**HOME GROWN: PROPOSAL FOR NETWORK SUPPORT FOR HOUSEHOLD FOOD PRODUCTION**

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The Home Grown Network (HGN) proposed here is intended to serve as a global Internet-based service to support individuals and groups in facilitating the production of food at home, primarily for consumption rather than for sale. Information and ideas would be exchanged about how to produce food, and how to choose foods that would offer good nutritional and economic value. The network would provide access to relevant documents and videos that are now scattered throughout the world. It would also help in making connections to supportive people with similar interests. These linkages would help to build local face-to-face communities of people who would share information and ideas about household food production in ways that are appropriate in their local situation.

Knowing how to produce food at home can be very worthwhile. For some people, tending the garden is a pleasant way to get some exercise. It can also be a way to shift to a healthier diet and save a bit of money. For low-income people it might be an important way to reduce strains on the household budget. Knowing how to produce your own food establishes a do-it-yourself safety net, increasing your capacity to cope with disasters and fluctuating food prices. Gaining those skills increases your food security.

There have been some excellent studies on home gardening, such as Helen Keller International/Asia Pacific, *Homestead Food Production—A Strategy to Combat Malnutrition and Poverty* (Jakarta, Indonesia: Helen Keller International, 2001), available at <http://www.hki.org/research/HFP_Strategy_Combat_Malnutrition_Poverty_2001.pdf> Searching the Internet on terms such as “urban agriculture” would locate a great deal of material. YouTube offers many short videos on how to produce food on rooftops and walls and in boxes and bags.

Unfortunately, much of the published material about home gardening is not intended to be useful to the practicing gardener. As envisioned here, the primary purpose of the HGN would be to pull together the widely scattered how-to-do-it information, and make it more accessible. There is some user-friendly (gardener-friendly) advice on how to produce food at home readily available in high-income countries, but it is not so easy to get in low-income countries. Also, it can be difficult to figure out which products would make a worthwhile contribution to the family’s diet, and which choices would be economically worthwhile. Sometimes it makes sense to shop for what you need. The HGN would be attentive to the interests and needs of the gardeners themselves.

Many people who know how to produce their own food are happy to share their knowledge. The purpose here is to facilitate that sharing.

Several organizations that already do that sort of work, such as:

* American Community Gardening Association. <http://www.communitygarden.org/>
* Aquaculture Without Frontiers. <http://www.aquaculturewithoutfrontiers.org/>
* Australian City Farms & Community Gardens Network. <http://www.communitygarden.org.au/>
* Growing Power. <http://www.growingpower.org/Index.htm>
* Kitchen Gardeners International. <http://www.kitchengardeners.org>
* Resource Center for Latin America and the Caribbean for Urban Agriculture and Food Security. <http://ipes.org/au/Ciudades_intervencion/ciudades_de_intervencion.html>
* RUAF Foundation: Resource Centres on Urban Agriculture & Food Security.
* <http://www.ruaf.org/>
* Spore. <http://spore.cta.int>
* World Food Garden. [www.worldfoodgarden.org](http://www.worldfoodgarden.org)

Most of the established organizations serve people in high-income countries, and their reach is limited. In contrast, the proposal here is for creation of a global Internet-based network that would provide useful guidance for people everywhere who are interested in producing food at their own homes for their own consumption.

In 2008 it was suggested that an existing organization with global reach might sponsor a network of this kind (see Appendices to this document). It was not taken up at that time, but it is still possible that some sponsoring organization could be found.

Another option is that the network could be established as an entirely new independent entity, a social-service oriented business with global reach. With the widespread availability of the Internet at little or no cost, this project seems very feasible. The basic problem is that while the network seems likely to produce substantial benefits at little cost, the relatively intangible benefits are not easily translated into cash income that would cover the costs.

The network would be designed as a business, not to enrich anyone, but to establish a structure that would be economically self-sustaining after a start-up period of, say, three years. While the organization would welcome volunteers and contributions of funds and other resources, the basic concept is that those who do the work should be fairly compensated for their efforts.

