

Case Study 8 Growing Orchards and Inspiring Communities



Central Scotland Green Network



Since 2009, the Forth Valley Orchards' Initiative has been capturing the enthusiasm and passion for orchards amongst landowners and communities across Forth Valley and the wider CSGN area. With a focus on orchard creation, community involvement and capacity-building, the initiative has been nurturing local expertise in the creation and management of orchards, whilst making friends and links with other similar initiatives and projects across Scotland and the UK.

Context

Forth Valley has a tradition of orchards stretching back to monastic times. Many orchards have already been lost and those that remain continue to be at risk despite heritage value.

For perhaps more than a century, the area has not been well known for its orchards, but a surge in interest in orchards generally - prompted by fears for food security, Climate Change and the need for sustainable food production and consumption - has spurred many to become actively involved in orchard creation and management.

Project Background

In 2004, Forth Environment Link recognised in Forth Valley's orchards an under-used resource that could be put to more productive use. Between 2009 and 2010, with growing interest in orchards and community growing in general and support from the first round of the CSGN Development Fund, Forth Environment

Link developed the first phase of an initiative to map and record orchards and fruit trees. This also sought to engage the wider public, landowners and other partners in a programme of orchard-related projects and activities. Initially, this project was confined to the Forth Valley area but in 2011, with further support from the second round of the Development Fund it was expanded to include the whole of the CSGN area.

“The Forth Valley Orchard’s Initiative has enabled a number of community groups in the Stirling Council area to plant their own community orchard. It is exciting to see communities being empowered in this way and the training and support provided by Forth Environment Link is exemplary.”

Councillor Ian Brown
Stirling Council

Key Points

- The phased initiative has provided new and exciting opportunities to enhance existing, and create new orchards across the CSGN area, primarily through the CSGN Orchard Grant Scheme.
- A greater sense of an 'orchard family' or community of interest is developing across the area through the increased interactions and networking between participants on training courses and at orchard events.
- 94 people have been trained in orchard care and management, many willing and confident to share their expertise to support others. Participants have also taken inspiration back to their own communities to develop their own orchards independently of CSGN grant eg Callander Community Orchard.
- The experience of developing orchards at a strategic level has shown that both a long-term view and input of a large range of stakeholders is essential.

What it Does

The Forth Valley Orchards' Initiative follows a programme established with the valuable input and advice of the Forth Valley Orchards' Group – a group of volunteers who are passionate about orchards.

During 2011-12, the CSGN Orchard Grants Scheme, disbursed over £17,000 in grants to 61 recipients to create over 11 hectares of orchards. Much of the planting took place on unused, vacant, derelict or unmanaged ground and several orchards were located in or near areas suffering from multiple deprivation. A diverse range of species and varieties of tree were planted enhancing the biodiversity value of the orchards.

CSGN support enabled a rich variety of additional activities to take place. As well as mapping existing and planting new orchards, capacity-building was a strong focus of the project. A programme of 9 workshops was undertaken attracting some 116 bookings. Topics covered included: winter pruning, orchard planning, planting techniques, and also pests and disease control. Furthermore, an Orchard Care and Management Certificate course was run in partnership with Elmwood College and Forth Valley Orchards' Day was held at Dobbies, Stirling, achieving a footfall of over 2,300 people. A Forth Valley Scrumper's Network was also established to encourage 'responsible scrumping' by



matching scrumpers to owners of surplus fruit. A key aspect of the programme of activities was to undertake an orchard economic feasibility study. This concluded that orchards can provide individuals, small businesses and community groups with a modest source of income which can help sustain their fruit-growing activities in perpetuity. It also indicated that business opportunities may be feasible though the cumulative impact would be micro, rather than macro-economic.

Wider networking, encouraged by the CSGN Case Officer, has led to invaluable links being made with other initiatives and projects across Scotland which helps the initiative's long-term sustainability.

