

2023 Veg Box Scheme Handbook

The Market Garden Project, Meanwood Valley Urban Farm, Sugarwell Road, Leeds, LS7 2QG

Charity number: 510452 email: veg@mvuf.org.uk Phone: 07922513704



What you will get by joining our scheme: Summary

1. **A weekly share of veg for you to collect and assemble into a box from Meanwood Valley Urban Farm on Wednesday or Thursday 2-7pm.** With a two week break over Christmas and New year. So no box Wednesday/Thursday 27th/28th December 2023 and no box Wednesday/Thursday 3rd/4th January 2024.
2. **A weekly newsletter via Mailchimp with info on the veg box produce, recipes, seasonal cooking tips and news from the Market Garden.**
3. **Invitations to community events at the market garden including Apple Day in October and our end of year community celebration in December in our greenhouse.**
4. **Free annual farm membership so you can visit the farm as often as you like.**
5. **Unlike previous years, there is no end to the scheme – you'll get a box every week, forever!**
6. **The chance to learn how your food is grown by joining in the [Market Garden volunteering programme](#).**

How much produce is from the Market Garden?

- **In the 6-month growing season, June – November, almost all food in your box will come from our 1-acre Market Garden.**
- **From December – May, we're partnering with [Organic North Co-operative Wholesalers](#) in Manchester and [Kirkstall Valley Farm](#) in Leeds for produce we can't grow ourselves, who source as locally as possible. In the case of Kirkstall Valley Farm, they're growing food just 2 miles away!**
- **So over the course of a year, around half of all produce comes from the Market Garden.** You can read about our growing practices [here](#).

Here are a few very important details below **you must understand** before joining the scheme

When you join our veg box scheme you are helping to support a food-growing project that is completely different from a conventional growing operation. It is by definition local, not-for-profit (as part of a registered charity) and only interested in feeding local people chemical-free food. For these reasons, we have a few unusual quirks that you must know about. Please make sure you understand and agree to follow these 6 important points:

1. **If you can't collect your box or arrange collection every Wednesday or Thursday 2-7pm from the Potting Shed at Meanwood Valley Urban Farm, then this is probably not the right scheme for you.**
2. **Your first box will be ready 2 weeks after you sign up.** This minimizes waste and allows us time to order from outside and pick crops precisely.
3. **We do not deliver, you need to come every week and collect and assemble your box (or arrange for someone to collect on your behalf). It usually takes 10 minutes to do this.**
4. **There are no 'pauses'.** If you can't collect or arrange collection on collection days, your box will be forfeit. In other words, if you can't collect on a particular week, but you don't want to cancel from the scheme (i.e. you're going on holiday), then arrange for someone else to pick up and eat your veg or tell us to give it away!
5. **You will get less things in your box if we have a poor crop performance or crop failure.** This will affect boxes in particular during June – November when most of the food from your box comes directly from the Market Garden.
6. **You can only cancel with two weeks' notice. You are always paying 2 weeks in advance for your box from the point you joined the scheme (see cancellation policy below).** When you cancel (by email to veg@mvuf.org.uk), you are entitled to two more weeks of veg boxes.

Cancellation and Refunds

If you want to cancel, you **must** send an email stating you wish to cancel participation in the scheme. You **must** send an email to veg@mvuf.org.uk and notify us only in this form of communication. If you contact us in any other way, we will **not** consider it as a formal termination of your membership and there may be a delay in getting you a refund.

From the date you cancel, you'll still get two weeks' worth of veg boxes from us. **If you are paying weekly, you do not receive a refund.** If you paid 6 months upfront, you will then receive a refund. The refund amount will be the cost of the number of boxes you didn't receive before the end of the full membership period because you are leaving early. You will be refunded by BACS transfer and we will ask you for your bank details to be able to send you the payment.

We specify this cancellation period because we need time to recruit new members which is hard to do as a very small market garden project. Especially during the main season, it becomes more difficult to recruit as we concentrate of the growing.

