



Strategic Plan 2014 - 2018

CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

SECTION 1 – INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY FARM

- 1.1 VISION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES**
- 1.3 COMMERCE MEETS COMMUNITY**
- 1.3 THE CORE ACTIVITIES AND STRUCTURE OF THE COMMUNITY FARM**

SECTION 2 – DEVELOPING THE ENTERPRISE

- 2.1 THE FIELD OPERATION**
- 2.2 THE WHOLESALE OPERATION**
- 2.3 THE BOX SCHEME**
- 2.4 THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT**
- 2.5 FUNDING THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT**

SECTION 3 - PEOPLE: MEMBERS, THE BOARD, STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

- 3.1 MEMBERSHIP**
- 3.2 THE BOARD**
- 3.3 STAFF**
- 3.4 VOLUNTEERS**

SECTION 4 – FINANCE

SECTION 5- PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

SECTION 6 – TCF SUPPORT STRUCTURES

- 6.1 IT INFRASTRUCTURE**
- 6.2 BUILDINGS AND AMENITIES**
- 6.3 TRANSPORT AND ACCESS**

SECTION 7 – FURTHER MILESTONES, RISK ASSESSMENT, MONITORING & EVALUATION, ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

- 7.1 MILESTONES AND ASPIRATIONS**
- 7.2 ASSESSMENT OF RISKS**
- 7.3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION**
- 7.4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

APPENDICES

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This Strategic Plan builds upon our experiences since the foundation of The Community Farm (“TCF”) in 2010. Our aim is to refine and reaffirm our vision for TCF over the next five years. The document is informed by a consultation process that involved a range of stakeholders, from members to customers and volunteers, in collaboration with Board members and staff. A brief description of the consultation process is given at the foot of this section.

Section One introduces The Community Farm. It sets out our vision, our aims and objectives. It describes what we believe is special and important about TCF as a social enterprise and the structure we have adopted to help us deliver our aims. It describes our core activities, including growing and selling fruit and vegetables in accordance with the principles of organic and sustainable farming methods, and our community engagement programme.

Section Two concentrates on the constituent elements of the TCF enterprise: our business operations and our community engagement. It looks at the plans we have for developing the farm, or field business, and the wholesale operation that includes the domestic vegetable box market and the corporate wholesale sector. The development of both our field and wholesale activities is closely linked to our programme of Community Engagement (CEP). This includes volunteering programmes, education and skills training courses, and holding public events with a focus on food and sustainable farming.

Section Three describes our engagement with some of the stakeholders central to the TCF enterprise. It looks at how we engage with members; how the board operates; how we work with our staff and volunteers. We also summarise our governance structure and the relationship between members, staff, board and organisation.

Section Four is the Financial Section. Our financial viability is critical to our continuing existence, and this section identifies the income streams we believe are available to us, the costs involved in running the enterprise and how we propose achieving that financial viability. It touches on the organisational disciplines we have introduced and the financial metrics we are working to, to ensure our business planning and execution remain robust.

Section Five outlines our communications and marketing strategy and the publicity and promotions programme we have developed to implement it. The strategy’s main aims are to: promote the uniqueness of TCF and raise its profile; promote our box and wholesale business; promote our learning and education opportunities; and engaging with our membership.

Section Six addresses the logistical challenges required to deliver the Strategic Plan in relation to IT, physical plant structures and amenities on site, and more generally issues concerning access to the farm and transport.

Section Seven identifies some aspirations in addition to the Milestones outlined in this document. Examples of the risks associated with achieving our aims are then considered and possible means to mitigate those risks identified. Already the lessons learned in the face of harvest failures in 2012 have informed our plans for 2013. The section finishes with a vote of thanks to all who have helped to keep the farm on track to date.

The documents included in the Appendices are there for ease of reference and further information and news about TCF is constantly updated and available at our website www.thecommunityfarm.co.uk.

THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

The content of this document is informed by the results of a consultation process that took place in June 2012 and comprised three elements:

- a. an online survey sent to Members, customers, key individuals and organisations, which attracted 148 responses, representing a response rate of 14.2%;
- b. phone, or face-to-face interviews with 18 representatives from key sectors; volunteers, wholesale customers, Board Members, staff, and potential community engagement partner organisations; and
- c. a Focus Group meeting attended by 15 people took place on 21st June 2012.

In many instances the individuals consulted belonged to more than one category of respondent, for example a Member may also be a volunteer, and a customer.

We also used the Annual General Meeting of members of TCF in October 2012 to discuss with attendees a range of issues relating to the activities and running of the farm and these, too, have been taken into account in developing this Plan. We did this in a 'World Café' style enabling all attendees to have an input into the four main areas of debate: strategic plan; box scheme promotion; the field; community engagement.

Many of the ideas and suggestions of those consulted are included, but some are not as they are either not feasible as this point in time, in part due to planning or financial constraints, or because although attractive proposals,

they do not meet our operational remit. We are indebted to all who contributed to the development of this Strategic Plan. The information gathered during the consultation period and details of the consultation process undertaken are available [here](#)

1. SECTION ONE - INTRODUCTION TO THE COMMUNITY FARM

1.1 VISION, AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

VISION

Our vision is to create a community farm supplying organic, local, seasonal produce that has community engagement and environmental sustainability at its heart, building social capital for the future.

AIMS

- a. To grow and sell organic produce within Chew Valley and the surrounding area, including Bristol and Bath;
- b. To encourage community engagement in growing, consuming and learning about local, seasonal, organic produce;
- c. To contribute to a sustainable, resilient local economy by producing food for consumption by the local community;
- d. To treat all members, employees and visitors fairly, adopting the principles of the Ethical Trade Initiative base code, or equivalent.
- e. To share knowledge and expertise to encourage adoption by others of the practices and principles of TCF; and
- f. To provide an opportunity for public spirited people and organisations to contribute financially to the community with the expectation of receiving a social dividend, rather than personal financial reward.

OBJECTIVES

The following Objectives for the next five years have been developed in relation to our core aims and provide a summary of what TCF hopes to achieve over this period.

To grow and sell organic produce within Chew Valley and the surrounding area, including Bristol and Bath:

- To increase the number of active customers purchasing vegetable boxes and organic produce by door to door delivery to 450 per week by the end of March 2015 (subject to being able to invest in the infrastructure to deliver this).

- To increase customer retention to 65% by 2016
- To increase the volume of TCF field crops in boxes

To encourage community engagement in growing, consuming and learning about local, seasonal, organic produce;

- To establish an economically viable schedule of educational activities based on farming, food and environmental conservation by 2015 based at our new Learning Zone, and develop the depth and breadth of our education project.
- To increase the number of field volunteers to 30 per week within the next four years. Currently between 5 and 12 regular volunteers a week. *Note: should we be successful in a grant application this figure will increase.*
- Slowly increase the number of Community Farming volunteer days per annum from 4 to 12 over 5 years.
- By 2018 deliver Care Farming days in partnership with a maximum of three charities or support agencies for groups of vulnerable people.
- To provide at least six Employee Volunteering Farm Activity Days each year from 2014.
- To enhance the accessibility and layout of the Field over the next three years by improving signage and accessibility.
- Hold 3 main events a year: wassail, midsummer picnic and harvest celebration

To contribute to a sustainable, resilient local economy by producing food for consumption by the local community;

- Building the network of organic growers who supply us from the surrounding areas. Currently we are working closely with three and aim to increase this number providing a route to market for small growers
- Raising our profile to become known as a successful values-based business that the community is engaged with and proud of
- To introduce apprenticeship placements from 2014 for up to five people a year over 3 years commissioned by Bristol Drugs Project.
- To participate with partners in local initiatives to promote sustainable development in the Chew Valley area, as and when opportunities arise during the life of this Strategic Plan.
- To achieve outstanding loyalty among customers, members, staff and volunteers

To treat all members, employees and visitors fairly, adopting the principles of the Ethical Trade Initiative base code, or equivalent.

- To carry out annual reviews of staff training needs and provide training where required annually and then year on year

- To introduce an annual Staff and Board Development day including an induction day for new Board members by December 2013
- To engage with members, volunteers and visitors to encourage involvement with the farm

To share knowledge and expertise to encourage adoption by others of the practices and principles of TCF;

- To establish an ongoing forum for Community Supported Agriculture and related issues at TCF Learning Zone by December 2014 and year on year.
- To hold a CSA Forum to celebrate the fifth anniversary of TCF.
- To welcome visitors from CSAs and other organisations
- To participate in SupurbFood – European funded project relating to sustainable food systems

To provide an opportunity for public spirited people and organisations to contribute financially to the community with the expectation of receiving a social dividend, rather than personal financial reward.

- To introduce a simplified Membership scheme and Open Share offer by August 2013
- To launch periodic investment opportunities within the terms of our constitution for new and existing shareholders to support specific appeals related to the development of the business
- To establish an ongoing forum for Community Supported Agriculture and related issues at TCF Learning Zone from 2014.
- To introduce a TCF online diary, or blog charting our progress as a CSA scheme that others can follow.
- To seek funding for research, and set aside an area of the Field for the development of adaptive farming techniques, such as permaculture, that mitigate the potentially harmful effects of climate change.

1.2 COMMERCE MEETS COMMUNITY

TCF is a natural vehicle for placing the community at the heart of commerce. Organic farming methods of cultivation are relatively more labour-intensive than mainstream commercial farming techniques and, as a community farm whose vision is to connect people to the food that they eat, we engage the assistance of our local community to produce the crops we grow. We benefit from Members and local people that take up volunteering opportunities in order to grow and deliver food to their community.

