**Local Partner and Climate Hub: Kindling Farm**

Kindling Farm is transforming 77 acres of conventionally farmed land, into a pioneering community owned organic agroforestry farm and learning centre for the Northwest. Based in Knowsley, one of the UK’s most deprived wards, we will work with our communities to tackle complex social challenges along side the ecological and social impacts of farming. Building on over a decade’s experience, we will involve our communities in learning about and creating a more sustainable food and farming system, through a range of relevant, engaging activities: Training (from agroforestry farming to eco-building); land-based volunteering; well-being wildlife activities; seasonal cooking on a budget.

It is part of Kindling Farm’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 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 have a long history of successfully engaging people in disadvantaged urban areas, through e.g.: grafting heritage fruit trees, welding courses for single mums, green construction with unemployed young people, refugees teaching us to cook Kurdish dishes.

There are huge opportunities for this at Kindling Farm and our surrounding communities from initial community consultation, to huge refurbishment training potential with our farm buildings. The farm house has facilities for smaller activities and we are building additional facilities to enable us to increase our engagement (e.g. field kitchen, outdoor shelter/toilets).

As we are new here, figures below are from our activities at Woodbank Community Food Hub. Kindling Farm is a much larger site, with buildings with great potential and already huge local interest, so these figures will increase.

* FarmStart training and commercial growers course – 250+
* Community Garden, veg stall, cooking group – 20+ regulars
* Land-based Volunteering – 150+ per year
* Open days (Spring day, Open Farm Sunday, Harvest Celebration): 300+ per event
* Monthly events (e.g. bat walks, dawn chorus and breakfast, moth nights, mushroom identification) 15-40 per session
* Open hub: a welcoming space, for discussion and money saving sustainable skills (e.g. seasonal shared meals, home eco-hacks, repairing clothes etc.) - e.g. 10-20 per session
* Veg Box Scheme – 375 (target 1,000 over coming years)

At Kindling Farm, we will both ramp up these activities up and look at how to engage people more deeply with the issues and in creating social and ecological change through practical and collective action.

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

We purchased the farm through a community share offer two months ago and have had around 100 visitors so far (with only small informal intro events). We estimate 500 to 1,000 people initially.

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

We've just arrived here and are still getting to know the area and people, but have had a very warm welcome and people excited about what we're doing - including the local farmers and our wider community. So far our partners include our: members (we are a Community Benefit Society, CBS, and have 650+ members); buyers (e.g. Veg Box People, University of Manchester, hopefully soon also Liverpool!); groups such as Lancashire Bat Group. We have also made more local contacts, who are interested in working with us, including: A range of voluntary sector groups e.g. Liverpool Growers Network; Foster Care Co-operative; Mind, Body & Soul (raising awareness of mental health with young people from minoritised communities); Feedback (Alchemic Kitchen); Mersey Rivers; Mersey Forest; One Knowsley. Knowsley Council are also being very supportive and have contacted us to ask how they can support us. Once we have found our feet (and have better facilities) we will contact the local schools and other organisations.

# 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.)

As described above and below, we are new to the area of Knowsley and the purchase happened in a very short timescale, so we are still just in the process of developing these local relationships - but there we have definitely been received with open arms. People feel there is nothing like this locally (or beyond!)

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

The climate and nature crises affects all communities and can only be tackled with social justice at the heart. The complex challenges faced by Knowsley communities mental and physical health, high rates of long-term unemployment and low educational opportunities, are compounded by a lack of access to healthy food, open space/nature, resources to change things for the better individually never mind globally.

Our low-carbon, high-biodiversity farm will provide a haven for wildlife and crucially for people. As well as access to fresh food, it will be a thriving hub of training, activities, events and hope. A place where people can gain skills, learn about/discuss the challenges we face and explore practical collective solutions. A community owned initiative that people can visit, enjoy, engage in, feel part of and inspired to go out and create that change in their own lives, communities and the wider world.

