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# National Gardening Leave

Why Britain would be better off if we all  
spent less time at the office.

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by Andrew Simms & Molly Conisbee



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Why Britain would be better off if we all spent less time at the office.

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*The case for a new, voluntary scheme to introduce a shorter working week, and for the rapid expansion of productive and pleasurable gardening in Britain's towns and cities*



by Andrew Simms & Molly Conisbee



# The Proposal – National Gardening Leave: for a stronger, healthier and happier Britain

This pamphlet argues that Britain would be better off if we all spent less time at the office. It makes the case for a new, voluntary scheme to introduce a shorter working week. We call this *National Gardening Leave*. The proposal calls for adapting a wide range of available spaces for the rapid expansion of gardening, both productive and aesthetic, in Britain's towns and cities.

We argue that this would make people happier and healthier. It would make the economy more resilient, better positioned for the challenges of the modern world, and better protected from external food and energy price shocks. It would also make communities stronger and more convivial places to live.

Giving people entering new jobs (and, where possible, those in existing jobs) the option of working a four day week – something which is standard practice in the Netherlands, for example – brings potential multiple benefits to individuals, workplaces, communities, the environment and the economy.

It is time to reap the benefits of a shorter working week. In the time made available, gardening wouldn't be compulsory or the only choice of what to do, but instead we could all help to cultivate a society where individuals and communities could flourish, grow together and plant the seeds of a better Britain.



# How the garden grows: from suburban escape to urban salvation

*If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need*

Cicero

*God Almighty first planted a garden. And indeed, it is the purest of human pleasures*

Francis Bacon

Resilience – emotional and environmental – is a well-planted garden, both literally and metaphorically. The language of planting, growing and harvesting permeates our culture like a deep root system, recalling a time when our ancestors were literally dependent on their (personal) ability to produce food to survive. There was, and still is, no culture without agri-culture. Settled farming allowed for food surplus, and created time for other expressions of being beyond survival. This must have included planting for beauty and aesthetics as well as edibility. New discoveries repeatedly force us to recognise how humankind previously used its spare time in the creation of art, ornament and culture, rather than excess productivity for its own sake.

In an era of mass-food production, which has divorced most of us, at least in the Global North, from the daily slog of growing our own, the renewed interest in allotments and other growing schemes is on one level a curiosity. Even with the sharp rise in global food prices since 2008, we still spend considerably less of our budgets on food than our grandparents did (around 10 percent compared to around 25 percent a couple of generations ago). Food is cheap – in part ‘thanks’ to the supermarket squeeze on producers, industrialisation of a once labour-intensive sector, and increased yields leveraged from oil-based fertilizers, pesticides and other practices of farming intensification.

Much contemporary interest in food growing has been attributed to the ongoing recession. Undoubtedly, growing your own – if

you have a few quid for seeds and access to some reasonable soil – is the cheapest way to access fruit and vegetables. But there is also a longer view that makes a more overtly political point about access to land, growing space, and the wellbeing engendered by green environments. Not as a pre-lapsarian ‘back to nature’ mythology – gardening and growing involves working with while also controlling, pruning and taming – but as a model of sturdy self-reliance, drawing on political traditions of both the left and right.



## Plots past and present

*Certain gardens are described as retreats when they are really attacks*

Ian Hamilton Finlay

*If I sowed, planted or dealt in seeds; whatever I did had first in view the destruction of infamous tyrants*

William Cobbett

Access to land for growing is intimately bound up with the transition in the UK from feudal to an early modern economic system. Common land was one of the bedrocks of the feudal system, whereby Lords of the Manor allowed access to grazing and growing land to their bonded labour. The Acts of Enclosure between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries gradually eroded this space; and the consequent move to private housing and gardens, the transition to an industrial economy, further encroached on plots for planting.

This is in part why planting has often become a site of resistance and political activism, rather than what George McKay describes as ‘suburban, as leisure activity, as television

makeover opportunity'.<sup>1</sup> The Levellers, and more radically the Diggers, argued for access to (common) land. William Cobbett's vision of the sturdy, self-sufficient rural family was predicated on their ability to produce their own food. The pioneers of the Garden City movement, although often ridiculed in their time as utopian dreamers, proved remarkably prescient in their visualisation of the potential of the self-sufficient urban realm. And contemporary urban farmers and guerrilla gardeners are increasingly busy planting the cityscape with food to eat and plants to enjoy.

