



Pre-budget submission to
the Joint Committee on
Social Protection,
Community & Rural
Development & the Islands
by
Community Gardens
Ireland

22ND MARCH 2021



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1. Executive Summary

Community Gardens Ireland is a network of community gardens and allotments on the island of Ireland. In existence since 2011 it aims to support and promote community gardens in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Internationally, the evidence-based benefits of community gardens are many, from the proven physical, mental health and well-being benefits to educational, environmental and cultural gains. There is also evidence that they hugely increase social capital by encouraging active citizenship and social connection, help reduce health inequalities, and contribute to reducing anti-social behavior, thus making communities safer.

The Local Government Act 2001 and the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, 2010 addresses the provision of allotments by local authorities and the planning around them. Additionally, the 2020 Programme for Government committed to working with local authorities and local communities to develop community gardens, allotments and urban orchards.

Despite the proven benefits, existing legislation and commitment in the form of the current Programme for Government, there is no country-wide policy in place to increase the number of allotments and community gardens. The existing legislation also provides little protection for communities or duties on local authorities.

In urban areas the amount of land available for allotments and community gardens will become increasingly scarce. Community Gardens Ireland's own recent survey of its members highlighted that the majority of community gardens surveyed had temporary licences which can have large implications for funding purposes, some were on temporary sites zoned for housing and many struggled to obtain funding for garden infrastructure.

Currently, no funding method is available for communities to avail of capital funding for land in local areas. This submission therefore calls on the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community & Rural Development & the Islands to

- a) assign a figure of approximately €500,000 per annum to be allocated for local authorities to purchase land specifically for community growing purposes. This would ensure more permanent locations be set up for community gardens and allotments and facilitate a long term vision for allotments and community gardens in urban areas, rather than relying on limited local authority owned land.
- b) It also calls for the creation of a specific funding scheme similar to the Clár programme for community gardens and allotments in urban areas.

Both of these initiatives would provide long-term outdoor support to communities in areas hit hard by the current pandemic, consistent with the 2020 Programme for Government and the COVID-19 Resilience & Recovery 2021 plan for The Path Ahead.



2. Community Gardens Ireland

Community Gardens Ireland (<http://cgireland.org/>) is a network of community gardens and allotments on the island of Ireland. In existence since 2011, it aims to support and promote community gardens in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Through its website, social media presence and annual gatherings it provides a way for community gardeners to share resources and exchange ideas. Community Gardens Ireland is operated entirely on a voluntary basis by a committee representative of gardens and allotments throughout Ireland.

Internationally, the evidence-based benefits of community gardens are many, from the proven physical, mental health and well-being benefits, to educational, environmental and cultural gains. They add to the Green Canopy of cities and urban areas, and there is also evidence that they hugely increase social capital by encouraging active citizenship and social connection, and contribute to reducing anti-social behavior, thus making communities safer. Increasing the availability of green space, trees and access to nature also helps reduce health inequalities.

In February and March 2021, Community Gardens Ireland organised a survey of member organisations to find out how secure their projects were, who owned their sites, what kind of licences they had and where their funding came from. Some key findings from this survey are summarised in No. 5 below, and relevant tables included in Appendix 1.

3. Legislation

Allotments and Community Gardens have a long history in Ireland with legislation passed within the first few years of the Irish Free State in the Acquisition of Land (Allotments) Act, 1926. This act outlined the responsibilities of local authorities to seek land for the provision of allotments when representations have been made to them. Changes were made in 1934 to this act, to include provision for those who could not afford allotment. These laws were repealed in 1994.

More recent legislation which covers the provision of allotments includes the Planning and Development (Amendment) Act, 2010 for local development plans, and the Local Government Act, 2001.

Amenity, recreation and other functions. 67.—(1) In accordance with and subject to [section 66](#), a local authority may take such measures, engage in such activities or do such things (including the incurring of expenditure) as it considers necessary or desirable to promote the interests of the local community in relation to the matters indicated in [subsection \(2\)](#).

(2) (a) The matters referred to in [subsection \(1\)](#) are—

(vi) allotments, fairs and markets, and related amenities, facilities and services,

Local Government Act, 2001, Section 67



‘allotment’ means an area of land comprising not more than 1,000 square metres let or available for letting to and cultivation by one or more than one person who is a member of the local community and lives adjacent or near to the allotment, for the purpose of the production of vegetables or fruit mainly for consumption by the person or a member of his or her family;

Amendment of
First Schedule to
Principal Act.

