy briefings in Bristol, Glasgow, London, and Sheffield. Alongside national-wide practitioner forums, these initiatives combined to co-create practical solutions and policy recommendations for taking innovative action in the coming years.

Project Partners: Bristol Food Producers; Glasgow Community Food Network; Landworkers' Alliance; Shared Assets; Regather; Sustain.

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Front cover photo credit: The Community Farm, Bristol

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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Glossary and Acronyms | 4 |
| Preface: Why agroecological farming in the urban fringe? | 5 |
| Executive Summary | 7 |
| Introduction | 9 |
| National Policy recommendations | 11 |
| Top 10 Local Authority Actions | 15 |
| Bristol Fringe Farming | 20 |
| Glasgow Fringe Farming | 21 |
| London Fringe Farming | 22 |
| Sheffield Fringe Farming | 23 |
| What next? | 24 |
| Further reading | 25 |
| References | 26 |

Glossary and Acronyms

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| Agroecology | Agroecology takes an integrated and holistic approach to producing food where ecological and social principles underpin regenerative systems that work to meet every person's right to access and produce healthy and culturally-appropriate foods. |
| County Farms | County Farms are farms owned by local authorities, set up at the end of the 19th century to provide a way into farming for young farmers during a long agricultural depression. They remain one of the most powerful levers a local authority has for helping people into farming. |
| DEFRA | Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs |
| ELMS | Environmental Land Management Schemes – which are part of the English farm policy support package, paying farmers for delivering public goods |
| Green Belt | Green Belt is a planning policy designation, set to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open. Green Belt can prevent neighbouring towns merging, assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment, preserve special character of historic towns and assist in urban regeneration, by encouraging development on urban land. Once established, Green Belt boundaries should only be altered in exceptional circumstances. The 14 Green Belts in England cover 1.6 million hectares, which is 13% of the country. |
| LA | Local Authority |
| LNR | Local Nature Recovery – one element of the English ELMS |
| Market garden | A small farm where fruit, vegetables and flowers are grown to sell for a profit. |
| NEETs | Young people not in Education, Employment or Training |
| Peri-urban | Located around the edge of a city or urban area; peri-urban areas may also be called urban fringe, 'rurban', outskirts and hinterland. Peri-urban areas can be described as the landscape interface between town and country, or the rural-urban transition zone where urban and rural uses interact and sometimes clash. |
| Public good | A commodity or service provided by government, organisations and private individuals without profit to society with no expectation of payment. Its use by one person does not impact access for others e.g. fresh air, education and public health. |
| SME | Small and medium-sized enterprise |

Preface: Why agroecological farming in the urban fringe?

Agroecological farming is an approach where food is produced by working with nature, rather than against it, and is traded fairly through closer relationships between producer, trader and consumer covering seed to soil to plate (see expanded definition on page 6). This systemic approach creates multiple social, economic and ecological benefits in peri-urban areas including:

- Increased access to regionally-produced, nutritious, culturally-appropriate foods
- Generation of goods and services that support community wealth-building
- Provision of jobs and training in a regional economy
- Access to green space and outdoor learning at the edge of built-up cities
- Support for community development through community-owned resources, events, and volunteering
- Integration of green and food waste into growing practices
- Sequestration of carbon through farming approaches that work with natural cycles in effect creating 'carbon-sinks' surrounding urban space
- Increased biodiversity through companion planting and integration into agro-forestry and edible woodlands
- Active building and protection of valuable fertile soils

These multiple benefits and public goods can support local, regional, and national government to meet existing goals covering climate change¹, biodiversity², enterprise and employment and more. In terms of urban planning, agroecological farming on the fringes of cities can assist a green economic recovery by using farming methods that retain the ecological benefits of peri-urban areas and greenbelt land, while also building economies that connect the urban and the rural.³

The Covid-19 pandemic has highlighted the frailty in the UK's just-in-time food supply chains⁴ and "leave it all to Tesco et al" default policy.⁵ Many people have turned to community food organisations to ensure access to food. At the same time local food producers and box schemes were inundated with demand, showing the critical role they play in resilient food economies.

Historically, cities developed with food growing, especially the most perishable foods, just outside of the city walls, with trading relationships for less perishable produce built out from this zone. This zonal approach still makes sense today. It offers benefits of proximity to markets as well as connections to urban (and close rural) populations who could now access the associated employment, education and training such enterprises could provide.

As recently as 50 years ago market gardens ringed many UK cities, but increased food imports through increasingly dominant supermarkets with centralised systems, as well as expanding urban sprawl, have resulted in many food businesses on the edge of urban areas closing.

Desk based research in London, UK, estimated that the conversion of 1.4% of land growing cereals and grassland to vegetables around the city could produce an additional 1.3 million kg of food for communities.⁶ Considering the increase in both demand for regionally-produced foods⁷, and demand for land by a new generation of growers, there is an opportunity for government, at different levels to meet these demands. For example, they could mobilise land, infrastructure and investment to support new green economies that channel funds to local communities.

Creative opportunities can and are being taken; from integrating agroecological farming into tree-planting schemes, to collaborative efforts to find ways for local schools to procure foods directly, as part of a package that includes farm visits and outdoor learning for pupils.

