



Annual report 2022-23

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 co-op) 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



Bringing in the bean canes, November 2022

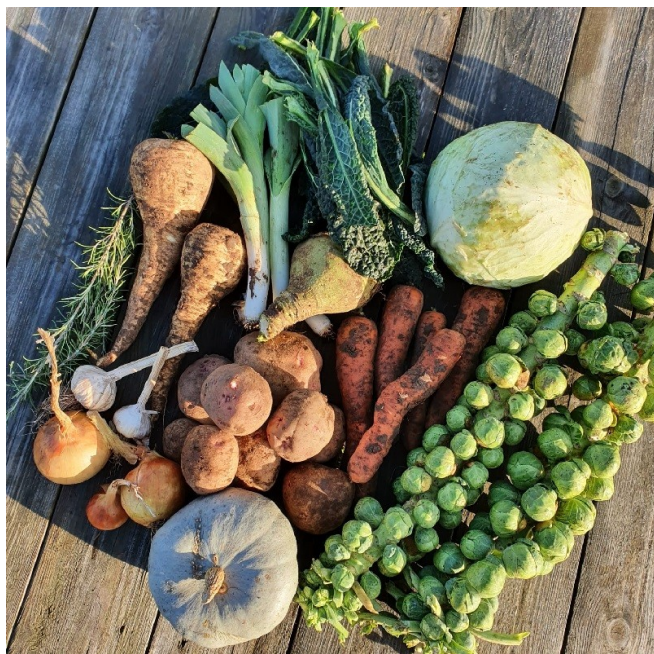
We begin this annual recap travelling back to a perfectly blue skied autumnal day as we brought our squash harvest in from the fields. Given the drought of Summer '22 we were generally pleased with our main crop harvests; the squash, onions, garlic, apples and beetroots did well, whilst potatoes and celeriacs suffered from the drought being both smaller in size and poorer in quality. With good calculations though they still

saw us through the winter and spring and our summer crops stretched out well into the autumn, even giving out our last tomatoes in November which might be a record.



Harvesting celeriac, early December 2022

The autumn of '22 was very mild but winter dramatically arrived in mid December when the temperatures suddenly dropped below freezing with consecutive overnight frosts which weren't clearing during the day. This didn't give our crops



Christmas double share

time to acclimatise and we were without water on site for over a week as the pipes stayed frozen. This also made harvesting challenging, our double Christmas share in particular, as the heavy frosts only cleared on the day of the festive pick up. Trying to dig up the leeks with work morning volunteers when our forks couldn't penetrate the ground was certainly a low point and growers' expletives could be heard from miles around.



*Keeping warm on a winter's work morning,
January 2023*

Thankfully we could harvest in the nick of time, but the sudden thaw on winter solstice meant a ten degree jump in temperature which caused damage to other crops. Our cauliflowers and

purple sprouting broccoli fared the worst and didn't really recover which was upsetting after all the tending we had done throughout the drought. We lost broad beans, chard and winter salad and also found out that day that some of our storage veg including squash, potatoes and onions in the barn had been frozen despite using our usual methods of frost protection.



The re-skinned polytunnel with vents

Putting our woes behind us we started 2023 with gusto, re-skinning tunnel 5 with added vents for better temperature control and giving the orchard a much needed prune. Heavy frosts lingered into February and winter merged into the wettest March in 40 years which delayed our ploughing. Instead we focussed on planting up our tunnels and rotavated outside where we could to get our crops in whilst we waited for the rest of the ground to dry out. The only thing that went in significantly later were our main crop onions. Planting early isn't always advantageous unless you have a warm sunny spring and as this year was the opposite it wouldn't have necessarily brought them on any quicker.

Downpours in early May caused flooding on our site and into the pole barn which highlighted the need to do more work on our drainage system which had become clogged over the years. It's vital we make the land as resilient as possible to fluctuating conditions and this reminded us why we spend so many winter work mornings ditch digging!



Planting out the first crops, May 2023

The heavy rains turned into a month of drought and scorching days during May and June which then cooled and brought more rain by July. This was great for irrigation but the lack of heat and sunlight meant our summer crops didn't burst onto the scene with the abundance we'd hoped for. Still, tomatoes, aubergines, beans, lettuce, courgettes and more provided a constant source of great summery veg.

and keep our members. We put a lot of work in, to make sure the share didn't seem drastically diminished for multiple weeks in a row. During the harvesting gap, many schemes comparable to ours either temporarily close or buy in veg to supplement what can be produced, but the Canalside ethos has always been to represent the reality of growing with whatever the season brings and to only provide food we can grow on site. If anything, there was less a distinct gap but generally a leaner year overall.



