For a living, working countryside



Ecological Land Cooperative

A living, working countryside that's accessible to all

The Ecological Land Cooperative develops affordable, low impact, smallholdings for ecological agriculture. The high costs of land and rural housing make it nearly impossible for new entrants to farming to establish a farm business. By providing affordable and secure smallholdings, we are helping to address this crisis.

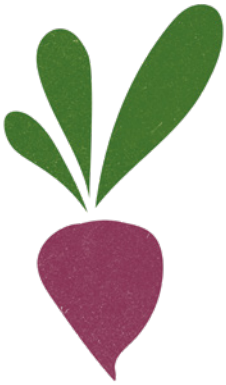
Determined to turn good ideas into reality, to have a positive influence and to give hope to those choosing to live sustainably, we have designed a model for creating affordable, ecological smallholdings. Having successfully developed our first cluster of farms in Mid Devon, we have begun work on our second site in East Sussex and purchased our third site on the Gower.

We show that small-scale ecological farming CAN work in today's economy. Sustainably managed smallholdings provide low-impact livelihoods, regenerate land and produce good, healthy food for local communities, increasing sustainability and resilience, and improving ecology and biodiversity for future generations.

By supporting new entrants into ecological agriculture we help revitalise rural communities. We want to see a living, working countryside where land is valued as a way to enhance the good of communities and the natural world.

"We support models of land use that make land work for people and the environment. Unfortunately we repeatedly see new entrants to farming struggle to secure access to land, planning permission, or start-up finance. The Ecological Land Cooperative have an excellent strategy for helping new entrants overcome all of these. Their model will get more land into productive, ecological management."

Kate Swade, Director, Shared Assets





Our work

Sustainable rural livelihoods – such as small-scale ecological food production – protect the environment and reduce greenhouse gas emissions by reducing fossil fuel use. Such businesses help build a vibrant, living countryside in which people flourish alongside our cherished landscapes and natural biodiversity, and have an important role to play in ensuring food and energy security. They also provide employment, access to local food and crafts, and educational opportunities for urban visitors, helping to maintain rural skills and to improve ecological literacy. Our mission is to increase access to affordable land for such livelihoods.

Our solution and core business is the creation of small clusters of three or more affordable residential smallholdings. As well as land, we provide smallholders with permission to build their own sustainable home, and with off-grid utilities and road access. Our model allows us to keep costs low, both through buying larger sites at a lower price per acre, and through distributing the cost of infrastructure, planning applications and subsequent site monitoring across a number of smallholdings. The model allows the smallholders to work and learn together and to provide mutual support. Our cooperative retains the freehold on each smallholding in order to protect it for affordable agricultural and ecological use in perpetuity.

Beyond this, our vision is one where land is valued and used as a means to enhance our collective good. At present land in the UK is the target of financial speculation; in contrast, our model champions a collective, ecological and cooperative vision of land ownership and land use.



"The Ecological Land Cooperative is a small organisation with big ambitions, and for that I applaud it."

Investor

Wider benefits

Our work is centred on the development of ecological smallholdings, but the impacts of our work are wider than this.

The creation of ecological holdings also:

- Demonstrates a model of collective ownership that can protect and enhance the land, based not only on ideas of conservation, but on producing a living and working countryside;
- Contributes to, and strengthens the growing community of individuals and organisations committed to fostering the skills, knowledge and solidarity to allow the land to sustain us as we head into unpredictable times;
- Provides evidence through our site monitoring research that helps strengthen campaigns for land reform;
- Seeks to improve planning policy by providing evidence and examples that low-impact ecological land use has multiple benefits and should be embraced and legislated for.

The context

Farming is inaccessible to new entrants. Even though the numbers of young people studying agriculture is growing, the average age of a British farmer is 59 and rising. Some of the factors causing this are:

High land costs: the price of agricultural land is currently at record levels with an average of £9,000 per acre. Instability in the financial system, plus the subsidy regime, has led to an increase in land bought as an investment. In the period 2000-2010 new farm entrants accounted for just 4% of agricultural land purchasers.

High costs of rural housing: the average house price in rural areas has more than doubled over the past decade to over £250,000, while the average salary is £21,000.

Land ownership: farms have been getting fewer and larger. Meanwhile, the number of County Farms has declined as Councils sell them off.

Farms are no longer affordable: most farmers cannot generate the income required to service a mortgage for the average farm from farming alone. The ratio of farm purchase price to average agricultural income is in excess of twenty to one on average. The result is a substantial body of people who wish to farm an ecological smallholding but cannot afford to do so. We want to change this.



Our model – creating ecological smallholdings

Our cooperative purchases agricultural land with a view to subdividing it into a number of ecologically managed residential smallholdings. Drawing on the advice of organic horticulturalists and farmers, ecologists, soil experts, transport advisors, planners, prospective customers, the local community, and those with local knowledge, we then establish a new smallholding cluster with a binding ecological management plan.

Once planning permission is granted, our cooperative sells (150 year lease) or rents the smallholdings to new entrants to ecological agriculture at an affordable rate and monitors the holdings' performance against the detailed whole-site ecological management plan.

At our first site, Greenham Reach, in addition to their holding of between five and nine acres of land, the three smallholder families received the following support:

- Permission to build a low-impact dwelling
- A shared timber frame barn
- Road access and internal stone track
- On-site renewable electricity generation
- Water via rainwater harvesting and borehole
- One year's business mentoring from a sector expert

"As a society we face numerous immediate and longer term challenges with regards to food security, energy and climate change. A genuinely sustainable response relies on more small farmers in low impact developments, providing good food, experimental data, and contributing to rural regeneration. The Ecological Land Cooperative does just that — putting in place today the foundations for the food production of tomorrow"

Caroline Lucas MP, Green Party



Our land

Greenham Reach

Our first project is a cluster of three smallholdings in the parish of Holcombe Rogus, Mid Devon.