You can also get refunds for substandard items or service. Please email veg@mvuf.org.uk outlining your request for a refund.

Example refund from a cancellation

Let's say you received your first box on Wednesday 5th April and paid 6 months upfront (26 weeks). You bought an average-sized box, worth £17.80 per week. So you paid £462.80. But then you decide to cancel your membership on 16th April, after already receiving 2 boxes. You're entitled to two more boxes after that, as per the cancellation procedure. So in total you receive 4 boxes.

That means you'll receive a refund equivalent to 22 boxes. That's $£17.80 * 22 = £391.60$

You will be refunded by BACS transfer and we will ask you for your bank details to be able to send you the payment.

Don't forget, even though you have given notice to cancel on 16th April, you're still getting two more boxes (on the 19th and 26th April) and you are fully entitled to those boxes. Only after the notice period does your membership cancel, you get a refund (if you are paying upfront) and are no longer able to get boxes.

Signing up and getting your first box

When you register and make your first payment, your first box will be ready for you typically **two** weeks after that (more accurately, 10 – 16 days depending on the day you sign up).

So, if you sign up between Monday 10th - Sunday 16th April, you will collect your first box on Wednesday 26th or Thursday 27th April.

Here a list of dates for signing up and when you get your first box

Date you sign up to scheme	Date you receive your first box
20th March – 26th March	5th/6th April
27th March – 2nd April	12th/13th April
3rd April – 9th April	19th/20th April
10th April – 16th April	26th/27th April
17th April – 23rd April	3rd/4th May

You will become a 'member' of a 'Community Supported Agriculture' scheme – what does this mean?

There is an international movement of similar food-growing schemes called 'Community Supported Agriculture' schemes where you, the eaters, are directly supporting the growers, and not just monetarily. By choosing a scheme where the growers provide food direct to you and not via any kind of intermediary, you are sharing in the risks and the rewards of food growing. It's a very simple concept but it's hard to put into words how different this is to the normal food system.

In the terminology of Community Supported Agriculture, you are a 'member' of our scheme and you receive a 'share' of our harvest. The time that you are part of our scheme is your 'membership'. Below is a summary of the scheme you are joining as a CSA member who receives a share of the harvest.

- You receive a share of the harvest every Wednesday/Thursday for 50 weeks of the year.
- You are able to come and volunteer to learn about food growing and the farm and to experience community-scale food growing.
- You'll have direct communication with the people who are growing food, when you come to collect produce and via a newsletter.
- We'll organise members' events and celebrations.
- You'll be part of a group of people who all care about where their food comes from.
- As members, you are able to organise your own activities like events or a member picking up and distributing for other members.
- You're eligible for free farm membership for a year.

What are your responsibilities to the growers?

- The understanding and acceptance that you are sharing in the risks and rewards of what we grow. If there is a crop failure, then it will be reflected in the box. If there is a crop surplus, that will also be reflected in the box.
- You will pack your own bag/box from the harvest crates in the potting shed.
- You will pay your subscription amount.
- You will adhere to the cancellation procedure.
- Enjoy your produce.
- And volunteer with us if you can!

Payment

When you register for the scheme, you confirm that you have read and understand the handbook and the relevant conditions of purchase and will be directed to set up payment immediately.

Costs

- 1) A small box is £10 per week or £260 upfront for 6 months.
- 2) An average box is £17.80 per week or £462.80 upfront for 6 months

3) A larger box is £26.70 per week or £694.20 upfront for 6 months

Community Supported Agriculture depends on our members' commitment to us for the season and we need a certain proportion of members to pay upfront for the full amount every year or we can't survive.

This is because it takes many months of work getting the crops ready before we get to the harvestable product. We recognise that paying upfront is not possible for everyone so we do offer payment weekly. However if at all possible please pay in a single payment at the start.

Pauses

We are unable to offer pauses to boxes. Please go to the FAQs or the 'Collection' section of the handbook to learn what you can do if you can't pick up your box.

