

Start-Up Case Studies:

Horticultural Units on Larger Farms

Grown Green at Hartley Farm: A market garden started from scratch

In 2010 Kate Collyns, a graduate from the Soil Association's Future Growers apprenticeship scheme, started renting land from Hartley Farm, a 150-acre mixed family farm. She now rents two 1.5-acre fields, on which she has developed a market garden supplying £18,000 worth of vegetables to local shops and cafes, a turnover which is growing each year. As the owner of the farm says, "We had dabbled ourselves with growing veg, but we quickly realised that we didn't have the expertise, passion & energy. I'd recommend to any farmer planning a diversification which may involve opening up to the public, to consider how this type of business can help put your farm on the map. But even if you're not planning any major changes and have a spare plot of land, it's very rewarding to see a young person using that resource to produce beautiful food with such passion."

Kate pays peppercorn rent of £500 per year, since she has invested in and installed all the infrastructure herself with help from friends, including six polytunnels (total cost £5,600), fencing and three lean-to sheds (total cost £1100). Being part of a larger farm, she benefits from an "on-site market" in the form of Hartley Farm Shop and Café, and having access to farm machinery and contacts with the other businesses on site. In return, the presence of Grown Green brings positive PR to Hartley Farm from media publicity and the availability of fresh produce for the farm shop, which is sold under the name "Grown Green at Hartley Farm". Kate also welcomes the public onto her fields for farm tours and monthly "Green Gym" volunteer days. During the last three years she has also employed several part time workers, to undertake seasonal harvesting and help with maternity cover during the last year.

Trill Farm Organic Garden: A successful salad business rented from a mixed farm

Trill Farm Garden - Ashley Wheeler and his partner Kate started their salad business at Trill Farm in 2010, following Ashley's completion of a horticulture degree. The one-hectare (2.5 acre) garden was already rabbit and deer fenced, with some polytunnels erected, and access to a tractor and packing shed included. In addition, on-site accommodation is provided in a purpose built agricultural workers' dwelling, which is rented separately from the market garden. The fact that the necessary infrastructure was already in place enabled Ashley and Kate to quickly establish a thriving business, supplying salad and other seasonal vegetables to restaurants and cafes in the surrounding coastal area. With Lyme Regis, and other tourist towns nearby, most produce is sold during the summer, which fits well with the heavy clay soil which holds moisture in dry spells, but tends towards water-logging in the winter. The business provides a good livelihood for Ashley and Kate and their young family, as well as providing part-time employment for three seasonal workers and a trainee. The rent is £3000/year, but sales to the on-farm restaurant are greater than that, causing the advantages of being at Trill Farm to outweigh the cost. In 2017/18 £60,000 worth of vegetables were produced and sold.

Trill Farm was bought by its current owner in 2007 with the aim of creating a model farm which contributes to the health and well-being of individuals, society and the environment through experiential learning. Initially the farm was run as a single business made up of a variety of enterprises which made the most of the farm's varying characteristics, such as its more fertile areas, grassland, woodland and wetland. However, paying the wages of the employees



needed to run all the different enterprises was not economically viable, and the farm shifted towards renting out its resources to self-employed entrepreneurs willing to take the risk of operating their own businesses. This model began with the market garden, and remit of the grower was to rent the land for growing vegetables to sell elsewhere, but also to provide vegetables for other enterprises on the farm, such as the restaurant and catering for courses. Other enterprises run by self-employed entrepreneurs now include a beef enterprise, a soap making enterprise and a restaurant/catering business, and an aim of Trill Farm is now to demonstrate how small businesses can be highly viable.

The landowner has invested considerable amounts of capital into the infrastructure for the market garden, including: £5,900 Deer and rabbit around one hectare; £24,000 a twin span polytunnel; £18,000 Borehole; £50,000 Barn (used as a packing shed/storage for grower, but shared with other enterprises and the roof generates an income from its solar array). All the initial investment in the assets has been paid for by the landowner, and rents have not yet recouped investment to date, but now that main investments are complete, rents will be being increased to create a recover outlay. Further infrastructure requested by the grower is paid for on a 50:50 basis, or is paid for entirely by the grower if he can take it away in the future. The growers are responsible for the repair and maintenance of the infrastructure and have a three-year tenancy agreement.

Trill Farm forms a hub of interrelated small enterprises, which can benefit from each other's presence. For example, manure from overwintered cattle provides fertility for market garden, vegetables supply restaurant and the on-site carpenter using timber from woodland provides joinery services for all the businesses, while people running such a variety of enterprises provide a diverse pool of expertise and skills. Such economic, cultural and biodiversity brings a vibrancy and wealth to the countryside, which can be seen as a public good. Fiscal measures to encourage the creation of such mixed farms could include capital gains tax breaks to non-farming land owners who are willing to invest in the infrastructure to make land resources available.

Eves Hill Veg Co, Norfolk: A community enterprise on a bare-land holding

Eves Hill Veg Co was started by Hannah Claxton in April 2016 on 0.8ha (2 acres) of agricultural land near Reepham in North Norfolk. It is a not-for-profit community enterprise, which grows and sells vegetables via a community share scheme and to local restaurants. The project was initiated by an offer from the farm owners to give Hannah a year's free rent in order to bring her community market garden to their site. The landlords see having the market garden on their farm as a valuable asset, alongside their existing campsite and planned farm shop and café. The garden is a bare land holding, but the landlords have provided a small shed and assistance with occasional heavy machinery (mostly compost turning and topping green manures). The annual rent is now £750.

Community involvement includes a weekly open volunteer day and a monthly community day, with events such as compost giveaways and apple day. These open days usually attract over thirty people, including families, most of whom value the opportunity to up tools and get involved. Eves Hill Veg Co have also run courses in organic gardening in association with the local agricultural college and run a structured traineeship during the summer months.

Eves Hill Veg Co received an initial £5,000 start-up grant from UnLtd Fund for social entrepreneurs, which paid for a small poly tunnel, basic hand tools and the first year's seed, plant and compost requirements. The running costs for the project are about £5,000-6,000 per year, plus capital investments. In its second year, Eve's Hill sold £13,000 worth of produce and is projected to sell £16,000 in year three. It currently employs a part-time grower/co-ordinator (3 days per week), a three day/week apprentice (part funded by a community fund-raiser) and a volunteer development worker (grant funded) to facilitate further community integration (for example programmes for long term unemployed and adults with support needs). Hannah estimates that to develop a fully working business model, the project needs capital investment of about £20,000, for additional poly tunnels, a small tractor and basic implements, a classroom/dry room for volunteers, a van for deliveries, wind breaks and a compost toilet. Such finance is modest compared to grants currently available for larger farms and has the potential to create further local livelihoods and train future growers.