

**PE1433/L**

The Petitions Committee  
Scottish Parliament  
Edinburgh

28 November 2012

**Petition PE 1433 – Land for Landless Scots to Grow their own food.**

Dear Mr Stewart (convener)

Our petition is pleading the case for unused land – particularly in public ownership - to be made available for people to grow their own food.

We are grateful to the various people who have responded and given their thoughts on this. We would like to address the Scottish Government letter of 15<sup>th</sup> Nov 2012.

Our desire is very simple: To make land available for ordinary people to grow their own food. We see no reason why that can't be allowed now on public land – and what is required is the will to do this.

The Scottish Government letter would make it appear that much is already happening. In our experience that isn't a fully accurate picture. The Scottish Government Grow Your Own Working Group has been meeting for many years. There are certainly achievements as outlined in the letter – but it would be interesting to ask how successful it has been on the measure of number of new people growing their own food.

The makeup of the Grow your own working group consists of a number of people from government, local government and agencies and various NGO's, as well as a minority of people involved in grow your own at a grassroots level. Our view is that a Grow Your Own working group – should be led by ordinary people who Grow Their Own at a grassroots level. At least the balance of paid officers and grassroots people should be more "bottom up" than "top down."

The Scottish Government letter refers to funding being made available. This funding has gone to a range of NGO organisations who promote Grow your Own initiatives.

The reality is that genuine "Grow Your Own" doesn't need to cost the taxpayer much money. We don't see the need for funded projects to emerge to service the "grow your own" sector. If you give people access to ground and let them get on with it – they will do so. You can give people tools and seeds perhaps – literally seed funding.

Sustainable and long term provision of grow your own, may be best achieved simply by allowing people to do it, and perhaps by helping build the skills so they do it with self confidence. It is literally what it says on the tin – “Grow Your Own”

Regarding our proposals for “A Right to Grow,” – and also in terms of allowing use of public land for grow your own, there is no reason why these ideas have to get slowed down by the Community Empowerment and Regeneration Bill process. This process is unlikely to reach any conclusions swiftly and any legislation will not be passed until 2015. It may or may not be sensible to include something on Right to Grow in the CERB bill – but that shouldn’t delay what can be done now.

With existing powers public land could be made available to ordinary people. What is required is a change of culture so that public agencies have a presumption in favour of helping people to get growing – rather than the current situation where agencies appear sometimes seems to create barriers which the ordinary people wanting to get growing have to overcome.

There was a reply in the Scottish Government letter regarding our idea of including fruit trees in woodland planting under Scottish Rural Development Programme. We welcome the idea that this could be considered in the future – but surely there must be scope for some short term action in terms of allowing amenity trees to be fruit trees? There are ambitious plans to increase forest cover across Scotland and if a small percentage of fruit trees were included this could make a real difference in opportunities for local food growing.

It is the job of land managers to plan developing woodland planting. However our understanding from discussions with the Central Scotland Forest Trust, is that the woodland managers don’t consider fruit trees because that isn’t covered under existing grant mechanism. If this was changed, then they would consider it as part of the balance of planting types. We would be glad to input into discussion to see how fruit trees could be planted in an appropriate way.

In Conclusion: The idea of continuing to allow land to sit idle, when people want to use it, seems immoral to us. The reply from Scottish Government does little to encourage a belief that this will change quickly. Once again we would urge the Scottish Parliament to use its influence to push for swifter action in terms of making public land available for productive use..

Yours,

John Hancox , Glasgow