

T5.2 Case study report (Code UK1A)

The UK Farmstart Network: supporting new farmers to build their skill

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Introduction

The Farmstart Network, identified as one of 30 'promising practices' by the RURALIZATION project, is a collaboration between the Land Workers' Alliance (LWA) and some of its member organisations who are running 'farm-start' or 'farm-incubation' projects to develop best practice and increase opportunities for new entrants into sustainable agriculture. Whilst the precise set-up of the Farmstart schemes differ between members, they typically involve a supported space for new entrants to further grow their skills and test out ideas before taking on the full financial, legal and business responsibilities of an agricultural enterprise (Land Workers' Alliance, n.d.). Drawing on desk research, interviews, a focus group and feedback from a public conference of key stakeholders, this case study report details the context from which the Farmstart Network emerged, the actors involved and their main activities, and the networks and support which have made possible any impacts this 'promising practice' has had on rural regeneration and generational renewal.

Regional context

The Farmstart Network currently has sites in three of the four countries of the UK - Scotland, Wales and England (Land Workers' Alliance, n.d.). The information below summarises the demographic, socio-economic, environmental and agricultural context of the UK as a whole, although more specific regional or local data is provided where available in this section and Appendix 1.

Demographic and socio-economic context

The UK has a population of 67,886,000 (United Nations, 2020) and is projected to surpass 70 million people by 2031 (Office for National Statistics, 2019a). The surface area of the nation is 242,495km² and the population density is 280.6/km², concentrated in urban areas. The population is ageing, with 24.1% aged over 60 and just 17.7% under 14 years of age in 2020 (United Nations, 2020), and this trend is set to continue over the coming decades (Office for National Statistics, 2019b). The legacies of the UK's colonialism and imperialism have strongly shaped its demography. England is the most ethnically diverse part of the UK, with 80.5% of people identifying as White British in the combined figures for England and Wales in the 2011 Census (although in Wales 93% of people identified as White British at this same point in time), and a wide range of additional ethnic groups comprising 19.5% of the population (Shankley, Hannemann and Simpson, 2020: 20-21). The number of people migrating to the UK has remained generally stable over the last few years (Office for National Statistics, 2020a), although the full impacts of Brexit and COVID-19 on this pattern remain to be seen.

The vast majority of the UK economy is made up of service industries, contributing 79.9% of Gross Value Added, and employing 81.3% of the workforce (United Nations, 2020). At the time of writing, the unemployment rate was 4.9% (Office for National Statistics, 2021). There are significant regional variations in terms of concentration of different industries within the UK, depending on historical context and more recent attempts at post-industrial regeneration. For example, financial and professional services tend to be concentrated in

London, while the North West has a stronger reputation for manufacturing (BDO, 2021). These regional disparities are one of the causes of the growing economic inequality within the UK (North East England Chamber of Commerce, 2020), where 'the richest 10 per cent of households own almost half of the nation's wealth, having benefited most from the recent wealth boom' (Bangham and Leslie, 2019: 1). Regional wealth gaps are also widening, with typical wealth in the North East, East Midlands and West Midlands falling over the past decade whilst increasing sharply in London, the South East and Scotland, driven mainly by rapid house price growth in the South East (Bangham and Leslie, 2019: 6).

Environmental context

In general, the UK has a temperate maritime climate, with significant regional variations due to terrain and land use. The north and west tend to be wetter, windier and less sunny than the south and east of the country (Met Office, n.d.). By the end of this century, all areas of the UK are predicted to be warmer, with more frequent hot spells, more intense precipitation events and sea level rise among the predicted effects of climate change (Met Office, 2019).

At the time of the UK's withdrawal from the EU, it had 153,137km² of Natura 2000 designated area, most of which is marine (86%) (European Environment Agency, 2020). The UK's greenhouse gas emissions in 2018 were 451 million tonnes, decreasing gradually over the previous 15 years. 10% of greenhouse gas emissions in the UK are a result of agriculture (Department for Business, Energy & Industrial Strategy, 2020: 1). The farmland bird index has plummeted, with all species indices less than half of their 1970 levels (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs et al., 2021: 11), and soil degradation is estimated to be occurring at a rate of 2.2 million tonnes per year (Varley, 2018: 91).

Agricultural context

The UK agricultural sector is facing a range of complex challenges at present - with the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate and biodiversity emergencies, and the impact of the UK's exit from the European Union all resulting in a particularly uncertain and rapidly changing

context for farmers. As with the population in general, agriculture has an ageing workforce - around a third of all farm holders are over the typical retirement age of 65 years, and just 3% are under 35 years old (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs et al., 2021: 22). Agriculture is also the least diverse sector in the UK, with 98.6% of farm managers and owners identifying as White British (Asgarian, 2020). Only a minority of farmers in the UK are women (about 17%), although this has increased by about 10% in a decade, and at agricultural colleges women now outnumber men two to one (Kale, Lewis and O'Neill, 2020). However, small-scale agroecological growing may attract a more diverse group of people - a recent survey of new entrants who were members of the Land Workers' Alliance recorded that 54% of respondents were female, their average age was 37, and 9% identified as Black, Brown or Indigenous People of Colour. 61% of respondents also came from non-farming families (Land Workers' Alliance 2020: 3, 5).

The UK doesn't currently have a centralised 'new entrants scheme'; people's routes into the sector often include one or more of succession, college or university courses for industrial agriculture/land management, contracting arrangements, informal traineeships, volunteering opportunities and different support schemes run by regional government or NGOs (e.g. Farming Connect's Venture programme in Wales [Business Wales, 2021], or The Henry Plumb Foundation's grant and mentorship initiative [The Henry Plumb Foundation, n.d.]) (Tasker, 2018). This range of options can be difficult to navigate, especially for people interested in agroecological, small-scale farming - the LWA's (2020: 5) survey also noted that only 21% of respondents had agricultural qualifications, well below the 35% of UK farm managers who have had formal agricultural education.

72% of the UK's land is used for agriculture (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs et al., 2021: 10), but just 2.7% or 485,000ha is farmed organically (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs et al., 2021: 123). Agriculture, forestry and fishing combined make up just 2% of GVA to the rural economy and 0.55% GVA nationally (Varley, 2018: 90). Over a fifth of farms in the UK failed to make a positive 'Farm Business Income' in the last year (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs et al., 2021: 10), giving an indication of the challenging context faced by small farms in particular (CPRE, 2017). Agriculture employs just 1.5% of the UK's population in work (however the relative proportion of population in Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland employed in agriculture is

slightly higher than in England) (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs et al., 2021: 28). Over half (63%) the agricultural workforce is made up of farmers, business partners, directors and spouses, with farm employees forming the other 37% (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs et al., 2021: 21-22). Just over 42% of farmland in the UK is rented, but ownership is also common, and a mix of approaches may be used on farms (Korthals Altes et al., 2020). Arable and livestock farming dominate UK agriculture, with horticulture accounting for just 163,000ha (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs et al., 2021: 18).

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has had, and continues to have, a significant impact on the UK, which may have resulted in changes to some of the statistics presented above, since many of them were last measured before the pandemic began. There is already some research which gives an indication of the varied socio-economic effects of COVID-19 in the UK - for example, that 'people from low socio-economic backgrounds have been disproportionately hurt by restrictions; that people from ethnic minority groups have faced more challenges than white ethnicities; and that the mental health of young adults has been hit particularly hard' (Bradbury and Fancourt, 2021: 10). COVID-19 also focused attention on food insecurity, both for households (where levels of food insecurity remain higher than pre-pandemic, affecting 4.7 million adults and 2.3 million children [The Food Foundation, 2021: 4, 6]), and as a country - the UK has a food production to supply (or self-sufficiency) ratio of just 64% (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs et al., 2021: 143), meaning much food is imported. At the same time, there has been increasing interest in the relocalisation of food, as illustrated, for example, by expanding sales of small farmer focused veg box schemes, which grew by 134% between end of February and mid-April 2020 (Wheeler, 2020: 3).

In terms of issues of particular interest to RURALIZATION, the experience of the pandemic, including lockdowns, remote-working, and lack of access to green space in cities (particularly for ethnic minority households [Office for National Statistics, 2020b]), may be changing people's attitudes to their careers and homes. 53% of workers recently surveyed by Aviva (2020: 14) are reported to be considering changes to their careers in the next year, and

according to a survey by estate agent Savills (2020: 1), 71% of younger buyers want more outdoor space and rural locations. There are concerns however that migration out of cities by middle class people could exacerbate inequalities (Booth, 2020). Academics Sandra and Abigail¹ interviewed for this research noted that for sustainable rural populations *“the key thing you need is diversity, you need a sustainable demographic population, so you need a good mix of age groups, you want it to be diverse, you don’t want an upper, middle class, white, rural world”* (Sandra) and yet that certain rural areas are at risk of becoming *“antiquated...ethnically homogenous”* (Abigail) *“theme park[s]”* (Sandra). When combined with research that shows the ‘experiences of alienation and feelings of unbelonging for people of colour and apprehension about spending time making use of [rural and natural spaces]’ (Calliste, Sivapragasam and McDonald, 2021: 6), and the hostility and racism faced in rural areas by Black and people of colour (Calliste, Sivapragasam and McDonald, 2021: 22), there is clearly considerable work needed to make rural communities and farming environments welcoming and safe for BPOC as part of processes of rural regeneration and generational renewal.

¹ Please note that pseudonyms have been used alongside quotes throughout this report to protect interviewees’ anonymity. A full list of pseudonyms and the type of interviewee can be found in Appendix 2.

