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Land Allotment Scheme in Cork city 1917-1923

MARY FORREST

During World War 1, food supply was an issue not only in Cork but throughout Ireland. At that time, the urban population was dependent on imported foodstuffs. In January 1917, the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction and the Local Government Board introduced a scheme to promote food production which included town allotments. The scheme provided for the acquisition of lands, instruction in allotment cultivation and loans for requisites, e.g. seed. Cork Corporation established an Allotments Committee, comprising local councillors and allotment holders. Each allotment site had its own committee. In each ward, land was rented or acquired compulsorily from local landowners. At the peak of the scheme, some 1000 allotments, distributed across the city and immediate environs, yielded annual produce per allotment valued at £10. Fixity of tenure, a significant issue for ploholders, eventually resulted in the Acquisition of Lands (Allotments) Act 1926. Though a war measure, the scheme continued until 1923.

INTRODUCTION

“Applications are invited from workmen resident in the City of Cork for allotments of arable land not exceeding in area one-eighth of an acre. Applicants must not be already in occupation of land, and must be willing to undertake the cultivation of potatoes or oats.”¹

Thus ran a notice placed by Cork Corporation in the *Cork Examiner* in January 1917. This article examines the rise and demise of allotments in Cork city in the years 1917-23. At their peak, some 1000 allotments distributed across the city and immediate environs were cultivated for vegetables.

From the beginning of World War 1, food shortages and escalating food prices were experienced in Cork. This led to the formation of the Cork Consumers’ League, requests from the Cork Poor Law Guardians to the Local Government Board to control bread and milk prices and discussions at City Council meetings to alleviate what was termed a “Food Crisis”.² In January 1918, a People’s Food Committee was established to survey

local food supplies and emphasise to merchants the need to retain existing supplies for local people.³

Food Production Scheme

Concern about food supply was not limited to Cork. In the early 20th century, foodstuffs for human and animal consumption valued at £24 million was imported into Ireland from 'every quarter of the globe', with the urban poor being particularly dependent on imported foodstuffs such as tea, sugar, bread and frozen meats.⁴ As World War 1 continued, it became apparent to Government officials in Dublin that, with blockades at sea, measures to promote local food production were vital. Addressing the Council of Agriculture in November 1916, Sir T.W. Russell, Vice President of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) spoke of the 'necessity for a greatly increased production of home-grown food' and intimated that measures to increase food production were to be introduced.⁵ Following a request from the Food Controller in London, in January 1917 the DATI and the Local Government Board (LGB) introduced a scheme to increase tillage of potatoes and oats. The scheme was in two parts: Scheme A, for 'holdings over £10 valuation' and Scheme B, for "holdings of £10 valuation, or under, labourers' plots, and town and other allotments".



Figure 1: Allotment gardens 1916, Westland Road, Belfast.
 (From W.H. Johns, *Journal Dept. of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland*
 XVI 1915-1916 pp 316-317)



Figure 2: Produce from allotment 1916, Belfast. (From G.H. Oliver, 'Allotment Gardens in Belfast' *Journal Dept. of Agriculture and Technical Instruction for Ireland XVII 1916*)

Allotments in Ireland

Allotments, areas of land separate to a dwelling, already existed in urban and rural areas where they had been provided by local authorities, by individuals and societies. With the enactment of the Labourers (Ireland) Act 1883, the LGB approved schemes for the construction and letting of cottages with allotments and the letting of land to tenants of local authorities living in nearby villages and towns. In the year ended 31 March 1911, schemes from 22 rural districts were submitted to the LGB, providing for new cottages, allotments for cottages, and 20 acres (8ha) of land for allotments for those living in neighbouring villages and towns.⁶ Workingmen's Gardens as they were known in France were established on vacant land in the rural towns of Navan and Killarney, and in Cork.⁷ Allotments had developed in other Irish cities. In 1910 the recently established Vacant Land Cultivation Society obtained three areas of vacant land in Dublin which provided 23 allotments or 'plots' as they were colloquially known, for those in casual labour.⁸ In 1907/1908 in Belfast, Mr C.J. Black established allotments in Strandtown with the aim of providing a working man with a 'pleasant and profitable pastime' as there were no workingmen's clubs in the city. By 1916 some 1500 plots on 120 - 130 acres (48.5 - 52.6ha) were under cultivation.⁹