A five year temporary planning permission was granted on 18th April 2013. The permission allows use of the 22 acre greenfield site for three farm businesses.

- Steepholding runs a community supported agriculture scheme selling fruit, vegetables, eggs and meat to local households alongside their business selling grafted fruit trees at markets and online. More info at **www.steepholding.co.uk**
- The business at Wild Geese Acres includes the production of gourmet salad bags, culinary herbs, cut flowers, vegetables, lamb, pork, wool and sheepskins. All sold locally to pubs, shops, cafes, restaurants and food fairs. More info at **www.wildgeeseacres.wordpress.com**
- Elder Farm grows medicinal herbs that are processed on site into medicines and foods and sold locally and online. Elder Farm also grows wholesale herbs for companies like LUSH and The Organic Herb Trading Company. More info at **www.elderfarm.co.uk**

By April 2018 we will have applied for permanent permission.

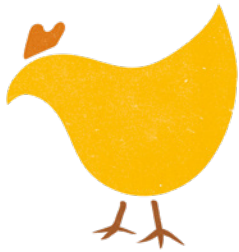
Arlington

Our second site is an 18.5 acre field on the southern edge of the East Sussex village of Arlington. Previously rented for maize production, we are proposing that the field be used for three ecological horticultural or mixed holdings. The site is well positioned for demand, with three local weekly farmers' markets and a host of local tourist businesses to supply into.

Having planted and topped a green manure crop, sheep are now grazing the fields and contributing to the improvement of the soil, while we wait for planning permission to develop the site.

Gower

Our third site is an 18 acre field on the Gower Peninsular which was purchased in December 2017. Our planning application is in process whilst the land is managed by a local community supported agriculture scheme producing vegetables for 100 households.




Pies & Pasties
Fresh produce grown
Swiss chard £2.40
Spinach £2
Strawberries £2.50
Onions 66 each
Fresh Garlic!
Cucumber £1.20
Sweet peas £1









Co-operation not competition

The Ecological Land Cooperative is a membership organisation: on joining, members become part of the group of people who collectively own the cooperative and decide how it should be run.

- We are a Community Benefit Society registered with the FCA.
- Our Board of directors is elected by the membership at the AGM.
- We currently have 300 members: 273 investors, 19 stewards and 8 workers.

Ours is a multi-stakeholder cooperative. We have three types of membership each of which share a proportion of voting rights:

1. Investor Members have invested money in the cooperative, share 25% of voting rights and receive returns on their investment.
2. Worker Members are those people that work for the cooperative. Like investor members, they also share 25% of voting rights. Worker Members are employees and volunteers that work at least 15 days each year.
3. Steward Members are ecological land managers and share the remaining 50% of voting rights. Voting rights are awarded primarily to Steward Members as they are the principal beneficiaries but often do not have the time to run both their smallholding and serve on the Board of Directors. This category of membership was designed principally for the cooperative's smallholders but can be applied for by practicing ecological land users who farm on their own smallholdings.

We would greatly value steward membership applications from people managing large and small areas of land ecologically (membership is just a nominal £1); we also welcome applications from supporters living locally to our sites, with a minimum investment of £50, or from supporters further afield with minimum investment of £150.

To find out more and to join our cooperative:

T **01273 766 672**
E **info@ecologicalland.coop**
W **ecologicalland.coop**



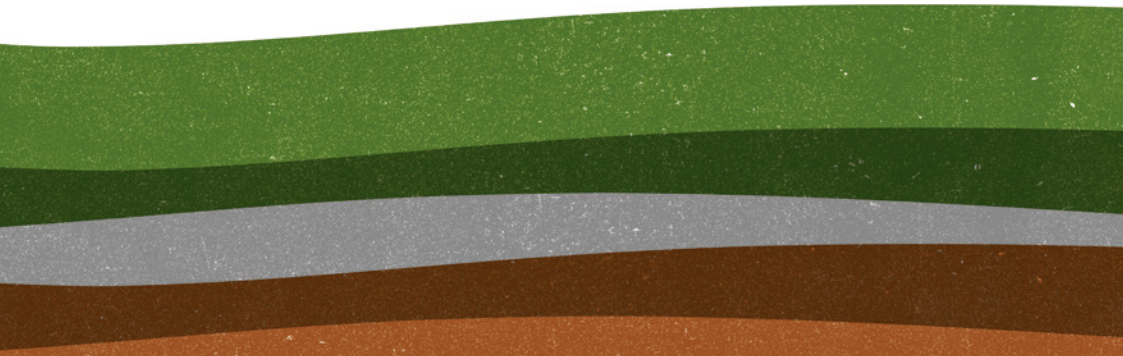
Ecological Land Cooperative is the trading name of Ecological Land Limited, registered with the FCA under the Cooperative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014, Reg. No 30770R. Unit 204, Brighton Eco Centre, 39-41 Surrey Street, Brighton, BN1 3PB

Donate land for ecological smallholdings

We are looking for donations of land which we will protect for ecological agriculture in perpetuity.

Do you have land that;
- is 20 acres or more, or near to one of our existing sites
- has good vehicle access
- a south/east/west facing
- is below 200m altitude

If you have land to donate or know of land for sale or rent then please get in touch.



To find out more please contact us:
T **01273 766 672**
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W **ecologicalland.coop**