

A city centre farmers' market is appealing for investment so it can develop its own market garden.

Riverside Community Market Association (RMCA), which runs the Sunday market opposite Cardiff's Millennium Stadium, wants its own land to grow produce. It has found 10 acres (four hectares) of former pasture to rent in the Vale of Glamorgan and is looking for people to invest £50 a share to get it going. The aim is to have a self-financing community-owned business in five years. The market garden project aims to employ one full-time and two part-time growers plus educational or training staff

Riverside Farmers' Market, in the shadow of the Millennium Stadium alongside the River Taff, celebrated its 10th anniversary last year. Set up as a social enterprise with the aim of serving Cardiff communities Riverside, Grangetown and Butetown, organisers have long aimed for its organic produce to be as home grown as possible.

RMCA has taken out a 10-year lease on a five-acre plot at Coed Hills in St Hilary, Vale of Glamorgan, with an option on another five to 10 acres.

It aims for the site to be in full production in 2011 and have certified organic status by early 2012. The site is around eight miles from Cardiff city centre, although organisers said they hoped to sell some produce in Cardiff as well as run a vegetable box scheme.

RMCA's website said: "The site will produce a wide range of organic vegetables, with a focus on higher value crops such as salads, and some fruit.

"Some of this produce will be processed into soups, sauces or other products.

"The poly tunnels will allow us to extend the growing season and also to produce Asian and Caribbean vegetables that meet the needs of Cardiff's diverse ethnic communities."

The social enterprise estimates it will have a turnover of £170,000 when at full production, producing enough vegetables to feed around 200 families. It has already secured funding from Cardiff council and has appointed a horticultural manager, and recruited two young workers under a government scheme.

It needs £30,000 of capital investment, in three stages, with the first by the end of September to buy tools, do

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The project aims to grow enough vegetables to feed 200 families

ground work and apply for organic certification.

RMCA chair Steve Garrett said: "We've had the idea for a couple of years now.

"The market garden project is a natural progression for RCMA, to develop a horticultural enterprise which offers a range of economic, social, and environmental benefits.

"In particular, it aims to develop a replicable model for local food production and distribution with community ownership, whilst also offering training and social networking opportunities.

"We're creating a sense of ownership and investment for people."

Mr Garrett said former First Minister Rhodri Morgan, a regular customer at Riverside farmers' market, had agreed to be a patron of the project.

<http://www.riversidemarket.org.uk/>