

Ecological Land Cooperative

For a living, working countryside

Social Impact Report

June 2021 – June 2022

The Ecological Land Cooperative's Social Impact Report for the period from June 2021 to June 2022



Contents

Page 3 ELC's Mission

Page 4 A Small Farm Future

Page 5 ELC Sites Map

Page 6 Site Progress

Page 7 Small Farm Businesses

Page 8 One Steward's Journey

Page 10 The Applicants' Journey

Page 12 Gift Your Land

Page 13 Jumping Fences

Page 14 Community Farm Land Toolkit

Page 15 Amplifying Voices Within the ELC

Page 16 Site Monitoring : Greenham Reach

Page 18 Site Monitoring : Martinsfield

Page 20 Site Monitoring : Furzehill Green

Page 21 Site Monitoring : Wyvern Fields

Page 22 The Workers' Survey

Page 23 A New Kind of Normal



ELC's Mission

The objects of the society, as described in our rules for the cooperative's management, are to benefit the community by widening 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 cooperative aims described below:

- To build membership within its stakeholder groups, and ensure that its membership fully reflects the diversity of those groups and of the wider community.
- To consult with, encourage participation from and respond 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 empower members and other stakeholders at the most local level possible.
- To educate its members and employees, support 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

We consider our impact 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.



A Small Farm Future

Chris Smaje has been a board member of the Ecological Land Cooperative since 2018. In his book *'A Small Farm Future'* he outlines why small, ecologically managed farms are vital for sustainable communities.



Worldwide, agriculture has increasingly followed a path of producing a small number of crops at low, labour-shedding margins to serve global commodity markets with long supply chains and strong local/regional specialisation. This has many drawbacks, some of which have recently become apparent with food price rises and supply squeezes.

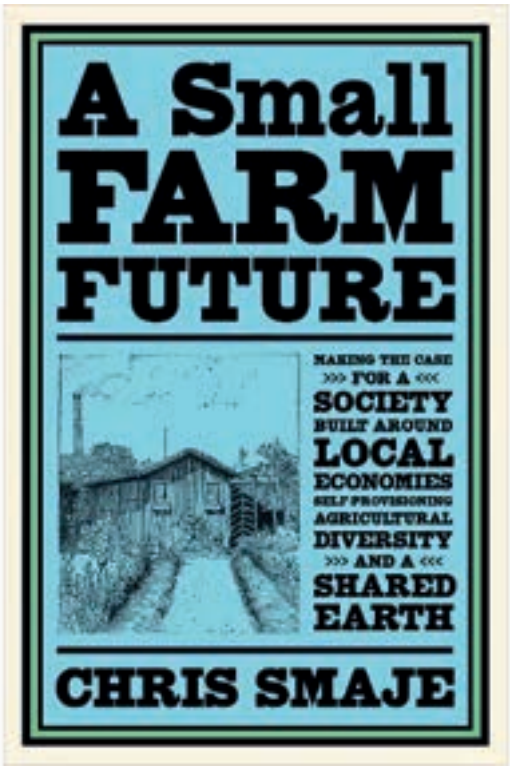
ELC farms pursue a different model, variously called small-scale farming, agrarian localism, agroecology, civic agriculture and so on. Less important than the name is the fact that these farms produce a great diversity of mostly fresh food or fibre for direct consumption in local markets, with a strong emphasis on local and renewable inputs.

In this way our farms help improve resilience to climate change and to the rising prices of unsustainable fossil energy, both of which threaten serious disruption to the present food supply system, and indeed its very viability. By providing more affordable and securely tenured farms, the ELC enables its stewards to grow diverse produce for local markets. This disincentivises the unsustainable use of local ecological assets such as soil, water and woodland, because the consequences are apparent to stewards and the local community, and are visibly counterproductive to local long-term livelihood.

The opportunity to forge long-term relationships between ELC stewards and the local communities they serve creates the possibility of new local food cultures based around interactive 'growers and eaters', rather than antagonistic 'producers and consumers'. And the fact that the freehold land is held by the ELC as a non-profit organisation decommodifies the land, helping to take local farmland out of the long-term speculative asset inflation that prices both new entrant farmers and local communities out of access to land and out of having a say in how their food is produced.

For these reasons, the ELC model is contributing to the wider small farm and agroecological movement in promoting local, regenerative, resilient, decommodifying and community-building models for food systems, farming and community.

Chris Smaje 2022



ELC Sites Map

We have 5 sites in England and Wales at various stages of development. Each site has 3 farms making a total of 15 small farms. We have recently been given Maesgwyn Isaf, a 47 acre farm in West Wales and have also bought 19 acres of land adjacent to the farm to increase the amount of pasture available.

Greenham Reach, Mid Devon 3 farms
Steepholding, Wild Geese Acres and vacant Plot A

Martinsfield, Arlington, East Sussex 3 farms
Allwood Farm, Aweside Farm and Fanfield Farm

Furzehill Green, Gower, Swansea 3 farms
Cae Tan CSA, The Rowan Tree and one available OPD plot

Wyvern Fields, Sparkford, South Somerset 3 farms
Cider Apple Trees, Farm to Fork and one available plot

