

Sowing New Seeds: Evaluation Report
Garden Organic

Elizabeth Bos, Kevin Broughton & Dr Moya Kneafsey
June 2013

SURGE

Contents

	Executive Summary	2
1.0	Introduction	4
1.1	Report Purpose	4
1.2	Project Overview	4
1.3	Evaluation Rationale and Methodology	5
1.4	Report Structure	5
2.0	Quantitative Data Analysis (Questionnaire)	6
2.1	Introduction	6
2.2	Seed Stewards / Individuals data	6
2.3	Schools data	17
2.4	Assessment of quantitative data	21
3.0	Qualitative Data Analysis (Interviews)	25
3.1	Introduction	25
3.2	Qualitative case studies	25
3.3	Initial engagement with the SNS project	28
3.4	Impact of the SNS project	29
3.5	Assessment of qualitative data	41
4.0	Final Assessment	44
4.1	Introduction	44
4.2	Aims and objectives of SNS	44
4.3	Final evaluation of SNS Project	44
4.4	Recommendations	47
4.5	Conclusions	49
	References	49

Executive Summary

Purpose and Background

- In 2012, SURGE, at Coventry University, was commissioned to independently evaluate Garden Organic's "Sowing New Seeds" project.
- Sowing New Seeds (SNS) is a discrete and small-scale project, which began in 2010. It aimed to enable individuals, allotment holders, schools and community groups in the Midlands to grow exotic crops not traditionally grown in the UK.
- To achieve this aim, the project's objectives intended to: promote exotic crop growing and encouraging the collection, safeguarding and redistribution of seeds; ensure skills and knowledge of exotic crops were passed on to younger generations and; establish a demonstration garden in conjunction with a series of events at Ryton Gardens.
- The project's aim and objectives would be achieved via the activity of participants from a range of settings, essentially becoming 'Seed Stewards'. Seed Stewards aimed to share seeds, produce, skills and knowledge to others, disseminating activities more widely.
- This independent evaluation thus intends to assess the extent to which the SNS project has achieved its aim and objectives, identifying the project's impact, its good practice, challenges faced, and recommendations for future development and sustainability.
- The evaluation framework involved the collection of qualitative and quantitative data from a range of participants. Quantitative data was gathered via a self-completion questionnaire; qualitative data was gathered via semi-structured interviews. This data was brought together and analysed in order to evaluate SNS project.
- The questionnaire had a response rate of 31% (42 responses from 113 invitations) and five semi-structured interviews were undertaken to ensure each 'setting' was covered. Thus, the results are based on relatively low numbers and caution should be used – nevertheless, the findings offer a valuable indication of the SNS project's outcomes.

Impacts

- Many 'impacts' for participants involved the achievement of certain goals or motivations, including: sense of fun from something 'different'; the need for personal learning and development and; desire to share (seeds, produce, knowledge and skills) with others.
- Participant activities involved in achieving these goals has increased social interaction, resulting in extending social networks, improved neighbourliness, and friendships.
- In some cases, such social interaction has had a 'social cohesion' dimension, whereby people from different backgrounds have come together. For some participants, activities have also resulted in improved understanding of other cultures.

- The vast majority of participants consulted stated that the range and amount of exotic crops they have grown and consumed has increased, with most also saving seeds.
- Whilst not a prevalent issue, some participants have reported improvements in health-related behaviours and well-being, along with improvements in consumption behaviour.
- Almost all consulted participants will continue to grow and consume exotic crops, ensuring the continued sustainability of the project's aim and objectives into the future.
- Examples of good practice include: using Garden Organic's existing networks of growers to 'quick-start' the project; support and responsiveness of SNS staff; the events offer and; the overall impact given the short period of time of many participants' involvement.

Challenges

- Participant reports of 'reluctance' by some people to engage with 'unusual' exotic crops.
- For certain crops and certain times, more detailed information was needed to get the best from the crop in terms of growth and consumption.
- Challenges around the engagement of particular groups, particularly young generations and those from a BME background, given the profile of the Midlands area
- Issues outside of the control of the SNS project (e.g. the wet summer of 2012).

Recommendations

- Continue with the existing light touch/extending model of support and events, and promoting the benefits of this 'new dimension' of growing 'exotic' crops
- Achieving a balance between providing information and enabling learning through challenge, for example via a social media blog to provide continued support and information to participants in a sustainable manner in the longer term.
- Continue, if feasible, with the well-received events at Ryton Gardens.
- Further exploration of activities to increase social cohesion, including analysis of barriers to young generations and those from BME backgrounds, to inform recruitment practice
- Further investigation into the extent to which health and well-being is a motivator of engagement or a positive by-product of engagement
- Longer-term reviews of exotic crop growing by participants to monitor sustainability.
- Reconsideration of some assumptions behind project design, such as generational knowledge transfer and personal links and reconnections with exotic crops.

Overall the SNS project has achieved a great deal in a short time, with limited resources and should be commended for achieving the majority of its goals.

1. Introduction

1.1 Report Purpose

The purpose of this Final Report is to provide an evaluation of Garden Organic's "Sowing New Seeds" project. The primary purpose of any project evaluation is to assess the extent to which a project has achieved its intended aims and objectives. However, more broadly, an evaluation can also identify the wider range of impacts that the project has had on those involved, noting examples of good practice. It can also highlight the challenges that the project and its participants have faced, and provide recommendations for future development and sustainability of the project. This evaluation intends to take this broader approach.

1.2 Project Overview

The Sowing New Seeds (*from now on known as SNS*) project began in 2010.

The aim of the project is:

- To enable allotment holders, schools and community groups in the Midlands to grow exotic crops not traditionally grown in the UK

To achieve this aim, the project set itself the following objectives:

- To prevent the disappearance of *exotic crops* grown in the UK, ensuring their growth is sustained via seed collection and safeguarding, redistribution and promotion of growing
- To prevent the disappearance of the *skills and knowledge* used in growing non-traditional crops, by ensuring skills and knowledge are passed on to younger generations
- To establish a demonstration garden at Garden Organic's Ryton Gardens, and deliver a range of appropriate events

In order to achieve these objectives, it was intended that the SNS project would particularly engage with BME groups and individuals, as well as younger generations.

The key mechanism for delivery of the project would be "Seed Stewards" – individuals, allotment committee members, community group leaders, school teachers, and others, who would endeavour to distribute and manage seeds, hand out information, disseminate skills and knowledge, share exotic crop produce, and show ways of preparing, cooking and consuming such crops.

1.3 Evaluation Rationale and Methodology

In the majority of cases where a project has already been delivering, the 'evaluation' of a project involves assessing the extent to which the project has achieved its aim and objectives. This basic assumption has thus been used as the foundation of the evaluation framework.

The SNS project is a relatively small-scale, discrete project forming one of a diverse range of initiatives delivered by Garden Organic. Given this context, an evaluation framework was established which primarily aimed to focus evaluative activity on the key *impacts* of the project, guided by the project's aim and objectives.

The research methods involved in the evaluation aimed to provide a balance of both quantitative and qualitative data. These datasets could be compared and contrasted in order to highlight key issues. In agreement with Garden Organic, methods were selected which aimed to keep the evaluation focused and uncomplicated. A self-completion questionnaire was designed and delivered to all key participants. Analysis of the responses was undertaken in order to provide a 'grounding' on which to provide some in-depth data, via the use of semi-structured interviews with selected project participants.

Both sets of data were analysed and the findings outlined, followed by an evaluation of those findings. This report provides details of the outcome of these processes.

1.4 Report Structure

An Executive Summary is provided at the very start of this Final Report for easy reference. Following this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 presents the quantitative findings from the questionnaire responses, concluding with an assessment of the quantitative findings which will subsequently inform the overall evaluation for the SNS project. Chapter 3 presents the qualitative findings from the semi-structured interviews, again concluding with an evaluative assessment to inform the overall evaluation. All of the key findings and assessments are synergised in Chapter 4, which provides a final and overall evaluation of the SNS project, guided by the SNS project's aim and objectives. Recommendations for further development are outlined before a final conclusion.

The Report now provides an analysis of the quantitative data.

2. Analysis of Quantitative Data (Questionnaire)

2.1 Introduction

A total of 71 questionnaires were distributed to Seed Stewards and 29 were returned, resulting in a response rate of 41%. Regarding the schools, 42 questionnaires were distributed and a total of 13 were returned, which results in a 31% response rate.

The data is separated and analysed in two parts: (a) data from Seeds Stewards (based at allotments or in community groups) or individual participants, and (b) Schools-based Seed Stewards. These are now outlined in Sections 2.2 and 2.3 respectively. An assessment of all of the qualitative data follows in Section 2.4.

2.2 Seed Steward / Individual Participant Results

Engagement with the project

Seed stewards and individual participants were asked about how they were engaged in the project, either as an individual, as an allotment association, a community group or representing another organisation. Overall, 48% of respondents are part of Sowing New Seeds as an 'individual', whereas 28% are part of a community group, 21% as part of an allotment association. One respondent (3%) stated they are from a charity promoting local food. Results are based on 29 responses.

Regarding the proportion of BME growers who are part of the allotment associations and/or community group that responded, the highest proportions of respondents reported low number of BME growers. Six respondents stated there is around 10-20% BME growers, three respondents indicated there are zero BME growers and two respondents stated there is around 41-50%. Each of the following proportions is represented by one respondent: 21-30%, 31-40%, 51-60%, 71-80% and 91-100%. Results are based on 16 responses.

Respondent profile¹

- The findings show that 57% of respondents are female and 43% are male.
- The highest proportion (79%) of respondents are middle aged between 40 and 69. However, small numbers of respondents are in their 20s (4%), 30s (11%) and 70s (7%).
- Half of respondents indicated that they followed no religion, and 36% informed that they were of the Christian faith. Small numbers of respondents indicated that they were of the following faiths: Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim (1 respondent for each group).
- Three respondents highlighted that they have a disability.

¹ The following results are based on 28 responses for each question.

- The highest proportions of respondents (72%) are either in full time employment (43%) or part time employment (29%). 21% of respondents informed that they are retired; 1 respondent is at home not seeking work and another respondent is undertaking unpaid/voluntary work.
- Focusing on qualifications, the highest proportion of respondents either hold a degree (39%) or a higher degree (18%). 21% possess GCSEs and small numbers hold A Levels (7%), an Apprenticeship (7%), or no qualifications (7%).
- Regarding household composition, the majority of respondents are married or cohabiting with no children (68%). A small number of respondents are married or cohabiting with children (14%), live in single occupancy accommodation (10%), are a single parent family (4%) or live in a multi person household (4%).
- Just less than one third of respondents (32%) informed that their annual household income is between £14,001 and £28,000. One quarter of respondents indicated that they receive an annual household income of £28,001-£40,000, and another quarter informed they receive £40,001 or more. The smallest number of respondents (18%) stated they receive a household income of £14,000 or under per year.

Involvement in Sowing New Seeds

When asked how they became involved in the project, a high number of respondents informed that they found out about the project via personal contact from Garden Organic (38%). Seventeen percent of respondents became involved in the project from attending a training event/exhibition; 10% found out about it through the Garden Organic or Sowing New Seeds website and another 10% read about the project in an allotment newsletter. 7% of respondents found out about the project from a friend or family member, and 3% read about it in the Organic Way magazine. Other ways that respondents found out about the project was through contacts at, or information received from, other organisations (10%). One respondent couldn't remember how they became involved in the project. Results are based on 29 responses.

When asked approximately how long they had been involved in the project, the following responses were given. The highest proportion of respondents has been involved with the project for the least amount of time.

- 6 months or less: 37%
- More than 6 months and up to one year: 19%
- More than one year (but less than 2 years): 18%
- 2 years or more: 26%

Seed Stewards were asked why they became involved in the project. The top three reasons for involvement are:

- To grow a wider variety of food (25 responses)
- To learn more about growing food (14 responses)
- To encourage others (6 responses)

A total of 75% of respondents felt as though their initial goal or reason for being involved in the project had been achieved. Results are based on 28 responses.

Focusing on the amount of time spent growing food, Figure 1 illustrates that 52% of respondents spend 8 hours or more growing food per week (results are based on 27 responses). The amount of hours spent growing food per week has increased for just over a third of respondents (34%), and had stayed the same for the rest of respondents (66%) (results are based on 29 responses).

