

CAMBRIDGE ORGANIC GAZETTE

courgette



The Spring Edition

Coming together for the
Procurement for Good project

PLUS:

What is *The Hungry Gap*?

The buzz on local honey

& a creative kids competition



Founder and owner of Cambridge Organic

Wouldn't it be great if you could send your kids to school knowing that they would eat a nutritious meal for their lunch, made from locally, sustainably produced food? Or, if you were unfortunate enough to be in hospital for a while, you would at least be fed good healthy food while you were there to hasten your recovery?

Addressing institutional procurement needs with good quality, environmentally friendly produce has long been identified as a real game-changer in terms of our food system; just imagine what would happen if all schools in our country were to switch their lunch menus to local, ecologically produced food... it would mean every child in the UK, regardless of their socio-economic background, would eat at least one healthy meal each day, and much more land would be converted to sustainable production techniques. This is why we feel so honoured that the Cambridge Food Hub – which is part of Cambridge Organic - has been chosen to participate in the Procurement 4 Good project, which you can read more about on pages 3 and 4.

I absolutely love the Spring: those first sunny days after a long winter, hearing the skylarks singing again, the trees budding and coming into blossom, it all fills the heart with joy. You'd think this would be a great time for our veg boxes, with so much growth going on, but sadly this isn't the case... yes, those veggies are growing like crazy, but we have to wait a little while yet before they are ready to eat. Kat has written an article on the 'Hungry Gap' opposite. One thing that I really enjoy about Spring though, is spotting the first bee of the year. There's something about the activity of bees that epitomises Spring... the pollination of those plants whose growth fuels the whole ecosystem. I'm so pleased to see that we have a feature on Cambridge Honeybees in this newsletter.



CAMBRIDGE
organic + food hub



New seasons seedlings
The Prospects Trust, Reach

Understanding the Hungry Gap by Kat Hiby

On a recent visit to local growers Sweetpea Market Garden, Prospects Trust, and Waterland Organics, I was reminded that we are entering the time when UK farms have less fresh produce available.

As winter winds down and early spring begins to show signs of life, it's easy to get excited

about the coming abundance of fresh produce. New shoots peek through the soil, and the promise of vibrant, seasonal vegetables fills the air. However, for many organic growers and those who rely on seasonal food, this time of transition brings a period known as The Hungry Gap.

This is the gap between the end of the winter vegetable harvest and the start of the spring crop season, typically from April to the start of June. During this time, stored vegetables like root crops (carrots, potatoes) and hardy greens (kale, cabbage) run low, while early crops such as spring greens and peas are still weeks away from being harvested.

For veg-box companies like ours, which prioritize local, seasonal produce, we need to source from further afield, such as organic farms across the continent, to keep our boxes stocked. We avoid working with UK growers who use hothouses due to their negative environmental impacts.

While the Hungry Gap can feel like a temporary scarcity, it reminds us of the importance of eating seasonally and supporting local farmers. We can embrace seasonal, stored vegetables and experiment with preservation methods like freezing or pickling. It's also a great time to explore recipes for hearty winter vegetables. By understanding the natural rhythms of food production, we can appreciate the work that goes into growing fresh produce throughout the year, and adjust our diets accordingly.



Last of the winter veg
Waterland Organics, Lode

Procurement For Good

by Alice Guillaume

What if we could get better food reaching a significant proportion the population, including some of the most vulnerable people?

For a long time, public procurement has been looked at as a way to both support sustainable farming practice and improve the quality of food provided in public institutions, such as schools, hospitals and prisons. The National Food Strategy calls for government procurement rules to be strengthened, so more taxpayer money is spent on healthy and sustainable food. The procurement sector has considerable buying power – over £2 billion annually – that could be leveraged to make genuine changes in the food system.

Last year, we heard that the Cambridge Food Hub – which is part of Cambridge Organic – was going to be involved in a

research project, since named 'Procurement for Good'. Led by Coventry University's Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, the project is a piece of 'co-produced research', meaning it involves both academics and research practitioners at four food hubs across the UK. With a focus on 'place-based procurement', the project will examine how to improve opportunities for food buyers in public

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The procurement sector has considerable buying power – over £2 billion annually”

sector organisations to include sustainable, locally sourced food in their menus. Having received four years of funding, the project has a significant period to make a difference.

The project started with a kick-off meeting in Coventry in October last year and visits to each of the food hubs. In January, I went to visit Galloway Food Hub in Scotland. The trip included a round-table discussion with key stakeholders in the procurement discussion for the region, including representation from Dumfries & Galloway Council, the NHS, local schools, and local farmers. We discussed existing local assets and how we could build on

them, as well as what was missing, for example, infrastructure for processing: if schools require carrots to be washed and pre-chopped, we need places for this to happen. On the second day, we visited several local producers. It was beautiful weather for walking through fields. We even tried some swede and carrots fresh from the ground!

We were lucky to have similar glorious weather when we hosted the group for the visit to Cambridge. We visited three of our

producers: Sweetpea Market Garden, The Prospects Trust, and Waterland Organics. It's always so inspiring and informative to hear from our local growers, from Adrienne and Tom at Sweetpea discussing the importance of education and infrastructure, such as water provision, to Paul and Doreen at Waterland telling us about the political and regulatory support smaller growers require. Over the next few weeks (from time of writing) there will also be visits to the Better Food Shed in London and Cultivate in Wales.



