

The case for a
**Market Garden
Support Fund** in England

Policy Brief
March 2026



Agroecological and organic market gardens deliver far more than fruit and vegetables. They also benefit the environment, public health, education and community resilience, while attracting a generation of committed new entrants and strengthening long term food security. In this booklet we aim to demonstrate these benefits and make the case for a Market Garden Support Fund, specifically targeted towards enabling this valuable sector to thrive.

Why is a Market Garden Support Fund necessary?

Market gardens and horticulture have traditionally received little or no government support, unlike other farm types, such as cereals and grazing livestock.

Existing DEFRA schemes do not currently work well for market gardens. The Farm Equipment and Technology Fund (FETF), payments for educational visits (ED1) and the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) are either poorly targeted or exclude market gardens altogether for the following reasons:

- Capital - The FETF is too restrictive and focused on technological innovation. Both new entrants and those wishing to scale up production need more flexible access to capital for basic equipment, to improve productivity and efficiency.
- Public Engagement - Payments for educational visits (ED1) were available in 2025 via Countryside Stewardship, but the application process was complex and confusing in relation to whether only farms enrolled in the Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) could apply. At the time of writing it is unclear if ED1 will be available through CSS in 2026 and if so, if the payments will be available to farms and market gardens below 3ha or without SFI agreements.
- Sustainable Farming Incentive (SFI) - Despite offering significant environmental benefits, market gardens of less than 3ha are now no longer eligible for SFI payments, while the area based nature of SFI means that payments are comparatively low for all horticultural operations which tend to operate more intensively than arable and livestock farming. We look forward to seeing how these problems can be addressed through the application of work undertaken in horticulture Tests and Trials, such as the Landworkers' Alliance's Growing the Goods Trial, financed by DEFRA.

Meanwhile, organic and agroecological market gardens urgently need support for the valuable public engagement work they offer, as well as an accessible grants scheme to enable them to develop their businesses and improve productivity and financial viability.

We are therefore keen to work with DEFRA to develop the Market Garden Support Fund outlined in this booklet, which would complement a revised SFI, support commercial horticulture operations of all sizes and contribute significantly to the delivery of the UK Government Food Strategy.

Our proposal: A Market Garden Support Fund

We propose a Market Garden Support Fund which would target horticultural operations that meet the following criteria:

- Provide a minimum of 1000 hours paid employment per year
- Grow a diverse range of vegetables and/or fruit
- Are organically certified (*see p.8 for how the fund would support certification costs*)
- Are enthusiastic and in a position to engage with the communities around them through activities such as school visits, volunteering, social prescribing, cooking and gardening classes and CSA membership (*the capital grant scheme will also be open to organic market gardens not offering public engagement*)
- Sell produce either directly or through farmer-focused routes to market* enabling a larger percentage of the retail price to go to the grower and a closer engagement with the customer

*Farmer Focused Routes to Market harness the collective buying power of their local community and directing it towards those farmers who are producing food in a sustainable way, they employ a principle-led approach to selecting the suppliers they work with and commit to paying the price that farmers set for the produce (and not to haggle), to work in partnership, and to pay invoices within two week (see Jaccarini et al (2022) Farmer Focused Routes to Market: An evaluation of the social, environmental, and economic contributions of Growing Communities.



**Organic, agroecological
growers can help the
Government to deliver the
4 elements of the vision
outlined in its
UK Food Strategy.**



1

A thriving UK food sector that feeds a healthier and more productive UK population and enables economic growth

1. Market gardens¹ can be highly productive, and offer stable, long-term skilled employment when combined with direct or farmer focused routes to market.²
2. Younger growers are attracted to the social and environmental purpose of this work, as well as the autonomy and quality of life it offers, compared to jobs on large scale horticulture farms where work is perceived to be physically hard, poorly paid and with little chance for career progression.³
3. Public engagement attracts people into horticultural training and careers.



Photo credit: Sutton Community Farm, South London

1. Market gardens include Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) schemes, urban, peri-urban and rural small scale vegetable farms.

2. 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; 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*.

Eldridge, H. (2018). *Digging into Horticulture: Encouraging the next generation of producers*. Soil Association; Tomlinson, H., Styles, G. and Talks, I (2022). *The Attraction of Agroecology and the barriers faced by new entrants pursuing agroecology and landwork*. Landworkers Alliance.

2

A healthier population with reduced diet related ill-health, especially for children and vulnerable people

1. Box scheme customers and Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) members eat more vegetables, make healthier food choices and enjoy a more varied diet.⁴ 85% of Growing Communities' customers eat 5-10 portions of veg per day, compared to the average of 33% of adults and 12% of children eating five-a-day.⁵
2. Public engagement resulting from membership of a CSA operation has a positive impact on mood, general happiness and well-being.⁶
3. Nature connection and the exercise associated with gardening improve health and well-being for people with a range of health and social needs.⁷



Photo credit: Canalside CSA, Warwickshire

4. CSA Network (2020) *Evaluation of the Impact of CSA in Wales*, p19-21

5. *Growing Communities. Impact Report 2023*

6. CSA Network (2020) *Evaluation of the Impact of CSA in Wales*; Milford, A. et al (2025). *Community supported agriculture's perceived positive benefits on mental health and vegetable consumption in Norway and the UK*. *Agricultural and Food Economics*. Vol. 13 Article no.2

