# compunity farm

## Annual Report 2021/22

#### Chair of Management Committee

Angela Raffle

#### Management Committee Members

Maddie Dunn John Christensen (resigned April 2022) Claire Bloor David Whittaker Annie Price Masuyo Newman Acomo Oloya Nicky Spear (on sabbatical since January 2022) Ben Newton Emily Wilson

#### **Key Personnel**

Managing DirectorKim BrooksFinance & HR ManagerSam Quinlan-rooneyBuyer & Commercial ManagerJake Cheesman until September, Guy Bardoe from NovemberHead GrowerJohn EnglishCommunications ManagerTom RichardsonCustomer ServicesSally PurnellCommunities & Partnerships ManagerDaisy SutcliffeWarehouse ManagerAtanas Sharkov

## Contents

An introduction fro

A report from our

Farming

Food

Communities

Wildlife

The Community Fa

**Financial Report** 

om the Chair of our Management Committee	1
Managing Director	2
	3
	5
	7
	11
ırm in numbers	13
	15

Please note: The Financial Report provides an overview only. Detailed audited accounts are available via our website.

## An Introduction from the Chair of our Management Committee

Welcome to our Annual Report for 2021/22, yet another interesting year in the life of The Community Farm. If I had to sum it up it would be "Post-Covid and post-Brexit weirdness". Globally all kinds of events were unfolding, economic hardship was looming, and climate change was reaching ever greater public recognition.

During the pandemic we saw food chains localised and we had hoped that the experiences people had during lockdown might have left a lasting public realisation of the importance of a resilient local food system. Equally, the frequency of extreme weather events continued to impact our food systems and demonstrated the importance of climate–friendly food. Whilst many of us are awake to these signals, turning away from the broken, wasteful, extractive food system the Global North seems wedded to, remains as big a challenge as ever. In the face of a narrative promoted by corporate media and large-scale agriculture, The Community Farm and our supporters continue to strive towards being a small but vital example that we can do better.

The Community Farm aims to bring enterprise and social values together as a counterpoint to this wasteful system, and this is what we have continued to do. So it falls to me simply to thank our staff, our management committee and all of our volunteers, our partners, our friends and our benefactors for their incredible dedication and flexibility during the year.

**Dr Angela E Raffle** Chair of the Management Committee



## A report from our Managing Director

It's been a turbulent year, but against a difficult backdrop of falling food sales, our farming, communities and wildlife continue to thrive here at The Farm.

Farming continues to be the cornerstone of what we do: a productive, organic horticulture operation providing a breadth of produce for our veg boxes and local businesses, farmed with our community of volunteers in such a way that creates so much more value than the food itself.

Despite falling sales, the percentage of food that we sell coming from our own fields and local farmers continues to grow. For us, this is proof that there is an appetite for local food, for making our food systems more focussed on small-scale farming and seasonal eating. We also continue to provide an important route to market for our network of farmers in the South West.

As well as a farm, we are a community resource, rich with opportunity for people from all backgrounds. This work is stewarded by our Communities Programme which saw new leadership this year as Hatty Richards handed over the reins to Daisy Sutcliffe as our Communities and Partnerships Manager. Hatty leaves behind a fantastic development legacy having created a learning area, two in-house therapeutic programmes, partnerships with Ecowild and Earthwise, and having led the construction of our roundhouse. Building on these foundations, Daisy is now working with the team to develop a strategy and structure to our programme that creates new and diverse ways for people to join us at The Farm and ensures we listen to the needs of our communities. Finally, our volunteer wildlife group has gone from strength to strength this year. As well as their brilliant work, our new therapeutic conservation programme, Wild Steps, has become a regular feature, building more opportunities for conservation work into our weekly routine.

Before you read on to the many highlights from this year, I must draw your attention to what has been a very difficult year financially. As you will see, our finances for the year prove that we cannot rely on the surplus from our organic food operations to fund the vital community asset that we continue to build here at The Farm. We need support from like-minded organisations and individuals willing to invest in a better future. We are more than a farm fit for the future; we are proof that by working with nature, by building a community, you create a resource that will last beyond all of us.

#### Kim Brooks Managing Director



## Farming

Overall this was another good growing season for the field, with yields and crop sales continuing on a gradual upward trend year-to-year. This reflects the efforts of the field team to improve our operational processes and our management of the soil and the crops.

