

Members' meeting 25th June, 2013

A quorum of members was present.

Pickup point discussion

The first agenda item was the discussion around the veg drop-off, which was led by Kate Whittle and Tim Lawrence. Kate emphasised how important it was to remember that we are part of a community of cooperatives. The Board is doing most of the operational work as well as strategic work which is the normal work of the Board. The coop belongs to the members and it would be good if more members could step up to help out with some of the operational work.

All members present were asked to sit at a table with other members from their pickup point area. Kate then asked the question "How is the distribution system working for you?" Our task was to introduce ourselves and share one or two things we like about Sims Hill, how the system is working, suggestions for improvement, and then prioritise which vegetables we want the most of, either root vegetables, potatoes, or onions. We were also asked to contribute personally what we thought that could do to make Sims Hill a success.

All of the feedback from the members present about the current pick up points and also the preferences for veg in the veg shares was written up and collected by Kate and Tim. We will report back to the members on these issues in a future communication.

Tim then went on to describe the differences between the pickup points that had bagged veg and those who weigh out their own veg. He thinks that people expect more of the bagged veg than the people who pick up from the sheds, and there is no chance of community there. Also, there is much less packaging for the shed drop-offs, and it takes much more time to prepare the bags than it does for the crates. Eventually he would like to move much closer to the shed model for everyone as much as possible. We need to find a place on Gloucester Road where we can move a shed. We are exploring one avenue at someone's house behind Sainsbury's. Tim would also like to move toward having big enough sheds where you could have buy extra amounts of field veg and even eggs and meat. At Stroud where he was an apprentice grower was also a gift box where people could put things that they didn't want and then other people could take it if they wanted. This was also a place to put gluts of some veg. This would require upgrading our infrastructure quite a bit to add these features. We could eventually move toward a model where each area could sort out its own shares.

The question was asked: "How many shares do we need to set up a shed at a pickup point?" At least 8 to 10 shares. Could we talk to Riverside Garden Centre or Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens as a better place for the Southville pick-up point?

Membership update

Kristin talked about the membership numbers. She handed around Bobbie's bar charts which showed the growth in membership numbers and also the number of actual new members against the projected number since the beginning of the year. We are still down on that projection but we have received quite a few new members in June so that is encouraging. We stand at about 42

equivalent full share members, and we are now budgeting for 50 full share equivalents by November. We have received most new members from having stalls at events and on Gloucester Road.

We had some people join after going on Tim's "Blue Finger" walk at Feed Bristol on 8th June. Would it be possible to do that again? Having the link with Feed Bristol is very important for helping people to see the larger context. Some people think that this is as important as the stalls. We are trying to organise another event in September with the Blue Finger Alliance and other growers in Bristol, as well as the Food Sovereignty movement. We could maybe involve social media and some foraging elements?

Finance Report

Bobbie then gave the finance report. We are still slightly behind on the income that we hoped to get in for veg shares, but the salad cash crop will hopefully bring around £1000 as against our £3000 shortfall. We also may get some VAT back. On spend there is a slight underspend so overall we are forecasting a small surplus on the year. Cash flow has been tight lately, but we are managing mainly because we are still holding £3000 in unspent grant funding.

Are we going to keep buying in veg? Probably only mainly in the hungry gap of staples and leafy greens, but it will be much reduced than what it has been.

Growing report

Tim then gave the growing report. The wet year last year showed up our drainage issues with the field, more than what you would expect from the rain. We discovered a bunch of broken land drains throughout the field. One consultant recommended that we put in swales to help control this issue. Other experts have questioned this idea, and so we have put one land drain across the top, two tracks down through the field, and redug the ditch at the bottom, to help take the water out of the field. Tim worked with a number of volunteer members on this. But this doesn't address the water running under the old topsoil that was dumped on the field when they built the motorway. This still needs to be addressed. We have also put in junctions the pipes, so later on we can still do swales or more traditional herringbone drains. We have the backbone of a drainage system that can be updated later on. We think that the original broken land drains might be as old as the 1830s?

We have the frame for the polytunnel up with the help of volunteer members. A group is going to skin it on Sunday 30th June. We can grow up to 50 full shares of salad in the polytunnel, but while we have the glasshouse we will probably grow cash crops in it.

Most of the veg is doing well, some are a bit behind, a few things bolted, but the veg boxes will keep getting much nicer. We need a bit more rain and it has been too cold still. All the workshares are doing really well as well.

Tudor Trust update

Sim talked about the Tudor Trust grant. We applied for an apprenticeship scheme to help extend our capacity to help improve our infrastructure for access, for educational and outreach effort, and also to help pay for some of our drainage costs. Tudor Trust came for a site visit to both Feed Bristol and

also to Sims Hill. The feedback was that they could see what we were trying to do, but had some serious queries about the accessibility of the Sims Hill site. They seemed to like the feel of Feed Bristol much more. We are opening a conversation with Feed Bristol to see what possibilities there are for us to partner with them as they have infrastructure and much more community outreach to bring in a wider more inclusive community and the more immediate community around in the area.

The question was asked: "What would Feed Bristol get out of this partnership?"

Tim answered that they do not have the capacity to actually farm the entire site, but they have the responsibility for it. They also want to expose people to the more productive side of food growing, and they want to guide the site to be more economic and self-supporting. There are obvious synergies between both projects, Feed Bristol has access and charitable aims, and the Sims Hill project covers more of the more productive and economic viability side of things.

The members present seem to be in agreement that we explore the possibilities take this idea forward. We are hoping that we can help grow the local food system and help bring in the more marginalised people as well. We also want to offer opportunities to our members to get involved in subsidiary enterprises. We want to make sure that we don't let funding drive our project. This will also fit in with our desire to be a Permaculture Land Centre. Could we attract some agricultural subsidies? We are actually too small to attract any of this funding.

We will take this idea forward and then report back to the members as we go along.