

working to support and enhance
our community
the local economy
our environment



ANNUAL REVIEW

2002-2003

Common Cause Co-operative is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee.

Registered in Sussex No. 2900270

Registered office: The Green Room, 20 North Street, Lewes, East Sussex, BN7 2PE

comcause@commoncause.fsnet.co.uk www.commoncause.co.uk

our beginnings

Common Cause Co-operative was established in 1991 in Lewes, East Sussex to promote community development that is co-operative, supports the local economy and is environmentally sustainable. Common Cause is committed to acting locally in a global context. We work with other local and national organisations and are run by our members for the benefit of wider community and environmental objectives. Common Cause is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee.

Common Cause aims to support and promote:

- social, economic and environmentally sustainable community development
- local food production, and connections between producers and consumers
 - agricultural development sensitive to the landscape and its biodiversity
 - social enterprises and initiatives

Common Cause has been involved since its beginning in a broad range of projects and activities including:

a local exchange trading scheme (LETS)
a housing co-operative to make available affordable accommodation
a permaculture course
a project to restore and provide furniture to people on low income
Art for Employment to help artists exhibit their work
an ethical/organic bulk food buying co-op
a weekly veg-box delivery scheme with a new organic farm
a directory of local farmers and growers
a programme providing unemployed people with training and farm work experience

We held a one-day conference, *Sustainable Lewes*, in 1988 to consider issues such as transport, housing, food, waste and energy use.

Lewes Farmers' Market was established later that year and continues to be one of our most successful community initiatives.

review of activities

Supporting sustainable farming

Work by Common Cause over the past few years has identified the benefits of assisting both established and would-be organic farmers to gain support from each other and from experts.

Beginning in 2001, Common Cause consulted with farmers in Sussex and conducted research in the UK and France to identify the best methods for supporting sustainable farming. Results showed the advantages of regional information and training centres, and of "farmers' networks."

Common Cause has been working in partnership with Plumpton College in East Sussex to establish the **Netherfield Centre for Sustainable Food and Farming** opening in spring 2003. The Centre, located on a working organic farm near Hastings, is intended to help meet the steadily increasing demand on Plumpton College for advice and information on low-input and organic farming practices. It will provide practical on-farm advice and training and will also be a resource directing farmers to existing organisations and advisors which offer support. A major function of the Centre will be to aid collaboration between farmers and to connect producers with retail outlets which wish to sell local produce.

Common Cause continues to facilitate the highly successful **West Sussex and Surrey Farmers' Network** which was set up in December 2001 to enable farmers to exchange information and experiences regarding organic production as a way of helping each other. More than 20 livestock producers participate, meeting

with speakers or attending farm visits and receiving a regular newsletter. The network, a part of the Soil Association's national network, has been useful for facilitating trades amongst farmers, reducing transport costs, and for developing collaborative marketing initiatives.

A feasibility study for a Land Trust was undertaken by Common Cause with funds from the Lottery SEED programme. This could make available an area of land for people in the Hastings area of East Sussex to use for organic agriculture production and could include opportunities for learning new skills or receiving advice on sales of produce or other means of assistance.

Fresh local food from farm to community

Farmers' Markets enable farmers to sell directly to the public, reaching many more people than those committed to a weekly veg-box. Farmers can ask a fair price for their labours while buyers get fresher food.

The **Lewes Farmers' Market** is a popular, busy and lively event every month with a full capacity of some thirty Sussex producers selling vegetables, fruit, eggs, cheese, meat, juices, wines, bread, cakes, preserves, plants, and some crafts. Priority has always been given to organic and small-scale producers with high environmental and animal welfare standards and producers say it is one of the most enjoyable and profitable markets in which to take part. Customers can ask questions about the products, and producers gain feedback

and ideas for developing their range. It is a truly two-way process from which everyone benefits.

Demand is such that Common Cause is planning a six-month trial of a mid-month weekday market as well, providing space for new producers in addition to some of the regulars. There is also potential for a Sussex Artisans' market to provide an outlet for practical crafts which we are unable to accommodate at the Market.

Expanding the market for locally-grown foods

Getting local produce into public sector catering increases the market for growers and provides fresher food to the consumer while minimising "food miles."

A conference entitled **Food in East Sussex Public Sector Catering**, planned for March 2003 in conjunction with Sustain - the Alliance for Better Food and Farming, will bring together people who work in food services within hospitals, colleges, prisons, schools, and other institutions. It is intended to examine the potential for connecting local food growers with councils' procurement policymakers by looking at examples from other regions and from Europe.

