

## **Survey of innovative projects**

**Many interesting and valuable things happen on allotments and most of them are not known to the rest of the world.**

**Many interesting and valuable things happen on allotments and most of them are not known to the rest of the world.**

That makes allotments vulnerable to attacks. If the outside world does not know how valuable the allotment is it will be difficult to defend it if somebody starts seeing it as an interesting potential building site.

Because so many attacks on the existence of allotments have been registered the Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux (International Federation of Allotment Gardeners) has decided to start a project to tell the outside world (and in the meantime give hope to its members) about special projects, initiatives or activities on allotments. Those projects will be collected from all countries where the national organization is a member of the Federation.

**Many times people do special things without realizing it.**

**Allotment gardeners have a special relationship with their neighbourhood.**

We know of example from an allotment in a larger city where they have a special relationship with a home for the elderly that was close to their allotment site. On several occasions they invited the occupants of that home to their allotment and organised activities for them. When the local authorities wanted to select the allotment as a potential building site they withdrew their plans before the overall growing resistance came to a head.

We know of other examples where an allotment has special relations with its neighbourhood, but we want to hear from you, because you probably know more than us.

**Allotments and renewable energy**

Another thing society does not realize is the important role allotment gardeners have played in the acceptance of renewable energy. In many places allotment gardens without a connection to the electricity network were the first places where photovoltaic panels appeared. Those panels on the roof of allotment sheds and in many cases were the first places where the public could see that sunlight can be converted into electricity. There are rumours about even more extended uses of renewable energy on allotments, even about heating water with solar collectors, or solar cooking. Please tell us if you know about or participate in such projects. The world should know about it.

We know examples where buildings on allotments are solar orientated, use the sun for being comfortable in spring and in autumn and cooled in summer. Some of us have been pleasantly surprised finding such examples on occasional visits to allotments. So we expect many more surprises in asking you to tell us about

examples you know of. Passive solar building, as this technique is called could be a development which society is waiting for. We hope you can give us more information than we have already about this exiting development.

### **Allotments are about gardening.**

Often we do not realize how much knowledge about the growing of fruit and vegetables exist in our gardeners. Studies in the UK even have shown the total added knowledge of allotment gardeners by far exceeds that of professional farmers, because the farmers grow only a few crops and more and more focused on these.

We know that some gardeners make an enormous effort to rediscover and keep old species alive. In some cases their work is even on a scientific level. It can be orientated towards old fruit trees or small root crops which can be edible of which there is an enormous variety indeed. Others specialize on only one crop and develop hundreds of varieties of that one crop.

In all cases those activities are very important for keeping a high biodiversity which is very important for keeping a sound and stable food production assured for the future.

We are pretty sure there are other related activities on allotment which we don't know of. So again we ask you to tell us if you know of such activities. These are much more important for society than most of us tend to realize.

### **Another element of gardening is being in harmony with nature.**

Allotment gardeners have played a leading role in exploring ecological gardening. Using the natural mechanisms of nature they manage to create magnificent gardens and produce excellent food, without the use of pesticides or unwanted chemicals. In many cases this gives another boost to biodiversity, keeping useful insects alive and giving a better environment for other creatures, be they plants or animals. Time again we are surprised about new initiatives in this field and we eagerly want to be told of more, because the experiences and work of allotment gardeners in this field can be an example for and give a boost to beneficial developments in society.

### **Integrated ecological work.**

On some allotments people realized working in harmony can go further than just in their gardening activities, so they worked on harmony with nature in all their tasks. The building materials used, the layout, the addition of "insect hotels" or "survival walls" etc all those and many more activities made their allotment an example of working in harmony with nature and examples have been reported of threatened species reemerging on such allotments.

We know of some examples, but we know that many more of those activities are taking place without publicity. Once again, knowledge of such activities can be a great help in promoting similar developments in society. So please tell us if you know about such initiatives.

### **Allotment gardeners as a part of physical planning.**

There are many interesting initiatives regarding allotments. Some cities strongly promote the use of small available pieces of land as allotments. This can give rise to extra numbers of allotments. In other places interesting initiatives for mixing allotments within housing or commercial building projects have emerged and can give inspiration. We have a strong suspicion that there are many more of such interesting projects we do not know about. So again please inform us if you know of any.

### **There are even more interesting facts out there than we can imagine.**

We heard rumours about allotments where people only come on foot or by bicycle, avoiding the use of cars. There is "hear say" about efficient and rewarding projects exploring different ways of participation and democracy in running allotments. In general we have tried to give examples about exiting developments on allotments, most of which are important for society. Therefore we ask you to inform us about any similar or other interesting initiatives. The world has to know about our existence and we need to be more outspoken about our important new initiatives.

**Our initiatives in the Office International du Coin de Terre et des Jardins Familiaux offer a fantastic opportunity to inspire others, so please tell us about them, and feel free to tell us about other examples which we didn't mention in this message. It is in our common interest.**