Collection at the farm

Collect your box from the Potting Shed at Meanwood Valley Urban Farm.

We keep all items for your box in lidded harvest boxes, so that they keep fresh and to involve you, the members, a little more in the process. All the harvest boxes will be laid out inside the Potting Shed on tables. There will be instructions of what quantity or number to take of the loose or bunched items inside. You will have to pack your own bag or box which usually takes 10 minutes.

Arrival at the farm - by car

From the carpark: Go through the metal gate and go straight on, passing the Epicentre (the big glass-fronted building and the barns on your left along the tarmac path. The next building is the Potting Shed/Greenhouse complex. Your box will be just inside the potting shed door. Any problems call Ben on 07922513704 or Luke on 07542437755.

If you've gone down the hill from the car park and found the bridge, you've gone the wrong way! Return up the hill to the tarmac path and go right.

Please park in the car park provided and make sure you lock your car. You will have to proceed about 150 yards on foot to get to the box.

Arrival at the farm - by foot or bicycle

You can get all the way to the Potting Shed by foot and you don't have to come in via the car park. You can come in along the public footpath that runs alongside Meanwood Beck. There are a few entry points into the farm on this path. For bicycle, you are welcome to take your bike round the gate and cycle up to the potting shed. You can either lock your bike at the bike rack next to the Dutch Barn or you are welcome to lock it temporarily to something that's lockable to and out of the way!

Wash your hands before taking your produce

Before you take your bags, please wash your hands. You can do this by finding the soap dispenser next to the door of the potting shed. Get some soap on your hands and then wash it off at the outdoor tap a bit further along the tarmac path.

Collection times

Collection for your box is on Wednesday evening 14:00 – 19:00 or Thursday 14:00 - 19:00. We want to be flexible but we would really like to make sure everyone comes by the end of Thursday. If you come after 19:00 there is a chance Ben or Luke will still be around so it's worth calling to find out.

In the event you can't come and pick up your produce - ask someone to pick up for you

If for any reason you can't come to pick up your produce, then in the first instance you can try and arrange for a friend/relative to pick it up for you. It is VERY important that you explain clearly how to pick a box or find someone who can help, or they'll arrive quite confused.

In the event nobody can pick up for you

If nobody can pick up for you and you simply can't arrange for produce to be brought to you, then unfortunately your produce will be forfeit and it will be distributed amongst volunteers and staff at the farm. It will make them very happy though!

If there is a significant amount of produce not taken away, then we donate it to Rainbow Junktion in Hyde Park, <http://rainbowjunktion.org.uk/>, who turn waste produce into tasty meals for the most vulnerable in society on a Pay as You Feel basis at their cafe in Hyde Park.

Complaints, feedback and compliments

As staff and your growers at Meanwood Valley Urban Farm, we aim to provide a service of a standard which is acceptable to all. If we fail to do this, we want to know about it. This will enable us to deal with the specific problem and avoid it happening again. If you're able to make your complaint known directly to the Community Growers, please pass on your complaint to Ben or Luke, either by emailing veg@mvuf.org.uk or by calling Ben on 07922513704 or Luke on 07542437755.

Alternatively

Alternatively you can email the CEO Adam Ogilvie at ceo@mvuf.org.uk

We greatly value all feedback, be it positive or negative. Please submit your feedback in the same way as you'd submit a complaint. We look forward to hearing all your different thoughts and experiences on this new and exciting project!

Volunteering at the farm

You are very welcome to come and volunteer with us to help us grow your own food!

Because we work closely with vulnerable groups and do relatively physical, outdoor tasks, you need to go through a volunteer induction process. You can find out all the information on how to volunteer online here: <https://www.mvuf.org.uk/garden/volunteering/>

Frequently Asked Questions

How much does a produce box cost per week?

