

Event report

Nourish Scotland, February 2017



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28 & 29 Nov

Increasing access to fruit & veg

Learning from the Wholesome Wave

Nourish Scotland & the Glasgow Food Policy Partnership are organising two meetings with **Gus Schumacher from the Wholesome Wave Foundation - with support from Community Food and Health (Scotland).**

Wholesome Wave work across the US, connecting farmers with low-income communities. Poverty should never be an obstacle to eating fruit and veg, they say.

Is there more we can do in Scotland?

28th November

13.30 - 16.30

Quaker Meeting House,
Edinburgh

29th November

10.30 - 14:00

Adelphi Centre,
Glasgow

Introduction

On the 28th and 29th of November 2016, Nourish Scotland and the Glasgow Food Policy Partnership, with support from Community Food and Health Scotland (CFHS), brought Gus Schumacher from the Wholesome Wave Foundation to Scotland. The two parallel events in Edinburgh and Glasgow were attended by a range of people from community food initiatives, national and local authorities, health bodies, food businesses, housing associations and civil society groups.

This report outlines the key points from Gus Schumacher's presentation and from the small group conversations that took place, as well as a note on next steps. For more detail, Rob Davidson, farm manager at The Cyrenians Farm, reflects on the Edinburgh discussions in [this excellent blog post](#).



Photo 1. Glasgow event in the Adelphi Centre. Photo by Gus Schumacher.

Gus Schumacher – Wholesome Wave Foundation

Wholesome Wave is a non-profit working across the United States, connecting the dots between farmers, businesses, local authorities, the health sector and communities. They believe poverty should never be an obstacle to eating fresh produce and coordinate a range of non-stigmatising food access programmes - benefiting over a million families and thousands of farmers.

Initiatives include sourcing private and public investment to double the value of food stamps when spent at farmers' markets on locally grown fruits and vegetables. This initiative demonstrated conclusively that improving the affordability of fruit and vegetables means people on low incomes make healthier food choices.

Wholesome Wave has also been working with healthcare professionals on the introduction of a fruit and vegetable prescription programme (FVRx). This enables doctors to give prescriptions

to families at risk of diet-related diseases, which can be exchanged at the farmers' markets for fresh fruits and vegetables. With a prescription, people get \$30-40 a week to spend on fruit and vegetables. In Washington DC this programme is run in combination with weekly group sessions for overweight children and their families focused on learning about nutrition and physical activity, and encouraging peer-to-peer support.

Both programmes have provided a boost to local farmers, and by extension the local food economy. More money is invested into farm infrastructure, more people employed and more land placed into production to meet the demand for fresh local food.

Alexandra Rose Charities

A previous visit by Gus in 2012 was the catalyst for the Alexandra Rose Charity in London to establish the Rose Voucher project at Brixton Market. Following the success of the scheme, the Charity applied for development funding and did do a UK wide call for interest in June 2016 and 11 cities applied. They ended up selecting Barnsley as the first location and Liverpool will follow early 2017. You can watch a short video about the programme [here](#) and read more [here](#).



Photo 1. Gus Schumacher in the Quaker House in Edinburgh. Photo by Olga Bloemen.

Table conversations

After the talk by Gus Schumacher and a Q&A, we discussed what we may learn from Wholesome Wave's work and apply in Scotland. What follows is a summary of some of the points raised by participants at the events in Edinburgh and Glasgow. Not all conversations were recorded, so inevitably there are points missing.

What are the challenges for increasing access to affordable fruit and veg in Scotland?

- Increasing access is complex: culture, resources and skills all play a part.
- We have a supply side constraint; Scotland doesn't nearly have as many fruit and veg farmers as the US and a shorter growing season (but it was mentioned there is potential to extend the growing season here harnessing renewable energy in conjunction with polytunnels).
- There is a need for more education around food and skills development – a multi-level approach is required. People need to want to eat more healthily. If they did, shops would sell more / better / more affordable fruit and vegetables – demand from customers would drive change. If people know how to grow, handle, and cook food, they are more likely to eat it.
- Currently there's a big price difference between mass produced, imported veg vs locally grown, organic produce.
- Unlike the US, and other parts of Europe and the UK, we don't have a strong market culture in Scotland. Many don't cater for ordinary people who want to get their basic shopping.
- Many farmers markets in Scotland are owned and managed by private companies, which results in high market rates for producers.
- Corner shops in other parts of the UK sell a bigger range of fruit and vegetables: this often reflects the local communities' differing food cultures. The number of community food co-ops has dropped.

What may be barriers to implementing food access programmes similar to Wholesome Wave's in Scotland?

- Due to lack of farmers markets, there was a worry that in Scotland a voucher or prescription system would be implemented in a way that profits the supermarkets rather than food producers..
- There have been schemes run in Scotland similar to Gus's fruit and vegetable prescription scheme, but the redemption of the vouchers was not always good.
- Many small fruit & veg providers such as fruit barras have not been able to engage with Healthy Start Vouchers because of lack of technology/infrastructure. In Forth Valley, suppliers worked with barras to redeem HS vouchers, minimising work for the barras. A voucher system would need simple, intuitive technology suitable for barras and other small providers.

How can we facilitate more direct links between fruit and veg producers and citizens in Scotland?

