**Local Partner and Climate Hub: Sims Hill
Shared Harvest**

Sims Hill is a grassroots Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) food growing project in Bristol. We grow vegetables in a sustainable way following organic principles. As well as providing vegetable shares to approximately 170 CSA members in Bristol we invite as many people as we can to belong to our land, facilitating groups to share in our collective knowledge through a workshare scheme (where members give half a day of work per week in return for a large veg share), as well as running a our Soil Connections project, which invites people who have been affected by the asylum system to use some of our land in different capacities: we run a weekly session, facilitate a trainee plot for one of the members of the group, and offer business advice to a previous member of the group who has now started his own food growing business on site (Rocket Man). We also host events throughout the year, for our members and public. We engage with our CSA members via weekly notes in our veg shares, newsletters, and meetings (4 a year including AGM).

It is part of Shared Harvest’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.

From April until December we host our workshare programme (10 members), who exchange 4 hours a week for a large veg share in return. It is a chance to come and feel connected to and understand the journey of peri urban food production.

We run the Soil Connections project, working alongside those who have been affected by the asylum system in the UK. We have a weekly session for members who have an interest in horticulture; we do growing tasks and share a fortnightly lunch. The project has both an educational and social scope. We also offer a training plot for one of our previous group members, the produce sometimes being donated to Borderlands. We also support a previous group member who has set up his own growing business on site, Rocket Man. He is a farmer from Syria so has a lot of agricultural knowledge, but we share information and work with his business mentors at Ashley Community Housing. This season we supported Ali to build a polytunnel. The project is funded through Quartet and donations.

We host monthly volunteer days on a Sunday open to all, during which we do some work on the land, as well as fun seasonal celebratory events on site.

This year with the new work structure of three new entrant growers, we decided to not run a traineeship which we have done since 2019. We do however have a student from Bristol Uni who has funding to work with us one day a week, and who is here in a learning capacity. She will be working with us for six months.

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

We estimate to have about 350 people who access our site directly through our volunteering projects, our events and our members meetings (4 per year). We also have other foot traffic through sharing a site with Avon Wildlife Trust and other projects/ craftspeople based on the shared land we work on. We run a project at Sims HIll called Soil Connections, which supports asylum seekers, refugees and migrants in Bristol through weekly horticultural sessions, training and knowledge sharing. The sessions happen weekly and throughout the project we hope to reach 20 to 30 participants.

# 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 interact with several organisations and charities that work with asylum seekers and refugees in Bristol, to facilitate our Soil Connections project. These include: Borderlands, Ashley Community Housing, Bristol Hospitality Network, Bristol Refugee Rights, Refugee Women of Bristol, Aid Box Community, WEA (ESOL provider), Vita Minds, GP surgeries and others who come across our project in Bristol. We also work in partnership with Avon Wildlife Trust and Grow Wilder as our main site is based here; we often collaborate.

We are part of a team of land partners including a herbalist, a wood worker (Tree to Treen), Rocket Man (a refugee led food growing business) and other growers based on site. We receive mentoring from a grower from the Community Farm as well as informal support from other growers at Five Acre Farm and Trill Farm. We are an active part of the growers community in Bristol and the South West and engage in events organised by other farmers. We are going to be a part of the South West trainee network this season and are organising an educational visit at Sims Hill for the trainees this July. We are also going to organise a visit with Bristol Drugs Project this season as one of our growers is also involved in this project, and a visit with the mentoring project at Borderlands.

* Whenever we have spare or leftover produce, we donate this to the Gleaning Network, Borderlands, St Werburgh's Food Club, and Co-Exist Community Kitchen.
* We are part of Bristol Food Producers. We ran events in partnership with an organisation that supports Hong Kong migrants in the UK in partnership with one of our Directors. We are a member of La Via Campesina and Landworkers Alliance, and South Gloucester local climate action group.
* Finally we are training a student from Bristol University and are working in partnership with them as they are providing the student with wages for the hours spent on the farm.

# 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 well as the work we do around volunteering, we work with Essential (a workers food cooperative) to provide free and subsidised solidarity shares to members. We are currently running a crowdfunder to secure more money to provide even more solidarity veg shares.

We work with several organisations who support those affected by the asylum system in Bristol, as we believe that connection to land and access to greenery can be powerful elements in reclaiming space in a hostile environment and a powerful tool for solidarity.

We work towards food justice, meaning that all communities should be able to grow, sell, and access affordable, locally grown, culturally appropriate and nutritious food. However, Black and People of Colour are widely under-represented in British agricultural sectors, as shown by the ‘Rootz into Food Growing’ Report (RIFG, March 2021). We aim to disrupt some of the structural inequalities and barriers to food justice BPOC face. Our priority is to engage a greater diversity of people, both in our worker’s team and in our membership. We see a strong link between social and climate justice and our Soil Connections project is a response to the need to advance both struggles. We want to ensure that we are expanding opportunities for more people to connect to and access land.

We are currently collaborating with an anthropologist from Hong Kong who is curating a food centred storytelling event, connecting migrants to a sense of home as well as to local communities.