The monthly or 6 months payment equates to £10 per box for a small box, £17.80 for a medium box, and £26.70 per box for a larger box. This is without a discount. Please see the 'Payment' section of the handbook for more information.

How many people does it feed?

Smaller box for 1 -2 people - £10 per week

Average box for 2 -3 people - £17.80 per week

Larger box for 4-6 people - £26.70 per week

Is the produce organic?

We farm using organic practices (such as using organic inputs, organic crop rotation, and not using chemical fertilisers or pesticides), but our land is not currently certified organic.

Are your inputs vegan?

No they are not. We use two non-vegan inputs: Blood and bone meal, which we buy in, and animal residues from the farm that we compost are used. Blood and bone meal is a by-product of the slaughter process and by no means leads the industry. We use a few kilos of powdered blood and bone per year. The animal residues from the farm are composted in our composting system before being applied to beds in the market garden. They are residues from ruminants, we don't compost poultry or pig compost.

What's in the salad bags?

You will get at least 100g of mixed salad. The different kind of leaves are:

Lettuce - 6 different varieties. 'Little gem', 'Romaine', 'Lolla Rossa', 'Forellenschluss', 'Black seeded simpson', 'Red salad bowl'. Orache - 'Purple Emperor'. Summer Purslane – wild. Spinach - 'Matador', 'Winter Giant'. Mibuna – wild. Mizuna - wild and 'red streaked'. Corn salad – wild. Rocket – wild. Kale - 'Red Russian'. Endive - 'Pancalieri' and 'Encornet de Bordeaux'. Chicory (Raddichio) - 'Vareigata di Castelfranco'. Sorrel – Wild. Fennel - 'Bronze'. Coriander - 'Calypso'

Can I choose/ customise what goes in my box?

No, every CSA member receives an identical share of the week's harvest. But you can substitute something you don't like for something you do from the substitutions box.

How do I pay for my box?

Online only - pay the 6-month amount upfront or pay weekly.

Do you ever deliver?

No, it is integral to the scheme that members come to collect their own produce as this helps to build community and gives you a sense of being part of the farm. By all means, members can organise amongst themselves to collect boxes on each others' behalf as a way to reduce the number of people collecting produce.

How do I pick-up from the farm?

Please refer to the 'Collection at the Farm' section of the handbook.

Are the boxes already assembled?

No. We want you to come and pack your own bag or box when you arrive.

How much packaging will the bags come with?

Contents will be loose, but compostable bags will be provided, and you are free to use them or not as you pack your box. This obviously minimizes packaging waste and allows you to bring your own packaging that suits you.

Am I likely to encounter other members of the public or staff when picking up my box?

Yes, you may even get to know the familiar faces. Do be prepared to explain what you are doing when you come to the farm if a staff member doesn't know who you are.

Can someone else collect on my behalf?

Yes, but please explain to them how they pick up and the requirement to wash their hands before packing their produce. If they have a problem, tell them to call Ben on 07922513704 or Luke on 07542437755.

What happens if I have COVID-19 symptoms or have contact with someone who has possible or confirmed COVID-19?

Try and arrange for someone else to pick it up for you. Don't come to the farm yourself. Follow the government's guidelines.

What happens if I go on holiday and can't collect my boxes?

We will not be able to issue refunds for missed or uncollected produce. Please tell us in advance if you are not going to be picking it up and cannot arrange for someone else to get it for you. In this case, your share would be distributed to volunteers or donated to charity.

How do I change or switch to a different size box?

You can switch your membership by sending us an email to veg@mvuf.org.uk stating the change in box size you wish to make. The change will come into effect two weeks after the request is made.

How do I cancel my order?

You can cancel by sending an email to veg@mvuf.org.uk saying that you wish to cancel. From the date you send the email to cancel, you will get 2 more weeks' worth of boxes. If you paid 6 months upfront, you will get a refund equivalent to the number of boxes you didn't receive. If you are paying weekly, your payment will simply be cancelled.

Can I pause my order?