The global Home Grown Network could be designed as a non-governmental, membership-based organization devoted to supporting household food production. Membership would be open to individuals and groups. Benefits would include access to a wide array of user-friendly documents and videos on household food production, and also the opportunity to participate in global, national, and local networks of individuals with similar interests.

Apart from memberships, the network could offer specific services for modest fees, such as publications and workshops.

Internet service is available in many places at low cost, and in some places, access can be obtained at no cost, at schools and public libraries. In some cases corporations might give access to their Internet systems to groups they wish to support. However, many people have no direct access to the Internet. Recognizing this, the HGN is based on the idea that many people could benefit from its services through participation in local groups that do have access.

One theme that would be emphasized is the possibility of producing good food even in difficult conditions. There are things that can be done even where there is little land, poor soil quality, little sun, hills, limited water supply, etc. This is demonstrated in Kenneth Helphand’s book, *Defiant Gardens: Making Gardens in Wartime*, and the associated website, <http://defiantgardens.com>

The information and ideas that are explored would be useful for community gardens, but the emphasis will be on food produced at home for consumption at home. The coverage could include related skills such as food storage and preparation, and relevant information on nutrition and economics.

Workshops and short courses of various formats could be offered, locally, nationally, and globally. Both on-site and on-line course could be offered.

**PARTICIPATION CATEGORIES**

Once it is operational, individuals and organizations would be able to participate in the global HGN in various ways. The following categories are envisioned:

1. **Basic Membership** would be for people who have easy Internet access. For an annual fee of, say, US$10, they would be issued member identifications and passwords that would give them full access to the HGN website. Some members would join because of the direct benefits they would receive, in terms of building their skills in household food production. Some would join because they want to support the Network’s purpose. Some would join for both reasons.
2. **Affiliate Membership** would be for members of HGN groups who do not have Internet access. They would participate through their membership in local HGN Groups. The annual membership fee for affiliates would be, say, US$5.
3. **HGN Groups** would be small communities of people who are interested in promoting household food production, among themselves, and with others. They would be clusters of about ten people, and could include both Basic and Affiliate members. They would serve as the bridge between local people and Home Grown Network. The groups could print out publications as needed, and offer workshops for people outside the group, either free or for a small fee. They could also serve as retailers for relevant products such books, seeds, and specially designed growing boxes. They could provide advisory services, with backup from the global network. They could host local Master Gardeners who could be called on for advice. Specific groups could be identified by calling them Home Grown [Community Name].
4. **HGN Coordinators** wouldbe Basic Members who are willing to coordinate an HGN Group. Coordinators would share information and ideas from the HGN with the group members, arrange occasional meetings and workshops, arrange visits to members’ home gardens, and arrange other activities of interest to the group. The HGN would provide support services for these activities. HGN Coordinators would collect the annual membership fees from both Basic and Affiliate Members, hold a share to support the group’s local operations, and send the remainder to HGN in exchange for its support services.
5. **National Home Grown Offices** could be established, as the network matures. National offices could have their own websites and their own publications in their own languages. These national offices could provide services directly to members, and also provide support to HGN Groups.
6. **Partner Organizations** would be organizations that have non-commercial interests in household food productions and thus have an interest in supporting HGN and its activities. These could include local, national, and global organizations. At the global level, these could include organizations such as the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and the Helen Keller Foundation.
7. **Sponsoring Businesses** would be commercial enterprises that offer goods and services relating to household food production. They could support HGN through advertising on the HGN website and by other means.
8. **Stock Holders** would invest the funds needed to start and operate the HGN, and would earn modest returns on their investment as the HGN flourishes.
9. The **Executive Board** would be responsible for overall management of the HGN.

**ISSUES**

In establishing the HGN, many different issues would have to be considered. For example the legal structure for each of its components would have to be determined.