Practice context and origins

The 'How to set up a Farmstart' handbook produced by the LWA, in partnership with three of its Farmstart partners - OrganicLea, Tamar Grow Local and the Kindling Trust - begins with a useful summary of the context from which the Farmstart Network emerged. It references many of the issues noted in the section above - the ageing UK farming population, the significant climate impact of the UK's current, import-reliant, food system, the high proportion of people facing food insecurity. It suggests that change is needed in the UK farming sector, but also identifies significant barriers to people wanting to make a living from agroecological growing - including little access to land, complicated planning permission processes, high start-up costs, and limited training opportunities - which make the changes needed difficult to implement (Land Workers' Alliance, OrganicLea, Tamar Grow Local and Kindling Trust, 2018: 2-3). This is in spite of evidence showing that small-scale farms can produce two to three times higher average yield for labour-intensive crops than standard non-organic systems, provide more employment opportunities than larger farms (3.2 FTE per hectare, well above the UK average of 0.028 annual work units per hectare), and generally earn more through sales income than average farm businesses, which tend to rely more on subsidies (Laughton and Kiss, 2017) that many small-scale farms are ineligible for as they are under five hectares in size (Rural Payments Agency and Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2020). The ecologically-friendly techniques and higher employment potential of small-scale agroecological farms also mean they have been recognised as a way to regenerate landscapes and biodiversity (Food, Farming and Countryside Commission, 2021) and build local economic resilience (Walker, 2018).

The 'How to set up a Farmstart' handbook goes on to detail how the Farmstart Network emerged in the UK:

- In 2013, the Kindling Trust, based in and around Manchester, launched the first Farmstart in the UK (Land Workers' Alliance, OrganicLea, Tamar Grow Local and Kindling Trust, 2018: 6).

- Tamar Grow Local, based in the Tamar Valley on the Cornwall/Devon border, and OrganicLea, based on the edge of London, followed suit, launching their Farmstarts in 2015 (OrganicLea, n.d., Tamar Grow Local, n.d.).
- These three Farmstarts met with others running new entrant support schemes to share experiences at the annual Oxford Real Farming Conference from 2015, and later hosted visits to their sites, but did not have enough time to properly support each other or help additional Farmstarts set up.
- In 2017, the Kindling Trust, OrganicLea and the Ecological Land Cooperative visited similar projects in France alongside the Soil Association and Shared Assets, and were particularly inspired by the RENETA national network of farm incubators, and decided an equivalent network needed to be established in the UK.
- The RENETA network was invited to speak at the 2018 Oxford Real Farming Conference, and over 100 groups and individuals took part in this session to discuss starting up a Farmstart Network to support Farmstarts all over the UK.
- This vision was developed further by the LWA and farms working to support new entrants, and funding was secured from the Joseph Rowntree Charitable Trust to support making it a reality.
- From February 2019, work on the Farmstart Network began formally, with more information and lessons learned shared between existing Farmstarts, and research into and piloting of accredited training and mentoring programmes (Land Workers' Alliance, OrganicLea, Tamar Grow Local and Kindling Trust, 2018: 6).

Currently, there are eight Farmstarts or farm incubators involved in the Network, with an additional group currently developing a Farmstart. The map below shows the approximate locations of the existing (in blue) and potential (in orange) Farmstarts:

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Figure 1. Map of Farmstart Locations

Source: Google Earth, 2021, with edits by the author

Appendix 1 gives some more specific information on the local context of each of the established Farmstarts.

Actors involved and motivations

Through this research, stakeholders directly and indirectly involved in the Farmstart Network were interviewed, to build an understanding of the wider Farmstart Network ‘ecosystem’, as shown in the diagram below:

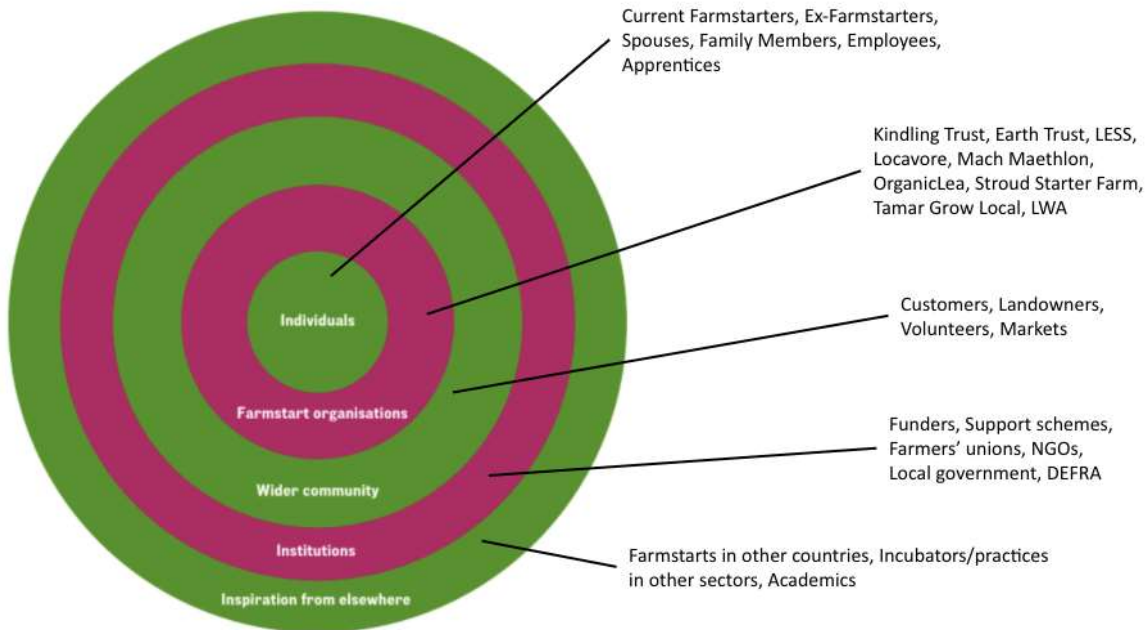


Figure 2. The Farmstart Network ‘Ecosystem’ - with key stakeholders in each layer noted

Therefore, although the Farmstart Network is technically a loose group of organisations running ‘farm incubators’ or ‘farm-starts’ (i.e. the ‘Farmstart organisations’ ring in Figure 2), this case study investigated the wider ecosystem in which it is embedded, to give a more comprehensive picture of the actors involved and its overall contribution to rural regeneration and generational renewal.

Whilst the actors involved in the Farmstart organisations are fairly static, there is more variety and ‘churn’ of actors involved in the other circles of the ecosystem, depending on the specific model of each Farmstart, the businesses which emerge from it, or the wider community or institutions which interact with and support these. In summary, these can be broken down into the following relatively porous categories (although it is worth noting not all of these actors are involved in each Farmstart, or have [the same] relationships with each other in each case):

Individuals

This group mainly includes new entrants to agriculture, who are currently doing a Farmstart programme, or have passed through a Farmstart scheme (some of whom have now set up their own agricultural businesses). It may also include their partners, family, friends, or employees/apprentices who support their new farming businesses, largely with their labour, in a paid or unpaid capacity. The new entrants often have a wide range of experience levels before embarking on the Farmstart, such as working on farms before, doing qualifications at college, or simply having enjoyed recreational gardening previously.

Farmstart organisations

This group is made up of the eight organisations listed in Figure 2 above (and the Land Workers' Alliance as the coordinating body) who are currently running active Farmstarts, plus one organisation potentially setting up a Farmstart. The eight active Farmstarts are responsible for the recruitment of individuals into their Farmstart schemes. They usually take on their Farmstart's land tenure and/or training aspects, and may provide some routes to market for individuals. The models vary between these organisations. For some there is (multi-year) training (led by an employed trainer), and clear routes to market (e.g. producing food for a veg box scheme). For others there is no formal training but some support with business planning or longer-term access to land, and other configurations exist as well. These organisations often have to apply for grant or other funding to support the infrastructure and staffing for their Farmstart schemes, and they share their experiences where time allows through the Network. They may also have, or be involved in setting up, forms of accreditation, so that 'graduates' receive a formal qualification at the end of their Farmstart training, for example from City & Guilds (a leading technical education body in the UK [City & Guilds, n.d.]).

Wider community

This category involves the broader local community in which the Farmstarts are located and are indirectly associated with, which may be critical to the success of the Farmstart

initiatives. The community members may act as volunteer labourers at the Farmstart or ex-Farmstarters' businesses (e.g. to support with particular peaks of labour or to enhance their own mental health and wellbeing), sometimes in exchange for some fresh produce. They may also buy from the Farmstart or businesses established by ex-Farmstarters, either at the farm gate, through box schemes, via traditional markets (e.g. grocery or farmers' market stalls in nearby urban centres) or newer online platforms (e.g. the Open Food Network, an open-source marketplace for local food [Open Food Network UK, 2018]). This grouping also includes local (individual or organisational) landowners who give access to land for Farmstarts or ex-Farmstarters' businesses, on a spectrum of less to more formal and secure arrangements (e.g. oral agreements to Farm Business Tenancies).

Institutions

This group of actors also often play a less direct role, but can facilitate or hinder the progress of Farmstarts or their 'graduates' running their own businesses. Some Farmstarts are linked to local NGOs which work on sustainable food issues and can raise awareness of their work, provide small pots of funding, or even open up routes to market. This category also includes farmers' organisations/unions, and funders, whether large grant-making foundations or local sources of financial support. Government schemes to support new entrants or agroecological farming might also fit into this category, although clear detail on how these will operate in practice and when they will roll-out at scale post-Brexit is still to be fully determined (Hughes, 2021).

Inspiration from elsewhere

This outermost level of the ecosystem comprises other Farmstart or similar schemes within the UK (past and present) and abroad, which the Farmstart Network has looked to for inspiration and learning, as well as academic research about these types of projects. Farmstart Network connections with this tier can be just in terms of stimulating ideas or more concrete (e.g. through the study visit to France mentioned above). Academic research on Farmstarts or similar can also potentially provide useful information to influence policy and funding opportunities.

Motivations

Each of these (groups of) actors have their own motivations for being involved in some way with the Farmstart Network, often aligned around social and ecological justice imperatives. From interviews, for individuals, these were often very personal journeys related to family circumstances, wellbeing and happiness, and a strong desire to work with the land. For institutions/NGOs, key motivations and visions were related to building better coordinated and mutually supportive local food systems (although not all of these may yet have been realised):

“I’ve always been a hobby gardener and loving that kind of thing and I’m at a time in my life when I thought about what makes me happy and that, for me, was going to be growing veg.”