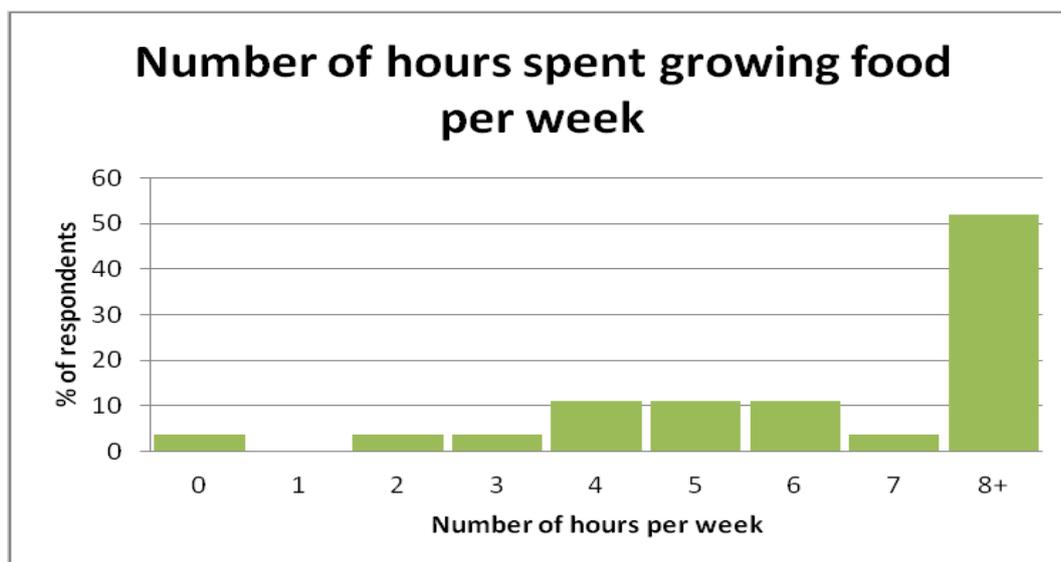


Figure 1

Environmental Impacts

Respondents were asked to state the proportion of the food they grow which they would class as 'exotic' (on average). Figure 2 shows that the highest proportion of respondents (57%) inform that around 10% of the food they grow is exotic.

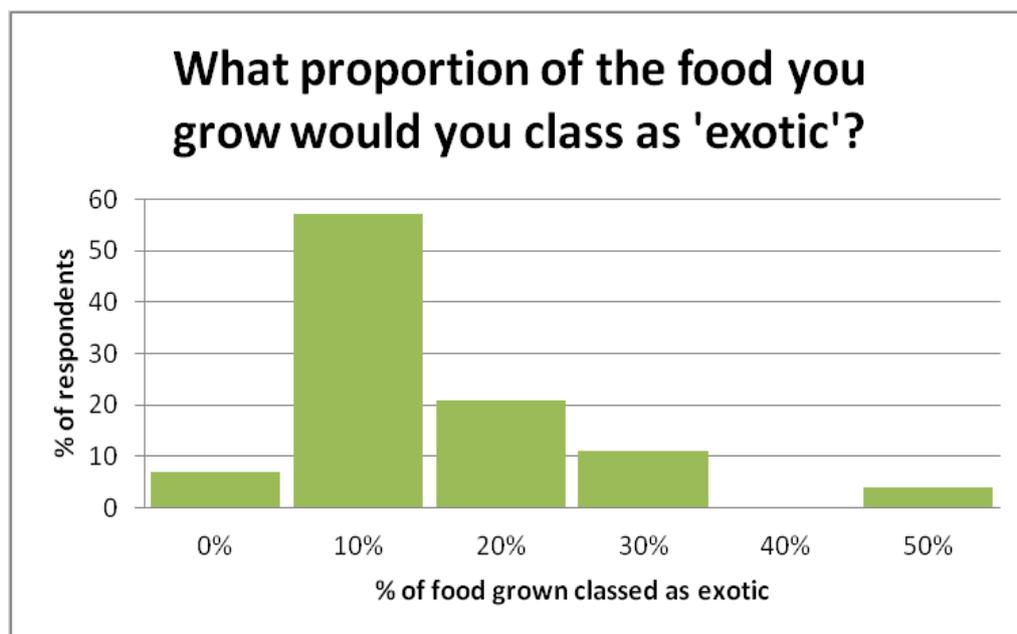


Figure 2

The results show that for 89% of respondents, the *range* of exotic crops they grow has increased and for 79% of respondents, the *amount* of exotic crops they grow has also increased.

The highest number of respondents grow their food in their garden or on their patio (18 responses) and/or on their allotment (18 respondents). Less common spaces are in a community garden (8 respondents) or on window sills or balconies (5 respondents). A number of respondents (a total of 8) also indicated that they grow food in 'other places' such as in a greenhouse, on a farm, in polytunnels, at a work space, or a neighbour's space.

Regarding the outcome of the exotic produce grown, respondents highlighted that they:

- Eat it (22 responses)
- Cook it (19 responses)
- Share it with others (14 responses)
- Use it for seed (12 responses)
- 'Other' (3 responses) including 'using for demonstration' and 'selling at garden market'.

Regarding 'seed saving', 75% of respondents save seeds from their exotic crops. Figure 3 highlights what respondents do with the seeds they save.

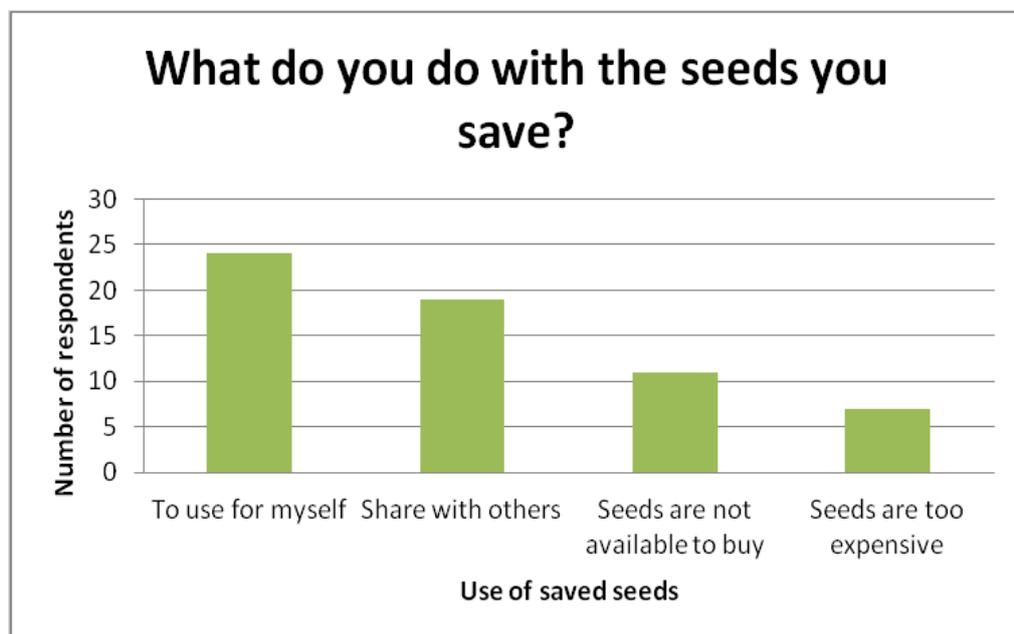


Figure 3

Impacts on Knowledge

Respondents were asked whether their knowledge around various aspects of exotic crops had changed at all since their involvement in the project. The following points demonstrate that knowledge has increased since being involved in the project:

- **Growing exotic crops** has increased for 93% of respondents (based on 29 responses).
- **Collecting seeds from exotic crops** has increased for 70% of respondents (based on 28 responses).
- **Cooking exotic crops** has increased for 67% of respondents (based on 27 responses).

Social Impacts

Respondents were asked a number of questions around whether their time spent with people had changed since participating in the project, whether meeting new people had changed, along with whether their understandings of other cultures had changed. The results are presented below:

- **Time spent with friends and family** has stayed the same for 88% of respondents, has increased for 4% and has decreased for 8%.

The reasons why time spent with friends and family had stayed the same received limited responses but those reasons stated include no change in behaviour, for example, 'now retired, still spend plenty of time with friends and family', and 'my friends and family are involved with the community garden'.

- **Time spent with other growers** has increased for 44% of respondents and stayed the same of 66%.

Time spent with other growers had increased for some due to 'more get-togethers at allotment', 'attending garden organic events' or 'because of more interaction with like minded people'.

- **Meeting new people** has increased for 48% of respondents and stayed the same for 52%.

Some respondents had met new people because they 'show crops to others, new allotment holders' and because 'exotics are a good conversation topic'.

- **Understanding of other cultures** has increased for 41% of respondents and has stayed the same for 59%.

Respondents expanded on why they felt their understanding of other cultures had changed. The main reasons included 'crops, food and/or seeds are a talking point at allotments' and 'learning more about other lifestyles and cooking'. The below quotes demonstrate these points.

- *"I have made efforts to understand why these crops are grown."*
- *"I already have wide interests involving diverse cultures. This adds another dimension, opens up possibilities of conversations with others."*
- *"The seeds have been a talking point with local growers from other cultures."*
- *"Learning more about other people's life styles and cooking procedures."*
- *"Contact with others at allotment. Talking about food grown in other cultures."*

When asked the question 'who do you advise and support to grow exotic crops?' the highest number of respondents informed that they 'advise person(s) at growing site', and 'friends', as shown in Figure 4 overleaf. 'Other' responses include 'work colleagues', 'visitors' and 'magazine readers'.

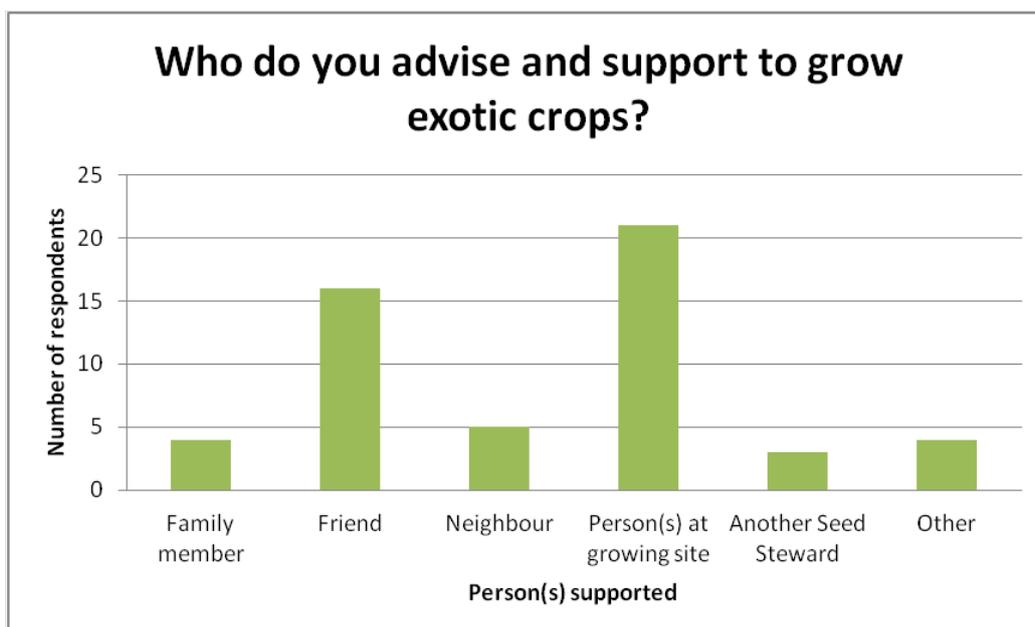


Figure 4

Respondents demonstrate, via a range of methods, that they support and advise others in growing exotic crops, as shown in Figure 5. 'Giving seeds', 'giving growing advice' and 'showing crops' are the top ways in which support and advice is given. 'Other' ways include the giving of plants and produce.

