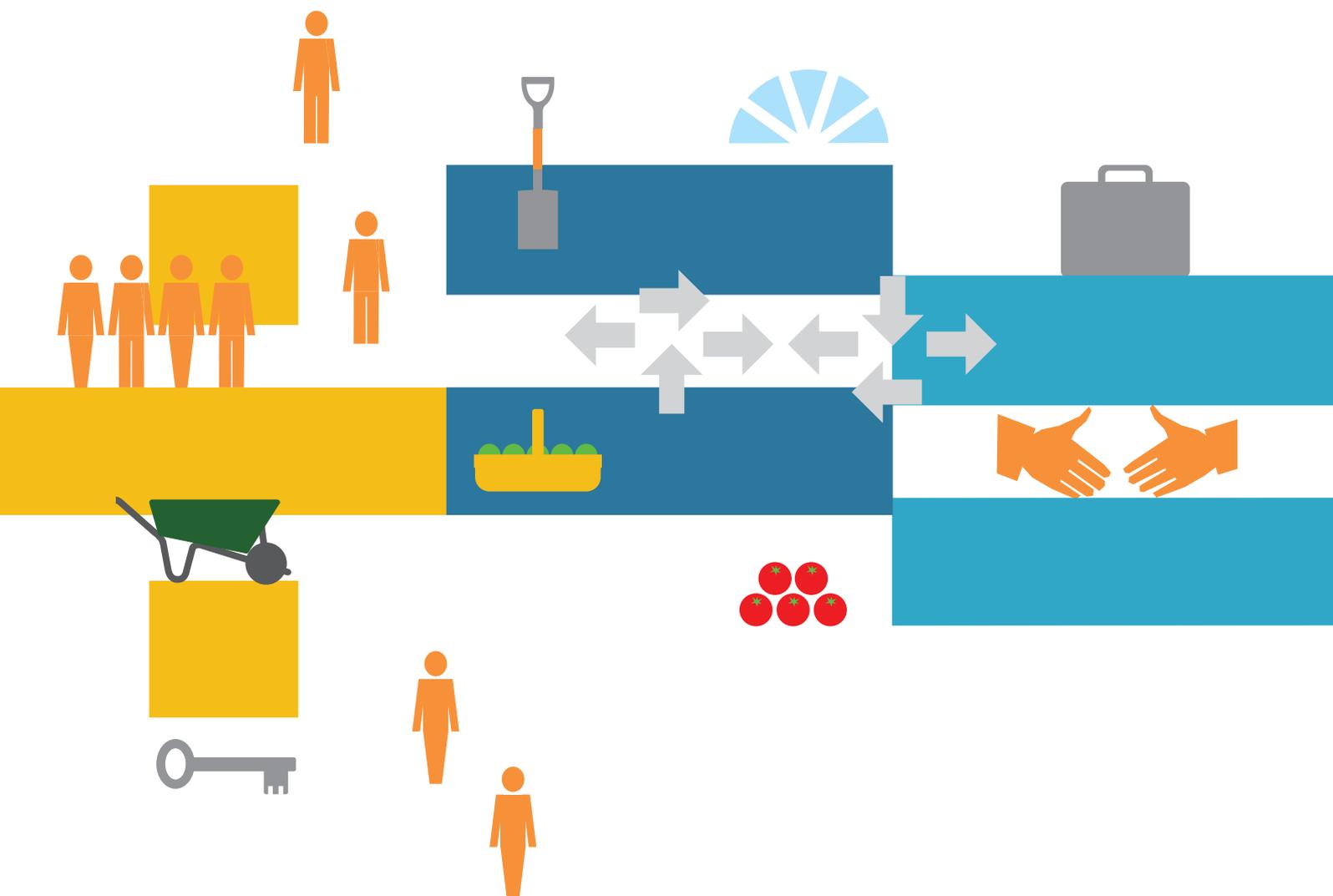


# GROWING FOR CHANGE: CREATING GOOD LIVELIHOODS FOR A BETTER FOOD SYSTEM A GUIDE FOR COMMUNITY FOOD ENTERPRISES



Written by Chris Walker

**SHARED ASSETS**

# INTRODUCTION

**Across the UK, community food enterprises (CFEs) are proving the potential for local collective action. Thousands of small-scale ecological farms, market gardens, community-supported agriculture projects, and local veg box schemes are offering an alternative to our global industrialised food system. Run in and for their local communities, CFEs are providing seasonal, sustainable, locally grown food for local people. They are rebuilding relationships between producers, businesses and consumers, instilling cultures of collaboration and fair trade. Perhaps most significant for our local economies, they are helping people build rewarding land-based livelihoods as part of local enterprises operating across the supply chain.**

This isn't just a case of doing business ethically. Many CFEs see their role as working within our food system in order to change it. They are growing demand for good food and good work, changing attitudes among consumers and businesses, challenging government policy, and building the case for radical changes in our food system. What's more, they are doing this whilst running viable enterprises.

