



EVERY SCHOOL
A **FOOD-GROWING**
SCHOOL



Connecting children with the earth is vital for their own wellbeing and that of the planet. Not only should they know what they are eating, they should also understand how it grows. That way they are assured of a healthy future. It's fun, too!



Alan Titchmarsh

Broadcaster, novelist, journalist and gardener

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This report has been compiled by the following organisations:



Children's Food Campaign





This excellent report provides compelling evidence of the many and diverse benefits of food growing in schools. I hope it will be given the attention it deserves. School shouldn't simply be about cramming for exams behind computers. We should be investing in healthier lifestyles and ensuring that children become stewards



Zac Goldsmith MP

SUMMARY

Many schools already teach food-growing skills and have discovered for themselves that this can help to:

- 🌱 Teach children enterprise skills, such as organising the sale or donation of surplus produce.
- 🌱 Build community spirit and a sense of citizenship, for example, linking up across the generations and supporting local charities.
- 🌱 Encourage children to lead healthier lives, through physical activity outdoors and inspiring children to eat the fruit and vegetables they have grown.
- 🌱 Reduce our environmental impact, by showing how locally grown, seasonal food can enhance biodiversity and reduce waste.
- 🌱 Raise educational standards and improve behaviour, particularly for those less comfortable in a classroom setting.

Hard evidence of these benefits is accumulating, alongside the experience of schools, pupils and a wide range of organisations. By coming together to produce this short report, we aim to persuade the Department for Education to work with us to ensure that all children – not just some – can reap these benefits.

INTRODUCTION

Most people would agree that society today is facing major challenges, including the economic crisis, environmental damage and serious health problems, such as obesity. It is understandable, in the face of such issues, to become disheartened. But there is a very simple, low cost, practical and positive stride in the right direction which we could take, and that is to make sure all our children, in every school, are taught how to grow food. It's not rocket science and it's something that some schools already know and do.

This short report summarises the growing evidence of the very many benefits of growing food in schools. For example, the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS), the UK's leading gardening charity, commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to assess the impact of gardening in schools.¹ Drawing on this and other research, and using examples of good practice, food and farming organisations, educational charities and campaign groups have come together to make a compelling case for food growing for all schools.



Food growing in schools is proven to alter children's diets. It's the easiest and cheapest investment we can make to improve children's health. It should be mandatory that all schools have a place to grow food.



Rosie Boycott

Chair of the London Food Growing Board

TEACHING CHILDREN ENTERPRISE SKILLS

Traditionally, in times of economic hardship, families have been able to supplement their limited shopping budgets with tasty and healthy home-grown produce. During the Second World War, it is estimated that there were 1.4 million allotments growing vegetables in the UK. Nowadays, however, nearly half of the population feel that they are less equipped to grow food in comparison to their grandparents' generation.² Schools can help to address this lack of knowledge and confidence.

Some forward-thinking schools have already seen for themselves how growing food can develop enterprise skills and generate income for their communities. Orford Primary School in Suffolk (Case Study 1) has generated around £200 through selling its produce to the local pub, while pupils at Richard Challoner School in South London made £220 selling produce grown at school at a stall outside the local Waitrose store. By donating the food they grow, Milton School in Cambridgeshire (Case Study 2) makes a significant contribution to reducing the food costs of a local hospice. As well as teaching children practical enterprise skills, we estimate that if every school in England produced food on this scale, £4.5 million could be generated from food growing.³

In a world of increasingly scarce natural resources with higher food prices predicted, having the skills to produce healthy and sustainable food is going to be increasingly valuable. Not only is the value of the food produced by schools likely to rise, but having the knowledge about how to grow their own food will be an important skill for the future of today's children.



Case Study 1

Orford Primary School, Suffolk

Pupils at Orford Primary School have not only been learning food-growing techniques, but also developing their enterprise skills by selling the salad leaves they produced in their kitchen garden, polytunnel and other plots to the village pub. Despite the cold weather, the pupils managed to supply produce right through the winter last year, with sales generating £200 in profits so far. Pupils plan the planting, grow the salad and one child even delivers to the pub. With the menu proudly displaying the source of the salad the pub serves, it's a real example of a school being involved in the local community and economy.

BUILDING COMMUNITIES AND DEVELOPING CITIZENSHIP

Teaching food-growing skills puts schools at the centre of their communities and can lead to partnerships between schools and local residents. There are examples where schools have set up allotments for the community and have benefited from sharing gardening expertise and sharing labour intensive tasks. For example, St Wilfrid's Catholic High School in Crawley, West Sussex, has set up a shared allotment scheme which has led to improved community relationships and the spreading of horticultural knowledge.

Schools can provide practical experience and space for food growing, which so many children may not be able to enjoy elsewhere. Haydonleigh Primary School in Swindon has used gardening to foster intergenerational learning, with senior citizens passing on their expertise to the younger generation. Pupils at Milton School (Case Study 2) have learned that there is more than one way to support local charities.



Case Study 2

Milton Church of England Primary School Cambridgeshire

Foodshare's "Growing To Give" schools project originally started as an idea at Milton Church of England Primary School in Cambridgeshire. Over 250 children (two thirds of the school) signed up for the Lunchtime Gardening Club. As part of the project, the children created some dedicated Foodshare beds on their school allotment to grow food for the children at East Anglia's Children's Hospice (EACH) nearby. They set up Foodshare signs and a 'Donation Station' by the allotment to collect food.

