

MORE THAN A SHOP

Digging in:
the local food revolution

Clare Negus

Incredible Edible Heaton Park

Huw Richards

*Vegetable gardener, author
and YouTuber*

Also featuring:

Radcliffe Market



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Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Hello and welcome to More Than a Shop, hosted by me Elizabeth Alker. We're welcoming guests with something new and radical to say about the big issues of the day. Well the flavour of the series is a search for new alternative ideas in the spirit of the worldwide co-operative movement, which happens to have started in my hometown of Rochdale.

Well, co-ops proudly offer radical alternatives to mainstream ways of getting things done. They are indeed so much more than a shop.

Today we're looking at that most essential of subjects – food. And here in the studio are two guests who spend much of their lives thinking about ways to improve our relationship with food.

Claire Negus is a Project Co-ordinator with the organisation Incredible Edible – that's a network with over 200 groups worldwide. And Huw Richards is author of the book *Veg in One Bed*, as well as star of his YouTube channel, which has 164,000 subscribers. So welcome to you both – thank you for joining us.

So I'm going to ask you both later for your big idea. That's something that might make a difference to our relationship with food. But for now, I just want to hear a little bit more about what you both do.

So Claire, I know Incredible Edible has been growing fast since it was set up about a decade ago in the town of Todmorden. What does it do?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Well, it started in 2008 it was two ladies called Pam and Mary. And they looked at their hometown of Todmorden and thought “this place needs some help”. There was a lot of deprivation, a lot of people out of work. There was no love for their community. So they thought, right, “how can we make this better?” And they started by putting some planters in the actual town centre and growing vegetables to start up a conversation with people. To get people involved with healthy food and growing and starting to love their town.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So food – and access to food – was one of the main problems that you identified?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah. It was more... It was a conduit to get people together, to get people to love where they lived and to start talking to each other. So it was about galvanising the community together, really.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay, and what's the philosophy behind it? And you know, considering co-operative values and how they're applied to this project?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Well, most Incredible Edible groups start with a small group of people who would like to make their community better in some way. That's kind of where it comes from. So, it's a grassroots organisation where people facilitate what they want in their community. Which is kind of how a co-operative works – it's about the people and they deciding what they want to do.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And were the founders... was their background in food and food production and growing?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Not really. I know that Pam used to be a teacher, I think. But yeah, they just wanted to learn and grow – and grow people – through food, really.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Yeah, so it was almost a hobby, but that they identified could impact the community in a positive way.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah. And you know, they identified that people don't necessarily have that connection with food. And young people don't really know where their food comes from. They just see something in a plastic bag from the supermarket. So, yeah, it's about bringing that connection to food as well.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And how did it spread to these 200 groups across the world?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Well, the Incredible Edible group that I'm part of in Prestwich – which was one of the first to start up after Todmorden – they heard about it. I think they had quite a lot of press at the time. And there was another group of like-minded people who wanted to improve the area. We started out with planters in Prestwich village with herbs in. We had them outside the Metrolink station where people could pick their herbs to take home. And it was about starting a conversation and people seeing something and going, “What's this? How can I get involved?” And then little projects started developing all the way around Prestwich. We've got veg beds in St. Mary's Park. We have quite a big set up in Phillips Park now, which has an allotment that people can visit and help. We've also got a forest garden in The Cloth, which demonstrates all the principles of permaculture. So there's lots of different ways of growing and there's lots of different individuals who are who bring something to the table.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Making it accessible and visible is key to what you do, isn't it?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, definitely. And we're open to as many ideas as possible. And if anybody wants to get involved, they can because I mean, the motto of Incredible Edible is if you eat you're in. So everybody can be part of it. So there's no “you can't come in,” and, another thing, that we believe in is the power of small actions. So it's small little things can all mount up to something quite big. Which again, is it's a lot about where a co-operative comes from.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And it's about people taking it on board in their local area and community...