One of the features of the mass move from rural to urban was the creation of allotments. Intended to help supplement the diet of working people, the Allotments Act of 1887 compelled the provision of growing spaces where there was demand. Provided from a range of sources – from private landlords to major industrial employers, such as the railway companies – by 1895 there were well over 450,000 allotments in use in the UK.

Allotments were to prove a major part of national food provision during the two world wars; over 1.5 million thrived during World War I ('every-man-a-gardener'). Post-War allotments were provided to returning soldiers. A similar movement existed in the United States – and indeed provided crucial food supplies in the inter-War depression years: the so-called 'self-help' or 'thrift' gardens.

The Dig for Victory and Victory Gardens campaigns during both World Wars are well documented; but what Jane Brown has described as 'digging fatigue' gripped the nation after the war years and allotments fell into rapid decline, not really to experience a revival during the oil crisis of the 1970s, when the number of people on waiting lists for allotments increased by 1,600 percent, at the same time that some were being concreted over for industrial or housing estates.

Today there are around 330,000 allotments, over 90 percent of which are owned by local authorities, who are often under pressure to give them up for development (a notorious recent example being Newham Council's decision on behalf of the Olympic

Park). There has been a strong revival of ‘allotmenting’, partly a response to rises in food prices, but also to a growing desire to reconnect in some way to the land, food production and forms of community engagement. And this is not a phenomenon of latter-day middle-class ‘Good Lifers’. Some of the UK’s most deprived communities have created a local form of resilience and regeneration from growing their own, with thriving schemes everywhere from Sandwell in the West Midlands to Hackney in London.

There are around 100 community gardens and 16 city farms in London alone. *Meanwhile Gardens*, for example, established in the 1970s, is planted next to the canal in Paddington, and emerged from 1960s and 70s counterculture movements for land occupation and social transformation. Artist Jamie McCullough documented the transformation of *Meanwhile*, from a waste tip site to a flourishing, accessible community green space, replete with trees, flowers and space for outside concerts. (One of the earliest fundraising activities for *Meanwhile* was a busker’s concert on the site).

## WHAT IS HAPPENING ALREADY...

### **Sandwell, West Midlands**

Sandwell has been a pioneer of urban food growing, thanks in part to the Director of Public Health, Dr John Middleton. Middleton has made it a priority to tackle the links between obesity and the difficulty of accessing fresh, healthy food for some communities in this deprived West Midlands area. His solution has been to get local people involved in growing their own: there are now 1,600 allotment plots and a working dairy farm. The flagship project, Salop Drive, is a three acre market garden and community growing project, which provides fresh vegetables to local families, and has a greenhouse, polytunnels, and outdoor beds, as well as allotments for the local community.<sup>2</sup>

### **Growing Communities, Hackney, London**

Growing Communities is a community-led growing scheme in Hackney, north London, not far from the gritty, rumbling Mile End Road. It was established in the last decade as a conscious response to the challenges facing our food system and the need to reconnect to local, sustainably produced food. The people involved run an organic vegetable box scheme and sell through a local farmer's market, supporting small-scale local producers, and also growing through their own organically certified market gardens. But it is much more than that: it teaches local people in a poor part of London about food growing, preparation and conservation. People swap recipes and knowledge about the food they grow.<sup>3</sup>

### **Incredible Edible Todmorden, Nr Rochdale**

Incredible Edible Todmorden is a practical, hands-on campaign for growing local food. From small beginnings with herb patches, Incredible Edible has blossomed into a growing project of widespread fruit and vegetable planting across the town, in order to use local land as productively as possible (every school in Todmorden has its own food growing patch as a result of the campaign). The growing is done by volunteers, and members of the public are free to pick anything they see growing around the town.<sup>4</sup>

### **Ashram Acres, Birmingham**

Ashram Acres was a community growing project established in Birmingham in the 1980s, in response to rising levels of deprivation, unemployment and social stresses. Although the state of the Victorian housing stock was parlous, the houses did benefit from large gardens which were converted into planted fruit and vegetable areas. Many of the crops reflected the ethnic diversity of the communities involved – with Asian and West Indian vegetables a feature of the plots. Ashram Gardens moved to Smallheath and is now managed by the Wildlife Trust; the original plot is now a community centre.

