

Growing Communities is helping families get hands-on with their food heritage. Credit: Rhi Ellis.

In a climate and cost-of-living crisis, reconnecting with our food heritage could offer a way forward.

Ein Cegin, a community kitchen in west Wales, is reviving traditional ways of growing and preparing food.

Working with local support services including Flying Start and Plant Dewi, the Growing Communities project invited families to rediscover heritage foods and techniques. Alongside passing on intangible cultural heritage, it's boosting wellbeing, climate resilience and community connection.

Sophie Bennett-Alford, Co-founder and Director of Ein Cegin, says: "We wanted this project to explore the unique food landscapes of the places we live and to reconnect local families with the diverse ingredients, recipes, knowledge and skills that belong to our cultural heritage."



Children and adults learned how to turn heritage grains into nutritious, homemade food. Credit: Rhi Ellis.

Project participants learned to cook with seasonal Welsh produce like leeks and laver seaweed, picked and pressed traditional varieties of apples from local orchards and discovered how to make butter by hand.

Heritage wheat was at the heart of the project. The participants took the wheat all the way from seed to plate, sowing it in community gardens, harvesting and milling the grain and baking bread with the resulting flour.

What is heritage wheat?

Before modern intensive farming, many varieties of wheat and other grains were grown on a small scale, each adapted to the local environment.

These heritage varieties are more genetically diverse, which can make them more resilient to a changing climate. The more variation between plants, the less chance there is that entire crops will be wiped out by an environmental disaster.



The project ended with a series of celebratory feasts, where participants shared the food and skills they'd grown together. Credit: Rhi Ellis.

Sophie says that using heritage ingredients can help "deepen our connection with food and our growing spaces. We're exploring where food comes from and how we can produce it in sustainable ways that are good for people and the planet we share."

Making food heritage accessible

With food prices rising, local ingredients and traditional ways of cooking can often feel out of reach. The project set out to show that food heritage does not have to be expensive or exclusive.

Sophie says: "Everyone should have access to good quality food grown with a commitment to sustainability, soil health and biodiversity.

"But often there is a disconnect between local communities and local food, which can be perceived as inaccessible or unaffordable. Throughout the project, we worked together to explore how we can use simple, affordable, locally grown ingredients to make delicious, nutritious meals inspired by our shared food heritage."



Families also learned traditional crafts associated with food and the harvest, like making corn dollies and pottery. Credit: Rhi Ellis.

Bringing the community together

As well as learning practical cooking skills, families strengthened their wellbeing and connection to one another.

To foster a sense of community belonging and ownership over the project, Ein Cegin co-designed activities with participants.

Sophie says: “The project was all about bringing people together to cook, eat and connect."

Together with the Ein Cegin team, families planted, tended, weeded and watered the crops through the changing seasons, braving rainstorms, celebrating summer sunshine and watching the wheat slowly ripen. They dug and processed local clay to make plates and pinch pots, sculpted clay guardians to watch over the field and sang Welsh nature songs while preparing delicious shared meals together.

The hope is that families will continue to build these practices into their everyday lives, returning to the community gardens and cooking the recipes they learned throughout the project.

Explore more intangible cultural heritage projects we've supported.



2026 joint winner: Hannah, Project Officer at Gloucestershire Archives, with vegetables harvested from the community garden. Credit: Gloucestershire Archives.



winning environmentally friendly project

A five-metre-tall puppet of Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd greets spectators as part of Prosiect 1176's celebration of the first Eisteddfod. Credit: Aled Llywelyn.



Project participants enjoying their allotment. Credit: The Birmingham Allotment Project.

Wotta Lotta Culture – The Birmingham Allotment Project