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

It's about empowering people and giving them the confidence to make change. Yeah, make their community a better place to live in. And, you know, not be isolated.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So it's not just about food, it's also about the community around us.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

No. I think we believe more in people than the plants, really. The growing – it's a reason to get together. It's a really *good* reason to get together.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

But doing it in the community as well and building those relationships. So there's a well-being aspect to it.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Definitely, yeah. A huge part of gardening is well-being, which I'm sure Huw would agree with.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Okay. Well, Huw I mentioned all those subscribers to your YouTube channel. What is it that you're doing out there that's obviously, you know, chiming with people and bringing them in.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Yeah, so I grew up on a smallholding and my parents got me involved with growing food since I was three. Around age of 12-13 I decided to start documenting what I was doing through video because I had a lot of spare time, it was summer holidays. And so I began filming videos.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And this is... already we have smartphones doing for this sort of thing, do we?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

We have smartphones for this sort of thing, but I had a little point and shoot camera. And I was speaking like this [speaks in a high voice] because I was 12 years old. And I was showing how to grow roses, and all those kind of things. But it kind of transitioned into food because I think about food a lot. And so I noticed that there was a really big interest from people all around the world about growing food. So my channel has been seen in orbit around four or five countries globally. And I think what's also different is people are seeing a young person. So I'm 20 years old so that they're looking at this like "why on earth is there this kid showing us about growing food?". And I think that interests people and gives people hope. And something that gives me great hope is a lot of people expect that my average age is above 50 or above 60. But my biggest audience segment is between 25 and 35, which I find extremely exciting because I hope that that's the age of young families and getting kids involved.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Why do you think that the perception is that people your age aren't interested in where their food is coming from? And why are you finding that, actually, they are. That people in that age bracket 25 to 35 do want to know how to grow things and make their own food?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

I think the Internet has allowed people to be a lot more curious about things. It's just, especially the younger generation, especially going through school food is kind of just seen as this thing which was given to you. You were never told how it was produced or anything. So on one side of things, you see this rise of veganism and the other side of things you see people just show no interest whatsoever. So there's kind of these, these two big areas beginning to grow. And I kind of put myself in the middle. And really just, kind of what you're doing with Incredible Edible, is I'm really trying to reconnect people with where food has come from. When people don't realise the effort that goes into producing food, you get a lot of things like food waste because there's no respect for it, they don't understand. So for me, I actually think it's really easy to show kids about growing food. And the great thing about gardening and growing food is as one of the few subjects which can facilitate the teaching of every single subject on the curriculum if you do it the right way. So I kind of see this I kind of see food education as a vessel of putting really important information to people, especially young people in school.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

There's a business aspect to it, a biological aspect to it, a community aspect to it, like we're saying.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Science, maths. You're always going to find a connection.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, English, Art... You can do anything in a garden and you can use a garden to teach anything. That is the beauty of it. It's almost like you should have schools in a garden and, and remove it, you know, teach around it.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

And it's also using your hands, because when you're sat in a classroom – kids, they're not programmed to just sit in a classroom for days on end being spoken at. They want to get out there, they want to actually try things and practical learning – a learning through having fun. I have no idea why this isn't being done.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

At what point did it go on from being kind of a hobby, something that your parents made you do as a child – weeding and that sort of thing – into realising that this is actually really serious and that it can benefit us all if we reconnect to food and understand where it comes from and how it's grown and produced.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

I really think the tipping point was when I was around 16 and I reached my first a million views. I thought okay, this serious and that I've started earning some money off that as well. There was definitely something in this and definitely interest in this. So, for me, the great thing about YouTube is it's free information. So I've made over 400 videos now. And in terms of watch time I've had over a century and a half of watch time. So yeah, I saw that there was definitely traction in this and I thought, okay, I'll get my A-Levels but I've kind of completely forgotten about University and just gone down this aspect.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Do you think your generation are reacting to, you know, being stuck in all the time driven everywhere? Having things easily accessible at supermarkets at the click of a button? Do you think they do want to get out there? And, you know, like you say, sort of be hands on.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