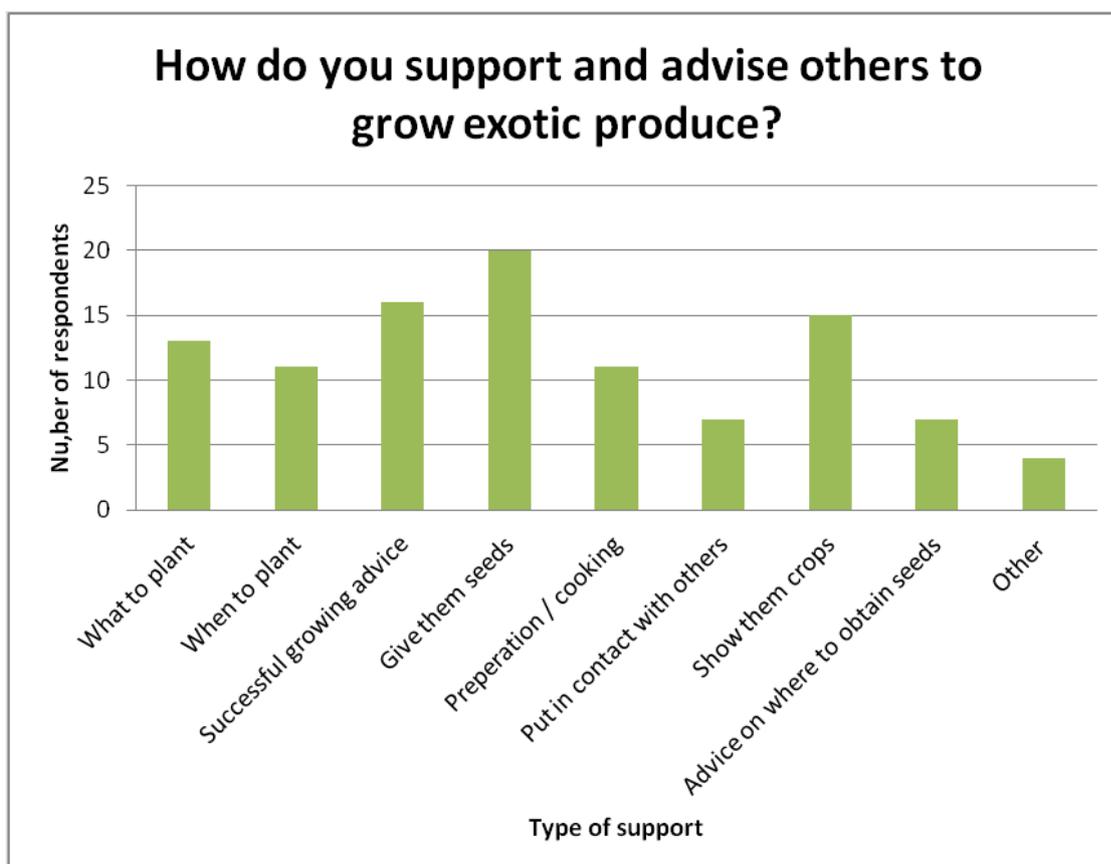


Figure 5

Seed Stewards were asked whether they receive any support or advice from others in growing exotic crops. The majority of respondents stated they receive support and advice from Garden Organic (21 responses). Advice was also received from others at growing site (8 responses), another seed steward (5 responses), a family member (4 responses), friends (3 responses), neighbours (1 respondent), colleagues (1 respondent) and online bloggers (1 respondent).

Food purchasing, consumption and cooking behaviour

Nearly 50% of respondents informed that they spend around £40-£70 per week on food. One third of respondents spend under £40 per week on food; 15% spend between £70 and £100, and 4% spend over £100. Results are based on 27 responses.

When asked whether the amount spend on food had changed at all since involvement in the project, for 89% of respondents it had stayed the same. The majority of respondents explained that this was because they do not grow enough of their own food. Other respondents informed that their behaviour had not changed. However, for 11% of respondents the amount they spend on food had decreased due to growing more of their own produce. Results are based on 27 responses.

Since taking part in the project a total of 21% of respondents have made changes to *what* food they buy. Changes include buying more 'adventurous' food (for four respondents), 'less fruit and veg' (for one respondent) and healthier food' (for one respondent).

- *"Started to eat more exotic vegetables; especially roots such as sweet potatoes, coco yam etc."*
- *"Try to buy more healthy and have appreciation of the work it takes to produce."*
- *"Try foods from other countries."*

Focusing on *where* food is purchased, 11% of respondents informed that they had made changes to where they buy their food from since taking part in the project. The three respondents stated that they tend to buy more local food, as demonstrated below:

- *"I tend not to shop in supermarkets anymore, I use local food markets or Asian supermarkets"*
- *"I try to buy from local farmers- meat and vegetables when I can afford it, they are a bit more expensive but better taste."*
- *"Try to buy more local food."*

Focusing on cooking habits, 36% of respondents informed that their cooking behaviour has changed since taking part in the project. For these respondents, they are either cooking

with new ingredients or are using new combinations, cooking with fresher, home grown produce, or are using more vegetables in their cooking.

- *“We cook with much more fresh, home-grown vegetables. A lot more fresh spices and herbs are thrown in at the end.”*
- *“More experimental, ready to try something new and exotic.”*
- *“I have been trying new recipes to suit the vegetables and eating more vegetarian food, although I do still eat meat.”*

Health and Well-being

The results show that respondents consume on average 4.8 portions of fruit and vegetables per day. When comparing this to the average, the results are slightly higher, with the national average stated as 4.1 portions (for adults aged 19-64) (National Diet and Nutrition Survey) (Bates *et al.*, 2012). Results are based on 28 responses. For 85% of respondents, the amount of fruit and vegetables they eat of average per day has stayed the same since being involved in the project, but for 15% of respondents it has increased. Results are based on 27 responses.

Respondents were asked to rate their current overall satisfaction with their life. This equalled an average score of 7.4 out of 10. This score is on par with the national average in 2012, which is also 7.4 (ONS, 2013). Results are based on 28 responses. For three quarters of respondents, they feel as though their life satisfaction has stayed the same since participating in the project, however for 21% it has increased. Results are based on 28 responses.

In total, 84% of respondents feel as though their involvement in the project has influenced their overall life satisfaction to some extent, with 16% stating that their involvement has had no impact on their overall life satisfaction. Results are based on 25 responses. Respondents who felt as though their involvement in the project has had no impact on their overall life satisfaction informed that participating in such activities was already part of their lifestyle, or that they are involved in other activities. For those respondents who informed that involvement in the project had influenced their life satisfaction to some extent, this was due to a number of reasons, such as:

- Satisfaction of growing own crops:
“Growing exotic crops is something to get very passionate about, being able to share successful plants and crops is inspiring.”
- Social aspects:
“Sense of community”
- Knowledge gain:
“Steady increase in knowledge”

- Enjoyable activity:

“It’s fun. More fun is good”

- Feeling healthier:

“By eating and staying healthy. Trying to eat more fresh and organic vegetables and by getting more exercise, doing gardening is very therapeutic too.”

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with various aspects of their life. These various components are taken from Defra’s Sustainable Development Indicators. Table 1 shows what proportion of respondents are ‘satisfied’ with these different aspects of their life. The column on the right indicates whether respondents feel that their level of satisfaction has changed at all since their involvement in the project. As Table 1 shows a high proportion of respondents are generally satisfied with the different aspects of their life, particularly those ‘social’ aspects of personal relationships, leisure activities/hobbies, and feeling part of a community. It is these areas which demonstrate the highest increase in satisfaction, particularly ‘feeling part of a community’.

Component	% of satisfied respondents	Increase in satisfaction
1. Personal relationships	93%	24%
2. Leisure activities / hobbies	90%	24%
3. Feeling part of a community	89%	32%
4. The area in which you live	89%	12%
5. Your day to day activities	86%	16%
6. Your accommodation	86%	12%
7. Standard of living	85%	8%
8. Ability to influence what happens in your life	85%	13%
9. Achieving your goals	78%	20%
10. Your health	75%	16%
11. Your future financial security	72%	4%

Table 1

Overall impact of the project

When asked what the main benefits from being involved in the project are, responses fell into the following categories:

- Opportunity to grow different things
- Learning and knowledge (of crops and other cultures)
- Information and support

Respondents were asked what they thought the main impacts of the project are; similar responses were given which can be categorised as:

- Bringing people together
- Better understanding / increased awareness of exotic crops

Finally, respondents were asked whether they would like to make any additional comments about their involvement in the project. The majority of comments were positive, such as:

- *“My involvement with Garden Organic seed steward project has led to additional, unexpected benefits, increasing partnership working and development between Walsall Council and Garden Organic.”*
- *“I hope it goes from strength to strength and becomes a self sustaining project as more and more seeds are swapped.”*
- *“Food is an excellent way to increase knowledge of diverse cultures. One step leads to another.”*
- *“Good support from the SNS Team!”*
- *“Good project-keep going.”*
- *“Very good project although only just started my involvement.”*

A few less positive comments were made including comments around the external factors impacting on growing, lack of engagement in the project, and receiving the questionnaire at an early stage in the project.

- *“I feel this has been a poor growing season and even my non-exotic are struggling”*
- *“Important to say I had very little involvement in project which is why most of my answers are 'stayed the same'. I got 3 packs of seeds and planted some myself of each gave some to friends I didn't use.”*

“Not at this stage. It would have been better to send this questionnaire later in the year as some of our seed has only just germinated.”

2.3 Schools Data²

Profile of schools

The Seed Stewards at schools hold a range of positions ranging from a school gardener (3 respondents) to a tutor and a deputy head. The majority of schools-based seed stewards stated that they were teaching assistants (7 respondents).

Approximately half of the schools are primary schools (7 schools), three of the schools classed themselves as 'reception', and two schools are 'secondary'. One school stated that it was both primary and secondary. The school years of children engaged in the project also demonstrates this; with schools engaging the most with reception to Year 6 students; few schools engaging Years 7 to 10, and zero schools engaging Years 11 to 13.

The majority of the schools are state schools with two of the schools classed as independent. Most of the schools also classed themselves as a community school (6 schools), two are voluntary schools, one is a specialist school, one is a private school and another did not know. Results are based on 11 responses.

Regarding how long the schools have been engaged with the project, this evenly ranged from two months to two years, with four schools having participated in the project for around six months. Results are based on 11 responses.

Focusing on the proportion of BME students in each school, 50% of schools informed that there were a low number of BME students at their schools, around 0-10%. 17% of schools (2 respondents) stated that around 11-20% of their students are BME, and 17% (2 respondents) stated around 21-30%. One school indicated that there were approximately 40-50% BME students, and another school stated there were around 81-90% of BME students. Results are based on 12 responses.

BME students' engagement in the SNS project

Overalls, the schools data indicated that there were low numbers of BME students *engaged* in the project; five schools informed that zero BME students were engaged, four informed that less than 10% of their BME students were engaged in the project, one school felt that around 20% of the BME students were engaged, and another school indicated that around 27% of the BME students were engaged in the project. Results are based on 11 responses.

Regarding how much time children spend on activities related to food growing, eight schools stated that the children spend an hour or less each week on such activities. One schools informed that the children spend around 2 hours per week on activities, at three schools the children spend around 4 hours per week on activities and at the children at one schools spend approximately 5 hours or more each week on activities.

² There were a total of 13 school seed steward respondents. Unless otherwise stated, 13 is the total number of responses for each question.

Schools were asked to state the reasons why they decided to become involved with the project (schools could state as many reasons as they wanted to); the results are displayed in Table 2 below:

Reason	Number of schools
Complements existing activities	10
To help understanding other cultures	9
Interesting resource	7
To continue growing food	6
To start growing food	5
Inclusion of pupils	5
Physical activity	3
Other: creation of sensory garden	1
Other: to engage children with learning difficulties	1

Table 2

Schools were asked how they became aware of the project; nearly 50% found out about the project from the Garden Organic or Sowing New Seeds website. Results are illustrated in Figure 6.

