



Beacon Farms is a learning organisation with its roots firmly planted in the soil: we aim to grow good food and build a strong community, whilst providing opportunities to learn from the land.

ABOUT US

Beacon Farms is a pioneering community enterprise and land trust with the aims of safeguarding some of the UK's highest quality soils, to provide local food and to support a new generation of farmers and growers to make viable livelihoods from food production.

We want to enable passionate and capable people to establish viable food producing enterprises whilst respecting the soils they care for. We will ensure the best and most versatile land is appropriately used to run productive market gardens and small scale farms – protecting it for sustainable food production now and for the future and strengthening the biodiversity of the peri-urban farming landscape. Through our projects we aim to provide enterprise support and learning opportunities for growers, chances to collaborate across the wider food system, a source of good-quality local food for local people, and a way of reconnecting our community to land, food and soil.

We currently have two active undertakings: **Bristol Food Producers** and our own **Farm Hubs**. You can see how these projects fit with our core objectives on the following page.

Beacon Farms Limited is a co-operative social enterprise incorporated as a Community Benefit Society (a type of IPS) with Co-opUK Community Finance Rules. It has a board of directors (see **Founding Directors** at the end) and a broader core group. It has the ability to establish a membership, issue shares to members and protect land through an asset lock as needed.



Our Core Objectives	How we intend to address these
<p>1. LAND: Protecting best and most versatile agricultural land, so that it can be used now, and in the future, for the sustainable production of food for local urban populations.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Acquiring and safeguarding strategically located parcels of urban and peri-urban land with good soils, viable for horticulture and mixed farms; through lease, purchase or asset transfer (in the later instances to hold in trust through our asset lock) • Helping to improve the processes and policies underpinning accessing Council land tenancies for food production through Bristol Food Producers and supporting The Blue Finger Alliance to raise awareness of the need to protect BMV soils via the planning system.
<p>2. GROWING: Making land available for growers and groups wishing to develop small-scale commercial enterprises to produce food for the local area using organic and sustainable methods and to sell into local markets.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Research the obstacles facing growers and develop projects and models (on our own Farm Hubs if possible) to help to resolve common issues, working in partnership wherever possible. • Collaborating with other projects, landowners and using our own leased or owned land to establish a network of growers, improving the sharing of infrastructure, logistics and opportunities (through our Farm Hubs and Bristol Food Producers) • Providing a brand and marketing mechanism to support the sale of market garden produce (through Bristol Food Producers local food brand)
<p>3. LEARNING: Providing training, and access to accredited qualifications where appropriate, in sustainable production methods and growing techniques, appropriate technology, and all aspects of running a sustainable horticultural business.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work with neighbouring projects to increase and promote learning opportunities on the land that meet identified needs. • Researching existing skills training and gaps in provision and working in particular to increase access to business skills for food producers. (Both of the above currently being developed via the Bristol Food Producers' Livelihood Skills for Landworkers certificate) • Learning what new growers need and developing our capabilities to help them (through our Farm Hubs & Bristol Food Producers' Land Seekers Survey)
<p>4. CARE: Ensuring that habitat conservation is undertaken and land is maintained for the health of all.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhancing biodiversity, noise screening, habitat corridors and bee paths on any land we manage. And making our farms healthy and happy places with good land management plans.
<p>5. COMMUNITY: Working with the local community and customers to ensure that our enterprises are supporting their local food needs, and other needs where possible, and providing opportunities for them to engage with the land.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with local networks, retailers and distributors to make more food available, to scale up growing and to provide land-based learning and connection opportunities (at present through Bristol Food Producers). • Building a local community of support around us.

FARM HUBS

Beacon Farms grew out of the [Blue Finger Alliance](#) and remains committed to acquiring and safeguarding land on the hugely significant area of high quality agricultural land that covers part of the north fringe of the city of Bristol – known locally as the Blue Finger. This area of fertile Category 1 land was historically used for Bristol’s Market Gardens; we want to re-establish a market gardening landscape and develop a strong growing community in collaboration with existing projects in the area (including Feed Bristol, Edible Futures, Sims Hill Shared Harvest and local small holders and market gardeners).

To this end Beacon Farms was established as a Community Benefit Society which has an asset lock and the potential to establish a democratic membership to ensure any land we hold is looked after in perpetuity – in effect we are a land trust and community enterprise. We named ourselves Beacon Farms as we have always had a vision of establishing a string of Blue Finger based projects in the area that can themselves seed other growing enterprises across Bristol – we are strategic and ambitious but grounded in our understanding of the practical needs and difficulties faced by small-scale producers (access land and security of tenure feature large amongst the start-up difficulties for new entrants.)

