

Small Farm Profits



Ecological
Land
Cooperative

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This short booklet, produced by the Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC), demonstrates that small farms can, and do, make a profit in the UK today, in 2018. This provides proof that it is possible to create economically viable, sustainable and highly productive enterprises on very small acreages.

The farms profiled in this booklet are all under five hectares (12.35 acres), make a profit after covering their costs and wages, and are doing so without any subsidies.

Not only that – they are incredibly efficient too. There is a ‘multiplier effect’ which creates numerous other social, public health and ecological benefits such as:

- fresh, local and healthy food; free from pesticides and other chemicals;
- high employment figures per land area: small farms play a part in reinvigorating rural economies and communities;
- environmental stewardship: promoting biodiversity, good soil care, low carbon emissions and no ‘downstream’ effects from poisons and chemicals;
- positive social impact: focusing on local economies and communities, small farms provide a space to learn and work alongside other people.

These additional outputs are commendable in and of themselves but they need to be long-lasting and sustainable. The following examples show farms that are financially sound and are making money as well as food.



Left: Helen Kearney of Elder Farm harvesting Calendula on an ELC smallholding in Devon.
Credit: Ecological Land Cooperative

Overleaf: The market garden at Steepholding, another one of the ELC's smallholdings in Devon.
Credit: Steepholding

The Ecological Land Cooperative is a Community Benefit Society whose mission is to create new opportunities for small ecological farms. We are often met with disbelief when we say that food producers can make a living from a small acreage. This is not surprising given that many of the UK's small farms have been lost over the last 40 years; subsumed into larger farm areas as a result of economic and mechanical imperatives, non-farming uses and land speculation.

But a reverse trend is now occurring with an increased interest in small-scale farms, opportunities for rural employment and a desire for growing ecologically.

With changes to business practices such as direct marketing to consumers, digital communications, an increased 'consumer literacy' (a demand for knowledge of where food comes from), value adding to produce, and a desire to create and support local and sustainable food, it is now possible to make a decent living on very small farms.

The figures we have put together are from working examples of small-scale farms. The data shows either an average of figures from the last two to three years or from the most recent completed year.

When the ELC creates new small farms the farmers may have their own off grid supply of water and electricity. With plenty of food for home consumption produced on site and low input costs for the farm, bills are kept low. Comparatively low profits can still mean a good living.



The Farms

Explanatory Notes

Income is from on site production unless noted.

Costs: These are not all Ecological Land Cooperative farms but like ELC farms costs can be very low ie. predominantly hand tools, few expensive machines and more natural inputs.

FTE = full time equivalent. Many of these farms also use trainee or volunteer labour serving an important social and educational function.

Wages: in some cases wages are hard to differentiate as the farmers take money out as and when they need it, rather than as a fixed salary. It is also worth noting that with a high proportion of their own food produced on site, the farmers' living costs and need for higher wages decrease dramatically whilst still enjoying a good lifestyle.

Profit = money remaining after paying wages and costs.

Canalside Community Food

canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk



credit: Canalside Community Food

Location: West Midlands, England

Size: 10 acres (9 acres in production)

Soil Grade: 3-4

Established: 2006

Employs: 2.25 FTE **FTE per acre:** 0.25

Produce: vegetables, fruit & herbs for a community supported agriculture box scheme.

Annual income from on-site production: £75,131

Annual Wages: £50,717

Annual Costs: £18,932

Annual Profit: £ 5,482

Homeacres

charlesdowding.co.uk



credit: Josh Rogers

Location: Somerset, England

Size: 0.25 acres

Soil Grade: 2

Established: 2013

Employs: 0.75 FTE **FTE per acre:** 3

Produce: salad and vegetables for local restaurants and shops.

Annual income from on-site production: £20,000

Annual Wages: £11,000

Annual Costs: £3,000

Annual Profit: £6,000

Moss Valley Market Garden



mossvalley-marketgarden.co.uk



credit: Moss Valley Market Garden

Location: Sheffield, England

Size: 1.2 acres

Soil Grade: 3

Established: 2012

Employs: 1.8 FTE **FTE per acre:** 1.5

Produce: vegetables for a box scheme.

Annual income from on-site production: £45,200

Annual Wages: £15,300

Annual Costs: £27,800 (these costs include the purchase of vegetables to ensure all year round provision of the vegetable boxes)

Annual Profit: £2,100

Trill Farm Garden

trillfarmgarden.weebly.com



credit: Jade Netherway

Location: East Devon, England

Size: 2.5 acres (1.5 acres in production)

Soil Grade: 3

Established: 2010

Employs: 2.9 FTE + 1.2 trainees **FTE per acre:** 1.9

Produce: salad and vegetables for local restaurants.

Annual income from on-site production: £70,000

Annual Wages: £40,000

Annual Costs: £30,000 Rather than take out a profit from their business, Trill Farm Garden has thus far reinvested any profit each year into increased infrastructure for the future sustainability of the business.

