

working to support and enhance

**our community
the local economy
our environment**



Annual Review

2004 ⇨ 2005

The Green Room 20 North Street Lewes East Sussex BN7 2PE

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

During the past ten years we have been involved in projects ranging from furniture re-use to permaculture to sustainable town living to co-operative food-buying to farm work-experience and training. Our recent work has been primarily related to support for local and sustainable food production and we began some projects this year which connect the general public, including children, to various aspects of food-growing.

Objects and Principal Activity

The company has carried out the following:

- i. Development and co-ordination of activities to encourage co-operation and market development amongst producers in the land-based economy,
- ii. Fundraising, research and production of resources and other project work to support socially equitable access to local healthy fresh food and resources,
- iii. Research, development and training work to promote agricultural development that is sensitive to and enhances the local landscape and biodiversity,
- iv. Co-ordination of an existing Farmers' Market, and development work for the establishment of a new Farmers' Market in order to promote and support social enterprises, reduced food miles, reduced packaging and direct marketing.

Membership is open to all who share our objectives. There are two General Meetings per year, at which each member has one vote.

Directors are elected from amongst the membership. The directors act as a management committee which meets regularly to oversee progress and accounting. There is no financial benefit from membership or directorship, although directors may be employed for project work. The directors as of February 2005 are as follows:

Johnny Denis
Tina Deubert
Vanessa Topsy Jewell
Debbie King
Eileen Michi Mathias
Katharine Rayner
Sarah Rideout
Lucy Young

Common Cause Co-operative is a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. It was incorporated on 21st February 1994 under the Companies Act 1985, registered number 2900270, and is governed by its Memorandum and Articles of Association.

Summary of Activities 22 Feb 2004 → 21 Feb 2005

Food and Health Partnership

Common Cause is a member of the management group for the Food and Health Partnership, having been instrumental in its initiation, development and funding. As part of its work to increase use of local foods in the public sector and support increased consumption, we carried out a number of projects and activities.

Local Food in Public Sector Catering

▪ A **survey** of care homes, B&B's, hotels, colleges, schools and cafes in the Lewes area was carried out in order to assess their capacity to make use of local produce, and information made available to local producers; we will continue to assist in connecting outlets with producers. This work could contribute to a local distribution scheme which the Netherfield Centre is involved in organising. A number of producers in East Sussex have approached about supplying local hospitals.

▪ Common Cause is working with the **South East Food Group**, funded by South East Development Agency, in conducting research into public procurement and local produce in the South East. We have also contributed to development of Food and Health Action Plans for the South East, for Sussex Downs and Weald and Eastbourne primary care trusts, and for the Rother and Hastings area.

▪ **Plumpton College**, an agricultural school whose menus we have been helping to revise in order to utilising local food sources, began in September to incorporating more fresh produce in its meals. We had supplied the College with sources of recipes and suppliers, as well as samples of local produce. A visit to another college catering department allowed exchange of ideas, advice and experience. Local meat is now sourced through Wealden Farmers Network, as well as from the college itself, while vegetables are bought from local organic farms. We are also working with the catering manager at the University of Sussex which is interested in using local sources of ethically-reared beef.

▪ **School Meals:** Common Cause was invited to attend meetings of the School Meals Review Board, initiated by East Sussex County Council and comprising headteachers, the contract catering service, and the economic development department, to consider improvements including the possibilities for local/organic procurement. We continue to attend monthly meetings of the Lewes School Food Action Group and quarterly meeting of the Sustainable Food Chains Working Party which coordinates this work at a national level.

▪ **Seasonal Cuisine**, a new course at Sussex Downs College which Common Cause helped to create, started in October. The year-long training, held during each of the four seasons, is intended for public sector cooks and encourages increased use of fresh seasonal fruit and vegetables in the institutional setting. A number of catering firms and care homes have enrolled members of staff after fliers were distributed to schools, care homes, and hospital catering departments.

▪ **Links with Europe:** In November Common Cause attended an initial meeting of European farmers, growers and food processors and supporting organisations, chaired by AlimenTerra, a European network of organisations committed to developing a sustainable European food system. The meeting, assessed potential for trading links and to provide for an exchange of expertise and connections between these producer groups.

▪ **Future plans:** With Sussex Downs and Weald PCT, we intend to apply for funding to continue progress on local food and public procurement, either working to connect local producers with the public procurement system, or combining work on local food culture and training in order to increase skills, particularly amongst chefs, for using fresh local produce.

