Community Models for Farm Ownership

Briefing Paper: Collective Enterprise

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Related Reports and Further Reading

This briefing paper is part of a series of reports created by the Community Models for Farm Succession project, which investigates various opportunities, barriers and approaches to community-ownership of farmland. The other reports can be accessed here.

Acknowledgements

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Context

The term Enterprise Stacking has gained traction in the last few years and is commonly used to describe two different things. Firstly, a farm which has diversified and "stacked" different enterprises but all under one farm business.

The second meaning of the term, and the one this briefing focuses on, is where a farmer or landowner "stacks" different enterprises on the land, but each enterprise is owned by a different person – essentially, they are hosting a number of different businesses which support each other and the host farm. For this reason, we decided to use the term Collective Enterprise (CE), rather than Enterprise Stacking to describe this model.

this Family Farm Succession project is because it may lead to more democratic forms of land governance and farming when a range of enterprises are on one site, and in some cases, to more democratic forms of land ownership.

We engaged with representatives from 11 farms which are utilising a collective enterprise approach through interviews and/or participation in a roundtable. These were: Molescroft Farm, Wakelyns, Stockwood Farm, Swillington Farm, Kingsclere Farm, Hardwick Estate, Balcaskie Estate, Baddaford Farm Collective, FarmED, Woodoaks and Fordhall Farm. This paper is also informed by research for the Community Buyout briefing paper.

What's at stake?

Both types of Enterprise Stacking have emerged in response to the increasing difficulty in making a viable living from farming. However, CE, as we will see, often has other stated purposes, including, things like training the next generation of farmers, solving farm succession problems, or creating vibrant food hubs. The reason it is interesting to

Table of Participants

Farm	Legal Form	Enterprises & income streams
Molescroft Farm	Public limited company owned by family hosting two businesses	Arable farm and dog walking field also hosting childcare setting and CSA
Wakelyns	Family Partnership	23 hectares of organic rotation agroforestry, and grains, pulses and other food and hosts Wakelyns Bakery, Contemporary Hempery, Willow Phoenix land art, a market garden and Be More Bee as well as having accommodation to rent and being able to house some workers on site
Stockwood Community Benefit Society	Community Benefit Society owned by over 500 shareholders	190 acres including: • Mixed farming • Renewable energy • Rural business park
Swillington Farm	Limited Company	120 acres including mixed farming sold through CSA shares and farm shop, fishing ponds, land rental to external businesses and a smallholding training site
Kingsclere Estates	Limited Company	2500 acres including mixed farming, 100,000 sq ft of mixed-use commercial units and 35 rental homes as well as hosting smaller enterprises including a dairy and rabbit food producer through their Pitch Up scheme supporting new land based businesses.
Hardwick Estate	In the process of private land ownership being converted to community ownership in a charitable trust	900 acre estate including 500 acres of woodlands and 27 rented cottages as well as hosting 4 farming businesses, an outdoor education space, a hemp cooperative, livery and many more.
Balcaskie Estate	Balcaskie Estate is owned by The Alexander Trust, a UK-domiciled trust	5000- acres including three perpetual conventional farming farm tenancies (arable and equine). 3500 acres farmed themselves in organic - suckler beef, sheep, arable and a few pigs and forestry. They also host multiple businesses of all types including a CSA and are running a “Pitch Up” scheme to support new farming ventures
Baddaford Farm Collective	Partnership	154 acres of which 80 are managed by Baddaford Farm Partnership which grows organic perennial fruit and veg crops and supplies Riverford Organic Farmers and The Bull. The land also hosts:

Farm	Legal Form	Enterprises & income streams
		Red Earth Herbs, Pigment Organic Dyes, Incredible Vegetables, Vital Seeds and Green Ginger Organics.
FarmED	CIC limited by guarantee	100 acre demonstration farm including a 5 acre CSA, microdairy, Sheep flying flock, 4 beekeepers, Courses and events, Cafe and kitchen, Arable, orchard and agroforestry and Cotswold Seeds
Woodoaks Farm	Charitable, Trust - The farm was donated to the Soil Association Land Trust by the Findlay Family in 2020	300 acres, including arable and pastureland and around 75 acres of semi-natural woodland as well as multiple businesses: brewing company, cafe, artist studio, market garden and flower farm
Fordhall Organic Farm	Community Benefit Society (Fordhall Community Land Initiative) with over 8000 shareholders	128 acres with tenant livestock farmer on 128 acres, as well as cafe, farm shop, butchery, bakery, weddings, courses, farm trails, school visits, meeting room, care farm, holiday let straw bale house, provision for excluded young people and various local groups.

