



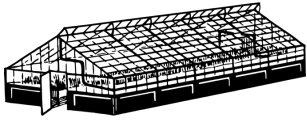
Closing the Gap

The final report of the Lea Valley Food Task Force -
A strategic review of opportunities for intensive
growing

May 2018

The Lea Valley Glasshouse Industry

Some Key Numbers



In the Lea Valley there are over 300 acres of glasshouse from a peak of 1300 acres in the 1930s. *While the number of acres is reduced, modern glasshouses can produce more in the same area.*

There are an estimated 2500 jobs (4.8% of total employment) in the local economy directly linked to the glasshouse industry.



The industry has grown in the last 4 years by 60 acres with a further 100 acres being planned.



The annual retail value of produce from the Lea Valley area is in excess of £1 billion.

The UK was around 49% self-sufficient in food production in 2016. The gap between what the nation produces and consumes is growing wider. Self-sufficiency for edible covered crops is below 20%.



3 Days: The supply of fresh food to the capital from the UK.

Approximately 70% of the UK's cucumbers, 50% of the UK's peppers, and 70% of the UK's aubergines are sourced from the Lea Valley.



For everyone in the UK to have 1 of their 5 a day requires 2.6m tonnes of produce per annum, a figure that may raise significantly due to ongoing changes in diet and campaigns to increase consumption of fresh food.

New lighting technology can make a massive impact to productivity, increasing the season length and producing more in the same area. The Lea Valley is host to the UK's first commercial artificial light cucumber crop.



The first technology centre in the glasshouse industry opened in the Lea Valley in 1914 and closed in the 1980's.

Most research and development and support products are now sourced from overseas.



In 2013, approximately 3.4% of the population in the District was unemployed, while many hundreds of jobs locally in glasshouses were available.

The industry is still seasonal but the non-growing times have reduced significantly and all-year-round growing is now possible.



Sources:

Hansard: <http://hansard.parliament.uk/commons/2017-07-18/debates/C88CE1E8-0842-4F0C-AA4F-524E394DBCE6/LeaValleyGreenhouseGlassIndustry>

Industry Interviews

University of Leeds

LSCC: lsc.co

VISION:

“Together developing a world class centre of excellence for intensive/protected growing next to London, co-locating on one area and expanding research and development activities in all aspects of glasshouse productivity, alongside a secure, vibrant and expanding commercial sector, delivering real benefits to the local community in terms of jobs and support for community growing; whilst providing fresh produce for the capital”
October 2014

Foreword

“Everyday we read headlines about food - its ever rising costs and the increase in the gap between what food we produce as a nation, and what we need. We see the issues of increased food miles, the rise of obesity, poor diet due to economic disadvantage and the resultant ‘time bombs’ for the NHS linked to poor diet.”
- from *Growing the Future*, October 2014

The Lea Valley Food Task Force (LVFTF) was established in 2013 with the support of a wide range of local stakeholders to see if locally we could play a major role in meeting the challenges in *Growing the Future* and deliver the vision above. It was set up to fill a void in the industry, and as such gained national and international recognition, winning an EU funded project with NIAB and becoming the food arm of the London Stansted Cambridge Corridor (LSCC). The LVFTF went on to suggest new approaches and identify new opportunities to meet local grower and government aspirations around greater food sustainability and security. Of course, the most fundamental challenge the industry is now facing was not apparent when we began our work. Brexit will have major implications for employment, food supply and markets. It remains unclear how we will face this challenge - or grasp this opportunity.

During its investigation, the Task Force was struck by the apparent lack of national direction, support or guidance for horticulture to play a much greater role in meeting the challenges of the nation’s food deficit. In the years since work began, the Lea Valley still hosts the largest concentration of glass in the UK. However, ever increasing demand for land near London and competing pressures on its use drive up values and have made it hard to hold onto this area of productive land to ensure home grown, secure and trusted

food. Even so, much expansion has occurred and there remains a significant appetite from the industry for more. The Task Force, with little funding and lots of goodwill from partners, has undertaken a great deal of work. Much has been done, yet much more remains to understand how to secure the future of the glasshouse industry locally, and enhance the job and other dividends to local communities. While some limited funding has been secured, significant additional resources are required to achieve any real progress for this area in setting out how glasshouses can be supported to play a much greater role.

