

Fact Sheet

Income generation

Details of organisations mentioned in this factsheet are listed in *Useful Contacts*. For more information on the associations mentioned in the case studies, contact ARI.

Raising some or all of the money yourselves means that you do not have to make so many compromises and have less paperwork and reports to write. It can be a slow process, with no sudden 'injection' of grant money, but this is often a safer way for an association to develop.

Be realistic about the potential time involvement and costs versus the potential income, as income generation can be time consuming. It does, however, also provide opportunities to promote your allotments to new potential plotholders (one of the best forms of income generation), hold enjoyable social events and gain new skills along the way as well.

Although you don't have a grant body to answer to, your treasurer must still keep receipts and records for the association. It is also still important to take a step back periodically and evaluate how the project is going.

Sale of produce

The sale of surplus produce and plants is permissible under allotment law and is a popular fundraiser on many open days. One association raised £1,000 on one open day. Some tenancy agreements do not allow sale of any produce, even surplus, but if you explain that you are raising funds for the association, the allotment authority may make an exception.

Market stalls

For farmers markets and other produce stalls to be effective, you need a varied and reliable supply of produce – which can be difficult on allotments, where gardeners often have gluts of the same vegetables and only give away their least exciting varieties. Fortunately, a lot of common allotment produce proves popular because it is hard to find in the supermarket, including rhubarb, broad beans, artichokes, chard, runner beans and blackcurrants. Many people are new to unusual varieties such as purple french beans, yellow courgettes and rainbow chard. Shoppers are also jaded by year-round availability and are excited to find the first freshly picked, locally grown peas or runner beans of the season.



In **Cambridge** member associations of the allotment federation pooled their surplus produce and took it in turns to run a stall at the farmers market. A giant map of allotments in Cambridge was also displayed on the stand.



Bullroyd Allotments Association, Bradford hold an open day every year. They can make up to £400 for the association by selling plants.

Marketing ideas for stalls:

- Have a leaflet (a simple typed sheet is fine) to tell shoppers who you are, and how and where they can get more produce.
- Provide recipe cards, especially for gluts or less common produce.
- Offer cooked 'tasters' from the recipes and invite customers to try these. Provide plastic spoons or samples on cream crackers.
- Display a map and photos of your allotments or allotment sites across your city. You could use map pins to indicate where the produce was harvested each week.
- Provide details of open days or other opportunities for customers to visit and details of renting a plot.



Some associations have found that a more low-key approach such as going to school fairs and other local events to work better than attending established markets. One association asked their local school if they could hold a stand outside the school when

parents were picking up children after school and raised considerable funds.

'Honesty box' produce stalls

These are more familiar in the countryside but have also worked well in cities, as long as vandalism is not a serious problem in the locality. Putting the stand in someone's garden can help to reduce

vandalism. Ensure the moneybox is firmly fixed and emptied regularly and do not leave produce out overnight.

Try to position the stand somewhere with good 'footfall' (passer-bys) but where it is not an obstruction, although if the stand is kept well stocked word will get round and people will travel to it.

Statutory requirements

Selling produce and processed food can generate income but also brings added responsibility. Start planning well in advance and ask your local council environmental health and trading standards officers for an informal 'fact-finding' meeting before you make any firm plans. This way you can establish which regulations you legally need to adhere to in a practical way, rather than being restricted by them.

Be aware of the following facts before you start and think about the balance between how much profit you will make compared to how much effort and initial financial outlay it will cost:

- All retailers selling food must register with their local environmental health officer.
- A basic food hygiene certificate is required if selling processed produce, e.g. jam or chutney. Expect to have your premises inspected by environmental health. You may be required to register a home as a business.
- There are statutory requirements to adhere to regarding labelling, weights and where you sell from. You may be able to overcome some trading restrictions by offering produce to people for a suggested donation, rather than at a fixed price.

If you are holding stalls regularly, markets will require you to have Product Liability and Public Liability insurance. The recommended minimum is £5 million. Some brokers offer a combined package from under £100 per year.

Sale of plants and related products

Spring plant sales are often popular for stock that cannot be obtained from garden centres, e.g. vegetable seedlings.

One association asked each plotholder to grow 10 shrubs/bedding plants on their plot, for the yearly plant sale. The sale raises an average of £300, with most sales between plotholders and to parents passing from the nearby primary school.

- Provide photos of what the final plant/produce will look like.
- Provide growing instructions, e.g. on a sticker on the pot.
- Unusual varieties of well-known vegetables are popular, e.g. yellow courgettes.

