

PRESS RELEASE

The Ecological Land Cooperative has launched a campaign to ask landowners for donations of small parcels of land to create clusters of affordable smallholdings for new entrants to ecological agriculture.

An organisation dedicated to helping new entrants into farming, the Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC) develops affordable, low impact, smallholdings protected for ecological agriculture in perpetuity.

And they need land to do this.

Addressing the Crisis for New Entrants to Farming

There is no dispute that there is a crisis for new entrants to farming where the cost and availability of land are one of the biggest barriers a new farmer faces when they are seeking to build a farm business.

This shortage of supply of farms is reflected in the age of current farmers: in DEFRA's most recent *Agriculture in the UK*, just 13% of farmers are under the age of 45, and just 38% are under the age of 55. Further, the number of farmers under the age of 45 has fallen each year during this last decade from 18% in 2003. The average age of today's farmer is 59 (citations available).

The first ELC site, 22 acres at Greenham Reach in Mid-Devon, was purchased in 2009, and now has three thriving mixed smallholdings. The ELC has gone on to purchase two further sites raising funds through community investment, friendly loan providers and grants.

The ELC has big ambitions and is ready to take on more land to create more smallholdings. Yet the biggest challenge the cooperative faces is accessing land. To help solve this the ELC is asking existing landowners to consider donating some of their land to be protected for ecological agriculture in perpetuity.

Why Ecological Agriculture?

At this year's Oxford Real Farming Conference Michael Gove, Secretary-of-State for Defra, spoke of Brexit and the inevitable changes it will bring to UK agriculture:

"The heart of farming is always going to be about food production. But ultimately, public money should go towards people who are working hard in order to ensure that our environment isn't harmed. If we are going to have £3bn spent, then that £3bn should be an investment for the future, rather than an incentive to carry on just as people have been doing ever since the Second World War – farming in an intensive way."

The ELC supports people that would otherwise struggle to access land - in part due to "the current subsidy system [which] bids up the price of agricultural land" and the fact that people "use agricultural land for tax purposes" as Michael Gove conceded at the conference. The new farmers that the ELC supports produce food in a way that benefits the environment - it is possible to achieve both with agro-ecological farming methods.

We desperately need more ecological farmers to produce food in a way that improves biodiversity, protects wildlife, does not pollute our water nor degrade our soil, and provides good, affordable, healthy food to local communities thus invigorating local economies.

The ELC aims to help new entrants to farming to overcome the hurdles of high land costs and inflated house prices, and get their farm businesses up and running. By providing affordable and secure smallholdings the ELC is addressing the crisis in rural employment, seeking to bring young people and fresh ideas into farming. Land is worth more than its monetary value and the ELC believes the natural world is a wellspring of good food, biodiversity and ecosystem services which farming, when carried out with care for the natural environment, can rely upon.

The ELC is looking for donations of land of any quality to continue their work to improve land and create smallholdings which will be protected for ecological agriculture in perpetuity. The criteria for the land is:

- Size: 20 acres or more (or near to one of our existing sites)
- Has good vehicle access
- Aspect is South/East/West facing
- Altitude is below 200 metres.

The Ecological Land Cooperative is supported by the Ecological Land Trust which is a registered charity no. 1158032. Donations of land and money made to the Trust may be eligible to be offset against tax.

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EDITORS' NOTES

Contact: Lauren Simpson on 01994 448 275 / 07885588626 | communications@ecologicalland.coop

Interviews are available with Oli Rodker, Executive Director & Site Developer and Sonia Sinanan, Operations Manager.

Photos are available on request.

THE ECOLOGICAL LAND COOPERATIVE

The Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC) is a community benefit society, co-operative in structure, established to address the lack of affordable sites for ecological land-based livelihoods in England and Wales. The Ecological Land Cooperative is supported by the Ecological Land Trust which is a registered charity no. 1158032.

They work to address a range of complex and deep-rooted social and environmental challenges in a simple and pragmatic way: by removing barriers to land access for sustainable uses.

Set up in 2009, the ELC's core business model is the acquisition of land, securing planning permission and installation of infrastructure for clusters of three or more affordable residential smallholdings. Smallholders are provided with permission to build their own sustainable home with off-grid utilities and road access.

Their first project, Greenham Reach, in mid-Devon, was granted planning permission in 2013. The 22 acre site is now home to three smallholdings operating as independent businesses but working co-operatively to manage the whole site, Greenham Reach, is a living example of ecologically managed land used sustainably for land based livelihoods with the environment in mind.

The ELC has since purchased two further sites, one in Arlington, East Sussex and one on the Gower Peninsular, Wales both of 18 acres.

For more info about ELC please visit: <http://ecologicalland.coop>