

# Take back the (food) economy: Lessons from the Hummingbird<sup>1</sup>

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Food is a topic that many of us who are concerned with building better worlds are keenly interested in. These concerns about food are addressed in a rich array of recent books and films. One book that has just been released is Julian Cribb's *The Coming Famine*, published by the CSIRO in Australia (and published overseas by The University of California Press). This book details a future food crisis (or more precisely a series of crises) that will affect not just the majority world (that part of the world where famines all too often occur) but the comparatively privileged minority world. Contributors to this coming famine include water shortages; loss of agricultural land; loss of nutrients in the agricultural land we do have; loss of our ocean's fish stocks; our over-reliance on fossil fuels; climate change; a global food system based on distorting trade barriers, farm subsidies and financial speculation in food commodity markets; and what Cribb calls the two elephants in the kitchen—population growth and overconsumption. It's a daunting list, and it's hard to see how this coming famine might be averted.

At times in the book our author is hopeful. Cribb has great faith that governments, businesses, farmers and citizens will act to make the necessary changes. He particularly points to the actions that citizens can take and concludes most chapters with a series of suggested practices (for an example, see Figure 1 overleaf). At other times in the book, Cribb seems less convinced that the crisis will be avoided. In the concluding chapter he says we need global solutions; and that "Global solutions will not be found ... until most people come to a sensible appreciation of the jeopardy in which we stand" (p. 189). Given that we're so used to thinking that global problems require global solutions, it's not surprising that this aspect of the book is being highlighted. For example, the reviewer in the New York Times writes "None of these practices [of the type listed in Figure 1] will matter much unless they're adopted worldwide" (Bittman, 2010).

Reading Cribb's work and reviews such as Bittman's, I feel an overwhelming sense of helplessness and despair. How on earth will most people develop a sensible appreciation of the situation? How are we ever going to adopt these individual practices worldwide? How are we going to convince governments and businesses of the seriousness of the situation and the actions that are needed? It's hard not to feel paralysed by the enormity of the

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situation (just as many of feel paralysed by the enormity of climate change, economic profiteering and social injustice).

#### WHAT CAN I DO ABOUT IT?

1. Rebalance your diet toward foods that have a smaller “carbon footprint,” such as fruits and vegetables.
2. Consume meat, oils, sugar, soft drinks, and dairy products more sparingly.
3. Favor foods that are seasonal and are grown locally and with low-energy inputs.
4. Favor foods produced by systems known to enrich the soil. Seek consumer information on how your food was grown.
5. Support government policies that promote “carbon farming” and the recycling of organic wastes.
6. Waste no food personally, but recycle and compost anything left over for return to the soil or to agriculture.

#### Figure 1: An Example of the actions advocated by Cribb

Source: Cribb 2010, p. 153

A wonderful antidote for our paralysis is offered by Wangari Maathai, the founder of the Green Belt Movement in Africa and 2004 winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. In *Dirt!: The Film*, she tells the story of the tiny hummingbird who fights a huge bush fire drop by tiny drop of precious water.

We are constantly being bombarded by problems that we face and sometimes we can get completely overwhelmed. The story of the hummingbird is about this huge forest being consumed by a fire. All the animals in the forest come out and they are transfixed as they watch their forest burning. And they feel very overwhelmed and powerless. Except this little hummingbird and it says “I’m going to do something about the fire.” So it flies to the nearest stream and takes a drop of water and puts it on the fire. And it goes up and down, up and down, up and down, as fast as it can. In the meantime, all the other animals, much bigger animals, the elephant with a big trunk that could bring much more water, they are standing there helpless, and they are saying to the hummingbird “What do you think you can do? You’re too little. This fire is too big. Your wings are too little. Your beak is too small. It can only bring a small drop of water at a time.” But as they continue to discourage it, it turns to them, without wasting any time, and it tells them “I’m doing the best I can.” And that to me is what all of us do. We should always be like the hummingbird. I may feel insignificant but I certainly don’t want to be like the animals watching the planet go down the drain. I will be a hummingbird. I will do the best I can. (Matthai in *Dirt! The Movie*, 2009, online at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IGMW6YWjMxw>)

The comments by Bittman in the NY Times review—“None of these practices will matter much unless they’re adopted worldwide”—echo the discouraging comments that the big animals in the story make—“What do you think you can do? Your initiatives are too small. The problem is too big.” Maathai’s closing lines are a powerful antidote to this disabling stance—“I will be like the hummingbird. I will do the best I can.” This is a call to action. In place of a vision of global social, political and economic transformation which is well beyond what any of us can do, these lines affirm the power and potential of small actions and initiatives.

