

# **COST Action Urban Agriculture Europe: STSM – End of mission report Developing a joined up approach to food growing: the case of Cork, Ireland**

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## **COST Action Urban Agriculture Europe.**

### **Developing a joined up approach to food growing: the case of Cork, Ireland**

**Short Term Scientific Mission. 02/11/2015 to 14/11/2015.**

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## 1. Introduction

This brief report was compiled following a 'rapid appraisal' over two weeks in November 2015, with the aim of exploring opportunities to establish and maintain a cross city network of food growing within Cork, Republic of Ireland. It took place as a 'short term scientific mission' funded by COST Urban Agriculture Europe.

The work was carried out with the support of Cork Food Policy Council (CFPC), and Dr Colin Sage at University College Cork (UCC). As a multi-disciplinary group working closely with the Cork Healthy City initiative, the CFPC has pioneered innovative approaches to bring food systems thinking into the city, at both local and policy levels. The opportunity to look at urban food growing in Cork in more detail recognises the potential of this activity to meet some of the aims around food policy development. (<http://corkfoodpolicycouncil.com/>)

The publication of the **Cork City Development Plan** (2015-21) by the city council, presents an impetus to look at food growing in more detail. The plan includes a number of references to food, partly recognising dialogue with CFPC. In particular, **Objective 7.15 b** within Neighbourhood Recreation & Amenity highlights an aim, 'To encourage the development of food-growing spaces such as allotments and community gardens' (<http://www.corkcitydevelopmentplan.ie/>). There is a growing interest in food growing within civil society groups across the city, but as yet, no co-ordinated approach. The Development Plan has provided an opportunity to look at how food growing might be embedded more into the fabric of the city, enabling both civil society and public sector to work together.

The report was developed with learning from Cork's existing food growing initiatives across the city, and through interviews with a wide range of stakeholders, including community gardeners, food producers, voluntary sector groups, as well as people involved in strategy and service delivery within the public sector. This approach has helped to show the potential for a people-centred vision for community food growing and urban agriculture in the city, and possible ways forward.

Whilst this is a very brief initial look at the Cork context, it is hoped that it will contribute to highlighting the good practice in the city. It provides the first steps to developing a vision for how Cork could develop a more strategic and joined up approach to food growing, in order to become a greener, healthier and more abundant food producing city.

## 2. Project aim and methods used

*To explore the opportunities and pathways for establishing and maintaining a cross city network for food growing within Cork, Republic of Ireland.*

Aims of the work included to:

- Bring a range of stakeholders together to explore the maximization of food growing opportunities building on the objectives raised through the Cork City Development Plan report.
- Explore the way forward to support Cork Food Policy Council and community gardening networks and other players in moving from policy to practice, and vice versa.

- Develop proposals for the practical expansion of food growing initiatives building on local examples and capacity including the good practice of the Knocknaheeny Community Garden (see UAE online atlas).
- Contribute to learning within wider COST initiative and within the WG2 focus on UA and governance.

**Research methods for the report included:**

- Desk survey of strategic and other documents with potential links to support food growing (see appendix)
- Interviews with over forty stakeholders, including community gardeners, food producers, Cork Food Policy Council, civil society, and statutory sector.
- Collaborative consultation workshop for over forty stakeholders using 'world café' format

Recommendations made following on from the work were put out to consultation with the Cork Food Policy Council during December 2015. The recommendations made are general, and it is hoped that the CPFC will endeavour to identify how and who might take them forward. In recognition of and with respect for the consultation process, the recommendations are *not* included in this COST report. A fuller version of this report, suitable for use by stakeholders in Cork, and including recommendations will be published on-line on the CPFC website in early 2016. This will happen once the full stakeholder consultation has taken place.

### **3. The setting for Cork**

Cork, as Ireland's second largest city, with a population of 119,230 is vibrant, energetic, and innovative, naturally facing outwards with its port and international links (Census 2011). It is a centre of learning and commerce, with University College Cork, and Cork Institute of Technology attracting students from worldwide.

Cork is also a city of geographic inequality. 'Employment, education and income levels vary widely, as do levels of opportunity, social inclusion and overall health' with a divide typically between North and South Cork. Cork has a strong community and voluntary sector providing diverse services with and for local residents. However, the economic recession and austerity programme has had a negative impact on the fabric of the city, and this sector in particular (Kelly and Hayes. 2014). Signs of a slow recovery are apparent. [http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/Cork\\_City\\_Profile.pdf](http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/news/Cork_City_Profile.pdf)

Food has long played a significant part in Cork's identity. Sometimes described as 'the food capital of Ireland', Cork has a strong culture of food, linked both to its past history and present activities. Rural areas surrounding Cork are well known for support of local growing, production and consumption, and the city itself brings food to its heart through its markets, restaurants and artisan foods. Farmer's markets and Country Markets are found in most towns across the county [http://www.tastecork.com/cork\\_producers.php?t=19](http://www.tastecork.com/cork_producers.php?t=19). Cork's food culture is a strong pull factor for tourism within the region and a valuable contributor to the economy, and much has been done to promote the identity of locally produced food.

