Ecological Land Cooperative

For a living, working countryside



Social Impact Report

July 2019 – June 2020

Welcome

This has been a time in which we have seen extraordinary changes in the world and in our day to day lives, and one in which the importance of the Ecological Land Cooperative's mission has been demonstrated as first Brexit and then the Covid 19 pandemic highlighted our over-reliance on global food systems.

It has also been another busy year for the cooperative with new farms being set up, new planning applications submitted and new land purchased, and whilst Covid 19 has had an impact on aspects of what we do, we adapt and continue to pursue our mission to the best of our abilities.

In this report we look at the impact we have made as an organisation in the period from July 2019 - June 2020.

Our reflections on the successes, challenges and disappointments of the last year, show that we have made progress towards our goals in many areas and welcomed a host of new stewards onto our small farms.

As we write the Black Lives Matter movement is at the forefront of our minds and, as we are committed to increasing access to land for all communities, we recognise that there is so much more to do.

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The Objects of ELC

The objects of the society, as described in our rules for co-operative management, are to benefit the community by pursuing this mission: to widen access to land for sustainable land-based uses including but not limited to:

- local food, grown with minimal inputs.
- renewable energy and fossil fuel independence.
- reconnecting people and place though social and cultural activities.
- forestry, fibres and other rural produce
- homemaking and community,

And the general co-operative aims described below:

- To build membership within its stakeholder groups, and ensuring that its membership fully reflects the diversity of those groups and of the wider community.
- To consult with, encouraging participation from and responding to its membership.
- To create a common wealth, building an indivisible reserve and providing a return on investment no more than is necessary to attract and retain the capital it requires.
- To maintain its autonomy and independence and empowering members and other stakeholders at the most local level possible.
- To educate its members and employees and of supporting education in the wider community and promote co-operation.
- To support the development and growth of the cooperative movement.
- To evaluate its impact on the community and the environment in which it operates, and develop policies that reduce harmful impacts and increase positive impacts.



How we measure our impact

Based on a piece of analysis for the 2017-18 social impact report of our vision, mission, aims and objects as described in our co-operative rules, we consider our impact as an organisation under three broad headings.

Food sovereignty and democracy

1. Widening access to land for affordable, sustainable use.
2. Producing food, forestry, fibres and other rural produce with minimal inputs.
3. Working with producers to rebuild local supply chains.

Social impact and community resilience

1. Supporting the development of resilient communities (inc. reconnecting people and place though social and cultural activities).
2. Supporting the sharing of knowledge and training (inc. ecological literacy/nature connection).
3. Building links with and between ecological/educational/agricultural organisations, communities, and projects.
4. Providing employment.
5. Building membership and member participation.

Ecological impact

1. Working towards renewable energy and fossil fuel independence.
2. Maintaining and enhancing habitats, species diversity, landscape quality.



Orchard Park in Cornwall, our fifth site purchased in February 2020

Widening access to land for affordable, sustainable use

Land purchase

Buying land can be complicated and so we were thrilled to finally complete the purchase in February 2020 of a new site in Netherton, Cornwall, after a lengthy period of negotiations. Orchard Park is a 20.4 acre site previously owned by an ELC supporter, comprising two fields near the eastern edge of Bodmin Moor, 25 km north west of Plymouth.

ELC has purchased and now manages five sites; Greenham Reach in Mid Devon (purchased in 2011), Martinsfield in Arlington, East Sussex (2016), Furzehill in Gower, South Wales (2017), Sparkford in South Somerset (2018) and Orchard Park, Cornwall. We are actively searching for suitable land for our sixth and seventh sites.

Local community consultation

It is important to our development of new small farm sites that we engage in open conversations with local communities about our plans. We do this with a combination of door-knocking, letter drops, presentations at Parish Council and community meetings.

In July 2019, we hosted a packed community meeting at the Barham Centre in Parkmill, Gower, located less than a mile from our Furzehill site. A lively meeting raised questions about visual impact, traffic and access, protection of the agricultural tie and the viability of small farms, discussed and answered by our team on the spot with follow-up information provided by email and on our website. Our plans for this site go beyond our usual model - they include a Farm Start project in partnership with Cae Tan CSA in addition to two small farms. With our planning application now submitted we are in further communication with the local community through letters and emails informing residents of our planning application and responding to questions and concerns.

Useful feedback from our new land stewards at our Martinsfield site in Arlington has underlined the importance of regular ongoing community consultation. Despite the significant work we put into informing Arlington residents of our plans at two community meetings early in the planning application process, many were still unclear about the nature of the development at the point when the new stewards moved on site.

This will be a particular consideration as we continue our engagement in Cornwall, which began in April with a letter sent to 260 residents in the neighbouring villages of Rilla Mill and Upton Cross and continued with a brief video presentation to Linkinhorne Parish Council in early June and an article in July's issue of Linked In magazine. Because of the Covid 19 lockdown we have been unable to organise a community meeting to meet local residents face to face. We will review this as restrictions are eased.

Our tree planting weekends in February (see page 22) provided good opportunities for us to meet local residents at our Arlington, Furzehill and Sparkford sites.



Furzehill community meeting, July 2019

Land regeneration

We require planning permission from local authorities before aspiring farmers can lease plots but there is nothing to stop us beginning the process of regenerating the land while we're waiting for that to be granted. This is the work to begin restoring soils and biodiversity damaged by industrial farming practices. ELC staff, members and local supporters come together to do these jobs and we try to make each occasion sociable and fun. This year we

focused on tree planting so we invited people to three weekend tree-planting parties in East Sussex, South Wales and Somerset.

