



## The Dean Organic Fund

*The Dean Organic Fund was established following a major bequest from the late Jennie Bone to the Organic Research Centre (ORC), along with the transfer of funds from the former Dean Organic Trust which she established in 1993. Her idea was to support the conservation of wildlife in the farmed environment by providing interest free loans to organic producers. ORC is committed to continuing this process with the new Fund. The second round of applications closed in September. Here, some of the successful applicants from the first round tell their stories of how the fund has helped them.*

### Stephen and Lynn Briggs, Whitehall Farm, Cambs

Stephen and Lynn Briggs are tenants of a 250 acre organic farm in Cambridgeshire growing cereals, vegetables and 125 acres of Agroforestry. The farm has a Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement, and Stephen and Lynn are passionate about adding value and engaging with customers and the public. After more than two years in development, in early 2018 they opened Harvest Barn Farm Shop, which retails local, organic and farm produced produce along with a café, and outdoor visitors and education area.



“We applied for the Dean Organic Fund (DOF) to help in developing the new farm shop business. The £25,000 loan has helped fund the purchase of retail and butchery equipment, and outdoor education and visitor infrastructure. The DOF loan has helped us manage cash flow for a rapidly developing new business venture and allowed us to expand and broaden the offering to customers quicker than we would have been able to without the DOF loan.”



### Taw River Dairy, Devon

Sam and Katie Bullingham of Taw River Dairy, Okehampton, Devon, received a loan for the expansion of their livestock herd and development of dairy processing facilities. Sam Bullingham said: “We applied to the DOF as we saw it as a great way to aid our sustainable organic farming system, being first generation farmers without land to secure against, access to capital is often difficult and always expensive! We used the money to buy ourselves a reliable modern tractor that should future-proof our farming for the foreseeable future, with the remaining capital we invested in more cows for our rapidly growing dairy and processing business. The DOF loan has been immensely valuable to us, we are a young couple with our own tenancy and relatively new business, the fact that we could postpone starting repayments until year two was great, it removed pressure in a financially tight period of growth.”

### Lauriston Farm, Essex

Lauriston Farm, Maldon, Essex, received a DOF loan for capital investments for a new horticultural enterprise.

Farm Director Spencer Christy said: “Lauriston Farm Limited heard about the Dean Organic Fund through the Biodynamic Association as we are a Demeter certified biodynamic holding that last year was put into community ownership. Part of the five-year business plan associated with this initiative involved initially cultivating two acres of grassland. We would establish a horticultural enterprise to supply thirty weekly seasonal vegetable boxes to our members/shareholders. We raised significant funds to cover revenue costs of the set up and were looking for a fund to help with the capital infrastructure required. We undertake extensive conservation work as ninety percent part of the farm’s 210 acres has SSSI status so the DOF seemed like the perfect match for us.

“The loan has paid for an 85 x 24ft wide polytunnel with side ventilation, a Tracmaster 740 two-wheel tractor with rotary plough and 80cm wide rotavator, an irrigation system for the tunnel and outdoor beds, two broad forks, various trays and boxes, fleeces and woven crop coverings.

“The rapid approval of our application and receipt of the loan enabled us to have the funds in place for the start





of the 2018 growing season. Now, in mid-August, we are supplying twenty weekly boxes within a twelve-mile radius of the farm, two local farm shops and attend two local artisan monthly markets. The interest free aspect as well as the twelve-month repayment holiday gave us the ability to develop the new enterprise this season and be ready for the start of the 2019 growing season with an existing customer base to generate the income to start repaying the loan.

“It has been a great pleasure and honour to be in receipt of such funding and we welcome visitors to the farm to see what we do and, in particular, how the DOF has helped us.”

### Albury Vineyard

Photo: John Mobbs, Great British Wine



Nick Wenman of Albury vineyard in Surrey said: “The major challenge for vineyards in the UK is our variable weather conditions, which can lead to significant fluctuations in fruit yield and quality. This is particularly acute for organic vineyards with yields typically 20% less than conventional vineyards. Of the 500 commercial vineyards in the UK less than 20 are certified organic so there is no alternative supply of fruit in difficult years. It is important therefore that we do everything possible to ensure the maximum possible yield whilst maintaining quality. This is accomplished by various canopy management techniques, one of which is to trim the vines several times during the growing season. This encourages good fruit set, exposes the grapes to the maximum sunlight available and allows airflow around the grapes to prevent disease.

“Up until now this operation has been performed by hand using hedge cutters, but this is inefficient and time consuming, which means that it isn’t always done effectively. We therefore applied to the Dean Organic Fund to provide the funding to purchase a tractor-mounted vine-trimmer to automate the process. This has already been used to great effect at the vineyard to help prevent disease and expose the fruit to sunlight.”

### Lynbreck Croft

Lynn Cassell and Sandra Baer of Lynbreck Croft, Grantown on Spey, received a loan for the establishment of meat processing facilities.

“We applied for the Dean Organic Fund as we saw it as an opportunity to grow our new croft business. We are a high agro-ecological performing croft with a vision



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to farm with nature using our animals as ‘land managers’ to deliver maximum benefits for wildlife and people. We are only a small set up with very little funding other than that we can get through grants or through our part time jobs. The Dean Organic Fund gave us a once in a lifetime opportunity to secure investment to grow our business in a way that promotes the values our croft is based on – healthy soils = healthy land = healthy animals = healthy food = healthy people.

“We are using the money to install a food processing facility and purchase the kit we need to store and butcher our own meat. We are investing in a fully kitted out sterile room in our recently renovated byre where we will be able to process raw meat and make artisan produce including high quality sausages and burgers. We are purchasing a food smoker and equipment needed to slice and vacuum package produce, including charcuterie we will be making. Our loan has also covered the cost of a walk in chill and two freezer units where we can store meat safely.

“In an industry where ‘added value’ is the latest buzz phrase, we plan to increase the financial value of our produce. For us as a small producer, this investment will enable us to generate enough income to reduce our part time working, allowing us to put more time into growing our business. We are so passionate about the way that we farm and the food that we produce and this investment has meant we can make our produce ‘go further’ allowing us to reach a wider market. It has also opened up the opportunity to buy in carcasses from other high agroecological/organic farming units where we can add value through processing and still provide the consumer with full product traceability.”

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