Providing adult training opportunities into public services, such as landscape management, is another opportunity. A critical step is for official recognition of the public goods that peri-urban agroecology provides and the opening up of national government farming schemes to include market garden scale enterprises in the urban fringe.

Finally, with valuable fertile soils situated at the edges of cities and at risk of urban sprawl, it is an ideal time to support a new wave of agroecological market gardens to create resilient and equitable food systems that protect this vital resource.

Agroecology takes an integrated and holistic approach to producing food where ecological and social principles underpin regenerative systems that work to meet every person's right to access and produce healthy and culturally-appropriate foods. Key features of bona-fide agroecological initiatives include:

- Working with natural cycles and regenerative soil approaches
- Developing territorial food systems that are rooted in local and indigenous food cultures
- Democratic learning centring farmers' knowledge
- Integrating social justice approaches in organisational infrastructure namely racial justice, feminism and workers' rights
- Community-based organisation of land and assets management

The Nyéléni declaration⁸, 2015, outlines in more detail agroecological approaches, and the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation has a major programme of work promoting agroecological farming.⁹



Regather Farm, Sheffield; credit: Dora Damian

Executive Summary

This report highlights the critical issues and barriers holding back the growth of peri-urban agroecology with associated public goods, and offers a series of policy recommendations for local, regional, and national government action, with case studies in a number of areas.

While the multiple social and ecological benefits of agroecological farming in urban fringes is well documented, research shows the opportunities to connect a resilient food supply with city markets are still being missed. There is also failure to value the contributions to existing government targets from climate change to enterprise creation.

The Fringe Farming project has shown multiple barriers that need to be addressed. Practitioners have limited secure access to land, and the training and start-up capital to support new enterprises is difficult to find. Likewise, planning policies can limit the ability of peri-urban agroecology farmers to produce and sell more and diverse foods. For example, limiting the number of covered spaces, or the creation of overnight accommodation for workers can impact farm operations. **This report calls for active and productive greenbelts that protect ecological benefits and thriving biodiversity, while supporting agroecological enterprise, which delivers environmental targets and builds community wealth.**

Examples of peri-urban agroecological projects that contribute educational programmes and green jobs alongside fresh foods into regional food supplies, are illustrative. They demonstrate how partnerships between the agroecological sector, local government, national funders, and landowners such as schools, have potential to be replicated and adapted in different contexts. Projects such as [The Community Farm](#) (Bristol), [OrganicLea](#) (London), [Regather Farm](#) (Sheffield), and [GROW](#) (London), all show how peri-urban agroecology contributes public goods to the UK and bring long-term economic benefits to regions.

Ensuring equity in distribution of land, resources and training opportunities in developing the peri-urban agroecology sector, is of critical importance, especially considering the farming sector is the least diverse in the UK.¹⁰ Initiatives such as [Rootz into Food Growing](#), and [Black Rootz](#) (London), highlight future pathways to build a UK food system with innovative enterprise and training models connected with food justice.

Learning from organisational, business, and farming models developed by the initiatives listed above, local and national governance can create supportive policies for agroecological initiatives. This will build on existing practices and help grow the peri-urban agroecology sector in support of meeting existing government targets.

Key policy recommendations to support this are outlined overleaf.



Peri-urban land outside Glasgow; credit: D M Milne

National policy

1. The **5-hectare eligibility criteria for farm support** needs to be removed to enable access for peri-urban agroecological growers who produce numerous public goods. There should be no size, or other limit to peri-urban farm eligibility in any of the four nations' schemes.
2. Provision of **start-up grants for new entrants**, in assistance with capital costs and/or revenue support. This could be through blended finance (public and private loans and grants) as peri-urban agroecological farms are well placed to generate multiple streams of income once up and running. In England, this could be included in the soon to be launched New Entrants Scheme and via new public farm investment and technology funds.
3. Government planning policy to prioritise safeguarding land for peri-urban agroecological farming that are **Grade 1 and 2 soils**, rather than used for other development and ensure planning policy does not inhibit peri-urban enterprise growth.
4. Support the **expansion of county-owned farmlands and growth of land trust arrangements**. In the land trust model, government provides long term and low interest loans to agroecological land trusts that meet certain criteria. These loans are then used by the land trusts to buy land, which would then be subdivided into 'starter farms' and leased to new entrants.

Local authority policy and actions

1. All local authorities should have a **food strategy and related policies that incorporate agroecological farming**, recognising the benefits this will bring.
2. **Map existing land and assets available for use for farming and food infrastructure**, and ensure this information is publicly available.
3. **Increase the amount of land and other physical spaces available for agroecological farming** and make these available for new initiatives.
4. Emphasise **equitable opportunities and leadership in food and farming** through all relevant strategies and actions to ensure access to land, infrastructure, routes to market and training are open and accessed by all.
5. Ensure **peri-urban agroecology is integrated into an economic strategy** to help build community wealth and a greener, fairer, resilient economy.

Introduction

This report offers policy directions for local authorities and national government to develop peri-urban agroecological farming in the UK and includes case studies from and policy actions for Bristol, Glasgow, London, and Sheffield.