New entrant farmers

It's been an excellent year for our steward farmer recruitment process. In the 12 month period between July 2019 and June 2020 we received 182 expressions of interest, conducted 45 initial telephone interviews, received 11 applications, held 9 full interviews, resulting in 7 final stage applicants, 2 of whom we were delighted to sign leases with in November for plots at our Arlington site. Other finalists are due to be taking on plots at Arlington, and at our Furzehill and Sparkford sites once we have achieved planning permission.

At the beginning of May we opened applications for our Orchard Park site. We've seen unprecedented interest in this site in the



Adam and Sinead of Aweside Farm

Measuring Site Progress in 2019-20

Our sites are Greenham Reach (21 acres), Martinsfield (18.5 acres), Furzehill (18 acres), Sparkford (21 acres) and Orchard Park (20.4 acres)

	At 1st June 2018	At 1st June 2019	At 1st June 2020
Acres secured	57.5	78.5	98.9
Consultation complete	39.5	39.5	78.5
Management plan submitted	39.5	39.5	78.5
Planning application validated	39.5	39.5	78.5
Planning application decision	21	39.5	39.5
Planning conditions / appeal completed	21	39.5	39.5
Let to small holders	21	26	39
First accounts / wildlife survey	21	39	57.5
Profitability achieved	21	21	21
Permanent planning permission	0	21	21
Total 'points'	281	383	551.9
Progress for the year (in points)		102	168.9

form of enquiries from potential applicants with solid farming experience. We've received 3 applications to date and are anticipating at least 3 more in the near future.

Springtime is a busy period for expressions of interest from potential applicants, helped by some good publicity generated during the 2020 share offer (including a feature on BBC Radio 4's Farming Today) and the level of contact we've had from potential applicants has increased dramatically since March 2020.

Certainly the process of designing our open application process that we described in last year's report has helped us to lay the groundwork for a "pipeline" of future ELC land stewards for our sites, as our recent survey of people who've expressed an interest over the last year clearly shows. 10% of respondents suggested they would be ready to take on a plot in the next year, 20% in the next 1-2 years, and 30% in the next 3-5 years.



Emily and Chris of Fanfield Farm

Planning Permission

Sparkford
In August 2019 we submitted our application for temporary permission for our Sparkford development to South Somerset LPA. The application has advanced to the point where a decision will be made soon although this has been delayed by effects of the pandemic on Council processes.

Furzehill
Following our Furzehill community meeting in July 2019 we took the carefully considered decision to make a One Planet Development (OPD) application for two small farms at the site. We had a productive pre-application meeting with Swansea LPA early in 2020 and submitted the final application in April. It is the first time that Swansea have dealt with an OPD application and whilst they are being cautious there is also some interest in the opportunity to work with the innovative policy. The application was validated on the 14th May and at the time of writing we are in the public consultation period.

Supporting planners to understand our work
ELC's planning applications for other sites have taken over two years to be granted. Underlying this is an issue of education: ELC's innovative model is new to planners, it doesn't fit a tick-box culture, and the viability of small farms is not always known about. With the appointment of Ruth Munns, ELC's first staff member dedicated specifically to planning, we've stepped up efforts to increase understanding and knowledge in the planning community.

In September 2019 the Royal Town Planning Institute (RTPI) invited us to their South West conference where our presentation on low-impact ecological farm development was well-received by over 100 attendees, most of whom were planning professionals. The importance of our work was particularly underlined by Christopher Balch, RTPI South West chair and Professor of Planning at Plymouth University, who commented that ELC "*provided a thought provoking contribution on the challenges and practical solutions to developing innovative forms of low impact food production in the countryside. Their passion and willingness to share their experience highlighted the potential of new models of sustainable rural development.*"

The day laid the groundwork for further engagement with planners and we are working on written guides and training workshops for planning officers to be held later this year. We'll focus on increasing awareness of the benefits and financial viability of agroecological small farms. We hope this will help often overstretched planners to effectively assess applications for rural workers' dwellings linked to pioneering low impact small farm businesses.

Site infrastructure
This year none of our sites were at the stage where we needed to build barns or install solar arrays, tracks or entrances.

Producing food, forestry, fibres

Our steward farmers create rural produce with minimal inputs and work to rebuild local supply chains.

The need for resilient, adaptable local supply chains has been severely underlined by Covid 19. Our stewards, along with other small farmers in the UK, have been at the cutting edge of a critical process of adaptation, which has seen an increase in the demand for veg boxes at the same time as other markets (e.g. restaurants, street markets) have diminished entirely.

However, this document does not report on the specific adaptations being made by our stewards during this period because at the time of writing that process is ongoing. ELC was able to support stewards during this time with rent holidays and grants to help them cope with the changing situations for their businesses, thanks to the rapid response of one of our funders.

Aweside Farm

Before joining ELC, Sinead Fenton and Adam Smith volunteered for and then managed an allotment based enterprise in London producing speciality greens, edible flowers and cut flowers sold direct to restaurants. The land used had no formal contract however and they dreamed of a long-term rural farming future. They moved onto Martinsfield in November 2019, naming their plot Aweside Farm.

Since then they've experienced four named storms and a pandemic - not an easy start. In spite of this they have planted thousands of trees, constructed their greenhouse and raised beds, sowed seeds and transplanted perennials. Their business plan is focused on growing edible flowers, cut flowers and herbs for sale to restaurants and florists and whilst the lockdown has caused delays they are concentrating on setting up their business this year, investing time in preparation for the re-opening later in the year.