Lisa

“I guess I’m a woman with no money who wanted to move back to the rural part of [area] where I grew up and there wasn’t any work for me so I was driving to [city] to teach, basically, farming, and what Farmstart did was gave me a way of transitioning my life up here which I’m very grateful for.”

Donna

“The idea really was around clustering of these holdings to foster the conditions of reciprocal work and reciprocal aid between Farmstart tenants, realising that when you start up there are times when you need additional help and additional pairs of hands and if you could be mutually supporting each other that’s quite a good model.”

Peter

“The bigger vision was having a ring of small-scale producers all around the district, but in a strategic and coordinated way so that there was common processes for crop planning, so the whole system’s working together rather than individuals trying to undercut each other, that was the big vision...we conceptualised that as a bit of a continuum through training and an enabling function to support new businesses to set up.”

Judy

Style of farming

The type of farming encouraged across the Farmstart Network is broadly small-scale and agroecological, in line with the Land Workers' Alliance's principles. Depending on the Farmstart organisation or individual (ex)Farmstarter, the precise approach might be described in different terms, including "organic" (certified or uncertified), "regenerative", "permaculture", or "human-scale", and interviewees mentioned many different techniques tailored to their chosen style, including no dig or no till, low or no machinery, use of broad forks, intercropping, and green manures. The Farmstarts are also mainly horticultural, sometimes with some small livestock. These approaches were usually selected because of the farmers' overall ethos and closely held principles of working with, not against, ecological processes:

"Also we try to minimise the use of plastics as well...they always talk about the dirty secrets of organic growers, the use of mypex and plastics, so I don't grow through mypex which a lot of people do, we did a lot of that at [Farmstart organisation], commercially it probably makes sense, it cuts down the weeds but I just think there's no point in doing it if you have to do that, I'd rather not do it if I had to use a load of plastics like that so we really cut down the use of that."

David

"Yeah we're no dig, we're not certified organic but we don't use any chemical pesticides, herbicides or any chemical feeds or anything like that. So we try to be as low impact as possible and farm in a way that's going to support healthy soil structures and help to increase the health of the land that we're working on. We spent a long time looking at the orientation of the beds so that we could minimise run-off and also increase water retention in the beds, so stuff like that we're trying to take into account as well when we're setting up the infrastructure."

Lily

Some interviewees also mentioned activities and aims to improve wider society within their farming practice:

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“We’re in the business of feeding people amazing nutritious food and in the business of working towards a positive climate situation and supporting people to have life-changing experiences.”

Donna

But people also acknowledged the difficulties in trying to reconcile these ideals with the tight margins of agroecological food production, and the structural inequalities of the food and farming systems. One academic noted the cumulative effect of these tensions, specifically around achieving racial justice:

“I think there’s a lot of awareness of the need for it...but I think there is definitely a bit of a tension between realising that in order to achieve racial justice you have to make these programmes accessible to people from all different backgrounds, but in doing so, how do you do that? What does that look like in practice? I think sometimes what is put forward perhaps as a priority is creating infrastructure first before asking who does that infrastructure attract and that’s something that I found consistently, it’s almost deflected to the future, ‘We’ll build it first and then we’ll make it inclusive’, rather than saying ‘Why is it not inclusive in the first place?’”

Louise

Activities, networks and synergies

Farmstart organisations

The network of Farmstart organisations itself, coordinated by the LWA, undertakes a number of activities as and when staff time and funding allow. A steering group of the more established Farmstarts meets every two to three months to shape the Network's direction. Events, meetings or farm visits for their wider membership group are organised to allow them to share experiences, learn from each other (e.g. by comparing lease documents) and strategise, although these have been made more difficult in person by COVID-19 restrictions. There have been attempts to connect members online and generate ongoing discussions via email lists and Facebook, although there was an acknowledgement that these weren't very active and needed more attention to stimulate discussion on a regular basis. The Farmstart Guide mentioned above was a resource successfully produced by and for Farmstart Network members, as well as for other organisations thinking about setting up a Farmstart. In future, they are hoping to help Farmstart organisations offer their training as accredited courses.

Although member organisations seemed generally positive about the Network, tensions emerged around time and capacity to engage with it. More established, time-poor Farmstart organisations expressed frustration at not having time to get more involved in the Network, even though they felt it was valuable, whilst newer members wanted the Network to do more activities. Consistent and secure funding of the Network and for its members to participate in it over the medium term would support the desire to strengthen and grow the Farmstart Network during the next few years. This might include making the most of knowledge sharing and synergies between organisations, to increase its ability to undertake policy and lobbying work, and so the Farmstart model can be replicated all over the country, ultimately creating a situation where:

“Everybody can see visibly [and] access training locally and very quickly be part of a family, be part of that solidarity network to capture these people who want to go into farming and even those who haven't thought about it. So I see it as this pulsating mycelium in the UK where it would be quite easy to just be drawn to because it's fun and it's a thriving industry

and because it's great solidarity and richness and diversity, it would be an amazing family to build."

Marcus

There were three main types of Farmstart programme models identified amongst the active Network members interviewed. These are as follows, with Model 2 being the most common:

- Model 1 - Access to land, some (limited) support with infrastructure, business planning, and routes to market, but Farmstarters are essentially running their own businesses on a given piece of land.
- Model 2 - Formal practical and theoretical training programme, including visits to and talks by other farms, run by an experienced trainer, to meet the needs of a range of experience levels of participants, with some access to land or established routes to market. There are different levels of decision-making or independence within this model - Farmstarters may have some input into crop planning, markets and so on, but this is usually decided upon and facilitated by the Farmstart organisation.
- Model 3 - Access to land/infrastructure only.

For more established Farmstarts, their models had sometimes adapted over time to better meet the needs of their participants, for example, through more or less formal training being provided. Since people come to the Farmstart programme with a range of levels of experience, and desire to participate in formal training, some flexibility will probably always be needed, but clear communication about what each Farmstart offers was also suggested as being useful. Presently, the range of models under the Farmstart Network umbrella was sometimes a source of frustration for new entrants when it didn't match up with their expectations of what a Farmstart was:

"I think it would have been really good for the Farmstart Network to have explained to [Farmstart organisation] a bit more about what it is and to call yourself a [Farmstart], what connotations that has for people applying and for them to be a bit clearer...I don't know, it didn't really feel like a [Farmstart] basically. So I think by the end of it I got quite frustrated that they could even call it that, they could have that label and be included in the documents about it and it's like 'How does anyone know if it is doing any of this stuff? It's not doing anything at all, it's just giving a bit of land.'"

Ann

As well as broadly sharing the style of farming described in the previous section, many of the Farmstart organisations interviewed shared favourable or constraining conditions for their activities. Access to land and information about land ownership was a key constraint for most, especially those in peri-urban settings, although with notable exceptions in two rural areas where land was more accessible. Even where land was available, finding a site suitable for horticulture and close enough to a critical mass of people to run a training course, were mentioned as issues.

Secondly, a lack of resourced staff time to put into the Farmstart or Farmstart Network were mentioned by some interviewees. Where external funding for the Farmstart did not exist or had run out, staff at Farmstart organisations have often had to limit their involvement to focus on other core activities, or were stretched very thinly:

“It’s a very small team and they’ve got so many different projects going on at the same time and so it means that their time is spread quite thinly and also there’s that classic pressure to get more funding all the time.”

Maria

“In years one to three it was quite hands-on, so we’d be there quite often, mainly because we were doing lots of infrastructure stuff. But now that’s all in place so it’s very hands-off at the moment, which is just as well because it’s not funded, and it just about washes its own face but we’re still subsidising it I think in terms of a bit of our time.”

Peter

A lack of sustained funding for Farmstart programmes has led to different organisations taking a range of approaches to cover costs, such as charging participants a fee, offsetting the costs of the Farmstart through more profitable aspects of their organisations, or accessing money through local authority adult education budgets. Putting the burden of costs onto the Farmstarters themselves was acknowledged by some (ex)Farmstarters and those in the wider ecosystem as creating, as described by interviewee Carl, “path dependencies” for the type of people who are drawn to and can access and succeed in agriculture more generally, and in Farmstart programmes specifically, namely those from more privileged backgrounds (this is discussed further in the ‘Impact and perspectives’ section below).

Individuals

Depending on whether they were current or former Farmstarters, and the model of the Farmstart programme they were involved in, the day to day activities of (ex)Farmstarters could be quite different.

Those currently involved in Farmstart schemes may have been learning in a structured way about agroecological horticulture for one or more days per week, with the balance between theory and practical agricultural labour shifting between the seasons. In the summer growing season, tasks might include seed sowing, irrigation, harvesting, and so on. Sometimes these were quite closely directed by a trainer. For those who were on a scheme with less or even no formal training, or ex-Farmstarters now running their own businesses, they had much greater responsibility for the overall development of their business and routes to market, as well as management of production, but might have still received some support or mentoring from the Farmstart organisation, which could prove invaluable:

“The second thing they did was at the beginning I didn’t have any money so they actually lent me some money, it was only about 1,500 quid but it was enough to do my first seed order and buy some bits of tools and get me off the ground while I was applying for a start-up grant...I ended up paying them back a bit in vegetables and a bit of cash...that was really important because again it gave me confidence because somebody said ‘We believe in you’...The third thing they did which was brilliant was they gave me access to an experienced grower to ask questions, and it wasn’t necessarily ‘Sit down and tell me everything’, it was just knowing there was someone there if I needed a phone call to say ‘Which crops do you fleece in winter and which crops don’t you bother with?’, or ‘What are your favourite tomato cultivars?’, those kind of questions, for an experienced grower so easy to answer, take you five minutes, but when you’re a new grower just amazing to have someone at the end of the phone or an email.”

Donna

Some (ex)Farmstarters also ran activities with their wider communities on their sites, although COVID-19 had hindered this in the last year or so:

“That was something I would have loved to have done but COVID put an end to most of that, we just have regular volunteers who’ve been amazing for the last year and definitely like giving them informal training and one of them’s now actually got a job at a farm based on

our references which is quite nice. I think I had lovely ideas of that but the realism was with how hectic it is in the summer it's just too much really. This year cos the kids have only started coming, there were school groups coming about three times a week from September and they're going to be here next summer as well so they're really up for doing big tasks and I'll have them weeding and things which will be nice, a lot of them are teenagers so that'll be cool."