This is difficult. In an economy where land prices are high, food prices are low, big business dominates our high streets, and land work is undervalued, CFEs face multiple barriers to success. In putting social value before or alongside profit and growth, it can be hard to secure the resources they need. Yet CFEs are contributing to the development of resilient local economies and playing an essential role in helping land workers overcome the barriers to developing sustainable livelihoods.

Shared Assets supports the management of land for the common good. Through our Better Land-based Economies project (2015-17), we have worked with and supported three leading community food enterprises, Ecological Land Cooperative, Kindling Trust and Organiclea, over two years as they worked to access land, grow their businesses and create new livelihoods. This work was funded by Friends Provident Foundation.

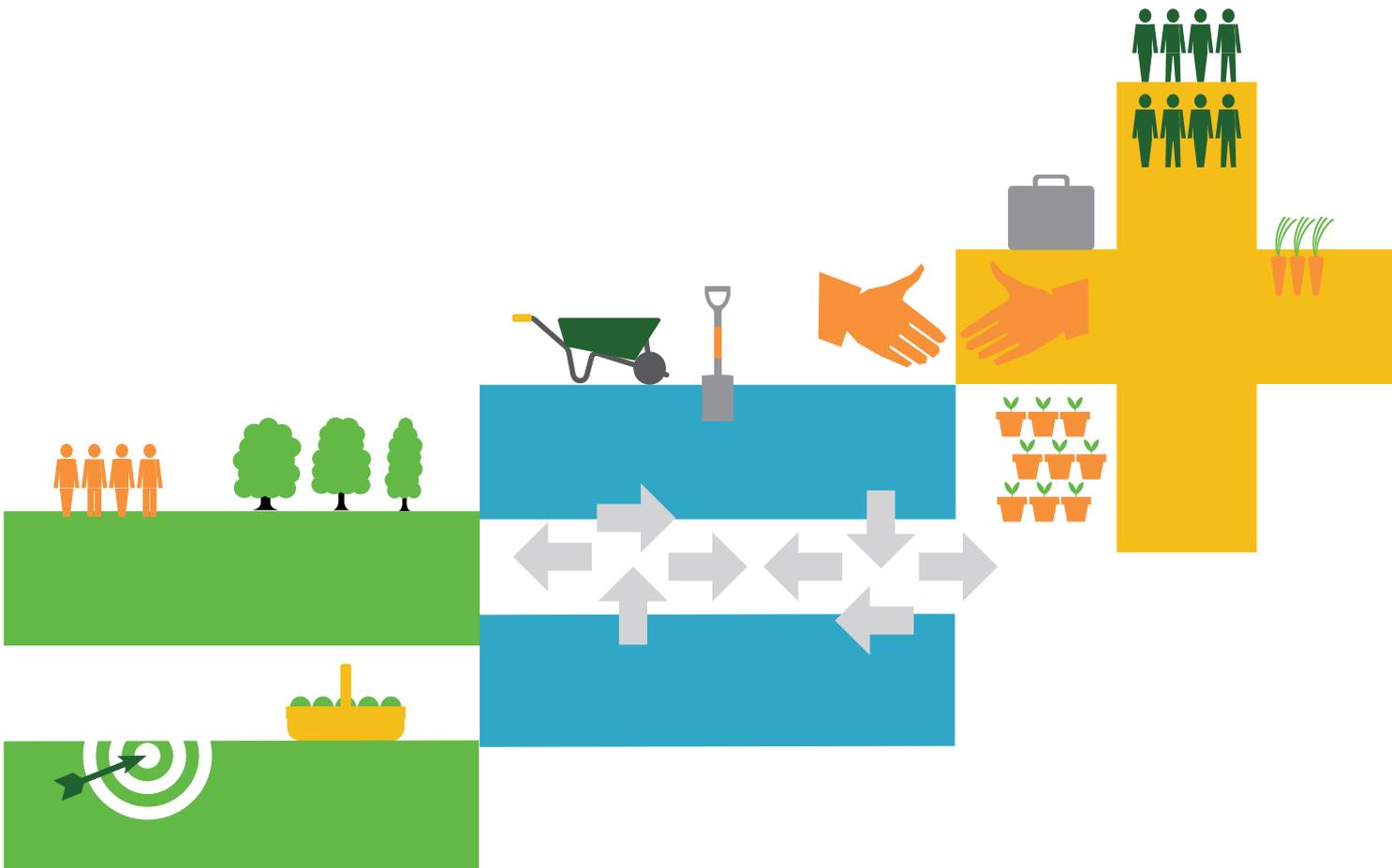
Our work with these organisations, and the experiences of many others, demonstrate the range of creative ways CFEs help land workers build sustainable livelihoods within our current food system. We've learnt that this requires CFEs to not only be resilient themselves, but also to operate within wider clusters or networks of businesses, community groups and services that form the basis for resilient local food economies.

