

Growing Together

How organic, agroecological growers can help deliver the National Food Strategy by:

- Meeting net zero targets
- Creating a 'Good Food Cycle'
- Boosting nature
- Plugging 'The Resilience Gap'
- Attracting a new generation of horticultural workers

This pamphlet has been created for the **UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition¹** (UKFVC) parliamentary launch on November 25th 2025. Participants will meet organic, agroecological growers from a range of production scales and hear what they are doing to address key environmental, economic and social challenges. Read on to find out how you can help us scale up our impact.

Our **Joint Actions and Policy Proposals** include ideas for how we could work together to:

1. Increase regional collaboration between growers to improve market access
2. Increase UK organic fruit and vegetable production to reduce reliance on imports
3. Target capital grants to boost the productivity of horticultural SMEs
4. Market Garden Support Fund
5. Train a New Generation of Growers
6. Deliver on manifesto pledge to source 50% of public sector food from local or sustainable sources
7. Invest in infrastructure to support the distribution of regionally produced fruit and vegetables
8. Use planning powers to prioritise space for sustainable & healthy food retail

¹ The UKFVC represents both organic and agroecological growers. Not all of the members of our organisations are certified organic. However, they are all motivated by social and political values that go beyond the legal definition of organic, encompassed by the term agroecology. Agroecology creates a mutually beneficial relationship between humans and their environment, while also addressing the need for socially equitable food systems. It is concurrently, a science, a set of practices and a social movement that aspires to create a healthy food system in which everyone can access healthy, sustainable, culturally appropriate food while ensuring that farmers can generate a dignified livelihood.

How our growers can help deliver the UK Food Strategy

Organic, agroecological growers are well positioned to support a transition towards the “Good Food Cycle”, identified in the UK Food Strategy (July 2025) as a way to address the triple challenges of: The Junk Food Cycle, The Invisibility of Nature and The Resilience Gap. Demand for organic fresh produce increased by 10.4% from 2023-2024, while the whole organic food and drink market has grown for thirteen consecutive years.² Yet the percentage of organic land share has remained largely static in England, representing just 3.5% of the country’s farmed area, meaning imports are needed to meet demand. This presents us with a huge opportunity to grow UK organic horticulture together. We are able to address pressing environmental and social issues in the following ways:

1) Climate Change – 40% of UK grown vegetables are produced on lowland peat,³ resulting in greenhouse gas emissions of 26-37tonnes CO₂e per hectare, per year.⁴

- Organic, agroecological growers meet, and often exceed, net zero targets while also producing high quality food, by building soil organic carbon, integrating trees and leaving wide crop margins⁵
- Avoiding NO₂ emitting nitrate fertilisers⁶ further reduces the climate impact of organic horticulture
- Our growers prioritise local food networks, thereby reducing food miles, and often use electric vans or bikes for delivery

2 Soil Association Organic Market Report 2025

3 Rhymes, J. and Evans C. (2023) The Future of Vegetable Production on Lowland Peat for Climate, Nature and People. UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, World Wildlife Fund and Tesco

4 Evans, C. et al (2023) Aligning the Peatland Code with the UK Peatland Inventory. Report to Defra and IUCN Peatland Inventory. p12

5 Lampkin, N. and Padel K. (2023) Growing organic – a multifunctional component of English land use policy. Organic Farmers and Growers Policy Paper 5 - 8th December 2023

6 Packer, S. (2020) Fixing Nitrogen: The challenge for climate, nature and health. Soil Association; Organic Research Centre (2025) Forty years of organic farming trials.

2) Public Health - Diet related ill health is causing misery to millions and threatening the NHS with escalating costs.⁷

- 85% of customers receiving weekly fruit and veg bags from Growing Communities eat 5-10 portions per day, whereas just 33% of adults and 12% of children eat 5-a-day⁸
- Initiatives piloted through Bridging the Gap demonstrate there is an appetite for fresh, organic fruit and vegetables among people on lower incomes⁹
- CSAs, urban and peri-urban farms improve mental and physical health through volunteering, community building, nature connection and gentle exercise.

