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[Pete Bevington](#)

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SHETLAND has to start thinking seriously about growing its own food, according to the growers group on its most northerly isle who have proved that you can cultivate virtually anything you like in these wet and windy climes.



The Unst Regeneration Growers Enterprise (URGE) has demonstrated that if you are prepared to put the energy and effort in, you can harvest a vast range of fruit and vegetables.

The group of four people have turned a plot of thin turf on thick rock into an oasis of greenery that has not only provided healthy and tasty produce for themselves, but has brought fresh fruit and veg to the local shop, hotel and holiday resort.

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URGE's "acquisitions officer" Sarah McBurnie said they had been motivated by the lack of fresh produce on the island that

cherries, all the product of the URGE polytunnel at the back of Nikkavord Lea, in Baltasound.

However she warned that others must start thinking seriously about growing more food in Shetland, and not just for the improved flavour.

"Our motto is change your food miles into food inches and Shetland has to start thinking seriously about growing its own food," she said.

"Those boats are not going to run forever; it's not going to be viable to import things from all sorts of funny places all over the world.

"We need to be self sufficient in fresh food so that if there's a problem it doesn't matter. But there will be problems in the future and I for one want to be able to eat everything from asparagus to spinach, absolutely everything.

"If we all want to do that then I am afraid that everybody's going to have to start growing things."

Guest speakers included Vicki Ferguson, who is a field worker for the charity Trellis and the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, which support therapeutic and community based horticulture throughout the country; and Bob Bull of the therapeutic Glachbeg Croft Education Centre, in the Black Isle, north of Inverness

Ms Ferguson said: "There is clearly a lot happening in Shetland and this is an opportunity to find out more about what is going on and what is working up here and how the work that we do could support projects up here."

The meeting had been organised by SIC environmental officer Mary Lisk who told the meeting that growing your own food was becoming increasingly important to local councils and health authorities across Scotland, saying this was something Shetland needed to think more seriously about.

After the meeting she said: "Everyone has gone away very excited from this and hopefully we can build on it in the future."

She is hoping the council will develop a strategy for supporting allotment and community garden projects, therapeutic horticulture and general grow your own schemes.

"I think this has been a long time coming in Shetland. The whole area of local growing, sustainability and reducing carbon is something we have looked at in a very disparate way and this has brought people together who have not realised they have a commonality," she said.

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lies at the end of the food chain in the modern world of supermarkets.

With absolutely no outside funding they have erected polytunnels and created their own soil using seaweed and animal manure, recycling everything they can lay their hands on in the process.

On Thursday Ms McBurnie left a packed meeting of Shetland Islands Council's environment forum in awe as she showed pictures of seven foot high sweet corn plants and trees laden with

Forum chairman Allan Wishart said that he was extremely impressed by the enthusiasm at the meeting, attended by around 30 people from projects and agencies throughout the islands.

He urged people to "keep that enthusiasm alive" by attending a public session with Ms Ferguson, Mr Bull and Ms McBurnie at Lerwick Town Hall's council chamber on Friday (17 September) at 7pm.