

GROW TO SELL



Photo credit: Keele University



STUDENTS
ORGANISING FOR
SUSTAINABILITY
UNITED KINGDOM

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GROW TO SELL HANDBOOK

GROW, SELL, EAT THROUGH SOCIAL ENTERPRISES

FOOD GROWING

Is there any human activity more important to the human existence than growing food? When humans learnt how to farm, we discovered a way for the land to support us in a way that made food more available to us. Farming is the most important ingredient in human civilisation, it is the seed from which everything grows, and it is the roots of all society. Throughout the last 80 years, as our society has moved forward into a place where industry and technology has taken a leading role in our lives, we have been experiencing an increased disconnect to the land, the food we eat and those who grow it for us. However, we are seeing a different trend emerging and we are becoming increasingly more aware of and appreciating the health and environmental benefits of food. Food is that one thing we all have in common and growing food is a great way to engage young people with sustainability, connecting them to the land and giving them the skills and knowledge to eat sustainably now and into the future.

WHY GROW TO SELL

The benefits of growing your own food are many, and setting up a food growing site on campus will act as an educational tool and community builder. It will provide new opportunities for young people to develop employability skills, increase food literacy and foster wider environmental activism among young people. Allotments and other growing spaces can also provide the perfect antidote to the stresses and strains of university life.

SET UP A FOOD ENTERPRISE

GOOD FOR YOU, GOOD FOR YOUR INSTITUTION, GOOD FOR YOUR COMMUNITY.

- Fresh affordable food for students, staff and members of the public.
- Provides real-life experience of setting up and running a business.
- An opportunity to see your ideas come to life.
- Enhances employability skills - leadership, teamwork, planning etc.
- A great way for emerging student enterprises and societies to market their products.
- Potential income generation for your students' union or society.
- A chance to raise awareness about the importance of buying sustainable food.
- Supports the local economy and community partnerships.





1. Nutritious and delicious food

The fruit and vegetables we find in the supermarket have often been on a complex journey to get there, sometimes they've even travelled across the globe. The produce can be found stored or sat on the shelf for a long period of time before it gets purchased by the consumer, often meaning the nutritional value of the produce has decreased. Growing your own food and eating seasonal local food - which can be harvested, sold and then eaten within a few days - provides you with fresh fruit and vegetables that are at their nutritional best.

2. Better for the environment

Production, storage and distribution of food on a large scale relies on heavy resource-use and fossil fuels. The factors involved in producing your food and bringing it to your table are many, and often rely on intense resource-use of land, water, chemicals, and fossil fuels, all of which have a negative impact on our environment. On top of this, 25-30% of total food produced is lost or wasted, which is estimated to contribute 8-10% of man-made greenhouse gasses. Growing your own food and eating seasonal local food massively reduces the negative footprint produced by large-scale farming, and includes reducing plastic pollution caused by excess packaging of fresh produce. You can also choose to avoid using harmful chemicals that can have a negative impact on both human health and natural eco-systems.

3. Improved wellbeing

Food growing and gardening enhance physical and mental health and work towards improving diets and overall public health. Being outdoors, planting seeds and watching them grow can be one of the most rewarding experiences that support our mental wellbeing. And just 30 minutes of sowing, planting and weeding is enough to improve your overall wellbeing.

'Cultivating Wellbeing Through Gardening.'



4. Grow together

Horticulture and agriculture are the two least diverse sectors in the UK. SOS-UK is committed to increasing equity and diversity in our work with students, supporting everyone to feel valued, respected and included. We urge all our food growing sites and enterprises to cultivate a culture where everyone feels welcome and appreciated irrespective of age, gender, race/ethnicity, faith, sexual orientation or abilities. Creating a food garden is to transform a landscape where diversity is fundamental for soil health, plant health, wildlife, and successful harvest. This interconnectedness should be reflected in the people who care for it so that we can learn from each other, share experiences, and take action to allow our growth to flourish.

5. Food economics

Growing your own food not only saves you money, but it also offers the opportunity to practice within a closed loop system. Taking people on the journey from seed to plate is a valuable way for people to connect with the food they eat, building a greater relationship and understanding for the value of food and the people who grow it. You can also save seeds from your fruit and vegetable varieties from year to year, giving you more resilient crops adapted to the area you are growing in. Anything that cannot be eaten straight away can be dried, frozen, pickled or jarred to preserve it beyond its growing season, which saves it from going to waste and adds value to your produce. Any waste beyond this such as green waste or produce not fit for consumption can be added to the compost pile to provide healthy, living soil for your future crops.

