Community Growing in the CSGN area - update
Introduction
We know that growing your own food has many advantages. As well as helping to provide greenspace in urban areas, it has a positive role to play in people eating well, improving health and wellbeing and fostering community spirit by encouraging people to get together.

Growing your own food can also positively impact on the local environment through a reduction in food mileage as participants reduce their fuel consumption and supermarkets face a reduced demand for products sourced from further afield. Wildlife too can benefit from community growing sites, especially those located within urbanised areas - helping to bring nature into the places where we work and live.

In recent years citizens have taken greater interest in growing their own food. This, coupled with National Policy such as Good Food Nation and the importance of Food Security has perhaps led to increased demand for community growing projects. Increasing awareness, however, has meant that, in some areas, the amount of land and number of sites available for growing has not kept pace with demand.

As Europe’s largest greenspace initiative, we are working to increase the area of land used for growing plants, fruit and vegetables across the region. The CSGN and partners have directly responded to this challenge. Since 2010, we have funded 41 projects engaged in community growing activities to a combined value of over £1M. Also, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scottish Government Food & Drink Division funded the CSGN and the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society (SAGS) to produce a comprehensive guide to designing and developing new and existing allotments and growing spaces to further encourage activity.

The Central Scotland Green Network Trust is also a key member of The Grow Your Own Working Group which takes forward the Scottish Government’s National Food and Drink Policy ‘Recipe For Success’ relating specifically to growing your own food. In 2013, this group produced a guide to help people who grow on sites with soil contamination.

The CSGN was also an early supporter of the award winning Glasgow’s Stalled Spaces project which included several temporary community growing space projects. This model has since been taken forward by the Scottish Government through Architecture & Design Scotland as a national initiative.

Whilst it is evident that much has been happening, we wanted to know if this activity has had the desired effect and this report goes some way to answer that question. It highlights an increase in the number of sites and area of land used for community growing between 2010 and 2015. There have been increases in numbers of allotments and orchards but, perhaps of greatest interest is the rapid increase in community gardens. Whilst sharing many characteristics with allotments, these tend to be smaller and less formally organised. This demonstrates that even very small community growing initiatives at a local level can contribute to wider public benefits.

We will continue to make progress on this theme and work towards increasing the amount of community growing space across the CSGN area to give many more people the opportunity to grow their own produce and reap multiple personal and societal benefits as they help to deliver aspects of the CSGN.

Keith Geddes, CSGN Chair
May 2016
Summary
As part of the 2010 CSGN Baseline research, the CSGN Community Growing Audit recorded the extent of community growing within the CSGN area. The research was published in 2011 and it identified 234 growing projects. The study also highlighted areas which might benefit from new community growing projects. This new report summarises research undertaken by the CSGNT during the spring and summer of 2015. It seeks to build on findings from the previous work and shed further light onto the subject.

This theme has great potential to contribute towards the development and delivery of the CSGN. New community growing projects not only increase much needed greenspace, it provides opportunities for social improvements and economic activities which can greatly improve the lives of people, particularly those living in areas of disadvantage.

Anecdotal evidence and recent studies indicate that an increase in community growing activity is taking place across the UK. This piece of research is an attempt to provide some figures on this growth within the context of CSGN area supplemented with case study examples.

From our 2015 study, we estimate that there are around 233ha of community growing space in the CSGN area. Around 72% of this land is given over to allotment sites with community gardens (12%) and orchards (16%) taking up the rest.

The average size of a community growing space is around 0.6ha, but there is variation in this depending on the primary function of the space.

Allotments tend to be the largest, with sites averaging around 1ha. Community orchards are the second largest at 0.7ha and community gardens much smaller at 0.3ha.

In terms of numbers, over half (53%) of all community growing sites are allotments. Community gardens (28%) is the second most popular type of community growing site and there is evidence that this has seen the fastest increase over the last five years. In 2010, there were 47 such sites on our database and this increased to 84 in 2015 – a 79% increase. Around 15% of all sites are orchards and 3% are described by respondents as ‘other’. An example of the latter is the small-scale edible borders approach which has been implemented in parts of Fife and Stirling.

