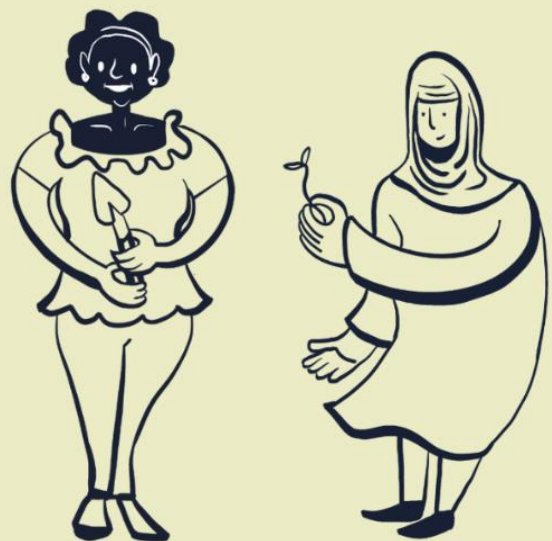




Louth Urban Food
SANCTUARY
Evaluation Report



Comhairle Contae Lú
Louth County Council



centre for creativity and innovation

Clár Éire Ildánach
*Creative Ireland
Programme*



Creative
Climate Action

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Executive summary

Between September 2022 and March 2023, representatives from Louth County Council's (LCC) climate, arts, heritage, and community sections convened to explore ideas for a Creative Climate Action project. These discussions were inspired by the diverse species of migratory birds now settling in the northeast of Ireland during summer months, a phenomenon linked to warmer climate conditions. Additionally, with non-Irish citizens making up 11% of Louth's population, the team identified an opportunity to celebrate the county's growing multiculturalism. They proposed exploring the feasibility of cultivating crops not traditionally grown in Ireland, testing whether these could thrive in Louth's changing climate. These conversations ultimately gave rise to the concept of the Louth Urban Food Sanctuary (LUFS) project.

The team approached Creative Spark and Dundalk Institute of Technology (DkIT) as potential partners on the project, and they were both eager to become involved. The project idea developed, and it was decided to engage local community gardens and growers and, on a larger scale, a commercial farmer, to trial-grow a selection of produce and propose ways that growers in Louth could embrace new measures to promote food sustainability in the region.

The project team initially comprised staff from LCC, lecturers from DkIT, and members of the Creative Spark team. As the project evolved, the team had the privilege of connecting with local experts who brought their enthusiasm and expertise to the LUFS initiative. These included organic gardener Roisin Cotter, Pamela Whitaker of Groundswell, and local artist and graphic designer Eimear McNally.

The key aims for the team were to promote food sustainability, explore possible measures to mitigate climate change impact on food consumption and engage the local community in events that increased awareness of regional climate change and issues threatening local biodiversity. As the only local authority to lead a Creative Climate Action Spark project, LCC was keen to highlight the crucial role of community gardens and growers—not only in supporting local food production but also as a powerful tool for fostering community integration and collaboration.



Background

Louth Urban Food Sanctuary (LUFS) was a Creative Climate Action project that explored the concept of local food resilience and cultivation as a potential climate change mitigation action. The project was funded through the national Creative Climate Action Spark II Fund, an initiative administered by the Creative Ireland Programme, and was led by LCC in partnership with Creative Spark.

With the region experiencing increasingly warmer climates, alongside critical factors like food miles and waste, food sustainability emerged as the central theme of the LUFS project. The team was inspired by the decreasing variety of crop options available to consumers—many of which are routinely imported into Ireland—and set out to explore two key ideas: cultivating Irish heritage crops sourced from Irish Seed Savers (ISS) and experimenting with growing non-traditional crops to determine their viability in the region's warming climate. Community gardens across the county and a group of individual backyard gardeners undertook trial-growing a selection of produce chosen by the LUFS team. The project was further strengthened by the invaluable support of local tillage farmer Tony McGuinness, who agreed to trial-grow several crops on a larger scale at his commercial farm.

From the launch event in October 2023 to the end of the project in 2024 the team engaged with a total of four community gardens in the county, as well as six individual backyard gardeners. Through a series of engaging workshops, food-themed events, and climate-focused talks, the team connected with the public to share practical ways to combat climate change through small, sustainable actions. These included seed saving, backyard gardening, and climate-conscious garden planning.



Illustrative aluminium board designed by Eimear McNally for display at Blackrock Community Garden

The LUFs team selected the crops which would be grown by the community gardens and growers, and a separate selection of crops was designated to the commercial farmer. In consultation with members of the migrant communities, the team tried to source purple sweet potatoes and ugu seeds (a vine plant native to Western Africa). Unfortunately, these seeds could not be sourced for export to Ireland. However, alternative suggestions from the migrant communities—such as chili peppers, ginger, and turmeric—were more readily available and were successfully included in the list of trial crops.

The commercial farmer sourced his own seeds, and the seeds for the community and back-garden growers were procured from ISS, Fruithill Farm and local organic suppliers. A selection of companion plants were also supplied to the growers including nasturtium, sunflower and calendula to promote crop pollination and the commercial farmer planted phacelia around the perimeter of his crops. Each grower and garden received a growing pack with the selection of seeds and companion plants at the LUFs Seed Day event.

Across several LUFs events, some growers engaged in seedling and plant exchanges of additional crops to grow alongside the LUFs produce.



Community Gardens and Back Garden Growers	Commercial Farmer
Tatsoi Pac Choi	Sunflower
Organic Ginger	Red Millet
Organic Turmeric	White Millet
Daniel O'Rourke Pea (Heritage)	Quinoa
Sweet Potato	Sweetcorn
Chili Pepper (De Cayene)	Linseed
Chili Pepper (Habanero)	Pea
Garlic	
Squash (Crown Prince)	

Table 1 Index of selected crops for the LUFs Project

The LUFs website, www.louthurbanfoodsantuary.com, was developed as an information outlet where tutorials could be uploaded and the site acted as a source of information on project events, workshops, photographs and growing tips for the community.

The key aims for the project were to:

- Empower people living in Louth with the skills to develop local food resilience by demonstrating and promoting the importance of micro-geographic food security
- Encourage people to consider factors such as food miles when procuring food and consider locally grown options
- Engage people in the topic of food and the changing diet of our region propelled by an increasingly warmer climate and cultural integration
- Embrace new communities and cultures living in our area by sharing knowledge, experience and food

- Highlight the importance of the role of community gardens to the community and the local authority's role in supporting their work



LUFS Team

Louth County Council

- Moya Rodgers, Creative Ireland Coordinator & Project Co-Lead
- Dr. Rory Sheehan, Climate Action Co-Ordinator & Project Co-Lead
- Melissa Hayes, Creative Communities Engagement Officer & Admin Support
- Brendan McSherry, Heritage Officer
- Fiona Lennon, Community Climate Action Officer

Creative Spark

- Gary Clark/Ciara Breen, Project Managers, Creative Spark
- Sarah Daly, Executive Director, Creative Spark

Facilitators

- Roisín Cotter, Organic Gardener
- Dr. Pamela Whitaker, Art Therapist & Founder of Groundswell
- Eimear McNally, Artist and Graphic Designer

Commercial farmer

- Tony McGuinness, commercial farmer

DKIT (Dundalk Institute of Technology)

