

the
community
farm 



Annual Report 2022/23

Chair of Management Committee

Angela Raffle

Management Committee Members

Maddie Dunn

Claire Bloor

David Whittaker

Annie Price

Ben Newton

Emily Wilson

Kim Brooks

Masuyo Newman

Jason Craig (appointed 1 November 2022)

Selena Gray (appointed 1 November 2022)

Acomo Oloya (resigned 1 November 2022)

Nicky Spear (on sabbatical and resigned 1 November 2022)

Key Personnel

Managing Director

Kim Brooks

Finance & HR Manager

Sam Quinlan-rooney (until December 2022)

Finance Manager

Julian Gren (from February 2023)

Buyer & Commercial Manager

Guy Bardoe (until September 2022)

Food and Farming Manager

John Miller (from December 2022)

Head Grower

John English (until September 2022)

Communications Manager

Tom Richardson

Customer Services

Sally Purnell

Communities & Partnerships Manager

Daisy Sutcliffe

Warehouse Manager

Atanas Sharkov

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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 The Community Farm's Annual Report for 2022/23.

We began our twelfth year knowing that it was going to be difficult. Grants that had been providing essential funding for our communities work were coming to an end, yet the financial reserves built up in 2020 – thanks to record numbers of home-delivery customers during lockdown – had made it difficult to seek follow-on funding at a time when funders were attending to those damaged by the pandemic.

By June the nationwide fall in organic sales was truly apparent, and we knew we had three options ahead of us. If we did nothing we would slide into a messy end, with all reserves used by December. We could instead choose to celebrate our wonderful achievements, throw a party, give all our staff the time needed to find other jobs and end the project well. Or we could do something else. This was the stark choice that Kim our Managing Director put to our staff and volunteers in July. Their response was clear – we'll do the third one! So under Kim's incredible leadership everyone swung into action under the banner "Don't let the cost of living crisis cost us the earth".

This Annual Report describes what happened, and pays tribute to the efforts made by our 30 or so staff (all of whom voluntarily cut their paid hours to get us through), our hundreds of volunteers, our hundreds of customers, and our thousand plus friends and supporters. So all that remains for me to do is to pay tribute to Kim and her team, and to my fellow Management Committee members, whose tireless behind the scenes unpaid efforts provided crucial help with financial management, forecasting, fundraising, legal and policy matters, and generally helping to keep everyone calm and joyful.

We are immensely grateful to everyone who has helped The Farm during the year, including our funders, customers, staff, volunteers, training providers, partners, members and all of our friends.

Dr Angela E Raffle
Chair of the Management Committee

A report from our Managing Director

The Community Farm, like many others, had another turbulent year. Unlike many others, our community supported us, and we were able to turn our fortune around.

April to August saw a continuation of falling sales of organic food. In the previous year, our sales had dropped from the exceptional highs seen during the Covid-19 pandemic and from January 2022 the impact of high inflation caused by the cost-of-living crisis drove customers back to cheap food. The message from the media was clear: all households need to save money. The message from the supermarkets was even clearer: you need cheap food, and the supermarkets can provide it for you.

By August 2022, we were facing closure by Christmas if our finances could not be improved.

Despite its financial position, our Community Farm continued to succeed. The Farm continued to produce quality organic produce, our wildlife continued to thrive, and our community grew in numbers and diversity.

To address the finances we launched an honest campaign that reminded our community we needed support: encouraging our household customers to buy veg boxes; our wholesale customers (local restaurants and shops) to buy our produce; and our funding partners and friends of the farm to provide grants and donations for our diverse communities programme.

Our community responded. Staff, volunteers, grantors and friends understood our message and did what they could. Our food sales increased, we secured grants to cover core costs, we reduced our overheads and we received generous donations. All of this combined resulted in a small surplus by year end.

My strongest memory of that time is of our team; our staff and volunteers who showed incredible strength, flexibility and generosity to reduce our costs and increase our income. Unrelated to the finances, it was also time for five key members of staff to leave The Farm. From Head Grower to Finance Manager, this would have been significant change on its own. Unable to recruit immediately, our remaining staff and volunteers learnt new skills, changed their hours and showed incredible kindness to create a new flexible team to ensure our survival.

After Christmas, we finished the year securing significant funds for the year ahead, embedding a new farming team ready to build on the legacy left by our Head Grower and developing our Senior Team to guide The Farm in my absence as I prepared for maternity leave.