From 1917, with significant government and local authority support for town and other allotments, the numbers of Irish towns and cities with allotments increased. The provisions of Scheme B relating to town allotments were: 'Acquisition of land for allotments ; Instruction as to management and cultivation; Measures for making available

supplies of seeds, manures, spraying materials and implements, and Loans for the purchase of seed and manure.¹⁰

Scheme B was implemented promptly by the LGB and the DATI. On 3 January 1917, the LGB issued a circular letter to Urban District Councils stating that a council could lease land for four years in or adjacent to the town for the purpose of letting allotments to workmen resident in the district, the land was to be leased by 15 January. The costs incurred by the Scheme would be recouped by the rent from the allotments, such rates of rent to be fixed by the council. The LGB would sanction loans to defray the cost of the Scheme, the purchase of seed potatoes and oats by occupiers of land and allotment holders, and ultimately approve all arrangements made by the council. Each Urban District Council was to form a subcommittee of five members, three of whom were to be members of the council.¹¹ These subcommittees became known as Land Cultivation Committees. Following the enactment of the Defence of the Realm Act (DORA) in January 1917, the DATI was empowered to compulsorily acquire unoccupied land or rent land for cultivation. Similar schemes were implemented in England, Wales and Scotland.¹²

Drawing on Council Minute Books, national and local newspapers and Annual Reports of the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, this article examines the implementation in Cork Borough of Scheme B, with regard to town allotments, from its introduction in January 1917 to cessation in December 1923. It also examines how the scheme operated at allotment level and the issues faced by ploholders, as occupiers of allotments were commonly known.

ALLOTMENT OF LAND SCHEME 1917

By the end of January, measures had been taken by Cork Borough to implement Scheme B. On 23 January 1917, a notice appeared in the *Cork Examiner* inviting applications from workmen resident in the City of Cork willing to undertake cultivation of potatoes or oats on land not exceeding one-eighth of an acre (500m²). Applications were to be submitted to the Town Clerk, City Hall by 26 January 1917.¹³

At a meeting of County Council Chairmen and Secretaries of County Committees held in Dublin on 25 January, Mr F. O'Connell, J.P. and Mr E. Corcoran, Secretary, represented Cork. Agricultural and horticultural instructors from around the country were to be called to a meeting in Dublin to learn about the local administration of the Scheme. The ordinary duties of the instructors and secretaries of county councils were suspended so as to allow the development of the Scheme.¹⁴ Such a suspension indicated the seriousness with which government officials viewed the food situation.

The first reference to the Land Allotment Scheme in council minutes occurs on 26 January 1917. Thirty five applications were made for allotments and four proposals for the letting of arable land for allotments were referred to the Law and Finance Committee.¹⁵ At a special sitting of the council held on 1 February, Thomas Butterfield, Lord Mayor, Councillors S. Mahony, John Murphy, P.M. Murphy and Alderman Sir Edward Fitzgerald were elected to the Allotments Committee.¹⁶ The minutes of the Allotments Committee are not deposited in Cork City Archives and may no longer exist. However, reports in

local newspapers and minutes of Cork Corporation council meetings provide detailed records of the implementation of Scheme B by this committee.

Acquisition of land for allotments 1917

The Allotments Committee received few offers of land from landowners and just hundreds of applications for allotments from a population of 80,000 people. Not only manual workers but anyone able to till a plot was urged to apply, and landowners in the vicinity of Cork were encouraged to be 'public spirited'.¹⁷ In response P. Bradley, President, Cork County and City Land and Labour Association, suggested that unless compulsory orders were introduced the scheme would not be a success, and he suggested that application forms be distributed to potential plotters by aldermen and councillors.¹⁸

At a meeting of Cork Allotments Committee, held in February, the Town Clerk provided an update on the offers of land and the interest in allotments in the city. The City High Sherriff agreed to give two acres (0.8ha) at O'Connor Ville (Friar's Walk) rent free for four years; Mr O'Donovan, Dunbar Street, offered four acres (1.6ha) at £4 an acre; and Mr Joyce agreed to let six acres (2.4ha) of land at Mayfield for £4 an acre (Table 1). As the demand for allotments exceeded the offers of land, compulsory acquisition of land would be necessary.¹⁹ At a subsequent meeting it was reported that Mr T. Jennings would make four and a half acres (1.8ha) on the Western Road available for four years and Mr M. Hunt J.P. three acres (1.2ha) at Boreenmana Road. The DATI had stated in a letter read at the meeting that if land could not be acquired Urban District Councils could apply to the LGB to initiate compulsory powers to acquire land. Sir E. Fitzgerald considered that the 120 applicants from the South Ward could be accommodated, whereas the 300 applicants in the North West ward could not and the Ward Committee would have to make representation to the LGB.²⁰ Later that month, the Committee accepted an offer of land at Beaumont, to be given to allotment applicants from Blackrock and Ballintemple, and from Mr Donovan who gave land at Gillabbey rent free.²¹