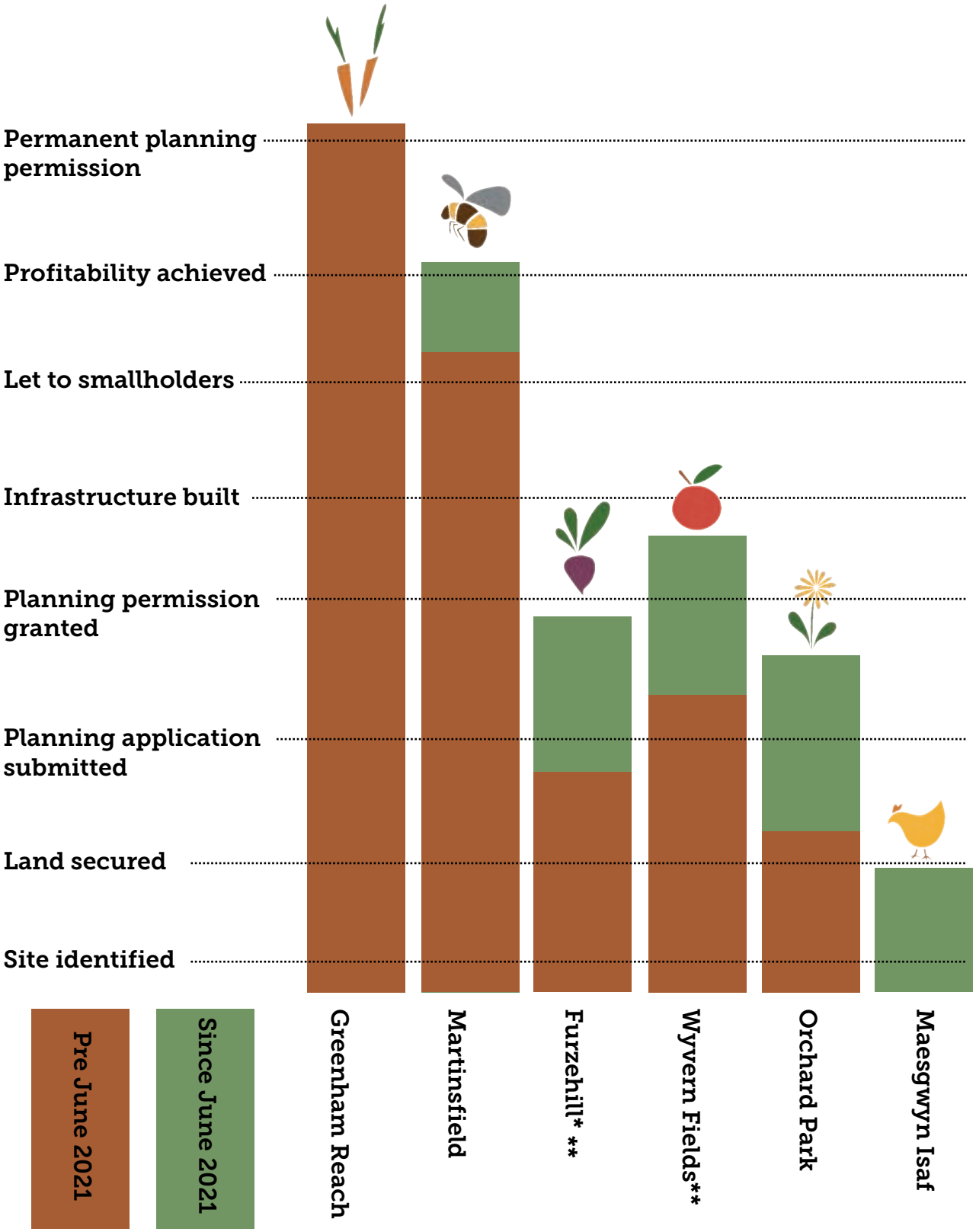
Orchard Park, Upton Cross, Cornwall 3 farms
Aval Farm and two available plots

Maesgwyn Isaf, Llanboidy, Carmarthenshire
newly donated farm house and 66 acres of fields and woodland.



Site Progress

Each year we measure our progress by looking at the development milestones that our sites have reached.



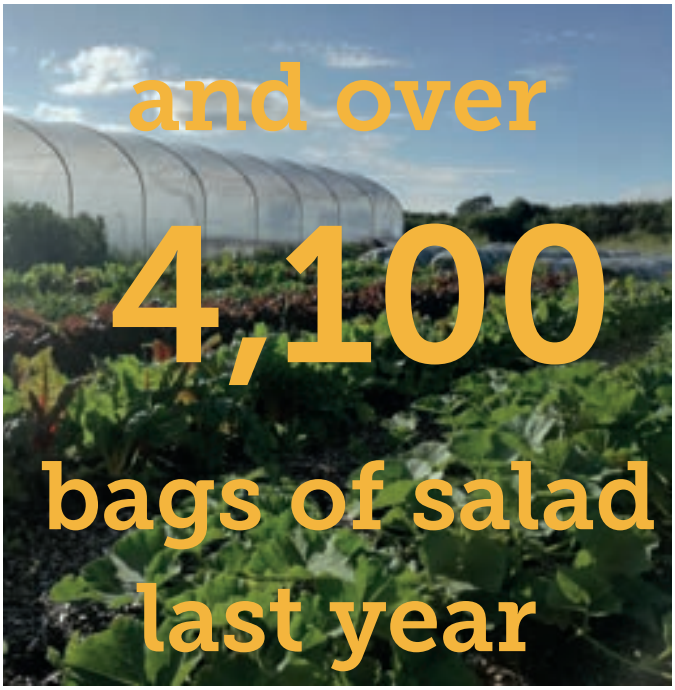
*The application for planning permission for the communal barn and infrastructure at Furzehill has been approved.