'ROOTZ INTO FOOD GROWING'

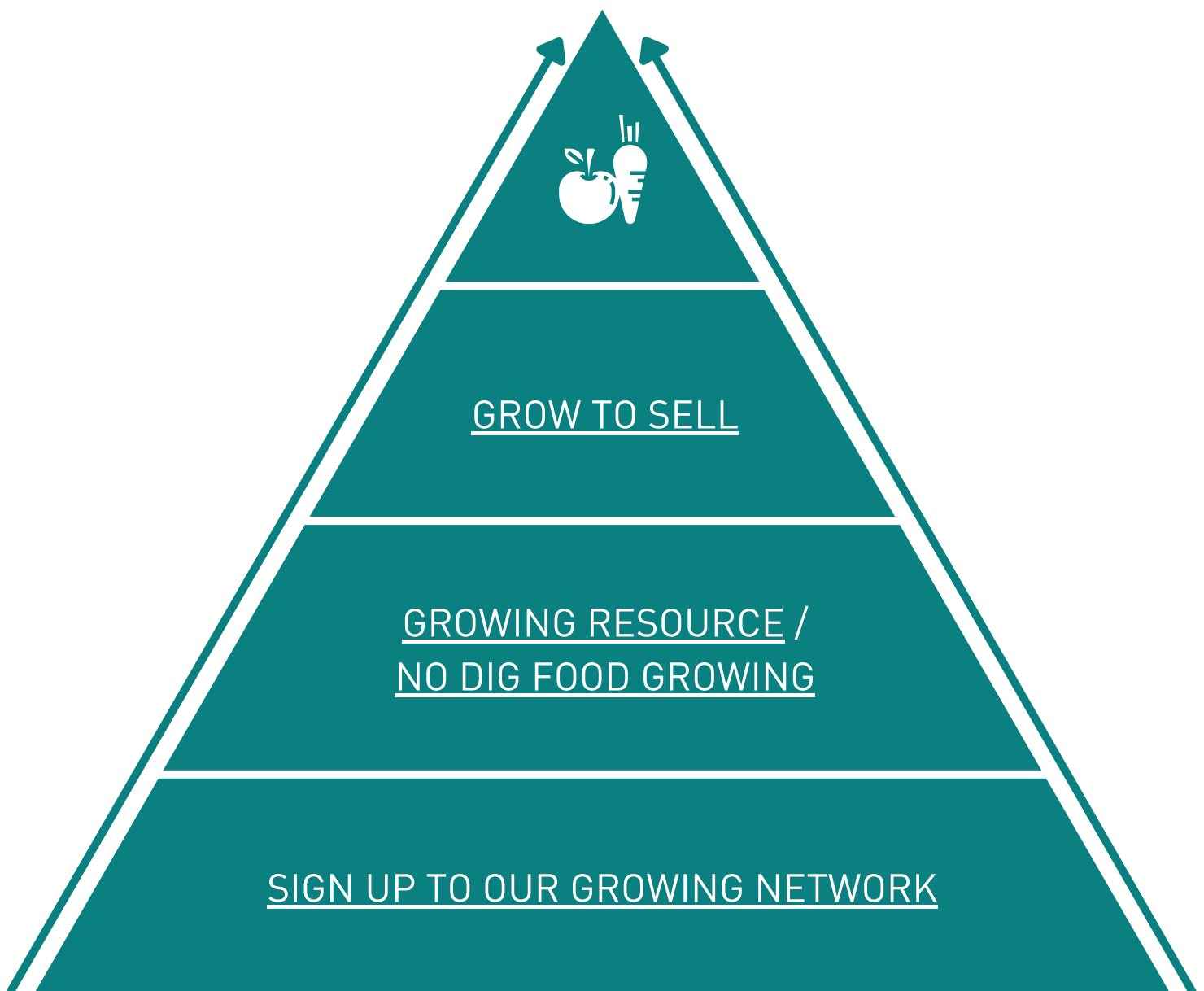
Learn more of how to
incorporate anti-racist,
equity-led practices into
your enterprise.



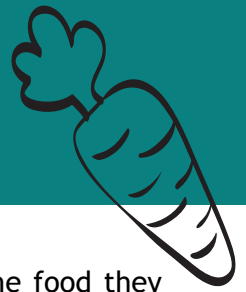
WHO IS THIS HANDBOOK FOR

This handbook is created as a guidance tool for universities and colleges who would like to expand from food growing to setting up a social enterprise selling their produce.