In line with the CSGN area’s characteristics, nearly three quarters (73%) of all community growing sites are located in areas classed as ‘large urban areas’ or ‘other urban areas’. ‘Accessible rural’ (18%) accounts for much of the other sites. This indicates that community growing sites are making a positive impact in the creation of accessible, natural places for people to enjoy in locations near to where they live.
Methodology
Gathering data on the quantity and location of community growing in the CSGN area is not simple. There is no single place where records of sites are recorded. Furthermore, the definition of ‘community growing’ is not clear and there is debate as to what allotments, community gardens and community orchards are. In particular, there is often confusion as to what constitutes a community garden and how this differs from an allotment.

In response to a lack of data, the then CSGN Support Unit undertook some research and published a report in 2011 which collated information from records held by diverse sources such as local authorities, growers associations and charities. It is fair to say that the quality and quantity of data obtained was variable. In particular, much of the information was obtained from local authorities and some of these had better records than others.

Upon the completion of this exercise, our conclusion was that though we were successful in gathering benchmark data, it was likely that our figures underestimated the true extent of community growing in the CSGN area. As part of our ongoing monitoring programme, the CSGNT decided to revisit this topic in 2015. This time we used a different approach which we hoped would give us access to more data.

Through various partners, media and communications channels, we called for individuals engaged in community growing activity to fill in an online survey to record key details of their sites such as size, location and activities. It also included an innovative mapping feature.

The response was largely positive but in no way complete. Many of the respondents informed us about sites we were previously aware of through the 2011 survey but other sites were new and we updated our records accordingly. As regards the definition issue, we allowed respondents to tell us which category (allotment/community garden/orchard or other) they thought their project best fitted.

Although we acknowledge that combining different data gathering methodologies is not ideal, from our investigations of this dynamic topic, we believe that it is a valid approach. The methodology is a variant of triangulation where a subject is studied from multiple angles in order to gain the most accurate results. In this way, researchers can hope to overcome the weakness or intrinsic biases and the problems that come from single method, single-observer and single-theory studies.

Having noted the drawbacks, we believe the data used in producing this report represents a useful source of information and adds to our understanding of the extent of community growing in the CSGN area.
Map of Community Growing in the CSGN area, 2015
Allotments
Allotment plots are most often rented from allotment providers by individual plot holders. Types of organisations involved in the day-to-day leasing and management of allotments tends to be local authorities, other landowners or societies.

The number of new allotment sites which our research revealed was just 11. This takes the 2015 figure to 164

In our research, the average site size for allotments is just over 1ha. If we accept the SAGS figure that the average size of a plot is circa 250m² then we can say that each allotment in the CSGN area has around 40 plots on it. Our research indicates that in 2015 there were at least 164 allotment sites in the CSGN area, 11 more than in 2010. Using this figure, we can estimate that there are a minimum of 167ha of allotments and about 6,700 plots. This is at least 440 plots more than in 2010.

In terms of geographic spread, there are clusters of allotments in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Fife and North Lanarkshire whereas other areas such as East Renfrewshire and Falkirk have comparatively few. As regards the rural urban breakdown 76% of allotment sites are within urban areas and 17% are classed as ‘accessible rural’. 

Inverleith Allotments

This is a council managed site located in the north of the city. It has been in operation since the 1940s and presently it has a very active committee which oversees the maintenance of the site and holds regular events.

It is a relatively large site covering some 2.4ha accommodating over 150 gardening plots. The average size of these plots is around 90m² which is smaller than average. It is a popular site and the waiting list to obtain a plot is about nine years.

The allotment committee encourage skills and knowledge transference amongst plot holders and also environmentally friendly practices such as composting, water conservation and the protection and promotion of local biodiversity.

Open doors sessions are also held to engage with local school children, horticultural students and residential neighbours to nurture a keen understanding of allotment gardening and nature in general.
Community Gardens
The term ‘community garden’ means different things to different people. This can make gathering data problematic.

