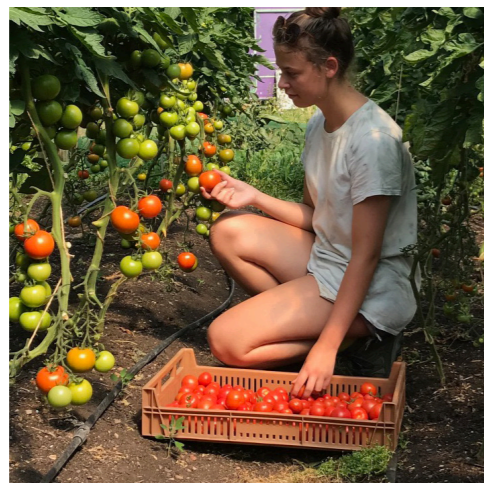




DIRECT SALES & SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS

Bringing the market
back into farmers hands

Case studies for setting up and running direct sales systems



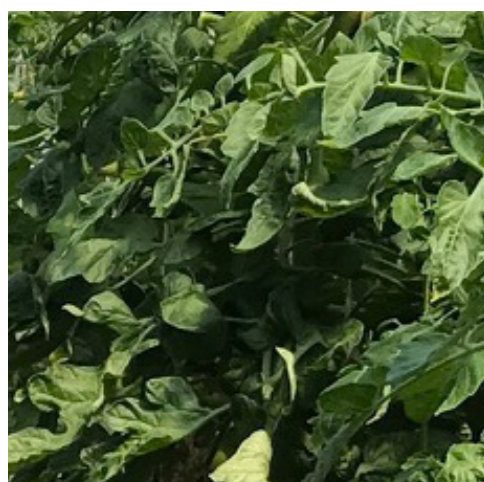
DIRECT SALES & SHORT SUPPLY CHAINS

Direct sales and short supply chain systems covers a wide and constantly evolving range of business models, but are primarily focussed on increasing the producers margin and security in the marketplace through direct relationships with customers. Widely used models include box schemes, CSAs, farm shops, online shops, farmers farkets, mobile shops, milk dispensing machines, milk rounds, local wholesale, restaurants, pick your own, and food networks or hubs.

These case studies have been produced by the Landworkers' Alliance and our members, with support from the Friends Provident Foundation. This is part of a wider project to support farmers and growers setting up or transitioning to direct sales and short supply chain systems. You can find further support resources on our website including guides to setting up and running businesses, business planning, finance and fundraising, best practice for Covid-19 safety and more. You can also watch our series of webinars on direct sales.

The Landworkers' Alliance is also able to provide some support and advice on direct sales and short supply chain models to members and farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers transitioning to agroecological systems. If this would be of use please use the contact form on the member support page of the website and we will direct your enquiry to people best placed to assist you.

September 2020



FORWARD

When we first envisaged this series of case studies we were aiming to showcase examples of direct sales and short supply chain businesses that can create viable livelihoods for producer's, whilst creating social and ecological value. We wanted to give new entrants and farmers thinking of transitioning to these models an idea of the range of models and scales currently used around the UK, and some tangible examples to think with. Direct sales and short supply chains have been on the increase for a number of years as ways to create security in the face of falling farm gate prices, unpredictable trade regimes and changes in subsidies following brexit.

In the end this collection of case studies has been drawn together in the six months following the beginning of UK lockdown measures imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. These six months have forced dramatic changes on the UK food system and is leaving an increasing number of producers facing uncertain futures.

March 2020 saw an unprecedented increase in demand for food in the UK, with supermarket shelves lying empty, and rationing systems set up for some essential items. This was not just an inconvenience in our usually convenient system. People lost their jobs and homes overnight and were forced to food banks, with food bank usage nearly doubling in comparison to 2019. Supply from supermarkets to food banks dropped as more food was being sold in store, pushing some food banks to close.

At the same time, as much as £20million of fresh food destined for hospitality and schools was at risk of being dumped, and thousands of litres of milk were poured down the drain as dairy farmers lost their markets. For many people our supply chains broke down, exposing the weaknesses in the global, just-in-time system. As is so often the case farms were left with little support or security as prices and demand fluctuated.

Supermarket shelves didn't take too long to return to normal, but at what price? Fears that thousands of tonnes of fruit and vegetables would go unharvested in our fields due to reduced ability of migrant workers to travel, drove an enthusiasm for a new British land army. Little attention was paid to the Romanian agricultural workers that were flown to the UK in the height of lock-down, without clear guarantee of safe working practices and accomodation.

Enthusiasm for the land army soon waned as reality bit. Labouring in our industrial agriculture system is rarely well paid, nor dignified. It is often dangerous.

It's telling that many of the Covid-19 outbreaks that happened over the summer originated in food processing plants, where people were expected to continue to work long shifts in warehouses where social distancing is impossible to follow. Pay disputes followed as factories closed and workers, forced to self-isolate, couldn't guarantee receiving sufficient sick-pay. Migrant workers are particularly at risk of being exploited in this system, afraid to declare feeling unwell or speak out for their rights.

Alongside this, financial pressure on smaller independent retailers intensified what was in many cases already a struggle to survive, while supermarkets sales surged and they benefited from rates holidays. In March the big grocers recorded an extra £1.9 billion in sales as shoppers made more than 79 million extra trips to their stores. Alongside the surge in demand the sector received a £3bn business rates holiday. For Sainsbury's, share prices surged, the business rates holiday was worth more than twice the companies annual profits, while Tesco had a business rates bill of £700m, equal to 50% of its profits for 2019. Shortly after the rates holiday was announced the company increased its dividend by 60%, proposing a payout to shareholders of £637m.

Farmers did what they could to meet this demand, with some showing incredible resilience and adaptability by shifting from supplying restaurants to setting up box schemes in a matter of weeks. Many farms could not expand much beyond their existing capacity to meet the demand, or weren't able to access financial support to make the kind of investment needed to upscale, falling through the criteria of many

government finance schemes. Instead of scaling up, some of our members are investing their time in supporting training initiatives for new entrants with the aim of developing much richer and more collaborative short-supply chain systems.

Amidst the crisis, there were glimmers of something better. The case studies in this publication are examples of a better food system that shone through. In the first month after lockdown sales of small scale box schemes (<300 boxes per week) increased by 134%, with two thirds of these systems actively prioritising key workers, vulnerable people or those who were self-isolating. These case studies reflect the experience of many of our members at the beginning of lockdown, with people getting in touch desperate for food but not able to go to the shops or access supermarket online ordering systems.

"We feel measuring success only in income is far too reductive as a host of other benefits are equally valued"

Lutfi Radwan, Willowbrook Farm

Direct sales and short supply chains allow farmers to create more secure demand and keep a far greater proportion of the food pound, as such they are a model for small-businesses that makes strong economic sense. In our current food system - where supermarket control pushes the price of food so low that a substantial amount of farmers now rely entirely on subsidies to keep afloat, and the future of those subsidies now unclear - creating a business model that is workable and isn't reliant on subsidy, is a

remarkable achievement in itself. It is likely that as supermarkets gain even greater control of food retail, and we face the likelihood of both tariffs on exports to the EU, and low-cost imports from the USA, more farmers will turn to direct sales and short supply chain models to regain some security in their sales and earn a bit more for their produce.

When we dig a little bit deeper into what direct sales systems mean for these case studies, we find much more to shout about than economics. For all of our case studies, capturing more of the food pound is never primarily for the purpose of profit. Direct sales allow their determined and driven effort to allow them to reinvest in their farm, to gradually regenerate depleted soils, support biodiversity, offer educational opportunities, and many many more benefits. Direct sales is also about building relationships with customers - with people - to develop a better connection between people and food. For the farmer to have a face, and for people to be able to have access to food that is good for them and our planet. It is ultimately about creating dignity.

It is clear that Covid-19 has already reshaped our food system dramatically, and that we face more shocks and changes in the coming years as our future trading relationship with the EU, and other countries through free trade agreements is negotiated. Covid-19 is not the last crisis we will see over the next few years. The climate crisis is now widely recognised as one of the biggest, if not the single biggest threat to food security. We need to act quickly to transform our food system to one that is more resilient, creates decent livelihoods for producers, and is based on principles of agroecology and food sovereignty. Direct sales systems offer one tool to help build the food system that we urgently need.



1. <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/uk-supermarkets-coronavirus-stockpiling-rationing-tesco-waitrose-toilet-roll-hand-sanitiser-a9385391.html>
2. <https://www.foodaidnetwork.org.uk/ifan-data-since-covid-19>
3. <https://www.london.gov.uk/press-releases/mayoral/mayor-urges-more-support-for-food-banks>
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2020/mar/26/food-wholesalers-seek-help-over-unwanted-coronavirus-stockpile>
5. https://www.farminguk.com/news/coronavirus-farmers-forced-to-dump-thousands-of-litres-of-milk_55377.html
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/apr/15/romanian-fruit-pickers-flown-uk-crisis-farming-sector-coronavirus>
7. <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/supply-chain/map-locations-of-uk-food-businesses-with-coronavirus-outbreaks/645657.article>
8. <https://unitetheunion.org/news-events/news/2020/august/banham-poultry-must-step-up-and-pay-self-isolating-norfolk-workers-adequate-sick-pay/>
9. <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/rival-retailers-demand-supermarkets-hand-back-3bn-business-rates-relief-nw255gfjj>
10. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2020/apr/08/business-supermarkets-government-rishi-sunak-coronavirus>
11. <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Food-Foundation-COVID-19-Veg-Box-Scheme-report.pdf>
12. https://www.ipcc.ch/site/assets/uploads/2019/08/2f.-Chapter-5_FINAL.pdf



CASE STUDIES



		Distribution Hub	On site farm shop	Farmers' markets	Online shop	Box schemes	Restaurants and cafes	Local wholesale
1	Better Food Shed	●						
2	Cae Tan					●		
3	Canalside CSA					●		
4	Edible Future					●	●	
5	Fresh and Green					●		
6	Hockham Farm				●			
7	Knockfarrel			●		●		
8	Manchester Veg People	●						
9	Mountain Hall Farm		●		●			
10	Parc y Dderwen							●
11	Plants with Purpose		●	●	●			
12	Ragmans	●				●	●	●
13	Regather	●				●		
14	Trill Farm					●	●	
15	Tomnah'a	●	●			●	●	●
16	Tyddyn Teg		●			●	●	
17	Vital Seeds				●			●
18	Whitmuir		●				●	
19	Willowbrook			●	●	●		

1 Better Food Shed / Growing Communities

Where are you?

Barking, London
Online at www.growingcommunities.org/blog/2019/02/new-kind-wholesaler

Size and type of farm

Sourcing from 15 farms.

Established

2018

Legal structure

Company Limited by Guarantee - with cooperative principles

Number of staff

6 part-time members of staff (3FTE)

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Annual turnover: £965,000
Average annual surplus: £30,000

Direct Sales Model

Distribution Hub
We work with several small/medium scale agroecological growers and producers, as well as a few larger farms. The growers we work with are mainly located in East Anglia and the South East of England. We also have direct relationships with a number of farms across the UK and an organic wholesaler who supplies imported produce when needed. Our main customer base consists of community led box schemes located around London. We also serve a few 'part-time' smaller customers e.g cooperative shops, food centred community projects and local authorities.

Every week our farmers send us a price list of what they have to offer which we amalgamate and send out to our customers. We manage the sales, orders and logistics which, combined with deliveries, frees up valuable time for farmers. It also gives farmers the opportunity to alert us about any produce they need to sell. This system allows us to send one combined order on a Thursday, as opposed to eight individual orders, giving them good time to organise and harvest. We put a 15-20% mark-up on the price from farmers, which covers our overheads (wages, rent etc).

