

CASE STUDY: STANFORD HALL CSA

A MIXED CSA IN RURAL LEICESTERSHIRE



Established: 2017

Type: Producer-Community Partnership

Legal Structure: Charitable

Incorporated Organisation

Paid staff: 1 FTE (One person)

Trainees: 2 FTE (Five internships)

Volunteers: 3.5 FTE (Three wwoofers and lots of local volunteers)

Produce: Veg, meat, honey, fruit

Members: 60 paying domestic members, 20 community grower members (free shares) and four schools (five shares each per week)

Member radius: 14 miles

Shares: 100

Buy in to supplement produce: Yes

CSA turnover: £31,000

Land: Two hectares of growing space and 2.5 hectares of grazing and woods run in partnership with the host estate

Infrastructure: Polytunnel, packing shed and two yurts, horsebox kitchen

Approach: No-dig, permaculture, biodynamic, agroforestry

And... there's a big focus on learning, with many structured ways to get involved from a full season's internship, to school trips that teach food, ecology and community through beans on toast

The seed...

The owners of 1000-acre Stanford Hall Estate regretted the decline in human and planetary resilience, wanted to do something to help, and decided a CSA was the answer. They approached Graham who was then running a local community growing project and have been hugely supportive ever since. The timing was immaculate. The Soil Association had just set up the school Food for Life Awards and were looking for link farms. This allowed them to set up a very structured educational element from the beginning and develop a good relationship with Leicestershire's school catering services.



Grew...

The estate owners put £5,000 towards an infrastructure shares offer launched in 2017. Graham's wages were paid by the estate for the first three years but now come from sales and grants. Their Baked Beans on Toast project produces haricot beans, wheat and milk grown in rotation in the corridors of a nuts and timber agroforestry system. The project has spawned a book and is run as a farmers co-op to show others how to produce popular high-value foods in a regenerative system. They also supply four local schools through the council procurement process and host regular visits from the pupils.

And...

They see vegetables as a form of emergency disaster relief. They market high-quality produce but don't spend time making it look pretty, in order to reduce costs and keep it as accessible and affordable as possible. The role of the CSA has shifted as it's grown and Graham now sees education and helping others get going on the CSA path as its main aims. He says: "I've found that offering the space and intention is the most important. I offer support where needed, but stepping back and allowing the community to co-create is the most powerful method and prevents the burnout that can arise when you try to do it all."