Letting and Cultivation of Allotments

The next stage was letting and cultivation of allotments. In March 1917, in the presence of Dr Colahan, Bishop of Cork, and Sir Edward Fitzgerald, Lord Mayor, plots, as they were more commonly known, were formally handed over to 50 people at a site in the South Ward. Those receiving plots were busy planting potatoes.²² The Bishop had previously presided at meetings to promote allotments in North-west [ward] and in Friary Lane Hall attended by 300 people.²³ In 1917, Bishop Colahan contributed to a public meeting about the Food Crisis and initiated the 'Cork Poor Children's Fund' and, in January 1918, chaired the recently convened 'People's Food Committee'.²⁴

Each ward or area had an Allotments Subcommittee which liaised with plotters and the Cork Allotments Committee. For example, the Blackrock Allotments Committee arranged to distribute seed potatoes to those who had duly signed the necessary agreements.²⁵ By April 1917, eight fields or 45 acres (18.2ha) in Cork city and 30 acres (12ha) outside the city, at Beaumont Estate, Ballintemple, were provided for allotments. Plot holders directed by instructors had become skilled at growing green vegetables and

potatoes.²⁶ Plotholders could also attend classes in gardening held in the Technical School, Cork.²⁷ In June, satisfactory reports were submitted by the Allotments Committee and a 'reasonably bountiful harvest' was anticipated.²⁸

While the main aim of allotment holders was to produce food for their families, the right of allotment holders to sell their produce was discussed by Cork Corporation in August 1917. Though a surplus should not be wasted, the sale of the entire produce would defeat the purpose of the Scheme.²⁹ Although no information is available about the yield of potatoes and other vegetables under Scheme B, an allotment of an eighth of an acre (505m²) of good land should yield 160 stone (1016kg) of potatoes, sufficient for a family for a year.

ALLOTMENT OF LAND SCHEME 1918

Acquisition of land for allotments 1918

The matter of selling produce was raised again in February 1918 when the Cork Allotments Committee was discussing the acquisition of land for 1918. The City High Sheriff, Mr O'Connor, said that he had given land free for 'needy people' and not to those who wished to send 'produce to England or midland counties'. Mr P. Murphy agreed with the High Sheriff, stating that some people who 'got land free, seed free and manure for very little' were sending food out of the city, despite the demand by poor city people. The meeting was informed that the Beaumont estate would not be available in 1918. It also received a request from some residents of Roche's Buildings for plots on an adjacent field owned by representatives of Mr Jerh Meehan.³⁰ Land was subsequently made available.

As in 1917, the Allotments Committee published notices inviting proposals to let land for allotments, and inviting applications from wage earners resident within the Municipal Boundary who wished to rent an allotment.³¹ In reply to their letter to the LGB concerning the compulsory acquisition of lands for allotments, the Board directed that their inspector Mr A.P. Delaney meet with the Committee and arrange an inquiry.³² As a result of the inquiry, it was decided to acquire 60¼ acres (24.38 ha) in ten lots of 2 – 14 acres, six lots in North West Ward and four in South Ward. Mr P. Murphy commented that there would be more than 1,000 plots in Cork, with 520 in the North West ward. This figure may have been based on a smaller allotment size of one sixteenth of acre (250m²) or it may take into account land rented directly from landowners. Mr. Griffin, Allotment Instructor, said an improvement was promised this year, and suggested a show of plotholders' produce be held in August. The Lord Mayor said that it would encourage plotholders to grow several kinds of vegetables.³³ While there were no reports of such a show occurring in Cork, shows of produce or awards for allotments occurred in Dublin and suburbs, Naas, Co. Kildare and Clonmel, Co. Tipperary.

