



Annual report 2019-20

Reporting on the activities and community benefit of Canalside Community Food

Canalside vision and mission statement

Canalside Community Food is a community supported agriculture (CSA) scheme. Canalside believes that communities should begin to take control of their own food production and to take responsibility for producing it in an environmentally beneficial way. We do this by providing our community with local, seasonal and organic food through our formally constituted Community Benefit Society (CBS- a type of community coop) which is run by members for members. We hope that our members feel fully able to engage with the CBS to grow the food and enjoy the on-farm activities we organise and invite all our members to get involved. We also actively engage with other groups and communities who would like to produce food in a similar way.

The View From the Field

Rollercoaster Weather

The past year has well and truly been a rollercoaster in the weather department. Summer 2019 alternated between downpours and heatwaves, so it was a relief of sorts when there was finally some consistency from mid September 2019 when it started raining... and didn't really stop until late March 2020. "Will it ever end?", we cried in despair.

Yes was the answer, as the subsequent spring provided an abrupt and absolute turnaround – the critical months of April and May were very dry, very warm and above all sunny. The statistics for that sunshine season are ridiculous: not only was it the sunniest Spring on record, it was also sunnier than every Summer on record bar three. May was the sunniest month of any month since records began. It was also the 5th driest and 5th warmest English spring.

Well Watered

After suffering in the heatwave of 2018 we have invested in new irrigation equipment, new sprinklers and hoses, and most importantly new timers; these enable us to irrigate reliably at night, reducing evaporation massively and making

our irrigation much more effective.



'Hungry gap' strawberries contributing to the abundant share

Increased use of sheet mulches for selected crops has also improved the efficiency of our water usage. Consequently our crops coped well with the conditions and we had an unprecedented abundance and variety of produce during the transition from winter to summer 2020, with the dreaded "hungry gap" not actually happening at all – in fact during our usual "hungry" phase from mid May to mid June we had more items in the share than at any other period since the previous

autumn. The growing team hopes to build on this as not just a one-off in a freak year but something we can consistently maintain in future for our members, and to demonstrate to the world that it IS possible to feed people with local vegetables, all the year round.

A Slow Summer

Summer 2020 has been a return to inconsistency, with mostly lower temps and sunshine hours than average, but there has been much more rain than we saw in the Spring. The Mediterranean treats of this time of year, such as tomatoes, aubergines and French beans, have been slow to ripen but overall yields are still looking good.

Helping Hands

We welcomed Assistant Grower Lena Sucker back from maternity leave in August 2019, rejoining the regular staff growing team of Head Grower Dom van Marsh and Assistant Grower Stephen Hayward. Eleanor Brown has been a highly valued Occasional Grower doing casual labour and cover during busy times.



Vendy picking the late summer tomato abundance

We were also very happy to provide an Erasmus internship to Prague University student Vendula Donatova in Autumn 2019; Vendy brought a wealth of farming knowledge and enthusiasm during her placement.

We couldn't have achieved such a great year without our team of twelve wonderful Workshare Volunteers, who have braved miserable mud and searing sun to keep Canalside crops

flourishing, frequently joined by eager volunteers from across the membership, with participant ages ranging from 18 months to 80 years young.

Volunteer numbers surged during the Covid-19 lockdown in the spring of 2020 and we were very happy to keep work mornings running during that challenging period with a range of additional measures to allow land work to continue safely; the contribution of those extra volunteers has been key to a fantastically abundant year at Canalside.



A work morning team in winter 2019 - Workshare Volunteers and members

In With the New

In 2019 we experimented with two new root vegetables. Salsify proved easy to grow, but disappointing to eat – though its flowers were stunning; and Hamburg parsley was harder to grow but showed good promise on the plate, so we are giving it another try in 2020. We will also be trying novel tunnel crops huauzontle and leaf amaranth, as well as a range of unusually coloured winter radishes.