I think it's really tricky, because I think a lot of kids don't actually realise that that is an opportunity and can be done. And you mentioned supermarkets. They're so effective because they're convenient. And it leads on to so many other issues looking at things like seasonality and that lack of connection or that lack of story. Once young people are shown that they have a choice and an option, that's when they start going for it. And I don't mind if people don't grow their own food. I just want people to be aware about how food is produced and where it comes from, and the impact that has both positive and negative.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

I know Claire, one of the things that Incredible Edible focus on as well is reconnecting with dying arts, pickling and bottling and that sort of thing and learning from older people and an older generation.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Definitely, yeah. I mean, I went to an Incredible Edible project in Rochdale, opposite the Kashmir Youth Project and they work together. And the elders from the Kashmir Youth Project have been showing people on the peer project how to preserve and pickle and what herbs to use and things like that. So I love the idea that there's these

lost arts that can be passed on to me, you, you know. You could also look at my grandparents generation who went through the war and rationing and how that can really impact your use of food.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

My grandma always had a jar of pickled eggs and pickled onions, which is hard to imagine still doing that.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, but it's knowing how to use it all and how to use up your waste, as well, and how to preserve it. So that, you know, your money goes a bit further. But yeah, it is a lost art that connection.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Now. Like many of the subjects that we're going to be tackling food is obviously hugely complicated in terms of production, distribution, health and well-being. So we're going to boil things down – forgive the pun – and I'm going to ask each of you to identify one particular challenge that faces us regarding food. So Claire, would you like to go first?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, food wastage, I think, is a huge problem. It's quite easy to go to the shop and buy a big bag of apples and forget about them and then they go mouldy and then they're in the bin. The environmental impact of that is the cost of the production of it, the transportation of it. You know, it's so throwaway and so easy to do that.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Huw – your idea?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

My idea is a kind of complete forgetfulness of seasonality. We've been very numbed by seasons when we look at where we get food from, thanks to the supermarkets. I honestly believe that nature gives us things at certain points for a reason. And you might think that's a bit hippy and stuff. But nature has been working really efficiently for thousands and thousands of years and it will always outlive us. So, for me, I think looking at seasonal food is the most important thing because if you look at seasonal eating you're immediately far more likely to be able to source food a lot closer to home. And so, for example, if you're looking at getting more of the perishable items like strawberries or something in January and February, these are quite likely to be flown into the UK and that's a massive environmental impact. And plus, they don't taste good at all. For me, this also brings in the lack of connection and lack of understanding of, "Okay, we've got this food, what do we do with it? How can we cook it?" I go to so many people's houses, and people just don't think about flavour, it's more of a chore to just get some food in you. When you get that excitement of knowing what to do with seasonal ingredients, you'll then suddenly have a bit of a Eureka! moment and never look at it in the same way.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Claire, one of the first things I was thinking when you were saying about the bag of apples, I mean, I'm guilty of that. And often that's like you say, it's just so cheap, isn't it to buy a whole bag. I live on my own, so I'm not necessarily going to eat them all in the time that they need to be eaten. How would I avoid doing that?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

I think you've got to look at lots of different ways of tackling it. Looking at being able to conveniently buy one apple for instance. The other way is looking at how you can preserve your food. You know, you can look at ways of freezing them, ways of cooking them up and freezing them in individual portions. You can look at making jams, pickles, fermentation, which is quite a big thing now. You know, there are lots of ways and these are all sort of traditional things that happened with sauerkraut, especially on the continent. We used to pickle things more, because you don't we don't really have a history of fermented stuff. So yeah, it's about having that relationship with your food again and really loving what you're doing and taking time.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