Adam makes a dirt track at Aweside Farm

Cae Tan

At Furzehill we work with a partner, a local growing operation called Cae Tan, who lease 5 acres to expand their food production and avoid buying in winter field crops for their highly successful veg box scheme. Together ELC and Cae Tan are planning for an 'incubator farm' with a residence for apprentices to live and learn the trade of market gardening on ELC's retained land.

As a Community Supported Agriculture scheme (CSA), Cae Tan has a reliable customer base and source of volunteers, and the wider community also benefits. In the past year this has meant 125 households in Gower were supplied with locally grown seasonal veg all year round while the community had access to traineeships and apprenticeships, field trips, outdoor learning for schoolchildren and a welcoming place to volunteer, get fit growing, make new friends or just be in nature.

Cae Tan's first trainee, Lizzie, became their second paid grower in 2017. Two other trainees, Fran and Abbi, have gone on to create their own growing businesses in the local area. Fran is running a salad growing project supplying local businesses and shops, and Abbi is now setting up Gower's second CSA - Big Meadow - under the umbrella of Cae Tan with a view to become its own legal organisation within 2-3 years.

Abbi is unequivocal about the help she's received: *"The support of Cae Tan's growers, directors and networks has been fundamental in enabling me to establish this new CSA. Through involvement with Cae Tan I have*

been able to draw on their expertise in setting up and running a project like this, as well as being able to provide a clear business plan to access funding."

Elder Farm

Helen and Stuart's farm business is dedicated entirely to dried herbs, herbal tinctures and herbal medicines. A huge proportion of herbs used in the UK come from overseas, so farms like theirs are ever more important in addressing the climate and ecological crisis.

The last 12 months has seen them continue to diversify production and develop markets, while perennial herb beds of thyme, hyssop, meadowsweet and others continued to thrive. As well as creating an online shop to sell her herbal products, Helen has also been involved in a wide range of herbal education: running weekly volunteer days, talks for local groups, farm visits, courses, medical herbalist training seminars and a herbalist summer school.

ELC and Elder Farm continue discussions on how to provide dried herb produce at the scale required by bulk buyers, from a low-impact farm with limited power supply, and how to increase the volume of home grown herbs in their own herbal products.

Fanfield Farm

Facing the same weather challenges as Aweside Farm since they moved on in November 2019, Chris and Emily have planted over one thousand trees, made vegetable beds, built a shed (rebuilt after Storm Ciara!), constructed polytunnels and sown seeds. The Huskins' business plan is for their farm to produce organic vegetable boxes on doorstep delivery to 200 households in Arlington and the surrounding area.



Goslings: New arrivals at Fanfield Farm

Fanfield Farm will be a Community Supported Agriculture scheme and before the pandemic they were already welcoming volunteers and visitors to their farm. Local demand for vegetables has risen sharply and Fanfield could significantly increase customer numbers from their original plan. They are also putting in blocks of veg beds specifically to supply fresh vegetables to food banks in Eastbourne and Brighton.

Wild Geese Acres

James and Sukamala's gourmet salad production with sales to local hotels and restaurants continued well over the year, selling up to 15kg a week in season. As a result of the changing marketplace created by the pandemic, they have gone back to selling 100g bags to local retail outlets and various pop-up stalls and stands. Output is about the same but more work is needed to pack these smaller bags.

Their rare-breed Kune Kune pigs continue to graze the pasture although their 15 Shetland sheep have now gone because of a new agroforestry field project they've instigated since 2018. Sheep and young trees don't mix! The field will eventually produce fruit and nuts for local customers. Mower maintenance problems in 2019 caused a greater weed burden but the young trees continue to flourish.

Their flower production - cut flowers and bouquets - has increased to meet demand, while a local shop in Wellington has started taking more vegetables for local sales.

Steepholding

Over the past year Alex and Ruth's community supported agriculture veg box business has continued to grow, providing boxes for 50 weeks a year to over 40 families prior to the pandemic.

From March the pandemic closed some routes to market for their trees but customer demand for their veg box scheme doubled, as it has for similar schemes all over the country.

Last year Steepholding took the decision to greatly reduce their goat herd. For the last few years they had been working to build it up with the hope of supplying goats cheese and milk, however their time has become too stretched and they have chosen to concentrate on growing the successful veg boxes and fruit tree businesses.

They have kept three breeding does in case they get the opportunity to expand again, but for now the goats have been re-homed around the South West.

They retain 30 or so hens for egg supply into the boxes. Work on the processing and packing shed continues.

New Furzehill land stewards

This summer new ELC stewards Trevor and Bettina will begin farming a 1.5 acre portion of their future plot on a short term lease, producing vegetables and flowers. They will live off-site until we get planning permission at which time we will be able to offer them a 150 year lease and the opportunity to live on their small farm.



Trevor and Bettina, new land stewards at Furzehill



Sarah and John, new land stewards at Sparkford

New Sparkford land stewards

In late March we signed a short term farm tenancy with John and Sarah Whittick which has enabled them to plant an apple tree nursery on 2 acres of the 10 acre plot we've offered them. They will take residence once we've been granted planning permission. John and Sarah have been runing a Cider Apple Tree business on rented land which they were asked to vacate in 2019. They sell their high quality 1-5 year old apple trees all over the region for new cider apple orchards and to replace ailing trees in established orchards. They plan a number of other small businesses, including a small livestock operation, on their plot.