This report looks in detail at the lines of inquiry that emerged. What we did, what we found, and most importantly lessons learned and recommendations for the future. Going forward, we are engaging more with agriculture as well as horticulture. New opportunities may develop in the supply chain which may shift more emphasis on-line and direct to consumers, via investment from internet companies such as Google and Amazon. Clearly there is much to do, but a good start was made locally.

I look forward to the establishment of a South East Strategic Food Board that could properly take these recommendations forward.

I’d like to finish by recording my thanks to all those organisations and individuals who gave up their valuable time to support this project.

Cllr Richard Bassett
Chairman



Executive Summary 2017

This section reviews progress against the issues of concern highlighted in the 2014 Interim Report, published by the Lea Valley Food Task Force on the state of the glasshouse industry in the area. (The final conclusions from 2017 are in **bold**.)

Interim Report 2014 Findings

- Long tradition of growing in the Lea Valley, however nurseries being driven out of the area due to a range of interconnected economic factors

2017 Report Conclusions

- **Over recent years this contraction has halted. The industry is now in a period of expansion and significant growth. Glass is an attractive area of inward investment and with the right support could be a very significant area of growth in the UK and locally**
- Major opportunities to meet an ever expanding national and regional demand for home grown, trusted food
- **Opportunities continue to grow and develop; supermarkets are increasingly setting targets, and a preference for home-grown products that are fresh and nutritious is growing among consumers. Brexit negotiations are already creating a demand to look at more UK growing as externally sourced food prices could rise. More research, development and investment should be considered for urban, closed-loop vertical system 'sheds' which offer a joined up approach to address current challenges**
- Real appetite from partners across a range of organisations to work collaboratively and deliver change
- **There remains willingness to work together; however issues around regulation and enforcement have been challenging, together with lack of leadership/funding from Central Government**
- Significant and prolonged contraction of the acreage under glass but increases in productivity mean the area is still a major supplier of fresh produce to the main supermarkets
- **Production and capacity are now both increasing significantly; capacity has increased by 60 acres in 4 years**
- Significant employment opportunities (estimated 2,500 jobs, of which 2,000 concentrated in Epping Forest District Council area)
- **Employment still significant but evidence of major investment in mechanisation to reduce costs and deal with issues around work force availability. This, growers feel, will be a long term and accelerating trend**
- High levels of migrant workers involved in production
- **This remains the case. However concerns are emerging on impact of Brexit and access to labour. There needs to be a reappraisal of non-local but UK based workers' ability to meet this challenge**

- Speculative land purchases driving up land prices
- **Land prices remain high; however the Epping Forest District Local Plan contains specific policies for the glasshouse industry. It will aim to remove 'hope value' for alternative uses to horticultural land, enabling glasshouse growth on a number of sites, at a more affordable cost**
- Significant areas of unemployment in and around the area under glass, no real career path, or hook to draw in local labour, and an employment recruitment cycle that self-supplies with non-UK labour. The Task Force received funds to develop a bespoke training programme for the local industry
- **Unemployment has now reduced significantly in and around the glasshouse area as the economy recovered. Projects designed to build an employment bridge between industry and the local employment market failed due to a lack of enthusiasm among local workers; the training project was unable to complete due to inflexibility of qualification funding streams and lack of agreed/approved training products. However, partners have completed most of the course development work; this could still be easily completed with the right funding, freedoms and flexibilities**
- New approaches to cross border working, duty to cooperate, and local plan production, giving critical opportunity for development of coordinated policy across the public sector
- **Work began strongly with significant engagement with a large number of Local Authorities in Essex and London. This failed to be maintained with personnel changes in Local Authorities and other work pressures emerging. However, the London Plan cites a desire to provide more land/ green space and opportunities for Londoners to grow food, which could lead to more cross border working with the GLA. The Plan, however, doesn't strongly set out a clear vision and pathway for securing London's food needs in a sustainable way**

