



Food

Supporting and campaigning
for **sustainable local food**.



**A guide for community and
campaign groups**



Scotland's champion
for our environment.

This guide is designed to help you and your friends or community group work towards a healthier way of eating that works well for all of us, and that is kind to the planet.

There's nothing like a good meal around a table with the ones we love, but many of us struggle to find the time to do it. Big companies dominate more and more of the food market, meaning that there's less security, less variety and more ecological damage in the food chain. Worst of all, 925 million people in the world are undernourished¹ while, in Scotland, a third of all the food we buy ends up in the bin.

This guide from Friends of the Earth Scotland will explain how you and your community group can change the way you eat, and also challenge the big picture injustices that are causing hunger and ecological damage, through campaigning.

Why is there a problem?

Supermarkets are popular in the UK – they control 80 per cent of the food market. This means it can be cheaper and easier for us to buy food from thousands of miles away, often imported by air, than to buy food that's grown around the corner. This situation is only possible because oil is relatively – and unsustainably – cheap.

It can be hard for farmers in the UK to reach customers, apart from through a supermarket. This is a problem because it means supermarkets can drive down prices to an artificially low level, and farmers struggle to make a living from growing food.



'In the UK, around 30 per cent of our carbon emissions comes from growing, producing and importing the food we eat.'

Source - WWF.

¹ World Food Programme website



What does it mean for the environment?

Large areas of forest and wildlife habitat across the world are being destroyed to make way for factory farms and plantations. If current trends continue, cattle ranchers and soy farmers alone will destroy 40 per cent of the Amazon rainforest by 2050 (Source - 'What's feeding our food?' report, FoE, 2008). Soy grown in the Amazon often ends up being animal feed in factory farms in Europe. (See 'Fix the food chain' link at the end of this guide).

What does it mean for people?

Across the world there are examples of people being forced off the land they were living on to make way for industrial agriculture. This threatens their livelihood, leaves them without land to produce their own food on, and little control over their own diet.



'Friends of the Earth International allies, La Via Campesina, demonstrate at the Durban climate talks, December 2011. Credit: FoEI

In the UK, people living in poorer areas can suffer from food poverty. The rise of the supermarkets has meant that many independent shops have shut down, leaving out-of-town stores the only option for getting food. People on low incomes often do not have a car, making it hard to access fresh food. These people have the lowest intakes of fruit and vegetables and are far more likely to suffer from diet-related diseases such as cancer, diabetes, obesity and coronary heart disease.

Local food - re-localising the food system

There is an alternative. We can get more of our food from closer to home, reconnecting ourselves to farming and the land. To make this happen, we can set up initiatives and buy local, but it's also necessary to campaign for changes that make it easier for local farmers and initiatives to succeed.

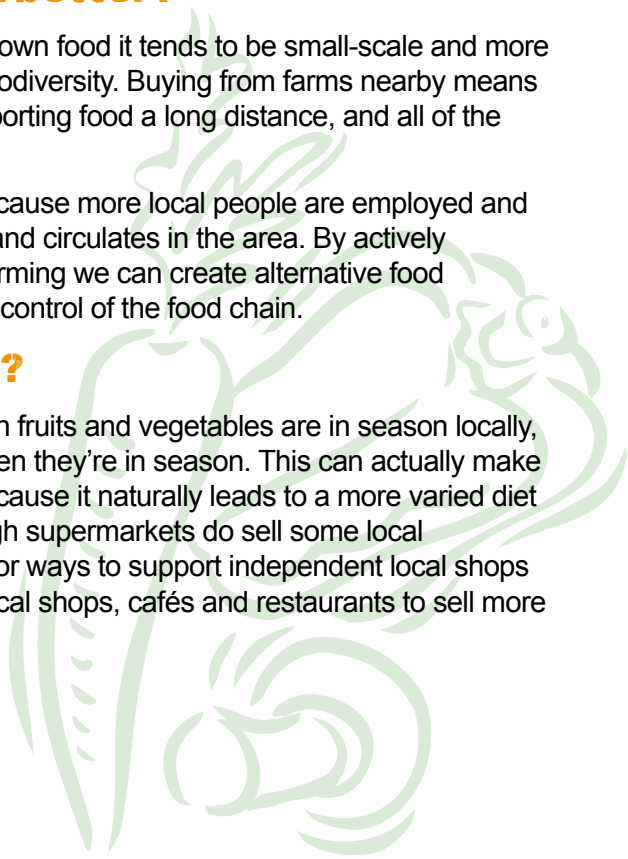
Why is local food better?

When people produce their own food it tends to be small-scale and more diverse, which is good for biodiversity. Buying from farms nearby means reducing the need for transporting food a long distance, and all of the emissions that come with it.

Local economies benefit because more local people are employed and more of their income stays and circulates in the area. By actively supporting local food and farming we can create alternative food networks, limiting corporate control of the food chain.

