

# GROWING LIVELIHOODS

People working together to build a future for smaller-scale food growers



  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation  
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Farm Start Manchester  
Ferry Farm  
Severn Project CIC  
Sutton Community Farm  
Tamar Grow Local  
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Fulfilling Work

Evaluation

Growing Livelihoods

2018

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# Introduction



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With Britain's decision to leave the European Union, food security is currently high on the agenda of policymakers across the UK and Ireland. Intersecting a number of policy priorities such as climate change; skills; employment opportunities; land ownership; and regulation, the ability of farmers across the UK and Ireland to successfully grow and sell their produce cuts across a number of political priorities.

Evidence suggests that there are currently significant challenges to the expansion of smaller scale farming and growing in the UK. These challenges include: high land prices and increasing competition for land, particularly around urban settlements; a rapidly ageing workforce; a lack of new entrants to the sector and the lack of a clear pathway for such market entry; few training opportunities for aspiring practitioners; limited co-ordination of support and resources for smaller scale growers; and few examples of successful models across the UK and Ireland.

Despite these challenges, there are also well-evidenced opportunities for smaller scale farming and growing. For example, strong consumer interest in the provenance of food and commitment to buying locally; localised food systems which benefit local economies, keeping economic spend in local communities; and growing consumer concerns about the environmental impact of industrial farming and an appetite to find different solutions. The result of these developments is that the community

food sector has grown significantly in the last decade, and is conservatively estimated to be worth at least £77 million annually.

This report provides an overview of one such project supporting smaller scale growers. Growing Livelihoods was a partnership project between the Carnegie UK Trust, Plunkett Foundation and the Land Settlement Association Charitable Trust (LSACT). The project built on a connection starting in 1934 through the Land Settlement Association, a pioneering scheme which enabled over a thousand families to achieve livelihoods as food growers.

Through Growing Livelihoods, we supported projects aimed at those new to the sector, young people, or those seeking a new direction. The project had a particular focus on the use of co-operation and innovation to help create viable livelihoods in this sector.

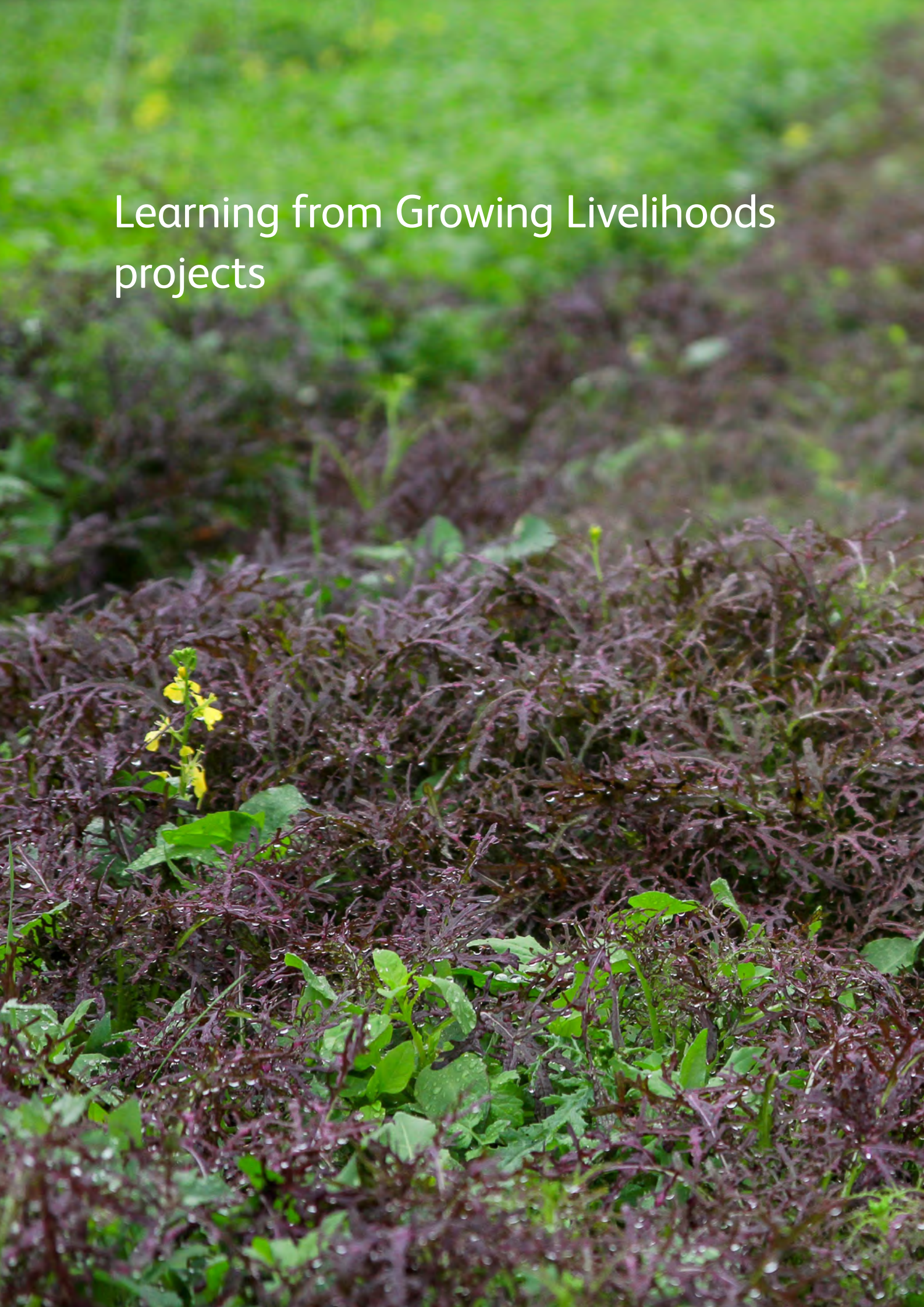
Phase 1 of the project supported five projects in the UK and Ireland. With funding from the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, the second phase of the project allowed us to offer support to a further five projects.

This report provides an overview of the development, outcomes, challenges, lessons learned and the next steps of the ten projects which took part in the Growing Livelihoods initiative, with the aim of providing information and inspiration to those currently working in or





# Learning from Growing Livelihoods projects





seeking to enter the smaller scale growing sector. Our Growing Livelihoods projects operated from Fife to Tamar Valley and, comprising different sizes, scales and business models, have produced valuable learning for aspiring and existing smaller scale food growers in the UK and Ireland. Our seven key lessons are as follows:

1. Smaller scale growing is a long-term investment, often taking longer than five years to generate meaningful progress towards outcomes. Our projects incurred delays as a result of a diverse set of challenges, including securing leases for land, adverse weather conditions, and the competing commitments of volunteers. Funders of small scale growing would necessarily be required to make long-term investments and make allowances for the unpredictability of the sector.
2. Good relationships with other stakeholders are important for progressing, and often, scaling up production. Partnership and networking between smaller scale growers, with other community enterprises, and commercial businesses can lead to pooling of assets; more training and development opportunities; more marketing opportunities; lower costs; increased revenue; and new routes for attracting additional volunteers and funding.
3. Sustaining a livelihood through the sector alone is very challenging. Our projects demonstrated the importance of smaller scale farmers diversifying their income through other revenue streams.
4. Evidence suggests that high yield and high value crops are an effective route for commercialisation. Our case study which pursued this route generated large increases in produce and revenue.
5. Apprentices are extremely hard to attract and sustain in the sector. Smaller scale food growing is a skill set which takes a long time to learn, and requires long-term commitment and investment. Our case studies which involved apprentices saw poor retention rates, which impacted on the outcomes of the projects.
6. The sector is vulnerable to external shocks. Evidence suggest that smaller scale growers are currently unprepared for exogenous changes such as extreme weather, labour market shortages, or significant changes in demand or supply for their produce.
7. There is a lack of umbrella body organisation support for smaller scale growers, which means that there is limited support available for new and current growers.



# Case Study 1: Beacon Farms

## Introduction

Beacon Farms was established in 2012 as a Community Benefit Society. This allows it to have an asset lock and grow a democratic membership to ensure any land held is looked after in perpetuity - in effect Beacon Farms is a land trust and a community enterprise.

