



# Stroud Common Wealth

Community Farm Land Trust Project

## Identifying and Evaluating the Benefits of Community Farm Land Trusts

A report for Stroud Common Wealth Ltd

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### Community Farm Land Trusts (CFLT)s

A CFLT is a legal-organisational form that allows a self-selected group of people, acting as members of a 'community', to:

- own land in the name of that community
- potentially separate the ownership of the land from the ownership of buildings and improvements made on or to the land
- exercise some continuing control over how the land is managed and used

A review of the literature on CFLTs highlights claims regarding a wide range of benefits associated with them and the means through which these arise. Paring these claims of means and ends to their essentials, the general argument can be laid-out as follows:

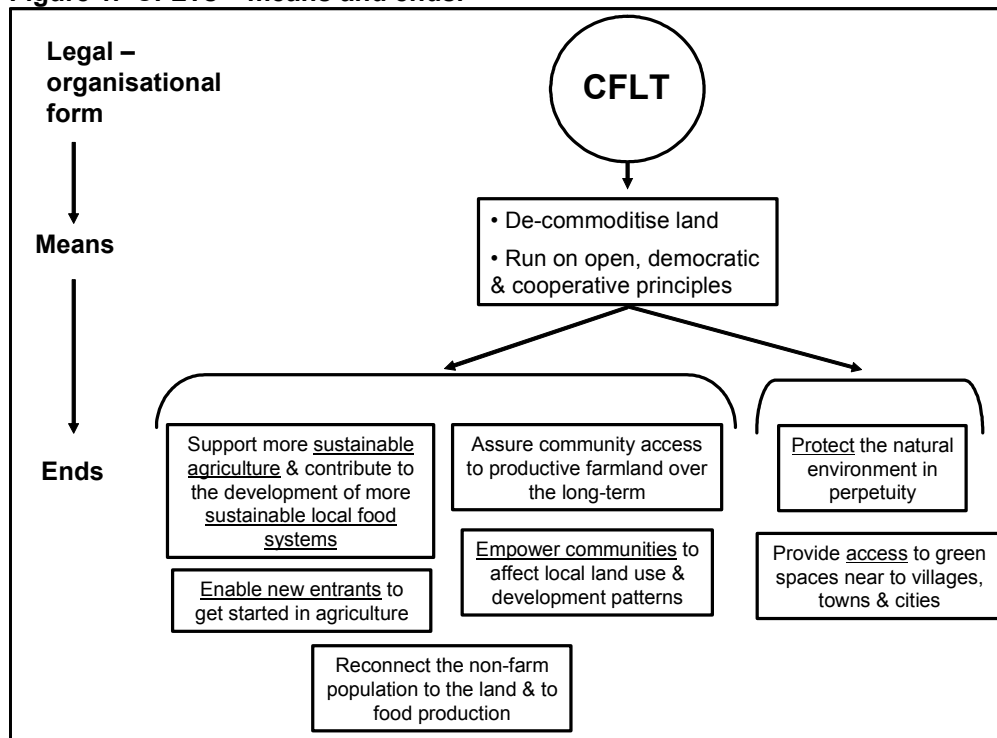
Because CFLTs:

- De-commoditise land (i.e. the market value of land is taken out of the decision calculus regarding land use and management)
- Are run based on open, democratic and cooperative principles

They can:

- Support more sustainable agriculture and contribute to the development of more sustainable local food systems
- Enable new entrants to get started in agriculture
- Assure community access to productive farmland over the long-term
- Empower communities to affect local land use and development patterns
- Reconnect the non-farm population to the land and to food production
- Protect the natural environment (farmland, biodiversity etc) in perpetuity
- Provide access to green spaces near to villages, towns and cities

**Figure 1. CFLTs – means and ends.**



It should, however, be understood that the existence of a CFLT does not necessarily deliver any of these benefits to either the community or the environment. The actual benefits associated with any particular CFLT will depend on the context within which it was established and operates, its goals and management, and the level of engagement with and by the community.

### **Challenges for monitoring and attribution**

Providing a simple yet robust framework for monitoring and assessing the benefits associated with CFLTs in general, or with any given CFLT, is problematic because:

- Local land, food and community systems are highly complex and at any given time are being acted upon by many different and interacting forces.
- In any given context, a CFLT is more likely than not to be a relatively minor part of the local land, food and community context.
- The effects of any given element of local land, food and community systems, particularly a minor one such as a CFLT, may therefore be difficult to identify and/or attribute.
- In addition, some of the benefits described above could be generated by means other than CFLTs, and indeed relate to the explicit objectives of other policies, organisations and initiatives.
- Definitions of ‘sustainable agriculture’ and ‘sustainable local food systems’ are contested; therefore, any movement to a position that is ‘more sustainable’ may not be easily quantifiable, and particularly over the short-term.
- How successfully a CFLT protects land ‘in perpetuity’ can never really be known.

