

A man in a blue polo shirt and khaki cargo pants is crouching in a greenhouse. He is focused on a wire mesh cage containing several plants. The greenhouse has a translucent plastic covering and a metal frame. In the background, other plants and structures are visible. The lighting is bright, suggesting daytime.

HOW TO SET UP A FARMSTART

*A handbook for
establishing and running
an incubator farm site*

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE

This guide has been produced by the Landworkers' Alliance, in partnership with OrganicLea, Tamar Grow Local and the Kindling Trust, with support from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust.



This guide is aimed at people and organisations who want to set up Farmstarts, or farm incubation sites. With it we aim to provide a set of best practice guidelines, based on the experiences of established organisations.

Alongside this handbook we are establishing a network of Farmstart organisations that can share experiences and support one another in the spirit of mutual aid and solidarity. By working together and sharing experiences earned through years of work, we hope to support other organisations and increase the opportunities available to new entrants.

You can find more information on the Landworkers' Alliance website www.landworkersalliance.org.uk/

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1. Introduction

1.1. Setting the context

The UK urgently needs a new generation of farmers. We face an aging farming population and an economic situation where many would-be farmers are effectively locked out by a number of interconnected barriers to entry. To make matters worse, these issues come at a time when farming needs to innovate and restructure to increase its environmental and social resilience, reduce its energy use and greenhouse gas emissions, and increase domestic production on sustainable foundations.

In 2017 a third of all farm holders in the UK were over the typical retirement age of 65 years and the proportion of young people aged less than 35 years was around 3%.¹ This aging farm population is increasing at a significant rate. Since 2005 the proportion in the 35-44 years old band has decreased by 5% and the proportion in the oldest band, 65 years and over, has increased by the same amount. Not only does the increasing age of farmers correspond to a wealth of knowledge that risks

being lost if not passed on to a new generation, but it also indicates a decreasing resilience in the sector. Farmers over retirement age are often less able or willing to adapt to changes in policy, environmental conditions and economic shocks.

In the context of climate change, the food and farming system in the UK is responsible for around 20% of our greenhouse gas emissions,² but our food system's climate footprint spreads to 30% when we take into account the impact of land use change from imported foods. We currently have a trade gap of £24.4 billion in food, feed and drink, indicating a considerably larger impact though imports.

On top of climate and environmental challenges we also face a crisis in access to food. To conform with dietary guidelines our fruit and veg consumption needs to increase by 64%,³ but many people are already suffering severe food insecurity and experiencing decreasing access to healthy food. The UN estimates that 4.2% of the population, or 2.7 million people are experiencing severe food insecurity, the second highest percentage in Europe.⁴



1. Agriculture in the UK 2017

2. Garnett, T. (2008). *Cooking up a Storm: Food, greenhouse gas emissions and our changing climate*. The Food and Climate Research Network, Centre for Environmental Strategy, University of Surrey.

3. *The Eatwell Guide*, Public Health England in association with the Welsh government, Food Standards Scotland and the Food Standards Agency in Northern Ireland.

4. The Food Foundation. *Farming for 5-a-day*

In response to these challenges, the Landworkers' Alliance advocates for a widespread uptake of agroecological farming systems that can combine food production with environmental and social benefits. This includes the development of a food strategy based on food sovereignty, a vision that localises our food system and puts control over the important decisions back in the hands of producers and communities.

Fortunately, there are a multitude of people who want to make livelihoods from farming and land-based work, and who want to do so precisely to help overcome these social and environmental problems. However, new entrants face a daunting series of barriers to entry that put off all but the most determined.



Access to Land is often the first obstacle for many new entrants, as concentrated land ownership and speculation on development value increases the price and limits the availability of land, making the cost of buying land prohibitive to most people. In parallel to this land is expensive to rent and often comes without infrastructure and on insecure tenancies.

Those who manage to access land then face a series of further challenges. Planning permission for the necessary infrastructure

is often difficult, expensive and stressful to gain for small agroecological farms, including critically the right to live on site.

Start up costs are also high, and many new entrants are unable to make use of commercial business loans because of the high costs and low returns of agroecological farming. As a consequence, many of those who start farms do so with substandard equipment and systems in place that limit the long term viability and efficiencies of the farms.

Furthermore, access to appropriate training, skills, and mentoring for agroecological farming is limited, with very few accredited schemes available. In addition, grants and subsidies are often inaccessible to small-scale producers and establishing local markets takes time and commitment so it can be a few years before farms break even and farmers earn a livelihood.

