

Building the new economy: action guide



Take action for fairer food & farming

Our food system reflects some of society's biggest challenges. Many people in Britain lack access to healthy, affordable food. Soil depletion and climate breakdown threaten our food supply, while global supply chains mean many of us have little idea of where our food comes from.

However, food is also a great way of bringing people together and making change happen locally. After all, we all eat!

This guide suggests some ways to take action for a fair and sustainable food system.

“The material foundation of our life is the tilling of the earth and the growing of food... We must conserve the goodness of the soil and not exploit it”

Quaker faith & practice, 25.07



Apples growing at Swarthmoor Hall, Photo: Sasha Bosbeer for BYM

Where to start: put your money where your mouth is

To support local businesses and reduce your food miles, one of the best things you can do is join a local veg box scheme. Find your local community scheme at communitysupportedagriculture.org.uk/find-csa.

Of course, not everything can be grown locally, but you might be surprised by which beans, grains and pulses can be grown in the UK – see www.britishquinoa.co.uk or www.hodmedods.co.uk to whet your appetite!



Capel Meeting orchard planting, photo: Colin Brewer

Shopping at a local market or independent shop is much better for the local economy than a trip to the supermarket: far more of the money stays local (about twice as much, depending on which studies you read).

Another way to support a fairer economy is to set up a buying group so you can buy in bulk directly from suppliers – Sustain's guide can help www.sustainweb.org/publications/food_co_ops_toolkit.

Grow your community

Growing food together can build community, benefit mental and physical health and help everyone develop new skills. Many meeting houses are blessed with gardens that can be used to support community projects and provide valuable growing space.

Capel Meeting in Surrey wanted to make good use of half an acre of land next to the meeting house, and decided to plant an orchard. They worked together with the local Anglican church to plant dwarf fruit trees: plums, damsons, apples and pears. 2019 was the first significant harvest, with the fruit shared between the meeting and the church.



photo: Colin Brewer

Tottenham Meeting House hosts the Mulberry Tree Community Garden project on its old burial ground, growing everything from peas, to spinach, to potatoes, carrots, leeks, raspberries and parsley. The project is run jointly with Martha House, which offers temporary accommodation for migrants who have become destitute, and connects guests with local volunteering opportunities and community activities. It was supported by a QPSW grant in 2018. Gardening helps Martha House guests and other migrants in difficulties get to know local people – and has helped Tottenham meeting make better links with other local groups.

What can I do?

- Being part of a community orchard or garden doesn't mean you have to do the gardening yourself. Could you ask an existing community garden or farm what it needs – more members, more volunteers, tools, a place for meetings? Alternatively, does your meeting have a garden it is struggling to maintain? Why not invite a community group to take (part of) it over? A surprising amount of food can be grown on a small patch of land!
- If the idea of a community orchard appeals to you, look up the Orchard Project, which works with communities across the UK to help them plant and restore orchards in their neighbourhoods. www.theorchardproject.org.uk



Make your voice heard

Many of us can choose to change our shopping and eating habits. Sometimes, however, food choices are beyond our control – like in school, in hospital, or when nutritious food is unaffordable. We might want to grow food, but have no space to do it.

We need a system that provides everyone with access to healthy and affordable food, supports local economies, and respects nature: and we all have the right to speak out about it.

Nourish and the Scottish Food Coalition have been calling for a Good Food Nation Bill for Scotland which establishes the right to food, and joins the dots across policy areas such as public health, agriculture and planning.

In June 2019, the UK government announced a consultation on a new food strategy for England; while a group in Wales has developed a Food Manifesto.



Tending the kitchen garden at Swarthmoor Hall, Photo: Sasha Bosbeer for BYM

If you'd like to know more about food policy and campaigns, here are some places to start:

Sustain runs many projects and campaigns to improve food and farming: www.sustainweb.org.

The Soil Association campaigns for sustainable farming: www.soilassociation.org.

The Landworkers' Alliance is a union for farmers and growers. Others can join as supporters at www.landworkersalliance.org.uk.

Geoff Tansey of Hebden Bridge Meeting is an expert on sustainable food systems. There are lots of articles and links on his website, www.tansey.org.uk.



Sustainable fish

Fishing is a key part of cultural identity in many parts of Britain – yet traditional fishing methods have all but vanished. Many people in coastal communities know little about fishing or cooking fish.

Felicity Sylvester, of Bideford Meeting, is helping to change that. After years selling the fish caught by her family, she decided to teach people to cook fish, as a way of eating nutritious food, learning about their heritage, and supporting a local industry. Yearly Meeting Gathering in Canterbury in 2011, where Quakers made their commitment to sustainability, helped Felicity “start to put it all together. Catching herrings in a boat with no engine, cooking them and preserving them locally – that’s all part of responding to the climate crisis.”

In 2018, Felicity relaunched her education project as Sustainable Fish Education, working in Devon and Cornwall. Sessions in schools have introduced children to many kinds of local fish and seafood they had never encountered, including spider crabs.

The project has received grants from Quaker Peace & Social Witness and Devon Area Meeting, which have funded community events and a trip to a national conference. Local Friends have also helped out at sessions in schools. Quaker involvement “has allowed us to plan, to have extra people, an exhibition space... and they love the food!”

Find out more at:
www.sustainablefisheducation.com.

Want to help your local area become a sustainable fish city or a sustainable food city? Visit www.sustainablefoodcities.org and www.sustainweb.org/sustainablefishcity.

Food for thought

Many Quaker meetings already hold regular shared meals. Could you extend an invitation to faith or community groups you don't often talk to, or offer to host a cookery event if you have a large kitchen?

Could your meeting house be a collection point for a local veg box scheme or buyers' group?

Local authorities can introduce planning rules requiring new housing developments to include space for food growing. Could you ask your council to introduce this policy?



The kitchen garden at Swarthmoor Hall,
Photo: Sasha Bosbeer for BYM

Get in touch! Send updates on current projects, requests for support, or feedback to our Economics and Sustainability team on 020 7663 1055 or at neueconomy@quaker.org.uk.

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