

Preparatory action on EU plant and animal genetic resources

Crop for the Shop

Overview

1. Objectives

The main aim of the Crop for the Shop scheme is to increase the consumption of local food products at a fair price, whilst changing the current food culture which is characterised by mass production of food and the control of the market by big businesses and retailers. Ultimately, Crop for the Shop aims at raising awareness on the importance of short supply chains and local products, including products from old and traditional varieties, for local economies. The objective of the case study is to identify the impact of the scheme on local communities and their regard towards local products, and also to investigate the presence and use of genetic resources in the context of the scheme.

2. Description of the case

Crop for the Shop is a scheme set up by the Community Interest Company (CIC)¹ Big Barn, based in the UK. The scheme was initiated in 2012, based on the idea that it would be easier to find local food in an area if the local people grew it. The scheme consists of local shops selling produce that is brought in by local growers, who will receive a share of the sales (generally 70%).

Crop for the Shop operates through Big Barn, which was created in 2000 by Anthony Davison, a 5th generation farmer who wanted farmers to receive a larger share of the price of the product. Anthony Davison sought out to develop short supply chains, enhance local product consumption and overall change the current food culture in the UK, characterised by mass production of food and the control of the market by big businesses and retailers. Big Barn also strives to encourage farmers to diversify the varieties used on the farm by the use of genetic resources, and employ a differentiation strategy rather than seek economies of scale. Big Barn employs one person full time as well as one part time employee. They are currently searching for volunteers to help carry out their work, as the lack of funding means that they will have to rely on volunteers to further develop Big Barn's activities, including the Crop for the Shop scheme. Indeed, Big Barn does not currently receive any funding for their activities.

Big Barn's activities are centred on the Big Barn website², on which there is a Local Food Map (cf. figure 1), regrouping shops selling local products across the UK. The shops on this

¹ A CIC is a company acting in the best interest of the community. See the following link for further information: <http://www.cicassociation.org.uk/about/what-is-a-cic>

² <https://www.bigbarn.co.uk/>

map have subscribed to Big Barn to appear and be advertised on the map, in exchange for a monthly fee (10 GBP). Subsequently, these shops can choose to take part in the Crop for the Shop scheme, notifying it on the Big Barn website through their administration profile. A logo (cf. orange carrot in figure 1 below) will then appear next to the shop on the map, indicating the visitors that the shop takes part in the scheme.

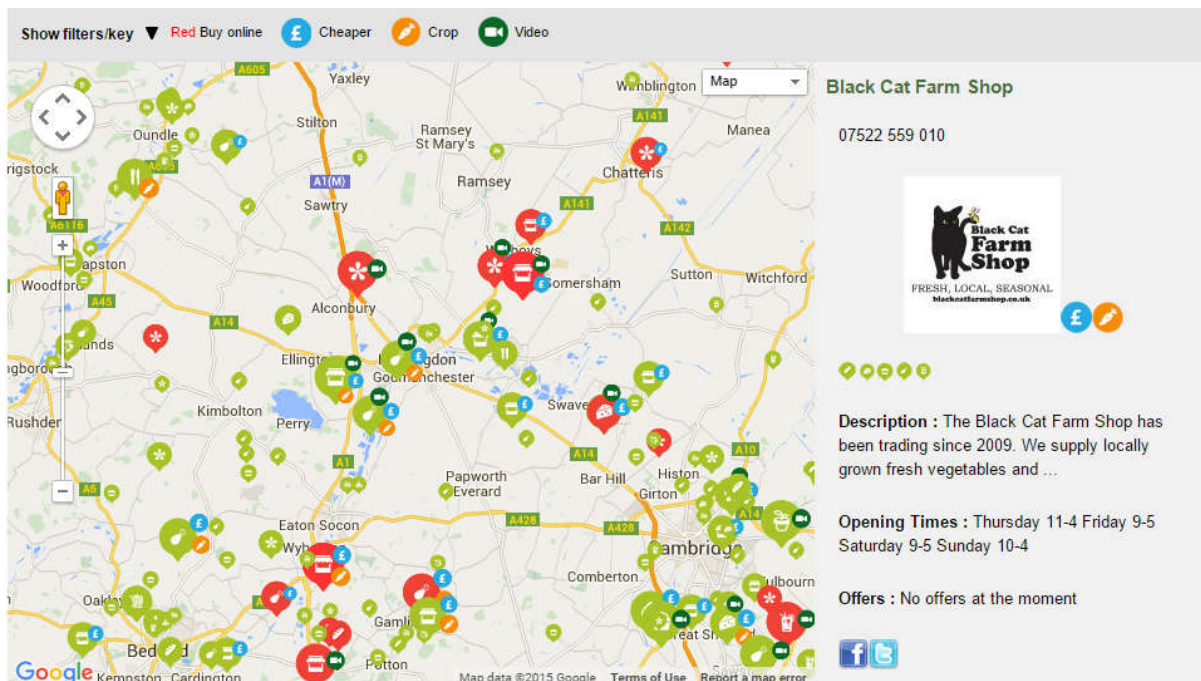


Figure 1: Big Barn's Local Food Map, containing among others shops involved in the Crop for the Shop scheme
 Source: www.bigbarn.co.uk