Cork Food Policy Council (CFPC) was established in 2012 as a forum through which to develop a wider analysis of the 'food system' within the Cork city-region. It encourages a wider examination of the issues surrounding food production, consumption, and sustainability, providing a voice for a more just and equitable food system. As a multi-disciplinary group that works closely with the Cork Healthy City initiative, it has pioneered innovative approaches to bring food systems thinking into the city, working at both local and policy levels. This recognises the position and value of food within the fabric of city life, and for its multifunctional benefits to health, community, infrastructure and spatial thinking. As food poverty is on the increase in Ireland, addressing these food system issues becomes more important. <http://corkfoodpolicycouncil.com/>



**Cork Food Policy Council; taking a food systems approach**

Urban agriculture and food growing can be a way to support and complement Cork's local strategic objectives, encouraging partnership working between voluntary groups, health and local authority to achieve shared aims. It is not just about food growing, but using the *activity, process and outcomes* of growing to embed principles of health, wellbeing, sustainability, skills and economic development, social inclusion in a people centred approach. *Identification of strategic links are outlined in the Appendix.*

The work of this report enabled information about food growing and community gardening initiatives in Cork and its margins to be gathered. This was challenging to do, as many groups were not aware of each other, and there is no central database. In total, over thirty initiatives, excluding school food growing, were identified in and around Cork (See Appendix), and it is clear that many more initiatives are taking place as well. These varied in their approach and motivations (in line with typology identified by COST UAE), broadly across models of *allotments, community gardening, social and therapeutic horticulture, gardening for education and training, and market gardening initiatives.*

#### 4. Consultation and themes arising

During the rapid appraisal, face to face interviews were held with over forty individuals, representing voluntary groups, growers, community gardeners and public sector. In addition, a stakeholder workshop was held on November 13<sup>th</sup> 2015, attended by 40 people, and focusing on the opportunities and barriers to urban food growing in Cork, and exploring creative ways forward. Other conversations were held by phone and email. All Cork Primary schools were contacted by email, to see if they were involved in food growing. The themes arising are outlined below.



**Stakeholder workshop. 13<sup>th</sup> November 2015 at Camden Palace, Cork**

Throughout discussions, many concerns raised indicated a sense of disquiet with the current food system, including concerns about food quality, sustainability, and food poverty. Many spoke about loss of skills in food growing, production and preparation, as the older generation passes on, rural links lessen and the younger generation understood and valued this less. There was a sense of Cork being at a tipping point, where this knowledge might be lost irretrievably.

*Many people of the older generation remember difficult times...and had skills to grow and process food. We are losing that now, lost the skills of preserving, processing and growing food...we are losing vital knowledge, and it's essential to find ways to sustain and develop these skills.*

People spoke about their hopes and fears around community and food. This highlighted concerns about future impact of climate change on agriculture,

systems 'shock' and the need to seek more resilient ways of living.

*Are people aware that we only have three days-worth of food in the system?*

*Once you are aware that this is a big thing, maybe you can look up from daily living and think about how we would manage. The future is a real concern.*

*Food growing can contribute to some level of resilience.*

The vision emerging from these conversations had people at its heart. Food growing was seen as a way to achieve wider community and individual aims.

**Themes** arising included:

- Improving **local environment**, derelict **land**, and access to green space, with a focus on resilience of the city to climate change
- **Growing**, preparing and distributing locally sourced and sustainably produced food and other products
- Improving **health and wellbeing**, through giving people the tools to improve physical and mental health
- Enabling development of **skills**, knowledge and independence
- Building **community and social inclusion** through bringing people together
- Building an **effective network** among growing groups, with links between strategy and the grassroots

Taking each theme in order, we will highlight some of the key issues that arose, including reference to opportunities, barriers and potential ways forward.

#### 4a) Land and environment

**Land: access by groups**



*Shine's 'meanwhile' site at Kyle Street, Cork and potential land?*

Finding and accessing suitable land identified by groups and individuals for

varied purposes was one of the key concerns raised by community members. Land suitable for growing included land that was accessible, safe, free from contamination, had potential for services and was based within the locality. Some groups were actively looking for land, or had been for some time. There was an awareness that there were land banks available if they could be accessed.

*There is a lot of institutional land available in every town...and groups ready or interested to take it on...they just need matching and support  
If land was made available, people would be really interested...*

There was a lack of awareness about how to go about accessing land for food growing...who would know about land availability and ownership. There was no clear pathway or contact within local authority through which people could find available land or go to if land had been identified. Some groups had spent a long time navigating local authority departments to find information and contacts to be able to start moving forward, and some gave up as a result of difficulties.

*Why isn't there a central point of contact in every council that groups could go to if looking to set up, and get advice and a way forward? There is a need for more understanding in local authority of the benefits of food growing and why communities might want to do it*

Often land is in private, institutional ownership and it is difficult for groups to navigate the complicated issues.

*If we could have a 'go to' person it would make a big difference...*

*There is lots of enthusiasm to tap into...but need for joined up thinking, there is no outreach from the council, it's always the community going out to them, and meeting lots of road blocks along the way, so people with initial enthusiasm fall off the route.*

*Need to have the 'top guy' filtering down into other areas...at the moment it's a 'mish-mash' of approaches, it's not coordinated, and not getting to the people who could make use of it*

One community garden group had found a potential site owned by a private landowner, and had gone some way down the route of negotiating use. However, this failed in the end as the landowner was concerned about letting land for 'temporary' use, and the negative publicity that might ensue if they took the land back. The group themselves were less concerned, and were happy for



**Midleton Community Garden**

this to be negotiated clearly up front, agreeing to temporary use.

*We didn't see this as a problem...it could have simply been built into any agreement with us*

Another group had been looking for land for some time, and had with the help of a planner been given some 'meanwhile' land on a temporary lease. The link with planning department had been invaluable in identifying the land, finding the private owner and negotiating a lease.