Executive Summary, continued

- Lack of joined up planning, or energy or employment policy with regard to the area under glass
- **This remains one of the most critical issues shaping the ability to maintain and expand glasshouse growth. Attempts to agree a common planning policy across District/ County boundaries have not progressed. A Task Force bid for a Food Enterprise Zone from DEFRA was unsuccessful. However the EFDC local plan now recognises the importance of the industry with policies designed to underpin growth. Issues of key worker accommodation to support the industry remain problematic. With production costs comprising 30% energy, as yet there is no apparent joined up approach to this cost driver and carbon generator. Although energy networks are being delivered in London, these do not extend outside the capital**
- Challenges to sustainability or expansion of the industry due to current planning constraints. As other areas build larger and taller glasshouses, planning challenges are restricting the area's ability to compete
- **Since the start of the Task Force's work, state of the art glasshouses are now being built in the District with size and scale to effectively compete with other areas. However, relationships with other local planning authorities and policies have impacted on the opportunities for, and the speed of, development. There remains no formal over-arching planning strategy to support and underpin growth across all Districts**
- No National Institute for Protected Growing/Horticulture/Food Security, no single public sector lead to coordinate and drive activity, or research & development for protected growing, as one of a mixture of platforms to meet future domestic food needs
- **This unacceptable position remains, though progress has been made with**
 - a food enterprise zone in Hertfordshire
 - major plans for an agri-tech site in South Cambs
 - the consolidation of research assets at East Malling and NIAB
 - securing of EU funding of BioBoost in Epping Forest by the Task Force
 - growers have offered their facilities to test projects with Universities, BioBoost, etc.

However there remains no sustained regional leadership for the food industry going forward, leading to fractured and uncoordinated programmes amid missed opportunities
- Almost all aspects of the core elements of the industry – plants, research, advice and built structures – are now imported
- **This position remains relatively unchanged although UK assets (academic and private sector) working in this field are working with foreign customers. The Task Force has helped forge new links between the industry and the academic sector in Essex and beyond**



Executive Summary, continued

- Crescent of agriculture/food related institutions mainly around north and east London, each with specialisms - Roehampton, Capel Manor, Writtle, East Malling - none dealing specifically with the needs of glasshouses, but which together could be a research and development cluster of international importance

- These areas of excellence remain but yet again no overall coordination, direction or attempt to provide overarching, integrated industry and technical leadership is apparent

- Increased development of R+D connected with life/Bio sciences along M11 Corridor from London to Cambridge / Norwich

- This trend continues with the relocation of Public Health England to Harlow. A new agri-science park is also planned for south of Cambridge. The Task Force has secured EU funding for the BioBoost programme (with partners in the Netherlands and Belgium), a project to promote cutting edge carbon reduction in the industry and designed to highlight the area as a place of innovation. It is too early to assess its impact properly.

The LSCC, following Task Force intervention, has hosted a major agri-tech conference for the corridor to assess current opportunities and challenges. The LSCC also funded a major value study (supported by the Task Force) into the food economy in the area, looking at income and employment.

Future technologies, especially around renewable energy and new plant varieties, are key opportunities for UK innovation and enhanced productivity

- Majority of components glass, light, plants, nutrients, irrigation, crop protection measures etc. are sourced externally, when previously the area was a Europe wide leader in capacity for R+D

- See previous comments

- No public subsidy to the glasshouse industry, from EU or nationally

- This remains the case in the UK but may not be the case to the same degree as other competitor countries in the EU. However this Task Force is convinced that to encourage viable, long-term and sustainable growth, incentives need to be re-introduced in order to expand capacity to scale and underpin the Task Force's aims to close the gap and trade effectively world-wide post-Brexit

- Continued development of the community gardening model in a series of London boroughs but with (suitable) land availability constraints on expansion

- Continues apace in London; opportunity for artisan production linked to the London supply chain is apparent but this opportunity has not yet been fully realised and it is unclear how this could be better coordinated and promoted

- Traffic and road infrastructure issues
- These continue to be issues for the industry, with access problematic and a perception that much of the large vehicle movement in the area is driven by

the industry, which often is simply through traffic. A sustained expansion of the industry will require infrastructure investment, although alternative transport models (canal barges, electric vehicles, etc) should be examined



The Task Force Work Streams

A number of key work streams were originally established to investigate issues, identify opportunities and develop effective responses within the Task Force's limited resources. These work streams developed and changed over the lifetime of the project. Some were successful, others were not. The work streams, program and conclusions are summarised here.