Infrastructure

In 2019 we replaced the polythene cover of Tunnel 4, one of our largest, which went well; this summer Tunnel 1, which was the first to be erected at Canalside, is finally getting a much deserved re-skinning. The past year has also



The new toolshed - ready for action!

seen two new woodsheds and a new small toolshed by the tunnels, to save workers time fetching tools.

In March 2020 an unsafe old oak tree was successfully pollarded, giving it a new lease of life, and some unsafe branches were also removed from the huge ash tree in the car park. Last winter saw the brave (and the foolish) descend into our drainage ditches, spade in hand, to clear them out and keep them flowing nicely – crucial work in such a wet winter.

Crop Yields For Selected Crops

We grow over 60 crops; it is not possible to list figures for them all here, so here we have yields for a few key crops. They illustrate very succinctly how some crops thrived in the wetter, cooler summer that 2019 gave us compared to the scorcher of 2018, whilst others craved the absent

sunshine.

Crop	2019 yield (kg)	2018 yield (kg)
Potatoes	10382	5615
Carrots	3451	2545
Onions	2166	645
Squash	1858	2130
Tomatoes	1017	1844
French beans	399	398
Apples	1035	863

Dom van Marsh, July 2020

Education project

The season for the education project runs from April until October each year. These are the months when the weather is generally suitable for classes to be outside and in the unheated, open sided pole barn for the duration of their visit. Sometimes it's quite wet and windy, which can be a challenge when working with charts, posters and worksheets, as was the case for some of the visits in summer 2019. June and July 2019 were very busy months for the education project, with 6 classes – from year 3 (7-8 years olds) up to year 9 (13-14 year olds) – visiting the farm!

c.170
students
came to the
farm on
school visits
in 2019



Seasonal menu planning

For the first time in the history of the education project, older classes visited to consider seasonality and food provenance.



Exploring food provenance through packaging and map investigation

Three year 5/6 classes (9-11 year olds) from Milverton primary school each had a day at the farm linked to their 'Healthy Eating' non-curriculum week. This was followed by a secondary class visit for the first time, from North Leam school. These older classes all looked at packaging to find out where different fruits and vegetables come from, found out how far different items had travelled and then research when different items would be in season in the

UK. They used all their new learning to help them plan a menu for a particular season, using a selection of recipe books and their own ideas.

It was a challenge keeping control of large world maps and plastic packaging during some of the visits, which experienced strong winds gusting through the pole barn and heavy rain showers which we dodged when we went on a tour of the farm – all this certainly contributed to making the visits more memorable!

Feedback from the teachers after the visits showed that the first-hand experience of seeing a farm and finding out which crops grow when stimulated really interesting discussions and fed into a wide range of work on the classes' return to school.

The younger classes that visited were from Woodloes Primary School and their trip linked to their year 3 topic of work called 'Where my Wellies Take Me', studying the book of the same name by Michael and Clare Morpurgo. The two classes followed in the footsteps of several classes from their school in recent years who have done the same topic and visited the farm as part of their work, showing how much the year 3 teachers value the experience of visiting the farm

and the way it enriches the children's summer term topic. The classes took part in activities to find out how fruiting vegetables are pollinated, which animals help to make compost and how the growers keep pests off the crops.

Volunteers from Canalside's membership played an invaluable role in the visits, whether helping to make resources, setting up the pole barn on the day or supporting the work with the students and adding depth and insight to their conversations. Grateful thanks to all members who stepped forward to help in this way and in doing so enriched the experience of the visits.

Autumn time can often be busy on the education project too, with lots to see in the fields – a popular choice for the teacher of younger classes as it links neatly to topics on the theme of harvest. In autumn 2019, there were no requests for visits, as sometimes happens! And of course the national lockdown in summer 2020 has meant no opportunity for school groups to visit this season either. We will wait and see what will be possible in the coming months as schools re-open in September.

Ali Jeffery, August 2020

The Willows Project

Listen out for us on Wednesday workshare mornings! Just as you're settling down to the various jobs on the farm you'll hear us heading in your direction.