CSGN Support and Learning

The experience of the Forth Valley Orchards' Initiative demonstrates that a dynamic and

“We are well aware of the important work that the Initiative has been undertaking across Forth Valley in supporting the development, maintenance and appreciation of orchards. The development of the Forth Valley Scrumpers’ Network is a great example of how the community is being engaged and how solutions are being developed to benefit from the apples that are produced in the Forth Valley area.”

Corrie Cuthbertson
Forth Valley Scrumpers’ Network member

innovative approach can deliver an increase in woodland cover across the CSGN area. The Initiative also shows that to develop existing and plant new orchards at a regional level, it is essential to engage with a large range of stakeholders including local authorities, government agencies, schools and colleges, community groups and private landowners. It is evident that the Initiative has provided people with both great enjoyment and numerous benefits through their involvement in a rich variety of projects and events. Fruit growing appears to be of great interest

and people have been quick to take up opportunities to get involved in the project and to learn about orchards. It is also recognised that the community benefits are far-reaching addressing issues such as skills development, health improvement and access to greenspace.

Future

The sustainability of the Initiative rests on training and capacity-building, and supporting the commercial potential of orchards. It is considered that orchard care and development should be undertaken by a wide range of stakeholders to maximise strengths and capacity. The Initiative will continue to match those who can offer help in orchard creation and management, to those that request it.



Outcomes

Increased Woodland Cover: The area of land being used to grow fruit has been increased by over 11 hectares. This includes community open space, schools, community allotments and gardens.

Improved Quality of Environment: New orchards have been created and some brought back into a management regime across the CSGN area.

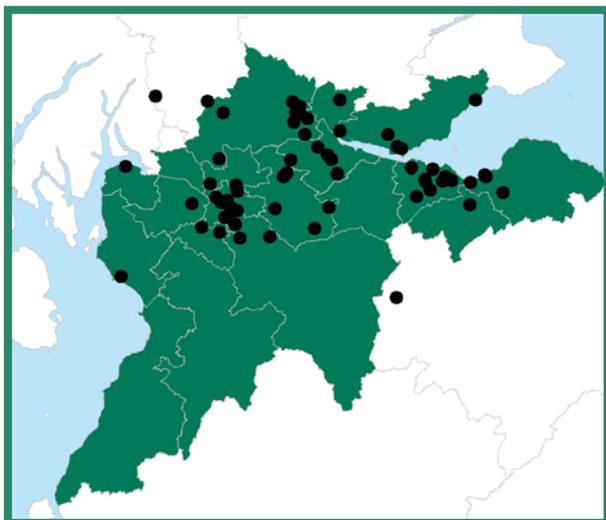
Increased Economic Potential: Better understanding of the existing resource (through mapping) helps to realise the economic potential of orchards. Orchards are a learning ground where transferable skills and knowledge are acquired which may also lead to local economic benefits and opportunities.

Engaged Communities: Many communities have been engaged through volunteering, fun days, orchard training, and orchard creation.

Better Health: Outdoor working in orchards, socialising, physical exercise and an increase in awareness about the benefits of fruit as part of a healthy diet have all contributed to participants gaining opportunities to improve their physical and mental well-being.

Location

The map below show the location of orchards assisted by Forth Environment Link through the CSGN Development Fund.



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Project Partners

Forestry Commission Scotland
CSGN Support Unit
Forth Valley Orchards' Group
Elmwood College
Private / public landowners



Education and Action towards Sustainable Living



What is the CSGN?

The CSGN is a national development within the National Planning Framework which aims to make 'a significant contribution to Scotland's sustainable economic development'. It involves public agencies and stakeholders (those with an interest in our work) working together to align their policies, programmes and actions to achieve a common aim. That aim is to change the face of Central Scotland by restoring and improving the rural and urban landscape of the area.

Getting in Touch

To discuss this case study please contact: Stephen Hughes, Monitoring & Evaluation Officer, Central Scotland Green Network Support Unit. E-mail: stephen.hughes@centralscotlandgreennetwork.org

For further information on other case studies please visit: www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org