*I had never thought that we could use a site like this, I thought a site like this would be a definite 'no'*

*X has been so helpful, step by step, going through all the things that needed to be thought through...she had a belief in the group and saw the potential, we couldn't have done it without her*

There was a recognition that once models of lease and land use were established, and successful, they could act as 'pilots' for learning, and give landowners and local authority more confidence in moving forward.

*HSE have been totally supportive from the start, we had a verbal agreement, but are now working on a formal lease...this could then be used as a case study and example of what is possible...there is potential for this elsewhere*

Other issues around land that were raised by groups and individuals were

- Where to find advice to clear and develop derelict and unused sites, including infrastructure and services
- How to find insurance, negotiate leases, and information about potential land contamination
- How to develop site use processes including health and safety
- How to develop operational plans, funding applications, and growing plans

### **Land: Local authority views**

Conversations with planners, parks and green space officers and engineers within Cork City Council and Cork County Council revealed both an interest and willingness to support food growing initiatives. However this was tempered by a recognition of the constraints; lack of funding, capacity and resources. Whilst there is pressure on land, particularly in North Cork, and for housing and development needs, there is still land with potential. The addition of food growing into Cork Development Plan provides a valuable opportunity

and statement of intent.

*We want to be as progressive as we can but it is difficult with the constraints within which we work*

*There is a huge amount of background work to get sites to a stage where they can be used, and it's a complex process which needs expertise...*

Officers held a huge amount of knowledge and expertise needed to assess, develop, and establish sites, including an understanding of the planning and legal frameworks, site histories, resource and infrastructure needs. Both Cork City Council and Cork County have established show case allotment sites at Churchfield and Ballincollig. There was a recognition that the local authority could provide the advice and support to find land, assess it for use, and act as a 'go between' when land was under private ownership. However, it was felt that support and leadership needed to come from 'on top' and not be left to keen individuals.

Various types of land were identified as potential for further exploration:

- Privately owned, public or institutional land for example City council, HSE, UCC, church owned sites, public housing, schools
- Landscape preservation zones within the city. Sites 'sterilized' from development, but with potential to be used for community and health value without being in conflict with zoning
- Vacant plots around the city including 'SLOAP' (space left over after planning)
- Derelict sites with potential for 'meanwhile' use, for instance pending sale or development or under asset reclamation plan (NAMA)
- Land earmarked for development as social housing in the longer term (5 to 10 years) which could be leased on a short term basis (e.g. Cork County)
- Potential for embedding food growing activity within Local Area and Action area plans
- Leasing or partnership opportunities from farmers and land owners on peri-urban sites, for example to establish market gardens or new public or private allotments
- Potential for Cork City and Cork County Councils to work together to identify land on the outskirts of Cork for allotments or market gardening
- Potential for citizens to take small growing areas, 'edge spaces' on spontaneously as in the example of Incredible Edible or diversifying a 'Tidy Towns' approach



***Early days at Shine's 'meanwhile site'***



***Douglas Allotments***

Parks and open spaces were seen as having more constraints, the policy for parks has been to provide clean, accessible, safe, green open spaces. It has taken time and patience to establish planting schemes within the city, and vandalism has been a problem. The department is moving towards having parks which are gated at night. Concerns about additional costs and complaints of 'mess' for example from fruit trees, or food growing in parks was raised. This said, there are some pockets which could provide potential food growing space. The opportunity to integrate food plants into ornamental bedding were also discussed. There is potential for parks and open spaces to work more closely with the planning department in identifying and bringing forward sites.

### **Churchfield Allotments Cork**

The first council provided allotment in North Cork, established in 2011 by Cork City Council. The site provides 50 plots, landscaped area, orchard, toilets and tool store. The gardens are the focus for community activities, food growing, learning and skills development. It is run and managed by the city council, with links to the active plotholders.



<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Churchfield-Allotments-Cork/237555192943296?sk=wall>

Whilst budgetary constraints are real, there was a recognition that other forms of 'in kind' support could be offered, through existing local authority capacity, working in partnership with groups. This included potential to bring machines, labour and expertise to clearing sites, as well as potential sources and transportation of manure, advice and input on site infrastructure planning (drainage, water, testing), possible use of JCBs to clear land, horticulture and carpentry skills, advice on funding bids.

Local authority officers expressed an interest in testing out pilot projects, working with local community groups in 'co-creation' of potential sites. It was recognised that interested groups would need to develop some level of structure, agreed aims, action plan and accountability in order for this partnership to be successful. Confidence from working together implementing pilots could move this forward onto other projects, if local authority could see that there was limited cost and additional work involved. This in turn could demonstrate to the wider council that this was indeed a viable use of land.

#### **4. b. Growing, preparing, distributing and selling locally produced food**

Although the focus of this report was not on commercial market gardening and food distribution, the potential to develop 'shorter food chains' and support the local economy through commercial food production is something that would merit more in depth exploration at a later date.

Cork has obvious opportunities to build on its strengths, including nearby fertile rural hinterland, food growing and agricultural skills, well established 'gourmet' food culture and interest in local food. Many saw sustainably and ethically produced local food as a way of building resilience in food systems. Again loss of skills in food growing were cited as a problem for the future, as small farmers and vegetable producers struggled to compete with international markets, and heavy farming subsidies.