International financial transactions can be difficult and expensive, so this aspect would require careful management. Consolidating payments through HGN coordinators might be helpful. Paypal has international services that could be used. See

<https://www.paypal.com/worldwide/>

The website and other on-line activities need to be designed. The website could include links to a broad variety of related websites and other resources (documents, videos, etc.), and it could be linked to appropriate platforms for hosting conversations relating to special interests. Some parts might be accessible to all while others are accessible only to network members. People would have to be assigned to maintain the different sections of the website, and to be compensated appropriately.

Many documents and videos on household food are already available, but they are widely scattered, and some are useful only in particular contexts. The HGN could make them more accessible, and might find ways to adapt them for different local circumstances.

As the network matures, it could sponsor the production of new user-friendly materials that are needed, in various languages. Good models are already provided in other sectors. In the field of health care, for example, Hesperian Health Guides (<http://hesperian.org>) publishes successful books with titles such as *Where There is No Doctor*, and *Where There is No Dentist*. One can readily imagine extending that list to include a book on *Where There is No Farmer*, and a website to go with it.

**THE PLANNING PHASE**

Everything set out here is tentative and open to discussion and modification. Planning means working together to steadily strengthen this document until it leads to creation of the reality that is envisioned. Obviously, the package might be much easier to implement if it were simpler than the multi-layer version sketched out above. The major challenge is to design a version of the network that would flourish and be economically sustainable.

The first step in taking up this challenge would be to reach out to likely partners in the venture and undertake planning with them. An initial group of interested volunteers would brainstorm to elaborate and refine the ideas presented here. The group could seek funds for a more detailed planning phase, drawing in professional planning assistance as needed, setting up the management structure, and recruiting staff.

The planning group should include participants from many different parts of the world. The planning effort itself could be Internet-based, using various Internet-based tools. It could get started with keyboard chats about these ideas, inviting all who are interested to participate.

People who are not familiar with Skype could learn about it at [www.skype.com](http://www.skype.com) and download the software at no cost. Hopefully most participants would be able to access the Internet at little or no cost.

One advantage of keyboard chats, when compared to voice chats, is that transcripts of the conversations could be saved. With that resource permanently available, people who miss earlier portions of the discussion would be able to go back and review its flow. Another advantage is that keyboard chats can accommodate large numbers of participants. It would also be possible to use voice chats from time to time. For conversations between just two people, it would be possible to do voice plus video chats, using Skype.

These early chats would not be about specific ideas on how to do household food production. Their purpose would be to create good spaces in which to share such ideas later.

The immediate need is to find a few individuals that would be interested in cultivating the seeds of ideas advanced here.

**APPENDIX A**

For those who are interested in the evolution of these ideas, the basic concepts were developed in a Yahoo! Groups discussion on a Household Food Production Website that I led in August-October 2008. That discussion is accessible to Yahoo! members at <http://health.groups.yahoo.com/group/hfpw/>

I then led an on-line discussion on “A Web-site on Household Food Production” in the Food Security and Nutrition Forum of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO). The *English Summary* is available at <http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/SUMMARY_WB_on_HH_Food_Production.doc> That summary is also provided here in the following Appendix B.

The full *Proceedings* are available at <http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/PROCEEDINGS_WB_on_HH_Food_Production.doc>

The FAO’s *Global Forum on Food Security and Nutrition* (FSN) can be accessed at <http://www.fao.org/fsnforum/>

The FAO is interested in home gardening, as indicated at <http://www.fao.org/ag/agn/nutrition/household_gardens_en.stm> I arranged a meeting on October 2, 2008 with some FAO staff members in Rome to explore the idea of FAO’s becoming involved in creation of an Internet-based network on household food production. While there appeared to be some interest, the discussion did not go forward at that time.

