

PE1433/G

Public Petitions Committee
Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

6 September 2012

Dear Mr Stewart (convener)

PRODUCTIVE LAND FOR LANDLESS SCOTS TO GROW THEIR OWN FOOD

Thank you for considering Petition PE01433. Thanks also for the responses from Scottish Government, Scottish Natural Heritage, Community Land Scotland, Historic Scotland, National Trust Scotland, and Royal Society for the Protection of Birds.

I understand that you also wrote out to Forestry Commission Scotland, Greenspace Scotland, the Scottish Allotments and Gardens Society, Sow and Grow Everywhere, COSLA, Scottish Land & Estates, NFU Scotland.

OUR RESPONSE TO THESE COMMENTS

Various respondents have outlined what is already happening. The time is right to build on these various successes and to sweep away obstructions to more widespread action. What is heartening is that everyone seems to agree that the principle of people growing their own food is a good idea. Our question though is **why if everyone sees it as a positive step, is it still so hard in practice for people to get land to grow?**

Our view is that we need to have a **presumption in favour of people being able to use underused public land for food growing**. Public landowners should enable this – unless there is a good reason why not. We need **A Right to Grow** and we urge the Scottish Parliament to help to achieve this in various ways:

1. Public landowners, agencies and local authorities be encouraged/ directed by Government **to enable and facilitate the process by which underused land can be used for food growing** unless very good reasons exist why not. This can be done by “allowing this use” as opposed to costly and time consuming leases or ownership transfer. The land could remain in public ownership and could work as a positive partnership between public landowner and the community.
2. Public landowners could also address the appetite for growing food proactively themselves: they could either plant, or simply encourage and allow the planting of edible food plants, fruit trees and fruit bushes in

- public parks. This could involve planting fruit trees round new buildings being created by government – for instance the various buildings and athletes village for the Commonwealth Games could include fruit trees and bushes. If the landscaping budget was spent on buying fruiting trees, rather than fruitless amenity trees this would make an enormous difference. The proposed **Commonwealth Orchard would also create a great legacy to the Commonwealth Games.**
3. Trees being planted by land managers supported by Forestry Commission Scotland and SRDP funding could include fruit trees. Our understanding is that a minor modification to the SRDP form to have a box to tick for “fruit trees” would allow land managers to include a percentage of fruit trees in place of amenity trees. **Could the committee ask FCS to investigate if this modification to this grant form could be made to facilitate fruit tree planting?**
 4. Similarly publically owned sports grounds and golf courses could include some fruit trees or bushes, which could be used by the public and which the community could help to maintain. **Could SportScotland be asked to encourage this?**
 5. Longer term we would like a cultural change to **reduce bureaucratic obstacles – which are off putting to less confident people.** Access to currently underused public land to grow food is really a modest aspiration. We hope that the very interesting Community Empowerment and Renewal Bill – currently out to consultation - might help with creating this cultural shift. **We believe that it would be beneficial to have more grassroots representation on the CERB reference group and also on the Grow Your Own Working Group.**
 6. We welcome the Scottish Government’s response and note the fact that it has been tasked to strategically support Grow Your Own. If other Government agencies, health boards, local authorities, Crown Estates and others public landowners were also tasked with supporting Grow Your Own, then this could have a huge impact. **We would ask the Scottish Parliament to ask how the various public landowners could also give strategic support to enable Grow Your Own.**
 7. It might be that **A Right to Grow** may require specific legislation – **this is an issue we believe should be considered by the Scottish Government in the context of the CERB consultation.**

EVIDENCE OF WIDESPREAD SUPPORT FOR THE PETITION:

Since filing the petition and launching our linked i-petition currently has 688 signatories at time of writing. We put this i-petition up because the parliament's system couldn't accept signatories at the time of lodging:

<http://www.ipetitions.com/petition/land-for-landless-scots-for-grow-your-own/>

Examples of comments taken from this petition website state:

Public bodies need to show leadership with this: Ailsa King

The Scottish Government needs to show leadership on making public land available to the public for growing healthy food, & healthy communities. What a potential legacy for Scotland in the 21st century not a blot on the landscape & a drain on the public purse made of steel & bricks but a legacy where every season underused public land gives Scots fresh affordable food. Agnes McGowan

As well as producing food and making individuals and the nation more self-sufficient in food, thereby reducing food miles, this will improve people's health (more activity and more fruit/ vegetable consumption). It will also give people skills they might not otherwise acquire. Ken Mackinnon

We need to promote and encourage the production of sustainable food wherever and whenever possible, by as many people as possible. There are large and small areas of land that could be cultivated by groups of volunteers, community groups, individuals etc. This is an excellent movement that should be supported. H Gibbs

There are many other comments on this petition site – reflecting both the **enthusiasm for the idea and frustration being expressed by people that this is not happening in practice.**

CONCLUSIONS

There is strong support for the petition and a real appetite for land for food growing. The efforts being made by local authorities and other agencies are so far not adequate. Despite the commendable efforts made by various agencies, local authorities and the efforts of the Grow Your Own working group, the perception of people is that it's still extremely hard/ virtually impossible, to get land to grow. The petition comments reflect considerable frustration that this simple idea of making underused land productive is so hard to turn into action.

Our core demand is that land is made available for ordinary people to grow in a timely way. Our hope is that the various public agencies – who are expressing support for this – will give this serious practical support which will allow a shift from people writing reports, to start digging and planting. We urge the Petitions

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Committee to back our recommendations that we hope will sweep away the obstacles and help create a more fruitful and productive Scotland.

Yours sincerely

John Hancox,
Glasgow