**1 set of stewards at Wyvern Fields and 2 sets at Furzehill are working on the land without living on site whilst we wait for planning permission conditions to be discharged..

Small Farm Businesses

The small farms that have been created by ELC stewards are serving their communities by providing healthy food and sustainable produce. It's amazing what our stewards can produce on their small farms...









And nearly 10 tonnes of vegetables from Allwood Farm alone in 2021 - their first year of operation...

These figures are an extrapolation from information provided by ELC stewards. They are meant to be illustrative rather than exact.

One ELC Steward's Journey

In an interview with Phil Moore we learn about The Rowan Tree's Bettina Davies' journey into ecological agriculture and an Ecological Land Cooperative small farm.



I first met Bettina planting trees on the ELC's Furzehill site on a cold windy day in February 2020.

Two years later entering Bettina and Trevor's land, through the hedgerow from where we had first met, was to see how the loving guidance of human hands can transform a field of grass into a riot of flowers, herbs, fruit and veg. This was The Rowan Tree, one of the ELC's most recent farms.

In the summer of 2020 the new stewards took on the land. Bettina recalled how the "grass was up to here" holding her hand to her hip. From tall grasses to a working site of flowers, food and trees, the transformation of this 1.5 acres of land was a dream realised. Cutting and suppressing the grass with tarps and black plastic and applying compost to create no-dig beds they swiftly made changes. Inspired by Charles Dowding's 'no dig' methodologies, Bettina and Trevor's commitment to human powered, hand-scale ecological agriculture was clearly evident.

With backgrounds in the performing arts, the thrust of their land based business is cut flowers as well as veg, fruits and perennials. Bringing beauty as well as abundance, I sat with down with Bettina for tea and homemade muffins in front of their polytunnel where Bettina had been attentively watering a bed of flowers.

Growing and working the land is physically demanding labour. A former dancer and theatre producer, Bettina knows all too well the life of the body in action. Having grown up in Switzerland she moved to London to pursue her passion for dance. What she thought would be a year long sojourn turned out to be a longer stay that developed into a successful career touring the UK, and abroad, with various productions.

Coming to her mid 30s with injuries in pursuit, and changes in social and community funding occurring, Bettina reflected that it was time for a change. During one of her last big jobs, she met Trevor, one of the actors.

They soon moved out of London to escape the city. An allotment followed, they joined their local Transition Town initiative and the bug for growing grew.

"I fell in love with gardening quite quickly," Bettina recounts. In their new flat there was a courtyard garden with some raised beds which they tended. "Gardens are a kind of paradise. Not just of flowers, not just of veg — it's the trees and the perennials. Wildlife. Everything."

Entering the next big chapter of her life Bettina enrolled on a year long course at Capel Manor College to get formal training in horticulture. A self-directed course, Bettina's drive was fuelled by her brilliant, eccentric tutor. Billed for career changers, the focus of the course was on vegetable and fruit cultivation.

Once she had completed the course, Bettina and Trevor tried to start a community growing project. Access to a polytunnel was given by Sunnyside Rural Trust, a charity and social enterprise giving training and work experience to vulnerable people. Seeing what could be achieved on the scale of hand-production enthused



their spirits to embark on such a journey themselves.

At this time, they were introduced to permaculture and sustainable agriculture by a friend who had given them a pile of books on the subjects. "We devoured all these books and thought this is great. This is it!" Amongst the titles was Patrick Whitefield's 'The Earth Care Manual' a comprehensive guide to permaculture design for temperate climates.

Bettina picked up the thread of her journey and how witnessing the beauty and abundance of a productive landscape at the Sunnyside Rural Trust inspired them to pursue something for themselves. Doing their own research they landed on the idea of cut flowers despite their initial desire to create a market garden where they were living at the time.

They found a site via Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's Landshare project. Landshare connected folk without any growing space to people that had plots and land to spare. Unfortunately the website closed in 2016.

However this site didn't work out due to poor soil and flooding issues. Their journey for land continued and with it their growing awareness of the frustrations of accessing land for reasons financial and political. Bettina recounts stories about the extortionate costs of renting one site, being mistaken for Traveller scouts and literally being hounded by dogs while visiting another. The surrounding land so often dominated by horse fields and bare ground, the country around them seemed like it wasn't available for creative and productive use.

In 2015 Bettina and Trevor began their cut flower business on just under an acre in South Hertfordshire where they were introduced to the ELC.

Bettina remembered the clear feeling of how, "we've got to find a piece of land where we can live. We want to live this life. Not do the commute back and forth to the flowers and where we were living."

Initially they didn't have any capital. Keeping a close tab on the ELC website the couple kept checking in on any news of land.

Some years passed and Bettina and Trevor received an unexpected inheritance. This afforded them the choice between buying a piece of land or a very small house. They remembered the ELC and as Bettina said, "things slotted together from there." They decided to apply for the site at Furzehill, and as they say the rest is history.

Working and living the land in a small scale ecological mode is an active choice they have made. "Once you start doing it, you learn the hard way. Experience first hand. But beauty and abundance is here. To feel whole you need everything — you need flowers and sustenance."

Her advice to new entrants is to get as much practical experience as you can and to offer your services if you can. Growing can be a tough game with the vagaries of life and the unpredictability of the weather. "You have to really love it," she muses.

As we part she shares that what really excites her about their land is putting in more trees and perennials — plants that put "down roots and grow more majestic as time goes on" as she puts it.

A fitting end to our time together as we talk trees once again.