The Society was primarily established to help safeguard and protect high quality land in a hugely important peri-urban area that stretches from South Gloucestershire into the heart of Bristol, along the main route into the city.

Known locally as the Blue Finger (for its shape and colour on a 1950s land use survey map) this area has very fertile Grade 1 soils - it was traditionally full of the market gardens, but is now in high demand for housing and transport infrastructure. Less than 3% of land in the UK is considered Grade 1, so this is an irreplaceable resource that Beacon Farms wants to protect in order to grow food (and food producers) for Bristol.

The organisation's founding members are passionate about safeguarding Bristol's high quality farm land for appropriate uses, both now and in the future, and using it to promote learning about sustainable horticultural and agricultural methods.

The five objectives enshrined in the Society rules are to:

- Protect high grade agricultural land, so that it can be used now, and in the future, for the production of horticultural crops for local urban populations.
- Make land available for new growers and groups wishing to develop small-scale commercial enterprises to produce food for the local area using organic and sustainable methods and to sell into local markets.
- Provide training, and access to accredited qualifications where appropriate, in sustainable production methods and growing techniques, appropriate technology, and all aspects of running a sustainable horticultural business.
- Ensure that habitat conservation is undertaken.
- Work with the local community and customers to ensure that the enterprise supports local food needs and provides opportunities for people to engage with the land.

## Project Description

Beacon Farms wanted to re-establish a market gardening landscape and develop a strong farming and growing community in collaboration with existing projects in the area. Their name, Beacon Farms, in part stemmed from their vision of establishing a string of Blue Finger based projects in the area that would inspire and seed other growing enterprises across Bristol.





Their plan therefore was to develop one or more Farm Hubs - pioneering, collaborative sites - populated by food producers who wanted to develop their own businesses and build their confidence in a supportive environment with shared infrastructure. Growers could continue to grow as part of the Hub as long as they wanted, investing in their soil, making use of mentoring, shared marketing and facilities, and perhaps eventually expanding on to other pieces of land identified by Beacon Farms.

The Farm Hubs model has been recognised as groundbreaking and important by Growing Livelihoods because it supports and shares learning from projects that are helping new small-scale farmers and growers to get started and make a livelihood from the land. The model was developed in consultation with land seekers from across the Bristol area, taking into account their concerns about the size of plots, essential infrastructure, start up capital, business skills, overheads, marketing and distribution.

#### The Farm Hubs:

- Support rural livelihoods by providing practical start-up support for new farming entrants;
- Increase the amount of locally produced food available in the area (using sustainable methods);
- Facilitate a variety of short courses relating to the skills of food production and processing, alongside small business skills;
- Engage the community in habitat management and support their local farm land/farmers;
- Ensure the appropriate use and care of high quality soils; and
- Protect and conserve the land both now and in the future.



## Project Developments

In 2014 an offer was submitted on 65 acres of land on Beacon Lane, Winterbourne, however, the farmer decided not to sell at this time. Beacon Farms then went to auction, hoping to acquire 7 acres of land in nearby Frenchay. Despite having raised £23,000 from the community for the deposit - in just 4 days - unfortunately they were outbid when the price of the land went up to £38,000 per acre. In 2015 they tried to negotiate a lease on 17 acres of land on Beacon Lane with South Gloucestershire Council – but the Council would not offer them a long enough tenancy to provide security. And in 2016, they tried to secure a very long lease from Bristol City Council for 35+ acres of Blue Finger land in Frenchay, with the intention of working alongside current smallholding tenants and acting as community stewards for the land, however, that deal also fell through after a promising start, when the Council withdrew from discussions following a change in political leadership.

In looking at these different land options Beacon Farms has been able to develop a number of possible business models that could be applied to leased or purchased land. Ranging from larger scale community market gardening with satellite businesses, to ‘hot desking’ leases for growers, these models would allow relatively small areas to become productive whilst assisting small scale food producers to start making a living. These models were developed with the needs of local producers in mind, and with an eye on long term financial stability, as well as sensitivity as to what would be the most appropriate use for the land in question.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

- 1) Acquiring land is hard – whether it is long lease or purchase.
- 2) High quality soils are not sufficiently valued or protected for appropriate uses.

- 3) These things take a long time to develop.
- 4) Its not easy to make figures stack up for farming projects.

## Developing Opportunities and Outcomes

Whilst looking for land Beacon Farms acted as the lead project partner on a collaborative project that involved many of the small commercial and community food growers in and around Bristol. These stakeholders are now all working together to scale up local food production in the area through a new Community Benefit Society called Bristol Food Producers.

Bristol Food Producers is helping to provide and promote well designed and supported training opportunities for growers with multiple entry points. This will, in the long run, enable more growers to take on land, run viable businesses, and make sustainable livelihoods from the land. Rural communities and economies will be strengthened, local food systems will be supported, and Britain’s small farming sector will become more resilient.





Three of the new training courses already available, or being developed in Bristol are:

*Scaling up Community Food Production* - a Grow Leaders course run by Feed Bristol to help those involved in community growing projects to make their initiatives more productive. This course covers skills on food growing, nature conservation and people care - including working with volunteers. Avon Wildlife Trust's Feed Bristol site provides volunteering opportunities and therapeutic activities as well as a base from which small growing businesses can launch.

*Fresh Start Horticultural Academy* - run by the Fresh Start Land Enterprise Centre, this ten session programme is designed for those already running growing enterprises or about to start one. It helps people to develop core business skills and is certified by SFEDI.

*Livelihood Skills to Land Workers* - a certified programme being developed by Bristol Food Producers to equip new growers with additional skills to run their own enterprise including: writing a business plan, managing staff and volunteers, market research and promotion, first aid, Health and Safety and food hygiene. The programme will allow learners to get a taste of how different community businesses work whilst developing their own business plan. This programme is ready to go but needs funding to launch.

As well as developing training courses through Bristol Food Producers, Beacon Farms has also collaborated on the Land Seekers Survey to establish the skills, needs and readiness of local new entrants to small-scale horticulture.

## Next steps

Beacon Farms is still looking for land to suit their purposes, exploring slow burning leads with the NHS and the University of the West of England about land on the Blue Finger. They still hope to establish a Farm Hub on Blue Finger land in the future.

Although there have been many obstacles along the way, there have been some positive outcomes. The project has helped to raise the profile of the issues on the Blue Finger, both locally and nationally. It has given the community a positive focus through which to express their support for action to protect the Blue Finger. The project has brought people together to imagine thriving horticultural businesses in the area again, and it has initiated conversations with farmers, landowners and growers that may in time bear their own fruit. It has also resulted in research into the needs of new entrants into horticulture through the Land Seekers Survey, which will provide data for other organisations seeking to help this sector.

Best of all has been the initiation of Bristol Food Producers ([www.bristolfoodproducers.uk](http://www.bristolfoodproducers.uk)). While waiting to acquire land, Beacon Farms was able to put some of their resources into submitting a successful funding bid to the Bristol Green Capital Strategic Grants fund on behalf of a number of Bristol growers and organisations. Bristol Food Producers was launched in January 2015, and in 2016 it incorporated as its own Community Benefit Society, leaving a tangible legacy for Beacon Farms in the Bristol food community.



## Case Study 2: Birr Community Growery

### Project

Birr Community Growery is a community based food project based in Birr, County Offaly, Ireland. Building on the established Birr Tidy Towns initiative and Biabox, a local food distribution model, Birr Community Growery was established to act as a Community Food Hub with the aim of hosting a variety of educational activities, training programmes, and services. Support is also given to new and existing food producers to enable them to get their produce to market locally.

During earlier work with Biabox, Eimhin Shortt had surveyed Birr as a potential space for the development of the model, and by January 2014 he had become familiar with the manager of the Birr Castle Demesne Estate, Michael Parsons. Michael was a community minded man who was also interested in developing 'The Cappeaneale Field' into an allotment garden site, mainly due to it having played that role historically for the workers of the castle.

While organising a community Christmas market in the castle courtyard that summer, the potential of the field was discussed and later that year, when Eimhin approached Michael with a project proposal, he gladly gave over the first of a subsequent series of sites, for community usage by way of a five year renewable contract and a peppercorn rent through the Oxmantown Settlement Trust and Michael's sister Lady Alicia Parsons. All those elements came together to form the Birr Community Growery.