- Dr. Siobhan Jordan, Head of Agri, Food & Animal Health
- Dr. Kevin Burns, Head of Hospitality
- Fiachra O'Cuinneagain, Assistant Lecturer, Dept. of Creative Arts, Media & Music
- Liz Murray, Lecturer, Department of Hospitality Studies

Community gardens/allotments:

- Blackrock Community Garden (led by Eileen Carter)
- Tallanstown Community Garden (led by Margaret and Richard Barry)
- D.I.G. (Dundalk Inclusive Garden) (led by Lara Schmit)
- Drogheda Allotments (led by Tony Conaghy)

Individual Growers:

- Máire Larney
- Petra Berntsson
- Pauline Caffery
- Ann Cleary
- Peter Dorman
- Clodagh McGreehan



Members of the LUFS team: From L to R – Pamela Whitaker, Roisín Cotter, Melissa Hayes, Moya Hodgers, Rory Sheehan, Fiona Lennon, Gary Clarke, Eimear McNally & Sarah Daly



Key project outputs

Project events and engagement

The LUFS project delivered **seven food-themed events** that brought together over **600 participants** to learn about the LUFS project, share recipes and tips, and taste foods prepared by representatives of community gardens and migrant communities living in County Louth. These homemade foods contained ingredients that were grown in the gardens of the project growers and included delicacies such as lavender-lemon cake, rosemary bread and tomato focaccia. Cordials were also made using fruits and herbs grown locally. Members of Tallanstown Community Garden from the Indian, Ukrainian, Moldovan, Afghani and Irish communities brought traditional foods to a harvest-themed event led by Pamela Whitaker which was held during a series of workshops celebrating Heritage Week. Recipe booklets that were designed by Eimear McNally were given to event attendees. At all the food-themed events, community tables showcasing foods and recipes formed a focal point to draw people

in, promoting the sense of community and encouraging conversation and engagement with the LUFS project.



Tallanstown Community Garden Harvest Event

Over the course of the project, a total of **12 talks/tutorials** were given on topics related to growing that included garlic planting, native species, seed-saving, rainfall and invasive species. The aim of these events was to educate both experienced and aspiring growers on key considerations for cultivating different crop varieties and the potential impact of climate change on the present and future of biodiversity and sustainable crop growth in Ireland.

The LUFS project took part in the **Earth Rising Festival**, the annual Climate Action event at the Irish Museum of Modern Art. Although the project was allocated only a short slot, it was an opportunity to showcase the LUFS project at a prolific national event. Roisín Cotter, the LUFS organic gardener, showcased the ginger and turmeric plants she successfully cultivated as part of the project, inspiring members of the public to try growing these crops themselves. She also introduced the concept of edible houseplants, highlighting the striking foliage of these plants and demonstrating how they can serve both as decorative indoor greenery and a source of fresh, homegrown ingredients.

Members of the team participated in a programme of events, training and networking opportunities provided by Creative Ireland including the **Sparks Residential** event in Borris House, Co. Carlow in November 2023 and the **Creative Climate Action Conference** in the Aviva Stadium in October 2024. These events were useful opportunities to learn about other Creative Climate Action projects and promote the LUFS project.

The project hosted a total of **20 in-person events and talks** including the launch and closing events across the 15 months of the project lifespan, with a total of **2,134 people combined attending the events**. **Four community gardens** participated in the project with a total of **43 growers** among them, as well as **six individual growers and one commercial farmer**.

A **strong network of community and back garden growers** has developed from the project. The group has created a WhatsApp forum to share learnings and insights and are very keen to keep in touch after the project, with plans to form a more formalised community group.

Reception to the project was universally positive. The project and its events were promoted in three regional papers and several members of the team gave interviews on both Dundalk FM and LMFM throughout the project promoting various events and learnings. Social media posts were instrumental in promoting the project, workshops and events. Across both the Creative

Ireland Louth Instagram and Facebook page, the project achieved a **total reach of 14,937 with 18,186 impressions on Louth Urban Food Sanctuary posts**. Project-related posts reached an average of 16-22% of non-followers and generated over 794 interactions through likes, shares, views and comments.

The LUFS website launched at the end of 2023 and it was used as an information hub and forum for promoting the project. Throughout 2024 there were **922 visitors to the site and 2,552 views**. The peak times for traffic were from March to May when the seed saving and information events were advertised and posted, and from August to September through traffic from content related to Heritage week and Culture Night events

The LUFS project has enabled **stronger relationships between DkIT and LCC**. The various departments at DkIT provided valuable supports to the project such as the media students' filming of Tony's farm visit and the culinary arts students' creation of recipes and a range of delicious foods for sampling at our events, showcasing the produce grown in the LUFS project.

Project Resources

As this was a Creative Climate Action project, the team strived to develop creative strategies for communicating the central messages of the project to the public. The graphic designer and artist on the project, Eimear McNally, designed a **branding pack** for the project that was used for all event promotional materials, resources and social media posts.

The LUFS website was developed into a learning resource for growers. Tutorials on planting the produce grown over the course of the project are available through the website in addition to useful information aimed at encouraging people to embrace growing vegetables from home. Additionally, information is also available on community gardens across the county as well as a gallery of photographs from various events held during the lifetime of the LUFS project.

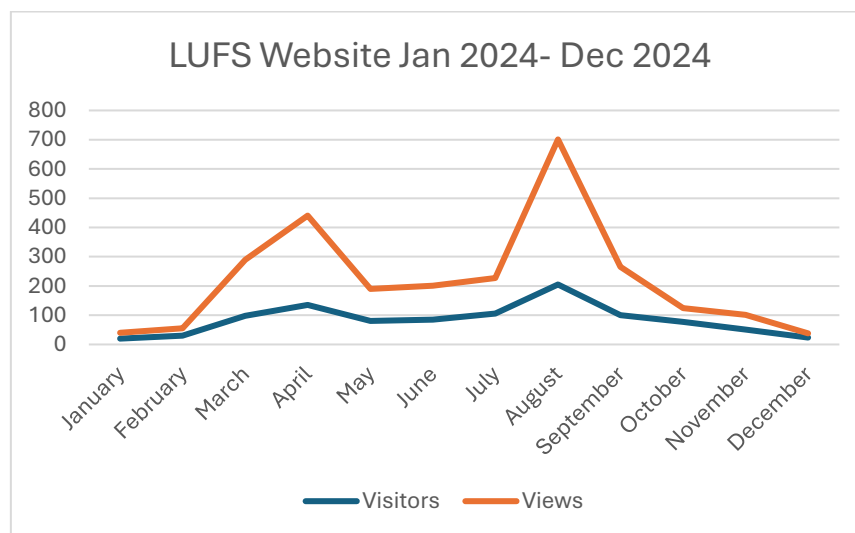


Figure 1 Traffic to the LUFS website

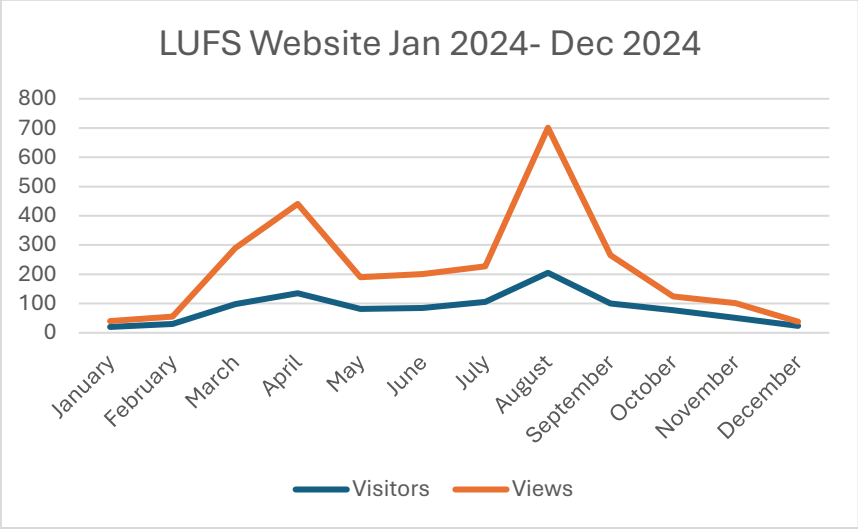


Figure 2 Traffic to the LUFS website

Search engine traffic data analysis showed that 267 of the 922 visitors came directly from searching for the name of the project on various platforms, with Google being the most prolific source of referrals.