I think just the sort of idea of throwing things away, we're so comfortable with that now, aren't we? I mean, my parents generation aren't comfortable with that. They'd rather eat everything on their plates, even if they were full than throw it in the bin.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Oh, yeah, but my mum has little pots in her fridge of beef fat and lamb fat because she can't throw anything away and it is, it's a generation thing. And myself, I've got kids and you know, busy family life and yeah, I feel awful throwing food away. And I can hear my parents saying it and I and my grandparents would be turning in their graves. They really would.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Even mashed potato from Sunday made into potato cakes always.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, or I put a lot of stuff in my freezer. Cryogenic storage is the way forward.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So how do we even begin to kind of reverse that mentality that we have now. You know, just seeing food as so disposable, as something we can easily throw away.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

I think, as Huw said, maybe people need to understand the complexity and you know, of actually growing food and how much effort it takes and how much time it takes because we're very instant. Whereas, you know, if you've got an allotment and you've got a whole load of kale that you need to eat up, you got to eat that kale or you've got to preserve it, because otherwise you're wasting all that time and energy, growing that food and it's all going to go to waste.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Planning and time...

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Planning and time and we're all aware we are very time poor. That's the way that life is.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And Huw one of the things that really struck me about what you said is the taste of these things. So often they're flown in. Have we got used to fruit and veggie not tasting as it should?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Unfortunately, yes. And, also, the nutrient quality of food has been declining. So if you look at nutrient values, whether it's meat or lettuce, or apples over the past 10 years, 20 years, 30 years – you've seen a decline.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And what's the reason for that?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Because farmers, the supermarket's pay by weight. So they don't care about the nutrient quality – and I understand why, because they're trying to make some money. So they're just growing varieties that put on a lot of water weight so they can get that. And it's also a lack of respect for the soil. The soil is the most fundamental thing when it comes to food and when you don't respect to the soil that's huge. I know a lot of people give a lot of stick to things like cows and methane and things like that. But when you look at intensive ways of growing vegetables, and the top soil erosion of that, it's a massive environmental problem. And so I think changing that is really important.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Yeah. Because that's about lobbying big business, isn't it?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Yeah. And I also think, you know, growing your own food is kind of dangerous. So, if you decide to grow your own tomatoes, and then you eat them – every other tomato you're going to get in a shop is just going to be so disappointing.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

It's ruined, it's ruined.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

A tomato evangelist, here!

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

I only eat home-grown courgettes, because they don't taste right [otherwise]!

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

I have to say I had an allotment for two and a half years and we produced a lot of beetroot, which did taste amazing. But I didn't have the time to keep it up. So that's really what would you say to somebody like me a failed allotmenteer?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Yeah, that's exactly I think it's about starting small. And one of the things that I'm trying to do is destroy a lot of perceptions around grown foods and try and give people less excuses to do that.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So you think an allotment is too much of a big thing to take on for a beginner or someone who's time-poor.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

It could be, yes. But if you start small, in a container, that's more manageable.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Can you manage easily? I don't have a garden either because I live in town...

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Have you got a balcony?

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

No, I don't.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Have you got window sills?

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

I do have a window sill. Daylight – is that all I need?!

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Daylight, yeah, pretty much or even lights. You can buy lights now to grow your own food.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

I think what's happening is we're, as a society, we're coming in a bit subdued and lazy. I'm not saying that you're lazy at all. But what I'm saying is people can get put off by the effort needed. And the most important thing that that I say is “yes, start off with some pots and slowly build up” , because you can feel overwhelmed if you take on an allotment. So imagine that you're used to driving a car. And then suddenly, you're told to fly a Boeing 747. It's that kind of step, because it's a massive change. So it's about small, incremental steps and building up your confidence. And when you do take on an allotment, you got to remember that the first year is going to be the most time intensive, because you've got to set up that infrastructure. But once you start every year after that, it gets easier and easier. It's like practicing muscle memory.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

You could always join a project, you know. You could join an Incredible Edible group local to you, I think that there is one in Manchester. And everything that is grown in an incredible edible project you can take and harvest yourself. So, you know, you could be part of a community allotment for instance, so you don't have to necessarily do it on your own. And actually, I think it's more fun when you do it with other people. It's as simple as that really and the community. Yes. And then you've got the community aspect where you could maybe share your produce, you know. Like in an allotment, if you've got a glut, there's always somewhere where you can leave your glut for everybody else to take.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