Whatever the weather, whatever the task in hand, we'll be there, excited to see everyone. Some of us will quietly join you, and some of us will arrive at full volume, with many questions to ask and stories to share. Recently it's been unusually quiet; we're social distancing at home until 22nd July when we are resuming sessions.

In the afternoons and on Fridays we tend to our flower gardens and do nature based arts and crafts to sell. They help to keep us sustainable.



Who dug the biggest parsnip?

We sow a lot of flower and herb seeds, watch them grow, plant some in our gardens and sell the rest to you from the pole barn. We spend time closely looking at pollens and insects we find.



Bird table ready for sale

The walk out to Leasowe Farm's pond is always an enjoyable experience. There are many birds,

butterflies and flowers to appreciate on the walk there, while the pond itself has lots of interesting wildlife to investigate using hand nets / jam jars.

During the year a group of National Grid employees came (with tins of paint!) through volunteeringmatters.org and repainted our cabin inside and out. They also used the leftover paint to repaint the veg collection space in the pole barn.

The spring winds didn't blow our polytunnel cover off but it was in need of renewing, luckily a group of volunteers from CGI and Npower offered to reskin it with us as a Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) day, bringing with them the funding for the new cover.

We ran a second Grow to Grow project for local vulnerable adults over 8 weeks, funded by Tesco's Bags for Life, with up to 15 participants in each session. During one of the sessions everyone enjoyed the opportunity to look inside a bee hive (empty!) and wonder at their social organisation! It gave rise to a lively question and answer session too, with an appreciation of their contribution to food production on the farm and beyond .

"The project taught us all that what we have been striving to achieve is possible, and what a positive difference time in the outdoors, learning about all aspects of growing [plants and emotions/self esteem] can be made to people's lives."

Grow To Grow participant



Re-painting in progress

Participants made new friends, enjoyed the fresh air on the farm and developed their self-esteem.

"Thank you for letting me be me."

Grow To Grow participant

Canalside provided the funding of £500 for one of our team to attend a 12 week Level 3 Award for Education and Training course at Warwickshire college. "The course has definitely opened my eyes and built my confidence and also given me new inspiration in moving forward with the Willows Project," Hayley said, reflecting on her learning experience. "I especially enjoyed preparing and presenting a micro teach lesson to college members and pushing myself to have the courage to do so. The most useful part of my course was being able to do a presentation about The Willows Project which I know will benefit future members of The Willows team."

"The biggest learning point from my course was learning to be organised and confident in my abilities of running large group sessions." Hayley

We would like to thank everyone for their continued support especially Canalside steering committee for welcoming us on site, leasing an area from which we can run sessions (for 7 years now), and guiding us in times of difficulty. Thank you all land share members who gifted their dividends to the project. We are putting this money towards an accessible loo on site.

Special thanks to Celia our much loved volunteer for her invaluable care and support .

The Willows Team, July 2020

Hayley, Ness, Dave, Paul, Ali, Mord

Socials

Each year there is a programme of social events at Canalside, many of which are repeated each year due to their success and popularity with members.

A long-standing and significant feature of the Canalside social calendar is the summer party.

Preparations begin in January, when members are invited to take on the organisation of different aspects of the event. Teams come together, and for the 2019 summer party this meant different groups of members took responsibility of almost all the areas of organisation. A veritable feast of

Indian food was prepared and sold to party attendees by a kitchen team of volunteers. A team organised and ran the bar. Entertainment was provided by The Kale-y Collective, a local ceilidh band (most of whom are members of Canalside) and an open mic session. As always, the party continued until dawn for a small handful, with music round the fire and late night chai.



Summer party feast plate

Other highlights of the social calendar included:



Potato picking underway

- **the Potato Harvest, AGM and Harvest Supper** in September– for the first time in Canalside's history (due to a change in the season when it took place) we were able to hold the AGM on the farm. It followed a

successful and sunny potato harvesting day attended by all ages (including a visit from the 'Play in the Woods' playgroup for under 5s and their families which meets in Tallis Wood). In total the harvesters brought in 6 tonnes of potatoes! The day was rounded off with a bring-and-share harvest supper (including some of the freshly harvested potatoes baked in their jackets).

