

CASE STUDY: NORWICH FARM SHARE

A HORTICULTURAL CSA IN PERIURBAN NORFOLK



Established: 2009

Type: Producer-Community Partnership

Legal Structure: Community Benefit Society

Paid staff: 1 FTE (Two people)

Trainees: 0

Volunteers: 1 FTE (15 people each week from a list of 200)

Produce: Vegetables

Members: 110 veg share members and five supporter members

Member radius: 7 miles

Photo credits: Norwich Farm Share

Shares: 110

Buy in to supplement produce: Veg in winter and eggs and fruit year-round

CSA turnover: £59,000

Non CSA turnover: £1000 from restaurant sales

Land: One hectare of growing space rented on a written agreement

Infrastructure: Three polytunnels, borehole and cabin

Approach: No-dig, permaculture

And... most of their shares are delivered by bicycle

The seed...

It all began in October 2008 when 50 people met as part of Transition Norwich to discuss the failings of the current local food supply. Norwich FarmShare was launched two years later and they began growing food for CSA members on a piece of land in Postwick with the aim of pioneering a cleaner, healthier future for the region and planet. The initial costs were covered by a £75,000 grant which helped support revenue costs and paid for a tractor, minibus, polytunnels, a container and rent. They set up as a community benefit society (CBS) to ensure they really were benefitting the right people.



Grew...

In 2016 they lost their rented growing land. After a long search, they secured a beautiful, south-facing one hectare site at Whitlingham. They have set up rabbit fences, polytunnels and other infrastructure on this site and have been growing there since 2018. Their volunteers have grown to a list of 200 people and include lots of young people who are inspired by what they do. Some of the biggest obstacles they have overcome (apart from security of land tenure) are a lack of business and marketing skills and confusion over how to best manage the structure of a community project which needs to make a profit.

And...

They feel immensely satisfied to be thriving ten years after the idea was first nurtured into being, despite bankruptcy and loss of their first site. As well as feeding lots of people every week, they are also a community sanctuary and a place to learn about growing food. It's always a difficult balance between the long hours and copious energy necessary to make a small-scale agroecological farm successful while paying appropriately and avoiding burnout. From now on they want to put more time and energy into outreach and education so they can share the benefits of meaningful work and a strong connection to nature.