77.— The First Schedule to the Principal Act is amended—

13. Reserving land for use and cultivation as allotments and regulating, promoting, facilitating or controlling the provision of land for that use.”,

and

(b) in Part IV by the substitution of the following for paragraph 8:

Planning and Development Act, 2010, Section 77

4. Government Support for Allotments, Community Gardens, Urban Orchards and Community Food Initiatives

The 2020 Programme for Government called out support for the following:

Programme for Government

Our Shared Future

Programme for Government – Our Shared Future

government and emerging EU policy.

- Establish an Independent Agriculture Appeals Review panel in legislation, as a priority, and ensure that the panel includes participants with practical knowledge and experience of farming.

International Market Diversification and Trade

As Ireland is a small open economy, exporting food and drinks produce to over 180 countries internationally, we recognise the importance of international markets and trade.

We will:

- Seek to protect existing markets and open new markets.
- Support the promotion of sustainable, high-quality Irish produce in premium target markets, to give our farmers a competitive advantage.
- Firmly defend Ireland's interests in international trade deals that may emerge, working with our network of colleagues in the European Commission and representatives in the European Parliament.
- Work closely with the agri-food sector to secure access to priority markets and to avail of opportunities that existing markets such as China and Japan afford the sector.

We will:

- Promote short, efficient routes to market that connect small food producers to the consumer and provide advisory, investment and marketing support for those who wish to diversify into new products.
- Support local authorities to expand the number of farmers' markets, farm shops and food emporiums; and support the formation of community-owned markets in all towns, showcasing local food produce from local farmers, growers, and food producers.
- Work with local authorities and local communities to develop community gardens, allotments, and urban orchards.
- Encourage schools and colleges to provide access to land where students can grow their own food.
- Support the small food producer, providing support for on-farm diversification enterprises and investment in local processing facilities, allowing farmers to sell their products into the local and wider domestic markets.
- Examine how other countries have been successful in developing premium markets from family-farm produce.
- Introduce local food procurement policies for the public sector to encourage the availability of nutritious, locally sourced food in public sector areas such as schools, hospitals, government buildings, and prisons.

• **Work with local authorities and local communities to develop community gardens, allotments, and urban orchards.**

In addition, the most recent COVID-19 Resilience & Recovery 2021 plan for The Path Ahead calls out support for community food projects as follows:

COVID-19 Resilience & Recovery 2021

The Path Ahead

- A programme of "citizen empowerment" wellbeing activities and initiatives will be delivered by Local Authorities with local partners, including activities supporting healthy living, physical activity, community food, creativity, managing chronic diseases and positive ageing.



5. Community Gardens Ireland Survey Findings

In February and March 2021, Community Gardens Ireland conducted a survey of allotment and community gardens groups throughout Ireland. The results from the survey were presented at the AGM of Community Gardens Ireland on 13th March 2021, some key tables of results are included in Appendix 1, and the full results are available at <http://cgireland.org/community-gardens-ireland-survey/>.

A. Licence and funding

Of note in the survey results were the issues surrounding the type of licence currently set up for community gardens or allotments. About 80% of gardens who responded highlighted that their licence is not permanent – this has large implications for funding purposes.

For example, LEADER funding requires organisations to have at least a five year lease, with a similar lease required for funding requirements for the recently launched Farming Biodiversity €1.25 million initiative under the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine's Rural Development Programme. The majority of community gardens and allotments would therefore not be eligible for these schemes.

An excellent funding scheme is in place for community gardens and allotments in Ireland through the Clár funding scheme, section 3a. However, this is solely for small scale rural schemes, and therefore excludes all urban areas.

In the survey, in addition to insecurity of tenure, the member organisations of Community Gardens Ireland also called out issues in relation to a lack of funding for various projects including public liability insurance and garden.

B. Zoning risks

In addition, the member organisations of Community Gardens Ireland highlighted that some sites are currently assigned as residential or mixed use. This poses a risk to the use of these locations as construction on local authority owned land is ramped up.

Community Gardens Ireland supports the use of residential land for the purpose of building homes as part of the Programme for Government, but equally seeks for replacement land to be set aside well in advance. In urban areas, one impact from increase construction activities will be that the amount of land available for allotments and community gardens will become increasingly scarce.