I presented the networking idea again in the chapter on “Household Food Production” in my 2011 book, *Ending Hunger Worldwide*. A presentation on the book for FAO’s FSN is described at <http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/Report_FSN_Event_Ending_Hunger_Worldwide.pdf> The manuscript for the chapter on “Household Food Production” can be accessed at [<http://www2.hawaii.edu/~kent/eh0080HOUSEHOLD.doc>](http://www2.hawaii.edu/~kent/eh0080HOUSEHOLD.doc)

The discussion on networking in support of household food production has been dormant for years. This proposal is intended to revive it.

Appendix B

Summary of the FSN Forum discussion

A WEBSITE ON HOUSEHOLD FOOD PRODUCTION  
From 18TH AUG. to 12tH Sep. 2008

Proceeding available at:

<http://km.fao.org/fileadmin/user_upload/fsn/docs/PROCEEDINGS_WB_on_HH_Food_Production.doc>

# iSSUES raised

* Main gaps in sharing methods for producing basic foods at the household and community levels (G. Kent):
* There is a lot of information already available about home gardens, community gardens, roof gardens, sack gardens, small scale aquaculture, and so on. The problem is that it is very scattered;
* Few efforts have been made to **systematically gather information on household food production** in a form that would be **directly useful to householders** and the NGOs that work with them;
* Most of the **information** about food security, farming, livelihood strategies, etc., is presented in a **form designed to reach specialists, and not to address ordinary people in their own terms**. Few of them provide practical guidance in ways appropriate to householders with low income.

# Opportunities and suggestions

**Opportunities for improving the sharing of information and methods on household food production:**

**Tools:**

* **Internet could be used to facilitate more systematic exchange of ideas** about how households and communities in difficult circumstances could produce basic food in new and different ways. (G.Kent)
* Often support to people with low incomes can come from other people in comparable circumstances.  A **website could facilitate that process** and this effort should be made to **communicate with the end users more directly**. (G.Kent)

**Approach:**

* Have a platform to share information that can be also shared with those who need **it most for improved food access**, particularly the resource poor households, then both the hunger gap period as well as the number of hungry people will be reduced. (R.Opiyo)
* The **grassroots-"for-the -poor” approach** will work only where CBOs and NGOs can actively communicate information to the organized groups that are willing to produce for cluster communities. The scientists would then be able to **communicate new innovations/science to the organized groups**, merging livelihood strategies and cluster multi-component food production. (V. Mugalavai)
* Most poor people would not be able to access the Internet directly, but the use of internet combined with **small local NGOs could serve as the bridge to** share information and ideas about household food production. (G.Kent)