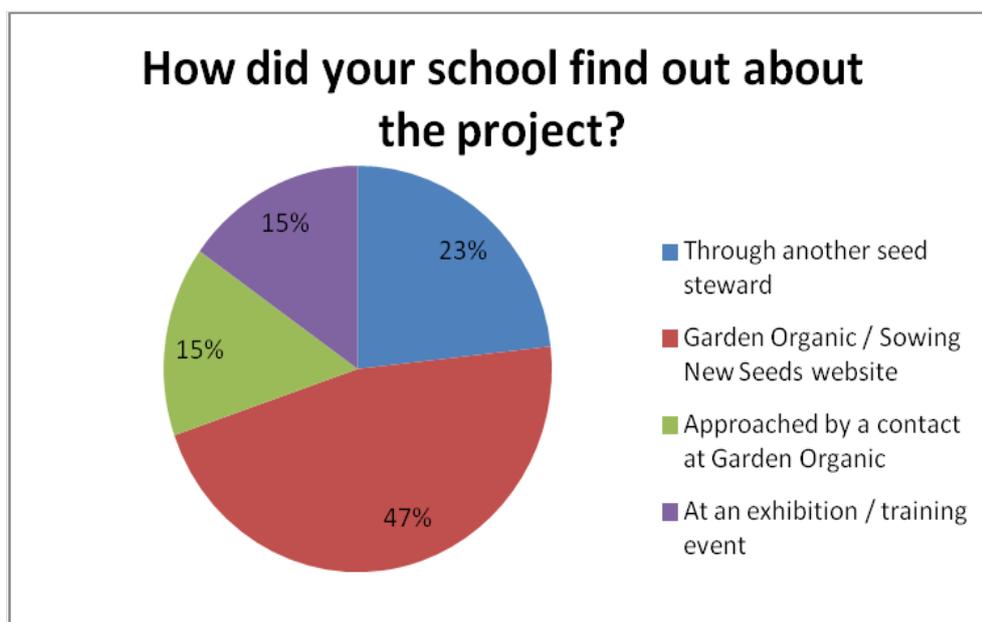


Figure 6

Schools were asked to state whether they *currently* engage in any of the following activities, and to also state whether they engaged in these activities *before* their involvement with the project. The findings show that there has been an increase in the number of schools participating in the following activities, since being involved in the project, apart from 'growing off site' – fewer schools do this since being involved in the project, and 'activities with community groups' – the number of schools participate in activities with community groups presently, and before involvement with the project.

- Growing on site (school grounds)
- Growing off site (not on school grounds)
- Cooking own grown produce
- Eating own grown produce
- Selling own grown produce
- Composting
- Farm or garden visits
- Seed saving
- Activities with older generations
- Activities with community groups

Four schools informed that through the school, children's families are engaged with the project; 8 schools indicated that children's families are not engaged. Results are based on 12 responses.

The findings show that approximately 10% of the food grown at 75% of the schools can be classed as 'exotic'. One school informed that none of the produce they grow is exotic whereas one school would class 20% of their produce as exotic, and another school would class 30% as exotic. Results are based on 12 responses.

Over half of schools (55%) stated that they save seeds from the crops they grow. Results are based on 11 responses.

Schools informed that they save seeds for a variety of reasons, including:

- To use within the school (7 responses)
- Because seeds are too expensive to buy (5 responses)
- To share with others (3 responses)
- Because seeds are not available to buy (3 responses)

One school also stated that they intended to save seeds from their crops from next year onwards.

Schools were asked to state whether the amount and range of exotic crops they grow has changed at all since their involvement in the project. As Figure 7 overleaf shows, over 90% of schools informed that the amount and range of exotic crops they grow has increased since their involvement in the project. For less than 10% of respondents, the amount and range of exotic crops they grow has stayed the same.

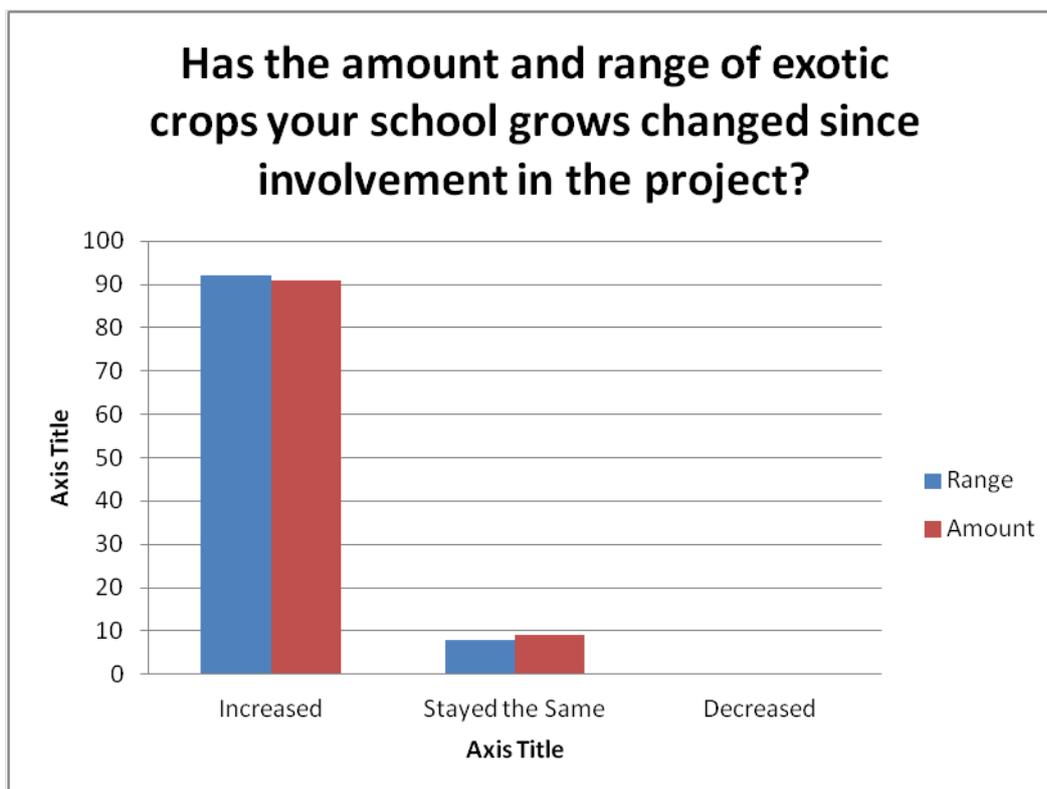


Figure 7

Benefits of the project

Schools were asked what they felt the main benefit was from being engaged in the project. Responses can be grouped into a number of categories. Firstly, the majority of responses focus on the aspect of experiencing something new, for example growing new crops, learning how to care for them, to cook them which provides opportunities to try new food. Finding out new information about where crops come from was also described as a main benefit from being engaged with the project. This is thought to give children the opportunity to find out about other countries, cultures and tastes which, for one respondent, enhances cultural diversity in the garden. For another respondent, engagement in the project widened their general horticultural knowledge and practice. Three respondents informed that they felt the resources were a beneficial aspect of the project; either the information provided in the resource pack (including information sheets), or for one respondent the support of the project staff. Finally, for one respondent, effectively integrating food growing into the subjects of geography and science was seen as a main benefit of being involved in the project.

- *“Children having the opportunity to look at, discuss and grow plants they would not normally think to grow. All the information was supplied for the seeds.”*
- *“We have tried new crops such as shark fin melon, halon and chickpeas. We have benefited from project staff supporting work at the school.”*

- *“Widening horticultural knowledge and practice, expanding on usual vegetables to include exotics, exploring different tastes and cultural differences through food.”*

Finally, respondents were asked whether they would like to make any other comments about their involvement in the project. A total of seven respondents took the opportunity to express their views on the project, all of which were positive, examples of which are given below.

- *“A great resource with support and advice on request, motivational/inspirational and exiting seeds are delivered.”*
- *“Been really beneficial. Only our 1st year, but we would love to continue and we’ve got lots of ideas about how to incorporate it into what we do more efficiently...”*
- *“I am quite a novice at this and am learning with the children, we are going to try to include seed saving/collection this year!”*
- *“The children in our gardening group were very interested in the project. We displayed the plant information on our raised beds but we were disappointed when our afternoon was cancelled and parents were unable to visit the school garden due to the rain.”*

2.4 Assessment of Quantitative Data

The quantitative data for the seed steward questionnaire responses are encouraging and provide some useful results to assess how the project is meeting its aims and objectives. As results are based on a low number of responses, the findings need to be approached with caution – more extensive quantitative research, with a larger sample of respondents would be necessary to gain a more representative illustration of the impacts of the project. An assessment of the quantitative data gathered is now outlined below, categorised under the aim and objectives of the SNS project.

To enable allotment holders, schools and community groups to grow exotic crops not traditionally grown in the UK

From the questionnaire findings it can be concluded that the project is meeting its overall aim of enabling allotment holders, schools, community groups and individuals to grow exotic crops not traditionally grown in the UK. In terms of engagement with the project, a range of groups (as stated in the overall aims of the project) are represented; nearly 50% of people participate in the project as ‘individuals’ with smaller portions participating as ‘allotment associations’ or ‘community groups’.

The findings show that engagement in the project is still relatively new for over half of seed stewards; for example only 26% of respondents have been involved in the project for 2 years or more, where as 56% have been involved for a year or less. The main reason why

respondents became involved in the project was to grow a wider variety of food and overall, 75% of respondents felt as though their initial goal had been achieved. It can be argued therefore that the aim of the project is in line with participants' goals, therefore successfully meeting a need. The majority of respondents stated they receive support and advice from Garden Organic (75%), which demonstrates that Garden Organic are enabling growers to grow exotic produce, therefore meeting the overall project aim.

Preventing disappearance of exotic crops – seed collection, safeguarding, redistribution and promotion of growing

Over half of respondents (57%) would class around 10% of the food they grow as 'exotic'; the findings also show that 75% of schools would class approximately 10% of the food they grow as 'exotic'. Although these proportions of exotic crops could be regarded as small, when taking into account the early stages of engagement, such findings are encouraging, particularly due to the barriers identified in the interviews, such as the poor summer of 2012.

The results show that for 89% of respondents, the *range* of exotic crops they grow has increased and for 79% of respondents, the *amount* of exotic crops they grow has also increased. In addition, over 90% of schools informed that the amount and range of exotic crops they grow has increased since their involvement in the project. Given that engagement in the project is still relatively new for many, the project is successfully encouraging the amount and range of exotic crops grown. These findings suggest that seed stewards had relatively little experience of growing exotic crops before taking part in the project, yet have largely been successful in these new activities, despite some challenges. Enabling more people to grow exotic crops is likely to contribute to preventing the disappearance of exotic crops via seed collection and safeguarding, redistribution and the promotion of growing. The full effect of this is again, something which deserves further attention and more in-depth research over a longer time period, to measure the sustainability of the project.

With regards to seed saving, 75% of respondents informed that they save seeds from their exotic crops and over half of schools (55%) stated that they save seeds from the crops they grow. These findings demonstrate that Garden Organic have been successful in encouraging this activity, although there is potential for more participants to undertake seed saving.

Skills and Knowledge passed on to younger generations

Many of the results demonstrate a number of benefits around growing our own food. Growing 'exotic' produce adds another dimension to personal food growing and seems to broaden people's knowledge, understanding and experience. In terms of knowledge around exotic crops, for a high number of respondents (93%), this has increased. Collecting seeds from exotic crops has also increased (70% of respondents) as well as cooking exotic crops (67% of respondents). The questionnaire results demonstrate that through engaging in the project, people feel more knowledgeable about exotic crops, not just growing them but collecting seeds, as well as cooking and consuming.

The results also provide some interesting findings around social interaction. For example, time spent interacting with other growers had increased for 44% of respondents due to 'more get-togethers at the allotment', 'attending Garden Organic events' or 'because of more interaction with like-minded people'. Meeting new people has increased for 48%, for some this was because they 'show crops to others' and because 'exotics are a good conversation topic'. Moreover, 'increased understanding of other cultures' was reported by 41% of respondents. The main reasons for this include 'crops, food and/or seeds are a talking point at allotments' and 'learning more about other lifestyles and cooking'.

Although the results around social interaction are very encouraging, there is limited evidence to suggest that knowledge is passed on to younger generations (*outside of activities within school settings*) which is a key project objective. Focusing on schools, many reflected that younger children participate in the project. Primarily 'Reception' to 'Year 6' student groups are engaged in the project – few schools engage students in 'Years 7 – 10' and no schools engage 'Years 11-13'. One third of schools responded that, through the school, children's families are engaged with the project. This shows potential to share learning and knowledge within the family. Thus, by engaging children in schools, in some cases knowledge appears to be transferred from young generations to older generations via parents – questioning the traditional assumptions about generational knowledge. This might be an area requiring further thought.

Demonstration garden at Ryton and series of events

Many of the comments received from the questionnaire respondents referred to the range of events delivered by SNS/Garden Organic. It is known that the demonstration garden has formed part of this. Thus, it can be suggested that this objective has been achieved and has largely been very well-received by those respondents who attended events.

Additional findings

There were also additional important findings identified by the evaluation. These are highlighted here.

Consumption Behaviour

In terms of shopping behaviour, 11% of respondents indicated the amount they spend on certain foods had decreased because they are growing more of their own produce. Though respondent numbers are low, it does demonstrate that participants growing their own food can impact positively on food expenditure, particularly given the current trend of increasing food prices. Since taking part in the project, 21% of respondents have made changes to *what* food they buy. Changes include buying more 'adventurous' food, 'less fruit and veg' (because they are growing their own), and 'healthier food'. Regarding cooking habits, 36% of respondents stated that their cooking behaviour has changed since taking part in the project. These respondents stated that they are: 'cooking with new ingredients', 'are using new combinations', 'cooking with fresher, home grown produce', or 'are using more vegetables in cooking'.

