

About Harvest

In 2009, the Brighton & Hove Food Partnership, Food Matters and other community food groups in the city were awarded funding of almost £500,000 over four years from the Big Lottery Local Food Fund to run an urban growing project. Harvest Brighton & Hove has now come to the end of this initial funding. The project is driven by the vision of a sustainable food system where more food is provided from within the city, and accessible to all residents. The primary aim is to get people growing their own food – whether in their own back gardens and balconies, on allotments, or in unusual spaces such as public parks or empty land around housing estates. The project offers training to individuals and community groups and supports the development of new community gardens.

Awareness raising

Interviewees felt Harvest had been successful in providing a central point of contact for individuals and organisations interested in local food issues across Brighton & Hove. Communications work was a priority for Harvest and the project's strategy was to focus initially on those who were already keen to grow their own and then build a momentum which could engage other people. Online communications were particularly successful, with over 70,000 unique visitors to the Harvest website, more than 3,000 followers on Twitter and 2,500 email newsletter subscribers. Harvest featured in 15-20 articles per year in the local newspaper, as well as receiving 14 pieces of national media coverage, including tv appearances and reaching the finals of the National Lottery Awards.

One of the rationales behind Harvest was that promoting food growing could encourage other sustainable food behaviours. Many evaluation survey respondents reported behaviour changes as a result of engagement with Harvest, such as wasting less food (44%), composting (41%), and buying more local food (36%).



2009-13 in numbers

51 new community gardens (increased from 25 to 76)

7,102 m² of new growing space

4,000 volunteers per year involved in community gardening (15,000 hours per year)

£45,000 given out in **70** small grants to community growing projects

24 community composting sites setup, involving over **500** households

10 tonnes of unused fruit processed by the Scrumping project, generating over **£12,000** in sales

700 people attended **70** training courses and talks on growing and cooking

70,000 unique visitors to the Harvest website

3,000 followers on Twitter and **2,500** email newsletter subscribers

Harvest staff attended **180** community events and spoke to more than **10,000** people

“The information and inspiration from Harvest has been life changing. I’ve gone from not knowing anything about growing to producing much of my own food on my local balcony and composting. Growing my own food and looking after plants has had such a beneficial effect on my stress and mental health. And there’s so much more I want to learn.”

Online survey response

*The Harvest evaluation covers July 2009 to March 2013. The evaluation report was based on 350 online survey responses, 36 semi-structured interviews with partners and stakeholders, 50 structured interviews with the public in Preston Park, and data and feedback from staff.

Land for growing

In total 51 new growing projects were started during Harvest, including 7,102 m² (1.75 acres) of new growing space. These projects are spread across the city and involve many different types of people, from local neighbours to charities working with vulnerable people (eg victims of domestic abuse or homeless people).

A small number of these were exemplar projects aimed at developing example leases or pioneering growing on new types of land or unconventional plots. In helping to establish these projects, Harvest ensured that template leases, processes and protocols were developed for use by Council staff in Housing, Parks and Allotments.

Harvest's role in the establishment of new projects varied. Some projects involved extensive support and lobbying by Harvest (for example, where there were issues around land

access or permissions), while other initiatives required a relatively small amount of support and advice. Many evaluation interviews suggested that Harvest's ability to bring key decision-makers and stakeholders together was a major factor in developing the trickier exemplar projects, and that it is unlikely that such projects could have been developed as quickly (if at all) without that contribution.

Overall, the increase in food growing during Harvest was largely based on more, smaller projects, rather than a few large-scale initiatives. By supporting a wide-range of projects, including small spaces set up more for social benefit than food production, it seems that Harvest has

helped to create a sense of a community food growing movement in the city and engaged a broader range of people in this.

Potential larger projects have only just started to come forward, and Harvest staff feel better able to support them with the existing momentum, awareness and key strategic relationships in place.



Skills and confidence

Harvest's training programme for individuals covered a range of topics, from vegetable and fruit growing to composting and preserving. Because there were already providers of more specialist training (eg permaculture or accredited horticulture), Harvest courses aimed to reach out to people who were interested in learning about growing for the first time or for whom the more detailed or formal adult learning wasn't appropriate. To support access a subsidised rate was offered – 33% of participants on training courses were on the low wage / benefits rate. 97% of training attendees felt confident in what they had been trained in and 92% said they planned to share their learning with someone else. People answering the evaluation survey felt engagement with Harvest resulted in improved skills and confidence in: food growing (61%) and environmentally friendly growing techniques (43%). The survey also found that 45% of respondents were

growing more food as a result of their involvement with Harvest.

Harvest's support for groups was mainly targeted at community and school gardens. It included advice on growing as well as issues such as funding and access to land, networking and training events and a 'mentoring' programme which provided over 100 hours of time from experienced gardeners to help projects get started

or make their plot more productive. Small grants of up to £1,000 were offered each year and enabled many projects to secure funding for the first time, pilot a new idea or move on to other funders in future.

Harvest was also a founding partner of the national 'Big Dig' project which encourages volunteering in community growing projects. As of 2013 it ran in 27 towns and cities across the country and included two major events each year to promote community gardening. 25 gardens in Brighton & Hove took part in the events, and received support to improve how they recruit and retain volunteers.

