**Local Partner and Climate Hub: Brighton CSA
Fork and Dig It CIC**

Set up as Fork and Dig It in 2007, connecting people to the land and their food through volunteering and community events. In 2011 we became Brighton’s first CSA, producing a weekly organic share throughout the year. We became a CIC in 2021 with charitable aims and a focus on climate action through organic food production. Our ongoing resilience has been due to a reliance on production rather than funding. We have a strong agroecological ethos, which has organic soil management and protection at its heart. We pass on our knowledge freely, diversifying with Team-builds, Workshops and Education Days.

It is part of Brighton CSA Fork and Dig It CIC’s core mission to engage and work within the community via a range of outreach and onsite activities, and to use community food growing to help address the climate and nature crises.

# Tell us a bit more about your existing community engagement and other ways people benefit from your work. Do you work with volunteers? In what capacity? Do you run training courses? If so, what are some examples? Do you host school groups / other educational visits? Do you host celebratory events such as Harvest Festivals, etc? Do you run an apprenticeship scheme or traineeships? What infrastructure do you have in place for hosting e.g. barn, on site toilets, etc.

We run a range of activities, for example:

* Traineeships – 19 participants weekly over 9 to 12 months
* Volunteers – 5 spaces weekly over 12 months
* Schools and colleges – visits twice a year
* Celebration events – twice a year
* Short courses – twice a year
* Social media – seasonal posts throughout the year
* Community payback – weekly sessions over 12 months
* Outreach work – both weekly and monthly involvement at other community growing projects
* Infrastructure – outside seating areas, pizza oven, compost toilets, hand-washing facilities, willow dome for shade, use of neighbouring projects covered space (50m2), ability to book the Brighton Earthship which is a landmark opposite our project

# How many people access your site on average per year?

25 trainees and volunteers for 48wks per year, plus Open Day/courses 500 per year.

# Which local organisations do you already work with? For example your local council, charities or community groups, schools, etc? (also identify main partners/collaborators)

Brighton and Hove City Council, Brighton and Hove Food Partnership, Stanmer Organics, Community Works, Community PayBacks, Welsbourne Health Centre, Bevendean Community Garden, Very Local Food Hub, Sussex University, Feedback, Seedy Sunday, Brighton College, AMEX, NHTrust, Southern Water, Hurst School, Waldorf Steiner.

# Do you have the organisational systems and structures in place, or do you feel confident of getting them in place, to deliver a programme of outreach, on site activities and expanded community engagement over the next three years?

Yes.

# How is your work embedded in your local community? Please give further brief details of partnerships and relationships with other community organisations, local council and other authorities, public services, etc.

We are deeply embedded in our local community. Being the most established peri-urban food growing project in Sussex we have been able to build, over the past 15 years, very strong connections with both Brighton and Hove City Council and Brighton and Hove Food Partnership. Championing the principles of organic production and agroecology we have also developed great relationships with many other community organisations, companies, universities, colleges and school. Recently, we have engaged with a local health centre to help develop social prescribing through food growing and community activities.

# What specific climate change and nature related challenges are facing your community/ area? Which of these are you helping to address and how?

All our activities are designed to address the negative environmental impacts of the over reliance on the industrialized food system. We do this through practical and theoretical education. We map the link between the ability of individuals and households to secure an affordable and nutritious diet, in Brighton and Hove, to the impact those choices have on biodiversity and environmental degradation. We try to promote community consciousness (lack of appreciation of food sovereignty) towards more sustainable choices, (locally sourced/grown food, shorter supply changes, nutrient dense etc.)

On site we are teaching adaptive growing techniques to deal with the effects of erratic weather patterns, e.g. drought, unseasonal temperature fluctuations.

# How have you involved local people, groups or organisations in shaping your activities and/or gathered any data from your local community that demonstrates the need for what you do? For example, any results from community consultations? Reported evidence and/or quotes?