Planning Policy

One important aim of the Food Task Force was to engender greater cooperation between the Planning Officers from neighbouring District Councils and other statutory bodies in the run up to finalising Local Plans to keep the food industry on the agenda. This was also important given the traditional area of production spanned a number of different councils inside and outside London. The Task Force held workshops which brought together Councils and other parties to discuss the impact of current planning policy on food production and glasshouse use and what may be needed in future.

A number of workshops were organised, and these were initially well attended by a wide range of neighbouring authorities. This informed the Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) Local Plan which now includes a draft policy for Food Production and Glasshouses. The workshops, however, failed to promote this approach in other council areas and no 'joined up' common framework has been developed to encourage investment and coordination in a recognised London Food Zone.

It is hoped that the creation of a **South East Food Strategy Board** will be more influential in planning policy and creating designated food zones in future.

Employment Bridge / Skills Programme

A secure and expanding local food industry offers major employment opportunities, especially in entry level employment, but also more skilled and management positions that employers also increasingly struggle to fill. Partners often find it difficult to recruit skilled and unskilled workers or workers interested in a career in the industry. There is also a desire to move from foreign labour to a more UK-based work pool as this would be more sustainable and effective in a post-Brexit environment.

The Task Force attempted to bridge this gap by enlisting the local college and the Department for Work and Pensions to create a training and entry platform for the industry. However, this was beset by problems around numbers available for training as unemployment reduced significantly in the area. Funds were secured to create a skills framework, but the development was hampered due to the inflexibility of qualification funding streams and a lack of agreed and approved training products for the industry. As funding for courses and subsidies changed, costs for employers spiralled. Curiously, there is no one centre for horticulture excellence in the UK which could address these issues and establish a benchmark/charter mark for quality training. With the drive to increased mechanisation/robotics, the need for enhanced technical training will become more pronounced as part of the mix of skills required. It is still unclear how this challenge will be met.

National Institute for Urban Horticulture / Food Security

The Lea Valley has a high concentration of glasshouse and is constantly innovating and changing. Much of the technology and knowledge is based on foreign research or is in limited academic areas spread across the UK.

The Task Force were keen to ensure the Lea Valley became a centre of excellence for research and development, in part by becoming a Food Enterprise Zone (FEZ). However, the Government identified an area around the Rothamsted Research Centre in Hertfordshire as the preferred location and the recognised key geography for innovation. This has meant that the Task Force decided it was unable to pursue an Institute for food technology and horticulture and instead developed links to NIAB, Agri-tech East and others to ensure the Lea Valley can increase local research in the LSCC corridor in future.

The Task Force also arranged for a number of local employers to offer participation in one of the BIS Pathfinder programmes; however this project was not brought to fruition. All wanted skills in the industry to have a career path and progress to higher paying jobs in the industry with a ready supply of senior and middle managers. This did not happen. Despite the employers willingness and support from the DWP, the group was unable to pull an effective suite of qualifications together and brand effectively, although work is still continuing.

Partners want a defined skills pathway for the industry, shaped directly by current and future industry needs that will attract a sustainable domestic workforce with recognised and valued qualifications.

There remains a need for a properly funded, coherent strategy for investment in employment, skills and innovation in the horticultural industry to fully capture the opportunities for growth and development.



The Task Force Work Streams, continued

Land Bank

The Task Force focussed on space for growth and the challenge of defining appropriate sites in and around London. Land prices remain high in all areas around London, including the Lea Valley, fuelled by returns for residential development. This has forced the drift north over many decades, pushing production further away from consumption. The Task Force has *worked closely with the EFDC Local Plan team to put policies in place to retain land for agricultural use*. This could free up areas for glass development at a more competitive cost. A South East Strategic Food Board could further influence central and local Government policies to ensure that land banks for food at an affordable rate is prioritised to underpin expansion for the glasshouse industry.