For example, in our 2015 online survey we found that respondents often ticked the box for community garden for sites listed by Local Authorities as allotments. In these instances we retained the designation of the site as an allotment for consistency.

In general terms, community gardens differ from allotments in that they tend to be less formally organised, are variable in size and often linked to other community activity such as community centres. In recent years they have become increasingly popular due in part to long waiting lists for vacant allotment plots and also as a localised response to vacant and derelict land and lack of greenspace.

Interest in creating community gardens, particularly in areas of disadvantage has also been stimulated by the activities of a range of third sector organisations working to promote good health and wellbeing. These include, for example, Urban Roots and the Woodland Community Development Trust in Glasgow. Such organisations provide a range of support and expertise for communities interested in setting up a community garden in their neighbourhoods. This ranges from providing assistance in finding funders to providing trained gardeners as instructors.

There are at least 84 community gardens in the CSGN area. However, we suspect that this figure is actually greater. Our figures indicate that between 2010 and 2015 the number of sites grew by 37 which is a 79% increase. As the average size of community growing site is about 0.3ha, we estimate that in 2015 there was in the region of 25ha of community gardens in the CSGN area.

Hareleeshill Community Garden Larkhall, South Lanarkshire

On a vacant piece of land enclosed by housing, this project has been developed by a local church in partnership with South Lanarkshire Council’s Changing Places team and Clydesdale Community Initiatives.

The garden is managed by a non-profit making social enterprise. Its main aim is to make a positive contribution to the community and enhance the quality of life for local people. As part of this it sees the provision of communal space in which people can grow produce and interact is important.

The site is located in one of Scotland’s most deprived areas. It is 0.6ha and has been running for five years. It has a polytunnel, sensory garden and more than 20 raised beds. The social enterprise provides opportunities for work, vocational training and volunteering as well as promoting healthier lifestyles. The garden is a key resource which allows it to achieve these ambitions.

It is described as: “a real asset to the community, a place of growing and bonding. A lovely space to relax, socialise and get your hands dirty!”
A community orchard is defined as a collection of five or more trees located in a public space. The planting and ongoing management of these trees tends to be undertaken by community groups, schools or allotment committees.

We estimate that community orchards cover some 37ha across the CSGN area and the number of sites increased by 39% between 2010 and 2015. Part of this increase is attributable to the work of Forth Valley Orchards, which has been supported by the CSGN. It has been working towards increasing both the coverage and number of community orchards since 2010. For example, the 2015 Fruit Futures Project, funded by the CSGN Development Fund, saw Forth Valley Orchards work with 17 community groups, businesses and school leaders in areas of multiple deprivation and/or near areas of vacant and derelict land.

In terms of geographic spread, there are clusters of orchards in Edinburgh, Stirling, Glasgow and Fife. Most sites are urban (63%) but in comparison with other community growing types there is slightly more rural representation here with 22% ‘accessible rural’.

Riverside Community Orchard, Stirling

Riverside Community Council planted an orchard of eleven apple trees and four plum trees in an urban area of Stirling.

They were planted on an underused, grassed area of land bounded by the River Forth. The project was funded by the 2014/15 CSGN Orchard Grant Scheme which made small grants of up to £500 available to community groups to design, create and manage orchards.

Pupils from Riverside Primary School helped with the planting and local residents were encouraged to bring along a spade and join in too. As well as providing fresh fruit, the new orchard makes an historic connection to the cultivated orchards of the nearby Cambuskenneth Abbey, helping to revive the ancient tradition of orchard cultivation in this part of Stirling.
As outlined, gathering data on the volume and location of community growing activity is problematic as there is no central dataset and not all local authority records are up-to-date. Output from this research indicates that in 2015 there were nearly 300 sites used for community growing within the CSGN area. This figure represents an increase of around 26% since 2010. However, there is a large margin of error within the dataset and it is thought that our figures underestimate the true level of community growing.