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

The Better Food Shed (BFS) was set up to answer the direct needs from both farmers and box schemes in the London area. Due to the growth of the box schemes BFS now serves, farmers were unable to keep up with demand and a wholesaler was being used more frequently. Collectively the box schemes wanted to form direct relationships with and buy direct from additional farms. The BFS uses the combined buying power of all the box schemes, enabling smaller box schemes to access a wider range of produce direct from smaller scale and often more local farms. In a way, we are adding an extra link in the supply chain as we are an intermediary between box schemes and farmers. However we think there are many benefits to having this specific model introduced into the supply chain as it greatly supports farmers to access more direct sales, and we operate using a set of core principles to champion agroecological farming and cooperative trading systems.

Smaller farmers really benefit from this scheme as it allows them to concentrate on growing higher value produce and/or produce that grows best on their farm, and giving them a guaranteed market for their produce. There is some cooperation amongst farmers to develop coordinated growing plans and pricing. There are also benefits for the box schemes which we supply, especially in relation to increasing the range of produce available, and linking up to a wider organic market.

Our operation aims to reduce the carbon footprint throughout the supply chain, specifically delivering into London. Prior to the BFS, farmers were driving into London in less efficient vans and often not at full capacity. To improve this, we have mapped out efficient delivery routes, streamlining deliveries to fit several orders on to a delivery run, saving time and carbon emissions.

We hope to have our first electric van on the road at the beginning of 2021. We also effectively reduce food waste - our ordering system allows farmers to pick to order, thus avoiding as much wastage as possible. Our system is also not speculative - so we know that all produce picked will be sold, and can keep the mark-up on our buying system low.



What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- Bespoke Excel spreadsheet to create and manage our pricelist, orders and van runs.
- Accountancy software, we use Xero.
- A low-cost warehouse, Forklift & Cold store

What are the key factors that helped with development

Better Food Shed was initiated by Growing Communities, which invested financially in running a feasibility study and investing in initial start-up costs. We were in a slightly unusual situation where we had guaranteed financial, IT and business support from our infancy. This has really helped us to get up and running quickly. Some start-up funding would be essential to setting up this kind of system. The ability to move produce quickly and operate in a short space of time has helped to keep operating costs low and allow for a lower markup on produce. To work effectively, it's important that our staff have some growing experience or an understanding of how growers and farms operate. It wouldn't work if we didn't properly understand the constraints and work of farmers.

Forming and investing in good relationships with customers and farmers is vital and is helped by things like paying bills promptly, maintaining flexibility in ordering, and problem solving.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

Covid has had a big impact on the BFS in a number of different ways. We experienced a huge increase in demand through our box schemes - the value of sales over the end of March and April being roughly 35 to 40% higher than budgeted.

This coincided with a number of shortages in the supply chain - the hungry gap kicking in early with lots of our farmers as a result of poor harvest in previous autumn (due to extremely wet weather in parts of the country) combined with a huge increase in demand across the entire sector meant we had to offer an extremely reduced list of crops to ensure the system could cope.

As we are a relatively small operation, with a strong focus on local food supply systems, we are able to be adaptive. Our farmers and growers point to the flexibility in the BFS's ordering system as being key to their success and viability during this period.

2 Cae Tan CSA

Where are you?

Gower, Swansea
Online at www.caetanca.org/en

Size and type of farm

8 acres over 2 sites - horticulture

Established

2014

Legal structure

Company Limited by Guarantee. Grower led CSA where all growers (3) are directors. There are also four non-grower directors with business skills such as accountancy, membership and volunteer management etc.

Direct Sales Model

CSA veg box scheme
We sell our boxes directly to 126 households in the Gower area, most subscribers pay up front on a monthly basis, though some pay upfront at the start of the year. We harvest veg on a Wednesday and Thursday. Boxes are packed at our hub on a Thursday. The hub is hosted by

a grower or trainee every Thursday between 4.30-6.30 and remains accessible afterwards. Members collect between Thursday and Sunday. Other producers pre-sell eggs, meat and bread to our members at the hub. We seek to grow everything for our members for 12 months of the year. We generally have to buy in some basics, such as potatoes, carrots and onions for 6 weeks during the hungry gap, but we think we can close this gap completely with good storage and winter tunnel use.

Number of staff

7 staff members. This includes 5 growers who are full time, apart from over winter when they are part-time. There's also one Education Officer, and one Accounts, Fundraising and Membership Manager. We have hosted 1 trainee each year and so far have employed or supported all but 1 of these to become a new grower locally.

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Up to £65,000 a year for veg and salad shares, plus additional funding for education streams which varies according to funding availability. Annual surplus is generally under £1000 once all costs are covered.



Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

Cae Tan seeks to grow really good food for a small group of local people, engaging this community in the realities of growing through volunteering, newsletters, social media, meeting and talking to them at the weekly veg pick up, social and educational events. We seek to create a connected community around our veg growing and the CSA model is essential to helping us build that community. Beyond this we engage local schools in this discussion, with 150 young people visiting the farm each year. This model really helps to create a sense of togetherness and wellbeing for us, which we just wouldn't be able to achieve with selling to supermarkets or a couple of shops.

Beyond supplying our 126 current households with seasonal veg for 12 months of the year, using agroecological methods, there are other environmental benefits. We have no food waste as we're growing to order, and any boxes that get forgotten at the end of the week go straight to a food charity. Boxes also allow us to minimise packaging and deliveries, which simultaneously reduce resource use and also give us more time to do the important work of growing, stewarding our land and building community. It is physically and emotionally demanding work. But overall it is incredibly rewarding and life affirming.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- Good land is obviously essential and it will be really beneficial to get as good a piece of land as you can, as close to a population as you can. We calculate that 250m² per full share household is enough to grow veg for

each share all year. You can also start out by growing on a much smaller area, buying in the bulk veg and just growing the expensive leaves, tunnel crops etc.

- Having a good online payment system that is adjustable by the CSA is really useful. This makes it much more efficient to manage prices and payments with all members at once.
- We've a small fridge to keep some perishables fresh over the collection window of thursday-sunday, but also communicate to members that we can't refrigerate everything so they know to pick up their veg sooner if they want to keep it fresh!

What are the key factors that helped with development

Having good people skills and communication channels between the staff team, directors and members is very important. We empower one another by trusting each other and allowing each other to take initiative and make mistakes. Having someone whose role is around admin and money management has been extremely helpful and frees up time for the growers. We'd also really recommend visiting other farms and asking lots of questions!

At the beginning, we accessed social and capital grants for the first few years to get things going without grower burnout! It would be extremely useful to have more Government support and training for new entrants. After new entrants or existing farmers have trained in operating a CSA with us, they should be able to access tapered government funds to establish their own enterprise. This would pay for capital items and ideally cover a part time wage to get going.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

We were already nearly at capacity at the beginning of this year, but increased our subscription to add in 10 new boxes. However we have a waiting list with over 80 people on it, and know that there is more demand than this. Our main strategy has been to work on training so that we can support more growers to set up businesses in the Gower area to meet this demand. In 2021 our main grower will reduce hours on actual growing to increase time spent on training systems to support new entrants into agroecology. So far we have supported 3 new entrants into gaining work, and we hope to help many more.



3 Canalside Community Food

Where are you?

Warwickshire
Online at www.canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk

Size and type of farm

10 acres, horticultural

Established

2006

Legal structure

Community Benefit Society

Number of staff

Two growers at full-time, and two part time admin staff. Total of 3 FTE.

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Gross income £89,260, with an anticipated surplus of £6,884 after wages.

Direct Sales Model

CSA veg box scheme
Weekly box (or 'share') of fruit and vegetables for members, with people signing up for a full

year. We have around 190 member households receiving produce that is distributed as 173 shares of the harvest (in 3 sizes). Most of our members live within a 10 mile radius of the farm and pick-up their produce from the farm. We don't buy anything in, so all produce is local, seasonal and organic.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

Canalside prides itself on supplying produce in an ethical and environmentally sensitive manner at the same time as engaging both its members and the wider local community in land based activities and celebrations. Members can learn about the local farming calendar and seasonal production, enjoying food at its freshest and most nutritious as shares are harvested close to the time of pickup from the farm.

In addition to the production of vegetables and fruit Canalside is rooted in the local community. Members not only help to run the farm through the steering group but also voluntarily help with farm activities in regular work mornings and other tasks. We organise regular events centred around the growing seasons to celebrate the farming calendar. We engage with members

and partners to provide learning opportunities for processing and preserving fresh produce and opportunities for horticultural therapy in partnership with the Willows. We also run a programme for local schools to visit the farm.

Canalside recently (2017) reformed as a Community Benefit Society (CBS) which allowed us to raise finances through a community share offer to buy the 10 acres of land we had previously been renting. The CBS has therefore given our members a chance to communally own the land which we farm and has provided an incentive for them to become even more engaged in both running the farm and participating in its activities.

Canalside engages its members in the production and distribution of local, seasonal and organic vegetables and fruit. Members share the risks and rewards of farming by subscribing for shares of the produce at the same time as participating in seasonal activities that support the work of the farm.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- A small tractor is pretty essential, with various implements. Our head grower is a particular fan of spring tines.
- On the finances, having a proper accounts programme is very helpful - we use Money Manager which is a stand-alone programme and is fairly flexible for our needs.
- For general admin, we use OpenOffice / LibreOffice extensively, with various self-designed spreadsheets to manage the members' database and a spreadsheet to manage the collection numbers and who's collecting when. Mailchimp is our chosen system for mailing our membership. And Wordpress is our chosen website editing platform.

What are the key factors that helped with development

We had support from a consultant advisor in the early days. This was invaluable as our growers had not been working as professional growers prior to the establishment of Canalside. We also had the generous use of glasshouses at a nearby facility for raising seedlings. Before we had enough surplus covered cropping space of our own this meant we could reduce our outgoings by raising plants from seed instead of buying in seedlings/young plants.

The ability to grow a wide range of vegetables

that is ready for harvesting throughout the year is central to the success of our business. The first growers developed a cropping plan in collaboration with expert consultants. Over the years this has been refined and developed by each grower and after each growing season. Growers use a range of activities to develop their skills including self-directed study, peer conversations, farm visits, conferences and workshops. One grower has also undertaken an apprenticeship scheme (Soil Association Future Growers) which developed their skills and on-the-job knowledge.

Having good administration with time earmarked for this makes a key contribution to the successful running of the scheme. Therefore communication skills, and a wide range of administrative skills including website maintenance, word processing and spreadsheet skills, social media and publicity are really important. The current administrator came to the role with many of these skills already well developed and has further developed them through self-teaching/self-directed study, and guidance from members and others in the wider community with specific skills.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

Covid-19 has not significantly affected our distribution or subscriber numbers. We extended our collection times to reduce the queueing caused by limiting the number of people in our collection space. We saw little difference in the number of people signing up to our waiting list or enquiring about becoming members - probably because the messaging on our website clearly stated that anyone joining the waiting list could expect to wait in excess of 6 months (no good for people wanting an immediate solution). This wait has been the case for the last 2 years as we've held a waiting list of 50+ households for most of that time. We did see an increase in people coming to work mornings, especially in the early months of lockdown when a lot of people were on furlough and options to get out and about were very limited. The growers worked hard to have a wide range of tasks spread out across the site for people to do in a physically distanced way, either in their household group or individually.

We also saw an increase in people asking about becoming social members or coming to volunteer with us. Due to the significant increase in turnout of existing members, we made a decision not to take on any new social members/volunteers until things had quietened down again.



4 Edible Futures

Where are you?

Bristol
Online at www.ediblefutures.com

Size and type of farm

2.5 acres - horticulture

Established

2012

Legal structure

Community Interest Company

Number of staff

There are currently 4 part time workers who all work as self employed. 2.4 FTE

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Our annual turnover up until 2019 was in the region of £15,000. All surplus is reinvested into the business for the next year. Turnover this year will be higher and is forecast to be £25,000.

Direct Sales Model

CSA salad and veg box scheme
We supply around 50 households with a weekly salad bag which they collect from various drop off points in and around Bristol. Subscribers receive salad 44 weeks a year, but their payments are spread over 12 months, helping the farm to balance its books through the hungry gap. We have also done direct sales to cafes and restaurants. Before 2020 about 50% of our trade was to restaurants and 50% was distributed through Salad Drop, so that we don't rely entirely on one sales outlet. This year we have taken on more land and used this to set up a veg box scheme.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

Direct sales enable the grower to capture a far greater proportion of the food pound, than sales to shops or wholesalers. Having drop off points linked in with other local independent businesses supports them too as people will often buy things from them when they come to collect their box.