This is an understanding of change that many share. It’s wonderfully captured by Paul Hawken in his book *Blessed Unrest: How the Largest Social Movement in History is Restoring Grace, Justice and Beauty to the World*. Hawken estimates that there are “over one—and maybe even two—million organizations working toward ecological sustainability and social justice” (2007, p. 2) and that these organisations are comprised of “ordinary and some not-so-ordinary individuals willing to confront despair, power, and [like the little hummingbird] incalculable odds in an attempt to restore some semblance of grace, justice, and beauty to this world” (p. 4). In laying out this vision of social change, Hawken quotes (among others) Adrienne Rich:

My heart is moved by all I cannot save  
so much has been destroyed  
I have to cast my lot with those  
who, age after age, perversely,  
with no extraordinary power,  
reconstitute the world. (p. 4)

Indeed, Hawken uses Rich’s poetry to introduce his book and his claim that “[t]his is the story without apologies of what is going *right* on this planet, narratives of imagination and conviction, not defeatist accounts about the limits” (p. 4, original emphasis).

So with the voices of Maathai, Rich and Hawken in mind, I want to return to food matters. I want to acknowledge and celebrate the imaginative and committed efforts of people to take back the food economy and make it work for us as an ethical people-centred and environment-centred space of action and possibility.

To do this we first need to rethink the economy. Here we can use the image of the iceberg (see Figure 2, overleaf). The tip of the iceberg is the familiar understanding of the economy as made up of paid workers, working in small, medium or large capitalist enterprises, producing goods or services for “the market”. But below the waterline is a much larger hidden economy that is made up of a host of other types of economic activities that include, for example, not-for-market transactions, barter exchanges, volunteer labour, and self-provisioning occurring in places like families, neighbourhoods and streets.

This image of the iceberg has been developed and used by J.K. Gibson-Graham and a network of academic and activist collaborators based primarily in Australia, the US, and Philippines—and working together as the Community Economies Collective (see [www.communityeconomies.org.au](http://www.communityeconomies.org.au)). To help interrogate the hidden and diverse

economic activities further we have devised the Diverse Economies Framework (DEF) (Table 1, below). The first row of the DEF is comprised of that part of the economy that sits above the waterline. But below the waterline we find a host of different sorts of economic activities. The aim of this DEF is to expand our imaginary of what the economy is, from the narrow set of practices that sit above the waterline, to a much more diverse array practices—and possibilities for intervention and change.



**Figure 2: The Economy as an Iceberg**

Source: Community Economies Collective 2001, Gibson-Graham 2006

ENTERPRISES	TRANS-ACTIONS	LABOR	PROPERTY	FINANCE
CAPITALIST	MARKET	WAGE	PRIVATE	MAINSTREAM MARKET
ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST	ALTERNATIVE MARKET	ALTERNATIVE PAID	ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE	ALTERNATIVE MARKET
NON-CAPITALIST	NON-MARKET	UNPAID	OPEN ACCESS	NON-MARKET

**Table 1: The Diverse Economies Framework**

Source: Gibson-Graham et al 2010 (see also Cameron & Gibson-Graham 2003; Gibson-Graham, 2006).

We can populate this DEF shell with the food economy of Newcastle (see Table 2, overleaf). Here we find in each column:

- a diversity of enterprises producing and distributing food
- various avenues through which food is transacted between producers and consumers
- a variety of ways of compensating workers who produce and distribute food
- different types of property which can be used to secure food
- a range of financial instruments for funding food initiatives.

This is by no means the complete food landscape of Newcastle; rather, the table is a starting point to illustrate the diversity that already exists and the imaginative ways that people are taking back the food economy. <sup>2</sup>

One important feature of the diverse food economy in Table 2 is that the rows do not necessarily line up. For example, although there are capitalist enterprises in the form of nationally and internationally based retailers (such as Coles, Woolworths, IGA, Franklins and ALDI) that transact produce through the market and employ waged workers (all in the top row of the table), these enterprises can also be active in other parts of the diverse food economy. For example, ALDI participates in non-market transactions by donating excess food to OzHarvest Food Rescue, a charitable organisation which has recently started operating in Newcastle to collect excess food and pass it on to welfare groups (Jack, 2010, p. 1).