The Community Farm is technically a small organisation of employees; in reality, it is a vast community of people and wildlife who all benefit from its existence. This year our community has shown once again how it can thrive where others cannot. As we look forward to 2023 and beyond, unfortunately there is no sign of a calmer future. The Community Farm is still needed as a beacon, and we still need all your support to continue to be one.

With thanks,
Kim Brooks
Managing Director



Farming

Overall, this was a year of transition as we moved to a new team structure. It was a steep learning curve made steeper by extreme weather conditions immediately before the change in staffing. We suffered the loss of a few crops due to the drought last summer, with the harvest period cut short in others. Fortunately, we were able to irrigate when needed, with no restrictions to our water supply.

At the end of the year, we found ourselves very close to our predicted crop sales, short by just under £2,500 (-2%). Our crop plan sales forecast (£88,591) was an increase of 25% on last year, factoring in an increase in crop areas in rotation (1.1 acres higher than 2021), sales price increases and our confidence in crop performance.

Some of the best performing crops this year included cucumbers which yielded 30% more than forecast and winter salad which produced 352kg, more than 100kg above forecast. Our winter squash also did well, producing 9.3 tonnes, a 14% increase on last year.

The year was punctuated by several changes in personnel. Head Grower, John English, who joined as a volunteer in 2011, then became organic apprentice and later led the growing operation from 2014, moved on in September 2022 to an exciting role at the Soil Association. The position was filled by John Miller as Food and Farming Manager in 2023, a role which incorporates some of the duties of Head Grower and Commercial Buyer, strengthened by a new three-person growing team – Will Warin (long-term volunteer), Nick Haigh (seasonal worker from 2022), and Harley Wright (from Elm Tree Farm). Facilitated by the Food and Farming Manager, the new team have led on the crop and field planting for 2023/24, and have assigned roles for key areas of The Farm in order to distribute workload fairly.

The building of our fifth polytunnel was planned for winter of last year, but has been deferred to winter 2023/24, and we have applied for grant funding from Farming in Protected Landscapes (FiPL). Having the fifth polytunnel in operation in time for the 2024 season would be a great asset to The Farm, increasing our tunnel production by 20%.

Growing a new team structure

With our Head Grower and Commercial Buyer roles vacant at the same time, it presented an opportunity to review how we operate as a farm. Food and Farming were previously viewed as separate entities, with a gap between the production and selling of our crops.

Creating one Food and Farming Manager role joins the dots between what we grow, what our partnering farms grow, and what our customers want to see in their boxes. Since January 2023, this role has been strengthened by a three-person growing team operating in a flat, non-hierarchical structure, with each Grower leading on a specific area – market garden, polytunnels, and field – allowing them to go deeper into the detail and take on more ownership and accountability.

“What is interesting about growing vegetables is that there is rarely one way of doing things. With so many variables at play, opening it up to collaborative decision making means problems can be solved with a greater palette of experience, opinion and evidence. Of course, this is not without its challenges but we are beginning to see some success in this way of working. With patience and understanding, robust processes, and open and honest communication, the Growers will continue to flourish as a team. We are not alone in trialling this approach and by sharing learning across different farms we are helping create new models for the future.”

John Miller
Food and Farming Manager



Food

This was a difficult year for organic food retailers, as we, like others, were forced to grapple with a significant loss in customers due to the cost of living crisis. We normally see a slight increase in weekly customers in the first half of the year, but in 2022, we experienced a catastrophic 26% drop¹.

During the summer of 2022 we announced that The Farm was experiencing financial trouble and we called on our friends and supporters to help. And you listened. We received phenomenal support, with press coverage from ITV and BBC local news, Bristol 24/7, The Mendip Times and the Bristol Magazine. During our campaigning period, more than 60 volunteers distributed 7,000 flyers, with countless more spreading the word.

These efforts resulted in over 200 new and 66 returning customers, as well as over £11,000 in donations. The campaign reversed the usual trend of ending our summer period at around 90% of pre-summer customer levels. Instead, this year customer numbers were 117% of pre-summer levels².

Despite the challenges, we fed 200 families at Christmas through a collaborative project with Bristol City Council's Families in Focus, funded by the Holiday Activities Fund, providing nutritious, organic produce to families in the lead up to Christmas. We also supported Caring at Christmas for the 5th year running, providing almost £500 worth of food and donations to support their project.



