

CASE STUDY: SCHOOL FARM

A HORTICULTURAL CSA IN RURAL DEVON



Established: 2011

Type: Producer-led

Legal Structure: Community Interest Company Ltd by guarantee

Paid staff: 1.6 FTE (Four people)

Trainees: 0.3 FTE

Volunteers: 1 FTE (Four people)

Produce: Vegetables and fruit

Members: 90

Member radius: 5 miles

Shares: Year-round

Buy in to supplement produce: Yes

CSA turnover: £45,000

Non CSA turnover: £1500 from seed production, £2000 from teaching and £3000 from sales at market

Land: 1 hectare rented on 5-yr farm business tenancy from charity

Infrastructure: Two packing sheds, tool shed, office and kitchen, three polytunnels and two glasshouses

Approach: Organic, min till, agroforestry

And... teaching is a core part of their work and they deliver Organic Horticulture Levels 1 and 2.

The seed...

School Farm was already an established market garden with an informal veg box scheme and horticulture courses. In 2011 three former students developed the veg box scheme into a 25-box CSA under the guidance of the lead gardener and teacher. Simultaneously, a Transition Totnes community consultation identified demand for a CSA scheme. The farm received funding from a local entrepreneur forum, the National Lottery, Power to Change and crowdfunding to buy additional tools, a shed and a pedestrian tractor, and to run community and volunteer days.



Grew...

With the move to year-round shares they now cultivate more produce in what used to be their off-season and have reduced their need to buy in. Teaching has always been a core part of the farm. The name 'School Farm' harks back to when it was attached to an alternative secondary school in the 1950s. The CSA has developed a good working relationship with Bicton College and delivers Level 1 and 2 City and Guilds accredited training and some shorter courses. These have grown in popularity, and around 50 students a year now join this practical on-farm training.



And...

"We might wish we'd had more experience to start with but it doesn't work like that, does it?! All one needs is the spark to begin, and the motivation to keep going. Some learnings are quicker than others, and the lessons never stop. Every year sees a process of refinement based on the keen attention to farm activity. Ten years in, the business is able to pay core staff the minimum wage (excluding overtime!) without reliance on grants. Believe it or not, that feels like a fine achievement. Ten years in, we've built a reputation for excellent veg and excellent shares, and we have a loyal member base."