Today the team at the Growery works across a number of sites, welcoming mental health patients, people with physical and intellectual disabilities, school groups, growers, gardeners, and people from the wider community with a focus on restoring the conscious link between soil, food, health, wellbeing, and vibrant local culture.

In 2017 they opened their 'social garden' as a community food commons, based on the first principle of the commons that contributors can draw from the shared resource in due proportion. The founder, having experienced chronic digestive ill health, felt the importance of access to quality food for those in need regardless of economic status. They now work in partnership with the Education and Training Board, Engineers Without Borders and the Irish Archaeological Field School - to name but a few.

The initial aims of the Growery project were:

- To engage with the community and key stakeholders;
- To move towards a formal participative structure;
- To develop the Biabox Service; and
- To access land for growing particularly from the local authority and local landlords.



## Project Development and Outcomes

A great deal of initial work was involved clearing the site to get it ready for growing. They also had to overcome a proliferation of bindweed, which had to be removed - root segment by root segment - necessitating double digging of the complete site. Eventually work started on the cold frame and the erection of a small poly tunnel, followed by planting of the first seed trays with organic seed. At this point the team began to write articles for the local paper, in order to publicise their work, and they also scheduled a series of events to raise awareness and promote the site.

Further development work included working with pupils from the resilient schools project and people on the Community Employment Scheme, and welcoming young people from the Restorative Justice programme. In some cases many of these visitors also engaged and participated in a number of workshops in beekeeping, building a biodigester and making a DIY open source wind turbine.

- The team also worked with new entrants to farming and had the benefit of support from national geographic explorer Dr Thomas Henry Culhane - a guest lecturer on biodigestion.
- They toured the country and travelled to seven locations over eight days, building garden scale anaerobic biodigestors. They delivered workshops that introduced gardeners, market scale growers and organic farmers to this innovative technology.
- The on-site workshops worked very well and like the tour they not only helped to raise awareness, but they also helped to build networks both in the local community and further afield. The workshops on beekeeping, wind-turbine and biodigester building opened up the 'grower-focus' bringing in others, who otherwise might not have visited, and of those that participated many still visit The Growery. Since those initial workshops the team has considered how a blend of workshop tours, together with a community share issue, could enable groups to purchase and build larger pieces of practical infrastructure collaboratively.



## Challenges and Lessons Learned

One of The Growery's original outcomes was to establish dialogue and increase understanding via education and practice in the small scale growth of food locally. Their workshops, classes, events, publications and social media and outreach work touched the lives of some few hundred people locally, and they also worked in close partnership with the community and local community groups to this effect.

They wanted to promote education and establish a training programme with workshops and having brought the initial site to readiness, and with work on the other sites in hand, they started to deliver formal courses in 2016. They received support from Offaly County Council and the Education and Training Board (ETB), and by offering adult education, in the field of new entrants to agro-ecology, further sites in the town will be developed under the expertise of a paid and qualified grower. This is a role that had been lacking and, in this instance, the ETB offered to pay the wage.

The team originally hoped to establish the community co-operative development process of Get Local using the Biabox system. They also wanted to increase support for new and existing food producers through Biabox, as a means of getting product to market locally. Unfortunately, this did not happen for a variety of reasons.

The model, which launched in Limerick, came on challenging times and the core team members were absorbed in 'tweaking' the model throughout the year. It would appear that although it was easy to sign people up, it was hard to keep customers. The encroachment of multinational supermarkets and the generational difficulty of online shopping in an ageing country were also contributory elements. As an alternative, work on developing a new Cottage Market as part of the GIY (GrowItYourself) national pilot scheme has since initiated a monthly market supporting twenty small scale producers in the town. It is hoped this initiative will continue to support local

producers, and give them an outlet to promote and sell their produce with increasing frequency in the future.

The most significant challenge related to this project has been the perception of what is achievable without experience, versus the actual pace of working on a shoestring budget in practice. The models that The Growery has developed needed significant preparation and required a great deal of time, hard work, and participation - either as employment or, as was in their case, by voluntary involvement.

In the case of voluntary participation the work goes much more slowly and the project leader is required to be on-site and leading the process 'hands-on' for the majority of the time. Other aspects of the work are equally important; for example: administration, networking, building capacity, preparing social media and web-presence, joining learning networks and applying for grants and funding etc., and these require even more time on behalf of the coordinator.

In the case of an organisation with appropriate investment, things would move very differently and this would have benefits in terms of efficiency, and in terms of personal relationships. In the initial phase the team at The Growery found people reacted to the 'voluntary' aspect of their work with a sense of respect and support, and also with a level of personal involvement that otherwise may not have been the case. In time however, the lack of resource to extend the project to cater to generating secure livelihoods for anchor volunteers did lead to difficulties that could otherwise have been avoided.

### Next steps

The team will continue to develop the sites, and having been successful with an application to the ESB Community Fund, they will build a classroom onsite with architect Caelyn Bristow in the style and spirit of the Alabama based Rural Studios.

With the formal education aspect established on a rolling basis, the group are looking to a three acre walled garden, 1km from the town to develop research and training garden that blends a local food model, with social aspects, and a sustainable rural development thread in partnership with WorldWide Global Schools, Offaly Local Development Company, and Dublin Institute of Technology's DTC (Development Technology in the Community) group.

So far all the work at The Growery has been done on a voluntary basis. Through additional voluntary participation on the County Council's Local Community Development Committee (LCDC), and by responding to public consultations, they have now found support for the establishment of the Growery model, in two further towns in the county in 2018, as part of the LCDC's five year plan. This work is assisted by their role as county network partners to the national Community Gardens Ireland network.

In the space between now and then the model has to be made ready. This will include preparing formal organisational compatibility and running courses through the Education and Training Board. To do this they will work with the Leader Programme through Offaly Local Development Company, and they hope to access Leader funding to support that work.



“ Ireland today imports 98%+ of its vegetal food and exports 95% of what is produced here. We are an aging society by virtue of economic emigration, and an increasingly unhealthy society by economically focussed decision making. A recent Guardian article was captioned “If you cannot feed a country, you do not have a country”. My work at The Growery, the unintended outcome of a ‘chronic’ illness I have since healed through the work, if only to show the peril of our predicament, and that we can restore a healthy practice, is good enough. I have not taken a penny, and much has been accomplished. My health has been restored, which is priceless, and next - the island. ”

Founder, The Growery





## Case Study 3: Cloughmills

Cloughmills Community Action Team works with the local community in County Antrim to develop a range of social, economic and environmental solutions to identified issues which are managed locally and which increase choices. The team manages a 4.5 acre former mill site as a community resource and, as well as a significant food growing project on site and a community managed park, they also organise and host many seasonal events, and provide training and information on sustainable lifestyle choices. The Community Action Team was established in 1999 to develop and implement locally managed and sustainable solutions to social, economic and environmental issues.

Incredible Edible Cloughmills is a campaign to reconnect people with each other, their community and the natural environment using food as the mechanism. It is managed by Cloughmills Community Action Team.

### Project Description

The original project plan was to cultivate high end mushrooms, such as shitaki and oyster mushrooms, over a 14 - 21 day period, using spent coffee grounds and shredded cardboard. They also planned to produce hydroponic salad crops in a geodesic dome. These ventures were chosen because they can be achieved in relatively confined spaces, can produce high yields and they utilise concepts and learning techniques that are relatively easy to master.

Targets for participation included younger people excluded from school or college, people experiencing difficulties in obtaining employment

due to a lack of experience or skills, and older people forced from employment for various reasons.

The project also aimed to initiate a 'Feel Good About Food' programme promoting the social and therapeutic value of becoming involved in growing and using food.

To achieve success they needed to:

- Recruit a minimum of three people [co-workers] to help deliver the enterprise;
- Install a growing dome and mushroom facility;
- Provide horticultural and enterprise skills training to co-workers and members of the executive committee;
- Develop branding and a marketing campaign;
- Enter into partnership agreements with at least four retail outlets in the first year; and
- Attend a minimum of three craft/food markets in 2016.