Ann

At the same time, ex-Farmstarters often had to grapple with issues such as lack of affordable accommodation close to their plots, insecure tenure, and unaffordable financing. These barriers and some potential solutions to them are explored further in the 'Policy and institutional support' section.

The approach to labour and payment within Farmstart schemes was mentioned as a source of sometimes considerable dissatisfaction. For some participants, there was a distinct mismatch between the amount of unpaid labour they were expected to put in as trainees, or from other volunteers from the local community who helped maintain the farm site, versus the principles of the Farmstart organisations or the branding of the produce they grew when sold at local 'ethical' retailers:

"I felt a bit exploited to be honest because we were doing these really hard graft days, two days a week each and it was just ironic that our work for free would then be used to sell food that is in an organic really right on...store. The thing is there's a big thing made in that store about this produce being from Farmstart and 'It's great, we're training the next generation of farmers' and some of my friends down the allotment when they were like 'Saw your pumpkins there in the grocery store' and I told them I didn't get paid for any of that and they were like 'Really you just do that all for free?' I was like 'Yeah and we're paying to do that as well'. I just think sustainability doesn't just mean environmental sustainability, it means economic sustainability and I think if that organisation promotes Farmstart as contributing to social justice and ecological justice, I don't think having people pay £500 to train for each year, without a certification, to produce food that gets sold in a store which is viewed as being a bit more high end, I don't think that's fair because you would never ask somebody who's training in a supermarket to work there for free."

Maria

The ethics of volunteer labour, and the prevalence of it within the wider sector, also proved to be an ongoing dilemma for ex-Farmstarters in running their own businesses:

"I feel pretty uncomfortable even when people want to volunteer with me, that really there's very little of that before I want them to be paid. When I did the community sessions that was really for the participants' wellbeing and they did get wellbeing from it, it was a very different atmosphere to when you're a paid grower, which is bloody hard, but when you're a volunteer you want to be there for your wellbeing and it doesn't really matter. So I think, I don't know, I haven't found the balance right myself with that, but I realised that for me if I'm having volunteers there it's about wellbeing and if not they're getting paid...My friend works in an art gallery and they have volunteers but they're not essential parts of the business, they just sit on reception and get some experience. I think with organic farming, why does it have so much? Nobody thinks working on a farm as a labourer is good for your wellbeing, it's really hard."

Nia

Networks and cooperation seem to play a significant role in creating favourable operating conditions for Farmstarts and Farmstarters. Different interviewees mentioned connections with local communities, farmers' organisations or landowners as being critical to securing routes to market (e.g. through direct sales, which were even more important during COVID-19), access to land, and agricultural materials such as manure. Several of the Farmstart organisations interviewed spoke of their aim to foster cooperation amongst Farmstarters or within the wider community but had somewhat mixed results in practice:

"I think that was the problem with the cooperative, it went beyond mutual support to mutual reliance and then you're relying on other people to be as efficient as yourself and it was clear in that group that that wasn't going to be the case."

Peter

There was also some evidence of different Farmstarters collaborating during and after their training - for example, around finding land, or sharing their experiences (good and bad), but it seemed this could be further encouraged and supported.

Innovation and transferability

When asked about which aspects of their practice they considered innovative, interviewees sometimes struggled to think of something specific, as many of their activities seemed common sense from their perspective, however, these may be relatively innovative in comparison with the practices of the mainstream chemical-based farming industry. The suggestions they offered included the following, all of which could meet RURALIZATION's definition of innovation, as broadly being about finding 'new' responses to issues in rural areas (Murtagh et al., 2019):

- Doing 'no dig' at a commercial scale - *"Would I say any of it is innovative? That's a good question, I haven't really thought of it like that, no dig seems like the obvious choice to us but I suppose for other people it isn't. No one else that I know of on the Farmstart project that we're part of works in a no dig system, so maybe it's relatively innovative, I don't know."*

Lily

- Running 'local lotteries' to support their work - *"Our apprenticeship is funded by the local community through a [name of] club, they donate £5 a month and we have a little lottery four times a year and it's a way for the oldies who maybe can't come down with their hoes to say 'This is brilliant that you're opening up and asking these questions', and I always say 'We don't have the answers, we're asking all the questions and if you want to get behind that stick five quid a month in'."*

Donna

- The backgrounds of their workers/trainees (in a sector dominated by white, middle class people) - *"I think we've got some interesting people, I'm kind of surprised, I think farming's very white and neither my employer or my Kickstarter¹ are white and that's, I've not done that consciously but I thought that was interesting cos when you go to conferences about growing it can be very, it's just not diverse...I don't know if that's innovative...They were talking about where they went to school and they're both*

¹ A 'Kickstarter' is a young person aged 16-24 on Universal Credit at risk of long-term unemployment whose wages are paid for the first six months by the UK government's recent 'Kickstart' scheme [Department for Work and Pensions, 2021]).

quite working class, that's how they describe where they grew up and stuff...I thought that was interesting."

Nia

- Reciprocal work between different Farmstarters - *"The thing that I really like is the reciprocal working that's going on. So what seems to have happened is each tenant will specialise in one particular activity or a piece of kit. For example one tenant's got a quad bike with a spreader on the back and also a flail mower and he gets sub-contracted out by other tenants to come and mow bits of grass or spread seed or calcified seaweed or something like that on the ground, so that works quite well. There's another one who's got a rotary push-along strimmer for the vineyard but that's also good for doing mowing on small areas where the topper on the back of the quad bike doesn't work. There's someone with a rotavator as well and it just seems to work quite nicely. They're sourcing help between each other."*

Peter

It was clear from the interviews that the COVID-19 pandemic had also resulted in rapid shifts in how (ex)Farmstarters and Farmstart organisations had to operate, from moving lessons online to finding new avenues for direct sales:

"So it's been very good this year and they've done very well with very little site visits. We did weekly Zoom sessions so everyone could get on Zoom and have a chat and say how things were going, they've got a Facebook page so anyone can post on that Facebook page and that's been a very good resource that they all use and I post bits of information on there, but they talk to each other on there as well so if I don't answer an email immediately they get the answers from each other...Some people chose to sell through the market, and we're very lucky, in [location] there is already an established cooperative market which people can just join...and start selling there, there's already an established veg box scheme so they could join that and sell through the veg box scheme, there's a local veg shop...so anyone who'd designed their model through selling to the restaurants had to quickly change what they were doing and choose a different sales model."

Eva

In terms of the Network itself, the Farmstart Network is one of, if not the only horticultural and agroecological farm incubator network of its kind in the UK, and so could be considered

innovative, but it was recognised that whilst this model was perhaps innovative in the UK, it is found elsewhere internationally. The focus within the Farmstart Network here on policy and resources such as the Farmstart Guide were also suggested as potentially innovative, and crucial for replicating the model elsewhere:

“I think the guide is quite [innovative], given that it was just created by the members of it as a very, it’s quite detailed, I think there’s quite a lot of information in there. And I think the policy side as well, I think there’s a lot of projects that have very practical arms to it but don’t also target the policy side of things, so it just becomes a sort of practical thing whereas actually if we’re genuinely wanting to get a model out there the biggest thing we can do is work on the policy.”

Clare

One focus group participant mentioned that local neighbourhood planning processes could be an innovative route to accessing land, but the fact they are often led by wealthy, older, landowners who can be quite disconnected from the struggles of other communities was perceived as a barrier to realising their radical potential. Membership of farmers’ networks (e.g. the Organic Growers’ Alliance) and visits to other farms were also mentioned by several interviewees as being important for their learning, and another way to support the successful replication of the model in other places.

Some interviewees were keen to complicate and critique the emphasis on ‘innovation’ and associated characteristics such as entrepreneurialism, which they felt fed into the dominant neoliberal capitalist food and farming regime that small-scale agroecological farming and the food sovereignty movement seeks to dismantle:

“A really big problem with incubators is they tend to adopt this entrepreneurial logic, so a farm is only good if it’s green in the balance sheet and the farms that are told as farming heroes, that are selected, are always ones that, it’s because it’s good for business too, to plant a couple of trees or whatever, but a lot of our agricultural system is set up so that the incentives are perverse so we should actually be fairly suspicious of the farms that are being successful in terms of economically.”

Carl

One interviewee also pointed out the neo-colonial and extractive nature of using techniques associated with what is broadly called ‘agroecology’ in the Global North - and this being at

odds with the backgrounds of the majority of people involved in (agroecological) farming in the UK:

“[Lack of diversity in the sector is] a shame because...a lot of these agroecology efforts stem from countries in the Global South and it’s from Indigenous communities which work with nature essentially rather than against, and that whole work against nature has only really developed with industrial farming which is a very Euro-centric, Western concept. Maybe if that was recognised through the Farmstart training then that might help people to be attracted to it, different people and it might bring that sense of ‘Yeah, I’m actually living and breathing this, I’m doing something really practical that is helping to make a difference’, that might help.”

Maria

In summary, there is substantial innovation at a local level within the Farmstart ecosystem - from reciprocal working, to innovative agroecological methods, and some funding models. However, many interviewees recognised that at a systemic level, the notion of innovation in agriculture is more complex, and identified places where Farmstart training might become more nuanced and radical, which might also attract more diverse trainees.

Policy and institutional support

There was general consensus from interviewees, from all of the 'rings' in Figure 2, about the constraints in current policy and institutional support for Farmstarts, and for new entrants to farming more widely, especially around access to land, finance and training. A few interviewees had managed to benefit from what existing limited support was available, but several also had creative ideas for ways in which things could be enhanced and improved to support small-scale farming and rural livelihoods. The analysis below is split into a description of the constraints of policy or institutional support, and proposed changes to policies or other forms of institutional support as put forward by interviewees.