**Suggestions for the establishment of a Website on HH Food Production:**

* **Objectives:**
* The website could be used to link people together, especially to **connect those who have questions to those who have answers**. More experienced people could provide advice on how to get started with particular food production techniques, and suggest ways to apply the ideas in specific local situations. (G.Kent)
* The Household Food Production Website (**HFPW**) should focus on **providing practical how-to-do-it information in a form that would be useful to householders** with low income who are looking for practical information on how to produce food at home.(G.Kent)
* **The goals and aim of the website need polishing and should begin with adequacy**, and then have a human approach-regalia and field work in communicating science - new innovations after enabling access to vulnerable groups, sharing innovative regional approaches and practices. (V. Mugalavai).
* **Target/End Users:** 
  + Start simple and with **rural towns** and not the capitals of states and precisely with the suburbs of these rural towns where farming still forms an integral part of their livelihoods. (E.Elamin)
  + The establishment of a website is an important means for sustaining the livelihoods of **small and marginal farmers**. (M.Yusuf Ali)
  + The website should actually serve **small nongovernmental organizations** that can help to make the connections between people in their own countries, and also with people in similar situations in other countries. The NGOs could print out documents of interest to local people, and maybe translate or adapt them as necessary. (G.Kent)
* **Structure:**
* Two-tiered system on Internet (P.Shrestha):
  + **Central (global) level:** Information on 'Global knowledge used by the NGO, CBO networks to get the ideas that are relevant to the local context;
  + **Local level:** Information that is useful to deliver (by the relevant NGO, CBOs) directly to 'community level' people. This tier should be simple with key concepts and hands-on tips hopefully in local language and with many simple sketches (pictures) as far as possible.
* **A central office is needed to help with the coordination of this activity** by(G.Kent).
* **Setting up a central global website** on household food production that would be available to everyone who had good Internet access. The central operation would provide **links to other computers and to documents that provide the needed information**. One can start collecting information in many different places, in various forms and then create the links;
* **More decentralized initiatives** that could belinked together in a kind of network and channelled in the global website(G.Kent).
* **Information Content:**
* How to grow food in the house yard or **home food production using farm yard manure**. A website will be very fruitful as many people in the world are there who can grow food in their home lawns without the deleterious effect of chemical fertilizers and injurious pesticides. (A.R.Kakar)
* The Local tier should (among others) include (P.Shrestha):
  + **Promotion of local foods**: Local foods particularly in the remote villages are most dependable food for local people. The information on the 'household food production' should reiterate its importance and values.
  + **Demotion of commercialized foods:** Villagers should be made aware of such food and taught to use their scarce resources wisely.
  + **Proper Storing**: One of the concerns in Nepal (and in other developing places like Bangladesh or India) is the loss of a significant proportion of staple foods during storing.
  + **Nutritional information**: The proposed site should also include information on micronutrients which the locally available food does not have and possible ways to get these micronutrients.
    - The website in the connection of the home food production needs a reasonable set of **data and documents along with some picture of the production in the home yards**. (R.Kakar)
    - Attractive/beautiful **pictures related to agriculture** (for example the farmers sitting in the home garden) (K.Sokkheng), that should come **together with practical information** about how to do household food production. (G.Kent)
    - Posting the **success stories in the field of food security** (K.Sokkheng). The website and the organizations that work with it could help people to **create their own success stories**. (G.Kent)
    - it would be betterto **include good practices and indigenous knowledge and technology in regard to organic food production** (cereals and vegetables) at household level. (B. Rajbhandari)
    - It should include **traditional food systems of different parts of the world** (S.Yesudas) and highlight **those elements that focus on practical methods** of household food production. (G.Kent)
    - **Sections focusing on food security success stories and challenges** on (R.Opiyo):
* Livelihood Strategies;
* Socio-Cultural Factors in Food Access;
* Access to better markets as an incentive for small scale farmers.
* **Sources of Information**:
* **Some people might be interested** in focusing on particular issues, and devote some energy to building up that information by **writing short documents on those themes** and/or by **developing new practical guidance** on how to do household food production. (G.Kent)
* **Some members can** take responsibility for different countries and **collect the local information including research papers** on Household Food Production to enrich the quality of the website. (S.T.Hossain)
* **Links to selected websites and documents** that talk about livelihood strategies, socio-cultural factors in food access, and access to better markets. (G.Kent).
* **Technology:**
* As most of the users on less developed countries (like Nepal) have very slow access to internet resources, the local tier should be built on very **'basic internet technology'**. (P.Shrestha).
* There are **several possible software platforms** for supporting the exchange of information and ideas on household food production. They should be accessible on the Internet from anywhere in the world. (G.Kent)
* **Yahoo sharing**- or **Google groups** is a very practical way of sharing/ discussing the issues among the working groups and others interested in it. (P.Shrestha)
* **Who might host it:**
* There are many organizations willing to host the website, but the funds and responsibilities related to its maintenance should be considered;(Z.Shaban):
* The NGO Integrated Science for African communities (ISAC) is willing to host it;
* The Governor of the Bugiri district in Uganda finds it a good idea and assured that could be passed through the council to help with the setting up of the website;
* The State Minister of Agriculture in Uganda is willing to help in any possible way.
  + FAO’s Headquarters or regional officies, or other organizations, may be willing to host this activity as part or **complement of other types of initiatives** taking place **in different places**. (G.Kent)
  + Such a site could be **designed**, **moderated** (M.Yusuf Ali) and **rolled out by FAO** (V. Mugalavai).
* **Sources of Funding:**
* There some organizations that might be interested in funding it once the proposal is on table (Z.Shaban):
  + Bill Gates and Melinda Foundation;
  + National and local governments in Africa;
  + There are organizations at national and local level in Uganda, such as the ISAC network, where this website could be started, also benefiting from local and national government's networking**.**
    - **Proposed names for the website:** 
      * **Pro-poorest household food production**, to distinguish it from similarly titled programmes that are broader in scope, or in application (J.Appleton)
      * **Food Security Success Story Website** (FSSSW) – (K.Sokkheng)
      * **The Household Food Access Website (HFAW)** (R.Opiyo)

