

Community approach to create a dream farm enterprise

COSTING THE DREAM
 What appears to be a rural idyll is entrepreneur Tim Waygood's unique community-based, sustainable and welfare-based project, reports Annie Counsell

For some people, running their own business is a dream. For others, it is a mission. In Tim Waygood's case, it is both.

Nestled in the rolling hills and fields of North Hertfordshire, Church Farm's 175 acres are piloting an "Agrarian Renaissance" - a far-reaching project to create a traditional, mixed, sustainable and high-welfare food and farming system. Waygood enthusiastically describes it as a "place for wildlife, beauty, diversity, community and people, as well as a place to produce authentic local food".

Still in its infancy - the cattle, sheep, pigs, chickens, geese and ducks arrived just a year ago and the organic gardens and new orchards have yet to bear fruit - the farm buzzes with human activity and the livestock graze contentedly. Schoolchildren arrive to feed the chickens and pigs, located near the bucolic village centre of Ardeley with its historic church, thatched cottages, pond and village stall selling the farm's eggs.

On first appearances, it seems to be a rural idyll, but much more lies behind the scenes. Waygood was driven to establish the project - along with other like-minded locals, family members, friends, and backing from organisations (such as the Royal Veterinary College) - "to build a sustainable, resilient source of great food for us and the community". He says: "Sustainable means



drastically reducing fossil fuel inputs from farm to fork, by creating a diversified, localised food system."

Waygood wants to involve households and investors to help create a secure, affordable, sustainable lifestyle which is an alternative to supermarket dependence.

He is passionate about finding an alternative to agribusiness, supermarkets and the corporate food industry. "I am dreaming with my eyes open," he says. "Things can happen, and there is room and enough money in the food chain for us. Tesco, for example, has to pay for HR (human resources) departments and run huge offices. It also incurs massive freight costs. The wheat cost of a loaf of bread - at farm gate prices - is only five pence. We can compete."

Waygood is a social entrepreneur - and one part of his big picture is already taking shape.

"Agrarian Renaissance exists to create replicable models and therefore create change," he says. The furthest forward is "Rural Care" which involves former drug addicts, mentally ill patients and the disabled who come to the farm for

work/therapy and interaction, as well as imbibing the whole picture of nature and wildlife.

This generates income from Social Services, engages people in the project, provides positive benefits and contributes to the community as a whole.

"With care farming, this is one example of a win-win model and an early success," he says. "We intend to lower the entrance hurdle for other farmers, growers and/or therapists from £50,000-£100,000 to £5,000-£20,000 to set up."

"This division has become cash positive after four months and we expect it to provide an income of between £15,000 and £20,000 for others who take up this 'social franchise'. Work is in progress, but we will not be rolling this out until late summer."

"Overall, we have invested over £800,000 to date, financed by remortgaging my house, cashing in all Peps and Isas and a bank loan. We aim to raise up to £20m over the coming 25 months," he adds.

The figures look daunting, but Waygood has a background of success and a hard-nosed business instinct. He

Animal farm: welfare, society and community are the focus of Tim Waygood's vision for sustainable farming

Daniel Lynch

jokes that he managed to get a degree in agriculture from Reading University by not being there. "I was known as the 'ghost'," he says.

While doing a paper on "rural diversification", Waygood was busy putting it all into practice, hence not attending lectures. He established MotivAction - a team-building/corporate entertainment company on the farm premises that his grandfather took on in 1958 - Church Farm.

Waygood says that it took from 1987 to 1994 to make a profit, but then turnover went from £2m to £10m in a few years as people bungee-jumped on board. The venture even included Russian cosmonauts.

A stint at Harvard Business School and, later, a bout of pneumonia changed Waygood's outlook. Sweating and crawling to the bathroom, he thought "what if I had only two more years to live? Setting a self-imposed deadline of two years, Way-

good said: "I want to do something for my children. I want to say I have done something."

So Agrarian Renaissance was born in 2007.

Waygood's mission is to reduce carbon inputs - "we are eating oil and nitrates," he says. "Taxpayers are paying to clean up the mess."

The first year has not been easy - but people, investors and other interests are buying in. However, future projects are much more capital intensive.

"The returns to myself and others as major investors and lenders to the enterprise are capped - loans, for instance, are capped at 4 per

cent above base rate," says Waygood.

"We are recruiting and looking for a 'magnificent seven' team of interested investors and entrepreneurs to help create and prove viable, sustainable and ecological alternatives to the existing supermarket/agribusiness mono-culture."

ORGANIC PRODUCE

Local food success offsets sales fall

Early indications from retailers have suggested that the huge annual sales growth enjoyed by organic foods for 15 years may be coming to an end. Organic food represents 2 per cent of the UK's food market, with sales of about £1.7bn.

Sales of organic produce soared by 26 per cent a year on average between 1993 and 2008, but this is set to fall to 7.5 per cent in 2009, according to Mintel, the market researcher. However, that rate of growth is still more than double that of the general food market, organic proponents point out. Three out of every four households

in the UK now buy some organic food, according to the Soil Association.

In 2002, only 30 per cent of all organic products were supplied by the UK. But by 2005, the Soil Association estimated that approximately 66 per cent of all organic primary produce sold by multiple retailers was sourced in the UK, demonstrating that more and more people are now beginning to appreciate the value and quality available in the organic marketplace.

Only 4 per cent of UK farmland is run organically and organic food represents 2 per cent of the UK's

food market.

Nevertheless, sales of locally produced food have been doing well as supermarkets have promoted them as a healthy, and environmentally sound option. Consumers are aware of the difference between local and organic, but perceive better value in locally produced food.

UK farmers can also look to the fall in sterling for some cheer. Its depreciation against the euro has made many agricultural imports more expensive compared with homegrown food.

Support needs	Clients per supervisor	Pricing per day (£)	Pricing per hour (£)	Group size/daily
Low	4	57	12	228
Medium	3	87	18	261
High	1	142	29	142
Average	2.7	95	19	210

Source: FT research