



## **HARROWBARROW AND METHERELL AGRICULTURAL SOCIETY (HAMAS) CASE STUDY Cornwall**

### **History**

HAMAS CSA developed out of various conversations in the local pub with James Tancock, who farms the land around the villages of Harrowbarrow and Metherell and had an extra area of land that wasn't being used. Following an attempt to gauge the level of support at a Gardener's Club meeting, a small steering group of volunteers was created. The project was actively promoted through word-of-mouth, forms left at the local post office for interested parties and a short piece written for the local newsletter. Membership was opened to all inhabitants of Harrowbarrow and Metherell and the local neighbourhood, and members of the community signed up through a preliminary open meeting held in the village hall.

### **Getting Started**

Costs were met through subscriptions from members, which covered most resources including seeds, plugs, electric fencing, James' labour, sprays, contract potato planting and plant protection, with a small grant from the Council for enviromesh. All other expenses - including a caravan - were covered via donation, freecycle or farm sales. Start-up costs were low, a factor attributed to the relaxed relationship between James and the group, as well as proficient members providing various services, such as soil testing.

After seeking advice from the Soil Association, Tamar Grow Local and other Community Associations, HAMAS CSA was formed as a Community Association with the constitution agreed by members, which was viewed as the easiest to set up and administer.

### **Membership and governance**

Created with the aim of promoting the achievement of localised food and farming systems, the project now has 65 members - 45 labourers and 20 non-labourers, a Steering Group consisting of 11 knowledgeable volunteers, and has the use of five acres through an informal arrangement with James. The core group consists of two Officers, Co-ordinator and Treasurer, whose role it is - amongst other responsibilities - to supervise and manage records of membership, meetings and decisions, determine planting plans, organise labour requirements, maintain accounts and ensure proper use of the Society's assets and finances. Members can also feed into general decision-making through members meetings, two of which are held each year, usually in the field.

### **Production**

HAMAS produces around 40 different varieties of vegetables. Most horticultural work is covered on a voluntary basis by members who are labourers, apart from potato planting, which is covered by Adrian (the potato farmer) and the heavy work which is done by James with machinery. Nothing is bought in; instead questionnaires are completed by members at the beginning of the season regarding the amount and range of vegetables that meet their requirements. The Steering Group take advice from James' agronomist and from Adrian on the best varieties and volumes, which determines seed and plant orders.

**Membership costs**

Labourers pay £30 per annum per share, non-labourers £40 per annum per share, with shares paid for in January each year. Harvest share is determined by the Co-ordinator who informs members what they are entitled to and what crops are ready for harvest. There is a loose, trust-based arrangement for members collecting their shares; members generally pick their own as and when they want it. HAMAS also offers a veg buddy system for those non-labourers who can't pick their own.

**Community**

From March onwards, HAMAS holds weeding evenings once a week, and encourages fortnightly group-working weekends to plant seeds and plugs. The team plan to hold a harvest festival in September, with members bringing something made out of HAMAS produce and invitations extended to the wider community.

**The future**

The CSA has seen membership levels gain stability and the viability and sustainability of the project getting better each year. Despite the lack of CSA experience, or, as Sara Rock puts it; "we didn't really know what we were doing as nobody else seemed to be doing anything similar locally", a combination of research, making contact with other CSAs, and a team of enthusiastic and knowledgeable people prepared to take risks and give their time has resulted in very positive feedback from both members and the farmer/grower. The scheme helps to bring the community together and is making good use of the available land, which is difficult to farm.

The vegetable production has progressed from year one when only a little produce was grown, to year two, when fresh vegetables were available for nearly seven months of the year (including unlimited amounts of spuds) to year three, which has seen 41 varieties, and the possibility of five-a-day for all.

<http://tech.groups.yahoo.com/group/hamagriculture>