Eleanor picking peas



Stephen mowing a green manure plot in the fields

We were very anxious about the harvesting gap this year after the combination of summer drought and winter frost/thaw damage alongside the price rise and pressure to produce good veg

Every season brings its new learnings. Farmers managing weather is a story as old as time, and, some of these are new challenges facing us. We are noticing the patterns and focussed on solutions. Our main lessons have been to always prepare for drought periods of some length. The farm infrastructure is getting older and plans for development are needed. Off-grid water storage is top of the list, and increased water pressure through pumps so we can irrigate more of the farm in one go. We've also learnt that our winter storage systems can actually handle prolonged frosts fairly well despite a lot of anxiety this year!

At the time of writing we are hopeful about most of this season's main crops growing well which were all planted well before our deadline at the end of July, however a lot rain and lack of sun throughout July and August have not been ideal and we already know the onions have suffered from this. For the foreseeable we are extremely busy tending to the many crops in the ground -

summer, winter and storage - and trying to keep the weeds at bay to allow them a good head start. Looking ahead, the start of the harvest season in autumn is firmly on our radar, starting with the community potato harvest.



Putting up bean canes, July 2023

As always we are hugely grateful to all our members who come and join us in the fields. This is such a vital part of what makes a CSA unique, rather than simple a veg shop. Our team of volunteer workshares are invaluable in getting the amount of work required done, alongside many other regular volunteers who turn out whatever the weather each week. We were very saddened by the death of volunteer Nick Rabson in June and he will be very much missed. Special mention to Nikki Cooper, Craig Barnes, Karin Wellert and

Clare Jones for their support with casual labour this season.



Lena planting squash

Thank you to everyone who has given us encouragement over the year – we feel the value of working in this community and hopefully being part of a solution. Growing local, seasonal and organic food feels a small yet powerful act in the face of many wider challenges. Staying connected to the season with all its facets and weathering both the abundance and scarcity is an important anchor amidst a culture that consumes with disregard and is rife with disconnections. Thank you for keeping us in employment and keeping connected to us as we bring our muddy hands and hearts to this work.

Eleanor Brown, Lena Sucker and Stephen Hayward.

August 2023

The Willows Project

Hi Canalside members,

Another year has passed and all is going well for us at the Willows Project. We have a great team of 7 workers with wide ranging skills and attributes. For anyone who doesn't know, we are located on the edge of the social field, to the left of the pole barn, just past the caravans and through the gap in the willow hedge. Feel free to have a look round anytime when we are not running sessions. Those on Wednesday morning volunteer mornings will know us well! We can



Some of our participants and workers

always accommodate more participants so please do speak to us if you know anyone who likes working in the outdoors and nature based arts and crafts, and signpost friends and family to us. We are open 50 weeks a year.



The new cabin at the entrance to The Willows' area at Canalside

We had to take our poly tunnel down after a request from the gas board as it was situated over an underground gas pipe. We were then successful in bidding for a Warwick District Council Grant to build a new cabin which can be seen just past the accessible loo providing much needed extra indoor space.

We also have a beautiful new garden with raised beds built in memory of Ella, with funds donated by her family and friends.

See the new improved entrance to our area which makes it more welcoming and accessible, as well as creating more light for polytunnel 6/7 with the willow hedge removed.

In the garden closest to the carpark we have planted mint, sage, rosemary, thyme, fennel and oregano this year which will be there for years to come for you all to pick your own to add flavour to your meals. The second garden by the

polytunnels will also be planted out with a variety of other herbs and pollinating insect attracting flowers. There are signs to identify the different plants. We will continue to provide herb plants outside the pole barn for you to purchase. Most of these are perennials so you will enjoy them for years to come in your own tubs and gardens. This money together with our other enterprise products continue to help us keep sustainable. Our herbs outside the pole barn have sold well again. Thanks everyone. You may have also seen our products for sale in Lighthorne Pavilion Café, Gaia and CORE, at the Leamington Peace Festival and Ecofest.

We have thoroughly enjoyed lighting up our pizza oven during open days.

We would like to show appreciation for this wonderful site that Canalside provide for our project and all the support and benefits that come with this partnership.



The view from the new accessible garden

Thank you also to the Ingalls for the visits to their amazing pond full of wildlife and to the rest of you for your continued support.

Ness, Dave, Hayley, Celia, Paul, Mord and Gill
thewillowsproject@gmail.com August 2023

Socials

The last year has seen the calendar of events back in full swing following the hiatus that the lockdowns of 2020 and beyond caused on such things.