* Originally held a consultation (2009) with the Soil Association and BHCC, Food Matters, BHFP and interested growing. Canvased CSA members with regards to the kind/need for locally grown food (2011) – Questionnaires and Survey Monkey
* We encourage weekly group discussion with our trainees (wide age demographic) on food related climate action, food policy and biodiversity loss.
* We attend local meetings, forums and engage with local organisations concerned with the promotion of food/environment related issues.
* All our core activities are oversubscribed - Traineeship, CSA share and volunteering, thus demonstrating a high demand in our area and more recently on a county level..
* We use statistical data gathered by (BHCC) and (BHFP) on public health and low-income areas.
* The need for change is also demonstrated by the disturbing lack of political will at national level – removal of horticultural strategy, legislative impotency (poor ELMS), national and international apathy (COP 26 and nothing happening). Grass roots organisation will create change.

# How do you ensure you are engaging with people from underrepresented and / or disadvantaged backgrounds and minority communities? Please give brief details about any strategies and activities to ensure greater diversity and broader inclusion in your project.

We are fully inclusive and open to all. We widen our impact through outreach work by regularly running growing activities in the more disadvantaged areas of east Brighton (Whitehawk, Bevendean and Moulscomb.) Our customer and trainee base has tended to be an educated, climate aware demographic, however, our future strategy, to ensure greater diversity and broader inclusion, is to apply for funding to create activities that reach underrepresented and disadvantaged groups.

# Tell us how you will be able to use the activities outlined in the Taste a Better Future framework to inspire climate action, and create learning opportunities on climate and nature? How will they impact positively in the long and short term on local communities? How will these communities in turn take action on climate and nature issues? e.g. through a change in shopping habits such as buying more local, agroecologically grown food. Or transitioning to chemical / fertiliser free growing in their own gardens. Or more people cooking from scratch with fresh vegetables.

We intend to use our CSA as the backdrop for our new activities. Brighton Community Supported Agriculture has been the cohesive focus for all our activity over the past 12 years and will continue to hold and focus us as we develop to becoming a Climate Action Hub Partner. Weekly commitment to the Share has provided us with the reason to grow as much produce as we can whilst sharing our knowledge with visitors, trainees and volunteers i.e., service users. Our resilience over this time has been due to a reliance on production rather than funding. Our growth and stability is testament to the strength of this approach.

We have designed a 3-year programme utilising both “soft” and “deeper” connections to Climate Change and Nature from your framework. We intend to kickstart and deepen awareness leading to positive behaviour changes through a) agroecologically growing food, b) seasonal eating in/with community, c) developing new skills and confidence in how to access and make better food choices (nutrient dense, freshly harvested, chemical free, local, organic, supporting local farmers and growers). In addition, therefore, the participants will be learning how to prepare fresh produce and collectively enjoy shared meals with little to no food waste. The programme will demonstrate how this can have a positive impact on Climate Change, Biodiversity Loss and Nature recovery, alongside, an individuals and communities increased health and wellbeing (mentally, physically, spiritually and nutritionally).

# What other activities would you like to deliver to enable your local community to gain a deeper connection with nature that could lead to changing people’s behaviours, a greater care for the environment and action on climate change?

DEEP TOUCH - a holistic, integrated approach to changing behaviour to targeted groups of up to 18 participants/course. These will take the shape of:

* Three 6-week courses in 5-hour session/week growing, harvesting, preparing, eating food, CSA Share to take home, recipe suggestions, seedlings to take home.
* One-week intensive course 5 x 5hr days (9- 2pm), during August
* One week “Work Experience Placement” for 5 Secondary Schools (2 placements each) - 5 x 6-hour days to show pupils possible career pathways into Growing and Farming. Inspiring the next generation. Growing future growers.

 This would represent 186 people involved in deep engagement over three years.