## What's a community food enterprise?

Community food enterprises don't simply produce, process or distribute food. They operate at a local level, working in and for their local community. Consisting of small-scale farms or market gardens, community-supported agriculture schemes, local veg box services, and many other enterprise models, they aim to provide multiple services and social benefits. This can include learning and training through food activities, improved wellbeing through the delivery of physical and mental health services, providing healthy food and green space, strengthening local trade, or encouraging green growing and business practices. The recent 'Making Local Food Work' programme estimated that there are 12,000 members of community food networks in the UK. Research for the programme estimated that the total value of the community food sector is between £77 million and £150 million a year ('Crabtree, T., Morgan, K., & Sonnino, R., (2012), **Prospects for the Future: Scaling up the Community Food Sector**, Plunkett Foundation).

## Using this guide

This guide is for community food enterprises. It is designed to help you recognise where your work sits within a broader movement to change our food system and create good land based livelihoods. It can help you identify and develop priorities and strategies to support the creation of livelihoods and the development of resilient organisations, and to build networks with others to improve your impact.



# SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

**For many people in the UK, land-based work is associated with low pay and low security. In our global food economy, this is all too often the case. Our supermarket supply chains currently rely on low-cost seasonal labourers who are some of the most vulnerable workers in our economy. Creating good work is key to building a better food system. That's difficult when the costs of living, land and housing are high, and income from land work can be low and precarious.**

**The Better Land Based Economies project has identified a number of ways in which CFEs are supporting land workers to develop sustainable livelihoods.**

## Reducing costs

The costs associated with grow-to-sell and new enterprise start-ups, and the general cost of living, are perhaps the biggest challenges for new entrants in to the UK food sector. The highest cost is usually land. Due to a lack of regulation and a public subsidy system that favours large landowners, land at market rate is often prohibitively expensive. Access to affordable housing is also a problem for many new entrants. Therefore, land workers and new growing businesses often need support in making the case to local authorities and other landowners for low-cost leases in return for the delivery of social outcomes. Securing social investment can also enable CFEs to purchase land which they are then able to make available to growers at reduced cost. For example, Ecological Land Cooperative raises money through issuing community shares and buys larger sites at a lower price per acre which it then makes available to growers as low-cost smallholdings. In doing so it distributes costs like infrastructure, planning applications and monitoring.