Our **Apple Pressing and Open Day** in October was a great success with all ages attending and

helping out. With two apple presses on the go there was a lot of delicious juice pressed during the day, some of which was made into cider by Tom Ingall, for this year's Summer Party. We also had farm tours so that members and non-members could find out more about what

happens at Canalside and The Willows Project were very busy with their wood fired pizza oven.



Setting up the apple press

Chacma's pop-up restaurant has been on site all year, in all weathers and seasons. Saturday share collectors, work morning volunteers and others come down for a dose of South Indian deliciousness cooked up by Sumithra and Simon, to round off the work morning or enliven the palette on a Saturday lunchtime!

We've held our big seasonal **harvest and planting days**, enabling members to socialise as well as join in with an extended work session. These were the autumn **potato harvest**, winter **beetroot harvest**, and spring **onion planting**. Of the three, the onion planting was the most affected by unseasonal weather as the extremely wet conditions meant ploughing and bed preparation were delayed by several weeks. In the end, the planting took place in May, about 5 weeks later than planned. A good turnout that day enabled the entire crop to be planted in one session: a big relief for the growers after so many setbacks.

Open Farm Sunday was in June as usual, allowing members and the public the opportunity of a tour of the farm and a chance to relax in the social area with a picnic.

Education project -----

Following the hiatus in education visits resulting from lockdowns, remote learning and general societal disruption, we welcomed our first classes

EcoFest took place in early September and we had our usual Canalside stall there. There was a steady flow of interest in our model of agriculture and as always it was a good opportunity to tell the public about what we do (and give a venue for The Willows Project to do the same). Our new display materials looked good on the stall and photo posters gave people an idea of what Canalside looks like through the year.

The **Summer Party** was a successful event that was well attended and continued into the wee small hours long after the toe-tapping tunes of the Aardvark Ceilidh Band ended. Chacma sold their delicious South Indian food and the marquee was put up again for the dancing, though no shelter was needed as the evening turned out to be a balmy summer's evening.



Summer party site lit up

We're planning for our **AGM** to be combined with harvest celebrations again, giving us time to look back on the successes and hard work of the season. We hope you can join us for that on Saturday 30th September from 12.15pm. Full details are in recent members' emails.

Thanks to the socials team, led by Helen Maiden this year, and everyone else who helped make all these events a success.

Ali Jeffery, September 2023

back to the farm in July 2023.

Two Year 3 classes (7-8 year olds) from Woodloes Primary School each spent a morning at the farm:

a morning with abundant new experiences for this cohort whose first two years of schooling were badly affected by the disruption to their education by lockdowns.

They played a cooperative game to find out what the growers try to keep from eating the crops, and what the veggies need to grow well. A walk round the farm gave lots of opportunities for seeing crop protection in action and learning about what different vegetable plants look like.

They ended their morning exploring compost to find out which animals help convert waste into a nutritious soil additive and finding out what grows in the polytunnels. Jemima Morgan (also a regular volunteer in the fields) joined Ali in delivering these sessions and will be working with Ali over the coming weeks and months to develop and promote education project visits to the farm.

Ali Jeffery, August 2023

Membership – April 2022-March 2023

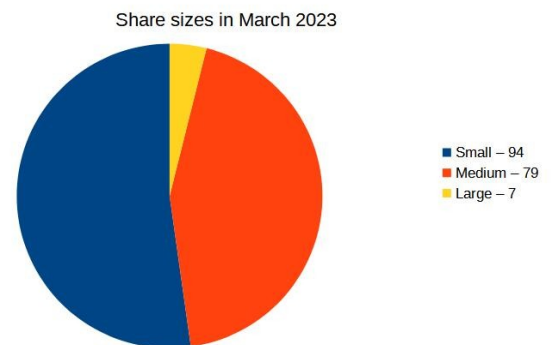
Whilst there is still plenty of interest in our produce share subscriptions, there are definitely signs of the cost of living crisis affecting people and forcing them to make difficult choices about how to spend their money.

Over the year we had a whopping 43 new households take up a veg share at Canalside. As always this was primarily as a result of trials that were started during the abundant summer months.

We also welcomed 17 new social member households, with these people wanting to take part in social events and work mornings.

The year ended with 180 produce share subscriptions – a higher number than the previous year indicating a general trend towards

the smaller share sizes.



