

Good evening. As Chair it is my duty to give you a run-down of our activities this year. It seems barely a year since we were last here for the AGM of the Dunkeld & Birnam Community Growing Project, but on a chilly night like this it is easy to remember the long hard winter we endured. With consistently low temperatures and disruptive snowfall, our plans for planting were pushed back and when temperatures rose we were eager to plant into the soil. However, scenes of closely working gangs hammering ice axes into a seemingly iron hard surface brings to mind the image of a first ascent of a distant peak, rather than the planting out of rows leeks. But, use these implements they did and many have the memories of blistered hands to prove it.

Once planted, our crops had to endure almost drought conditions. We were forced to water seeds, seedlings and plants to ensure they did not succumb to the conditions. Whilst we planted our usual crops, we also expanded our range of produce. There were good results from the various squashes we planted and there was the exotic red sweetcorn which flourished in the conditions. Our broccoli, rather than the “cattle food grade” of old has many varieties and has an almost twelve month season.

Ground preparation was also something that we worked hard on. Creating our own compost in the south facing bins, buying in extra compost and for once, being able to weed with ease in the dry conditions of the growing season all helped contribute to the plants being afforded the best opportunity of flourishing.

Weed suppression was helped in part by the dry conditions, but also by the membrane we applied to some of the plots. We experimented with different types of membranes and found that those sturdy enough to withstand the weather and thick enough to keep the light out were not only good at eliminating weeds, but also able to be used over and over again. In his annual report, illustrious agrarian warrior Jim Sutton notes that through the adoption of membrane, we had almost 100% weed control, the reduction of pests and diseases and a clean crop which made harvesting easier.

This use of plastic has troubled us, but with advice from plastic campaigner Jamie Wylie we have been able to tackle one of the current topics of environmental interest head on. You will have noticed that our veg is less likely to be presented in plastic bags. Where we can, vegetables are tied in bunches. Our kale as well as our flowers are now sold in bouquets – the perfect gift.

However, despite our best efforts to reduce our plastic use, we did order a huge amount of the stuff earlier in the year. The big polytunnel. What looked so cavernous when first put up now seems less so, with sweetcorn, tomatoes,

cucumbers, runner beans, winter lettuce spring carrots and hot, hot chillies forming our first crop.

We have seen the number of people working up at the field expand. The innovation of an after-work work session proved particularly popular during the summer. Work parties on Thursdays and Saturdays continue to thrive and there are huge efforts from volunteers to stock the stalls at the Duchess Anne, the Institute, and at the gate to the Field. Reports have come to our attention that there are gangs of vegetable enthusiasts who descend upon the gate stall on a Saturday morning and strip it bare as soon as it is stocked. We do not wish to discourage this behaviour and eagerly restock it in the hope of seeing the flock swoop by again. There are still thousands of leeks to come, as well as carrots, parsnips and sprouts. But you'd better get up to the field fast before these are snapped up too.

We have also had our word spread wide, through visits from BBC Radio Scotland's Grow It Cook It Eat It programme, journalists from Kitchen Garden Magazine and Small City Big Personality, who are writing articles on us. We have had visits from like-minded groups eager to set up similar projects and we have regular requests from local groups to use the field for various activities. Peter Flood takes a creative session on the first Sunday of the month and uses the Field as inspiration for the creation of pictures, poetry and prose.

I could talk about how many thousand carrots we planted, give you the tonnage of tatties harvested, the number of varieties of veg we have grown, or the dimensions of our fattest marrows, but in some ways the vegetables take a secondary role in the purpose of our organisation. A comment from one of our Duke of Edinburgh volunteers, seemingly exasperated by sitting on a chair for too long was the "you guys really love a cup of tea". Yes, it's the interacting with others that is one of the main draws of the field. Whether you're working at the field, buying produce from the stall, or talking to someone who's asked you about the branded jute bag you're carrying, it's the human contact that's special. What are we most proud of growing this season? That's easy. It's the membership. For the first time we've broken the 100 barrier – membership stands at 103, our largest membership on record. Thanks Dave for all your efforts. Thank you for your continued support, for without it we would not be able to continue doing the things we do. One of these things is eating the food we grow.