Many common perennials are easy to propagate - a blackcurrant or gooseberry bush can provide 50 cuttings from the prunings alone, rhubarb crowns can be divided and mint roots easily.

Open days and other events

Open days can attract new plot holders, link with other people in the community, improve the site profile and raise funds in the following ways:

- Have a 'suggested donation' entrance fee at the gate
- Charge stall holders a small fee or percentage of their takings
- Charge a fee for special activities, e.g. craft workshops, garden tours, gardening workshops (it is better to offer free entry if you do this)
- Raffles or prize competitions
- Produce and plant sales
- Sell refreshments.

Linking to an existing national event is a good way of getting free publicity, e.g. National Gardens Scheme (www.ngs.org.uk), National Allotments Week™ (www.nagtrust.org) or Heritage Open Days (www.heritageopendays.org.uk).

People will only want to come to the event if there is a lot going on. It is better to run a short event packed with activities, e.g. 2 – 4pm, rather than trying to drag out

the entertainment over a whole day.

The best form of publicity is word of mouth, so make sure the plotholders have details far in advance. Announcements on local radio, listings in local papers, and posters and leaflets in local schools and shops work well too.

Provide parking if you can, as local residents will be irate if visitors take all their parking spots.

Ideas for activities

- Social events - barbecues, harvest festivals, picnics, games and treasure hunts are all popular. You could relate events to the seasons. Avoid bonfire nights, which can damage the site and raise safety and insurance issues.
- Craft demonstrations - experienced craftspeople may be happy to provide these, especially if they are able to sell their crafts, e.g. basketry, wool spinning, pole lathe turning, felt making. Find contacts through craft shows, markets and guilds. Crafts that use materials harvested from the allotments make a popular workshop or demonstration. Ideas include baskets from brambles and climbers, making a bread oven from garden clay, nettle string, home brewed wine, wood turning using orchard wood on a foot pedal-operated pole lathe. For more information contact the Permaculture Association, look at back copies of permaculture magazines, or 'self sufficiency' books.



Lancashire Wildlife Trust

You could relate events to the seasons...

- Practical gardening workshops or question panels - popular topics include 101 ways to deal with slugs, fruit pruning and grafting, easy plant propagation, easy vegetables and how to grow them, make and plant a herb hanging basket, how to build a compost bin, composting.
- Guided tours of the allotments - select the tour guide carefully: your visitors will love anecdotes, gardening knowledge and history of the site, but will lose interest if the guide talks incessantly or if the tour is longer than half an hour. Volunteers should accompany the tour to ensure that visitors stick to paths and don't wander onto plots, so that the guide can concentrate on giving the tour.
- Garden competitions and shows - always popular, especially if they feature giant vegetables or vegetable carvings or sculptures.
- Children's activities - there are many good books available on willow and nature crafts, face painting and gardening projects, so perhaps someone in your group could run the children's area. To avoid any problems, put a notice up stating that only children accompanied by an adult can take part.
- Refreshments - the traditional cup of tea and slice of cake works best. Offer cold drinks too.
- Stalls - the more variety the better. Visit craft and produce markets and local fairs to canvass potential stallholders.
- Music or theatre - from the local school choir or the amateur theatrical group. Background music is more popular than



Beacon Hill Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Society opens their site to the public in September to coincide with Lincolnshire Heritage Open Day. They link in with activities being organised by the local astronomical society, which has their observatory on site, and with the local history society which arranges visits to the cemetery next door with its Bronze Age burial mound. Because there is a lot of activity going on they can attract as many as 250 people to the open day, and raise over £100 by selling produce.

Moulsecomb Forest Garden and Wildlife Project holds cooking demonstrations with a difference. They organise pick and cook days, where visitors pick vegetables and fruit from the project's plot of unusual and heritage varieties, and a community cook is hired to prepare and cook them on site

They also link into the annual Brighton Festival Fringe, running an event which includes music, storytelling and dressing up, nature trails and bug hunts, and pizzas from the outdoor clay oven.

Walnut Avenue Allotment Association, Bury organises a number of community events – including bonfires, barbecues, first aid courses, and cook and eat sessions.

loud bands, which deter people from visiting stalls or taking part in activities.

- Bees - every county has a beekeepers association, where you can find details of beekeepers with a glass-fronted hive they can bring to events, a popular attraction for all ages.