If you are starting up a food growing site from scratch or if you already have a growing site but would like some additional resources, then download our [growing_calendar](#), sign up to our [growing_network](#) and/or take a look at our training session to set up a [no-dig_growing_site](#) via the learning academy.



WHERE TO START



Setting up a grow to sell enterprise is a great way to connect students to the food they eat. Here we have listed a few things that are important to consider when starting up a food growing enterprise on campus, but please make sure to do your own research and find the strategy that is best suited for your enterprise idea.

- **Support** - Look into what kind of labour or funding support the college, university and/or students' union can offer. Reach out to community leaders or influential people to share / pitch your enterprise idea. If funding is limited or scarce, why not pitch a joint idea with another community project.
- **Costs and Funding** - There are many ways of creating a food growing site on a budget. Regardless, you will have to cost up your expenses for the tools and resources you will need to support your enterprise, this will also be useful for applying for funding.
- **Business model** - create a plan describing how your enterprise will operate. A business model canvas is a great tool that can help you visualise how your enterprise will generate income, sell products etc. This will help your understanding of the different elements of running a business and build a framework that will support your enterprise journey. Run a brainstorming workshop with your team to map out ideas, dreams, knowledge and skills within your group.
- **Values** - write a list of your enterprise's core values. This will be an important part of how you operate and give back to your community.

THINGS TO CONSIDER

1. Create a timeline for setting up your growing site, from creating your site to your first harvest.
2. What type of managing structure(s) will be in place to ensure production is maintained and the site is cared for throughout the year.
3. Growing plan: Draft a basic growing calendar for the season, what can you grow where you are? Create a simple crop plan for the year to help you plan what to grow when in the space that you have access to. Be strategic with your plan to avoid crops that need a lot of attention during the summer months when perhaps there are not many students around to help with watering.
4. Your market: Who will be purchasing your produce? Allow customers to provide feedback through surveys, comments boards or questionnaires.
5. How will you sell your produce? Is there a market on campus or nearby you can be part of? Can you set up a market stall on campus? Could you stock a shop or café? Or perhaps you want to set up a veg bag/box scheme?
6. As you are setting up as a small business, you will have to ensure that you have the right insurance cover and company structure. This is usually covered by trading under your students' union, so make sure to check in with them and maintain clear communication throughout your journey.



HARVEST AND PACKING

Set up a plan for harvest day in relation to the day of sales, can this happen on the same day? Dependant on your food processing and storage space availability, you will have to plan out what happens between harvesting your produce and it ending up on your sales table.

After harvest:

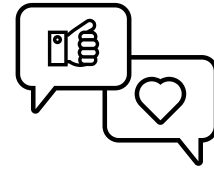
1. Harvest and weigh each variety of produce.
2. If producing bags of mixed leafy greens, mix these, bag and weigh.
3. If producing bunched veg, weigh and bunch these.

Keep a record of the produce you harvest and its weight. This is useful for collating data for impact reports, future funding- or award-bids and to see potential increase/decrease in production each year.

If selling pre-packed produce such as salad bags, you must label it with:

- Name of Produce
- Name of enterprise + address
- Date of harvest
- Storage
- Weight





SALES

Growing food to sell offers a unique selling point where you can offer the freshest and most nutrient rich produce available by harvesting and selling your produce in the same day. You are growing food to provide students with fresh and healthy produce that is affordable and accessible. If in the start up phase you are not able to sell your produce from a sales point, sell or donate the produce to your volunteers. It is also worth considering giving certain amount of your produce to volunteers as part of your enterprise model. This is a great way to keep motivation up among volunteers, and it creates a great talking point for students when bringing home fresh produce which they have grown themselves.

Once you have set up a sales point, identify a consistent pricing system. If you are selling to low waged students or community members, perhaps offer a reduced, but fair price and charge a higher price to higher earners (e.g. university staff) so that you can cover your costs and also reinvest money back into your growing site. It may also be worth setting up a box scheme if you are growing large quantities of produce. This also helps to build a reliable customer base and promote seasonal eating. You may want to set up a partnership with other local growers if you are short of certain crops during the hungry gap.

If you produce more food than you are able to sell, then freezing, drying and preserving produce is a great way to avoid food waste and create value added products to sell over the colder months when production is low.