Analysis

3. Funding and support

When it was founded in 2000, Big Barn received funding through the UK Lottery Fund as well as the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA). However, currently Big Barn does not receive any funding. Since Big Barn's work and activities are social, and there are few economic outputs, funding is required for future developments. Furthermore, funds are not always searched for as the application process can be costly, and if it proves unsuccessful money will have been lost. As an alternative to public funding, Big Barn is trying to develop sponsorships with private companies and find volunteers. Funding has been highlighted as the main issue to developing and maintaining Big Barn's activities, including the Crop for the Shop scheme.

Shops and growers do not receive any support regarding strategies of implementation, and there is a lack of means of communication between shops involved in the scheme in the UK, to share knowledge and their experience. However, some tools are provided on the website,

such as a poster promoting Crop for the Shop available to download for shops (cf. figure 2 below), as well as a grower/shop owner agreement.



Figure 2: Crop for the Shop poster, available to download by shops on the Big Barn website
 Source: www.bigbarn.co.uk

Big Barn advises shops to sell the products 20% cheaper than supermarkets, and to give growers 70% of the profit of the sale in store credits, as the offer creates incentive, and the shop is sure to benefit from it. However, shops are not required to follow this advice, and some may decide to pay growers directly. For instance, the shop interviewed in the context of the case study adapts the pay on the type of product and the supermarket price.

4. Positioning at local or regional level

Shops across England, Wales and Scotland are involved in Crop for the Shop. The target population is therefore national. However, the perception of the shop involved in the area depends on how actively it takes part in the initiative, and if it advertises it. Based on the interviews conducted, it seems like shops who make the initiative known generally get a good response from the local community, who is then encouraged to consume food from a shorter supply chain. The growers providing the products range from farmers to people who

have a vegetable garden, and sell their excess produce on the Crop for the Shop scheme as an alternative for throwing it away. Therefore, growers benefit from the scheme as their excess produce can be sold.

5. Partnerships and networking (in the EU, outside of the EU)

Big Barn's partners and networks currently only exist within the UK. Big Barn's partners include Ecotricity (green energy company), Soil Association (membership charity) and Friends of the Earth (NGO). They are currently trying to get companies on board through CSR initiative strategies.

700 to 800 shops currently take part in the voluntary Crop for the Shop scheme, and are each responsible for finding growers (cf. figure 3). These growers are asked to register as such with the local council, and sign an agreement with the shop certifying that the products meet health requirements. However, not all shops use this agreement, as the health requirements are not as strict with fruit and vegetables as with products containing dairy for instance. The agreement between grower and shop owner is sometimes more informal.



Figure 3: Anthony Davison, founder of Big Barn and grower for the Crop for the Shop scheme, picking his vegetable crop in his vegetable garden to take to a shop

Big Barn also links with Thomas Ety Heritage Seeds³, who sell heritage vegetable seeds for use in a garden or allotment. Their heritage seeds are sold directly through the Big Barn website⁴, and most seed packets are under 2 GBP. The buyers can then grow old traditional

³ <http://www.thomasetty.co.uk/>

⁴ <https://www.bigbarn.co.uk/marketplace/vendors/thomasetty>

vegetable varieties in their garden, and sell some of the produce to local shops via the Crop for the Shop scheme. Therefore, this partnership encourages the use and consumption of old fruit and vegetable varieties in people's gardens by providing the seeds at a fair price, and helps raise awareness on the importance of allowing the presence of products deriving from agricultural genetic diversity on the shelves.

Building partnerships is seen as an essential component of the development of Big Barn's activities, including the Crop for the Shop scheme. Indeed, Big Barn wants to keep the subscribing fees low, so partnerships and agreements with companies and newspapers are the only way to expand. Shops listed on Big Barn pay a 10 GBP per month fee to have their name and information on the Big Barn local food map (cf. figure 1), which is the only source of income for all of Big Barn's activities. Part of the aim of Big Barn is to help develop local shops, and raising the subscribing fee would be too much of a disincentive to joining Big Barn. In addition, as mentioned above, public funding is difficult to obtain. Therefore, the only viable source of funds for Big Barn's activities is through partnerships and sponsorships.