As a participant member of the **School Food Action Group**, Common Cause meets with individuals and organisations involved with schools to develop ideas for healthy food initiatives. In a joint project with South Downs and Weald Primary Care Trust and the Healthy Schools Scheme, we helped produce The Good School Food Guide and the Healthy Eating Audit Tool to offer ideas and information to schools on healthier eating for pupils.

Ensuring a future for local produce

Locally-grown vegetables need local markets but increasingly people today are less accustomed to cooking with unprocessed ingredients. As lifelong habits are developed young, it's a good idea to interest children in fresh fruit and vegetables from an early age.

In order to encourage parents and carers to use more vegetables, especially those which are local and seasonal, Common Cause is preparing '**The Friendly Vegetable Book**', a recipe guide for parents on how to cook fresh vegetables in ways that children are likely to enjoy. The book will contain complete vegetable-based recipes as well as short 'snippets' and tips giving ideas on easy ways to use them, including ideas for vegetables often considered unpopular with children.

Common Cause has also begun developing a **children's card game** based on the popular top trumps concept to encourage children to show the importance of vegetables and fruit. Early trials with a mock-up version have shown its effectiveness in teaching about basic nutrients. The game, with full-colour illustrations, will be made available to primary schools where it can be used in the science curriculum.

The **pedal-powered blender** belonging to Common Cause was used by schools and community groups to demonstrate how healthy eating can be easy and delicious. By pedalling an adapted bicycle, designed and built by a local artisan, children turn a series of gears to operate a blender and make fresh fruit into various kinds of drinks.

how we work

The Co-operative Movement

Common Cause supports the International Co-operative Principles adopted 8 January 1996 by the International Co-operative Alliance (ICA) in Geneva. These include:

- ✓ Voluntary and open membership
- ✓ Democratic member control
- ✓ Member economic participation
- ✓ Autonomy and independence
- ✓ Education, training and information
- ✓ Co-operation among co-operatives
- ✓ Concern for the community

Membership is open to all who share our objectives. Directors are elected from amongst the membership, and any employees are encouraged to be members. We have a one-member, one-vote policy.

There is no financial benefit from membership or directorship, although directors may be employed for project work. The directors form a management committee that meets regularly to oversee progress and accounting.

Common Cause has an equal opportunities policy and posts are advertised to ensure a fair recruitment process. We have a green housekeeping policy to minimise the environmental impact of our activities.

Directors of Common Cause in 2002–2003:

Johnny Denis
Topsy Jewell
Debbie King (Secretary)
Michi Mathias

Katharine Rayner (Treasurer)
Duncan Thompson
Lucy Young (Chair)

Partnerships

Common Cause is a member of, or participant in, a number of networks and organisations including:

- ▶ East Sussex Food and Health Partnership
- ▶ Co-op Union Rural Working Group
- ▶ Food Link UK Steering Group
- ▶ School Food Action Group
- ▶ Soil Association Producer Services
- ▶ South East Forum for Sustainability
- ▶ Sustain's Food Chains Working Group
- ▶ Lewes Town Partnership

Documents available from Common Cause

Can Farmers' Markets Improve Access to Fresh Local Produce for Families on Low Incomes? by Anne-Marie Bur, 1999, Common Cause Co-operative, 9 pp. (Free)

An Evaluation of Three Farmers' Markets in Lewes by Anne-Marie Bur, Topsy Jewell, and Katharine Rayner, 1999, Common Cause Co-operative 53pp. (£5)

An Evaluation of Two Village Produce Markets, Rolvenden and Broad Oak Brede by J. Russell and K. Hart, produced for Community Action for Food and the Environment, 2002. (Free)

A Farmers' Market in Lewes: Feasibility Study 1998, 14pp.

Farmers' Market Survey Pack 1999, Common Cause Co-operative. (£5)

Good School Food Guide 2003, Food & Health Partnership East Sussex, 38pp

Gluts for Tea. a Guide to Making the Most of your Vegetable Box 1998, Common Cause Co-operative, 36pp A5. (£2.50)

Healthy Eating Initiatives and Food Provision in Primary and Secondary Schools by Anita Tull, 2001, Common Cause Co-op 136 pp. (£15)

Lewes Farmers Market and Local Produce Guide (full colour A3 brochure) (Free)

Reducing Food Miles: Forging Better Links Between Food Producers and Village Shops in Sussex by Anne-Marie Bur, SRCC, 38pp. (£5)

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