MARKETING

Finding a name and developing a logo for your growing site and enterprise is a valuable way for people to get to know about and recognise your project. It will help you promote volunteering opportunities, events, and your produce.

Using social media to promote your enterprise is an easy way to reach your target audience. Consistency in engagement is important to build up a following, no matter which channel(s) you use. Decide on the imagery and tone of your profile, and stay consistent with this. You can keep it interesting and interactive by using hashtags, captions, competitions, polls and so much more. You want to capture the attention of your audience and tell your story.

HEALTH AND SAFETY

It is your responsibility as a food enterprise to ensure that the food you produce, and sell is safe for consumption. During production, you also have to ensure that yourself and volunteers are properly trained in tool use and aware of any possible dangers of working on a growing site. You have to have a risk assessment in place for the area you are working on, and the activities associated with the enterprise (e.g. food growing, packing, selling). Make sure you have good routines in place for your space and that these routines and guidelines are clearly communicated to all the people involved.

REGISTERING YOUR FOOD ENTERPRISE

Although growing fruit and vegetables are considered a low-risk venture, you may still have to register your enterprise with your local authority. It is free but you need to register 28 days before you start trading. You may get fined and prosecuted if operating a food enterprise without registering.

SELLING YOUR PRODUCE

For your produce to be fit for sale you must ensure it is:

- intact
- not rotten, severely bruised or severely damaged
- clean (exceptions are root veg such as potatoes, carrots and beetroot where the soil helps preserve and provide longer shelf-life to the produce)
- fresh in appearance
- practically free from pests
- practically free from damage caused by pests affecting the flesh
- free of abnormal external moisture
- free of foreign smell or taste
- sufficiently developed/ripe, but not overdeveloped/overripe

Lead staff and/or students working with food should consider getting a Food Safety and Hygiene certificate, which will allow them to train, supervise and instruct volunteers to a level appropriate to the activity. You can easily find Food Safety and Hygiene courses available online and they should usually be between £15 - £25 per certificate.

If selling pre-packed produce such as salad bags, it must be labelled with:

- Name of Produce
- Name of enterprise + address
- Date of harvest
- Storage
- Weight

You can learn more about correct labelling from
the [Food Standards Agency](#).
or
contact your local Trading Standards office for support



IMPACT & EVALUATION

Keeping track of your enterprise's operation will support you in developing your enterprise and it will help you see whether you are reaching your project aims and that your time and effort is making a difference among the people you are working with. It will also support future funding bids, award applications and reports. Set up various impact reporting spreadsheets on Excel where volunteering hours and produce harvested / sold can be tracked on a weekly basis. This should be stored either on the cloud (shared), or among a core group of project leaders. Ensure any personal data for volunteers is stored appropriately and securely, in line with [GDPR](#) requirements.

VOLUNTEER SURVEY/FEEDBACK

When your food growing enterprise is up and running, consider introducing a survey which is sent out to your volunteers once or twice a year at the end of the academic term(s). Although you are running an enterprise, which focusses on the production and sale of fresh produce, your activities will inevitably have an impact on the people running the enterprise. The volunteers are also the heart of your enterprise, and that is why measuring this impact is so important. No matter your enterprise management structure, there should always be space for volunteers to give feedback about their participation, ideas and wishes. This will provide volunteers with a sense of belonging and ownership, which in turn will encourage long-term participation. It will also help you implement collaborative strategies to improve and develop your enterprise.

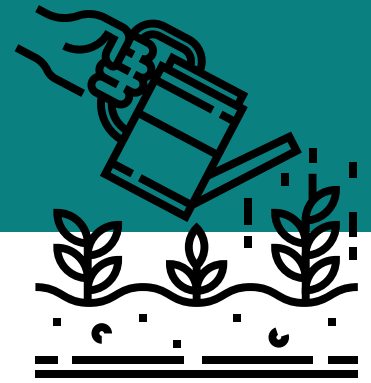
IMPACT REPORT

Producing a yearly impact report at the end of the academic year is a great way to collate all your data and produce a document that tells your story. It also acts as 'proof of impact' and can make it easier for you to pull information out for writing funding bids, award applications or to promote your enterprise in social media. An impact report should include a mix of storytelling, quantitative (numerical) and qualitative (quotes/experiences) data. The impact reports are also valuable for when it is time to create a [handover document](#) that will support the longevity of the enterprise.