In just six months, the school had grown and donated over £500 of produce, helping substantially to reduce the Hospice's increasing food bill. The school regularly has Foodshare-themed assemblies and it has become the centre of their annual Harvest Festival celebrations. Simon Hemsell of the Hospice said, "We rely heavily on voluntary income and one of our costs is providing meals when families come and stay at the hospice. Taking that cost away by having food donated by the local community is absolutely wonderful."

HELPING CHILDREN TO LEAD HEALTHIER LIVES

The health advice is clear – eating more fruit and vegetables gives the best protection against cardiovascular diseases and many cancers. But figures on children’s diets make for grim reading, showing that 96 per cent of children do not eat the recommended levels of fruit and vegetables.⁴ While public health campaigns have done their best to persuade children to change their eating habits, they have had limited success. However, there is increasing evidence that children who grow fruit and vegetables are more likely to eat them. For example, a recent study carried out by the University of California found that vegetable intake was almost one serving per day greater in schools with a growing food curriculum, and combined fruit and vegetable consumption increased by one and a half servings.⁵ This finding was confirmed by the Royal Horticultural Society report noted above.

As the Hermitage School in Durham (Case Study 3) has shown, many children are proud of the produce they grow and not only learn where their food comes from, but are also motivated to learn how to prepare and cook it. In addition, food growing provides outdoor physical activity, and has also been shown to have a positive effect on mental health, in particular helping to develop confidence and self-esteem.⁶



Case Study 3

The Hermitage School, Durham

Starting from scratch, the school transformed a piece of the school grounds into a garden and vegetable patch. With funding from the Primary Care Trust and the environmental regeneration charity Groundwork, and a lot of hard work, the school was able to fence in the garden, build three raised beds and apply for three composting bins. They have planted vegetables galore, from sweetcorn to green and purple kale.

The students put in a great deal of effort into weeding and watering the plants, providing the school kitchen with bountiful crops at harvest time. The school's caterers have made delicious and hearty meals for all the students, from pumpkin soup to vegetable risotto, pumpkin pie and stuffed marrow. This approach has really paid off – the children have been introduced to a wider range of vegetables, which they are much more willing to eat because of their involvement in growing them. Deputy Head Gill Dobson explains, "Everything we grow is displayed, cooked and eaten."

REDUCING OUR ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

By its nature, the produce of school gardens is local and seasonal, the ultimate example of healthy and sustainable food. School gardens can promote biodiversity, teach sustainable waste management techniques such as composting, and support and inspire good environmental habits, both at school and at home.

The activity of growing a few crops can also help schools to reduce their carbon footprint and environmental concerns can often resonate more with young people than health messages; food growing engages pupils on the former while supporting the latter.

Case Study 4

Kedington Primary School, Suffolk

Kedington Primary School has used gardening to raise ecological awareness amongst their students and families. The school has built its own greenhouse out of recycled plastic bottles and a new pond has been established next to the vegetable gardens to attract frogs to deal with the snails and slugs in the garden. There is a wildlife area at the bottom of the school field, and the request to plant more flowers there to attract bees and butterflies came directly from the children's own gardening club. Any surplus fruit and vegetables grown by the children are sold locally.



Extracts from Kedington Primary Ofsted Inspection report – Dec 2008

“A key feature of the school is its excellent dedication to being an eco-friendly environment in which children are aware of how to take care of the world around them and look after what they have. They monitor the energy efficiency of the school, keep a careful watch on how much fuel the eco-boiler uses and are vigilant in turning off any unnecessary lights at every opportunity. Children grow their own fruit and vegetables for the kitchen table and sell any surplus locally. Recycling is a buzzword in their vocabulary as they compost waste and reuse materials whenever possible. This helps children to grow up being very aware of their future economic wellbeing and what it means to be responsible for their surroundings. Their personal development is outstanding.”

RAISING EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

Food-growing activities provide a method of teaching with the potential to engage children in different ways, particularly less academically inclined children that are less comfortable in a classroom environment.

In the research conducted by the National Foundation for Educational Research for the RHS, teachers highlighted the increased range of teaching methods afforded by outdoor food-growing activities. They drew attention to the way this environment enabled them to “encourage pupils to become active and independent learners”, the type of skills that are particularly valued by the UK’s leading academic institutions.⁷ This research also found that involving pupils in gardening activities resulted in

“greater scientific knowledge and understanding, using scientific techniques, enhanced literacy and numeracy and the use of a wider vocabulary across all areas of the curriculum”. In addition, teachers noted the contribution of gardening activities to improved literacy amongst children who have English as a second language.

A recent Ofsted report also found that learning outside the classroom, “led to improved outcomes for pupils and students, including better achievement, standards, motivation, personal development and behaviour”.⁸ The survey also found examples of the positive effects of learning outside the classroom on young people who were hard to motivate.



Our responsibility, in this life, is to our children. It was not so long ago that what they consumed seemed unimportant. Happily we are seeing a quiet revolution, not borne out of celebrity, but from the organisations that put together this report. This is not a challenge to the bigger picture, just an understanding that every child should know that good food originates from the seed and ends on the plate.



Chris Collins

The Blue Peter Gardener

CONCLUSION

The beacons of good practice highlighted in this report indicate how food growing would have major benefits for our society if it took place in every school. But for that to happen, we need help from government. We would like the Department for Education to discuss with us, in our expert capacity, how to provide food-growing opportunities in all schools. This could be a taskforce, linking our finest growing

institutions with schools, to develop the practical plans needed to make growing in every school a reality. We need to involve schools, Ofsted, Parent and Teacher Associations, parents, local allotment holders and all kinds of food growers in the planning and implementation stages.

Teaching children to grow food in schools makes straightforward common sense. Let's make it happen!

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