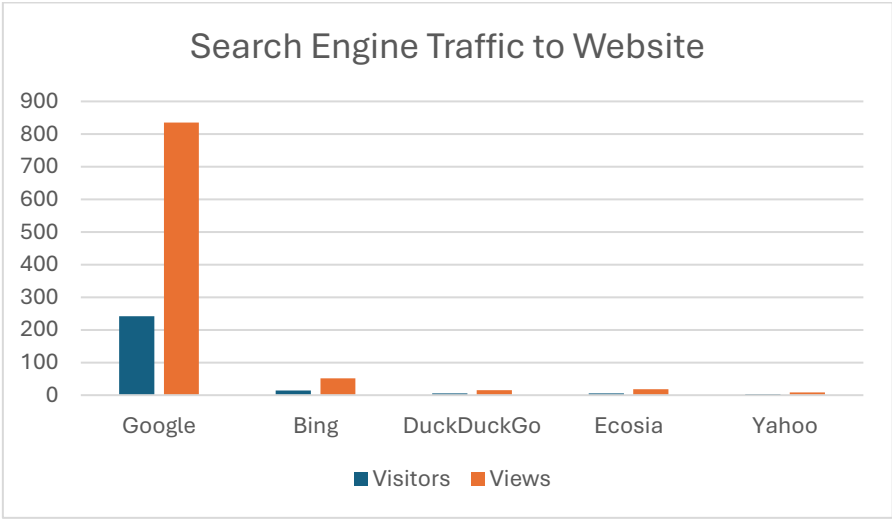


Figure 3 Search engine referrals to LUFS website

Social media traffic analysis showed 46 of the 922 visitors came from social media referrals from views of content shared on Instagram and Facebook, with Facebook being the most popular referral platform.



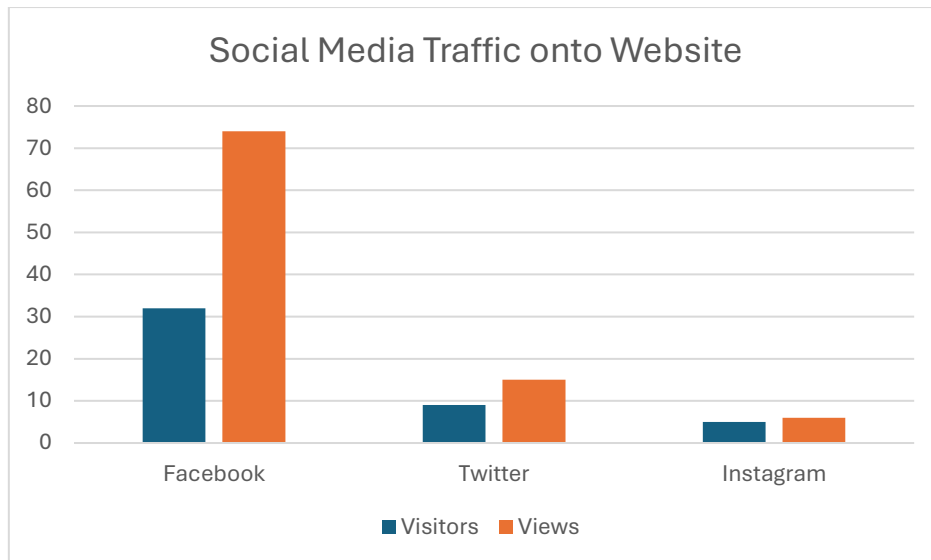
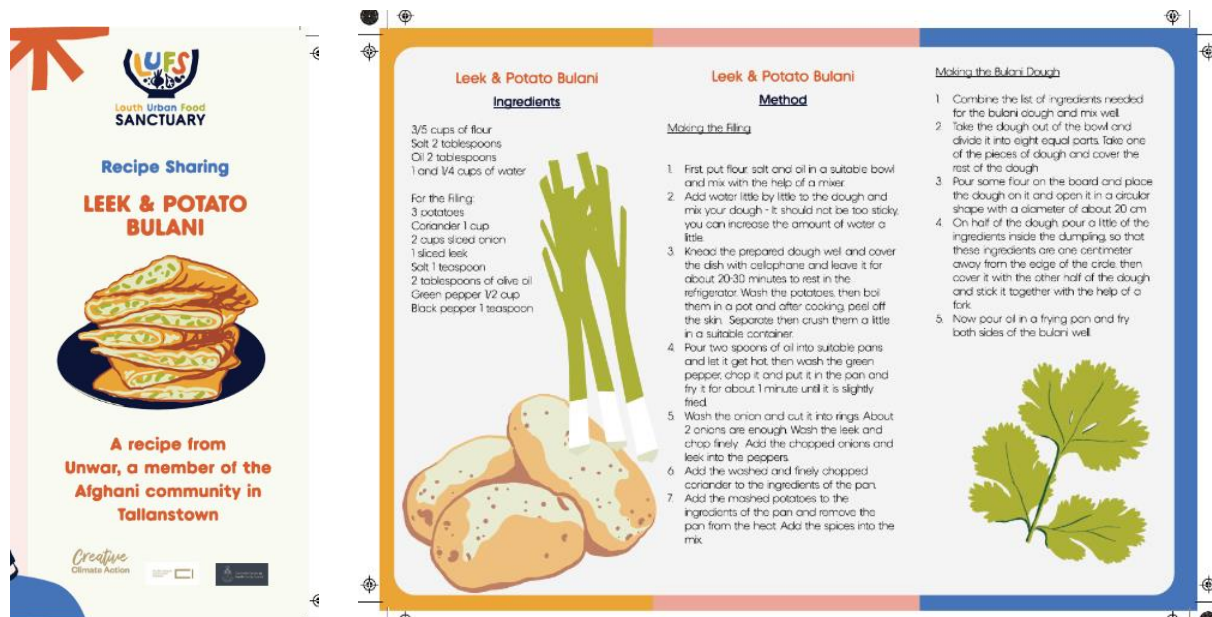


