

Researching organic **urban** horticulture



FOODMETRES is a new, EU-funded research initiative that is looking at ways of shortening food supply chains in metropolitan areas. Garden Organic is involved in its own right and also as part of CAFS (Centre for Agroecology and Food Security) with Coventry University. Ulrich Schmutz from our research department introduces this exciting project.

FOODMETRES is the working name for the "FOOD Planning and Innovation for Sustainable METropolitan REGionS" project. Seven universities and 11 small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are involved; Garden Organic is registered as an SME. The project's aim is to shorten food supply chains – reducing the actual distance our food travels, but also cutting the number of "middle people" it passes through on its journey from producer to consumer. The horsemeat scandal earlier this year very clearly highlighted some of the risks of overly long and complex supply chains.

What will the research do?

The researchers will identify concepts and practical examples of food chain innovation in the EU and developing countries, and then assess their economic, environmental and social impacts. Interaction with stakeholders, such as growers, consumers and local authorities, is a key part of the work.

Knowledge brokerage – that is shared learning – where expertise and ideas are exchanged and discussed across the board will take the project forward alongside scenario modelling and impact assessment tools, which are essential to plan a successful future.

EU and farther afield

The project is studying metropolitan areas of different sizes – such as London (large), Milan in Italy, Berlin in Germany, Nairobi in Kenya and Rotterdam in The Netherlands (medium-sized), and Ljubljana in Slovenia (smaller).

Garden Organic is already active in London and works with Sustain and the Capital Growth Initiative to enable more urban food growing spaces. With the Master Gardener programme in London and Garden Organic projects like Sowing New Seeds, we have already developed innovative growing and knowledge sharing systems. FOODMETRES will build on these and help to develop tools such as computer maps to find out how to improve growing spaces, increase productivity and measure social and environmental benefits.

Practical example: urban orchards

New growing spaces can be found in unexpected places. The photo above shows an "urban orchard" (orchard is defined by 12 trees or more). It was created with a pneumatic drill carving out a foot-wide (0.3m) strip at the edge of a tarmac drive. The orchard has a mix of plums, cherries, apples, grapes and figs. All are on slow-growing rootstocks and trained against a south-facing wall similar to a Victorian kitchen garden. The drive is still used.

A flowering orchard along an urban wall is not only beautiful to look at, but attractive for urban bees and later in the year for urban foodies. Computer map tools can help to identify possible sites for such systems and calculate potential costs and benefits.



You can keep up-to-date with progress on this project on the **FOODMETRES** website: foodmetres.eu.

Contents

Summer 209 • The **Organic**Way

Features

- AGM report** 14
A round up of the topics covered at our recent AGM.
- Researching organic urban horticulture** *Cover story* 17
Shortening food supply chains in cities.
- Is my beetroot ripe?** 20
Tips on identifying when popular veg crops are ready.
- The Editor's last words?** *Cover story* 23
Pauline Pears recalls a life's work for Garden Organic.
- Breakthrough for bees** 28
Brilliant news for our Bee Heard campaign.
- Figs in pots and small spaces** *Cover story* 30
All you need to know to grow figs this summer.
- Keep your hens "egg-stra" healthy** 34
Chicken pests and diseases to guard against.
- There's life in the soil** 36
Which underground creatures improve your earth?
- hens@home** 39
One man's experience of keeping hens.

Regulars

- Changing seasons** 5
Welcome from the Chief Executive Myles Bremner.
- Garden Organic news** 6
All that's happening in the world of Garden Organic and how you can get involved.
- Members' letters** 10
Sharing your views and opinions on a range of issues.
- Garden Organic answers** (*sponsored by NFU Mutual*) 12
Advice on your gardening problems.
- Heritage Seed Library** 18
Cucumber collection tested
Trialling the best outdoor growers.
- Peas on the move**
Vintage varieties rescued by members.
- Members' experiments** *Cover story* 26
Results from 2012 "bake your lawn" trial.
- Food issues: The next generation in horticulture** (*sponsored by Suma*) *Cover story* 32
Challenging young people's opinions on the industry.
- Rhubarb, rhubarb** 46
A topical column by Tim Lang, Garden Organic's President.



20



23



26



34



36

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The Organic way

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Next generation

Figs

Urban food chains

Home-grown wheat

Editor's last words


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organic**
the national charity
for organic growing