These examples are not just a feature of the UK: many US cities, abandoned by the industrial and manufacturing heritage that built them, have also turned to urban growing en masse – Detroit, being perhaps the highest profile and symbolic example. Dependent on its car industry, the city was the embodiment of a 20<sup>th</sup> century economic model of fossil fuel driven industrialisation. The re-invention and rescue of its poor and abandoned neighbourhoods through urban farming led to the change being dubbed ‘from Mo-town to Gro-town.’

### **Grown in Detroit**

*Grown in Detroit* is a cooperative of 37 market gardens in the city; it grew out of the city's Garden Resource Program, a joint project of several not-for-profit organisations, which provides compost and seeds to Detroit's 1,200 vegetable gardens. Urban agriculture has become a key resource in a city once famed for its now ailing automotive industry. Years of decline and growing deprivation are slowly being reversed as more than one third of the city has been greened through fruit and vegetable growing, providing both much-needed employment opportunities and access to affordable, healthy fresh food for the city's residents. Urban farming is happening in the city's many abandoned factories, and empty lots left by shops and residences now the city's population has declined by over a quarter since its heyday of 1.8 million in the 1950s. This space is now being tilled and planted to provide low cost, in some cases even free, fresh food for the city's 900,000 residents.

Something similar is already happening in the poorer areas of New York too. In the most densely populated city in the US, one study found 5000 acres of land suitable for urban farming, with a further 1000 acres in housing projects and under-used land.<sup>5</sup> Such an area couldn't be used to feed the whole city, but it would contribute significantly to self-sustainability, as well as helping some of the poorest people on the worst diets.

## Back to the Garden City

The early twentieth century idea of the ‘garden city’, perhaps best associated with Ebenezer Howard, envisaged small-scale growing and collective gardening at the core of a revived community. Howard’s highly influential *Garden Cities of Tomorrow* (1902) was a manifesto for what he conceived of as a ‘new civilization’. Drawing on the tradition of Robert Owen’s New Lanark, and some of the later Victorian model communities (Port Sunlight, Saltaire, Akroyden, Bourneville), Howard envisaged a mixture of generous gardens and communal green spaces, which would encourage a literal and metaphorical ‘growing together’.

For the non-garden owning city dweller, there is a long tradition of creating growing spaces in the urban realm. From roof gardens to window boxes, to the more radical land occupiers (often associated with the squatting of buildings) many of our contemporary growing spaces began as acts of protest. Vauxhall City Farm, in the centre of London, started as one such land occupation in the 1970s; it is now a charity, and a respected local institution offering the local community a chance to visit a range of animals, to learn to ride, and to have parties and other social gatherings in the middle of blocks of social housing. As George McKay notes:

*Such projects have been important for a number of reasons – they have involved the garnering of community action (a primary step in which might be the invention of the previously fragmented or alienated community), self-organisation and local autonomy. They [are] not usually led by the authorities, even if these were local councils which actually owned the land, controlled relevant budgets, and held statutory responsibility for improving the life experience of their own constituencies.<sup>6</sup>*

For these and other reasons, a core proposal of *National Gardening Leave* is that all public and private bodies seek to establish growing areas, using whatever spaces they have available. In schools, for example, a large body of evidence shows that contact with nature when young has a positive effect on the physical and mental health, and general well-being of children, as well as

contributing to their educational development.<sup>7</sup> Studies reveal that active involvement in a school garden helps young people to develop more sustainable lifestyles.<sup>8</sup> Practical community-based environmental learning programmes, ‘improved young people’s attachment to place, civic engagement, and environmental stewardship.’<sup>9</sup>

Opportunities abound in very different institutions too, such as prisons. Re-offending in England and Wales is estimated to cost £11 billion a year.<sup>10</sup> Yet research by the conservation organisation BTCV found that nature-oriented programmes for offenders increased the chance of ex-offenders holding down a job, and reduced re-offending on release. Programmes showed a 39 per cent success rate in helping offenders through the processes of gaining employment.<sup>11</sup>

For all of us, exercise in green spaces brings enormous physical and mental health benefits. The combination of nature and exercise is particularly potent. In one study, asked if they felt less tense after a walk, 71 per cent said they did after walking outside, while only 28 per cent who walked indoors said so.<sup>12</sup> The cost in health terms of physical inactivity in England is estimated to be around £8.2 billion,<sup>13</sup> while the cost of mental ill health in the UK as a whole is thought to be around £23.1 billion.