Phil's full interview with Bettina can be read on the ELC website:

www.ecologicalland.coop/bettina-davies-the-rowan-tree

Photos previous page: Bettina and flowers ,This page: Trevor and tomatoes

The Applicant's Journey

Future ELC stewards Georgie Beach and Cameron Mitchell talked to Hannah Padgett, our new Steward Support and Community Engagement Manager, about their experience of applying for an ELC small farm plot at our fifth site, Orchard Park, in Cornwall.



How did you hear about the Ecological Land Cooperative's small farms?

We heard about ELC through Cameron's cousin who is a grower at Regather in Sheffield. We were interested in One Planet Development (OPD) at the time and he suggested ELC as an alternative.

What was it about our work that made you interested in applying for a plot?

It was the opportunity to access affordable land that was interesting to us, also the opportunity to live within a community on the land and also the support with planning as well as off grid living and farming. With OPD we would have had to do that all on our own, the planning process seemed difficult and also we would have to buy land then apply for OPD and hope to get it. The ELC model meant we didn't have to do so much of that work, it gave us a support network.

What were your expectations when you applied? Have we met them?

I don't know if we had expectations when we applied. We didn't think we were going to get anywhere to be honest with you, when you read the people who joined Greenham Reach they all seemed to have so much experience and for us it was a massive stab in the dark so I honestly think our expectations were super low. We thought that you would be saying we just didn't have enough experience and that maybe we should be thinking about applying later down the line. But also our expectations were that it wouldn't take as long as it has, we applied two years ago. I think once we realised it was going to take a while and once we were offered it we could relax but up until that point it was all consuming, everything was hanging in the balance, should we move down to Cornwall? We were waiting to see what would happen before we could devise a bigger plan I suppose. So I think once we found out we could relax.

What has it been like for you to be in the application process?

I really enjoyed writing the business plan because it articulates why we made this massive drastic move to leave London. It was actually a really interesting process to go through in terms of figuring out in our own minds why this was so important for us. I think it was extremely helpful for figuring out in our own heads if this is something that we could make work from a financial perspective or is it just a wild dream! Forcing us to do the financial projections, for me just like is this a legitimate business was just super helpful.

C - I'm not very good at those application type things so it was very good to have Georgie be able to do all that, I did a lot of the research into the costs and equipment, and the practicalities side of it but I find it difficult to write about those things

G - I think that was pretty good team work.

C - Our interviews were during Covid, so we didn't actually meet anyone until the final interview. It did feel like we were waiting a long time for our final interview, which was partly circumstantial because of Covid. It was a year from when we handed in our application form to our final interview.



Have you felt supported by the ELC during this process?

G - I think we have. Being totally candid, I think what we realised in meeting the other stewards, was that the ELC were really excellent at the planning side of things, but maybe, and it does seem like you're doing a lot to address it now, they hadn't felt as supported once they were on the site and that issues arose between the different stewards and that did worry us.

But then we also understand that this is a relatively new concept and that you are still working things out. The other thing that we assumed, was that the electricity generated would be enough to support us without looking too much into it and we realised we would have to figure that out ourselves rather than relying on you in terms of what power we would have and what power we would need for anything extra. It wasn't until I directly asked Oliver the question and he worded it something like 'the power covers your house and your living needs it doesn't cover your business' and I thought 'oh I hadn't realised that before now'.

C - It was after the site visits that we realised we would probably have to try and figure out funding of our own power source, especially if we wanted to set up the dairy. Having visited the East Sussex site and Greenham Reach where they would run out of power just for their dwellings and just market gardening. So that was something we didn't realise going into it.

Do you have any comments or suggestions for how we might do things differently?

G - In terms of the actual application process I think it was all good. Just the timeframe of it but that's just the nature of it. You could make people more aware of those things up front but you could scare people off. There's an element of kind of figuring it out on your own as you go through the process, which can make it seem too hard when it already is quite scary. I think the timeframe for us was frustrating but that's because we'd left our old lives, I think some people stay in their lives with one eye on the next. We were in this kind of limbo stage, but it did allow us to get loads of experience.

C - Running out of power and using a petrol generator over winter is worrying and I prefer the idea of connecting to the grid and feeding into it over summertime and actually be renewable energy producers for the grid.

G - I think what's actually been amazing is how much I feel you have been listening to us and what our concerns are, that's been great.

What are your hopes for the future?

G - It would be incredible to do it off grid, to set an example and to show people that we sell to that we are running ecologically sound practices and that it is possible for different types of businesses which are more power intensive.

I would like to influence the people around us to change their behaviour, not in a nagging way but by example, educating them as to what is possible. I feel like the only thing we can really do to make a difference is to change our own behaviour and that's what I'd really like to do.

Georgie and Cameron will set up Aval Farm on the ELC's Orchard Park site in Cornwall. We are very hopeful that we will achieve planning permission for the site in 2022.

Photos: previous page Georgie tree planting at Orchard Park, this page: Cameron tree planting at Orchard Park

Credit: Klaudia Van Gool, ELC

Gift Your Land

This year we are launching a campaign to ask for donations of land for ecological farms. We have huge ambitions and we are inviting landowners to help support a new generation of farmers working for nature and for climate - now and into the future.



For Farmers

High land prices and limited government support make it really difficult for new entrants to farming to get started. With the average age of UK farmers pushing 60, it's vital that a new, diverse generation are supported into farming.



For Nature

The farming sector is under growing scrutiny for damage to biodiversity, habitats and ecosystem. But it doesn't have to be this way. We believe that we can achieve food security without undermining nature.