In 2021 the planted crop area was approximately 4.2 acres (excluding the 4 polytunnels) with the rest of the growing area (another 3.8 acres) in two-year fertility building rotation. Sales of crops from the field totalled  $\pounds$ 70,000 for the financial year, close to the  $\pounds$ 72,500 which was forecast in the crop plan at the start of the season. (These values represent our 'internal sales' of produce direct from the field into our box scheme and our wholesale operation at our internal wholesale prices, before adding our veg box and wholesale margins).

The most unpredictable variable continues to be the weather and the increasing likelihood of encountering extreme weather events. Every year we are seeing a period of extreme weather that brings different challenges and has some significant impact on our growing. In 2021 the most notable was an unusually dry spring that was followed by several weeks of below average temperatures and heavy rainfall in May, just after we had planted our early season crops and were about to cultivate the ground for more. We had also just sown two fields with new fertility building leys (clover and grasses). Both of the leys (2 acres of ground) failed to germinate and the majority of the crop plantings we did in April either failed entirely or yielded very poorly and a month later than usual. The spring weather had such a knock-on effect that we didn't have any significant crop sales until mid-July.

Fortunately the majority of these early losses were compensated for by some better than average yields from our summer plantings and we achieved some of our highest ever monthly sales in the August to October period. Aside from the cost of resowing, the failure of the leys does have some knock-on effect on the crop plan for future years as it means they will need to stay in the fertility building part of the rotation for an additional year (3 years rather than 2); this is likely to mean that we have a slightly reduced field area available for crops in 2023 to 2024.



In 2021 we expanded our miniumum-till 'Market Garden' area to a second plot, giving us a total of 72 beds of 25 metres each. This is now a significant and productive part of the field operation which we use to grow salad, herbs, beans, beetroot, garlic and courgettes. It also works well for 'season extension', for example earlier and later plantings of brassica, salad onions and leafy greens.

The field team for 2021/22 comprised of: Head Grower, John English (four days a week); Community Farmer, Ian Sumpter (three days a week); Emmy Wurmli, Community Engagement Leader (two days a week on the field), Will Warin (Field Assistant, three days a week volunteer) and Field Assistant, Atanas Sharkov (one day a week). The seasonal field workers this year (2 posts, 4 days a week from May to October) were Alex Goodman and Vivien Martineau. This year our seasonal workers took part in the pilot year of the Landworkers' Alliance Agroecological Traineeship scheme, a programme of on and off-farm learning and farm visits. Since then, Alex has gone on to be the Head Grower at Purple Patch in Bristol and Vivien has stayed with us providing part-time assistance on the field and in the warehouse.





## Food

In August the fields and warehouse were filled with film cameras, as the BBC glowingly reported on The Farm's role in feeding hundreds in our community with local, organic food. Our priority, during the episode of Countryfile, was to make it clear that we don't do this by ourselves. Since The Farm's beginnings, we made a choice not just to sell the food we could produce on our own fields, but to work with a wider network of farmers and producers in the South West of England, a region blessed with brilliant produce and which boasts 40% of the United Kingdom's organic farmland<sup>1</sup>.

This year 13% of the fresh produce we sold came from our fields and over 50% came from other producers in the South West. Through our brilliant warehouse staff, office workers and drivers, we've supported over 40 producers from the South West to get their produce to customers, providing £290,000 in sales to keep those businesses going and support the local economy.

Keeping box numbers high is the best way for us to sustain our customers with nutritious food and maintain a healthy business model. On average we delivered 674 boxes per week this year (838 in the previous year). Our box numbers went down following the easing of Covid–19 restrictions, although they have stayed above pre–pandemic levels. We've also noticed a further drop as the 'cost of living crisis' takes hold, a combined fall in average monthly box numbers of 28% over the course of the financial year. In February, due to rising overheads and produce costs we increased the prices of our boxes by an average of 13%, our first increase in 3 years. At Christmas, we fed 184 families through a collaborative project with Bristol Council's Families in Focus, funded by the Holiday Activities Fund, providing nutritious, organic produce to families for Christmas week. We also supported Caring at Christmas for the 4th year running, providing £1,546 worth of food and donations to support their project.

Our annual marketing campaign made a temporary dent in falling box numbers as we used billboards (a first for The Farm), local newspapers and magazines, as well as social media to reach new customers in key areas of Bristol, Bath and the Chew Valley. The campaign reached hundreds of thousands of people and helped box numbers rise by over 100 weekly orders from October – December. It also increased our new customer sign-ups by 66% compared to a comparable pre-Covid period in 2019. Continuing this effort to build our customer base will be a major focus for the year ahead.

