

Sims Hill Members' Meeting 29th November 2016

A quorum of members was present.

Growing report from Farm Manager Miriam Schoen: Miriam said that we are starting to have frosts which are good for the soil. She has been clearing and preparing lots of areas for next year, and planting winter crops.. The fall ploughing might wait for first thing in new year if needed. Miriam has done a development plan for the next 3 years so she has lots of structural jobs to do over the winter, including making compost piles and bays. The tunnels now have green manure in preparation for spring crops. She is still waiting for the woodland crew to come and mark the trees for thinning. She is hoping to have a nice tea break area for activities where the railway carriages are now. Miriam would like to focus more attention on utilising the field more for crops. Miriam will be sharing the development plan more widely.

She will start ordering seeds for next year in mid-December. She wants to have better soil preparation for the crops for next year. She would like to grow fewer potatoes next year as it cheaper than other crops to buy in. A good new team of workshares has come in and Miriam is running it throughout the whole year instead of for just six months. We have a City of Bristol work experience student. Miriam would also like to establish some railway sleeper cold frames, which we already have glass for. Workdays have been well attended throughout this year. The next workday will be in January. We can't really refurbish the greenhouse as we can't raise money for this until either we or AWT get a long lease on the land. We are trying to buy in from more local growers, i.e. within 40 miles.

Education project update: Kirsty Philbrick is working on Fridays for the education project on food education. We are trying to focus on food growing and nutrition instead of wildlife. She has done flyers for primary and secondary schools and has visited lots of schools. There will be one class at least in the next couple of weeks. She is also offering teacher training. The Council is very supportive of the project, and if we have any contacts with local primary schools she would love to hear from you at simshilleducation@gmail.com.

Crowdfunder update: There has been a small group working on the crowdfunder to raise money for a tractor. We are hoping to raise at least £5000. If we can't get a tractor, we can use David's tractor as long as we have a secure place for it on site and we can use the money to get some implements to use with the tractor as this will help us raise better crops. We have £2600 so far, and we done lots of flyering which has helped raise our profile. We can keep what we raise. Please Like us on Facebook and help share it around! The video is excellent! We would still like to have a social event for members during the winter.

Community Project update from Laurie King: The Community Food Centre project is aligned with Real Economy. This is for people who would normally be referred to food banks. They are invited to come and do a bit of growing, cook a meal together, take some Sims Hill food and Real Economy food home. Laurie has contacted lots of referral agencies and there is some interest. Hopefully we will have some referrals coming so a group can come in the next few weeks. She is hoping to start using peer referrals as well. The possibility of liaising with Stoke Lane Action Group came up. The day on Thursday will be open to other people as well who aren't in crisis.

Budget update:

Last year we decided to hire the Farm Manager to help us get on a sounder business footing. We have made a formal arrangement with AWT as far as rent and use of facilities, etc. and we are going to sign an MOU with them shortly. We have received the Tudor Trust grant for the education and community projects, and that pays for some of Miriam's time and also for use of Feed Bristol facilities. However, our members have not grown as forecast in the budget and we have had to cut some of the growers' time.

We are £5k down on veg share income, and we are £1711 down on projected veg sale income. We have had £7k in donations and grant income from Tudor Trust and Lush grants.

We have bought in considerably more veg than we budgeted for, over £5k. Other farm costs were less than we expected. We have projected just under a £4k loss for this year. We are anticipating £1000k income for the woodland. We are taking this as income for this year. Our reserve was £3972 and our loss is £3937. We need to have the woodland income to have any reserves going into next year. We won't have any cash flow problems because we have the grant income. We do have a big weed problem which has caused us to lose a lot of crops, which is why we have spent a lot of money on bought-in veg. If we have an onsite tractor and implements then we should be able to get on top of this more quickly. We also want to get the Sims field more attention.

The proposed budget for 2017. We have put in ½ day a week for outreach work to help increase members. We want to increase grower days from 1st March to 4 days for Miriam and 3 days for another grower. We also will employ Freya to do deliveries 2 hours a week. We have also budgeted for salad shares, added in grant income and supporter income for a total income of £46,133. We are expecting our expenditure to be £44,865. If we adopt this budget, we need to review it every quarter, and adjust grower hours to go with member numbers. Miriam is hoping that the bought-in veg costs will be less than projected in this budget. For this budget to work the cost of shares have been put up £48 for a full share and to £27.50 for a half share.

Feedback from groups: How do you use up all the carrots? Miriam has asked people to put this in the questionnaire. Can we grow more cash crops? Miriam would like to increase cash crops in the summer, not so much in the winter. Should we reach out to a more mainstream audience and to more organisations such as workplaces? Miriam is thinking of having some corporate work days this winter and this might open some doors for us. It would be good for the outreach person to organise events and to communicate more directly to the members, and it would be helpful to put some recipes and ideas about how to use the veg on the website and at the pickup points.

It was decided that the Board would report back to members each quarter so hopefully we can come up with other ideas rather than automatically cutting grower hours.

The budget was adopted except that the members wanted to wait until the end of March to put the price up for the shares, in the hopes that we can recruit enough shares in the meantime between members all recruiting one share and the outreach person/work also bringing in more members.

We need a new Finance Manager other than Roberta Sunderland who has officially stepped down from this position. This is a volunteer role for a person who has finance experience and shares our values. The ad for the position is on the website. If you are interested or know of anyone who might be, please email us on simshillsharedharvest@gmail.com