### Challenges and Outcomes

Unfortunately, the group experienced a number of challenges with the project. A key volunteer, who was expected to lead on the mushroom project, had to leave for personal reasons. And, being an entirely volunteer-led group meant people were not always in a position to devote all the time that was required.



They had difficulties in liaising with coffee shops to obtain the required growing medium, so they looked at using pasteurised straw obtained from a local farmer. This was an interesting development, connecting them to the community in that the straw comes from a local organic farm. It added another dimension to the project and eventually they did go on to develop an effective relationship with a local coffee shop chain.

There was an unexpected delay in the signing of a lease for their main site at the old mill. This led to difficulties in obtaining planning permission for the geodesic dome and obtaining additional support from other organisations.

It was a steep but a valuable learning curve and one which led them to research other possibilities. The most valuable lesson learned was that it is better to deal with only one element of a project, rather than trying to do two at the same time. On the positive side, their core ideas remained strong and viable and they received widespread support across the community.

They decided to investigate their legal structure, with a view to establishing a community cooperative to manage all the horticultural enterprises. They felt this would give members a greater sense of ownership, and it would help to promote the ideals of a truly community managed project. On reflection they feel that they should have started this exercise at an earlier stage of the project as it would have provided a clearer path forward for them.

They now have three co-workers in place and at least one of their co-workers has moved on to further education, training or employment.



## Next steps

Work continues on their community co-operative model, assisted by Jo Bird, a locally based expert, who is supporting them with that process. They are also exploring how they communicate as part of a larger and more in-depth communications and marketing strategy. Now that the enterprise is more established they are encouraging more people to visit the site and see what is happening.

They remain convinced that their project and model has the potential to be replicated across other communities. Their aspirations remain the same and whether it is their raw materials supply chain, or the end product sales chain, both will be highly localised. They aim to stimulate debate around local food supply and hubs through the project. The appropriate co-operative model and the adjusted raw material supply chain will increase their effectiveness and income.

After the difficulties they encountered with planning permission for the dome, the local authority offered to build a potting shed and training area for them valued at £12,000 – a major step forward. The space is being used for horticultural training and eight trainees have received a Level 1 OCN qualification, and one older trainee has now joined the team on the horticultural enterprise project. They have also used the training area to deliver a programme of courses in permaculture and 16 young people have attended those courses.









## Case Study 4: Cultivate

Cultivate is a worker/producer co-operative dedicated to building a localised sustainable food economy based in Newtown, Powys. They are part of the Cwm Harry collective, a family of enterprises building sustainable communities. Cultivate originally operated as a Community Interest Company (CIC) but after seeking expert guidance they took the decision to convert from a CIC into a Community Benefit Society to allow a more open and inclusive governance structure to be created.

### Project Description

Cultivate came up with an ambitious project plan to encourage small scale local producers to come together under a single and supportive structure - a co-operative - with the aim of creating greater access to customers, collective learning and shared marketing. The plan also included the setting up of a new permanent 'Local Food Shop' in the town centre.

This involved consolidated growing spaces, altering the way they made local food available to the communities of North Powys, and sadly it also meant stopping the veg box delivery service that had been in operation for over 12 years.

### Project Development

They used the funding from Growing Livelihoods to reach out to the local growers they knew about, and they also looked for ways of identifying and engaging with new growers. In total they worked with over 25 small scale local growers and producers producing sustainable, local and

organic food. They held numerous producer meetings, hosted some skill-sharing study visits and throughout the project they engaged and consulted with their volunteers and small team of staff.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

It can often be difficult for small scale producers to free up sufficient time to be able to engage fully in a project such as this. The flexible approach to the way the funding could be spent, however, enabled Cultivate to work on imaginative ways that allowed good interaction with their producer network. This included evening meetings, variable locations and taking time out to make personal visits to many of the growers.

Any form of trading that relates to selling good quality, locally and food grown in a sustainable way brings with it many challenges - and running a small local food shop is no different. The biggest challenges encountered by Cultivate were: managing gluts of produce, controlling the quality of produce, supply chains, determining prices, effective marketing and staffing.

Changing their legal structure was also a complicated process and in hindsight they feel it would have been simpler to close one entity before starting up the co-operative. Some confusion arose over annual reporting dates and deadlines, company tax returns on and so, however, they feel that converting into a Community Benefit Society was certainly the right choice. On holding the first AGM, having recruited a healthy number of new members (shareholders)



prior to the AGM, they were able to elect a strong board of nine to help steer the enterprise.

Acutely aware of how every producer differs in their methods of operation, attempting to get the producers all on a level playing field was a challenge and a steep learning curve. Some growers had very little IT knowledge and even simple tasks, such as producing invoices and delivery notes, were a struggle at times. This led Cultivate to provide some basic back office support to those growers who needed it, and in using information supplied by the more experienced growers some model templates were supplied.

## Outcomes

Working as one of a number of projects on this wider funded project was interesting and Cultivate felt the experience of being able to engage with the other projects, and members of the project team, was beneficial.

- They were able to more than double their sales of local produce achieving a turnover of around £49,000 in the first year of trading. Sales of veg boxes and farm gate sales in the previous trading year had only brought in around £23,000.

- They also worked with several local organisations to find creative methods of dealing with some of the gluts and produce that sometimes is not fit for direct sale. They created a Jam Club and adults with disabilities were given the opportunity to make jams, pickles and preserves for sale through the shop. They developed a volunteer lunch every Wednesday producing hot meals using the lower quality produce, and some of the 25 volunteers started to create higher value foods from the glut. Working in partnership with a local cider producer ensured that a glut of local apples was processed into 'added value' apple juice.

- Other achievements include the creation of a buying policy, a producer agreement, a simple membership form and templates for many other documents that will help the organisation long



into the future. The shop certainly now has many replicable elements that will be of interest to other local food initiatives which will be helpful and supportive for new entrants to the sector.

By working in partnership and developing a network, Cultivate was able to identify the many and varied barriers encountered in developing a business. This was achieved by organising producer meetings, circulating producer questionnaires and making personal one-to-one visits to the producers and growers. This helped them to share best practice and to identify areas where specific support was required. They currently support over twenty three local small scale and artisan producers as a direct result of this project funding.

A good example of how they were able to achieve this is the way in which they worked with many other local organisations such as the local adult day care services - where they helped to add value to produce. Cultivate supported dozens of volunteers throughout the project and increased people's knowledge of not only growing and horticulture, but also in cooking and adding value to food. Many of these individuals were disadvantaged in some way (e.g. long term unemployed, low levels of education, young offenders etc.).

As well as using websites, Cultivate used multiple social media feeds, including two Facebook pages/groups, a Twitter account and a Flickr account to reach out to people, and subsequently they received thousands of hits per day.

As well as helping to secure two part-time posts in the shop, it has also provided an opportunity for a small and supportive group of eight volunteers to help the shop staff on a regular basis. Essential equipment was also purchased through the support of Growing Livelihoods, items such as modern, efficient chilled display units, and certified scales etc. Purchasing of these items would not have been possible without the

assistance from Growing Livelihoods. The entire shop was set up on a minuscule budget of just £500!

## Next steps

Cultivate is now working with many different community organisations including the local Health Authority, the Job Centre and Probation Services, the outcome being that they are able to offer supportive placements to around four people a week. They have also gone on to win a contract with a local housing association to manage some of their grounds with residents, turning underused spaces in to thriving spaces for food and social interactions. In addition to all of this, Cultivate is assisting with one of the largest transfers of land from a local authority to a community (over 140 acres in total!). If all goes to plan for Cultivate they will operate over 20 acres of this land as food growing space, including over 100 new allotments and 15 acres of fruit growing space in the heart of town with dedicated processing facilities as part of the design.

In closing, Cultivate say that establishing a permanent local food outlet was, and now is, a direct result of them securing flexible funding through Growing Livelihoods. The local food shop is going from strength to strength and is now turning over in the region of £90,000 a year, offering a secure future for the social enterprise.







## Case Study 5: Falkland Small Growers

### Project Description

Falkland Kitchen Farm and Meadowsweet Organics are two newly established enterprises working together on the Falkland Estate in Fife. Both businesses gained access to land through the estate's New Farmer Scheme, and organic certification was gained from the Soil Association in May 2015.