The schedule of compulsorily acquired lands in the County Borough of Cork presented to the Council on 12 April 1918 was as follows:-

Ballincolly (rural district) 7 acres Miss O'Driscoll

Kilnap (rural district) 4½ acres F. Sheedy

Gurranabraher 9¾ acres (rural district) Mrs P. H. O'Sullivan

Knockcullen West 2 acres (rural district) Misses Forrest
Friars Walk 3¾ acres South Ward T.A. Callanan
Gurranaברה 7½ acres (rural district)-Collins
Ballinlough 2½ acres (rural district) M.D. Spillane
Knockrea (rural district) 2½ acres Leonard Dobbin
Ballinaspigbeg (rural district) 7 acres Mrs Hannah Dennehy.³⁴

Little information about the Land Allotments Committee is included in the Minutes of Cork Council. However, at its meeting of 12 July 1918 it confirmed the following as Ward representatives to the Allotments Committee.

North East: Alderman Forde and Councillor Kenneally
North West: Councillor Doody and P. Murphy
North Centre: Alderman Simcox and Councillor Maguire
South Centre: Councillors Curtis and Williams
West: Councillors Bradley and J. Murphy
South: Alderman Fitzgerald and Councillor Murphy
The Centre: Alderman Meade and Councillor Hart.³⁵

Cultivation of Allotments 1918

Newspaper reports of the Allotments Committee captured the views of Committee members and concerns raised by plotters. Sir Edward Fitzgerald, Chair, said that 'apart from the supply of food it was instrumental in affording, it had inculcated habits of industry among their working classes'.³⁶ The DATI notified the Committee that an award of certificates, perhaps together with a monetary award would be introduced in 1919. No references to the award of such certificates in Cork or elsewhere in Ireland have been located. Other issues mentioned at the meetings was the theft of potatoes and damage caused by goats to 30s worth of onion plants of a plotter and member of the Committee, J. Kelleher.³⁷

Mr. John Griffin, Chief Allotment Instructor, presented his report for the 1918 season. The best allotments were located at O'Connor Ville, Friar's Walk. He recommended the potato varieties, Arran Chief, British Queen, Leinster Wonder.³⁸ While the Instructor had given a satisfactory report about allotments, the Allotments Committee was aware of poor results in Glasheen and 'other places'.³⁹

The cost to the Council of renting land was also discussed. In Cork, compulsorily acquired land was rented at £7 per acre whereas in Dublin the rent was £4 5s per acre.⁴⁰ In their reply to the Committee's inquiry on the matter, the DATI stated that the rent was based on the 'productive capacity of the soil' and would not be reduced. However, the Council rented at £7 an acre (equivalent to 18s rent per plot) while landowners who had given land voluntarily received £4 per acre. The City Solicitor advised the parish (allotment) committees to submit their requirements for the following year (1919) so that any inquiry could be held quickly. One owner, Mr Thomas Donovan, advised that he would not be letting land bounded by Magazine Road, College Rd and Fernhurst Terrace for allotments in 1919.⁴¹ Following the City Solicitor's advice, notices about forthcoming meetings of West Ward allotments and St. Finn Barr's West Allotments Scheme appeared in the *Cork Examiner*.⁴²

ALLOTMENT OF LAND SCHEME 1919

On 1 January 1919, Mr A.P. Delaney, L.G.B. inspector, conducted an inquiry into compulsory acquisition of land for allotments in the presence of the City Solicitor, six other solicitors, members of city council, plotholders and land owners. Some solicitors spoke on behalf of their clients stating that land was not available in the coming year, due to tillage, cattle or house construction. One owner, Mr Thomas Jennings, agreed to let a plot of 2½ acres on the Western Road.⁴³

The outcome of the inquiry was brought to the Council meeting of 14 February 1919. The DATI, having considered the application of the Council for lands for the year ending 1 November 1919, decided that lands at Ballinlough compulsorily acquired in 1918 be returned to the owner, Mr. M.D. Spillane, Leitrim Street and, secondly, to offer Mrs H. Denehy (sic) £49 for 7 statute acres (2.8ha) at Ballinaspigbeg and Mr Dobbin £15 for 2½ acres at Knockrea (Douglas Road).⁴⁴ His acceptance of this offer was noted at a Council meeting held on 28 February 1919.

Cultivation of Allotments 1919

One of the provisions of the DORA regulations was 'instruction as to management and cultivation' (of allotments). In 1919, a demonstration plot, funded by the Allotments Committee and managed by the Chief Instructor, was laid out at Jennings' field.⁴⁵ This is the only record of such a demonstration plot in Cork.