Another example is The Community Kitchen in Merewether. As shown in Table 3 (on page 7) it is a non-capitalist enterprise, and it involves Kumera Kitchen volunteers and access to the facilities of Mereweather Uniting Church. The current iteration of Kumera Kitchen is the outcome of five years of community kitchen work by Kumera Kitchen. The Community Kitchen provides meals for around 80 people each week. Food is donated by individuals and by five local businesses; and I'm speculating that some of these businesses would operate as capitalist enterprises and some as alternative capitalist enterprises (in which the for-profit motive is moderated by other concerns such as a commitment to making organic produce affordable or provided decent wages for local staff or paying local organic farmers a decent price for produce). People who eat at The Community Kitchen are encouraged to volunteer their labour (particularly with cooking or cleaning) or to make a small donation. This is to get away from the idea that it's a soup kitchen where meals are provided as a type of social service. The idea is that it's a place where open access meals are produced for sharing – hence it's a community kitchen in the true sense of the word.

Another project that demonstrates how the rows in the diverse food economy don't all neatly align is The Beanstalk Organic Food, a non-capitalist enterprise that operates as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) project (see Table 4, page 7). This means it

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<sup>2</sup> Some of this diversity has been explored in an earlier paper with Rhyall Gordon to highlight the policy options that emerge from taking a diverse economies perspective (as well as the politics of 'alternativeness') (see Cameron & Gordon 2010).

**Table 2: The Diverse Food Landscape of Newcastle**

<b>ENTERPRISES</b>	<b>TRANSACTIONS</b>	<b>LABOR</b>	<b>PROPERTY</b>	<b>FINANCE</b>
<p><b>CAPITALIST</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Nationally based retailers (e.g. Coles, Woolworth, IGA, Franklins)</li> <li>▪ International retailers (e.g. ALDI)</li> <li>▪ Local retailers (e.g. restaurants and coffee shops)</li> </ul>	<p><b>MARKET</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food from major supermarkets</li> <li>▪ Food from local retailers</li> </ul>	<p><b>WAGE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Workers at national and international retailers</li> <li>▪ Workers at local retailers</li> <li>▪ CSA (Beanstalk) worker</li> <li>▪ Community garden workers</li> </ul>	<p><b>PRIVATE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Retail spaces</li> <li>▪ Backyard food growing areas</li> </ul>	<p><b>MAINSTREAM MARKET</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loans from mainstream banks</li> </ul>
<p><b>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Small family-run food businesses</li> <li>▪ State/Council owned businesses (e.g. Lake Macquarie Worm Farm)</li> </ul>	<p><b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food sourced directly from farmers (e.g. farmers' markets, CSA)</li> <li>▪ Saturday morning sales of community garden seedlings</li> <li>▪ Sales of community garden herbs to restaurants and coffee shops</li> <li>▪ Fair trade produce</li> </ul>	<p><b>ALTERNATIVE PAID</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ In-kind payments for Beanstalk "volunteers"</li> <li>▪ In-kind payments for community garden workers</li> <li>▪ Self-employed workers (e.g. farmers, sole operator food outlets)</li> </ul>	<p><b>ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Land used for community gardens from Council, churches, schools, bowls clubs, RSL clubs</li> <li>▪ Premises for CSA and community kitchens on peppercorn leases or donated arrangements from orgs, institutions</li> <li>▪ Showgrounds for Farmers' Markets</li> </ul>	<p><b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Loans from cooperative banks and credit unions</li> <li>▪ Slow money lending</li> </ul>
<p><b>NON-CAPITALIST</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Self-employed farm businesses</li> <li>▪ Self-employed food operators</li> <li>▪ CSA (The Beanstalk Organic Food)</li> <li>▪ Community gardens</li> <li>▪ Community kitchens (e.g. Kumera Kitchen)</li> <li>▪ OzHarvest Food Rescue</li> </ul>	<p><b>NON-MARKET</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Food from backyard production and community gardens for home use or gifted to neighbours and friends</li> <li>▪ Donations of food to community kitchens or OzHarvest Food Rescue</li> <li>▪ Donations of waste from restaurants and coffee shops for community garden composting</li> </ul>	<p><b>UNPAID</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Community garden volunteers</li> <li>▪ Community Kitchen volunteers</li> <li>▪ Self-provisioning workers (e.g. back-yard producers, allotment community garden producers, dumpster divers)</li> </ul>	<p><b>OPEN ACCESS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Gleaning and scrumping from overhanging trees and trees in public parks</li> <li>▪ Open community garden produce</li> <li>▪ Dumpsters for diving</li> <li>▪ Hunter River fishing</li> <li>▪ Open access meals from community kitchens</li> </ul>	<p><b>NON-MARKET</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Family and friend lending</li> <li>▪ Donations and gifts</li> <li>▪ Sweat equity</li> </ul>

*Note: This table is not meant to be a complete inventory of the diverse food economy in Newcastle. It is intended to illustrate just some of the diversity.*

participates in an alternative market whereby food is sourced directly from nearby farmers, with farmers setting the price for the produce they sell to Beanstalk (for more on this see Cameron, 2010). Beanstalk employs one paid worker to coordinate many of its activities, but it also relies on workers ("volunteers") who are paid in-kind with boxes of produce. It is currently based in premises that are provided through Renew Newcastle. As a result of these arrangements, Beanstalk has established an alternative CSA market that has affordable organic food for consumers; and farmers can finance their operation through the guaranteed prices and payment arrangement with Beanstalk, and also pay themselves an income.