Figure 4 Social media referrals to LUFS website

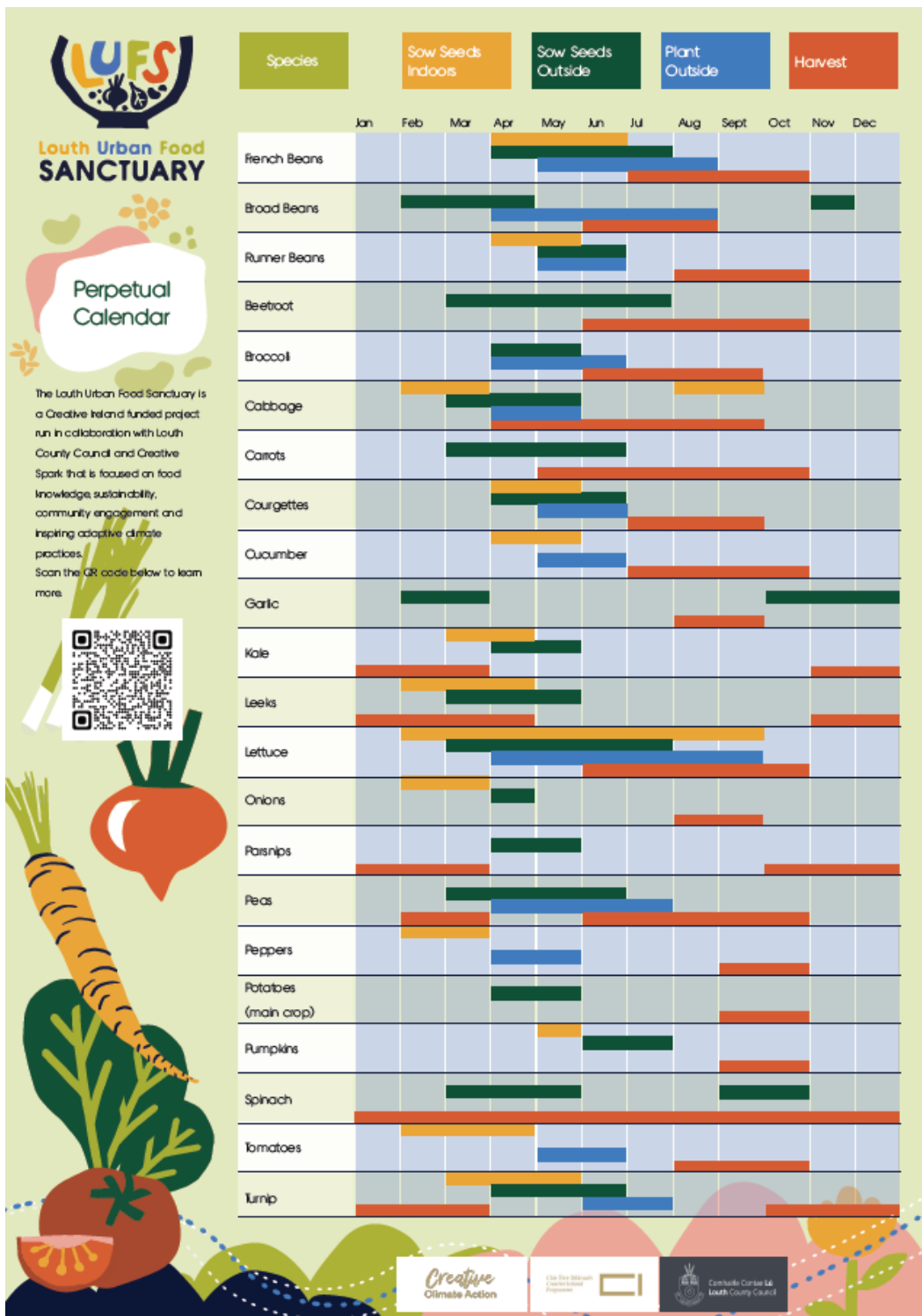
Recipe leaflets, designed by Eimear McNally, were created from recipes submitted from members of Tallanstown Community Garden who come from a variety of countries including Afghanistan, India, Moldova, Ukraine and Ireland. These recipe leaflets were given out at all the public engagement events held over the course of the project.



Sample recipe pamphlet developed during the project designed by Eimear McNally

Eimear designed a **perpetual growing calendar** that illustrates the time of year a variety of crops can be planted and harvested. This calendar was disseminated at all LUFS events as well as through Louth Library Services across the county. The calendar provides clear, accessible growing instructions for members of the public interested in starting their own crop cultivation.

LUFS Growing Calendar



LUFS Perpetual Calendar

Additional funding was awarded from Creative Ireland to develop an **LUFS project handbook** that includes recipes from culinary arts students at DkIT and recipes provided by members of the multicultural community gardens who took part in the project. The book also includes tips on planting climate-resilient gardens, the perpetual growing calendar, a map of community gardens in County Louth as well as an index of local producers.

Local Authority impact

The project has fostered strong interdepartmental connections between the climate section, parks and outdoor section, arts office, libraries, integration team and heritage office of LCC and provided opportunity for team members to learn more about the work of various offices. For example, the LUFSS project availed of the opportunity to provide information on heritage crops and native plants at events during Heritage Week via a series of workshops held across the county. Additionally, the integration team has expressed interest in partnering with Tallanstown community garden on a project that showcases the positive impact of community initiatives, such as community gardens, on fostering integration.

The learnings from the LUFSS project are informing the planned **Allotments and Community Gardens Strategy** for Louth, which is currently under development. The LUFSS project has also been instrumental in informing the **LCC Climate Action Plan 2024-2029**, including the use of arts and creativity to inspire behavioural and attitudinal change.

Commitment has been secured by LCC to fund **three new community gardens** in Louth on foot of the success of the project and overwhelming demand for more community facilities that can be used for collaborative growing. The project acted as the genesis for the development of a **Community Gardens and Allotments issues paper** under the previous LCC Climate and Energy Strategic Policy Committee. Both the climate and Creative Ireland sections of LCC have committed to providing continued support to the LUFSS growers by facilitating meetings and signposting the group to funding opportunities that may assist the development of gardens and related community projects. LCC will also facilitate contact between members of existing community gardens and members of the new community gardens under development over the next 12-18 months.

Crop growth

Data gathered from surveys issued to the project growers outlines the varieties of produce grown by each grower/community garden and the success of crop growth for each seed type. Not all growers were able to attempt every crop in the seed pack due to limitations in space or the availability of resources such as greenhouses or polytunnels.

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Calendula	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well
Organic Ginger	Indoors/ Greenhouse	Mar	Limited Growth
Organic Turmeric	Indoors/Greenhouse	Mar	Limited Growth
Daniel O'Rourke Pea (Heritage)	Outdoors	Apr	Grew very well
Sweet Potato	Greenhouse	May	Limited Growth
Chili Pepper (De Cayene)	Greenhouse	Mar	Grew well
Squash (Crown Prince)	Greenhouse	Jun	Perished
Pac Choi	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well but perished later from overwatering

Table 2 LUFSS Grower 1 Data

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Garlic	Outdoors	Nov	Grew well
Organic Ginger	Greenhouse	Mar	Slow growth
Organic Turmeric	Indoors	Mar	No data
Daniel O'Rourke Pea (Heritage)	Indoors, Sown outdoors	Mar	Grew well
Nasturtium	Outdoors	Jun	Grew well
Sunflower (McAnallen)	Outdoors	May	Grew well
Chili Pepper (Habanero)	Indoors	Mar	Grew well but didn't flower
Squash (Crown Prince)	Outdoors	Jul	Grew well
Pac Choi	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well, bolted later