3) Biodiversity - Pesticides and habitat loss are driving insect decline, impacting biodiversity further up the food chain.¹⁰

While Integrated Pest Management is reducing pesticide use, conventional horticulture systems are still characterised by monocultures with little land left for wildlife.

- Organic growing prohibits the use of herbicides and artificial pesticides, relying instead on healthy ecosystems to naturally regulate pests and diseases.¹¹
- Organic systems have been found to have up to 83% higher activity of soil organisms, including earthworms, microbes and other microfauna as a result of careful management of organic matter.¹²
- Crop diversity also builds resilience to pests and diseases¹³

7 The Food Foundation (2025) The Broken Plate 2025; Jackson, T. (2024). The False Economy of Big Food and the case for a new food economy. Food Farming and Countryside Commission.

8 Growing Communities (2023) Impact Report; Food Foundation (2021) Peas Please Veg Facts 2021

9 From 2023 and 2025 Bridging the Gap piloted 10 schemes across the UK to make climate friendly fruit and vegetables available to all, including people on low incomes. Their report will be launched on 25th November 2025.

10 Powney, G.D. et al (2019). Widespread losses of pollinating insects in Britain. Nature Communications 10, Article 1018; Van der Sluijs, J.P. (2020) Insect decline: An emerging global risk. Current Opinion in Environmental Sustainability, Volume 46 October 2022, p39-42; Pisa, L.W et al. (2014). Effects of neonicotinoids and fipronil on non-target invertebrates. Environmental Science and Pollution Research, Vol.22 p68-102

11 Palomo-Campesino, S. (2022). Do agroecological practices enhance the supply of ecosystem services? A comparison between agroecological and conventional horticultural farms. Ecosystem Services, Vol. 57.

12 Organic Research Centre (2025) Forty years of organic farming trials; Pfiffner L and Mader, L (2012) Effects of biodynamic, organic and conventional production systems on earthworm population. Biological Agriculture and Horticulture, Volume 15; Yan, B. et al (2021) Impact of land use type and organic farming on the abundance, diversity, community composition and functional properties of soil nematode communities in vegetable farming. Agriculture, Ecosystems and Environment, Vol 318

13 A MSc study of 48 small scale, agroecological market gardens found an average of 118 crops per farm being grown annually, compared with an average crop diversity of 7.5 crops per farm for larger, conventional UK horticulture farms. Ref: Wagstaff, A. (2023). The role of market garden crop diversity in supporting UK food security and planetary health. Unpublished MSc Dissertation Candidate 2303416ab, Royal Holloway University.

4) Resilience of Supply - Imports make up 85% of fruit and 53% of the UK vegetable supply,¹⁴ with heavy reliance on countries already experiencing drought from climate change.¹⁵ Geopolitical and cybersecurity issues further threaten national and domestic food security. At the same time, 11% of the UK population live in households experiencing food poverty.¹⁶

- Organic, agroecological producers build local and regional supply chains focused on trust, co-operation and paying fair prices to farmers, building resilience through decentralisation.¹⁷
- Our growers can be highly productive, and are well-placed to replace imports of some fresh produce, especially high value salad crops, beans and peas and leafy greens.¹⁸
- Contrary to popular opinion, market research shows that low income households do buy organic produce.¹⁹ Solidarity pricing and work-share options in Community Supported Agriculture schemes are used by organic, agroecological growers to make their produce even more accessible to people on lower incomes.