This year, 17% of the food we sold came from our fields, and more than 60% of what we brought in from elsewhere came from the South West³.



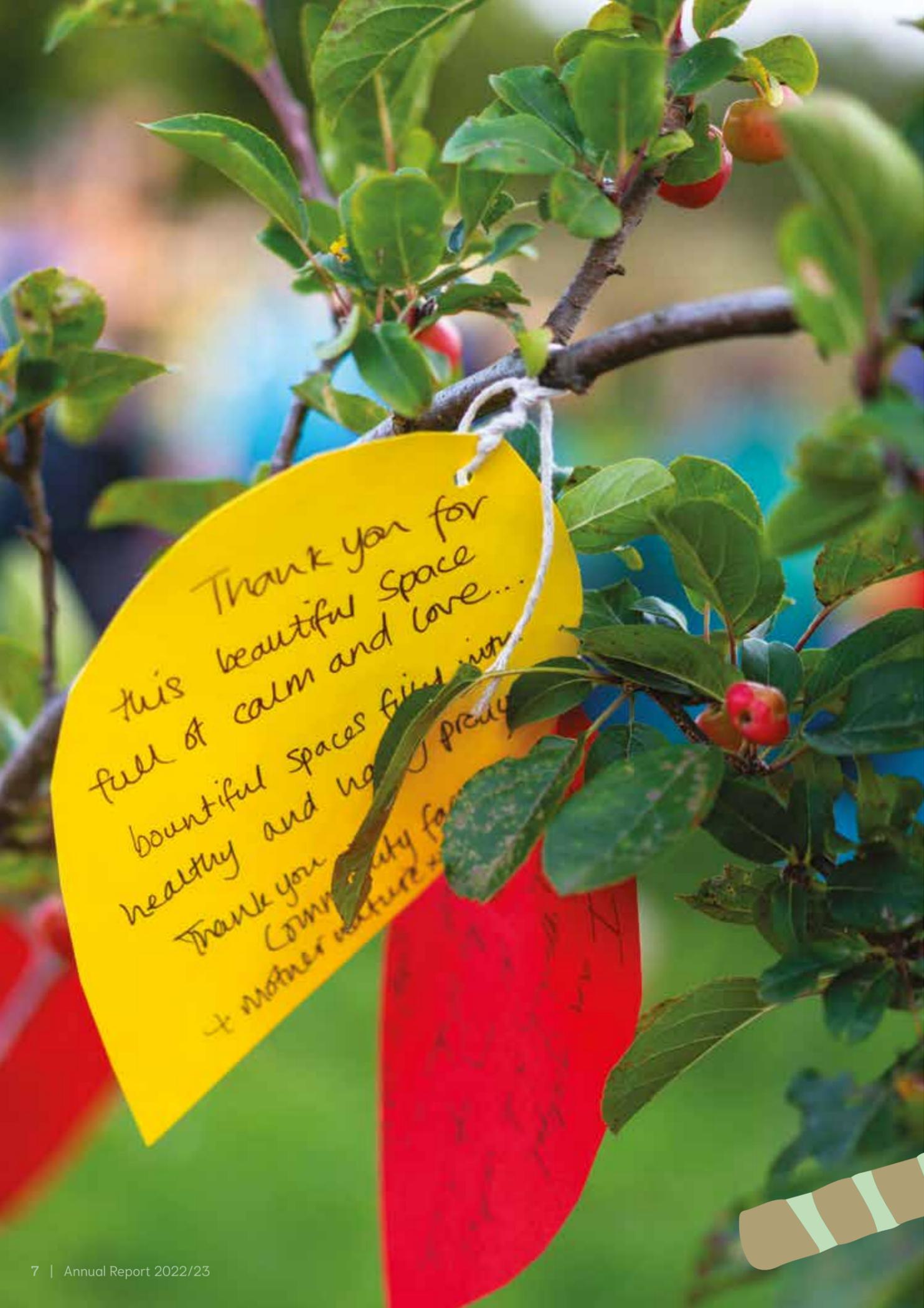
When the harvest gives you apples... make apple juice!

We had a bumper crop of apples this year (3.3 tonnes), but apples are unpredictable as a crop line and our forecast was way off. So, as the saying goes... we made juice! This was a great opportunistic use of our apples, and a project we really enjoyed – we juiced enough apples for 1,200 bottles, which were lovely box add-ons and gave us enough supply to last until June 2023. We are now figuring out if, given the choice, it would be more financially beneficial to sell our apples wholesale or juice them. Watch this space!