The Prospects Trust tour



Paul Robinson of Waterland Organics and the rich soils of the Fens

Key takeaways that I have from the project so far are:

- Public food procurement is about getting good quality, nutritious food to everyone, including people who are vulnerable, whether it's due to age, income, or health issues. It is equalising.
- Targets are important. When public institutions are required to meet certain standards, such as on sustainability or nutrition, this is a crucial motivating factor.
- Financial support is also necessary. For example, as happens in the Welsh Food in Schools initiative, where the government supports more Welsh produce in schools by subsidising the difference between what schools can afford and what farmers require.

Currently, we are not working with any local public institutions (this is different for other hubs, for example the Better Food Shed has worked with their local council, including on veg provision for school holiday lunches). If any of our members would like to support us on this project, or hear more about it, then please do get in touch. You can find out more at www.procurementforgood.co.uk.



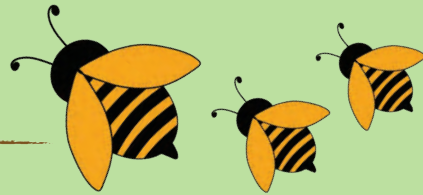
Sweetpea Market Garden



Adrienne and Tom of Sweetpea talk education and infrastructure

photo credits: Richard from Cultivate

Cambridge Honeybees



With the warming weather returns the familiar buzzing sound of bees, as they venture out to find spring's first bounty of nectar. During winter, the honey bees cluster together in their hives, just like penguins do, vibrating their bodies to generate heat. Honey bees keep their hives around a balmy 20°C, (up to 34°C when they have a brood) even during freezing temperatures!

We spoke to Peter, from Cambridge Honeybees, about his honey and apiculture (beekeeping). Each honey jar displays the season of its harvest and the flowers that contributed to its creation. Peter will collect the honey two times a year, at the end of spring and midsummer, but only takes a third of the bees' production, leaving plenty for the colony.

Peter is a man with knowledge and passion, coming from three generations of beekeepers. His main motivation is not profit. The main objective is to protect the health, genetic diversity and population numbers of local bees, in the most natural ways possible. They improve the genetic integrity of the bee stock by selecting and introducing wild bees which are well adapted to local climate and plants. They don't use any treatment chemicals in the 'apiaries' (also known as a bee yard, where multiple beehives are kept) and work as close to natural beekeeping practices as possible.

Peter cares for multiple apiaries across Cambridgeshire. He selects locations that are centred within five miles of quality and diverse sources of pollen and

nectar, such as wild flower meadows and nature reserves. He actively avoids locating hives near large mono-culture farms. For one, these farms can use a cocktail of chemicals that are harmful to bees. In addition, having only one type of food crop nearby does not lend itself to a healthy population. During the pollinating season a honey bee's life is just 5 weeks and the greater the variety of food they can find the better.

In addition to honey products, Cambridge Honeybees also offers support for beekeepers, with advice for beginners and access to beekeeping equipment and books. They are also the people to call if you have a bee nest or swarm that needs removing.



"Our bees are kept in conditions similar to that in nature. This is Darwinian Beekeeping."

from www.cambridgehoneybees.co.uk



Peter advises to store your honey in a dark space away from sunlight and to always pop the top back on after using, just like a bee will seal its honey into the honeycomb.

Bees are essential to our natural environment, and in the UK, we've lost 60% of all insects in the past 20 years. Peter suggests that we can all contribute to creating habitats that support bees and other insects, as the decreasing green spaces mean there's not enough food for them. Here are his four tips from the website www.cambridgehoneybees.co.uk.

1. Plant and keep bee-friendly shrubs and trees, such as fruit trees, maples and horse chestnuts (among many others)
2. Mow lawns only after the flowers have blossomed (first cut after blossoming of dandelions in June and second cut after blossoming of clover in August).
3. Trim hedges and trees after their flowers have blossomed. Specifically protect the ivy, which provides bees with crucial last food of the season to survive the winter.
4. Avoid chemicals: pesticides, fungicides, and even herbicides, which go into to the soil, contaminate roots and seeds of the plants, poison the bees, and at the same time, the food that we eat.



Thank you to Peter for his time. It's fascinating to listen to someone with such ingrained knowledge and passion for these tiny crucial creatures. We currently have the summer 2024 harvest in stock. Click the QR code to add to your next box.



Competition Time!



What does food mean to you?



Calling out to the veg-box kids that like to get creative, with a chance to win some delicious vegan Biona sweets. You can create a sketch, a drawing, even a poem or short story - anything you want that lets you tell us **'what food means to me'**.



Use the box above to create your masterpiece - or use an alternative piece of paper. Place it in your empty veg-box facing up (so it can be seen!) for your delivery driver to bring back to base. We will look at all your wonderful creations and pick 3 to feature in our next magazine. The chosen 3 will also receive a bag of delightful vegan sweets from Biona. Get your masterpieces in by the end of April.

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