These recommendations have been developed through a programme of collaborative initiatives in 2021 including:

- Place-based research and action planning in Bristol, Glasgow, London and Sheffield.
- Three UK-wide peri-urban farmer and grower forums with themes of ‘access to land’ and ‘access to finance’ attended by 110 practitioners.
- Strategic development of policy and practice through a series of project partner meetings creating space to share learnings from different contexts.
- Practitioner focus groups to integrate feedback into policy recommendations.

The report draws together findings and recommendations of interest to a broad audience, including: councillors, council officers, MP’s, civil servants, farming sector organisations, members of the public, and researchers. Further briefings will be developed following the publication of this report, aimed at particular audiences i.e. national policy recommendations.

As a project promoting agroecology, these methods of policy development have aimed to centre the voices and knowledge of the workers developing peri-urban agroecology. For this reason, the Fringe Farming initiative, while focused on policy development and action planning, has also worked to support the development of farmer-to-farmer networks – especially through the national forums led by the Landworkers’ Alliance. The report, while focusing on peri-urban market gardening, also references community gardens and allotments, as these largely urban spaces provide pathways to farming.

A key barrier and initial focus of the project continues to be ‘access to land’, to set up new agroecological initiatives that could connect rural and urban areas and generate multiple benefits and public goods (see Preface). Accessing land also means creating secure, long-term tenancies, so viable business plans can be enacted, and trust and relationships can be built for food supply that works with and meets the needs and cultures of local populations. This report outlines policy recommendations, particularly for local authorities, to use land and other assets in support of new agroecological initiatives that have long-term economic benefits.

While the project is focused on *farming per se*, it has been clear that the benefits of peri-urban agroecology will only be realised if supported across regional supply chains. This means also focusing on the transport, goods and services, distribution hubs, and education centres these chains work with. Therefore, the report includes recommendations related to the development of infrastructure that would help viable agroecological enterprises grow and find markets; from buildings for storing and packing produce, to space for vehicles, to opportunities for sales and distribution. In this sense ‘fringe farming’ relates to various other sectors and this regional approach can emphasise green recovery and community wealth building.

With the term ‘sustainable’ and ‘regenerative’ farming, and various terms around local food being used, the Fringe Farming initiative policy recommendations are rooted in agroecological principles of equity, democracy, and social justice. As with all food systems, peri-urban food policy and practice needs to be based on just and equitable access to land and community wealth building. This also works alongside and complements ecological elements such as working with nature, increasing biodiversity and addressing climate change.

2021 has seen a series of peri-urban agroecology research programmes, and this report recommends these as complementary reading

to support development of future strategy and action. These include: 'Rootz into Food Growing'¹¹, 'Urbanising in Place'¹², and 'Credit Where Due'.¹³

The next steps for the Fringe Farming initiative, as outlined at the end of the report, include the continued development of regional action plans in five UK cities, case studies in best practice to set up peri-urban farming initiatives, along with national events. These will bring practitioners, researchers, and policy-makers together to understand how peri-urban agroecology can support the meeting of existing government targets on everything from climate change to jobs and training.



Forty Hall farm; credit: Zoe Warde-Aldam

National Policy recommendations

Currently there is no policy framework in the UK to ensure that the public goods produced by agroecological peri-urban agriculture are supported and delivered. Peri-urban agroecological farming can help national government meet multiple health, social, environmental and economic goals, in ways that may not have been considered to date. While market gardens in the urban fringe may focus on climate-friendly food growing, they also often generate learning programmes, create new enterprises with jobs, offer access to green space, and support nature recovery.

The role of government policy can, overall, be seen as enabling access to land; financial support; training; decision-makers; and markets. New and existing policies in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland can work to ensure peri-urban food SMEs can receive incentives and support for increasing biodiversity, carbon sequestration, education programmes and new enterprises.

Supportive policy recommendations can also be situated in national food bills such as Scotland's 'Good Food Nation Bill' released in 2021 and the Government response to the National Food Strategy released in 2021. Connecting the 'Levelling up' agenda with urban food growing – local, agroecological food production and trading can create more jobs-per-tonne than conventional food production, and help to develop local food culture, heritage and identities, as well as access to nature.

1. Recommendations for farm policy and wider transition plans

Current farm support based on EU Common Agriculture Policy is still available and should provide support for the creation and maintenance of peri-urban farms. Following our exit from the EU, new, bespoke schemes are being developed in the 4 nations. In England, Environmental Land Management Schemes, farm transition and investment support and new entrant schemes

are being developed. In this and in the farm support and transition programmes being developed in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland, governments should apply the following approaches – focused here on the England scheme as an example - to deliver peri-urban food growing. **The Sustainable Farming Initiative (SFI) (first national roll out spring 2022) must:**

- a. Be eligible for all farms by removing the 5-hectare eligibility criteria for English ELMS support. This needs to be removed to enable access for peri-urban agroecological growers who produce numerous public goods on smaller farms. There should be no similar barriers in any nation's scheme.
- b. Ensure peri-urban agroecological farms have access to finance to pay for facilitation and collaboration - to be able to provide public goods at scale by collating goods (such as public engagement, education and access to nature). This would help ensure resilience and build local food systems that can deliver local public and private goods.
- c. Incentivise maintaining, not only creating, good environmental management as many peri-urban agroecological farms already work to good practice in terms of environmental management.
- d. Include a peri-urban standard (scheme) or add to existing or new piloted standards to trial in 2022/3 and roll out in 2024. Defra should convene a Defra peri-urban subgroup to develop this.
- e. Fund delivery of public engagement outcomes. The scheme needs to include specific support for funding public engagement activities that covers the wide opportunities from peri-urban farming (access to open spaces, education and training), and public health opportunities (green prescriptions), close to large urban populations.

