



Sustainable development

Green Paper 2000, updated and revised November 2007

Useful knowledge, ideas and tools - guiding good practice for sustainable development

Introduction

This Green Paper draws on the wide range of practical experiences of people who are engaged in developing City Farms and/or other Community Land Based Projects and their activities; (these include: Community gardens, adventure playgrounds, food growing projects and recycling ventures). The paper aims at people who wish to become more active in their community or neighbourhood through sustainable development.

City Farms are environmental, social and economic projects where children, young people and adults can daily experience with their senses and learn about urban and rural environments, natural cycles, plants and animals, the impacts of the seasons and the relationships between all of these.

The City Farm movement is a key tool in helping urbanised people to relate to their environment, engage in a process of life-long learning, improve their well being, quality of life and develop an understanding of sustainable development using farming and/or gardening as a platform.

City Farms have an important role to play in the sustainable development of the European Union as they have a holistic approach to environmental, social and economic issues.

City Farms have a history of delivering a wide variety of services that focus on the needs of their users and promoting the interests of their local communities. Many City Farms play an important role in local service delivery, whether independently, in partnerships with other bodies and as contractors. Many are engaged in all three types of service delivery.

City Farms strive to maintain an ambience that is both welcoming and encourages the unexpected, yet is also safe and predictable. Combining the feel of a village within the buzz of a city. What most people increasingly want are engagement, conversation and involvement. Despite the growing impact of the Information Technology, at the local level, face to face communication is still key to our quality of life. In a rapidly changing world, distinctive, good quality places and spaces, like the City Farms, with which people can identify, become even more important to people's quality of life."

Kinderboerderijen, Jeugdboerderijen, Gezinsboerderijen, Fermes d'Enfants, Fermes d'Animation, Jugendfarmen, Aktivspielplatze, City Farms, 4H-Farms and similar organisations, actively promote the equal access and involvement of children, young people and adults through practical experience in a wide range of social, recreational, educational, environmental and economic activities focused around farming. They empower people to improve their own lives and environment in peaceful coexistence.

Sustainable development

Sustainable development means: "meeting our present needs in a way, that doesn't compromise future generations to meet their own needs". The idea of sustainable development includes social equity, environmental soundness, and economic viability. It is the key to a 'really' successful lasting initiative.

The idea of sustainability was picked up by the United Nations Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1992. At that meeting a far reaching plan was adopted, which encourages co-operation and action at both global and local levels, towards a sustainable future. As the level of governance closest to the people, local authorities should play a vital role in promoting sustainable development.

City Farms too have an active role in educating, mobilising and responding to their members and users to apply sustainable development principles and help make them aware of the opportunity for co-operating on innovative community initiatives that can address some of their identified problems.



If City Farms are to operate to their full potential at the local level, they need to understand fully how to apply sustainable development principles to all their developments, practices and activities. The application of sustainable development principles include:

- Accountability to all our stakeholders
- Democracy, transparency, participation and consultation
- Co-operation and networking
- Accessibility
- Equal opportunities and social inclusion
- As sustainable development aims at future generations to meet their needs; to enable children and young people to play a central role in City Farm work.

City Farms need to be aware of global changes

At the community and neighbourhood level we are unlikely to change the world, but we can make an important positive contribution to those global changes and contribute to local people's quality of life. By being aware of international issues, we can better plan to meet local needs and help address local issues. To complete the circle, City Farms have the opportunity to operate globally in a number of ways, for example:

- Sharing experiences or seeking help and advice through websites and e-mail
- Playing an active part in the EFCF and their national federations
- Participating in transnational projects and exchanges both as hosts and visitors

Tools, ideas and experiences

Networking, collaborative and partnership working

Successful networking, collaborative and partnership working, can enable projects to achieve an impact way beyond their own resources. Who are the friends, supporters and collaborators of the project? How do we try to involve all our stakeholders? Board of Management, staff, volunteers, members, users, children and young people, local community, funders, EFCF, national federation, other City Farms and other similar social economy organisations. How do we involve those people who do not use the City Farm and those who may oppose its existence?

Adopting a 'green' project management policy

A starting point is for a project to develop and over time implement a 'green' management policy:

- To demonstrate good practice
- To help monitor and manage the project and reduce costs and eliminate waste of resources
- To upgrade and implement policies like maintenance and health and safety
- To help reduce crisis management with more forward planning
- To practice the 5 R's, an essential component of sustainable development:

Reduce	- the use of resources and energy
Reuse	- where possible
Repair	- what can be repaired
Recycle	- what's left whenever possible, and minimise waste disposal
Review	- your progress and make changes based on evaluation and consultation

Public Relations, Promotion and Marketing

The projects need to develop a flexible approach to meet the changing needs of members and users. A commitment to sustainable development provides an important tool for promoting the project and getting people involved.