ENTERPRISES	TRANS-ACTIONS	LABOR	PROPERTY	FINANCE
<b>CAPITALIST</b> <u>Local Business</u>	<b>MARKET</b>	<b>WAGE</b>	<b>PRIVATE</b>	<b>MAINSTREAM MARKET</b>
<b>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</b> <u>Local Business</u>	<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b>	<b>ALTERNATIVE PAID</b>	<b>ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE</b> <u>Uniting Church,</u> <u>Mereweather</u>	<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b>
<b>NON-CAPITALIST</b> <u>The Community Kitchen</u>	<b>NON-MARKET</b> <u>Food Donations</u>	<b>UNPAID</b> <u>Kumera Kitchen</u> <u>Volunteers</u>	<b>OPEN ACCESS</b> <u>Shared Meals</u>	<b>NON-MARKET</b> <u>Monetary Donations</u>

**Table 3: The Diverse Economy of The Community Kitchen**

ENTERPRISES	TRANS-ACTIONS	LABOR	PROPERTY	FINANCE
<b>CAPITALIST</b>	<b>MARKET</b>	<b>WAGE</b> <u>One paid coordinator</u>	<b>PRIVATE</b>	<b>MAINSTREAM MARKET</b>
<b>ALTERNATIVE CAPITALIST</b>	<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b> <u>Produce direct from farmers</u>	<b>ALTERNATIVE PAID</b> <u>'Volunteers' paid in kind</u>	<b>ALTERNATIVE PRIVATE</b> <u>Premises through Renew Newcastle</u>	<b>ALTERNATIVE MARKET</b>
<b>NON-CAPITALIST</b> <u>Beanstalk</u>	<b>NON-MARKET</b>	<b>UNPAID</b>	<b>OPEN ACCESS</b>	<b>NON-MARKET</b>

**Table 4: The Diverse Economy of The Beanstalk Organic Food**

When we portray the food economy in this way we start to see how the activities in the diverse food economy are interconnected—and relatedly how diverse groups of people are interconnected: groups like capitalists, alternative capitalists, community organisers and activists, farmers and consumers.

Importantly, many of these interconnections involve some form of ethical commitment. For example, the local donations of excess food to OzHarvest Food Rescue and The Community Kitchen can be seen as reflecting an environmental concern for the amount of waste that occurs within the food industry and a social concern for people who do not have easy access to fresh and good quality food. Likewise as a CSA project The Beanstalk Organic Food is underpinned by a strong set of social and environmental ethics. The whole aim of Beanstalk is to connect people in a transparent and direct way to make explicit the interdependencies between producers and consumers, and rural and urban areas. This means that producers are still supported during hard times. For example, when one farmer suffered crop losses because of floods, Beanstalk continued to pay him what he would have received even though it meant that consumers still paid the same amount for fruit and vegetables boxes that may have had slightly less produce or less variety of produce in them (see Cameron, 2010). And of course, with its commitment to organic food, Beanstalk is supporting farmers who are producing in ways that are attuned to the environment.

In these examples, the connections are local or local-regional. However, the diverse food economy is not just a local economy. It can incorporate ethical connections with people in distant places through practices such as fair trade. More and more research is demonstrating the benefits of fair trade (e.g. Le Mare 2008)—whether fair trade produce is sourced through major retailers stocking fair trade chocolate from major food manufacturers (e.g. Cadbury’s fair trade dairy milk chocolate) or through smaller fair trade networks (such as Black Star coffee). In either case, there is fair trade certification that guarantees that social and ethical commitments are being acted on through mechanisms such as a guaranteed minimum price for small producers and an additional fair trade premium that the cooperatives of small farmers can use to build educational and health facilities and foster more ecologically sustainable agriculture practices.

What is so powerful about this diverse economies framework is that it gives us a way of talking about how people are taking back the economy through various food initiatives. So ‘the economy’ features not as something ‘out there’ that is the domain of mainstream businesses or ‘the market’ or ‘globalisation’ or ‘capitalism’, but as something that we all can make in ways that are people and environment centred. Furthermore, ‘the economy’ features not as a bounded entity but as an open space of ethical decision making that is limited only by our imagination, our creativity and our will to ‘take back’.