Despite this range of obstacles, many new entrants do manage to carve out innovative and sustainable livelihoods from agroecological farming and growing. Recognising their challenges and achievements, our task is to focus our attention and collective power on overcoming these issues so we can support more people into agroecological farming.



1.2. Why a Farmstart?

In the context of the numerous obstacles facing new entrants, Farmstarts provide an important opportunity for people to test their farming and growing ideas in a protected environment, whilst building the knowledge, skills, confidence and experience to progress to their own farm or market garden. By providing access to land, markets, equipment, training and mentoring, Farmstarts take much of the financial risk and stress away from new entrants in the crucial early phases, allowing them to focus on working out what kind of business suits them best.

Farmstarts are an important entry route into farming, and fill a gap in opportunities for new entrants. For most people, taking on a Farmstart opportunity will follow on from some form of training and on-farm work experience, and will give them a few years in which to test their ideas for real before making further steps to start their own business on long term foundations.

1.3. What is a Farmstart?

There are lots of different projects working to provide access to land to new entrants, but what distinguishes a Farmstart or Incubator Farm is that it is tackling some of the deeper issues at a systems level, usually managed centrally by a group or organisation.

The key elements to this are the training, land access and markets, all of which are required in some form to be classified as a Farmstart.

Each Farmstart will be different, depending on the situation and opportunities in the local area, choosing which are the most relevant elements to focus on and include. If you are not able to set up and run a Farmstart, there is still a lot

of value in establishing a project that supports access to land or addresses one or more of the barriers raised above.

Farmstarts generally include protected access to several of the following things:

- Training and mentoring
- Land
- Markets
- Business support
- Progression (moving beyond the Farmstart or Incubator Farm)
- Equipment/Infrastructure
- Access to a community of other Farmstarters, or agroecological producers

It is not necessary for a Farmstart to be on a site that is certified Organic, but operations must be growing to organic/agroecological principles. We encourage non-certified sites to put in place an Ecological Land Management plan in place to support this.



1.4. History of Farmstarts

NORTH AMERICA

The oldest incubator farms in North America have been operating for around 30 years. There are over 100 incubator farms currently in operation in North America and the New Entry Sustainable Farming Project run a training initiative and network for incubator farms across the continent.

One of the longest running is the Intervale Centre in Vermont, which has been running since 1990. The 135-acre site sees experienced growers farming alongside new entrants; each year they normally take in two new entrants and match them with six mentors who are already running businesses on the site. They do not provide any training to the growers, instead focusing on access to land and mentoring.

Farm Start in Canada started in 2005 but was forced to close after 10 years of operating due to lack of funding. They had several different approaches, including:

- Training farms that provided curriculum based programs with flexible internship opportunities
- Incubator farm facilities that provided small independent plots of land for farmers
- Mentoring during the first 6 years of the enterprise
- Access to business planning skill development programs.

New farmers paid a progressive fee structure that supports their start-up phase but prevented them from developing a non-viable business. These fees covered the operating and running costs of the farm, but were not able to contribute towards the program or organisational costs.



FRANCE

In France the RENETA (Réseau National des Espaces-Test Agricoles) national network of farm incubators has more than 80 members. There are 45 operational incubator farms and almost 30 incubators in the process of being established. Incubator farms were first formed in 2007 in response to the increasing need for new entrants to enter the field of agriculture, and in recognition of the multiple barriers facing these new entrants.

The incubators exist to allow people to take part in a 'farming trial period', with the key elements to the farm incubators defined as:

- Incubator – a legal framework that allows people to test their business autonomously without having to establish a formal business
- Nursery – the provision of the land, tools and infrastructure to reduce the high start-up costs
- Mentoring – multifaceted support providing training, support and advice to the new entrants as needed
- Coordination – connections with local partners and the community

This has quickly become a popular model in France, and by 2016, 200 people were participating in an incubator farm.

In 2013, Kindling Trust launched the first Farmstart in the UK, followed by OrganicLea and Tamar Grow Local. The projects learnt a lot through the first couple of years. In 2015 they began meeting at the Oxford Real Farming Conference (ORFC), along with various other new entrant support schemes, to try and share lessons learnt. They also found that others wanted to set up similar programmes across the UK and were eager to learn from their successes and mistakes. So the existing projects hosted visits and ran 'how to set up a Farmstart days', but there was never enough time to support each other or new Farmstart projects to set up.

In 2017, joining with a Soil Association trip, Shared Assets organised for Kindling Trust, OrganicLea and the Ecological Land Coop to visit some projects in France, including the RENETA network. They were all hugely inspired and decided they could (and had to) make it happen in the UK, so they got Jean Baptiste of RENETA over to ORFC 2018. There, a packed room of 100 groups and individuals discussed establishing a RENETA style Network, to support and encourage the growth of Farmstart projects in the UK.