One of the other things I just want to ask you Huw as well is we're so used to – it's an attitude thing, like we were talking about with Claire. We're so used to be able to get in foods from all over the world whenever we want them now. How do you claw that back? How do we reverse that kind of attitude and go back to wanting things that are seasonally produced? I mean, can you see us reversing the trend?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

I think it takes something like... Let's look at what happened with David Attenborough and *Blue Planet*, and how much of a shock that was for everyone. I think you kind of need that shock truth factor to happen with food as well. As soon as they see the kind of impacts that are happening on mass monoculture scale food, then I think there'll be a shift. And it's gonna be tough, but you have to do it. And that's what my life goal is. You know, I'm not gonna give up.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Or just give everyone a home-grown tomato.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

No way I am sharing my tomatos.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Grow Your Own. Okay.

Well, what is the latest trends in food retail at least has been the rise of the food hall. Typically, older buildings that play host to a range of different street food style outlets. Our producer Geoff Bird has been to visit the one in Radcliffe near Bury [Greater Manchester].

Alan Mackrell, Radcliffe Market

So I'm Alan Mackrell and I'm the Market Manager.

Rob Grant, Radcliffe Market

I'm Rob Grant, I'm one of the Directors on the Community Benefit Society board.

Geoff Bird, producer

So describe the place for me. It's a beautiful old market that much is obvious.

Rob Grant, Radcliffe Market

It is a wonderful space. It's like an industrial shed building that contains what was always the market in the centre of Radcliffe, but we've just re-engineered it a little bit. So we installed some kitchens and some food outlets as well as a bar – because we recognise actually to get people down here, they need a reason to come down and what better reason than food and drink. We took management of the market nearly two years ago now. And it was just about eight or nine traders at the time – retail traders. We installed the kitchens that are around us at the moment and some local entrepreneurs to run businesses. So that, actually, you know, what we've got is a place where people can come, they can eat, they can talk.

Alan Mackrell, Radcliffe Market

We also have lots of other things going on. So we have indoor bowling in the winter. We have Tai Chi, a weekly choir

Rob Grant, Radcliffe Market

We put on some bands as well.

Geoff Bird, producer

In terms of the food, I can see big tables. Tell me some of the kind of foods you can get here.

Rob Grant, Radcliffe Market

So we've got Louisa's who provide sourdough pizzas. We've got the Northern Glory Kitchen, Moguls who provide us with a Punjab cuisine. Yo Thai, Blackbird Pantry, which is a Southern American Caribbean feel to it. Acapulco, Mexican, and we have Prez who are local company doing wholesome foods, organic foods.

Geoff Bird, producer

And you're a Community Benefit Society – what does that mean?

Rob Grant, Radcliffe Market

It means that we are owned and run by our community for our community. So we're a non-profit making organisation. All the money that we earn through the bar and through the rents and through the people visiting, goes back into refurbishing the site and reinvested in the site to make it bigger and better. We're run by a board of volunteers who've all got day jobs. We employ people from the local area. It's part of our principles that the money we earn and the impact we have is for Radcliffe. And we just want to build a sense of pride back into what is a great place to live.

Alan Mackrell, Radcliffe Market

I think when we first started off before it actually happened, and people can see what was going on, people weren't sure. But now that they see what we're doing, the response has been great.

Geoff Bird, producer

So food becomes an agent for community change, but it's also an agent for kind of an economic remodelling. And ultimately, it's also about creating an exciting experience through food.

Rob Grant, Radcliffe Market

Yeah, I think, to use a cliché phrase, the high street, it's now about experience. It's about spending time together. And when you see families come here, and all of a sudden the family can order from four different five different cuisines. It makes it that much easier to have a time together. So it's not about finding *a* restaurant.

