

# Belper Food

## Introduction

A straw poll at Belper Goes Green on 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> June 2013 asked a number of questions under the heading of 'How can we make Belper greener?' The responses listed below relate to food and are, indeed 'food for thought':

### ***What will be the biggest change to life in Belper by 2030?***

- Much more locally grown food in gardens and community gardens

### ***How can we produce more of our own food?***

- Grow your own and free tuition in how to do it
- More allotments and growing in public places
- Vegetarian café and decent health food store
- Beg, borrow (but not steal) land for more allotments. Stall at farmers market for allotment produce to be sold at commercial rates so as not to annoy farmers
- Local gardening show/fete, cakes crops etc.
- Establish a tools data base/forum to rent out tools for maintenance /gardening
- Better education in schools on food and gardening
- Start a buy/sell forum for unwanted mowers etc. (in line with the tool rental scheme)

### ***What would make Belper a happier more positive community?***

- Continue to support local shops- no more large supermarkets
- Food co-ops

There is a sense in many of these responses and in the support indicated for them that by coming together and sharing we can be more productive, less wasteful and better supported in our efforts to utilise our gardens and be more self-sufficient. So, let us look at this co-operation and examine how it might work in practice and whether it could be a viable business venture that many of us can contribute to and benefit from.

## Growing fruit, herbs and vegetables

What do we need?

- Somewhere to grow produce,
- The right tools and equipment for digging, weeding, planting and harvesting,
- Natural compost, fertiliser, pesticides, fungicides and herbicides,
- Help and support to identify soil types and efficiently prepare soils and care for plants until harvesting,
- Physical help with major projects such as making growing beds, paths, fruit nets, polytunnels, sheds and greenhouses,
- Somewhere to sell excess produce,
- Ways of adding value by making jam, pickles, freezing, soft drinks, beer and cider and use in baking and preparation of ready meals

## **Starting out**

If this plan is the seed it needs planting and nurturing. The minimum requirement for starting out is for three local fruit and vegetable growing households to come together and start to organise themselves, form a Co-operative or Social Enterprise and work out how they can make best use of their gardens for their mutual or community benefit.

They could:

- Work out a joint growing plan for the coming year based on soil quality, crop rotation and/or permaculture principles. Some research and testing may be needed to determine which crops will produce the best yields in varying soil types, what yields can be expected and what is the relative demand locally throughout the year,
- Agree a price per kilo that the enterprise will pay to growers which could be a set figure for the coming season or as a proportion of (say, 10%) of the local supermarket retail price. Also agree a retail price that could be below the supermarket price (90%?),
- Based on expected harvesting times, book stalls at Belper's Farmers Market to sell available produce either in its raw state or as value added products (e.g. jam),
- Use unsold produce to create 'value added' products that can be either frozen, preserved or otherwise stored and sold at subsequent Farmers Markets. This will require the use of a kitchen that has passed inspection and holds a current hygiene certificate,

## **Developing**

### **Promotion**

The work of the enterprise will need to be promoted if it is to expand to wider horizons so will need a web site, email addresses, logo and promotional material to give to customers and potential partners.

### **Administration and accounts**

Some funds will be needed to set up a new legal entity and work will be required to meet all the regulatory requirements of the chosen form of enterprise. The initial partners should determine a 'membership fee', or shareholding, to cover administrative and setup costs. Once trading at Farmers Markets a bank account will be needed and a treasurer or accountant will need to be appointed to prepare accounts and submit required returns.

### **Mutual support**

We are not all experts although some have more experience than others. The enterprise could provide a mutual support network to offer advice and encouragement either remotely through social networking sites or physically via visits. Regular growing workshops could be held to share experience and knowledge both within the enterprise and for a wider public education. There are also more major garden maintenance jobs such as compost bins, walls, fences, paths, sheds and greenhouses for which members could call on others for help – in return for time tokens (promissory notes) or informal arrangements to suit.

### **Plant care products**

Members could also produce and market natural plant care products – herbicides, insecticides, fungicides, fertilisers etc. to sell at Farmers Markets and offer at discounted price to fellow members. Again, workshops could be held to share knowledge and/or collectively produce such products. This area of activity may suit someone with a limited garden growing area.

### **Tool share**

Members could produce an inventory of tools and equipment they are willing to lend to others. As the project develops members could consider purchasing tools for use by all especially those in demand most frequently or more specialist high cost tools.

### **Expansion**

When membership reaches a stage that there is too much produce for a monthly Farmers Market the enterprise will need to seek out further outlets locally. As the whole object is for more food consumed in DE56 to be produced in DE56 it would be counter-productive to attend other Farmers Markets outside the area. Online shopping facilities could be developed to allow local residents to purchase produce and products from what is available at any given time. This could replicate the DE4 Food Hub service or be a new stand-alone service. In either case a local food collection/storage point will be needed.

The alternative, (or addition) to selling online would be to rent shop premises in Belper town centre where the enterprise's produce and products, including plant care products, could be sold and tools hired. Additional services and products would probably be needed to make this viable but could include, bread and bakery products, café and fair trade food products such as tea and coffee. Such premises could also act as a hub for Transition Belper. Members would need to consider issues such as staffing, energy efficiency, kitchens, hygiene, insurance etc. and draw up a detailed business plan with realistic cost and sales projections.

### **Members without land**

Membership of the enterprise should not be restricted to those with land available to grow. There are other ways for people to contribute:

- The enterprise could be instrumental in finding and agreeing the use of appropriate parcels of land for community gardens to meet land demand from those lacking growing space.
- Administrative and marketing tasks
- Production of plant care products as discussed above
- Giving time at Farmers Markets
- Proactively seeking the involvement of the wider community including other community groups, schools etc.

### **Rewards**

The return, for growers, needs to match the savings they would make by simply using their produce themselves – including allowing for what might be wasted. Some detailed financial modelling needs to be undertaken to determine the appropriate buying and selling prices. In addition growers and other members could be given 'stamps' in return for produce, products or time given in support. 'Stamps' could be given a value each year that are relative to profits less any sums set aside for future development. These could be cashed in or held over but an appropriate sum would need to be set aside for 'member benefits'. This suggests a Co-operative (Industrial and Provident) form of organisation rather than a Social Enterprise.