Their project involved the setting up of a membership network of local, small growers in order to share services such as promotion, sales and marketing, new routes to market, access to equipment and ordering software. Educational events help to highlight the diversity of land based careers that are also available to young people.

### Project Development

Both businesses grow organic fruit, vegetables and herbs and are run by new entrants to small scale farming. By establishing a membership network of local producers they were able to make the businesses more resilient. They shared resources, such as a tractor and crop covers, and reduced their running costs by purchasing in bulk for the two farms. They created co-owned farm infrastructure such as compost loos; they developed a shared brand to market their produce; they attracted many new wholesale customers; and increased their market reach by sharing delivery routes and market stalls.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned

Some of the challenges faced along the way included:

- Management of the project logistics when they were short of time during the busy growing season. However the time they saved overall, by sharing delivery routes etc., more than made up for any time lost dealing with administrative tasks.

- Maintaining the identity of each business involved in the network. From the start they were clear that an over-arching brand would not take away from the individual farms own branding and marketing initiatives.

- Developing an efficient way to advertise what products the network would offer. The original plan was to create an online database for customers, where each farm would upload lists with weekly availability lists. After receiving advice from other more established organic farms, and after seeking advice from Plunkett, they decided that it wasn't a cost effective way of going forward. It would not provide the same level of personal service to customers as when you speak to them directly. Instead they opted to email joint availability to customers each week.

- Attracting new members to the network was a challenge and remains a challenge – as yet they have been unable to sign up many new growers and suppliers.



## Outcomes

Sharing equipment was one of the most successful outcomes. Since purchasing a shared tractor and crop covers with money from the fund they have also added new equipment to the tool share including tractor attachments and a precision seeder.

Working together on the farmers' market stalls was also very successful. Not only did it free up more time, because it was no longer necessary for someone from each farm to man a stall each week, but it also allowed them to provide more variety to the customers.

Another big success was the ability to attract many new wholesale customers. Neither Falkland Kitchen Farm nor Meadowsweet Organics would have been able to supply enough quantity to supply wholesalers individually, but as a network they had plenty to offer. These wholesale customers generated significant sales for both businesses and it was also much less labour intensive than supplying lots of small customers.

- Establishing the network also led to more farm gate sales. Local businesses were given an incentive to come and collect produce from the field and, at the same time, they were encouraged to order from both farms. This was extremely helpful because deliveries are very time consuming, and although lots of local businesses were interested in the network's produce, sales could not be made because they were not close enough to any of the network's delivery routes.
- On reflection, and if they had to start the project again, they feel it would have been better to develop relationships with wholesalers at an earlier stage of the project. Also marketing of the network, primarily to wholesale customers, would be far more beneficial.
- They have learned that it is important to schedule regular meetings and it is also vital to define each member's role within the network far more precisely.



## Next steps

There has been a definite increase in sales of produce supplied by the network members. And since the creation of the network three new customers have been gained, who order consistently each week, one of whom is a wholesaler placing large orders. They have taken on a new weekly Farmers' Market, which is staffed by members of the network. The sales figures are up on last year, mainly due to these new developments.

The network has also been helpful in maintaining healthy sales during the slower periods of the season - when not much variety is on offer. By working together they can provide customers with more choice at those times of the year and hence they have been able to maintain steady sales.

One of their aims was to educate the public about the benefits of small scale organic farming and to raise the profile of land based careers. In order to achieve this they held an event introducing the local community to the project and discussion took place about the importance of local and sustainably produced food.

The event attracted approximately 50 attendees comprising other growers from local farms, local food producers, independent retailers, and potential new entrants to small scale farming, organisations with an interest in local and many other members of the local community. Surveys after the event revealed that 55% of attendees were not satisfied with access to local food, and over half of the attendees were interested in establishing a local food hub. This provides evidence and reassurance that the community will benefit from the work being carried out by the network to increase access to local food. In addition the growers who attended were also surveyed, and there was support for a tool share scheme, shared deliveries and a local food hub.

Working together does create sustainable businesses and collaboration has certainly provided some excellent outcomes for both

the Falkland Kitchen Farm and Meadowseweet Organics. By sharing delivery routes they are saving approximately £430 per year per business. This benefit will increase as and when the network grows and more people volunteer to drive.

By encouraging customers to drive to the farms and collect produce a further 220 miles of travel is being saved each month equating to £510 per year. In addition, both businesses have also saved approximately £3,050 each by sharing equipment.

They were planning to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to earn a living from small scale horticulture, by offering them a discounted membership to the network. Unfortunately they were less successful than planned but they feel sure it is something that they can work towards in the future. However, they have increased an awareness of opportunities for new entrants in horticulture by sharing their experience with others and inviting volunteers onto the field. This has allowed them to give young people a realistic picture of what it is like to run a horticultural business. In addition, through a mentoring scheme run by Nourish Scotland, they have also been sharing their experiences with a group of potential new entrants.

The network supplies businesses based in Edinburgh and Kirkcaldy each week, and they are considering opening a delivery route to Glasgow. They have also been exploring the idea of delivering veg via a courier in order to reach more urban parts of Scotland and with this in mind, they are planning to collaborate on a veg box scheme serving households in Dundee and Edinburgh.

In conclusion, by participating in the network each business has saved approximately £4,000 per annum, and those savings will go towards the cost of purchasing more sharing equipment and extending all the delivery routes.







## Case Study 6: Farm Start Manchester

### Project Description

The aim of FarmStart Manchester is to support new entrants into commercial organic growing in a low risk environment. It offers the perfect programme and opportunity to build up skills and experiment with organic growing on a larger scale and it is the UK's very first organic farm incubator initiative.

By providing access to affordable land, shared equipment, training and access to markets, FarmStart provides a supported route into farming for brand new entrants, helping to build a new generation of organic growers in the North West. FarmStart means that skilled and enthusiastic people from all backgrounds can build new careers in producing fresh, healthy, sustainable food for local markets.

### Project Development and Outcomes

There are two sites in the project where new entrants can access land in different ways. At the Abbey Leys site FarmStarters take on  $\frac{1}{8}$  -  $\frac{1}{4}$  acre sections to trial their growing skills and business ideas. If they prove viable, they can expand each year. Some growers work on their own, others with friends or family, and depending on what they grow, spend anything from a few hours to a couple of days each week tending their crops.

The second site, FarmStart Woodbank, is located in the heart of urban Stockport, and is part of Woodbank Park, a new urban agriculture hub that's joining up community gardening with commercial food production. Farmstart

Woodbank is a 1.5 acre site with two large polytunnels and an outside area that has been newly bought into production. Trainees work alongside Kindling's FarmStart co-ordinator for 1-2 years to learn about scaling up from allotment to commercial scale growing before attempting to start their own growing enterprises. FarmStart Woodbank plant crops with Veg Box People and Manchester Veg People, two not for profit co-operatives aiming to increase access to local organic veg for all and to support new growers.

With support from Growing Livelihoods the Kindling Trust wanted to improve this programme, to ensure that any new entrants to farming are supported in the most effective way, and to also start discussions about support and interest for FarmStarts in other areas.

The Trust decided to focus on creating some clear information and publicity to explain the package/ progression that the Kindling Trust is developing to support people along the journey to becoming commercial organic growers.

Using some of the funding that originally had been earmarked for a conference and a manual (and a co-ordinator's time for achieving those things), the Trust decided it would be far better to make a film and produce a brochure with plenty of clear information. These new resources would explain to potential entrants how the different elements of the whole FarmStart model fit together to create a progression for new entrants into farming and a more sustainable food system. They hoped this new format and approach would help to attract more people and encourage them



to sign up and become commercial growers. They also wanted to spread the word about FarmStart and some of the other Kindling Trust projects, with a view to supporting similar initiatives across the country.

The overall FarmStart model and programme does work well - the combination of access to land, training and mentoring, equipment and market. However, the Kindling Trust constantly wants to learn how to improve it and develop the relationship between the growers and buyers, the systems they use, the training on offer, and how best to run the first year - in other words, all the vital elements.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The Kindling Trust are continually facing new (and old) challenges and learning new lessons which they then use to improve the programme.