## Managing risk

There is inherent risk in setting up a new enterprise. Land workers' income depends on people buying their produce and enterprises need to know that distributors, restaurants or retailers will work with them. Established CFEs, including Kindling Trust in Greater Manchester and Organiclea in London, support new growers by committing to buy their produce for their box schemes, or introducing them to businesses and retailers they have already worked with. In Devon and Cornwall Tamar Grow Local worked with Plymouth City Council to create a veg bag scheme for local housing association tenants. This provided new growers with a guaranteed market, enabling them to take the risk of establishing their businesses. Linking growers to consumers via established relationships is a key way to help growers secure an income.

## Building skills

New entrants to small-scale, ecological growing rarely come from a farming background and training can be hard to come by. Setting up an enterprise, marketing and selling also requires training. CFEs and training organisations are helping to fill a gap left by mainstream vocational training and work-based learning. There is a growing number of centres providing accredited training, work placements and mentoring in land work, organic growing, community horticulture work, start-ups, and enterprise skills. Yet mentoring for new entrants can be just as effective. Farm incubator programmes like Kindling Trust's Farm Start can not only help provide resources, but offer ongoing advice from experienced workers.

## Supporting wellbeing

Land work is demanding. The combination of physical graft, a low and precarious income, and running an enterprise can take its toll on workers. The CFEs we have worked with report that even the most dedicated land workers find it tough. Whilst no CFE could make land work easy, providing mentoring, facilitating spaces to share experience, and linking workers to wider networks can all help sustain new entrants.

## Retaining assets

Small-scale enterprises require a range of assets to be viable. Among other things, this includes buildings, infrastructure and equipment. New entrants rarely have the capital to invest in all of these assets. Yet they need not own them all, or have sole use of them. Established and larger enterprises can have a role in securing and retaining valuable assets like glasshouses, storage space, vehicles and tools in order to loan or share them with others.

### RENETA / Farm Incubators

RENETA is the French network of farm incubators. Incubators support entry into farming by providing technical support and mentoring, access to land and equipment, and local connections, to new farmers, while limiting their risks. They have developed rapidly since 2007, thanks to the involvement of farmers' associations, rural development associations, vocational training centres, community-supported agriculture groups, local authorities, and others. As of 2017 there are about 50 operating farm incubators, and 25 in development.



### Tamar Grow Local

Tamar Grow Local supports community food projects and enterprises in the Tamar Valley in Devon and Cornwall. As well as helping create over 20 community food initiatives it has also developed a second layer of initiatives that provide the infrastructure they need to thrive. These include a cooperative market stall, food hubs, equipment bank and a shared processing kitchen. By holding these assets on behalf of the growers Tamar Grow Local ensures that they are retained within the local food system even as individual projects and enterprises come and go.



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# RESILIENT ORGANISATIONS

**If community food enterprises are to support land workers in our current food system, they must be able to face challenges and uncertainty themselves. CFEs may directly employ a collective of workers, or work with a network of growers and other workers to support them. Either way, sustainable livelihoods need resilient enterprises. Through the Better Land Based Economies project, Shared Assets has observed some common features of resilient CFEs:**

- They have a **diversity of income streams**, for example through selling produce, delivering health and wellbeing services, and training. Income may include a combination of sales, contracts, investments and grants.
- They have an **asset base**, either through ownership or secure tenure of the land, buildings and equipment they operate with.
- They take a **considered and organic approach to organisational growth** that strengthens their social value and sustainability.
- They demonstrate **good governance**, placing workers at the centre of management decisions, supporting cooperative working and strengthening the sense of workplace community.
- Finally, as the next section explores, they contribute to and **operate within a resilient local food economy** run and supported by a by a network or 'cluster' of organisations with which they collaborate.



