



# Land Partnerships

The Future of Land Access?

Jon Goodman – Ragmans Lane Market Garden

# What motivates new entrants to growing?

- Increasing interest from young people
- Many volunteer, some find paid work, some start their own business or CSA
- General cons: low income, cold and wet, 'drudgery'.
- Business cons: market/climate insecurity, hard to find affordable land/home
- So – why?
- Profound disconnect from practical skills among many urban young people
- Disillusionment with specialised service industry jobs disconnected from essential needs of life.
- Awareness of human degradation of natural world – desire to produce society's material needs in a non-destructive way

# What does growing work give young growers?

- Being part of a practical movement and doing work they believe in
- A skill set many believe will be invaluable in future
- A healthy lifestyle
- Nature connection
- Profit often a secondary motivation – people setting up growing because it feels right, then trying to make it work financially.
- This means potential for poor business planning, but also high level of emotional investment
- More small growing businesses established now means more in place for the future when likely to be more needed and profitable.
- How can more people with limited capital start growing businesses? Land partnerships!

# Ragmans Lane Market Garden

- Example of both the advantages and potential pitfalls of being determined to go for it
- Started this season
- 4 equal partners
- 2 acres, 3 polytunnels, potential to expand
- Wide range of crops – focus on salad, also some cut flowers.
- Wholesale: farm shops, village shops, restaurants
- Retail: Dean Forest Food Hub, occasional markets

# How we came to Ragmans

- 4 old friends, non-horticultural background
- Got into growing variously through apprenticeships, farm work, volunteering, permaculture
- Nearly started a growing business on a country estate 2012
- This fell through – terms of agreement too vague
- However, yield and market research convinced us a market garden on 4 acres could be viable
- Knew Ragmans were open to suggestions for their old market garden – sent an e-mail then several meetings to explore options

# Partnership

- Partnership agreement: responsibilities, protocol if someone leaves
- No head grower – initially everything was decided by consensus.
- Now growing area is split with each of us managing one zone (but working collectively)
- We each have responsibility over particular aspects of business eg. Accounts, sales, flower growing.
- Key decisions still made by consensus.

# Finances

- We each borrowed £5,000 privately, invested this sum for 25% stake in partnership
- Applied unsuccessfully for grants to facilitate community involvement
- Unsure if we would have been able to obtain a commercial loan
- Working Tax Credits etc. for low-income self-employed have made it possible for us to survive without taking a wage from business so far
- We all work part time outside of business – 40% of income from this goes to business
- Aim to start paying ourselves wages after we start paying off debt

# Partnership – pros and cons

- Reduced debt burden
- Learning from each other – more confidence in growing techniques
- More sociable!
- Living and working together can strain relationships
- Realising that open but respectful communication will be as crucial as growing and sales to business' long-term viability.
- Easy to prioritise communication in principle, hard to find time in practice



# Tenancy with Ragmans Lane Farm

- Farm business tenancy
- Includes use of existing infrastructure
- Includes shared use of farm equipment (for a fee)
- Shared use of Ragmans Farm brand (condition for collective SA licence)
- Detailed agreement: clauses on maintenance responsibilities, compensation for improvements etc.

# What's made it work

- Knowing what we needed (acreage, security), listening to what farm needed (quality and commitment from us, flexibility, respect for principles)
- Thoroughness in thinking through responsibilities and potential issues (eg. quality control, notice period)
- Mutual benefit: farm want more food production and more people working on land, we benefit from landlord's knowledge and support
- Trust and shared ethos: both sides looking at how we can act in our shared interest (rather than just fulfilling contractual obligations)

# Replicability?

- We are lucky to have a supportive landlord, but many more out there!
- Many reasons why landlords could be persuaded why land partnership is in their interest (increased income, cost-sharing, desire to see people working the land, practical help on farm etc.)
- Would-be growers: try contacting farmers directly – nothing to lose
- Would-be landlords: try advertising and no commitment if you do not find suitable tenants
- Be aware of your needs but ready to compromise
- Research in advance to avoid problems down the line: eg. can be difficult for farmer to start receiving single farm payments again on land previously rented out
- Go for it – but do your homework!