Minutes of 1919 report on routine matters and approval of an allotment rent of £55 for lands in the North-East and North-West wards. The Secretary was to make conacre agreements with various plotholders. Other issues arose. A solicitor appeared at an Allotments Committee meeting on behalf of plotholders at Jennings' field. They were concerned that plotholders resident outside the Ward would lose their plots. The Ward Committee agreed that this would not occur. They also recommended that surrendered plots and those held by persons without families be given to those with families. The Allotments Committee agreed to support a proposal made by the Limerick Plotholders' Protective Association to hold a Munster Convention of Plotholders.⁴⁶ The purpose of such a convention, or whether one took place, was not recorded in local newspapers. However, discussion of tenure and the provision of allotments was the likely purpose.

FIXITY OF TENURE

Fixity of tenure was a recurring issue for plotholders in Cork and beyond. In England and Wales, the Towns' Allotments Act 1887 and Small Holdings and Allotment Act 1908 placed an onus on local authorities to provide allotments for rural and urban dwellers. Similar legislation was demanded in Ireland. In November 1917, the Vacant Land Cultivation Society had written to Cork Council asking it to write to the Chief Secretary in support of a permanent allotment bill.⁴⁷ In June 1919, Cork plotholders met to discuss fixity of tenure. As the provision of allotments was intended to have effect during World War 1, they were now likely to have to vacate allotments they had held for over three years. In response, the Land Allotments Committee stated that there were 660 allotment holders in

Cork, and they agreed to ask the LGB to urge Government to introduce a bill seeking fixity of tenure for plotters, and, in so doing, they sought the cooperation of Plotters' Associations in Dublin and Limerick.⁴⁸ Three months earlier, in March 1919, a meeting of the Irish Plotters' Union, which was established in 1917, took place in the Theatre Royal, Dublin, where tenure was the main issue on the agenda.⁴⁹ Alderman Sir Edward Fitzgerald and Councillors P. Murphy and Bradley were to represent the Corporation at a meeting of local authorities and the DATI to discuss this issue.⁵⁰ At a meeting of allotment holders, held in the Council Chamber in July 1919, tenure was again discussed and the meeting agreed to form a Cork branch of the Plotters' Association.⁵¹ Many years passed before legislation was enacted. In 1926, the Free State Government passed the Acquisition of Lands (Allotments) Act which obliged local authorities to provide allotments. This Act was amended in 1934 and titled Acquisition of Lands (Allotments) Amendment Bill.⁵²

In September 1919, the Cork Allotments Committee was informed that the Defence of the Realm regulations would be extended for 12 months. The DATI said that, following the session ending November 1919, it was withdrawing from possession of lands as follows - Miss O'Driscoll's land at Ballincolly; representatives of Mr R.M. Forrest's land at Knocknacullen West; Mr Leonard Dobbin's land at Knockree; Mrs Hannah Dennehy's land at Dennehy's Cross; and Miss Forrest's land at Blarney Road. The meeting was informed that 50 plotters on Mrs. Dennehy's land and 18 plotters on Miss Forrest's land had already planted winter vegetables. Allotments which had been acquired compulsorily had to be vacated whereas those acquired voluntarily would remain for the lease period of four to five years.⁵³ Later that month, the DATI authorised possession of plots on land owned by Miss M. Collins at Gurrabraher. The recently formed Cork Branch of the Irish Plotters' Union demanded legislation to ensure fixity of tenure. The Chairman asked local allotment committees to prepare their schemes so that land could be acquired for the following year. The demonstration plot mentioned earlier which had been managed by Mr. Lynch, the DATI's instructor, was a great success. In reply to a query, the cost of rental of an allotment at Mr (sic) Dennehy's was 13s 6d not 10s as assumed by plotters.⁵⁴ Few details of costs of renting allotments in Cork were located.

The Cork Allotments Committee met in October 1919 and suggested that the inquiry into the compulsory acquisition of land be held on 30 November. Reports were submitted from wards: in the South Ward 5 acres (2ha) were obtained from Capt. Newman; 400 plots were available in the North West Ward; and in another unnamed ward an additional 30 applications for plots had been received.⁵⁵ As in previous years, the Allotments Committee sought proposals from landowners willing to let arable land for allotments.⁵⁶ Sir Edward Fitzgerald chaired a large and representative public meeting held on 21 November 1919. He stated that people had obtained plots so as to provide food for their families. Barren land had been made fertile and now plotters had to leave their plots. He urged people to attend the forthcoming public inquiry.⁵⁷

At the Inquiry before Mr Adrian Robinson, Inspector, Mr Galvin, City Solicitor, appeared in support of the applications and Mr Cottrell appeared for the plotters. In

his statement, Mr Galvin said the Allotment Movement 'saved the country from famine in the darkest days of war' and, though war was over, the need 'for food production was greater than ever'. In 1919, 81 acres (32ha) were used for allotments and 17 acres (6.87 ha) obtained compulsorily, providing approximately 650 one eighth acre plots. 200 applications had been received for the coming year, many from demobilised soldiers. No offers of land had been received in response to the request made by the Allotments Committee. The Allotments Committee had then visited sites in the city and they considered the following suitable.