Forms of support

The forms of support interviewees were able to access fell into three main categories: funding, land, and advice. Both Farmstart organisations and some ex-Farmstarters were able to get some funding to develop their training programmes, pay horticultural trainers, or staff. This funding came from both public and private sources. For example, the UK government's recent 'Kickstart' scheme (which pays the first six months of salary for new jobs for 16-24 years olds on Universal Credit at risk of long-term unemployment [Department for Work and Pensions, 2021]), allowed some ex-Farmstarters to hire new staff. Charitable funding also resulted in one ex-Farmstarter receiving a small start-up grant for social entrepreneurs, and the development of several of the Farmstart programmes. However, the time-limited and competitive nature of grant funding and uncertainty around the length of government schemes, especially after COVID-19 (which has resulted in a raft of support programmes for various sectors [e.g. UK Government n.d.]), and in terms of post-Brexit subsidy reform, means long-term planning and/or consistent provision of services within a Farmstart or new farming businesses is difficult.

Institutions such as councils and an educational centre were sympathetic landowners mentioned by interviewees which granted access to land (sometimes with additional onsite infrastructure) for little or no cost to Farmstart programmes, perhaps because, in the words

of one interviewee, Sasha, *“They love the kudos of having us there and all of that sort of thing, so it’s scratching backs sort of thing.”* Council staff were sometimes mentioned as being a useful source of advice and support, but also, they could be quite unresponsive in terms of securing access to land, which had been previously promised to a Farmstart by a council in one circumstance. Another helpful source of advice mentioned was the Community Land Advisory Service, which helped one Farmstart with their lease and tenure agreements when seeking advice from their local council for this had been prohibitively expensive. Unfortunately, the Community Land Advisory Service is currently only funded in Wales, not elsewhere in the UK as it used to be (Social Farms & Gardens, 2021), meaning expert advice for new entrants on these issues can be too expensive to access.

Constraints and proposed policy changes

Interviewees’ suggestions for policy changes drew from their deep personal or professional experience of being, supporting, or researching, new entrants into farming's journeys and struggles.

Finance and markets

Several interviewees mentioned the difficulties new entrants and/or Farmstarts faced in accessing appropriate finance to support their businesses and programmes. Farmstart organisations were frequently reliant on short-term grant funding, preventing them from maintaining a consistent, high quality training programme, designed for people from a wide range of class and ethnic backgrounds, or from further developing and replicating the Farmstart model around the country.

For ex-Farmstarters still in agriculture, central government finance or subsidies were usually unsuitable, because they were often only for farms over five hectares in size, required upfront payment for equipment which could then be claimed back on receipt (which small farms didn't always have the requisite cash flow for), were for too large amounts, or required repayment too quickly, to be affordable.

With this in mind, research participants suggested the following changes to policy and institutional support:

- Paid traineeships and income support for Farmstarters and/or new entrants, similar to that provided in France, to allow them to concentrate on their training (without having to balance this with other paid employment), and room for genuine experimentation and a safety net in the first few years of their business or training.
- Eligibility for and access to finance for start-up or scale-up capital costs, tailored to the needs of small-scale agricultural farmers, for example, for small machinery or infrastructure for processing.
- An acknowledgement of the value of farming as a vocation, of the true cost of food, and the wider support to the community that small, agroecological farms deliver, in government policy. This should be accompanied by high level and holistic financial support for the transition to agroecological farming, similar to after the Second World War (Bowers, 1985) (perhaps funded through post-Brexit changes in subsidy regimes), but not targeted at industrial agriculture this time around.
- More widespread localised food policies and public procurement policies to guarantee markets for small-scale agroecological growers.

Land and infrastructure

Access to the right type of land at an affordable price and with the right sort of infrastructure was a significant challenge for most Farmstart trainees wanting to continue a career in farming, and for the newer Farmstarts still in the process of setting up. Land prices often reflect their 'hope value' - the market value of land over and above its agricultural value if developed for an alternative use, often housing (Merrick, 2017). As such they reflect profit levels anticipated through property development, not the narrow margins of making a living through agroecological farming. Sometimes new entrants, including some people involved in this research, have to move considerable distances to secure land, but this means they lose valuable community networks to support their businesses and have to start building these up again. On the issue of land access and infrastructure, research participants suggested the following changes:

Greater regulation of the land market and land prices to make it more affordable for farming, and more support for routes to decommodify land, such as through Community Land Trusts.

- Regional land use planning, possibly involving democratic decision-making over what each area wants and needs and who will produce it (which could provide a progression pathway for Farmstarters).
- For much more public and private land to be opened up for Farmstarts to allow for progression after training, or facilitate longer-term tenancies on Farmstart-managed land. Protecting and expanding the 'County Farm' estate¹ might form part of this.
- Reform of the tax and inheritance systems so that they benefit farmers actively working the land more than investors buying up property for speculative purposes, and so that the tax system associated with succession doesn't only support consolidation of land ownership.
- (Support to) secure longer-term agricultural tenancies to allow new farmers to invest in infrastructure on their land that would boost their productivity.
- Reform of planning legislation so more people can live and retire on or close to their farmland.
- Prioritisation of agroecological growing around cities in their 'green belts'² as opposed to using this land for horse grazing or it being seen simply as 'waiting' for housing development.
- More investment in better roads and broadband internet in rural areas to make farm and non-farm-based livelihoods easier there.

Advice and networks

Various constraints were mentioned in interviews related to advice and networks (including the Farmstart Network itself) which if tackled at a policy/institutional level could increase new entrants' chances of success. The high costs of specialist legal, planning or financial advice (regulations for which can change quickly and be hard to keep abreast of) held back or slowed down new entrants and indeed Farmstarts when developing their businesses or

¹ 'County Farms' are one classification of farmland owned and leased out to tenant farmers by local authorities. For a more detailed explanation of this and other sorts of publicly owned farmland in England, see Graham et al., (2019).

² 'Green belts are a buffer between towns, and between town and countryside. The green belt designation is a planning tool and the aim of green belt policy is to prevent urban sprawl by keeping land permanently open; however, there is not necessarily a right of access there.' (Open Spaces Society, 2021: 1)

projects. Also, not always having ongoing support after some Farmstart programmes could leave trainees unsure about how to overcome the significant remaining barriers to making the most of their newly acquired skills and developing their own businesses, especially if they moved to a new location. With this in mind, research participants suggested the following changes in support:

- Free ongoing mentoring to new entrants across the UK, including business and marketing support.
- More national and regional strategies and support for food and farming - for example local councils assisting new entrants into farming and linking them up with local food hubs.
- For the Farmstart Network to be more actively managed or coordinated so that it can act as a source of advice and support for Farmstarters as well as the Farmstart organisations.
- For more cooperative networks of producers and collective sourcing to help producers, processors and consumers get fair prices for food, as opposed to unrepresentative major farming unions where generally only those who fit the stereotypical representation of farmers (i.e. older males running large-scale industrial farms [see more on this in the 'Gender' section below] have the time available that's necessary to put into it).
- For training to be accredited where it forms part of Farmstart programmes and the creation of more formal agricultural college training places for agroecological growing, so that more people emerge from them with a recognised qualification to help them progress into agroecological farming as a career.

If all or most of these improvements to policy and institutional support could be realised, it would go a long way towards enabling many more people to have fulfilling livelihoods in agriculture, and in turn support rural regeneration and generational renewal. The extent to which the Farmstart Network has already made an impact on these themes is examined further in the next section.

Impact and perspectives

The conceptual guidelines of the RURALIZATION project describe how the process of rural regeneration should be one of positive transformation as opposed to simply reversing decline, but also how there often exists a gap between the rhetoric and reality of regeneration (Murtagh et al., 2019). In analysing the impact of the Farmstart Network on rural regeneration, these two points resonate strongly. From the research conducted, there were certainly seeds of, ambitions for, and, at a small-scale, examples of, transformation of our food and farming systems. This included people's livelihoods and connections to the land, and to each other, in rural areas and their continuum through the peri-urban and into towns and cities. However, in practice, the experience of the Farmstart Network, Farmstart programmes, and whether Farmstarters are able to continue farming as a career, has been varied for different organisations and participants. Their transformative potential is limited by operating within current systems, lack of resources, and the context of deep structural inequalities. This final section will illustrate some of the impacts the Farmstart Network has had upon its members, trainees, and their wider communities, to consider the key factors that contribute to rural regeneration and generational renewal, and how these might be enhanced or expanded in the future.

Individuals

Individuals who have been through or were currently on the Farmstart schemes expressed a range of opinions on the effects their participation had in their lives and careers. Most of those currently on the programmes seem satisfied with the training and/or support they were receiving, with one notable exception, and were particularly happy about the positive connection some of them had managed to make with the local community, especially during COVID:

"I think people really love our veg at [grocers], especially when the pandemic started there was a really big focus on sourcing nutritious, locally-produced stuff so it was really nice to be able to rise to the challenge." Lisa

“So we’ve been able to sell into that project as well, which feels really good to be able to...use our produce to help them tackle food poverty and just getting really good quality, highly nutritious vegetables into the kitchens of people that really need it, feels really good.”

Lily

One interviewee who was less positive about their experience was on a scheme where just land access and little other training or support was offered. They felt it was perhaps somewhat misleading for this project to be called a Farmstart and had been quite overwhelmed by the experience. This suggests, as another interviewee put forward, that there may need to be more consistency in what Farmstart organisations offer so people know what to expect from the outset and can decide whether it is the right opportunity for them.

People interviewed who had previously completed a Farmstart course were generally those still involved in agriculture, although a couple of interviewees made reference to the fact that a number of their course peers had not continued into farming afterwards. For some, this was because of barriers mentioned above, such as finding suitable land, but for others, the experiences of Farmstart may have put them off. While there will always likely be some people who decide commercial scale growing is not for them after trying it out (and indeed it is useful for them to have a supported Farmstart or training experience to realise that), there was a sense from some interviews that more Farmstart participants would have continued to pursue agriculture as a career if they have been better supported during and after the Farmstart:

“I guess there are so many different models...[but here] it’s very much you have this piece of land and here’s the infrastructure and then you’ll start your business, which is great in loads of ways because you do have the freedom to create whatever the hell you want, but it is also extremely overwhelming as well, it’s a bit too much freedom, inviting people who are quite inexperienced to come to a place and then have to create their own business. My other [Farmstarter] [name] quit at the end of last season cos it was just too much for her and she’s now really questioning her future in growing. [Name of former Farmstarter] also, it was too much for [name of same former Farmstarter] as well, [name of same Farmstarter]’s not doing growing any more, [name of another former Farmstarter] also isn’t doing growing any

more. So if you're looking at what the [Farmstarts] are doing it's definitely not helping them into growing."

