

Good for Ewe

Inverasdale, Poolewe, Ross-shire,
www.goodforewe.org

Summary

A group of people who came together in a remote village in Wester Ross (North West Scotland) to grow vegetables for themselves and the local community.

Introduction

Today, people are asking more and more questions about food, where it comes from, how is it produced, nutritional values, environmental issues etc. These concerns affect us all, and so, one of the fundamental concepts of Good For Ewe (GFE) was born : to have some control over food production and how we treat the earth to achieve it - sustainable agriculture.

Although GFE is based within a traditional crofting community, there are households which have no access to land, so this project attempts to redress that particular issue by being available to the whole community.

Connor Mays recounts, 'Initially, the offer of the land was as a community plot, accessible for anyone interested in growing fruit and vegetables on a communal basis, with the produce shared amongst those that worked to grow it. Any surplus would be sold via local shops and a market. From this early idea, GFE has evolved into an allotment scheme with individual members free to grow what they want. We have retained a communal plot for produce, which will be sold at affordable prices, to the public'.



History

There was clearly a growing interest to establish a CSA, and so during 2003 local opinion was gauged by a postal questionnaire and by invitation to the first meeting at Inverasdale primary school. Turnout was very encouraging, with people from all walks of the community attending. Anita Aggarwal from the Soil Association's Cultivating Communities project and John Toal from the Crofters Commission were present to offer advice and answer the many questions from the floor.

Other meetings quickly followed and Connor Mays generously volunteered approximately one acre of his croft land for the project.

Further meetings gave the group direction, and a co-operative company limited by guarantee, were forwarded as the way to go, followed by the formation of a committee and constitution. Nominal membership fees were introduced, enabling any member to benefit from the co-operative's pool of resources, both now and more importantly in the future, as the project developed.

Several 20'x 60' outdoor plots were created and made available for a token annual rent, with smaller plots available to rent on a pro rata basis.

Land was also earmarked for the future development of three 26' x 60' Keder greenhouses for indoor growing.

Organisation

Good For Ewe Ltd was incorporated under the Companies Act 1985 at Companies House, Edinburgh, 4th May 2004, as a common ownership co-operative consortium.

There is a Board of Management, comprising 3 directors and company secretary, elected annually by the membership which to date stands at 32. Statutory responsibility is undertaken by the Board of Management, but a Management Committee deals with funding, marketing, plot management etc.

Finance

Scotland Unlimited provided funding of £2500, to cover initial start up costs and site preparation, such as ploughing, manuring and fencing. The Soil Association's Cultivating Co-operative's project provided £300 to cover formation and incorporation costs and Healthways funded the costs of seed potatoes and vegetable seeds to the tune of £360. A further £500 discretionary fund has been granted by the local councillor

Wester Ross Alliance and RACE have match funded £5000 each and Fresh Futures provided the project with a grant of £70,000.



The current project

GFE now have 60 members and three robust Keder greenhouses which are well suited to the weather conditions experienced in this region and they are in full production. One is used specifically for growing produce for sale at Poolewe market between the end of May and September and hopefully beyond (extending the growing season year-on-year is being achieved). The second, double span Keder is being used by the community as an allotment style undercover area for members including a social work project and children's plot.

There are also outdoor growing areas used as allotment plot for members' own growing and dedicated outdoor space for market produce. We have secured more tools, created storage space, and improved the fencing and paths and even have a community shed.



Community shed

Future Plans

As the project progresses, GFE would like to see the membership grow and to become a centre of excellence, and used as a model for other communities to establish their own schemes. This could lead to further sites across a much wider geographical area, pooling knowledge and fostering partnerships between different communities.

The GFE brand and value-added products will enhance reputation and run in tandem with other independent growers and perhaps provide them with another outlet.

GFE envisages fresh fruit and vegetables being available to the whole community at affordable prices and together with Healthways we could really push for a healthier lifestyle. Educational and training programs are envisaged in the near future, with local schools being

particularly welcome to participate.

GFE is now focussing its development work on a renewables project to provide irrigation and power for the site.

Although volunteer-based, GFE is looking to create employment opportunities which, is much needed in a remote, rural area such as this.

This is a very exciting project attracting much interest from funding organisations. Absolute transparency, clearly defined procedures and dialogue are essential to ensure that no grey areas remain. The GFE concept has only been established to benefit the whole community, whether they intend to physically take part, offer support or just be end users. That can only be good for everybody in this community.

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Updated February 2009