As mentioned we run quarterly meetings with our members, some of whom have been supporting us since the start of Sims Hill over ten years ago. We are shaped and governed by our members who have voting power on our decisions as a CSA, and offer multiple opportunities for our members to give us feedback.

In terms of our community engagement, this happens at our Grow Wilder site. We are able to share the use of an outdoor kitchen, sheltered area and there’s the possibility we could arrange the rental of the classroom which is already on site. There is an accessible toilet on site and some paved paths. This means that it is accessible for community members with access needs to come to our site.

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

We grow on an area that is partitioned by the M32, meaning that our land is surrounded by and inevitably affected by motorway air pollution. We have been experiencing extremely dry summers and wet early springs, particularly this season. We have lost crops as we could not cultivate in March-April, and it has been challenging to establish crops in what has been one of the driest May in years - no rain for a month. The extreme weather conditions impact what we grow, and the community we are wanting to feed. There is a significant loss of green space in the Bristol area, Sims Hill is based in what used to be the Blue Finger (about 1,000 hectares running from Bristol into South Glos that used to be Bristol’s Market Gardens. Our field site had been threatened to become a park-and-ride site for years and in 2018 we ran a successful campaign, though it could still happen in future and we have an insecure contract with BCC (more info on this on our website). The changing climate impacting habitats means there are less predators for our pests (ie slugs), putting our crops at risk.

# 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?

We run regular AGMs for our CSA members, so we consider their feedback in our crop plans and how we run the farm. We have worked alongside the grower of Rocket Man as he started joining our Soil Connections group years ago, and have shared opportunities with him to facilitate the beginning of his project. We created the Soil Connections project as a response to his and others’ desire to access land and grow. One of our workshares has shared finding coming to the farm " the highlight of the week", and another said it has hugely improved their wellbeing and therefore that of their kids as well. We collect and consider feedback throughout our sessions and conversation. We co-created our autumn celebration meal with some of the members from the Soil Connections group.

# 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.

Our workshares serve as an offer to people who might not be able to afford veg shares to have access to organically produced, local and nutritious food. We understand that buying well produced food is more expensive, and so make sure that we maintain our workshare offer and also offer our solidarity boxes.

The Soil Connections group is now running its third year and we advertise it across organisations in Bristol who are supporting people affected by the asylum system, therefore expanding the reach of who has access to land, and particularly a group of people that is greatly affected by structural racism, the hostile environment and more recently the Illegal Immigration Bill / NABA.

This season we are running more open events, expanding our solidarity veg box scheme, running visits for projects at other organisations (Bristol Drugs Project, Borderlands, WEA), and are currently giving veg plants away for free or donation to encourage more people to grow at home.

# 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 love to have capacity to host more events at the farm which centre our relationship with food in the belief that this can play an important part of behaviour change. Food growing gives participants a direct experience of changing climates as well as solutions (ie growing more drought resistant crops, learning about what we can grow and eat locally, expanding knowledge on edible ‘weeds). We would like the events to take the form of farm tours and community meals where we can use up produce from the farm.

We want to expand the groups we work with, inviting people onto site who engage with food in different ways to demonstrate how food production can model community nourishment and climate change resistance at every scale. This could take the form of free short courses or workshops (we would like these to be accessible - so some funding for translated materials, online tools, transcripts), to give more people growing knowledge and to facilitate a platform. We want our work to help facilitate growth from windowsills to allotments, helping people organise with each other to ask for more access to food growing in the city.

We’d love to have additional capacity to further engage with campaigns and existing networks of growers and climate activists. We currently only have funding to employ a total of 1.8 people (all growers) and have a voluntary board of Directors. Having funding would allow us to employ someone as well as to build capacity within our existing cooperative growing team who can dedicate additional time to campaign work, communication and knowledge sharing tools.

Sharing access to land and growing knowledge throughout Bristol will allow more people to feel connected to themselves, their community and city. A stronger connection to place allows people to be more invested in helping to protect it from the adverse effects of climate change, while growing food gives tangible solutions to a sometimes abstract concept.

# 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 like to host more farm tours and workshops, and could start running short courses on agroecological farming in a peri-urban environment. There is such eagerness for this within the Bristol community but not many offers of practical, hands-on experience, nor access to working crop plans and different financial models. Hosting more slow, reflective sessions that involve connecting with the food on the farm and sharing lunch could bring great wellbeing benefits as well as transform people's relationships with their natural environment. We could expand the reaches and training that our team have to be able to facilitate additional wellbeing sessions. We also would love to contribute more to climate and food justice campaigning in Bristol and beyond, as we see how political our work is and are hands on seeing the impact of the changing climate in our work, which we would like to share.

# 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 love to increase our solidarity shares, do more outreach around this and also get people on to the farm who might not have access to green space (either for courses, workshops or farm tours). As part of this we would offer free bus tickets to ensure the activities we run are accessible.

Our Soil Connections group has huge value to us and to the people who come, but is currently limited to just a few hours a week with one member of staff. If we could have more time with the group then there would be much more scope for developing learning outcomes and agroecological farming knowledge in a structured way as well as expanding the number of participants. This could also involve becoming a training centre so that people can leave with a qualification in horticulture (as modelled by the St Mungo’s gardening groups/Windmill Hill).