Currently, no funding method is available for communities to avail of capital funding for land in local areas. Feedback from elected officials is that local authorities would often be reluctant to purchase land for this purpose, despite the huge community benefits from community gardens or allotments. The cost of land in urban areas is also considerably



higher than rural areas, which would also imply that local authorities are less likely to purchase land for this purpose given the additional cost.

It is safe to assume there will be future impact to local communities from the future removal of community gardens and allotments for housing purposes. Therefore, there is a role for central government to step in and provide community facilities where the local government is not able or willing to provide capital funding for this purpose.

Also, it was noted that in 2020 there were more planning permissions submitted for apartments compared to houses for the first time area (See Appendix 2). Currently there are no planning requirements for apartments to include a space for a community garden in the design. Apartments have a key role to play in the housing of residents in urban areas, but equally there is a role for outdoor amenities such as parks, community gardens, allotments and urban orchards for residents in built up areas to avail of.



6. Funding Proposal for Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community & Rural Development & the Islands

To prevent this becoming an issue, Community Gardens Ireland propose the following:

- A. Community Gardens Ireland propose that the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community & Rural Development & the Islands assign a figure of approximately €500,000 per annum to be allocated for local authorities to purchase land specifically for community growing purposes.
- B. Community Gardens Ireland propose that the Joint Committee on Social Protection, Community & Rural Development & the Islands create a specific funding scheme similar to the Clár programme for community gardens and allotments in urban areas.

7. Funding Rationale

The rationale for this is that it would ensure additional permanent locations be set up for community gardens and allotments. It would also allow a long term vision to be set up for allotments and community gardens in urban areas, rather than relying on limited local authority owned land.

In addition, this would provide a long-term outdoor support to communities in areas hit hard by the pandemic. This would be consistent with the 2020 Programme for Government and the COVID-19 Resilience & Recovery 2021 plan for The Path Ahead.

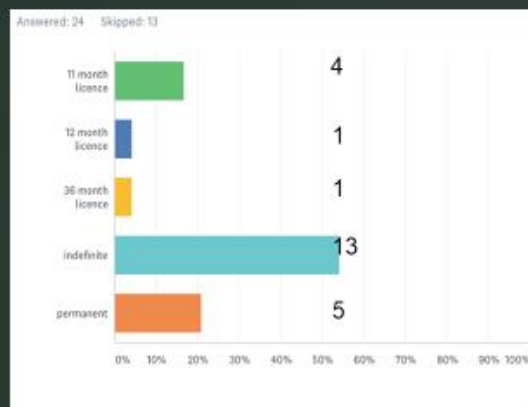
There is no current Irish-wide policy in place to increase the number of allotments and community gardens. In the absence of such a policy, this would be a first step to a plan to increase the number of allotments and community gardens on a permanent basis.

Appendix 1: Community Gardens Ireland 2021 Survey Findings

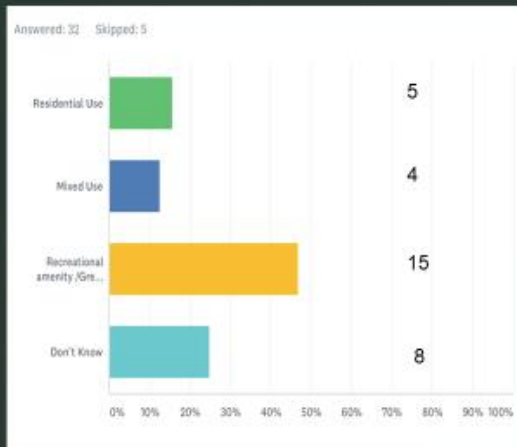
What kind of licence do you have?

Under 'OTHER', 8 said they'd no fixed agreement although some were in discussion for one

One had a 10-year licence (3 years to go) and another had a 5-year licence



Is your site zoned for residential use, mixed use, or recreational amenity / green use?



Who owns the land your garden is on?

- Majority on land owned by local councils (Belfast, Cork, Donegal, Dublin (7), Fingal, Galway, Kildare (2), Leitrim, North Down, Waterford)
- 8 owned by community organisations/town
- 5 by local businesses or farmers
- 4 by church organisations
- The rest a mixture of abandoned land/ sold to private developer by DCC/ not sure

Source of Funding – Answers were wide & varied, indicative of hard work gardens put in to survive...