First crop of radishes, Fanfield Farm

Supporting the development of resilient communities

We recognise that a shift towards a more ecologically sensitive and regenerative agriculture system requires the development of regenerative culture, in terms of our internal working culture at ELC, the culture of the sector in which we work, and the wider culture of our society.

Sharing knowledge and training

Wild Geese Acres and Vallis Veg host ELC steward applicants

During 2019-20, three couples who applied for plots at our Arlington site spent a week with James and Sukamala at Wild Geese Acres. This visit gave applicants a feel for life on an ELC small farm, and our existing stewards an opportunity to meet potential future stewards and participate in our assessment process.

Chris and Emily, now land stewards at Arlington, also visited Vallis Veg, farm of ELC Director Chris Smaje and his partner Cordelia Rowlatt. Chris said afterwards, *"Seeing a box scheme run so efficiently is fantastic and seeing some of the build projects on here too has been great, giving us lots of exciting ideas."*

Organic Growers Conference

At the first horticultural conference run for The Organic Growers Alliance in October 2019 in Bristol, our communications team Lauren and Phil ran a stall informing attendees about the ELC and our work. There was great interest from many OGA members that are growers without secure land tenancies, or who are currently doing apprenticeships as new entrants and looking to access land for their own enterprises.

Workshops at the 2020 Oxford Real Farming Conference

At The Oxford Real Farming Conference in January 2020 our team were involved in several sessions over the two days. Our main session titled 'We have land to farm - who wants it?' was an opportunity for potential ELC stewards to question the ELC team and learn more about our model and application process. It was at ORFC in 2019 when we first met Sinead and Adam who are now ELC stewards at Aweside Farm at Arlington.

We were also involved in three other sessions "Overcoming Planning Barriers", "Small Farm Finances" and "Access to Finance for Agroecology". The first discussed how small-scale farmers and growers face significant planning barriers when establishing rural businesses, which lead to huge financial and emotional costs. These range from struggles to gain permission for agricultural workers' dwellings to enable them to live on their farm, to having to compete with the elevated prices of farm buildings. This session looked at barriers from a farmer's perspective and some solutions to these challenges, both in terms of practical actions and proposals for policy change.

The second session offered case studies inspired by our research booklet "Small Farm Profits" showing how different business models were able to provide a viable living for farmers and growers.

The Access to Finance session was convened by Triodos Bank, and looked at a wide range of approaches currently being used to finance the transition of land from conventional to ecological farming.

ELC and One Planet Development

Our Planning Manager Ruth Munns joined the team in June 2019, just in time to attend a One Planet Council workshop that helped to inform our decision to make our Furzehill site our first One Planet Development, the first OPD on Gower, and the first that Swansea Council have had to process.

The ELC model is an interesting fit for One Planet Developments because the ecological management plan our stewards agree to abide by contains many similar requirements to those defined by the OPD planning policy. The main difference between OPD and the usual planning route we utilise (known as "rural enterprise" to gain planning permission for an agriculturally-tied rural workers dwelling) is that, unlike our developments in England, an OPD planning permission does not include a five year temporary planning phase.

Steward applications

Our open application process is designed not only to identify future ELC land stewards, but also to provide guidance and support for people in all stages of their journey to become agroecological farmers.

Many who contact us are at a relatively early stage in this journey, without sufficient experience to take on an ELC holding, and so we give them guidance about the possible next steps to take in order to become ready.

In May 2020 we contacted 161 potential applicants who had been in touch with us during the previous year and received 40 responses to our first annual survey. Our question *"Was your engagement with ELC helpful in guiding your future plans?"* received an average score of 7.1 out of 10. This provides a baseline for future surveys, as does data generated about gender, ethnicity, education, geographical location and other factors, including people's reasons for deciding not to make an application, presented below.

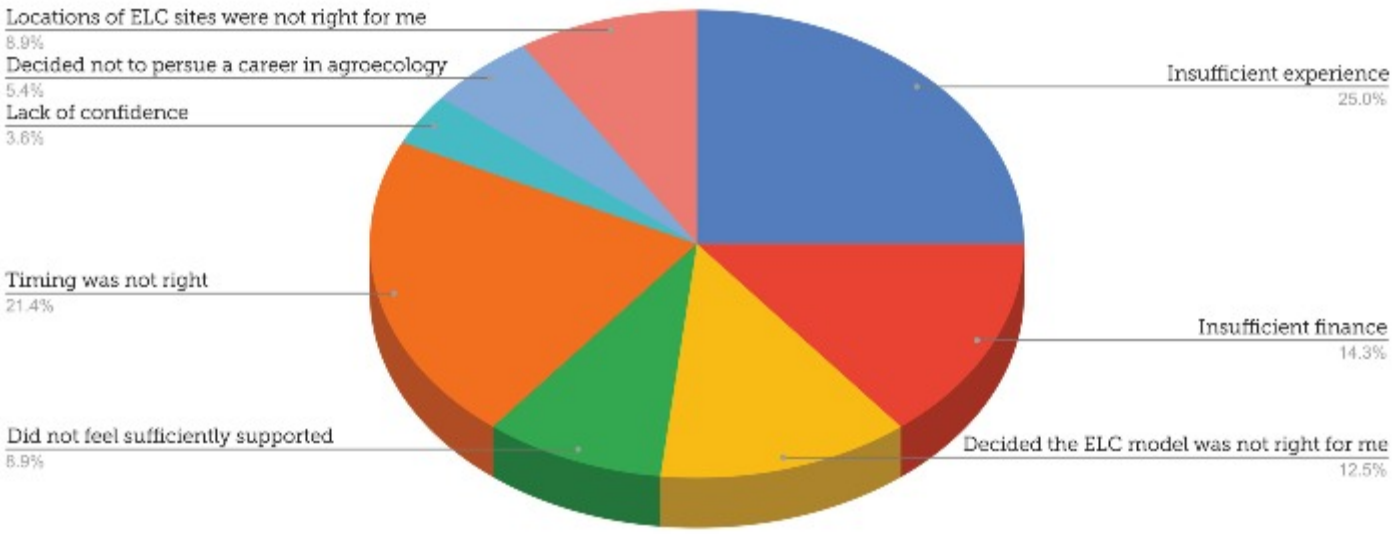
As well as lots of positive feedback on our initial engagement with those who expressed an interest and had a preliminary conversation with us, the survey indicated that we can do better when it comes to managing a smoother, more transparent and clearly defined process for those who go on to make an application and invest time and energy in developing a business plan.