7. Howarth M. et al. (2020). *What is the evidence for the impact of gardens and gardening on health and well-being*. *BMJ Open*. 2020 July 19;10(7)

Case study 1

Chagfood, *Devon*

- CSA farm (Community Supported Agriculture) supplying 120 weekly veg shares from 8 acres of land (*a figure which rose to 150 shares during Covid*).
- Employ 3 FTE staff.
- Recipient of £38,000 Making Local Food Work Lottery Grant in 2009 - paid over 2 years.
- Used it to pay for capital costs (£19k) and revenue costs (wages) for 2 year start-up period. Polytunnels, packing shed, tools, seeds, fruit trees, etc.
- The grant was essential in enabling the business to be thriving 15 years later.
- Over the years they have hosted 26 trainees and run 15 CSA training courses, training 5-10 people per course.



Photo credit: Walter Lewis



3

Better environmental outcomes on land and sea, enhancing nature and ecosystem services while reducing pollution, waste and greenhouse gas emissions

1. 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 margins.⁸
2. Organic growers must avoid using NO₂ emitting nitrate fertiliser, further reducing the climate impact of organic horticulture.⁹
3. Agroecological growers prioritise local food networks, thereby reducing food miles, and often use electric vans or bikes for delivery



Photo credit: Dagenham Farm, London

8. 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

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

Case study 2

Tomnah'a Market Garden *Perthshire*

- In 2015 received £60,000 Pillar 2 funding from EU and Scottish Government. Essential for putting in key infrastructure in the first few years, including deer and rabbit fencing the whole site; trackways and hardstanding area; packing shed barn; BCS tractor implements (power harrow, flail mower); polytunnel; irrigation kit (tank, pipework, sprinklers, pump etc).
- 10 years later - 140 CSA shares for 6 months of the year with nearly 100% produce for the shares being grown on site.
- Tiered payment option based on income/ wealth.
- Over 100 members visit the farm each week to pack and collect their shares. Members within a 10km radius of the farm.
- Employ 7 staff (4.5 FTE) and just finishing 10th season.
- Also supply local shops and restaurants and seasonal flowers and offer floristry services to an onsite wedding venue.
- On course to bring in around £165,000 in revenue for the 2025 season (*at the time of writing*).
- Run a number of courses and events such as introduction to growing your own food, willow weaving, preparing seasonal salads, floristry, pick your own flower sessions, plant sale, solstice celebrations.
- Hosted WWOOFers and trainees, and have a committed team of regular local volunteers.

Photo credit: Tomnah'a



4

Improved resilience of the supply chain, with reduced impact of shocks and chronic risks on access to healthy and sustainable food

1. Organic, agroecological producers build local and regional supply chains focused on trust, co-operation and paying fair prices to farmers, and building resilience through decentralisation and community connection.¹⁰ During the Covid pandemic (Feb-April 2020) veg box scheme sales went up by 111% and had long waiting lists, as people turned to local suppliers.¹¹
2. 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.¹²
3. Market research shows that low income households do buy organic produce.¹³ Solidarity pricing options in CSA operations and box schemes are used to make produce accessible to people on lower incomes.



Photo credit: Canalside CSA, Warwickshire

10. 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*.
11. Wheeler, A (2020). *Covid 19 Veg Box Scheme Report*. Food Foundation
12. 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.
13. Soil Association (2025). *Organic market report 2025*, p8

Key Components of a Market Garden Support Fund

What it would pay for

- Small, flexible capital grants for both existing and new market gardens (up to £25,000) to pay for equipment and infrastructure, both new and second hand.
- Larger grants (up to £100,000) to support community market garden start-up or development costs (equipment, infrastructure and revenue).
- The costs of running a programme of public engagement activities (up to £25,000 per year for three or more years)
- Organic certification costs: £1250 in total to cover certification fees and administration costs.

Scope of fund

- The combined membership of grower organisations that belong to the UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition in England is approximately 1500
- A £10 million pilot fund (less than the £12.5 million robotics and automation fund) would pay for 400-1000 (£10,000-25,000) small grants or a blend of small and larger grants.

Administration

- Ring-fenced to enable small and medium scale growers to access it before funds are used up by large farms, who are able to employ people to apply for funding.
- Easy to apply for at a time of year when market gardens are less busy (e.g. Autumn, Winter and very early Spring) or a rolling all year round application window.
- Administration of the fund could be contracted out to a body which understands the needs of organic, agroecological growers
- Beneficiaries will be required to provide an annual report of what public engagement has been delivered along with evidence of sales and hours of paid employment provided.



The UK Fruit and Vegetable Coalition is a newly formed alliance between the organisations representing organic, agroecological growers across the four nations of the UK.

We are working together 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 where everyone can eat and enjoy healthy food that is produced without wrecking the environment and climate and 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,
Wildlife Trusts, Propagate, Permaculture Association

Contact: coordinator@organicgrowersalliance.co.uk

