

CASE STUDY: PLOTGATE COMMUNITY FARM

A MIXED CSA IN RURAL SOMERSET



Established: 2016

Type: Producer-led

Legal Structure: Community Benefit Society (CBS)

Paid staff: 1.5 FTE (Two people)

Trainees: 1.5 FTE (Four people)

Volunteers: 2 FTE (14 people)

Produce: Veg, meat and apple juice

Members: 64 investor members, 100 veg members and 15-20 workshares

Member radius: Eight miles

Shares: Year-round in two sizes

Buy in to supplement produce: Yes

CSA turnover: £74,000

Non CSA turnover: £7,200 from grants and meat sales

Land: 14 acres on a 150-year lease from a land trust being paid off over 25 years

Infrastructure: Five polytunnels, reservoir, off-grid, two barns, greenhouse, sheds and workshops

Approach: 50% No-dig

And... possibly our largest no-dig CSA and run a growing club and accredited courses in L1 and L2 Horticulture

The seed...

Amy and Dan wanted to do something positive to tackle the challenges of a changing climate, ecological destruction and at the same time open up the possibility of living differently through a solid relationship with the natural world. Through a land trust formed with friends and family they gained access to a 150 year lease on 10 acres alongside two other rural businesses operating on the same piece of land. Whilst the logistics of the land were not always easy access to land made a huge difference.



Grew...

Funding provided an initial £15k loan at 8% interest and a £15k grant matched against £25k raised through community finance. This was spent over the first three years on salaries and infrastructure and the loan was paid off over five years. The financial input was really important to accelerate the scale of what they wanted to do and allow them to do it. The best part was the community investment as it forced them to get out and find people to invest for a three-year minimum. The AGM decided the interest rates.



And...

They are one of the largest hand cultivated growing projects in the country and Dan does lots of work developing push tools for use by two people. Rotations and compost are really important to get right in a large no-dig system and being entirely off-grid is an additional challenge. As they mature they are concentrating on education and volunteer involvement. In particular they are keen on strengthening skills development and the communal aspect of bringing volunteers into the Plotgate family. What they wish they'd known at the beginning is that fertility building is a big issue!

