

Do you have a food strategy for energy decent?

Mark Harrison, Nick Weir and Greg Pilley provide support for community based food projects and may be able to help you.

Summary

Current mainstream agricultural and food retail systems depend heavily on oil. This dependence runs right through from initial production methods (oil-based fertilisers and pesticides), through distribution (supermarkets add thousands of air, sea and road food miles to most foods) to retail outlets, which consume huge amounts of energy themselves and are often out of towns, requiring consumers to travel to buy their food.

We think that, as society is forced to reduce energy consumption and oil-dependence, there will be an increasing need for localised economies, where the basic requirements of society (such as food) are supplied as close as possible to the point of consumption. Strong local communities with experience of working together to meet their basic needs will be much better placed to thrive in an oil-poor world than societies relying on globalised production and distribution systems.

Mark, Greg and Nick were all founder members of Stroud Community Agriculture (SCA) - a thriving community supported agriculture (CSA) project. Six years on, SCA is farming 50 acres organically and providing beef, pork, wood and vegetables for 155 families.

SCA has a founding principle to demonstrate and show what we have done for others to copy and learn from. We also have a principle of transparency, including financial transparency, so that visitors are able to learn from our mistakes as well as our successes.

We have already received funding from the Royal Agricultural College to pay us to support a new CSA project in Stroud. The National Trust has funded us to support one of their tenant farms. We would like to support other projects that may be interested in our experience. This can include;

- community building
- organic agricultural advice (e.g. setting up crop rotations)
- facilitation of public meetings and participatory development workshops for business planning, defining founding principles, etc.
- one-to-one support / buddying / mentoring for interested individuals, new projects, etc
- setting up appropriate management and administration systems; guidance on chairing management meetings
- volunteer management
- fundraising
- media interviews, press releases
- workshops on the farm and presentations at other people's events
- arranging for you to join / attend the core group of other CSAs for advice and support
- welcoming observers to Stroud Community Agriculture meetings, workdays and farm tours
- providing copies of rules, membership systems and documents, accounting systems, etc
- practical experience / volunteer placements on the farm or in the management group

Nick, Greg and Mark each have at least four years' experience of working as part of the voluntary management group of SCA during which time the management group;

- set up the initial public meeting which launched SCA
- found appropriate farmland and farm workers
- set up a four year vegetable rotation and three polytunnels to produce vegetables for 130 families
- set up a pork and beef herd to produce meat for 130 families
- developed systems to;
 - o promote the project
 - o manage the growing membership
 - o build the sense of community around the farm
- organised public meetings to help develop the vision and principles of the project

- ran regular planning meetings to involve large numbers of members in planning the future of their farm
- ran frequent social events around the farm
- set up a quarterly newsletter which is sent to over 300 supporters
- grew the project from scratch to its current size (3 farmers on 50 acres providing meat and vegetables to 130 families with a turnover of £80,000 and a profit of £6,000) in less than five years.

We have also spent a lot of time showing interested visitors around the farm and answering questions to support other groups to set up similar projects. We have significant experience as facilitators, mentors, business advisors and fundraisers; having worked with local food projects in various capacities throughout the UK.

What we offer

- Ideas and challenging questions to help you determine what you need
- Help in choosing a local food project that suits your town / area. CSA is just one option. We know about food co-ops, buying groups and food hubs too.
- Funding suggestions
- Support in setting up an implementing body - local food links organisation or new enterprise
- Practical ideas and access to tried and tested systems for setting up local food projects.
- Support in the horticultural / agricultural details of growing food on a community scale.
- A network - with capacity to act

About Us

Mark Harrison

Mark is a founding member of Stroud Community Agriculture (SCA) and an experienced grower currently managing SCA's horticultural production for 150 households. Previous to this Mark ran a small vegetable box scheme. Mark has a great deal of experience in crop planning, box schemes, vegetable wholesaling, managing volunteers and financial management of horticultural enterprises.

Greg Pilley

Greg's interest is linking ecology, socio-economics and culture to sustain agricultural production, the communities those farms serve and the environment.

Greg worked with the Soil Association for 5 years principally as project Co-ordinator for the Cultivating Communities project which promoted and supported the development of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) across the UK before going on to establish Action Organic a new project supporting the development of a network of local organic groups.

Greg now works on a freelance basis broadly in the realm of local food and social enterprise. He is an active member of Stroud Community Agriculture Ltd, a Community Co-operative which runs its own farm business, sits on the Gloucestershire Food and Drink Advisory group and runs his own business – Stroud Brewery.

Nick Weir

Following 5 years on the management group of SCA, Nick is helping to set up Stroud's second CSA project which is a farm-led project based on 100 acres producing vegetables, firewood, lamb, beef and eggs.

Nick is also part of a communal allotment group, Stroud Food Co-op (a consumer buying group) and is now working to set up a Local Food Hub, which is a co-op made up of both producer members and consumer members using a school as a regular drop-off point for local food and drink produce.

Nick works as a freelance facilitator mainly with groups involved in local food.

To contact us please phone 01453 840037 or email nick.weir@localfood.org.uk