After further development of the vision with a group of amazing organisations working in the field, the Landworkers' Alliance submitted a successful funding bid to the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust. In February 2019 work began to establish a network, sharing information about Farmstarts and researching and piloting relevant related projects including accredited training and mentoring.

More information about the network as it develops, including a list of members and how to join, can be found on the Landworkers' Alliance website.



2. DESIGNING A FARMSTART

2.1. Mapping the landscape and deciding the aim

The first step in designing your Farmstart operation should be to consider what other projects, organisations and markets are around, and what the aim of your Farmstart is. Each city or rural region has a different set of strengths and challenges, and to be successful, your Farmstart will need to work alongside these. It will also depend on what resources your organisation or farm has to offer.

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- Existing producers - What existing producers are there? What are they selling? How are they selling their produce at the moment? Are they at capacity? Do any of them have land they aren't farming that they could rent to you?
 - Routes to market - What are the current routes to market? What retailers/ distributors/wholesalers are currently operating? Will local restaurants buy produce? What are the opportunities for direct selling?
 - Demand - What is the current demand for local produce? Is this being met by existing producers? What is the capacity for growth in the market?
 - Potential partners - Are there partnerships with local veg box schemes, farmers markets, farm shops or wholesale operations that could be explored? Or with farmers or local authorities who would like to support new entrants to farming by renting you land?
- Training - What are the training opportunities available in the local area? What is the take-up? Is it practical or classroom based? Is there business support available?
 - Land availability - What land is available to you? How much land? Who owns it? What kind of farming does the land suit?
 - Participants - Who is interested in a Farmstart? What skills and experience do they have already? What support will they need? Is there any support already available?
 - Resources - Do you have the equipment and infrastructure you need already available? Do you have the finances to establish the operation or will you need to apply for funding or raise capital? If so, where from?



2.2. Land and Tenancies

The cost of agricultural land, whether bought or rented, is extremely high and is a real barrier to many new entrants. In addition, short-term tenancies on rented land can leave people with a lack of security.

One of the main factors in a Farmstart is going to be the piece (or pieces) of land that you establish it on. The size of the piece of land, existing infrastructure, soil quality, water supply, orientation and shading, access and possibilities for planning permission will all have an impact. It's important to consider the bearing of these factors when designing how your Farmstart will run – for example, location or access restrictions may affect how regularly your Farmstarters go to the site, which will in turn impact on their operations. It is also important to consider whether there is access to affordable housing nearby, especially if you are a rural operation.

A good place to start is considering how much land you want and what kind of tenants you want on your Farmstart. Are you looking to incubate small scale horticulture, or are you open to operations such as flowers, chickens, orchards and bees? Or if you have more land available are sheep, cows, pigs field scale veg or arable a possibility?

In reality, opportunities often come about through word of mouth, so it's worth asking around in your local networks if anyone is aware of any local land availability or farmers who may be open to a conversation.

The length of tenancies provided to Farmstart tenants often varies and is a balancing act between giving the new entrant the time and security to establish their business with confidence, while also providing the organisation with flexibility if it doesn't work out with a tenant. It can also depend on how much infrastructure you are providing and how long people can stay on the land for. For sites providing a lot of infrastructure that anticipate people only staying on the site for a few years, a short lease might be appropriate, but otherwise a longer tenancy (with potential break points) is encouraged if possible.



When looking for land, there are a number of good starting points:

- Your local city or county council
- Local farms or landowners who may be supportive
- Other large landowners (NHS, universities, National Trust?)
- Land Agents
- Auction sites (if looking to buy land)
- Your land - if you are a landowner or currently lease land, how much land can you offer to a Farmstart?

2.3. Training and mentoring

One of the key motivations behind establishing Farmstarts is a recognition of the lack of appropriate and accessible training opportunities for new entrants. As a result, most sites and projects choose to offer an element of training or mentoring as part of the Farmstart, but the depth and topics covered vary from site to site.

One of the aims of the Farmstart Network is to draw together some accredited training options, and look at how accredited training offered could be standardised and delivered at a lower cost across several sites. The latest update on this work will be found on the Landworkers' Alliance website.



The required training can be divided into practical farming based training, and business/enterprise skills.

