

## New Routes to Market

SA Conference, Custard Factory, Birmingham. 3<sup>rd</sup> Feb 2010

Chair: Helen Browning

Panel: Ann & Norman Stanier (Dragon Orchard Cropsharers), James Smith (Growing Well), Tim Waygood (Agrarian Renaissance)

HB introduced workshop, highlighting how aim is to look at ways of bringing producers and consumers together. The CSA approach is versatile; whilst having an overarching emphasis upon social enterprise and community investment, there are many different ways of running successful CSAs and the workshop seeks to introduce a few approaches

### **Ann & Norman Stanier, Dragon Orchard CSA, S/E Herefordshire**

*1<sup>st</sup> model is an example of where an existing model shifted its focus to improve upon business and made it more viable in long-term.*

Ann and Norman bought 22 acres of fruit ground near Malvern Hills without much previous knowledge or experience of growing. The land had been used for growing fruit for over 150 years and, finding it difficult to manage the large quantity of apples produced by the orchard, they reduced the amount of fruit trees in one area and gave over another part to using the apples for cider. Still finding they had an excessive amount of dessert apples, they turned to SA for support and decided to set up a box scheme with a dedicated group of customers subscribing to apples for 3-4 months of the year. To extend the value of the customers' contribution, they turned to using the asset of the orchard itself by offering a crop share scheme whereby customers visit the site seasonally to help on the orchard, attend events, festivals, walks, etc. They then receive the harvest in autumn via apples, pears, juice, chutney, cider and jam. Ann & Norman currently have 35 crop sharers who pay a yearly subscription which provides them with a steady income for the year.

The benefits of this CSA model are for both the community and the orchard:

- 1) Has financial benefit to the orchard and local community – knowing where their fruit comes from (locally)
- 2) Brings the orchard to life by involving the local community whilst supporting a local business
- 3) Through its produce, community involvement and environmental care, the orchard can continue to serve both the owners, community and wildlife
- 4) Acts to bring community together; not only the crop sharers with the land owners but also wider community (e.g. orchard hosting the Ledbury Poetry festival or walks)

Further developments

Have recently set up drink's business (inc. a perry champagne and dessert cider) called *Once upon a Tree* and shop. Now looking at raising money to build visitor centre. Norman

stressed that it is through an awareness and practice of adaptability that the orchard have proven to be so successful.

### **James Smith, Growing Well, Cumbria**

*Based in South Cumbria, this social enterprise was set up on a 2 hectare site and is an example of where a CSA can work within a rural community in conjunction with a nearby farm shop. This is a model for social enterprises run in co-operation by producers and their communities.*

Growing Well produce veg, run horticultural training with local college and educational visits with an aim to help inspire others and build confidence in horticultural skills and mental health. Growing Well started as an idea without any land. It thereby approached Low Sizergh Barns, a local farm shop, which was already a successful business but that wanted to sell produce that they had grown themselves – therefore Growing Well were welcomed to bring this local produce into the shop. In return, this suited Growing Well as the shop already had a strong consumer market and profile. In 2004 Growing Well began growing on site and developed a wholesale business but difficulties arose through a lack of solid commitment, small margins and few customers – it was an important lesson in realising that wholesale is not suited to small production.

James relayed that the business shifted its marketing route away from wholesale to a more committed customer-focused approach that mutually benefited producer and consumer by sharing values for local food, organic growing methods, flexible production and fair-priced goods. Their CSA model is robust and simple; growing organic, local and seasonal produce, offering 2 sizes (family/couple), 2 paying options (to accommodate different needs – and a cheaper payment in winter) and no delivery (and instead helping organise a car share scheme). They trialled this method in 2008 which resulted in 40 committed members that enabled them to have a regular income for the year. A key benefit to the business is also getting direct feedback from its members – what they want/don't want – on a regular basis to keep the business developing and being loyal to the customer's needs.