*Ballintubber Farm, Midleton Farmer's Market*

Speaking to a few small food producers at Farmer's Markets the following issues were raised:

- Need for more education and awareness within the public and institutions around unsustainable food production systems, climate impact,

food waste, and value of organic or quality production and locally produced labels, in order to increase local demand

- For some, farmers' markets were not the ideal forum to sell in order to develop consistent sales. Some expressed a need for support with
- alternative models of accessing markets for local food such as potential for larger bulk buying coops, institutional procurement or more centralised local food retail centre (e.g. Limerick Food Coop <http://www.theurbanco-op.ie/>) which would enable 'ordinary' shoppers to buy a week's shop at one point, at more affordable prices.
- Support with marketing through business planning, social media, and other methods. Links to UCC marketing and food production courses were highlighted as a way of getting this support through hands on student projects linking small scale producers to 'real life' course projects in practical ways

For the community garden groups, many were involved in selling or distribution of produce, and value adding. This provided a small source of income generation for the projects, as well as a sense of 'giving' within the local community, building local networks, contributing a valued resource, and bringing people together in shared activity to eat, cook and buy. Fresh food distribution was also linked to perceptions of poor access to fresh produce within the local community. Some projects had developed links with local restaurants interested in sourcing local produced food, and social benefits. Lettuce Inn, on Barrack Street, a small greengrocer, is interested in using food growing locally to support the shop, whilst supporting the regeneration of the local area.

Support with marketing, developing labels and brands, and promotion of the social value of community produced food across the city was highlighted. New models of selling such as Country market style stalls were also suggested.

#### **4. c. Health and Wellbeing**

The health, social and therapeutic value of gardening and food growing taking place across Cork was recognised by all. The activity of gardening was seen to directly contribute to individual, community and family wellbeing and public health. This included mental wellbeing, increased physical activity outdoors, reduced isolation and increased awareness and skills around healthy eating, cooking and growing food. The shared activity of food growing was seen as important to many, bringing generations and people of mixed backgrounds together. Cork University Hospital also saw the benefits of creating decorative and edible gardens for patient and staff wellbeing, through creating healing

environments to look out on and enjoy.



**Transformation of courtyard spaces at Cork University Hospital**

Gardens were also used as a venue and health promoting space for health and community based groups to use and link into. Midleton Community Garden Project for example saw the value of linking the adjacent hospital to the garden, and was developing links with wider health groups such as elderly day care centre, and local mental health services and Men's sheds.

Knocknaheeny and The Glen community gardens, also acted as a focus for a wide range of health and wellbeing activities, working with a cross section of groups, and attracting HSE, and HAZ public health funding. The gardens were used as a base for a variety of activities including cooking, arts based projects, schools and family programmes, all of which build community wellbeing.



**Knocknaheeny**



**Healthy activity at The Glen**

*We are working with a parents group linking to food and nutrition, cooking and budgeting for meals, there is no shortage of interest...*

*The connection between food growing and eating is very deep, seeing the pride when a child involved says 'yes I grew this radish myself'*

*It's all about bringing about the interaction with people...rather than being stuck in the house all day*

The use of gardens in a more structured way for social and therapeutic horticulture and horticulture therapy was also an important part of some garden's work. This involved working with a range of groups including adults with learning disabilities, individuals with autism, and mental health issues, often with funding from HSE and social care budgets. 'New Directions' social inclusion strategy for changes to day service structure and personal budgets were cited as potential opportunities. Cope Foundation for example, work with adults with learning disabilities, using gardening for food growing, training, independence and job skills through running two garden centres and an allotment. Cork Autism's work with adults with autism, and find gardening has many benefits for people involved:

*We see dramatic changes in people's behaviour...when they come to the garden we never have challenging behaviour, and that says it all really...*

Others highlighted the way gardens reduced isolation.

*People come to the site for relaxation, and to meet others...one lady came up to me saying the garden had given her something to look forward to after church...whereas before she would just go home and see no one all day*

*We get lots of phonecalls from parents with children with autism, as a group they are quite isolated...so something like a gardening group could be very beneficial*

Some gardens had undertaken training in Social and Therapeutic Horticulture and this was seen as a growing area in Ireland, although there was no umbrella organisation for this (most had made links with Thrive UK). Some groups highlighted the need to learn and understand more about the health and wellbeing benefits of gardening and food growing and how to evaluate them.

*We would like to know what we are looking at in terms of developing the health and wellbeing work, and for advice and support on measurements and*

outcomes

*Would like to learn more about therapeutic horticulture, and have more courses offered*

#### **4.d) Skills, knowledge and education**

Gardening was seen as a pathway to develop valuable skills and knowledge, linked to life-skills development, employment, citizenship and inclusion.

Many primary schools and some secondary have innovative programmes around growing food and gardening, often linked to the Green Flag award. Gardening in schools provides an active way of exploring all subjects within the curriculum, as well as sustainability, food and nutrition. It can provide a link for intergenerational work and wider community involvement. Schools identified both funding, information and technical gardening skills as their support needs.

*We have a very successful school garden. With parent (and grandparent) volunteers, the pupils of 5th class grow organic fruit, veg and herbs*

*As well as growing vegetables we do cookery activities with the produce from the garden. We also have a harvest festival each year - which has been a great celebration of all the gardening activities*



***Middleton Community Garden and Churchfield Community Trust***

Some community based gardening groups working with adults, used gardening, selling produce and linking to community as a training activity. This was linked to job skills, literacy and numeracy, enabling development of social skills, and re-entry to social settings following life crisis. Some received funding for garden instructors from Education and Training Board to deliver FETAC level horticulture or permaculture qualifications, or non-vocational community based courses. FAS community employment scheme was also seen as a way to develop skills bank within community gardening, and for some trainees had

resulted in employment within horticulture. Thrive (UK) had also delivered training courses in therapeutic horticulture, identified by many as of interest, and potential to deliver from within expertise already in Cork.