None of this would have been possible without your support, and while we're not out of the woods yet, your support made a huge difference and has allowed us to continue welcoming people onto the land, providing a route to market to more than 40 other producers in the South West and supporting a way of farming that is better for the health of people and the planet.



¹ From 714 customers in the first week of January to 525 customers in the last week of June.
² From an average of 531 customers per week in June to an average of 619 customers per week in September.
³ This represents the value rather than the volume of food sales. For example, salad weighs next to nothing, but is a high value item.



Thank you for
this beautiful space
full of calm and love...
bountiful spaces filled with
healthy and happy people
Thank you Community for
+ mother nature

Communities

Over the past year, with all its setbacks, we have been more amazed and delighted by the support from our communities than ever before. Community is fundamental to our work at The Farm, and the Communities Programme at The Farm has now settled into five strands: Volunteering, Growing Wellbeing (supported by EcoWild), Schools (supported by Earthwise), Targeted Outreach with community partners, and Events.

Volunteering

Volunteering remains the beating heart of what we do, and includes weekday field volunteers, Community Farmer Days, wildlife volunteers and corporate volunteering. It is a testament to the joy people experience when helping on The Farm that many of our original volunteers who helped The Farm come into being are still coming regularly today.

Our weekday field sessions have been running at capacity three times a week, with volunteers generously giving their time to get jobs done across The Farm, from sowing, weeding and harvesting our crops, to planting and preparing the land. Our volunteer opportunities this year were funded in part by The Network for Social Change.



Growing Wellbeing

With significant investment from the West of England Combined Authority, this year saw us bring our wellbeing work together under the umbrella of Growing Wellbeing.

Our wellbeing courses:

GROW & MAKE

A 12-week course in therapeutic horticulture



WILD STEPS

A 6-week course in therapeutic conservation



LAKESIDE WELLBEING

A 6-week course in therapeutic mindfulness, movement and creativity



We also introduced Grow Days and Wild Days – one off days which allow previous participants the opportunity to top up their wellbeing after graduating from our courses, and also to encourage people who aren't sure about committing to a whole course to try it out first.

While this more joined-up way of working presented some challenges, it also allowed us to become more strategic in promoting our work, both within green prescribing networks and to the public, and to think longer-term about what our role in this sector is. It was a joy to move from a very precarious position in relation to funding, to a more stable structure and we are delighted that we managed to secure funding for the next few years to continue to grow communities and their wellbeing.

"I live in a council estate in the city...you can often end up thinking 'what's my meaning, what's my purpose?' and when you come out here and spend time like we have this morning you realise, 'my purpose is to be a living being'"
(Lakeside Wellbeing participant, 2022)

Grow and Make participants (18 people over 30 sessions) developed and maintained the learning area, especially the Forest Garden, while Wild Steps participants (31 people over 26 sessions) looked after our hedgerows and pond. In addition, Lakeside Wellbeing welcomed more than 50 people to four six-week courses providing a different route for people to engage with The Farm, and connecting the team with the wider wellbeing and green prescribing sector.

Schools

We continue to work in partnership with Earthwise on our schools programme and have developed a more strategic partnership with Chew Valley School. This year, we hosted seven sessions for the school, involving over 200 students who came as part of their Food Technology GCSE, work experience week and the school's climate and growing groups.

Targeted outreach with community partners

Food and farming is one of the least diverse sectors in the UK and we are continuing to work in partnership with organisations who are working to tackle this lack of diversity. This past year, thanks to funding by Farming in Protected Landscapes, we provided 31 sessions for our community partners Groundwork South IMPACT, Aid Box Community, Square Food Foundation, and Black 2 Nature, reaching more than 150 people.

Events

As well as our regular owl prowls, birdsong and foraging walks, we held three wonderful seasonal events here at The Farm including a harvest fundraiser, a festive craft day, and a wassail, funded by Farming in Protected Landscapes.

The harvest fundraiser alone saw 114 people coming along to sample the delicious food and drink, to take part in the squash olympics and raffle, and to try their hand at the squash harvest. We raised over £2,000 for The Farm, and fun was had by all!