- **Apple Pressing Day and CSA Network Open Day** in October, a well-attended and enjoyable event saw families and members of all ages press around 300L of juice to drink at the farm and to take home, as well as to be pasteurised and also made into cider for future events.



Apple pressing preps

2020 has started quiet, with the lessening of activity in the late winter, followed by the COVID-19 lockdown which has removed all our events from the calendar.

The steering committee had hoped we might be able to meet face-to-face for our AGM, but in the end have decided that a short meeting on Zoom seems the most practical. We hope you can join us on Sunday 27th September at 5pm. The access link will be circulated with the agenda 2 weeks before the meeting.

Ali Jeffery, August 2020

Membership – April 2019-March 2020 -----

The produce grown by Canalside was in high demand for the whole of the year. For the first time in the Canalside's 14-year history as a veg

scheme, we held a considerable waiting list throughout this business year – it stood at more than 50 households for a large part of the year!

This is record-breaking demand for our locally grown, organic produce.

Due to the high member numbers we already had, we were only able to take on very few new/returning produce members in the early part of the year. Once vegetable production neared its peak in late July, we were able to increase the number of produce members and offer a trial share to 17 households from the top of the waiting list.

6 month

average wait for a trial share

23

new subscribing households

Apart from one household, all of those who took a trial share between late July and September went on to subscribe for a regular share of the harvest on-going. The latter part of the year was as quiet as the start for new arrivals, as numbers of subscribing share members gradually reduced to the level aimed for in most of the year.

Throughout the year we also welcomed 4 new volunteer workshares to the land team, who mainly took the place of others who had relinquished their commitment. The growers are supported by 12 volunteers who make a weekly commitment to a work morning to help with all the seasonal tasks on the farm.

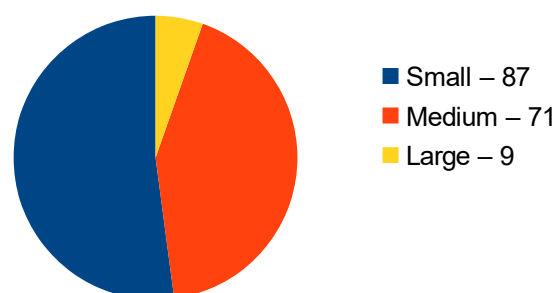
We started and ended the year with 167 produce

share subscriptions feeding the members of approximately 180 households.

Our membership continues to comprise of 10 households who had joined the scheme before the first produce was ready for distribution, and a further 8 households who joined within the first year. It's great that, 13 years on from the very first shares of the harvest, over 10% of our members are those who have been with us from the very early days.

10 founder members still receiving produce

Share sizes in March 2020



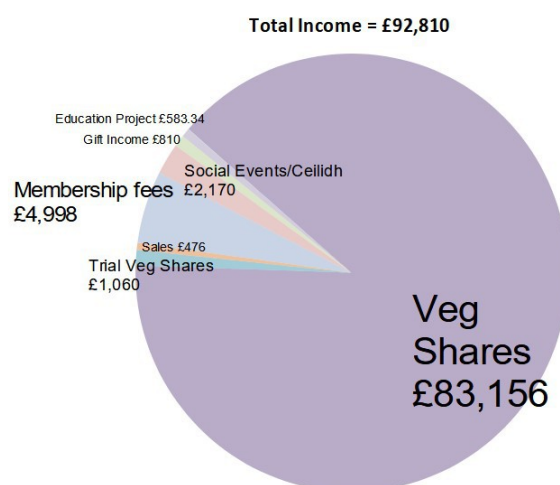
We were sad to say goodbye to 23 subscribing households during the year who left for diverse reasons. Some of these members had been receiving our produce since the early years of Canalside, including one household that had been members since December 2006 before there was even any veg growing!