Some questions to consider when looking at training options:

- Will the training be accredited? It is possible to offer Organic Horticulture training through City and Guilds at Level 1 and 2 (as currently delivered by OrganicLea), which allows adult education funding to be accessed. The process of becoming an accredited training centre is complicated though, and exploring ways that this could be rolled out across the country is a priority of the Farmstart Network.
- Will the training be delivered 'in the field' or in a classroom? Or a combination? Will you cover things like crop planning, record keeping and pricing?
- Who will be delivering the training? Are there local producers within your network or are you recruiting for this role?
- How often is the training? Weekly? Monthly? What time commitment is required from participants? How will this fit with the time they need to run their business (eg in the winter, can classroom based training take place after dark to avoid encroaching on daylight hours)
- How are you going to fund the training, especially after initial funding might run out?
- What additional business and enterprise skills are needed beyond the practical farming skills? Marketing, business planning, budgeting, accounting, staff recruitment, working with volunteers, and health and safety are all worth considering.

Different Farmstarts are currently delivering different training options depending on their capacity. Farmstarters at OrganicLea have usually been through their training before joining the Farmstart project, but continue to receive practical growing training and support from the growers at OrganicLea as they progress through the traineeship, and then an element of mentoring once they progress onto their own plot.

In Manchester, the Kindling Trust provide in-field training through their Farmstart Coordinator throughout the year, with a series of classroom training sessions delivered by an experienced local organic grower at the start of the year. These cover both practical skills (crop planning, soil fertility, harvesting etc.) and business skills such as financial management and record keeping. It is also worth considering whether there are any other qualifications that might be useful to your Farmstarters. Tamar Grow Local have a commercial kitchen, so they include a Food Hygiene Certificate in the training to allow people to be able to create value added products in this space.

In addition, are there skills you can offer at low or no cost to your organisation? Can you build in some training around how to run a market stall by getting participants to help out at a market you already attend? Can you create some training around packaging and quality control? Is there any free or subsidised training available locally that you can access?

Depending on the experience level of your Farmstarters, it might be appropriate to offer mentoring from experienced local producers. If the funding isn't available to provide a full training programme, this can be a more affordable way of providing relevant and useful support to your Farmstarters as they begin working to establish their own businesses. It

will depend on your circumstances as to who these mentors are and how regularly they are able to offer support. It is worth noting that mentors should be paid for their time, recognising their level of experience and skill that has taken years and hard work to reach. It is important to acknowledge that their time is valuable and they are being asked to step away from their own farms and businesses to provide this support. The Landworkers' Alliance are looking into establishing a Farm Mentoring programme - please keep an eye on the website for more information.



2.4. Access to Markets

A key challenge facing many new entrants is the time that can be required to establish routes to market, especially when this is being done alongside getting the practical side of the operation up and running. It may be that your organisation offers a route to market that the Farmstarters can make use of, such as Kindling established co-operatives Manchester Veg People and Veg Box People, the Tamar Grow Local food hub or OrganicLea's box scheme and farmers markets.

It is worth exploring what existing routes to market exist and how you can connect people into these - and are there new market opportunities that can be explored, such as

- Box schemes
- Wholesale operations

- Farmers markets
- CSA/Direct to customer
- Retail outlets
- Food hubs
- Restaurants
- Farm shops

For your Farmstart this may look like connecting your Farmstarters into the opportunities already available in the area, providing them with a route through your existing operations, or supporting them to establish a new market opportunity of their own. It is important to encourage collaboration and be sensitive to what other small-scale producers in the area are already doing - by helping people to identify gaps in the market and avoid oversaturation of specific products or stepping on toes.



2.5. Equipment and infrastructure

A huge barrier for new entrants can be the high capital costs that may be required for setting up a business. Many Farmstarts choose to tackle this by providing much of the essential infrastructure needed by the tenants, but this will depend on your individual situation and set up.

This infrastructure might include:

- Fencing and gates
- Water troughs and livestock infrastructure
- Water access (mains or off-grid)
- Other utilities (electricity, gas)
- Polytunnels
- Use of barns, packing sheds, storage space, toilets
- Communal tools
- Access to tractors and equipment
- Transport for deliveries

It is also useful to clarify who is responsible for the maintenance of these assets. For example, Tamar Grow Local received funding to put a polytunnel on each plot, but the tenant is responsible for the maintenance of the tunnel, and the same might apply for fencing on grazing operations.



2.6. Progression

There is a balance between providing security of land access, and having a regular turnover to make this opportunity available to a wide group of people. As a result, a key part of designing your Farmstart is deciding how long people can stay on the site for, and this may depend on how much land you have available. If you have limited land available, you may need to set a time limit of 3-5 years for people to stay on the Farmstart site, before moving on to their own land. If you are only able to provide small plots, you will likely find that this progression is natural as people look at taking on an area of land that can support a livelihood. It is worth considering if you are able to provide any support in finding land for tenants to move onto - do you know any other landowners, do you have a relationship with the local council?