We are unable to offer pauses. Please go to the FAQs or the 'Collection' section of the handbook to learn what you can do if you can't pick up your box.

What if I have a complaint to make regarding the CSA box scheme?

Please call or email us in the first instance to see if it can be resolved. If you are still not satisfied, please refer to our complaints procedure in the member's handbook.

How will I know about changes and updates in the CSA box scheme?

We will endeavour to give member-wide updates through our secure MailChimp account. If it's a major change or regarding a cancellation specific to one person, we will email you directly from veg@mvuf.org.uk or call/SMS you directly from 07922513704.

How do I volunteer?

We already have a weekly volunteering programme in place every week, Tuesday- Thursday where volunteers work and learn about market garden-scale food growing and as a member wishing to volunteer, you would join this group.

Box contents - Wednesday 28th June - 23rd November

The box contents below are during the main season, when most of the produce is coming from the Market Garden. During other months, we will email you in advance what will be in your box and where it comes from.

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: rhubarb, head lettuce, chard, kale, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 8 - 11

Wednesday 28th June

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Rhubarb, Broad beans, Courgettes, head lettuce, chard, kale, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 11 - 14

Wednesday 5th July

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Broad beans, peas,, chard, kale, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 11- 15

Wednesday 12th July

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Courgettes, chard, Broad beans, peas, radishes, kale, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Additional extras: Onions, potatoes

Number of different items: 12 - 15

Wednesday 19th July

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Tomatoes, Courgettes, chard, Broad beans, peas, kale, basil

Number of different items: 12 - 15

Wednesday 26th July

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Tomatoes, Courgettes, summer squash, chard, kale, basil

Number of different items: 11 - 14

Wednesday 2nd August

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, Courgettes, summer squash, chard, basil

Number of different items: 11 - 14

Wednesday 9th August

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Apples, cucumbers, tomatoes, courgettes, summer squash, chard, basil

Number of different items: 13 - 16

Wednesday 16th August

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Apples, cucumbers, tomatoes, courgettes, summer squash, chard, basil

Number of different items: 12 - 15

Wednesday 23rd August

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, Courgettes, summer squash, chard,

Number of different items: 13 - 16

Wednesday 30th August

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, aubergine, Courgettes, peppers, celery, apples, summer squash, chard, radishes, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 18 - 21

Wednesday 5th September

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, aubergine, Courgettes, peppers, celery, apples, summer squash, chard, radishes, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 18 - 21

Wednesday 12th September

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, aubergine, Courgettes, peppers, celery, apples, summer squash, chard, radishes, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 18-21

Wednesday 19th September

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, aubergine, Courgettes, peppers, celery, apples, summer squash, chard, radishes, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 19 - 22

Wednesday 26th September

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, aubergine, Courgettes, celery, apples, summer squash, chard, radishes, purple sprouting broccoli, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 18 - 21

Wednesday 3rd October

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, Courgettes, apples, summer squash, jerusalem artichokes, chard, radishes, purple sprouting broccoli, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 17 - 20

Wednesday 10th October

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, Courgettes, apples, jerusalem artichokes, chard, radishes, purple sprouting broccoli, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 16 - 19

Wednesday 17th October

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Cucumbers, tomatoes, Courgettes, apples, jerusalem artichokes, chard, radishes, at least 2 or 3 extra herbs

Number of different items: 15 - 18

Wednesday 25th October

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: Courgettes, apples, jerusalem artichokes, chard, radishes

Number of different items: 11 - 14

Wednesday 1st November

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: pumpkin, apples, jerusalem artichokes, chard, radishes

Number of different items: 11 - 14

Wednesday 8th November

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: pumpkin, apples, jerusalem artichokes, chard, radishes

Number of different items: 11 - 14

Wednesday 15th November

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: pumpkin, apples, jerusalem artichokes, chard, radishes

Number of different items: 11 - 14

Wednesday 22nd November

Likely unchanging items: Spring onions, carrots, beetroots, leeks, mixed salad, at least one herb

Likely other contents: pumpkin, apples, jerusalem artichokes, chard, radishes

Number of different items: 11 - 14

Why Meanwood Market Garden CSA?