The therapeutic power of landscapes and gardens appears to be greater the more natural features they contain. The range of specific health benefits attributable to gardening is extraordinarily diverse, ranging from lower mortality and likelihood of the onset of dementia, to less brittle bones from osteoporosis, fewer problems with blood pressure, heart disease, and a range of conditions relating to depression and anxiety. Some of these latter benefits and the specific advantages for child development are thought to relate to how gardening calms and improves concentration. This is known as ‘attention restoration theory,’ or rather nicely, ART.<sup>14</sup> As a side note, the presence of trees in urban areas, many of which depend on gardens, is shown to correlate with lower levels of hostility, ranging from psychological aggression to severe violence.<sup>15</sup>

Greening the urban environment will also help to ‘calm’ the brow of a warming world. Built up areas create ‘heat islands.’ Global warming that is already locked-in by rising concentrations of greenhouse gases is likely to worsen and increase the frequency of heat waves that will be felt most strongly in large towns and cities. Increasing the amount of green space in urban areas can, though, reduce temperatures. Trees also aid cooling, directly by providing shade, and through moisture exchange.<sup>16</sup>

Gardens and green spaces also ameliorate other weather extremes that are set to become more common due to climate change. They act as a buffer, slowing the passage of rainwater into urban drains which reduces flooding following heavy rainfall. Gardens too, can be Arks of biodiversity. One detailed study over a 30 year period of an ‘ordinary garden’ in the English town of Leicester revealed it to be visited by one in four of all the known insect species in the country, while a concentrated three year study discovered 15 species of wasp previously unknown in the UK and four more that were unrecorded anywhere.<sup>17</sup>

The energy, carbon and water footprints of gardens and green spaces vary enormously depending on how they are managed. Broadly speaking, however, following permaculture principles produces the most environmentally friendly results, that is: minimum soil cultivation, low chemical use, plant diversity, using recycled water and organic matter.



# Finding the time: the case for National Gardening Leave

*The mass of the people can hardly conceive of a time when the Saturday half-holiday did not exist... Latterly, controversy over hours of work has resolved itself into the question: to work or not to work on Saturday morning.*

E.S. Turner, *Roads to Ruin: A Shocking History of Social Progress*, 1950.

## **Hands up if you want to spend more time at the office?**

If you could get by working a shorter week, with more time available for family, friends, gardening, going places, making music, making anything for that matter, picking up new skills, walking, joining clubs, or reading a book, would you?

To achieve a better rather than simply bigger economy, time as much as money is the resource required. At the turn of the 1900s there was a progressive social campaign in the US to establish a shorter, eight-hour working day. It was vehemently opposed by the American National Association of Manufacturers (NAM), who claimed it would be potentially ruinous to the economy.

Much the same argument was used to oppose the abolition of slavery, the introduction of life-preserving safety measures in shipping, and almost every other progressive labour reform throughout history. In the 1920s NAM also lobbied against a shorter, five-day working week. In the 1930s, however, the very same lobby group paid for a billboard advertising campaign boasting that the US now had the 'world's shortest working hours' adding, with the zeal of the converted (or at least those who realise that they've lost the argument and might as well move-on): 'there's no way like the American way'.

According to the Office for National Statistics, the UK has the third longest working hours in Europe. The UK Trade Union Congress calculates that a rising number of people are doing unpaid overtime in their jobs. Over five million of us are

estimated to be providing the equivalent of a whole days worth of free work to their employers every week, worth £29.2 billion to the economy in 2011.<sup>18</sup>

Yet the momentum toward a shorter working week is long established and nothing new. The ‘struggle for Saturday afternoon’ was just another step in a 150 year campaign for shorter hours of work. Not so long ago, it was said that the idea of giving workers a half day holiday on a Saturday would lead to ‘immorality.’