## **Possible ways to deal with these monitoring and attribution challenges**

Despite the challenges outlined above a number of steps can be taken that should allow more effective monitoring and assessment of the benefits of CFLTs. These include:

- Development of clear and unambiguous definitions for key terms such as 'community', 'sustainable agriculture', 'sustainable local food systems', 'empower', 'reconnect', 'in perpetuity', 'access' and 'biodiversity'
- Identification of realistic and meaningful indicators that will allow these to be monitored over the short-, medium- and long-terms
- Articulation of a dynamic, multi-faceted model of change that clearly acknowledges the fact that CFLTs are one of a number of initiatives that, taken together, should lead to more sustainable agriculture and food systems, and more empowered communities
- For any particular CFLT, re-statement of the benefits to reflect the local context

## **The potential benefits associated with CFLTs**

A greatly expanded list of 'potential benefits' associated with CFLTs can certainly be developed. This might include everything from 'creating social capital' and 'reducing childhood obesity' to 'conserving local agricultural knowledge' and 'constraining the process of globalisation'. However, the more extensive this list the more complex or contested the concepts underlying these benefits become. In addition, the less directly and uniquely these benefits relate to the activities of the CFLT, the more daunting the monitoring and attribution challenge becomes. Following this logic, I conclude that such an expanded list is likely to be of little real value in rationalising, monitoring or assessing CFLTs.

## **General observations**

My reading of the literature on community land trusts COMMUNITY FARM LAND TRUSTS from the UK and the US leads me to the following conclusions:

- The need and demand for affordable housing in the UK is (1) real, (2) experienced in both rural and urban areas, and (3) widely recognised.
- On the other hand, the problems that CFLTs seek to address are less well articulated and less widely recognised. Specifically, the demand for access to farmland (or engagement with community-supported agriculture) is less strong, less widespread and more poorly articulated than the demand for affordable housing.
- Whether for CLTs focused on affordable housing or for CFLTs, in the UK adequate and appropriate legal – organisational models are currently available.
- While it is possible to construct arguments about the potential contribution of CFLTs to more sustainable local food systems and/or thriving communities, these arguments need to be (1) more realistic, (2) more finely honed, and (3) place CFLTs in the context of the many other on-going initiatives aimed at supporting local food systems and communities.
- The most important constraint blocking those groups presently interested in establishing CFLTs is their ability to obtain suitable land, through either purchase or donation. Given

the state of the agricultural economy, as long as each nascent land trust group is essentially forced to start from scratch to raise the funds required to purchase land, we would seem to have every reason to expect few new, functional CFLTs.

- Therefore, if we assume for the moment that there is in fact real and widespread interest in greater access to farmland or in engaging with community supported agriculture, then in order to create a dynamic CFLT movement, an easier route to land purchase will be required. Two possibilities arise: (1) a national campaign for the gifting of land, and (2) the establishment of a national fund for land purchase.

**Table 1. Community Land Trusts and Community Farm Land Trusts: a reading of the literature**

<b>Question</b>	<b>In relation to <u>housing</u></b>	<b>In relation to <u>farmland and food</u></b>
What is the problem?	The availability of affordable housing in rural & urban areas is inadequate	Limited opportunities for new entrants into sustainable food production  Difficult for small-scale / sustainable food production to compete with agribusiness  Increasing distance between food production and food consumption; limited opportunities for people to engage with, support and/or participate in sustainable food production  Loss of biodiversity; degradation of natural environment; loss of farmland near to town and cities
What are the proximate causes of this problem?	The structure of the UK housing market & resulting house price inflation  Second homes in rural areas  Rural low-wage economies	High price of farmland  The structure of the agri-food sector  Dominant social and cultural values and norms
How widespread or general is the problem?	Widespread	??
Is this problem widely recognised?	Yes	?? Perhaps the best that one could say is that this cluster of problems is 'increasingly recognised'

Are there viable / proven land trust models available to address this problem?	Yes	Yes
What are the most important constraint(s) to the successful use of these models?	Familiarity with the models Availability of suitable land Planning permission	Familiarity with the models Availability of suitable land ?? Local commitment
How might these constraints be most effectively addressed?	Education Govt backing and incentives National campaign to promote the gifting of land A national fund to purchase land	Education Govt backing and incentives National campaign to promote the gifting of land A national fund to purchase land
Are there other, non land trust models available to address this problem?	Yes, but the array of benefits associated with each is different	?? Other CSA models