

CHAPTER 12

Community food and farming



'We sat there thinking,
there's a risk involved
in this. But we took
that risk and I think
it's paid off'

Tom Johnston, Director, Glendale Gateway Trust

Community food and farming

A Community Land Trust (CLT) may wish to provide opportunities for community gardening, community-led agriculture or the provision of new allotments.

Across the country communities are already engaged in using land for community gardening, ranging from tiny urban plots right up to large-scale community supported agricultural enterprises (CSAs) with hundreds of acres. Most community food groups have a large number of volunteers and many have paid staff as well. Some have a cash income under £100 per year whilst others have a turnover exceeding half a million pounds. Many have some grant income and some also trade, selling produce or services such as care of vulnerable people or training. CSAs, in particular, seek to produce food on a commercially viable scale. The legal structures for community gardening are variable including unincorporated informal groups, CICs, IPSs and companies with charitable status.

The motivation for producing locally sourced food may arise from the need to:

- Increase community control of food production
- Reduce the carbon footprint of food
- Stimulate local economic activity through social enterprise
- Protect local environmental resources and land
- Create new jobs and training opportunities
- Bring people together and building community resilience
- Connect people with the land
- Increase food growing skills
- Improve diets
- Increase exercise levels

- Help new entrants into agriculture
- Provide learning opportunities for school children

At present very few CLTs have been set up to support community food and farming and, vice versa, very few community food initiatives are based on the CLT model.

Instead, community gardens and CSAs usually rent land and are often restricted by short leases or insecure land arrangements. Only 19% of CSAs are working on land they own. Of those renting, 35% have agreements under 3 years long and only 17% have agreements exceeding 10 years, and the rents vary, from peppercorn rents to market rates.

However, insecure and short term land agreements can limit community gardening and agriculture in several significant ways:

- Participants often seek a long term connection with land;
- Food growing enterprises need long term investment in land – improving soil, growing trees and hedges, enhancing ecosystems etc.
- Food enterprises often need capital investment for polytunnels, tractors, sheds, fencing and so on which is unviable without long term security on land.
- Grant funders often require long term security before funding land-based enterprises.

There is therefore significant potential to use the CLT model as a solution to problems of access to land and security of tenure.

Land purchase for these purposes is also often an attractive fundraising offer, particularly if the group is asking for withdrawable share capital rather than donations. Some community food

projects pay rent for land and would be able to pay dividends on shares, some interest on investment or contribute to mortgage repayments.

One of the most successful examples of land purchase for farming is Fordhall Farm, a Community Farm Land Trust.

Fordhall Farm, a family run farm in Shropshire, was one of the first in the country to go organic. In 2006 the landowner wished to put the farm on the market, giving the family a short period to raise the asking price of £800,000. If they failed to raise the cash, the land was likely to be sold to developers.

In order to raise the money, Fordhall Community Land Initiative was set up as an Industrial and Provident Society with charitable status. An appeal went out for people to buy into a community share issue. With just one day to go before the deadline, required funds were raised from around 8,000 shareholders from across the UK and indeed the world. This society owns Fordhall Organic Farm in its entirety.

Further information about the Fordhall Community Land Initiative and how it has developed is available on the Fordhall Farm website www.fordhallfarm.com.

Other examples of community food and farming initiatives include:

- Stroud Woods Co-op has bought woodland as an IPS with withdrawable shares www.stroudwoods.org.uk.
- People in Hook, Hampshire decided to buy land to provide allotments www.hookallotments.ning.com
- Tablehurst CSA has purchased land with the help of the Biodynamic Land Trust www.biodynamiclandtrust.org.uk/land-share-offers



New polytunnel bed at Land's End Peninsula CLT. Courtesy of Land's End Peninsula CLT

Issues to consider for CLTs

Community Land Trusts for food growing will need to address many of the same issues as CLTs for housing, as well as some particular issues. Typical questions for food groups will be:

- Can we achieve our aims more easily by renting land? Will land purchase distract from our main aims?
- Can we get better land by renting or buying?
- Do we have the capacity and skills to deal with buying and managing land?
- Can we raise sufficient funds quickly enough to buy the site we want before it is sold to another buyer?
- Can we afford to make a long term investment and cover our short-term running costs?
- Will the site be suitable? Can we install water, erect polytunnels, improve disabled access etc?
- How will the land owning group relate to the land using group? Should we be one or two organisations?
- What lease or license will be suitable to offer to the land user group from the land purchase group?
- What legal structure do we need? Can we change from our existing legal structure to a structure better suited to land purchase?
- How will land purchase affect future grant funding?

Sources of further information and support

For more information on how to form a Community Farm Land Trust visit the Stroud Common Wealth at

www.stroudcommonwealth.org.uk

The **Soil Association** has had a key role in the development of community supported agriculture. Its website contains information on

technical support for setting up a CSA project, an action manual, and advice on funding sources and community finance.

www.soilassociation.org

Similarly the Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens exists to support, represent and promote community food initiatives across the UK. Its website provides advice, support and an ability to find a local initiative www.farmgarden.org.

A new project hosted by the Federation of City Farms is the **Community Land Advisory Service (CLAS)** and the website

www.communitylandadvice.org.uk provides comprehensive information on community land access including advice about leases and communities buying land. The CLAS also offers training and one to one advice for community food groups www.landshare.net

The **Landshare** movement aims to connect under-utilised private land with people wishing to grow their own food. Using the website as a platform, people can post the land they have available for others to use and connect with people in their local area who wish to use it. This aims to help local food initiatives and create a movement which allows under-used land to be managed in a more efficient and productive manner.

Support and advice can also be found at **Making Local Food Work**, an initiative funded by the Big Lottery Fund and managed by the Plunkett Foundation to explore community enterprise approaches to the reconnection of people and land through local food. The initiative runs several projects related to the development of local food initiatives, ranging from community supported agriculture to the creation of food co-operatives and community shops. More information on opening a local community shop or pub is available from the **Plunkett Foundation: www.plunkett.co.uk**.