The industrial revolution robbed men, women and children of the privileges that they had once enjoyed even under feudal lords. Calculations of the number of weeks worked in some medieval periods suggest that annual hours of labour were shorter than in the industrial era. Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Dancing in the streets: a history of collective joy* describes the benefits of having time off. In fifteenth-century France one in every four days was an official holiday.<sup>19</sup> But with the advent of industrialisation it took until 1825 to limit child labour to 12 hours a day in the week, and nine hours on Saturday. Each reduction in hours was fought tooth and nail by economic interests. A reduction to 10 hours, it was argued in familiar fashion, would be utterly ruinous to the economy.

### **The art of living**

The French have a saying, ‘The English kill themselves to live.’ But this is not innate. ‘We English certainly do not like working for work’s sake,’ wrote J.B. Priestly in the *New Statesman* in 1949. ‘There is nothing inside us that cries to be set going at an early hour and kept at it until a late hour. We have no private passion for being industrious.’ J.M. Keynes famously imagined that, with the logic of progressive economic, social and technological developments, by the 21<sup>st</sup> Century we would be working typically just a 15-hour week. The rest of our time would be devoted to the art of living.

Contrarily, we have created an economic system that generates both high levels of overwork for those in employment (although as noted, many of the hours contributed are in effect, unpaid), and high levels of unemployment (which are demonised).

Considering that few people have the privilege to enjoy work as vocationally-driven and fulfilling, it begs the question: *have we forgotten that work and the economy should serve us, rather than the other way round?*

In a 1909 presidential address to the Section on Economic Science and Statistics of the British Association for the Advancement of Science, Sir Sydney Chapman argued that ‘competitive pressures would tend to set the working day at a longer than optimal length.’ His empirical evidence showed a rise in productivity after shorter working hours were introduced. As a result, where working hours exceed an optimum, reducing them can lead to relative improvements in wages, productivity and employment, regardless of all the other social, well being and environmental advantages. This makes a case for shorter working time, whether or not the amount of paid work available in the economy has an upper limit. Employment opportunities don’t need to be ‘fixed’ in amount for multiple benefits to flow from sharing available work more equitably.<sup>20</sup>

In a green economy that devotes more effort and attention to care, maintenance, re-use, recycling and repair, where there is a shift from a culture of passive consumption and disposability, to one of more active engagement and production, there will be more genuinely useful things for people to do.

Low carbon economies need people for all the repairing, re-using and recycling demanded in a closed-loop system. But if work is also better shared-out between those who are over-worked and unemployed, or underemployed, we can also solve a raft of other problems. To explain this argument more fully, together with colleagues Anna Coote and Jane Franklin we produced a report called *21 hours: Why a shorter working week can help us all to flourish in the 21st century*. This argued that a radical redistribution of paid and unpaid time can help to tackle three serious problems that we now face. It would not be compulsory or introduced as a kind of shock therapy. Several other simultaneous reforms would be needed too, such as housing market reform to make homes more affordable, and a rise in the minimum wage. But the main benefits would be threefold.

Firstly, economic. It would help to resolve the paradox of overwork and unemployment, and ameliorate the impact of the deep, intractable recession and rising unemployment that has followed from the credit-induced collapse of the global financial systems. It would also help to shift the balance of the global economy to serve the needs of society *and the environment*, rather than depending on treadmill of passive over-consumption.

Secondly, social. The redistribution of paid and unpaid work would address widening inequalities, and the fact that working and earning more beyond a certain point doesn't make us happier. It would give more people more time to be better parents, carers, friends, neighbours and gardeners, and everyone a chance to earn a living. We'd save money by being able to do more things for ourselves. With more people around to help each other the pressure on public services would be eased, and it would reduce the accumulating stresses of retirement.

Thirdly, *and crucially*, environmental. It would help us escape the consumer hungry and environmentally depleting treadmill in which we are persuaded, as Professor Tim Jackson puts it, 'to spend money we don't have on things we don't need to create impressions that won't last on people we don't care about'. These are things which, we add here, we probably won't use, don't make us happy *and which the planet cannot afford*. (Neither, it seems, do we have the space in our homes to keep them. Yellow Box, the company which provides units to store surplus household goods, is expanding by 40 per cent a year in the UK.)