We would like to invest in some equipment to reflect the needs of people with mobility issues and develop accessible growing tasks - we already do this informally on an ad hoc basis but would like to expand this.

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

As mentioned, we are striving to host many more events on the farm. These could be both open events and events for specific demographics, such as people within a certain radius of the farm, and for our Soil Connection group of past and present. We love inviting everyone to the farm together to build the growing community around Sims Hill, but more focused events could also develop a deeper relationship to the farm and to place. We want to have the time and resources to more proactively engage in the educational aspect of the farm, which would bring the local community closer to the work that we do through greater understanding and engagement. Finally we would like to expand our partnership work with other farmers in Bristol and local climate organising by expanding our campaigns work. Also, we would like to become a hub that other groups and activists could use for meetings, we want our land to be open for these purposes.

# 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 already practise resource sharing with other new entrant growers and farms in Bristol, and have hosted site visits, which we would love to do more of. In terms of training and support for our team, it would be great to receive some support with public speaking and communications in order to share our model with others, to present our work and to write reports. Whilst we possess some of the relevant skills in our existing team, it would be difficult, due to time constraints and capacity, for the existing growers to engage with the knowledge sharing element of the project and we imagine that this would be a part of the new role that the Taste a Better Future project would make possible.

# 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 be more than happy to do this. We already engage in informal peer mentoring with other growers in Bristol, sharing resources such as crop plans, policies and procedures. We would be thrilled to be able to engage with this further as we see sharing knowledge as a way of advancing the movement for food and climate justice, aiming to create efficient community growing models and allowing maximum time to be spent in working with people on the land rather than creating systems that already exist.

# 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?

We currently don’t have capacity to focus on more structured education on the agroecological movement; policy surrounding organic small-scale farming and the practical tools throughout the year. Not having our groups coming through the winter means the overview of the farming year is lost. We believe that through participating in Taste a Better Future this education will be more embedded into our approach. Establishing more events focused on engaging with the journey of our food - from planting the seeds to harvesting the crop to cooking it together - is something that we have already discussed as a team. Through the support we would receive we would be able to build the structures to establish Sims Hill as a community food hub, something that will create deep relationships with our community and bring in lots more people and partner organisations to the farm. Through this, and through participation in wider campaign, we feel confident that Sims Hill will play an important role in changing people’s relationships to their food and the food system more widely for a time well beyond the funding.

# 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 farm is split into two sites, one which is predominantly field scale and tractor cultivated while the other is half tractor cultivated and half manual, some of our market garden follows a no dig system. We have limited implements and do all planting and weed control by hand. Within both sites we also have polytunnels which are both hand-cultivated. We are assessing our systems and are contemplating a future of only fixed beds on our smaller site to contend with unpredictable weather conditions and late cultivations. When we work with volunteer and community groups, we work on our market garden site without using machinery.

# 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.

Our Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) scheme supplies approximately 170 members as well as a small amount of wholesale to restaurants / shops in Bristol. For our membership we operate a collection point system at different drop off points in the city. We also have workshares; members of the CSA who come to the farm every Tuesday to help with practical tasks for half a day, and in return they get a veg share each week. Additionally, we give two full share equivalents as a solidarity share each week.

Most of our field scale is in a restorative green manure for this year and potentially the next which has changed our production. Currently we buy potatoes year-round, but aim to use our own items for 6 months of the year, while in the hungry gap we buy in the majority. Our produce is sometimes donated, varying in regularity and location (see list in answer 13). We use our own produce for our community events (so far we have had a spring equinox celebration and are planning our summer solstice on 18 June) as well as our fortnightly lunch provided to members of the Soil Connections group.

# 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.

* We work without a fridge/ cold room, with a fridge we would be able to harvest store vegetables to use up in our prospective community meals. An outdoor kitchen would also be hugely beneficial for running regular engagement activities around food and cooking - however we do have access to an outdoor kitchen through our site at Grow Wilder, for which we pay rent.
* A larger tool shed to accommodate additional volunteers on site and make it more accessible.
* Compost toilet for our field site.
* Tables and chairs for community events. This also would be useful for Soil Connections, as we have people with accessibility needs who need sit down tasks and we would like to have more infrastructure for accessibility needs.
* Laptop and support to professionalise our administrative systems.

# 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.

We run an AGM where we ask our CSA members for their experience of receiving a share of the food we grow. We then consider this feedback in our work and in our growing plans. We also have collected initial thoughts from participants of the Soil Connections project on what they would like to gain through their time at the farm and plan to conduct a feedback session at the end of the project to monitor how this changed. We would like to run a focus group halfway through the sessions. Our site is based at Grow Wilder, where data on biodiversity is registered (i.e. butterfly and moth count) and where some of the benefits for the biodiversity living on site can be attributed to the way we tend to the land (for example through green manures, planting of wildflowers, composting and leaving some parts of the site undisturbed). We also run annual soil tests to monitor the changes and nutrients. We would like support to develop some of our own systems for recording this data in future as well as additional capacity to run focus groups and surveys to further engage and be shaped by our community.