The Task Force felt that an initial review should be undertaken of opportunities to drive the industry back into London using brownfield sites was apparent. Again, land values would make costs insurmountable without subsidies.

Exploratory discussions with the industry revealed that growth in and development of floating glasshouses could be considered. Growing platforms on London reservoirs, lakes, etc., is an initiative that could attract significant private sector investment. New planning guidance and a new policy would need to underpin this.

The idea of specifically designated London Food Zones on the capital's border was raised repeatedly. It was felt that with relevant planning policy support, access to land and energy networks, this could become a positive area for investment in coming years, ensuring expansion and increased private sector interest, and importantly retaining production next to consumption.

Growing Places

The Growing Places work stream aimed to look at ways to increase the opportunities for Londoners to grow their own food. This could have many potentially important benefits including:

- providing access to fresh food
- supporting people on low incomes to access cheaper food
- supporting increased physical exercise
- many other 'health and wellbeing' dividends.

Access to land for growing in the capital is very limited while the demand for allotments is high and growing.

There may well be an opportunity to open up access and market promotion to allotments in areas bordering the capital where demand is less acute.

The Task Force was unable to focus on this work stream, but would recommend that the South East Strategic Food Board look into any ways possible to assist those in larger cities in the South East (not just London) in growing more for themselves.

It was felt that an Institute for Horticulture could provide advice and support to residential growers. Providing access to bespoke technical advice on growing in urban environments to increase yield and quality may be a possible support to urban growing. This does not exist in a meaningful way at this moment.

Food Summit

The Task Force has investigated a range of issues and come up with a number of innovative ideas for moving both the debate and the industry forward. The idea was to hold a major event to raise awareness of issues with key policy makers. It was agreed that the Task Force final report and launch would fulfil this role.

BioBoost

The Task Force (with Epping Forest District Council as the accountable body) has secured EU Interreg funding for the BioBoost project. This is a project involving nine partners in the UK, Belgium and the Netherlands, looking at ways to use agricultural and horticultural waste in the circular economy. This project will take three years and will involve Abbey View Produce as an observer partner.

The aim is to complete several work packages to look at innovative ways to use waste for the pharmaceutical and cosmetic industries, for secondary foodstuffs, and other projects. While the project has just begun it has attracted significant interest from partners and initial outcomes are promising.

This work will aim to further improve the carbon profile of the industry which is often viewed as a brake on expansion.

Changing Retail Priorities

A much greater proactive stance from supermarket customers is required to access sustainable, ethically grown, UK produced products for shoppers. Clearly this offers opportunities to change the nature of the marketplace and develop new approaches to horticulture going forward that can be exploited.

While the Task Force has been completing its work, it has been evident that perceptions and priorities of consumers and retailers who drive the industry have been changing. While the price point remains critical and downward pressure on prices are still a fundamental reality for the industry, there are additional concerns around safety, consumer preference for UK sourced production and growing ethical concerns. This offers a major boost to the potential of the locally purchased option.



The Task Force Work Streams, continued

Brexit

Following the Brexit vote, the Task Force undertook a series of conversations with major investors and owners. The conversations identified a growing anxiety around the implications from Brexit and its negotiations, particularly around a lack of clarity of timescales and the ability to plan and budget for different scenarios.

Perception that Brexit offers positive opportunities, given the efficiency of industry locally; this may enable greater opportunities to compete in foreign markets. However, this would require a major, joined-up strategy with identifying support from Central Government if these opportunities are to be fully realised, and focussing on the main challenges identified throughout this report. The new Government industrial strategy appears to give some potential opportunities to address key challenges, but also opportunities to influence in horticulture post-Brexit. However this will require much more work around implementation and delivery.

The availability of labour is one concern post-Brexit. Due to the uncertainties, in 2017 there is already a 20% shortfall in the number of migrant workers relied upon to pick fruit and vegetables in the UK. The industry will need to make itself heard during negotiations to ensure that availability of seasonal workers will continue after 2019, and/or support is available for increased mechanisation.

In addition, the value of the Pound Sterling is one area for concern. With currency fluctuation, the cost of materials and technology from the EU could increase substantially, however if devaluation becomes sustained this will

offer real opportunities for export of UK products.