Table 3 LUFS Grower 2 Data

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Chili Pepper (De Cayenne)	Greenhouse	Mar	Grew well
Organic Ginger	Greenhouse	Mar	Slow growth
Squash (Crown Prince)	Outdoors	Apr	Grew well
Daniel O'Rourke Pea (Heritage)	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well

Table 4 LUFS Grower 3 Data

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Sweet Potato	Greenhouse	Jun	Grew well
Organic Ginger	Greenhouse	Mar	Slow growth
Daniel O'Rourke Pea (Heritage)	Indoors, Sown outdoors	Mar	Grew well
French Beans	Outdoors	Apr	Grew well
Tomatoes (Beefsteak)	Greenhouse	Apr	Grew well
Chili Pepper (Habanero)	Indoors	Mar	Grew well but impacted by weather
Chard	Outdoors	Aug	Grew well

Table 5 LUFS Grower 4 Data

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Garlic	Outdoors	Oct	Grew well
Calendula	Polytunnel	Apr	Grew well
Organic Turmeric	Polytunnel, indoors	Mar	Did not grow well
Daniel O'Rourke Pea (Heritage)	Polytunnel	Mar	Grew well
Organic Ginger	Polytunnel	Mar	Perished
Sunflower (Mc Anallen)	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well
Chili Pepper (De Cayenne)	Indoors	Mar	Grew well
Squash (Crown Prince)	Outdoors	Apr	Slow growth
Tomato	Polytunnel	Mar	Grew well
Sweet Potato	Polytunnel	May	Slow growth

Table 6 LUFSS Grower 5 Data

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Garlic	Polytunnel	Nov	Grew well
Calendula	Outdoors	Apr	Grew well
Organic Turmeric	Indoors	Mar	Grew well
Daniel O'Rourke Pea (Heritage)	Polytunnel	Mar	Grew well
Organic Ginger	Indoor	Mar	Grew well
Sunflower (Mc Anallen)	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well
Chili Pepper (De Cayenne)	Polytunnel	Mar	Grew well
Squash (Crown Prince)	Outdoors	Apr	Grew well but eaten by sheep
Nasturtium	Outdoors	Apr	Grew well
Pac Choi	Polytunnel	Apr	Did not grow well, bolted
Sweet Potato	Polytunnel	May	Grew well

Table 7 LUFSS Grower 6 Data

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Organic Turmeric	Polytunnel	Mar	Slow growth
Organic Ginger	Polytunnel	Mar	Slow growth
Peas (Daniel O'Rourke)	Outdoors	Apr	Grew well
Sweet Potato	Polytunnel	Jul	Slow growth

Table 8 LUFSS Grower 7 Data

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Peas (Daniel O'Rourke)	Outdoors	May	Grew well
Chili Pepper (De Cayenne)	Outdoors	May	Did not grow well
Tomato	Outdoors	June	Grew well
Green Beans	Outdoors	May	Grew well
Organic Turmeric	Outdoors	May	Slow growth
Organic Ginger	Outdoors	May	Slow growth
Melon	Outdoors	May	Slow growth

Table 9 LUFS Grower 8 Data

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Organic Ginger	Polytunnel	March	Slow growth
Garlic	Outdoors/Polytunnel	July	Grew well
Pac Choi	Polytunnel	May	Grew well but eaten by slugs and later crop bolted
Peas (Daniel O'Rourke)	Polytunnel	April	Grew well
Sweet Potato	Polytunnel	May	Slow growth
Squash (Crown Prince)	Indoors	April	Did not grow
Chili Pepper (De Cayenne)	Indoors	April	Grew well
Organic Turmeric	Polytunnel	March	Slow growth

Table 10 LUFS Grower 9 Data

Crop	Where Grown	Month Planted	Growth
Sunflower	Outdoors	May	Grew well
Red Millet	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well
White Millet	Outdoors	Mar	Did not grow well
Quinoa	Outdoors	Mar	Did not grow well
Pea	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well
Sweetcorn	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well
Linseed	Outdoors	Mar	Grew well

Table 11 LUFS Commercial Farmer Data

Project learnings

Much of the learning from this project stemmed from the direct experience of the growers and commercial farmer. Overall, the project evolved in more ways than the team had originally envisaged when applying for the Creative Climate Action funding. The team adopted early learnings and public feedback to steer the project. Variables such as lower-than-average temperature during the growing season of 2024, heavy rainfall and availability of resources such as polytunnels etc impacted which crops grew successfully for each grower.

Without the benefit of poly tunnels or green houses our climate in 2024 favoured mostly traditional, native Irish food crops - it was cold and wet. Next year may be different therefore it might be worthwhile extending the project for another year or two to see if this type of climate is what to expect in Ireland with climate change. It may be the case that our summers especially will be wetter and cooler in which case, without the funds and resources for growers to invest in poly tunnels and greenhouses, there isn't much point in trying to grow ginger, turmeric, tomatoes, chillies etc irrespective of what they cost to import (and in air miles). We may have no option but to stay with growing food suitable for the current Irish climate as this may be the future. – Grower 5

Growers communicated their challenges and experiences to each other to enable them to share tips on growing conditions, soil, temperature, pest control and weed control. The team anticipated that unpredictable factors such as temperature and weather would impact on the success of growth for certain crops, particularly those that are typically grown in warmer climates.

70% of growers said they would consider growing varieties of the produce grown from the project again. Daniel O'Rourke peas, Crown Prince squash, ginger and chilli peppers were identified as the most popular crops to re-trial in the future by the project participants. Many of the growers cited the wet weather during the spring-summer season of 2024 as a factor hindering crop growth, and suggested a warmer, dryer growing season could yield different outcomes in 2025 if they tried to grow the same produce again. The feedback from growers indicates that overall, they enjoyed the challenge of trying to grow new crops.

Being part of of LUFs has enabled me to grow a number of foods for the first time – Pak Choi, Turmeric, Sweet Potatoes – Grower 5

“Have I tried something new? Yes, I tried the ginger turmeric and sweet potato. I will try to develop my expertise in growing these plants. I think in terms of the original aim of testing plants that we don't normally grow here but may be able to in the future with climate change was probably not the strongest outcome. But to me it gave a focus to us networking, a connection with experts on growing and on climate change, access to sites I wouldn't normally see and a strong networking vehicle. I think the initiative has great potential and should be seen as a seed for future programmes. Thank you – Grower 3

The growth success rate for each crop varied with approximately 60% of each trial crop growing. Growers adapted to challenges imposed by colder weather by moving heat-thriving plants indoors to a warmer, dryer environment. However, some growers reported that some

crops perished as they were moved to a warmer environment as they had suffered too much damage from the elements.

Plant growth in crops typical to warmer climates

The data from the growers in relation to chili pepper, sweet potato, ginger and turmeric suggests that these crops can be grown in Ireland. However, as many of the growers reported having to move the crops to a warmer indoor location from outdoor facilities, it may be difficult to grow these crops on a larger scale in our current climate conditions, even in polytunnels or greenhouses.

Organic ginger and turmeric

100% of the community gardeners trialled growing organic ginger. Although most growers cited success in trialling this crop, with only one participant's crop perishing, 77% of growers experienced a very slow growth in the crop, with several growers stating that they moved the plant to an indoor location such as a sunroom to promote faster growth.

My ginger did very well. The plant I grew in my sunroom grew very big. The plant in the tunnel in a pot not so big – Grower 5

77.7% of growers trialled growing the organic turmeric. 57% experienced slow growth in this crop.