SOFT TOUCH - We have a strong presence at already successful large local events (3,000+ people at each). Using these events as a platform to extend our reach:

* Seedy Sunday
* “One Garden” (Plumpton Agricultural College) Sustainability talks, setting up information stalls, promoting conservation and demonstrating how to engage in Climate Actions through making better food choices.
* Harvest Celebration Festival event on our site Sunday 29th September (free but ticketed) (100 people) showcasing our work with; site tours, info boards, talk, taster plates. This has a potential reach of 18,300 persons over 3 years,

In total, 18,486 people over 3 years. *(They say you need to change 3.5% of people to transform a system. We have 300,000 residents in Brighton and Hove so this work could take us there :) )*

# What groups would you like to engage with? How will you address barriers to participation for underrepresented and harder to reach people and communities? Please give a brief description of any relevant activities you’d like to do but haven’t yet had the resources to deliver. How you might engage new audiences and get more people involved in your project.

* We would want to offer transportation through Brighton Community Transport for each targeted group to ensure their full attendance.
* We would want to offer a healthy shared meal at each session.
* We would want sessions to be free to participants and include a share of our harvest to cook at home.
* We could offer a session on participants nearest Community Food Garden or their local allotment site.
* We would like to make a film about our work and the type of experience they could expect to receive before signing up.
* We currently work with a health centre were the Doctors could “socially prescribing” patients to us. We would further recommend our courses.
* We feel short 6-week courses are easier for people to commit to.
* We would ask if they knew a friend in the same circumstances who would like to participate with them.
* We would love to offer regular Plot to Plate/Farm to Fork outdoor restaurant experiences.
* We would engage with new audiences through our short courses and engage with the masses through our seasonal events. These activities would signpost more people to our work and raise awareness of the positive impact we can each have on Climate and Nature through making better food choices.
* Working/partnering with established front-line community groups would help to sign-post appropriate participants to our courses.

# How would you like to embed further in your local community? Please give brief details of any partnerships / relationships you’d like to pursue.

* We would like to further develop our projects relationship with BHCC, Food Matters and BHFP especially in regard to the delivery of the whole Downland Estate Plan - next 100 year plan for the South Downs which is an area very close to our hearts.
* Secondary schools for work experience, the NHS through social prescribing, the, LWA and Ecological Land Trust – through future farmers programme development/experience. The Real Junk Food Project – crop donations and community Café.
* In partnering with the BHFP and BHCC we could be pivotal in directly relating community food poverty issues (their *bêtes noires*) with ours, food provenance and sovereignty; clear and simply through crop production, seed saving and food sharing.

# Being a Climate Hub Local Partner will also involve participation in knowledge sharing and disseminating learning amongst the rest of the cohort and new potential hubs looking to replicate the model. This could involve presenting at webinars and events, hosting site visits, etc. It may also involve participation in research and contributing to the development of reference materials and educational resources. Does this sound feasible? Would this be useful? What would you like to see? What might the implications be for your wider organisation? Anything we should be aware of? For example, the need for greater communications skills training and support.

We would love to get involved with all this. We do have some experience of public speaking, obviously onsite we are used to holding and directing some very large groups (40+ on some days). We have been involved in research into downland productivity, previously, with the STEPS programme at Sussex University, so this is of interest too.

We have written structured course material for teaching (at rudimentary and advanced level) growing knowledge; as six 3-hour presentable teaching sessions. These we constantly adapt and tweak depending on our audience level/purpose/course etc. Presenting to the public, face to face, comes naturally to both of us. We have also started to write a 52-week activity guide to help community group leaders manage there volunteers. Essentially, cheat sheets for group leaders.

Skills training would always be a bonus, marketing and promotion, and any help with presenting can often be helpful.

# Would you be willing to offer peer-to-peer support to other Climate Hub Local Partners? This might involve sharing existing resources such as template policies and other documents; offering *ad hoc* advice or mentoring on specific topics; providing connections and introductions to other organisations; signposting to useful resources.