For Climate

Climate change is the biggest threat humanity faces, and farming needs to rise to the challenge. We believe that by careful land management and reduction of energy intensive inputs, agriculture can be a force for good in tackling climate change.



Forever

Building up a successful farm business takes years, and stewarding land for nature and climate takes generations. However, the average lease for farm tenants in the UK is only five years. We offer multi-generational leases of 150 years. We manage our land for the long-term, holding it in perpetuity for the good of our farmers, nature, and rural communities.

Jumping Fences

Our collaborative project with Land in Our Names and the Land Workers' Alliance to identify barriers to accessing land and rural spaces for Black people and people of colour in the UK.



This year, ELC has begun implementing the project, a collaboration with Land In Our Names (LION) and Land Workers' Alliance (LWA), and funded by Farming the Future.

Through engaging with UK Black farmers and farmers of colour, the project explores how farming and rural sectors are experienced by racialised groups. The aim of the research is to identify barriers, discrimination, and the support needed, as well as highlight success stories.

The agriculture and environmental sectors remain the least ethnically diverse in the UK. But beyond this, there is only minimal understanding and unevidenced assumptions about what encourages or deters Black People and people of colour (BPOC) into land-based work. This project aims to build a stronger evidence base to support ongoing strategies to improve diversity in these sectors. For example, access to land is a most likely barrier, which aligns closely with ELC's approach.

In February 2022, ELC employed Naomi Terry to coordinate the research project. Naomi has been ensuring that the project is in line with the ethics of ELC, LION and LWA, to carry out research in a way that brings reciprocal benefits to participants, and avoids extraction or duplication, whilst at the same time allowing people a voice in sharing their stories.

Naomi has been recruiting people that would like to take part in the project, through the networks of the partner organisations, and beyond. The responses so far have been encouraging. The intention is to engage with a maximum of 30 participants. Up until now, Naomi has engaged with anyone that is eligible and interested in the project. Going forward the strategy will be a bit more selective, to consider gaps in demographics and regions. For example, only two participants so far are from Northern England and Scotland, so the next recruitment push will focus on these two regions.

The participants so far include many new entrants, and range from vegetable growers/CSA schemes, livestock farmers, apiarists and flower farmers. There are also some landowners who have not yet developed their agricultural business, as well as trainees. From the people that have approached us so far, the project has been met with enthusiasm. Many of the participants are people that have not directly engaged with the project partners before.

The project is overseen by a Steering Committee with representatives from the three organisations. We are looking forward to the insights that will arise from this research, and how they might inform the UK agroecological movement to become inclusive of the diverse communities of the UK and shift beyond white dominated farming. The final report will be ready in early winter and is intended to be launched at ORFC 2023 and disseminated through workshops, social media and events.

Community Farm Land Toolkit

A new web based resource for individuals and groups who would like to set up a community farm land trust. www.communityfarm.land

The final part of the Farming the Future funded collaborative project between the Ecological Land Cooperative, the Scottish Farm Land Trust and Community Shares Scotland *'Scaling Up Community-owned Land for Agroecology'* was the creation of a website of resources for anyone wanting to start their own farm land trust.

Drawing on the learnings of each organisation, and the project as a whole, the website links users to a host of materials which will guide them through identifying land, land purchase, finance, making planning applications and finding land stewards; right the way to building good community relations with their neighbours.

With links to people and organisations that may be able to help, plus a range of useful guides, we hope that anyone who might be considering a community based regenerative farming project will find some inspiration, and what they need to get started, from this resource which will be launched in June 2022.

www.communityfarm.land



Amplifying Voices Within the ELC

The ELC is an ecosystem comprising different types of members, each fulfilling different roles. We have land stewards, workers, investors and supporters, and without each of these membership classes the ecosystem would collapse. Although all membership classes are equally vital to the continuing flourishing of the cooperative, there are some members whose lives are more directly impacted by the ELC day-to-day: stewards living on ELC land being the most affected.

In the lead up to the 2021 AGM it was agreed that, as a user-led cooperative, changes needed to be made that would ensure that those who are most involved should be represented in the governing bodies of the ELC. It is a sign of the cooperative's growth and continuing success that the number of members is increasing and it is vital that we develop new processes and structures that support member engagement.

At the 2021 AGM it was agreed that a review would be undertaken into the composition of the ELC board to ensure that these user-led cooperative principles were prioritised. The first stage of the review was a gathering of ELC stewards, workers and board members at Fernhill Farm in Somerset in November 2021 (see picture below).

It was the first time that many of these members had met in person and was an exciting 3 days visioning what comes next for the ELC. There were many positive discussions leading to the formation of a working group of representatives from each of these membership groups to take the review forward. Further meetings and surveys were held in the first half of 2022, culminating in a collaborative proposal to enhance inclusion that will be brought to the 2022 AGM for ratification.

The process has highlighted the desire across the organisation for the ELC to become more connected. For the ecosystem to thrive most effectively, mechanisms for gaining democratic input, sharing practice and a sense of solidarity are crucial.



ELC Stewards, Staff and Board Members meet at Fernhill Farm in November 2021

Credit: ELC

Site Monitoring Reports for 2021

Greenham Reach

This is the eighth annual monitoring report for our first site, Greenham Reach, in Devon where we have permanent permission for our farms.

It is three years since permanent planning permission was achieved and the farms are now well established in the landscape and local economy.