The England Local Nature Recovery (LNR) scheme must:

- f. Recognise the role peri-urban land, and farmers in these areas working together, can play in delivering locally-targeted actions to make space for nature.
- g. Include additional support for public engagement opportunities.
- h. Include support for horticulture, Integrated Pest Management (IPM), biodiversity, and other natural capital assets that can be delivered on peri-urban and urban land such as water management and food waste recycling.
- i. Consider facilitation funds to support cross farm public access coordination e.g. Managing habitats that are not contiguous but that could provide vital refuge or corridors for nature, or for school visits and public engagement.

New entrants schemes must:

- j. Support access to peri-urban land and the new agroecological entrants and enterprises that would farm on this land.
- k. Provide start-up and capital funds and skills and training that work for such enterprises (such as removing match funding or minimum cost requirements).¹⁴

2. National Food Strategy

- a. The Government is expected to launch a White Paper or government strategy as a response to the government sponsored but independent National Food Strategy recommendations.¹⁵ This should include specific acknowledgement of, and support for, the public benefits of peri-urban farming as delivering on the need for more fruit and veg, health and wellbeing, shorter supply chains, skills and training and employment.

3. Publicly funded investment, business and regeneration policy

- a. Regeneration and enterprise based public investment, (alongside impact investor and private finance) should be provided to ensure peri-urban farming can grow. This could be via local regeneration support, new Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) levelling up finance and alongside encouragement to impact investors and private financiers to support agroecological peri-urban farming. This could provide start-up grants, assistance with capital costs and/or revenue support and could incorporate blended finance (public and private loans and grants) as peri-urban agroecological farms are well placed to generate multiple streams of income once up and running. This should also support the development of regional food logistics networks, including in logistics, marketing, retail, etc.
- b. Setting up an agroecological development bank. In alignment with the recommendation of the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission in 2020, we suggest that an ambition for agroecological farming and trading needs a bespoke, state-backed investment bank to finance the transition at scale. However, there is also scope for the new National Infrastructure Bank (NIB) to perform that function if given an explicit agroecological purpose in legislation.
- c. Central Government can also assist in using its food public purchasing power to support agroecological peri-urban producers. This can be done through buying produce from such enterprises for schools, care homes and hospitals. It could also create a facility that enables SMEs to trade with large institutional customers and public procurement consortia, as well as purchasing from locally-owned cooperative supply-chain models i.e. Tamar Grow Local in Plymouth.¹⁶
- d. The government should look at and advise on how to connect Healthy Start vouchers and Free School Meals with supply from peri-urban agroecological farms.

4. Planning and land policy

National government should:

- a. Ensure national planning policy frameworks set out strategic support for a more sustainable food system which increases access to locally sourced healthy food, encourages a circular food economy, manages land for public benefits of health, climate and nature. National government can assist in documenting and disseminating the benefits of peri-urban agriculture to local authorities and encourage councils to facilitate new entrants with affordable access to council-owned lands.
- b. Provide specific guidance for local authorities to speed up planning processes, and grant permission to agroecological peri-urban farmers for low-impact dwellings and farm infrastructure; road access; on-site renewable electricity generation; and water access via rainwater harvesting and borehole. This needs to also ensure affordable housing for peri-urban food workers - a barrier identified in the recent survey of new entrants by the Landworkers' Alliance.¹⁷
- c. Ensure land use classes and permitted development is reviewed to identify how smaller sites (under 5ha) in the urban fringe can be supported to establish viable food growing businesses whilst also meeting other social, environmental and economic objectives.
- d. Support and promote the 'Community Right to Buy' for developing peri-urban agroecology enterprises.
- e. Prioritise keeping (especially high grade i.e. Grade 1 and 2) land available for peri-urban agroecological farming rather than for other development. This should also ensure, via adequate budgets for wider LA activity, that local authorities can maintain their county farms and land for new-entrants. As land speculation is a major issue, driving up the price of land, we need government to acknowledge and act especially for farmland around urban developments, often on high grade soils which are valuable assets that should not be sealed via development.

- f. Support through providing funds and enabling legislation, the expansion of county-owned smallholdings and farmland and growth of land trust arrangements. In the land trust model, government provides long term and low interest loans to agroecological land trusts that meet certain criteria. These loans are then used by the land trusts to buy land, which would then be subdivided into 'starter farms' and leased to new entrants.

5. Training and skills policy

- a. Traineeship schemes should be made available to support farmers and new entrants wishing to apprentice and learn practical and theoretical farming knowledge via peri-urban schemes (OrganicLea¹⁸ and Sutton Community Farm¹⁹ for example, run apprenticeships and trainee schemes that could be expanded to a borough-wide or regional model). Access to funds for the creation of such a network would lower barriers to entry. This should be combined with an ongoing mentorship program that provides support in practical matters, like business planning, finance, and sustainable land management.
- b. Development of farming apprenticeships that effectively remunerate both the apprentice and the host organisation – i.e. building on and improving the 'Kickstart scheme' that has been picked up by SMEs.

