



# Canalside Community Food Case Study

## Introduction

Canalside Community Food is based on Leasowe Farm near Leamington Spa in Warwickshire. Owned by the Ingall family since 1994, it comprises 145 acres. The arable land is fully organic and in its third year of organic production. The grazing land, which is leased out to local sheep farmers, is now in its second year of organic conversion.

Tom Ingall and his wife Caz, moved back to his parents farm 8 years ago and took on a partnership role in the running of the farm. They had previously trained in anthropology and worked in Tanzania for 9 months. So returning home with no money, they came to live at the farm. They were very keen to be involved in more practical things and so Tom completed an MSc in human ecology in which he did a module on plant based nutrition and protein based food.

Following talks with Judy Steele, who was involved in the local Environmental Action Group 21, and Gareth Davies from Garden Organic, who'd both been keen for a number of years, to establish a CSA, Tom and Caz joined them to take on the challenge. Canalside CSA held their first public meeting to which 80 people came and in their first season, 60 signed up for shares. Tom negotiated the lease of 7 acres of land on the farm and with the help of 2 other part time growers, put it over to vegetable production, and expanded to fruit production in 2009. They borrowed £10,000 through an interest free loan, from a community member, in order to fund the set up of the CSA and are paying it back over a five year period.

Three years on, they now produce for 125 shares, 6 of which are work-shares.

## Getting Started

When the CSA first got started, none of the growers had any experience and so taught themselves. In addition, Tom volunteered at Ryton Organic Gardens for a day each week for 4 months to learn from the experts! They then employed a consultant on a very part-time basis from Ryton organic gardens to help them with crop planning, disease control, choosing varieties, planting schedules etc. Buying in this expertise was instrumental in ensuring the CSA got off to a really successful start and has since gone from strength to strength.

**Seedlings:** At the beginning, the CSA arranged to produce their seedlings at Ryton Gardens where there was spare capacity in the greenhouses. This meant they didn't have to buy in transplants which of course would have been an additional expense. With 5 polytunnels, they are now developing the capacity to grow their own seeds.

**Organic certification:** All of the land used by the CSA is certified organic with the Soil Association. Tom is clear that being certified gives them a real advantage, ensures good record keeping and enables them to sell any produce from the farm with an organic premium to local shops.

**Machinery:** The CSA is fortunate in having access to the farm machinery including 2 tractors and a harrowing machine for which they pay an annual rental fee. Most of the mechanical work is done with a small two-wheel drive Massey Ferguson and the CSA has gradually bought small-scale kit such as a steerage hoe and rotovator to run with this.

**Crop varieties:** Four years on, as their knowledge and expertise has grown, so has the range of crops they are producing on a field scale and in the polytunnels, thereby ensuring sufficient quantities and varieties to supply their members throughout the year.

**Soil fertility:** In addition to regular crop rotations as stipulated by organic certification, they source organic manure to increase soil fertility from a nearby organic livestock farm.

## **Legal structure and governance**

The CSA has been set up as a separate entity to the farm and is a company limited by guarantee.

**Steering group:** They established a steering group from the beginning in order to make key decisions necessary for the smooth running of the CSA. The steering group is made up of the 3 growers, 2 founding members, and some other committed members. They now feel they have a good balance of people who bring a range of skills to the project including, organic growing research, business experience, accounting knowledge, and experience in running a food coop etc.

**Administration:** The CSA now employs 2 part-time administrators, one deals with the project finances and growers' pay, the other covers day to day members' stuff & on-line enquiries, and also produces a quarterly newsletter. The CSA receives a large number of enquiries from others wanting to set one up and as it is part of their mission statement to support the growth of the CSA network, they are happy to provide information. They also run a number of open days for visiting groups throughout the year.

## **Work-shares**

Work-share members have to work 4 hours for a large share and 3 hours for a small share. Some members have had a work-share for a number of years now and so have developed real horticultural knowledge giving them the ability to take on the role of leading the volunteer working groups.

## **The vegetable shares**

The CSA aims to produce vegetable shares for 52 weeks a year. They grow all their own field scale vegetables including all the potatoes carrots and onions, and also have protected cropping in their six polytunnels which enables them to extend the season. Having access to barns on the farm gives them storage capacity for the root crops.

Whatever is harvested throughout the year will be shared out according to whether members have subscribed to a large, small or mini share. The large size is roughly enough for a small family, small for a couple and a mini for individuals. Both share sizes will receive the same produce, but in varying quantities. This obviously means the summer share will be larger and more diverse than the share in the spring due to the seasonal variances in abundance but the value of the veg is calculated to balance out over the year.

**Collecting the produce:** There are two periods during the week when members can go to the farm to collect their produce. The vegetables are all freshly picked and put in crates in the yurt on site. Members then weigh out the amount specified for their share size. By restricting the pick up times, they can ensure that the produce remains fresh. For an additional monthly fee of £2.20 to cover packing and delivery, veg shares can also be collected from a community centre in the nearby town.