Common Themes

- The most resounding theme was the **power of bringing these farmers together** to share and learn from each other and that the power of diversity shines through. No one size fits all. These ideas and stories open up opportunities for others to pick and choose those that fit with them.

"It was just very reassuring to know that you're not alone, that these things are doable in some way, you know, at various stages on the journey."

"I think for me, it's realising that we're all trying to do something amazing. Amazing. And we're having a discussion around this sort of concept of collective enterprises, but there's no one size fits all. We're all doing something different, but it's been amazing to come and visit."

- The initial rationale was **financial / viability based for some** and **more ethical / philosophical for others**, however all farms discussed the benefits of inviting enterprises to the land beyond financial gains and the farmers shared a common goal of promoting agroecology.
- For some farms, a large driver of why enterprises are on site is to **build a circular economy on site and use farm 'waste'.** Other farms saw collective enterprise **as offering huge potential on land that wasn't currently utilised.**
- **Non-farming businesses are often financially supporting farming businesses**; however this is not always the case.

Benefits of Collective Enterprise

- Multiple businesses **offer more support** to each other than a single business
- Different enterprises bring their own **networks** which mean increased **routes to market for all**.
- Different enterprises also bring their own knowledge, experience and new ways of doing things and this is of **mutual benefit to everyone involved** - the collective is greater than the sum of its parts.
- **The social benefits are significant** but hard to measure financially, such as building an **engaged community** both on site and locally, which widens networks and outreach.
- The model appears to increase **revenue streams** and **derisk** other businesses (although this area needs more research to understand this better)
- **Personal resilience is improved** through connection and these farms build solidarity, belonging and placemaking.
- CE can **encourage the strengthening of a local sustainable economy** by enterprises at the farm using products from another business on site e.g. at Woodoaks the brewery

uses the site's market gardeners' fruit.

- **Enterprises benefit from sharing resources.** Wakelyn's have a large walk-in fridge that the enterprises use but none would have been able to afford individually.
- The farm can **employ more people**. At Balcaskie in 2008 6 people were employed and in 2024 that had risen to 119.

> *"If you looked at each business on its own you might say you'd get a better return from doing something else, but when you add them together there is a resilience to the whole estate that you can't get alone."*

We also learnt that:

- Most farms seem to have **bespoke agreements with tenants** including leases, contracts, share farming models and verbal agreements.
- The **involvement of tenants in running the whole farm varied**. Some farms had **a formalised structure** involving tenants in meetings to make decisions about collective issues, whilst others do this **more casually** through work socials. Some have **a more top-down** approach where the board or landowner make the decisions.
- Similarly the way the whole farm is marketed varied, in a continuum from the whole farm being marketed as one, to each business marketing themselves.
- Whilst most farms offer volunteering options, not many mentioned offering bespoke **new entrant training** (apart from Balcaskie and Kingsclere through the "PitchUp" Scheme and FarmED's paid internships), but many do it unofficially

  "agroecological business coaching is being done without being recognised."
- **How the finances work is very different and more work is needed to understand this better**. For Hardwick Estate and Wakelyns a significant income comes from housing and accommodation and for Stockwood from the business park rents. There is a **constant balancing act of money versus purpose** and where CE might help is the cross-subsidising that different businesses can provide, but we need more understanding of how this actually works.
- For some CEs **the benefits of a connection to a catering enterprise are clear,** such as The

Bull Pub buying from one of Baddaford's businesses, or Fordhall making money from weddings. The cafe at FarmED attracts visitors, tells the story of authentic food, but just breaks even.