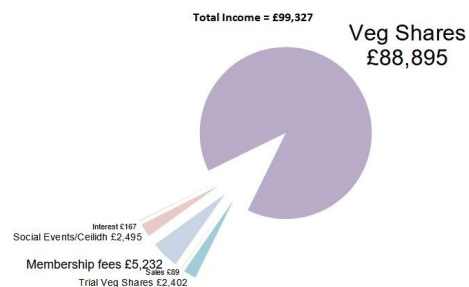
During the year, 36 subscribing households moved on from Canalside for a number of different reasons. Commonly, people's ability to collect the share has changed or they are moving out of the area.

Ali Jeffery, September 2023

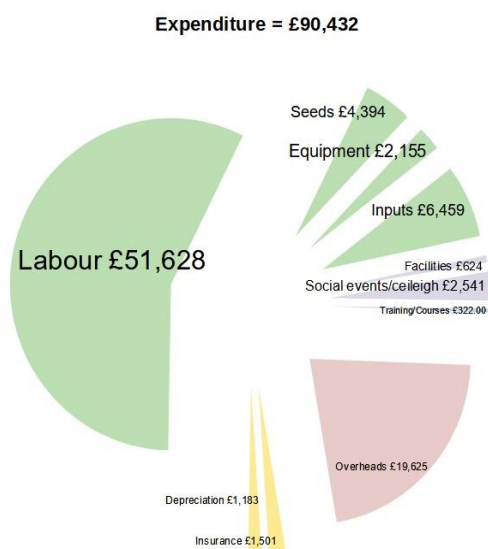
Finances – April 2022-March 2023

In the past year we have been producing 160 seasonal veg and fruit shares on a weekly basis all year round despite the disruptive weather that we have been enduring. This is thanks to our regular team of three growers who have the responsibility of planning for, and producing the required fruit and veg. They are supported by a group of regular casual labourers, and importantly, a team of regular and *ad hoc* volunteers from the community who turn up to our regular work mornings on Wednesdays and Saturdays. So thanks to our members for this continual support. In addition to the growing team we have a small admin team that oversees the membership, the book-keeping and other administrative chores needed to keep the Society trading.

Our turnover on shares and memberships, which constitutes 90% of our income, was £99,326 this year, slightly up on last year. We also benefited from £912 in donations so thanks to those donors. See the pie chart for a breakdown of our income.



Against our income we had expenses of £90,432 of which our main costs were wages for the growing and admin team (around 60% of our spend). Once again our high wage costs reflect our desire to pay a fair wage to our workers and the fact that producing veg and fruit is a labour intensive activity. The team are out there come snow, rain or shine all year round. Our other costs are related to growing the veg and fruit (about 16% of costs) and overhead costs that involve servicing our membership and providing them the facilities and space to enjoy the farm (about 27% of our costs). We have to balance this cost with charging our members a competitive rate for our veg and fruit shares and making enough money to reinvest in the Society. We believe we have got the balance right as we regularly deliver a fresh, organic and seasonal share of 5- 10 items at the same time as keeping the cost of our fresh, healthy produce at a very reasonable price. See the pie chart for a breakdown of our costs.



All in all, in the financial year 2022- 23 we posted a higher surplus than the previous season on the back of a modest price rise (in the context of the recent food inflation). The surplus is provisionally £7,205 (after tax) which represents a very small fraction of our turnover (about one month's

running costs). This partially reflects the decision not to pay interest on our community shares in this year. For those interested in our legal FCA cooperative returns these are presented on the website.

Our reserves as a Society are in the region of £35,000 which is a healthy level as compared to anticipated running costs and for meeting any contingencies. However, and to set against this, the steering committee recognises upcoming challenges to the sustainability of the Society which we need to factor in. To that end the Staff Team and Steering Group are looking for options for investing in a new sustainability plan for Canalside which will secure the Society into the future. In particular we need to address issues around upgrading staff working conditions and facilities on site and ultimately put in place plans for succession and career development in the Society. We also need to upgrade and improve a number of our systems to work more efficiently for the age and size of farm that we now are. Alongside this we need to consider environmental resilience in the face of changing weather patterns and rainfall. All these considerations are likely to require a considerable monetary investment, in excess of the money we hold in our reserves, and the steering group will need to put in place a realistic investment plan for an enterprise of our size and resources to secure our future.

Finally, for those interested in playing a part in these exciting developments please consider joining the steering group or offering your skills in any capacity that you feel able through volunteering. Let us know through the general administrator (mail@canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk) or by contacting the steering group email (steeringcommittee@canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk).

Gareth Davies, August 2023

Photo credits: the Canalside staff team and The Willows team

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