For example, a variation on the original model (of each FarmStarter taking on  $\frac{1}{4}$  of an acre)

was attempted for a year at Abbey Leys. First year trainees, with less growing experience and confidence, worked together on a shared section. This didn't really work - trainees dropped out (for various personal reasons) leaving too few with all the work and feeling overwhelmed. Learning from this, The Kindling Trust developed the model for their second site where the co-ordinator is the lead grower, so they have the responsibility for the overall production and co-ordination. The trainees work alongside the co-ordinator for their hands-on practical training, without feeling responsible for the overall production - enabling them to focus on learning techniques for scaling up. The classroom training is given by another experienced grower at the start of the year before the season gets too busy. This model has been much more successful.

Recruiting people for the four day commercial organic growers course – which aims to give people a taste for commercial growing, before progressing on to FarmStart - has been a geographical challenge. For some people the course was too far away to progress on to FarmStart. The Kindling Trust therefore opened



up the course to people from further afield (who have their own land or access to land elsewhere) and needs to look at how to reach more people locally who might be interested. This was one of the main drivers for the focus on communications i.e. production of the promotional film and a brochure using the support from Growing Livelihoods.

Evaluation of the 'How to set up a FarmStart' day, run for groups who want to set up their own new farmer programme in other areas, indicated that this worked well. Some very positive feedback was received together with suggestions as to how to improve it, which have been successfully incorporated into the following sessions, e.g.:

- More time to explore other FarmStart models and to look at what has worked/and what hasn't worked;
- Further discussion and debate on recruitment, markets and land - as well as the chance to explore thinking "outside of the box!"; and
- Time and the opportunity to talk and interact with FarmStarters on a site visit.

Growing demand, at the same time as supply, is crucial and also quite a tricky thing to get right. Policies need to be changed to be more supportive of small scale producers, key policies being:

- Funding for training - ideally funding experienced growers to provide training/ apprenticeships for new growers, as well as funding programmes such as FarmStart.
- Favourable planning policies - e.g. protecting land (from housing development etc.) and prioritising agricultural use, planning permission for poly-tunnels and low impact homes for growers to live on their land.

- Public procurement - making veg contracts smaller so that smaller local growers are able to go for them. Encouraging procurement officers to source locally produced food.

Recent research has found that it takes between five to ten years for small organic growers to make a living from what they do. The FarmStart programme aims to support new growers for a two to five year start up period, before they move out and acquire their own land.

From experience and further evaluation, the Kindling Trust would say that small scale growers need access to land, training, peer support/ problem solving, shared equipment and machinery (and/or finance to enable them to buy their own), access to market (and a fair price for produce) and crop planning with other local producers - as well as co-operative working in general (with growers and buyers).

It is a huge challenge - both to grow the market and find the best way to support new growers, and for growers to keep going in a very challenging and risky job with low pay. However the Kindling Trust believes it is possible, and recognises the growing number of people who are passionate and committed to sustainable food and making it happen.



## Next steps

Overall 27 people have participated in the FarmStart programme, and most have either continued on to jobs with existing growers, growing on other sites or to work in a range of other food related projects.

The Kindling Trust will continue to develop the whole FarmStart programme and the other related initiatives, and they intend to try and implement some of the suggestions and changes that have been identified.





## Case Study 7: Ferry Farm

### Project Description

The aim of this project was to open up small plots of land for start-up food growing enterprises on fair land leases on Ferry Farm, a family farm located in East Anglia.

This would be achieved by:

- Establishing relationships with key stakeholders (including potential growers, existing similar schemes and local networks) in order to understand their needs and lessons learned.
- Developing a pilot plan to offer small plots of land for start-up food growing enterprises, based on the outcomes of consultation carried out with key stakeholders.
- Identifying partners and growers for the 2016 growing season on Ferry Farm.

### Project Development and Outcomes

A keystone in this work was the development of relationships with a number of key stakeholders both locally and nationally. Meeting with a range of people, who were engaged in different ways in the food system, helped to create a rich picture of what might be possible, what would be needed and it also identified what people were already doing.

In particular, existing schemes were open to sharing lessons learned and best practice and

that was really valuable for the project: it helped the project team to formulate a vision of what might work best on Ferry Farm. A number of study visits were also undertaken that provided valuable insight, and talking with growers about their ideas and needs really helped to illustrate how the plan could work.

As the project developed, the team became more embedded in the local network, and the process of creating a shared vision with the wider community became a possibility.

The team also realised that in order to move forward, as well as developing relationships with key stakeholders, the local network would be vital in supporting new growers with routes to market, in providing mentoring and in creating closer links with other growers.

Stakeholder consultation, with more than 89 representatives and organisations, also identified a number of emerging themes, and the team realised that the process would need to be more iterative and responsive to the needs and aspirations of the growers. Rather than offering a set package of support, land partnerships would need to be flexible and adaptable for both the grower and the landowner.

In order to raise awareness about the initiative, both at a local and national level, they became involved in local networks and built relationships with organisations like Peterborough in Transition, Local Roots and the Young Farmers Association. They wrote articles for national publications such as the Farmers Guardian, produced local newsletters, used social media and set up a simple



website. They also contacted local agricultural colleges and apprenticeship schemes. All of these approaches led to a range of different opportunities with local growers, farmers and restaurants.

### Challenges and Lessons Learned – what worked well?

- Being able to visit the farms and seeing different ways of setting up.
- Combining visits with phone interviews meant a wide range of stakeholders could be contacted in a short space of time.
- Networking events were an efficient use of time and resources.
- There is no need to rush – it's important to take the time to find the right match in developing a fair land partnership agreement.

- Flexible opportunities are better than a rigid model - they can be adapted to who comes forward.
- Being embedded in local networks helps to develop a shared vision.
- Sharing assets and costs can help unlock innovation and enables new growers.
- Land is not the solution in itself – looking at what family farms may be able to offer in addition to land (longer term security, access to machinery and buildings, marketing support etc.) can make all the difference.
- It's vital to build on each other's strengths.
- It's an opportunity to diversify farm production and enhance agro-ecosystem functioning.
- Tap into emerging market opportunities and the interest in niche crops and local food.
- Sell 'The Story'!



Deciding on how best to go about promoting the partnership opportunity was a challenge. Initially the team had considered a 'business plan competition-style' approach inviting people to submit their ideas. Instead, however, they realised that it is better to spread the word slowly making the most of different networks. They feel this encourages people to come forward who feel the plan might work for them. Although it can take more time than originally anticipated, the team believes it will yield more effective results in the long term.

The following key things were identified for on-going success:

- Mentoring and support, especially from existing growers.
- Long term security and room to grow/innovate.
- Stable markets/relationships with buyers for niche and local products.
- Access to water, poly-tunnels, buildings, sharing machinery and tools.
- Opportunities to lower and reduce set up costs.
- Grants/subsidies for new entrants and small farmers.
- Access to finance/creative financial models to allow investment in infrastructure.
- Clear communication between growers and landowners is vital.

## Next steps

The team intend to seek out more growers and they will continue to develop networks and look for new markets. They are also going to continue to promote the initiative and in partnership with other local stakeholders, they will encourage others to get 'on board' with the project and make a joint effort. They believe that by deepening relationships with potential markets that many more opportunities will emerge.

They are also going to make contact with other apprenticeship schemes in the wider community, and they will reach out to other 'next generations' on family farms to see if they have similar ideas.









## Case Study 8: Severn Project CIC

### Project Description

The Severn Project is a social enterprise and community interest company founded in April 2010 with start up capital of just £2,500. The enterprise has a number of sites that produce and supply quality salad across Bristol and further afield. It is run by passionate individuals who have a strong track record in helping people from socially excluded groups, such as those recovering from substance misuse, people with poor mental health or individuals with offending backgrounds. Overall, their mission is to make market gardening viable and visible.

Since 2010, the project has supported over 300 individuals providing therapeutic support, housing, training, education and employment.

The Severn Project is also developing a 'food hub' to enable individuals and organisations, such as satellite growers, to grow food, gain access to land and equipment, machinery and storage, to market their products and provide a sales and distribution route to market. The Hub also provides administration and business support as well as collective buying power.