6. 'Right to Regenerate'

The new policy or 'Right to Regenerate'²⁰ should address the following issues:

- a. There needs to be a framework for requests to prioritise assets for use by new enterprises and organisations that have social, community and environmental value. This would boost the local economy, create local jobs, and promote sustainability. Rents would reflect the community benefits and income model of the enterprise. Typical uses would include farmers' markets, packing areas for vegetable box schemes, cooperatives and small growers and farmers.

- b. We note that the Scottish Government have taken this approach with the development of a framework of wider benefits²¹ for unused land. This will ensure land or buildings in question will increase social value, boost the local economy, support climate and nature, and align with the Sustainable Development Goals.
- c. The current criteria which prioritise economic value will mean more housing developments – in particular, unaffordable housing. Local authorities need to work with communities to identify community needs which are likely to be assets beyond housing and offer opportunities for sustainable businesses with benefits for local economies. Effective mechanisms need to be in place to make sure unused land isn't monopolised by private investors and taken out of public ownership.



The Castle Climbing Centre Kitchen Garden, London; credit: Miles Willis

Top 10 Local Authority Actions

Local authorities have multiple avenues through which they could and do support the development of urban and peri-urban farming, but often this is piecemeal and not engrained in policy. Local authorities often do not have a designated lead officer or department for food system issues or may lack the connections or capacity to push forward this agenda, despite the multiple benefits it can bring a local area.

These recommendations for policy and action have been developed with a focus on local authorities with access to peri-urban land or with resources e.g. glasshouse, that could increase agroecological food production. Allotments and community gardens play an important role as pathways for farming, and so recommendations are also applicable for local authorities in urban areas that want to play a part in generating resilient regional food systems. These local authorities can also support routes to market by utilising buildings for food processing, packing, and distribution/retail.

Some of these recommendations target specific departments, but many could be enacted by any number of teams or departments. But either way development of these recommendations into policy or plans, would be a significant step in enabling more urban and peri-urban farming to help councils meet various objectives.

1. All local authorities should have a food strategy and related policies that incorporate agroecological farming, recognising the benefits this will bring.

Lead: Cross cutting / CEO / Food Strategy lead

In developing this consider:

- a. Getting political commitment to the principle of multiple local benefits for use of council and other land for agroecological benefits, using established case studies and evidence.
- b. Working with community-based partners to develop or incorporate agroecology into an existing food strategy, such as a Food Partnership that is a member of the Sustainable Food Places network.²²
- c. Taking an integrated approach; the process can be coordinated by one of several teams or departments but should involve many in order to realise multiple benefits of public health, green economic development/ community wealth building, biodiversity, parks and housing, education and training, and climate change.
- d. Including targets on: food grown within an area; land allocated to facilitate food growing; and buildings and other assets for processing and distribution.
- e. Work with community-based partners to map local food cultures and heritage, to ensure land, resources and training opportunities bolster existing local food systems and promote food that is culturally-appropriate to local communities.

2. Map existing land and assets available for use for farming and food infrastructure, and ensure this information is publicly available.

Lead: Property services / Climate Team

- a. Maintain an accessible online map or database of council and private land that could be used for food growing, or other food-related activity including packing and distribution.
- b. Identify spaces to support routes to market and trading, e.g. packing and storage.

3. Increase amount of land and other physical spaces available for agroecological farming and make these available for new initiatives.

Lead: Cross cutting but involving Property, Planning, Economic development or CEO, Climate team)

- a. Investigate new land in urban fringes, with potential for food production, starting with publicly owned land, but extending to other landowners e.g. Crown Estate, Universities, housing associations and the NHS.
- b. Develop relationships with local community organisations or social enterprises that can help to identify demand for land.
- c. Implement a process for matching up available land with new entrant farmers and/or community organisations (potentially managed in partnership with a local community food organisation). Include local agricultural colleges, community gardens and allotment organisations.
- d. Provide land and/or other space at reduced cost for community food enterprises and locally-based businesses in acknowledgement of wider social, economic and environmental benefits.
- e. Provide medium to long-term leases that provide security and opportunity for

agroecological initiatives to develop resilient business plans, provide secure jobs, and engage meaningfully with communities and education providers.

- f. Adopt new models of land management of council owned land such as those presented by the Ecological Land Cooperative²³, the Soil Association²⁴ and the Food, Farming, and Countryside Commission²⁵, to allow flexibility and progression for farming careers.
- g. Introduce criteria for prospective projects that take on public land to ensure they meet standards of agroecological enterprises that maximise community value and environmental/climate change benefits e.g. protect workers rights, community-led development, working with natural cycles, biodiversity and soil improvement.

4. Emphasise equitable opportunities and leadership in food and farming through all relevant strategies and actions to ensure access to land, infrastructure, routes to market and training are open and accessed by all.