This extends beyond the growing of our produce. Members and volunteers work with us in many other areas of our operations, including marketing, funding applications, box preparation and events. We also aim to build a

closer relationship with our customers, so they feel a greater connection with the food they receive from us.

It involves working collaboratively with other growers in the local community to develop a more resilient supply network. This has become increasingly important to us, and our fellow growers, following the poor harvests in 2012 and is an area we are committed to strengthen to provide a market outlet for local Somerset organic growers.

In addition to this if funding is available, we would like to extend volunteering opportunities in 'Care Farming' www.carefarminguk.org to charities and organisations that support vulnerable people to rebuild self-confidence, gain therapeutic benefits from green exercise and acquire new skills. We are keen to work with people to help them into, or back into, the job market.

We aim to run educational programmes at the farm, working with schools, individuals and businesses and events that bring elements of the community together to celebrate the land and our relationship to it.

The aim is to build a symbiotic relationship between our community and enterprise that generates a dividend that contributes to the development of the business, whilst enhancing the lives of those living within our area that engage with the farm.

The success of our endeavour will be measured by its longevity; by how well our enterprise serves our community; and by the extent to which our community serves the enterprise. This is the focus of the Strategic Plan we wish to develop for the next five years.

1.3 THE CORE ACTIVITIES AND STRUCTURE OF THE COMMUNITY FARM

TCF is a form of co-operative, known as a community benefit society. Its governing document, the Rules, confirms that it exists primarily for the benefit of the community located within a 15 mile radius of the farm. This includes the metropolitan populations of Bristol and Bath and also the Chew Valley. By the fulfilment of TCF's vision and aims, we believe we can deliver a variety of related benefits to that community.

TCF's core business is growing organic vegetables, salad crops and fruit, certified as organic by the Soil Association, and marketed locally; either through door-to-door deliveries to homes in the area, wholesale outlets and through the weekly Bath Farmers' Market. The farm originally started growing on 22 acres of Grade 1 agricultural land and took on an additional 6.5 acres from April 2013.

TCF is owned by its members – approximately 500 people who bought shares in the organisation during two public share offers in 2010 and 2011. Each member has invested an amount in the company – anything between £50 and £20,000. Regardless of the amount invested each member is entitled to one vote at general meetings of the company.

TCF is managed by a Board of volunteer Directors. It currently comprises a combination of some of those who belonged to the initial TCF steering committee prior to transferring to the new company's Board, and new volunteers elected by members at subsequent Annual General Meetings. Directors are nominated by the Membership, but need not be Members of the Farm to stand for election. An Annual General Meeting is held each calendar year. Full details of the Rules of the society can be found [here](#).

TCF is also categorised as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme because it combines and fulfils the three essential elements of CSA:

-

- a. A landowner who is prepared to look at models of food production that engage the local community
- b. A farmer, or grower, who is keen to produce food for the local community and respond directly to their needs
- c. A local community with a commitment to engage with food production and to become members of the CSA scheme.

2. SECTION TWO – DEVELOPING THE ENTERPRISE

In the context of connecting (or in some cases reconnecting) people to the food that they eat, the following section focuses on commercial activities we will undertake to strengthen and develop our consumer base. Our primary task is to ensure that the level of financial return from the field and wholesale operations together are commensurate with the staffing, capital and overheads required to sustain the business. Our main focus will be on expansion of field operation, efficiency of wholesale operation, continued growth of box scheme and developing the community engagement programme.

2.1 DEVELOPING THE FIELD OPERATION

The Field is still in its infancy and will take up to ten years to reach its full potential for cultivating a balanced range of organic produce. Between now and 2023 our hope is that the Field will become a major contributor of organic farm produce to Bristol, Bath and surrounding areas. From April 2013 an additional 6.5 acres has been leased bringing our total acreage to 28, and thereafter TCF has an option to take up a further ten acres sometime in the future. Developing our field operation, however, is not purely about increasing levels of cultivation, but also awakening public interest in the

abundance of choice in fruit and vegetables available locally and learning about the journey food takes from field to fork.

The richness of vegetable varieties is something that TCF Members are familiar with, but for many supermarket shoppers, purple beans, green onions and yellow carrots are not familiar, and some traditional vegetables have almost entirely disappeared from the modern culinary compendium, such as leafy kales and herbs like French sorrel. Buyers of mass-produced, pre-packed trimmed vegetables may not know that carrots are root crops that display green bushy leaves above ground, or appreciate that young beetroot leaves can be eaten, rather than discarded. It is through education that interest in food and demand for locally sourced organic produce will grow.

2.1.1 The following is a list of proposals relating to the commercial development of the Field Operation. Our plans are to:

- a. Increase volunteer staffing levels at peak periods in order to enhance the supply and quality of farm produce.
- b. Incorporate further training into regular volunteer Field days.
- c. Concentrate on doing more of what we currently do well, particularly in the area of high value crops.
- d. Invest in additional poly tunnels to expand the area of protected cropping in order to provide protection from adverse weather conditions.
- e. Reconfigure the Field layout in order to facilitate management of the various activities taking place on site. This will involve:

Relocating mechanised bulk crops, such as potatoes and carrots, to the 'High' fields furthest from the entrance, and reserving the 'Home' field at the entrance and close to the site amenities, for the cultivation of a diverse range of crops in order to introduce adults and children to all things edible from the field, and learn how to grow, prepare and serve them.

- f. Rearrange staff and volunteering work patterns to complement the new Field layout.

The 'High' fields will be open only to staff and trained, regular volunteers during the working day whilst the 'Home' field will be accessible to everyone visiting and volunteering at the farm. This includes occasional farm volunteers, Care Farmers, and members of

the public attending training and education courses, or taking part in corporate activity days, or events on site.

- g. Set aside areas of the farm for
 - I. Teams' of experienced farm volunteers to undertake specific growing projects.
 - II. school children to cultivate their own allotment on site
 - III. a volunteer picnic area, with wheelchair access from the entrance.
 - IV. Care Farming groups to engage in cooperative ventures producing selected crops on a share-farming basis at some time in the future.

- h. Consider introducing complementary, alternative farming activities such as setting aside meadow-land for stock rearing for the table or wildlife conservation, or introducing bee hives to stimulate pollination and produce wax and honey and holding a permaculture trial in partnership with a research organisation.

2.1.2 Milestones for the Field Operation

Milestones	Timetable
To identify discrete projects for experienced and skilled farm volunteers to undertake, such as protected salad cropping.	From April 2013
To review the September 2012 Field Development Plan including issues such as growing optimum value crops, and extending protected growing areas.	By September 2013, then year on year
To provide 5 apprenticeship work placements and an apprenticeship leader 8 months of the year commissioned by Bristol Drugs Project.	By February 2014
To increase the number of field volunteers to 30 per week within the next four years. Currently between 5 and 12 regular volunteers a week. <i>Note: should we be successful in a grant application this figure will increase.</i>	From March 2014 and ongoing
To set up an optional training day each year for regular field volunteers and provide ongoing training in seasonal topics across the year.	By March 2014
Increase utilisation of current growing area through increase in labour provided through the apprenticeship scheme with BDP. Anticipated increase in yield from to be between 25% & 33%	From March 2014
From 2015 onwards	Timetable
To extend the Field growing area by a further 5 to 10 acres.	From March 2015
To increase the volume of TCF Field crops in vegetable	To be inserted in

boxes.	2015
Introduction of crops currently bought in from non-local suppliers (Including carrots & parsnips)	From 2016

2.2 THE WHOLESALE OPERATION

The wholesale and box scheme operation is roughly split between one third of total sales deriving from box sales and two thirds deriving from wholesale. Labour costs are split roughly 50/50 between the two operations. In addition to crops from our own fields, vegetable box and wholesale orders contain a variety of organically certified English field crops as well as organic fruit and vegetables grown in Europe and beyond. We source top quality vegetables either directly from farmers within Somerset and the southwest region, or via wholesale markets serving organic producers further afield in England and parts of Europe. We never air freight produce and make decisions on our produce mix based on what is available seasonally.

The Wholesale Business

TCF wholesale enterprise provides a significant part of our turnover and income and adds scope and diversity to our customer base enabling TCF to reach a wider audience, from independent food stores to local restaurants, cafes and schools. Operating mainly in Bristol the wholesale business has managed to gain surer footing after a rocky period losing custom, due to the difficult economic conditions, by refocusing efforts to secure sales to new and committed wholesale partners such as The River Cottage Canteen and Watershed in Bristol. The team also recognises the continued trade and partnership with the Better Food Company and St. Christopher's School. Though less predictable and potentially more vulnerable to outside factors, the wholesale market allows the farm to trade higher volumes of produce allowing it to stock greater variety of produce available at more competitive rates. At present we have sufficient wholesale custom to sustain the business and do not plan to increase the number of customers significantly, but to ensure retention of existing customers and build up our network of smaller customers.

- On average the net weekly profit for wholesale sales at the time of writing and before overheads and wages is £2330 (assuming a margin return of 25%)

2.2.1 Our strategic plans for the wholesale operation are to:

- a. Maintain our current wholesale customer base, improve the quality of our service and develop the business through recommendation by existing customers.