North East Ward - Major Broadley at Knights Hill, 5 stature acres

North West Ward – representatives of Jeremiah Meehan at Rathmore and Audley Fields in the parish of St Annes, Shandon, 32 acres and Mr Frank Sheedy, Kilnap, 3 acres;

South Ward - Cat's Home Field, Evergreen Road, Mr A. Callaghan trustee, 1 acre; Mr P.T. Buckley field, Ballyphehane, 1½ acres; Mr E. Murphy, Evergreen Road, ½ acre; Mr Thomas Donovan, Woodview, Douglas Road, 2 acres.

Sir Edward Fitzgerald, Chairman of the Cork Plotolders, said that the presence of such a large number of plotolders demonstrated 'an honest desire on their part to help themselves and their families'. He hoped that the Inspector would recommend that 'every plot and perch of land' was granted. He commented that granting plots was the only boon ever given to urban workers. The newspaper report demonstrated the detail of such an inquiry, with solicitors instructed to appear before the LGB Inspector on behalf of individual landowners and Allotment Ward committees.⁵⁸

A month later, the Allotments Committee wrote to the LGB asking if the lands had been approved for plots so that plotolders could commence work for the 1920 season.⁵⁹ Though Major Broadley's land was considered unsuitable, being too stony, he was to be given a rent of £7 per acre. The DATI determined that Mr M.J. O' Donovan, Assumption Road, be given £22 rent for land at Rathmore and Audley Place.⁶⁰

ALLOTMENT OF LAND SCHEME 1920 - 1923

Allotment of Land Scheme 1920

In 1920, the Committee received a grant of £159 10s from the DATI for surveying and staking of allotment sites. Grants from the Local Government Board were available via the DATI and were a provision of the Scheme. This was the first mention of such a grant in Cork newspapers. Monies having been paid to draughtsmen from the City Engineer's Department, £95 remained. The Corporation was paying £3 rent per acre, a reduction from £4 in previous years. The comment was made that plotolders, however, would have to pay full rent in coming years.⁶¹

In June 1920, a letter from Mr W. O'Donovan, Departmental Inspector, stated that eleven plots at Gurrabraher and two at Mayfield (Major Broadley's) were not cultivated and he queried why the DATI should grant compulsory powers if plots were not cultivated.⁶² These comments about full rent and uncultivated plots in newspaper reports signal a change of attitude to the provision of allotments in Cork. In November 1920, the Committee discussed the deficit of £678 11s 1d incurred by the Corporation.

Rent receipts were £281 7s 2d and payments were £459 18s 4d. This was due to the loss on cost of manure, and difference between monies paid by allotment holders and the cost of renting land. The amount received for manure was £100; had it been sold from the Depot it would have realised £600. Five Corporation staff were paid £10 each for professional services from the DATI grant for fencing and adaptation purposes.⁶³ The Cork Plotolders Association met with the Land Allotments Committee to discuss availability of land for the following year and future costs of manure which was 8 loads per plot at 6d per load. Expressing a republican view, Mr [Sean] French said that his party (Sinn Fein) would not support the Local Government Board. The Chairman agreed. Mr McSweeney suggested that owners and plotolders appear before a Dáil Éireann Court. Owners should be paid £4 per acre. Manure should be 2s per load. A motion was adopted that no application be made to LGB or DATI for compulsory acquisition of land for allotments in 1921. In what appears like avoiding responsibility, the Allotment Committee placed itself at the disposal of ward committees for the voluntary taking of land for allotments and 'Rent to be paid by the plotholder and manure to be obtained by plotholders at the depot in the ordinary way'.⁶⁴ With regard to lands, a letter was received from Mr Massey renewing his letting of land at Ballinamought at £8 per acre, and Mr. W.F. O'Connor requested that land at O'Connorville which he had given rent free be returned to him.⁶⁵

