

HebVeg Case Study

Hebden Bridge in Calderdale, West Yorkshire

HebVeg is a new CSA started as a result of the meetings of the Food Group of Transition Town Hebden Bridge in Calderdale, West Yorkshire. Hebden Bridge nestles at the bottom of steep sided wooded valleys which then level out into sheep pasture and moorland of the South Pennines watershed. Despite being only a few miles from Incredible Edible Todmorden, there is very little fruit and vegetables being grown locally. Because of the lack of space in the valley, very few houses have gardens and allotments are like hens' teeth.

There are several vegetable box schemes available, but they are perceived as expensive and are generally not locally sourced. A significant number of people felt that we should develop a more sustainable, locally grown vegetable supply and a consumer based CSA (like Stroud CA) looked like being the preferred option. However we decided that we would like to provide locally sourced veg from day one and build a box scheme organisation which would evolve into and fund the start-up of a consumer-led CSA by building a customer base, then finding land, employing a grower and gradually supplementing the veg box with hebden grown veg. It may be that we never fully replace all the bought in content and concentrate on growing what grows well up here in the wind and the wet - we shall see and at the end of the day the members will create whatever they want to meet their needs. However the ambitious aim is to produce everything in the box from within 3 miles of Hebden Bridge town centre within 3 years.

The first chance to pick up a HebVeg box was on January 15th 2011 with 50 boxes packed by member volunteers collected from a local Baptist church hall and 25 people added to the waiting list. The vegetables came from an organic certified grower in Hipperholme near Halifax about 9 miles away. The box contained organic potatoes, carrots, onions, leeks, cabbages, beetroot, swede, kale and parsnips. At the moment it's 'one size fits all' with a £10 box providing enough veg for 2 to 3 people for a week. There are currently nearly the same number signed up for the second distribution on January 29th.

"It's all about getting good food in a way that is affordable for both us and the environment," explains Ben Oubridge, one of HebVeg's organisers. "We want to encourage low energy farming methods and minimise food transport by making it easier to get hold of organic produce that can be grown on our doorstep. Local and seasonal means you won't pay through the nose for high quality."

One of the main challenges for HebVeg are building a market for healthy locally grown vegetables without jeopardising the trade of existing suppliers. This will be achieved by offering Climate Friendly veg rather than Organic and by working with existing local retailers to explore possible areas of co-operation. The aim is to increase the consumption of locally produced low carbon food, not to compete with existing provision.

The other main challenge is to find suitable land for growing and the climate up here on top of the Pennines. It is claimed that the Romans grew grapes in Calderdale so that gives us hope.

To find out more visit: <http://www.hebdenbridgetransitiontown.org.uk/node/1250>