FEELGOODFOOD

'Its like a little present on the

Veg box customer

doorstep...beautiful and fresh'

To inform future product development, marketing and to improve our service, this year we also undertook detailed customer research to better understand who is shopping with us and why. We found:

#### Why do people buy from us?

- Our values and the broader community work which buying a veg box supports
- We're a local business
- We're a great organic and climate-friendly option

## What are the best things about being a customer of The Community Farm?

- The box design & produce quantities
- The quality of produce overall is high
- Deliveries are convenient and reliable
- Our customer service is friendly and effective
- Customers regard us as well priced for what we deliver

' It's more than just a delivery...It gives you a feel good factor – I feel like I'm doing something good in the local and global environment ' Veg box customer

'Buying a veg box is like going for a run every day – people like the idea of it – but you've got to give it time to make it work ' Veg box customer

<sup>1</sup> https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/agriculture-in-the-united-kingdom

compunity starm.co.uk

hop veg boxes and more at the

CLIMATE-FRIENDLY FOOD

Delivered from the Chew Valley right to your door

Veg-led 🛛 💗 Less packaging

FOR ST GEORGE

#### What stops people buying from us?

- We are too expensive for some households
- Some people find it hard to cook with what comes in their veg box

#### What could we improve on?

- The boxes can get repetitive during the hungry gap
- Quality can occasionally slip on some items
- Some customers find the website ordering system difficult to use

We're already working to address these points. We've put in place new processes to catch produce not up to scratch, we've improved our website to make changing the date or quantity of your order easier, and we've published tips to help people make the most of their veg boxes.



## **Communities**

As we emerged from Covid-19, and as part of The Farm's broader strategy work, the communities team led plans for the coming five years, including the development of a new statement defining what we mean by community:

#### Community is key to everything we do

We aim to grow community as much as food. Here communities are the webs of life that are connected with The Farm. From the microbes in our soil to the birds in the hedges to our members and the people caring for our land, our habitats and growing our crops, to those buying, packing and delivering our boxes.

Where activities had an indoor element, we continued to limit our numbers until the new year, but as we adapted to the new pandemic landscape we were able to continue our regular volunteering, Community Farmer Days, and Grow and Make returned to pre-pandemic operation. In July we started a new programme called Wild Steps to expand our therapeutic programme which focuses on conservation for wellbeing.

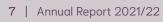
Over the past few years we've invested in the infrastructure to support our communities work and this year we saw our new outdoor shelter, roundhouse and yurt provide shelter for 1,143 people, who took part in 285 sessions, and collectively spent 1,774 days at The Farm. We've continued to plant our mini forest garden, develop our pond, and have added a hazel coppice to The Learning Area for shelter, wildlife and, eventually, a source of sustainable mulch.



In 2021/22, The Covid Fund raised £7,000 through customer donations on our website. These funds have enabled us to continue to build nascent community partnerships with Aidbox Community and Groundworks South's IMPACT project, helping us to bring underrepresented groups to The Farm. These relationships in turn supported our successful application to the Farming in Protected Landscapes fund to further develop these partnerships as part of our outreach programme until 2024. Crucially for us, The Covid Fund has also enabled the continuation and development of our intensively supported wellbeing courses, Grow & Make and Wild Steps, and to start to shape these into an overarching Growing Wellbeing programme in preparation for fundraising. We were also able to support Coexist Community Kitchen and Earthwise's Summer School Fund through these donations.

In April 2022, after the year end, we transformed this fund to 'The Community Fund' to continue to allow customers to donate to support similar people and projects.

Thank you to all customers who generously donated to The Covid/Community Fund.





### **Regular volunteering**

As anyone who visits The Farm will know, volunteers are at the heart of what we do, and one of our most important links to the communities in which we belong. This year, 240 people supported our work, spending a total of 1,147 days on The Farm between them. Volunteers told us that coming to The Farm offered them valuable respite, a way to connect with friends, learn about farming and to be part of a community.

### **Therapeutic courses**

Grow & Make, our twelve-weekly therapeutic horticulture programme has supported 21 people over 45 sessions this year. Wild Steps, our six-weekly therapeutic conservation programme has supported nine people over 21 sessions and helped us towards achieving the goals set out in our Biodiversity Action Plan, thanks to the kind support of Natural England and Quartet Community Foundation with the pilot.

