

your *green.* business opportunity

Case Study **02** Whitmuir the Organic Place

Whitmuir the Organic Place is a farm with a strong commitment to food quality, biodiversity and sustainability. Although it has required extra investment of time and money, this self-imposed obligation is the key marketing strength of the enterprise providing it with a competitive edge to take on large supermarkets.



Bringing change to life

Business Benefits

- Business ideals drive forward strong PR which leads to increased sales.
- Engagement and education of visitors helps to create a market for organic foods and produce.
- Investment in green technology lowers bills and will have paid for itself in the next 4-6 years.

Wider Benefits

- Improved biodiversity from diversification and organic farming practices.
- Opening up access to an area previously shut off to people, including marked trails.
- Educates consumers about the benefits of sustainable farming and fresh organic produce.

Awards

Natural and Organic Awards, 2011 - Best UK Organic Retailer
Scottish Farmer, 2011 - Lifestyle Supplier of the Year
Vision in Business for the Environment of Scotland, 2011 - Finalist
Tourism Innovation Award, 2011

Context

Whitmuir Farm was formerly a sheep farm which was bought by Peter Richie and Heather Anderson in 2001. They had the radical ambition of running the farm in the most sustainable and environmentally sensitive way possible. At the same time, they embarked upon an innovative marketing and engagement strategy to bring customers directly to their farm and to educate them about the benefits of organic food production. This has paid off with a subscription scheme whereby customers commit to paying for produce in advance.

The enterprise is located in West Linton, 16 miles south of central Edinburgh, on a 56ha site which is disadvantaged in farming terms by being around 300 metres up on a North facing slope. Around 25% of the land is under woodland, hedges and shelter belts.

The farm stocks 6 different types of livestock. In addition to the local tradition of farming sheep and cattle, Whitmuir has chickens, turkeys and pigs. Polytunnels and the re-establishment of hedges to shelter growing areas, enable 30 different types of vegetables and crops to be grown.

All of the farm's produce is sold directly through the farm butchery, shop and restaurant. There is also a bakery and the farm hosts bee-keeping facilities, an organic flower growing enterprise, an apothecary's garden and community allotments.

So how can a small scale business with a strong commitment towards sustainability be profitable in the face of an aggressively priced marketplace dominated by the multinationals? The answer is very much in pursuing ideals in tandem with the creation of an informed and supportive public.

Farm Supporters' Scheme

The business believes that farming should be a trusted relationship between the producer and consumer. This initiated their decision to adopt an alternative food distribution model called the Farm Supporters' Scheme.

This is based on a direct food distribution system popular in Japan called Teikei. In practice, every two months members pay a standing order, to purchase an agreed amount of food from the farm.

Over 300 people have joined the scheme since 2006, making it one of the largest community supported agriculture projects in the UK. This provides the enterprise with an assured income equivalent to around one-third of its income.





It also gives the enterprise an increased understanding of its market and provides a steady cash flow. Crucially, this enables the farm to plan with confidence and invest in the development of the business.

The benefits to the customers are that they know much more about the food which they and their family eat and how it is grown. They have a direct relationship with the farmers and are even able to influence what the farm shop stocks.

Better Biodiversity through Farming

The absence of chemicals and pesticides on the farm lowers production costs. As an organic and sustainable replacement to these increasingly costly raw materials, waste from one farming activity, such as broccoli stalks, goes into pig feed and waste from pigs is spread onto to fields where crops are grown.

This holistic approach to farming has not only reduced production costs and created a network of organic shoppers, it has encouraged wildlife to return to the farm including otters, owls, deer, badgers, bats and birdlife.

Creating a Visitor Destination

Whitmuir the Organic Place has been created and marketed as a visitor attraction. It hosts a variety of events and activities which have direct spin-off benefits including increased sales for the farm shop.

Over 75,000 people visited the farm in 2011 and they were all challenged to think more about what they eat and where food comes from. There are regular educational walks from the Farm and presentations take place in the building, such as wine tasting or organic growing.

“We shop there because we care about the food we eat. We want to know how the meat is reared and how the veg is grown.”

Mrs Philips, a member of the Farm Supporters’ Scheme.

Reducing Costs Through Sustainability

Low carbon and green technology practices have been adopted throughout the site.

The creation of the new restaurant and shop building, which opened in 2009, included several innovative components such as solar power, sheepswool insulation and a ground source heat pump. Although these resulted in a higher capital cost, they will have paid for themselves within 4 to 6 years, after which the buildings will have minimal running costs.

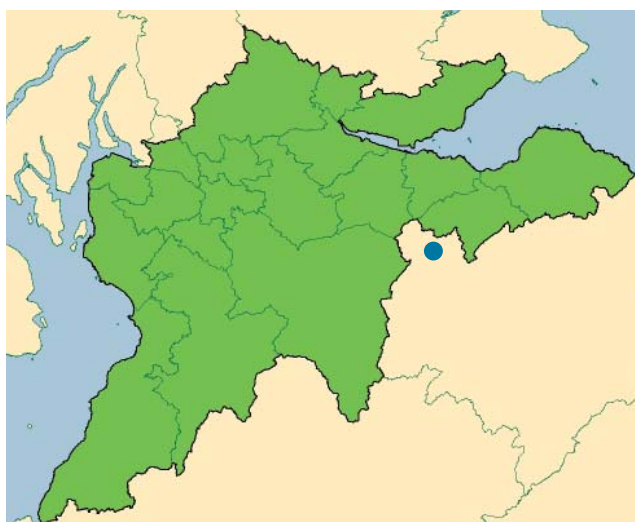
As a result of this investment, the business has already reduced electricity usage to just 450kw per day and only 200kw on a sunny day.



Costs and Value

- Sustainable ideals drive forward strong PR which leads to farm visits and increased sales.
- Over 300 people have signed up to an innovative Farm Supporters' Scheme which provides the business with an assured client base for organic foods and produce.
- Investment in green technology has enabled the business to reduced electricity usage to just 450kw per day and only 200kw on a sunny day. This investment will have paid for itself in the next 4-6 years.

The map shows Whitmuir Farm in relation to the CSGN area



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The CSGN will change the face of Central Scotland by restoring and improving the rural and urban landscape of the area.

What is the CSGN?

The CSGN is one of the 14 national developments in the National Planning Framework 2. It is the biggest greenspace project in Europe and will help to make Central Scotland a more attractive and distinctive place to live, to visit and to do business. The CSGN has wide political and partner support and an all encompassing remit, far beyond just a 'green' initiative, with economic development very central on the agenda.

What are these Case Studies for?

These case studies demonstrate that green network and green infrastructure approaches can save money and create better solutions for businesses. They are intended to inspire other businesses to take similar approaches and to inform interested parties, such as planning authorities, in order to encourage a supportive environment for such initiatives.

Getting in Touch

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For further information on the CSGN and other case studies please visit: www.centralscotlandgreennetwork.org

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