The Severn Project was behind the regeneration of 12 acres of disused or brownfield land on three separate sites. The creation of urban farms on these sites ensured that the land was being used to promote ecological diversity, and to produce local food in close proximity to its customers, therefore reducing carbon emissions. Land that was previously an eyesore was transformed into an asset for the communities in which they were based.

The specific aims of the project for Growing Livelihoods were:

- To improve the engagement offer to apprentices;
- To improve what is on offer to satellite growers through the food hub;
- To generate revenue with possible diversification; and
- To move the business forward on three fronts: production, processing and distribution.

### Project Development and Outcomes

The project engaged with four young apprentices through Bridgwater College, and they all made a livelihood from working for the Project for varying lengths of time. For various reasons, three apprentices left after several months; however the fourth apprentice stayed for 10 months and completed his NVQ level 2 qualifications, and he is now working in Sweden. Here is an extract from his personal statement:

“ Throughout this, I have learnt how to use a strimmer and a rotavator, how to mix cement, concrete and plaster, and Steve has even begun to teach me how to drive the vans on site. This, all on top of the skills related to growing and maintaining the produce.

Steve sets a very rapid work pace, which to begin with was hard to imagine being able to match,



but over the course of the year, he has driven me to put more effort in, and I can see a large improvement in my attitude and determination in the workplace.

The business has a clear path for future apprentices, teaching them the full workings of the business and then providing the space and tools for them to become self-employed growers, which is very difficult to achieve alone.

The qualification side of the apprenticeship was provided by Bridgwater College, who sent a tutor out to visit me and the other apprentices once a month. Although my tutor was taken ill for a few months in the winter, I was still able to keep on top of the coursework by email, and he was very helpful and knowledgeable whenever I got stuck. ”

Moving forward, the Project helped to consolidate its offer to the satellite growers and, over a 12 month growing period, the growers were paid approximately £35,000 for their produce. Also, on average, the enterprise grew 660kg of produce per week - 40% up on the previous financial year.

• A 30% increase in revenue resulted in the Hub being recognised by the SE100 (Social Enterprise 100 index) as one of the top 22 of enterprises regionally.

• The Severn Project is constantly evolving and developing. Temporary spaces for growing food, and the cycle of building and later the dismantling of two urban farms, were both time consuming and costly, however in 2015, the sites at Keynsham and Temple Meads were dismantled and a decision was taken to concentrate solely on the Whitchurch site. In 2016, when funding from the Big Venture Challenge was awarded, and a mortgage from the Esmée Fairburn Foundation was secured, the Project was finally able to purchase 7.3 acres of land in Holt, Wiltshire.

• This new site in Wiltshire meant that for the first time in the development of the Project, it could begin to put down secure roots with a degree of certainty. It also gave them the opportunity to supply a larger number of people with highly nutritious and locally grown produce, and they will be able to continue creating employment opportunities – this time in the rural landscape



where unemployment rates are just as high as in the cities.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

Although only one apprentice actually completed the training, the Project is now working with the College to improve the selection process. What was learned is that that being an enthusiastic ‘engager’ initially can lead to being an enthusiastic leaver, particularly around the season of music festivals.

They also found that having too many sites and lack of security of tenure are issues. Founder, Steve Glover, stated:

“ I would only do a pop up farm again if I needed the publicity and had the ability to generate a lot of publicity from those activities.

It is also important to divide the business up into sections – growing, processing and marketing. Each section should be given support and each section should be kept separate from the others in terms of record keeping and strategy. Of course the beauty of a closed loop system like this is that while each segment is separate, each segment also relies on the other and needs to work in partnership. The other thing about segmented working is that each segment can attract funding and other types of support specific to the segment. ”

## Next steps

The Project is intending to grow food in Holt. In the past they have built their infrastructure as they went along, but this time they want to start with a fully functioning system which will help to predict performance and productivity and they will be able to recruit employees with confidence. Eventually, they are intending to move all leaf production from the Whitchurch site to Holt,

where they expect to grow around 1.5 tons of produce per week.

Moving leaf production to Holt will mean that they can concentrate on expanding herb production at Whitchurch. They still need to grow around 15 tons of parsley, coriander, mint, dill, edible flowers and pea shoots per annum, in order to keep up with customer demand.

They have recently embarked on a crowdfunding campaign which will allow them to develop the infrastructure at Holt. They need a water reservoir and irrigation system, an electricity connection, an agricultural building, a road and car park, fencing, a tractor and some machinery.

They have established that it is possible to grow a large amount of food on a relatively small piece of land, and their accounts for the financial year end 2016 show an agricultural income of over £200,000 from approximately 2.5 acres of land. They also employ 10 people, many of whom are from challenging backgrounds. They want to bring this model into the rural environment where unemployment rates are just as high as they are in the cities.









## Case Study 9: Sutton Community Farm

Sutton Community Farm (SCF) is a community-owned farm which was established in 2010. It was set up in response to a community need, with the purpose of increasing access to fresh, healthy, sustainable food and to provide a shared space for people to cultivate skills, get exercise and make new friends. The farm sits on a beautiful 7.1 acre smallholding with views towards the skyline of central London.

The aims of the farm are:

- To increase local food supply, grown sustainably.
- To create inclusive, shared spaces for the community to cultivate skills.
- To be community led.
- To achieve economic stability, supporting land-based employment.

### Project Description

The aim of the project at SCF was to start a Co-operative Food Growing Business Incubator for new growing entrants which would assist them in setting up their own food growing business. The focus of this pilot programme was to provide the growing entrants with the unique opportunity for growing food on an urban fringe. By working cooperatively, the entrants would be offered the opportunity to test out their ideas and market their products through SCF's distribution facility. They would also be offered equipment,

a polytunnel, outdoor growing space, access to market and mentoring and peer-support to increase their confidence.

The programme was designed to give the growing entrants a positive experience, and to help them develop a business plan for continuing small-scale food production.

### Project Development and Outcomes

In December 2015, four entrants were selected for the pilot, based on the quality of their applications and the strength of their ideas. The programme had clear expectations and arrangements for the entrants, as evidenced by the promotional materials produced for the project.

The entrants were:

- A native herb grower producing healthy and tasty teas for sale to individuals and wholesale;
- A producer of healthy juice drinks and functional smoothies designed to improve people's health;
- A small-scale aquaponics system designer and grower of leafy greens and herbs; and
- A producer of herbs, edible flowers and wild crafted plants.



The Farm Manager and Head of Production met regularly with the growing entrants in order to support them with food production and business planning. However, by April, it became clear that two of the growing entrants would have to withdraw from the project due to ill-health and personal reasons. Nevertheless, the two remaining entrants remained engaged and they developed a greater confidence as they became more familiar with yields, costings and scale for their enterprises.

One entrant used the programme to build two fully functioning aquaponics systems (one on-site and one off-site). This produced a crop in May-July but the yields were unsatisfactory, given the time and investment. He therefore shifted his focus to test crop specialised high-value greens, which he had more success with and he was able to sell those on to the farm's Box scheme. This entrant showed great commitment to the project and although his initial aquaponics work did not have the success he had anticipated, he learned a great deal about yields, market value and small-scale aquaponics viability. He continued to use the

- space productively, receiving mentoring and went on to develop his enterprise plans for the future, while growing salad for the SCF box scheme.

- The other entrant produced an initial crop of 10kg of fresh herbs that she then dried and sold as tea mixes. This was her first season of growing herbs and she also gained a lot of knowledge about production, scaling and costings from the project. She developed a test website and a detailed financial planning spreadsheet which helped to identify income, variable and fixed costs for herbal tea production.

- SCF invited the growing entrant to stock their online shop with her herbs, an offer that she might take up in the future, but only when she believes that she can reasonably double production and serve more customers each fortnight. She is aware that with her part-time job, she can only commit to 1 day per week, and therefore she will not be able to cultivate the whole area outside as well as within.



The other growing entrant, who has since moved away from the system, practiced growing high-value greens such as pea shoots and broad bean leaves. He sold his pea shoots externally and SCF also purchased his broad bean leaves for their Box scheme.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The Farm Start programme was designed and launched successfully, gaining interest from many people in the sector. The two growing entrants have:

- Been committed to the programme and had an experience of food production and sales that would not have been possible otherwise.
- Met objectives in terms of testing production and sales, learned about scale, project design and business planning.