# GROWING LOCAL FOOD CLUSTERS

**Sustainable livelihoods, and indeed resilient organisations, depend on resilient local economies. No single enterprise can create all the conditions for good land based livelihoods to flourish. Local food economies require the establishment of networks or ‘clusters’ of collaborative enterprises, organisations and services delivering complementary functions. CFEs often play a role in forming and facilitating these clusters. Together, a local food cluster provides the range of tailored support needed for both new entrants and established land workers. They also provide the broader economic opportunities and conditions within which land workers and CFEs operate.**

Some of these bodies are necessarily based in the local community. Yet in order to access the knowledge, finance and other resources they need, they must also work with networks and organisations that are regional, national or even global. A CFE may play multiple roles. The following diagram explores the range of roles and function that Shared Assets think are integral to a local food cluster.

The following roles are often central to the role of community food enterprises. Together these roles contribute to their diverse incomes streams and their multiple social impacts.

## Supporting new entrants

CFEs and other bodies help new entrants with training and mentoring, accessing land and equipment and finding routes to local markets. Reducing both costs and financial risk for new entrants is key, and active support for workers’ wellbeing is often required. This can be delivered through tailored ‘farm start’ or ‘incubator’ programmes.

## Supporting established land workers

Either by directly employing land workers or committing to trade with them, CFEs and other enterprises sustain livelihoods on an ongoing basis. A range of enterprise activities directly support this, including growing, distribution, processing and marketing.

## Service delivery

CFEs often provide social benefits beyond employment and food production through delivering other services for local people. Examples include education, health and social care through volunteering, healthy eating awareness, access to green space, and training. These services embed local food economies in the community, deliver broader economic benefits and diversify income and opportunity for land workers.

## Advocacy

Viable local food economies depend on local awareness and cooperation, as well as the right policy conditions. Outreach and education activities build support among potential customers, businesses and services. A responsive local authority can help provide resources, raise local awareness and offer conditions for security. Regionally, nationally and globally, campaign groups create pressure for policy change to support a more just and sustainable food system.

## Providing resources

A range of services help enterprises and land workers access the resources they need, such as finance and land. Social investors (including finance institutions or crowdfunding schemes) or trusts contribute to the financial stability of the local food economy and help protect against risk. Local authorities, land owners and land cooperatives can support ownership of land, or access to land at affordable rates and with secure tenure.