Common Challenges

Many of these were common across the farming world, such as:

- **Housing** for workers.
- **Short tenancies** for businesses.
- **Lack of financial support and training for new entrants**.

Others, more specific to these farms, included:

- Hardwick and Molescroft Farm initially experienced **family resistance** and / or a concern about having others on the land.
- Whilst many farms can freely admit visitors, others experience **access restrictions** due to small roads, lack of space, neighbour concerns etc.
- Sometimes the businesses need support to ensure shared good working relationships and successful collaboration around shared resources and space. The farmer is already managing their land and **managing people adds a whole other task.**
- Some farms had **struggled to recruit the right businesses** because of a lack of applicants or because those interested actually sought training or employment rather than taking on a business.

Many of these issues around land ownership and succession were explored in detail within phase one of the Farm Succession project.

It appears that CE can help move towards more equitable land ownership.
As CE brings additional, often local, people onto the land, where there is willing from the landowner, this collective can provide the inspiration for a shift towards more equitable ownership and/or community buyout, although this is not always the case. For instance Baddaford and Wakelyns were considering a shift towards a community ownership structure, whilst others were clear that the ownership would stay in the same hands.

Recommendations

1. Continue to **bring collective enterprise farms together to share and learn from each other**. All of our roundtable attendees highlighted how useful it had been having this opportunity to meet, and to develop learning and support networks. All those present also offered to host another exploration day and were keen to participate.
2. **Explore the different forms of agreement between the collective enterprises and host farm**, and share the learning, especially where tenants are included in governance processes on the farm.
3. **Carry out further analysis of success** on these farms in personal, community and business terms, and across social, environmental and economic realms.
4. **Explore and share how the finances work on these farms** and how much diversification and non-farming enterprises support the whole – most of those present were happy to share their financial information internally for analysis and comparison.
5. **An England-wide landmatch scheme** such as this one being developed by a collective of organisations, would help match businesses with suitable host farms.
6. **Understand, quantify and value the new entrant support** and that takes place on these farms.
7. **Explore the specific opportunities and challenges of CEs** with regard to community buyouts / farm succession i.e. are they uniquely positioned to enable smooth pathways to succession?

Case Study

Wakelyns in Suffolk, was bought in 1992 by Ann and Martin Wolfe. It is a private limited company, with 23 hectares. It is a pioneer of sustainability through organic rotation agroforestry, and by growing grains, pulses and other food with a focus on short food chains and enterprise stacking. The site produces food, addresses the climate crisis, provides materials, crafts, work, accommodation, learning, public access, community, inspiration and wellbeing. Wakelyns also hosts Wakelyns Bakery, Contemporary Hempery, Willow Phoenix land art, a market garden and Be More Bee, an initiative to support the wild honey bee population on site.

These are each separate businesses, independently run and owned by the people involved. Each has a "microsite" within the overall website. They are in some way involved in activities connected to the place of Wakelyns, whether that is growing there, or using what grows for crafts or for cooking/baking, or celebrating or supporting biodiversity. Some use space in the farm buildings, some use areas of land, some use both.

Each enterprise operates under an agreement (a licence) with Wakelyns which establishes the basis on how businesses operate on site. No rent is paid by the businesses. Some of the businesses' workers live on site through Wakelyns planning permission under an accommodation licence. This allows for 6 accommodation units for long term "rural workers", as well as caravans for seasonal agricultural or forestry workers. All enterprises have signed up to act in accordance with Wakelyns statement of "commitments and values".

While all are separate businesses, they act collaboratively to provide mutual support, share resources and so on. The interaction is critical, but hard to measure as it is around sharing resources and collaborating, such as when one business represents all others on site at a farmers' market. Social support is also important as often there will be 25 people on site which makes it a congenial social place to work, especially in spaces which are often isolating.

Wakelyns would like more enterprises on their land and are also exploring community ownership as a way of buying out an owner who needs access to the finance held in the farm