Plot A, Greenham Reach

In 2013 the Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC) bought their first site, 22 acres at Greenham Reach, Mid Devon, with the aim of offering access to this land to three sets of new entrant farmers. In doing so, ELC began to fulfil its mission of offering affordable opportunities to live and work on the land. Nine years on, with four more sites in varying stages of development and seven other steward businesses working ELC land, there are two businesses thriving at Greenham Reach, while the third has moved on.

To be an ELC Steward is to work the land through agroecological principles, producing healthy farm produce while thoroughly regenerating the landscape for nature and future generations. Quite uniquely, ELC Stewards are also required to work and live cooperatively with their neighbouring smallholders, to share key infrastructure onsite as well as the ups and downs of the weather and farm life. These are not just ethical guidelines, the ELC ensures, through careful monitoring, that stewards are meeting these standards and where they do not, a process to raise standards is implemented.

Sadly, in the case of the third farm at Greenham Reach, their land based business did not form the largest proportion of their income or investment of time, a strict requirement of planning consent and the agricultural tie for the site. In addition the spirit of cooperation was also lacking, which made it difficult for neighbouring stewards to manage their shared assets and reap the benefits of working collaboratively. As a cooperative organisation this is integral to our work. Unfortunately, after much effort on the part of everyone involved, these issues could not be resolved, the ELC bought the lease back and the smallholders left in January 2022.

The ELC and the remaining stewards at Steepholding and Wild Geese Acres are looking forward to welcoming new stewards to this wonderful and now vacant plot. The new tenants will have the benefit of joining an established site which is teeming with wildlife and bustling with the activity of the two neighbouring farm businesses. As we prepare this report we have opened the application process to find new stewards for Plot A and we are looking forward to welcoming them on site later this year.

Landscape

Trees and hedges continue to grow well, providing increasing levels of shelter for the buildings and operations at Greenham Reach. The farms are now well integrated into the landscape; so much so, that traditional, cyclical work like hedge laying can now be carried out on planted hedges across the site.

Both Steepholding and Wild Geese Acres have carried out hedge laying this year. On Wild Geese Acres, the old field boundary hedge has been laid in collaboration with Devon Rural Skills, whilst the adjacent ditch has been cleared out and new fruit

trees planted. At Steepholding they have laid around 100m of the hedge that they planted 7 years ago as a new boundary. It is a great step forward to be able to properly manage hedges that were planted after ELC arrived.

Wild Geese Acres has a new small wooden tool shed, replacing an older one.

The caravans and other small buildings across the site remain screened by wooden cladding and planted trees and hedges.



Biodiversity

Wildlife and nature are thriving across the farms. Steepholding has frequent visits from a hedgehog - which is a great indicator of a healthy food supply and habitat. There are signs of otters along the River Tone here and a polecat was spotted by Wild Geese Acres.

The lack of herbicides and pesticides, the wild corners, the care for the soil and the continuous small scale rotation of crops and operations are all combining to create a safe and healthy environment for a wide range of flora and fauna.

Animals

Wild Geese Acres continues to keep small numbers of pigs, geese, ducks and chickens. Steepholding has a couple of golden Guernsey goats, 2 kune kune pigs and a small poultry flock.

The animals look well and there are no reports of maltreatment.

Assessment

Wild Geese Acres continues with its successful small scale flower and salad business. The production beds look well managed, and they have expanded production with a large area of courgettes growing in pots over - and under- black plastic mulch in 'market garden two'.

Steepholding continues with its weekly CSA veg box scheme. They have run three open days for customers, maintaining the link between consumers and growers. They have also hosted a day of work experience for children with special educational needs. Trees and cultivation areas all look healthy.

Both farms have continued to host volunteers and share their knowledge and experience.

On Plot A the land has been left in a good state, with trees growing in various lines and groups, and the polytunnels in good repair. The cultivated area is all now under grass or in mulched beds of perennial herbs. Wildlife will no doubt be making itself at home through 2022.

The tricky questions about limited resources and the position of new homes are still present. However with the site looking forward to new stewards on plot A and with nature thriving and local community connections well established, the future looks bright.

Newly laid hedge at Greenham Reach Credit: ELC

Martinsfield, Arlington

There are now three thriving farms on site at Martinsfield, with an application for permanent permission due to be made in 2023.

This is our second report on Martinsfield. We achieved temporary planning permission from Wealden Council in the summer of 2018. At the end of 2019 two couples moved onto two of the holdings, and began setting up their homes and business. They were joined at the start of 2021 by Ben and Bryony Allwood with their wholesale veg business, Allwood Farm, on the largest holding, 8.5acres.

These last couple of years have obviously been notable for both the Covid-19 pandemic and difficult and unpredictable weather patterns. These are not ideal circumstances to start a new small scale farm business - but all the farms have made huge strides.

Fanfield Farm have developed their growing areas with the preparation of new beds, the addition of a third polytunnel and the creation of a small orchard. The newly enlarged pond is looking better established and is becoming a home for local wildlife and passing birds.

Aweside Farm have also spent a good deal of time expanding and preparing their growing areas, adding covered growing space and generally exapanding their infrastructure.

Allwood Farm spent the Spring putting up their first large scale polytunnel and setting out and preparing beds. By September most of the beds were laid out and producing vegetables despite a leatherjacket infestation and storms blowing down a secondary polytunnel.

All three farms have all been working incredibly hard during trying times.

Landscape

Many thousands of trees have now been planted around the three farms. The impact of these farms upon the landscape now depends on how well and how quickly these trees grow up and provide shelter and screening.