Financial viability

We need to plan our future so that it is not dependent on the current financial climate, our government or the local authority supporting development of our sector. Many more stakeholders are becoming aware of the importance of sustainable development, community land based projects and local economic development. Over the last 10 years there has been a shift amongst many social economy organisations in the realisation that their own income generation is an important element of their own survival, independence and democracy. Community land based projects, in securing their future, must recognise they need to achieve a mixed finance portfolio and not become dependent on any one dominant short term source of funding.

Consultation, monitoring, evaluation and social audits

City Farms need to involve all sections of their communities. Where do the projects ideas, plans and developments come from? Who is involved and how are they involved in this process? What monitoring and evaluation takes place? What records are kept and why?

We can all make a positive difference every day!

Each action we take combines with the actions of others. These all have some effect for good or bad on our project, community and immediate environment, like how we welcome people at our City Farm. We can drop litter in the street or grow vegetables; the impact of our acts have far reaching effects. For example, covering bare soil with vegetation during the winter helps reduce soil erosion, builds fertility and absorbs heavy rainfall so helping to reduce flooding and erosion, and soaks up some of the excess carbon dioxide from the atmosphere.

There is no such thing as a failed project, only learning experiences!

What have you learnt from your decisions and actions that didn't go as planned or did not meet your expectations? Encourage pilot projects to understand this process.

Transforming problems into opportunities

There is no such thing as a disadvantage!

Remember every disadvantage can be turned to an advantage! We need to turn any problem into an opportunity. One person's waste can often become another's resources. What at first glance may seem an impossible situation will, with some imaginative lateral thinking. A rubble-strewn piece of land can provide building material for a dry stone wall. A wet area thought of as unproductive can be used to produce reeds and rushes for water cleaning, making compost, establishing wildlife habitat, or using for animal bedding. Remember that a local problem can be turned into a funding opportunity.

Celebrating Successes - think big - start small

Maintain a shared vision of what you want to have achieved in 2 to 5 years time. Take time to make your plans, but begin by concentrating your time and energy on doing something small and quickly achievable, which fits into the overall plan, and follow it up with another and another. Remember to celebrate your achievements, and review what you have learnt from what did not go to plan. Become more ambitious in these achievable tasks as your skills and experience develops and more resources become available. Don't take on too much, too soon.

Creating synergetic effects

Synergy describes the behaviour of systems, which cannot be defined by the individual quality of separate parts of the system. That goes for complex chemical connections as well as for ecological or social systems. Creating synergetic effects means to improve your performance by clever connections instead of increasing input. One tool to use in this direction is to address everything with a variety of uses or functions. Environmental improvements, for example, should be planned to have many functions that complement one another. This increases their value and makes the best use of your resources.

For example, the purpose of growing carefully chosen climbing plants up a garden store could be to:



- make the building, and thus the garden, more attractive
- provide habitat, shelter and a food source for bees and other wildlife
- help insulate the building
- produce food
- create a 'burglar barrier' against unauthorised entry.

Encourage imagination, lateral thinking and creativity

Any fool can spend money!

Most projects need money, but it is too easy and often wasteful to see solutions only in terms of money. Lateral thinking, inventiveness and money saving ideas on the part of a group can be great fun. Five examples (there are many more!):

- For land or buildings - negotiate a 'peppercorn' rent or lease
- Negotiate preferential discounts with suppliers
- Practice the 5Rs
- Work with other groups and form bulk buying consortiums and co-operatives
- Local Exchange Trading Scheme (LETS)

Supporting people in building their capacity

Build the capacity of your most important resource – people!

Not enough money is usually the first issue that is raised by a project as its major problem. Money and resources are out there, but why should a particular City Farm have it rather than another cause or need. To get investment and funding is hard work. But if a venture is well supported by local people and a significant number are directly involved in the project, the job becomes much easier. When a project demonstrates that it is delivering quality facilities and services that people want, they may even find that potential funders are coming to them.

Involving people and retaining them involves is a continuous process, and is the responsibility of everyone!

A small group of founding members, who are still doing all the work and making all the decisions without consultation or participation year on year - will have problems. The problems of management, security etc. will become a chore rather than a joy and an end in themselves. The founder members are likely to become more authoritarian or burn out and drop-out, or both.

Innovation and problem solving

You are only limited by your imagination, lateral thinking and creativity!

City Farms by creating a people-friendly environment in which there is an opportunity to think, learn, plan, participate and act creatively and innovatively, will help make the local community and the City Farm more successful, habitable and vital.

Problem solving is based on open-minded thinking, taking risks, being willing to think afresh, experimenting and, crucially, to review and reflect; helping to generate a cycle of learning that leads to continuous improvement. We need to work together to solve problems by looking at situations in an integrated, holistic way - thinking laterally and flexibly - the basis of sustainable development.