Creating a new social norm of a shorter working week could turn negative prevailing economic circumstances from a problem into an opportunity. It would also be the next step on a long historical path that, designed well, could ensure that everyone benefits, especially those who are currently unemployed and poor. So-called 'time affluence', or reduced working hours, relates positively to improved well being.

Glimpses of possibility are already emerging. The Netherlands has for some time embraced a four day working week. In reaction to the Europe-wide recession in the 1980s, the Dutch

government hired new workers at 80 percent of the old working week. It proved popular. Employment contracts across sectors allow for a four day week, and even became the norm in the banking sector.

When in the USA Utah introduced a four-day week for state employees as a cost saving measure in response to the recession in 2008, they had the presence of mind to monitor the results. The four day week was achieved by working the same total number of hours, but compressing them and giving everyone a three-day weekend. The results were striking. More than half the workforce said they were more productive and three-quarters said they preferred the new arrangements with a longer weekend. Workers were clearly happier as absentee rates fell. The State saved \$4.1 million as a result of fewer staff being off work and through overtime savings. It saved \$1.4 million through less travel in state-owned vehicles; and carbon emissions went down by 4,546 metric tons or 14 percent, above even the ambitious annual targets that climate science tells us is necessary. Over eight out of ten employees wanted the year long experiment to carry on. Former Harvard economist and Professor of sociology, Juliet B. Schor, says of the rising interest in a shorter working week: 'The sustainability movement motivated it, the internet facilitated it, and the economic downturn mainstreamed it, as cash got scarce and time got more abundant'.

Productivity does not fall in line with shorter hours. The shock of the three-day week in 1974 saw production fall by only 6 per cent. The French experiment with a statutory 35 hour week, abolished by President Sarkozy, is often used to demonstrate the failure of shorter hours. In fact, in spite of the law change, most workplaces left their arrangements unchanged. Following Utah's experience it would appear to be an experiment worth repeating.



# Implementing National Gardening Leave

*The most difficult thing to find is the way to the signposts.*

Wieslaw Brudzinski

There are broad benefits to Britain of a shorter working week and an expansion of opportunities to garden (in the broadest sense) in towns and cities. Gardening's contribution to human well being and urban conservation is well established. Gardening's therapeutic power is felt across the social and demographic spectrum, from a child's simple pleasure at seeing a seed grow, to the wired executive shedding stress with pruning shears, to the depressed, and those in prison, finding comfort and rehabilitation as they dig the soil.

Yet the advantages are also structural in terms of our livelihoods. Global food and energy markets are shifting and increasingly volatile. Higher costs and the prospect of countries blocking exports in hard times means that even a modest shift in the balance of our dependence on imported food would leave us stronger, more resilient, and better insulated from upheaval in world markets.

To reap all these benefits, however, requires ingredients that are either missing, in short supply, or otherwise hard to access: mainly time and physical space. We've previously argued the many benefits of a shorter working week. A long history of modernity teaches us that this is a desirable direction in which to head – a reminder once again that *the economy should be there to serve people, and not the other way around*. It is an effective response to tough economic times that can allow more people the rewards of working life, whilst guarding against destructive, over-long hours. Or as William Morris put it, there's a distinction between useful work and useless toil. More time for other pursuits, including gardening, allows us to pursue the art of living and step off the hypnotic treadmill of passive consumerism.

With that in mind, we make just two, simple recommendations to make Britain better off, and a better place to live.

- Firstly, that all employers, public and private, offer all new recruits (and retrospectively to all existing staff, where possible) the voluntary option of working a four day week. How this is done could be left open and flexible. Some might find that they prefer working a full week in four days, so-called ‘compressed hours,’ others might find the advantages and opportunities for cost savings when they have more time to do things for themselves and others sufficiently attractive simply to work a shorter week. In the time people are able to claim back, they wouldn’t, of course, have to garden. They could do any number of other things. But the existing and rising popularity of gardening, with rising awareness of its many benefits would make it inevitably attractive to many. Any firm or body that adopts this scheme could call itself a ‘National Gardening Leave Employer’. Joining would make employers attractive in the job market, and single them out as innovative, modern and trusting. Experience suggests that they would be rewarded with added commitment, high morale and motivation from staff.
- Secondly, and in tandem, we recommend that all work places establish ‘growing areas.’ The spaces adapted could range from roofs (Thornton’s Budgens, the community supermarket in Crouch End, North London have shown how this is possible with their ‘food from the sky’ initiative), to sections of car park (in Los Angeles, citizens have taken to commandeering one or two spaces in car parks and digging them up to create ‘parklets,’), or even just window sills. Shared endeavours, like gardening in the work place, have all the benefits outlined above and in particular can reduce stress and increase a sense of joint enterprise, co-operation and shared endeavour.