Currently during the negotiation period, prices for UK produce are very competitive. However, depending on the outcome of the negotiations, if there are tariffs on UK produce to the EU market, the confidence in the UK industry will be impacted.

An opportunity for the Lea Valley area (which extends well into London) post-Brexit would be to establish a Food Enterprise Zone. However, the need for land designation for the food industry continues to be a challenge to realising the ambition to expand.

What is now being grown in the region's glasshouses?

- Cucumbers
- Peppers
- Tomatoes
- Aubergines
- Figs
- Lettuce
- Chillies
- Exotic Veg
- Exotic Fruit

The Wider Food Cycle

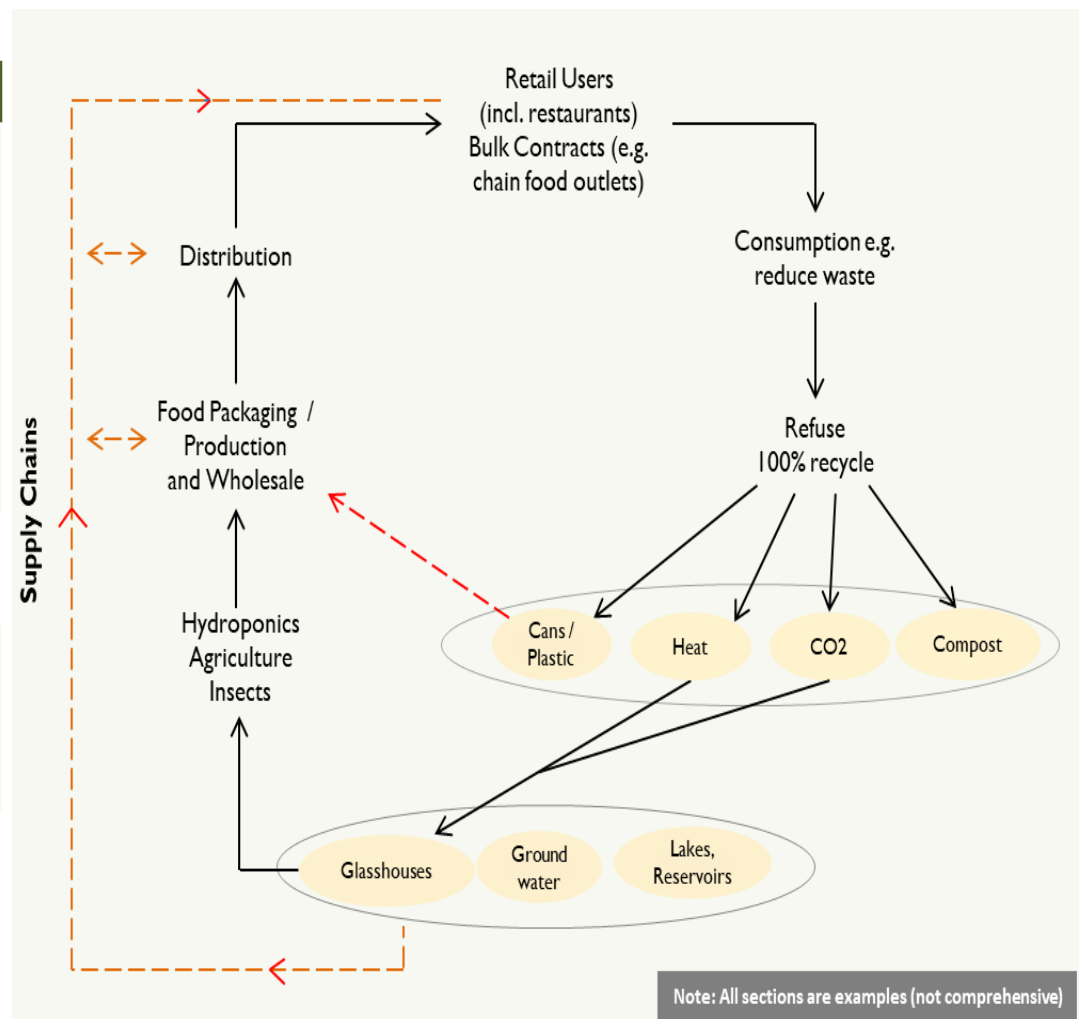
Currently, London and the South East are dealing with a triple-threat of land shortage for growing, shortage of workers, and issues around a 'just-in-time' approach to production in the industry.