One criticism of the Diverse Economies Framework is that it doesn’t take into account the scale of the activities in the various cells in Table 1. Capitalist enterprises, for example, are represented as equivalent to alternative capitalist or non-capitalist enterprises. Some researchers have responded to this criticism by studying the scale of economic activities in various parts of the diverse economy. For example, Williams (2005) has carefully studied

the extent to which commodification (i.e. goods and services transacted through the market) has become a feature of contemporary life in the UK. Contrary to the common belief that more and more we rely on the market, he has found that self-provisioning and mutual aid (i.e. non-market and alternative market transactions) are so widely practiced that people spend the same amount of time doing paid work as they do unpaid or alternatively paid work, and that the proportion of time spent in this form of work has increased relative to the amount of time spent in paid work.<sup>3</sup>

In a wonderful new book on what they call “collaborative consumption”, Rachel Botsman and Roo Rogers (2010) challenge the prevailing view that consumption is market-based. They document the extent of collaborative consumption that is based not on money, but on trust, sharing and a commitment to the social commons. For example, the hospitality service that is most visited on the internet is CouchSurfing a not for profit service that links travellers with couches in people’s houses (p. xvii). Travellers are not charged to use the couches but are encouraged to thank their hosts with a small gift or an act of kindness (hosts who charge are removed from the site, see <http://www.couchsurfing.org/index.html>). Currently there are almost 1.2 million couches offered across the globe for travellers to stay on. Freecycle an online registry of free items for reuse or recycling has over 7.5 million members, and Botsman and Rogers claim that more than 12,000 items are ‘gifted’ every day (p. xvii). SharedEarth is according to its home page “the largest community garden on the planet” with over 6 million square metres of land currently being shared between people who have land and those who want to garden (see <http://www.sharedearth.com/>). Astonishingly, Botsman and Rogers draw on figures from the US Department of Agriculture to highlight that in 2009 there were more than 1000 more farmers’ markets in the US than there were Wal-Marts, and that farmers’ markets are the fastest-growing part of the food economy in the US (p. 50).

Work like Williams’, and Botsman and Rogers’ is important to demonstrate just how much activity goes on outside those parts of the diverse economy that are presumed to be dominant (at least in the minority world) (i.e. tip of the iceberg or the top row of the DEF: capitalist enterprises, market transactions, waged labour, private property and mainstream market finance). However, a different response is to ask not which parts of the diverse economy are the biggest, but which parts of the diverse economy are worth growing and strengthening. This question moves us away from debates and contestations about how the world is, to discussions about how the world might be and the sort of future we want to contribute to creating—and ways to be like the hummingbird and do the best we can to help create ethical (food) economies that are people and environment centred.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Drawing on Williams, Healy (2009, 342) argues that our attention is so firmly fixed on the presumed dominance of “capitalism” that we cannot see the everyday economic activities that are all around us and sustaining us.

<sup>4</sup> In contemporary social science debates this is known as the move from a realist stance to a performative stance (e.g. Cameron et al., 2010; Gibson-Graham, 2008; Healy, 2009; Law, 2004; Law and Urry, 2004).

How might we do this? How might we build on the innovative ways that people in a centre like Newcastle are already taking back the food economy? What sorts of actions can we take to contribute to this people and environment centred economy that already exists? In posing these questions, I'm reminded of the hummingbird that in its own way is doing the best it can; and of Paul Hawken's focus on "what is going *right* on this planet" (2007, p.4, original emphasis). Our options to do the best we can and support what is going right on the planet include:

- Keeping doing what we're already doing to take back the food economy, whether through community gardening, backyard production, being a community kitchen or CSA volunteer, shopping at farmers' markets, or generally following the sorts of practices that Julian Cribb talks about in *The Coming Famine* (see Figure 1, page 2).
- Supporting other initiatives in Newcastle that are taking back the food economy. For example, when calls come out such as Fig Tree Community Garden's call for assistance (see Figure 3, overleaf), then we might lend a hand to support the range of existing diverse economic practices that we find in such an initiative (for more on the economic diversity in Fig Tree see Cameron & Gibson 2008).
- Promoting existing initiatives. We can talk to friends, families, neighbours, or we can promote the initiatives more widely particularly by using new technologies. For example, VEIL, the Victorian Eco-Innovation Lab, has produced a map of Melbourne's community gardens (see Figure 4, p. 12). A slightly different 'mapping' exercise has been undertaken by the Newcastle Community Garden Project, 2010, where we not just located the gardens on maps but produced stories that profiled the gardens involved and discussed themes that cut across the different gardens (see Figure 5, p. 12; see also Cameron et al 2010; Newcastle Community Garden Project, 2010). While we're on mapping, it's worth having a look at the wonderful maps produced by Fallen Fruit in Los Angeles to publicise fruit that is readily available in local neighbourhoods, growing along streets, in public parks and around parking lots (see Figure 6, p. 13). Maps are available online and people who use them are asked to follow a code of conduct (see Figure 7, p. 13).

