

FoodFriends Registered Small-society Lottery
Run by LESS (Lancaster District) CIC
Part of the wider FoodFutures Network



ANNUAL REPORT & ACCOUNTS

2024/2025

2025/2026

For years ending 31 March 2025 & 2026





OUR STORY

Where we started and why FoodFriends was set up

Huge challenges exist with our food system including the high cost of land, access to training for would-be local growers and the lack of infrastructure for them to reach local markets. In order to support a growing local food economy, LESS initiated a feasibility study to explore what was needed to build local capacity.

The resulting vision is to create and support a ring of small-scale farms around the district to provide local, healthy food to the community. In turn, this will create meaningful jobs and, through organic and regenerative farming methods, will help to improve local biodiversity and build healthy soils to support future crops.

This vision embraces short supply chains, with low food miles, less packaging and greater community ownership of food-growing in the area.

LESS established the FoodFriends scheme to provide an independent fund to help support new local food initiatives and longer term, reduce reliance on grant funding.

FoodFriends, a registered small society lottery, also known as a 500 club, was launched in 2020 providing monthly prizes to members with the aim of raising funds to support regenerative, local food production and distribution projects. The scheme is overseen by the LESS Directors (LESS is a registered Community Interest Company).

As well as being in a monthly draw for prizes, members of the scheme receive regular updates, information and opportunities to get engaged in the projects that FoodFriends fund.



OUR GOALS

Where we want to be

In 2021, FoodFutures - North Lancashire's Sustainable Food Network, put together a ten year Community Food Strategy. The vision is for a whole range of producers around the district supplying local institutions, businesses and individuals with fresh, affordable food, grown in a way which enriches the natural habitat. FoodFutures envisage a thriving and vibrant local food system.

Funding underpins our work. All agriculture in the UK is subsidised, but unfortunately for small holdings, there's little meaningful financial support from government. We rely on grant-funding to support the set-up and on-going costs of our initiatives while we build scale, capacity and demand.

Our goals:

- The FoodFriends scheme provides a stable and sustainable income source from the local community to achieve the vision for a resilient local food system
- To create a 500 strong FoodFriends community, which will generate around £20k per year to underpin local food projects.



OUR STORY

Where we are now

2026 is a major milestone year.

Over the past 5 years the FoodFriends scheme has supported two key projects which aim to address the identified gaps in the local food system:

- The setting up and development of a market garden from scratch called The Plot at Old Holly Farm near Garstang and an indoor growing site at White Lund, Morecambe on the Council depot, which has increased the production and availability of local, organic fruit and vegetables.
- The training of new growers in regenerative farming methods through the Plot's FarmStart programme. 15 new growers have been supported and learnt market gardening, horticulture and business skills to upskill them to set up similar enterprises to address the local skills gap.

2021 saw the first crops of organic vegetables at The Plot and its first cohort of FarmStarters. In its first year of production, the team supplied produce to several local businesses and regular customers. As the vegetables grew, the numbers of FoodFriends grew and by the end of the year, the scheme had 150 members.

The following year, The Plot launched its first cropshare scheme for the full season from April to November, and consistently provided 25+ veg boxes for local people every week.



OUR STORY

2023 was a year of growth. Despite drought conditions in early Spring, the Plot cultivated two additional spaces at Old Holly Farm and expanded the number of crop sharers who enjoyed deliveries of kale, salad and tomatoes (and other veg!) as well as increasing sales to shops and cafes. During this time, The Plot was able to employ two seasonal growers and these positions offered development opportunities for the FarmStarters

2024 was a challenging year for farming, and it sent many small growers out of business. Production was down due to record wet and then record dry conditions hampering the growth of many crops, but thanks to community support, it was easier to 'weather' the actual storms. Veg continued to be shared via the crop-share scheme and the wider support from FoodFriends and additional grant funding meant that the FarmStart training scheme could be continued.