You may also decide that you are able to provide some support even after people have moved off the Farmstart site - perhaps through mentoring over the following 12 month period or in another form. Keeping these people involved in the Farmstart network can also strengthen the network, as well as providing an additional avenue of support for the next round of Farmstarters.

If you have more land available then you may decide that progression is not necessary.



3. SETTING UP A FARMSTART

3.1. Start-up Costs

There are likely to be start-up costs associated with setting up a Farmstart. This will depend on your existing organisational/farm structure, the current set up on the land that you are running the Farmstart on, and what facilities and infrastructure you are intending to provide to participants.

Capital costs might include barns, hardstanding, polytunnels, tools, packing or tool sheds, toilets, a tractor or rotavator, and fencing. You may also need to put in infrastructure for water access, electricity and parking/road access.

In addition, there's likely to be some revenue and staffing costs associated with setting up your Farmstart. Consider including the development time involved setting up the site, advertising and recruiting Farmstarters, and planning and preparing any training you are intending to run as part of the scheme.

It is worth taking time to research and consider the start-up costs and how these will be financed through grants or other financial income.

3.2. Setting up your site

The work to establish and set up the site will vary depending on the facilities already in place, and how much communal infrastructure you are providing to tenants. It's really important to be clear about access limitations or restrictions to shared facilities and equipment in order to ensure smooth operation of the site as a whole.

A key part is considering how you divide the land. Some Farmstarts provide people with a small plot of land, but allow them to expand onto an additional plot (and further) if they are managing their original plot well. This requires careful site planning to ensure that this is possible without people working across split plots.

If Organic certification is important, you could consider certifying the Farmstart scheme, to save on individual certification costs. This is the avenue that the Kindling Trust chose in Manchester – all packaging had to be labelled with the Kindling Trust name (as they are the certification holder) and sold on market stalls under the Kindling FarmStart banner. They could also include information about the Farmstarter, to help them build up their future market.



4. RUNNING A FARMSTART

4.1. Managing Applications

The first step is working out where you are going to find your Farmstarters. Do you have existing networks you can promote the scheme through? Are you advertising more widely? If so, where?

Here are some potential places you could advertise:

- Email newsletters and facebook groups
- Farmshops, local grocers or box schemes might advertise for you as potential buyers
- Local newspapers
- Social media
- Landworkers' Alliance and other national and local farming organisations
- Through local groups or having stalls at relevant events

The second step is establishing an application procedure. It might make sense to have an initial open expression of interest or open day on site, from which you can then invite people to make a full application. It is up to you what this application looks like, but it may be worth asking people to provide a business plan (or at least the outline of one - such as Lean Canvas), a land management plan and crop plan (if relevant) to ensure that they are at the right point to be joining the Farmstart and have a clear idea about how they are going to use the opportunity.

Experience from established Farmstarts is that people are often keen to take up the opportunity but do not have sufficient experience to make the most of the opportunity and struggle to commit the time or get their enterprise off the ground.

Some of the things you might want to consider are:

- How much practical hands-on experience do they have?
- How much time are they able to commit to their Farmstart enterprise?
- How long have they been working towards their project for?
- Is their business plan viable and realistic?

The final stage to consider is what policy documents and agreements that you will ask people to sign when they join. After struggling with a tenant that was misusing the site, Tamar Grow Local and Kindling Trust have adopted a Farmer Policy which Farmstarters must adhere to, which provides them with the means to terminate the tenancy if a tenant is not managing the land appropriately.

You can find example application forms and policies on the LWA website.

4.2. Cost to applicants

One of the main things to consider is how much you are going to charge people to participate in your Farmstart. This can be an important source of income towards the running costs of the project, but equally if it is too high this can be a barrier for entry to people.

Most projects choose to charge a set fee per plot, but this cost and the size of the plot varies and is likely to be influenced by the amount of land you have available and the experience level of your Farmstart applicants, as well as your plans for progression.

An option to consider is whether you charge a set price for the initial piece of land, but then a market-rate based amount for any additional land. For example, the Kindling Trust charge £500 (plus VAT) a year to participate in the programme. For this they get training, use of tools, trips, volunteer support etc., and in the first year at their Abbey Leys site includes 1/8 acre of land. If in the second year the participant takes on more land (increasing to 1/4 or 1/2 acre) the fee doesn't double, they are charged the same annual fee plus the market rate for additional land. If you are renting larger areas of land, you could consider charging below market rate for the first few years to allow people to establish their business before increasing the rent to ensure their business is viable.