Developing a membership of subscribers offers the ability to spread your income over the year. In our 'Salad Drop' scheme, subscribers get salad

for 10 months a year, but their payment for it is spread over 12 months. A subscriber model also affords you stability in that your customer base is very spread out. If you are reliant on one or two wholesalers you are more vulnerable, than if you are dependent on a hundred subscribers.

The model allows us to develop individual relationships with people across our community, which builds up loyalty, relationships and a better food culture. The Solidarity Veg Box model [see below] has now allowed us to reach outside of the small subset of local people who would personally subscribe to a veg box. This is a massive benefit to this model.

Most importantly, direct sales models allow small farmers to run workable business, and therefore keep practicing agroecology, which has multiple benefits for our ecology, food system, local economies and communities.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- Using a 'shopperfy' web platform has been useful to set this scheme up. It definitely isn't perfect for the box scheme sales system, but was accessible and more or less fit-for-purpose for our needs. We are now looking to shift over to Bucky Box as a web platform.
- Having a good promotional video has also been really useful for publicity.

What are the key factors that helped with development

Having good social and communication skills to build relationships with potential buyers, members and supporters is key. Less tangibly but no less significantly, being a visible and respected small farm in our community is key to getting subscribers to both household and solidarity veg boxes. This is based on multiple personal relationships, but also having a social media presence and accessible website. The LWA have also supported us with press releases and social media which has been a massive help in terms of gaining subscriptions. The fact that one of my coworkers was able to build a website was also key, but might be a skill that would have to be outsourced if not available in-house.

Having good drop off points is really important to this model - in retrospect I would have worked out our veg box drop off points further in advance so they were better organised and better distributed over target communities. We're currently sharing a drop off point with another small farm which can cause confusion with

customers about what they're picking up.

This year, the owner of our new field has allowed us to use it rent free. This, along with the £1,000 donation from Rosanna Morris who sold some 'Black Lives Matter' prints on-line and gave us the funds has been really helpful in adapting the business for the solidarity boxes.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

This year we have set up another direct sales model we've called 'Solidarity Veg Box' in response to the 2020 Covid-19 crisis. The Solidarity Veg Box scheme came about from securing an additional 2 acre field for veg production for the 2020 season and a desire for at least some of this veg to reach local people experiencing food poverty. Members of the public can go onto the Edible Futures website and sign up for either a regular 'Household Veg Box,' or a 'Solidarity Veg Box' that they pay for but do not personally receive, so this is essentially a donation. People can opt to buy a solidarity veg box either weekly, monthly or as a one off. Edible Futures builds up a bank of free veg boxes that we can give away to people in food poverty. In order to reach people in the greatest need we have teamed up with grass-roots community groups, including Borderlands which works with destitute asylum seekers, to distribute our Solidarity Veg Boxes for us. We currently distribute twenty Solidarity boxes each week, and hope to run this as long as we can keep raising funds.



5 Fresh and Green Vegetables

Where are you?

Devon

Size and type of farm

12.3 acres - mixed farm comprising mainly vegetables, laying hens, grazing pasture and productive and amenity woodland.

Established

2003

Legal structure

Partnership

Number of staff

2 FTE

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

£45 - 50,000 pa turnover. All surplus reinvested.

Direct Sales Model

Veg Box Scheme

At the outset we supplied about 20 customers a week. Now we supply approx. 90 customers mainly on a weekly basis - we do accommodate people who only need a fortnightly delivery too. All produce is grown at and supplied from the farm with the exception of potatoes which we source from a local organic grower in winter time. Customers 'commit' to having a weekly or fortnightly veg box from us, but can cancel on their regular week if they don't need it for whatever reason. Payment is upon receipt - either cash to their pick up point or bank transfer - there is no upfront payment or other commitment required.



Boxes are dropped at one of seven pick up points to make deliveries less costly and time consuming - mostly at regular customers' houses who agree to host the bags being collected there - these are outside the house so there is no 'bother' for the pick up point - it also means that people can be flexible as to when they collect - no shop hours as such.

The farm also produces free range eggs for sale. Two mobile chicken houses and their flocks are rotated around the growing area - the 60 hens clear crop aftermath, and also help with weed control.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

Engaging in direct sales has meant the business has been profitable from the outset - the business has grown alongside the sales - I started small on rented land then once the model was 'proven' we bought our own land and transferred the business to this site.

Having regular committed customers helps with financial stability and predictability - the produce is already ordered - so doesn't have such cosmetic or presentation demands as if for a market or caterers. There is very little wastage as any pack house grade outs get recycled through the chickens. Crop surpluses are accommodated within the sales model as extra big bags for customers on some weeks.

We've chosen this payment model because having the payment system upon receipt feels most accessible for people on lower incomes compared to an annual or monthly subscription.

We don't seek to expand customer numbers beyond this as we feel it is a sustainable business model for this farm.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- The scale of growing is facilitated by using a 2wd tractor and loader plus a variety of implements for cultivation, soil amendment distribution, headland mowing and weed control. The larger mechanisation is combined with smaller scaled implements such as a walk-behind tiller for use in the polytunnels, and pedestrian seeder, and pre-emergent flame weeder plus hand tools for crop maintenance.
- Three polytunnels of 25 x 9m each allow season extension and year round cropping - particularly of more tender crops such as tomatoes and aubergines in the summer -

and a broad selection of salads and other greenstuff in winter time. There is also a large propagation greenhouse to raise seedlings for transplanting into the growing system. These facilities mean that veg box sales can continue year round.

What are the key factors that helped with development

Initially - before internet ubiquity became a thing, the problem was how to let people know we existed - this was done by flyers, word of mouth and a presence at a couple of community markets. We also hosted Farm Open days which helped. I think if we were starting from scratch now, having a good internet presence would be essential.

Having good local contacts and an ability to interact with customers and build up personal relationships over the years has been really important. We generally have a very loyal customer base - some have been with us from the start and we're seen as reliable suppliers of good fresh produce. Word of mouth recommendations probably account for 80% of new customers.

Obtaining planning permission from the Local Authority for our polytunnels and shed required

a considerable amount of work on our part, however the greatest difficulty was encountered when seeking permission to reside onsite, in order that the business could be properly maintained, this permission was eventually obtained at appeal in 2014.

The turf roofed packing shed and barn, constructed on site, provides naturally cool storage of produce so long as it is harvested early, and for crops to be graded and packed efficiently, thereby reducing waste.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

During the Covid-19 crisis the farm and its production has continued pretty much unchanged. The short supply chain model has held up - the business has attracted more customers - local people have been very appreciative of the opportunity to source reliable supplies of healthy food of known provenance for themselves. Anyone not able to pick up from their usual local collection point has had their veg box dropped off directly - either by us or by other customers in the network. Surplus harvests over the summer have been made available to foodbank users via our local networks.



6 Hockham Farm / Indie farmer

Where are you?

Hailsham, East Sussex
Online at www.indiefarmer.com/meatboxes

Size and type of farm

45 acres - cattle and sheep family farm
Another 300 acres with various grazing agreements

Established

40+ years

Legal structure

Partnership, with Indie Farmer as a separate limited Company for meat box marketing services.

Number of staff

2 full time workers and 1 part time.

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Approx £100,000 with the business making a small profit.

Direct Sales Model

We pre-sell 10kg beef boxes at £110 each and aim to get 20 boxes per carcass. Often we have left over mince which we sell in 450g packs or have made into burgers. We take orders for our meat boxes mainly by email and using WhatsApp. I also use a reservation form on my website indie farmer, where customers can reserve a box via a customised contact form - which then sends me an email with their details. We use social media channels to market our meat boxes - especially Facebook, where we've had a great deal of success using local groups to post free adverts.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

Before I returned to the family farm 6 years ago all our beef animals were sold direct to ABP Food Group. At that time we had a continental suckler herd of around 30 cows and a commercial flock of 200 ewes. I convinced my parents to start a Sussex suckler herd with a view to selling our beef direct. From an initial 6 heifers the Sussex herd has grown to 25 cows with around 20 continental cows still in the herd. Previously my dad Al'd all his cows mainly to Limousine

bulls. Then in 2015 we decided to buy our own pedigree Angus bull which has worked well on both the Sussex cows and Dad's continentals.

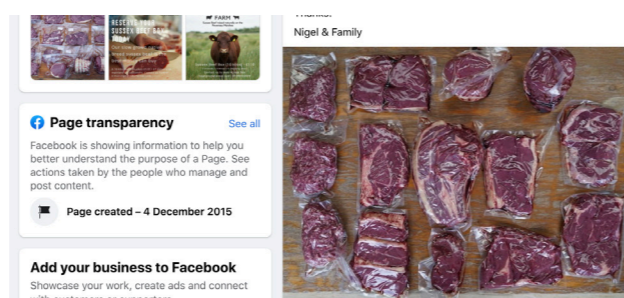
When I first started out back in 2016 I focused on selling to London using cool boxes and a third party overnight courier. This worked well initially but then we had a few bad experiences, with one or two of the boxes getting lost in the warehouse. Since the goods are perishable it is not possible to get insurance and any losses result in a large chunk of the profit being wiped out as we reimburse the customer. This has led us to focus more on local customers, where we can deliver the boxes ourselves - which now accounts for over 50% of our customer base.

I started marketing our beef boxes direct in 2016 and sales have increased from one animal to 12 so far this year, with a goal of 15 animals by the end of the year. Based on this, direct sales of beef will generate around £33,000 of income for the farm. The remainder of the animals are sold via ABP.

We also sell some lambs direct (£80 for a half and £150 for a whole) though the margins are less selling direct and we have a good reputation in our local livestock market in Hailsham and achieve an average finished lamb price of over £80.

Selling meat boxes isn't for all farmers - it takes time to build up a customer base and find a model that fits the way you farm. If you can make it work - perhaps by involving a younger member of the family, selling direct to the public can be very rewarding in terms of feedback and providing a useful income stream. Also unlike a lot of diversification ventures it doesn't require a lot of up front investment. You don't need your own butchery. We work with a local butchery a few miles from the farm - who does everything to our specification; including vac packing, labelling and sorting the meat into 10kg boxes.

Selling direct is also a good way to trial working with the public. We don't have a farm shop but it is something we are considering for the future. We are also interested in running on farm events



and other workshops so selling your meat directly is a great way to start building a relationship with customers.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- You don't need an expensive website and/or fancy branding - a basic logo will do. So long as you have a good product, have a smartphone to take a few photos and can use a few basic tools on social media - you're good to go.
- We use google sheets to keep track of orders and mailchimp is great for designing and sending newsletters to your customer base.
- We also use the free online design software Canva to create flyers and social media adverts.
- Build a good working relationship with your butcher - it's amazing how much you'll learn about all the cuts and that really helps with marketing. We've experimented with a couple of carcasses during the summer, offering steak and bbq boxes but be careful that you don't end up being left with lots of mince. You do need to factor in the cost of slaughter and butchery (which comes to around £500 in total). And the cost of packaging for any cool boxes you send via courier (around £2.50 per box). We add on the cost of third party delivery (£10) to customers so this isn't absorbed within the box price. After deducting all your costs there is still a healthy profit left to cover your time and to pay the farm a better return than the wholesale price.

What are the key factors that helped with development

One of the key factors has been our gradual transition to more native bred animals. Working closely with my parents to convince them of the merits of a lower input animal that can be finished on grass, whilst at the same time giving us the opportunity to market direct to the public.

Building a customer base is vital. You can do this in different ways but we find that mailchimp works really well. It's free to use and allows you to market directly to your existing customers via email - we send regular 'reserve your beef boxes now' emails. One thing I've recently added is a button to allow people to message me via WhatsApp message from the email. Try to keep an open mind as to your potential customer base.