## Business support

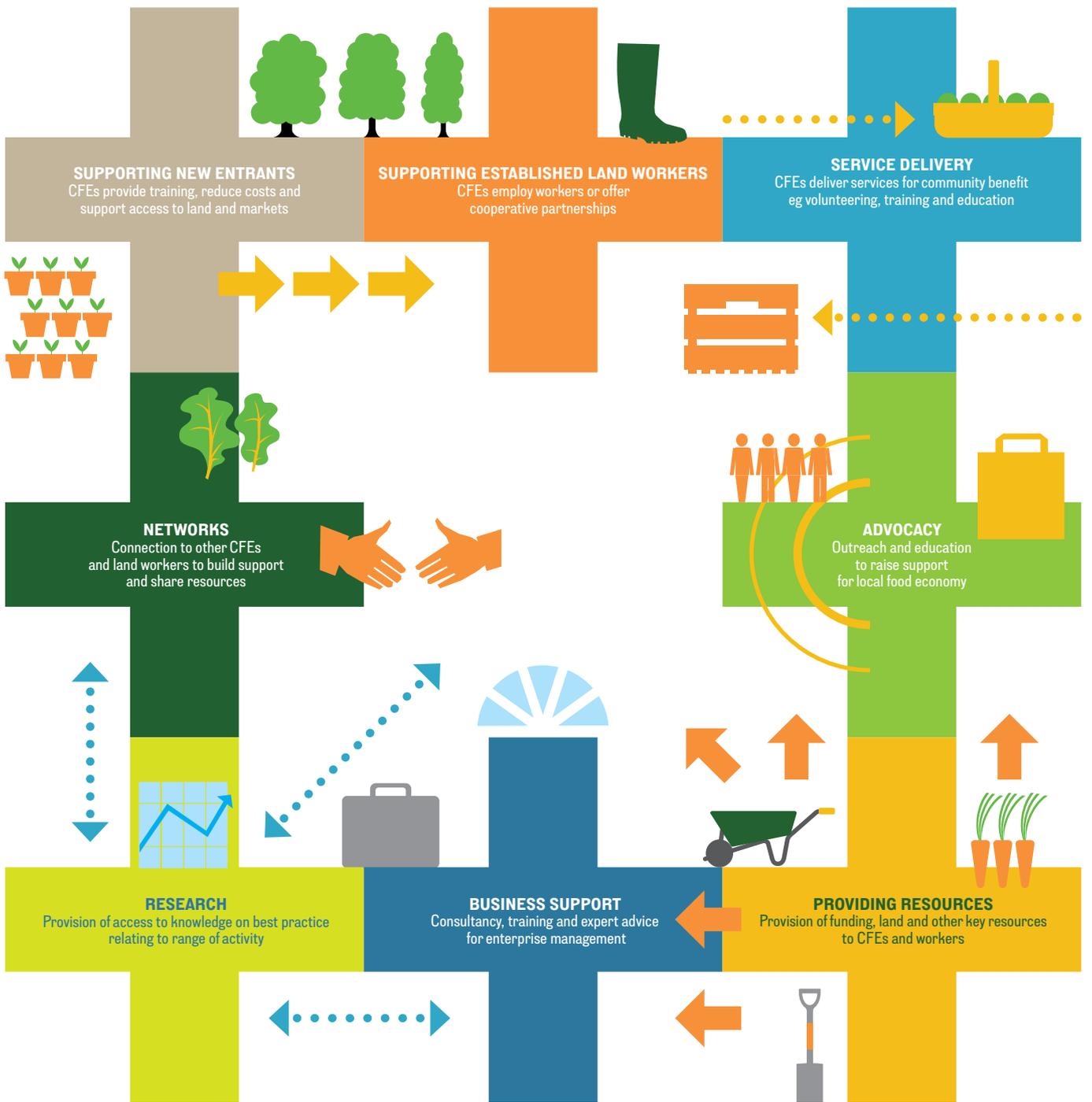
Consultancy services, training programmes and advice schemes provide enterprises with support in running organisations well. This may include supporting business model development, good governance, financial management, human resources management and other needs such as advice on planning.

## Research

Institutions, enterprises and individuals share knowledge to improve production, enterprise management and service delivery. They provide evidence for best practice across a range of topics, eg, organic growing, social investment, therapeutic horticulture. This improves CFE's impact and helps them build support for their work.

## Networks

Both CFEs and individual land workers are connected to networks to share resources knowledge and experience, provide mutual support, build community and create collective pressure for change.