5) Horticulture Workforce - The UK horticulture sector is reliant on poorly paid, insecure and seasonal work, and training opportunities for UK growers are inadequate, despite demand for apprenticeships outstripping supply by a factor of six.²⁰

- A range of young people²¹ and career changers are attracted to the outdoor work of agroecological horticulture by its values, diversity of tasks, and the opportunity to learn new skills²²
- Agroecology is attracting people from diverse backgrounds, bringing skills and experience from across the world, thus building the resilience of the UK horticulture sector, whilst also offering meaningful employment to BPOC people born and raised in the UK²³
- Despite inadequate training provision and start-up support, new entrants are finding their way into organic and agroecological horticultural work. How much more could be achieved if policy support for organic, agroecological horticulture were forthcoming?

14 Defra (2025). Horticulture Statistics 2024

15 Goudie, S. (2020) Is the UK's supply of fruit and vegetables future proof? SHEFS Briefing No. 1, Food Foundation and Welcome Trust, p6

16 Francis-Devine, B., Malik X., and Foley, N. (2025). Food Poverty: Households, food banks and free school meals. House of Commons Library Research Briefing.

17 Jaccarini C., Manuela Lupton-Paez M. and Phagoora J. (2022) Farmer Focused Routes to Market: An evaluation of the social, environmental, and economic contributions of Growing Communities. New Economics Foundation and NEF Consulting; Sustain et al. (2025) Local Food Growth Plan.

18 Laughton, R. (2024). Horticulture Across Four Nations. Landworkers' Alliance. Laughton, R. (2017). A Matter of Scale: A study of the productivity, financial viability and multifunctional benefits of small farmers (20ha and less). Landworkers' Alliance and Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience at Coventry University.

19 Soil Association (2025). Organic market report 2025, p8

20 House of Lords Select Committee (2023) Sowing the Seeds: A blooming English horticulture sector. HL Paper 268

21 41% of Landworkers' Alliance members are aged under 40, while 15% are aged over 60 (compared with 15% of English farmers being aged under 45 and 40% over 65 in the UK farm. UK Government Statistics (2025) Agricultural workforce in England at 1st June 2025).

22 Talks, I., Tomlinson, H. and Styles, G. (2022). The Attraction of Agroecology and the barriers faced by new entrants pursuing agroecological farming and land work. Landworkers' Alliance; ; Eldridge, H. (2018) Digging into Horticulture: Encouraging the next generation of producers. Soil Association Policy Report.

23 Terry, N. (2023) Jumping Fences: Land, food and racial justice in British Farming. Ecological Land Co-operative, Land in Our Names and the Landworkers' Alliance.

Meet the growers

Here is a brief introduction to the growers participating in this event. We asked each of them which policy ideas would be most useful to them, and the quotations are their responses.

Growing Communities in Hackney, has been helping Londoners access organic food since 1996. They supply 1,600 households with organic produce sourced from their own urban farm in Dagenham and about 20 growers from the rural hinterland around London. The following four case studies are growers who supply Growing Communities.

Pear Necessities, Kent

Pear Necessities aim to grow fruit using carbon-conserving methods of fertility building and disease control. This 13 acre pear orchard in Kent was converted to organic production by

Anthony Froggart and Julie Brown, who also planted a mixed fruit and nut orchard. Fifteen years later, as

well as four varieties of pear, they are harvesting, selling and processing organic apples, plums, gages, apricots and nuts. Pears are processed into juice, chutney and jam, as well as being sold fresh at Stoke Newington Farmers' Market and contributing to the Growing Communities fruit and vegetable bag scheme.

"The regional produce hub and market provided by Growing Communities has been game changing for us. More set-ups like this, in every city in the UK would enable growers to access urban markets, dramatically improving viability".

Bagthorpe Farm, Norfolk

Nick Walton, the grower at Bagthorpe Farm (700 acres) grows onions, carrots, potatoes, parsnips, and beetroot, providing the bulkier, lower value crops, which complement the urban and peri-urban produce in the Growing Communities veg bag scheme. The sandy loams of this mixed farm are ideal for root crops, which are grown in

long and integrated with nitrogen fixing grass and clover leys, on which Bagthorpe's herd of grass fed Aberdeen Angus beef cattle are grazed.