Results around how participation in the SNS project has impacted on respondents' health and well-being are also encouraging. In terms of health, for 15% of respondents the amount

of fruit and vegetables they eat on average per day has increased, since participating in the project. The results show that respondents consume on average 4.8 portions of fruit and vegetables per day, which is slightly higher than the national average of 4.1 portions. Regarding well-being, respondents were asked to rate their current overall satisfaction with their life – the results showed an average score of 7.4 out of 10. This score is on a par with the national average in 2012, which is also 7.4 (ONS, 2013). Around three quarters of respondents reported that their 'life satisfaction' had stayed the same since participating in the project, however for 21% it had actually increased. Overall, 84% of respondents feel as though their involvement in the project has influenced their overall life satisfaction to some extent.

BME engagement

Those allotment associations and community groups that responded stated that relatively low numbers from a BME background were involved in the SNS project. Regarding school contexts, 50% of schools-based respondents reported that the share of students from a BME background at their school was between 0 and 10% – the share actually engaged in the project being similar. One school-based respondent stated a 40-50% share of BME students engaged in the project, and another school-based respondent stated an 81-90% share of BME students engaged in the project.

Data on the ethnicity of individual growers was somewhat incomplete and thus it is unclear to what extent participants' from a BME background were engaged in the project, although indications suggest that the vast majority of respondents were White British. More comprehensive data would be very useful, given the nature of the SNS project's intentions around inclusivity and diversity, and is something that needs to be collected and analysed. Without better data, it is difficult to explore the claim that (for example) older generations from BME backgrounds possess particular knowledge of exotic crops which could be shared with future generations.

At present, the results show that a relatively wide audience is engaged across a number of contexts. In some cases, it was reported that this is supporting an increased understanding of other cultures, although this does not necessarily mean via the mechanism of people from different backgrounds coming together. Engaging more people from BME backgrounds is an important challenge in broadening the diversity and inclusivity of the SNS project, which would further assist its sustainability. Such issues will be examined later in the Report.

The Report now provides an analysis of the qualitative data from the interviews.

3. Analysis of Qualitative Data (Interviews)

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this phase of the evaluation was to provide qualitative evidence of the impact of the project, to support or contrast with the quantitative evidence already outlined. This phase involved five semi-structured interviews with selected Seed Stewards and other individuals engaged in the SNS project, across the range of contexts in which it operated (individual households, allotments, community groups / projects and schools).

This section of the Final Report firstly provides case study contexts for each interviewee. This is followed by identification of the key impacts of the SNS project, drawn from an analysis of the semi-structured interview data. The analysis identified a number of cross-cutting themes that are common across the interviewees' experience of the SNS project. These themes cover issues around benefits to participants, challenges and barriers, suggestions for improvement and sustainability and legacy. Supporting quotes from interviewees are provided in order to bring these themes to life. A final evaluation summary of the SNS project's impact is then provided, followed by recommendations for future development and final conclusions.

3.2 Qualitative Case Studies

To provide some background, the boxes below provide necessary information on interviewees' contexts and activities. It should be noted that, in order to ensure the anonymity of interviewee identities, all interviewee names have been replaced by numbers.

CASE STUDY 1: INTERVIEWEE 1a & 1b: INDIVIDUAL SETTING

WHO

Individual participants

WHERE

Small village in Banbury/Oxfordshire area

WHEN

Last 12 months – have been involved in Garden Organic for around 10 years

HOW

Growing in own garden

WHY

For own interest and consumption but also to share with others via 'open garden' days each year, for those in the village and surrounding areas to view and find out more

CASE STUDY 2: INTERVIEWEE 2: INDIVIDUAL SETTING

WHO

Seed Steward

WHERE

Burton-upon-Trent

WHEN

Last 12 months, though been a member of Garden Organic for some years

HOW

Growing in own garden, but also advice to allotment plot holders, neighbours and others in his social network

WHY

Both for own interest and consumption but also for neighbours, those in the surrounding areas and allotment plot holders

CASE STUDY 3: INTERVIEWEE 3: ALLOTMENT SETTING

WHO

Individual participant

WHERE

Allotment in city of Birmingham

WHEN

Last 12 months – only been a plot holder for two years and only recently involved with Garden Organic via an allotment committee member who is a long-standing member of Garden Organic

HOW

Allotment based, but also on own property

WHY

For own interest in growing, cooking and consuming exotic crops as something different, but also for sharing produce, seeds and knowledge with others

CASE STUDY 4: INTERVIEWEE 4: COMMUNITY PROJECT SETTING

WHO

Seed Steward

WHERE

Community project in the Coventry area

WHEN

2 years ago

HOW

Had community garden since 2008
Contacted by Garden Organic
Growing site based at community project.

WHY

Inter cultural community bridge building good to have seeds from different places. Idea of growing stuff that came from home countries of communities seemed like a good idea, engagement in gardening or the sense that it's there. Exotic crops proved to engage residents before.

CASE STUDY 5: INTERVIEWEE 5: SCHOOL SETTING

WHO

School Seed Steward

WHERE

School in the Leicestershire area

WHEN

Around one year after being contacted by Garden Organic, but have been gardening at the school for around 3 years.

HOW

Growing space on school ground

WHY

Were contacted by Garden Organic
To introduce children at the school to growing different things

3.3 Initial engagement with the SNS project

As highlighted by the quantitative data from the questionnaires, Garden Organic was able to 'hit the ground running' with the SNS project, by utilising its existing contacts and networks engaged in other projects (e.g. the Master Gardener programme) to invite and recruit Seed Stewards and other participants into the project. Data gathered from the interviewees appears to support the questionnaire data, as the majority of interviewees stated that they were already connected with Garden Organic generally or through specific initiatives.

Interviewees were asked what their initial motivation was, to engage with the Sowing New Seeds project. The responses mirror (or are intertwined with) the range of benefits that interviewees experienced, and thus the impact of the SNS project. Therefore, interviewees' motivations for engagement with the SNS project are identified as part of 'Impact' in Section 3.4 below.

3.3.1 Continuing support from the SNS project, after initial engagement

The school particularly valued the visit from Garden Organic / SNS, along with the resources provided such as the seeds, pictures and accompanying information. The school was particularly impressed by the efforts Garden Organic made with the session for the children (and parents) at the school, and generally found Garden Organic to be very encouraging, helpful and supportive.

"The cards and the information we had were very clear, they were absolutely great."
Interviewee 5)

"..with the information and the pictures and things we had made it straightforward really because it told you how to plant the seeds etc. you could see what they were going to look like etc. so it was fine, it was great for people like us who are inexperienced gardeners but wanting to be more experienced...and being able to sort of email somebody or whatever if I needed to that was fine as well if you had any questions people were more than happy to engage with that and as I say the session with the children was the icing on the cake for us." (Interviewee 5)

"Anton has been very friendly and enthusiastic and has come by. When I've emailed him and asked him a question he's been happy to answer...certainly in terms of tips and information, there has been printed information as well, so in terms of information on growing particular seeds we've been given that's been very useful." (Interviewee 4)

"Some additional things (...) I wanted to try to some rye and he got a college to send us some rye, so they've been generous and open to being helpful." (Interviewee 4)

3.4 Impact of the SNS project

The impact of the SNS project has already been assessed in relation to *quantitative* data from Seed Stewards and other project participants. However, to add further insight and depth to the findings, impact can be assessed in relation to the qualitative benefits that have been experienced and gained by interviewees' involvement in the project. Impact can also be assessed in relation to the challenges experienced by those involved in the project, as well as suggestions for project development to overcome such barriers. In relation to long-term impact, the sustainability and legacy of the SNS project is also reviewed.

3.4.1 Benefits of Involvement in SNS

A broad range of benefits of involvement were evidenced by interviewees, supporting the quantitative data findings from the questionnaire. The majority of these benefits were also identified as key motivations for initially engaging in the SNS project:

- Fun, excitement and interest (particularly exotic crops being 'different')
- Personal learning and development (particularly experiences of learning around crop growing and consuming)
- The experience of sharing
- Interaction, expanding social networks and developing friendships
- Increasing and/or maintaining social cohesion
- Engaging particular groups
- Health and well-being

These are outlined in detail below, bolstered by supporting quotations from the semi-structured interviews.

Fun, excitement and interest

Perhaps the least quantifiable but most important benefit was the element of 'fun', interest and excitement that interviewees reported as both a key motivation and as part of their experience of involvement in the project:

"I genuinely enjoy it and I like the taste of fresh vegetables" (Interviewee 2)

"It was a lot of fun going to the allotments [event] in Birmingham. We did a day's session there. They had a clubhouse in the middle and it was interesting to see what they were growing" (Interviewee 1b)

"...it was exciting to watch them grow up and think 'oh, what are they going to look like?'" (Interviewee 3)

"I think they [the children] really enjoy growing things and taking responsibility for something, once they've planted it they want to see how it's growing and they want to know more about it, it's sort of ownership really isn't it? And then if you can take it from plot to plate, so you plant it and eat it as well I think that's quite a good journey " (Interviewee 5)

"It's been pleasant and fun and useful." (Interviewee 4)

"The main impact generally is just the opportunity to grow some things we haven't grown before and therefore to engage with a wider range of people, so we tried callaloo and it really went badly but we've got a different variety this year and I think it'll go well and will definitely involve some interest from different communities (...) so engaging people. And the sense of there being an organisation...just being connected to a large gardening organisation is kind of encouraging in various way and then through them with other people who are also doing community gardening, interested in one way or another in some variety of inter or multi-culturalism in some way to do with their gardening." (Interviewee 4)

Such data from the interviewees supports the findings from questionnaires. The motivation and experience of fun and excitement was often linked to the idea of exotic crops being 'different' or 'more interesting', compared with growing, preparing and the consumption of more traditional foods:

"...some of these things [exotic crops] are more expensive and unusual and are therefore valuable to grow, for a variety of purposes..." (Interviewee 1b)

"Oh yes, because I do enjoy different foods. It's nice to have a change – it is nice to have a little bit different – a bit of fun to share with your friends, and that sort of thing" (Interviewee 2)

"We just love growing unusual things, as well as ordinary standard vegetables, so we thought we'd like to give it a try" (Interviewee 1a)

"...it was interesting to let them [the children] have a look at other crops because they were very unusual and the children hadn't seen them before..." (Interviewee 5)

The SNS focus on exotic crops has, in most cases, sustained and augmented existing growing and consumption activities by furthering interest and action in a 'new' and 'different' direction. For most, this was an extension of their activity, whilst for a small number it was actually seen as their new core activity. Again, this data supports the findings from the questionnaires. The main motivation to engage with the project was thus the excitement of trying something new and different.