What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

Covid-19 hasn't really impacted the running of our farm business. We've experienced an increased demand for our beef and lamb boxes. I think people with freezer space are beginning to understand the benefit of buying meat in bigger quantities and also becoming more adventurous with cooking different cuts. The increased demand for our meat boxes has meant more admin work and time spent delivering boxes to customers within a 20 mile radius of the farm. Though ultimately it's been rewarding providing a small income for myself and a better return than the wholesale market my parents previously relied on. It also puts money back into the local economy providing vital income to our local family run abattoir (Tottingworth in Heathfield) and our local farm butcher (Smithers in Hellingly).

7 Knockfarrel Produce

Where are you?

Highlands
Online at www.knockfarrel.com

Size and type of farm

44 acres - mixed croft with horticulture and woodland

Established

2010

Legal structure

Partnership

Number of staff

1 full time; 4 part time; plus volunteers and trainees.

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Turnover: £110,000
Surplus (for reinvestment): £8,000

Direct Sales Model

CSA Box scheme and farmers markets
We run an organic certified box scheme which represents about 70% of our annual farm turnover. There are currently 150 veg box subscribers – this has increased steadily year-on-year. We deliver every fortnight, along 3 delivery routes – around half of all customers get their order delivered to their door; for the other half we have a series of drop off and collect points, that are run by volunteers or very helpful customers.

We grow around 85% (by value) of all the veg. We don't have the soils for root veg (or good equipment) so we buy-in carrots and main crop potatoes from two local organic farms, plus some mid-winter brassicas from two other organic Scottish farms. In addition to the veg, we also supply a range of other produce, including our own pork and eggs, preserves, and cheese bought in from a local dairy.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

We have tried several other routes-to-market for our produce. For 2 years we had a contract with Ocado, to supply 1200 bags of kale a week to their London distribution hub; and for 3 years we had a contract with Highland Council to supply organic lettuce to their 116 school and care home

kitchens. However, we are too small to compete on price for larger contracts, and we wanted a more diverse croft and to play a useful part in our local community. The combination of our box scheme and seasonal farmers markets enables us to achieve this: but it does take a lot of work!

We offer our customers more than just a Tesco-style 'click and drop' service, and we expect our customers to give us more than just the price of what they want each week. We want our customer to feel that they belong to our croft and support us, and in return we ask them to commit for a regular delivery; pay into a farm account and top-it up regularly, and help us by organising drop-off points, washing their crates for return, and sending back all packaging for reuse.

We recruited our first box customers from our regular customers at seasonal farmers' markets, who wanted to get a regular supply of what we grow. We continue to add customers this way, and through word-of-mouth. We have never paid to advertise. We currently have a waiting list of customers wanting to get a regular slot with us.

We have only a 15% annual churn of customers. We know all our customers by name, and we keep in contact with them by newsletter every fortnight. We carry out an annual satisfaction and feedback survey of our customers, to find out what they like and what needs to change.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- We use a range of methods for cultivation. We have moved away from direct seeding into open beds, as it requires too much weeding, and led to soil compaction. We now grow over 80,000 veg transplants that we propagate ourselves each year, and transplant into 1.5m beds through biodegradable corn starch mulch; or into 5m wide beds through reusable woven covers. This move has enabled us to better plan our harvest; increase the range of crops we grow, and extend our veg box supply season from 22 weeks in 2013, to 42 weeks in 2020.
- Our management of customer orders is pretty basic – we use spreadsheets to record customer details and all sales. Then manually transfer fortnightly orders to pick and delivery sheets. This is laborious and can lead to mistakes! We are currently transferring to a new shared software and payment platform for veg box operators in the UK – www.ooooby.com – to reduce the time taken and increase accuracy.

What are the key factors that helped with development

Our farm is not reliant on subsidy, representing less than 1.5% of our turnover. We have received agricultural grants from planting trees; conversion to organic farming; building of new access, services and sheds. The best bit of help we have received is an interest-free loan from the Dean Organic Trust, run by the Organic Research Centre, which we used to change our cultivation methods, and are now using to build an on-croft butchery and commercial kitchen to widen the range of value-added products that customers can add to their veg box.

The skills required to run a veg box are quite diverse. I took a year long Masters in Organic Farming at SRUC Aberdeen to learn the concepts, followed by several years working with farms to gain experience. I would not recommend a box scheme as a first step into local food supply – we attended farmers markets and ran a weekly chef-delivery scheme for 3 years, to gain experience, before taking on the obligation to have 12 types of veg available in sufficient quantity to fill our veg boxes, every week.

Finding additional skilled workers to expand the business is not easy. There are no colleges teaching food production horticulture in Scotland. We have had to either train our own staff, or take seasonal workers from Universities that do teach food production, in mainland Europe. Most of the people who have trained with us have gone on to set up their own local food business – we have

mentored 22 new local food businesses in the past 5 years.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

The Covid-19 pandemic is changing the balance of our business: box scheme demand rose sharply during lockdown, and we took on an extra 30% of subscribers, mostly older people who were shielding. We also had to turn away many potential customers who we were simply unable to serve. Most of the new customers have stuck with us, and spend per customer across all the boxes is up 20% too. But we have had no farmers' markets. Overall the increased veg box income has almost equalled the lost market revenue. If covid-19 continues into another year, we may sell solely through the box scheme - the only real downside of this is that veg box customers buy about 75% veg and 25% value added produce from us; whereas market customers buy less veg and more higher value products. To survive on veg sales alone we will need to rent land and plant more; or we can look for alternative markets for our processed foods. We also had staff shortages during lockdown, as our overseas trainees booked to work with us for the season could not travel. Instead we have taken on and trained two new local people – this is good to do, but they are not getting the formal educational back up they need, as there are no Scottish higher education institutions offering horticultural or local food training to them.



8 Manchester Veg People

Where are you?

Manchester
Online at www.vegpeople.org.uk/newsite

Size and type of farm

Sourcing from 6 local farms and 2 wholesalers

Established

2011

Legal structure

Multi-stakeholder cooperative, registered with the FCA, using the Somerset Rules and certified by the Soil Association.

Number of staff

2 part-time.

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Turnover in 2018/19 was ~£170,000, predicted to increase to ~£200,000 in 2019/20 (not including Veg Box People produce). Our model aims to cover our running costs while paying growers a fair price, with any potential future profit re-invested in training new growers, through our partnership with the Kindling Trust.



Direct Sales Model

Distribution hub: Manchester Veg People operates across Greater Manchester as a co-operative of organic growers, buyers (restaurants, caterers and the public sector) and workers. There are 6 local growers and up to 20 buyers (including the University of Manchester). We also buy in from a number of growers from further afield and a local organic wholesaler when there are gaps in local produce. We work with local growers at the beginning of the season to make a collective crop plan, based on the demand from current buyers (and any increase or changes they predict). On a day to day basis, we send out a weekly availability list to buyers, based on our growers availability, take orders by email and phone and do deliveries twice a week. There is a minimum order and we put a mark up to cover costs of distribution, staffing etc. (though buyer members get a discount).

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

Our model opens up markets for small-scale growers. It would be really hard for a small grower to access customers such as universities and larger restaurants. We help to coordinate smaller growers to access these markets. This means we get really good quality local food to a wider range of people rather than just to higher-end restaurants. Working with growers to coordinate their growing plans leads to increased cooperation between growers and therefore less food waste from produce that can't be sold.

A key part of our model is that we are part of a wider family of organisations (Veg Box People and Kindling Trust) working together to create a better food system in Manchester. Many of our customers are also Veg Box People collection points which not only strengthens our connection with them, but means we save resources through shared deliveries (we also share our storage and packing unit which is a big saving). We also build the relationships with the growers and the farms through activities run in partnership with the Kindling Trust, including chef visits to the farms with cooking challenges and team volunteering days.

Importantly, the growers set the price and include costs such as delivery to the hub, rather than us setting prices based on wider market prices. The aim of our model is to allow growers to get the price they need to support their businesses and the time they need to focus on growing (as MVP takes on a lot of the work of marketing, distribution, coordination).



What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- Communication and facilitation skills for cooperative working and relationship development are really important.
- A van for collection and deliveries was essential
- We use quickbooks for the book keeping as well the ordering system and record keeping.

What are the key factors that helped with development

Building relationships is essential, right from the start. If you supply the public sector (or other large organisations) it's important to build relationships with the whole organisation so that you aren't reliant on individual relationships.

In the beginning we got some establishment funding from the Rural Development Programme for England (European funding) and ran a crowdfunder to buy a van. This was really useful but it is also well worth considering growing organically, as sometimes getting funding at the beginning can create a model that isn't sustainable in the future.

Being part of the wider group of the Kindling Trust and Veg Box People has really helped to build a bigger picture and help to show people that they're involved in a wider systems change approach to the food system. It has also helped to be adaptable this year with Covid-19 resulting in sudden changes in customer base.

The Better Food Traders Network is a really great resource that can help with advice and systems for business development.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

During lockdown all of our customers closed so we suddenly had no income at all. However, at the same time interest in Veg Box People increased, so we were able to focus our team, energy and resources there for the time being.

For Veg Box People there were a couple of adaptations needed e.g. finding temporary collection points (with the Universities and restaurants shut). We also wanted to continue getting veg to people who couldn't get to the collection points (due to being key workers or vulnerable), so other customers volunteered to deliver bags to people living close to them which has been great.

Now, restaurants have gradually been opening up, but for much smaller customer numbers, so we understandably won't be their first priority. However, we feel the interest in local food and in what we do as a wider group is stronger than ever. Veg Box People is going strong, so we are able to continue to support local growers; our MVP buyers have stayed in contact, as well as new buyers approaching us recently; and Kindling are setting up a larger scale agroforestry farm, bringing with it a whole load of new opportunities in terms of local organic produce, markets, engagement and so on. So while it is hard at this stage to say exactly when and how Manchester Veg People will return to business as normal, it will and we definitely feel this model of co-operative working is the right way to do it.

9 Mountain Hall Farm

Where are you?

Pembrokeshire
Online at www.mountainhall.farm

Size and type of farm

15 acres owned, 100 acres rented on temporary agreements - Dairy and beef farm

Established

2017

Legal structure

Company Limited by Guarantee

Number of staff

5 staff, 2.5 FTEs

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

This year, we've had a £10,000 annual turnover from beef, of which £2500 is surplus. Predicted annual turnover from milk for the next 12 months is £58,000.



Direct Sales Model

On-farm shop, milk vending machine and online sales: Mix of online sales and on-farm shop open twice a week. In the shop we sell our milk through a vending machine, with the aim of selling 100L of milk each day. We also sell beef online and in the shop alongside some other produce from other local farmers, occasionally our own pork. The rest of the milk is processed for yoghurt, cream and ice-cream and sold via our shop and soon, local shops.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

This model allows us full control over the sale of our product - we're not reliant on other businesses in order to sell our produce. It takes a bit more time, but the direct sales pays better per hour than selling wholesale, which is imperative when you're working on a smaller scale. We receive no farm subsidies and no off-farm income. We need to make enough to live off for ourselves whilst having a flat wage/equal pay policy for all employees (including my wife and I), and to put enough money away to pay for future farm improvements and repairs. Further to this we are in the process of developing a profit share scheme based proportionally on hours worked.

As a result of direct selling, we also get a much closer connection to our customers. People really know the produce they're buying, which we like. We're building a direct relationship between farmer and consumer contributing to local food resilience, and helping to define a place in terms of food culture.

Our system allows us to minimise packaging and resources. We can sell milk in glass with customers bringing their own bottles back each week. Eventually it will allow us to sell the beef with minimal single-use plastic. The extra money we make allows us to farm in a manner that is more conducive to the local ecology as we're not under as much financial pressure as dairies selling for 28p/litre. We can afford to encourage wildflowers, plant trees, not use wormers or herbicides. We don't need to grow grass just to cut for silage, we can manage in a way that improves soil health, which helps keep pollutants out of local watercourses.