Projects reported that Harvest made them feel part of a larger food-growing community in Brighton & Hove and that this increased their confidence, developed their common identity, provided inspiration and helped new people access their projects.



Case study: Harvest demonstration garden

The demonstration garden in Preston Park was established in the first year of Harvest to show what could be grown in a small space, inspire people to grow at home and to be a focal point for Harvest's work. The garden is led by a staff member but maintained by volunteers on regular work days, who receive produce from the garden. Members of the public often approach volunteers for advice about gardening or to simply have a chat or show their children around the garden. The project has acted as a showcase for community gardening, inspiring other gardens in public spaces and provoking volunteer enquiries which are referred to other gardens when Preston Park is at full capacity. It has also changed attitudes to food growing in public spaces, from fears about vandalism to questions about the aesthetics of vegetable growing. This has led to Harvest being trusted by organisations like the local council to develop and support other types of food projects in public spaces.



"The enthusiasm and support of Harvest people. The motivating sense of being part of a wider network – very important as we are a small group. I think my confidence that you CAN start gardens on bits of urban waste land might have fizzled out had it not been for Harvest."
Online survey response

"The awareness across the Council amongst senior officers, officers generally, and councillors, is significantly increased, and their support for this whole agenda has increased exponentially since Harvest."
Council officer interview

"Volunteering with Harvest not only gave me the chance to indulge my passion for growing food but also gave me something to focus on while being unemployed. Also, being around other volunteers and by talking to many of the public gave me back a lot of my self-confidence and self-esteem."
Gary Johnson, volunteer at the Harvest demo garden

Strategies and guidance

Harvest's lobbying activities led to some notable successes in influencing the City Council and long-term policy, creating lasting change. This work has resulted in various mentions of space for food growing in the new City Plan for 2013–2020 and in the One Planet Sustainability Action Plan as well as influencing the city's Communities Strategy, Joint

Strategic Needs Assessment and Health & Wellbeing Strategy.

Food Matters drafted a Planning Advisory Note (PAN) with the Council as part of Harvest, encouraging developers to incorporate food growing into new housing developments in the city. Brighton & Hove became the first local authority in the UK to adopt such planning advice. In the 12 months following the Council's endorsement of PAN, 44 out of 98 planning applications (45%) had proposed food growing as part of development – amounting to 186 m² including 12 fruit and nut trees. The PAN was a finalist in the 2013 Royal Institute of Town Planners Awards and was highly commended in the South East Constructing Excellence Awards 2013.

Harvest representatives were invited to give oral evidence to the House of Commons Select Committee on Sustainable Food and shared learning in places including Swansea, Middlesbrough, Berlin, Paris, London and Manchester.



Scrumping project

Harvest's Scrumping project collects unwanted fruit from private gardens and public spaces around the city to prevent it going to waste. It processes it into juices, preserves and chutneys, which it sells. The project processed 10 tonnes of fruit generating £12,000 in sales and is on track to become a self-sustaining social enterprise.

"Harvest have really helped us cement our work in Moulsecoomb not just at our allotments but at the local schools and other community areas increasing fruit and food production and giving lots more people the opportunity to get involved in growing."

Warren Carter,
Moulsecoomb
Forest Garden

What next

- **Increase access to the benefits of food growing.** By helping new growing projects to start and involving new people in growing, Harvest has helped bring the benefits of growing to a wider audience. The evaluation showed benefits include improved mental wellbeing, physical health, community cohesion, skills and confidence and changes in other food behaviours (eg waste). But interviewees were keen to see even more in-depth work in future with deprived communities and vulnerable people to enable more people to take part.
- **Continue support for food growing projects, particularly those with greater need.** Interviewees felt that no other organisation could provide the range of support Harvest offered to food projects, or had the local knowledge to effectively target that support. This was seen as particularly important in supporting new projects, supporting projects that support people with high needs themselves, and projects that are less well resourced or have less voice.
- **Continue a citywide, partnership approach** which influences strategy and policy as well as delivering projects at a community level. This approach was highly valued by interviewees, and is essential for delivering major changes to the city's local food system, such as supporting larger-scale growing projects to start and succeed.



Thank you...

This summary is based on the full evaluation report which was researched by Rebecca White (Research Fellow, University of Sussex) and James Thomas (independent researcher). The University of Brighton was Harvest's overall evaluation partner. Clare Devereaux at Food Matters coordinated the evaluation process. Many partners, volunteers, staff and local residents provided information for the evaluation. Many of these people not only contributed to the evaluation, but also to the success of the Harvest project and the growth of the food growing community in the city. All of the work would not have been possible without the funding provided by the Big Lottery's Local Food Fund, other organisations that provided match funding and the in-kind support offered to the project.

"It was really useful to me in starting out growing produce on my allotment. I do keep going back to the things I learnt in the Harvest workshop"
Online survey response

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Harvest's range of projects are delivered by partners across the city, including Brighton & Hove Allotment Federation, Brighton & Hove FareShare, Brighton Permaculture Trust, Fork and Dig It, Moulsecoomb Forest Garden, Whitehawk Community Food Project and supported by Brighton & Hove City Council and NHS Brighton & Hove.

