



Seeding Our Future and Transition Town Bridport

DIGGING INTO LOCAL FOOD



Tuesday 12 January 2021, Event report

1. INTRODUCTION

UK's Food supply is more fragile than it appears. Some 40% of our food comes from abroad and depends on good harvests, stable climate and frictionless borders. COVID-19, Climate Change and Brexit are making feeding Britain even more precarious.

This event looked at the national picture and also some solutions to the problems as they relate to Bridport.

For further information and reports of previous events visit <https://www.seedingourfuture.org.uk/local-communities>

2. PRESENTATIONS

2.1. Overview of Britain's fragile food security - Caroline Walker

Caroline took inspiration from several sources including Feeding Britain (Tim Lang), 'Growing through Climate Change (Seeding Our Future), Can Britain Feed Itself (Simon Fairlie), and Small Farm Future (Chris Smaje).

For a summary of main points in Caroline's presentation see [Appendix 1](#), and to access her Powerpoint slides click [here](#).

Caroline's summary of what needs to be done is to:

- Have more people from UK committed to working in the food sector
- Set goals to increase production sustainably, not intensively
- Grow more food for home consumption. Aim for 80% self-sufficiency (now 61%)
- Increase the diversity of crops grown
- Increase grain for humans than for intensive livestock production
- Increase horticulture, and local production of vegetables and fruit
- Reskill farmers
- Release land for young growers

[Landworkers Alliance](#) are helping to address these issues, as is the [Land Magazine](#). (Both of these have a strong base locally.)

2.2. Robert Golden – This Good Earth film.

This Good Earth has been over two years in the making and will be released for streaming from **7pm on 21 January** via <https://this-good-earth.com/> and a direct [link](#) to the trailer.

The film features several farmers and others local to West Dorset who are practicing an agroecological approach. It provides a beautiful, emotional and unifying view into the relationship between political failure and the long corporate food chain of power; the rise of obesity, non-communicative diseases and early deaths; the denial of basic human rights, species extinction, soil and landscape destruction and global warming.

Drawing on the national picture, Robert added that politicians are compromised between the electorate and those corporations which fund them. Post COVID-19 will be the time for people involved in social action to ask for the economy to serve the people, rather than the other way around. This is when we recognise the local power we have for action.

2.3. Bridport Local Food Group (BLFG) – Kathy Dare and Ines Cavill

The aim of the BLFG is to promote and support the local food and drink industry and inspire everyone to eat locally and healthily. The showcase is the annual Bridport Food Festival. In 2020 this was a virtual event, and is the expected date for 2021 is 13 – 19 June.

BLFG supported local businesses by publishing a directory of those who offer deliveries and takeaways. BLFG is planning a new Award, voted by community, to recognise those businesses which have gone the extra mile during COVID.

Next Committee meeting is **Tuesday 19th January at 2pm**. They particularly welcome ideas and suggestions on ways to move the Food Festival forward this year. Contact admin@bridportfoodfestival.co.uk.

BLFG is now working as a group with and alongside other groups with similar aims and ambitions, and all recognise the fragility of food chain.

The **Community Cooking Kit** is a resource which can be used by community groups large or small, and will hopefully will be widely used this year. You can cook with up to 30 people. It is housed by Discover Farming at Washingpool, but is available to be used at no cost by any group, large or small, for projects or events of any size, and can be delivered. Contact Ines by text 07967106047 or inescavill@gmail.com.

2.4. Edible Garden, St. Mary's Primary School - Sarah Wilberforce

Edible Garden was created by Robert Golden and Sarah 8 years ago. Two part-time gardeners Tia and Mitch. Kitchen make meals from scratch and fresh meals and supply fruit and veg when can. The aim is educational and it is integrated into the school - growing, cooking, healthy eating, as well as biodiversity and climate change. In 2020 they sponsored trees to plant an orchard. Recent activities have included Yr. 3 garden veg stew and flat breads in the pizza oven. They also now offer activities for children to do at home.

They have begun discussions with Bridport Primary school about helping them set up an edible garden and are looking for sponsorship and others who might help set it up.

Last summer, the garden continued in parallel to the school, and in the holidays set up a 'glut stall' outside the school gate. This represented Self-sufficiency of food, using locally grown organic produce, reducing waste.

2.5. St Swithun's glut and surplus produce stall – Peter Wilson

The summer glut stall moved to St. Swithuns church carpark in North Allington in September and has been running every Thursday morning (10 – 12.30) since. It has been developed by Peter Wilson with Sarah Jones of Community Fridge, and counts on many loyal volunteers.