"This place is so important to me, I don't know what I would do without it, I can't imagine coping"
(Volunteer, 2023)

Valley Fest

Valley Fest, Bristol's lakeside food and music festival, is held each summer in the fields neighbouring The Farm. When the festival gates open, the landscape is abuzz with music, food and fun, and we host revellers on the land for farm tours, as well as sharing information about organic, nature-friendly farming at our stall and on stage. Valley Fest is a wonderful opportunity to get people on the land, and revive the connection between food, where it's grown, and who grows it. In 2022 we also used the festival to shout about the financial difficulties facing The Farm with almost 30 brilliant volunteers helping us get the message across.



Wildlife

As we tune into the different seasons on The Farm, we can't fail to notice the changes taking place around us and the effects on plants and animals. With a colder than usual spring, followed by the hottest summer on record, 2022 was certainly memorable.

The sound of late spring at The Farm was a cacophony of bird song, and with the blossoming of flowering plants came the bees and other insects. When summer arrived, the prolonged heatwave and drought was a worrying period for us – would plant and animal life have been able to gain sufficient strength and reproductive capacity to see through the winter?

Autumn brought positive news. A survey by ecologist Elizabeth Pimley revealed three dormouse nests – now empty – but evidence of summer occupation. We were thrilled to learn that this endangered and legally protected species had found food and shelter in our hedgerows, confirming that the careful restoration of these borders was literally bearing fruit. When we began in 2011 the hedgerows surrounding our fields were heavily flailed, whereas now flourishing blackthorn, hawthorn, hazel and bramble scramble among the oak and ash saplings, providing shade, shelter, food and a superb habitat year round.

As in previous years, we continued the annual Bumblebee Conservation Trust's BeeWalk, carried out monthly from March to October. Despite extreme weather, the numbers are holding up with 227 bumblebees recorded during these snapshot surveys. We've also continued with the Big Butterfly Count in April 2023 with support from Butterfly Conservation and volunteers – both counts enable us to build a better picture of biodiversity at The Farm.



Other wildlife sightings this year include:

- Redwings
- Swallows
- Fieldfare
- Swifts
- Starlings
- Stoats



The Community Farm 2022/23 in numbers

4.6KM OF LEEKS PLANTED

9,000
CUCUMBERS
HARVESTED

9.3 TONNES
OF SQUASH
HARVESTED

7,000 FLYERS
DISTRIBUTED
BY FRIENDS AND
SUPPORTERS

60%

OF PRODUCE WE BROUGHT
CAME FROM THE SOUTH WEST

200 NEW
CUSTOMERS
JOINED DURING THE
SUMMER CAMPAIGN

1,900
VOLUNTEER DAYS
WORKED

227
BUMBLEBEES
COUNTED

15 DORMOUSE
NESTING
BOXES
INSTALLED

500
COMMUNITY
FARMER DAY
ATTENDANCES

1,700 PEOPLE
REACHED THROUGH
OUR COMMUNITIES
PROGRAMME

500 BULBS
POND PLANTS
AND WILDFLOWER
PLUGS
PLANTED BY WILD STEPS

Financial Report for the Annual Accounts 2022/23

The Community Farm has had a turbulent financial year. The first half of the year saw food sales continue to fall and without securing further funding The Farm faced possible closure by the end of December 2022. Following an incredible response from our community, coupled with some swift decisions by the management team to reduce the operating cost base, we saw a complete turnaround and ended the year with a net profit of £46,000 (compared to a loss of £72,000 in the previous year).

The Farm's underlying financial position has improved in line with the profit, being a net surplus of £105,000 compared to a £57,000 deficit in the previous year.

Summary Financial Statement of Income and Expenditure ^[4]

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

Table 1: Summary	2022/23 £'000	2021/22 £'000
Turnover	946	1,102
Cost of sales	(487)	(565)
Gross Profit	459	537
Gross Profit Margin	49%	49%
Administrative expenses	(557)	(645)
Operating Surplus/(deficit)	(97)	(108)
Other Operating Income and Grants	144	36
Operating Profit/(deficit)	46	(72)
Interest and similar items	(0)	(0)
Surplus/(deficit)	46	(72)

⁴ See the Detailed Income Statement on Page 9 of the Accounts. All figures are rounded to nearest thousand

Turnover

Turnover decreased by 14% compared with the previous year, driven by an 11% decline in veg box sales as the cost of living crisis continued to drive customers back to the discounted food retailers. The drop in market turnover reflects a full year without our Community Farm shop in Green Park Station in Bath (this was closed in November 2021). Despite the difficult trading conditions, turnover from our wholesale customers was 11% above forecasted sales.