How do we start?

Start by thinking about which fruits and vegetables are in season locally, and try to buy them only when they're in season. This can actually make life a lot more interesting because it naturally leads to a more varied diet throughout the year. Although supermarkets do sell some local vegetables it's best to look for ways to support independent local shops and farms. You could ask local shops, cafés and restaurants to sell more local food.





Local Organic and Fair Trade (LOAF) lunches

Friends of the Earth Falkirk enjoy holding LOAF meals as a way of getting together for meetings or social time. Everyone brings a dish that, as the name suggests, is local, organic or fair trade.

<http://foefalkirk.blogspot.com>

Veg box schemes

One way to get food directly from growers - with minimum packaging and food miles – is to join a weekly fruit and veg box scheme. You get a selection of local seasonal food, usually organic, delivered to your door. Some suppliers also do extras such as dairy produce and bread. When you order and pay in advance suppliers can buy exact amounts which means there's less left-over food to go to waste. It also saves you carrying all that heavy fruit and veg home!

For these schemes to work well they need commitment from a group of people to buy on a regular basis, as well as reliable transport.

Food buying groups and co-operatives

As a group you can get good food at a more affordable price by pooling your money and buying in bulk direct from local farms or wholesalers. A community can run their own food-buying group for themselves, or run market stalls, sell in shops, or set up veg box delivery schemes for the wider community. To do something like this you'll need money for start-up costs - to buy equipment like weighing scales, and to have a cash float. You could start a food buying group at work, at school, college or university, or a local community centre.

Get to know your local farmers

A lot of co-ops and buying groups work directly with local farms. Buying from various small farmers cuts out the middlemen (wholesalers and supermarkets), which means the farmers get better prices and you get fresher, cheaper produce. Dealing with local farmers means face-to-face contact between farmers and the people who eat what they've grown. You can meet some of your local growers by visiting your local farms and farm shops or you can find them at farmers' markets.



An organic permaculture farm where you can pick your own vegetables.

Local farmers' markets

Farmers markets allow local producers to sell their own produce directly to the public. These regular outdoor markets mean extra income, better prices, and social interaction for farmers. The food on sale is just-picked, straight from the farm, genuinely fresh and you can presume it didn't clock up many food miles. The stalls are usually manned by the farm workers, so you can meet them and find out how the food was grown. With a stall of their own, farms can offer a wider selection of food and the

money spent circulates around the local economy. There's also minimum packaging. School farmers' markets in playgrounds or school halls are a hands-on educational experience for children.

Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)

As a community group it might be possible to buy shares in your local farm or even spend time working on it, getting weekly boxes of fruit and veg in return. You can also agree in advance to buy certain food from certain growers, supporting your nearest organic or environmentally aware farms. This means the farmers know at the beginning of the planting season that they have a guaranteed market and therefore what and how much to grow. Or as a group you could buy or rent small plots of land (allotments on a farm) or even employ your own farmer or grower.

Farming can be a bit of an isolated job and CSA helps farmers and the people who eat their food get to know each other. It can support smaller organic farms that sometimes find it hard to survive. The responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared. These kinds of arrangements can play a big part in creating a fairer, more ethical food system.



Residents at a community garden in Granton, Edinburgh. Credit: Tom Kirby.

Grow your own

Growing your own food is the ultimate in local food - no food miles - and it's practically free! The UK has about 500 community gardens, 250 thousand allotment holders, and more people growing their own food in back gardens, waste ground, parks, schools, housing estates, roof tops and indoors. There are plenty of how-to books, local experts and courses, some of which are listed at the end of this guide.



Eating less meat

Meat is a big part of many people's diets. Research carried out by Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland has shown that reducing the amount of meat we eat in the Western world could



'Upper Wick Farm. Credit: Glyn Thomas'

have significant benefits for the planet. This is because factory farms use very carbon intensive methods, such as importing animal feed made from Latin American soy. The research has also shown that some types of meat are better than others. For example eating grass fed beef is much better than grain fed beef, because the animals have lived off food that is readily available here, rather than processed animal feed. You and your group could commit to changing your eating habits – for example having a 'meat free Monday' or choosing to only eat high quality meat, less often.

Campaigning for a better food system

Friends of the Earth Scotland is an active member of a global campaigning network. There are often decisions being made by those in positions of power that impact badly on people and the environment throughout the world. This is why we're campaigning for change at a local, national and international level, and want to encourage you to campaign too. If you want to run a campaign in your local area, we can support you with tips on strategy, getting in the media, lobbying decision makers and sustaining a campaign group. Our contact details are on the back of this guide.

Campaigning for local food

In your local area, there are lots of publicly owned institutions that serve food. You could lobby the council to make sure food served in their canteen is locally produced. This could give a huge boost to local farmers.