In 2025, the weather was kinder and it was a good season for veg. The Plot crop-sharers enjoyed a regular harvest, and, as in the previous season, veg was also for sale via Gather, a pilot food hub which brought together a number of local producers to sell and distribute their produce together. The FarmStart programme also provided opportunities for the trainees to see the beginnings of work at Summerhouse Community Farm, the land purchased by LESS for a community farm.



OUR STORY

What FoodFriends funded

Over the past 5 years, the income generated by the scheme has helped to pay for a variety of crucial things at the farm and bursaries for Farmstarters. Importantly, it provides an independent income which has been flexible and enabled us to cover costs of adhoc equipment, such as the rotavator, and pay for some of the underpinning costs of the farm and the training we provide.

- Buying of organic seeds and compost for the season
- Contributed to the rent for the growing site
- Organic certification with the Soil Association
- The purchase of a rotavator
- Bursaries for to enable access to the FarmStart programme
- Rent for the packing shed/classroom to enhance the training experience
- FarmStart training costs and visits to other farms

2026 and beyond

As the annual report goes to print (January 2026), the Plot team are wrapping up operations at Old Holly Farm in readiness to re-establish a market garden at the newly purchased Summerhouse Community Farm in the heart of Lancaster.

The purchase of the farm (with grant funding) is part of the wider vision of North Lancashire's FoodFutures Partnership to see more land put into community ownership and being used for sustainable agriculture, education, growing healthy soils and sustainable food for local residents. The vision is to create a local hub for agroecological growing, skills training and nature recovery, rooted in a community-led permaculture design.



OUR STORY

Funding from the FoodFriends scheme will focus on the set up of the new market garden at Summerhouse Community Farm. The FarmStart programme has been paused for a year, while the infrastructure is built to enable the provision of training in horticulture, education and regenerative enterprise in future years. This is crucial to enable us to be able to offer the training again in future years.

The FoodFriends provide on-going support to help train and enable new small-scale farmers in the Lancaster District, to support the development of regenerative local food projects and to support local distribution of local food. Their funding will continue to be complemented by one-off crowdfunding activities, grant funding and produce sales. Over time, and should the FoodFriends membership grow, we expect to be able to support a wider number of local farmers and food projects.



A closer look at members and income

March 2025: Number of FoodFriends members: 164

March 2026: Number of FoodFriends members: 160*

With the cost of living increases having an impact, a handful of FoodFriends cancelled their membership. Numbers have fluctuated around the same point throughout the two financial years with a few members withdrawing from the scheme and new members joining.

Total income:

Annual income from FoodFriends membership after transaction fees:

2024 - 2025: £8,328

2025 - 2026: £8,617 *

A small number of hours of staff time to promote the scheme was funded separately via grant funding.

**Estimates made for February and March 2026 at time of report printing in January 2026.*

Total expenditure:

From the income the following was spent:

2024-2025

- Prizes and expenses 2024-2025 (£2,193)
- Administrator wages 2024-2025 (£1,551)
- FarmStart programme contribution, including training (£1833)
- Equipment and tools (£2751)



THANK YOU

Our latest numbers continued:

2025-2026

- Prizes 2025-2026 (£2160)
- Administrator wages 2025-2026 (£1730)
- FarmStart programme including training support (£2490)
- Seeds and compost: £639
- Contribution to field and pack-shed rent, including space for meetings/training and organic certification costs: £1,598

Offering bursaries is important to enable those who often face financial barriers to have the chance of joining the FarmStart training programme.

Thank you for your generous support

We're up against multiple local and global challenges including climate breakdown which is also leading to unpredictable weather patterns. Without any significant government support, FoodFriends provide vital funding to keep focused on low impact production methods, feeding local people, training new growers and pioneering models for connecting people with those who grow their food.

How FoodFriends members can help further

Please share this report with friends, families and colleagues or link them to our website:
<https://foodfutures.org.uk/foodfriends/>

Get in touch

Any questions for the FoodFriends small-society lottery please email foodfriends@lessuk.org
Thank you for taking the time to read this annual report.