Allotment of Land Scheme 1921

During 1921 Council meetings continued to mention allotments. In February, the following were elected to the Allotments Committee:

North East: Councillors French, Day and Sutton;

North West: Aldermen Murray, Coughlan, and Lucy, Councillors Murphy, P.F. O'Sullivan and Egan;

Centre: Councillors Gamble, Kelleher and Fitzpatrick;

South: Councillors Sheehan, Kelleher, Walsh and O'Riordan and Alderman Sir Edward Fitzgerald.⁶⁶

In March 1921, Alderman Lucy was appointed Vice Chair. Mr Thomas Jennings would let land at Western Road for £12 6s 8d plus rates for the coming year. Mr John L. Corkery wrote to the Committee to say that North West Allotments Committee would not function in the coming season, however they were asked to function. North East Ward's Subcommittee rented land from Messrs Massey and O'Mahony and Major Broadley at £6 per acre plus rates.⁶⁷

Contemporary political tensions had their effect on allotments. In 1921, St Patrick's Schools were raided by the military when 'what appeared to have been a meeting of the local Allotments Committee was in progress.'⁶⁸

A brief newspaper report stated that a Cork Allotments meeting which discussed 'routine business' took place on 7th May 1921.⁶⁹ In their Annual Report for 1921, the DATI reported that, at a national level, land was retained where necessary but no new lands were acquired.⁷⁰

Allotment of Land Scheme 1922

In January 1922, the Council decided that Mr Jennings's land on Western Road be returned to him and that rent and rates of £33 be paid. Also to be returned was land owned by: Mr O'Mahony, Ballinamought, Mayfield; Daniel O'Mahony, Cahergal, Montenotte; Matthew Hunt, Ballinlough Road; Messrs Donovan, Ballinlough Road, and Massey, Mayfield.⁷¹ In the final newspaper report concerning the Allotments Committee, Mr Daniel O' Mahony inquired whether his land would be required for the coming year. With regard to land on the Western Road, the Ward Sub Committee would deal with the landlord.⁷²

The DATI grant aided two areas of allotments in Cork in 1922, probably the two referred to above.⁷³ Though there is no record in the Cork Council minutes of allotments in 1923, the DATI grant aided two Cork sites in 1923.⁷⁴ On 31 August 1923, power to acquire land under Defence of Realm (Acquisition of Land) Act 1916 ceased.⁷⁵

DISCUSSION

Newspaper reports and Council Minutes demonstrate Cork Corporation's commitment to the implementation of the Food Production Scheme as it related to town allotments. In the years 1917 - 1921, Sir Edward Fitzgerald, in his capacity as Alderman, Lord Mayor of Cork or Chairman of the Allotment Committee, encouraged landowners to provide land for allotments, attended plotters' meetings and lobbied on their behalf. The provision for the acquisition of land for allotments was given particular attention, and such level of detail was not found for other cities in Ireland. The outcomes of the LGB Inquiries detailed the landowners and locations of land compulsorily acquired. However, few details were available of land acquired by agreement with a landowner.

At its peak in 1919, 81 acres (32ha) plus 17 acres (6.87ha) acquired compulsorily were cultivated for potatoes and vegetables. Apart from references to onions and cabbage, no information about the vegetables cultivated was located. The potato varieties, 'Arran Chief', 'British Queen' and 'Leinster Wonder' were recommended, and are the only varieties mentioned in accounts of allotment cultivation in this period in Ireland.

The value of the crops cultivated in allotments in Cork was not recorded. However, Mr T. P. Gill, Secretary of the DATI, speaking in Waterford in 1917, estimated that there were 15,000-16,000 allotments in Ireland with produce valued at £150,000-£160,000.⁷⁶ This would have given a gross return per annum of £10 per allotment. In 1918, there were 2,250 acres (910ha) of land under allotments, yielding produce estimated at £400,000 which 'gave an idea of value to working classes in towns'.⁷⁷ These figures were presented at a meeting of the DATI Council of Agriculture who were discussing an Allotment Bill for Ireland. Fixity of tenure was a major issue, not only in Cork but in other cities and towns, and was requested by plotters, the Irish Plotters Union and local councillors. Following several attempts to legislate for the provision of allotments, the Acquisition of Lands (Allotments) Act was enacted by the Free State government in July 1926.⁷⁸

While Cork Corporation received grants from the LGB for fencing and laying out of the site, it incurred a deficit of £678 11s 1d in 1920. Other expenses would have included the cost of the inquiries, employment of allotment instructors and inspectors. While

allotment holders may have had produce to the value of £10, Cork Corporation and the state had a financial outlay. The newspaper reports of Cork Corporation meetings reveal issues not seen in other towns. These included the sale of produce and, in the later period, evidence of political tensions, when Sinn Fein councillors would not recognise the Local Government Board and favoured an inquiry before a Dáil Éireann court.