Ben and Luke came up with the idea after being inspired by other Community Supported Agriculture schemes and veg box schemes around the country and became convinced that it was an extremely viable scheme for inner-city food growers.

Luke and Ben, with the help of many brilliant volunteers, have been slowly restoring the 1-acre market garden at the farm to full productivity. After 5 years of work and the support of so many people and organisations, we hope to have 100% of the market garden in production.

Both Ben and Luke both live within 30 minutes' walk from the farm - they are part of the locality. They wanted to grow high-quality, completely chemical free produce and make it a viable social enterprise that supports the farm and the wider community.

It was the combination of restoration and the desire to make a viable, urban community enterprise around high-quality fresh produce that birthed the CSA scheme that you are a part of. It is a way to restore and make productive extremely beautiful land in the city, whilst feeding people high quality produce from the land. What could be better?

The Market Garden

The market garden is predominantly where the produce is grown which comes from the Market Garden, but there are small pockets of herbs and wild areas which we also harvest from to put into the produce boxes.

The potting shed and greenhouse are where the majority of the plants start their life, grown from seed each year. We are extremely lucky to have such a well-made area like this to get the seedlings off to the best start.

Growing practices - Chemical free but not certified organic

In general, our practices would adhere to the requirements of a certified organic regime. We do not use any chemical fertiliser or pesticides whatsoever and we practice a long-term organic rotation. But we are not certified organic and cannot use the term organic to describe our produce.

We don't have certification because it is a lengthy and expensive process (roughly £500 a year just to have the license) and, in some ways, it actually would increase costs. It is well-known that the certification process does not cater easily to small-scale food growers. Even in the UK, our scale of food growing is usually termed 'micro', people just don't usually grow on such small amounts of land! That's not to say we shouldn't.

On a small scale, with small distances involved in the city to reach the eater, we can create a much more complex and resilient system that meets the needs of the producers and consumers more directly. This benefit unfortunately is not considered in standard organic certification.

Greenhouse - growing practices

The greenhouse uses a small heated area to germinate the seedlings. It is some highly insulated shelving with a heating element in it and a thermostat. We call it the germination chamber. It covers about a 2.5m x 2.5m space. All the watering is automated, which is far more efficient than hand watering. We use mains water for watering because of the extremely large expense in creating high quality rainwater that can be used in the greenhouse. We hope to make a system in the next 5 years that moves onto using rainwater.

'No plastic' soil block system

We are using and developing a 'no plastic' system that uses soil blocks to grow all the seedlings in. The soil is put into a press and then squeezed out into cubes that don't need a pot to keep their shape. For more information on soil blocks and how to make them, click onto this link: <https://www.chelseagreen.com/2020/ditch-the-pots-use-soil-blocks/>

There are a few crops that are too big to use soil blocks with - cucumber, tomatoes, aubergine, pumpkins and squashes. For them we use air pruning pots; they create a much better root system than a conventional pot.

Bought-in organic compost and fertilisers

We buy in the following compost and fertilisers and they are all certified organic: Seaweed meal, blood and bone meal, soft rock phosphate and sustainably harvested peat: (<https://moorlandgold.co.uk/product/test-product-copy/> . We use the meals in growing seedlings because they provide all the macro and micro nutrients that are needed for a healthy immune system.

We also add soil into our mixes, which is from the farm and fully alive!

Organic seed

We only use certified organic seed. To save money, we buy from <https://www.kingsseeds.com/> organic section. To really support an ethically-minded seed network, we try to buy most of our seeds from <https://seedcooperative.org.uk/> or <https://www.realseeds.co.uk/>

Bags and crates

Most of our bags are fully compostable, but we do use virgin plastic bags when we sell salad to wholesale (to greengrocers and restaurants) to increase shelf life.