# 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?

Our work has always been shaped by our communities which, over the last decade has included local growers, trainees, buyers, veg box customers; 600+ members; volunteers, participants, communities surrounding our sites (Woodbank and Bridge 5 Mill, established over 20 years ago!). This happens via initial/ongoing consultations, feedback following events/activities, informal conversations, annual surveys etc. We ask about expectations, learnings, resulting actions, plus how to improve, and other ideas. We analyse what people tell us and act on that to improve, develop future activities and be more relevant and impactful. While our communities in Knowsley are very new to us, they are already shaping what we will do. We have been to local events and are very excited have started volunteering days and ‘pop in for a cuppa’ sessions at the farm showing people around, discussing our plans and motivation, and finding out feedback, ideas and memories of the farm/area.

# 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.

Kindling Farm strives to make our organisation, activities and work inclusive and accessible, including by:

* Work with gate-keepers in the community to reach as wide a range of people as possible.
* Ensure that our activities and approach is relevant and accessible to as many people as possible.
* Hold activities and events to bring diverse communities together, to debunk stereotypes that prevent us working collectively to tackle the huge challenges we all face.
* Seek advice about how to be more inclusive asking people within our communities how to make what we do more inclusive and improve e.g. our communication, approach and actions.
* We are part of a network of organisations facilitated by the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust, questioning, challenging and changing our work to create inclusive and anti-oppressive strategies.

# 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.

Our vision is to engage and support communities to develop practical and relevant solutions to these global challenges we face. Long-term impacts include collective action leading to carbon reduction and biodiversity increase but also healthier, more active and skilled communities who see the impact they can have (be that community farming or working for systems change).

We have been exploring with our Kindling family how to more effectively influence behaviour and turn individual actions (e.g. attending a community event) into long-term collective action on climate change. Ways identified (that happily fit your framework) include e.g.:

Open days and activities to initially engage and welcome people, but also inspire action:

* Tours of the farm include the root problems, how we are tackling those, discussion of actions, why being part of collective action can lead to greater change/impact.
* Ask people’s opinions! Their challenges, ideas, hopes, support needed to create change.
* Ask what people have learnt and what action they will take.
* Remind people of this action – send an email/text/postcard in e.g. 3 months.
* Offer ways to stay involved/feel part of something/feel supported to take action.
* A visual/interactive version of our tour/theory of change to take out in the community.

Activities with schools (and other groups):

* Using interesting practical activities (at the farm or school) e.g. fruit tree grafting workshops, to discuss overwhelming challenges and solutions, learn skills, create and plant a fruit tree, follow up maintenance sessions, exploring further climate and wildlife actions.

# 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?

There are many ways that we want to do this, for example with schools:

* Initial session: discuss recent school meal, some of the issues around that (a past group bought up impacts on wildlife, climate change, workers rights) and potential solutions to this.
* Follow-up: inspiring farm wildlife walk/pond activity, discussion about sustainable farming and harvesting and tasting some fresh organic salads.
* Deeper work: includes (with previous success) supporting students to engage the whole school with food, through e.g. veg tastings, trailing seasonal soups, getting feedback from students, teachers, cooks, parents. Working with cooks to change the menu to incorporate more local organic veg.

Long-term impacts include: awareness around food, farming and climate change/nature impacts, increased knowledge/hope that it is possible to change that, school taking action, young people seeing their positive impact, school purchasing from Kindling Farm/local farms, increased economic viability of farms and community support.

# 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.

So far, we haven’t had the resources to deliver many activities (apart from initial meet the neighbours/local groups). We have met a range of groups that we would love to with (see question 13). We want to engage a range of people in our communities as well as bring those groups together e.g. young and older people, asylum seekers, our white working class and more affluent communities, etc.

In previous work with underrepresented people and communities we have found that the main barriers include initially meeting and then getting people to come to our beautiful spaces. This generally isn’t to do with distance, but a mix social, emotional and economic factors. We address this via gate keepers, us going into the community talking to people about what they think and how they would like to be involved. Then e.g. doing the first journey with people and providing delicious food here.

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

A key goal is to engage other local farmers on these issues and build a really positive local farming network. We have already started building relationships and have been made very welcome (admittedly slightly surprisingly, as it is a traditional conventional farming area). We will hold specific farming focused sessions and workshops at the farm both to learn from others (about this area, soil, weeds, wildlife etc.), to demonstrate the benefits of organic agroforestry (on biodiversity, soil, water management, carbon capture, yields etc.) and learn/work with them to explore how to farm in the best possible way for the climate and nature and for that to effect their farming practices and that together we roll out to other farmers further afield (locally, regionally, nationally!). Similarly we will work to ensure we are embedded with our buyers, be that individual customers or public sector buyers (schools, Knowsley council, Liverpool University etc.).