"There is a correlation between the countries where organic agriculture is thriving and the support the government is giving the organic sector. For the sector to grow significantly we need the government to recognise the benefits and solutions that organic farming provides"

Ripple Farm Organics, Kent

As well as growing for their own and other local box schemes and farmers' markets in East Kent, Martin Mackey and his team supply Growing Communities. Access to London markets has enabled them to expand from their original 14 acres in 1989 to 100 acres of neighbouring fields and employ 10-15 workers throughout the year. Vegetable fields and fertility building green manures are integrated with measures to support wildlife, including pond creation and providing early season seed mix for turtle doves. As a result, turtle doves, as well as a long list of more common birds, mammals and insects are regularly seen at Ripple Farm.

"We need to help more young people into commercial fruit and vegetable production, and this involves training them and more importantly giving them access to growing spaces... ie. land!"

Dagenham Farm, London

On nearly 2 acres in the heart of Dagenham, Alice Holden and her team produce around 5 tonnes of vegetables per year to supply local people and feed into Growing Communities' veg bag scheme, whilst engaging local people of all ages in food growing. For example, the "Grown in Dagenham" programme trained 11 local unemployed and lone parents in food growing and on-farm processing, leading to employment for several people. School children, college students with special needs and people with mental health problems learn about food growing, biodiversity and healthy eating, while enjoying the therapeutic benefits of community building and nature connection.

"Our outreach is funded through our already stretched farm staff submitting funding bids that we are not always successful in winning. Financial support through a non area based subsidy would enable us to continue and build upon the health benefits we offer to the urban population."



The following three growers belong to other UKFVC member organisations, and illustrate the multi-functional benefits of organic and agroecological horticulture.

Grown Green, Wiltshire

Kate Collyns established Grown Green in 2010, on land rented at Hartley Farm in Wiltshire, after a two year apprenticeship with the Soil Association Apprenticeship scheme. Produce is grown year-round on two fields totalling 2ha, with herb

beds and eight small polytunnels. It is mostly sold via Hartley Farm Shop and Kitchen, as well as local restaurants, pubs, shops, box schemes and some direct veg boxes. Few training opportunities for organic growers currently exist, so this year Kate and others at the Organic Growers Alliance established a Training Network to provide a training syllabus and a programme of online webinars and farm visits for organic trainees on nine farms across England, with plans to expand to other parts of the UK in 2026.

“Many small farms often miss out on the capital grants awarded to big businesses. The same fund broken up into smaller, more numerous and accessible grants would have an enormous impact on farm productivity, profitability and sustainability, by funding scale-appropriate technology and community engagement programmes.”





Five Acre Community Farm, Warwickshire

Since 2012, led by grower Becca Stevenson, Five Acre Community Farm has been supplying weekly veg shares to the 90 members of this Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme. A CSA trading model provides a direct connection between the community eating the produce, who pay a standard monthly subscription despite seasonal fluctuations in produce availability and diversity, and the growers, who are assured of a fixed monthly income. CSA members are also encouraged to engage with the annual cycle of farm tasks and celebrations, at volunteer days, farm tours and harvest events.

"The policy request that speaks to me the most is about rebuilding the regional food supply and supporting diverse routes to market. CSAs are about connecting people to food and place."

Roddy's Organics, Devon

Since 1997, Roddy has been growing organic veg and raising turkeys, and established a herd of pedigree Hereford cattle at Bickham Farm. He grows twelve varieties of veg, which are sold wholesale to Organic North, Langridge Organics and a range of other box schemes. In addition, the farm offers free visits to primary and secondary schools, over the years welcoming hundreds of pupils to participate in forest school or learn about geography, maths, english and science, through direct experience on the farm. We currently receive payments for these educational visits through the mid tier educational access programme.

"Policy request 1 is number one for me. We need to grow the market opportunity for small growers to be able to sell into, all of the other points can feed off a buoyant market."