The relatively new experience over the last two years of developing multiple sites and identifying stewards for them has inevitably felt a bit like plate spinning at times, resulting in a few applicants experiencing our contact with them during the assessment phase following their face to face interview as sporadic. We have reviewed the open application process and now have some clearer procedures in place to manage this phase. During this time a fine balance needs to be struck between guiding and supporting these second stage applicants and assessing their ability to operate independently and proactively. We think we are in a good position to resolve this issue in time for the Orchard Park application process. We will continue to monitor this and refine the application process as necessary.

The survey provided a range of positive and constructive feedback on the experience that potential applicants have had of engaging with ELC during the last year, including:

- *"We received some really honest advice that made us think about some practical next steps in our journey"*
- *"Really friendly and supportive, and made us feel like our dream is possible."*
- *"We came into the process thinking we lacked a lot of areas of knowledge as first time farmers, but this was never looked down upon and we got nothing but support from everyone from the very first email exchange."*
- *"Oliver was really helpful when I emailed him and let me know of a potential job opening to build experience"*

Reasons for deciding not to apply



Suggestions from respondents on how to improve our support for potential applicants included:

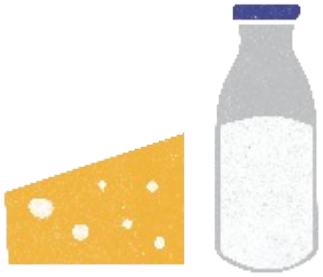
- Clear deadlines/another check-in call before submitting the application/draft business plan.
- A more regularly updated website that clearly indicates the availability or lack of individual sites.
- More clarity at the start on some of the limiting factors about taking on a plot i.e. if the rental/rent to buy option isn't available.
- More workshops and experience days for prospective applicants and a broader/ more comprehensive educational component.
- More exposure/support for people currently in conventional agriculture.

We received a total of 18 applications for 11 plots between May 2019 and June 2020, the first full year in which we've been running our open application process.

This report summarises a small cross section of the survey's results. We're continuing to review the full results in order to improve the process for the next year and beyond.

Steward applications, May 2019 - June 2020

	Arlington	Furzehill	Orchard Park	Sparkford	TOTAL
In first stage			3		3
In second stage	1	1		1	3
Offered lease				1	1
Signed short term lease		1		1	2
Signed full lease	2				2
Not interviewed/ withdrawn	3	1		1	5
Interviewed/ withdrawn	1			1	2
TOTAL	7	3	3	5	18



Reconnecting People with Places

In this year's steward survey we asked our land stewards to report briefly on the social impact they're making.

Steward responses to our first annual steward survey speak directly to the myriad ways in which their farms and their work help to reconnect people with places.

Tom, Cae Tan

"As well as supplying 125 households with weekly veg boxes, in the last year we have worked with 6 schools, a university class, supported two MSc students with their studies, hosted 2 trainees and 20 volunteers. We've also run a variety of social and educational events."

Chris and Emily, Fanfield Farm

"We're already seeing the impact we're having through the support we've received thus far. Thirty families will soon be receiving weekly veg boxes and we've 50-100 others on a waiting list that we wish we could be growing for, and will be next year.

We've had a large number of volunteers and are currently receiving 3-5 emails a week asking when we will be opening up volunteer and open days again."

Helen and Stuart, Elder Farm

"Over the last year Elder Farm saw lots of visits from volunteers and WWOOFers and ran a number of courses and workshops. Many of the herbs we grow and medicines we make are provided to Betonica, a CIC that offers subsidised herbal treatments."

James and Sukamala, Wild Geese Acres

"At Wild geese acres we have had many volunteers over the years from the local community, from WWOOF, and from HelpX. At least 3 of those people have found paid employment in the wider community as a direct consequence of their experience here. Many others have found inspiration and a new direction.

Others have realised first hand that their land based dreams are unrealistic once they see the amount of work involved and the limitations and stresses of off grid living. Generally we have a very positive reaction to our work here and our living situation."

Sinead and Adam, Aweside Farm

'We've had several volunteers from cities who have come to learn more about setting up a regenerative farm and wanting to get out and connect with nature. We are passionate about the free exchange of knowledge and we've worked with the volunteers we've had here and shared what we're doing and why so they can take this back with them.

We're in talks with the charity Feedback about hosting a paid internship (paid by Ecotalent) at the farm. Through the Eastbourne Food Partnership we're partnering with Fanfield Farm and other local producers to create a food hub that ensures a healthy, short supply chain of food reaches Eastbourne. We will be using the Open Food Network to facilitate this."



