

Extending service provision through partnering with other professionals



David Rose explains how Farmeco Community Care Farm has developed and how his new eco-centre is utilised by community groups and individuals through an innovative partnership with a community interest company, Quercus Community.

- Farmeco Community Care Farm is a third generation 265 hectare farm enterprise situated about 12 miles north east of Nottingham. The farm aims to improve visitors' education and health while creating jobs, at the same time reducing the carbon footprint of food production.
- The farm has a new eco-centre which has been designed using sustainable principles, and is available for a wide-range of community uses. As well as LNFYS visits David hosts school visits and a holiday club, and the eco-centre is rented out to an organisation called Quercus Community who work with care farming clients.
- The centre has an adjoining sensory garden and small plots of arable crops as well as a purpose built teaching facility. Visitors often get involved in a wide-range of activities such as seasonal livestock tasks, hedge-laying and food preparation.

<http://www.farmeco.co.uk>

<http://www.quercuscommunity.co.uk>



As well as hosting visits you also work with individuals. How did you move on from a group structure to working with individuals?

Two people who used to work for Nottingham City Council, David and Julia, have professional experience of working with people with special needs. A couple of years ago they asked if their company, Quercus Community, could work with us and rent the eco-centre building two days a week. At that time people with special needs had a budget managed by the council but now that has changed and personalised budgets allow a person to choose what services they want to access. There are a range of options open to people with personalised budgets and we now provide one of those options locally. David and Julia also work with me to deliver visits on the remaining three days of the week, when they are not delivering personalised care services.

What would you say you have learnt, in terms of making what you have here financially sustainable, covering costs?

Funding is always difficult, grant funds are very competitive and whilst they may help with start up, it is not a medium to long term sustainable source of funding. There needs to be a funding mix made up of charging for what you can, for example through personal budgets, fund raising events linked to farming, open days, workshops and running special programmes. For example we're accessing personnel budgets and we are now delivering a project with local schools with at least two years of funding from a local trust. The project is called 'Seed to Sandwich'.

One of the issues for us has been our location and transport. To come out from any location, people need transport be it bus, car or taxi. Encouraging people from the inner city has been especially difficult as we haven't the money to pay for everyone's' transport.

How did you find out about the local trust?

They found out about us, a gentleman from the trust in question liked what we were doing and said we could apply for something if we wanted to. So we did, and they have part funded a kitchen and then supported the idea for a schools project.



What is your long-term plan?

The long-term plan is to deliver a health project that builds rural resilience that is not just for people with special needs but for everyone within the community, creating opportunities for people to live longer within the local area without having to go into care homes. It's a process of training and supporting people to manage their own health and wellbeing as well as to help others through diet, exercise, stress reduction and community networking.

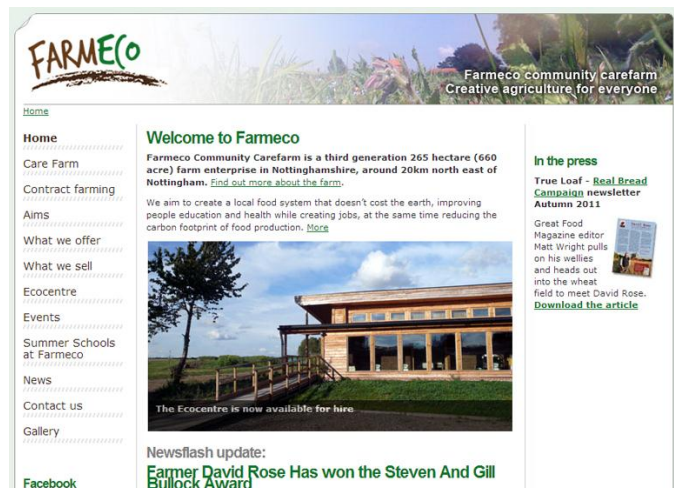
Do you envisage visitors paying for themselves or referred by GPs?

We hope for GP referrals but also think that there are enough 'silver surfers' in this area with small amounts of disposable income that they could pay for a service. We are working with a Nottingham University Researcher to promote 'Green Care' to GPs.

What are your other plans for the future?

We will start working very heavily on care and health issues because I believe that we need to 'grow' people as well as food. I think longer term that is where there is a need to sustain village life and money will come in.

In addition we will develop the new kitchen as a facility where we can teach healthy eating to everybody including 'ladies that lunch'. The can also be offered to corporate clients who can afford to pay, and that will help subsidise some of the other activities and visits we want to do.



How much does it cost to run this building on a weekly basis, i.e. what is the revenue you need to bring in for this to be sustainable?

I think you need at least £100 a week just for the building to stand empty. If you look at it commercially, when you have two paid staff here it needs to bring in £300 or £400 per day, which includes on-going costs for the classroom, insurance and delivery time. So on a user pays model we're looking at least £10 a head.



Do you see any value in making a pitch as a consortium with other farmers for funding bids?

I would have thought so; also GP's would only see it as an opportunity if there was critical mass with other people doing something similar. Long term I think you will see farms all around the country doing it, the amount of people who ask me about it, there is a real opportunity to sell the template.

Farmeco Community Care Farm is a social enterprise company but you're not a charity at the moment, so in terms of pitching to the trust how was that?

In the end the trust wasn't bothered whether we were a charity, they just wanted to know that it would be something that was deliverable. The kitchen they funded is a major part of the construction of the building and they were happy to support it. The payment for the 75 school visits is made through the farm. In terms of setting up as a social enterprise, you need a consultant to hold your hand and go through it.

In a nutshell!

- David is committed to developing people and building rural resilience. He was approached by two people who had heard about his eco-centre and asked if they could rent the building two days a week to offer care services to individuals.
- David also approached a local trust who have funded a new kitchen facility and 75 school visits.
- The two people who hire the facility, David and Julia, also help deliver school visits and LNFYS visits.
- The trust funding for school visits will help the centre to be financially sustainable for the next two years.
- David's vision is for a health project for everyone within the community, creating opportunities for people to live longer by looking at diet, exercise, and stress reduction.
- There is not one sector of care, education or health that would make the centre viable, so it is important to offer a range of services and access different funding sources.
- Consider offering services to corporate clients who can afford to pay to subsidise other activities.