Recommended Joint Actions and Policy Proposals

The UKFVC represents growers' organisations from England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. These proposals have been drawn up primarily by our England Working Group, but broadly represent the needs of organic, agroecological growers in the devolved nations.

1. Increase regional collaboration between growers to improve market access

Create a ring-fenced funding pot to co-design and pilot a programme of regional clusters of growers, collaborating and innovating to increase production, improve sustainability and connect with the market. The programme would combine elements of the Fruit and Veg Aid Scheme and ELMS, but address the challenges of both in terms of access for organic, agroecological growers and the need to move away from area based payments to reward better land management in a comparatively small scale, intensive sector such as horticulture.

2. Increase UK organic fruit and vegetable production to reduce reliance imports

Incentivise an increase in organic land and organic fresh produce production by incorporating organic targets for fresh produce into legislation, building upon current organic SFI packages, reintroducing the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS) and setting organic targets for public sector procurement (see point 5).

3. Target capital grants to boost the productivity of horticultural SMEs

Adjust the Farm Equipment and Technology Fund so that it works for SME growers, by consulting closely with the UKFVC to establish which equipment and infrastructure their members need to grow their businesses, and improve sustainability and productivity. We would welcome the opportunity to co-design a more flexible and accessible "Productivity Power Pack" that would meet the needs of growers to buy basic and appropriate technology alongside innovative equipment.

4. Market Garden Support Fund

Provide targeted support to organic, agroecological market gardens, prioritising those with a public facing aspect (e.g. CSAs, provision of educational visits or therapeutic volunteering) and enabling mixed farms to diversify into horticultural production. Grant funding would be available to pay for basic equipment and infrastructure necessary to establish and develop a commercial market garden, such as cultivation machinery, polytunnels and irrigation equipment.



5. Train a new generation of growers

Subsidise a training course and mentoring programme, to enable new entrants to benefit from the experience of established growers. This would build on the success of the New Entrant Support Scheme to catalyse a dramatic increase in the number and production capacity of growers.

6. Deliver on manifesto pledge to source 50% of public sector food from local or sustainable sources

Build in specific targets for 1) Organically certified food and 2) Fresh or minimally processed fruit, vegetables, pulses, beans, wholegrains, nuts or legumes, and work with us to identify and replicate practical examples of how to open public procurement up to small and medium enterprises (SMEs) by methods such as simplifying tender bids and/or creating Dynamic Purchasing System processes to allow contracts to be fulfilled by a mixture of different suppliers.

7. Invest in infrastructure to support the distribution of regionally produced fruit and vegetables

In strategic locations, where regional supply can meet demand, invest in distribution and processing infrastructure such as produce hubs which serve individuals, businesses and public procurement contracts with sustainably produced fruit and vegetables. This will help to rebuild regional food supply and support for diverse, farmer-focused routes to market.

8. Use planning powers to prioritise space for sustainable and healthy food retail

Incorporate food resilience recommendations into planning frameworks, include a local competition test with weighting towards independent grocery and leverage vacant retail spaces for permanent retail and weekly food markets.

The **UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition (UKFVC)**

is a newly formed alliance between the organisations representing organic, agroecological growers across the four nations of the UK.

Together, we are working to create a future in which more fruit and vegetables are produced in the UK. A future where we reduce our reliance on imports and where agroecological growing becomes a rewarding, valued and accessible career path for many more people. A future in which everyone can eat and enjoy healthy food that is produced without wrecking the environment and climate, and in which our whole planet thrives.

Membership organisations

CSA Network, The Food Foundation, Organic Growers Alliance, Landworkers' Alliance, Soil Association, Sustain, Lantra, Growing Communities, Organic North, Regather Sheffield, Better Food Shed, Food Sense Wales, Bridging the Gap, The Wildlife Trusts, Propagate, Permaculture Association

Connect with us

Website

foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/uk-fruit-vegetable-coalition

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