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Project by project

FEL



Falkirk Food Gathering 2026 Discussion Summary Report



At the recent Falkirk Food Gathering 2026, participants took part in four facilitated table discussions exploring community engagement, future ambitions, volunteering, and measuring impact. The discussions brought together experiences from different groups and provided valuable insight into what works well, the challenges organisations face, and ideas for future development.

Table 1: Engaging Communities in Orchards and Community Gardens



Activities That Have Worked Well

Participants highlighted that variety and accessibility are key to encouraging community involvement. Offering a wide range of activities allows people with different interests and availability to participate, which helps build a stronger and more diverse community.

Events that bring people together around shared interests and social interaction were particularly successful. Food was frequently mentioned as a strong motivator for attendance and engagement.

Examples of activities that have worked well include:

- Seasonal community events such as **Summer Fetés, Christmas Fayres, and Apple Day celebrations**
- **Family-friendly activities** and events that encourage intergenerational participation
- **Raffles and tombolas** which help raise funds and attract visitors
- **Pamper days** and other wellbeing-focused activities
- **Sunflower growing competitions** involving children
- **Community building projects**, such as creating new seating in orchards
- **Local nursery involvement**, where children help care for parts of the garden
- Events that allow people to **socialise as well as participate**

Some groups noted that offering a wide range of opportunities has resulted in high demand and waiting lists for activities, demonstrating strong interest from the community.

Activities That Have Been Less Successful

Activities that were too niche or specialised tended to attract fewer participants. For example, a specific activity such as line dancing may not appeal to a wide audience compared with a more general social dancing event.

Another challenge highlighted was the growing demand for community activities alongside difficulty recruiting new volunteers, which can limit what groups are able to deliver.

Ideas for Involving More People

Participants generated a wide range of ideas for expanding engagement and reaching new audiences. A key theme was the importance of actively reaching out to groups who may not traditionally engage with community garden projects.

Suggestions included:

- Reaching out to **marginalised or underrepresented communities**
- **Expanding engagement into neighbouring areas** such as Stirling and Clackmannanshire
- Working with **universities and students** seeking volunteer hours
- Partnering with **existing community groups, churches, and local organisations**
- Involving youth groups such as **Scouts, Boys Brigade and Brownies**
- Engaging **sustainability groups in primary and secondary schools**
- Ensuring that individuals who may have previously felt excluded from community activities are **welcomed and included**

Practical activity ideas included:

- Indoor activities such as **planting bulbs or seeds** to reduce weather barriers
- **Window-sill herb garden projects**
- **Guerrilla growing workshops**
- Creating a **community seed library**
- Outdoor food-based activities such as **picnics, cooking sessions and open days**
- **Practical training workshops**, such as mushroom cultivation or composting
- Offering **mental health training sessions**
- Hosting social activities aimed at younger people, such as **ice cream and volunteer parties for teenagers**

Participants also highlighted the importance of:

- Creating **safe and respectful spaces**

- Building **trust by understanding the local community**
- Focusing on **shared interests** to bring people together
- Developing **orchard networks and sharing resources** such as tool libraries
- **Sharing produce** from the orchard with the wider community

Publicity and Communication

The most effective ways of promoting activities were reported to be local and personal forms of communication.

Successful publicity methods included:

- **Word of mouth** within the community
- **Direct engagement and conversations** with residents
- Social media, including **Facebook advertising**
- **Local newspapers**
- **What's On listings** both online and in print
- **Flyers and posters**
- **Banners** displayed outside the garden
- **Promotion through primary schools** to reach parents

Radio advertising was generally seen as less reliable for attracting participants.

Table 2: The Future of Community Gardens



Participants discussed their aspirations for the future of their gardens and community spaces.

Future Development Ideas

Several groups expressed interest in developing their gardens into multi-purpose spaces that support wellbeing and community connection. Ideas included:

- Creating **multi-use garden spaces**
- Developing **peace gardens** or **'zen' spaces**
- Providing **safe, welcoming environments** where people can relax and spend time outdoors

Long-Term Goals

Participants shared a range of ambitions for their projects, many of which centred on sustainability, skills development, and community resilience.

Key goals included:

- Improving **financial and environmental sustainability**
- Supporting **community food resilience**
- Delivering **climate skills training**, such as beekeeping qualifications
- Providing **social enterprise training**
- Delivering **practical skills development**, including training kitchens and food hygiene certification
- Embedding **inclusion and accessibility** within projects

Table 3: Volunteering in Community Gardens



Volunteers play a crucial role in the success of community gardens. Participants shared insights into what helps volunteering programmes thrive.