We have looked at lots of land in Frenchay and Winterbourne. We have tried to buy land from private land owners with money loaned from a charitable Foundation, we have been to auction for land using money raised from the community in an extraordinary 4-day fund raiser, we have bid for the lease of a tenancy for South Gloucester Council owned land. So far none of our attempts have been successful for a variety of reasons. We have learnt a lot about the difficulties of securing land – land on the Blue Finger isn’t often available, it is often over priced, particularly in peri-urban areas where people hope to build more houses, and landlords don’t like offering long enough leases to give projects the security to develop. The things that have made it hard for us to secure land also make it hard for new entrants.

As we have been looking at land options we have developed a number of models which could be applied to leased or owned land that would allow relatively small areas to become productive and assist small-scale food producers to start to make a living on the land. Our models will always be developed with the needs of local producers in mind, with an eye on long term financial stability and with a sensitivity for what is most appropriate to the land in question.

Our Farm Hubs model has been recognised as groundbreaking and important by Growing Livelihoods, who have chosen us as one of their five 2015/2016 projects. Growing Livelihoods is a partnership between the Plunkett Foundation, Carnegie Trust and the Land Settlement Association; it supports and shares learning from projects that are helping new small-scale farmers and growers to make a livelihood from the land.

Our Farm Hubs could:

- support rural livelihoods by providing practical start-up support for new farming entrants;
- increase the amount of locally produced food available in the area (using sustainable methods);
- facilitate a variety of short courses relating to the skills of food production and processing in collaboration with local projects and Winterbourne Medieval Barn;
- engage the community in habitat management and supporting their local farm land/farmers;
- ensure the appropriate use and care of high quality soils;
- protect and conserve the land now and in the future.

We hope to establish our first Farm Hub on the Blue Finger in 2017 and are in talks with Bristol City Council about taking on a long lease of 35+ acres of Blue Finger land in Stapleton where we would act as stewards. The land has existing tenants who we would work with alongside other local stakeholders and new entrants looking to develop future businesses on the site.

BRISTOL FOOD PRODUCERS

Beacon Farms is the lead project partner on a collaborative project that involves many of the small commercial and community food growers in and around Bristol. We are working together to scale up local food production in the area. For us scaling up is as much a matter of increasing the number of diverse and viable smaller enterprises as it is about the sustainable growth of individual operations.



“We believe a resilient Bristol needs an abundance of fresh, fair, local, and sustainably produced food – food that is good for people, good for Bristol and good for the planet.

We are a diverse network of local, independent growers, farmers, food processors and distributors working together to supply the city we love. We’re collaborating and supporting each other by sharing advice and resources to scale up our local food system and make good food more visible and available. We’re growing together to put local food at the heart of Bristol. “

The inspiration for creating the group came from a number of meetings over the past few years, since the [Who Feeds Bristol?](#) report was published and the network has been established with help from a Green Capital Strategic Grant. In 2015 we planted seeds for further development work across a number of strands. In the future we hope to continue to develop projects under our main strands of work, responding to the developing needs of our members and to new opportunities as they arise. We have 30 members in the network and it is open for anyone to join: producers, processors, distributors, trainees, supportive organisations and individuals. We welcome anyone with an interest in scaling up local food production and distribution in Bristol. Our programme of work has been developed through stakeholder meetings and are summarised in the diagram below.



You can find out more about the work we are doing at www.bristolfoodproducers.uk where you can also sign up to the free BFP Opportunities Update. You can email Bristol Food Producers at bristolfoodproducers@gmail.com, follow on Twitter [@BristolProduce](https://twitter.com/BristolProduce) and join on [Facebook](#).



The Founding Directors



Phil Haughton (Chair)

Phil is Director of the Better Food Company and original co-founder of The Community Farm, Chew Magna. A former Trustee of the Soil Association he has been working within the local and Organic food scene in Bristol since the early 80s.



Richard Spalding

Richard is a human geographer teaching at UWE Bristol. A trained horticulturist, he specialises in rural community regeneration projects and has worked for a decade as a driving force behind Winterbourne Medieval Barn Trust of which he is a Vice President.



Rob Sexton (Financial Director)

Rob is a qualified chartered accountant (ACC); he is currently financial director of Yeo Valley and was previously CEO of Soil Association Certification Ltd and COO for the Soil Association. He has worked across a wide range of sectors including the third sector, enterprises and corporations.



Bonnie Hewson (Company Secretary)

Bonnie is a project manager and previously manager of the Soil Association's Community Supported Agriculture work. She has been involved in several community and urban growing projects and is passionate about local resilience in the food system. She currently works for The Power to Change trust as a Programmes Manager in Bristol, supporting the development of the community enterprise sector. Bonnie was recently a finalist in the Bristol Post Green Capital Awards' Green Hero category.



Get in touch...



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