# EXERCISE: A GUIDED EXPLORATION FOR GROUPS

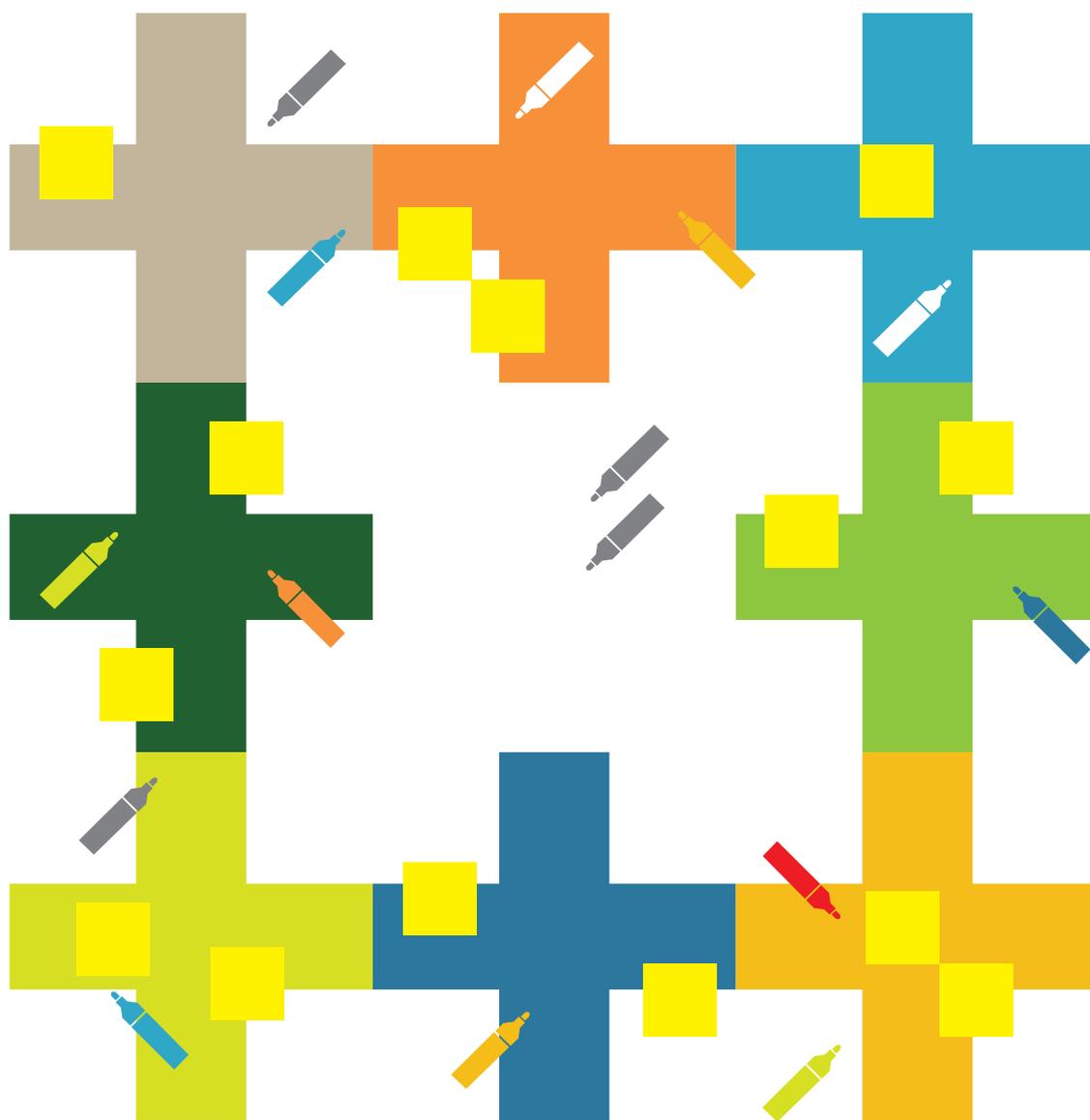
**The following exercise is designed to help groups running CFEs to explore how you support sustainable land-based livelihoods.**

It may help you:

- assess how well you support local workers' livelihoods
- consider how you can monitor your impact
- describe the benefit of your activities to a local authority, funder or potential partner in the context of supporting livelihoods

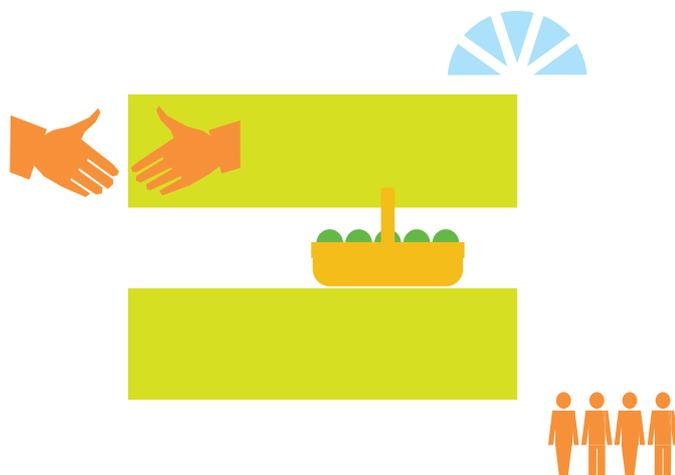
A similar exercise could be run for group setting up a CFE. Simply reframe the exercise and questions on p11 to focus on what your planned CFE hopes to offer, or what it could potentially offer.