It includes not only garden gluts but also other produce, including surplus meals from cafés and supermarkets. The current situation of crisis management means any food is accepted, including processed food. Anyone can bring produce or contact Peter Wilson (07778 159826) or Sally Collings if it needs picking up.

Everyone can use it, not just people who consider themselves 'in need'. The food is free or for donations. Over 500 people have used it so far. People feel safe because it is outdoors, and it creates opportunities for people to talk, heart-wrenching stories have been shared.

They received a Grant for equipment to improve access for free food, and plans are underway for workshops with schools, and they may use the Community Cooking Kit there to show how to use the ingredients. They are working closely with others in the field, and have produced a list of other food poverty initiatives in the town, which can be found [here](#). They ask that people spread the word and check on how their neighbours are.

The Stall has provided a much-needed resource and will continue while the situation remains critical. Part of the work going forward must be to work with local politicians/councillors and others to improve provision of money/vouchers so people can get enough food, and do not need food banks. The other aspect is how to reduce food waste, especially by Supermarkets who seem to over order. It is time to get "political" as well as to educate and encourage use of seasonal and local produce and reduce waste.

2.6. Seeding Our Future (SoF) initiatives – Alan Heeks

[Seeding Our Future](#) is a project which aims to act as a catalyst and support, working with Bridport Local Food Group and Transition Town Bridport and others, to move forward on Food Security.

The situation is urgent and likely to get worse in terms of interruptions to food supply especially climate change and crop failures, and Brexit on top. We are keen to link the national picture to what we can do locally. Most vulnerability is in horticulture, with highest dependency on imports. See [Growing Through Climate Change](#) research which looks at how Dorset and SW England can successfully meet a lot more of its food needs. Our Climate Change outlook is relatively good – i.e. we will still have plenty of rain and sun compared to other regions, so there is opportunity to grow more food locally. This requires different cultivation methods and in some cases changes in crops. So, we need to consider what are

the easy and obvious things which we as consumers need to do to help producers get out of the box they've been cornered into.

What we can all do this year: contribute to increases in local production, especially of fruit and vegetables. This requires:

1. Land acquisition – some initiatives looking for land. Please help if you can.
2. Growers with experience to use that land.
3. Start-up capital.
4. Increase demand – producers said we need to increase supply before demand, but they are both crucial.

The long-term obsession with cheap food has led to problems. Food is going to get more expensive for all of us, and we have to pay premium prices for quality, nutritious, local food. There are some ways we can mitigate that within this community, such as Community Supported Agriculture whereby the community commits to buy from local producers, helps its own food be affordable to those who otherwise can't afford it.

SoF has also been encouraging home and allotment growing. We will arrange an Open Veg Gardens event to share skills and knowledge about climate-adaptive growing.

SoF is keen to help 'join up the dots' providing more information for all of us about what initiatives are going on. This could include online information and more pop-up events.

Suggested Action: [Subscribe](#) to SoF occasional e-newsletter to keep informed.

To get involved or help Seeding Our Future in any way, or if you have a relevant project or resources that we can inform people about, contact us via bridportfoodclimate@gmail.com.

3. DISCUSSION - MAIN POINTS ARISING

At what level should we focus in order to act effectively?

There was a discussion about *what can we do about the Government's mismatch between policies and actions and the problems identified to us by Caroline?* (Michael Dower) Although necessary and laudable, many local small-scale initiatives will not make a difference to the land situation: the Government has started implementing an agricultural policy which is not focussed on food security, or on changes we propose re crops for climate change, but instead on taking money away from direct payments to farmers and putting that money towards public payments for Public Goods (which are to do with nature but not food security). While attention to landscape and the natural environment are necessary, they are not related to changes we are recommending in crops, grains and animal feed. So, there is a need to press Government to bring those issues into mainstream farming.

Several people felt that we should focus on the local and what can be done, in view of the disarray and bleak outlook at national policy level, and the fact that others, such as the Landworkers Alliance, are working hard on national and international policy. Locally, many farmers are already producing in an agroecological way and there a high degree of community support. There is potential to do more.

According to Climate Outreach Information Network, the preoccupation about local food is the single area that all seven categories of the population are concerned about (ranging from radical progressives to ultra conservatives). (Raja)

It was felt that positive progressive local work on the ground can be combined with local political engagement.

Suggested actions:

- Lobby our local MP Chris Loder - group together to sign letters and lobby. Ideally this should involve a wide selection of people from across the community. (Robert Golden, Rachel Millson)
- Citizens Assembly meetings to draw in a wide range of people, and be educational. (Rachel)
- Include Universal Basic Income or Job guarantee scheme as a lobbying point. Enable small businesses not to be dependent on loan schemes. It is overdue for that to come into being. (Nic Jeune, and many others)
- Respond to Dorset Council's Climate Emergency plan before 20th January (links below).
- Talk to Parish Councils about food and climate emergency. Food might be the place to start. (Rose Allwork). Bridport Town Council is keen to build a strong network of local parishes in relation to these issues.