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HELP WANTED: Jo Plummer with visitors to the Fig Tree community garden.

by MICHAEL BLAXLAND

THE end of a State Government grant has led to a tightening at one of Newcastle's landmark ecological projects.

The Fig Tree community garden was founded five years ago on land owned by the adjacent Mount Wickham Sports Club in Albert Street, Wickham.

For the past three years, an area assistance scheme grant has provided Fig Tree with 21 hours per week of paid staff time.

Group spokeswoman Jo Plummer said, although there were scores of volunteers involved in Fig Tree, having a small allowance for paid staff had meant they were able to contribute to a steady stream of visitors, volunteers, workshops, events and groups, the administration work, meetings with partnering organisations, fund-raising and insurance.

"Fig Tree is undergoing a transition and we need some extra heads and hands to ensure the place keeps up the momentum it has gained in the last few years," Ms Plummer said.

She said some of the services that Fig Tree

employees offered and which could be constrained without further funding included:

- supervision of youth at risk in construction projects around the garden, gardening and herb production and sales;
- supervision of people with disabilities and support for carers and organisations that work with people in need;
- community event supervision and hosting;
- herb production and sales to local cafes and restaurants;
- workshop design, planning and delivery; and
- maintenance of organic gardening and information and support for the community to learn and join in with all aspects of the garden.

The sprawling gardens now involve traditional fruit orchard, bush food and vegetable gardens, medicinal and edible herb plantings, chicken run, children's play area, worm farms, bathhouse and outdoor kitchen, including wood-fire pizza oven.

The organisation makes some money from the sale of herbs to restaurants and free-range eggs, but Ms Plummer said these couldn't replace the need

for grants or sponsorship.

"It takes a lot of people a lot of time to keep the garden ticking along so that everyone in the community can use the space however they would like to," Ms Plummer said.

"The main source of support for the employees who have helped Fig Tree grow has finished, so we are looking for ideas and support so we can keep doing what we do best.

"Fig Tree is a connected community. There are many organisations and individuals who visit or use the site in some way or another, whether it's to have a work function with the pizza oven or to empty the office compost bin.

"We've put out the call to our members, and the community, if they know of anyone who can help us, whether it's a friend who is the CEO of a big company, someone with a good head for business or an uncanny success with writing grant applications or even someone interested in starting a community investment fund which finances local eco-innovations for a modest return to the Fig Tree Trust."

Information about the Fig tree community garden can be found at [figtree.org.au](http://figtree.org.au)

## Figure 3, A Call for Support

Source: *The Post*, 29 September, 2010, p. 1



Figure 4: VEIL's Melbourne Food Map  
 Source: [www.communitywalk.com/veil-map](http://www.communitywalk.com/veil-map)

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On two separate days, 22 community gardeners went on a bus tour of each other's community gardens. The tour was a joint collaboration between 9 community gardens and 3 community gardens-to-be. The project was organised by Jenny Cameron from the University of Newcastle and Craig Manhood from Fig Tree Community Garden, and Jamie Pomfrett worked as a researcher on the project. Funding was through the University of Newcastle and Newcastle City Council. The aim of the project was to provide a space where community gardeners could share and learn from each other -- and to communicate what we learnt to other community gardeners. (And the project only involved some of the community gardens in Newcastle - at last count there were 23 in the area!)

This website has stories of the participating community gardens. Written versions are at [A Community Garden Manifesto: The Contributing Gardens](#).

This website also has some of the key themes that emerged in our discussions. A complete set of themes is at [A Community Garden Manifesto](#). We'd like to get all the themes on PlaceStories but first we'd really like to know whether this would be useful to do - please email us and let us know what you think. Thanks. And enjoy!

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For more information, visit <http://www.communityeconomies.org/Resources/Community-Resources>.

**Where on earth is this project?**  
  
 Location: Newcastle, Australia

**Folks In This Project**  
 2 admins  
[browse](#) [map](#)

Figure 5: The Newcastle Community Garden Project, 2010  
 Source: <http://ps3beta.com/project/7733>, see also [A Community Gardening Manifesto](#); and [A Community Garden Manifesto: The Contributing Gardens](#).