The Friendly Vegetable Book

Designed to help families make use of more local, seasonal vegetables in their diet, this cookbook produced in January 2004 contains recipes as well as quick and easy ideas. Most of the 12,000 copies have been distributed free of charge to children's health-related organisations and others including

Sure Start, 5-a-Day programmes, schools, health visitors, East Sussex school meal service, care homes and colleges. Copies were also sold through Farmers' Markets, veg box schemes, farm shops, and local bookshops, and numerous requests were received from Primary Care Trusts and other food and health projects throughout the country. Feedback and responses to our monitoring questionnaire have been positive and show an increase in quantity and variety of vegetables used.

Beet That! card game

This trumps-type card game for children, based on vitamin and mineral content in Five-a-Day portions of vegetables and fruits, was printed in September. From the print run of 3000 decks, several hundred were supplied to a Healthy Schools Scheme project and a County Council catering team, and six each to all primary schools in the County. Packs were also sent to after-school clubs, playschemes, special schools, residential homes, and childminders; others have been sold. Feedback affirms that the game is an excellent resource for learning, suiting a range of ages and activities. With the current focus on children's nutrition, there has been some interest from national organisations and future distribution via the Five-A-Day teams may be negotiated.

Pedal-powered blender

This adapted bicycle, on which children turn pedals to operate a blender and make fruit smoothies, was designed and built by a local artisan. The blender was hired out some half a dozen times over the summer to schools and community groups, and bookings continue to increase through word of mouth as it's always a popular and eye-catching demonstration of simple, delicious healthy eating. Hire fees are on a variable scale for organisations from schools to companies. We are considering making the blender available to an organisation or individual to manage as a social enterprise.

Community Orchard

Common Cause is working with Lewes District Council to support the development of a community orchard in Ringmer which would provide business for a local farmer, supplying apples to Ringmer Community College. Suitable land has

been located and funding is to be sought for planting in the autumn.

Netherfield Centre for Sustainable Food and Farming

A joint venture between Common Cause and Plumpton College, the Centre was established in 2003 with funding from the European LEADER+ programme and ESCC to promote productive and efficient farming in Sussex which also protects and improves communities and the natural environment. We received hundreds of enquiries during the year, the majority regarding training and technical advice and others relating to diversification of farming activities, marketing and adding value, sourcing local products, employment, and grants. Our newsletter is currently sent to a mailing list of over 600 farms and businesses.

▪ **Training courses:** We held some twenty different courses during the year, many designed in response to business and individual needs, averaging more than ten participants per session:

Feeding Forages
Lambing
Starting a Beef Herd
Herbs & Salads
Safe Use of Vet Meds
Safe Use of Vet Meds (mock practical)
Grassland Management
Direct Meat Marketing
Soil Analysis
Starting a Sheep Flock
Starting a Pig Herd
Basic Food Hygiene Cert
On-Farm Selection of Finished Livestock
Pork Butchery
Lamb Butchery
Environmental Stewardship
Post-CAP Reform
Managing a Sheep Flock
Sausage Making
Lambing
Feb 2004 – Feb 2005

The South East Food Group Partnership has allocated South East England Development Agency (SEEDA) funding to support some of our courses.

- **Farm advisory visits:** The Centre carried out dozens of visits and arranged numerous work-shadowing opportunities and we continue to offer ongoing mentoring advice to many farms by telephone and e-mail.

- Promoting **local and direct marketing** reduces food miles, increases farm profits and makes good quality, healthful food available locally. We assist retail outlets to increase sales of local foods by finding sources for products and connecting them with farms.

Following the 2002 Curry Report on Sustainable Farming and Food, the Government Office of the South East (GOSE) produced its *Delivery Plan for Sustainable Farming and Food in the South East* in which the Netherfield Centre was cited as fulfilling a number of key tasks in East Sussex. In May we presented our work to the Delivery Board and were described as “inspirational;” the following month we were invited to another GOSE meeting and praised for being a model project that GOSE would like to replicate elsewhere in the South East.

As the Netherfield Centre project is nearing the end of its pilot phase in March 2005 we are considering future funding and direction. Plumpton College have confirmed their support for the Centre and their desire that it continues in partnership with Common Cause. We may bid for a second LEADER+ grant in which case the College would offer matching funding, but also need to look for other sources. SEEDA have provided a consultant to evaluate the Centre and prepare a business plan to increase revenue and reduce dependence on grant funding.