- b. Carry out a survey of our wholesale customers and our suppliers to gauge levels of satisfaction and opportunities for development and respond to the findings

2.2.2 Milestones for the wholesale operation

Milestones	Timetable
To take on a weekly stall at Bath Farmers' Market	From May 2013
To carry out market and consumer research in order to improve the wholesale operation and trial new products.	By December 2014
To attend more local events and food markets to promote TCF and sell our produce, possibly including setting up a farm gate stall.	By March 2015
Investigate options for combined warehouse with field operation or other suitable premises for wholesale.	From 2014
To provide apprenticeship opportunity for the 5 apprentices through the work with BDP.	From February 2014

2.3 THE BOX SCHEME

As of the 29th March 2013 we have 2438 customers registered on our box scheme database. We supply on average 410 customers each week packing on average 500 boxes plus 380 extra items. The average customer spend per customer is around £15.20. The majority are door-to-door deliveries across the area, although some are collected from TCF hubs, for example at the Better Food Company in St Werburghs Bristol. The share of own produce in our box varies from season to season, and is comparable to most other medium scale vegetable box businesses.

During 2012 vegetable box sales remained stable during the first half of the year despite a dip in the Field output due to adverse weather conditions, and then increased throughout the autumn. This was largely due to the voluntary closure of two local, small-scale vegetable box schemes that TCF stepped in to take on and by working to improve product, customer service and extra items available to purchase. By developing a new packing system and emphasising the need to increase customer's average spend the team have successfully improved the efficiency and profitability of the box scheme. Though potentially the most profitable part of the business in the long term, the box scheme does have significant overheads and is logistically complex. As such, expansion much further than its current level will require further investment in more vans, staff and IT support along with more pronounced marketing activity and a wider network of suppliers.

- During the week commencing 27/11/2011 the box scheme delivered 330 boxes and 44 extra items
- A year later during the week commencing 02/12/2012 the box scheme delivered 463 boxes and 210 extra items

- On average the net weekly profit for box scheme sales before overheads and wages is £3070 (assuming a margin return of 51%)

2.3.1 Our strategic plans for the box scheme are to:

- a. Increase the TCF share in the organic vegetable box market within the area by attracting new customers.
- b. Concentrate on what we do well and support other organic suppliers within the South West farming sector through establishing links to our supply chain. We have identified growers, some nearby and others within a 40 to 50 mile radius, that have a comparative advantage in producing specific vegetables, such as onions, peppers and cucumbers for our vegetable boxes.
- c. Gradually increase the contribution of English vegetables from our own field to box over the next five years.
- d. Carry out market and consumer research in order to improve the box operation. Suggestions include:
 - i. surveying the current vegetable box market to identify any new initiatives that will strengthen our market position.
 - ii. carrying out a survey of customers on our existing box scheme database to gauge levels of satisfaction with box contents and glean suggestions for ways in which the box scheme can be improved.
 - iii. Identifying and implementing ways of turning those who have 'thought about getting a box....but' into customers
- e. Periodically include a 'bonus' item in boxes for members and regular customers as a thank you for their custom e.g. sample pack of new product.
- f. Run trials of new vegetable boxes to attract additional customers, for example a 'toddler box' for babies and young children, and introduce packs of grade-out, or misshapen fruit and vegetables for preserve and pickle making.
- g. Attend more local events and food markets to promote TCF and sell our produce.
- h. Identify ways of making boxes, vegetables, and information about the farm available via the farm gate.

- i. Redevelop the box scheme database to improve customer service, promote sales and customer management.

2.3.2 Milestones for the box scheme

Milestones	Timetable
To carry out market and consumer research in order to improve the box operation and trial new products.	By December 2014
To attend more local events and food markets to promote TCF and sell our produce, possibly including setting up a farm gate stall.	By March 2015
To increase the weekly number of vegetable box customers to 450 a week (currently around 410)	By March 2015
To increase the volume of TCF Field crops in vegetable boxes.	To be inserted in 2015
To increase customer retention to 65% to be achieved through focused marketing, increased hubs, improved customer experience through new ordering system.	By March 2015

2.4 THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT (CEP).

The Community Farm is an enterprise that involves the active participation of volunteer workers and consumers to support the enterprise. As a Community Benefit Society we are committed to providing social benefits for local people, such as skills training and educational opportunities and the positive impact on health and wellbeing from participating in an ethical venture, in addition to providing a venue that local people can use and enjoy. We hope also to develop opportunities for 'Care Farming'. Our Community Engagement Project is based on this commitment and in this section we outline four specific areas of community engagement through:

- Volunteering
- Education and skills training
- Care farming
- Engagement within the local area

2.4.1 Community Engagement through Volunteering

Volunteering is a key element of not only our enterprise operation, but also our Community Engagement Project. Our aim is to harness local enthusiasm

for volunteering and the following list covers plans to make volunteering at TCF even more attractive to individuals and organisations:

- a. To provide at least one hour per month of training for regular Field volunteers in horticultural topics, including sessions to be held at each Community Farmer Day, as well as an optional farming training day each year.
- b. To identify discrete projects for experienced and skilled horticultural volunteers to undertake, such as protected salad cropping or tending the asparagus beds. This will benefit both volunteers eager to take on more challenging tasks, assist the business by easing demands on staff time, and make a valued contribution to field output.
- c. To offer a range of volunteering options in addition to farming that appeal to a broad spectrum of people. For example, hosting school or corporate visits, carrying out research work, marketing and social media, box packing and warehouse duties or general maintenance tasks.
- d. Some members are unable to help out with strenuous work on the field but would still like to volunteer their skills and experience. To this end, carry out an optional Skills Audit of volunteers and Members, who wish to contribute their experience and expertise to assist in the implementation of this Strategic Plan. It is evident from talking to volunteers and Members that there is a pool of talent and skills available that could benefit TCF over the next few years.
- e. To find suitable expert advice for design, feasibility and costs to introduce a wheelchair accessible raised bed area to enable volunteers with restricted mobility to actively participate in farming activities, and ensure appropriate toilet facilities are available.
- f. To provide volunteer placements for apprentices studying farming, marketing and other related topics that would benefit the farm.
- g. To address the question of how to acknowledge the valued contribution that volunteers make to TCF. Although many see volunteering as a reward of itself, we will consider what options are available, including the idea of introducing a new Membership category to thank volunteers who support Farm staff on a regular basis throughout the year.
- h. To hold lunchtime discussions around food, farming and the environment at volunteer Community Farmer Days during the year.

- i. To establish volunteer groups within outlying districts to promote sustainable food and farming in their areas, and attract new customers. In October 2011 local members within the Chew Valley set up the Valley Promotion Group with TCF support and introduced a seed growing project for local schools and other promotional activities. We would like to build on this experience and form groups elsewhere to encourage young and old to get involved with what we do.
- j. To arrange the most cost effective community or commercial transport option(s) available from urban pick up points to the Farm.
- k. To produce a Hand Book for volunteers including a site map, and Health and Safety regulations.
- l. To evaluate the benefits of engaging groups of visiting farm volunteers run by organisations such as WWOOF (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms), if suitable accommodation can be found locally.

2.4.2 Community Engagement through Education and Training.

This will be a major undertaking and one that underpins our ethos to connect people to the food that they eat. To date TCF has obtained grant funding to purchase and equip our new Learning Zone, together with a budget to deliver our first year's education and training programme from the autumn of 2012. Our proposal is to develop and evolve a programme that comprises elements including:

- a. Inviting schools and youth groups to take part in hands-on activity days at the Farm and also to run outreach projects at their premises.
- b. Providing subsidised, and fee-paying education and skills training courses taught by experts in their field based around food, farming and the environment, such as learning how to grow globe artichokes, or reduce personal carbon footprints.
- c. Establishing a 'Employee Volunteering Activity Day' programme for businesses in the area wishing to make a contribution to community development within their local environs.
- d. Arranging Cevas and Care Farming training for farm staff engaging with children and vulnerable adults. (Countryside Educational Visits Accreditation Scheme).

2.4.3 Community Engagement through Care Farming

Care Farming is a concept that has evolved to meet the need to provide therapeutic and vocational activities for people supported by social care charities during their recovery from mental ill health, or addiction to drugs and alcohol. In order to establish a viable, and mutually rewarding Care Farming programme we will need to fully investigate the options open to us by working with key third sector organisations to identify potential partners. Some are likely to be new partners, and others are already known to us, for example 'Developing Health and Independence' that runs a fruit and vegetable stall at Green Park Station in Bath and also supplies TCF vegetable boxes.

The activities proposed are to develop and explore a programme for introducing care farming that might include:

- a. Setting up a care-farming programme with up to 3 social care organisations over the next five years supporting vulnerable people to grow in confidence and develop skills that will enable them to lead independent and fulfilling lives.
- b. Offering individuals with some knowledge of horticulture either therapeutic farming opportunities, or skills training for those seeking employment opportunities, and provide apprenticeship placements for clients enrolled in farming and food related qualifying courses.
- c. Evaluating the potential benefits of establishing a co-operative growing venture with one, or more, social support agencies at TCF. For example, an agency will be offered a share of the produce cultivated on a dedicated plot in return for farming it.

The first of these programmes will start from the beginning of 2014. TCF will be commissioned by the Bristol Drugs Project to have 5 apprentices referred by the service or clients at the end of their rehabilitation looking to retrain or gain employment. In addition there will be an apprenticeship leader, recruited by TCF in the first year and in further years from the team of apprentices. Each post will be for 8 months of the year over a 3 year period so 15 apprenticeships in total. This initiative will train or re-train with a view to gaining new skills and enhance employment opportunities.