Our harvesting crates, that you pick your produce from, have been bought second-hand.

Growing plants in the field or in the polytunnels

As said, previously, we grow plants on an organic rotation system, which is a standard system to prevent disease build up in the soil and to cycle nutrients efficiently. The composts that we add are made at the farm from the animals at the farm and from all the waste organic matter from the market garden.

Tillage

Our principle on the market garden is to adopt, as much as possible, a no-tillage practice, alongside keeping the soil covered as much as possible. To learn more about no-till or low-till systems, please click on this link: <https://www.agricology.co.uk/resources/no-till-growers-realising-promise-soil-health-organic-horticulture-part-1-helping-growers>

What is Community Supported Agriculture (CSA)?

Originating and first coined as a term in North America in the 1980s, Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) is a system that connects those that make the food and those that eat it within the food system more closely. It does this by allowing those that eat the produce to subscribe to the harvest of a certain farm or group of farms. It is an alternative socioeconomic model of agriculture and food distribution that allows the producer and consumer to share the risks of farming. The model is a subcategory of civic agriculture that has an overarching goal of strengthening a sense of community through local markets.

In return for subscribing to a harvest, subscribers receive either a weekly or bi-weekly box of produce or other farm goods. This includes in-season fruits and vegetables and can expand to dried goods, eggs, milk, meat, etc. Typically, farmers try to cultivate a relationship with subscribers by sending weekly letters of what is happening on the farm, inviting them for harvest, or holding an open-farm event. Some CSAs provide for contributions of labor in lieu of a portion of subscription costs.

A CSA veg box scheme is moreover a business model whereby the community literally buys into supporting the growth of their weekly produce. The growers get a guaranteed, fair income throughout the year, giving them the financial security to plan, propagate and plant.

As such, Community Supported Agriculture is as much about growing community as it is about growing vegetables.

Common practices

The CSA model is quite diverse in the UK, ranging from the purist model, where the farm is self-sufficient and receives regular support from members with farm work and administration, to models where the bulk of the work and organisation is by the farmer, with some supplementary produce bought in, during the hungry gap for instance. It is up to the farm and community to build a model which suits them best.

However the CSA is structured, certain common working practices are demonstrated by all CSA farms. These include:

Direct distribution

Members have a relationship with the producer and the production. CSA farms are not food hubs or shops; although they may buy in some produce or supplementary items to bulk up their share. The CSA scheme may run alongside other elements of the whole farm enterprise such as a farm shop or supplying to restaurants etc....

Shared risk

Producer and consumers share the risks of production through a pre-arranged agreement between members and the farm for instance on the crops to be grown and fair price to be paid or through investment in the farm (whether financial or through time commitment).

Connection to the farm

Members have the opportunity to understand the extraordinary commitment a farmer demonstrates to produce our food, and an opportunity to be connected to the working life of a farm and what's produced there.

Cae Tan CSA - example

A great example of a Community Supported Agriculture box scheme is Cae Tan CSA in Wales. Their website is here:

<http://www.caetancsa.org/en/>

Cae Tan runs a trainee scheme with one person from the UK and one person from Europe each year - each working with the team of growers for at least nine months to learn the key skills involved in market gardening. Their first trainee Lizzie became Cae Tan's second paid grower alongside Tom and is now a co-director, and both the second and third UK trainees Fran and Abbi have gone on to create their own growing businesses. Fran has set up a salad growing project supplying local businesses and shops and Abbi is beginning her first season on Gower's second CSA '[Big Meadow](#)'.

CSAs during the pandemic

The pandemic has highlighted the [weakness of the UK's food system](#), but alternative models like Community Supported Agriculture can serve as beacons of hope as we search for solutions. Growers and farmers, members and volunteers in CSAs across the country have been tirelessly working and quietly demonstrating the resilience of local food systems where the risks and rewards of farming are shared between the people producing the food and those they feed.