Further developments

James said that they are now looking into widening their produce into milk and eggs. See [www.growingwell.co.uk](http://www.growingwell.co.uk)

### **Tim Waywood, Agrarian Renaissance, Church Farm, Hertfordshire**

*175 acres, practice poly-culture approach. In start-up stages but hope to have in place a 10-yr membership scheme in place by May 2010*

Mixed farming approach involves growing veg, promoting biodiversity, rearing livestock, a cafe/tea room, summer camping and cabin hire, walks, events, educational activities, etc..

Tim introduced farm to the group and outlined how he is aiming to bring together ideas and activities that all work successfully on their own and bring them together on one site

## **Kirstin Glendinning, Just Food, NY**

*KG outlined this well-established U.S model which supplies urban residences with rural food. This shows how a CSA can help to feed a city!*

Just Food work on 3 programmes; CSA, City Farmers Markets, and Fresh Foods for All.

CSA: set up on 1995 and currently have over 80 across NY state. Each CSA is twinned up with a farm and they collect their produce from a central site (i.e. church) every week. They also run training programme to help new CSAs set up

City Farmers Markets: 11 currently existing in NY, provides outlet for rural farmers to make a living from their produce. There are also attended by urban farmer (30 in NY).

Fresh Food for All: Programme designed to help low income community groups (e.g run soup kitchens as part of their emergency food programme)

The organisation is also involved in major campaigns (recent bee campaign) and they therefore act as a political voice for both rural and urban communities. They receive funding from external bodies and also run training in food education and organise study visits

## **Jade Bashford, Stroudco, Gloucestershire**

*In its infancy, this model takes the approach of the distribution/trade of local food rather than growing – as a successful CSA is already in place in Stroud – to help the wholesale/retail problems that the CSA has been battling*

Another not-for-profit initiative that is owned by its members/customers. Through an on-line system, producers input what they want to sell on either a regular or occasional basis, then customers order and pay on-line before turing up on collection day to receive their goods. One worker collects and sorts the produce on collection day, meaning there is no overheads that comes from running a shop.

Funded by money from the lottery's Local Food programme, it is in early set-up stages but when reaches 200 members (spending £24/month ) it will prove to be self-sustaining

## **Discussion: Q & A**

*Q: We live on a family farm that is currently being run by contractors? How can we bring it back in hand and link up with the local community to get support from/as a CSA?*

First make sure you are clear about what you want out from the local community and clear about what you want the farm to become. Then look into the Transition Town group network for support, Friends of the Earth, think up ways of marketing the farm to track down the skills you need (i.e. approach horticultural college), Care Farm initiative and advertise on [www.EnvironmentalJobs.co.uk](http://www.EnvironmentalJobs.co.uk)

*Q: How to buy others into the idea of sharing community resources*

*Q: How can we expand our box scheme into the wider community?*

*Q: How to bring down financial barriers between communities to work together on land? How to work more with low income groups (like NY model)?*

Jim and Jade outlined how the financial constraints can be broken down by spending time to talk to people and realising that in many parts of the UK financial differences are no longer subject to geographical areas (especially in the bigger cities – Bristol, London, Manchester, etc). Jim also outlined the importance for leadership; people need to be confident that they are part of a positive experience when taking a risk into something new (i.e. a new distribution of ownership)

*Q: How about a Community Supported Cooking project to extend the growing of food into wider food cultural issues: cooking and eating together in barns, orchards, fields, etc?*

See Scott Chaskey's model in the U.S for examples.

*Point was raised about the difficulty with Organic's association with elitism:*

*Q: Do, therefore, CSAs have the potential for breaking down this misconception (i.e. trade through labour/exchange)?*

*HB asked panel final question: What is the biggest barrier you face with taking the active steps towards community engagement?*

Lack of confidence in farmers, SA and like organisations not backing up community work enough, people's lack of confidence in thinking differently/more creatively, needing people to embrace flexibility/change more readily...and to get on and start growing!