Personal learning and development

Personal learning and development was another cited benefit of involvement in SNS (again learning was a key finding in the questionnaire data). All interviewees believed that their experience of growing, cooking and/or consuming exotic crops offered many new learning experiences:

"...that's been the benefits personally we've had – just extending our knowledge and experiences" (Interviewee 1b)

"I love learning and I do challenge everything...again, it's keeping a positive thing – 'it wasn't a failure, it was a learning experience'" (Interviewee 2)

"...that's still learning for me – I'm still in that learning curve" (Interviewee 3)

"...add another dimension to what we do because I think both myself and my colleague who runs the other group, we're sort of learning and developing, so when things come along and they sound interesting we're quite keen, we're not experts and we don't know particularly where it's going to end but I think it will help us to extend our knowledge of gardening" (Interviewee 5)

Of particular note was the specific learning around getting the best out of crops – a great deal of learning and experience was gathered by interviewees in their attempts to grow, seed, prepare, cook and/or consume exotic crops provided by the SNS project:

"They were quite successful last year – the sweet potatoes – but we grew 'under cloche'...I tried to grow them in the garden like normal potatoes and they didn't work – they were pencil thick...but growing them under cloche in a cold frame environment, we had four or five meals off ten slips" (Interviewee 1b)

"I've learnt quite a lot, obviously, from the theory of it. One of the big things that I've learnt is, its day length rather than temperature – that's the big effect and that's, you know – there's a lot of things that seem counter-intuitive. So yes, I have learnt a lot in that way. I made the mistake, the first time, of putting some stuff in the greenhouse, thinking it will need the greenhouse. And things like the shark fin melon – I got this huge great plant half-way across the yard, but not a lot of fruit! So I need to sort of, this year, squashes and things like that, I am putting in land that had spuds in last year, so its 'depleted-ish' and not over-fertilised – let the plants start to set fruit and then I'll start to fertilise, to get the energy into the fruit. But they perhaps need that bit of 'stress', to actually get them setting the fruit in the first place" (Interviewee 2)

"Some of the seeds didn't germinate which was probably a God send because they were the shark fin melon and they are evidently enormous and I didn't know that when we sowed the seeds, those we did separately in pots in our poly tunnel whereas the other ones we sowed directly into the soil. The ones that we sowed in the soil were absolutely fine but the shark fin for some reason didn't germinate but I think somebody said it wasn't a particularly good year..." (Interviewee 5)

The activity of preparation and/or cooking for consumption also involved a range of learning experiences:

"And what to do with it when you've grown it – some of them aren't obvious, but yeah, that's been the benefits personally we've had – just extended our knowledge and experiences" (Interviewee 1b)

"I like the callaloo – I'd never eaten callaloo in my life. I didn't even know what it was – I didn't know how tall it grew, where to put it, you know. So it's learning about something..." (Interviewee 3)

“...even my colleague and I said a few of the things, we didn’t know how to cook or what you would do with them, but in the session in the PowerPoint it talked about what they were and what you could do with them and we thought ‘oh that sounds interesting we’ll have to try that then’...we had some recipes as well which was quite useful...” (Interviewee 5)

“They are always ever so keen to cook but I don’t think they have enough opportunity” (Interviewee 5)

“In terms of the regular gardening session it’s not the most populated thing that we do. When we harvest stuff people get really excited [...] People did clean the wheat, so people really enjoy, and the cooking for example, really enjoy using the cooking stuff they brought from the shop and then add a bit of fresh coriander and it’s not brought its grown, people really like that.” (Interviewee 4)

It is clear from the above that the SNS project’s various elements (growing, seeding, preparing, cooking and consuming) all provided opportunities for personal learning and development, gaining skills, knowledge and experience for interviewees, and supports the data from the quantitative phase.

Sharing

Sharing – whether this was knowledge and skills, seeds and/or produce – was a major motivation and experienced benefit for interviewees:

“So yes, I have been able to share it quite a bit, and hopefully the interest is starting to grow a bit more” (Interviewee 2)

“So, we all learn from one another on the plot, to be honest. Because I’ll go up to XXXX and say ‘how have you grown that?’ or ‘When do I put this in?’ – so we’re sharing information all the time” (Interviewee 3)

“One thing that will interest the small community that’s around here is – they’re always, dare I say it, a bit nosey about what’s going on behind the [garden] wall and they quite liked the opportunity to come and have a look. So we’re just playing on that – it means we can get 10 or a dozen people to come through on Saturday afternoon...” (Interviewee 1b)

“...you pass the fruit on, or the seeds on, to other people – so that’s how we worked...So we just pass things about when we’ve grown them. And if they look good and they look different, we pass them around” (Interviewee 3)

“It’s nice linking the cookery with it as well because then the children cook that and then they’ll often badger the parents to cook with it at home and it surprised us that parents were saying that they liked to have a recipe with what they were buying [produce grown and sold at the school]” (Interviewee 5)

It is clear that the SNS project is a conduit for people to share – either enhancing existing sharing activities or for completely new sharing experiences. Questionnaire data also appears to support this view.

Social interaction

Most importantly, the desire to share provided a great deal of opportunities to interact and connect with other people, expand people's social networks, improve neighbourliness and/or develop new friendships:

“Yeah, it definitely does. Because when I was growing my mouse melons, and I'd say to XXXX ‘come and look at my mouse melons’ and people come to the plot and ‘come and have a look at this’ because it's exciting and it's new, you know. And then you bring them in and people say ‘oh, they're so tiny’ and then you talk about it and then so and so will say ‘I've grown this and I've grown that’ and you go and have a look and ‘when did you put that in?’ and so on. But we are all community spirited anyway, it's the way plot holders are – they like to share their information – especially the older people to the younger people and the newer people. They just like to share” (Interviewee 3)

“And we've tried to interest friends and the villagers in what we're doing. So we had an Open Day here. We took people round a guided tour of the exotic fruit and the other exotic crops that we were growing. We had about eight people – no, a dozen I think” (Interviewee 1b)

“But the idea is to go down to the community centre, hopefully this year, and say ‘look, have a try at this, this is what I've grown in the area where you live – why don't you have a go?’ That was the big thing about it yeah – so the Sowing New Seeds, in particular, was to try and help me get that message across.” (Interviewee 2)

“So we've had about half a dozen parents who volunteer [...] and we've held on to a parent now who we class as part of the community as he no longer has children at here but is still happy to come and help as a support because he's ever so good he used to work in a garden centre so knows a lot about planting [...] And then we've got some grandparents who will offer to dig ground over if we need it, we sort of have various parents who perhaps don't get involved in the after school thing but will come and dig the garden over or whatever for us [...] we also access the garden centre opposite here, they are very supportive as well, obviously they are quite busy but will help us with ideas or whatever.” (Respondent 5)

“We're here but people don't really know what we are and then people walk past and the fifth time they've seen you watering [...] or weeding or whatever, they say ‘you alright?’ or whatever, do you know what I mean, you can gradually get to become familiar, or the volunteers can gradually get to be familiar with the locality so it's important for that as well.” (Respondent 4)

As with many other gardening and growing activities, the SNS project appears to be a vehicle which enables participants to interact with others around the activity of growing and consuming exotic crops, such that participants have expanded their social networks and

developed additional friendships, on top of similar existing activities. Very similar findings around this issue were identified from the questionnaires.

Social cohesion

Linked to the themes of interaction, social network and friendships, one of the key objectives of the SNS project was the wide notion of increasing and/or maintaining social cohesion – of getting people from different backgrounds to come together. Our analysis of the interviews found that this was somewhat dependent on the context in which people lived, grew and interacted – e.g. those interviewees living in a small village only had limited scope to share knowledge with people from ‘different backgrounds’ relative to their own, but their ‘Open Garden’ day they organised certainly broadened their social networks and neighbourliness with other villagers:

“We didn’t know everybody that came – at least three people. One came with somebody we did know, but we’d never met them before. And another couple came that we’d never met. In fact, they phoned me up to ask if there were still spaces to come. I said ‘yes, come along!’” (Interviewee 1a)

“Some of the things which were brought couldn’t be grown unless you had a greenhouse or whatever, it needed a certain environment, and it was sort of talked about where it had originated from” (Interviewee 5)

In more diverse contexts, the SNS project was more likely to augment interaction of people from different backgrounds. Usually, interaction between people of different backgrounds was already taking place around sharing knowledge of food growing, seed and produce sharing (e.g. in allotment contexts or via existing networks and friendships), but the SNS project was a good vehicle to continue to bolster this activity further (apart from in the example of the school):

“This area, where I live, has a very high ethnic population...and lovely big gardens with these old terraces. The Asian family next door who I get on with great – they don’t touch their garden – so I garden it for them, and just share the veg with them” (Interviewee 2)

“I have been able to share it with the allotments, because I still had some dealings with them, and I have taken seeds up to places. And again I meet a lot of, particularly, West Indians in the local pubs – chat to them about it – they’ve have some seeds that I’ve grown.” (Interviewee 2)

“There’s Asian mixes, there’s Whites, mixed race, my husband’s black – so there are different [ethnicities], and they grow different things. Like there’s a guy down there who grows pumpkins, and he sells them on to the church. And different people grow different things – like me with the callaloo – I just got into aubergines as well, which is quite exciting... and ochre, I’ve known people who’ve grown ochre – all different things, so yeah, there’s a variety. And we have a plant sale, and then come August we’ll have like a vegetable show, so people will bring their vegetables and their fruits in that they’ve grown. And you can see the size of them or the difference, so all that comes in. We do that as a community as well, we look at what people have grown – big massive onions and things.” (Interviewee 3)

“There isn’t someone else who has come along and is like absolutely passionate about gardening and wants to take it on or whatever and the people who get involved like doing it and it’s a great way to involve people who haven’t got great English [...] people have really enjoyed the companionship and friendliness of a bit of digging and a bit of pruning [...] and you can talk slowly and at your own pace about things.” (Interviewee 4)

Assuming that social cohesion relates to people from ‘different’ backgrounds getting on together, the level of social cohesion that the SNS project might contribute to is clearly limited or enabled by on the nature of the context in which the various participants operate. According to the school setting interview, there were low numbers of students from BME backgrounds. This was reflected in the gardening group as there were no BME students participating in the group. Nevertheless, it appears that the project’s activities have potential to enable interaction between people from ‘different backgrounds’ in contexts where there is higher diversity, but more research might be needed into how far this takes place.

The SNS project’s ethos is about inclusion and diversity – engaging particular groups such as those from BME backgrounds and younger generations was considered to be crucial to ensuring that the knowledge and skills of growing exotic crops are not lost. For example, there are assumptions that people with a heritage link to exotic crops might ‘reconnect’ with growing and consuming them. Interestingly, however, there were mixed views as to whether the SNS project would encourage people from particular ethnic backgrounds to grow crops from their countries of heritage – some interviewees suggested that historical connections might encourage people to do this, but others said it made no difference and people were more likely to grow things they were interested in producing, planned to sell, or wanted to eat or share with others, regardless of where the produce or the grower came from. Assumptions about older generations having greater links with food growing appear to be a complex area, and something that could have implications for future project design. This is something that might warrant further exploration in future.

It is also worth noting that increased understanding of different cultures through growing, cooking and eating exotic crops does not necessarily equate to increased social cohesion. Again, caution is needed regarding how people have come to learn more about different cultures and whether this is something that has been achieved via interaction with people from different backgrounds or through other mechanisms. Again, this is an area that could warrant further exploration.

It is acknowledged that delivering initiatives which aim to increase inclusivity and diversity involves many challenges. One respondent had some philosophical insights and practical suggestions on this wider issue, in terms of the design of similar projects in the future. This respondent had some concerns over the use of the term ‘exotic’. It was suggested that this term might be interpreted negatively by some people and that perhaps more appropriate terms might be considered. There were also suggestions about improving diversity within the project – both in terms of participants and in relation to decision-makers:

“...if they were able to recruit at the central position of what they are doing, people who come from a variety of communities, then that always makes a really big difference to a project if it’s got diverse staff then the impacts can be bigger (...) It’s not a criticism of

what they've got, what they've got is great, but in terms of what direction to go in that might allow them to do new things" (Interviewee 4)

Furthermore, the SNS project also had an objective of ensuring that *younger generations* were engaged in growing and consuming exotic crops. Again, there were mixed views here from the interviewees. Observations suggest that younger generations were getting involved – but the emphasis was on *younger* generations, rather than the *young* generation. Again, this might warrant further research. Obviously, in the case of school settings, the younger generations were the main focus, engaging children involved in the gardening club, through growing and cooking.

Health and well-being

Interestingly, the impact of the SNS project on people's health and well-being was only briefly mentioned by interviewees – primarily regarding new people getting involved in growing and gardening more widely, rather than referring to themselves:

"But I just thought 'well, it would be good to get more people appreciating growing their own stuff, especially the children – the next generation" (Interviewee 2)

"Now it's changed very much [in local allotments in this area] – the demographics have changed, so we're getting a lot more families and a lot more women, and taking their children down...whereas before it was all old blokes..." (Interviewee 2)

"...and also I had one parent who said 'my child won't eat any fruit or vegetables at all' she said, 'but she's tried the rhubarb and really loves it she says'." (Interviewee 5)

Thus, for those SNS participants interviewed, it appears that health and well-being was not high on the agenda either as a motivation or in terms of experienced benefits. It is unclear as to whether such responses are merely assumed, as most interviewees have been involved in growing for some years. Again, further qualitative exploration might shed additional light on this issue.

The SNS project has clearly resulted in a range of impacts on those engaged with the project. Qualitative evidence suggests that the project has provided a number of positive outcomes for Seed Stewards and other participants involved. However, there were also a number of challenges and barriers that interviewees experienced during their project activities, along with suggestions on how these issues might be overcome.