Ann

Most of the ex-Farmstarters interviewed said the course had given them at least some useful practical skills to work in agriculture:

"As far as Farmstart are concerned I think it was really valuable and by the end of it you get an idea of what's involved, even though you're only there two days a week, you're there two days a week from February to October, you see the best of it and the worst of it when you get there in February and the polytunnel's flooded or it's a lovely sunny day and you're doing some nice harvesting, so it's really good for that. A lot of the things I've grown this year are pretty much what we did at Farmstart last year and it's using the same techniques so it's been brilliant like that."

David

Although some emphasised they had expected more in terms of particular topics, for example pest management, or marketing and business support, or at times even felt exploited or in a rather vulnerable position based on their time and monetary investment in the programme:

"We were supposed to all have access to [route to market] but actually it was just them, so we invested our money and it just wasn't equal. It's just when you have a job...you have rights as an employee, even as a volunteer you have some rights and legal protection, you have nothing in this scheme."

Nia

The Land Workers' Alliance's internal research estimates that 119 people have been trained through the programmes of Farmstart organisations (Land Workers' Alliance, 2021), but even for those who have gone onto a job in agriculture afterwards and have been relatively successful, it is hard to earn a living:

"I just don't think unless you're a farmer with a farming background that you quite get how hard it is."

Nia

They also have to continue to overcome barriers mentioned previously throughout this report. For example, one interviewee, despite having a substantial impact on their local

community in the five years they have been established (see further details in the next section) was struggling to access land again after their lease wasn't renewed recently:

“It’s been really difficult, we had a five year lease to start with and it’s not enough and it’s not been an easy relationship with the landlord sadly, they were brilliant at the beginning but I think the reality of an organic market garden in their heads was going to look like a National Trust garden and I’m sure you know what an organic market garden looks like, to us it’s gorgeous, to them it’s weeds and nets and old tyres weighing things down and it doesn’t fit in with their twee aesthetic of what they’re trying to create with a farm...so we’ve been asked to leave. It’s really tricky with not having a long-term lease because then we haven’t been able to develop any infrastructure here, we haven’t been able to build and invest in what we’re doing which makes us look very tatty and make-do and short term, which is a self-fulfilling problem.”

Donna

This speaks to the fragility and potential bidirectionality of new entrants’ position on the ‘Access to Land Pathway’ proposed by the RURALIZATION project (Loveluck et al., 2021). They are likely to continue needing support at various levels of the pathway without radical reform of the broader inequitable land, food, and farming systems they operate within.

A number of current and ex-Farmstarters, as well as other interviewees, also mentioned concerns about the people who are most able to participate in and succeed at Farmstart programmes and smoothly transition to a career in agriculture afterwards. The ones who do achieve this are often those with substantial privilege, particularly in terms of financial security, enabling them to do the Farmstart course without being paid or having to balance it with another job, and afterwards are able to afford to purchase or rent the necessary land and equipment, and perhaps not break even for a few years:

“My main argument is that [the current model of many farm incubators] just totally entrenches the status quo and the only people who will succeed in that model will be the most privileged members of society, the people who can get around the structural barriers but now they have this new ability, essentially a green thumb.”

Carl

Managing the hard physical labour on the Farmstart course and in running an agricultural business was also thought to be easier for people without other jobs or caring responsibilities to cope with:

“There’s a reason why most of the people that turn up or go onto these programmes are the majority white, most are highly educated...I’d say it’s increasingly more women, young women, career changers, like late 20s, but equally women who have quite a lot of freedom, limited responsibility, so again they’re not representative of anyone that has a family or has to work.”

Louise

These findings back up other recent research produced specifically about the experiences of social enterprise food growers from Black / communities of colour in the UK, which details the systemic racism faced by Black and people of colour in trying to enter agriculture as a career, and emphasises the need for proper remuneration as opposed to the ‘normalised’ practice of ‘low-to-no pay labour...in regenerative, sustainable food growing spaces’ (Calliste, Sivapragasam and McDonald, 2021: 30).

One academic also mentioned concerns about rural gentrification, particularly post-COVID, and it may be that this typical upper-middle class profile of successful farmers could carry through to solidify this trend. Whilst an influx of younger, wealthier people from cities to rural areas could be thought to constitute generational renewal, it may not result in the transformation or regeneration desired by people living there already who are struggling to access affordable housing and good jobs:

“Again it’s a social justice issue where I think the smart money is moving to the countryside and I think...we’re going to see a lot more of that post-COVID...I think we just need to be careful that when we’re encouraging new entrants into farming we need to think about are we encouraging a particular class of people into farming, are we encouraging well-educated, university people to buy land in the countryside and develop it for farming, and I’m not necessarily sure that that’s wrong, I’m not sure that it’s ethically a problem, if we think that our food producers should be well-educated, but I think it’s a problem if it becomes that access to land is something that only well-educated people can have and we end up with the situation that we had 300 years ago with feudalism, where it was wealthy people that owned land and it was poor people that actually worked on the land and did the groundwork.” Jay

Farmstart organisations

People interviewed involved in researching running Farmstarts on behalf of organisations and in the Network or its coordination were positive, if realistic, about the extent of its impact over the last few years. They were optimistic about the potential of Farmstarts to train a new generation of agroecological farmers, create meaningful work, and revive horticultural industries, particularly if given more funding and policy support to allow for their replication in other places. At the same time, they acknowledged the current challenges in keeping Farmstarts going, their inaccessibility to certain demographic groups, and the limited wider impact they have had on their local communities:

“I don’t think it’s big enough. People can see it from the road as they’re driving past because it’s in quite a prominent point in the landscape, so people can see it from the main road about half a mile away, so I guess visually it’s had an impact but not socially or economically.”

Peter

“The thing with new entrants is they’re often few and far between so you don’t normally have a cluster of a critical mass of them, it’s wherever land happens to become available and they’re not huge rural employers, they employ themselves typically for not a whole lot of money, so I’m not an economist to be able to say how much benefit they are to the local community particularly, but I wouldn’t think that they would be a huge impact, not a negative impact by any shape of the imagination, it’s more people in the area, it’s more business happening and potentially a few more kids in the schools but I wouldn’t think as a way to repopulate rural areas or regenerate rural areas that that is necessarily a huge impact unless they’re doing something like community supported agriculture that creates a lot of social capital in the community...So as a regeneration strategy I think it would be one part of a bigger effort towards eco-tourism or that kind of thing, so that’s where your new entrants might have more success is where they’re doing some of these diversification activities that involve a larger number of people.”

Jay

Still, even with their relatively small-scale of impact at this stage, one Farmstart mentioned attracting international interest in their model:

“Just last week we had a call from a group in Catalonia who are setting up a Farmstart and they had a video call, they were asking for some advice and some more information, so those groups further afield that are looking at what we’re doing as a Network, so that’s good.”

Peter

Given that Farmstarts are just one piece of the puzzle in terms of transforming the UK’s food and farming sector, more political work and lobbying is necessary to improve the challenging context in which they are currently operating. With this in mind, the Farmstart Guide produced by the Network should be seen as a positive impact. The experience of the Farmstart Network may also have contributed to building the credibility of LWA members who are currently participating in DEFRA’s ongoing New Entrants’ Support Scheme co-design process. One interviewee who is trying to set up a Farmstart also explained that the Network has given them a concrete example to talk through with their local council with the aim of accessing land, showing one practical way this lobbying can be done at a local level:

“It’s been very interesting talking to the council about it and planning, it’s changed the relationship of our conversations with the council because we’re not just saying ‘Give us some land, we want to grow some vegetables’ it’s ‘Give us some land and this is what we can do, here are some examples that have done this and this is what we can achieve and this is how’. It’s definitely helped our relationship with the council having a model and an idea that’s proven and shown and is about more than just ‘Find some land, put a grower on it, find some land, put a grower on it’.”

Clare

However, one researcher interviewed said that from their own studies Farmstarters themselves often feel quite distant from the political work of the broader movement for food sovereignty, despite considering themselves part of it. Better integrating the politics of the LWA, La Vía Campesina (the broader peasants’ and small-scale farmers’ movement of which the LWA is a member [La Vía Campesina n.d.]), and the food sovereignty movement into the design and running of the Farmstart programme might be a potential route to overcome some of the difficulties faced by its participants and graduates.

One academic interviewed who had considered farm incubator projects in the US and UK noted their emancipatory potential as an alternative to replicating, even if unintentionally,

the status quo of structural inequalities embedded in the UK farming sector by emphasising characteristics such as innovation, as opposed to cooperation (as is often the case currently):

“So in what ways could the curriculum of those spaces be more politically aware, emancipatory, create a type of mobilising force that flips the classroom on its head so that it’s an imaginative space of ‘What do we think the problems are?’...the types of participatory and bottom-up learning that asks not ‘What do I need to know in this system?’, but ‘What should the system be and why are things the way they are?’”

Carl

This, Carl suggested, might be one way to work towards “rural reconciliation” that is truly transformative, as opposed to re-entrenching existing injustices through ‘rural renewal’ or ‘regeneration’:

“The real interesting thing about incubators is I would like to think it forces a question of ‘Is it really rural renewal that we want to be accomplishing or is it some kind of rural reconciliation?’, cos if you’re at a farm incubator and people are doing lots of different things with different visions of what agriculture should be, people are working in collectives and they’re young and they care, they’re attaching agriculture to these ideas of power and imperialism and then after that they’re supposed to go inherit a 1000 acre beef and sheep operation, what exactly are we renewing?”