Annual Profit: reinvested (see above)

Cae Tan CSA

caetanrsa.org



credit: Lizzy Walshaw

Location: Gower, Wales

Size: 8 acres (5 acres in production)

Soil Grade: 2 & 3

Established: 2015

Employs: 1.3 FTE + 0.9 trainees **FTE per acre:** 0.26

Produce: vegetables for a community supported agriculture (CSA) box scheme for 100+ local households.

Annual income from on-site production: £46,504

Annual Wages: £29,485

Annual Costs: £16,921

Annual Profit: £ 98 (this project has a lower profit but higher wage level)

Fresh and Green

freshandgreenvegetables.co.uk



credit: Fresh and Green

Location: Devon, England

Size: 12.3 acres (6.2 acres in production)

Soil Grade: 1

Established: 2006

Employs: 1.6 FTE + volunteers **FTE per acre:** 0.26

Produce: vegetables and eggs for a local vegetable box scheme and markets.

Annual income from on-site production: £31,500

Annual Wages: £9,500

Annual Costs: £11,000

Annual Profit: £11,000

Mountain Hall Farm

facebook.com/MountainHallFarm



credit: Mountain Hall Farm

Location: Pembrokeshire, Wales

Size: 12 acres

Soil Grade: 4

Established: 2016

Employs: 1 FTE **FTE per acre:** 0.08

Produce: unpasteurised milk – based on 6 Jersey cross cows, rearing all offspring for beef except when replacements are needed. Cows keep their calves weaning 'calf at foot' until 3-4 months of age, being milked once a day. Pasture is managed using a rotational 'mob-grazing' system with cows being 100% pasture fed.

Annual income from on-site production: £24,000

Annual Wages: £11,000

Annual Costs: £12,000

Annual Profit: £ 1,000

Steepholding

steepholding.co.uk



credit: Steepholding

Location: Devon, England

Size: 9 acres (2.5 acres in production)

Soil Grade: 3

Established: 2014

Employs: 1.5 FTE **FTE per acre:** 0.6

Produce: vegetables and eggs for a community supported agriculture box scheme. Fruit trees at market and online.

Annual income from on-site production: £ 22,517

Annual Wages: £ 10,879

Annual Costs: £ 11,638 including developing a micro dairy facility for processing their goats milk into cheese to increase future income.

Annual Profit: is reinvested into the growing business.

Sheffield Organic Growers

sheffieldorganicgrowers.com



credit: Sheffield Organic Growers

Location: Sheffield, England

Size: 2 acres

Soil Grade: 3

Established: 2015

Employs: 1.3 FTE **FTE per acre:** 0.65

Produce: vegetables and salad for a local vegetable box scheme, local shops and market.

Annual income from on-site production: £20,000

Annual Wages: £11,200

Annual Costs: £3,000

Annual Profit: £5,800

Down Farm

down-farm.com



credit: Down Farm

Location: North Devon, England

Size: 3 acres (1.5 acres in production)

Soil Grade: 3-4

Established: 2017 Down Farm is a new enterprise and it is estimated that income will rise to £30,000 a year once fully established.

Employs: 1.4 FTE **FTE per acre:** 0.9

Produce: vegetables, salad, herbs, flowers and seeds for local shop, cafes, pubs and vegetable box scheme.

Annual income from on-site production: £24,349*

Annual Wages: £2,000*

Annual Costs: £19,678*

Annual Profit: £ 2,671*

*in the first 16 months

The wages paid and profit levels attained for these farms are not high + but the people are making a truly sustainable living directly from farming, as well as bringing in a range of benefits for local communities.

Surely the regulations and financial incentives available should in part be about encouraging more of these types of operation; and establishing the short supply chains and local markets which mean that fresh healthy food can be grown in the communities that need it.

Of course, most of these farms are horticulture based, as that is where the higher incomes per acre and the labour-intensive work adds value. But locally grown fruit and veg is exactly what we need to be eating more of, for diet and climate related reasons.

We currently import huge volumes of produce that we can easily grow in the UK, undermining our own farming economy and our cultural connection to food production. Seeing thousands more of these small farms around the country would make perfect sense.

Moving to a profitable agricultural system, whilst improving our health, encouraging more wildlife and reducing our impact on the climate is all possible if we shift to an agroecological system. That shift will entail a change in political policy and financial incentives to reward truly sustainable production.

We can't view these small farms as separate from the wider context of UK agriculture. That setting is a system which has seen an overall decline in environmental quality matched by increasing costs from diet-related ill health, propped up by subsidies which reward the wrong type of farming.

Defra's 'Total Income from Farming' figures for 2016 showed total income at £3.7 billion, with subsidy making up £3.2 billion of this: amply demonstrating that farming today is utterly dependent on subsidy.

Yet farmers aren't to blame, squeezed as they are by the global market and supermarket buyers. We can't remove all subsidy. Protecting our land, landscape, and wildlife whilst also producing good food takes skill and hard work and needs support from government targeted at the right outcomes.



Do you know a farm that should be
in here? Get in touch...

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