"It got me out and about mixing with people. I am vastly more confident now ... I am looking into other conservation projects, I have also joined a environmental action group." Wild Steps participant



"The sessions live with me throughout the week. During difficult weeks, it was the one day I looked forward to. Being outside in nature with spectacular views, gardening and tending to the land has had a great impact on how I feel the rest of the week. It has been lovely to be able to arrive early to The Farm to start the communal fire - I love this."

Grow & Make participant

### **Delivery partnerships**

Long-standing wellbeing partner Ecowild continued to run their highly commended nature-connection activities here on The Farm, running their Lakeside Wellbeing programme (24 people) alongside providing crucial leadership on the development and delivery of the IMPACT project here on The Farm. In addition, their Pakistani Women's Group funded through The Covid Fund last year also came to fruition and saw two days out on The Farm for seven women who had been further isolated due to Covid-19. Ecowild continues to provide links into the green and social prescribing networks, and remains crucial to the Farm's outreach activities.

Long-standing education partner Earthwise continued to run Little Shoots, their Farm and Forest School at The Farm on Tuesdays and host ad hoc school visits throughout the year, especially during the busy summer term. This year saw the trial of an additional group for mothers and babies. 363 people attended Earthwise events across 37 sessions.

### **Community partnerships**

In 2020, like many other organisations, we made a commitment to start our journey to becoming an anti-racist organisation. We've continued to develop our relationships with Aidbox Community, Groundworks South's IMPACT project, and Black2Nature, providing bespoke days on The Farm for the groups they work with. We want a more diverse group of people on our fields and engaged with food and farming. More locally, we began a new project with Chew Valley School to support them in teaching about food and farming, and especially organic and nature-friendly farming.



#### **Events**

This year we ran 25 different events on the land including our new Seasonal Events which we hope will become a regular fixture in the local events calendar for years to come. So far these have included a harvest & halloween event at the end of October and a wassail at the beginning of February.



## Wildlife

There's a particular kind of magic that happens in the margins of The Farm. It's a magic you can't always see but you can certainly sense – happenings in our soil and in our hedgerows, under foot and overhead. Our volunteer Wildlife Group can see it, in the kestrel which hovers, or the morning paw prints, or the tell-tale owl pellets. From the earliest days of The Farm they've been working to carefully observe the wildlife on the site and make small but meaningful changes to our practices to encourage all life on The Farm to thrive.

We're ten years into a thirty year project to help biodiversity return to The Farm following decades of industrial farming, and this year has been an important year for our 'whole-farm approach' which sees the wildlife group work with the field team and community groups to support The Farm's non-human essential workers. This year our staff and volunteers have improved the infrastructure needed for wildlife to thrive, building a palatial bug hotel, surveying the owl boxes (alongside the Hawk and Owl Trust), maintained expanses of flower beds, developed winter foraging areas for birds, and divided and replanted perennial plants to create pollinator corridors around The Farm. Ikm of hedges and margins have also been protected through a regularly updated 3 year cutting and maintenance plan to encourage flourishing growth for food, shelter, shade, nesting, and carbon capture.

As in previous years, we continued the annual Bumblebee Conservation Trust's BeeWalk (2021) and the Big Butterfly Count, organised seasonal walks around The Farm, and introduced people to our hedgerows as part of farm tours.



#### Biodiversity at The Farm:

- 94 arable plant species identified including rare corn spurry
- 219 bumblebees of 8 species, counted during snapshot walks May to October, an awesome 146% increase from 2020!
- Countless birds sighted include kestrel, buzzard, red kite, skylarks, meadow pipits, innets, redwing, marsh harrier, long-tailed tits, woodpeckers, owls and swallows
- 222 young native trees planted in the hedges and across the site including hazel, hawthorn, field maple, silver birch, oak, and willow
- 685 bulbs planted including crocus, snowdrops, bluebells, wild daffodils, and winter aconite



11 | Annual Report 2021/22



## The view from the hedgerows

"In 2020 a Biodiversity Action Plan was drawn up, we could call it a management plan but in truth, the wildlife manages us. Our role as stewards of this land is to make sure everything we do is in tune with nature and this year we've seen an encouraging increase in biodiversity on The Farm, thanks to the efforts and ingenuity of our volunteers and staff. It's a joy to see but this really is part of a long-term journey.

