

Dunkeld and Birnam Community Growing Cooperative  
Chairman Report 2025

AI- Active Involvement

This 2025 report is my sixth distillation of the growing year at the Field.

In that time we have had 5 prime ministers and 6 chancellors!

The initial 2 years were significantly affected by the pandemic. Covid in some ways showed on one side vulnerability and risks of global travel and food supply but also resilience..managing to adapt, continue to grow and still engage together. The loss was social connection which we value and celebrate each Thursday and Saturday..and each year in November with 'our' Harvest Supper.

The Field is not a dinosaur in ancient growing practice but a forward looking dynamic and democratic way of growing organic seasonal vegetables, fruit, flowers and herbs for our local community. We are in some ways disconnected..no mains power..no sewage..but hopefully we are truly connected with our soil, weather, local food supply and, each other.

There is AI at the Field...Active Involvement. This is the linchpin..the essential ingredient.

It is the volunteers that have contributed to the planning, ground preparation, sowing, planting, weeding, watering, nurturing, harvesting and distributing. The Harvest Supper is celebration of the produce but also the generous input of our volunteers and trustees. AI is hands on..real .. created by us- not digital or virtual.

2025 has been a memorable weather year. The warmest summer since 1976. The heat and direct sun has benefitted some crops but the dry conditions and at times torrential downpours created challenges. This year has been a "mast" event. Copious acorns have sounded like gunfire landing on our sheds and polytunnels.

What about the growing year?

Raspberries, blackcurrants, redcurrants have been plentiful. Apples, plums and pears less so.

Early potatoes ( Casablanca and Alouette) were excellent and the brassicas have flourished- a bumper broccoli crop still growing in October.

Courgettes, cabbages, carrots and parsnips all good quality. Beetroot and basil enjoyed the summer of '25'

Disappointing crops this year have been beans...? deer damage -and main crop onions which suddenly wilted with onion rot. A lower harvest that will not store as well for our hungry gap. The early onions from the Howe / Amos no dig plots were amazing...fresh vibrant and tasty.

The polytunnels have allowed a long harvest of tomatoes, cucumbers and basil during mid and late summer -and spinach in the early months.

What have been the challenges?

Dry conditions needing many hours of watering.

Blackthorn spreading to adjacent ground and posing a significant injury/ health risk from their sharp irritant thorns.

Deer breaching our fences and doing their own pick your own harvesting.

Couch grass a perennial problem..hopefully suppressed by prolonged covering.

Denaturing plastic. Our black plastic is becoming fragmented by UV light and posing a challenge ...poor covering and windblown fragments. Apologies to our neighbour!

Wasps...around the apples..sheds..home baking at break time.

Compost delivery ..the narrow road and gate entry is limiting for large vehicles.

What has been new in 2025?

**Field Storyboard**- It acts as a signpost for visitors but also an explanation in words and pictures to capture the essence of the Field. Thanks to Maddy for her evocative artwork and Linda, Dave & Sally for their input.

**Archeology** - An initiative from the archive enabled archeologists and local schoolchildren to undertake a dig to excavate an area of the Field. A flint head from 2000 years BC was discovered..awaiting confirmed dating.

**Bees**- Martin and Jan ( with Gail and Dave as helpers) introduced a hive in June which added to the biodiversity improving pollination and giving a further source of food. Already 18-20 jars of pure honey have been enjoyed by active volunteers. Martin has joined us at tea / coffee break time and given us insight into the lifecycle and workings of a successful hive. More hives and deeper learning in the months ahead.

### **Visits..and Visitors..**

We hosted the Aberfeldy / Strathbraan Open Gate day and I attended a Tayside Bioregioning Workshop enabling local food growing .

We ( Ginny, Jane, Sally , Alan and I) also visited the 3.5 acre Taybank walled garden near Murthly impressive and inspiring..despite the heavy rain.

Throughout the year we host many formal and informal visitors. The current market conditions for small growers are harsh and each year Scotland loses market gardens -being financially unviable..although so "sustainable".

It is joy to meet and learn from visitors..trying to convey "oracy".( a concept awakened by Raymond)....the ability to explain- convey understanding.

**Volunteers**-Each session on Thursday and Saturday has had increased numbers of active volunteers..enthusiastic and engaged. The essential ingredient in caring for the soil and growing food.

### **Continuing to Learn.**

A recent break chat led to Jan asking us about what 'Permaculture' actually was. I was vague about perennial planting but inept at the oracy bit.

Further exploration & reading explained permaculture was simply...a design of growing on any size or place..mindful of...

Earth care - care of the soil

People Care- looking out for each other

Fair Share- equitable distribution..mindful of need not want.

I think The Field aligns with the Permaculture aims.

**Volunteer Stall** - We reconditioned both the gate and field stall and to give higher priority to produce to those who sowed ,planted and tended the produce.

**Market Times**- We have changed our Birnam Market to Thursdays in the summer with the Field Gate Stall in Dunkeld stocked each Saturday. This has allowed more social harvesting and increased awareness of the range of produce for our active volunteers.

**Tools**...We continue to replace hoes, hoses and find new innovative weeding tools.

**Transition** .Maddy has grown flowers at the Field for 12 years and is handing the lead role to Liz.

Sandy has been the large polytunnel lead again since the beginning in 2011. In 2026 Jane, Ruth and Alan will take that role.

A big thank you to Maddy and Sandy for their major contribution to our community growing.

The world in 2025 is challenged with: disasters, disputes, discord, division, deaths, dilemmas and diminishing democracies...they dominate our 24 hour news. Our daily experience however ' can be one of connection to people and nature..eating well and feeling in some ways enabled and hopeful.

The importance of growing our own local food and valuing each other has never been greater.

Thank you for your active involvement.

Open AI..R is such a joy!

David E Bee  
Chairman  
Dunkeld and Birnam Community Growing  
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