We consider sharing knowledge essential to the process of change. Running, a free, traineeship for the past 5 years, had at its hear, the desire to help others engage and enjoy reconnecting with their food. Sharing has been integral. More recently, we have mentored on many occasions and find this aspect of our work the most enjoyable. So very happy to signpost, introduce and promote the work of our Partners.

# At the end of the three years how might your organisation be operating differently due to participating in Taste a Better Future? How might you build on the work after the funding ends?

Taste a Better Future funding will greatly increase our reach, energise and deepen our service to the community. The impact of our initiatives is designed to reverberate community wide and to move towards reinstating a wholesome sense of wellbeing that our connection to food and (more obliquely) the earths providence. A far more holistic, integrated approach will promote behaviour change. We feel we would have considerably increased our Community Building capacity and have formed more resilient stronger relationships with many more differing groups. We see it as a real opportunity for growth and change.

# What is the balance between mechanisation and manual labour in your food production methods? Please give an explanation of production relying on machinery vs manual labour (e.g. bed prep with tractor; planting, crop care and harvest by hand) and / or land area managed by different systems (e.g. fixed beds vs field cropping) or whatever measure makes most sense to you. We would like to gauge the opportunities for engagement, participation and skills development at the human scale i.e. not entirely reliant on operating machinery and power tools, which we recognise are often necessary for running a viable business.

We use traditional hand tools and methods, with landcover and modern growing systems; lazy beds, inter-cropping and cover cropping, we reduce the need for mechanised land management for crop production. We use a strimmer and chainsaw occasionally.

# How do you sell / distribute your produce in the local community and who benefits from this? Please give details of Veg Box / CSA scheme. Any other retail or wholesale relationships. Do you donate produce? If so, how and where? If you also buy in produce for distribution then please tell us the % of what you sell that is grown on site.

Through the CSA share we deliver to 40 families 48 weeks/year. (Buying in 60% of produce throughout winter and spring). Previous, prior setting-up the CSA, produce was sold to local organic outlets (Infinity Food, HISBE. Seed and Sprout). Surplus produce is donated to FareShare when we change poly tunnels twice each year. There’s a shared lunch each week and glut crops are given to trainees and volunteers.

# Do you have any additional infrastructure needs on your site to be able to host greater numbers of visitors and volunteers? For example: tools, toilet facilities, water supply, storage.

Water storage tank and some new tools, a covered eating platform, refurbish pizza oven.

# What is your experience of monitoring and evaluating your project’s impact? For example conducting surveys or focus groups on behaviour change and shifts in attitudes of project participants and/or beneficiaries; monitoring who is and who isn’t involved in your work; carbon reduction data; biodiversity metrics. Please give brief details. And tell us what support, if any, you think you might need to deliver monitoring and evaluation.

Evaluation, to date, has been predominantly group discussion based, group leader directed/lead. Being a social enterprise with charitable aims there has always been space for negotiation, opinion and debate. However, this is an area, given more resources, we could benefit and improve on; especially if we need to consider the types of matrices used in third sector, health and wellbeing work.

At a farm level of mechanisms for monitoring impact and behaviour change, we have previously used, and would adapt: questionnaires, survey monkey type surveys at beginning, intermittently with a final one at the 3 month mark, after course completion.

We have always generated site footfall figures, with some analyses, as these are included in our annual group reports for Stanmer Organics to document social impact for Brighton and Hove City Council.

We would want to include evaluation that identifies and demonstrate the change in people’s food choices and lifestyle habits. This could take many forms, shopping/eating routines and habits, relationship to sense of wellbeing before and after etc…We would be looking for some support from you on how to set up focus groups 1) to show changes in attitude towards food and 2) for further study into the different aspects of behavioural science that might help develop the evidence needed, after all, statistical analysis is a skill, developing the right questions that need to be asked to support the monitoring and evaluation would need careful consideration.