Started in house and moved to the greenhouse. Looks OK but hasn't flowered. Very slow to mature – Grower 1



Turmeric Growth – Grower 6

Chili pepper and sweet potato

88% of growers trialled growing chili peppers, with 87.5% of these growers reporting that their chili peppers grew very well, with only one participant reporting that their plant did not thrive.



Chilis – Grower 3

66.6% of growers trialled sweet potato, and 66.6% of these growers reported slow growth in this crop, with the remainder saying that the crop grew well.

Planted 3 in a potato grow bag and inserted bamboo canes in wigwam form. Lots of growth climbing up to the top. – Grower 4

Plant growth in Irish heritage crops

The results from growing Irish heritage crops sourced from ISS were overwhelmingly positive. Daniel O'Rourke pea and McAnallen sunflower were the two Irish heritage seed varieties trialled by the growers. All growers who trialled either crop reported good growth in plants. This data suggests that Irish heritage varieties thrive in current climate conditions and are worth growing on a larger scale. As these varieties were grown from heirloom, organic, open-pollinated seeds, there are additional advantages to growing these two crops such as the opportunity to save seeds for replanting year on year.

Peas

100% of project growers trialled growing Daniel O'Rourke peas and all participants reported that this crop grew well or very well, though some participants noted that growing the crop outdoors without a polytunnel or other protection resulted in the peas being eaten by birds.

Outdoor crop eaten by pigeons. Tunnel crop was plentiful and so tasty. – Grower 7

Grew fine – would grow again. – Grower 3

Great crop and tasty. Grew very tall and did not have enough support. Need longer and stronger support next year. – Grower 4



Pea Growth – Grower 5

Sunflowers

33.3% of growers trialled McAnallen sunflowers as a companion plant, and all the growers who planted these seeds reported that this variety grew very well.

Excellent flower and all-round plant for biodiversity. Petals and leaves are edible – Grower 5

These were great, grew very well outside – Grower 6

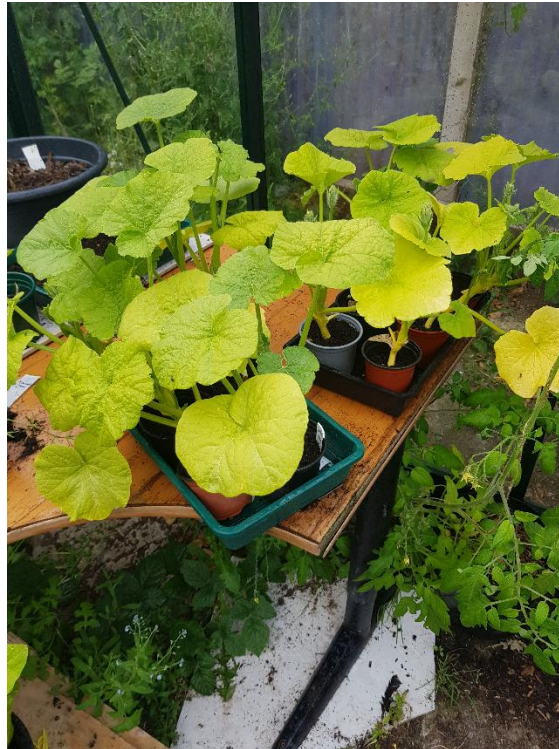
Plant growth in other crops

Other types of produce were also trialled as part of the LUFFS project such as Crown Prince squash, Tatsoi pac choi and organic garlic, as well as plants which were exchanged by growers at events such as melon, chard and tomato. The results from growing the squash and garlic were very positive overall suggesting that it would be worthwhile growing these crops again. However, the growers who grew Tat Soi pac choi from ISS reported that it did not yield very promising results, and the majority reported that the crop bolted (reached maturity and produced seed) very early on into growth.

Crown Prince squash

66.6% of growers trialled growing Crown Prince squash and 50% of these growers reported that this variety grew well. One grower reported that the crop perished and another reported poor growth in the crop that produced smaller fruit than previous years.

Very slow to get going this year due to poor weather. I have some nice squashes now but smaller than normal – Grower 5



Squash growth – Grower 1

Organic garlic

44% of project growers trialled growing organic garlic, with all these growers reporting that the crop grew well.

Grew really well in my tunnel at home and in the Marist School tunnel. Also does well outdoors – Grower 5

Pac choi

44% of project growers trialled growing pac choi, and of these, 75% reported that the crop had bolted prematurely, and the remaining 25% reported that the crop perished.

First planting outdoors devoured by slugs. Second planting (tunnel) went to seed (June) – Grower 4

Commercial farmer's feedback on crop growth

Tony McGuinness was enthusiastic from the inception of the LUFs project about trialling the growth of new crops. His farm, run by him and his brother, Pat, has been in his family for almost 100 years and they continuously seek new and innovative methods to evolve their farming practices to meet the challenges of the changing times.

Tony reported that the two most successful crops he grew as part of the project were sunflower and linseed. However, he discovered that the sunflower seed within the flowerheads did not develop into a viable seed to save for next year's planting due to lower-than-average temperatures during the growing season. Interestingly, the red millet he planted experienced good growth, while the white millet had very poor growth. The quinoa planted on the commercial farm also experienced poor growth. Tony suggested the average temperature

during the growing period being four to five degrees lower than previous years as a possible reason for the stunted growth of some produce.

Tony cited the main factors that impacted crop growth as soil temperature, weather and weed control techniques. He also stated that he would like to try growing the sweetcorn and red millet again, experimenting with growing conditions by planting them under bio-degradable plastic to encourage faster and more sustained growth in the crops.

Crop	Result
Sunflower	Grew well, but poor seed development
Red Millet	Grew well
White Millet	Did not grow well
Quinoa	Did Not grow well
Sweetcorn	Grew well
Linseed	Grew well
Pea	Grew well

Other project learnings

Grower network

The feedback from the surveys issued to project growers and the public has demonstrated that there is a strong interest in home growing and an appetite to continue to develop the network of growers that has formed as a result of the LUFFS project. LCC is committed to supporting future opportunities for this network of growers and will guide the group toward relevant funding opportunities.

Would be valuable to create a network of growers throughout the county, to build on work and experiences from the project and encourage more people to start growing some food. – Grower 8

Before this project I had zero connection with other growers. My hope is that this is the beginning of a growers network within the county. – Grower 4

I think it was a very rich project incorporating networking among growers, farmers, academics, artists and others. It was a rich tapestry. I enjoyed swapping ideas, plants and having access to expertise such as Roisin's gardening knowledge – Grower 1

The experiences of the growers in the project were interesting, but I feel that what happens next, when the project finishes will be the most important outcome of LUFFS.

Eg . Will we be able to form a Growers Network in the County and run more workshops to help people start growing? Can we encourage a culture of interest in where our food comes from and how it is grown in our county? We have like-minded groups around the county, who are interested in these things, in Cooley, Omeath, Dundalk, Drogheda, Blackrock, Tallanstown....How do we link them all up for the benefit of each of them? Maybe a network similar to the Tidy Towns Together might be an idea. The project has started more people talking about the issues and the final events will be a great opportunity to highlight these even more, but it would be a terrible shame if it all just ground to a halt after those events. We could also look at what other counties are doing to see if there is a good template we could adopt in Louth going forward. – Grower 5

Additionally, feedback from a targeted survey of growers and attendees that was distributed at LUFS events indicated that continuation of the grower network was the foremost post-project outcome that participants hoped would emerge from the LUFS project.

