Exeter Community Agriculture, Devon

Getting started

In the summer of 2007 a group of people from Exeter met together, inspired by Emma, a local artisan baker who had the vision of creating a social enterprise that would support local producers and make local food more widely available. Two of the group were local organic farmers. After several months of working together, a project developed – Love Local Food - that is now successfully operating a mobile shop selling local produce around Exeter and developing educational activities centered on food with local communities.

In January 2008, 3 of us from the group started exploring the idea of setting up a CSA. One of the farmers in the group, also keen on CSA came forward and offered to rent out four acres of land within a 24-acre pasture.

By March 2008 we had grown to six and over the months that followed we worked on how to go about setting up a CSA, and how much we needed to work out before going public. We were lucky to be able take part in a day workshop in Truro on CSAs and two of us also visited Stroud Community Agriculture.

September 16, 2008 was our launch date – an evening meeting with Jade Bashford and Amanda Daniel from the Soil Association's CSA team. To our surprise and pleasure over 80 people turned up to hear about the opportunities and benefits offered by CSAs and talk about what everyone attending would like from a CSA. By the end of the meeting all kinds of ideas had been discussed in small groups. Before leaving everyone wrote down their contact details and skills which they could offer. A follow-up meeting was set for two weeks later, October 2, with a visit to the site.

Several people came forward to help organise the next meeting. After meeting up at the village hall, we all walked with the farmer to take a look at the field he was offering as a site for the CSA. After returning to the hall, we discussed what the principles of the project should be – with the guidance of a trained facilitator from the group.

Wanting to keep up the momentum, our next meeting was October 28. By this point we had a message board running and had set up working groups: a Business Group, a Communications Group and Action Plan group – each with their own brief. The Business Group was briefed to look into the types of legal structure we could adopt – necessary to take the project forward. The Action Plan group carried out a site survey to try and establish the best site and the Communications group

worked on designing a skills survey, consolidating the principles put forward in the group and decision-making processes.

In November a core group made of people from each of the working groups was informally adopted. They have continued to research and discuss possible legal structures, fine tuning the principles and objectives and organising a whole group meeting led by Dawn , Social Enterprise Worker of the Rural Community Council for Devon.

This meeting in January brought 23 people together to work through a series of questions in order to work out the best legal structure for the project. It was a very useful and bonding exercise – though it didn't lead automatically to a legal structure! The group delegated the Business Group to follow up the process and make recommendations about the most appropriate structure. In early February the decision was taken to become an IPS co-operative (Industrial and Provident Society) called Exeter Community Agriculture.

We now have a firmer time-line, for setting up a lease, creating a membership structure, and all the practical tasks needed on site eg. fencing and a shed. We're aiming to have our first crops ready in Summer 2009.

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2 February 2009