One further thing to consider is taking a deposit of around £100-150 per participant. This money can work as an insurance that people will look after their land and not let it get overgrown or be mismanaged if they leave the project.

4.3. Encouraging Collaboration and Community Engagement

Whether done formally or informally, there can be real value in encouraging collaboration between tenants. Whether that's people cooperating to grow crops together, shared use of machinery or hiring other tenants to carry out maintenance such as mowing, shared watering schedules in the summer, or waste products from one enterprise being used by another.

Another consideration is how you communicate with your tenants. In sites where tenants are fairly independent, a regular monthly or bi-monthly meeting can help encourage the community to develop and nurture such collaborative relationships.

It's also worth considering how you, as a Farmstart site, and also your Farmstarters, engage with the local community. It can be great to run events to introduce who you and your tenants are and what you're doing, publicise the programme, gain public support and customers.



4.4. Staffing your Farmstart

The staff required to run your Farmstart will depend on the number of tenants you have and the amount of involvement you have in the operation, as well as being influenced by the staffing structure of your organisation (if applicable). The start up phase will require significantly more staff time, but on an ongoing basis you will still need someone to be the point of contact, coordinate applications and keep an eye on the progress of the tenants. It is good to budget for a minimum of 0.5-1 day a week for this once the project is established (although more time will allow you to support Farmstarters further), with training staff in addition.

Two alternative Farmstart models that you could consider are:

- A Farmstart built around a central business, such as Stream Farm, who provide the land and infrastructure for different enterprises on the farm. People can come and spend a few years running one of the existing enterprises (or start a new one) under a share farming agreement, with produce being sold under a single central brand. Part of the income goes towards the central costs, including the land and infrastructure, with the rest going to the individual to support a viable livelihood.
- A Farmstart set up by an existing farm, such as Stroud Community Agriculture, where a small plot of land is rented to a starter farm. Mentoring and support is provided, as well as potentially a route to market, but the starter farm runs independently from the parent farm.

4.5. Ongoing Costs

Most organisations set up a Farmstart because they recognise that it feeds into their wider goals of supporting new entrants and increasing production of local food in response to the demand. However, it is very difficult to make a Farmstart cover its own costs without ongoing funding or support from a larger organisation. It can be possible to make it financially sustainable as a project if you are simply providing land access and some basic coordination support (i.e. covering the land rental and minimal staffing), but if the project involves any kind of training or more in-depth support, it is unlikely that the fee the participant pays will cover this additional staffing cost. As a result, longer term funding or support from a wider project is usually necessary, and it's helpful to be aware of this when setting up a Farmstart.

Potential ongoing costs might include:

- Staffing for coordination of the Farmstart
- Staffing for training or mentoring
- Ongoing maintenance of equipment and infrastructure
- Any certification fees
- Insurance
- Land rental

More information about these models and other Farmstarts can be found on the Landworkers' Alliance website.



5. WHERE NOW?

5.1. Funding your Farmstart

Most Farmstarts have significant start-up costs due to the infrastructure and equipment required, as well as development revenue costs. Several funders such as the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust and the National Lottery Community Fund support food, sustainability and community work. It is also worth looking at local funds and databases such as Funding Central can be a great way to look at possible grant opportunities. There are also other ways to raise capital through crowdfunding, community shares or bonds. Sites like crowdfunder, chuffed and ethex have more information about how these work.

5.2. Using the Farmstart network

The Farmstart Network has been created to support new Farmstarts and Incubator Farms to be set up, and support those already running. There is a lot of experience within the network that people are willing to share, so check out the Landworkers' Alliance website <insert link> for case studies, useful documents and to sign up to the email list. We will also be organising annual gatherings and exchange visits so keep an eye on the website for more information.



Case Study: Tamar Grow Local

ABOUT TAMAR GROW LOCAL

Tamar Grow Local was started in 2007 with three main aims; providing opportunities for local people to grow their own food, raising awareness of the benefits of local produce, and working with commercial growers and supply chains. In addition to the Farmstart, they run a Food Hub, a scheme to improve healthy eating and cooking skills with low income households, they run producer cooperatives, community food projects and more. The Tamar Valley is very rural with low population density and limited public transport.

THE MODEL

Several fields totalling 12.5 acres have been leased from a local landowner (more land is available if needed) on a ten year Farm Business Tenancy and split into 1-acre plots, and people do not have to move off the plots as there is so much land available. Each plot comes with a 30 x 14 ft polytunnel, a 1 tonne IBC water tank and shared access to barn space, electricity and off-road parking. On the site they have had a variety of operations including native cut flowers, a small orchard, a vineyard, hatching eggs and several market gardens. Some tenants bought equipment (mower, topper, spreader) and do work for other tenants - self organised. They have found a monthly tenant meeting works well to help with communication.