# Conclusions

* This initiative has a **good potential for supporting people** with low incomes to increase and improve their food production at the household level.
* Creating **strong networks** on the issue could help to facilitate the process.
* The **Internet could be used to tie local nongovernmental organizations** together with **a global network** of people interested in household food production.
* **These groups could serve as the bridge** between global (and, possibly, national and local) websites and local end-users, i.e. the householders.
* The pilot online group called “Household Food Production Website” will be used to experiment the ways of doing it.

# Pilot Project – “Household Food Production Website” on Yahoo Groups

George Kent has created an experimental **“Household Food Production Website” on Yahoo Groups**, called HFPW for short. The HFPW itself is used to experiment with ways of setting up the final website.

To make it more manageable, the access to the HFPW is not open, but requires invitation from and approval by the website owner. Those interested are invited to send an email to [kent@hawaii.edu](mailto:kent@hawaii.edu) with their email address and a few lines about themselves.

The instructions on the Yahoo Groups site may seem to suggest that it is necessary to create a Yahoo email address in order to join this group. However, it is actually possible to continue using any e-mail address one may have.

**There is a “Files” section on the website**, accessible from the menu on the left side of the front page. In that section, it is possible to create a number of folders, labelled with different topic names such as, say Sprouting Seeds, Sack Gardens, Composting, and Aquaculture etc. Copies of documents can be stored inside those folders.

**There is also a “Links” section on the website**, where links can be set up to other websites. In time, if some of the folders become very full, other groups might be created on this specific topics.

HFPW will also maintain an **archive of email messages** that have been exchanged through that system.

# Resources

**Web-Based Platforms for knowledge sharing** (G.Kent)**:**

* + - **Wikia**: [www.wikia.com](http://www.wikia.com)
    - **Global Knowledge Partnership, described at:**

<http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?r=503>

* **Yahoo Groups:** It can organize a members’ list, archive e-mail exchanges and maintain document files and a list of links to other websites or documents. An introduction to this system can be found at:<http://groups.yahoo.com/>

**Material on Household Food Production:**

* **Homestead Vegetable Gardening: Meeting the Need of Year Round Vegetable Requirement of Farm Family.** On-Farm Research Division (OFRD) of Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI) has long been working for household nutrition and food security of small and marginal farmers under its Integrated Farming Systems Program. It has developed and recommended nine models of homestead vegetable/fruit production for the resource poor farmers of different agro-ecological regions. (M.Yusuf Ali) : <http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?r=501>)
* **National conference** on "**Climate change: Food Security in Bangladesh**" held on August 2008 by the Bangladesh Agricultural Economists Association in Dhaka, Bangladesh. In the conference a number of papers was presented on food security from a national and global perspective. **Household food production issues were highlighted in the seminar** (S.T.Hossain): <http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?no_cache=1&r=540&nocache=1>
* **Extension material of the Pro Huerta program, Argentina** (available only in Spanish) This programme is being implemented in other countries such as Haiti. "La Huerta Organica" is the basic text (A. Marcos): <http://km.fao.org/fsn/resources/fsn_viewresdet.html?no_cache=1&r=538&nocache=1>