Lead: Cross cutting

- a. Ensure food strategy and actions embed the key principle that all communities have the right to 'grow, sell, and eat healthy food, which is fresh, nutritious, affordable, culturally-appropriate, and grown locally with care for the well-being of the land, workers, and animals'.²⁶
- b. Prioritise community-led approaches that build trust and leadership of food strategies with communities experiencing structural injustice and barriers into the sector.
- c. Develop long-term land, training and enterprise opportunities with Black and Racialised growers to grow local and indigenous foods.
- d. Map green space activities in the borough to ensure that resources are being equitably

distributed and not disproportionately invested in higher income areas.

- e. Ensure that active anti-racism practice is part of allotment management to challenge gatekeeping and discriminatory cultures.

5. Ensure peri-urban agroecology is integrated into an economic strategy to help build community wealth and a greener, fairer, resilient economy.

Lead: Economic Development / Cross cutting

- a. Integrate ambitions for food growing and procurement plans into the local Community Wealth Building or economic strategy.
- b. Support the establishment of enterprises in which wealth created by users, workers and local communities is held by them, rather than flowing out as profits to shareholders. These include small enterprises, community organisations, co-operatives and municipal ownership businesses. Small grants could be offered to set up or convert to co-operatives.
- c. Redirect investment wealth into local businesses to ensure they have access to credit, through local pension funds, mutuals and community banks and/or credit unions.
- d. Pay a real living wage and promote the living wage to other institutions in your area – to help ensure your community can afford good food.
- e. Improve community control over land and assets: transfer under-utilised assets to Community Land Trusts, or work through Public-Commons Partnerships. Offer medium to long-term leases on land, to ensure local farming businesses have greater security and can become embedded in local communities.

6. Create and review planning frameworks to protect and encourage the use and development of land and buildings for peri-urban agroecology.

Lead: Planning

- a. Include specific consideration in planning guidance for agroecological market gardens and smallholdings. This could include:
 - i. Protect existing council owned agricultural land from developments that would reduce access to land for food production.
 - ii. Identify and protect land with Grade 1 and 2 agricultural soil from development.
 - iii. Support the change of use of golf courses, sports fields and bowling greens, plant nurseries or vacant land etc in urban fringes to agriculture.
 - iv. Allocate sites most suitable for new food growing enterprises.
 - v. Specific consideration for agroecological market gardens and smallholdings that enable them to develop infrastructure for economic viability e.g. polytunnels, agricultural sheds.
 - vi. Specify access to affordable housing for peri-urban farm workers.
- b. Ensure new developments have space for agroecological food growing and managing inedible food waste and review these against guidance. These spaces should be partly financed by the developers and maintained by community organisations.
- c. Review retail policies so that local food production has routes to market e.g. space for street markets, permanent market spaces, and farmers markets as well as infrastructure for retail operations.

7. Use food procurement opportunities (e.g. schools, canteens) to support agroecological food production and enterprise.

Lead: Procurement

- a. Ensure LA procurement contracts are accessible to agroecological food producers, for example by:
 - i. Breaking large contracts into smaller components so they are accessible to small local businesses.
 - ii. Creating a 'Food Hub' to link up local businesses with large buyers, and provide training and support for producers to access council contracts.²⁷
- b. Ensure LA contracts include clear weighting in favour of agroecological and community-based food enterprises, to include those operating in your urban fringes (see Public Services (Social Value) Act, 2013).
- c. Consider council procurement beyond food, including food and garden waste processing, compost, therapeutic gardening, education and training.
- d. Host a steering group to support local producers to supply anchor institutions including universities and colleges, large employers and the NHS.
- e. Support agroecological enterprises more broadly by utilising communication channels to promote the products, services and programmes of local projects.

8. Include emissions reductions from food and farming in Climate Action Plans and integrate food into tree planting strategies, recognising the clear climate mitigation opportunities from peri urban farming.

Lead: Climate team

- a. Peri-urban agroecological farms can act as 'carbon sinks' around urban spaces by sequestering carbon in soil and improving biodiversity. Peri-urban food growing offers clear emissions reductions and climate mitigation opportunities.²⁸
- b. Ensure Local Nature Recovery Strategies include agroecology as a key opportunity to improve nature within farmland.
- c. Tree planting should benefit local communities, biodiversity and food security, so agroforestry and community orchards should be included in tree planting strategies.²⁹

9. Develop partnership with education providers to create horticultural and agricultural training to maximise skills development and secure green jobs.

Lead: Economy / Skills

- a. Work in partnership with education providers, food producers and other stakeholders (e.g. local food partnership), to develop training schemes that include food production and growing, distribution, catering, business planning and organisational development.
- b. Identify ways to subsidise and make training accessible including funding subsidised / free training opportunities and living wage apprenticeships.
- c. Commit to equitable opportunities for trainer positions for educators from marginalised backgrounds facing disproportionate barriers

to the sector and ensure that training centres and trainers have engaged with anti-racism training and approaches. See 'Bay Area Farmer Training'³⁰ as an example.

10. Ensure Smallholdings and Allotments team have capacity to manage council smallholdings to maximise public goods, or outsource this to an external community organisation.