2.4.4 Community Engagement within the Local Area

In the long term we hope that neighbours in Chew Valley will grow to see the Farm as part of the fabric of village life; a place where people are welcome to join in events and celebrations, learn new skills, seek employment or become volunteers, as well as coming to value and enjoy the home grown produce of their Valley. Our plans are therefore to:

- a. Hold three regular annual events open to the public that promote the ethos of the farm: for example the Midsummer Picnic, Harvest Festival, and Wassailing the Apple Harvest.
- b. Continue to work in partnership with the network of existing like-minded enterprises and organisations in Chew Valley that promote sustainable businesses, ethical trading initiatives, and environmental conservation in the area.
- c. Open TCF to the public on Sundays for walks or picnics, and possibly hold a summer camp for local children.
- d. Set up a TCF network of volunteers in the community that can offer assistance to individuals, or groups in the neighbourhood.
- e. Support apprenticeship schemes by, for example, offering placements to students at local training institutions in the area studying farming or marketing related topics.
- f. Connect with, and offer mutual support to other Community Supported Agriculture enterprises in the area.

2.4.4. Milestones for Community Engagement

Milestone	Timetable
To develop the training and education programme based at the Learning Zone.	From April 2013
To arrange a minimum of 6 corporate volunteer activity days at TCF with local businesses.	From April 2013
To hold a minimum of 4 weekend Community Farmer Days at TCF rising to 12 per annum over 5 years	From April 2013 to April 2018
To set up a programme of children's activity days and arrange Cevas training for the staff involved.	From June 2013
To identify volunteering opportunities, beyond farming, to engage the diversity of skills found in TCF Membership base.	By December 2013
To review Community Engagement funding for the following year and develop a fundraising strategy.	By December 2013
To introduce periodic 'mini' horticultural training sessions for field and Community Farmer Day volunteers.	By March 2014
Milestones	Timetable
To enhance the recreational facilities available for volunteers on site	By June 2014
To produce a Hand Book for Volunteers and Visitors	By June 2015
To review CE expenditure and develop a fundraising	By December 2014

strategy for the following year.	
To establish a Care Farming partnership with one more charity or social support agency and schedule of activities.	By March 2015
To set up a series of outreach horticultural projects at local schools.	By March 2015

Aspirational Goals	Timetable
To establish a pathway across the Farm open to local people and visitors to the area during at weekends only.	To be considered further in 2015
To establish a Care Farming partnership with another charity or social support agency and schedule of activities	By March 2016
Set up a TCF network of volunteers in the community that can offer assistance to individuals, or groups in the local neighbourhood.	By April 2015

2.5 FUNDING THE COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT PROJECT

There are various funding streams available to sustain the Community Engagement Project. In June 2012 we secured two grants from the Big Lottery to support our education and skills training programme managed by a part-time Community Engagement Coordinator funded for one year. Beyond this date, should surpluses from the business prove inadequate to meet the costs of sustaining our CEP plan, the following sources of finance have been identified:

- a. Fees charged for company 'Employee Volunteering Activity Days' will meet the full costs of running corporate activity days including staff time and materials required.
- b. In addition to fees, TCF receives corporate donations arising from employee 'Employee Volunteering Activity Days these donations will be used to meet the running costs of the overall CEP.
- c. Fees paid by participants attending courses at the Learning Zone will cover the full costs of running these courses including TCF staff time and tutor costs.
- d. Fees paid by schools for educational trips to the farm will cover all costs involved in running school educational visits including staff time and production of educational materials.
- e. Investigating opportunities to link in with the home schooling network and providing fee paying educational visits for home schooled children.

- f. Annual events and celebrations will be self-funding in general, but may also provide opportunities to raise funds for specific appeals, for example equipment for the Farm or educational activities.
- g. Funds from our open share offer will go towards essential capital spends as a priority as well as running costs. Should there be surplus this will go towards community engagement.
- h. Allocation of surpluses from the other elements of the business.

Volunteering

This is such a key element of the farm and part of the ethos. Volunteering costs are generally around staff time in terms of organisation and management. In June 2013 we trialled a regular volunteer co-ordinator post with the view to this becoming more permanent if it can be seen to be increasing volunteer numbers and retention. Volunteering for regular volunteers and Community Farmer Days makes a significant financial contribution to the farm by reducing labour costs through a volunteer workforce.

Employee volunteering days will be expected to contribute and cover full costs of running these days, including staff time for preparation and on the day, and any materials required for specific projects. This will be covered through the charge made to businesses for the opportunity and materials and potential donations from them as well.

Education and Training

Costs of school visit will cover all staff time to deliver these through the charges made to the school per pupil. This will include time required by the CE co-ordinator and Farm Manager. The costs of CEVAS training is included in the 2013/14 budget.

Adult Learning Courses

These will be based around seasonal cookery and the costs will be covered for the course tutor and TCF staff time through the charge made for these courses.

Care Farming

It is anticipated that Care Farming will not only cover all TCF costs but bring in additional income for the farm that can be used to further enhance the volunteering and training programme.

For example, our work with Bristol Drugs Project is fully funded for 3 years providing 5 apprentices per year and an apprenticeship leader. This type of work not only contributes to the social benefit TCF wants to provide but

additional labour at no extra cost. Other options for Care Farming will be fully explored over the coming years.

Community Engagement within the local area

This will involve some costs attending events, stall hire and staff time as well as putting on events. The largest costs to the farm for TCF events is the Harvest Celebration held in September each year. This is included in the marketing budget as it is an important part of TCFs engagement locally.

Grants and other funding streams

TCF follows up all funding opportunities through grants when appropriate and relevant to the work of TCF. However, we do not want to become grant dependent and will work to ensure our CE activities, where possible, cover costs and potentially provide an income stream.

Other funding streams that are available for consideration include:

- i. The 'Forest Schools Project' that provides participating schools with funding for outdoor pursuit activities. It is proposed to set up Forest Activity Days at TCF.
- j. Recent welfare reforms provide limited scope for funding through schemes that encourage apprenticeships, or offer incentives to people returning to work following a period of absence due to ill health or disability.
- k. Developing a fundraising strategy. As a Community Benefit Society, TCF qualifies for grants and community development loans that can support either our community engagement, or farming activities. Possible funders include :
 - i. Local Authorities that periodically provide grants to organisations supplying services that match their objectives in areas such as health and education, or promoting social inclusion and cohesion.
 - ii. Community Development Finance Institutions that offer low cost, unsecured loans or match funding for buildings and equipment to social enterprises that provide a community benefit.
 - iii. And the Big Lottery, and many Charitable Trusts are open to applications for capital and revenue funding that support, in particular, vulnerable people and children taking part in our Community Engagement Project.

SECTION 3: PEOPLE – MEMBERS, THE BOARD, STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

3.1 MEMBERSHIP

Members of TCF play an important role in ensuring that the enterprise remains devoted to achieving the objects set out in the Rules, now and in the future. Members have the ability to appoint and remove directors, to vote on changes to the Rules and to call general meetings of the society, in addition to attending and voting at the Annual General Meeting.

The structure of our Membership

It is currently possible to become a member of TCF in the following ways:

a. Buy Shares in TCF

From July 2013, it is possible to buy shares in TCF at any time (subject to a minimum holding of fifty £1 shares). These are non-transferable shares (i.e. they cannot be sold or passed to a third party) and as they cannot be sold they do not have a sale value. They are withdrawable, which means that the holder of the shares can ask the society to cancel its shares and return their investment. This is subject to:

- i. An initial period of three years during which time the shares cannot be withdrawn
- ii. The directors being satisfied that the withdrawal of the shares and repayment of the investment will not affect the society adversely
- iii. The directors not determining that the value of a share in the society, in the current circumstances, is less than £1.

b. Employee Shares

All staff in post for more than three months are offered a share in the society for the duration of their employment.

c. Volunteer Shares

Individuals who work for TCF in a voluntary capacity for more than 100 hours are offered a share in the society.

The above arrangements are different in some respects to those that were in place previously, described below for completeness.

When TCF was originally constituted, the ways in which it was possible to become a member were:

- *By investing in TCF as part of two public share offers. These share offers were time bound and it was not possible to apply for membership other than during the course of these offers. As we still receive requests from parties wishing to become*

members and as there are currently no intentions to run a further time bound share offer, the board has decided to allow an open offer, so that parties can become members at any time.

- *Annual membership*

This cost less than full membership of the enterprise, recognising that for some the £50 minimum investment was financially prohibitive. Annual members enjoyed equivalent rights to full members, plus receiving a 10% discount on purchases from TCF. Annual membership has now been withdrawn.

Loyalty Scheme – The Carrot Club

Our previous ‘Annual Membership’ has been replaced, in part, by the Loyalty Scheme. This costs £35 per annum, or £20 unwaged, and lasts for 12 months from the date of purchase. It provides a 10% discount on vegetable box purchases only and 15% discount on courses. The scheme is open to all box customers, whether Members or non-Members. Members of the farm can only receive this discount on their boxes by also becoming part of the loyalty scheme. There is no voting right associated with this scheme.

The Contribution of Members to TCF

Apart from their role participating in decision-making regarding the strategic direction of TCF, many Members contribute throughout the year to different aspects of the farm. There is a wealth of knowledge, skills and expertise amongst Members and volunteering is an important element of our Membership programme. During 2011 to 2012 around 100 Members gave their time at weekends to participate in Community Farmer Days, working under the supervision of farm staff who themselves volunteer to run this activity. In addition throughout the year a team of skilled regular volunteers, some of whom are Members, donate up to a day each week to assist staff working on the farm and in the warehouse, and during the unseasonal weather in the summer of 2012 that disrupted field production, Members responded to an appeal for help to assist Farm staff.

Members also regularly contribute photographs, video clips and articles to the website, donate plants and occasionally equipment, prepare financial data, market produce at organic food fairs or farmers’ markets, write fundraising bids, some have also visited local schools and residential homes in the area to promote TCF. Without the support of its Members, The Community Farm would not have come into existence, or survived its challenging early years of operation.