Because the entrants had to maintain existing jobs, it was difficult to ensure commitment and, as a result, two entrants left the project within four months. Many applications did not proceed due to this issue.

Starting a new enterprise/venture is hard work and SCF sought candidates who they felt would be able to demonstrate a capacity for hard work, determination, and intuition with their business idea. Finding entrants with these characteristics was difficult.

With any new venture, it is inevitable that business plans can change significantly as lessons are learned and research conducted. In such a short time (one year) it was difficult to help entrants make the transition from initial idea stage and testing to production of a completed business plan.

Even with the equipment and space that was provided, there were set up costs that the new

entrants had to cover. Typically variable costs were packaging, transport, seeds and company registration. Both growing entrants did commit personal finances towards these costs for company registrations, packaging, specialised equipment and seeds, however for the more expensive items, such as building a dryer, it was challenging and limited yield.

Making small-scale food growing financially viable almost always requires a strong business plan that is supported with income beyond the production of the food itself. This is typically achieved through:

- Educational services: training and skill development, activities for children;
- Social and therapeutic services: aimed at particular community: e.g. mental health learning difficulties and disabilities, physical health, services for older people, offenders/rehabilitation;
- Food processing/value-added-production: e.g. herbal teas, super foods such as spirulina, preserves or dried goods; and
- Other products and services: e.g. cafe, restaurant, events venue.

SCF is confident that the pilot model they explored could support a viable livelihood, however, as with any new business candidates must be hard working, very determined and focused. The majority of new businesses fail in their first year, so an incubator must be very selective in choosing its candidates and must also ensure that they make the most of opportunities available. The time frame depends on the level of the entrant. Usually it always takes at least one year to get a business off-the-ground in early stages, and typically 3-5 years before the business is fully operation operational.



## Next steps

SCF would like to consider extending an open invitation to more prospective food enterprises for co-operative working. This approach will take some of the aspects of co-operative working that were encouraged in the Food Growing Business Incubator Pilot - e.g. sharing of space, markets and resources. However, without the right funding and support they would only be able to work with prospective entrants who can demonstrate a clear potential for success.

In the medium-long term SCF is hoping to convert some buildings on site to establish a facility for value-added production food processes (a FoodLab). This facility would offer a valuable extension/reason to re-run the Food Growing Business Incubator, focusing again on niche food production opportunities on the urban fringe.





## Case Study 10: Tamar Grow Local

### Project Description

In 2015, Tamar Grow Local (TGL) launched the provision of some starter horticultural units through a Farm Start project in the Tamar Valley called Mill Lane Acres. This project was aimed at new growers wanting to access parcels of land to kick-start their fruit, vegetable and flower growing business ideas.

Tamar Grow Local provided:

- 1 – 3 acres of land;
- A share of equipment including hand tools and bulk purchasing of agricultural contracting services;
- A small van subject to appropriate licenses and training;
- Practical advice from growing mentors on how best to use the site;
- A poly-tunnel and water harvesting equipment;
- Business advice from a Business Development Manager;
- Access to wholesale markets to sell produce;
- Access to retail markets to sell produce including farmers markets;
- Training and mentoring; and
- Access to EHO-approved test kitchen space (off-site).

The project formed a discrete part of the wider Farm Start project, which in turn was part of TGL's wider activities – activities geared towards revitalising food production in the Tamar Valley. The Growing Livelihoods project created the physical infrastructure to enable collaborative working between Farm Start tenants including use of a shared packing room, meeting space and small office.

### Project Development and Outcomes

At the start of the project no one knew each other, but as the project developed greater collaboration between the growers was experienced through friendships and regular shared working. The most formalised of these resulted in a shared crop of premium salad potatoes. Three Farm Starters collectively planted one acre of potatoes (spanning the boundaries of their three plots) they collectively purchased seed stock in bulk, contracted for labour together and shared packaging costs.

Other examples of tenant collaboration included:

- Farm Starters self-organising themselves into working groups in order to help each other erect poly tunnels and small sheds.
- Equipment sharing – one Farm Starter had a two-wheel tractor - another had a quad with trailer, and a topper and harrow.
- Bulk purchasing – Some Farm Starters grouped together to buy soft fruit plants and some calcified seaweed (which was spread using the quad) and they contracted additional labour as and when required.



TGL anticipated that there would be a demand from the Farm Starters for mentoring and specific training. The first session was a shared mentoring day with a local market gardener who was invited to come in and talk through everyone's plans. The intention was that this would help the Farm Starters to identify areas where they might need further support. Despite regular encouragement, the Farm Starters were reluctant to request any further mentoring and instead they requested specific training options which TGL provided.

These included Level 2 Food Hygiene Certification (required for adding value to produce through processing), a packaging and marketing workshop, and some bespoke one-to-one training on using Food Hub software for various markets. The food hygiene course was carried out with an external trainer off-site, and the other workshops, that required internet access, were also held off-site. Three Farm Starters found mentors independently, one had a regular session on site, and two more gained experience with the mentor acting as the host.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned

The weather proved a significant challenge over the winter of 2015/2016. The ground became saturated due to continual heavy rainfall, and field run-off caused significant erosion of the gateway access. This delayed on-site works and made workdays for the volunteers a soggy affair. The weather impacted upon the morale of the Farm Start tenants, some of whom were unfamiliar with land based activity in the winter. They also became frustrated by a lack of vehicle access to the plots. Whilst nothing could be done about the weather, TGL will try to manage tenants' expectations differently in the future i.e. explain to them more thoroughly, before the winter, about seasonal access patterns to plots, and seasonal timings for plot preparation.

At the start of the project TGL commissioned a planning appraisal so that they could have site specific planning guidelines for the tenants. Unfortunately in early May 2016 the local authority disagreed with the planning appraisal



and TGL was asked to submit retrospective planning permission for site works, as well as prior notification for future works. Whilst the local authority was supportive of the project, this did put a stop to any further development on site until permissions were granted (i.e. further poly-tunnels, a compost toilet and some small sheds). This caused frustration amongst the tenants, and it meant that TGL could not offer some of the facilities that had been planned. It is difficult to know how they might have avoided this situation, as they had approached the local planning office for advice prior to project inception.

Key to successfully managing these situations, and in order to engender a sense of shared purpose within the Farm Start project, regular monthly meetings were held. These were held both at the offices, and on site once the infrastructure was completed. These meetings allowed TGL to keep tenants up to date on site works, and they also helped to steer collective work efforts and general collaboration, and provided an opportunity to discuss markets and packaging and processing requirements.

## Next steps

TGL believes that this model of a constellation of different projects, which collectively foster increased local food production, is fully replicable in other areas.

The Tamar Valley has a significant population from disadvantaged backgrounds. 20% of households in Callington are on the edge of poverty, and 15% are villagers with few well-paid alternatives to agricultural employment (CC Community Intelligence Team). The short supply chain food hub model enables TGL to pass on greater margins to primary producers than traditional wholesale and intermediary retail models, thus making engagement in the local horticultural sector more viable.

Through a number of projects TGL has created a continuum between recreational engagement with horticulture, through to supporting self employment opportunities in the sector. The Farm Start project demonstrates the potential for engagement in the sector by new entrants. In addition to regular PR and communications output, in May 2016 TGL presented a seminar workshop to agriculture and horticulture students at Duchy College with the aim of raising awareness and recruiting further Farm Start tenants.

This project also supplies another project that TGL delivers which involves delivering economically priced veg boxes, some of which are 100% subsidised, to areas of Plymouth that are considered food deserts and households that are experiencing food poverty. Produce is also made available through their retail and wholesale short-chain, low-waste online food hubs.

As the project has moved forward, the Farm Starters have been able to concentrate on plot infrastructure, and this has put them in a stronger position for greater volume of crop production next year. It will also help TGL to generate a greater proportion of income from sales of their produce through both the retail and wholesale outlets.

“ Mill Lane Acres offers a route into horticulture that supports innovative approaches to horticultural techniques and co-operative working practices, Tamar Grow Local also offer a number of different sales routes for produce grown on the site. Having this background support network reduces some of the risk for start-ups trying out new business ideas, and helps new and existing businesses to flourish in the longer term.”

Simon Platten







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