- Expand and replicate the Glasgow Local Food Network map, and encouraging other areas to create maps, including a structure for continuously updating the maps.
- Our public kitchens should source nutritious food from local, sustainable suppliers
- We can learn from co-ops like the Manchester Veg People, which brings together local organic growers, buyers (restaurants/cafes, caterers and the public sector), and workers.
- Can we make sure all community food and health initiatives offer good quality, as much as possible locally produced food?
- We need structural support for small-scale, sustainable producers of fruit and veg, recognising the public benefits they deliver. Brexit may be an opportunity to change farm subsidies.

Questions raised by participants:

- Does the voucher programme work best with recent immigrant communities who have cooking skills and familiarity with fresh produce from their home countries?
- Is this disrupting the current food system at all or just topping up the processed food with some fruit and veg?
- Does a prescription system medicalise food and make it the field for health experts? Is it sustainable in the long run? What happens after people stop receiving prescriptions, can they still afford to buy fruit and veg? And how do you know that people receiving the prescriptions actually use / eat the fruit and veg they're been prescribed?

How can we enable dignified, affordable access to fruit and veg for people on low income?

- Food banks have risen in prominence but many offer the opposite of dignified access to fruit and veg.
- Everyone should be able to access affordable, not free, fruit and vegetables – in this we can learn from Wholesome Wave.
- Can vouchers or fruit & veg prescriptions ever be dignified, given that they single out people with poor health or low-income status? Swipe cards were discussed in one group as being a bit better and how they could be marketed as a 'Healthy Card', but there remained disagreement in the group about this. Universal Basic Income was seen as a much more effective way of tackling food poverty. If we were to use a healthy food card system, beneficiaries could possibly get points/funds for attending cookery classes or social food events and they could top up their cards at the post office.
- More donation-based community meals where everyone who's taking part is treated equally and eats together. This helps build a more dignified food system.
- We need to take serious the human right to food.
- Improve and expand school meals provision
- Can health services prescribe / offer vouchers for community food projects such as community gardens selling produce, community cafes and fruit barras

What more can we do in Scotland to create spaces that both make it easy for people to access fruit and veg and have social value?

- Set up more people orientated farmers markets:
 - e.g. covered markets run by local authorities and offering producers the option of having their produce sold by market staff, while making sure they get a fair pay for their produce
 - non-profit, or more than profit, centrally located farmers markets that offer cookery workshops, a voucher scheme, a crèche, other community and health initiatives, local producers and ethnic diversity reflected in produce.
- Support producers to come to public places, such as councils, schools, hospitals, nurseries, to sell their produce
- Make community food activities more visible – hold community meals outdoors and wherever possible in or near busy public places. This tied in to maximising unused land - Glasgow City Council is currently undertaking a mapping exercise identifying unused and neglected land.
- Establish more well-equipped training/demonstration kitchens and be creative in tackling 'red tape', particularly about using kitchen facilities in public institutions
- We need more physical spaces where food is an integral part of the community activities provided and we need to make sure that people know they're there.
- Community cafes are potential vehicles for lots of food activities, but many are reluctant to do expand what they do – this is a missed opportunity.
- Develop community retail.
- Veg gardens for every school, integrated with the curriculum for excellence.

Possible next steps

- Try different pilot schemes to test supply /demand scenarios.
- Visit each other's community meals and share what works and what doesn't.
- We need to map who is doing what, so that we can find opportunities for collaboration, and develop a cohesive community food network so that we can share infrastructure/facilities across organisations.
- Engage with the local authorities elections to campaign for some of these ideas to be taken forward locally.
- Talk to the Chief Medical Officer / Secretary of Health about the possibility for health professionals to prescribe fruit and veg to people in risk of diabetes.

Examples of good practice that came up in the conversations:

- The Real Junk Food Project hosts community meals, prepared using surplus food. Customers pay what they can afford / wish to pay.
- Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership is funded by the NHS to provide access points for fruit and vegetables (currently around 40). It runs a range of types of access points – differing in size, type of venue used etc, including schools, hospitals, community centres.
- The Little Leithers project, managed by Edinburgh Community Food is a cooking skills programme, also provides vouchers for families with young children to buy fruit and vegetables, meat, and fish from local retailers, which is supporting local shops.
- The Cyrenians run cooking classes as well as a course called 'Good Food Good Health' for people and organisations to run their own cooking classes (it was proposed for community food initiatives organise classes collectively to save costs)
- Meal bags - a good way to get fruit and veg to people who might have limited cookery skills or confidence shopping for fresh veg.
- The Toot for Fruit mobile shop van, run by the Midlothian Community Food Initiative, sells produce across Midlothian to those most in need.
- Fruit and/or veg Barras organised by NGCFI, the SEAL Community Health Project and others

What's next?



Photo 3. Gus Schumacher, Nourish Director Pete Ritchie and Bruce Bennett, Pillars of Hercules, in Edinburgh. Photo by Gus Schumacher.



The Dignity Project

Much related to the questions we've been exploring at the events with Gus Schumacher, Nourish Scotland and the Poverty Truth Commission are developing a framework/tool addressing: 'How can dignity be at the centre of our responses to food insecurity and food poverty in Scotland?'

In 2016, the Scottish Government committed to a set of principles for a dignified response to food poverty, outlined in a report by the short-life working group of food poverty entitled *Dignity: Ending Hunger Together in Scotland* (report available [here](#)).

With funding from the Fair Food Transformation Fund, our project seeks to explore how these principles can be further developed and used in practice, and to encourage peer-to-peer learning and collaboration in the sector.

We've been co-producing the Dignity framework since November through a series of workshops with community and voluntary organisations that provide food - for example, through emergency food provision or community meals - and the people who are using these services.

You can find out more about the project [here](#).