3.4.2 Challenges and Suggestions for Development

A number of challenges were raised across the various interviews, primarily:

- Lack of detailed knowledge/experience of growing, preparing, cooking and/or consuming certain exotic crops
- Reluctance of others to try something new
- Impact of factors outside the project's control (health / safety regulations on sharing and 'showing', and the impact of the poor summer of 2012 on crop production)

These are now discussed in depth below, supported by quotes from the interviewees. It should be noted however, that all interviewees were aware of the support available from the SNS Project and its staff, and overall were very satisfied with the support and interaction that they had with staff. Face-to-face events, visits or contact was perceived to be very positive and preferential to other forms of communication, but interviewees were also very aware that project resources and capacity were limited.

Lack of detailed knowledge

One of the main challenges to successful growing was largely around **lack of detailed knowledge and/or experience of how to store / germinate seeds, the conditions in which to grow them, when to harvest and how to extract the seeds:**

"...it grew quite high [callaloo] – I got sick of it in the end because it was everywhere!"

"I tried to dry it [mouse melon] out, but they're so tiny, and I'm not quite sure how to get seeds out of things" (Interviewee 3)

"I didn't rate the callaloo – it grew, but it's supposed to be like a spinach substitute but to be honest I prefer spinach – but we did try it, we did give it a go" (Interviewee 1a). "But I think that is one of the areas where, in effect, more support could have been provided, because it may well be that it [the taste of the produce etc] is better than we think it is – but we're not quite sure – we're not quite doing the right thing with it, if you know what I mean? Not picking it at the right time?" (Interviewee 1b)

The same points were made in relation to how best to **prepare, cook and consume such crops**, as interviewees identified this particular issue as another challenge:

"And what to do with it when you've grown it – some of them aren't obvious" (Interviewee 1b)

"So we're finding our way really, and obviously you revert to those things that you get to work. Even like the achocha, that we were really pleased with, it took me a while to realise that I should have picked them much sooner. You can eat them raw at thumbnail size...if you actually let them go really to that big [a little bigger], you certainly couldn't have them raw because they went really tough and stringy, so you'd have to cook them. But they cook really nice – but you couldn't stir fry them if they'd got too big, because they were too stringy. You'd have to stuff them and roast them – but you couldn't stir fry them. And yet it says salads and stir fries is the place to use them – but you have to catch them at the right time. You've actually got to pick them much younger than you think" (Interviewee 1b)

Reluctance of others

This issue of lack of knowledge, and how to consume exotic crops, were perceived to be key barriers to engaging **new people** in the project's activities. **Reluctance or reticence of other people to try something unusual or unknown**, in terms of growing, but particularly in terms of not knowing what to do with the end result (in terms of cooking / consuming) was experienced by some interviewees when they were sharing their knowledge and produce:

“And I’ve travelled a lot – particularly in my earlier years – hitchhiking around in the 70s. So I was quite used to a lot of different flavours and different foods – so I wasn’t frightened of it, you know – I think that’s another thing [for other people]” (Interviewee 2)

“Anything that doesn’t look like a potato or a carrot or a turnip and everyone is a little bit wary of it!” (Interviewee 1a)

“...I think there’s a certain amount of [pretends to take a step back] for things that are as ‘exotic’ as butternut squash! A lot of people have never seen it before, didn’t know what it was and didn’t know what to do with it” (Interviewee 2)

In response to this issue, both the SNS project and Seed Stewards locally have developed recipe books as part of a regular feedback and events process:

“So we have done a little recipe book – to give people recipes for these things, as a way of encouraging them to have a go... Yes, I mean the last one [event] I went to at Ryton, they did – I mean, they have sent out a few recipes – that is something that I did feed back the first time” (Interviewee 2)

“We sort of fed back all our ‘plus and minus’ points about what we did” (Interviewee 1b)

Respectable efforts have clearly been made, but the various issues above highlighted the potential for the SNS project to offer **more detailed step-by-step information and knowledge** on how to get the best from exotic crops at all stages of the process. At the same time, this needs to be balanced with enabling participants to learn through their own experience and mistakes! One possible solution to this is a **real time ‘blog’ or ‘network’** using social media whereby Seeds Stewards could connect with each other and discuss their experiences and challenges with each other. This could be very useful as a supportive tool to assist people with queries or concerns whilst growing week by week, or for cooking and consumption ideas.

“If they were going to close whenever their money runs out, it would be worth them spending a month thinking about the existing organisations and encouraging us to have contact through some existing social media ... encouraging us to set up a separate little network of community...because there may be, but to my knowledge there isn’t a network of community gardeners in the midlands for example [...] and that in itself would be a great thing to have.” (Interviewee 4)

In relation to the issue of ‘reluctance’ from others, one interviewee stated that a major barrier to sharing knowledge further was that of health and safety regulations. The complexity of these regulations meant it was incredibly difficult for ‘individual’ Seed Stewards to ‘show and share’ how such produce could be prepared and cooked in informal settings (e.g. open house days) due to regulations around hygiene and health risks. This frustrated this particular interviewee because they wanted to encourage people to overcome their fears of the unusual by showing and sharing how best to cook exotic fruit and vegetables with people. However, those interviewees who had attended the SNS project’s events at Ryton on cooking certain produce claimed that these events were excellent:

“And they’d actually got a lady there doing some cooking. So, again, that was a very positive thing. And I thought the layout that they’d got with the big mirror above it – so you could actually see – so you could see her [the chef presenting] doing it on the counter – they [the audience] would see right down on the counter. That was really good – that worked very, very well” (Interviewee 2)

Impact of factors outside of the project’s control

National health and safety regulations are, of course, outside of the remit of the SNS project. Another issue outside of the project’s remit is the weather. A major challenge referred to by all was the **very poor wet weather conditions of summer 2012**, which ruined a lot of crops or prevented their growth, but also prevented sharing produce and knowledge:

“Unfortunately last year, with all the wet, I lost so much to slugs...I haven’t had a huge success with it locally [sharing knowledge and produce] – as I say, largely because last year’s crops were a failure...that’s set me back a year, yeah. So I shall see how I do this year” (Interviewee 2)

“...take the chickpeas for example – they failed completely. They produced – the plant came up, the pods appeared – but at the end of the season they were empty, because the weather had just been so awful. The previous year – it was really good – I’d grown some, and we got several meals off the crop” (Interviewee 1b)

“I think last year was such a bad year...things like the chickpea plants grew but we didn’t sort of get chickpea chickpeas because I don’t think there had been enough of whatever it needed umm but that’s just an environmental thing.” (Interviewee 5)

Information on saving seeds has been clear but because of the crap-ness of the weather, we’ve not had much call to use that as much as we would have likes to, we haven’t got that far. (Interviewee 4)

Whilst outside of the project’s remit, the impact of poor weather on project activities is clearly demonstrable. Not only does it reduce the likelihood of success with crop growing, it also has an impact on sharing and showing events – in terms of attendance and in terms of the produce that Seed Stewards have to show and share with others.

3.4.3 Sustainability and Legacy

All interviewees said they intended to continue to grow exotic crops and continue to share knowledge, produce and seeds with others, regardless of what the future holds for the SNS project. It appears that this augmentation or extension of crop growing into ‘exotic’ produce will continue to sustain their activities and interests into the future, as well as sharing with others – so arguably the project has kick-started something that will continue independently:

“Oh absolutely – we’ll carry on growing these things, anyway...on a personal level, trying out unusual things, we’ve bought a whole load of James Wong seeds, and we’re having a go at those. So we’re going to try and add to some of the things that we’ve grown that we really like, and is successful. And we’re having another open day in the summer to

show people some more unusual things we've been growing, which will include some of the stuff that we grew before" (Interviewee 1a)

"I will [continue with exotic crops] – I'm not the world's greatest seed collector, I will admit. I mean, certain things are nice and easy, like your beans and peas and that kind of thing. But yeah, I have tried to collect seed, and I will be continuing to grow that and encouraging other people to grow it, and sharing that with them...I will keep trying to push it as much as I can and try and keep that interest going" (Interviewee 2)

"For me it was about storage of seeds and when you could collect seeds...what I think we'd like to do in the future as well is, we talked about you know packaging seeds up, and then obviously it's something we can exchange with parents and then perhaps any parents who already save seeds might like to exchange them as well" (Interviewee 5)

Essentially, the Sowing New Seeds (SNS) project appears to sustain and extend existing growing and consuming activities undertaken by participants:

"So this was like a really exciting opportunity to extend what we've been doing, and get some support as well" (Interviewee 1a)

"I mean, going back in time, we've always grown..." (Interviewee 1b)

The SNS project has a potentially powerful legacy in that, for some interviewees, it has expanded the direction of their growing and consumption into new and different directions, such that exotic crops (rather than traditional crops) for some have actually become their primary activity.

"The 'seed' was already there, if you like – I'd already 'got the plot laid out' and this [SNS] was the seed to actually plant in it" (Interviewee 2)

"I wanted to grow something different, something a bit more exciting that needed a bit more attention, really." (Interviewee 3)

"I think I would be unsure about how to go about planting and whatever, whereas with the information which we had you can feel more confident about having a go and sort of you know, I thought chickpeas I love chickpeas let's grow some but I never would have thought of it if someone had said here are some chickpeas.. " (Interviewee 5)

For one interviewee in particular, growing exotic crops has really broadened their growing and consuming horizons:

"...until I came here and looked at the Seed Steward thing again, a carrot was just an orange carrot to me. But you know, you've got our purple, you've got your red – and you're thinking 'oh, there's all these different things I can try', so it does expand you – it makes you excited. It makes you want to get out there and grow stuff that's different!" (Interviewee 3)

“We certainly wouldn’t have grown most of the crops we’ve grown through them, coriander we’ve already grown. A) we wouldn’t have tried them, so last year we tried Vietnamese mustard, callaloo, shark fin melon, chickpeas and fenugreek, there may have been others but I cannot remember them, and four of those five just failed one way or another. We’ll try them again this year, and we’ll try them again fairly confidently, that we wouldn’t have done, even if we’d thought of trying them we would have persisted with them.” (Interviewee 4)

There is clearly a vast range of themes that have been identified from across the interviews, around the impact of the SNS project. The following section now provides an assessment of the findings from the qualitative phase.

3.5 Assessment of qualitative data

The qualitative data is largely very positive in relation to the impact that the SNS project has had on those engaging with it. It also raises some issues that need further consideration. Again, as results are based on a low number of interviewees, the findings need to be approached with caution. Nevertheless, provided here is an assessment of the extent to which the project’s aims and objectives have been met, based on the findings of the *qualitative* data above.

To enable allotment holders, schools and community groups to grow exotic crops not traditionally grown in the UK

Overall, the interview findings suggest that the SNS project *does* appear to be meeting its aim of enabling allotment holders, schools and community groups to grow exotic crops not traditionally grown in the UK. A range of factors lie behind this successful outcome:

- SNS / Garden Organic has been able to tap into its existing networks of growers to enhance growing and consuming activity in the area of exotic crops – an example of good practice. Thus, findings suggest that participants’ exotic crop activity *augments* existing ‘traditional’ growing activity, driving it in a new direction.
- The project has clearly targeted the range of contexts in which it intended to deliver (individuals, allotment associations, community groups and schools), though the profile of respondents is claimed to be somewhat under-represented in terms of people from a BME background and younger generations, which is a key challenge for the project.
- The support, knowledge, information and seeds provided by project staff was claimed by participants to be critical in getting things started. Project staff were reported to have been very open to feedback and responsive to challenges as they arose. This support appears to be an example of good practice. At the same time, a major challenge to the SNS project, which was outside of everyone’s control, was the wet summer of 2012.
- The interest, enthusiasm and ‘fun’ of growing something new and different was a major motivator for participants interviewed. A challenge identified by some interviewees was

that of exotic crops being viewed by others as unusual, such that people were reluctant to try them (whether growing or cooking and consuming).

- Participants' desire to learn something new was a major driver in all aspects of project activity (growing, seeding, preparing, cooking, consuming), resulting in new knowledge, skills and a sense of achievement for participants. However, there have been challenges around getting the best from growing, preparing, cooking and consuming exotic crops, whereby more detailed information could help participants.
- All participants interviewed stated that they would continue to grow and consume exotic crops regardless of the future status of the SNS project, thus the overall project aim of exotic crop growing activity will continue for these participants.