And that increasing the diversity of Farmstarts’ trainees was crucial to achieving this:

“I bet the types of solutions towards real renewal would be much deeper if a broader constituency was involved in those types of programmes.”

Carl

Wider community

Although Farmstarts and businesses of (ex)Farmstarters may not yet have had a significant impact on the general public at a regional or national scale, there were certainly encouraging examples of what they have achieved at a hyper-local scale already, or have plans to do in the future. One of the longest established ex-Farmstarters interviewed, Donna, who has been running their own business for about five years, gave this summary of its impact locally:

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“In five years as a project I think we’re doing so well and our annual turnover’s about £70,000 a year, we’ve trained over 100 people through accredited training programmes, we’ve run traineeships, we’ve got the only [productive horticulture] apprenticeship in [the geographic region]...we’re training other people to do this, we’re supporting other people to do this, I’m now mentoring other people who are setting up sites elsewhere and I give them my time because [Farmstart organisation] gave me their time so it creates a culture of, I hope, wanting to support each other which is also really lovely.”

Donna

A more recently established Farmstart felt the initiation of the scheme and the connections it had made through its work had helped engage local people in wider conversations about the food system. Indeed, the increasing interest of people sourcing locally-produced food since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic (Sustain, 2021) was something other (ex)Farmstarters mentioned as helpful for their businesses:

“With COVID and people’s interest in food and organics and veg boxes and deliveries just went through the roof and I think we’re just riding the tide of that and had enough experience to be in the right place at the right time.”

Nia

Another current Farmstarter spoke of future plans to expand their business and farm into something with a wider community impact beyond food production:

“Our longer term vision is...to make the space itself a bit of a community asset, so running courses and workshops and community open days and things like that, so getting people in to learn and to share in the space as well, so we’ve got various ideas for that, I’m also a yoga teacher as well so the thing I do as well as this is teach yoga so we’d quite like to run yoga and wellbeing things and as part of that I often offer food so we can have shared meals and stuff there. So we’ve got a wider ambition aside from just growing to just turn it into a space that people want to hang out as well.”

Lily

There are also occasional examples of other Farmstarters offering work or training, supporting biodiversity, providing opportunities to volunteer, as well as beginning to reinvigorate local horticultural production at least at a small-scale, which has given consumers in their area more retail choice for fresh food. However, some interviewees and

the focus group participants raised concerns about the accessibility of this produce - that in the same way that many of the more successful new entrants are from relatively affluent backgrounds, the food they are growing, and selling at a premium, is only affordable for people with a similar class position. In order to realise bigger ambitions of transforming the food system, it was recognised that there is a need to break out of these niches and that this would likely take more coordination at all levels, from production through processing and onto retail, so that farmers and processors can make a decent living from their work, and that substantially higher costs aren't only borne by customers:

“A lot of ecological producers operate in a niche so that’s by definition limited, it’s exclusive to a certain consumer base but it also means you can’t have loads of other producers doing similar things which makes it really difficult if we’re thinking of properly changing rural areas or systems...So it’s just really difficult because the margins are so tight, people are having to find these little niches but then there’s tensions...I think those coordinating bodies are really good and I think they’ve also got a lot of ability to get beyond the niches....it also helps break that thing of the higher costs of production being passed onto consumers and then that being a niche and also it enables people to do, there’s more the collective sourcing, so it’s not like only one grain farmer would supply all the grain, multiple people are producing the grain and it’s almost a cooperative type model.”

Lee

As part of this broader-scale work to reshape landscapes, food, and farming, dialogue and relationship-building with groups pushing for other forms of land use will likely be necessary in order to open up progression pathways for more (ex)Farmstarters. Rewilding, afforestation, and housing development were mentioned as land uses which might (and indeed already were in some rural areas such as the Scottish Highlands) further elevate land prices and make them unaffordable for new entrants to agriculture. Hopefully there are ways that can be found for different groups to work together, as in particular the rewilding agenda has some overlap with the priorities of small-scale agroecological farming in terms of increasing biodiversity. A few interviewees mentioned their hope that in the future Farmstarts can become part of a trajectory or pathway from leisure and community gardening to commercial farming, so that more people view agriculture as a worthy and desirable profession and can find the right place for themselves in it:

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“I just feel if this process can be replicated all over it would make such a massive difference. Not just this, I came up through managing community gardens and the whole community capacity building and you had community gardens on every corner, school projects going on, building up to Farmstarts, just an acknowledgement that it’s a worthy profession for a start would be really, even a pastime, bring it on, it’s really important.”

Sasha

Indeed, entry into land work was seen as a way to counter the despair felt by young people worried about and mobilised through related issues of climate breakdown and food justice:

“I think there’s a lot of apathy and desperation, I think some of that can be combatted with, ‘Well [land work’s] a proper form of employment, it’s very fulfilling and it’s deeply necessary so really important that we’re part of that to make that happen’.”

Rose

Overall, the Farmstart Network has so far had a relatively small impact on rural regeneration and generational renewal at a national scale, with the deepest impacts concentrated at a hyperlocal level around individual Farmstarts and ex-Farmstarters’ businesses. Having said that, the extent of what has been achieved in a short period of time by the (ex)Farmstarters who have been best-supported shows the impact of the Network is potentially substantial if funded to be replicated in many more places across the UK, and so that connections between Farmstart(er)s could be strengthened. However, there may also need to be changes to the Farmstarts’ pedagogical models, support packages for trainees after ‘graduation’, and better linkages to the wider food sovereignty movement, for the scheme to become equitable and accessible to people from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances, and to simultaneously bring about the necessary change in the broader context of food and farming in the UK for new entrants to thrive.

Gender

The RURALIZATION project has a particular focus on understanding gendered experiences, especially those of women, in farming and rural areas, and how overcoming more ‘traditional’ gender roles might be part of generational renewal (Murtagh et al., 2021). Interviewees were asked and spoke organically about how they felt gender had an impact on their own journeys into agriculture and within rural and farming contexts more generally. There was a recognition of the continuing sexist defaults of the farming industry, described by one interviewee as the “cultural mythology” of what farming should be and who it's for, as being typically male, and operating large-scale industrial farms, contrasting with the more gender-diverse sphere of agroecological and small-scale farming and market gardening:

“Where that becomes sociologically interesting is it's not that men [who took part in focus groups for this academic's research] wouldn't vote for women [in union elections] because they're women, they wouldn't vote for them because they're not the image of who they think should be representing farmers in [area], and who they think should be representing farmers in [area] are men in their 50s who run large-scale operations that have a son, preferably, behind them who can take over the day to day running of the farm while the dad runs off to all these meetings, because being an executive takes a lot of time. So what that rules out then is any representation in the [major farming union] of small farms, of new entrant farms, of young people, of people who are working part-time for instance, because none of those people have the time or the resources that they can just wander off to these meetings that happen quite regularly.”

Jay

“I think within growers and market gardeners it's much more likely to have women than other parts of agriculture...I don't think it's too bad to be honest, the market gardening that I do, when I go to conferences in the market gardening organic sector it just seems pretty mixed. I think they seem to be doing more, making sure they've got women speakers and women on the panel.”

Nia

One interviewee speculated as to why this latter experience might be the case, but noted that further research was needed:

“So women, when they come into farming, tend to do it on much smaller scale farms, interestingly they’re more likely to be owner operators and that’s because they’ve had to buy their farm and that’s why they’re small, but they’re also much more likely to be recreational. We don’t know whether that’s because they come into farming because they love it so why would you bother trying to make money off it, it’s not very profitable anyway, or whether because they just couldn’t, or they just don’t want to engage with this whole competitive, commercial male-sphere, so they come in and do something that’s more alternative.”

Jay

However, other academics interviewed warned against making gendered assumptions when looking at mixed gendered farming couples for example:

“What’s interesting with the work I’m doing right now is that I was talking to a group of women and they were laughing amongst themselves saying that sometimes their husbands tend to see the farm as a lifestyle first, they want to turn a profit and that’s what’s motivating them.”

Sandra

Despite this more mixed gender perception of the agroecological farming sector, everyday sexist attitudes and experiences remain. Several interviewees, both new entrants and more established ones shared these, affecting everything from machinery dimensions to interactions with other people:

“I still get it when a delivery driver comes into the yard with a delivery note for something that I’ve ordered and it’s clearly got a female name on it but as soon as they see any guy even vaguely on the horizon they’ll rush off towards them to find out where it is to drop this thing off...It’s totally not just men that have these preconceptions, it comes from both sides, things take a while to change.”

Charlie

“That’s the other thing, appropriate technology for female body sizes, that’s another thing that’s really held us back is that all these blokes are like ‘Look at me and my lovely power hammer on a walking tractor’ and I’m a small woman and I can’t use them so that kind of

‘You can work on a small-scale and be really productive’, it’s just for women it’s really passing us by.”

Donna

This speaks to the continued importance of seeing more women and people of other marginalised genders represented farming at events, in unions, and in technical industries supporting farming, and also for safe spaces (such as skillshares) where specific gender-based or other identity groups or caucuses can learn from each other and share their experiences:

“I just got paid to be on a panel and I really had the least experience of everyone but just because I was a woman, I was like you know what I’m going to give it a go, cos I do think it’s important to see people doing it who aren’t just men.”

Nia

“Especially being two young women working there and people would come by and see us doing something quite manual and hardcore and it’s quite nice to be like ‘Look, we can be farmers too’. So that feels quite good.”

Ann

“So I think that whole mentality of just ‘Have a go at it, you don’t have to be amazing at it, it’s ok if you’re just an average farmer, that’s actually enough’. So I think it is that old thing of the more we see people doing these things and it’s just normal and it’s not exceptional and nobody has to feel like they have to be amazing at it then the easier it will be, and it’s not just women, it’s anyone who’s currently under-represented from these groups...It would be great to just have more people doing these things, being able to draw from a far greater diversity of people.”