Alan Mackrell, Radcliffe Market

All of these kitchens are owned and run by individuals with their own ideas and their own invention. So they can create what they believe in and what they're passionate about. But that means that people that come here are going to get something that is unique to, to their dining experience, because it's someone's own passion, you know, a recipe that they're passionate about.

Geoff Bird, producer

Sorry what's your name?

Trader, Radcliffe Market

Rose

Geoff Bird, producer

And you hear on the Acapulco stand?

Trader, Radcliffe Market

Yes, I'm doing Mexican and Japanese food.

Geoff Bird, producer

So why the cross between Mexico and Japan, that's an unlikely one, isn't it?

Trader, Radcliffe Market

Because they are my favourite food. So, why not? I cannot explain.

Geoff Bird, producer

It's a good place to explore here is it?

Trader, Radcliffe Market

It is, it's a great place as well, because a lot of people is supporting Radcliffe Market. If you will come here Friday night, Saturday, and Sunday we're all busy, all of the time.

Geoff Bird, producer

Fantastic. Thank you very much. Good luck.

What's your name, please?

Trader, Radcliffe Market

Katie. I own a food stall in the market called Northern Glory alongside Sharon, who is our Head Chef and our business is focused around northern food. Hot pot and pies and the typical kind of Northern home comfort.

Geoff Bird, producer

Black pudding?

Trader, Radcliffe Market

Black pudding in a bit of a pie or it can go into a sausage as well.

Geoff Bird, producer

Sounds terrible to me, but I'm sure there are plenty who love it.

Trader, Radcliffe Market

Well there's vegetarian as well, if you're that way inclined?

Geoff Bird, producer

How do you feel people part of it, you know. It is a Community Benefit Society – what differences that make?

Trader, Radcliffe Market

Because our profits are spread out within the community, I think people feel like spending money here is a good thing rather than just going into someone else's pocket. And we also take into account the society's values. We have to cook fresh food on site, make sure that all our packaging is compostable. No single use plastic here. And we have to make sure that our foods come in locally.

Rob Grant, Radcliffe Market

I mean right behind us in three words, we live by 'connect', 'believe' and 'change'.

Geoff Bird, producer

Writ large up on the brick wall there.

Rob Grant, Radcliffe Market

That's so we don't forget them. So we want to connect people. We want to connect them to great foods, great services. So can we grow stuff locally? We've had some micro-herbs growing in our cellar. We're connecting with local community groups to bring fruit and veg in. And really, we're driven by creating a sense of belief. But we're very fortunate that we have a big group of volunteers who help make this place what it is. We had a flood at the weekend. We put a call to arms out to the community and we had 20 people dredging our basement. And I think that is the real impact of what this is about when the community says, "we'll do that" at that, for us, tells us we're doing the right things.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

That was Geoff Bird at the thriving new food hall in Radcliffe.

So we asked each of you to bring us one idea – however grand or modest – that could be used to make a real difference to how we all think about food. Claire, what would you like to see happen?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

I'd like to see more urban agriculture. So, you know, on your walk to work you will be walking past growing food. That connection is right there on your doorstep all the time. And it is about imagining an urban landscape full of vegetables and growing and orchards. And schools based around growing. It's possible if there is, you know, a lot of grand changes

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

In the way that we think?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

In the way we think, our attitudes, our time, our attitude to work.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And are you talking about city centres here? Because I live in Manchester city centre. A lot of the land is privately owned. There's a lot of pressure on space. I mean, every square four meters seems to have a 50-story building going up on it at the moment. I mean, how can we sort of infiltrate those spaces?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

There is quite a bit of empty space sometimes in towns and cities where landlords can't get tenants in. Now all those shops you could set up some micro-green growing, you could grow mushrooms...

