

November 11<sup>th</sup>, 2016

To whom it may concern

I am writing in support of the Ecological Land Co-operative's application to develop three agricultural residential small holdings for new entrants to small-scale ecological food production in Arlington, East Sussex.

I work at the Centre for Agroecology, Water and Resilience, which specialises in research on resilient agriculture, food and water systems. For almost twenty years, as part of my research on sustainable food systems, I have followed the development of local and regional food chains in the UK and Europe. Since the first farmers' market was established in Bath in 1997, the demand for local food has been growing, even during periods of economic volatility. Consumers like to buy local because they trust the foods' origins, they want to support local producers producing high quality food, and many hope their choice will be more environmentally friendly.

There are many good reasons to support the local food sector. The Campaign to Protect Rural England's (2012) report estimated that it sustained about 61,000 jobs. The sector can also deliver valuable social impacts, such as improved community relationships, and better access to fresh healthy food. Yet the sector faces barriers to growth, which include the limited supply of locally grown food, especially that produced to high environmental standards, by small-scale farmers who can sell direct to consumers. The number of small-scale farmers has fallen dramatically over the years, and yet it is increasingly recognised that they are a vital part of the diverse agriculture sector that we need, a point which has been reinforced recently, again by the CPRE (2016). One reason for the decline of small farmers is the difficulties faced by new entrants to farming who are often excluded by the high cost of agricultural land, but would benefit from access to small units from which to develop their businesses.

The ambition of the ELC to support farmers using agroecological methods to produce food is of central importance for environmental reasons. Sustainable and regenerative farming practices are urgently needed to restore soil quality and biodiversity. The UK has sustained some of the worst biodiversity losses in the developed world. The recent (2016) 'State of Nature' report showed that of 3,148 species in the UK, 60% have declined in the last 50 years and industrial agriculture is one of the key contributors to this loss. The same report argued that it is possible to reverse this trend if all parts of society act together to save nature.

Throughout the world, agroecological methods have been proven to have a regenerative effect on soil and biodiversity. From an environmental point of view, therefore, it is vitally important to support agroecological approaches that can help us to regenerate our natural resources. The soil strategy for England (2009, p.5) confirmed that "*Farmers and other land managers, developers, planners and construction companies must all play their part in managing soils sustainably and protecting soil functions*".

From a research point of view, the activities of the ELC are of high importance, due to the rigorous and regular monitoring that they are committed to undertaking and making public. Examples of such careful monitoring are rare and extremely valuable because they enable us to establish baseline indicators from the start of the interventions, and then to monitor change over time. The ELC monitoring report from their site at Greenham Reach is an extremely useful resource, and the fact that it is publicly available means it can be shared widely and used to improve knowledge and understanding of how agroecological food and farming systems can contribute to the UK's future food resilience.

In summary, therefore, I hope this application will be supported and wish ELC every success.

Yours sincerely



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