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

Lauriston Farm is Scotland’s largest community farm: a local response to climate change, biodiversity collapse and lack of access to fresh and affordable food. The 100 acres is managed holistically incorporating three main elements – food production, biodiversity and community. At the heart of our approach is the concept of regenerative, integrated land management and healthy communities. Our vision is for a large-scale urban food growing project which is nature rich and which benefits primarily the communities that live in the local area but also the wider city. The farm is managed by Edinburgh Agroecology Cooperative, a workers’ cooperative founded by local people.

It is part of Lauriston 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 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 work with volunteers across the whole farm. We have regular volunteer days in our Market Garden, twice per month in the morning and afternoon for up to 15 volunteers per session.
* We have regular tree planting and tree care workshops with up to 20 volunteers per session.
* We invite volunteers to take part in our biodiversity surveys, this summer we have bird, butterfly and bee options. We are also planning soil workshops.

In our community allotment area we have community and individual plots, grow-your-own courses and a series of events planned for the summer. We run weekly drop-in volunteer sessions which attract 6-10 volunteers each time. The community allotment space is a vital place for people to come together, make friends, benefit from being in green space, get some exercise, learn something new and gain access to freshly grown produce. Many people in our local area do not have access to a garden and in Edinburgh allotment waiting lists are over 10 years long.

* We have a volunteer community orchard group - we support them to lead on the design, planting and maintenance of the new orchard. Including organising skills workshops and field trips.
* During our summer programme last year we engaged many local people through educational and creative workshops and had over 1,000 people attend our inaugural Harvest festival.
* We worked with local school and youth groups through tailored specific activities last year and hope to develop these relationships further
* Other community engagement activities include seed saving, grain and pulse planting, volunteer thanks and celebration, composting workshops, fibre workshops, music sessions, arts workshops and more!
* With the forthcoming construction of our community kitchen and cob oven we will be able to run cooking workshops and shared meals using farm produce.

We have a packing shed/barn, newly built, as we develop its layout we will consider social space. There are two compost toilets on site. We have two portacabins with basic kitchen facilities, seated/meeting area and wood-burners. A long-term goal is to have a bespoke community building for our community.

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

1,500.

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

Edinburgh Council, local NHS trusts, Fresh Start (helping people who are homeless get established in new homes), SHE Scotland (empowering women and young girls), Granton Community Gardeners, Pilton Community Health Project, Edinburgh and Lothians Regional Equality Council, Bethany Trust (homelessness charity), Positive Futures (activities for over 50s), Gaia Foundation (seed sovereignty), Scotland the Bread, Community Supported Agriculture Network, SRUC (Scotland’s Rural College), Landworkers’ Alliance, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, Scottish Organic Producers Association, Edinburgh Voluntary Organisations’ Council, North Edinburgh Arts, Edible Edinburgh Food Partnership, Nourish Scotland, Scran Academy (catering social enterprise), Edible Estates (community greenspaces) and more!

# 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.

The farm has been designed in close partnership with the surrounding community answering the needs and wishes of the local population via a community consultation to which we received 1,030 responses. We have strong relationships with organisations such as Granton Community Gardeners and Fresh Start who are pivotal charities in North Edinburgh and who seek to address the issues of inequality and poverty.

As a flagship project in Edinburgh and Scotland and a tenant of Edinburgh Council we already have a high profile in a short time. Lauriston Farm is an important asset and resource for delivering Edinburgh’s Sustainable Food City Plan. We work closely with organisations from the grassroots in our local area to city wide authorities and national institutions.

On site we are hosting a local Kenyan women as our first Farm Start. And in a month’s time we will be welcoming another local land-based business – Grassroots Remedies – on site as part of our long-term aim to share the land with other like-minded enterprises.

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

Probably the biggest impact of climate change on people from our area is the ever increasing cost of living. Spiralling food costs and fuel costs affecting transport and home heating make it very hard for our neighbours, especially those on low incomes, to access nutritious and culturally appropriate food. It can also be incredibly difficult for some people in our community to access rich, biodiverse greenspace as the cost of transport is incredibly prohibitive. Our project aims to bring climate resilient biodiversity to their doorsteps. Our solidarity pricing model for our CSA Veg Box scheme and plans for food distribution via local partnerships aims to support those on low incomes to access organically grown, fresh produce from our farm. We also provide a space for people to come together and share in joyful celebration - something that is incredibly important as we face the collective impact of climate crisis, communities in breakdown and wildlife loss.