This is particularly evident in an appeal made to members in February 2013 when the Farm was facing a serious cash flow crisis at a time when it needed to purchase seeds and equipment for the new growing season. Generous donations of £4,000 and a further £3,500 in interest free loans from members helped us through this crisis enabling us to:

- Cover a third polytunnel to grow more protected crops
- Replace our worn tractor tyres
- Purchase our seed potatoes and other seeds

Without these generous donations and loans we may have found it difficult to survive.

In addition to this, £10,000 was raised through loans from members in October 2012 to buy the goodwill of a Bath based box scheme due to the owner deciding to retire. Prior to that we had just a handful of Bath customers and this opened up the Bath customer base to more than 100 new customers. Repayment plans are in place for all loans received from members.

Details of how to become a Member of TCF and the full benefits are available [here](#).

Members are kept up to date with current events via newsletters and invited to the AGM.

3.2 The Board of TCF

TCF has a board of voluntary directors appointed by the members. Each year one third of the board (those that have been serving the longest since their last appointment) are required to resign and may, if they choose, stand for re-election.

The role of the Board is to:

- a. set the strategy of TCF, consistent with the Rules and views of the membership,
- b. oversee and support the operational activities of the society consistent with that strategy
- c. ensure the society operates in accordance with relevant legislation and its Rules
- d. be answerable to the members

Board meetings take place every two months and other ad hoc meetings may be called to address specific issues. Board members are also encouraged to participate in events run at, by, or for the farm. And volunteer on the field and at the warehouse, should time allow.

As at summer 2013, the talent, expertise, knowledge and wealth of connections that Board members bring to the farm include:

- a. Experience in business and trading, catering, retail and marketing.
- b. Expertise in fields of public health, education, policy, law and finance.
- c. An abundance of farming and organic growing know-how.

- d. Established relationships with local and national food, farming, transition and environmental networks.
- e. Existing links to community engagement networks, and the charitable sector.

For more information about TCF Board Members, please follow the link [here](#)

3.3 STAFF

TCF currently has 19 staff, 4 are full-time the rest are part-time, and this is equivalent to approximately 12 full-time posts. The structure chart on the following page shows the current make-up of staff. Some staff are based at the field, others at the warehouse or out delivering and some work mainly from home due to lack of office space.

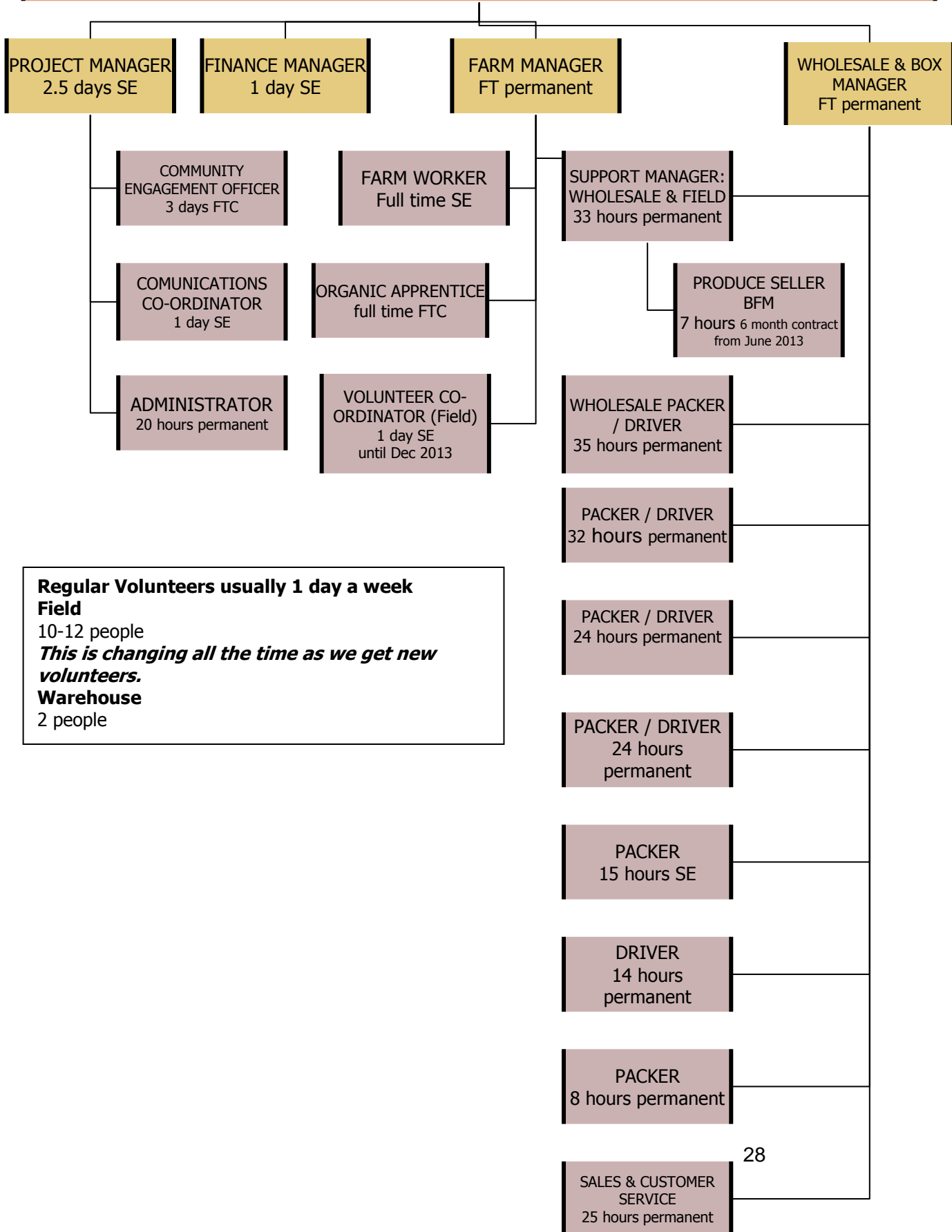
Staff at TCF have shown an incredible resilience and dedication through some difficult times in the last 2 years and have adapted to change. Staff often work above and beyond the day-to-day work and TCF recognises that it cannot either expect this to continue nor ignore what is actually required in terms of staff to deliver an enterprise such as this. Over the last two years we have learnt a lot about staff requirements for the business and have responded with changes as necessary. We are well aware of where we are under-staffed and will work to address these as priorities over the next 3 years.

Since the farm came into being two years ago, time and energy has been devoted to developing staffing structures, expertise and procedures. These support the operational staff, the volunteers and the boards as the farm grows.

Staff retention is essential to the success of the organisation. Policies have been developed by the People, Policies and Procedures sub group of the Board to make ensure that all staff are aware of their rights as employees within the farm. This includes a pay policy which is reviewed annually and an annual performance review structure which has been constructed to help staff reflect on their progress and plan for the future. Training needs are identified from this. HR expertise is being developed within the financial administration role.

The Board is active in the life of the farm and key members of staff are invited to attend Board meetings on a regular basis. Board members are also encouraged to attend events and to have an informed understanding of the day to day operations of the farm. Regular staff meetings are also attended by board members so that information is shared as much as possible.

BOARD



Regular Volunteers usually 1 day a week
Field
 10-12 people
This is changing all the time as we get new volunteers.
Warehouse
 2 people

3.4 VOLUNTEERS

Volunteers are an integral part of the farm and resources have been put into systems to support both the administrative and the operational activities. Details of this can be found in 2.4.1 but to date we have had volunteers helping on the field, packing boxes in the warehouse, developing our social media, photography and video at events, promotions at events and many other unseen short and longer-term support. This element cannot be underestimated and recognition of the work and importance of volunteers is essential. The dedicated team, many coming back week after week giving their time to TCF have actually provided the equivalent of at least one full-time member of staff during 2012. The experience of volunteers enhances the social benefit of the enterprise and will continue to be developed over the coming years.

3.5 People: Members, the Board, Staff and volunteers – next steps

- a. An annual review of the staffing structure to see if it is fit for purpose and is able to deliver the strategic plan and revision of structure to adapt to the needs of the organisation.
- b. Appointment of any necessary posts in relation to (a) including review of the management structure
- c. Annual reviews of all staff to identify strengths and areas for development along with training needs. These will need to be budgeted for and costed.
- d. Develop the role of the Community Farm as a key deliverer of apprenticeships and other training qualifications
- e. Formalise the role of the volunteers and develop a method of acknowledging their contribution
- f. Ongoing review of governance and the role of the Board in supporting the development of the farm and ensuring a balance of expertise is present with clear expectations of what the role of board member involves
- g. Continue to develop the voice of the members to help inform strategic planning for the future

4. SECTION FOUR - FINANCE

OUR START POINT

Our business model for the last 2 years has been based on increasing sales, together with using our own produce from the field, enabling us to keep bought in produce as low as possible.

Last year we made a loss as a result of lower sales than planned, and a poor year for the field due to the weather. This resulted in the losses seen over this period. In 2013/14 sales are on target, and the field is on target to produce the budgeted quantities of produce.

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT

We have tight financial controls at the farm to ensure we are always fully aware of our financial position. We produce a cash flow forecast on a rolling 12 week basis. This is updated almost daily. In addition, all financial results are fully analysed and understood by all relevant parties.

These controls ensure that potential issues are highlighted and resolved at the earliest opportunity.

