

Members' meeting September 24, 2013

A quorum of the members were present.

Offers from the members.

Catherine Lawrence asked if people would be interested in buying her jams and chutneys and have them be available in the sheds.

Will Campbell-Clause explained about Stream Farm and asked if members would be interested in people receiving chickens, fish, or juice. He can deliver or possibly put a cool box in the sheds. Will also asked if people want to join a juice CSA.

Members asked a few questions about practicalities, especially if they are picking up at Harvest as Harvest already sells jams or chutneys. Tim is pointing out that Kebele wouldn't be able to do any animal products.

The consensus of the meeting was that we were happy for these activities to go ahead pending resolution of practical difficulties.

Actions: Tim and James will see whether Catherine's products can go in the sheds and other dropoff points. Catherine will pursue the details with them. Will will assess the interest level from members and then communicate about how deliveries might work.

Sims Hill SWOT analysis (led by Bobbie Sunderland)

This was a group exercise where all the members present fed back into the list below on all four categories.

Strengths

- Member-owned, not reliant on shareholders
- Quality and diversity of vegetables
- Very skilled growers
- Good fertile land
- New polytunnel
- Local to Bristol
- Commitment
- Veg is seasonal only
- Value for money
- Growing team/workshares
- Delivery system is reliable
- Growing membership
- Shared values
- Strong robust model
- Delicious!
- Human element, food with a face
- Goodwill in the membership

- Environmental benefits
- Partnership with Feed Bristol
- Strong Board

Weaknesses

- Coop bags, would like to have Sims Hill bags, not plastic
- Need more members
- Not well known
- We will only attract a certain type of people
- Communication capacity
- Lack of social media use
- Core model is difficult we have to put resources in before we get the members
- Very small margins
- Low reserves
- Hard to turn inquirers into members, hard to administer
- Difficult to grasp our non-horticultural values
- Land, drainage, access, and split sites
- Need to encourage members to get involved
- Members feel ignorant of big picture, too much dependence on growers
- Board needs to ask for more help
- Need to link more with Feed Bristol and have some advertising for Sims Hill there
- Need to hear more about what other CSAs are doing
- Lack links with national CSA group?

Opportunities

- Make use of social media/radio, etc.
- Permaculture Land Learner, build on that
- Developing involvements with schools
- Forming relationships with other groups such as churches, Feed Bristol, Blue Finger Alliance, Yoga West
- Developing leadership and participation for the future to strengthen the Board, etc.
- Volunteer scheme in exchange for some food?
- Feed Bristol's funding ends in just over a year?
- Spread the word more with other organisations?
- Increasing interest in where our food comes from
- Link to the local brand?
- Sims Hill branded bags/reusable?
- Increase the variety of stuff in the veg box?
- Social media and media
- Increase awareness of nutrition?
- Link up with the European Green Capital 2015, communicate a strategy
- Sell cash crops to UWE
- We are in the Blue Finger

Threats

- The weather
- Economic threats, people might not be able to afford it
- Lease ending
- Funding ending
- Competition
- Climate change
- BRT2, the park and ride and UWE as possible land grabbers
- Financial precariousness
- Drainage
- Supermarkets

Future of Sims Hill section (led by Tim Lawrence)

Tudor Trust application to support the apprenticeship scheme update. The Board felt that our community and permaculture aims had taken a back seat to the business development. To help remedy this situation we had applied to the Tudor Trust to fund an apprenticeship scheme that would help support these wider aims as well as the project infrastructure. We had also applied to be a Permaculture Land Centre to help facilitate our community engagement and educational aims.

Reaction of the Tudor Trust. The Tudor Trust came back with three challenging questions: How could we change the access to the site, which makes it difficult for the wider community to get involved? Who did we want to involve beyond our members and our apprentices? There needs to be a wider community that would benefit from their funding. What part of what we are doing is for charitable purposes?

They were very interested in Feed Bristol as a way for us to involve a wider community. If we had long-term partnership with them, they would be much more interested in working with us.

We have the choice of continuing our current application with modifications, resubmit to them as a different application or choosing to not apply to them.

The next section was a group exercise led by Kate Whittle about what kind of community involvement we want in light of these existing questions and issues

Feedback about the community involvement

Feedback from the members included the following suggestions

- We need to work with the very local and marginalised communities, Stoke Park, Lockleaze, some of whom lack shops, that are close to Sims Hill.
- We need to figure out the social needs of the membership, social, events, etc.
- Walkers could be brought in through signage, etc.
- Feed Bristol is a huge opportunity to work with their existing community as we have an existing relationship with them.
- Currently the workshare community is the most active. We need to extend this through volunteering, and scheduled work days.

- There are groups at UWE that might be interested in working with us.
- It is important to remember we are a food-growing project.
- There are lots more opportunities to work with charitable groups such as food banks, ex-offenders, etc., but this would need to be managed very carefully.
- We could do more workshops and suppers at pickup points. We could also share recipes.
- Sharing infrastructure and tools with different growing groups.
- Working with apprentices and students.
- Half days where school groups could help.
- Presentations to groups, and we could charge for this.
- Make a presentation kit for people who are willing to speak.
- Develop an internal/external communications policy, and ask volunteers to help with this.

Conclusions from the exercise

Members indicated that they want Sims Hill to develop a closer relationship with Feed Bristol, concentrate on developing the capacity of the members of the coop and organically build up our wider community involvement through links with other organisations, etc. We want to be careful not to be distracted away from our core business by focusing too much on charitable and social aims.

How could members contribute to Sims Hill (led by Simone Osborn)

Lynne Tinsley is willing to coordinate a surveymonkey that will go out to all our members to get their ideas and offers. We will also build up a spreadsheet that will include all the offers from members who signed up to our task list.