The caravans, polytunnels and buildings are of course only two years old at most and can look quite exposed in a new environment. But as the selection of native trees, shrubs and strips of willow do grow, this infrastructure will blend into the landscape. Equally, the new paths and tracks can look an imposition on the fields, but development is impossible without them and time will soften their edges - as has already happened with the barn and parking area inside the gate. Periods of drought and waterlogging have not helped the trees to grow, but by far the majority are now establishing themselves and should start to develop more quickly.

The stewards received a grant towards windbreaks which have gone some way to protect the plants from the steady winds that blow across the site.



Windbreaks at Martinsfield **Credit: Aweside Farm**

Biodiversity

It is still far too early to have any statistical evaluation of improvement in biodiversity. However, personal experience and wildlife sightings tell us that as the ecology of what was once a large maize field becomes more varied, so do the creatures and plants that live there. We look forward to a second set of ecological surveys to be carried out in 2022, which will follow the analysis by the Ecology Coop in 2020. This will compare populations of pollinating insects, breeding birds and earthworms The site has changed a great deal since we bought it, so it will be good to see how much wildlife has noticed the difference.

The great variety of flowering plants and trees, the diversity of habitat in and around wild areas, the long and tussocky grass, the buildings providing shelter, should all be contributing to expanding insect populations and therefore the creatures that depend on them in their turn.

Soil

Analysis of soil tests taken in 2021 show little change in ph, organic matter and key minerals over the last couple of years. That is to be expected, and our capacity to do more rigourous soil analysis across depth and location is limited by its cost. Some of the soil test positions need to be adjusted to take account of the current geography of cultivation and shelterbelts. But there is clearly no sign of contamination or soil erosion. Improving the heavy clay soil so that it is a better growing medium is still the main challenge.

Energy

The 10kw solar array on the barn roof has been working well through 2021, with only limited need for the generator to supplement it. However Allwood Farm are yet to take power from this system, as they have their own smaller domestic set up for home use. The real test will come in the first long winter that all three homes and businesses are taking power from this solar array.

Animals

Fanfield Farm is the only one of the three holdings to keep any animals. Two Kune Kune pigs have been enjoying themselves in a run on the south side of the holding, although they have still needed some supplementary feed. The hens have been under netted cover due to the avian flu outbreak all year, and there has been some predation by the local fox population. Stock proof fencing may need to be improved to provide longer term security.

Assessment

Setting up farms like this, with limited capital, on an almost bare field, in a changeable economic situation, in a new neighbourhood, was never going to be easy. And it hasn't been for the farms at Martinsfield.

Despite all of this, great progress has been made.

ELC 's plan to help the three farms negotiate site issues and processes was hampered by staff changes leaving us with less capacity to support stewards. This has now been resolved with the appointment of the Steward Support and Community Development Manager in March of 2022. We hope that now we can devote more time to assisting our stewards with site matters.

As growing got under way across the site, the challenges of growing good quality horticulture on a heavy Sussex clay soil, have become clearer. The soil conditions are not helped by the solar cable that was dug underground in a deep trench and backfilled before the farms were established. Still, the farms are committed to long term soil care and ecological management. Raising beds, shelter belts, draining water, better irrigation, and above all, close attention, will gradually improve the situation.



Furzehill Green, Gower

We are still awaiting the outcome of our One Planet Development planning application at Furzehill but have had success with the permission for the barn and solar array.

As we reported last year, because so far there are only short term rental agreements on the fields at Furzehill Green, and not longer term leases, there is no need for a full audit against a management Plan for 2021.

In light of this there is only a minimal report here but we can say ELC is very happy with the progress and farm businesses there.

Hedges are growing up and starting to provide better protection from the elements.

Cae Tan CSA continues to be a well loved and successful part of the local food economy around Parkmill, its veg boxes are heavily over subscribed. With no need for further infrastructure on their holding, they have continued to concentrate on simply producing food.

This year has also seen The Rowan Tree make great strides with their flower and fruit based business, after beginning in 2020.

The Rowan Tree has a range of perennial fruit bushes, roses and shrubbery all establishing, and plenty of beds ready for increased cultivation in 2022.

They expanded the area of growing beds significantly, have erected their polytunnel and planted plenty of trees. They continue to make good business connections in the area.

Assessment

The site is looking well cared for and productivity has been generally good.

Clearly a lot of work is continuing to go into the site and a more diverse range of plants and habitats can be seen.



The soil looks in good condition, with no observable problems of soil loss or maltreatment.

The fields in the northern half, which are unoccupied are looking a little wild, but that is to be expected with so little human intervention. A number of snipe have been finding the fields very appealing, indicating its useful wildlife status.

We continue to try and tread the fine line between minimal management to benefit wildlife and not letting the field areas get out of hand, given they will have to support farm businesses in the near future.

We continue to wait for our planning application for the One Planet Development for The Rowan Tree to go through the local planning process.

We have received planning permission for site infrastructure - the track, barn and solar array and we hope work will begin on this later in 2022.

Flowers at The Rowan Tree **Credit: ELC**

Wyvern Fields, Sparkford, South Somerset

Temporary planning permission for the site has been granted in May 2022 and we are working to discharge the planning conditions and get started on the development of three small farms.

Like Furzehill Green, our site at Sparkford in South Somerset is awaiting planning condition discharge and has no long term leases signed with people for farm businesses. In consequence this is only a brief overview of the site .

We bought the 21.4 acre field of grassland at the end of 2018. We applied for three agriculturally tied farm businesses there in the summer of 2019 and were hopeful of getting a positive response to this when Covid-19 struck at the start of 2020.