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Inside the shop?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, yeah.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So persuading landlords as well, because like rents are high on that.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Rents are high, but if their shops empty, then they're not getting any money. And it seems really silly. So why can't there be, you know, if they've got all these empty spaces, why can't you trial, a project where it's this could

happen? I mean, all the universities are really exploring urban agriculture, growing with aquaponics, hydroponics, growing under lights. That could all be explored within an urban environment and then it would bring everybody that connection to food. You'd be able to go and get your salad from the corner shop because it would have been grown in the corner shop.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So it would be produced and then sold in shops in the city centre, rather than people going and picking it themselves?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

I mean, there are market gardens in and around Manchester anyway and they grow the veg boxes and they grow for restaurants. But it's about making it accessible to *everybody* because it is quite nice niche, you know, you've got to pay. And it's not as convenient or easy as a supermarket. And, you know, you've got that scale as well that you've got to feed a huge amount of people.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And is it about forming relationships, connections with local shops or with high street supermarket chains?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, definitely. But equally, you could form a co-operative from this sort of idea. You know, you could have people coming together and kick-starting this project and having ownership in it and it is a co-operative and they take the profits and put it back into this, you know, it could be a community driven project. I think it's more about ownership and financial benefit for a lot of co-operatives. And it's fulfilling a need – yes, you're getting healthy food, I think that is the reward is that you've got healthy food with no air miles, no road miles with very little cost to the environment, especially if they're using renewable energy. So that is the reward in itself. Sometimes looking at something in financial rewards and figures and money and statistics like that – you can't put a price on being able to eat something that's been freshly picked.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

I think the most underutilized space in city centres are rooftops. So I've been in London and visited some amazing – they do this open squares where they open for a weekend and some amazing rooftops up there. And there's never been a better time to be able to have access to those rooftops. Because businesses, even if they don't care about sustainability, like to pretend they care, just so it keeps a public happy.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Bee hives and things like that?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Exactly. So just ask them and say, look, we'll do it for you. And they'll love it as a PR thing. But I think that's a really useful space.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, and there's a lot of small social responsibility for companies now anyway. So you can always tap into that.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

I'm just thinking about how you bring people together to form these co-operatives as well. I mean, I've lived in my building for five years and I don't even know my neighbour's name. You know, how do you sort of change that?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

You need to have a house warming party! That's how it works. Well, do you know what, it doesn't matter. They don't know, if you don't know them? They might, you know, you think well, I need to get to know my neighbours. Why don't you have a barbecue?

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Starting with a small change?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, get to know your neighbours. Start talking to people.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Or move to the country for a better way of life.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Well Huw, can you tell us what your idea is?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Yeah. So my idea is that every household should grow one thing that they really enjoy. It's just more of a challenge – just not bite off more than you can chew. Small steps can make the biggest changes. So I just invite each household to choose something that they really enjoy growing and would be excited about. So this could be strawberries, or even potatoes. I mean homegrown potatoes, roasted or potato wedges. Amazing. So just start with this one thing, give it a go. And there's so many benefits of this. Firstly, if you have kids, it's a great way to teach them about patience. Because at the moment, it's very much about instant gratification wanting, wanting, wanting. But you know, if they're gonna pull up that potato plant too early, they're not going to be able to eat anything. So that's what I'd say. You've got to be excited about what you're growing.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

I mean, that sounds great, in theory. What about people who are living, as we were discussing with Claire, in high density areas? How would they do this?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

That's a great question. And I think it's about choosing something fun to grow on a window sill. All you need is a window sill, even indoors. As you can look at microgreens. But something that I love doing and costs hardly anything is growing pea shoots. And you can do this any time of year and have a bit of a taste of summer. And I think that's really special. So you can just buy dried peas, soak them for an hour, and then plant them in a tray of maybe four to five centimetres of compost, cover them with another centimetre, plant them really thick as well. And then about two or three weeks later, you'll have an amazing crop of pea shoots, and then just harvest above the first little leaf. And you might be able to get four or five crops from that. And I think that's something really easy to get started with.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

I mean, this is all sounding doable. And what about scalability, though. You know, when we're facing a growing population when access to food is under a greater challenge than ever before? How can this realistically solve food sustainability on a global level.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

In this country, having just spoken about food wastage, it's hard to imagine that there isn't enough food for everyone. It's quite a difficult question to answer because I'm not an economist. And I'm not, you know, a town planner. I think the best way to do this is to start small and see what happens because solutions will come. We'll see a problem and we'll fix it, because that's what we do. And it will come from individuals coming together, forming, getting ideas to work. Yeah, I mean, it is a really tricky question, and I couldn't answer it really sorry.