What Works Well

Successful volunteering programmes often have clear structure, good communication, and opportunities for volunteers to develop skills and social connections.

Practices that have worked well include:

- **Regular drop-in sessions** with clear start and finish times
- Proper **induction and training**
- Having clear **policies and grievance procedures**
- Advertising opportunities through **multiple channels**
- Maintaining a **large pool of volunteers** to prevent burnout
- Providing **training opportunities**
- **Celebrating volunteers** regularly
- Offering **hot food and social opportunities**
- Creating a **welcoming environment** where people can also sit and enjoy the garden
- Holding **community days and events in the garden**

Inclusivity was also highlighted as important. Gardens have successfully engaged diverse groups including:

- Carers
- People living with dementia
- Individuals with additional support needs

Other important factors included:

- Understanding that **volunteers are motivated by different things**
- Being **flexible**
- **Respecting volunteers' time and availability**
- Providing **opportunities to network and make connections**
- Accepting that **challenges and mistakes are part of the process**

What Does Not Work

Participants also discussed some common pitfalls:

- Not providing **training or progression opportunities**
- **Advertising volunteer roles in only one way**
- Trying to run **too many activities at once**
- Putting **too much pressure on volunteers**

Table 4: Measuring Impact



Participants discussed different ways they capture and measure the impact of their projects.

Methods That Have Worked Well

Many groups use a combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches to capture their achievements and demonstrate impact.

Common methods include:

- Keeping **records and trackers**
- **Photo diaries and progress photographs**
- Recording **participant numbers and footfall**
- Tracking what is **grown, harvested, and sold**
- Collecting **feedback through conversations, surveys, and interviews**
- Capturing **case studies and participant stories**
- **Visitor books** and comment cards
- **Google Forms surveys**
- **Feedback forms** at training events
- Monitoring **energy usage or environmental metrics**
- Creating **digital impact reports**
- Recording **quotes and testimonials**
- Conducting **pre- and post-project surveys** to track changes in attitudes or behaviours
- Using **volunteer journals** to document weekly progress and experiences
- Producing **legacy films with interviews**, sometimes in partnership with local colleges

Food-based activities were also highlighted as effective opportunities for informal feedback. Cooking and eating together can create a relaxed environment where participants are more comfortable sharing their experiences.

Challenges When Measuring Impact

Participants also identified several barriers:

- Limited **time and capacity** to manage data collection
- Social media updates being **difficult to maintain**
- Some community members **not using social media**
- People being **reluctant to share personal data**
- **Low response rates** for surveys, particularly among children
- **Language barriers** during surveys or interviews
- Difficulties collecting **equality monitoring data**
- **Funding requirements** sometimes placing pressure on groups to measure specific outcomes

Potential Solutions and New Ideas

Participants suggested several ways to improve impact measurement:

- Asking **volunteers to help manage social media**
- Using **scheduled social media posts**
- Sending surveys **via email rather than paper**
- Keeping surveys **short and simple**
- Including **survey links in newsletters**
- Using **WhatsApp conversations** to gather informal feedback
- Increasing **community engagement before asking for feedback**, to build trust
- Using programmes such as **Duke of Edinburgh or Saltire Awards** to support engagement, learning and feedback
- Creating **safe and welcoming environments** where participants feel comfortable sharing their experiences

Some groups also expressed interest in exploring new ways to measure environmental outcomes, such as carbon impact, though many were unsure how to approach this at present.

Conclusion

The discussions highlighted the vital role community orchards and gardens play in supporting wellbeing, building connections, and strengthening local communities. Successful projects tend to offer a wide range of inclusive activities, with food, social events, and practical learning all proving effective in encouraging participation.

Volunteers remain central to the success of these spaces, and groups emphasised the importance of good communication, training, and recognising people's time and contributions. Participants also shared ambitions to develop their gardens further, with a focus on sustainability, skills development, food resilience, and creating safe, welcoming places for everyone.

While measuring impact can be challenging due to limited capacity, there is a strong commitment to finding simple and meaningful ways to capture the difference these projects make.

Overall, the discussions showed a high level of enthusiasm, experience, and willingness to collaborate across the community garden network.

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