What is clear is that in recent years, the idea of growing your own food either on an individual or community basis has become increasingly appealing for a wide variety of reasons. There are obvious personal benefits in that the produce provides the grower with healthy food and the activity is an opportunity for exercise in the outdoors. In addition, there are wider societal benefits. As demonstrated in the case studies included in this report, growing spaces encourage personal contact with fellow growers and this in turn can help improve wellbeing, quality of life and promote interpersonal connections and support at a neighbourhood level. In short, community growing projects help to create stronger communities.

This fits in with our belief that the delivery of the CSGN will increase engagement of people in the management of their neighbourhoods and greenspaces and also help to increase civic pride.

It is also apparent that these and other benefits are being recognised by policy makers within organisations such as the NHS, and both Local and National Governments. However, despite this increasing interest, it is widely reported that the provision of growing spaces has not kept pace with demand. It is not uncommon, as in the example of Inverleith Allotments in this report, that people must wait up to a decade to get a local allotment plot. It is no surprise therefore, that the greatest increase in community growing projects over the last five years has been seen in informal community gardens.

It appears that the approach of community gardens is more dynamic than the traditional allotments model. Possibly this method is able to identify unused spaces in our urban environments and make use of them flexibly for community growing even, as in the example of the Stalled Spaces Initiative, for a limited period of time.

Moving forward, the CSGN continues to support the Grow Your Own Working Group (GYOWG). A core objective for this body is to raise awareness of the potential of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015. This was passed by the Scottish Parliament in July 2015. It increases the protection for allotments and introduces a number of new duties on local authorities, one of which aims to reduce waiting times for allotments.

It is anticipated that up to 1,000 new plots will be created within 12 months of this new Act coming into force. Looking ahead, this increases the importance and role of the CSGN in ensuring this happens.

In particular, elements of this legislation encourages community groups to engage with the planning system to achieve community growing ambitions. This may include land purchases and asset transfer which allows more land to become available for community growing.

The GYOWG is also starting to support Local Authorities to develop individual food growing strategies. Early work on this includes a number of information sharing events/workshops. The first of these will be held in Autumn 2016. These events will explore the purpose and aims of food growing strategies and provide guidance on what they can achieve.

This report demonstrates that throughout central Scotland, interest in community growing and the number of sites available for this activity is increasing. The challenge now is to feed this momentum and provide appropriate support which will allow more people to achieve their grow your own ambitions and thereby engage in the delivery of the CSGN.
Further Information

Trainees improving access in Castlemilk Community Woodlands

Toryglen Community Garden, Urban Roots
A list of the community growing groups which were included in this research is available on the CSGN website using the following link - http://www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org/resources/publications/category/47-studies-reports?download=379:community-growing-in-the-csgn-2015-update-appendix-a

Particular thanks in producing this report go to:

For more information on community growing within the CSGN area the following organisations and links might be useful:

- Appletreeman: https://plantsandapples.co.uk/
- CLAS Scotland: http://sc.communitylandadvice.org.uk/
- Community Food and Health (Scotland): http://www.communityfoodandhealth.org.uk/
- Edible Estates: http://www.edibleestates.co.uk/
- Fife Diet: http://fifediet.co.uk/
- greenspace scotland: http://greenspacescotland.org.uk/
- Grow Your Own Scotland: http://www.growyourownscotland.info/
- Nourish Scotland: http://www.nourishscotland.org/
- Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society: http://www.sags.org.uk/
- Soil Association Scotland: https://www.soilassociationscotland.org/
- Stalled Spaces Scotland: http://www.ads.org.uk/stalled-spaces-scotland/
- The Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens: https://www.farmgarden.org.uk/
- Trellis Scotland: http://www.trellisscotland.org.uk/home
- Scottish Rural and Environment Directorate: http://www.gov.scot/About/People/Directorates/ruralandenvironment

Images

Cover: left top – Back Garden (G3 Growers), left bottom - The Urban Croft (South Seeds) , right – Hidden Gardens (The Hidden Gardens Trust)

Back: left top – Hareleeshill Community Garden (Larkhall Community Growers), bottom left - Community Apple Orchard (© Angus Kirk), bottom right – Hidden Gardens (The Hidden Gardens Trust)