Unfortunately from that point forth until the end of 2021 it was almost impossible to get any news or progress from South Somerset Local Planning Authority.

The situation was further slowed down and complicated because in late summer of 2020 we were asked to provide proof that we would not cause an additional, phosphate problem on the field, after a broad Natural England ruling about the Somerset Levels in general. As an agroecological site, the excessive input of phosphate and consequential leaching into watercourses should not be a problem, but this proved to be another issue where data and previous independent evidence are hard to come by.

We have now successfully navigated all these issues and received planning permission for three small farms on the site in May 2022. We are currently working to discharge the planning conditions so we can begin work on the development and welcome our stewards to live on their new farms.

This has come as some relief to the two businesses we have agreed can begin work on the land at Sparkford, now named Wyvern Fields.

One of these, Cider Apple Trees run by the Whittick family, has a short term agreement for 2 acres and is currently growing on their heritage apple tree saplings and whips within a fenced area.

These are doing well, under their careful management, with many hundreds of trees growing in marked out beds. The other business, a vegetable based 'farm to fork ' business will get started later in the year.

On the rest of the field we are managing the grassland with annual cutting, and have replanted the old hedgeline across the field with a mixture of native trees. Cider Apple Trees have provided a number of additional apple trees along the hedge line and boundary.

After being heavily grazed by sheep before our purchase the land is in good heart after being mainly rested for a few years, and we have great hopes for it.



Wyvern Fields panorama Credit: ELC

Worker's Survey

The ELC Worker team has grown to 12 members who all work part time and remotely to support the organisation. This brings its challenges as well as benefits and this years survey results reflect this. This year we asked for suggestions for improvements as well as some feedback on what our workers enjoy about their work for the cooperative, and we will be looking at this together over the coming year. Scores are out of 5.

Survey questions and comments	June '21	June '22
Everyone at the co-op is working toward the same organisational goals.	4.4	4.3
I see a clear link between my work and the ELC's goals.	4.6	4.6
The ELC board is sincerely interested in the needs and welfare of the employees.	4.5	4.1
When conflicts arise at the co-op, they are effectively resolved.	3.4	3.4
Employees are treated fairly and equally at the ELC	4.3	4
I receive good levels of support in my work from my co-workers.	4.5	4.3
I am fairly paid for the work I do relative to other local opportunities.	4	3.8
Employee ideas often result in changes at the ELC.	4	3.8
ELC workers' overall satisfaction score.	4.32	4



ELC staff hard at work
Credit: ELC

A new kind of normal

Seeking planning permission for our developments has taken longer than we expected but there are good reasons to be hopeful about the future.

This year has had the air of spring as the world opened up again and we saw movement in the processes which had seemingly ground to a halt during the previous long winter of a year.

Local planning departments came out of hibernation and engaged with our planning applications leading to two positive decisions and a promise of a third with, we hope, more to come.

Receiving the positive decisions at Furzehill Green and Wyvern Fields brought us great joy. Even more heartening was the fact that our successful track record was mentioned in the South Somerset planning officer's report. This was also reflected in the positive reception for our planning application in Cornwall where we gained the support of the local Parish Council and local people.

There are still challenges ahead, we are awaiting a decision on our first One Planet Development application in Wales, but we can allow ourselves to hope that in the future it will become easier for everyone to achieve planning permission for low impact, regenerative, small farm developments because of these successes..

This year we have also received our first land donation in the form of a farm house and 47 acres of land in Carmarthenshire. Maesgwyn Isaf is a bequest from Jenn and Stuart Carter who owned and managed the farm for 18 years planting thousands of trees and creating a haven for wildlife and people. They left the farm to the ELC to ensure it remained in community ownership in perpetuity and we will be glad to honour their wishes.

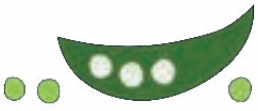
Later this year we will be raising funds to renovate the farmhouse and prepare the farm for new stewards.

The last year has also seen the resolution of long standing issues at Greenham Reach as one set of stewards moved on. The staff team and directors have offered support to our remaining stewards through this difficult process and the start of a new era for the site.

In late autumn last year the organisation came together to discuss governance issues and particularly the representation of community members on the board of directors, the strategic governing body of the cooperative. Out of this has come a range of proposals for rule changes that will be presented to the members at our 2022 AGM along with nominations for new board members from the steward and worker community.

Looking forward we have engaged a consultant to work with us on financial modelling and business planning so that the cooperative has a sustainable future as we continue to grow. We will launch our new campaign to encourage land donations 'Gift Your Land'. Through 'Jumping Fences' we are considering issues of ethnic diversity in the regenerative farming sector, and we have also created a web-based toolkit to share our learning with anyone who wants to get started on a community ecological agriculture project.

We remain dedicated to supporting our land stewards to continue to grow their land based businesses, and to enabling those who are prepared to live lightly, providing healthy food and produce for their communities whilst tackling nature depletion and climate change, and providing a regenerative model for the future of farming.



Many thanks to all of the people and organisations who have supported our work over the last year.

Elizabeth Creak Charitable Trust

The A Team Foundation

Ernest Kleinwort Charitable Trust

Thirty Percy

ef Esmée Fairbairn Foundation

Glastir

patagonia

treebeard trust

Farming the Future

I DIG TREES

In collaboration with OVO Energy & The Conservation Volunteers

Ecological Land Cooperative

For a living, working countryside

Unit 2, Wildgoose Space, 228 Mina Road, St Werburghs, Bristol, BS2 9YP
info@ecologicalland.coop | www.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.