

SIMS HILL MEMBERS MEETING – 26TH NOVEMBER 2020 – ONLINE MEETING HELD ON ZOOM

30 attendees

Members update

We've had around 90 members all year. This is more than ever and higher than planned in the budget

Growers update

James showed a photo diary of the year on the plot. It has been a positive year. We have managed to continue to deliver through Covid with good harvests. We also grew some novelty crops like cucamelons and aggettis.

Lease

We are in conversation with Bristol City Council about renewing the lease on the big field which runs out in August. Keen to do it. They came for a site visit in late September related to this. We have also completed a detailed form. The communication has been very positive so far.

A member commented that it would be good to highlight our community work
Freya replied that this was part of the form, which was a useful exercise and shows what we are doing along with areas for development

Veg share price change proposal

Information on this had been sent to members ahead of the meeting. James talked through the 3 options which had been put forward and the reasons for suggesting a change:

- Option 1 - for the share price to remain the same
- Option 2- for the share price to increase from £48/month (Full Share) and £28/month (Half Share) to £50/month and £29/month respectively
- Option 3 - for the share price to increase from £48/month (Full Share) and £28/month (Half Share) to £52/month and £30/month respectively

James outlined the reasons we feel there is a need to increase the share price per below:

- We would like to increase the wage of our Assistant Grower to bring it in line with the Living Wage for 2021. We also wish to start paying for some of our bookkeeping services which previously have been done on a voluntary basis.
- This year has seen a significant rise in the cost of the bought in veg portion of our shares. The pandemic has caused a large increase in demand for local vegetables which has meant that we have more limitations on which wholesalers we use, and also that some of the wholesalers have put prices up. A lot of uncertainty around this also with Brexit changes.
- We are anticipating an increase in the amount of rent we pay for our land especially with the lease renewal.
- We have not put share prices up for several years.

- The average value (based on veg in share) of members shares received over the last 3 seasons has been higher than the amount they pay.
- Gives us a bit of a safety valve.
- A trainee (part of year) is included in the current budget a minimum wage. Would be nice to have room in the future to make this a bit more generous.
- The average value of the full share has been £12.30. You probably feel like you're paying £12 per share (4 weeks per month) but are actually only paying for 48 shares when you get 52. Current price, in reality, works out to £11.08. Increasing to £52/month brings it up to £12/week.

Questions from members:

Q Where does the profit go?

James - It goes into reserves, but we are also using some of it to invest in tools, compost facilities etc.

Q To avoid higher veg costs, can we use some of the surplus to grow more and rely less on bought in veg.

James - Will be doing our best to open up more land. Bought in veg will always be part of the model though due to seasonality.

Q Do we have a way to help people who are struggling with affordability due to Covid/economy?

Julian – nothing formal currently in place for this. Have discussed previously the idea of some kind of tiered pricing system. Would be good to get member feedback on how to make a system that we can reasonably administrate and also keep fair and affordable.

We have also had the community food centre in the past to provide a resource, but this is not currently running.

Decision: A vote was held online – the result was a unanimous adoption of Option 3. Details on this will go out to members via email.

Engagement

South Gloucestershire Climate Emergency Community Engagement Group (SGCEACG)

Freya has taken part in this group on behalf of Sims Hill. Lots of people in it are really supportive of what we do and interested in the CSA model [The Sims Hill field is actually in S.Glos although the land is owned by Bristol Council]. We added our name to a S.Glos Climate Emergency Pledge. Another meeting will take place in January. There are a lot of people out there who recognize the climate emergency and want to take action to address that.

We've been forging strong relationships with local growers to make sure that we support each other and make sure we keep it local and that veg doesn't get wasted.

We're also in close contact with Land Workers Alliance. They are involved with the government apprenticeship scheme to try to get more young people into horticulture. We've been in touch with Ali

at the City farm to help them with factfinding on what a workplace placement might look like for apprentices – the kind of support needed etc.

Questions from members

Q re. the park and ride – is there an update?

Freya - for now it has gone away, however West of England Combined Authority (WECA) working on a new Spatial Development Strategy see <https://www.westofengland-ca.gov.uk/west-of-england-strategic-planning/>.

The huge response that we had regarding the previous plans was certainly positive.

Q Why the does half share cost more than half?

Membership price is included in all shares. Also half share gets slightly better value re amount of veg. More packing involved. Will discuss again at a board meeting.

Getting involved

Sim reminded members – if you want to get involved more we'd love to hear from you. There is the regular monthly volunteer day which goes out via facebook, but email us if you don't do facebook. We will send out info re. standing for the board ahead of the AGM. Also if you have other ideas do get in touch. We are also planning to do a member questionnaire in the near future as a way to be in touch and find out more about how members want to be involved.

Some members talked about charities they are involved in and connecting those with Sims Hill. Julian to set up a Zoom on that.