What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- We're now using Xero to track financials.
- We've had to re-lay our track as we were getting complaints about it. It costs a lot of money, but it's a prerequisite for having customers visit the farm.
- We struggled for a while to find a good relationship with a butcher for our beef. We've now found a good one, but are planning to build our own butchery this year, with a friend running it, and that will take our beef product, and sales, to the next level.

What are the key factors that helped with development

We started out just by advertising word of mouth, friends and Facebook. We were new to the area, so we've had to build up our customer base from scratch. Lots of people told us we would struggle to shift enough beef and milk to make it worthwhile, but what we've found is that it's steadily grown over the 4 years we've been here. In our first year of sales we managed to sell more than a ton of beef, all to locals. Facebook has been the main marketing and sales platform for us. We do now have a website, but it mainly serves as just a sales route - taking card payments.

We did the occasional market stall at first, but found it didn't pay us for our time, and with running a farm, was an inefficient use of our time. We were part of a local food assembly for just over a year, but just found again that it wasn't paying us enough for the effort.

We used to bottle all milk by hand, and run it on a CSA system - with customers committing to X number of litres each week on a given day. However we moved to having the shop open twice weekly, and just advertising when it's open. We didn't want to have 20 customers here every day as the shop is more or less straight in front of the house, and we want some days with privacy and without customers!

We've always offered free delivery of our beef in the local vicinity, which I think has played an important role in capturing more customers. We find that 80%+ of our custom is repeat custom, and having a direct relationship with customers really helps with retention. It's essential to relate to people and to be able to tell your story. Being open and honest with customers is important. When we had to close milk sales for 18 months, we told them why at the beginning and kept them in the loop the entire way, and it seems like most of those customers are coming back to us.

Ultimately I think our relative success so far has been in offering something a bit different and communicating our story effectively. There's a lot of local competition for high-quality grass-fed beef, yet we've managed to find our own customer base. The milk has helped to drive beef sales too.

10 Parc y Dderwen

Where are you?

Pembrokeshire
Online at www.facebook.com/ParcyDderwen

Size and type of farm

12 acres, mixed – horticulture/orchard/meadow/coppice

Established

2018

Legal structure

Partnership

Number of staff

2 part-time staff plus third casual worker approx. once per month for production days. 1 FTE

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

This year, turnover was £18,500
Costs of Production (not including earnings):
£6,750
Earnings / ongoing business investment: £11,750

Direct Sales Model

Direct local wholesale
We make a range of sauerkrauts and kimchi – all cabbage based and naturally fermented for 3 weeks before being packaged into glass jars. We currently sell to 24 independent shops (a mix of wholefood shops, farm shops, delis) and are producing approx 180kg per month. Each kilo of cabbage makes approx. 3 jars of sauerkraut (which sells wholesale at £3.50 per jar with RRP of £4.50). Orders are taken via email or phone and records kept on an excel spreadsheet and invoices sent via email. Most shops order roughly once a month so delivery days can be flexible to suit our schedule and enable us to piggyback on existing trips by us, friends or our friendly local wholesaler. Shops orders range from 12-150 jars a month.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

In April 2018 we began selling in 5 local shops and a farmers market once every 3 weeks. Over the next year we started selling at 2 further farmers markets (each every fortnight or 3 weeks), and selling at a total of 15 shops within a 30 miles radius. After one year, and looking at our sales records and time spent at markets we

decided not to sell at farmers markets anymore and just do the occasional food festival for fun/marketing. It ended up taking too much time for the money made with too low an hourly wage for the overall business with so much time standing at a market taking time away from setting up the farm. Doing the markets and food festivals was crucial however to getting our name and product out there, meeting future stockists and getting potential customers to taste what is for some an unusual food. Our location lends itself well to selling in many small independent shops. With no major cities or large towns very nearby – there are 15 or so small towns plus smaller villages also with their own shops and keen to sell local produce. As we're selling an added value product, our model can afford to sell at wholesale prices to shops and thus support the small independent shops to continue existing and provide good healthy food to local communities. An added benefit of selling to shops is a minimal amount of time is spent selling and therefore maximum time on the farm setting it up and focusing on the land management and growing.

We're completely in control of how much product we make, where it goes, for how much money, and when. We can be flexible and adapt quickly. Our set up will change when more ingredients are grown (up to 95% in the years to come) at our farm as the veg that is ready will dictate what needs using - but we will then have the benefit of decreased costs of production (although most likely a lower wage per hour once more growing time is factored in!) and being a truly local product with ingredients grown and processed on site.

The business also aims to support the local community in a number of ways. We've run 7 workshops teaching people about fermenting and will continue this in the farm's processing kitchen which is in the process of being built. When it is ready it will be available to the local community to use – to make their own products or for events/workshops. We also want the farm to be open to people to come and be / volunteer and learn. As the business develops we hope to provide more local employment

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- Spreadsheets! This was crucial in understanding our sales, costs, yields and earnings per hour which helped us make business decisions as we became established.
- It's been really important to have good communication skills - both in telling our story via social media and at markets and with dealing with shops on a regular basis.
- To manage a business where you're growing, processing into a value added product, selling and distributing it's been important for us to have good organisation skills - in knowing what and how much to grow, timing the harvest and processing days, managing orders we have and when, keeping check of stock levels and scheduling deliveries.

What are the key factors that helped with development

We began the business before our farm was set up – to test the market, our products and start earning part of our living from the business whilst transitioning to a more land based income – buying in organic ingredients from a local wholesaler. Ingredients would be as priority welsh, then UK then Dutch.

We received support through Social Farms & Gardens' mentoring scheme for CSAs in Wales which covered the costs of us, and the farms and mentors we visited, to learn from them in terms of equipment, processes, farm design and crop planning.

In May 2019 we were granted planning permission for our farm and agricultural workers dwelling and in Spring 2020 we began the market garden to start growing ingredients for the business. The aim over the next few years is to build up the garden to be growing the majority of the ingredients for our existing sauerkrauts & kimchi and develop new products that wouldn't have made sense with bought in ingredients e.g. fermented hot sauce, seasonal pickles, dilly beans, gherkins. This will depend on storage of winter cabbages and root vegetables such as carrot and beetroot and drying of onions and garlic. A Polytunnel production will also enable extended seasons for early cabbages if needed after stored cabbages are used up and before outside spring cabbages are ready.

We plan to set up a small scale ferment CSA for seasonal boxes of ferments of different types/sizes for our most enthusiastic customers – and offer members time on the farm, whether volunteering, relaxing or working instead of monetary payment for the products.

Something that would really help us is a way of local businesses to easily see what journeys are being done across West Wales and to piggyback on each others' delivery rounds, so a kind of distribution hub for small local producers. For a business our size it isn't worth us dealing with couriers or a large distributor so we do deliveries ourselves – which generally fits in amongst our everyday life – but could be better and more efficient when partnering with others.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

We were lucky in that Covid-19 hasn't impacted us very much so far - most of the shops we supply stayed open during lockdown or set up local delivery systems instead. We hope that by starting to grow our own raw ingredients from now on we'll be able to keep going, even if supply chains get more disrupted.



11 Appletreeman

Where are you?

Perthshire
Online at www.plantsandapples.com

Size and type of farm

600 square metres on a community farm of 123 acres - fruit tree nursery

Established

2008

Legal structure

Initially a trading partnership with a herb nursery called Plants with Purpose. Now my partner has retired, and I operate as a sole trader. The herb side of the business was sold to a keen local newstart grower.

Number of staff

1 full time and occasional temporary seasonal staff

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

With a turnover of circa. £45,000, the business delivers a surplus of between £12,000 to £18,000 which is taken as salary.

Direct Sales Model

On farm shop, online sales, farmers markets
We have a small shop area on the farm where we are based, and also take online orders via our website. Winter sales are also available for collection from the farm, or by postal service or via a delivery service. We also attend three regular farmer's markets and two larger annual horticultural shows.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

The business has an unusual production cycle in that most of the sales are made in the winter with bare root stock, when the trees are dormant. This can prove problematic in severe winters, when the trees cannot be dug from frozen ground or deliveries are impeded by poor weather. However, in recent years, we have increased the number of containerised fruit trees which can be sold throughout the summer at the shop and farmers markets. This has brought its own complications. While helping to balance out income throughout the year, the trees are too

large to be delivered by mail, so must be sold directly from the farm.

Attending farmers markets has been essential in reaching new customers and increasing our market share within Scotland. Around 150 to 250 customers are served each winter, equating to sales of around 2,000 trees. Almost no direct paper-based advertising has ever been done. Instead our customers tend to first make contact through our events and workshops – we regularly give talks, run apple days, and organise training courses – resulting in increased awareness of the business throughout Scotland too.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- There are very few machines used in our production process; a small rotavator and strimmer is all we have needed. Ground-cover plastic has been our main weed control measure, but a lot of weeding by hand has to be done. We are looking to become less reliant on plastic, and are experimenting with green manures and different organic mulches.
- Our website and social media are crucial to generating direct sales. Regular blogging, and updates on instagram and facebook are now the main ways we stay in touch with followers and generate business – previously, an email newsletter and twitter were also important tools. The skills of a website designer and an easily updatable interface was instrumental to the initial success of the business. Being part of a community farm has also boosted our profile and various apple pressing days are arranged with local groups.



What are the key factors that helped with development

By starting small, and increasing production slowly, the business has never required extra financial input. Keeping our labour costs very tight, doing our own bookkeeping and managing our own website and deliveries has helped to keep the business sustainable.

Direct contact with me – ‘the producer’ – is highly valued by customers, especially with the farm shop, as they can get one-to-one advice before purchase and support later on if problems or queries arise. Being regularly available for customers to the shop is tricky as the nursery is separate from the sales area. We manage this by checking stock levels regularly and keeping it open 24/7 with an honesty box for small purchases and information to direct other buyers to the paypal buttons on the plantsandapples.com website. Being located on the community farm means that there are often other people around who can send customers down to the nursery as well.

Education and passing on orchard skills has been crucial to the business – we’ve taught children, adults and community groups how to assess, prune and care for their fruit trees. However, at the moment passing on the business before retiring seems a remote likelihood as

there is little spare money available to employ a trainee to lift them to the very high standard required. The propagation of fruit trees in quantity is a highly-skilled manual operation and the level of practical training in horticultural knife skills in Scotland is currently lacking.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

Currently, and despite Covid-19 and lack of outdoor markets, we have many customers already looking ahead to the winter sales. However, there’s likely to be a significant drop in sales to community orchard projects due to lack of funding and ability for community projects to run. As a result I’m potting on quite a lot of trees for sale next year.

12 Ragmans Lane Market Garden

Where are you?

Forest of Dean
Online at www.ragmans.co.uk/ragmans_lane_market_garden

Size and type of farm

1.6 acres - horticulture. We also harvest apples from a local orchard and rent out pressing and pasteurising kit.

Established

2018

Legal structure

Sole trader partnership

Number of staff

2

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Year 1 - £16,000 turnover, Year 2 forecasted £20,000+

Direct Sales Model

Direct local wholesale, box scheme
We sell to a range of independent retailers and veg box suppliers. Last season we also sold to cafes and restaurants. We sell locally, within 7 miles, and further afield 20+ miles (Stroud and Bristol) to get sufficient custom to ensure financial sustainability. We also sell produce through Dean Forest Food Hub and a community garden in Bristol who operate a mini farmers market.

This year we set up a box scheme after losing our restaurant and cafe customers. We have 25 customers for a weekly veg box, and the majority of the customers collect directly from the farm. We split the collections in half over the week so that there's enough space in our chiller and to manage the number of people coming on site.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

When we first started we concentrated on supplying the food hub as this made accessing customers really easy. The Dean Forest Food Hub has been going for 5 years - it is a workers co-op set up to help local producers access customers by setting up an online box scheme where you can make custom boxes from producers who sign up and list their availability weekly. Produce

is wide ranging, from beanpoles to cakes. The Food Hub also collected our produce from the market garden which cut out the need for us to do deliveries at the start. The Food Hub aims to encourage a weekly customer base by buying in some things from wholesalers on a seasonal basis, and this means that it's a really good outlet for us in the winter as we can still sell some produce to keep a small income coming in once we've run out of enough produce to sustain a full box scheme.