This year we've planted huge numbers of native flowering plants and saplings, and watched our precious old East hedge thrive, becoming an even more vibrant shelter and food source for our wildlife, and essential windbreak for our crops.

In the year ahead, we want to get much better at collecting data, monitoring, measuring and evaluating what we're doing; rewilding our ancient east hedge and of course increasing year-round wildlife corridors across and beyond our Farm. If you like the sound of what we're up to then please do come and get involved."

#### Annie Price

Long-term volunteer and Wildlife Group member

## **The Community Farm** 2021/22 in numbers





## Financial Report for the Annual Accounts 2021/22

After the extraordinary year of 2020/21, the financial year ending March 2022 saw The Farm's finances once again up against the dominant corporate food system leading The Farm's financial situation into more familiar territory with a £72,000 loss in the year (compared to a £90,000 surplus in 2020/21).

Turnover decreased from the unprecedented levels seen during the height of Covid-19, driven by citizens returning to pre-Covid buying behaviours and the impact of the cost of living crisis in early 2022. Our operating costs have increased due to Brexit and despite the removal of lockdown measures, Covid-19 continued to put pressure on supply chains for food and farming.

We were delighted to see visitors returning to The Farm as our Communities programme came back online, though our core grant funding for these programmes had come to an end in December 2020.

The Farm's underlying financial position has reduced in line with the loss, being a net asset position of £57,000 compared with £130,000 in the previous year.

#### Summary Financial Statement of Income and Expenditure<sup>[2]</sup>

The final statement of income and expenditure is summarised in Table 1:

Table 1: Key Financial Indicators	2021/22 £'000	2020/21 £'000
Turnover	1,102	1,346
Cost of sales	- 565	- 696
Gross Profit	537	650
Gross Profit Margin	49%	48%
Administrative expenses	- 645	- 596
Surplus/(loss) on Trading Activities	- 108	54
Donations	35	28
Operating profit/(loss)	-73	82
Net Grants	1	9
Interest and similar items	- 0	- 1
Surplus/(loss)	- 72	90

<sup>2</sup> See the Detailed Income Statement on Page 19 of the Accounts

### Turnover

Turnover decreased by 18% compared with the previous year, driven by a 22% decline in veg box sales as the customers who had joined us during the pandemic ceased buying from us. Our turnover was further impacted by the closure of our Community Farm shop in Green Park Station in Bath during the year. After 5 years of trading unprofitably, we took the difficult decision to close the shop to focus on our core revenue streams and The Farm site itself. Despite the difficult trading conditions, turnover from our wholesale customers held up relatively well, showing a marginal 1% decline against the prior year.

The analysis of turnover is set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Turnover	2021/22 £'000	2020/21 £'000	Percentage Change
Box Sales	751	964	-22%
Other Wholesale	286	291	-1%
Markets/Veg Shed	50	84	-40%
Other Turnover	14	6	115%
Total Sales	1,102	1,346	-18%

## Key Drivers of Financial Performance in 2021/2022

The loss on trading activities of £108,000 which, compared to the previous year's surplus of £54,000, is reflective of the downturn in trade after the height of the pandemic. Food sales started the financial year 18% lower than the previous year (April 2021: £103,000 versus April 2020: £125,000), correlating with the relaxation of Covid–19 restrictions in place at those times. The decline in sales continued as restrictions eased, and the seasonal growth we often see after the summer was muted compared to previous years.

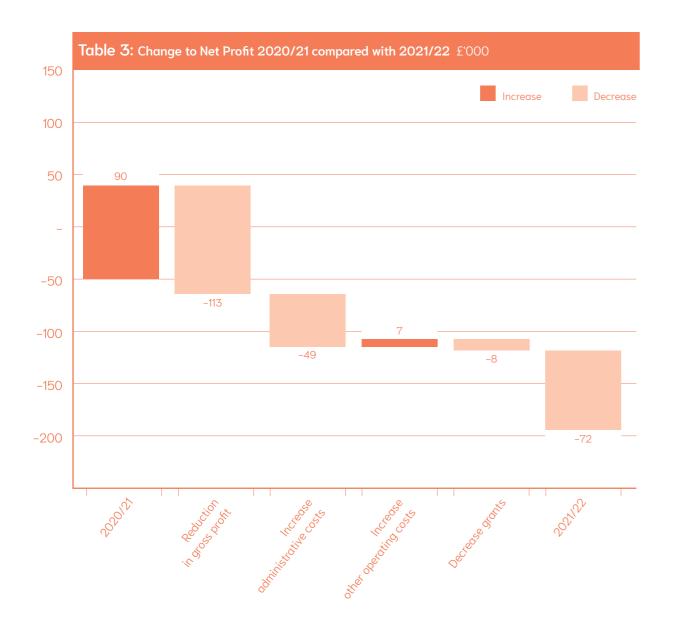
Increased operating costs for our food and farming operations required a price increase on our veg boxes in January 2022 averaging 13%, our first price increase since 2019. The invasion of Ukraine in early 2022 cemented the cost of living crisis in the UK, negatively impacting our veg box sales and increasing cost of sales and overheads further. The year ended with sales still 17% higher than pre-pandemic (March 2022: £20,000 per week vs February 2020 £17,000), but showing a clear downward decline which has continued into 2022/23.