Participants provide a business plan, crop plan and soil building plan. They also have business

review meeting after 6 months with a break clause in the contract if they are not adhering to the farmer policy.

MARKETS

Encourage and support tenants to grow through supplying their retail and wholesale Food Hub or Grow Share Cook project, and most sell through the Hub as well as having their own direct sales including a pop-up shop and small veg box rounds. Some informal partnerships and shared crops have worked between tenants. Tamar Grow Local also provide access to their equipment bank which includes market stall equipment which tenants can borrow.

TRAINING

There is no formal training with the programme. Initially there was some time funded to provide training, and this ended up being spent on bespoke training for each individual, but this funding has now ended. People are provided with Level 2 Food Hygiene training so they can use the Community Kitchen.

COST

Tenants pay £500 a year for a 1 acre plot. After 3 years this decreases to £300 per acre, and tenants are responsible for maintaining the tunnel. Tenants can also expand onto another acre when they have proven they are able to manage it. Tenants pay a £150 deposit in case they leave their plot in a poor state.



Case Study: OrganicLea

ABOUT ORGANICLEA

OrganicLea is a community food project based in the Lea Valley in north-east London. They produce and distribute food and plants locally, and inspire and support others to do the same. Their work includes running a fruit and veg box scheme, farmers markets, offering a range of training courses and working with local schools.

THE MODEL

Building on their existing work-based training scheme, the Farmstart was a response as to where people could move onto after the training scheme. People do a specific Farmstart traineeship for 9 months - the first three months are work based training and mentoring within the OrganicLea production team, the next three months are setting up their own micro-plot on the OrganicLea site, and the final three months are about moving on to their own land and developing planting plans for the next season. At the end of the 9 months, OrganicLea provides land for them to move onto or supports them to find their own land, moving into an 'incubation stage' where they get some mentoring support.

If people are looking to earn a full livelihood they generally outgrow the sites and move on to find their own land and grow their business. A lot of people earn a partial livelihood from it.

MARKETS

Option to sell produce through the OrganicLea box scheme and markets - they get help with quality control, packaging, getting produce to

market on time. Some growers grow directly for restaurants or have other routes to market.

TRAINING

People have to have gone through one of the OrganicLea training schemes before joining the Farmstart to make sure they have the skills and enthusiasm. Their training offering currently includes Level 1 and 2 courses in Horticulture, traineeships and apprenticeships. When they are on the OrganicLea site, they are growing salad and veg for the OrganicLea market, of which 50% of the market rate is placed in a bursary for when they set up independently.

COST

There is no cost to the traineeship, but people may have to pay for the horticultural courses (they are means tested)

People do not pay rent for the land at the incubation stage but are not provided with any infrastructure, only what is existing on the land.



Case Study: Kindling Trust

ABOUT KINDLING TRUST (KT)

Since 2007, KT has been working for a just and ecologically sustainable society. Working with communities, farmers, activists and policy makers, they use food as a catalyst for environmental and social change. In addition to their Farmstart, they run a veg box, a wholesale veg operation, a community food hub, volunteer programme and a commercial growers course. The veg box scheme and wholesale are established as two independent co-ops but work closely together.

MODEL 1 - ABBEY LEYS

The Abbey Leys site is 2 acres of organic land, and participants are given $\frac{1}{8}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of an acre for their operation. Participants reapply every year, but can stay on the land for up to 5 years, increasing their area each year if they can demonstrate they are ready. KT provide tools and infrastructure such as water, and the site is certified organic through the Soil Association. Certification is under the KT FarmStart name, so each FarmStarter has to use this name for their labelling (if labelled organic), however they can also put their own name, and each participant has to keep their own documentation to feed in to the Soil Association inspection as part of their training. People buy their own seeds, fleece and other materials, but keep all money made from selling crops.

MODEL 2 - WOODBANK

This model is ideal for people with very little experience, focusing on scaling up your growing and getting more efficient. People spend two days a week growing alongside a grower who provides all the in-field training and takes all responsibility for the planning and selling of the produce. There is no additional cost to the participants (costs of seeds, compost, materials are covered), but KT keep all the money from selling the produce to cover these costs.

People can stay on the programme for up to 3 years, getting more involved in the crop planning etc., then move onto the Abbey Leys site (or find their own land), and can continue to receive mentoring from the FarmStart co-ordinator or from another experienced local grower.