# 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?

The founding members of Edinburgh Agroecology Cooperative began with a consultation to a broad spectrum of people in the local communities of Granton, Muirhouse, Silverknowes, Davidson’s Mains and Cramond - of which there is a huge range of people in different socio-economic circumstances. 1,030 people responded to that survey. 478 were interested in volunteer days, 643 were interested in seasonal celebrations and 576 in nature trails. The response was overwhelmingly positive and showed a clear desire for a nature rich urban farm to be developed in the area. The farm planning and site design took into consideration the responses that came from the community consultation. Further on site days and sessions with people from the local community have helped inform further planning and programme of activity.

Lauriston Farm’s voluntary Advisory Group has representation from the local community and local organisations. This group gives advice and a steer on planning around community engagement, land management and activities.

An evaluation from the community allotments gathered positive feedback from participants and showed that people were having fun together, learning lots and feeling healthier.

# 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.

The farm is very close to areas and communities that are hugely marginalised, underrepresented and disadvantaged (they are high up the social-deprivation index). By working in partnership with existing community and local organisations in these areas, we are ensuring that we have a better chance of reaching those that may feel excluded.

We prioritise people living in these communities for access to community allotment plots. The results from our first year of launching the plots have been really encouraging and show that our strategy of working together with existing community groups and social enterprises has brought people from underrepresented and marginalised backgrounds to the site. As we expand the number of allotments available we will work with more local groups. It definitely helps that members of our team are from the communities surrounding the farm and/or have worked in these areas.

We are also committed to offering lots of different ways to engage with the farm - dog walker friendly paths, arts and music sessions and workshops, drop-in sessions, volunteer days midweek and at the weekend, communal meals.

# 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 would use the activities outlined in the framework to build on and expand our existing programme of regular and one-off events and sessions. Our events, workshops and volunteering sessions all have an explicit or implicit regenerative message whether that be focused on food and farming, nature and biodiversity enhancement or community cohesion.

We are particularly excited to expand our outreach capacity. There is a huge opportunity for us to engage with schools, youth groups, housing associations and other community groups where they are based but we simply do not yet have the resources. Youth engagement in particular is a passion and area of expertise for members of our existing team. Meeting people where they are at and taking our message of climate and nature friendly farming out into the community will likely bring more people to our site to deepen their learning, inspire them to start growing their own and offer myriad learning opportunities on regenerative farming and biodiversity enhancement.

The development of our community kitchen will enable us to offer communal meals using fresh produce grown on site. We have already hosted popular events such as a celebration of the bean where members of our community cooked bean dishes from their home countries, and we planted beans together. These practical, delicious and enjoyable ways of raising awareness and getting a message across about health and wellbeing for people and planet help to inspire action and longer term behaviour change.

Also, launch of our CSA Veg Box scheme will give people an alternative choice to shopping at big supermarkets - the only really viable, regular local option in our area. We’re starting small but aiming to increase customers year on year. The activities outlined in the framework will help us to connect learning opportunities with behaviour change through potentially encouraging participants to become a CSA Veg Box subscriber.

# 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?

We would love to have the resources and capacity to develop a programme of outreach. It’s sometimes hard to encourage harder to reach communities to come to visit and participate in farm activities. So meeting people where they feel comfortable and safe is a really important step for our future community engagement strategy.

We have had success in the past with engaging people through the arts - hosting theatre performances, creative workshops, music sessions, spoken word. Members of the Lauriston Farm team are well connected locally with inspirational performers and we have found that opening a space for people to engage with the land and our vision in different and creative ways can bring about unexpected connection and impact. It would be wonderful to offer more creative events with climate and nature care as a theme.

# 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 have made a good start engaging with many local groups and building relationships and connections broadly. We could always do more and a key area of focus is to work with organisations that are on the front line of food insecurity such as pantries and food banks. A key part of our mission is to serve local people who are experiencing lack of access to fresh, healthy food.

To reach these people we will continue to seek local partnerships, and are about to start engaging with local NHS link workers. And as our food growing on site increases we will hopefully be able to work with them by offering fresh produce that suit their needs. We hope that this may be a hook to encourage people to engage with the farm in other ways such as volunteering, participating in communal meals, attending free workshops.

We would like to develop our relationships with youth groups and schools to work more consistently with young people. We have been approached by a number of groups who would like to collaborate to engage young people but have not yet been in a position to be able to resource the opportunities.