Social media and ELC in the news

The ELC uses social media to connect with our community. As part of our social impact reporting we record data relating to our "digital reach" as an organisation.

With a new film, growth in all our social media channels, and mainstream media coverage on Radio 4's Farming Today, our digital reach and media coverage has helped us to achieve our aims of attracting new applicants for our farms and new investors and members for the cooperative this year.

The positive social impact of social media is difficult to quantify, and the "echo chamber" effect means that we don't always reach parts of the more mainstream farming community.

Media coverage can be more effective. ELC director, Alex Lawrie's, interview on Radio 4 Farming Today in April resulted in calls and emails from conventional farmers interested in transitioning to regenerative farming methods, and a huge spike in website views.

A second example that demonstrates both the positives and negative aspects of mainstream media coverage was the impact of an article that appeared on the Wales Online website in early June which focused on our development at Furzehill under the headline: *"Wanted: Two people to move to beautiful Gower, grow crops and live in 'hobbit houses'"*.

The article included factually incorrect information which resulted in more than 50 expressions of interest from a wide variety of people, many of whom were attracted by the headline rather than a sincere desire to become agroecological farmers.

Despite their limitations, articles like these do provide opportunities for engagement with a wide variety of different types of people outside of the agroecological sector.

Part of our 2020 share offer communications strategy saw us experiment with working with PR experts to target mainstream media outlets. This did not result in as much mainstream coverage as we had hoped for but was difficult to evaluate because the blanket coverage of the Covid 19 pandemic blocked out other news.

Since the launch of our new film on 14th April it has been viewed on YouTube 1,200 times. It's interesting to compare this to the 4,000 views our previous film has received over the 4 year period since it was launched on Vimeo in 2016.

Social media and website reach, 2016 -20

	June '16	June '17	June '18	June '19	June '20
Facebook	1,843	2,717	3,139	4,027	5,464
Twitter	1,500	1,900	2,320	2,549	2,977
Mailchimp		1,247	1,674	1,896	2,119
Instagram				369	1,856
Website				34,066 *	45,078 *

** Website visitors over the 12 month period covered by this report*

Engaging with, and supporting, the wider cooperative and land justice sectors

Building links between organisations, communities and projects.

The ELC have been working on a variety of initiatives and projects as part of the wider agroecology movement including with The Landworkers' Alliance, Sustain, the Real Farming Trust, CSA Network, Kindling Trust, Tamar Grow Local, OrganicLea, Soil Association, Organic Growers Alliance, WWOOF, Rewilding UK, Shared Assets, Ctrl Shift, and the Biodynamic Land Trust.

We have also been building relationships with Land In Our Names (LION) and the Scottish Farm Land Trust and we hope to run joint projects with both of these organisations in the next year.

Incubator farms across Europe - funding applied for from ERASMUS plus to work together

The ELC is friendly with organisations and networks on the continent of Europe who are, like us, working to help new entrants into farming in their countries, to provide training and to give them access to plots of land for 'incubator farms'. In recent months RENETA, a network of farm starters in France, invited us to be a partner in bidding for EU funding (Erasmus +) for a European network of farm starters. The ELC became a partner in the bid along with organisations in Spain and Belgium and the result will be known in July. With rapid climate change affecting how our lands can produce food comes a vital need for new farmers, and those who support them, to share learning across borders and fortify the international agroecological movement.

Partnering with The Landworkers' Alliance

The Landworkers' Alliance (LWA) is a union of farmers, growers, foresters and land-based workers founded in 2015. Oli Rodker, ELC board member and site development manager, is also on the LWA board.

In 2019, ELC director, Zoe Wangler began working with the LWA on a campaign to integrate agroecology and agroforestry into the work streams of agriculture and land-use planning ministries in England, Wales and Scotland. The campaign has so far influenced the debate on the Agriculture Bill. Government made commitments to the principles of agroecology and MP Kerry McCarthy mentioned the research in her speech defending the importance of a commitment to agroecological farming practices. Along with ELC and LWA have been in discussions with Defra on a programme of support for new entrants to agroecology.

Mentoring Programme Development

The mentoring programme is a two year programme being run by the Landworkers' Alliance, Organic Growers Alliance, ELC and the CSA Network. The first year's programme launched in April with 15 mentees and 7 mentors. The mentees are new entrant farmers who've been farming for less than 5 years, located across England, Scotland and Wales. Mentoring takes place in a combination of group and one-on-one meetings as well as training webinars. At the moment, due to Covid 19, the mentoring is being done online or over the phone but it's hoped that face-to-face meetings will be possible later in the year. Applications for the 2021 programme will be opening in the autumn.

Land In Our Names - LION

LION seeks to uproot and disrupt systemic issues of land as they pertain to black people in Britain. They are a UK black led organisation set up to address land justice as a centre point for issues around food insecurity, health inequalities, environmental injustice and widespread disconnect from nature.

They strive to creatively reimagine a country where black people can feel at home in rural settings, delight in nature as equally to their white peers and be able to live off the land in ways which care for the soil, the surrounding biodiversity and themselves.

ELC has begun talking to LION about a joint project to identify the barriers to access to land for minority communities in the UK so that we can help to remove them and increase everyone's access to and enjoyment of rural spaces.

Articles and reports

Notable reports we've contributed to and articles we've been featured in over the last year.

