Open Discussion Table Notes

Most of what came up was about how to develop the good food market and making good food more accessible to everyone.

* It was noted that there is (or appears to be) a middle class bias to a lot of work around better food. Organisations need to be conscious of how they may appear when engaging with more disadvantaged communities.
* Changing the food culture is extremely challenging. We need to help develop people’s skills and confidence but we also need to acknowledge that many people don’t even have the necessary equipment to cook much in their own homes.
* Pricing can be a challenge. Better food often costs more than ordinary supermarket produce, although it was noted that if one shops around carefully this is not always the case. However, there is often at least a perception that better food costs more which is discouraging to people on lower incomes.
* At the same time, it was recognised that food must be fairly priced so that producers can make a reasonable living from production. The issue of dairy farmers selling milk for below the cost of production was highlighted as an example of how distorted our food pricing really is.
* Public procurement was discussed briefly. If councils and organisations like the NHS were to focus on procuring food from this sector, it could be key in boosting growth since some of the barriers mentioned above that apply to many individuals do not apply at all to large, well-funded bodies. It can also be much easier to sell in bulk to a single buyer than to spend a lot of time selling at farmers’ markets or other retail methods.
* A community café group was suggested as a way to support larger-scale production and to reliably return compostable material to the growing soil. (It occurs to me as I type this up that GCC’s talk about the “circular economy” might fit into something like this really well. I’m sure I remember seeing that they had funding for circular economy pilot projects.)
* There was also some discussion of allotments. It was suggested that when land is made available for allotments, there should be a more graduated entry, i.e. there should be more micro-plots available for new entrants to shorten waiting lists, weed out those who are not highly committed, get applicants more prepared to take on a full-sized allotment and expand the growing base. A typical 300m2 allotment could potentially hold 35 2mx2m micro-plots.