



PUBLIC PETITION NO.

PE01410

Name of petitioner

John Hancox

Petition title

Developing a fruitful future for all young Scots (and some older ones)

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to support and encourage local authorities, schools and community groups to plant fruit trees in schools and community settings so children, families and the wider community can learn how to grow harvest, and enjoy their own local seasonal fruit by providing funding to enable this to happen. We also ask the Scottish Government to support the development of the Commonwealth Orchard – as a Scotland wide legacy of the 2014 Commonwealth Games. While some of this could be in Glasgow's East end, our vision with the Commonwealth Orchard is for that to be widely geographically spread, and developed in partnership with a range of local community groups.

Action taken to resolve issues of concern before submitting the petition

We have held apple days in Holyrood and have done our best to publicise the potential of school orchards to delivery social community and educational benefits. This has been successful in a piecemeal manner – but it would be our ambition to see as many Scottish School children as possible able to benefit from having fruit growing – regardless of where they live, or whether their school grounds have suitable grounds for planting. We have shown that even very inner city schools, such as Royal Mile Primary, in Central Edinburgh next to the Scottish Parliament, have been able to plant fruit trees in large planters. We have also worked with many community groups, housing associations and some local authorities to find suitable land in parks, social housing areas, or in general landscaping which can be planted by schools with help from the local community.

We have met with Scottish Government officials and also Glasgow City Council officials with a view to getting official backing from the Commonwealth Legacy, but for a variety of reasons this has not proved successful.

We have also input into the Scottish Government's Grow Your Own Working Group – and have submitted papers to this group explaining the value of Orchards to the Grow Your own agenda – and also put forward the Commonwealth Orchard there, but this has not been translated into official recommendations for Grow Your Own.

Petition background information

The idea of schools having their own fruit trees is to give all young Scots the chance to help with growing their own food. The experience we have had in running a “fruitful schools” project allowed us to get school orchards planted in 80 schools (about 7% of 2000 schools across Scotland) This was achieved very cost effectively through the work of the Children’s Orchard.

While we believe there is considerable scope to build on the work we have done, other groups such as National Trust for Scotland, Historic Scotland, The Botanic Gardens, in Edinburgh, Glasgow, St Andrews, and Dundee could all do much more to involve children growing fruit, understanding the many varieties of Scottish apples, ie White Melrose, Galloway Pippin, Golden Pippin, Stirling Castle, Beauty of Moray, and East Lothian Pippin. We believe that Scottish Orchards might also be able to develop Heritage Scottish Apple collections – and that these could hold the varieties for posterity in conjunction with these other agencies or charities.

As well as preserving old apple varieties – we would also be keen to use these orchard collections to build on skills and knowhow which if anything has been lost more rapidly even than the varieties. Working with Scotland’s young people and showing them how to prune, graft and look after the trees – and also show them how to use the fruit – seems one of the best ways to rebuild the heritage of fruit growing which has been lost.

The need to build on the skills and knowledge was emphasised to my mind when John Butterworth – Scotlands expert on fruit growing - who I have worked with for several years – retired from his nursery business very abruptly – and his skills and knowledge have effectively been lost. Also his orchard collection has been sold and is now no longer publically accessible. This emphasises how fragile the recovery in Scottish fruit growing is.

There is also scope for commercial growers – farmers, landowners and foresters to include orchards/ fruit trees in planting plans for amenity value – and these could also have educational and community benefits. At a recent meeting with foresters it was interesting that one of Scotland’s major forestry contractors had included fruit trees in a mixed planting.

The orchard as a model is really good as a way to introduce young people to food growing – and fruit trees really fits well with the school year. You get blossom in spring, fruit in autumn and can plant further trees in winter (when trees are dormant) We worked with Eco-schools Scotland last year on the Food Topic – and have supported a number of schools in developing their eco work.

The funding that was made available by Scottish Government in financial year 2010/2011 of £15,000 was paid as a grant to the Children’s Orchard. This allowed us to plant around 80 school orchards, and to deliver a number of geographically spread out training sessions, for school teachers, and pupils. We consider this a very cost effective way (less than £200 per school) of delivering a wide range of health and educational benefits to children, for years to come.

We do not want to suggest we are the only possible way of delivering school and community fruit growing – though we would wish to continue to be part of this – and believe our experience has helped to show what is possible – and this is something that could be developed further in partnership with others.

The SNP manifesto has a declaration to encourage young Scots to learn more about food growing which we believe would be well addressed by the development of school orchards.

<http://voteSNP.com/SNPmanifesto2011lowRes>

"We will also continue with our efforts to improve food education in Scotland’s schools so that young Scots are empowered to choose fresh, healthy, local and seasonal food."

Regarding the Commonwealth Orchard – the declared aims of the Commonwealth Legacy are to improve health and well being of Scots, to encourage volunteering, to help communities to flourish, and to improve Scotland’s natural and built environment, and to expand opportunities for Scots to succeed. There are also aims related to increasing volunteering opportunities.

We have previously presented detailed information to Scottish Government, detailing how the Commonwealth Orchard can address these various aims, and it is disappointing that this has failed to gain support. Our observation is that the decision makers really are very risk averse – and that despite the rhetoric of having a legacy led by the community, in practice they really want it led and controlled by local authorities or larger organisations. In the process I believe they are missing out on the creativity and vision of local people to improve their lives themselves. In these times of restricted public sector funding creative, low cost and grassroots solutions should be encouraged – and in my view, they are not. There are no examples of small grass root initiatives like Commonwealth Orchard being backed officially, and I wonder if that can be changed.

The model of the Commonwealth Orchard offers a way in which communities across Scotland can create a lasting healthy legacy of the 2014 Games – and it is an idea that deserves to be supported and encouraged officially.

Unique web address

<http://www.scottish.parliament.uk/GettingInvolved/Petitions/PE01410>

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NO

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1

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