Farmers' Network

The West Sussex and Surrey Farmers' Network, a group of West Sussex and Surrey organic livestock farmers brought together by Common Cause in 2001, had a busy summer programme including farm visits, a guided tour of a new organically certified abattoir in Henfield, and a tour of a woodland renovation project. The Network, with some 20-plus members, has been effective in helping farmers trade amongst themselves, share transport costs, and develop joint marketing ideas.

With the assistance of the Netherfield Centre, one member is co-ordinating other farms in the network to supply finished beef animals to a farm which will be supplying Hampshire schools. This is a major step forward in local and organic sourcing of food for schools, and as the enterprise grows it will need to source more meat from other local farms.

Lewes Farmers' Market

The Market, now in its 8th year, continues to be popular and busy, fully booked by stallholders until the end of this year and beyond, and with applicants on the waiting list. We maintain strict standards and aim for a successful mix of products giving priority to local and small-scale primary producers; many stallholders have commented that it's the best market in the area in their view.

- **Second Market:** It had been planned to trial an additional monthly market in autumn 2004, moving towards the ideal of a weekly market which could have a significant influence on shopping habits. However, it became apparent that research to ascertain views of shop-keepers and to find ways to support other businesses on market day is needed. Given the market's impact on the economy of the town, we will explore options with Lewes District Council for a mid-month market and do an initial survey of nearby shops regarding effects on business and their views on a new nearby market. A separate site could be beneficial to businesses in the top end of town and avoid confusion.

Lewes Organic Allotment Project

Common Cause supported an initiative to bring children onto this allotment at Nevill in Lewes, recently cleared and planted by volunteers, for a series of hands-on workshops. The first sessions in summer 2004 were followed by seasonal workshops taking place in October and February. Children have taken part in a number of activities involving growing fruit and vegetables as well as caring for the wildlife found in the area while

enjoying the allotment environment. Very positive feedback and enquiries about future workshops have been received from both children and parents.

▪ **School visits:** Plans are being developed for children from a Lewes primary school to visit the allotment in small groups for a range of activities beginning in April 2005. The school is to cover costs for the first term from PTA funds, and funding has also been applied for from the Lewes Rotary Club, which supports projects connecting children with growing their own fruit and vegetables. This programme may be offered to other schools in future.

Brighton & Hove Farmers' Market

Having made a decision to establish a farmers' market, Brighton & Hove City Council approached Common Cause about the possibility of managing the new market planned for George Street, Hove, a long road with good capacity for a large market. Following a series of meetings over the past year, and extensive discussions still ongoing with shopkeepers and managers of other markets, we are preparing a proposal to be submitted in March 2005 for a six-month trial beginning in the summer. The Licensing Committee would need to approve a change of status for George Street if a regular market is to take place.

Compost Doctor

The Compost Doctor scheme, initiated in October 2004 at the Sustainability Fair [see below], was set up to offer advice and give practical hands-on help with home visits, if required, to resolve composting problems as home composting is encouraged by the District Council but many people lack experience. . . Consultations cover a wide assortment of problems, and clients have been very pleased with the scheme and the minimal fee. One enquiry involved setting up a community composting scheme for a group of residents.

Composting in Schools

A primary school in Lewes accepted our proposal to begin composting on site. The PTA paid for a large, rodent-proof bin, supplied by East Sussex County Council at a subsidised rate; a grant is available from the Waste Management Department to cover such costs. Two staffmembers will oversee emptying caddies in the classrooms--which will also collect waste paper--into the bin and the Compost Doctor will monitor progress to deal quickly with any problems.

Sustainable Communities Fair

In conjunction with Lewes District Council, Common Cause were involved in planning and organising this one-day free event held in October. Groups and organisations were invited to prepare exhibits and activities relating to:

- Energy • Recycling • Transport
- Biodiversity • Food • Cookery

The Food venue, organised by Common Cause, gave information on sourcing local produce, permaculture for gardeners, the Just Trade buying co-op and the Netherfield Centre, as well as games and a guess-the-apple-variety competition. We held fruit tree pruning demonstrations on an allotment, and announced the start of the Compost Doctor scheme to help anyone with composting problems. A larger event may be planned for next year, in which case Common Cause would concentrate on activities which are more participatory and of increased relevance to local issues.