This diagram shows how, in terms of the food industry, the whole is greater than the parts. This could be an area of strength for the UK if integrated, but the country is not making the most of this as yet. A key task for the group as a South East Strategic Food Board would be to bring together the voices for all sectors of the Food Cycle set out below.

Challenges

- Brexit
- Employment / Skills
- Climate Change
- Research and Development
- Weak Supply Chains
- Lack of manufacturing capability (e.g. structures, LED, heat)

Every component in the cycle comprises elements of manufacturing, buildings, lighting/LED and heating.



Case study: Keeping the Food Cycle Local

'Buy local' is often an over-used phrase. Peter Sparks knows what this really means for his fruit and veg business.

PA Sparks was founded by Peter's father in 1958. Around 5% of the business is through their greengrocer shop in Debden, while around 95% is supplying local businesses in the Lea Valley area.

Working with local schools, restaurants, ready-meal producers, and entertainment venues, Sparks can supply fruit and veg from local producers and further afield. Sparks works with local glasshouse producers to supply salad vegetables to the area, as well as working with local farmers for other crops such as potatoes and eggs in Essex.

Peter can supply quality produce and ensure the provenance - very important to customers but particular to schools.

Delivering six days a week, Peter and his 16 staff work hard to ensure that not only do they supply what the customer requests, but go above and beyond the call of duty to offer that extra service where needed.

'We work with EAT 17 (a small, family run chain of shops) to supply and merchandise their produce. They trust me to supply the best quality - if I see something interesting I know their customers would like, I buy it in,' says Peter.

By keeping the supply chain short, Sparks are specialists in their field. This knowledge is then passed on to customers in the shop, or to wholesale clients needing help with seasonal planning.

'It's all or nothing really,' says Peter. 'You can't play at being a wholesaler. We're in this job 24/7, with communication, quality and service being the key to a successful business.'

Peter hopes that Brexit will mean more customers support buying seasonal, home-grown British produce.

'People are missing out on so much because they've been educated by the supermarkets with year-round availability. Shopping locally, supporting local producers and small businesses, can only be a good thing because of the independent knowledge they bring to the marketplace.'



The National and Regional Picture

Food continues to have a mixed place in the strategies and plans of both local and national government departments. The Food Task Force has reviewed many recent documents and initiatives to determine the prominence of food production across the UK.

Epping Forest District Local Plan

The Epping Forest Local Plan includes policies for the glasshouse industry. While in draft form at the time of writing, there are currently policies in the Local Plan to support the food production and glasshouse industry within the District.

Industrial Strategy

The UK Industrial Strategy, published in November 2017, sets out numerous recommendations. One is that the UK is at the forefront of the global move to high-efficiency agriculture through precision technology, while at the same time making our food production more sustainable by reducing waste and pollution. The Strategy also recommends moving towards a more circular economy approach in many areas, including food production.

The London Plan (draft)

The draft London Plan includes a policy on food growing in the capital. In particular, the London Plan looks to a macro scale to provide land to support farming and agriculture, particularly close to the source to create a sustainable food network for London. The Lea Valley is currently a contributor to this network, and is well placed to continue to serve a growing population of London by expansion and higher production.

East Herts Council

In their draft Local Plan, East Herts Council have included their support of food production in the area, citing they are suppliers to London and need to ensure that food miles are reduced while food security is increased. As a council in the London Stanstead Cambridge corridor, East Herts are ensuring food production growth in the Lea Valley region.

Yes Please: the Pease Please Initiative

This initiative aims to get more people in the UK to eat 'five a day by changing the system', not simply telling people to eat more veg. By collaborating with growers, retailers, food manufacturers, and restaurants, Pease Please's goal is to identify challenges in the system that prevent people from eating more veg. Their objective is to secure agreements with the government and food industry to improve availability, affordability and quality of vegetables on offer, especially in places such as fast food outlets. Toolkits for retailers, the food service industry and even towns wanting to be 'veg champions' are available from their website. This campaign is proving to be successful, with dozens of major organisations signing up to the 'Pease Pledge.'