Informal community based courses and training were also offered from many gardens, including allotments. These focused on the practical skills of gardening planning and cooking, aimed at amateur gardeners and first time food growers, or the wider community. This support was seen as essential to both community gardening and allotments in keeping up interest in food growing, building skills and preventing people becoming demoralized and dropping off.

*There a big swell for 'Grow Your Own' but it needs education, people fuss over gardens too much, they need practical growing skills, to be able to grow food effectively*

*Some people take on plots, and expect it to be easy, in Ireland many people are growing for the first time, don't have the skills, and don't realise the amount of work involved...they take a plot on and give up after a bit as they lose energy...they need support and encouragement as it takes time....*

Many of the gardening groups themselves held knowledge and expertise that could be shared more formally through themed training events and activities across the city. Enabling this to happen would build food growing and gardening skills at a community level. GIY (Grow it Yourself) Ireland was seen as contributing to this in a valuable way, although many felt there was an additional, more local need for skills development at a grassroots level.

A need for more support in the skills of setting up projects was also identified including issues around safeguarding, health and safety, site planning and infrastructure, insurance, policies and management, community development and volunteering. Much of this support is 'out there' but needs drawing together, and many groups did not know where to turn and avoid 'reinventing the wheel'.

College and education institutions also were seen as being able to contribute to skills, linking students to practical growing initiatives, citizenship and community outreach, or through university clubs and societies. UCC students for example grow food in polytunnels as part of the Environment Society. Kinsale College is well known for students with skills to offer in sustainable horticulture and permaculture. Potential for students to support food growing development through practical 'projects' was also raised.

#### 4.e Community and social inclusion

Cork has a wide variety of 'community gardens' and food growing projects. Not all gardens are open to all, or about 'community' of place, but might be limited to identified groups or themes such as mental health recovery or training, or individual food growing. They come from diverse motivations from individual desires to grow food, permaculture or build resilience to climate change, through to community development objectives, including health, social inclusion and regeneration.

Some 'community' gardens were seen as exclusive or unwelcoming to the wider community, identified with 'gatekeepers'.

*The public visit parks and feel they have a right to go there, but some community gardens are not like this, people sometimes feel they can't just wander in and sit there and enjoy...*

Others raised concerns that 'community gardens' were being established without gauging community interest or needs beforehand. Valuable lessons had been learnt through the process of setting up community based gardens:

- Clarity of aims and objectives of gardens as an essential element at the outset, in order to avoid confusion and failure. What need is it you are meeting?
- Does the community really want a garden? Ensure that community development approach is taken at all stages and the community is engaged, consulted and on board. This takes time and resources
- Many gardens are focused on getting off the ground...but it is important to look at how gardens can be sustained in the longer term. This takes money, energy, time and resource
- If gardens are aiming to be open 'community gardens,' structure, accountability, and accessibility are essential to ensure they remain inclusive to all

The work of enabling, facilitating and supporting involvement in gardens in many cases fell to skilled volunteers, (for example GIY focus on bringing forward 'community champions') and was seen as an essential role. Some felt this work was best undertaken through a salaried role if possible, even for a few hours a week, to provide continuity, coordination and a welcoming face. Lack of this presence and capacity in some gardens was seen as a limiting factor for developing the work further.

*We need to develop a more consistent presence in the garden, a more structured approach, so when people drop into the garden there is a link, and someone to direct and be the point of contact for involvement*

*...need consistency, a 'go to person'...It's no good if people are just coming in when it suits them, or if one person takes ownership, it excludes others and there is no accountability...you need support, funding and clear guidelines..*

The danger of 'burnout' among key driving individuals was also seen as an issue, and the need to support groups with formation, decision making and sharing the workload and responsibility were seen as essential for ensuring project sustainability.

*It's maintaining it over time which is challenging, enabling the continuity of individuals and actors, people doing the work...how to sustain the networks, you need someone in the centre to make it happen...people move on, you can only do so much..*

The importance of linking out to wider community structures, and relationships was seen as important for building resilience.

*You need lots of people to create the structures, but you can't do it by yourself...got to do it in groups, and build from that...link and engage and develop sustainable things, build relationships..*

This was recognised as a strength. If gardening and food growing could be embedded within existing relationships and structures, policies and strategies, and not just through central gardens themselves, then the activity would have more chance of growing sustainably. For instance, Men's Sheds, and Tidy Towns were mentioned on numerous occasions as being a structure into which food growing could be clearly linked, as were health groups, family groups, schools and social housing. Linking to others' agendas within the community through introducing food growing and gardening was seen as a way of widening involvement and interest beyond a few, and building a point of interest through food, cooking and shared activity.

One housing association for older people for instance was very interested to learn about the potential food growing could bring to them.

*Growing could be a way of linking out into the community...a much needed link...bringing intergenerational work, social inclusion, and reengage people in what they did before 'light that spark again*

Land was available here within the housing stock. Much of this activity could be, with the right support, network and skills development be done within existing structures and organisations, with limited additional cost, once they could see the potential and relevance of food growing and gardening.



**Stakeholder workshop**



**UCC Student Club Polytunnels**

*From our point of view, this is absolutely what we would want, it would be absolutely brilliant, enhance independent living and enable residents to give back to the community*

#### 4.f. Building an effective network



***Food growing in Cork- a joined up approach?***

Across all of the above themes, the need for a wider network of those interested in food growing and gardening in all its aspects was seen as essential to move the agenda forward. Many of the groups interviewed had no idea of the other groups ‘out there’, and many were struggling with common issues on their own.