We set a clear sales target for our first year, and wanted to develop a mixed customer base so that we weren't reliant on one customer. Word of mouth in the local area helped us develop a few links with local cafes and restaurants, and our wholesale organically grew from there. With wholesale sales, we sell our produce for less than we would selling direct but save ourselves time by having fewer customers, shorter delivery run and not needing advanced sales software.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- We use "Invoice simple" for invoicing and keeping track of payments and running totals.
- General business and sales skills have been learnt to ensure we can market and sell what we grow.
- We are also improving Excel skills to help us log data so we can assess profitability of different crops. Our system is quite admin heavy, and you have to be prepared to dedicate some time to keeping track of orders and invoices.



What are the key factors that helped with development

The wider farm is well known in the area and people know the story of the farm and want to support it. This has really helped us to develop good links with a range of customers. Selling is hard and it is a skill to be able to market your produce. You've got to really believe in selling and develop relationships with people.

Being close enough to Bristol has been important for our income as it's allowed us to access a higher end market for higher value crops such as leafy greens. It's around 1 hour drive and is worth selling to restaurants there as this helps us to balance our books and sell a range of produce to local people through the box scheme.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

When the lockdown started we had a huge drop off in sales to restaurants and cafes, as well as a drop off in wholesale demand. We have taken on a new customer who is likely to be one of our most profitable - Redcatch Community Garden in Bristol. They have a small "farmers market" once a week and are taking over £200 of produce each week. We also set up the box scheme for people in the local area and we really like doing this, though it's quite admin heavy. We'd like to keep it on probably at roughly the same scale as it feels manageable. Having the box scheme has also really helped us add another string to our bow in terms of having a range of different customers to sell to.

13 Regather Farm

Where are you?

Derbyshire

Size and type of farm

15 acres- market garden, polytunnels, small orchard and meadow.

Established

2010

Legal structure

Community benefit society, registered with the FCA. Farm and Box are certified by the Soil Association.

Number of staff

10.6 FTE

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

2020 £650,000 (est.)

2019 £302,000

Typically we have sustained a small loss annually since trading started. The loss has reduced annually, has been negligible for the past 3 years, and is on track for a breakeven or small surplus in 2020.

Direct Sales Model

Box Scheme

Regather Farm is a 15 acre peri-urban market garden and agroforestry development located on the edge of Sheffield in the Moss Valley, NE Derbyshire. In 2019 Regather entered a 20 year agreement to lease the land from the Friends Field Limited social enterprise. Over the past year Regather has substantially developed farm infrastructure, with installation of a water borehole, irrigation system, hardstanding, trackway and polytunnels. The Regather Farm is widely supported by the local community with regular volunteer work days, and crowdfunding campaigns raising £6,000 to plant 1000m of new native hedgerow at the farm, and £18,000 of loan capital for a second hand tractor. 2020 will be our first full season growing on the land, with approx. 1.5 acres of mixed salad, fruit and vegetable crops due to be harvested later this year.

Produce grown at Regather Farm is sold directly to Sheffield households through the Regather Box scheme which offers online retail of local, seasonal and organic fruit, vegetables, bread, eggs, milk and groceries for weekly home

delivery or collection. Regather also manages The Club Garden, located at Regather Works, our main premises, which is a 1250m2 community greenspace and edible landscape, with a small scale hydroponic indoor growing facility. The Farm, the Box and the Garden sit at the heart of our vision for a values based community food system, where: land is more productive; food is fair and better quality; money is retained in the local economy; health and environment are improved; and people are engaged in how their food system, from local to global, can change for the better.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

The Regather model has been slow, iterative growth, based on local, co-operative and organic values, and supported by a diverse portfolio of autonomous, but interdependent and mutually beneficial trading activities. Prior to Covid-19 this portfolio was in the process of successfully consolidating to reach an annual breakeven / surplus, and effectively balancing out the different seasonal cycles of each trading activity.

The main benefits of this approach include:

- relatively low working capital requirements
- good capital to asset value and productivity transfer rates
- resilient position due to diverse range of trading activities
- ability to align role and activities with longer term strategic developments and partnerships
- loyal customer base, built on personal referral and word of mouth

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- Reliable vehicles
- suitable packing room
- manual handling kit
- digital infrastructure (website, box management system, accounting software, social media management, customer relationship and enquiry management, payroll).

What are the key factors that helped with development

Regather developed the Box from 2012/13 onwards. The scheme has always operated with online retail and collective purchasing with a mix of wholesale and local producer suppliers, offering a weekly delivery and collection model. Starting with a single wholesale supplier and a small number of customers, the scheme grew organically with a gradual increase in supply from local growers as they developed their operations, and customers joined through word of mouth. From 2015 onwards the scheme started regularly working with 2-3 wholesale suppliers, and became the largest single purchaser of locally and organically grown fruit and vegetables. The digital and physical infrastructure of the scheme was developed iteratively on an ongoing basis as the scheme grew in scale and complexity.

Throughout the development of the scheme Regather operated a diverse range of additional trading activities, in particular events and festivals, which contributed to overall business sustainability, route to market for food and drink products, and customer awareness and customer growth for both Regather and the Regather Box. When the Box started we were able to build our customer base from our event and festival audiences. This broad approach accelerated with the development of the Regather Works bar and event space, and The Folk Forest annual arts and music festival. In parallel Regather invested substantially in supporting the development of local food infrastructure including a city wide partnership, supporting the annual food festival, offering small food business incubation facilities and campaigns to promote a fair, sustainable and healthy food system for Sheffield. All this ensured the values underpinning our approach could be clearly recognised and understood by the wider community. This combination of culture, trading and values based activities has been key to our successful development.



What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

New subscriptions for Regather Box increased in 10 days from 320 to 650 households, plus a waiting list of 300. We erected a marquee behind our building to create a 2nd temporary box packing space alongside recruiting and training new staff and significantly scaling up our logistical operations. We have since successfully prioritised new subscriptions from vulnerable households, cleared the waiting list with a 25% sign up rate, and maintained capacity at 650 households. We have successfully dismantled the marquee, repurposed our events venue space for box packing and are working to find efficiencies to increase capacity to 800 households.

At Regather Farm, following extensive delays caused by the wet weather in early 2020, and the subsequent Covid-19 lockdown, the development of some infrastructure was temporarily delayed. We have needed to implement a range of measures to ensure our essential workers can operate safely on site, and adapt arrangements for accessing welfare facilities and sharing transport. Otherwise operations on the farm have proven to be fairly resilient, and have adjusted accordingly. Elsewhere in Regather we have been forced to stop our events and festivals activities until further notice. This will impact our trading position, and change how we communicate and manage our relationship with our customers and the wider Regather community.

14 Tomnah'a Market Garden

Where are you?

Comrie Croft, West Perthshire
Online at www.tomnaha.com

Size and type of farm

5 Acres - mixed horticulture with hens

Established

2015

Legal structure

We are a Company Limited by Share. There are three main directors and Comrie Croft (our landlords) also own a small share.

Number of staff

3 full time, 3-5 seasonal interns.

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

2019/20 Financial year we had a turnover of £80,000. All our surplus are put back into wages and the business.

Direct Sales Model

Veg box scheme

We produce veg (62% of sales), cut flowers (35% of sales), eggs and fruit.

Most of our veg is sold through our Veg Share Scheme (Approx. 65% of veg) where our members sign up for the season (May-November) to come and pack their veg box at our farm. We also sell through three online food hubs called Neighbourfood (Approx 10%) where customers order their produce online and we drop off to a hub where they collect from multiple food producers, like a farmers market but everything is pre-sold.

We sell some produce through Comrie Croft Farmshop throughout the year and they also carry on a veg box scheme for our members during the winter. We also sell to cafes and delis, 3-4 restaurants, two other box schemes (this year) and other catering companies (around 20%).

Normally we sell most of our cut flowers to weddings at Comrie Croft and add value by doing floristry and installations. This year we have been concentrating on wholesale by setting up collection hubs with other growers for florists to buy directly from so we can increase our range and amount. We also sell subscription bunches, pick your own and other retail bouquets to order.



Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

Coming from charity and community growing backgrounds we really wanted to set up a business that was financially independent and that fed as many people as possible by making the best use of the land whilst respecting it and encouraging biodiversity. Combining the veg and cut flowers made a lot of sense to add more diversity to the farm and also a value added product that we felt was important financially. Our main purpose was to sell directly to customers and we wanted them to have a real understanding of why we were doing this and what it involved, we now have 115 members, 10 of which get a volunteer or barter share (cakes, milk, bread and pastries).

Although it is hard to communicate with 100+ people we do our best through a weekly newsletter, annual party and feast, occasional work days, tours, PYO veg, fruit or cut flowers and by having weekly access to the farm to look around and see what's happening. We really wanted the farm to have a sense of community which I think we are achieving whilst communicating the reality of being a very busy working site.

The online food hub model is a real draw as it offers a great alternative to a farmers market which we were wary of doing due to the unknown waste of produce and time. Although we have to travel further than we would like (20 miles) we really like the idea of Neighbourfood as we still get to meet our customers and have the feeling of a market but the risk of harvesting too much and not selling it is gone which is particularly important with perishable produce. It has also been really beneficial for meeting up with other small scale producers as we have a lot in common and it is good to support each other.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- We love our Japanese razor hoes for hand weeding and planting.
- Our rotary mower we have used more this year for mulching beds when they are finished, it can cut through anything!
- Our two wheel tractor (with various implements including a mower) was useful to start with but, now that we grow on permanent beds and try not to disturb the soil, it is becoming less important. Our quad bike and trailer will be eternally useful for moving stuff around, it can also straddle our narrow beds to make clearing/composting easier.
- Google forms and spreadsheets for customer sign up and recording data to share.

What are the key factors that helped with development

Being able to live cheaply on site for the first 4 years of setting up and not having to earn a full salary straight away. Having said that, moving off site has been equally important for us and probably the future of the business as we struggled to get time off.

The New Entrants Start Up Grant through SRDP was essential for setting up so quickly and paid for our packhouse, deer and rabbit fencing, tractor, hens, tracks, irrigation and electricity supply. We would have still set up without the grant as we invested into the business ourselves but it would have taken a lot longer.

Help from other local businesses especially

Comrie Croft and trust and support from our local customers and volunteers are very important to making the business work.

What has been the impact of Covid-19 on your business and how did you adapt?

The biggest blow is the lack of weddings which is a fair chunk of our income and we can't see these getting back to normal in the near future. Luckily being a small diverse business means we are able to change and adapt quite easily and these lack of sales gave us more time to look at the wider flower market and how we can work together to reduce the use of imported flowers.

The lack of restaurant and other wholesale was a worry as this is important to our business but it coincided with a rise in the use of online food hubs which we were selling to around 200 customers during the busiest time through 3 different hubs.

We are looking at setting up a food hub here at Comrie Croft as the farmshop here has really suffered from Covid-19 having to close down for two months and now being short staffed. We hope pre-ordered sales will mean the shop can offer more variety especially of perishable items (like our own) and will be less risky for buying things in.

We were also supported by our local baker who quickly had to change their wholesale business to doorstep retail and hubs and we were able to offer salad, other greens and cut flowers alongside their bread which is delivered across the central belt. It was great to see another business react to quickly and positively to the situation and join forces.



15 Trill Farm Garden

Where are you?

Devon
Online at www.trillfarm.co.uk/pages/trill-farm-garden

Size and type of farm

2.5 acre field rented from a 300 acre organic farm - horticulture

Established

2010

Legal structure

Partnership

Number of staff

2 full time, and 2 part-time staff, reducing hours slightly over the winter. Plus two part-time trainees and a delivery person. 3.1 FTE in summer, slightly less in winter.

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Annual turnover is usually around £80-90,000. Due to the investments that we have continually made over the last ten years in infrastructure, machinery and accommodation for trainees, our profits are relatively low (around £15-20,000), however, if capital costs are taken into account it is more like £20-25,000. This is taken as takings for the partners (effectively wages).