Ali Jeffery, July 2020

Finances – April 2019-March 2020

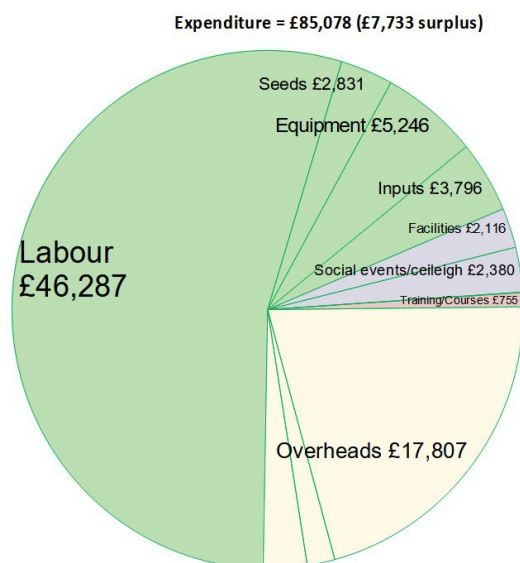
In our first full year as a cooperative society we consolidated our finances after the share offer that we raised to purchase the land we had been renting for the past 10 years. We have a full complement of members which balances our need to make a fair surplus to invest in the business with the community we feel that the land and social space can provide for.

On a turnover of £92,810 we made a surplus of £7,733 before tax which represents an expenditure of £85,078. Most of our income, as might be expected, comes from vegetable and fruit shares which provide us with a regular and steady monthly income (see pie chart). This in turn allows us to properly plan our veg growing



and allows us to pay our growers and admin team a fair wage. Importantly it also allows us to invest

money back into the business and keep the machinery, polytunnels and social space in good order.



Our main expenditure is wages for both our

skilled growers and our admin team who keep the coop running smoothly and ensure that subscribing produce members are able to pick up a weekly share (see pie chart). We also spend money on social events to help members enjoy access to the farm and take part in farm activities. The balance of our expenditure goes on overheads to keep the cooperative within the rules set for coops to trade and legally run.

After the land purchase in the previous financial year we have had a year of consolidation, rebuilding our reserves, and haven't made any significant asset purchases although we plan to do so in the near future as per our business plan.

For those interested in the actual figures. Our actual legal cooperative accounts and returns are presented at the AGM and are also available on our website. They are ultimately filed with the FCA.

Gareth Davies, July 2020

Future plans

The Steering Committee is always looking at how to invest in Canalside to enhance the sustainability and resilience of the organisation. To this aim, there are several exciting plans in the pipeline!

In the coming year we intend to take on a new field: Little Gorse, which is the one between Big Gorse and the canal. This is part of a plan to plant a new orchard in one of our existing fields, to replace our current orchard which, although not under any immediate threat, is not available to buy – and thus safeguard – along with the rest of our land. This will also bring an orchard into the heart of our site for everyone's benefit. We hope you will look out for news about how to help with this plan in the months ahead.

We are on the cusp of installing a new accessible toilet, for Canalside and The Willows Project members, visitors and service users with mobility difficulties for whom the existing toilets are

unsuitable.

We plan to buy a bigger tractor, for work that our little Massey Ferguson 230 can't manage, as at present we are reliant on borrowing Leasowe Farm's tractor.

Finally, it is our aim to find an alternative to mains water for irrigating the vegetables: mains water is an expensive resource and, with changing weather patterns due to climate change, irrigation is increasingly needed during periods of drought such as during the summer of 2018. The Steering Committee is currently investigating options including a rainwater storage reservoir / wildlife pond, or a borehole.

Look out for more information through emails from us, as the plans develop and we gain a clearer idea of what we will do and how you can help us.

Dom van Marsh and Ali Jeffery, August 2020

Photo credits: the Canalside staff team, Magali Fowler, the Willows team

For more photos of Canalside's activities go to <https://www.flickr.com/photos/126538300@N02/albums>