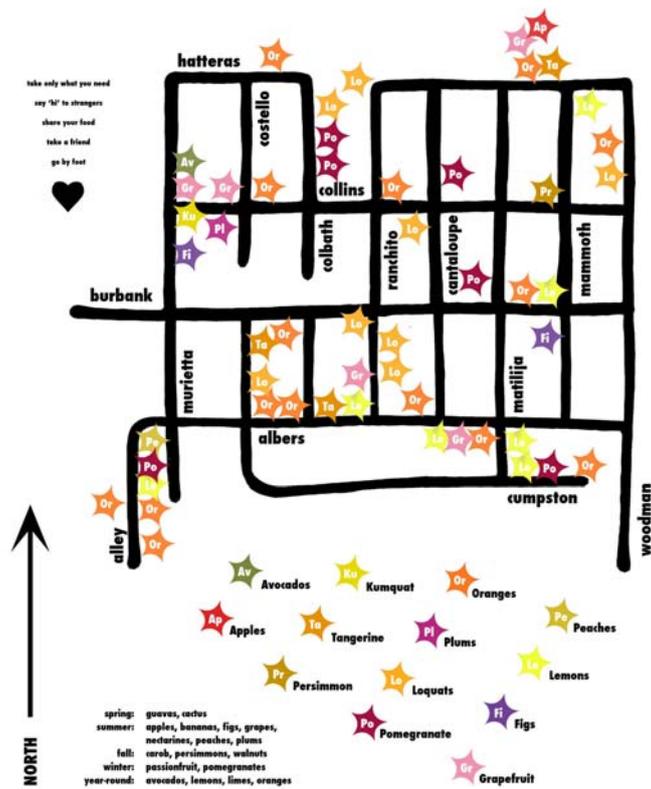


Figure 6: Fallen Fruit Food Map

Source: <http://www.fallenfruit.org/index.php/media/maps/>

<b>take only what you need</b>	<b>tome solo las que necesite</b>	<b>tag kun hvad du har brug for</b>
<b>say 'hi' to strangers</b>	<b>salude a los desconocidos</b>	<b>del din mad med andre</b>
<b>share your food</b>	<b>comparta con sus amigos</b>	<b>sig hej til fremmede</b>
<b>take a friend</b>	<b>invite a un amigo</b>	<b>tag en ven med</b>
<b>go by foot</b>		<b>gå til fods</b>
		

Figure 7: Fallen Fruit, Code of Conduct

Source: <http://www.fallenfruit.org/index.php/media/maps/>

- If we've got spare capacity, we could look at new ideas for taking back the food economy. While I'm a big believer in an assets or strengths based approach (which means supporting what we've already got),<sup>5</sup> there are a couple of ideas that I want to share, because I think they demonstrate just what is possible and what we can learn from people in other parts of the world who are similarly taking back the food economy and developing diverse economic practices. **Neighbourhood Supported Agriculture** is a model being developed in Boulder Colorado, where local farmers use the front and backyards of willing residents to produce food that is shared between both parties (see [www.communityrootsboulder.com/](http://www.communityrootsboulder.com/)). Once farmers' and residents' needs have been met, surplus produce is sold through the farmers' market or given to other families in need. This initiative also has an apprenticeship program to train budding urban farmers to use their own or others' gardens for food production.

A similar program in the UK called **Landshare** connects people who want to grow food with landowners willing to donate spare land for cultivation (<http://www.landshare.net/>). Landshare is thriving. Astonishingly, it only started in early 2009 and already has 56,000 people involved, and more than 3,000 acres (or over 1,200 hectares) of land being shared in all parts of the UK (see also the discussion above about SharedEarth, p. 9).

Working at a very different scale and over a different time period, **Alter Trade Japan** was formed in 1989 to link consumer cooperatives in Japan with small-scale banana growers and traditional dark sugar producers in the Philippines, particularly in Negros Island. Since then ATJ has expanded into fair trade coffee, and trade with a cooperative of traditional salt makers in France (who are working to protect marshlands); Palestinian Olive Oil producers, and traditional extensive (as opposed to intensive) shrimp farmers in Indonesia. It's worth looking at the aspirations of ATJ, as outlined in Figure 8 (overleaf).

In terms of fair trade, it's worth taking note of the Fairtrade Towns initiative. The town of Garstang in Lancashire, Northern England became the world's first Fairtrade Town in 2000 by meeting five criteria set by the Fairtrade Foundation (see Figure 9, overleaf). To meet these criteria, local councils as well as local businesses need to be involved. While fair trade links consumers primarily in the minority world with producers in the majority world, Garstang's fair trade status was only achieved because the town worked with local-regional producers to simultaneously promote produce grown closer to home. As Morgan et al. identify 'the [fair trade] campaign to highlight the plight of primary producers abroad resonated with the campaign to help primary producers at home' (2008, p. 174-6). There are now over 800 Fairtrade Towns, mainly in Europe and North America (see [www.fairtradetowns.org/](http://www.fairtradetowns.org/)).