FINANCIALS FOR APRIL 2014 TO MARCH 2015

Expected net profit - £37.5k

Our strategy for the next year is as follows;

- Keep within our current capacity – we do not have surplus funds for expansion. A large increase in sales would lead to the need for investment in vans, a new warehouse, and additional labour.
- Stand on our own two feet - our business model needs to work without the benefit of grants and donations as these are not guaranteed. Any funds from these sources should boost our operation. We should not be reliant on them.

Therefore, financials are based on the following;

- Maintain wholesale sales levels – we do not plan to expand in this area, but any losses need to be replaced by new customers
- Increase box sales to 450 customers by end March 2015
- Improve box customer retention to 65% by end March 2015
- Maintain Bath market sales levels through dedicated resourcing
- Increase utilisation of the field by 29% to improve gross margin to 42% (39% 2013 Budget). This includes the introduction of new crops which have high demand (carrots, parsnips etc.)
- Improve labour efficiency by taking labour as a % of gross margin to 64% (67% 2013 Budget). *Please note that we are using labour as a % of gross margin as opposed to labour as a % of sales. This statistic is more meaningful to us as our business model is based on gross margin improvements.*
- Keep overheads at a minimum – no year on year increase other than costs required to generate additional revenue
- Increase Community Engagement activity to a level that enables it to be self-financing, no longer reliant on grant support.

Financials for the above assumptions are shown in **Appendix A.**

Surplus funds are planned to be spent on the list of capital items in **Appendix B**

SCENARIOS

The strategic plan is a realistic target for the farm. It contains targets for growth whilst ensuring a level of risk is allowed for. We know from the last two years that there is always something waiting around the corner to challenge us!

2 additional scenarios have been produced based on the least predictable of our assumptions, the field - See **Appendix C and D**

Scenario 1 – Aspirational – assumes nothing unexpected happens, weather good for growing – 30% increase in field transfers

Scenario 2 – Poor growing conditions – assumes 50% of expected field transfers. We do not expect, as a rule, for weather and circumstances to be as bad as 2012. We have ensured that we are managing risk through growing less lines, growing more resilient crops, and protecting our crops to a much greater degree through investment in polytunnels, a sprinkler system, and agri-mesh. In addition, we will react once a crop is not going to plan and ensure good money does not go after bad.

Our intention is to replenish our reserves to a level which allows us to continue to operate in our loss making months. This has not always been possible due to difficult trading conditions. When and wherever possible we will work to have reserves to cover 3 months of trading during these periods. This will take some time to achieve and updates will be made available on as and when possible.

OPPORTUNITIES

We recognise that there are a large number of opportunities for improvement to the numbers stated in this plan. They have been left as opportunities as they are either embryonic, yet to be confirmed, or otherwise not guaranteed.

The larger opportunities are as follows;

- Grant income
- Impact of resource from our contract with Bristol Drugs Project November 2013 to March 2016. This will bring 6 paid posts: an apprenticeship leader and 5 apprentices per year
- Increased box and wholesale sales within current capacity following process improvements (possibly 20%)
- Donations
- Bath farmers' market sales (and related box sales)
- Livestock
- Profit and increased profile from Community Engagement
- One of the advantages of our model is that activities in one area often deliver benefits to other parts of the enterprise so, for example,

working with volunteers and apprentices may improve field efficiency as well as meeting community engagement aspirations and funding we may receive for one purpose (such as education) may have benefits in other respects, such as improving our infrastructure.

- Economic and environmental circumstances may make locally sourced produce more attractive to consumers

There are numerous smaller opportunities such as extending the range of products we sell, reducing bank charges through promoting direct debit etc. These are all part of our internal programme of 'continuous improvement'.

RISKS

We have identified the following as the most significant risks to our enterprise:

- Adverse weather affecting production of our (and other local) crops
- Loss of customers
- New competitor into the market
- Economic / market conditions affecting demand for our produce
- Lack of UK produce
- Loss of key personnel

We are developing mitigation strategies in relation to these risks and monitor the situation to identify and address others as they may arise.

Further details of Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats can be seen at **Appendix E**.

5. SECTION FIVE – PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

We have identified opportunities to publicise and promote our enterprise, what it does and our work to reconnect people to how food is grown. The priority promotional areas for the enterprise are:

Business

- Organic vegetable box delivery to homes and offices
- Wholesale delivery of organic produce to restaurants, shops, schools, etc.
- Carrot Club - loyalty scheme

Community engagement

- Adult learning workshops - in three broad areas: horticulture, eco-building, food and cookery
- Children's activities – including Forest School, vegetable growing and theatre workshops.
- School visits – primary and secondary
- Employee Volunteering Days
- Membership - investment in the farm through our Open Share Offer
- Regular weekday volunteering
- Community Farmer Days – one day volunteer events
- Public and membership events – including the Midsummer Picnic and Harvest Celebration

Our Marketing Strategy sets out how we will achieve our aims and covers the marketing of organic vegetable boxes, wholesale deliveries, adult learning workshops, children's activities, school visits, and Farm membership.

Cross-selling our products and services will be a key part of the strategy; for example promoting our vegetable boxes and wholesale business to workshop participants and corporate groups, and vice versa.

The strategy aims to quickly identify the most pressing needs for the farm and focuses on no-cost or low-cost promotional activities. The recommended activities also take into account that staff are extremely busy so marketing activities need to be quick and easy to turn around.

We need to be clear about what we need to achieve, monitoring carefully what works and what doesn't and putting simple things into action.

To date we feel we have focused too much on print – both printed advertisements and leaflets. We can achieve so much more if we shift this emphasis toward online marketing, raising brand awareness and supporting word-of-mouth communication.

An aim of TCF is to convey to the general public how, and why making the choice to grow or buy local organic produce contributes to the sustainability of rural livelihoods, landscapes and wildlife, and strengthens community resilience. To those who are new to the idea of being connected to the food they eat, it is a complex concept to get across.

In addition to that it is essential that all staff, volunteers and members understand what we are aiming to achieve through our publicity and be kept informed about our strategies and how they can help with publicity.

We aim to harness the knowledge and goodwill of all those who already support TCF as members, volunteers or customers to help us to inform and educate their friends and family about the benefits of local food. Bristol and Bath have strong local food networks that we can also tap into to contribute our experience and knowledge about sustainable, organic farming. Poor harvests both in the UK and around the world in 2012, and the horsemeat scandal in early 2013 have focussed the attention of both the media and consumers on how we source the food we eat. The opportunity exists to draw people into the debate about where and how food is produced, and what control we have over this process to safeguard future food security. As a social enterprise TCF is well placed to demonstrate the advantage of Community Supported Agriculture and thus launched its Supermarket Free Challenge in February 2013, with a focus on our business aims of increasing and retaining box scheme customers, wholesale customers and promoting our community engagement programme.

5.1 Building on this, and contributions received during the consultation process, we plan to:

- a. Create an attractive and engaging entrance and Home Field area that enhances the site and is accessible and welcoming to visitors; install signage throughout, keep the site tidy at all times and improve the on-site amenities available to visitors. Provide a map, signage and signposting and information around the site
- b. Continue to ensure and improve open internal communications – open and transparent with all staff and Board members
- c. Harness the power of social media and the web to raise public awareness of TCF by increasing the regularity of facebook and twitter updates, and introducing interactive educational children’s games to our website.
- d. Take advantage of the potential to promote TCF via word of mouth through existing members, customers and support groups and perhaps include an incentive for introducing new customers to the business.
- e. Work with high profile customers such as River Cottage and the Watershed to raise our profile to their customers
- f. Promote and advance TCF’s social benefit aims through our education programme
- g. Run promotional campaigns in vegetable box customer strongholds to attract more business.
- h. Continue to hold farm open days and stage popular annual events such as the Harvest Festival.
- i. Identify target audiences for promotional activities with the aid of current customer profiles

- j. Compile a TCF presentation pack for the media.
- k. Drip feed articles about TCF to local magazines that feature food and farming news and through social media
- l. Use high visibility public relations tools to attract attention.
- m. Shout out about our awards and seek further awards in the future.
- n. Replicate and develop the work of the local promotional groups in other areas.
- o. Work with like-minded groups to mutually support one another; local and sustainable food and low carbon networks, and organisations such as Avon Wildlife Trust through its Living Landscape project, to promote sustainable food and farming across Chew Valley.
- p. Attend relevant events especially food related and local Chew Valley events using volunteer time and paid staff time as appropriate.

5.1.1 Milestones for Publicity and Promotion

To set up a Publicity and Promotional schedule of activities for each year.	By July 2013, then year on year
---	---------------------------------

6. SECTION SIX - TCF SUPPORT STRUCTURES

6.1 IT infrastructure

We have a database that was developed on a bespoke basis and our increasing IT demands identify a need to invest in our IT infrastructure to ensure easy use of our systems and ordering and general IT support.

We will review, assess and costs IT options available to TCF that provide these solutions. We own few computers and many staff use their own. In addition we primarily use mobile phones for communication as well as a project management system called Basecamp.

We need to rationalise our telephone lines with three different numbers for wholesale, box and accounts and assess the best options for us. We are also based in a rural areas where broadband speed is slow.

6.2 BUILDINGS AND AMENITIES

Although the site, situated on the north-east border of Chew Valley Lake on Denny Lane, is primarily a working farm that requires structures and amenities in place to facilitate our business operation, our Community Engagement Project raises the question of how we can improve the onsite facilities available to visitors in a way that is environmentally and user friendly. For example we use earth closets in preference to a water closets as it saves water, and our present electricity provider, Ecotricity, invests in renewable energy, although we are looking at options

regarding the financial feasibility of installing solar power panels to generate our own power in future.