The project has demonstrated the importance of inter-departmental collaboration as the demand for more public gardening spaces identified through the LUFS project has led to the development of three new public gardens in North, Mid and South Louth over the next 12-18 months. The LUFS project has also served as a driving force for developing and implementing new policies that draw on the data generated by the project to advise the provision of more amenities for community growing and gardening.

Though the focus of the project was primarily on trial-growing crops as a means of researching regional food sustainability, the project, in hindsight, could have allocated more resources to developing what has now emerged as a strong and energetic cohort of community gardeners and individual growers. The support of this emerging network will now be a key area of priority for LCC in providing information on funding, particularly through the climate team, and in hosting events and providing information to other growers who are interested in joining this group.

Creative approaches

The use of creative approaches to communicate scientific information has proved very successful over the course of the project. For instance, the project engaged local artist Úna Curley to produce a climate stripes weave, based on the original concept by climate scientist Ed Hawkins at the University of Reading, by engaging members of the public at various events to weave a single stripe on a wooden frame, with each stripe representing average global yearly temperature from 1961 to 2010. This exercise encouraged the public to think about climate change through a participatory, visual activity, highlighting the success of creativity as a conduit to communicate complex scientific statistics.



Climate Weave in Bó Studios on Culture Night

A survey was shared after climate-themed events to gauge the understanding of the LUFS growers and members of the public who attended these events regarding climate change. 91% of those surveyed reported an increase in their understanding.

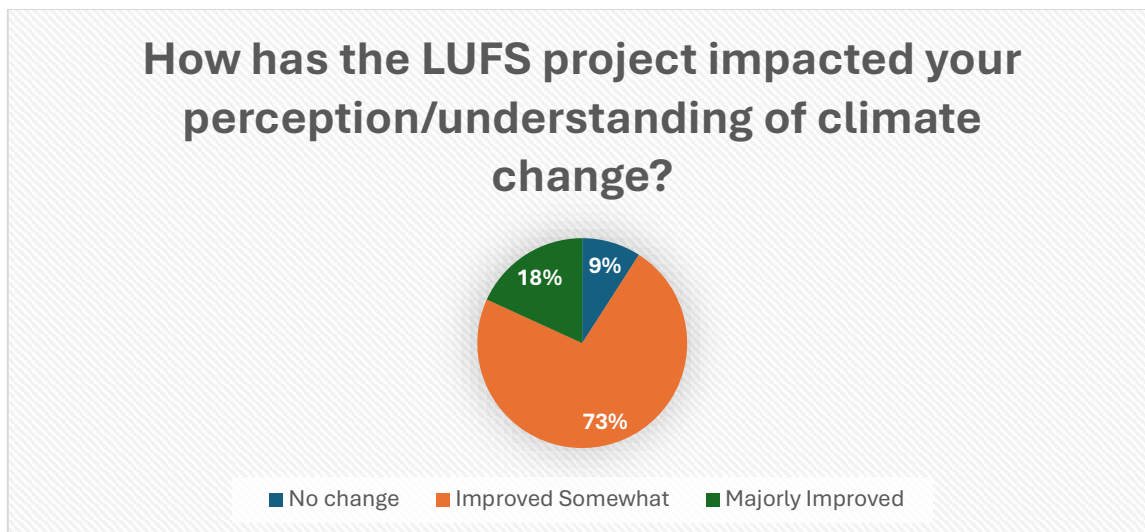


Figure 5 Understanding of climate change post LUFS events

Local producers

The desire to showcase local producers ranked highly with project participants in survey feedback. There is clear recognition amongst growers that local producers are key to helping address the current food crisis and should be afforded the opportunity to showcase their produce. The project team endeavoured to connect with local producers to highlight their work and the challenges they experience in an increasingly competitive market. For example, the team invited Maria Flynn of Ballymakenny Spud Shack to give a public talk on the variety of potatoes she grows with her husband on their farm. Maria highlighted the difficulties in competing with larger producers, particularly when faced with unforeseen challenges such as crop failure, Covid-19 etc. It was several such factors that inspired Maria to change from growing Rooster potato crop to lesser-known varieties that varied in colour, texture and taste. This subsequently attracted new customers to her business and ultimately led her to establish the Ballymakenny Spud Shack.

Indeed, among the LUFS growers, several gardeners showcased their produce at various events, gave insightful information on their involvement in local markets and shared knowledge on practices such as pickling for preserving vegetables and various methods of pest control such as the use of sheep's wool.





Maria Flynn of Ballymakenny Spud Shack giving a talk during Heritage Week

We really need a proper local food market in Dundalk. There used to be one in the library grounds years ago which was fantastic. It's impossible to get good quality organic produce, especially meat and fish, or low miles produce in the area." – Grower 2

Additionally, the growers stated in their survey feedback that visits to the commercial farm were very enjoyable and educational, and enabled them learn more about growing produce on a larger scale and the current challenges faced by farmers. Many of the growers specifically cited the events that took place on Tony McGuinness's farm as one of the main highlights of the LUFS project.

I really loved visiting Tony's farm because you're actually seeing what's happening 'on the farm' and listening to him was so interesting too, finding out what worked, why and what didn't work. – Grower 4

For me, the visit to Tonys Farm was the outstanding event so far, in terms of a learning experience. We don't really know the challenges that farmers are up against, and they generally get a negative press. It was very enlightening to see a field scale growing experiment at Tony's and to hear about the challenges that he and his family are facing into now with climate change, EU legislation, invasive weeds and so much more. – Grower 8

Any farm visit is a great learning opportunity. Farmers are really struggling with so many challenges now and the general public do not realise this. – Grower 3

The interest in Tony's farm was also evident on our social media platforms where 17% of total reach figures were generated from posts related to the commercial farm.



The commercial farm tour was one of the highlights of our project with brothers Tony and Pat McGuinness talking about their produce and the challenges faced by farmers today



Conclusion

LCC takes great pride in the LUFFS project and the significant achievements made throughout its duration. This initiative marked the first collaboration between the Climate and Culture teams, and it proved to be an invaluable learning experience for all involved. The success of using artists to capture and convey information, alongside partnerships with local community representatives, facilitators, educational hubs, and various departments within the Local Authority, has been deeply rewarding.

Feedback from the growers who participated in the project has been both insightful and overwhelmingly positive. LCC will leverage this feedback to inform future strategies and initiatives. As a direct outcome of this project, three new community gardens are already being

funded across the county, and there is a clear commitment to developing a comprehensive allotment and community garden strategy within the forthcoming LCC Climate Action Plan.

The development of strong relationships with existing community gardens and local growers has allowed the LUFS team to strengthen connections among these groups, reinforcing the foundation of a sustainable local grower community dedicated to advancing food sustainability across County Louth. LCC remains committed to showcasing the work of local growers and producers, ensuring continued support for their growth and well-being.

The project has also highlighted the inspiring role that community gardens, and engagement with diverse cultures, play in shaping both LCC's vision and public perception. This was especially evident at the multicultural events held at Tallanstown Community Garden, which drew significant public interest.

The trial-growing of various crops produced mixed results, further emphasising the ongoing challenges related to food sustainability. Commercial farmers and growers who participated in the project shared several adaptive strategies they plan to implement for future crop growth, recognising the pressing need for innovation in this area.