## Price of the shares

The price below is for collecting your share from the farm:

Size of Share	Price (per month)	Works out as £ per week
Large	£58.50	£13.50
Small	£39.00	£9.00
Mini	£26.00	£6.00

## What's in a share

Example 1 - Large share, August		Example 2 - Small Share, October	
2kg	New potatoes	1.5kg	Potatoes
1kg	Carrots	650g	Carrots
750g	Onions	500g	Onions
1.5kg	Sweetcorn	1 small	Cabbage
600g	Courgette	1 bag	Spinach
1 bulb	Garlic	1 bulb	Garlic
300g	French beans	1 small head	Romanesco
2	Lettuces	1 small	Pumpkin
1	Cucumber	300g	Tomatoes
750g	Tomatoes	1 mixed bag	Salad*
1	Aubergine	30g	Coriander
50g	Chillies	20g	Basil
30g	Basil		
(50g	Parsley		
50g	Coriander)		

Example 3 - Large share, December		Example 4 - Small share, February	
2kg	Potatoes	1.5kg	Potatoes
1.2kg	Carrots	650g	Carrots
600g	Onions	400g	Onions
4-5 medium	Leeks	1 small	Cabbage
1	Celariac	1 small	Swede
600g	Parsnips	250g	Purple sprouting
1 stem	Brussel sprouts	1 mixed	broccoli
1 bulb	Garlic	bag	Salad*
1 mixed bag	Salad*		

Example 5 - Large Share, April <b>HUNGRY GAP!</b>		Example 6 - Small share, June	
Large bunch	Radishes	1kg	New potatoes
400g	Purple sprouting broccoli	150g	Chard
2	Spring cabbages	Small bunch	Spring onions
4-5	Leeks	250g	Broad beans
Large bunch	Spring onions	1	Lettuce
1 mixed bag	Salad*	750g	French beans
1	Cauliflower	1 mixed bag	Salad*
		Small bunch	Radishes

Salad bags to include: Lettuce, Rocket, Mizuna, Giant Mustard, Green-in-the-Snow, Tatsoi, Purslane, Parsley, Lambs Lettuce Chicory, Corn salad, Cress (as and when each are available and in season)

## **Membership**

Membership of the CSA is £2/£1\* per month (\* *Concession rate for low-income individuals/families, pensioners, or anyone on benefits*). The cost of membership goes towards paying for administration, insurance, and other organisational costs involved in having members of the public on the land and putting on social events. It is also a way for people to show their support for the project and gives the CSA some financial security to be able to plan ahead.

**Payment by standing order:** Members pay monthly by standing order but they hope to move to direct debits in the future in order to have better control over the finances such as price increases because of having to wait months for members to change own their standing orders.

## **Not just a box scheme**

Alongside the monthly share payment, members are also encouraged to contribute a minimum of three 3 hour work shifts throughout the subscription year. The work mainly involves manual work in the vegetable fields, weeding, harvesting etc. If members feel unable to do physical work, other options to get involved are offered, such as helping out at social days, delivering leaflets etc. If members wish to cancel their subscription they are required to give 2 months notice to allow enough time to find another member to take up the share.

## **Communicating with members**

There is regular communication with the members when they come to collect their share from the farm and in addition the quarterly newsletter contains news from the farm, future plans, information about workdays, social events, what vegetables to expect over the coming season and a delicious array of seasonal recipes.

## **Volunteering**

Each week, the farm organises 2 volunteer work days for any members keen to get involved in planting, harvesting, weeding etc. These take place on Wednesday and Saturday mornings. A number of members volunteer on a regular basis; younger families tend to come during the week, but Saturdays attract the most volunteers.

## **Marketing**

A variety of promotion tools are used, such as a leaflet (designed by one of the members), quarterly newsletter, a website and through having a stand at local events. This provides an opportunity not only to promote the concept of CSA and Canalside but also to sell excess produce thereby bringing additional income into the CSA coffers. Members are also able to buy surplus produce, especially the non-veg share members.

## **The Growers**

There is one full-time grower and 2 part time growers working on the farm (working a total of 10 days a week in the 8 summer months and 6 days a week during the winter months. They are currently paid £8.50 an hour (it was originally £7.34), and the CSA hopes to increase this to £10 per hour over time.

The work-shares are important and make a valuable contribution due to their reliability and they add up to 20 hours a week.

The member volunteers days are then on top of this and although the CSA totally relies on their help, especially at certain times like weeding and big harvests of onions and spuds, it's a bonus when there are big turn outs of volunteers.

There is also a budget of about £1,750 for additional seasonal labour when jobs urgently need doing.

### **Developing local links**

They have developed good links with local shops to which they sell their surplus. In return they're able to advertise the CSA through the shops.

The CSA used to sell locally produced organic meat and eggs to their members from a nearby organically certified farm as the decision was made by the growers not to produce livestock, but this has recently been stopped due to the logistics of organising it.

### **Development on the farm**

Leasowe Farm is developing a number of additional exciting projects on the land such as the planting of a nut orchard on 5 acres; varieties include hazels, sweet chestnuts, walnuts, and heartnuts (a Japanese walnut), which they'll be able to start cropping in a few years time. In addition they are growing shiitake mushrooms on logs in the woodland for sale to CSA members and local outlets. They are also planting a number of new hedges around the farm; starting to manage the mature woodland; and establishing a footpath around the farm that will serve as a farm walk in the future.

A fruit CSA was planted on the farm last winter with a variety of top and soft fruit using permaculture principles.

Ideas from enthusiastic members are always mixed into the pot for future projects, but Canalside has learned that it's important, when considering decisions, to return to their core values and aims to ensure the focus remains on food production for local people.

**[www.canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk](http://www.canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk)**