Kitty Ford is helping establish a [youth wing of the Landworkers Alliance](#) (LWA) for up to 25-year olds, to be launched on Thursday 14 January and welcome support and involvement. Contact youth.flame@landworkersalliance.org.uk @youthflamelwa on Facebook.

Bridport COVID group Social Prescribing Unit has taken plot 17 allotment, hoping for it to be for people attending the Medical centre. Suggested Action: suggestions on how to introduce people to gardens and growing. (Nic Jeune)

Low-income families and Cooking skills:

Pop-up cooking sessions, showing cooking from scratch, using basic ingredients: these could be next to the food stall at St. Swithuns, and the new kitchen at the Chapel in the Garden might be able to host pop up lessons there (Lizzie Harley). Beaminster is considering how to help people to cook, and connecting this to retrofitting low income houses (better cooking equipment); then offering advice on how to cook with fresh food. (Michael Dower)

Can vacant school kitchens be used for learning to cook in the holidays? (Michael Dower)
Colfox School not only used to teach cooking but had an allotment as well as a couple of pigs. All very useful at teaching life skills and learning about life. (Cervantes Lee)

A number of points were made about **poverty** including:

- Food diet and poverty needs a multi-disciplined approach (Lesley). Poverty and its complexities in relation to food need to be understood. For example - cooking a potato may cost more than buying one; spending precious time cooking may be wasted if the fresh food is not eaten if people are more used to processed foods high in sugar and salt. (Robert)

- People need to be willing to find those they can make contact with in the communities, to be the link and develop relationships.
- Crisis points are being reached because of current situation. At the Glut stall they are witnessing an extreme situation in Bridport. Many young people find themselves out of work, with their utilities disconnected; a Morrisons employee couldn't put food on his table (although the supermarket has surplus food). (Peter)
- Many are reticent about taking too much free food from the stall – they don't want to be seen to 'scrounge'. The glut stall and the community fridge are hopefully gradually removing stigma around taking food by making them open to all. It needs to be clear that we're trying to reduce food waste – it doesn't matter who takes it. (Sally Meadows and Sally Collins). It was suggested it could be branded as 'Taste Not Waste'.

Do current food poverty initiatives keep up with need?

The food bank and glut stalls in Bridport are not short of food at the moment, but may not be getting to everyone in need. The challenge is to get the word out further and include more people. Could Citizens Advice Bureau advise of families in need? Schools are so overwhelmed in dealing with COVID etc. but may include information in their newsletters. Suggested action: check on people who seemingly are ok but may not be. Suggest how else to access more people in need.

4. UPCOMING EVENTS

Town Council Forum on local food. Tues 19th January 7pm, up to 45 minutes.

Anyone is welcome to air views and ideas. You can join the meeting from your computer, tablet or smartphone at <https://global.gotomeeting.com/join/682976613>. You can also dial in using your phone, tel. 020 3713 5011 (one-touch phones: <tel:+442037135011,,682976613#>), access code: 682-976-613. New to GoToMeeting? Get the app now: <https://global.gotomeeting.com/install/682976613>.

Dorset Council Climate and Ecological Emergency Strategy is [open for comments](#), until **20 January**. If you wish to comment on, say, just the food section that would be really useful. If enough people don't respond to this survey, the council will put it on the back burner. Anyone over 14 can also fill in a much [shorter questionnaire](#) which takes 2 minutes. Contact James Potten for queries about the Strategy j.potten@dorsetwastepartnership.gov.uk.

Dorset Council has set 2040 and 2050 for target dates for Zero Carbon for the council and Dorset as a whole. If you feel this is too far off, please [sign this petition](#) which was started by the Dorset Climate Action Network (dorsetcan@gmail.com) and Planet Purbeck.

Open Gardens event 17 March to help allotment holders and home growers to learn about crops and cultivation methods which can help them adapt to climate change. SoF hopes to include at least three locations, including the Edible Garden at St Mary's School. Full details in the next newsletter. [Subscribe](#) to SoF occasional e-newsletter to keep informed.