Our turnover will most likely be much higher this year due to transitioning to a veg box scheme during the Covid-19 pandemic, and then the return of restaurant sales in the summer. It will most likely be around £120,000 from 2020-21.

Direct Sales Model

Prior to Covid-19, we specialised in growing salad, herbs and other high value crops for sale to restaurants, cafes, caterers and shops all within about 10 miles of the farm - so a business model based entirely on local wholesale. This year, we've also set up a box scheme, which this case study focuses on.

Our sales routes all changed during the Covid-19 pandemic when many restaurants and cafes were forced to close. We quickly transitioned to a box scheme model and started by buying in about half the value of the boxes as we set up in the hungry gap. We had 150 people sign up to the box scheme within three days of launching and had a waiting list of a further 50 people. As the shops began to have

more consistent supplies of produce some people began to drop out of the box scheme, and others who grew their own in allotments or gardens also dropped out. Numbers then evened out at around 80-100 veg bags per week. These are delivered to Lyme Regis, Charmouth and surrounding areas on a Friday and then Axminster, Seaton and surrounding areas on a Tuesday.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

In March when lockdown happened and restaurants and cafes shut, we were suddenly faced with having a huge amount of produce that we wouldn't be able to shift. It wasn't clear at all how long this was going to last for. At the same time there was a sudden surge in demand for box schemes and home delivery so we made a quick decision to set up a box scheme to sell our produce. This model seemed the most straight forward to setup.

It has been great to be able to quickly set up a box scheme to supply the local community, and we have received great feedback and great support from customers. It has also brought in another element of the business which spreads



the risk a bit, as opposed to previously selling solely to restaurants and cafes. Something we are very aware of is the fact that there is a large part of our community on lower incomes/lower wealth who cannot afford our produce, as well as people who assume our produce is much more expensive than supermarkets. We are keen to make sure that we can make our produce more accessible and supply people on lower incomes, but this will take time and work, so we will most likely work on this at our quieter time of year in the winter.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- We have been lucky enough to borrow a cold store on a nearby farm and purchase a van that was required for increased deliveries.
- We also had some amazing help to set up the box scheme from Collette Haynes, another vegetable grower in Sussex. She helped us with the software that we are using (Bucky Box), which is simple and works effectively, but it is fairly limited and time has to be spent matching up payments. However, with some simple software developments it would be perfect.

What are the key factors that helped with development

The key to running a veg box scheme seems to be organisation. This is much the same for running a fairly intensive market garden, so it fits with the way we work. Ellen planned the crops for growing for a box scheme which took some time, and we have tweaked these a little as the season goes on. Being able to adapt quickly is important - due to now supplying restaurants and cafes, we are continually having to adapt our cropping plans. Having good knowledge of a variety of crops has been really essential in helping us be adaptable. Also, Ashley's parents ran a box scheme for around 15 years from the early 1990's and so they already had some experience of selling through this way and could offer advice.

During the first month or so of setting up the box scheme the level of admin was very high - we were working until midnight most days (starting at 7ish in the morning). Although this work went down once the box scheme was set up. It still needs a fair amount of time dedicated to the administration compared to selling to restaurants, and requires a high level of organisation to run smoothly.



16 Tyddyn Teg

Where are you?

Bethel, Caernarfon
Online at www.tyddynteg.com

Size and type of farm

31 acres - horticulture

Established

2015

Legal structure

In May 2020 we transferred from a Company Limited by Guarantee to a Cooperative Society.

Number of staff

9 staff (5FTE) and 4 trainees.

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

For the year July 2018-June 2019 our turnover was around £70,000 with a surplus of around £3,000. We are anticipating a significant increase in turnover this year.

Direct Sales Model

CSA veg box, local restaurants, farm shop
Most of our vegetables are sold via a Community Supported Agriculture Scheme, with around 150 households from the local area (Gwynedd, Anglesey and Conwy). Scheme customers join on a rolling monthly basis selecting either the Basic scheme (£40 per month) or the Bumper (£60 per month). Customers bring their own bag or box to our farm shop and select items listed from a list and weigh them out themselves, then tick off their name on a list for the week. We do not pack boxes (except for the delivery and recently for NHS staff/ care workers if they request it).

Those not wishing to commit to the scheme are able to use the shop to purchase as many or as few vegetables as they like at standard retail prices. Both scheme members and drop-in customers are also able to buy a range of 'extras'. As well as our own vegetables we sell produce from other local organic farms (honey, fruit and eggs) and some organic store cupboard items such as cans of beans, olive oil, pasta. We buy in some vegetables from Organic North wholesalers, both for scheme and drop ins/ extras, but are almost 100% self-sufficient for the scheme from July to December. The shop is open Thursday to Tuesday and customers can collect at any time.

In addition, we operate a small wholesale vegetable business selling our produce to several local shops and restaurants.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

Having a mixture of sales outlets gives us flexibility and stability. A box scheme with a minimum commitment provides a level of predictability and income stability, making it easier to plan the year and know what to harvest on a weekly basis. Whilst customers only have a minimum one-month commitment, in practice most stay with us for several months or even years. Drop in customers, extra sales and wholesale increases our customer base and income, and enables us to sell large volumes of particular vegetables during high production periods.

We initially packed all boxes but switched to the pack your own system after seeing the set up at Stroud Community Agriculture. This saves us around 2 person days' labour. Whilst some would prefer the convenience of a pre-packed box many like being able to select their own.

Having an unstaffed self-service shop saves on costs. We live in a low crime rural area and the risk of having produce stolen is very low and wouldn't justify the cost of a shopkeeper at present. Nonetheless there is usually someone around the shop area available to help customers out or just have a good natter.

A cooperative structure with equal pay for all coop members and different areas of responsibility gives us a sense of intellectual ownership over our work and improves motivation. Big decisions are made collectively, but we have working groups for managing different aspects of the farm including growing, retail, infrastructure development, admin and long term business development.

Ecological sustainability is a core value for us, and it is our ambition to be at the forefront of the sustainable food movement, proving that food production need not cost the Earth. To that end we are constantly developing and refining our horticultural practice, with a range of processes and techniques around maximising productivity per unit area and labour efficiency, whilst conserving or even improving our soil through minimising cultivation, cover cropping, and mulching.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- A good irrigation system is a life saver. We have a large refrigeration unit which is crucial to enabling us to supply certain crops year-round and reduce the amount we buy in. In the nursery we use thermostatically controlled heated benches. These were initially electric wires in sand, which we found to be inefficient. Switching one of them from sand to concrete has significantly improved efficiency. A springtine cultivator has been key in helping us get on top of perennial weeds (particularly cooch grass) and we recommend drawer hoes for day to day weed management.
- On the software side having a system for tracking sowing, planting and harvesting dates and data is a must. We use excel spreadsheets for this. An accounting software package (we use Xero) is really helpful in reducing time on accounts management and using the time tracker app Clockify has helped give us a more accurate picture of how long different tasks take.

What are the key factors that helped with development

We were fortunate in that we took over an existing vegetable business (when the couple running it retired in 2015); but we have developed it and grown the customer base since then.

Developing the sense of community among our customer base through customer events, volunteering days and our social media has helped ensure there is always demand for our veg and we have support when needed. For example, after storms destroyed our polytunnel we were able to fundraise for a replacement from our customers.

Visiting other farms and training from other growers helped us develop techniques and methods. For example, following a Farming Connect funded consultations from Jake Eldridge of Oxton Organics and Johannes Storch of Bio-Gemusehof Dickendorf, we recently transitioned our polytunnels and some field areas to a bio-intensive no-dig approach with permanent beds using municipal green waste or well-rotted wood chip compost. This has helped significantly reduce the weed burden and maintain soil health.

Going to events with the Landworkers' Alliance, Permaculture Association and CSA Network has helped us meet others we can call on for advice and increase the sense that we are not alone in this endeavour.

Our traineeship has helped ensure that we are able to bring new people in, help them to develop their skills and contribute substantially to the farm. Of the 7 trainees we have had, 5 have become or are about to become coop members. Most existing directors started as trainees or volunteers and bringing in new people helps ensure the long-term security of the business and prevent things falling apart if and when coop members decide to leave.

We plan to expand our capacity with new equipment, infrastructure and shop development via a loan from Loans for Enlightened Agriculture Programme (LEAP). LEAP provided mentoring to help us write our business plan for this. This process has been invaluable in helping us develop and refine our long-term goals and build a consensus around our priorities and ambition.

What has been the impact of Covid on your business and how did you adapt?

We had no wholesale trade from cafes and caterers, this would normally start in May/June and run until December. However, we had a significant surge in demand in March 2020. We were at our planned capacity but added another 10 customers in March and again in May. Nonetheless we had a long waiting list until July, when we were able to expand further. We introduced a home delivery service for those that were vulnerable or people who were happy to pay an extra £10 per month.

We set up a sink with soap and paper towels outside our shop and brought in a one in one out policy inside the shop. Customers have been very happy to follow these rules and we have had positive feedback about how safe they have felt compared to other shops.



17 Vital Seeds

Where are you?

Devon
Online at www.vitalseeds.co.uk

Size and type of farm

1 acre - Seed production

Established

2019

Legal structure

Limited company

Number of staff

2

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

2019 was our first year of trading, and turnover was £32,000, with a loss of £3,600. For 2020 we don't have full data, but our turnover will be £100,000.

Direct Sales Model

Online shop
The vast majority of our sales (>90%) are through the online shop, though we do some wholesale and direct sales at events.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

We use the online shops as it's the most efficient way to sell seeds. Seeds are very easy to post as they are lightweight. We would never find enough local customers to make a shop-front scenario viable.

Our sales are very seasonal sales with the majority of revenue between mid January and mid April. We do Christmas gift of seed collections and other nice stuff which helps with promotion, and also run a July-Aug late sowing seed collection which is very popular.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

- We do a lot of digital marketing for our seeds and it took quite a lot of time to learn how to use online ads. We use paid ads on social media as well as non-paid marketing, also Google Ads have been a very good return on investment during the Spring.
- We're increasingly using email marketing (11,000+ email subscribers) which is much better as you own your list, unlike social

media where Facebook owns everything and could shut down your account at any moment.

What are the key factors that helped with development

It's very important to learn marketing basics even if you don't want to! Don't be afraid to sell your stuff! We found the "My Digital Farmer" podcast very good resource, and also the Story Brand book by Donald Miller. You have to have a willingness to spend a lot of time doing stuff that you don't want to do - i.e. office work and admin - rather than doing what we love which is working in the field with seeds. Plus a combination of naïve optimism and obsession has helped!