SOCIAL IMPACT

Some things are harder to measure than others, especially when our impact is in areas that cannot easily be measured numerically. That does not mean it is not equally as important. Measuring your social impact is of great importance when measuring the success of your social enterprise but can often be challenging to capture. [The Social Impact Toolkit](#) is a multimedia tool full of useful information and indicators to help you understand the outcomes of measuring your social impact and how to do it.

CASE STUDIES



LEEDS BECKETT ALLOTMENT

The Beckett Allotment is one of Leeds Beckett Students' Union Volunteering Projects and is run by student volunteers who welcome anyone who's interested in getting involved with food growing. Here, the students get to experience everything from design, planting and harvesting. The allotment site can be found on the edge of a park close to the Leeds Beckett city campus, and is situated right in the heart of a student neighbourhood. It is one of the most beloved and longstanding projects to come out of LBSU, supported by students' union staff and led by students who are passionate about what they do.

The aim of the Beckett Allotment is to bring people together to learn, share and experience growing their own food. It also offers a space where students can take a break from their busy schedule, reconnect with nature, relieve stress, and have fun with their peers in an outdoor environment.

Engagement with the allotment has varied over the years, but it has recently experienced its most popular period with more students wanting to get involved than they are able to accommodate. The students who are managing the allotment have done an amazing job ensuring that as many students as possible will get a chance to be involved, with the site growing and constant improvements being made it is looking better than ever! During COVID-19, the allotment provided great comfort to students still based on and around campus. Students have been able to stay active on site while adhering to social distancing guidelines, continuing to make improvements to the site.



Photo credit: Leeds Beckett Allotment, Leeds Beckett SU

“Our approach has been to give the student leaders as much autonomy over the site as possible, allowing them to make it their own and creating a space that they want to share with others.”

Lyndon Wallace, Student Groups Coordinator

The social impact of the allotment project has been fantastic. Large social groups have sprung up through the project, and students are learning new skills that they probably would not have had the chance to learn had it not been for this on-campus based opportunity. The Beckett Allotment has also provided opportunities to develop positive relationships with the local community, bridging the gap which is often found between university students and local residents.

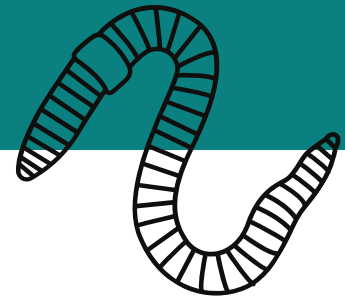
One of the biggest challenges the project is facing revolves around increasing the production of food so they can produce enough to feed both students volunteers and their enterprise project, Eco Soup. Eco Soup is their main source of generating income, turning fresh produce into soup which is then sold to students and staff at the university. The allotment hopes to tackle this challenge with the installation of a polytunnel to increase the length of the growing season, and to create crop plans which focus on crops that are available during term time.

In the future, the Beckett Allotment will be looking towards creating more growing spaces on campus. Not only will this support the production of veg for Eco Soup, but it will accommodate the increasing popularity of food growing among students. LBSU will also work towards tying all their sustainable food projects and enterprises together, so they can offer a more holistic opportunity to their students.



FOLLOW
LEEDS BECKETT
ALLOTMENT
ON INSTAGRAM:

[@leedsbeckettallotment](https://www.instagram.com/leedsbeckettallotment)



GROWHAMPTON

Growhampton is an urban food growing project delivered by the Roehampton Students' Union at the University of Roehampton in Southwest London. The project was established in September 2013 after receiving funding from the NUS Students' Green Fund. Since then, Growhampton has achieved an enormous amount and today the project consists of an edible campus with growing spaces found across the university grounds, a sustainability café that offers organic, ethical and local foods, as well as freshly picked vegetables and eggs laid by their very own chickens. All of this comes together to give students the opportunity to learn about food production, food enterprising, ethics and sustainability.

Since its inception, Growhampton has engaged nearly 2000 students with sustainable food through volunteering opportunities, events, and guest lectures. They have grown 1500 kg of produce on campus, including 600 kg alone in 2020, 360 kg in 2019 and 155 kg in 2018, demonstrating a significant year-on-year rise. According to Capital Growth's 'Harvestometer', a platform where Growhampton logs its produce data, the 1500 kg total equates to 20,000 meals, or a monetary saving of £8k.