MARKETS

For Abbey Leys, participants are supported to sell through Manchester Veg People, Veg Box People and Unicorn Grocers, and trained in how to run a Farmer's Market stall. For Woodbank the produce is sold through the same channels but the grower handles the sales (although participants have some involvement in the admin/record keeping and from the 2nd year are involved in the ordering and sales process).



TRAINING

In addition to the in-field training there are an additional 5 classroom sessions across the year (varying between 2 hours and ½ a day). These cover topics such as soil and fertility building, record keeping and tool maintenance in the first year, moving on to cover finances, pricing, working with volunteers and business planning in the second and third years. The programme also includes a day with the buyers to get an understanding of their needs and visits to two other growers (of different scales).

COST

Participants pay £500 + VAT per year, plus pay a returnable £100 deposit

There is an application form and process, including an opportunity to attend a ‘Do you really want to be a farmer’ evening. For the Abbey Leys programme participants have to submit an annual crop plan and soil fertility plan (which is also part of the Soil Association record keeping)



Case Study: Stream Farm

ABOUT STREAM FARM

Stream Farm was started in 2002 with the aim of providing training and self-employment to new entrants to farming and revitalising the rural landscape. The 250-acre organic farm in Somerset has a number of different enterprises running on the farm, including beef, lamb, pork, chicken, eggs, smoked and fresh trout, apple juice, spring water and honey. The aim is to provide people with a pathway to a sustainable livelihood, and for people to move on after a few years and continue running their own enterprises elsewhere.

THE MODEL

The farm operates on a Share Farming model, with people coming on board to run one of the on-farm enterprises full time for up to two years. During this time, people are trained on the farm and take responsibility for the enterprise, learning the practical skills as well as the knowledge necessary to run a successful business. Produce is sold through a single central brand that encompasses all the enterprises on the farm. The enterprises are designed to run and complement each other - for example the hens roam in the apple orchards, and all the farmers come together to support each other when intensive amounts of work are needed - for example cleaning barns

in the winter or preparing a trout order.

MARKETS

Stream Farm sell all their produce under a single brand, selling direct to customers, restaurants and occasional markets. Learning about this side of the business is part of what trainees learn while they're on the the farm.

TRAINING

There is no formal training, but practical training and business training is given on the farm while people are running the enterprises.

COST

- There is no cost to the participants - they are paid a share of the gross income of their enterprise earns, aiming for a livelihood at a living wage (some currently provide a full livelihood, some a partial livelihood).
- Some of the farmers live on site, so their financial needs, whilst they are being trained, are lower than they would be otherwise. As part of the Share Farming model, the rest of the gross revenue goes to the central Stream Farm business to cover the working capital, maintenance, the land etc.



Case Study: Stroud Community Agriculture

ABOUT STROUD COMMUNITY AGRICULTURE

Stroud Community Agriculture (SCA) is a community-led enterprise, an established local farming business that produces fresh organic and biodynamic produce for its members. Members pay a small membership fee and a monthly payment in order to receive produce including vegetables, with lamb, pork and beef available in addition. They are currently diversifying into other produce to expand the range. The farm grows on 3 sites, part of which are certified organic and biodynamic.

THE MODEL

SCA launched the Starter Farm 3 years ago when two people who had been working at SCA wanted to set up their own farm. They applied for funding (in SCA's name) for a polytunnel and some tools and equipment, and rent around 0.5 acre off SCA (0.25 acre plus a polytunnel), with the plot moving as part of SCA's rotation. SCA helped getting the project off the ground, including assembling the polytunnels, laying water pipes etc. SCA undertake an initial cultivation of the plot each year, and they share tools and equipment (including being allowed to borrow the tractor if they can demonstrate competence) and have access to farmyard manure. Originally SCA bought the produce grown for their veg scheme but the starter farm now sell independently and operate as an independent business. The current tenant has been on the land for 3 years but think it'll be a two year opportunity going forwards.

MARKETS

Originally SCA bought all the produce but the starter farm is now an independent business and sells some of their produce through their own routes to market and some through SCA outlets. They feel like this is the best option as it makes sure people learn how to run a business, sell produce etc, which are important skills when they move off the plot.

TRAINING

The Starter Farm tenants are presumed to have previously undergone an internship/traineeship/apprenticeship before moving onto the site - there is no training provided, but some informal mentoring from SCA.

COST

- Tenants do not pay rent on their plot of land to SCA, but they pay for water and utilities, potting compost and packaging bags (that SCA buy in bulk) and petrol for the rotavator
- There is rent-free seasonal accommodation available on site for one person (in a caravan, so not available during winter months).





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.



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