Social enterprise

During periods of low demand for allotments, your allotment authority may consider allowing you to use derelict plots for dedicated income generation if the profits are solely for association purposes. These plots will require a 'temporary change of use' under allotments law as

they will no longer be used as allotments and must be genuinely surplus to requirements. **The National Society of Allotment and Leisure Gardeners (NSALG)** can provide legal advice on the Allotments Acts.

Do not embark on activities that require a permanent change of use on statutory allotments, as this will make the allotment land vulnerable to development.

Growing 'cash crops' is often made to sound easier and more lucrative than it is in practice. Research your market thoroughly and be confident that you will be able to sell the product before you buy stock and start planting. Find a training course or read technical publications on growing that particular crop, so you are aware of pitfalls and reasons for potential crop failure before you start.

The Permaculture Association produce a monthly magazine which often has income generation ideas from gardening and related activities. You could also consult Kitchen Garden magazine and smallholding magazines.

Willow



Contrary to popular belief, willow does not have to be grown in a wet area, although it will grow well in waterlogged areas unsuitable for allotment use. It does require good light levels, effective weed control and prefers a fertile soil.

Avoid the fast growing 'biomass' varieties, opt for coloured basketry ones instead.

Lawrence Weston Allotment Association, Bristol

has planted an area of willow on some unused sites. The willow is used by all the plot holders for sticks and structures on their own plots. The surplus is used by the local city farm. The farm sells willow sticks and willow products and gives part of the profit back to the association.

TWIGS (Therapeutic Work in Gardening in Swindon) grow trays of wheat grass in their polytunnel, which they sell for £3 each, to a gym cafe. Wheat grass is quick and easy to grow for making a highly nutritious juice: one Bristol juice bar sells wheatgrass at £10 a tray. See 'The Wheatgrass Book', by Ann Wigmore for further information.

TWIGS also prepare miniature herb gardens in hanging baskets, which they sell to a garden centre for £8



'Contorted' willow is popular as an ornamental shrub and in flower arranging. Willow can be cropped after your first year. The plants will crop for decades.

You could sell willow bundles or cuttings at craft shows, garden shows or markets, or direct to florists. Coloured and

'contorted' willow cuttings are useful as ornamental or hedging plants and to make 'living willow' fences.

For information on growing willow and to order cuttings, visit:
www.thewillowbank.com

To find contacts of basket makers in your area, visit: www.basketassoc.org

Other potential cash crops:

- Hazel and dogwood coppice – to produce sustainable pea and beanpoles for gardeners, for wattlework and weaving. After coppicing, dogwood produces attractive red shoots suitable for basketry and other rustic weaving work. Ideal for shady plots unsuitable

for food production. Visit:
www.allotmentforestry.co.uk for more information and a list of suppliers.
Please note: permission from the allotment authority for statutory sites is essential.

- Asparagus - start-up costs are high and asparagus pests, e.g. asparagus beetle, are often common on allotments.
- Strawberries can offer a lucrative yield, if kept weed and slug free.
- Tree nurseries for unusual fruit and nut trees and shrubs. Visit:
www.agroforestry.co.uk

Other fundraising ideas

If you are providing a service, such as gardening, it is important to be reliable and professional, regardless of it being a fundraiser for your association.

Allotments are photogenic places, with allotment holders, sheds and produce providing plenty of scope for calendars, greetings cards and so on. You will need to be confident that you have a market for these (especially since charity calendars have become so popular), and dry storage. You could approach local businesses for sponsorship (e.g. by paying for printing) in exchange for displaying their logo on promotional information.

Hold a charity dinner, using allotment produce for the meal and flowers to decorate the venue. Publicise the event to sympathetic local councillors, businesses etc, as well as ploholders. 'Safari' suppers, where guests travel to a different venue for each course are very popular, often raising over £1,000 per event.

Providing products and services that are useful to ploholders is the easiest way of creating a market for your product, e.g. willow wigwams for climbing beans, refurbished tools and plot clearance services.

Trading Huts

Most allotment sites are now full and with the increase in 'Grow Your Own' generally there is an increased market of willing buyers for trading huts to entice. The key

Windmill Hill City Farm, Bristol

manufactures comfrey liquid feed and sells it to visitors for £5 for a two litre bottle (2010 price). Comfrey liquid feed has a similar nutrient composition to many commercial liquid feeds and is particularly suitable for tomatoes and other fruiting plants, due to its high potassium content.

It is very simple to make: take a barrel or tub, cram with comfrey leaves, fill with water and leave for 3 to 5 weeks. Don't be put off by the smell - it's good stuff! Ladle into plastic bottles and label clearly. Nettles and seaweed can be added to the comfrey leaves to enhance nutritional composition.