Having full time employees, specialising in *inter alia* public relations to have a wider impact, would be important for the work of Big Barn as well as for the Crop for the Shop scheme. This would enable them to improve and develop their activities in order to become an important CIC. However, currently this is not possible due to the lack of funding.

In addition, in 2012 Big Barn teamed up with Eco Kids Leicester City Ltd, a social enterprise aiming at educating children to lead a greener and healthier lifestyle, to develop the Crop for the Shop scheme in a primary school in Leicester. The children planted and grew vegetables in an allotment at the school, cooked some of the produce and sold the rest at a local shop as part of the Crop for the Shop scheme. As a result, the children's awareness was raised on the importance of consuming local products, thus influencing their parents' consuming habits. Furthermore, they learned about the different varieties of vegetables that exist (e.g. carrot varieties that have different colour ranges), raising awareness on genetic diversity. The project was very successful. However, it could not be carried out the following year, despite demand for it, due to a lack of funds. The social enterprise Earth Buds⁵, founded by a member of Eco Kids, successfully carried out the scheme the following year in two other primary schools in Leicester (Linden Primary School and Abbey Primary Community School), however this was not continued as there were no more funds and sponsors were not found to carry out the initiative. Indeed, sponsors were not willing to invest in such a lengthy project (12 weeks). The costs of sustaining this activity (finding tutors, taking care of the allotments, etc.) are high, and the lack of regularity in the funding means that it is difficult to carry it out every year.

6. Communication

90 currently websites have the Big Barn map on their website, mentioning the shops involved in Crop for the Shop. Examples of such websites are Friends of the Earth⁶ and Ecotricity⁷. In addition, a newsletter is sent monthly to 4,000 people (e.g. listed and non-

⁵ <http://earthbuds.co.uk/>

⁶ <http://www.foe.co.uk/>

⁷ <http://www.ecotricity.co.uk/>

listed shop owners, people interested in Big Barn) to advertise the scheme. In some cases where shops are close to Big Barn's headquarters in Bedfordshire, Big Barn will directly approach shops to talk about the scheme and present them with local products to initiate it (cf. Figure 4).



Figure 4: Big Barn founder, Anthony Davison, promoting the Crop for the Shop scheme at a local shop in Bedfordshire

Shops involved in the scheme communicate about it according to their own strategy. There is an A4 poster that they can download off the Big Barn website (cf. figure 2), but all other marketing means are left to the shops. The local food map (cf. figure 1) was highlighted as the main way for shops to make the initiative known to the local community.

Big Barn are currently looking for corporate sponsors for the initiative, to enable the funding of bigger prints and posters for shops to advertise their participation to customers and potential growers. Another idea is to send seed bags to shops so they can sell them to growers. For the latter activity, they have talked to seed manufacturers, asking them for 10,000 seed packets, and offering them to put their name on the poster for marketing purposes. However, no seed manufacturers have agreed to participate yet, as they consider it insufficiently profitable. Creating partnerships with these stakeholders is essential to the development of the Crop for the Shop scheme, so as to help it grow and be more visible to the general public. Having the name "Crop for the Shop" known by the public would help shops attract more clients through the scheme, as many currently do not know about it, mainly due to the lack of funding for promoting activities.

Communication through the media is seen as very effective and further media coverage is currently sought. Media coverage through local and national television programmes and newspapers articles has been the main channel of communication so far. Indeed, the Crop for the Shop initiative in the primary school in Leicester in 2012 was covered by the local television BBC news programme⁸, and another school which carried out the scheme in 2013 with Earth Buds was the subject of a children's CBeebies television show called "Mr Bloom Here and There" in 2013. Media coverage allows the initiative to be known to more shops and villages, and also raises awareness on the surrounding issue. Big Barn wishes to cooperate with important daily British newspapers, but so far they have asked for money in return for covering the activities carried out by Big Barn in the paper (e.g. 2,000 GBP/month), which Big Barn cannot provide due to their status. The need for more media coverage and for the general public to understand the meaning of the phrase "Crop for the Shop" was also recognised by the shop interviewed.

Online communication is also an essential part of Big Barn's strategy for Crop for the Shop, especially through the website and the online map. Big Barn also encourages listed shops to provide a description and video of their activities so as to upload it on the website, but this proves difficult as many lack time to concentrate on online promotion. Indeed, the local shops listed on Big Barn focus on a local clientele, they are small businesses which market their products via signage and word of mouth.

7. Outputs and added value

Crop for the Shop helps enhance local communities, in some cases saving local shops from closing, as it brings in more customers (including the growers). Indeed, a local shop in Bedfordshire which had very few customers was taken over by owners who adopted the Crop for the Shop scheme, and was able to continue business thanks to the products brought in and the increase in customers through the initiative. The fact that growers are paid in store credits also enables to build client fidelity. Local communities have access to fresh local produce, and awareness is raised on the consumption of local food.