The minutes of the Allotments Committee formed by the Cork Corporation are not held in the City and County Archives. If located they could provide more information about the plottolders, their names and addresses, and the cultivation of their plots. While government officials commented about the benefits of allotments to urban dwellers, no personal reminiscences of plottolders in Cork or elsewhere in Ireland were located.

CONCLUSION

Cork Corporation implemented the Food Production Scheme with speed and diligence, providing allotments in or adjacent to each city ward. To what extent it resulted in augmenting food supply for urban dwellers is less obvious. However, some 1000 citizens became skilled in small scale horticultural production and their families enjoyed the benefits of fresh potatoes and vegetables.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Table 1: Allotments in Cork 1917 – 1922

(DETAILS DRAWN FROM CORK CORPORATION MINUTES AND NEWSPAPER REPORTS 1917 – 1921)

Location	No of plots/area	Ward	Owner	1917	1918	1919	1920	1921	1922
O Connor Ville, Friar's Walk	2 ac 0.8	South	High Sheriff O'Connor	X	X	X	X		
Friar's Walk	3 ¾ ac 1.11	South	T. A. Callanan		X				
Western Rd	4½ ac 1.82	South	Mr T. Jennings	X	X	X	X	X	X
Mayfield	6 ac 2.4	North East	Mr Joyce	X					
Beaumont estate, Ballintemple	8 ac/ 3.2 20/30 ac 8 – 12.1 ha		Mr Woodhead	X					
Gilabbey	6 ac 2.4	West	Mr Thomas Donovan	X					
Ballinlough Rd	4 ac 1.6		O'Donovan, Dunbar St.	X					
Ballinlough Road			Messrs Donovan					X	
Magazine Road, College Rd, Fernhurst Ave			Mr Thomas Donovan		X				
Shanakiel, Sunday's Well	16 plots		Mr Frank Murphy	X					

Ballinlough Rd	3 ac 1.21		Mr M. Hunt J.P.	X						
Hollyhill, Knockcullen West	48 plots		R. M. Forrest		X			X		
Knockcullen West, Blarney Road	2 ac 0.8 18 plots		Misses Forrest		X			X		
Strawberry Hill, Blarney Street			Mr Patrick Murphy					X		
Ballinlough	2½ 1 ha		Mr M.D. Spillane		X					
Knockrea, Douglas Road	2½ 1 ha	South	Mr L. Dobbin		X			X		
Dennehy's Cross	4½ ac 1.82 50 plots		Mrs Hannah Dennehy					X		
Ballinaspig Beg	7 2.8 ha		Mrs Hannah Dennehy		X					
Glasheen					X					
The Lough	18 plots		Mrs Dennehy		X					
Coolmore, Ballyphehane	8½ ac 3.4 ha	South	Major Newenham					X		
	5 acres 2 ha	South	Capt Newman						X	
Rathmore and Audley Fields at St Anne Shandon	3½ ac 1.4	North West	Jehr. Meehan						X	
Rathmore and Audley Fields at St Anne Shandon		North West	M. J. O'Donovan							X

Evergreen Road	½ acre 0.2 ha	South	Mr E. Murphy					X		
Cats' Home Field, Evergreen Road	1 (.4 ha)	South						X		
Ballyphehane	1½ 0.6 ha	South	Mr P.T. Buckley					X		
Woodview, Douglas Road	2 ac .8 ha	South	Mr Thomas Donovan					X		
Knight's Hill, Mayfield	5 ac 2.02	North East	Major Broadley					X	X	
Ballinamought Mayfield		North East	Massey						X	
Ballinamought Mayfield		North East	Mrs O'Mahony						X	
Garranabraher	3 ac 1.21 7½ 3 ha		Mrs Collins			X		X		
Garranabraher	9¾ 3.9 ha		Mrs P.H. O'Sullivan			X				
Ballincollog (Ballincolly)	7 ac 2.8		Miss O'Driscoll			X				
Caheragal, Montenotte			Mr Daniel O'Mahony						X	X