- | | |
|--|---|
| ▪ Local County Councils | ▪ Heritage Lottery Fund |
| ▪ CLÁR programme grant (Ceantair Laga Árd-Riachtanais - for small-scale infrastructural projects in rural areas) | ▪ Small grants from various sources <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Annual Applefest Grant ▪ Waste prevention grant scheme ▪ Tidy Towns |
| ▪ Community Services programme | ▪ Fundraising /Voluntary collections/hosting open days |
| ▪ SICAP Programme (Social Inclusion & Community Activation Programme) | ▪ Market (affected by Covid); |
| ▪ Community Environment Action Fund (CEAF) (Local Agenda 21) | ▪ Seed swap/donation for seeds/seedlings |
| ▪ Community Enhancement Programme (CEP) via LCDC | ▪ Donations of tools/seeds |
| ▪ Local funding (e.g. Changemakers /Local Development Partnerships) | ▪ Membership fees- ranged from €5 to €50 |

Appendix 2: Article from RTÉ in 2020 stating the record number of planning permissions for apartments

21/03/2021

Planning permission for apartments at record high

Planning permission for apartments exceed houses for first time

Updated / Friday, 30 Oct 2020 18:27



Apartments make up 51% of the total planning permissions granted last year

Planning permissions for apartments have exceeded those for houses for the first time in the country's history, according to the first report from the Office of Planning Regulator (OPR).

There were 40,252 residential units granted permission last year throughout the country with apartments making up 51% of the total.

The report from the OPR - which was set up to oversee the planning process - states that apartments are "key to sustainable urban development".

It said that the Strategic Housing Development (SHD) process was one factor in the increase as it allows large-scale developments to bypass local authorities and go straight to An Bord Pleanála.

The relaxation of rules on apartments - which included increased height and density - was another factor, it stated.

In Dublin, 86% of all residential units given the go ahead last year were for apartments compared to just 24% in Cork.

<https://www.rte.ie/news/2020/1030/1174874-planning-permission/>

1/3



Community Gardens Ireland

w: www.cgireland.org e: info@cgireland.org

Appendix 3: CLÁR 2021 Scheme Outline Local Authority Measures: 3(a)

Link to 2021 Clár scheme (for rural areas only): <https://assets.gov.ie/126842/1b8caf99-c30d-493d-b425-5a1fe2a0aec7.pdf>

Appendix 4: Backup information regarding the benefits of allotments & community gardens

We believe that the provision of space for the community to grow their own fruit and vegetables can help with climate change, biodiversity, pollinators, food poverty, food sustainability and help reduce obesity in families.

A. Community benefits from having allotments

Community gardens also clearly help contribute towards some of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, for example:



- **Goal 3** Good health & well-being
- **Goal 11** Sustainable Cities and Communities
- **Goal 12** Responsible consumption and production

Mental and Physical Health & Well being

The physical and mental health benefits of community and allotment gardening are well proven. Research has shown that as little as two and a half hours of gardening a week can reduce the risk for colon cancer, heart disease, high blood pressure, obesity, osteoporosis, type 2 diabetes, and premature death (Center for Disease Control (CDC), 2019)

https://www.cdc.gov/pcd/issues/2019/19_0117.htm

One review of ten papers published since 2003, which was cited by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (NICE), reported the positive effects of gardening as a mental health intervention, including reduced symptoms of depression and anxiety with participants describing a range of benefits across emotional, social, vocational, physical and spiritual domains (Clatworthy J, Hinds J, Camic PM. Gardening as a mental health intervention: a review. *Mental Health Review Journal* 2013; 18(4): 214-225).

<https://www.scie-socialcareonline.org.uk/gardening-as-a-mental-health-intervention-a-review/r/a1CG0000001ztthMAA>

The UK's National Association of Allotment Gardeners have details on the benefits of allotments.

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/allotment-info/benefits-of-allotment-gardening/>

They also include a case-control study of the health and well-being benefits of allotment gardening, with the following conclusions:

Conclusions

Overall, the findings of this study indicate that one single session of allotment gardening can improve both self-esteem and mood, irrespective of how long participants spend on the allotment, whether they have attended in the last 7 days and their overall length of tenure. Furthermore, allotment gardeners have a better level of self-esteem and mood and a reduced level of abnormal psychological functioning than non-gardeners. Thus, in order to improve health and well-being, people in the UK should be encouraged to take part in short bouts of allotment gardening. Health organizations and policy makers should consider the potential of allotment gardening as long-term tool for combatting the increasing prevalence of ill-health and local public authorities should seek to provide community allotment plots to allow residents to have regular opportunities to partake in gardening activities.