*I had no idea that there were all these other groups out there...there is no real sense of a food growing network in Cork and around...*

*I would like to find out about other groups, and to network and to know who is out there doing what...*

A network would avoid reinventing the wheel, to learn from each other...

*If we set up a network, we could visit one another and see each other's work to gain more understanding, link volunteers etc...*

*If you had a ‘hub’ of projects joined together in activity, building on shared resources, a hub to meet and a shared service, it might work better...*

*A network could provide somewhere to go to learn and gain information, support and skills from setting out with ideas, through to setting up, and maintaining projects...*

Social media was seen as one way to build an effective communication

network, share skills and ideas and create a 'social buzz awareness'. Following the workshop event on 13 November, a group interested in taking this forward established a 'facebook' page for communication 'Grow Cork' to get participating groups communicating. (<https://www.facebook.com/growcork/>)

Bringing about a network, or networks that are diverse as well as focused was seen as important. With skill, it need not be unwieldy or time consuming. It needs flexibility to provide opportunity for bringing together strategic support, agencies as well as grassroots groups as appropriate for different purposes but with the overview of supporting the development of food growing.

*Networks are a living thing...must be valid and valued...they need resourcing to make them happen, it's all well putting it into policy, but it needs to be connected to broad networks...with public, private and not for profit groups*

*The strategic network across the city can be fractured...often you don't see a level of integration or shared events...there are institutional barriers, time, funding competition...*

*Energy to do things is key, but this needs top down support to meet with the needs of grassroots bottom up projects, and that is largely lacking...if there were top down structures it would make a huge difference*

*You also need a champion, a person to drive it, 'doers' and people who are passionate about what they are doing*

## **5. Conclusions and way forward**

As aforementioned, a final report included recommendations for the CFPC to consider and take forward. Recommendations included the need to establish a cross city network of food growers to share skills, knowledge and momentum, a need to identify clear pathways and links to the council through which to identify land, within a more strategic approach.

The recommendations were under consultation at the writing of this report, and could not be included at the time. However, the impetus from the process of consultation has already led to new initiatives taking place in Cork, including the initiation of a food growing network at grassroots level, and forthcoming skills sharing workshops for 2016. It is anticipated that some of the barriers identified to food growing here will have been highlighted, and that there will be a will to explore ways of addressing them. In particular, making visible the issues raised regarding access and pathways to land will it is hoped begin to link civil society groups with the aspirations of the Cork City Development Plan, regarding space for food growing.

## 6. References

- COST Action Urban Agriculture Europe. <http://www.urbanagricultureeurope.la.rwth-aachen.de/>
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- Cork City Development Plan, 2015-21. Cork City Council, Ireland. <http://www.corkcitydevelopmentplan.ie/>
- Kelly, T and Hayes, P. (2014) Cork City Profile 2014. Cork Healthy Cities and Social Inclusion Unit, Cork City Council, Cork, Ireland
- Sandwell MBC/Sandwell PCT (2008) Growing Healthy Communities. A Community Agriculture Strategy for Sandwell 2008-12. Sandwell: Sandwell MBC/Sandwell PCT. (this report draws on the structure of this strategy, with which the author was involved)
- Schmutz, U., Lennartsson, M., Williams, S., Devereaux, M., Davies, G. (2014) *The Benefits of Gardening and Food Growing*. UK; Garden
- Organic and Sustain. [http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/the\\_benefits\\_of\\_gardening\\_and\\_food\\_growing/](http://www.sustainweb.org/publications/the_benefits_of_gardening_and_food_growing/)
- Viljoen, A. (ed) (2005) *Continuous productive Urban Landscapes: Designing Urban Agriculture for Sustainable Cities*. Burlington, MA: Architectural Press.

## 7. Appendix

### 7.1 Food growing in Cork: links to strategy and key documents

There is an opportunity to build on the work of community and productive gardening and social and therapeutic horticulture through linking and embedding the work within local and wider strategic objectives.

Although not exhaustive, some of the key national, Cork council and health based documents, where links could be made with urban agriculture, are listed below:

#### Health

- *Health Action Zones* with focus health promotion and public health in North Cork <http://www.healthactionzone.ie/site/>
- *Cork WHO Healthy Cities working to embed healthy city principles* <http://corkhealthycities.com/>
- *Cork City Profile 2014*: statistical and geographical profile of Cork City Authority Area focused on health and social inclusion, highlighting health inequalities across the city (Kelly and Hayes 2014) [http://corkhealthycities.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CORK-CITY-PROFILE-FINAL\\_COMPRESSED.pdf](http://corkhealthycities.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/CORK-CITY-PROFILE-FINAL_COMPRESSED.pdf)
- *Mental health division operational plan 2015*. Includes development of public mental health and recovery based services. HSE. <http://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/mhopplan15.pdf>
- Department of Health: *Forthcoming Obesity Policy and Action Plan* <http://health.gov.ie/healthy-ireland/obesity/> and *Physical Activity Action Plan* <http://health.gov.ie/>
- Department of Health. *Healthy Ireland – A Framework for Improved Health and Wellbeing 2013 – 2025* <http://health.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/HealthyIrelandBrochureWA2.pdf>