To purchase comfrey visit:
www.organiccatalog.com

For more information about comfrey contact Garden Organic or see Bob Flowerdew's 'The Organic Bible' or any other good organic gardening book.



to obtaining as wide a market as possible is to obtain permission from the allotment authority to allow 'Associate Membership' of the trading hut as this permits members of the public to purchase from the hut.

The viability of a site trading hut can depend on a number of factors: how much competition there is from existing trading

Beacon Hill Allotment and Leisure Gardeners Society, Cleethorpes has a table by their store for plot holders to leave surplus plants and produce. They are also encouraged to recycle any unwanted gardening tools here. A donation box is left out for people to make contributions for whatever they take away.

Walnut Avenue Allotment Association, Bury has a communal building on-site with a meeting room, cooking facilities and toilets. They hire out the community building to tenants and residents associations, local councillors to run surgeries and community groups. The money raised goes towards paying for the running costs of the building. They also have a craft centre where they make bird boxes and bat boxes for sale.

May Lane Allotments, Birmingham has been holding a series of fundraisers to contribute to a new roof for their pavilion. They have organised Easter egg hunts, quizzes, raffles and barbecues on site.

Cole Park Allotments, Twickenham has, in agreement with their local council, rented out a small number of car parking spaces when there are rugby matches at nearby Twickenham rugby ground. This provides a small regular income for the association and reduces traffic congestion.

Sefton Park Allotments, Liverpool raises about £600 per year by recycling paper and cardboard on their site. They collect about six skip loads per year from site members. This is a scheme that has been funded by the local council.



Ascott Allotments, Ealing, London

A well-stocked and well-presented trading hut

huts on other sites in your area; the amount of willing volunteers you have to run the hut; whether you already have a suitable building or storage container to trade from.

What you will need:

- Permission from the allotment authority and/or council. You may be able to sell to members of the public if they become associate members of the association.
- A secure building, e.g. a metal shipping container. The container must be removable to avoid onerous planning conditions.
- Product liability, as well as public liability insurance
- A business loan, sponsorship or a small business 'start up' grant to finance purchasing of the building (if not

Bullroyd Allotments Association, Bradford makes a small amount of money for the association by buying seeds through a discount scheme, saving more than 20% on the cost of seeds. The money they save is enough to buy fuel for the association's power tools.

Walnut Avenue Allotment Association, Bury has a trading shop on site which sells garden supplies, bedding plants and compost. They buy large 25 kg bags of compost which they then re-bag into 1 kg bags to sell. The shop raises about £600 per year, which pays for organising and running the annual flower show.

**Our vision is to
increase allotment
uptake by individuals
and groups**

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donated) and the initial outlay of stock. Charitable grants cannot be used for a commercial venture.

- A survey of plot holders to gauge which materials to buy and in what quantities. Compare the prices of different horticultural wholesalers. Placing orders with neighbouring site shops may reduce ordering costs.
- NSALG provides a discount seed scheme to its members.
- A trading hut brings additional responsibilities – see ARI pack *Health and Safety on Allotments – A Management Guide*.

Other income from plotholders

Rent and services

Devolved (self) management allows your association to set the plot rental rate and decide how rental income is spent.

Providing even basic services on an allotment site is not cheap and allotments are just one of countless council services vying for subsidy. None of us want to pay more than we can afford for our plot rental but paying a bit more can be a good way of bringing the site up to scratch.

The water bill is often an association's biggest cost. Consider levying a separate water charge from tenants, to encourage water conservation. Provide information on water conservation measures such as mulching and correct watering and how to report a burst or leaking water pipe.

Consider charging for other additional services, e.g. plot clearance, rotovator use, a plot with a shed. Carry out bulk collection of manure/leafmould and charge per barrow.

Commemoration

Allotment gardening is a popular hobby with older people, often enabling them to enjoy a healthy, sociable and independent old age. Invite plotholders to consider the allotments in their will or covenant, as a way of ensuring that future generations can continue to enjoy allotments.

Some associations provide the flowers for a deceased gardener's funeral from their plots, a more personal touch than florists bouquets, with friends and relatives making a donation to the allotments instead of buying flowers.



Mudchute Allotments, London

have a memorial garden as a place for plotholders to relax and remember deceased fellow gardeners. Memorial gardens can offer relatives and friends the chance to make a donation to their deceased relative's favourite hobby through a commemoration bench, plaque or tree.