As a research initiative, this project has been a valuable learning experience for the LUFS Team, LCC, the growers, and the broader community. It has provided abundant opportunities to explore food sustainability issues in Louth, and we look forward to applying the insights gained to drive meaningful action in the near future.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Eileen Carter (Blackrock Community Garden), Margaret Barry (Tallanstown Community Garden), Lara Schmit (DIG) and Tony Conaghy (Drogheda Allotments) for all their hard work and support during this project. Thanks to all the members of the community gardens and the back garden growers for their enthusiasm and insightful advice and assistance. Their hard work in maintaining their gardening spaces and their continued efforts to encourage their local communities to get involved in community gardening is an inspiration.

Thanks also to our team members, facilitators, local producers, community organisations and educational facilities for supporting this initiative. We also wish to acknowledge the members of the public who attended the events and provided wonderful engagement, interest and laughter that made each event so enjoyable and memorable.

Special thanks to Creative Ireland and the Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media for funding this initiative.



Gallery of event posters



Launch & Garlic Planting - Oct 2023



Seed Day - March 2024



Gardening for Climate Change –April



Growers Get Together – May



Drogheda Allotment & Composting – June



Commercial Farm Tour – July



Heritage Week Workshops and Talks – 17th – 24th August 2024

WATERCOLOUR CLASS FOR BEGINNERS
7.30pm - 10.30pm
 The goal is to provide an inclusive and educational experience for participants from Dundalk and surrounding areas' varied communities. They aim to engage local community groups and minority groups, ensuring a diverse and enriching event.
CARROLL MEAD HALL

OPEN STUDIOS **BOOKING NEEDED**
7.30pm - 9.30pm
 As a collective of nine artists and craftspeople, They aim to showcase their diverse talents and engage the community through a captivating evening of creativity.
BRIDGE ST STUDIOS

ORIEL ECHOES - A NIGHT OF TRADITIONAL MUSIC
7.00pm - 10.00pm
 A night of live performance celebrating the music of the Oriel area.
AN TEACH SCORAÍOCHT

DUNDALK LIBRARY
 uplifting rendition of traditional Irish music while our library staff will have a range of arts and crafts for families to take part in.

CLIMATE WEAVE
6.00pm - 9.00pm
 Large weave with artist Una Curley. You are invited to participate in a large weave based on the Climate Stripes as part of the Louth Urban Food Sanctuary (LUFS). LUFS is a council led project exploring food sustainability in the changing climate.
BÓ STUDIOS

For Full Listings in Louth visit:
<https://culturenight.ie/Louth>

Creative Climate Weave – Culture Night



IMMA Earth Rising - September



Creative Climate Conference –October



The 5 Ways to Wellbeing - October



Louth Feast – November

Gallery of Images



Facilitator Eimear McNally at work



Delicious Focaccia bread



Produce in Drogheda Allotment



One of our many community food tables



Garlic Growing - how it started...



...how it ended - The finished product!



Facilitator Pamela Whitaker



LCC Climate Action Coordinator Rory Sheehan



Garlic planting was one of our most popular events where all attendees took their own planted garlic away with them to nurture and grow over 9 months. Some were successful, others were not, but everyone learned something new.



Artist and facilitator Eimear McNally captured a range of insights and feedback at all our events, many of which are captured in our recipe book.



Food played an important role in many of the events - bringing people together and keeping people focused for talks and workshops!

Tallanstown Community Garden multi cultural food tasting event for Heritage week.



Louth Feast Event at DkIT



Appendices

Timeline of Project

Date	Location	Description	Facilitators
16 th Sept 2022	LCC	Meeting with Climate, Heritage, Community and Arts on possible proposal	
9 th Dec	LCC	Meeting with potential focus group, including Creative Spark	
2023			
9 th Jan	LCC	Meeting to develop proposal for application	
30 th Jan	LCC	Meeting to decide other partners including DKIT & potential artists	
22 nd Feb	LCC	Climate and Arts meeting to finalise proposal for application	
13 th Mar		Application submitted	
12 th Jul		Confirmation of funding award received from DTCAGSM	
7 th Sept	LCC	First team meeting for LUFFS – meetings held monthly thereafter until the end of the project	
13 th Oct	Creative Spark, Dundalk	LUFFS Launch in Creative Spark	Project team, talks by Pamela Whitaker and Lara Schmit (DIG), garlic planting with Roisín Cotter and graphic recording by Eimear McNally
21 st – 24 th Nov	Borris House, Carlow	Creative Ireland Sparks projects residential	Melissa Hayes & Fiona Lennon
30 th Nov & 1 st Dec	Tony's Farm, Ardee	Filming of tutorial videos and McGuinness farm	DKIT students, Tony McGuinness
2024			
28 th Feb		LUFFS website launches	Zipped Eye Productions
2 nd Mar	Creative Spark, Dundalk	Seed Day event	Roisín Cotter

27th April	Blackrock, Co. Louth	Community Event, Blackrock Community Garden	Pamela Whitaker, Rory Sheehan, Eileen Carter & Eimear McNally
30th May	Creative Spark, Dundalk	Growers Session	Roisín Cotter
22nd Jun	Drogheda Allotments	Drogheda Allotment tour & information session on composting	Tony Conaghy & Tracy Fitzpatrick
18th July	Tony's Farm, Ardee	Tour of McGuinness Farm, Richardstown	Tony McGuinness, Pat McGuinness & Eimear McNally
17th August	The Still, Dundalk Library	The Art of Gardening for Climate Change workshop	Pamela Whitaker & Eimear McNally
19th August	The Still, Dundalk Library	Seed Saving workshop, Dundalk Library	Roisín Cotter
20th August	The Still, Dundalk Library	Modern Potato Growing talk	Maria Kenny, Ballymakenny Spud Shack
21st August	Tallanstown Community Garden	Harvest: Cultural traditions with Pamela Whitaker & Tallanstown Community Garden	Pamela Whitaker, Tallanstown Community Garden & Eimear McNally
22nd August	Drogheda Library	Seed Saving, Drogheda Library	Roisín Cotter
23rd August	Ardee Library	Climate Change and Invasive species and pests	Rory Sheehan
24th August	Townley Hall, Drogheda	Louth's Changing Climate and Food	Hilda Crampton, Townley Hall, Rory Sheehan & Eimear McNally
20th September	Bó Studios, Dundalk	Climate Weave on Culture Night @ Bó Studios	Artist Una Curley
22nd September	IMMA, Dublin	IMMA Earth Rising presentation	Rory Sheehan, Gráinne Murphy and Roisín Cotter
19th October	Drogheda Allotments	Drogheda Allotment tour as part of Climate Week activities, includes a talk on pickling	Tony Conaghy, Rory Sheehan, Tracy Fitzpatrick & Aija Golden
21st Oct	Aviva Stadium, Dublin	Attendance at 'The Gathering' – Creative Ireland Climate conference	Roisín Cotter, Melissa Hayes and Fiona Lennon
23rd Oct	Fairways Hotel, Dundalk	Attendance at the '5 Ways to Wellbeing' conference led by Healthy Ireland and Community	Moya Hodgers
19th Nov	DKIT, Dundalk	Louth Feast – food showcase event at Culinary School of DKIT with taster recipes and local producers showcasing food	Project team, DKIT culinary arts students and local food producers