#### Cork City Council

- *Cork City Development Plan 2015-2021*, Objective 7.15 b within Neighbourhood Recreation & Amenity highlights an aim 'To encourage the development of food-growing spaces such as allotments and community gardens' outlining the <http://www.corkcitydevelopmentplan.ie/>
- *Cork City Local Area Plans* areas that require economic, physical and social renewal, and/or areas likely to be subject to large scale development within the lifetime of the development plan. This includes Cork's 'Major Development Areas' of Docklands, Blackpool and Mahon <http://www.corkcity.ie/services/strategicplanningeconomicdevelopment/localplanning/localareaplans/>
- *Forthcoming Cork Local Economic and Community Plan* due out in 2016 <http://www.corkcity.ie/localeconomicandcommunityplan/>
- *Cork City Climate Change Strategy 2010* and commitment to sustainable development principles <http://www.corkcity.ie/theenvironment/corkcitycouncilclimatechangestrategy/>
- *RAPID* (Revitalising areas by planning investment and development) <http://www.corkcity.ie/services/housingcommunity/rapid/> including enhancing opportunities for communities to participate in the strategic improvement of their area, including physical environment
- *City of Difference. Mapping Social Exclusion in Cork*. Highlighting geographical and economic nature of social exclusion across the city
- <http://www.corkcity.ie/services/corporateandexternalaffairs/>

[socialinclusionunit/filedownload.2739.en.pdf](#)

- *Cork City Community Development Strategy 2004* highlighting community needs and community development approach <http://www.corkcity.ie/services/corporateandexternalaffairs/communitydevelopment/>

#### **Local documents from NGOs and other bodies**

- *Cork Food Policy Council* works to a set of four common values, recognising the contribution that food consumption and production has to meeting these.
  - ⇒ Health and wellbeing for all
  - ⇒ A thriving local economy
  - ⇒ Resilient food friendly communities
  - ⇒ Lifelong learning and skills
- *Cork Environment Forum* building on the principles of LA21 and bringing local stakeholders to embed sustainability into the city <http://www.cef.ie/>
- *Cork City Partnership* <http://corkcitypartnership.ie/> supports communities, working collectively to meet local needs with focus on education, skills and engagement, in partnership with voluntary sector organisations
- *Cork Local Community Development Board* includes framework for building community development and focus on Cork as a city of learning in report '*Imagine our future. Integrated strategy for Economic, Cultural and Social Development* (2004). <http://www.corkcitydb.ie/imagineourfuture/>
- *Cork Volunteer Centre* supporting volunteering <http://www.volunteercork.ie/>
- *Cork Chamber (2014) Corks agri-food and drinks opportunities*. Highlights value of artisan and locally produced foods to tourism and local economy as Cork's unique 'food story'.  
[https://www.corkchamber.ie/UserFiles/file/Policy%20&%20Research/CorkChamber\\_Agri-Food&DrinksOpportunities.pdf](https://www.corkchamber.ie/UserFiles/file/Policy%20&%20Research/CorkChamber_Agri-Food&DrinksOpportunities.pdf)
- LA 21 Environmental Partnership Fund, Cork Council <http://www.corkcity.ie/services/environmentrecreation/localagenda21environmentalpartnershipfund/>

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| <b>Community gardens: health and social inclusion focus</b>  |
| Glen Community Garden, Blackpool, North Cork<br><a href="http://www.healthactionzone.ie/site/index.php/gallery-glen/169-the-glen-community-garden">http://www.healthactionzone.ie/site/index.php/gallery-glen/169-the-glen-community-garden</a>  |
| Cork Simon Community, Garden projects working with homeless people<br><a href="https://volunteeringincolombia.wordpress.com/2010/11/13/simon-community-gardens-cork-city/">https://volunteeringincolombia.wordpress.com/2010/11/13/simon-community-gardens-cork-city/</a><br><br><a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtDa460hr74">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XtDa460hr74</a> 'Green Friends' |
| Shine, Kyle Street<br><a href="http://www.shineonline.ie/index.php/latest-news/381-new-shine-garden-to-get-cork-talking-about-mental-health">http://www.shineonline.ie/index.php/latest-news/381-new-shine-garden-to-get-cork-talking-about-mental-health</a>  |
| Dunmanway Community Garden<br><a href="http://healthyfoodforall.com/community-news/2015/06/dunmanway-grow-it-cook-it-eat-it/">http://healthyfoodforall.com/community-news/2015/06/dunmanway-grow-it-cook-it-eat-it/</a>  |
| Lantern Project, 14 Georges Quay Cork<br><a href="mailto:norma@lanternproject.ie">norma@lanternproject.ie</a><br><br><a href="http://www.lanternproject.ie/">http://www.lanternproject.ie/</a>   |

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| <b>Community gardens: community focus/ volunteer led</b>  |
| Mayfield Community Garden<br><a href="http://www.mayfieldarts.org/toolbox/toolbox/home.html">http://www.mayfieldarts.org/toolbox/toolbox/home.html</a>  |
| GIY Ladysbridge<br><a href="https://www.facebook.com/ladysbridgegiy/posts_to_page/">https://www.facebook.com/ladysbridgegiy/posts_to_page/</a><br><br><a href="https://www.facebook.com/thecottagemarketladysbridge/">https://www.facebook.com/thecottagemarketladysbridge/</a> |
| GIY Cork City<br><a href="mailto:giycork@gmail.com">giycork@gmail.com</a>   |
| Shandon Community Green Garden<br><a href="https://www.facebook.com/shandonarea/">https://www.facebook.com/shandonarea/</a>   |
| Midleton Community Garden<br><a href="https://www.facebook.com/midletoncommunitygarden/">https://www.facebook.com/midletoncommunitygarden/</a>  |
| Cork Environmental Forum; Community Gardens Awards<br><a href="http://www.cef.ie/">http://www.cef.ie/</a>   |