Despite the challenging trading conditions, our gross profit margin improved slightly to 49% (48% in 2020/21). However, we maintained our staffing levels and implemented a wage increase in January 2022 to honour our commitment to meet the Living Wage Foundation guidelines, and spend continued on marketing to retain as much of the Covid–19 related customer growth as possible. The Farm's own reserves and the Community Fund have been used to fund our Communities programme in this financial year.

Overall, when taking donations and grants into account, the current year's performance worsened by £162,000 versus 2020/2021.

The overall movement in the position is analysed in Table 3:

Table 3: Financial Performance in 2021/22 compared to previous year



### Donations

The Community Farm's Covid 19 Fund was established during the pandemic. Thanks to the generosity of our customers £8,000 (2020/21: £8000) was raised in the year, adding to the £5,000 carried over from the previous year. This year £10,000 has been donated to organisations to help those affected by the pandemic and £3,000 will be be carried into the following year.

The Farm received a £15,000 donation from the estate of Hugh Norton, our previous Management Committee member who was passionate about The Farm and its wildlife. This has been carried into the following year.

Included in The Farm's income (Table 1), Net Grants of £1,000 was invested in an outside hand wash and therefore used to purchase assets and not charged to expenditure within the same financial period.

### Grants



National Lottery Awards for All Balance of £500 carried forward from the previous year from the National Lottery Community Fund for the community garden and wildlife area was spent on plants for the area.



**Quartet Community Foundation** The balance of £4,573 from Quartet was spent on continuing our Grow and Make project during the year.



#### Natural England

The grant of £4,860 received in the previous year was used to fund the Grow and Make and Wild Steps projects during the year.

#### The Monica Fund

Less than £1,000 was spent on our Learning Area during the year, the balance from this private legacy of £53,429 will be carried into next year.

## **Overall financial health**

A summary Balance Sheet is set out below (Table 4) for the year ended 27th of March 2022 (prior year 28th of March 2021):

Table 4: Balance Sheet	2022 £'000	2021 £'000
Intangible	4	4
Tangible	77	94
Total Fixed Asset	82	98
Stock	17	16
Debtors	35	29
Cash	85	183
Total Current Assets	137	228
Creditors: due within year	162	197
Net Current Liabilities	(24)	31
Total Assets less current liabilities	57	129
Net Assets/ (Liabilities)	57	129

The net assets of The Farm reduced to £57,000, from £129,000 in the prior year. This has been driven principally by the decrease in cash due to the loss in the year.

As planned at the end of the previous financial year, we used the funds to continue to operate as a resilient producer of wonderful organic produce and continue our impactful communities programme. The unexpected decrease in sales and increase in costs, however, meant that the proposed investment has been used to survive, rather than start to thrive as hoped.

The Farm has a net current liability of £24,000 at the end of the year, however this includes £54,000 from The Monica Fund held as deferred income. This can be used at management discretion for operating costs or investment.

## Conclusion

Sadly, the exceptional financial results resulting from the Covid–19 pandemic seen in 2020/21 did not continue into the 2021/22 financial year, with similar experiences being shared by many across the organic and local food industry.

Whilst The Farm's food and farming operations remain a viable business model, unfortunately they cannot fund the incredible social and environmental value The Community Farm creates across its Wildlife and Communities programmes. As such, donations and grant funding remain an essential part of the funding strategy for The Farm in order to continue to deliver this value.

We would like to thank all our donors, supporters and loyal customers for their continued support as The Farm looks to weather the next storm for organic food and farming and third sector organisations caused by the cost of living crisis.

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