With these initiatives, we believe that a more diverse and dynamic food economy will grow, and that this will yield yet further benefits. There is a more detailed agenda for market reform that we do not have the space to enlarge upon here, but which is covered extensively elsewhere. Two significant changes are worth

mentioning, however, that could make a substantial positive contribution. To encourage a positive, self-reinforcing dynamic, public and private bodies should be encouraged to favour locally based and owned horticultural and food provision. The loop of localism provides for a reciprocal economy, both in terms of consumption and content of the goods and services provided. This will increase the value of spending to the local economy through the local multiplier effect. This happens because less spending tends to leak out of the local economy.

Secondly, something which will be intuitive to any gardener, especially one who has to battle super-weeds like knotweed, bindweed or ground elder. This is that if you want a productive garden with a satisfying and nutritious variety of plants, you have to intervene to keep weeds in their place as part of a garden ecology. As in nature, so it is in the economy. To allow for just such a diverse and enterprising local economy it is vital that markets are kept open and are not dominated by just one or two very large companies. Experience from the study of supermarket power in the retail chain suggests that the ability to manipulate the supply chain through market share and company power can begin by having captured as little as 8 percent of the market. That was the conclusion of the Competition Commission in one of its several investigations into the supermarket giants. Competition policy is then, although potentially a rather dry subject, an important concern for those interested in a thriving, food and plant growing economy.



# Reaping the harvest

*What is a weed? A plant whose virtues have not been discovered*

Ralph Waldo Emerson

In the period after the Industrial Revolution proposals have been made to shorten the working day, or the working week. It is to our collective disadvantage that vested interests have prevailed in foreclosing on these initiatives. But who would now defend child labour, no right to weekends, Bank Holidays or paid leave? Notwithstanding the progress that has been made on these fronts, the case for a redistributive economy is even stronger than before, sharpened by the perils of climate change and looming environmental crises, and by the tides of unhappiness and dissatisfaction experienced by so many in the wealthy, resource hungry, overdetermined, work-intensive, ‘developed’ world.

We believe that *National Gardening Leave*, imagined as a positive, progressive social policy, committed to help create the circumstances for human flourishing, would be a creative response to a number of the challenges now facing us: under- and over-employment; environmental degradation; de-skilling; a lack of time to develop community and social networks.

We believe a forward-thinking economy would enable its citizens time to grow – both literally and metaphorically – and to lead more engaged, embedded lives in their communities. Philosopher Martin Heidegger said, ‘to dwell is to garden’. We say, to start living, we need to plant seeds of change, for now and for a more resilient and sustainable future. Heidegger was a reader of Nietzsche, who wrote of the need for truthfulness with respect to humanity’s visionary capacities in his essay ‘On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life’:

*It is only through such truthfulness that the distress, the inner misery, of modern man will come to light, and that, in place*

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*of that anxious concealment... a culture [will emerge] which corresponds to real needs and does not... deceive itself as to those needs...*

We must ask ourselves as our individual and collective troubles multiply: what now are our needs, and how may we satisfy them?



# Endnotes

- 1 McKay, G (2011) *Radical Gardening: Politics, Idealism and Rebellion in the Garden*, Frances Lincoln
- 2 [www.sandwellfoodnetwork.co.uk](http://www.sandwellfoodnetwork.co.uk)
- 3 [www.growingcommunities.org](http://www.growingcommunities.org)
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*The case for a new, voluntary scheme  
to introduce a shorter working  
week, and for the rapid expansion of  
productive and pleasurable gardening  
in Britain's towns and cities*

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