<https://www.nsalg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/health-and-well-being-allotments.pdf>

B. Climate Change

The provision of space for allotments and community gardens can help with climate change and biodiversity improvements.

As a benchmark, The Highland Council in Scotland have an allotment policy which was reviewed in Winter 2019 by their Climate Change team. Allotments are provided by The Highland Council, and their allotments policy has an equal aim to improve the local environments through increased biodiversity. The Highland Council acknowledge that new allotments sites will provide an increased diversity of habitats.

Aim 1: to increase the provision of allotments across the Highland Council area. Performance towards this aim will be measured by the number of new allotment sites established and the maintenance of existing sites. Our target is to establish at least 4 new sites and have identified suitable land for a further 4 sites by April 2014.

Aim 2: to improve local environments through increased biodiversity. New allotment sites will provide an increased diversity of habitats. This policy encourages planting of new hedgerows to further enhance biodiversity. Baseline measurements of hedgerow length will be performed on new allotment sites and reviewed annually.

Also, the Highland Council have highlighted the reduction of carbon emissions through the provision of allotments. By allowing members of the community and families to grow their own, our food travels less, and ultimately less journeys are undertaken by consumers.

Local Outcome 6: Carbon emissions are reduced and communities are protected from the consequences of changing weather patterns

Reduced carbon emissions, both in terms of less produce transported from producers to shops, and fewer journeys to buy produce. By providing local allotment sites, we will minimise travel needs

From The Highland Council:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/1210/environment/321/climate_change/10

Tree Canopy

The current tree canopy cover across County Dublin is 10%, placing it in the lower half of European city values, although there are large variations between local authorities, e.g DLR has 18.9% but the North East Inner City of Dublin has a canopy cover of only 1% compared to 10.2 % in the city as a whole. A tree canopy cover of 15% would make Dublin comparable to other European cities (*Dublin Tree Canopy Study Final Report 2017*. Available from:

https://www.researchgate.net/publication/316441902_Dublin_Tree_Canopy_Study_Final_Report) (Table 2, from page 5 below)

Local Authority	Area (ha)	Canopy (ha)	Percent canopy	Percent urban
DCC	11,772	1,197	10.2	97.1
DLR	12,660	2,398	18.9	59.8
Fingal	45,806	2,996	6.5	25.7
SDCC	22,350	3872	17.3	42.2
Total	92,588	9,284	10.0	43.4



Nationally, Ireland also has the the lowest forest cover of all European countries, according to Teagasc. Land cover here is 11% while over 40% of all land in the 33 member states is wooded. (Hickey, D. (2016), <https://www.irishexaminer.com/opinion/columnists/arid-20389700.html>)

C. Food Poverty

The original legislation providing allotments in Irish law in 1926 were brought in to help with food poverty of the Irish people. An amendment made to the 1926 law in 1934 specifically called out that allowances be made for those who were unemployed and could not afford them.

In today's Ireland, food poverty remains – recent estimates are that 10% of Irish people live in food poverty and are not getting enough nutritious food in their diet. In addition, obesity in children and adults is at its highest levels.

Research performed by Grow It Yourself has highlighted the positive benefits of allotments in helping to combat food poverty. Grow It Yourself estimate that a family can product 135kg of nutritious fruit and vegetables per year in one plot. The provision of allotments throughout towns and villages will provide local communities with the space to grow their own, which ultimately sets children up for success later in life.

Food poverty is a complex issue which requires many aspects to help remove it from society, but the provision of land for allotments and community gardens will directly help with this.

Grow Your Way Out Of Food Poverty

- 10% of People in Ireland living in Food Poverty
- Home-grown food could help lift people out of the Food Poverty trap
- Average sized vegetable patch can yield €500 worth of food each year
- GIY calls on Government to make more land available for allotments

From Grow It Yourself website: <https://giy.ie/archive/grow-your-way-out-of-food-poverty.html>



D. Food Sustainability & Seed Sovereignty

Food sustainability should be treated as a carrot, not a stick! There is nothing more sustainable than having the ability to grow local and eat local. Ireland's current supply chain for our supermarkets allows cheap fruit and vegetables to be imported from thousands of kilometres away.

It is common knowledge that nutrients in food start to break down after they are harvested, so the optimum solution for nutritional value is to grow, pick and eat when required. Seasonal fruit and vegetables also taste better than compared to strawberries grown out of season for Christmas, for example.