Preventing disappearance of exotic crops – seed collection, safeguarding, redistribution and promotion of growing

Interviewee data suggests that the activities of the SNS project *do* appear to be contributing to the preventions of the disappearance of exotic crops, via seed collection and safeguarding, and the promotion of growing. Through the activities of the project and participants, it appears to achieve this via a number of mechanisms, in addition to those outlined above:

- Participants appear to have a strong wish to share things with others (whether this is produce, seeds, knowledge or skills) – the SNS project is clearly an appropriate conduit to meet this need and in doing so disseminates the activities of growing, cooking and consuming exotic crops
- The desire to share results in increased interaction with others, whether this is people who are familiar or who are new. This increases social interaction, extends social networks, improves neighbourliness, and can result in the development of friendships.
- Social interaction can result in increased or maintained social cohesion, if settings and opportunities are in place for people from different backgrounds to come together around their interest in exotic crops.
- As mentioned previously, all participants interviewed stated that they would continue to grow and consume exotic crops (and share this with others) regardless of the future status of the SNS project – ensuring a continued contribution to preventing the disappearance of exotic crops.

Skills and Knowledge passed on to younger generations

- Excluding the activities of the school, according to the interviews, there appears to be evidence that seeds, information, skills and knowledge is being passed on to *others* via a number of mechanisms (open house days, interaction with others on the allotment or in other settings, through friendships). Some of this activity does appear to be passed

on to younger generation, but there is little evidence to suggest that such recipients are from young generations.

- It is unclear as to how far people from BME backgrounds are, in some way, 'reconnecting' with exotic crops from their heritage country – this is an assumption that needs further exploration as some interviewees stated that people from BME backgrounds did not choose the crops to grow only on that basis, but chose crops based on a range of different reasons.
- The ability of Seed Stewards and other participants to share seeds, information and knowledge with others has led to some interaction with people from different backgrounds, but this is dependent on a number of factors, including the ethnic diversity of the local area and how connected individuals are with particular groups and networks. It should also be noted that increased understanding of different cultures does not necessarily result from social interaction with people from different backgrounds, but also from a range of other sources.
- Regarding the school settings, there is a small amount of evidence to suggest that information, knowledge and skills is actually being passed back *up* the generations, from schoolchildren to their parents, via the activities that the schools are undertaking for the SNS project – this arguably questions assumptions about passing skills 'down' to younger generations.
- As mentioned, all participants interviewed stated that they would continue to grow and consume exotic crops, including sharing seeds, information and knowledge with others, regardless of the future status of the SNS project – thus making a contribution to passing on exotic crop knowledge to others.

Demonstration garden at Ryton and series of events

- It is known that the demonstration garden at Ryton has been established – those interviewees who have attended both the garden and the range of events stated that these were very well-received. Events provided opportunities to gather more knowledge and information on all aspects of growing and consuming exotic crops; make new friends and acquaintances, and be inspired to continue in growing and consuming activities. The events in particular appear to be an example of good practice.

In the final chapter of the Report overleaf, the assessment of the quantitative (questionnaire) findings will now be drawn together with the assessment of the qualitative (interview) findings, in order to provide the final evaluation findings for the SNS project.

4. EVALUATION OF SOWING NEW SEEDS

4.1 Introduction

This section of the Final Report brings together all of the key findings of the various phases of the research, in order to provide a final assessment of the SNS project. An evaluation aims to assess the extent to which a project has achieved its original aims and objectives. Thus, to evaluate the SNS project, it is necessary to reiterate the original aims and objectives here, in order to compare these against the quantitative and qualitative findings in the previous sections.

4.2 Aims and objectives of the SNS Project

As a reminder, the overall aim of the SNS project is:

- To enable allotment holders, schools and community groups in the Midlands to grow exotic crops not traditionally grown in the UK

To achieve this aim, the project set itself the following objectives:

- To prevent the disappearance of *exotic crops* grown in the UK, ensuring their growth is sustained via seed collection and safeguarding, redistribution and promotion of growing
- To prevent the disappearance of the *skills and knowledge* used in growing non-traditional crops, by ensuring skills and knowledge are passed on to younger generations
- Establishing a demonstration garden at Garden Organic's Ryton Gardens

4.3 Final evaluation of the SNS Project

The section below provides an overall evaluation of the SNS project. As mentioned previously, it should be noted that respondents / interviewee numbers were relatively low and thus these findings provide an indication of overall project's impacts and challenges.

Overall assessment of findings evaluated against project aims and objectives:

- The evidence gathered from this evaluation appears to show that the Sowing New Seeds project is indeed achieving its aim of 'enabling allotment holders, schools and community groups in the Midlands to grow exotic crops not traditionally grown in the UK', but further engagement from young participants (within or outwith schools) and those from a BME background is necessary to provide a representative profile of the Midlands area.

- The key findings suggest that, given the resources available to it, the SNS project is making a valuable contribution to 'preventing the disappearance of exotic crops grown in the UK – the vast majority of respondents claimed that the range and amount of exotic crops they have grown has increased, and that they save seeds. The project is thus making progress towards 'ensuring exotic crop growth is sustained via seed collection, safeguarding, redistribution and promotion of growing'.
- Along the same lines, the evidence available illustrates that the SNS project is making a valid contribution to 'preventing the disappearance of the *skills and knowledge* used in growing non-traditional crops, by ensuring skills and knowledge are passed on to younger generations', but further knowledge sharing needs to be promoted towards young generations and those from BME backgrounds.
- Findings from the research appear to show that the demonstration garden at Garden Organic's Ryton Gardens has been established and forms one of a number of elements of the projects' 'offer' to participants in terms of events and facilities, which have been very well-received by those attending.

Key impacts:

- Motivations or 'needs' of participants are often intertwined with the project's potential impact in terms of these needs being met through engagement with the project.
- One of the most important impacts on participants was the achievement of a sense of 'fun', interest and enthusiasm, gained from the involvement in growing, cooking and consuming 'new' and 'different' crops, along with a sense of achievement.
- Learning and personal development was another key impact the SNS project had on participants via their involvement in project activities, resulting in broadening participants' knowledge, experience and skills in the areas of seed retention, exotic crop growth, and preparing, cooking and consuming exotic crops.
- Participants' desire to share with others (whether this is seeds, produce, information, knowledge or skills) has been achieved or sustained by involvement in the activities of the SNS project, as a conduit.
- In connection with the above, social interaction and meeting new people has reportedly increased as a result of involvement in the SNS project, due to (for example) exotic crops being an interesting talking point. Such interaction has reportedly resulted in extending social networks, improved neighbourliness, and the development of friendships.
- Linked to social interaction, the project appears to have resulted in increased 'social cohesion' in a number of cases, though this is dependent on the nature and location of the setting. The project also has increased understanding of other cultures, though it is not clear how far this has been achieved via people from different backgrounds 'coming together' (e.g. those from BME backgrounds and/or young people).

- Interestingly, school-based activity in the project might actually be resulting in skills and knowledge being passed 'up' the generations from children to parents, raising questions about assumptions of knowledge being passed 'down' generations.
- As mentioned, the vast majority of respondents claimed that the range and amount of exotic crops they have grown has increased, and that most save seeds, thus making a substantive contribution to exotic crop production and retention across the target area.
- Some participants (in collaboration with SNS) have developed additional resources for their local area, such as recipe leaflet, tips on getting the best from crops and other information posted on social media.
- Whilst not a prevalent issue according to some of those consulted, health and well-being appears to have been positively influenced by engagement in SNS project activity, particularly in relation to changes in healthy eating and improvements in perceptions of 'life satisfaction' for some.
- Consumption behaviour has also been positively changed by engagement with the project. Some participants have saved money on their shopping budget by growing their own produce, broadened the range of fruit and vegetables they purchase, and changed their cooking habits towards healthier behaviours.
- Responses from participants suggest that almost all will continue to grow and consume exotic crops (regardless of the status of the SNS project), thus ensuring continued sustainability of the aim and objectives of the project into the future.

Examples of good practice (additional impacts):

- SNS / Garden Organic have tapped into its existing networks of growers, members and participants involved in other Garden Organic initiatives, which has enabled the project to 'hit the ground running', as well as sustain and extend participants' growing activities in a new direction, particularly for 'individual' settings.
- The support, knowledge, information and seeds provided by project staff was claimed by participants to be critical in establishing momentum. Once the project was well-established, project staff were reported to be very open to feedback and responsive to challenges as they arose, despite a range of constraints outside of their control, such as a poor summer and health and safety legislation.
- The package of events and facilities at Garden Organic's Ryton Gardens, including the establishment of the demonstration garden, has been extremely well-received by attending participants and this should be highlighted.
- A substantive share of respondents / interviewees are relatively new to the project (around three-quarters being involved far less than two years), and whilst exotic

crops makes up around one-tenth of crop growth, the impacts reported for the project should be commended.

Key Challenges:

- Participants reported that exotic crops were sometimes viewed by others as 'unusual', to the extent that such people were reluctant to attempt to grow, prepare, cook or consume such crops.
- More detailed information on the various processes of growing, seeding, preparing, cooking and consuming were sometimes considered to be needed for certain crops at certain times.
- As mentioned in the section above, there have been challenges to engage with young generations (outside of primary school settings) and those from a BME background.
- It is unclear as to how far people from BME backgrounds are, in some way, 'reconnecting' with exotic crops from their heritage country – a range of other factors appear to be at play. Such issues warrant further exploration.
- Issues outside of the control of the SNS project were the very wet summer of 2012 having a negative impact on crop growth and sharing events, as well as the impact of health and safety legislation around cooking food (for informal sharing events).
- As mentioned, it should be noted that SNS project staff have responded to a range of challenges within resources available, as part of regular contact and feedback with participants.

4.4 Recommendations

Based on the findings in the previous sections of this Report, the following recommendations are made to further develop the SNS project:

- Continue with the 'light touch' and 'extending' approach, as a low-cost method of sustaining interest in exotic crops, but also growing and consuming organic produce more broadly, as part of Garden Organic's mission.
- Future promotion of the SNS project should emphasise the benefits of growing and consuming exotic crops as exciting, because it extends the growing and consuming experience into 'new' and 'different' arenas.
- The project should focus additional attention on engaging additional participants from young generations and from BME backgrounds. Where current mechanisms to engagement are known to prevent others from engaging, alternative routes to engagement should be explored and implemented.

- Achieve a ‘balance’ between providing sufficiently ‘detailed’ knowledge, support and information to participants on growing, cooking and consuming exotic crops, whilst enabling learning on getting the best from crops through successes and failures.
- In relation to the above recommendation, a social media ‘blog’ network might connect up Seed Stewards and other participants, such that there is sufficient support and knowledge available amongst those engaged. This also has the potential to be self-sustaining in the long-term.
- Continue, as far as resources allow, with face-to-face events and other forms of support and knowledge sharing, as these activities were highly favoured and well-received.
- Further exploration of the following areas is suggested for future development:
 - The extent to which the project has enabled, sustained or enhanced social cohesion by bringing people together from different backgrounds.
 - An analysis of the barriers to engagement in the SNS (or similar) projects for certain groups, such as young people and those from BME backgrounds, in order to inform recruitment practices.
 - How influential ‘health and well-being’ is, as a motivator for involvement or whether it is a positive by-product of engagement.
 - A review of exotic crop growing by participants in (e.g.) two years time could identify how sustainable exotic crop growing promoted by the SNS project actually is in the long-term.
- As part of the above, certain assumptions also need to be reconsidered – for example:
 - The degree to which crops from certain countries are grown by people with heritage of those countries, or whether a range of other factors are more significant in affecting what people grow.
 - Whether older generations really do possess knowledge and skills to pass to younger generations, or whether this is more complex, given the experience of schools/children influencing parents.

4.5 Conclusions

The data gathered, analysed and evaluated suggests that the Sowing New Seeds project is a valuable vehicle for sustaining and extending existing growing and consuming activity, broadening participants' interests and activities into new dimensions.

The SNS project has achieved a great deal in a short time, with limited resources, and should be commended for achieving the majority of its goals. There is further work to be done around broadening diversity to fully represent the profile of the target area, and further attention is needed here for future development.

In terms of impact, there is clearly a wide range of benefits for participants and the environment that have been gained from engagement in the SNS project. These far outweigh the number of challenges that have been faced by those involved, such that almost all participants consulted stated that they would continue to grow and consume exotic crops into the future.

References

Bates, B., Lennox, A., Prentice, A., Bates, C., and Swan, G. (2012) *National Diet and Nutrition Survey Headline results from Years 1, 2 and 3 (combined) of the Rolling Programme (2008/2009 – 2010/11)*, Department for Health and the Food Standard Agency

Defra (2010) *Measuring Progress: Sustainable Development Indicators 2010 (National Statistics Compendium)*, Cardiff: ONS

Office for National Statistics (ONS) (2013) *First Annual Experimental Subjective Well-being Results*, Cardiff: ONS

END OF REPORT