Lead: Small holdings, Parks, Allotments

- a. Employ an appropriate level of staffing to manage smallholdings and allotments, who have active links and integrated workstreams with other council departments.
- b. Work with the Transport team to connect public transport routes to agroecological farms in support of education, training and enterprise opportunities.
- c. Employ an Urban Agroecology officer to coordinate efforts to maximise the economic, social and environmental outputs of these sites towards developing a resilient regional food system.³¹

Bristol Fringe Farming

Key asks for Bristol City Council (BCC) are shared below from the 'Peri-urban land in Bristol: the potential for food growing and farming'³² report published in August 2021:

- Provide clear aims and objectives for the asset of the council smallholdings that also take account of social and environmental factors.
- Resource the Smallholdings and Allotments team to be able to manage the BCC smallholdings in a way that will maximise the potential of these sites (in terms of food production but also income generation for the council), or outsource this to an external community organisation. This would include reviewing existing holdings and identifying underutilised land. We acknowledge this comes with a financial cost to the council but a huge potential for social, economic and environmental benefits.
- Implement a process for matching up available BCC land with new entrant farmers (potentially managed in partnership with BFP).
- Protect existing Bristol City Council owned agricultural land from development.
- Recognise horticultural training as a skills priority for Bristol, with a commitment to making this training accessible to everyone in the city.



Bristol urban growing; credit: Steph Wetherell

Glasgow Fringe Farming

Key actions led by Glasgow City Council are listed below from the 'Peri-urban land in Glasgow: the potential for food growing and farming' report published in January 2021:

- Baseline mapping of available land across Glasgow, with associated suitability for food growing (this to include public and private land, and re-establishing food growing areas in local parks).
- Land available being prioritised for food growing rather than lawns or feed crops.
- Clarification, simplification and transparency of decision-making processes within the council, especially with regards to procurement processes, and decisions on making land available.
- More support for food growing, both financial and human resource within the council, and this to have a long-term approach to support new growing spaces until they are able to become independent.
- Support grower and procurer events to build relationships towards service contracts integrating locally-grown food into the public sector– with a view to support a pilot procurement project with a school and Glasgow Community Food Network (GCFN).



Glasgow urban farming; credit: Glasgow Community Food Network

London Fringe Farming

In 2021, a Fringe Farming Working Group led by Capital Growth and Shared Assets, and involving local practitioners and policy makers, have developed on the key actions published in the 'Fringe Farming in London' report³³ from August 2020. These include:

- Develop a business case for local authorities and other institutional landowners quantifying benefits of making land and support available and explore this as a service provision opportunity.
- Explore a joint manifesto / campaign on the use of greenbelt for socially, economically, and environmentally productive use, incorporating trees and forestry opportunity.
- Offer a coaching programme for conversion of land use for agroecological farming.
- Research succession options for aging farmers / landowners.
- Identify land opportunities through meetings with key local authorities, Asset Registers, and exploration of data sets with GLA Environment team.



OrganicLea Growers, Chingford; credit: Zoe Walde-Aldam

Sheffield Fringe Farming

Key asks for Sheffield City Council and the South Yorkshire Mayoral Combined Authority are listed below from the 'Farming Sheffield's Fringe: The potential of food growing and farming on peri-urban land around Sheffield' report³⁴ published in October 2021:

- Provide access to the Carter Jonas Land Asset Review: ShefFood looks forward to the publication of the Council's Land Asset review undertaken by Carter Jonas. As the city's Food Partnership we have a legitimate interest in seeing the report to establish not only the availability of, but also the intentions for, public land that is potentially suitable for agriculture / horticulture.
- For Sheffield City Region to announce itself as an 'Agroecological City Region': This forward-thinking regional status will firmly embed the relationship between both the climate and ecological emergencies and the benefits gained by bringing low-carbon farming and horticulture back to the urban fringe.
- Develop an integrated horticultural and agricultural training system: To tackle the lack of local education provision of horticulture/ agriculture skills, the City Council should promote training in both, as core skills, regarding them as priorities for securing future green jobs. This requires regional funding support, enabling both bursaries and/ or apprenticeships, particularly for young adults classed as 'NEETs' and for those with limited financial resources.



Regather Farm, Sheffield; credit: Dora Damian

What next?

The Fringe Farming project will continue to drive action plans at a local, regional and national level. In the next phase, the initiative will be working to increase peri-urban agroecology in the UK through the following steps:

- Existing regional partners in Bristol, Glasgow, London, Sheffield, with Shared Assets and Sustain, will actively follow up 2021 city-wide actions plans through collaborative working with local and regional authorities to increase access to land and resources for peri-urban agroecology.
- New area-based partners, including FoodSense Wales - will be invited to join and undertake action planning to highlight opportunities, barriers, and what resources are required for next steps.
- Further case study-based documents will be produced, sharing legal, financial, site planning, and community development processes for setting up peri-urban market gardens.
- At a national level Sustain, Shared Assets and Landworkers' Alliance will step up policy work to address the barriers to more peri-urban food growing; including events bringing together policy makers, practitioners, and civil servants to share policy recommendations, case studies and develop concrete next steps. A national policy briefing will be published in relation to these national events.
- Farm visits with regional and national government will be organised to highlight the integration of peri-urban farms into regional economies and their contribution of public goods.
- Landworkers' Alliance will pilot with peri-urban farmers, appropriate online communication tools for ongoing learning, exchange and mutual support, building on the popular forums of 2021.
- The Fringe Farming partnership will be consolidated to build broader visions and strategy based on action learning across regional action plans and national policy engagement.