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

Table 2: Turnover	2022/23 £'000	2021/22 £'000	Percentage Change
Box Sales	671	751	-11%
Wholesale	239	286	-17%
Markets/Veg Shed	13	50	-74%
Other Turnover	24	14	70%
Total Sales	946	1,102	-14%

Key Drivers of Financial Performance in 2022/2023

The overall deficit between total Farm expenditure versus income from trading was £97,000 (£108,000 the prior year) reflecting the ongoing need to fund our communities programme from non-operating sources of income.

Food sales started the financial year 33% lower than the previous year (April 2022: £69,000 versus April 2021: £103,000), as the cost of living crisis took hold and stories of high inflation were circulating in the media. Average weekly food sales dropped for 7 consecutive months between January and July 2023, falling to below pre-pandemic levels in June. Financial projections in August indicated The Farm would not have sufficient funds beyond December 2022 to continue trading. In response, we launched our campaign, appealing to customers, staff, volunteers and friends of The Farm to support us.

With huge thanks to everyone who supported us, this campaign successfully improved the finances for the second half of the year, with the following highlights:

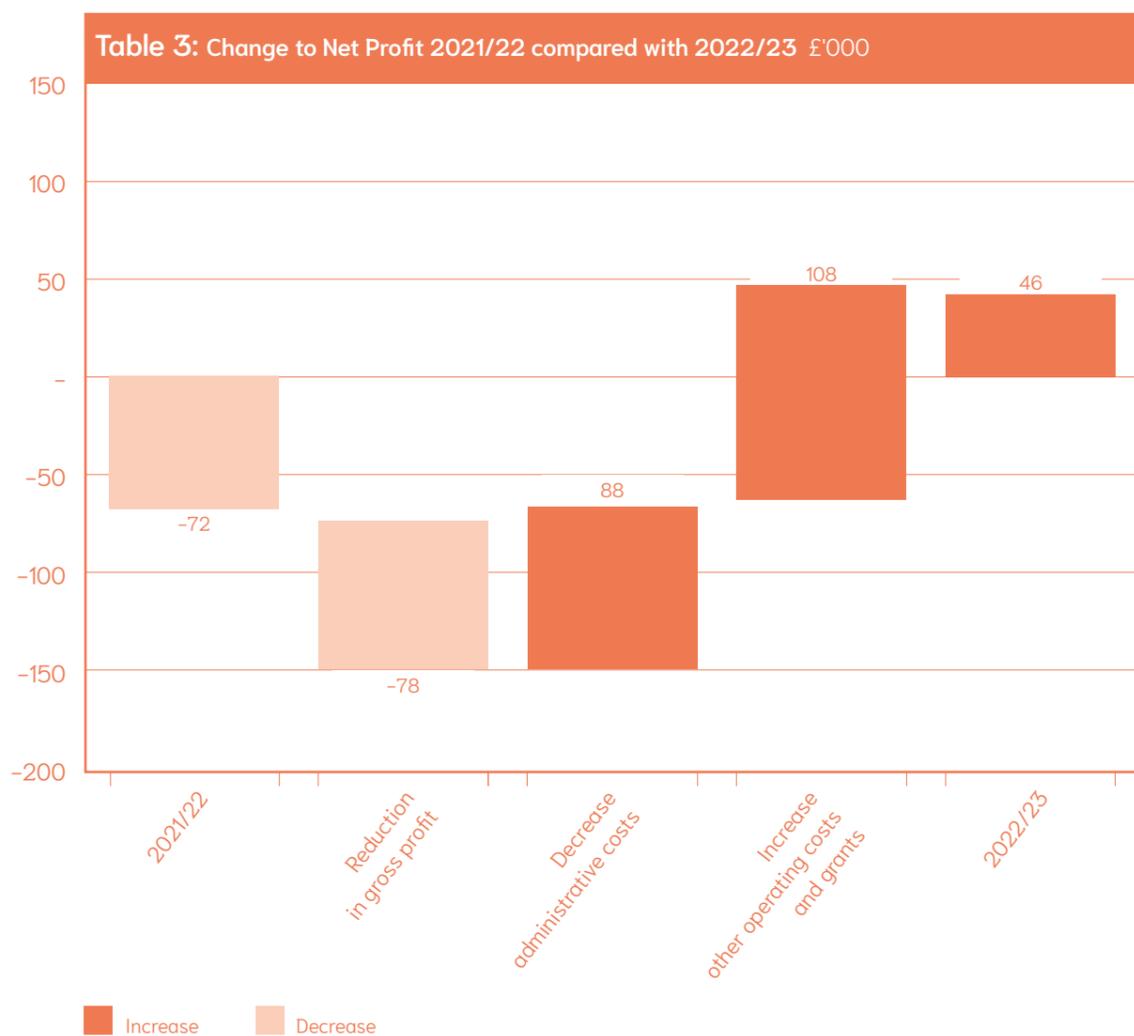
- Weekly food sales increased by 48% between August and December
- The Farm secured grant income of £50,000 from WECA to cover core costs of our Communities programme between August 2022 and March 2023, and used £40,000 of grant income from the Monica Fund to cover other staffing and operational costs
- The Farm received £26,000 in donations between August 2022 and March 2023
- A recruitment freeze and staff changes reduced staffing costs by an estimated £17,000 between September and January, and despite running a successful campaign, marketing spend for the year was reduced by £5,000 compared with the previous year