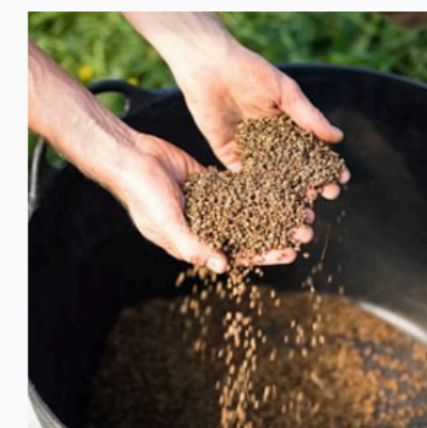
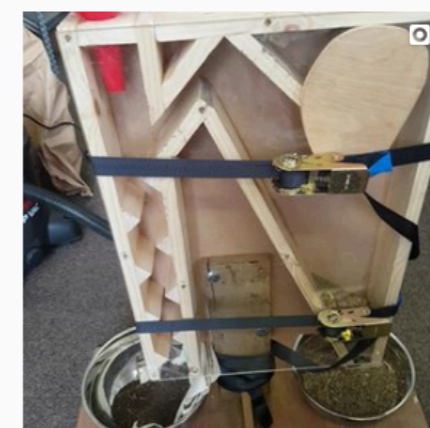
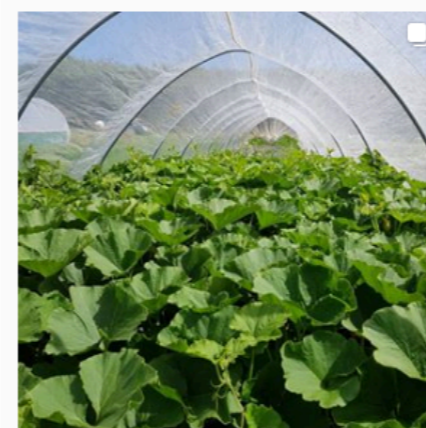
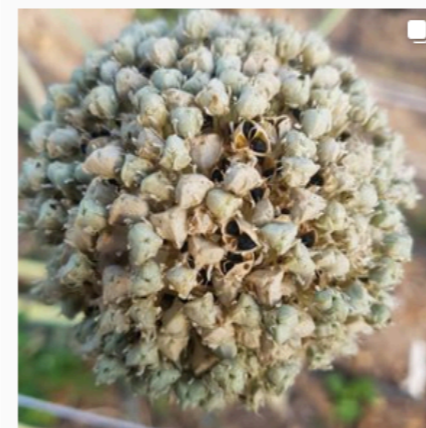
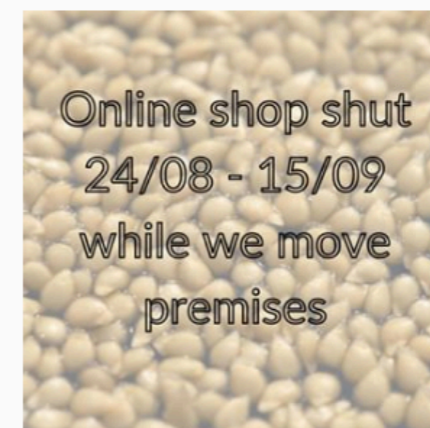
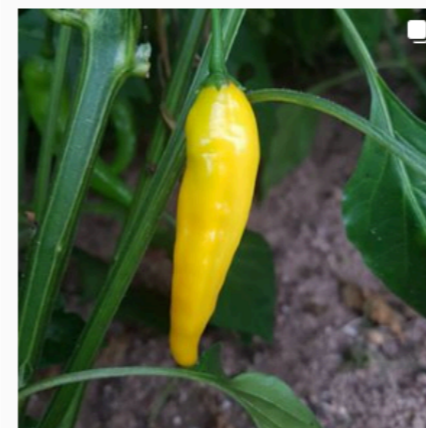
We received lots of moral and practical support from others in the industry, which we are (and continue to be) extremely grateful for. Having a good network of like minded businesses has been essential for learning and support.

What has been the impact of Covid on your business and how did you adapt?

2020 has been a very intense year for us due to Covid. There was a huge surge in interest in seeds as the beginning of lockdown was in March which is when lots of people buy seeds, and with the thought of being locked down and there being potential food shortages, many people decided to take up food growing. We sold more seeds in the last 2 weeks of March than in the whole of the previous year (although we are only in our second year of trading anyway).

We were very limited by the speed which we could packet up more seeds as we were doing all seed packing by hand at the time (although this was greatly helped by getting a seed counting machine with a Covid response grant through Gaia Foundation). We could only open our website for a couple of hours a day throughout March and April as we could not cope with more orders than that. It was really full-on and although from a sales point of view it was positive, we were very nearly burnt out by the end of April and would not want to go through that again. We have since taken on some people to help with packing up seeds which should mean we are more prepared in the future.

We expect that 2021 will be another busy year for us, potentially more than 2020 but it's very difficult to predict what will be happening then. We will be taking on some more staff to help hopefully which will ease the pressure from the two of us





Where are you?

Scottish Borders
Online at www.whitmuir.scot

Size and type of farm

138 acres - upland farm.

Established

2005

Legal structure

Initially set up as a farm partnership, and since 2010 as a limited company.

Number of staff

8 part time staff .

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Annual turnover of around £400,000 and an expected net profit of around £20,000

Direct Sales Model

On farm shop
We run an on-farm shop which sells produce from the farm and also a much wider range of groceries. Although close to Edinburgh, the farm is four miles from the nearest village and bus stop and the surrounding area is sparsely populated, so it's an important place for people to come to. Anyone can come to the shop, but we also have around 200 'Farm supporters' who decide how much they want to pay each month, and they have an account on the till and online so they don't need to pay at the point of purchase. Every month they get a statement by email telling them what they have spent and what they have paid in.

Each customer has a credit limit (£100 plus) and if they are up near the limit they will be asked

to make a payment to get back into balance. If on the other hand they have paid in more than they have bought they are encouraged to buy more food - or to reduce their standing order till their account is back in balance.

When farm supporters leave the scheme, they settle up with the farm. In the 12 years since this scheme has operated there have been no bad debts. Currently about half the farm income is through the farm supporter scheme.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

In the early stages of the farm's development, we were selling fat lambs and store cattle, which 'went away on a lorry' - but not producing any food for people locally. The lambs at times were travelling 500 miles to be slaughtered in Devon for a multiple retailer. This disconnect was part of the reason for setting up direct sales. The farm had taken on a pair of old sows and as there was no obvious market for the fat pigs a local butcher took on the job of processing them and meat became part of the sales offer. We started to sell meat and veg at Saturday markets in surrounding villages and the farm evolved from there over time to now having an onsite shop and cafe.

While there is additional admin involved, this model helps Whitmuir in two ways. First, supporters make a long-term commitment - most will remain customers for at least a year. Second, it reduces transaction costs, especially compared to Paypal which charges a hefty commission. Having such a close connection with a core group of customers is rewarding but also demanding. The packing notes tell the story - "No substitutes", "No nightshades", "No frozen meat under any circumstances", "No internet, ring for order Tuesday afternoon". At Whitmuir, food is definitely still a relationship, not a commodity.

What are the key factors that helped with development

Over the years, Whitmuir has transformed a quiet farm with no permanent employment to a thriving rural hub. We moved to the farm in 2000 and put the land into organic conversion. We also planted 3km of hedges and a few acres of woodland. For the first few years we built up a flock of sheep and a herd of cattle before starting a direct sales business in 2005. When they started they had a simple aim of growing food for people living locally - our slogan was 'growing for people we know'. Our interest had always been in growing rather than livestock, but the farm's size, climate and soil meant that livestock would always be a core part of the enterprise.

We started with a small growing area in the farmhouse garden, with some raised beds and a small polytunnel. Word got around that fresh local salads and strawberries were available and people started to take an interest. In 2006 we ploughed up 2 acres of the flattest field nearest the farmhouse and grew a huge variety of veg.

When we decided to give up on the day jobs and develop a direct sales model, our first challenge was to raise capital for a small butchery unit and a polytunnel, as well as improving the access road to the farm. Evidence of a customer base was key to our first loan application so we developed a questionnaire and took it round local villages.

This asked people about buying local veg, eggs and meat, with a seasonal calendar of what might be available - and also if they would be prepared to make a regular commitment by standing order. Once we had 30 potential customers ready to sign up we took this evidence to the bank and were able to secure an investment loan.

We started selling out of the back of the silage shed on a Saturday morning, and when the veg was gone, it was gone. A year later, we converted an old shed into a shop and started selling a full range of organic produce. The business outgrew this space too and in 2009 we built a new farm shop, art gallery and café.

What has been the impact of Covid on your business and how did you adapt?

When lockdown was announced the Whitmuir shop and café closed to walk-in customers. The shop was not an essential service especially as people had to drive to get there - and the risk to staff was significant, especially for those staff living with people who were at particular risk from the disease.

The business moved online and for a few weeks experienced a huge surge in demand along with supply chain shortages, delivery challenges and a key member of staff being away. Many new customers offered to become farm supporters as a way to secure a delivery and were told that this wasn't necessary. As supplies and shops returned to nearer normal, many customers fell away, and deliveries went back to around twice their pre-Covid-19 level.



19 Willowbrook Farm

Where are you?

Cherwell Valley in Oxfordshire
Online at www.willowbrookfarm.co.uk

Size and type of farm

45 acre s - mixed farm, rearing sheep, poultry, both for eggs and meat and growing vegetables

Established

2003

Legal structure

Family farm, constructed as a partnership between Lutfi and Ruby and managed collectively.

Number of staff

7.5 FTE

Annual turnover and average surplus (profit)

Annual turnover of around £400,000. Annual surplus is £10 -15,000 after paying all salaries.

Direct Sales Model

Farmers markets, veg box, on site cafe and shop. Initially, to sustain the farm, we focused on egg production under contract but very quickly moved to packing our own eggs and selling them all direct to customers within the Oxfordshire region. It was always our intention to create a link between our produce and its consumers, but the reliability of a contract provided some stability for the business in its early years.

Ruby played a role in establishing two of Oxford's earliest farmers markets and we still sell our produce weekly at the East Oxford Farmers Market. More recently, on a weekly basis we supply around 150 families with ethical and sustainable produce from a simple weekly box of eggs to a family meat box. These are either collected directly from the farm or at East Oxford Market, or delivered by ourselves, or through our courier service.

Why have you chosen this model and what are the main benefits?

Direct sales are our preferred model as it enables us to have a close relationship with our customers. We are able to benefit from the higher retail price and they are able to take personal responsibility for the food they consume through a direct relationship with the producer.



We also feel it is important that the public have access to see how we manage the animals and the land. We provide farm walks and information about natural farming.

As Muslims producing halal (ethical and sustainable) food we feel the inter-personal social and economic relationships of responsibility and trust are fundamental to any business. Industrial farming and the global food distribution systems that serve it separate consumers from producers. No one feels any direct responsibility towards each other or towards the environment. This in turn leads to social inequalities and economic injustice along with environmental degradation. We strongly feel the model of small scale farming, with direct-to-customer relations, is truly sustainable, environmentally, socially and economically. The relationship between the customer and producer is very fulfilling and engenders loyalty and trust. Farmers and customers are able to take responsibility at all stages.

What are your essential tools/equipment/pieces of software?

We run the farm on three basic principles, producing food sustainably, reducing energy inputs and minimising waste. As a result, much of the work done on the farm is labour intensive and using simple tools. At the time of the hay harvest, rather than bring in a baler, we invite all our customers to engage with a traditional hay making day, where we manually build haystacks and move the dry hay to our barn.



What are the key factors that helped with development


We started with no special business and customer care skills, however in a way that is part of the attraction of our farm, it is the opposite of 'corporate'. The key for us has been openness, honesty and integrity. However as a family farm we do work very long hours and over the years we have learnt the importance of working efficiently, when managing orders and providing customers a top quality service, whilst at the same time keeping a divide between work and home. We took some business advice along the way, both from Government agencies and

from other farmers and businesspeople and we also did our own research on how to run a retail business but ultimately we learned from our mistakes, which were many.

What has been the impact of Covid on your business and how did you adapt?

The impact of Covid-19 restrictions has not been as great as we anticipated. Socially and psychologically we have sought to provide support for our workforce and offered the option of furlough to those who chose it. We had a quiet period during the lockdown, however this coincided with Ramadan, so it provided us a rather special 'family time' and allowed us to focus on general farm work. Courier services carried on with little interruption, so we were able to obtain any inputs (feed and materials) and safely dispatch our produce to our customers. Following lockdown we benefited from a desire on the part of our customers to get out and enjoy the countryside, so our open weekend events have continued to be well attended throughout the summer. We did put in place all the relevant health and safety procedures which have been beneficial for the farm and moving forward we will keep most of these in place as standard 'good practice. So all in all we have managed to continue both producing and selling our produce with little change.





With huge thanks to all the farmers that took time out of this hectic summer to share their models with us. We hope these are helpful and inspiring for those wanting to set up or transition to these kinds of models.

The Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) is a union of farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers. We campaign for the rights of producers and lobby the UK government for policies that support the infrastructure and economic climate central to our livelihoods. We have a growing membership who we work to support by developing agroecology training and solidarity support networks.

@landworkersalliance
@landworkersuk
info@landworkersalliance.org.uk
www.landworkersalliance.org.uk