During 2012 we also installed a soak hose irrigation system to water the crops, and converted part of the old stone barn into a covered refreshment area with sink unit, available for workers and volunteers to use. In the autumn we erected a yurt on the boundary between the designated Home and High fields to house our new Learning Zone. This has been equipped with tables, chairs, training equipment and a wood-burning stove. In the future we hope to add a kitchen area for cookery demonstrations and training purposes. Hygiene water points will be placed around the site for visitors and workers to use.

Following these achievements, there is still some way to go to fully furnish the site.

In regard to the field and wholesale operation, our requirements are to install the following structures but these will all be subject to gaining the appropriate planning permission, and to raising the finance necessary, and will take a number of years to achieve:

- a. More field poly tunnels.
- b. A barn and equipment storage area on the farm.
- c. Compost toilets
- d. Static accommodation, if required to facilitate farm activities.

There is the potential to investigate the option of a combined warehouse and packing shed located on the field but this is likely to be in the much longer term.

In regard to our Community Engagement Project we require:

- a. A recreation area, including a basic kitchen for visitors, volunteers and staff to use
- b. A field kitchen for cooking demonstrations
- c. Attractive signage, hygiene and education-points, and we are keen to find space for art installations.
- d. Wildlife habitats such as a pond, insect houses, hedgehog lodges, and bird and bat box.

A plan of the site has been produced indicating these requirements with initial discussions with Bath and North East Somerset having taken place.

6.3 TRANSPORT AND ACCESS

Although TCF is within 10 and 14 miles distance respectively from the centres of the Cities of Bristol and Bath, there is little in the way of public transport that serves the Farm. There is no railway station at Chew Magna, the nearest village, and the occasional bus service does not operate at times that accommodates volunteer, or

visitor access. The farm is readily accessible by road and in part, by cycle ways, and in consequence the suggestions for travel to the farm for those not within walking distance, are as follows:

- a. To identify and publish cycle routes to the farm from Bristol and Bath on our website, and if possible set up two guided rides for volunteers to introduce them to the chosen routes.
- b. To set up a message board on the TCF website Member's area where people can arrange car sharing for visits.
- c. To arrange the most cost effective means of community or commercial transport available from urban pick up points to the Farm.
- d. To lobby local bus companies to move departure from Chew to Bristol earlier on a Friday evening.
- e. To improve access ways across the farm for people who have mobility problems.
- f. To explore opportunities to promote use of low emission vehicles

6.3.1 Milestones for Transport and Access

Milestone	Timetable
To set up a message board or link to car-sharing website where people can arrange car sharing for visits.	By October 2013
To identify, trial and publish cycle routes to the farm from Bristol and Bath on our website.	By October 2013

7. SECTION SEVEN – FURTHER MILESTONES, RISK ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION and ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

7.1 MILESTONES AND ASPIRATIONS

TCF Business Plan for 2010 – 2013 stated that :

'By April 2015 it is envisaged the membership of 500 will be playing a very active role in the strategic direction of the Community Farm, so at this stage we can only speculate what the developmental activities will be.'

The Membership of TCF following the two share-offers held to-date is 482 so we are well on our way to achieving our goal of 500, and are delighted to report that this Strategic Plan is the result of our Members' active involvement in shaping our

future. As a Community Benefit Society this document recognises the need to address both the business imperatives in operating a successful commercial enterprise, and our social objectives and how we will fund and achieve them.

The tables shown in the earlier sections of this document outline priority areas for development over the next two years for TCF as a whole, the Field, Box and Wholesales Businesses, and the Community Engagement Project based on Education, Volunteering and Community Activities. As the Strategic Plan is a live web based document, the tables will be updated periodically to show progress made towards reaching Milestones for 2013 to 2015, and in 2015 the current aspirational goals for 2015 – 2018 will be reviewed and updated online for all to see.

7.1.1 Aspirational Goals

Aspirational Goals	Date
To set up a Farm Blog or online diary to chart our progress as a CSA and link to other local CSAs.	To be inserted in 2015
To review local sustainability networks and consider taking on a more active role in the promotion of local food and farming networks in the area.	To be inserted in 2015

7.2 ASSESSMENT OF POTENTIAL RISKS TO THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE MILESTONES

Three major issues are dealt with within this section. These relate to the following assumptions that:

- we will be able to increase the number of people using local organic vegetables
- we can secure income streams to support all aspects of our Community Engagement Programme, and
- changing weather patterns will not disrupt our field operation materially.

Increasing the TCF share in the local vegetable box market.

The UK organic food market saw a dip of 6.3% in sales from a 23.3% share of the UK organic market in 2010¹. Despite this, it is anticipated that several factors will enable TCF to achieve its target sales in vegetable boxes over the next three years. These are:

- a. The purchase of J.P. Organics customer base in Bath took place at the end of 2012
- b. TCF took on a stall at the weekly Bath Farmers' Market from May 2013
- c. The bond that many of our existing vegetable box customers maintain towards TCF as either Members or established supporters of CSA.

- d. Despite a challenging three plus years, the organic vegetable market appears to be showing signs of an upturn particularly by direct and local sellers. For example, Abel and Cole's vegetable business has recently grown by 40% [but not at our expense].
- e. The development of our Community Engagement Project over the next three years that seeks through education, training and volunteering to connect our community to the food that they eat, and encourages people to seek locally sourced food.
- f. The implementation of the TCF Publicity and Promotional programme outlined in this Strategic Plan.

Securing income streams for the Community Engagement Programme.

It is anticipated that the Community Engagement Project will be capable of part funding itself through its own activities after the first year, and details of additional sources of CEP funding to approach are set out in Section 3.2 above, Funding the Community Engagement Plan. However, if these fail to raise sufficient income and there is no surplus available from the business to support the CEP, it may have to reduce in scope. A review of Community Engagement funding will take place each autumn to identify gaps in funding that it may be possible to fill by applying for grants from the Lottery, or Charitable Trusts and Foundations.

Changing weather patterns.

As the position of the jet stream deviated from its anticipated path time and again during 2012, UK weather conditions continued a trend towards unpredictable seasonal fluctuations, with monthly rainfall and temperature records regularly broken. Climate change is now a major concern for UK farmers.

One of the strengths of organic farming lies in the hands-on, in-depth knowledge of the terrain and innate soil conditions that are central to growing food year on year without depleting the quality of the soil. Unlike large scale, commercial mono-crop farming operations, the diversity of crops grown on an organic farm aids the selection of climate resilient plants that suit local conditions, whilst opening up opportunities to develop niche markets in hardy heritage species.

TCF also has the option to diversify into meadow-field stock rearing for the table if we opt to increase our acreage. We also plan to introduce more covered growing areas. These factors, and our ability to call upon a pool of volunteer workers from our Membership to assist during peak, or stress periods in the field provide a degree of flexibility within our operational response to changing weather patterns.

7.3 MONITORING AND EVALUATION.

The Strategic Plan will be monitored and evaluated on a regular basis. The Board will set the evaluation criteria, and staff will monitor progress. For example, in regard to the business the following information will be kept:

- a. Weekly vegetable box sales,
- b. Weekly sales to wholesale customers,
- c. Weekly field input and output,
- d. Field volunteer hours worked per month.
- e. Membership numbers, quarterly.
- f. Weekly weather records.
- g. Financial monitoring: monthly accounts, weekly cashflows, sales trends

And with regard to the Community Engagement Project a full evaluation of the Project activities including financial performance, will be undertaken every six months, and monitoring information will include:

- a. Numbers attending educational courses and skills training days,
- b. The range of courses and skills training on offer.
- c. Numbers of school and youth groups participating in activities and how many children were involved,
- d. Numbers of outreach projects set up at schools,
- e. Numbers of, and attendance levels at corporate employee activity days,
- f. Numbers of support agencies and charities working in partnership with TCF and numbers of vulnerable people engaged,
- g. Numbers of apprenticeship placements taken up,
- h. Attendances at CSA Forums and hits on CSA web blog.
- i. Attendances at TCF public events on site.

In addition it will necessary to carry out ongoing monitoring and evaluation of our Publicity and Promotional programme to ensure that it is effective.

Monitoring reports will be collated and presented at Board meetings. The Board will evaluate these and assess where changes and improvements need to be made and what measures can be taken to improve the business and Community Engagement Project. Much of this will be dependent on developments over the next 12 months and a full monitoring and evaluation strategy will be developed and assessed against targets and objectives set out in this plan.

To introduce and implement a monitoring and evaluation programme in relation to this Strategic Plan.	By March 2014 and implement year on year
--	--

7.4 ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The massive amount of support received from the Board, Staff, Members, Volunteers and Customers since 2010 is gratefully acknowledged, particularly in

the face of the challenging farming and financial climates experienced in 2012. We hope that the determination and grit displayed during this period will, in part, be rewarded by the joy of seeing the rolling fields above Chew Valley Lake producing an abundance of fresh, organic vegetables and fruit for our local community for years to come.

This Strategic Plan is available online at our website www.thecommunityfarm.co.uk, and hard copies can be ordered by phone, or in writing from our The Community Farm, Woodbarn Farm, Denny Lane, Chew Magna, Bristol BS40 8SZ.

APPENDICES

In addition to Appendices A to E shown on the following pages, additional background information can be accessed by clicking on the links.