# 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)

# And also: 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.

In answer to both these questions: This is what we try to do with all of our work so we would be more than happy to be involved in this and would love to be part of doing it collectively with the others involved and learn from that. The implication would be time, but if that is within the role that would be fine - and training in effective social media is always welcome!

# 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?

Being involved in Taste a Better Future would give us the resources to build on our initial consultation work, with properly resourced, meaningful community engagement/support from the start. This will massively help to properly embed us locally, resulting in our communities feeling ownership and commitment to Kindling Farm. The impact of this will also be to build stronger foundations for our economic sustainability, through creating new markets and those individuals, communities and public bodies buying our produce, engaging with us for the long-term. It will also lead to a wider diversity of people involved in and shaping the way we work and the long-term changes in their communities, leading not just to positive ecological impacts but social justice through bringing (sometimes polarised) communities together through practical action and collective solutions. We feel hugely excited about the potential for this work to be a success by being involved in this programme. This is not just in terms of funding (although that would be a massive help!) but by being part of a national programme will give us additional credibility and learning from and with others going through the same process is invaluable.

# 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.

The plan is for a real mix of farming methods with huge opportunities for skills training and engagement throughout. The mechanisation e.g. land preparation/sowing/maintenance of the green manure, cereals, field scale crops will provide training for farmers/new entrants in best sustainable field-scale practice and agroforestry management. Other elements will be human scale: biodiversity plans and habitat management; undercover growing; planting and care of our agroforestry system (indeed over 3,000 people grafted the trees!). Engagement and skills development will happen both through more formal training (e.g. FarmStart and intensive commercial courses) and informal e.g. workshops, regular community activities/volunteering.

# 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 how much of what you sell is grown on site.

Distribution will build on our existing model, bringing local growers together to supply our Greater Manchester markets. We do currently have to buy in, but Kindling Farm (KF) will significantly reduce this percentage and develop new markets locally. We supply a wide range of people through our Growing Communities inspired Veg Box scheme, made accessible to diverse and low-income communities by:

* Community hub collection points
* Starter bag at same price since launching
* Healthy Start vouchers
* Donating uncollected bags to food access projects
* Raffle funding our grow, cook, eat well-being programme currently with asylum seekers.

Working with our new communities (Knowsley, Liverpool etc.) to develop new relevant distribution methods e.g.:

* Supported bags through vouchers, supporter price, pay forward options, seasonal cooking on a budget classes etc.
* Pick your own
* Working with local groups
* Supplying local schools

We would love to explore successful distribution solutions to engage harder to reach communities with other farms in this programme.

# 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.

To engage larger groups of people for longer visits/activities than currently possible, we would need additional toilet facilities (we'd love to build some compost toilets and know some local gardens want to come for training when we do!), an outdoor shelter for volunteers and groups visiting groups (basic e.g. a marquee), ideally a basic outdoor/field kitchen (this maybe a longer term thing but is on the wish list), tools for engaging groups in e.g. tree grafting/planting, pond dipping (though we can possibly borrow these while we apply for funding).

# 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. Give brief details. And tell us what support, if any, you think you might need to deliver monitoring and evaluation.

Over 14+ years, we have used various methods of measuring our impact and writing evaluations, both for funders and to help us improve and progress with our work and objectives. We have a social impact framework with specific outcomes to measure through feedback, annual surveys and/or structured or informal conversations (appropriate for our different stakeholders). We then evaluate the results and look at what we can change about our delivery to better achieve our aims, whether that’s increasing produce sales, widening access, making people feel healthier, more able to take action, more hopeful etc.

We have been doing a focused reflection of our overall work and whether we are achieving our long term social change goals, initially with our team and 650 new members of Kindling Farm which is helping shape our work. We measure our carbon impact and wider ecological impact on soil, biodiversity, etc. using Farm Carbon Tool and supported their addition to the tool to measure the carbon sequestration for fruit trees. We are currently developing baseline measurements (habitats, soil health etc) with working groups of our Kindling Farm members. We are super excited to be measuring the Kindling Farm transition and engaging our communities in this.

**Information provided for Taste a Better Future proposal, June 2023**