You can also work with schools to encourage them to source their food locally too. The council can also promote farmers markets and permanent market spaces, especially in poorer areas. Local authorities could help with start-up costs, planning and licensing. Why not find out what they're doing already and encourage them to do more?

One Friends of the Earth group in Manchester persuaded a local primary school to have 'meat free Mondays'. Your group could do the same.

Community Right to Grow

'Community Right to Grow' is the simple idea that a community should be able to grow their own food on empty and unused land. In Brazil a landless people's movement regularly takes over unused land, and in Venezuela the government created the 2001 Land Law that says land being used unproductively can be confiscated by the government and distributed to small farmers and communities. Some groups are calling for a similar right to grow in Scotland, whereby if land is left empty and unused, people living nearby could be allowed to use it to grow food on.

Farming to feed people, not to make profit

Friends of the Earth International is a federation of grassroots campaigning groups in 76 different countries. Informed by groups working all over the world, we are calling for food sovereignty – peoples’



right to determine and control their own food systems. We are concerned about the power of transnational agribusinesses to destroy small-scale farming and replace it with large-scale agriculture that relies on their own products.

“It is essential that we build global food sovereignty based on diverse, localised agricultural solutions. Traditional knowledge, based on peoples’ common heritage, must be protected from corporate interests. False solutions, such as the push for genetically modified crops and other corporate-led technologies, must be stopped. People should be allowed to determine and control their own food systems. This form of agriculture also helps communities become more resilient to climate change.” – Friends of the Earth International

At Friends of the Earth Scotland, we want to contribute to this goal by promoting and campaigning for sustainable agriculture in Scotland. Please join us, and the many other groups in Scotland working towards this goal, by supporting sustainable food producers in your area.

Find out more at www.foei.org/en/what-we-do/food-sovereignty

Useful links

Setting up a food co-op

Food Co-ops Toolkit – a simple guide to starting one up: www.sustainweb.org/foodcoops/

How to set up a food coop or buying group <http://tinyurl.com/6eirl37>

Growing Communities www.growingcommunities.org/start-ups/

Connecting with local farmers

Organic farms run special visits and open days in Scotland <http://tinyurl.com/3z9dzc8>

Buying from local farms

Scottish Association of Farmers' Markets: www.scottishfarmersmarkets.co.uk/organisers/index.htm

FARMA members have been vetted to make sure they're the 'real deal' in local foods: www.farma.org.uk/

Map of pick-your-own farms: www.pickyourown.info/map.htm

The Soil Association encourages the growth of farmers markets. Their Local Food Links department: 0117 914 2426.

Community supported agriculture

Making Local Food Work www.makinglocalfoodwork.co.uk/about/index.cfm

Local CSA groups Scotland <http://tinyurl.com/2v98fpm>

Grow your own

Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens

www.farmgarden.org.uk/farms-gardens/your-region/scotland

Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society www.sags.org.uk/

Growing your own food www.foe-scotland.org.uk/growyourownfood

Dig For Victory Scotland www.digforvictory.com/scotland/

Planting fruit trees and fruit plants across Scotland www.commonwealthorchard.com/

Landshare.net links people who want to grow food with people who have land to share.

Campaigning on local food in Scotland

There's already a well-established local food movement in Scotland with plenty of organic farms and local food projects.

Local Foods Project in Scotland <http://tinyurl.com/62r5pc4>

Nourish - Scotland's Sustainable Local Food Network www.nourishscotland.org.uk/

Sustainable local food economy for the Forth Valley area of Scotland www.fvfl.org.uk/

Castle Douglas has designated itself as a local food town www.cd-foodtown.org/

Local Action on Food www.sustainweb.org/localactiononfood/

Edinburgh Local Food Network www.edinburghfood.org/

Edinburgh Community Food www.edinburghcommunityfood.org.uk/

Broomhouse Health Strategy Group Food Co-op <http://demo1.healthstrategygroup.org.uk/>

Feed Your Family from 50 Miles - buy food grown within 50 miles of where you live. Fife Diet is a network of people dedicated to eating only food from Fife www.fifediet.co.uk

Other campaigns

Contact FoE Manchester to find out more about their local council campaign: <http://manchesterfoe.org.uk/>

Friends of the Earth Fix the Food Chain campaign [www.foe.co.uk/what we do/fix food chain 20576.html](http://www.foe.co.uk/what_we_do/fix_food_chain_20576.html)

The True Cost of Food [www.allotment.org.uk/articles/The True Cost of Food.php](http://www.allotment.org.uk/articles/The_True_Cost_of_Food.php)

Food Poverty in the UK <http://www.sustainweb.org/localactiononfood/>

Community Right to Grow

Brazil's Landless Worker's Movement www.mstbrazil.org/

Via Campesina <http://tinyurl.com/4dl5vtl>

Friends of the Earth Scotland
A Scottish charity SC003442
5 Rose Street, Edinburgh EH2 2PR
0131 243 2700

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