Many City Farms have achieved and maintain a process of imaginative problem solving. The aim is to support and encourage projects to be able to generate and maintain a continual flow of innovative solutions to problems and needs that have an impact on the project and people's quality of life.

Developing a long term plan and strategy

Achieving sustainable development is a long-term goal! There are many potential benefits of developing a strategy, including:

- Sharing good practice on social inclusion, environmental quality and economic development.



- Raising awareness about sustainable development and why sustainable development is important to everyone's well being and quality of life
- Gaining commitment of all sectors and the community to the Local Agenda 21 process.
- Taking the opportunity to identify what is already happening in the neighbourhood, community, town, city and region and highlight any gaps.
- Celebrating the work that has been done.
- Developing links and connections between initiatives and activities
- Developing a co-ordinated action plan to work towards sustainable development.

Guidelines

Set out below a series of guidelines that have been learned by successful projects over the years. Keeping to them is not easy - but the success of any organisation is dependent on the key resource - the people involved. By investing in people you will be helping the project to develop a broad-based support, be able to share the tasks and make the project successful, happy and welcoming.

Empowering people

- Be open and welcoming to all newcomers
- Involve everyone as far as possible
- Have self-managing teams and working groups to tackle tasks, issues and problems
- Spend time and trouble recruiting members, management committee, volunteers and staff
- Induct, train and retrain management committee members, volunteers, staff and members
- Remember to thank people for what they have done

Managing

- The management committee, any staff and volunteers must manage by example
- Delegate activities and responsibilities wherever possible
- Set achievable goals, with some successes, however small, each week or month
- Demand total integrity from everyone involved
- Listen - listen - listen!
- More THANK YOUS!

Creating involvement

- Develop and display an inspiring vision of the project
- Provide top quality in what you do as seen by the local community and your users
- More listening!
- Encourage pilot projects of ideas and activities wherever possible and learn from them
- Make "word of mouth" promotion and information exchange everyone's responsibility

Team work

- Involve all members of a team or working group
- Respect each other
- Recognise contributions, no matter where or who they come from
- Recognise the skills and experience of those involved; everybody has something to offer
- Stay together and produce a good solution to a problem or issue

Sharing and Networking

- Share your ideas, successes and failures with other projects, to help them be successful
- Make a habit of learning from other projects - avoid reinventing the wheel!
- Encourage mutual learning group visits to other projects – 'seeing is believing' visits



Professionals on tap not on top - thoughts for professional staff and advisers

- Remember, however experienced you are you don't know it all! Take advice.
- Your willingness to help, openness and integrity will help your City Farm to address its needs
- City Farms are self-governing organisations and make their own decisions
- The role of specialist professionals is to support a City Farm meet its needs
- That the EFCF and national federations are there to support and help you in your tasks, within their available resources.

To apply the 5 'S's' to the development, planning & service delivery

Sustainable development	SD	integrating the environmental, social & economic
Social inclusion	SI	the essential social justice component of SD
Social enterprise	SE	creating quality needed services and generating income
Social capital creation	SC	improving the well being and quality of life
Social auditing	SA	to monitor & evaluate SD, SI, SE & SC & address issues

To apply the 5 Cs of service and social enterprise development and delivery:

- **Challenge:** to assess whether a particular service should be provided, if so, to determine whether it is being provided effectively or if it could be provided better in another way or by another organisation.
- **Consult:** finding out what members/users need & what they are prepared to pay for.
- **Compare:** assessing the level, quality and cost of service against that achieved in previous years and/or by other bodies providing similar services.
- **Compete:** determine who can best deliver a particular service at the right quality & cost.
- **Creativity:** imaginative problem solving is the cutting edge of innovation. When solutions depend on connections yet to be made, logic is not enough!

Has your city farm established a reputation and record of being?

- Innovative, imaginative and creative
- Democratic, open, transparent and trusted
- Public service ethos that is responsive and flexible
- Representative of and good reputation with your members and users
- Focussed on providing benefits and understanding and meeting identified needs
- Providing high quality products and services and added value
- Committed to equalities & sensitive to cultural differences
- Committed to sustainable development, inclusion, well being and a quality of life
- Maintaining a wide range of specialist knowledge, expertise and experience
- And skilled and experienced in networking, working collaboratively and in partnership

EPILOGUE: The Social Economy – an innovative and creative sector!

Over the last century, the social economy, our sector has provided many of the ideas and methods for delivering services and facilities which are now part of mainstream provision in education, social services, health, sport, recreation, the arts etc. At the same time many ideas and methods have served a useful purpose for a number of years but then superseded by changing needs, changing technology, culture etc. Some of our services may have a limited life, others may still be needed at the end of the twenty-first century.

City Farms and other Community Land Based Projects need to maintain an active commitment to sustainable development principles and practices in all their actions, as an essential element of helping to influence global development, securing the project's future and that of its members and users.