# 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 have the resources and capacity to pursue some of the ideas and activities outlined in our answers above. Currently we do not have the resources or capacity to respond to the growing number of requests we are receiving from local groups to collaborate on initiatives and projects that often seek to address some of our core aims such as engaging people in nature and climate friendly food production, in cooking and eating healthily, in appreciating and seeking to protect wildlife and biodiversity. Lauriston Farm is a big project on the edge of a city and word is spreading! We need to be strategic in using resources for the right things at the right time, but we are often currently saying ‘no’ to opportunities that could be exciting and beneficial.

In time we would like to offer accredited training courses in food production, ecology, other farm-based skills. This is a long-term goal that requires partnership with an educational institution but would mean that we are offering tangible, employable skills and learning.

# 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 are open and keen to participate in knowledge sharing and learning as part of the climate hub cohort. It would be good to gain a greater understanding of what the commitment for this will be e.g. how many hours per month and whether there is extra budget to deliver some of these activities mentioned. If you are thinking to offer training and support on presentation skills, etc., we would like to offer this to our team.

# 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.

Yes. We would need to be a bit mindful of capacity but in principle we think this is a good thing to participate in.

# 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?

At the end of three years we hope to have built a solid programme of regular community engagement both on and off the farm. We hope to have hosted at least one trainee or apprentice in the market garden - and hopefully more! We will have increased the number of people visiting and participating in farm activities and events to well over 2,500 per year. Our staff team will feel motivated, secure in their roles and working within capacity.

We would hope to build on the work by having secured continuation funding to deliver free or ‘pay what you can’ sessions, activities and events. And our applications for more funding will be supported by robust evidence that we have delivered real and lasting impact and behaviour change amongst our community. We could try to develop some of the work to be income generating but this would risk an important element of inclusivity and equity so needs to be thought through carefully.

We hope to have had success in reaching out to marginalised or disadvantaged or harder to reach groups. And to have brought people together on and off the farm to learn and engage with climate change, regenerative farming, the wonder of nature and biodiversity through the joys of sharing a meal, growing plants together, coming to a music session or creative workshop / event, helping with a biodiversity survey and much more!

# 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.

* In the 2-acre Market Garden we have a small tractor and hand operated machines for bed preparation, moving materials and grass cutting in large areas. All propagation, planting and harvesting is done by hand in a fixed bed system with volunteer involvement. We also have covered cropping in 3 polytunnels.
* The 4-acre community allotment area is entirely people scale and manual with local groups growing food collectively on small plots.
* We are planning field-scale grain production which will include as much human scale hands-on activity as possible. We currently have micro scale grains and pulses trials underway which were hand planted and will be hand harvested and processed.
* We have planted at least 14,000 trees since December 2021, including agroforestry alleys, a community orchard and native woodland. All tree planting and ongoing tree care is by hand.

# 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.

Initial sales in our first year were all at stalls in our community garden and at Granton Community Garden down the road. In year 2 we are launching our CSA Veg Box scheme with up to 50 shares being sold on a solidarity payment scale, meaning we can reach people on low incomes. Veg Boxes will be delivered by cargo bike to pick up hubs locally. If we have a surplus we will use any funds from our solidarity payments to supply produce to social enterprises near us and if there is a further surplus we will look to supply produce wholesale to businesses in Edinburgh. Currently we do not intend to buy in produce.

Produce from the community allotments is distributed amongst the allotment holder groups - most of whom are local social enterprises and community groups. This year we have funding to build a community kitchen and cob oven in the allotment space. This will be used to cook and share meals with the local community using food grown on site.

# 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.

Our infrastructure is currently basic but functional, and things get tricky for hosting large groups if there is bad weather! Long term we hope to raise funds for a community hub building and another accessible compost loo. In the meantime more bike racks, temporary shelters such as gazebos, and small items such as more hot water urns would be helpful.

# 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.

It is still early days for Lauriston Farm having got on site in December 2021. Since then our priorities have been setting up infrastructure (the farm had no buildings and only water connection, no power) and getting going with our food growing, tree planting, biodiversity monitoring and enhancement and community activities.

We understand and recognise the importance of monitoring and evaluation and have begun to conduct surveys with groups of beneficiaries eg allotment holders to gather feedback and data on impact. We are also working with an external consultant (paid for by a funder) to undertake a social return on investment (SROI) assessment.

We have been doing biodiversity baseline surveys and have collected data across a range of key indicator metrics. We are at the beginning stages of developing a farm wide framework for monitoring and evaluation but struggle with capacity when we are all so busy doing!

If there is support on offer for monitoring and evaluation we would definitely be interested.