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

I think we need to use the tools we have at our disposal. So, for example, me, it's about utilising the internet, because it's never been easier to connect with people all over the world. So we need to use that to transport either the successes, the failures, the ideas, people's dreams, people's visions. Show what's happening, get people speaking about it. Because the idea with social media is it's got to be social, and you've got to have people getting an opinion about things and make them want to comment and interact. So, that's what I'd say. And I also think you need to find those individuals who do have that energy and those radical ideas, and you need to support them. Because if they feel unsupported, they might give up. So it's about joining these together, connecting these people together and letting them grow.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So more importantly than ever, just not to feel as individuals disempowered, basically. We can make small changes, okay. A lot of what you're talking about seems to be exposing different people to different ways of relating to food. There's more out there in terms of community schemes. I know there's a really good story of a case in Rochdale, Claire?

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, I went to the Pioneers Museum, which is the home of the first co-operative on Toad Lane. I met this wonderful guy called Andy and his story is just really inspiring. He was homeless two years ago. It was in January, they had the Pioneers Museum, they were running cooking classes. And it was cold and wet, and he thought "Right, I'm going to go in here and get a warm cup of tea. At least I'll, you know, get dry". He had spoken to people, anybody for months. He went, he got his hot cup of tea, you know; he felt like part of something. And he went back again, two weeks later. And from that his confidence grew. He managed to get somewhere to live. And he helped with other people who were there to form something called The Pantry, which is a co-operative Food Bank. And that was such a success for the local community that with the profits, they all got together and thought, right, we would like to grow some actual fresh food to be able to offer at the pantry. And that from that they developed lots of planters on Toad lane, and it's now the Incredible Edible Toad Land allotment. And through this he discovered a passion for Rochdale itself. He didn't realise it was the home of the co-operative. He learned all about this. He'd been living there for 50 years. And he, you know, he had a passion about where he lived now. And he has been giving back. He's now a mentor to other people. He just speaks so passionately and that's infectious.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So reconnecting to his community had all these positive ramifications.

Claire Negus, Incredible Edible

Yeah, it just you try and do things to make good, but good things do happen like this. Yeah.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

And Huw do you have a similar story of someone you know, who would have been overwhelmed by the idea of producing their own fruit and veg? The seasonality of it? The things you've been talking about? Has put it into practice and it's made a positive change?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Yeah. What motivates me is when people send me emails or direct messages on Instagram, sending pictures of things they've grown because they've watched a YouTube video of mine. And they're like, "Thank you. This is the first time we've ever harvested our own potatoes". And I think that is so exciting. And I also love, like with my, with my book *Veg in One Bed*, I've had a lot of grandparents buy it to do it as a project with their grandchildren, which is kind of like what used to happen with the allotments. So I think things like this are really exciting.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

So skipping the generation who might be really tied up with work, grandparents working with children?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Exactly.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Also taking into consideration, Huw, co-operative values. How do you as an individual, doing your thing on YouTube. How do you incorporate the values of the co-operative movement?

Huw Richards, vegetable gardener, author and YouTuber

Well, I really agree with all the values, and I think it's just the moral decision. And for me it's about being able to support everyone, regardless of their background. So, for example, all my day courses now, I offer a 'pay what you can afford' structure. So there's a suggested donation amount, but if you can't afford that amount, that's fine. You can still come on the course. And it's about being inclusive, which is not being done enough. And very often it's the people who can't afford these opportunities, they have the fire in their belly and the passion to do it. So by allowing people to have that experience and opportunity, empower them, give them all the information they need, very often you'll see that that'll make the biggest change.

Elizabeth Alker, presenter

Fantastic, thank you both very much for joining us today.

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