Charlie

Other focus group participants and interviewees spoke optimistically about the future, with new entrants perhaps having less ‘baggage’ around gender or family structures/division of labour:

“When you’ve got people coming in from outside the sector as well you also get more egalitarian gender-relations because the rest of [area] has moved on and we no longer think that a woman’s place is to be behind the husband and silent in other sectors, so when women come in that don’t have that cultural bias and they weren’t raised to behave that



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way, then they just follow their cultural script I suppose that they're accustomed to from where they were...I wouldn't say a wave, but certainly a growth in people who have very different backgrounds and approaches to family relationships coming in...So there's a lot of freedom in what's coming into farming as well and challenging the traditional family-types and that sort of thing."

Jay

This was also acknowledged in the focus group, with rural places being described as sometimes a mix of traditional and unconventional, the latter allowing for the emergence of more diverse gender identities amongst young people in rural areas, but simultaneously that further work on issues such as gender privilege and the rights of trans people being needed to overcome ingrained biases.

From the experiences of interviewees and focus group participants, the Farmstart Network, as part of the wider agroecological horticulture sector, seems to be a place where women (and people of other marginalised genders) can find acceptance and develop fulfilling livelihoods. In doing so the Network contributes to more equitable gender relations and power dynamics in rural areas at a small scale, though further in-depth research is certainly needed to improve understanding of this. By strengthening the connections within and between the Farmstart cohorts, and with wider feminist movements associated with food and farming, more opportunities for improving representation and building the skills of women involved in agriculture may emerge. At the same time, gender is only one facet of people's identities which may impact upon their experiences in farming, and life more generally, so taking an intersectional approach to understanding and tackling structural inequalities is vital for rural regeneration and generational renewal that benefits everyone, not just the most privileged.

Conclusion

This report paints a picture of a complex ecosystem of actors, institutions and circumstances that have created the Farmstart Network as it currently exists.

With very little funding or institutional support, the initiators of the Farmstart Network have achieved a substantial amount, supporting the creation of a movement of incubator farms, aspiring Farmstarters, and graduates now running agroecological farms and having demonstrable impact in local communities. Indeed, some Farmstart graduates are running farm businesses that are thriving while traditional agriculture is struggling:

“I know the farmer we rent land off is running at a loss and that’s the thing, we’re not running at a loss, we’ve got a really good solid business that employs three and a half people and it really bugs me, and yet DEFRA will pour more and more money into these big farms and the bigger the farms the more they get, but us small people who are actually having a real impact in the wellbeing of our local communities and the nutritional wellbeing of our communities and contributing to the future of the way food is grown, you just get nothing.”

Donna

As this quote illustrates, though, the innovations and successes that the Farmstart Network has had have been in spite of a general lack of institutional, policy and funding support. A key conclusion of this report is that while a lot has been achieved with a little, more comprehensive funding and support for this work would increase its impact significantly. In particular, removing the need for participants to pay, and instead paying them to participate, would open up the Farmstart opportunity to a far wider range of people.

Perhaps due to the unsupportive circumstances the practice has developed in, there are a number of areas where we would recommend the Farmstart practice could improve or develop, in addition to lobbying for the policy and institutional support suggestions mentioned earlier. These include:

- Creating a more standardised and better-communicated approach to Farmstart where similar levels of support and training are offered across the Network.
- Seeking to make Farmstart training accredited so that graduates have a qualification at the end of the programme.



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- Providing participants with the opportunity to give anonymous or independent feedback, and developing processes for this to be acted upon.
- Considering the pedagogical approach used by Farmstarts and potentially shifting towards a more asset-based model which recognises a broader range of farming histories and relationships to the land and better links with the political work of the broader food sovereignty movement.
- Considering the general model - usually of individual entrepreneurs graduating to start their own farms - and developing alternative more collaborative models that might contribute to a more equitable and sustainable rural renewal.

This research has also highlighted the need for further research including:

- Detailed work on the gendered and racialised experiences of new entrants into farming.
- More quantitative work on impact.
- The impact of the reliance on part-time work and volunteering in supporting the development of new entrants and their farm businesses.
- The opportunities and barriers to the creation of more explicit progression pathways (e.g. gardening as a leisure activity or volunteering in community gardens, through training courses to Farmstart and progression to, for instance, a County Farm).
- The role of networks and coordination, and the infrastructure that is needed to support new entrants.

In conclusion, the Farmstart Network can certainly be considered a promising practice for rural regeneration and generational renewal, but with some adjustments and further support may also contain the seeds of a more radical and liberatory era of “rural reconciliation”.

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Appendix 1. Further detail on Farmstarts' local contexts

<i>Name of Farmstart</i>	Earth Trust
Location/NUTS 3 Region Code	Oxfordshire/UKJ14
Population of area (2011) (at NUTS 3 level)	653,798 (Nomis, n.d.a)
Main industries of employment (at NUTS 3 level)	Education, wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles, human health and social work activities (Nomis, n.d.a)
Main types of agriculture (at NUTS 1 level)	Cereals and livestock (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2021: 30)
<i>Name of Farmstart</i>	Kindling Trust
Location/NUTS 3 Region Code	Greater Manchester South East (Stockport and Tameside)/UKD35
Population of area (2011) (at sub-NUTS 3 level)	105,878 (Nomis, n.d.b)
Main industries of employment (at sub-NUTS 3 level)	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles, human health and social work activities, education (Nomis, n.d.b)
Main types of agriculture (at NUTS 1 level)	Grazing livestock and dairy (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2021: 10)
<i>Name of Farmstart</i>	LESS
Location/NUTS 3 Region Code	Lancaster and Wyre/UKD44
Population of area (2011) (at sub-NUTS 3 level)	48,085 (Nomis, n.d.c)
Main industries of employment (at sub-NUTS 3 level)	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, human health and social work activities, and education (Nomis, n.d.d)
Main types of agriculture (at NUTS 1 level)	Grazing livestock and dairy (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2021: 10)
<i>Name of Farmstart</i>	Locavore
Location/NUTS 3 Region Code	Glasgow/UKM34
Population of area (2011) (at NUTS 3 level)	633,100 (Glasgow City Council, 2021)
Main industries of employment (at NUTS 3 level)	Human health and social work activities, administrative and support service activities, and wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles (Nomis, n.d.e)
Main types of agriculture (at NUTS 1 level)	Forage, livestock, and cereals (Scottish Government 2019)
<i>Name of Farmstart</i>	Mach Maethlon
Location/NUTS 3 Region Code	Powys/UKL24
Population of area (2011) (at NUTS 3 level)	132,976 (Nomis, n.d.f)

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Main industries of employment (at NUTS 3 level)	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles, human health and social work activities, construction (Nomis, n.d.f.)
Main types of agriculture (at NUTS 1 level)	Livestock and dairy (Armstrong, 2016)
<i>Name of Farmstart</i>	OrganicLea
Location/NUTS 3 Region Code	Redbridge and Waltham Forest/UKI53
Population of area (2011) (at sub-NUTS 3 level)	258,249 (Nomis, n.d.g)
Main industries of employment (at sub-NUTS 3 level)	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles, human health and social work activities, education (Nomis, n.d.g)
Main types of agriculture (at NUTS 1 level)	Cereals and grazing livestock (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2021: 30)
<i>Name of Farmstart</i>	Stroud Starter Farm
Location/NUTS 3 Region Code	Gloucestershire County Council/UKK13
Population of area (2011) (at sub-NUTS 3 level)	112,779 (Nomis, n.d.h)
Main industries of employment (at sub-NUTS 3 level)	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles, human health and social work activities, manufacturing (Nomis, n.d.h)
Main types of agriculture (at NUTS 1 level)	Grazing Livestock, Cereals, and Dairy (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2021: 34)
<i>Name of Farmstart</i>	Tamar Grow Local
Location/NUTS 3 Region Code	Cornwall and Isles of Scilly/UKK30
Population of area (2019) (at NUTS 3 level)	571,800 (Nomis, n.d.i)
Main industries of employment (at NUTS 3 level)	Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, accommodation and food service activities, and human health and social work activities (Nomis, n.d.i)
Main types of agriculture (at NUTS 1 level)	Grazing livestock, cereals, and dairy (Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs, 2021: 34)

Table 1. Details of individual Farmstarts

Appendix 2. The list of interviews

Code	Interviewee (Pseudonym)	Role
UK1A/Int.1	Clare	Promoters and actors involved in promising practice; Key person in local communities, social networks or social movements; Responsible person of local employers' association, farmers organisation and trade unions
UK1A/Int.2	Peter	Promoters and actors involved in promising practice; Key person in local communities, social networks or social movements
UK1A/Int.3	Eva	Promoters and actors involved in promising practice; Key person in local communities, social networks or social movements
UK1A/Int.4	Lily	New entrant
UK1A/Int.5	Judy	Promoters and actors involved in promising practice; Key person in local communities, social networks or social movements
UK1A/Int.6	Stevie	Newcomer/new entrant; Promoters and actors involved in promising practice
UK1A/Int.7	Sasha	Promoters and actors involved in promising practice
UK1A/Int.8	David	New entrant
UK1A/Int.9	Lisa	New entrant
UK1A/Int.10	Ann	New entrant
UK1A/Int.11	Marcus	Promoters and actors involved in promising practice; Key person in local communities, social networks or social movements; Responsible person of local employers' association, farmers organisation and trade unions
UK1A/Int.12	Lee	Key informant on promising practice; New entrant
UK1A/Int.13	Maria	New entrant
UK1A/Int.14	Donna	New entrant
UK1A/Int.15	Charlie	Key person in local communities, social networks or social movements
UK1A/Int.16	Jay	Key informant on promising practice
UK1A/Int.17	Sandra + Abigail	Key informants on promising practice
UK1A/Int.18	Jodie + May	New entrant + Key informant on promising practice

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UK1A/Int.19	Louise	Key informant on promising practice
UK1A/Int.20	James	Key person in local communities, social networks or social movements; Key informant on promising practice
UK1A/Int.21	Carl	Key informant on promising practice
UK1A/Int.22	Rose	Responsible person of local employers' association, farmers organisation and trade unions; Key person in local communities, social networks or social movements
UK1A/Int.23	Nia	New entrant

Table 1. Interviews