Growhampton depend on generating income from their activities, and over the years they have found ways of generating income in several ways. Firstly, seasonal produce allows for campus-grown crops to be sold year-round to a customer base that includes staff, students and the local community. This produce can be purchased at the project's café, known as the Hive, as either fresh greens and vegetables harvested and packed by student volunteers, or as hot nutritious meals cooked up by the kitchen team. In addition, customers can purchase campus produce via an email system. A weekly email is sent out to a customer

mailing list of what is available to buy, they can then pop through their order which will be ready for pick up the following week. This system can help avoid picking too much produce, which then may not be sold throughout the week. However, any produce not sold at the end of the week will be given away for free to students or fed back into the soil via their chickens or wormery.



Cooking, freezing and drying produce also helps to boost income generation. With funding from SOS-UK, Growhampton has been able to set up a food processing space on site, from here they produce chutney, jam, pesto, tea and cordials under the brand of This is Our Jam, which are all popular products among Growhampton's customer base. Having apples, tomatoes, herbs, chillies, horseradish, berries, currants, and greens all readily available on their edible campus, they are able to facilitate preserve-making workshops run by students for students. Here, students get to conjure up delicious, value added products from produce that would have otherwise gone to waste, whilst boosting cooking skills in the process.

Growhampton would describe themselves as the incubator for an altogether positive university experience for students. They offer knowledge and life-long skills in food-growing, biodiversity, soil care, chicken care, jam and preserve-making, and cooking.



“I am learning so much about sustainability and feel like I’m positively contributing to something that’s worthwhile for the university community, the wider Roehampton community, and the environment. It’s also just been great spending time outdoors.”

Student Volunteer,
Growhampton Survey 2020

Growing seasonally re-instates the enterprises' focus on reducing food miles, diversifying diets and encouraging people to become more familiar with 'less glamorous', nutritious vegetables such as turnip, radish, or sprouting broccoli. Growing in a polytunnel enables the enterprise to grow higher yields of produce during the winter months and cultivating crops that are more challenging to grow outdoors in the UK during the summer months, namely melons, aubergine, tomatoes, and loofah squash.

By demonstrating that more 'unusual' fruits and vegetables can be grown in an urban environment such as London, greater levels of audience engagement and local climate resilience can be achieved.

More recently, following the economic impact of Covid-19 on their local community, Growhampton partnered up with the Roehampton-based youth charity Regenerate to deliver fresh campus produce to at-risk residents with an initiative called the Roehampton Community Box. Between April 2020 and April 2021, more than 400 kg of campus-grown produce was donated to local families. With the guidance from the edible campus team, students have undertaken seed sowing, transplanting, maintenance, watering and harvesting to support this initiative.

“The stark challenges posed by Covid-19 to the social, economic and environmental landscape have shone a light on the importance of community food enterprises, in particular how they offer access to green space and healthy food, boost human connectivity, and strengthen partnership working and citizenship locally.”

Ollie Cem, Growhampton Project Coordinator

Beyond the skills gained from growing food, the students experience greater wellbeing with improved mental and physical health. Their volunteering sessions involve the management of different woodland and sensory spaces on campus to highlight the importance of wellbeing, mindfulness and mental health. These spaces are accessible to the wider student population and community, and have been used for yoga, theatre, filming, reading and lunch breaks, as well as creative play spaces for the local nursery.

As a well-established centre of knowledge locally and nationally, Growhampton offers a range of unique spaces to engage students and communities in practices of climate resilience, food sovereignty and wellbeing. These should be celebrated and maintained going forward in order to meet the complex challenges that lay ahead.

Let's create more food growing spaces on our campuses!



FOLLOW GROWHAMPTON
ON INSTAGRAM:

[@growhampton](https://www.instagram.com/growhampton)

GROW TO SELL

Since 2017 SOS-UK's Student Eats programme has worked with almost 80 student and staff groups to help them establish sustainable food social enterprises on campus. These have included zero waste shops/stalls, vegbox schemes, growing to sell and food preserving enterprises, pay-as-you-feel cafes, beekeeping and many more.

We have been working with universities and colleges across the UK to bring social enterprise ideas to life. These enterprises have changed their local food systems and encouraged students and staff to choose ethical, healthy and affordable food.

SIGN UP YOUR GROWING SPACE TO OUR NETWORK!

We support campus growing sites, shared allotments and community gardens through our growing network, which is free to join if your food growing is part of a university or college initiative.

WWW.SOS-UK.ORG/project/food-and-farming

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