- **Ruralization project**
  ELC features in the Ruralization project's inventory of innovative access to land practices
- **Small Farms, Big Solutions: Climate crisis prompts investment in future farming**
  In Permaculture Magazine
- **A Question of Ownership**
  Article about Aweside Farm in Riverford blog "WickedLeeks"
- **Small Farms Offer Big Solutions as Global Issues Turn Focus to Home**
  On Resilience.org
- **Why the Rise of the Veg Box Could Save our Planet—and Ourselves**
  In Prospect Magazine
- **ELC has Helped to Return 99 Acres of Land to Eco-farming Practices**
  In Co-op News
- **Small Farms, Big Solutions: The Ecological Land Cooperative Helping New Farmers**
  On the Sustainable Food Trust website
- **Learning Pathways into Sustainable Agriculture: Motivations and Approaches of Young Entrant Farmer**
  On the Cardiff University blog
- **Planning Barriers Faced by New Organic Horticulture Businesses in England**
  A report jointly written by the Landworkers' Alliance and the Ecological Land Cooperative, demonstrating a number of examples where a new entrant to organic horticulture has sought permission from their local authority, either for infrastructure or temporary accommodation.



A volunteer at the Furzehill tree planting in February inspects his handiwork

Providing opportunities for employment

Our team grew over this period, and our strategic plan will see us create a number of new posts before the end of 2020.

Sparkford site manager

Having an experienced site manager living close to a site during its development phase is important for a variety of reasons, including building relationships with neighbours and looking after the land prior to stewards moving on site. In September 2019 we employed Amy Willoughby, co-founder of nearby Plotgate CSA to manage our Sparkford site on a freelance basis. Her management of the site, particularly the tree planting weekend in February 2020, has been extremely valuable, and she feels very much like one of the team. Cae Tan fulfils this function at our Furzehill site and we're hoping to find someone to take on this role at our Orchard Park site in Cornwall in the near future.

Staff Satisfaction Survey

For the second year we asked all staff to let us know how they feel about working for the ELC in a short survey.

The results are presented below and show a small reduction in overall satisfaction in a larger staff team. We will conduct further research with staff to understand these results better.

Results of the Staff Satisfaction Survey

We asked our workers to let us know how they felt about the following statements: the scores show how much they agreed with the statement and are an average of all scores . The maximum score is 5 - strongly agree.

	June '19	June '20
Everyone at the co-op is working toward the same organisational goals.	**4.75**	**4.5**
I see a clear link between my work and the ELC's goals.	**5**	**4.8**
Management is sincerely interested in the needs and welfare of the employees.	**4.75**	**4.5**
When conflicts arise at the co-op, they are effectively resolved.	**4**	**4**
Employees are treated fairly regardless of differences.	**4.5**	**4.4**
I receive good levels of support in my work from co-workers and management.	**4.5**	**4.4**
I am fairly paid for the work I do relative to other local opportunities.	**4.25**	**3.8**
Employee ideas often result in changes at the ELC.	**4.25**	**4**
I am proud to work for the ELC.	**4.75**	**4.75**
Working at the ELC is good for my personal career development.	**3.75**	**3.75**
ELC workers' overall satisfaction score.	**4.48**	**4.29**

Developing the staff team

In May 2020 we began a process of assessing team members' individual job roles and responsibilities to inform our strategic development following a successful share offer. We will be working on this as an organisation over the summer to develop new roles to increase capacity and cover areas of work identified as essential as we move forward with our plans. We continue to develop a collective model of working for the staff team with a flat pay structure. This will be reviewed in the coming year to identify opportunities for staff development and progression within the organisation. Staff turnover remains low with no-one leaving the organisation this year, one new staff member joining the team, and two directors re/joining the board.

Building membership and member participation

Our investor membership has grown significantly during the year thanks to an extremely successful share offer.

Share offer

The spring of 2020 saw us raise £528,000 in new investment to support our plan to develop a further 18 farms by 2023 as well as looking at ways to diversify our activities into new areas of work. It also saw the cooperative's membership grow by 40% thanks to an influx of 187 new investor members.

	2017	2018	2019	2020
Stewards	19	21	24	33
Workers	8	5	7	8
Investors	120	248	257	444









Thank you messages from the ELC team and land stewards shared with our supporters upon hitting our share offer target.

Land steward survey

Our first annual steward survey indicated that our land stewards feel supported by ELC and that their farms are having a positive social impact. The aggregated scores (out of 10) below will provide a benchmark for future surveys.

In addition to stewards' comments about their appreciation of the financial and other support we've provided over the last year, and particularly during the pandemic, they also made the following suggestions about how we might increase our support of them.

- Have a team member assigned to each site to keep regular communication channels open with both land stewards and local people.
- Formal steward representation on/to the ELC board.
- Timelines for action with respect to on-site infrastructure development.

Stewards also provided the following feedback on how we might support them to increase their farm's social impact.

- The Greenham Reach open day, held in October, was thinly attended compared to previous years, attributed to a lack of prior publicity and poor weather. More support from the cooperative for events like open days and tree planting days would help ELC farms have a greater social impact.
- Encourage apprenticeships and opportunities for stewards to teach. The emphasis on farm production (i.e. volume of food grown) is not conducive to this.
- "Help to access funding to support volunteers from marginalised communities and those who may not have the financial capital to afford an ELC lease. We often meet people who are excluded from the organic, food sovereignty movement and we'd like to do our part in changing that."
- "The support you are already giving is fantastic. Through ELC connections we have linked up with a lot of memberships and are part of a trainee mentorship scheme."
- "The support given by your comms department gave us fantastic links to press in the area which helped with marketing, giving us a great reach for getting people involved and telling people what we are doing."