Allotments and community gardens are not generally maintained by just one person – families often get involved. In Healthy Ireland's "A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan", a healthy diet is specifically called out as crucial for both adults and children:

2.1.1 Diet and nutrition

A healthy diet is crucial in maintaining a healthy lifestyle. It plays a key role in maintaining a healthy weight as well as encouraging positive lifestyles generally.

The findings of Irish adult and children nutrition surveys over the last ten years show that eating habits are not consistent with optimal health. Excess consumption of saturated fats, trans fats, sugars and salt (especially from foods and drinks on the top shelf of the Food Pyramid) and low consumption of fruit and vegetables are the major problems in the Irish diet (IUNA, 2012a, 2012b, 2012c, 2012d, 2012e).

Source: Healthy Ireland

<https://assets.gov.ie/7559/2d91a3564d7e487f86a8d3fa86de67da.pdf>

By introducing children to the method of growing fruit and vegetables early, they have better diets and have "food empathy", according to Grow It Yourself founder Michael Kelly: <https://www.thejournal.ie/readme/gardening-tips-with-children-3217359-Feb2017/>. This is evidenced by Agri Aware's successful Incredible Edibles initiative now in its 13th year (<https://www.incredibleedibles.ie/>) and GIY's more recent Grow at School project (<https://giy.ie/programmes/grow-at-school/>)



Seed Sovereignty

Ireland does not produce enough open pollinated and organic seed to meet its current needs, which are set to increase drastically, with a 200 percent increase in demand for all seed in the last year, and a 600 percent increase in demand for open pollinated untreated seed. A vibrant and responsive local seed industry will enable us to breed seeds that are better suited to the Irish climate and microclimates, and add substantial value to the operations of smallholdings, community farms, community gardens and community allotments. In the short term, a distributed network of seed production hubs is possible by using the already established community garden network, building on the strengths of self-organisation and cooperation that we display. Irish Seed Savers Association and Social Farms and Gardens NI are providing free training in this process to upskill our gardens and allotments. This is a massive step towards seed sovereignty and the building of a resilient economy, which will be increasingly necessary as the climate crisis unfolds.

E. Communities & Local Economy

Allotments and community gardens are a haven for all members of the community to shelter from daily pressures and problems. Allotments allow all members of the community to learn about the amount of work that goes into producing food to go into the food chain. Allotments provide a space for people to get physically active in fresh air, particularly those who do not have access to back gardens (approx. 10% of Irish population).

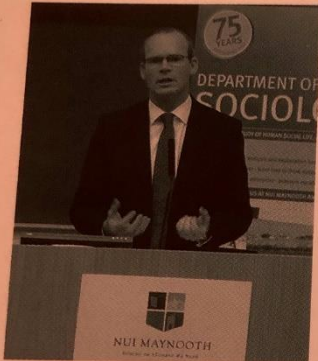
Allotments and community gardens help to promote healthy eating by encouraging locally grown organic uncontaminated fresh fruit and vegetables. Allotments also have a positive impact on the carbon footprints of local communities by improving the sustainability of food production – grow local, eat local, buy local!

While communities benefit directly from the produce, the provision of allotments can also help with the local economy. Apart from an increase in the amount of seeds, plants, tools and other equipment to be purchased in local shops and local garden centres, there are other examples of allotments and community gardens helping the local economy.

In 2016, the EU-funded research on “Urban Agriculture Europe” was published which includes reference to how community gardens and allotments can help the local economy. One example included was where local residents in Rotterdam from diverse ethnic and social origins grew herbs in a community garden. These residents then sold these herbs to local restaurants and cafés, which shows the overall impact of diversity and inclusion when it comes to allotments, along with the potential for local innovation and economic improvements.

F. Urban Agriculture Europe, 2016

Quote by Simon Coveney TD (Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine in 2016) from page 16 of Urban Agriculture Europe.



Simon Coveney
T.D. and Minister for Agriculture, Food and the Marine, Minister for Defence, Ireland

'Even though the concept of Urban Agriculture as a term is relatively new to policy makers, the actual thinking behind it about using natural resources in an urban environment in a different way, in a healthier way, in a way that promotes a better understanding and education around how food is produced, where it comes from. I think that debate is taking place.'

Urban Agriculture is not the same in a developing country metropolis of the twentieth century as in a medieval European city of the thirteenth century.