



## **CHAGFOOD CASE STUDY**

### **Chagford, Devon**

#### **Introduction**

Chagfood CSA rents two plots of land totalling three acres from two local farmers, on which it grows more than 50 varieties of seasonal veg, and has recently planted 20 apple trees and 50+ fruit trees. The produce is delivered via a box scheme to 35 members with the help of Samson the horse – who plays an indispensable part in transporting the boxes to the central pick-up-point in Chagford. The scheme received planning permission from Dartmoor National Park Authority for three polytunnels and two sheds on the site, making the scheme eligible for the full £38,600 grant applied for by the team – supplied by the Big Lottery Fund's Local Food programme. More than two years after the initial community meeting, after a certain amount of "hard work and perseverance" the scheme is now up and running, and plans to increase shares to supply 80-100 boxes a week.

#### **Getting Started**

Inspired principally by the local farmers, motivation for Chagfood CSA came from a community meeting hosted by the New Economics Foundation in the town in February 2009. The aim was to establish a CSA veg-box scheme for Chagford, in order to supply ecologically produced, seasonal and affordable vegetables to Chagford's residents, providing local farmers with a living wage and working to promote traditional farming skills.

Initiative was taken by Ed Hamer and Ysanne Friend, who, in their own words "had a vision and pulled as many strings as possible to make it happen." They started talking to landowners, looking for land and completed an application for funding from the Big Lottery Fund's Local Food programme. A few months later Chinnie Kingsbury became involved as grower, and from then on Chinnie, Yssey & Ed covered most of the work on business planning, funding and planning permission.

An initial community meeting was held to launch the idea to local residents in November 2008 and gauge the level of interest. The need to get letters of support for the planning application in December 2009 also helped to raise the profile of the initiative among the local community.

#### **Funding**

The project's initial application for £38,600 funding from Local Food was successful. A subsequent application for £9,200 to Dartmoor National Park's Sustainable Development Fund for specific unforeseen costs was also successful. Grant money is being used to subsidise the first 2 years of the scheme, both capital and revenue costs, and is paid directly into the Chagfood bank account following submission of the relevant forms and quarterly reports. Although the initial grant was not enough to cover costs, the shortfall is being subsidised through the grower's time. Core members are keen to demonstrate that, after this initial injection of capital, local food schemes should be able to make themselves financially self-sufficient, and therefore have no further plans to apply for funding. Chagfood took out insurance from NFU mutual for capital items, and public liability up to £5m.

The group received financial advice on incorporation and account keeping from CEU group through the Plunkett foundation, as part of the Making Local Food Work programme and horticultural consultancy through Tim Deane, via Organic Growers Association.

### **Legal Structure**

After much debate and confusion, regarding which legal structure to go for, Chagfood sought advice from CEU group / Plunkett Foundation (Making Local Food Work), and decided to incorporate as a large-membership Community Interest Company, limited by guarantee. The core group of four Directors deal with day to day running of the CSA, including work on promotion, membership, finances and legal issues, although an accountant is employed for the quarterly audit of accounts and to take care of payroll.

### **Members and share of the harvest**

Chagfood now has 35 members / subscribers who sign-up for a year's share of the harvest, either a large or small share, which they pay for either up front in April or quarterly. There is no additional membership fee. For the 2011-12 season a large share, suitable for a family of four, is priced at £15 a week. A small share, suitable for a household of two, is priced at £11.

Key motivations for members are found to be:

- To support local growers
- To secure a future food supply for Chagford
- To support local food and ecological farming practices

Produce is collected from the central pick up point in Chagford, though a few collect from the field. All members are invited to get as involved as they like in the running of the scheme, (although in reality very few have so far), with the opportunity to attend the annual AGM in autumn to discuss major decisions such as box prices. Communication with members is primarily through email. Chagfood holds an Autumn Harvest festival and spring gathering on the field, and plans to host a workday on the last Saturday of each month for members and non-members to get involved in seasonal growing tasks, meet each other and find out more about the scheme.

### **The land**

The project rents two plots of land immediately adjacent to each other from two separate landlords. The primary plot is 1.3 acres on which Chagfood has a 5-year renewable Farm Business Tenancy agreement and where they have established polytunnels, a compost loo, an office & packing shed. The group have just taken on an additional 1.7 acres on a 1-year renewable Farm Business Tenancy agreement. The team underwent an extensive planning process<sup>1</sup> over four months. The application received 47 letters of support and 11 letters of objection, and as a result a committee hearing was arranged in which three minutes were allowed to argue the case. Ultimately committee members voted unanimously to support the application.

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<sup>1</sup> For a detailed case study on the planning application, see: the HogCO Toolkit: [Finding Land to Grow Food: Community Groups' Guide to Legal issues](#)

## **Whats in production**

Drawing on Chinnie and Ysanne's extensive experience in horticulture, more than 50 varieties of seasonal vegetables are now produced by the project. 20 apple trees (all local Devonshire varieties) have been planted, as well as 50+ soft-fruit bushes. Chinnie and Ed are, at present, the only paid growers, although rely heavily on volunteer labour from other members of the core group. Local farmers provide machinery for occasional hire, and small quantities of bulk inputs eg. lime and calcified seaweed.

The weekly picking and packing is done by Chinnie, Ed, Ysanne, and the two other volunteer growers - Annkatrin and Alice. Produce is sold to members and wholesale to local restaurants and shops, and, on principle, no produce is bought in. Much of the work is aided by Samson, Chagfood's horse, who works on the field 1-2 days each week using a French designed tillage tool called a Kassine, and is an integral part of the CSA.

## **Finances**

For 2011-2012 financial year the core group anticipates subscription sales to total £25,000, with wholesale sales to total £2,400. At present the scheme is paying Chinnie and Ed £9/hour (gross) for three days per week – working out at around £9,400 net per year.

## **The future**

Chagfood currently need to increase shares to supply 80-100 boxes a week in order for the scheme to become financially self-sufficient. The core group have therefore decided to broaden the range of subscriptions to include residents of neighbouring towns and villages, although acknowledge that they would prefer to be supplying exclusively to local residents and encouraging neighbouring towns and villages to set up their own CSA schemes.

## **Carbon footprint**

As part of their ethical commitment to their customers, Chinnie and Ed recently decided to calculate the carbon footprint of the business in order to inform members about the carbon emissions created from food production. The study calculation found that there was very low fossil fuel use and in fact low emissions overall, a result that gained the CSA positive recognition.

The benefits of Chagfood include the environment, the community and the growers. The low input holistic approach to food production helps to increase biodiversity and improve the health of the soil, the local community are provided with food security and increased awareness of ecological food production, and traditional farming skills and knowledge, and the growers with a secure (albeit minimal) wage, as well as "priceless job satisfaction".

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[www.chagfood.org.uk](http://www.chagfood.org.uk)