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<sup>5</sup> For more on an assets based approach (and diverse economies) see Cameron & Gibson 2008.

## What is Alter Trade Japan (ATJ)

Alter Trade Japan (ATJ) trades food-stuffs including bananas, coffee and so on. Today, our daily life including diet is closely connected with occupations and living of all people in the world. And yet, the trade as a whole is controlled by a few international institutions and corporations. ATJ was established by consumers' cooperatives, groups for direct trade between producers and consumers, citizens' organizations, aiming to a system and relationship different from the current one, an alternative society through trading that connect communities of production and of consumption.

Through its activities, ATJ

- 1) supports small producers growing crops suited to local climate within their community.
- 2) trades good food, safe for both producers and consumers, and non-destructive to environment.
- 3) offers the space for "encounter" beyond borders, aside from trading. Producers and consumers meet and support each other as human beings through trading of food stuffs.

With economic activities of grass-roots, ATJ aims to build a system which allows everybody can choose his/her lifestyle and living in the community. In an alternative society we wish to build, everybody would live together peacefully on this planet.

**Figure 8: The Aspirations of Alter Trade Japan**

Source: [http://www.altertrade.co.jp/english/01/01\\_01\\_e.html](http://www.altertrade.co.jp/english/01/01_01_e.html)

The screenshot shows the 'Fairtrade Towns' website. At the top, there is a search bar with the text 'Enter keyword(s)' and a 'Search' button. Below the search bar, the main navigation menu includes 'Home', 'About', and 'The Five Goals'. A 'Print page' icon is also visible. A callout box on the right states '795 Fairtrade Town campaigns in 18 countries'. The main content area is titled 'The Five Goals' and includes a sub-header 'The core Five Goals are:'. Below this, there are five numbered points: 1. Local council passes a resolution supporting Fairtrade, and agrees to serve Fairtrade products (for example, in meetings, offices and canteens). 2. A range of Fairtrade products are available locally (targets vary from country to country). 3. Schools, workplaces, places of worship and community organisations support Fairtrade and use Fairtrade products whenever possible. 4. Media coverage and events raise awareness and understanding of Fairtrade across the community. 5. A Fairtrade steering group representing different sectors is formed to co-ordinate action around the goals and develop them over the years. The footer contains 'AROUND THE WORLD' with a description of Fairtrade Towns as a unique peoples' movement across 18 countries, a 'FIND OUT MORE HERE' link, and a list of navigation links: 'About', 'Take Part', 'Resources', 'News & Events', 'Contact Us', 'Terms & conditions', and 'Sitemap'. There are also logos for Fairtrade and the European Union, and a note that the website is part of the Fairtrade Towns in Europe Project, co-financed by the European Union and managed by the Fairtrade Foundation, Max Havelaar France and Max Havelaar Belgium. The footer also mentions 'Web Design & Development by Reading Room'.

**Figure 9: The 5 Criteria for Fairtrade Towns**

Source:

[http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get\\_involved/campaigns/fairtrade\\_towns/the\\_5\\_goals.aspx](http://www.fairtrade.org.uk/get_involved/campaigns/fairtrade_towns/the_5_goals.aspx)

Neighbourhood Supported Agriculture and Landshare; Alter Trade Japan and Fairtrade towns are only four projects out of an immense field of possible projects that I could select from, but they give us a taste of the different sorts of food initiatives that people are working on in different parts of the diverse food economy. Importantly these initiatives link people together—whether farmers and residents in Boulder, growers and land holders in the UK, Japanese consumers and food producers in very different parts of the globe; or minority world consumers and majority world producers.

To return to our starting point and Cribb's list of actions that we can take to avert what he believes will be a future food crisis, we can see how the Diverse Economies Framework adds an extra dimension. Cribb's actions are primarily focused on the things that individuals can do to change their consumption practices. While this is important, when we use the Diverse Economies Framework to start looking for initiatives both in our backyard (Newcastle) and in other parts of Australia and overseas suddenly a whole array of imaginative and creative initiatives spring into view—initiatives that take us well beyond a focus on individual actions in the area of consumption. We find people working together to develop innovative ways of producing and sharing food that connect different groups in the food economy. Importantly, these innovations are underpinned by ethical commitments to building a better social and environmental world for humans and earth others. When we start telling these narratives of people and environment centred economies, it becomes clear that there is not one lone hummingbird hard at work but there are flocks of hummingbirds who are taking back the economy by working together in exciting and innovative ways.

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