OTHER LINKS

- Tim Lang's Feeding Britain book <https://b-ok.cc/book/5589787/972533>

- UK in 100 seconds <https://ud.coop/uk100sec> a great video of UK land use.
- The Land Magazine <https://www.thelandmagazine.org.uk/> advocates for young growers.
- Landworkers Alliance <https://landworkersalliance.org.uk/publications/>
- The Ecological Land Co-op <https://ecologicaland.coop/> is doing great work on acquiring land for agro-ecological smallholdings
- [Terre de Liens](#) is focussed on helping young people get access to land.
- Devon Climate Emergency <https://www.devonclimateemergency.org.uk/> have just added some adjoining squares for the Devon mosaic.
- Baroness Natalie Bennett has introduced a Green New Trade Deal in the House of Lords <https://greenworld.org.uk/article/green-peers-demand-increased-scrutiny-trade-bill>
- Petition about children's food vouchers <http://chng.it/XLmBwwWFW9>

APPENDICES:

- 5.1. Overview of Britain's fragile food security – main points**
- 5.2. List of participants** registered for the event

5.1. APPENDIX 1 – Overview of Britain’s fragile food security - Caroline Walker

Main points included:

- Food security is complex, embracing questions of availability, access, knowledge, personal choices and family practices, needs and tastes. It is affected by a range of government policies. The plans for a UK Food Policy have stalled and the Agricultural Bill does not contain progressive thinking.
- UK is not self-sufficient in food and is vulnerable not least because we import more than we export, with a trade gap of £24.3 bn. We have an over-reliance on a few crops, mainly cereals, particularly wheat. We produce only 23% of fruit and veg we consume.
- Brexit is likely to increase food insecurity and prices are increasing. If people are not able to spend much on food, they are likely to buy poor quality food which impacts on health.
- Very little land is used for fruit and vegetable production. Horticulture accounts for only 3% of English farm land use.
- The prevailing system is over reliant on commodity crops, mostly grown for livestock. “We are a species that has outgrown its niche and cattle are our greatest competitors” (Tim Lang).
- The UK’s many threats include few stocks, enormous trade gaps, Eco systems pressure.
- Current diets make us ill, and the cost of food is major driver of inequality. UK has 3rd highest volume sales of ultra-processed food in Europe, which correlates with high levels of obesity. Fewer than 1 in 10 children get 5 a day.
- Other problems include: food prices don’t tell the truth; intensive food production damages the environment; agricultural workforce receive poor pay and conditions; there is a production/ consumption mismatch; the manipulation of food culture and choice; systemic food waste; social inequalities which keep food poverty going, etc. 10% UK households are severely food-insecure.
- Power of control over land is in too few hands.
- Little skills training for horticulture.
- Migrant workers, mainstay of agricultural labour, are shunning UK since Brexit.
- There is much pressure on farmers towards large-scale, labour light, ecologically quite uniform petrochemical solutions to land use questions.
- The safest food supply lines are proximal not distant. The longer the supply chain the bigger the risk of disruption and vulnerability. Local growing means local accountability and traceability.

5.2. List of Participants registered for the event

Rose	Allwork	Rachel	Millson
Laura	Anderton	Emily	Nicholson
Ian	Bark	Aoife	O Sullivan
Belinda	Bawden	Shakiba	Parhoon
Polly	Benfield	David	Pencheon
Emma	Blades	Christopher	Pike
Candida	Blaker	Christine	Preston
Bridget	Bolwell	Janie	Prince
Isabel	Bourne	Claire	Pritchard
Andrew	Carey	Barbara	Pugh
Robin	Carter	Rhiannon-Jane	Raftery
Ines	Cavill	Mandy	Rathbone
Alan	Charlton	Sandra	Reeve
Annie	Cole	Helen	Ross
Sophie	Colley	Hester	Schofield
Sally	Collings	Lin	Scrannage
Fiona	Dare	Helen	Simpson
Kathryn	Dare	Karen	Smith
Imane	Darkaoui	Lisa	Stamper
Josef	Davies-Coates	Sean	Storey
Kian	de la Cour	Ciara	Travers
Michael	Dower	Jill	Turner
Kate	Drew	Joel	Vincent-Janes
Megan	Edwards	Caroline	Walker
Vicki	Elcoate	Mary	Watkins
Kitty	Ford	Annie	Webster
Timothy	Graham	Janet	Webster
Rose	Harris	Sarah	West
Louise	Heatley	Vicky	Whitworth
Linda	Heeks	Samuel	Wilberforce
Sarah	Herring	Sarah	Wilberforce
Karen	Hunt	Peter	Wilson
Raja	Jarrah	Lesley	Windsor
Amanda	Jesenska		
Nic	Jeune		
Chrisb	K		
Niki	Karatza		
Trevor	Larkum		
Cervantes	Lee		
Sally	Lloyd		
Philip	May		
Sally	Meadows		
Wendy	Millar		