One of the strengths of CSA is that it is a flexible model that can be adapted to suit each community's needs. CSA responses to the current crisis have been equally diverse. Many have welcomed new members to accommodate increased demand. Several have organised members to make volunteer deliveries of veg to those who are self-isolating or vulnerable. All have come together as a community to ensure they're able to continue to offer the same local, fresh produce this season as they have in previous years despite the ongoing situation.

Who is Meanwood Valley Urban Farm?

Background

Meanwood Valley Urban Farm (The Farm) was one of the first three city farms in the UK and was registered as a charity in 1980. It began with two small fields and a few animals and has developed into a site of over 27 acres with 13 paid members of staff.

It comprises meadows, pastures, market and ornamental gardens, woodland and a variety of wildlife habitats.

The Charity's Objectives

1. To provide recreational facilities and green space for recreation and other leisure-time occupation in the interests of social welfare with the object of improving the conditions of life, providing connection and wellbeing for those living or working in Meanwood, Leeds and surrounding areas [hereafter known as the "area of benefit"], for the public benefit.
2. To promote the importance of restoring, maintaining and increasing biodiversity, our ecological impact, environmental awareness, and sustainable agriculture and horticulture, through the education of visitors and wider audiences through online platforms, for the public benefit.
3. For the public benefit, promote, sustain and increase individual and collective knowledge and understanding of sustainable agricultural and conservation principles including animal welfare, food production, and impacts on nature and ecology through both formal and informal education for all ages and abilities within the area of benefit.
4. To provide opportunities for education including personal and vocational skills development amongst those in need from the area of benefit, including young people and adults from disadvantaged backgrounds or with physical, cognitive or sensory impairments, for the public benefit.
5. To promote improvement to mental and physical health through a community programme of recreational and therapeutic activities and focussing on services for people from the area of benefit including those with physical, cognitive or sensory impairments; and those living with mental health issues, for the public benefit.

These objectives are fulfilled through a variety of activities that provide facilities for service users, the local community and beyond.

The Farm seeks to engage with local communities by inviting visitors to visit the Farm between 10:00 am and 4:00 pm every day of the year and by arranging events.

Action Days offer an opportunity for members of the public to support the Farm, other individuals volunteer on a weekly basis. The Farm seeks to educate visitors by demonstrating:

- ethical and sustainable methods of farming animals and offering a sample of the variety of breeds found in the UK including some rare or at-risk breeds
- organic and sustainable methods of growing vegetables and fruit and applying the same principles to the ornamental gardens
- developing and managing a variety of wildlife habitats
- environmental responsibility through conservation, recycling and sustainable activities.

Further information can be found on our website www.mvuf.org.uk or Facebook page <https://en-gb.facebook.com/MeanwoodValleyUrbanFarm/>

Services

Meanwood Valley Urban Farm is a busy educational farm and has 6 main programmes that fulfill its charitable objectives

ReConnect

This is a programme offered to young people experiencing difficulty in the classroom environment. In partnership with their school, students attend the Farm one or two days a week for a term or full academic year

ReConnect+ -

This is a programme offered to young adults between 19 and 26 undertaking a variety of tasks with the Education Team

HOOF

This is a programme offered to adults with learning disabilities who join either the Animal Care team or the Horticulture Team.

Schools

These are environmental education visits led by a member of the Education Team undertaking curriculum-related activities. There is also an Incubation Scheme with local primary schools and after the chicks are hatched, they are returned to the Farm.

Community Events and Celebration

A number of events are organised throughout the year including Easter Eggstravaganza, Summer Fayre & Duck Race, Seeking Santa and Carol Service Under the Barn. In addition, a number of third-party events are hosted including Meanwood Fest.

Market Garden Volunteering Programme

Described in more detail above, the market garden at the farm runs a weekly drop-in day where volunteers participate in all aspects of the market garden, from sowing seeds to renovating polytunnels. The market garden shows its appreciation to volunteers by giving away produce every week.