Credit: Kaboompics.com / Pexels

Further reading

Sustain publications

www.sustainweb.org/publications/the-case-for-local-food/

www.sustainweb.org/publications/beyond-the-farmgate/

www.sustainweb.org/publications/councils-food-growing-april-2021/

www.sustainweb.org/publications/dec21-council-toolkit-councils-and-food-growing/

Sustain Fringe Farming publications

www.sustainweb.org/publications/aug21-how-can-peri-urban-farming-flourish-in-the-bristol-region/

www.sustainweb.org/publications/jan22-peri-urban-land-in-glasgow/

www.sustainweb.org/publications/Fringe-Farming-Breifing-Aug2020/

www.sustainweb.org/publications/oct21-farming-sheffields-fringe/

Sustain Fringe Farming blogs

www.sustainweb.org/blogs/fringe-farming-green-economic-recovery/

www.sustainweb.org/blogs/aug21-council-smallholding-urban-agroecology/

www.sustainweb.org/blogs/oct21-pathways-future-farmers/

www.sustainweb.org/blogs/jan22-glasgow-land-food-growing/

Reports/Research

www.ubele.org/rootz-into-food-growing

<https://urbanisinginplace.org/>

<https://neweconomics.org/2021/06/credit-where-due>

Blogs

<https://www.farmingthefuture.uk/post/farming-the-urban-fringe>

<https://www.resilience.org/stories/2020-06-24/building-an-anti-racist-food-movement/>

<https://www.wri.org/insights/rosario-urban-farming-tackles-climate-change>

References

- ¹ https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1033990/net-zero-strategy-beis.pdf
- ² As identified in the Environment Act 2021 which includes a duty to set a legally-binding target to halt species decline by 2030. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/landmark-environment-bill-strengthened-to-halt-biodiversity-loss-by-2030>
- ³ <http://ccri.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/FoodfromUrbanFringe.pdf>
- ⁴ <https://www.bmj.com/content/370/bmj.m3085>
- ⁵ <https://theconversation.com/food-shortages-brexit-and-covid-19-how-britains-problems-converged-at-christmas-152412>
- ⁶ <https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/Fringe-Farming-Breifing-Aug2020/>
- ⁷ <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publication/covid-19-uk-veg-box-scheme-report>
- ⁸ <https://www.foodsovereignty.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/Download-declaration-Agroecology-Nyeleni-2015.pdf>
- ⁹ <https://www.fao.org/agroecology/overview/our-work/en/>
- ¹⁰ <https://www.resilience.org/stories/2020-06-24/building-an-anti-racist-food-movement/>
- ¹¹ <https://www.ubele.org/rootz-into-food-growing>
- ¹² <http://urbanisinginplace.org/>
- ¹³ <https://neweconomics.org/2021/06/credit-where-due>
- ¹⁴ see detailed case studies <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/New-entrants-costs-website.pdf>
- ¹⁵ <https://www.nationalfoodstrategy.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/National-Food-Strategy-Recommendations-in-Full.pdf>
- ¹⁶ <https://tamargrowlocal.org/>
- ¹⁷ <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/05/New-entrants-survey.pdf>
- ¹⁸ <https://www.organiclea.org.uk/2021/02/trainee-roles-2021/>
- ¹⁹ <http://suttoncommunityfarm.org.uk/farm-news/we-are-hiring-a-2020-21-growing-apprentice/>
- ²⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/right-to-regenerate-to-turn-derelect-buildings-into-homes-and-community-assets>
- ²¹ https://www.landcommission.gov.scot/downloads/5f48e7a98c655_Land%20Reuse%20Framework.pdf
- ²² <https://www.sustainablefoodplaces.org/>
- ²³ <https://ecologicaland.coop/>
- ²⁴ <https://www.soilassociation.org/>
- ²⁵ <https://ffcc.co.uk/land-use-framework>
- ²⁶ <https://wererepair.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Food-Justice-Glossary.pdf>
- ²⁷ <https://www.thesouthwestfoodhub.co.uk/>
- ²⁸ See <https://www.foodfortheplanet.org.uk/toolkit/>

²⁹ <https://www.sustainweb.org/blogs/jul20-orchards-agroforestry-climate-nature/>

³⁰ <https://mesaprogram.org/programs/bayarea/farmers/>

³¹ Such roles existed as part of Rosario's (Argentina) Urban Agriculture Programme which contributed to winning the '2020-2021 Prize for Cities' Award. See: <https://www.wri.org/insights/rosario-urban-farming-tackles-climate-change>

³² <https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/aug21-how-can-peri-urban-farming-flourish-in-the-bristol-region/>

³³ <https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/Fringe-Farming-Breifing-Aug2020/>

³⁴ <https://www.sustainweb.org/publications/oct21-farming-sheffields-fringe/>

Fringe Farming

Peri-urban agroecology
towards resilient food
economies and public goods

A Sustain publication

February 2022

About Sustain

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming, advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the living and working environment, enrich society and culture, and promote equity. It represents around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional and local level.

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