In addition, the involvement of Crop for the Shop in schools allows children to learn about food and how it is grown, and contributes to changing food culture. Moreover, they will then influence their parents to buy and cook with fresh local produce. In addition, they are taught entrepreneurial skills through the sale of their produce in local shops. The approval and satisfaction of the programme by schools is shown by the fact that they wanted to continue the initiative once it was carried out. According to Earth Buds, the next step of using Crop for the Shop in schools would be to create an online programme, and take it nationwide (ultimately globally). Schools could then purchase it and implement it internally.

8. Sustainability

Funding is an issue in terms of developing Crop for the Shop, as mentioned above. Its sustainability will depend on the amount of funding available to carry out actions, as well as the development of long term partnerships and cooperation, such as sponsorships to provide seeds for growers and fund the printing of promotion posters for shops, and partnering with

⁸ Link to BBC video: https://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=6vVf96m_O20

the media to communicate on the Crop for the Shop scheme with the largest possible audience.

Regarding the Crop for the Shop scheme in primary schools, more sustainable ways will need to be found, such as an online package providing all the information and material to carry it out without the intervention of a third party. This is currently not carried out due to a lack of funding and partners. Earth Buds would like to form partnerships with larger organisations to create more opportunities, but this proves difficult as these organisations already have partners that they regularly deal with, and are not always willing to take on new ones.

9. Upscaling and out-scaling

Big Barn as a whole has received interest from other Member States such as the Netherlands and Germany, but a deal in which Big Barn would share its strategy and technology in exchange for monetary compensation has not been signed yet. One of the challenges is to reach an agreement where Big Barn would be compensated in exchange for e.g. sharing the knowledge and expertise on the establishment of the local food map, the technologies used for the website, the challenges and drivers of success of current initiatives. However, initiatives like Crop for the Shop would be suited to Member States where small-scale farming still plays a big part in agriculture, such as France and Italy. Therefore, communication on this initiative needs to be developed with other Member States, so as to identify organisations who share similar goals with Big Barn and establish a collaboration. There could then be an exchange of knowledge between Member States, and funding could be pulled together to develop activities and initiatives at international level.

Conclusions

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
<p>The initiative is easy to take on by shops, and does not incur additional costs;</p> <p>The scheme involves both shops and growers (multidisciplinary approach);</p> <p>The scheme can be used in schools.</p>	<p>The lack of funding and resources;</p> <p>The lack of a common implementation strategy and guidelines for shops, in-keeping with the absence of cooperation between shops involved;</p> <p>The low level of marketing and communication around the scheme.</p>
OPPORTUNITIES	THREATS
<p>There is a growing interest and demand for local quality products;</p> <p>Other Member States have expressed interest in Big Barn's activities.</p>	<p>The impact of the food industry and big retailers (supermarkets) on influencing long supply chains and favouring non local products.</p>

The Crop for the Shop scheme ultimately aims at increasing the consumption of local products, through creating a tighter local community through local collaboration, and

developing a strategy for local shops. Furthermore, the scheme can be carried out in primary schools, thus influencing new generations in favouring local produce. The positive impact of the scheme on the schools where it was carried out shows that shifting people's mind-set towards local and traditional produce is possible. However, the lack of funding for the scheme hinders its development, and it is the main source of the weaknesses identified in the above SWOT analysis. Appropriate partnerships with private companies are currently sought to solve this issue. Indeed, there is a lack marketing and communication around the scheme due to the limited funds available, and as a result it is not well known by the general public. Moreover, there is no common strategy of how the shops should implement and carry out the scheme, and shops involved cannot share knowledge and experience.

Many of the opportunities identified are linked to a change in the food culture across the EU, where quality products deriving from old and traditional varieties are currently benefiting from an increased interest by the general public. However, the food industry and big retailers still influence the market, and encourage farmers to produce more of a single product so as to reach economies of scale.

The use of genetic resources, while in-keeping with the vision of the scheme, is not particularly developed presently. However, through an increase in partnerships with heritage seed companies such as Thomas Ety, the use of more diverse products by growers could be further encouraged by the scheme.

The interest in Big Barn's activities expressed by other Member States, such as the Netherlands, leads to believe that the Crop for the Shop scheme could be developed in other countries in the future if an agreement is reached. Developing partnerships with private companies is currently the main future development, so as to address the limited funding and create new opportunities for the Crop for the Shop scheme.

Annex 1 – List of interviewees

- Anthony Davison, Big Barn Founder
- Sue Lang, Black Cat Farm Shop owner
- Bina Sitaram, Earth Buds Founder

Annex 2 – List of references

Big Barn, *Buy local food buy seasonal food farm shops sustainable food organic food*. Available at www.bigbarn.co.uk (Accessed: August 2015)

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