Despite the challenges, The Farm continued to honour its commitment to meet the Living Wage Foundation guidelines by increasing wages in January 2023 by 10%.

We revised our financial strategy in the previous year to recognise the importance of fundraising grants and donations. The increase in other income (inclusive of gross grants) from prior year was £93,000, rising from £51,000 in the previous year to £143,000 this financial year.

Overall, when taking donations and net grants into account, the current year's performance improved by £118,000 versus 2021/2022.

The overall movement in the position is analysed in Table 3: Financial Performance in 2022/2023 compared to previous year.



Donations

The Community Farm's Community Fund received £6,000 (2021/22: £7,000) from generous customers which was partially spent during the year, with a balance of £3,000 being carried forward to the following year.

The Farm spent £3,000 of the £15,000 donated the previous year from the estate of Hugh Norton, former Management Committee member who loved The Farm and its wildlife. This was spent on tools and equipment to benefit our wildlife. £12,000 remains to be carried into the following year.

Grants

Funding for Social Change

£7,000 was received and spent in the year on wages for staff supporting our community programme.

West of England Combined Authority (WECA)

£50,000 was received and spent in developing and running the Growing Wellbeing programme between August and March.

Quartet Community Foundation

£5,000 was received and £2,000 was spent in the year on transport for participants of our Growing Wellbeing community programme. £3,000 will be carried forward or spent in the following year.

Farming in Protected Landscapes

£14,000 was received and spent in the year on running activities to support wildlife on The Farm with 5 community organisations.

The Monica Fund

£40,000 was spent in the year on staff wages. £13,000 will be carried forward for spending in future years.

Overall financial health

A summary Balance Sheet is set out below (Table 4) for the year ended 26th of March 2023 (prior year 27th of March 2022)

Table 4: Balance Sheet	2023 £'000	2022 £'000
Intangible	5	4
Tangible	68	77
Total Fixed Assets	72	82
Stock	10	17
Debtors	71	35
Cash	69	85
Total Current Assets	151	137
Creditors: due within one year	118	162
Net Current Assets / (Liabilities)	32	(24)
Total Assets less current liabilities	105	57
Net Assets / (Liabilities)	105	57

The net assets of The Farm increased to £105,000 from £57,000 in the prior year. This has been driven principally by improvement in working capital; decrease in creditors and increase in debtors.

The Farm has a net current asset of £32,000 at the end of the year. The balance of £13,000 in the Monica Fund is held as deferred income, however this can be used at management discretion for operating costs or investment.

Conclusion

Difficult trading conditions continued into the first half of financial year 2022/23 and put The Community Farm under significant financial risk. The incredible response of our supporters and staff combined with significant funding through grants created financial stability in the second half of the year.

Longer term, donations and grant funding remain an essential part of the funding strategy for The Farm in order to continue to deliver social and environmental value through our community farming, wildlife activities and communities programmes. Thanks to the hard work of staff during 2022/23, and the generosity of the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and the Real Farming Trust, significant funding has been secured at the beginning of the financial year 2023/24.

We would like to thank all our donors, partners, supporters and loyal customers for their continued support as The Farm continues its work to provide so many people with the opportunity to be part of an organic farm and food system that is benefitting local people and wildlife.



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