Challenges with member engagement

The wider membership of the cooperative continues to be supportive of our work (13% of existing investors made an additional investment in the recent share offer) but we have yet to develop effective ways to translate this support into more practical engagement.

Steward and member engagement are areas where we know we can do better, and as the team's capacity increases when new team members are recruited, we will be focusing more attention on these important aspects of our work.

Results of the Land Steward Survey

We asked our land stewards to let us know how they felt about the following statements: the scores show how much they agreed with the statement and are an average of all scores . The maximum score is 10 - strongly agree.

	June '20
The ELC has been supportive of me and my farm business and land stewardship over the last 12 months.	**7.33**
The ELC has been supportive of OTHER farm businesses and land stewards over the last 12 months.	**7.83**
My farm has had a positive social impact over the last 12 months.	**8.67**

Working towards renewable energy and fossil fuel independence

A 10 kWh solar system is working well at Martinsfield, ELC's East Sussex site.

At Greenham Reach, wind and solar systems continue to generate power on site, although this is still a limiting factor for the farms. Emissions are relatively low for the Greenham Reach businesses, as far as we can tell with our limited monitoring resources.

There is no slurry to generate nitrous oxide emissions, no cattle producing methane and a low level of vehicle and small scale tractor activity using diesel.

Against this there is 20 acres of photosynthesising and carbon sequestering plant growth, both in grassland and the thousands of new trees. More expert monitoring is needed but early observation of activity shows that the site is slowly sequestering carbon overall.

At Martinsfield the 10KWh solar system that we installed last year is generating plenty of electricity for the two farms there, with sufficient surplus capacity to support a third farm.

The stewards at Greenham continued to store carbon via biosequestration, planting thousands more trees on site this year with help from the Tiverton Tree Team.

Our sites at Martinsfield, Sparkford and Furzehill also saw thousands of new trees put in the ground, including a significant amount planned for coppice (see our report on our tree planting parties below).



Solar panels were installed on the barn at Martinsfield in Autumn 2019, shortly before Aweside and Fanfield Farm took residence.

Maintaining and enhancing habitats, species diversity, landscape quality

Our tree planting parties in February saw us plant over 2,000 trees on three ELC sites.

2020 tree planting parties

Our weekend tree-planting parties on three ELC sites in February are now a precious memory. Braving stormy weather over three weekends in East Sussex, South Somerset and South Wales, ELC staff, stewards and over 60 volunteers planted a total of 2,030 hazel, alder, willow, oak, blackthorn, hawthorn and dogwood. The trees make up new hedgerows, fill gaps in old ones, form shelterbelts for crops and act as boundaries for the farms. This is important work for habitat restoration as hedgerow destruction since the second world war has been a leading cause of farmland plant and animal species declines.

Ecological surveys

In order to judge the impact of our agroecological farms on biodiversity and wildlife restoration, ecological surveys of our land need to be carried out, ideally before, during and after agroecological farming practices come into play. In the past year we raised funds to survey and obtain baseline data from Martinsfield. An ecological surveyor has visited the site this Spring to survey what wild plants are present and over the summer he'll be assessing the birds, insects and soil. In about two years time, once Fanfield, Aweside and the third farm are established, we will survey again to see what the outcomes have been for wildlife and biodiversity.









Future challenges for the ELC - understanding and improving our impact

We have communicated hard this year, talking to potential new investors to raise funds for our work and potential land stewards who might want to apply for one of our small farms. We have surveyed our current stewards and our staff to get feedback about our performance.

However there is always more that we can do to understand who is able to benefit from our work and who is not.

As we go into the next year we want to think about participation and who gets to make use of our rural spaces. A project with the black led Land In Our Names will enable us to have a conversation with minority communities who are often without access to land, with the intention of addressing the issues that cause this exclusion.

We also need to better understand the barriers facing those with disabilities to access the land. Our stewards' work with people with mental ill health has shown the great benefits being out in nature can bring.

We will be looking at different types of small farm developments - on the edge of towns and cities, and woodlands - so that we can serve a greater variety of land workers.

This year we successfully completed the sale of two new farm leases and we have learnt a lot in the process about the support that our new farmers need to make a success of their growing businesses.

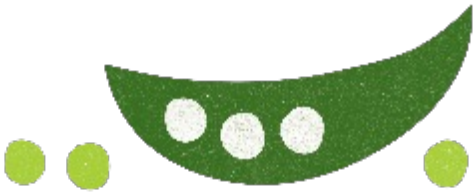
This has been made more difficult this year by the Covid 19 crisis and we will reflect on what we have learnt about how best we can support our new stewards as we go forward with an increasing number of small farms and growing businesses.

Building resilience into our small farm clusters through good steward and community relationships is an area that we need to resource and this has been highlighted by our steward survey.

Creating a successful model for our small farm clusters includes developing strong connections between people so that they can support each other, share resources and overcome difficulties as they arise.

We look forward to the challenges of doubling the amount of small farms that we develop over the next few years and will endeavour to ensure that they are accessible to anyone who has a plan to work with nature for a land based livelihood.

ELC 2020



A heartfelt thank you to funders who have supported ELC in the past year

Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust

Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust

Thirty Percy Foundation

The Reach Fund

Welsh Government Glastir
Small Grants and Pollinators 2019

Patagonia Environmental Grants Fund
A fund of Tides Foundation

Banister Charitable Trust

OVO Energy I Dig Trees
Via TCV

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