[Rules of the Farm](#)

[Details of TCF Board](#)

[Details of TCF Vegetable Box, and organic produce.](#)

[TCF Share Offer](#)

The Community Farm – Strategic Plan 2014-18

APPENDIX A

STRATEGIC PLAN PROFIT AND LOSS VS 2013 BUDGET

	STRATEGIC PLAN	BUDGET	VARIANCE	EXPLANATION OF YEAR ON YEAR CHANGES
<i>BOX WEEKLY SALES</i>	5,962	5,916	46	
<i>BFC WEEKLY SALES</i>	4,331	4,331	-	
<i>WHOLESALE WEEKLY SALES</i>	5,880	5,880	-	
Sales				
Veg box sales	309,804	307,385	2,419	Increase to 460 customers by March 2014
BFC sales	225,025	225,025	-	
Wholesale sales	257,746	257,746	-	
Bath Market	54,780	48,880	5,900	First full year in 2014
Total Sales	847,355	839,036	2,419	
Cost of sales				
Carriage & packaging	(13,240)	(13,240)	-	Increased utilisation of the field - Up 29% Additional seeds for above
Purchases - external	(464,030)	(485,155)	21,125	
Seeds, plants & compost	(16,383)	(12,700)	(3,683)	
Total Cost of Sales	(493,653)	(511,095)	17,442	
Gross Profit/(Loss):	353,702	327,941	19,861	
Gross Margin %	42%	39%		
Other income				
CE (offset by direct costs)	-	13,279	(13,279)	2013 was grant funded for 1st 6 months
Other	4,200	6,360	(2,160)	
Total other income	4,200	19,639	(15,439)	
Overheads				
Wages and Salaries Regular	(223,630)	(215,491)	(8,139)	Additional resource to support Bath market & additional marketing resource
Other overheads	(96,784)	(96,676)	(109)	
Livestock	-	(3,762)	3,762	
Total overheads	(320,414)	(315,929)	(4,486)	
Net Profit/(Loss):	37,488	31,651	(63)	
Wages % of Gross Margin	63%	66%		

The Community Farm – Strategic Plan 2014-18

APPENDIX B

2014 STRATEGIC PLAN CAPITAL REQUIREMENTS

		£	Benefits
Field	Topper	£1,500	Labour and hire costs savings. Flexibility of use. Self sufficiency
	Power Harrow	£1,500	Labour and hire costs savings. Flexibility of use. Self sufficiency
	Muckspreader	£1,000	Labour and hire costs savings. Flexibility of use. Self sufficiency
	Polytunnel 1	£2,500	Extra yield
	Polytunnel 2	£2,500	Extra yield
Wholesale	Database	£2,000	Improved customer experience, reduced bank charges
	Van	£5,000	Standard vehicle replacement due to wear and tear
	Stitcher	£250	Labour saving on potato sacks
CE	Tool shed	£300	Storage of equipment for use by volunteers
	Field kitchen	£2,000	Equipping the yurt for use as a field kitchen to be able to run courses.
	Irrigation	£500	Water available closer to the yurt for washing up, cleaning etc.
General site	Site development	£1,000	Including signage, information boards and replacement gates.
		£20,050	

The Community Farm – Strategic Plan 2014-18

APPENDIX C

STRATEGIC PLAN PLAN VS ASPIRATIONAL TARGET - ADDITIONAL 30% FIELD PRODUCE

	STRATEGIC PLAN	ASPIRATIONAL	VARIANCE	EXPLANATION OF VARIANCES
BOX WEEKLY SALES	5,962	5,962	-	
BFC WEEKLY SALES	4,331	4,331	-	
WHOLESALE WEEKLY SALES	5,880	5,880	-	
Sales				
Veg box sales	309,804	309,804	-	
BFC sales	225,025	225,025	-	
Wholesale sales	257,746	257,746	-	
Bath Market	54,780	54,780	-	
Total Sales	847,355	847,355	-	
Cost of sales				
Carriage & packaging	(13,240)	(13,240)	-	
Purchases - external	(464,030)	(434,192)	29,838	Increased utilisation of the field - Additional 30%
Seeds, plants & compost	(16,383)	(16,383)	-	
Total Cost of Sales	(493,653)	(463,815)	29,838	
Gross Profit/(Loss):	353,702	383,540	29,838	
Gross Margin %	42%	45%	4%	
Other income				
CE (offset by direct costs)	-	-	-	
Other	4,200	4,200	-	
Total other income	4,200	4,200	0	
Overheads				
Wages and Salaries Regular	(223,630)	(225,630)	(2,000)	Additional resource for picking and packing
Other overheads	(96,784)	(97,924)	(1,140)	Additional repairs and due to higher machinery/vehicle usage
Livestock	-	-	-	
Total overheads	(320,414)	(323,554)	(3,140)	
Net Profit/(Loss):	37,488	64,186	26,698	
Wages % of Gross Margin	63%	59%	-4%	

The Community Farm – Strategic Plan 2014-18

APPENDIX D

STRATEGIC PLAN PLAN VS POOR WEATHER CONDITIONS - 50% LESS FIELD PRODUCE

	STRATEGIC PLAN	POOR GROWING CONDITIONS	VARIANCE	EXPLANATION OF VARIANCES
BOX WEEKLY SALES	5,962	5,962	-	
BFC WEEKLY SALES	4,331	4,331	-	
WHOLESALE WEEKLY SALES	5,880	5,880	-	
Sales				
Veg box sales	309,804	309,804	-	
BFC sales	225,025	225,025	-	
Wholesale sales	257,746	257,746	-	
Bath Market	54,780	54,780	-	
Total Sales	847,355	847,355	-	
Cost of sales				
Carriage & packaging	(13,240)	(12,240)	1,000	
Purchases - external	(464,030)	(513,760)	(49,729)	Higher as 'in house' produce not available
Seeds, plants & compost	(16,383)	(16,383)	-	
Total Cost of Sales	(493,653)	(542,383)	(48,729)	
Gross Profit/(Loss):	353,702	304,972	(48,729)	
Gross Margin %	42%	36%	-6%	
Other income				
CE (offset by direct costs)	-	-	-	
Other	4,200	4,200	-	
Total other income	4,200	4,200	(0)	
Overheads				
Wages and Salaries Regular	(223,630)	(223,630)	-	No savings. Resource redirected to minimise losses
Other overheads	(96,784)	(96,784)	-	Unaffected due to high proportion of fixed costs
Livestock	-	-	-	
Total overheads	(320,414)	(320,414)	-	
Net Profit/(Loss):	37,488	(11,242)	(48,730)	
Wages % of Gross Margin	63%	73%	10%	

The Community Farm – Strategic Plan 2014-18
APPENDIX E SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Symbiotic relationship between commerce and community engagement in farming and food. • Collective decisions made by a people with a wide range of experience. • High stakeholder participation rate in planning the future of TCF. • Some latitude in choice of what to grow due to bias towards supply led, rather than demand led box content. • Small-scale production adds flexibility to adapt growing plan to respond to climate variations. • High quality local organic vegetable produce. • Active membership and community volunteer base. • New Learning Zone raises profile of local food to a wider audience • New Community Engagement Project (CEP) strengthens Farm’s credential as a CSA. • Local authorities and local food networks endorse local CSAs. • Crops grown on grade one farming land. • Growing vegetable boxes customer base. • 30 existing wholesale business customers • Existence of efficient supply chain providing high quality wholesale produce. • Proximity to large urban markets in Bristol and Bath. • One of the advantages of our model is that activities in one area often deliver benefits to other parts of the enterprise so, for example, working with volunteers and apprentices may improve field efficiency as well as meeting community engagement aspirations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shortage of skilled farm volunteers. • Non-member Wholesale business customers have less commitment to the project than members. • Reliance on grant funding to top up CEP. • Weak response to the first year of the CEP may jeopardise the sustainability of the project. • Lack of outreach capacity to fully engage with deprived and diverse communities. • Local community not fully engaged although awareness is developing. • Access issues around affordable, shared transport to the farm. • Uncertainty over planning application outcomes. • Lack of volunteers in the Chew Valley area. • Staff capacity may prove too low to fulfil objectives of the Strategic Plan. • Starting something we cannot finish. • Occasional dichotomy between members’ and the business’s interests leading hinders decision-making.

The Community Farm – Strategic Plan 2014-18

Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate running the business and CEP via the new Home and High fields system. • Option to increase acreage to meet rising demand, and diversify farm activities e.g. stock rearing, bee-keeping. • Strengthen our volunteer base. • Harnessing diverse talents within our membership base. • Getting the CSA message out there. • Developing produce that will attract BME population. • Developing markets and raising awareness of traditional, and niche market crops. • Extending protected growing area. • Becoming a beacon CSA demonstrating its value to other local growers and farmers. • Forging links between urban and rural communities through locally sourced food. • Using CEP to attract new funding streams. • Engaging with apprenticeship programmes. • Offering skills training in farming and marketing. • Increasing public focus on food issues vis a vis price, climate change, local sourcing. • Increased labour and resource from contract with Bristol Drugs Project • Increased box and wholesale sales within current capacity • Donations • Bath farmers' market (and related box sales) • Profit and increased profile from Community Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adverse economic climate leading to staff lay-offs and limited capacity to invest in CEP. • Contraction in the organic food market within the South West. • Adverse weather conditions affecting production of our (and other local) crops • Investors might want their money back if recession continues to bite. • Loss of existing customers • Not enough new customers to meet targets. • Inability to attract skilled horticultural volunteers. • Grant funding programmes not available for CEP. • Competition for grant funding and knee jerk applications lessen chances of success. • Being unable to obtain planning permission for basic site improvements e.g. toilets, small office, storage shed • Timescales cannot be met. • Too many opportunities – being unable to prioritise. • Politics of collective decision-making. • New competitor into the market • Economic / market conditions affecting demand for our produce • Lack of UK produce • Loss of key personnel