

How East Anglian allotment growers can help fight food poverty

Local food banks and schemes are on the look out for any surplus fruit and veg – and explain how you can help. By **DANIELLE LETT**

Autumn is just around the corner – which means this year's harvest is about to take place. Usually starting late September or early October, it's the time of year when farmers, crop producers and allotment owners start thinking about reaping what they've grown before winter arrives.

Many allotment growers and avid gardeners are often left with a surplus of fruit, vegetables and herbs – which begs the question 'what do we do this all of this produce?'

There's only so many friends and family you can give your extra stock to – but did you know that food banks and schemes across the region are always on the look out for your leftover fruit and veg?

Figures from national charity the Food Foundation estimate that a total of 7.3 million adults and 2.6 million children experienced food poverty in April 2022 – with BAME, disabled and older people the worst affected.

Food charity FareShare East Anglia said in May this year it was distributing three times as much food as it was pre-pandemic, supporting around 15,000 people in Suffolk alone.

We speak to two different organisations in the region who are helping combat food poverty one punnet at a time – and explain how you can help.

"It's very important people maintain a decent standard of food intake"

Located in Suffolk is Find Ipswich – a registered charity that has been offering local people a lifeline if they are experiencing poverty or going through tough times for over 30 years. It provides free food parcels and personal care items to help people get through a crisis – as well as furniture, bedding, and other household items.

And as referrals for food banks increase, founder Maureen Reynel MBE acknowledges that she cannot skimp on the quality of food given to those in need.

"It's very important that we encourage people to maintain a decent standard of food intake, and that's why the food parcels we give out are nutritious, with

plenty of fruit, vegetables, meat, and dairies in them," she explains.

"And by receiving some donated goods, it will help the spends on my end which run into a couple of hundred pounds a week."

Maureen says she is looking for fruits such as apples, pears, and plums. In terms of vegetables, she's seeking growers to donate potatoes, carrots, onion, and beans.

"The bog standard varieties, essentially. I don't want marrows or the more unusual greens as most people won't be using those, and we'd hate for things to be wasted. And before you bring them in, could you please wash them so we don't have any creepy crawlies or slugs in the food bank."

She adds that the best time to bring in any produce donations to Find Ipswich is any afternoon Monday to Friday between 2.30pm and 4.30pm.

However, the needs of every food bank and scheme differ – and it is worth checking with your local charities and asking ahead that week what they and what they don't.

Maureen adds that the number of referrals to her charity has gone up – and she is seeing 'an average of 25 to 30 new referrals every day.'

"That means I'm also now low on the number of volunteers I have who deliver our food parcels, so I'm always looking for volunteer drivers who can spare their own time, vehicles and fuel to help us get our parcels out there," she says.

To get in touch and find out how you can help Find Ipswich, visit findipswich.org.uk

"We are noticing a reduction in the amount of fresh produce

donated to us"

In Norwich, FoodCycle is one of the country's many programmes that aims to make food poverty, loneliness and waste a thing of the past. Rather than putting together food parcels, it instead focusses on weekly community dining, serving freshly-cooked meals by a team of volunteers – using food that would otherwise go to waste.

"We serve around 50 guests a three-course vegetarian meal each

week using surplus food but, like many food charities, are noticing a reduction in the amount of fresh produce donated to us," explains FoodCycle East's regional manager Sam Disney.

"With the increase in the cost of living, more people are buying stickered items, stores are getting better at managing their surplus and many are doing away with best before dates to extend the shelf life of perfectly good produce that would either go to organisations such as us or

unfortunately landfill."

In 2021, FoodCycle saved 191 tonnes of food from going to waste – and will happily take any fruit or veg that is left over from local allotments.

"We know that allotment owners often have gluts of produce to the point where they don't want to look at another courgette or runner bean! So we welcome any donations of fruit and vegetables and can work with individuals or allotment groups to help rescue their surplus to turn



Allotment owners can help tackle food poverty by donating their surplus foods to local food banks and schemes. Inset left, Maureen Reynel of Find Ipswich

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FoodCycle volunteers. Above, FoodCycle saves food from going to waste - and cooks free meals with the ingredients

Pictures: FOODCYCLE



Check with your local food bank or food scheme to see what fruit and veg they're in need of

Picture: GETTY IMAGES/ISTOCKPHOTO

it into delicious, nutritious meals to feed anyone in the community that needs it.

“Root veg and tree fruit is always good as it tends to last for more than one week but we genuinely will use anything and everything! It is very Ready, Steady, Cook in how we make meals – using the surplus we have received and anything we don't use in our cook and that won't keep for another week would be given to our guests to help them during the week.”

Norwich's FoodCycle serves a weekly free meal every Friday at 7pm at Friends Meeting House on Upper Goat Lane in Norwich.

To help out Norwich's FoodCycle with either surplus stock or to volunteer your time, visit foodcycle.org.uk

If you are an allotment or vegetable garden grower with a surplus of produce, please get in touch with your local food bank or poverty scheme to find out what they need and how you can donate.