Conclusion

For a small group of people with little resources, the Food Task Force (and latterly the Food Board) has made significant progress over the last four years. It has identified a large number of opportunities and challenges, and proposed and tested potential responses/solutions, some more successfully than others. However, issues facing the industry will need more sustained work, with a wider geographic focus and engagement with more senior policy makers and industry bodies.

The Lea Valley Food Task Force as it exists does not have the capacity to support this fully. Therefore, the Task Force has proposed approaching other players in the south east of the UK to create a South East Strategic Food Board. This would raise issues and seek solutions with backing from the Government and private sector food producers in order to 'close the gap' between what we need as a nation and what we produce.

To move on to the next stage, there are many challenges and questions that need consideration locally, regionally, nationally and internationally:

- Is local sustainable, safe food a priority for anyone other than consumers?
- How can production be increased?
- How can Government help with infrastructure to accommodate growth?
- Can we create a joined up approach to the sector?
- What will Brexit mean?
- What financial incentives (tax breaks, etc.) can be introduced to enable rapid growth in the industry?
- What steps can be taken to re-establish UK research and development?
- What future technologies should we be investing in as an industry today?
- Can we set out and define the national vision for the industry?
- How to engage the leadership of the industry in a meaningful way?
- Should local authorities be incentivised to provide support?
- Creating a strong and developed skills agenda with the support for growers.
- Can we establish effective platforms for engagement and opportunities linked to the sector?

The overall conclusion is that the Lea Valley Food Task Force has been good at identifying problems and working out potential solutions and has made a start. However with current resources and with no outside support, commitment and funding, it can not address effectively the questions set out above.

Task Force Final Recommendations

The findings of the Task Force can be distilled into a number of key challenges and the following actions would go some way to addressing them.

1. Establish a strategic body (South East Strategic Food Board) to lead, coordinate and support growth to UK food capacity to close the ever-widening gap between what is required and what is produced locally, and deliver consumers' preference for home grown food at an affordable price.
2. Grasp the opportunity to build on the UK's history and experience of innovation and research in food by consolidation of existing, related research and development; around a National Institute for Food Security; and to repatriate research and development capacity and investment in the horticultural industry. This would become a centre of excellence for research in all elements of glasshouse production and a resource for communities and individuals to 'grow their own' more efficiently.
3. Develop clear and consistent planning policies in key growing areas and across city regions to retain and expand the growing capacity near to areas of intense consumption. This may involve looking at innovation on sites, linked to integrated housing development on brownfield land, and on water.
4. Jointly to develop a national horticultural strategy with the Government/AHDB that sets clear targets for closing the growing gap, as well as clear lines of accountability for delivery. As part of this, re-establish incentives, such as tax-breaks and subsidies, to rapidly expand intensive growing for UK needs in partnership with the private sector.
5. Alignment, coordination and development of clear skills pathways including affordable training packages to enhance the job offer for UK candidates considering working in the glasshouse/protective growing industry as a career. Include support for workers from areas of higher unemployment to take up posts in the south.
6. Ensure clear responsibility for promotion and support of the food industry is given to Local Enterprise Partnerships, with food to be highlighted as a national priority in the Industrial Strategy: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/building-our-industrial-strategy>.

These recommendations can be categorised according to their geographical focus:

National	Regional	Local
2	1,3	3
4	5	5
6	6	

The Lea Valley Food Task Force is a consortium of organisations in the public and private sectors working together in a voluntary capacity to secure a future for the historical glasshouse industry of the Lea Valley.

The following organisations have been represented at the Task Force meetings:

One Epping Forest
Epping Forest District Council
Essex County Council
London Stansted Cambridge Consortium
Epping Forest College
Abbey View Produce Ltd
Vibrant Partnerships Ltd
NIAB
Agri-Tech East

The Task Force would like to send our thanks to all of the Lea Valley growing community who have worked with the Food Taskforce over the years.



LSCC

London. Stansted. Cambridge. Consortium