**You will need big piece of paper or large whiteboard, pens and post-it notes.**



## Guide for facilitators

- 1 Ask the group:
  - a What is a sustainable livelihood?
  - b In our local community, what enables us to grow sustainable livelihoods?
  - c What are the current barriers to this?
- 2 Draw a spider diagram with your CFE at the middle, surrounded by the modes of support under 'Growing sustainable livelihoods' on pages 7 and 8.
- 3 Using post-it notes, add examples of how you achieve these modes of support.
- 4 When you've done this, discuss where your strengths and weaknesses lie. Ask the group to answer the following questions:
  - a Overall, how well do we support sustainable livelihoods?
  - b What could we do better?
  - c What organisations and services in our community and beyond could help us support new entrants?
- 5 Together, explore the diagram illustrating the range of roles in a local food cluster. Ask the group:
  - a What roles do we, or could we, play?
  - b Are others delivering the functions that we don't?
  - c Which bodies can we engage with to strengthen our local food cluster?
- 6 Agree how to record the conclusions of your conversation. Could you write them up as the beginning of an organisational development plan or a strategy? Think about when in the future you need to consider the needs and aspirations you've identified.



# FURTHER RESOURCES

## In this series

**Local economic resilience: the part you play**  
A guide for community food enterprises

**Access to land: working with local authorities**  
A guide for community food enterprises

**Understanding the planning system**  
A guide for smallholders and community food enterprises

**Essential rural workers' accommodation for small-scale agriculture**  
A guide for local authorities

**Local economic resilience: the role of community food enterprises**  
A guide for local authorities

You can find these resources at:  
[www.sharedassets.org.uk/innovation/local-land-economies/](http://www.sharedassets.org.uk/innovation/local-land-economies/)

## Networks for change

**The Land Workers' Alliance:** for farmers, growers and land-based workers campaigning for policies to support their livelihoods [www.landworkersalliance.org.uk](http://www.landworkersalliance.org.uk)

**Sustain:** run a range of campaigns and projects in support of better food and farming  
[www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)

**Community Food Growers Network:** a London-based support network of food projects putting land into community use [www.cfgn.org.uk](http://www.cfgn.org.uk)

**La Via Campesina:** an international movement of peasants and small- to medium-scale farmers <https://viacampesina.org>

## Project Partners

**Shared Assets** is a think and do tank that provides practical advice, support and training to landowners and communities who want to manage land as a sustainable and productive asset [www.sharedassets.org.uk](http://www.sharedassets.org.uk)

**Kindling Trust** support new organic growers in Greater Manchester through their FarmStart training programme, and have established and support a cooperative of growers and buyers, and a worker owned organic box scheme [www.kindling.org.uk](http://www.kindling.org.uk)

**Organiclea** run an organic market garden, a veg box scheme, provide training for new growers in London, and help them access land and set up new enterprises  
[www.organiclea.org.uk](http://www.organiclea.org.uk)

**Ecological Land Cooperative** secure land to develop affordable sites for farming, forestry and other rural enterprises, and opportunities for ecological land-based businesses in the UK  
[www.ecologicaland.coop](http://www.ecologicaland.coop)

**Friends Provident Foundation** is a grant-making charity whose Building Resilient Economies programme aims to contribute to a more resilient, fairer and sustainable economic system  
[www.friendsprovidentfoundation.org](http://www.friendsprovidentfoundation.org)