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| <b>Education and training focus</b>  |
| Downs Syndrome Cork 'Field of Dreams'<br><a href="http://downsyndromecork.ie/fieldofdreams.aspx">http://downsyndromecork.ie/fieldofdreams.aspx</a>     |
| Churchfield Community Trust Garden, Assumption Road, Cork<br><a href="http://churchfieldcommunitytrust.com/">http://churchfieldcommunitytrust.com/</a> |
| Cope Foundation<br><a href="http://www.cope-foundation.ie/">http://www.cope-foundation.ie/</a>   |
| UCC Polytunnels project, College Road  |

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| <b>Market gardening and commercial food focus</b>  |
| Lettuce Inn, Barrack Street<br><a href="https://www.facebook.com/The-Lettuce-Inn-414546255398184/">https://www.facebook.com/The-Lettuce-Inn-414546255398184/</a> |
| Mealagulla Orchard, Knockane, Ovens, Co.Cork<br><a href="https://www.facebook.com/mealagulla.orchard">https://www.facebook.com/mealagulla.orchard</a>            |
| Real Meat Cooperative. niall@realmeat.ie<br><a href="http://www.realmeat.ie/">http://www.realmeat.ie/</a>  |
| <a href="http://www.tastecork.com/cork_producers.php?t=19">http://www.tastecork.com/cork_producers.php?t=19</a>  |

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| <b>Social and therapeutic horticulture focus</b>  |
| Cork Autism Association, Carrigtowhill<br><a href="http://corkautism.ie/contact/">http://corkautism.ie/contact/</a>   |
| Shine Centre for Autism, Carrigaline  |
| Cork University Hospital  |
| Cork Headway, Ballincollig<br><a href="mailto:ocallaghanp@headway.ie">ocallaghanp@headway.ie</a><br><br><a href="http://www.headway.ie/services/servicesbyregion/cork.html">http://www.headway.ie/services/servicesbyregion/cork.html</a> |

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| <b>Sustainability and food focus</b>   |
| Kinsale Transitions group<br><a href="http://www.transitiontownkinsale.org/">http://www.transitiontownkinsale.org/</a>   |
| St Mary's Health Campus, Gurrabraher<br>Potential land on HSE site (80 acres approx.)<br><a href="http://eccowellcork.com/">http://eccowellcork.com/</a>   |
| East Cork Slow Food Educational Project<br><a href="http://slowfoodireland.com/campaigns/east-cork-slow-food-educational-project/">http://slowfoodireland.com/campaigns/east-cork-slow-food-educational-project/</a> |

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| <b>Allotments: council and private sites</b>   |
| Churchfield Allotments. <b>Cork City Council</b><br>(Potential site at Blackrock, Mahon)                             |
| Ballincollig Park Allotments. <b>Cork County Council</b>   |
| Douglas Allotments, Douglas Brian Walsh <a href="mailto:douglasallotments@gmail.com">douglasallotments@gmail.com</a> |
| Mealagulla Allotments, Knockane, Ovens   |
| Amberley Allotments, Amberley, Rochestown, Co.Cork   |
| Myrtleville House Allotments, Myrtleville, Co.Cork   |
| <a href="http://www.allotments.ie/">http://www.allotments.ie/</a> list of Cork city and county allotments and links  |
| Hydro Farm Allotments, Blarney <a href="http://hydrofarmallotments.com/">http://hydrofarmallotments.com/</a>         |

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13 th November 2015.

Dear Frank

Re: Short-Term Scientific Mission – Veronica Barry

I am extremely happy to write this letter to confirm that Veronica Barry has successfully completed her STSM with the theme, "Developing a joined up approach to food growing: the case of Cork". Veronica has been resident here from 1<sup>st</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> November and during that time has undertaken numerous interviews. Indeed, over the past two weeks she has created the conditions for us to develop an active network of food growing groups from across the city and beyond. We are very much looking forward to reading her final report and we are sure that there will be significant opportunities for further collaboration

I am really very grateful to the COST Action Urban Agriculture Europe that provided the opportunity for us to host Veronica on this STSM.

With best regards

Dr Colin Sage

COST- the acronym for European Co-operation in the field of Scientific and Technical Research- is the oldest and widest European intergovernmental network for cooperation in research. Established by the Ministerial Conference in November 1971, COST is presently used by the scientific communities of 35 European countries to cooperate in common research projects supported by national funds.

The funds provided by COST - less than 1% of the total value of the projects - support the COST cooperation networks (COST Actions) through which, with EUR 30 million per year, more than 30.000 European scientists are involved in research having a total value which exceeds EUR 2 billion per year. This is the financial worth of the European added value which COST achieves.

A bottom up approach the initiative of launching a COST Action comes from the European scientists themselves), a la carte participation (only countries interested in the Action participate) equality of access (participation is open also to the scientific communities of countries not belonging to the European Union) and "flexible structure" (easy implementation and light management of the research initiatives) are the main characteristics of COST.

As precursor of advanced multidisciplinary research COST has a very important role for the realisation of the European Research Area (ERA) anticipating and complementing the activities of the Framework Programmes, constituting a "bridge towards the scientific communities of emerging countries, increasing the mobility of researchers across Europe and fostering the establishment of "Networks of Excellence "in many key scientific domains such as: Biomedicine and Molecular Biosciences; Food and Agriculture; Forests, their Products and Services; Materials, Physical and Nanosciences; Chemistry and Molecular Sciences and Technologies; Earth System Science and Environmental Management; Information and Communication Technologies; Transport and Urban Development; Individuals, Societies, Cultures and Health. It covers basic and more applied research and also addresses issues of pre-normative nature or of societal importance.