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Opportunity to co-own The Archers' farm and secure sustainable future through community share offer

The original inspiration for BBC Radio 4's *The Archers*, Rush Farm in Stock Wood, Worcester, is back in the limelight with a community share offer that could give thousands of ordinary people the chance to invest in sustainable British farming and support a progressive new model of community farm ownership.

Members of the public can invest in the award-winning traditional family Rush Farm by purchasing shares from as little as £100 up to £20,000, offering an anticipated return of 5% for its investors.

Stockwood Community Benefit Society aims to raise £1 million through the share offer. The goal is to secure the future of Rush Farm's biodynamic organic farmland and its on-farm Stockwood Business Park, advancing sustainability by protecting the natural environment and safeguarding rural employment. Over £415,325 has been raised of the £1m needed and the offer ends 31 October 2013.

The 150-acre organic and biodynamic farm was the original inspiration for *The Archers* on BBC radio. *The Archers* was written and recorded at Rush Farm in the early 1950s and 'The Bull' is based on the village pub at Inkberrow.

The farm is now run to the highest certified-Demeter biodynamic and Soil Association organic standards. It creates carbon-rich soil, encourages wildlife, uses low-energy farming methods, and respects the natural behaviour of farm animals.

The farm offers a unique model to invest in, thanks to its on-farm property, Stockwood Business Park, run on ethical and sustainable principles, which generates approximately £200,000 income per year. The 27-unit business park contributes to the local rural economy, employing over 100 local people in 19 businesses and generating £12m per year in revenues, in a range of fully-let offices and light industrial units, making it viable for local people to stay in the area.

It is an inspirational farming model which family owners, Sebastian, Sophie and Tabitha Parsons, want to transfer to community ownership – in perpetuity for the benefit of the community. Sebastian says:



"A traditional farm is not a line on a balance sheet. It is a rich and complex resource for our children's children. When a community of shareholders buys a family farm to be held in public trust, this ensures it will be farmed sustainably for ever. We hope our model of community farm-ownership can inspire other farms to do the same."

The farm's current owners and the Biodynamic Land Trust have created a farming trust, Stockwood Community Benefit Society, to turn the farm and its business park into a community-owned sustainable enterprise.

Martin Large of the Biodynamic Land Trust says: " The community buyout of Rush Farm will show how family farming can be accessible to both the Grundys as well as the Archers, because the family farm will be secured into community benefit trusteeship forever, and not flogged off. Rush Farm is a pioneer of a growing movement for community supported farming, following the successful rise of community shops and pubs.

"Stockwood Community Benefit Society is a pioneer community farm land trust and secures affordable access for farmers. We look forward to every county having one."

Charlotte and Ben Hollins, farmers of Fordhall Organic Farm, England's first community-owned farm, encourage people to support Stockwood: "Your investing in Stockwood Community Benefit Society will help secure Rush Farm for organic, biodynamic farming, countryside conservation, education and public access for posterity. Plus you are preserving the original Archers' farm and being part of a wonderful community. What more could you ask for?"

Shares are available direct from the SCBS at <http://stockwoodcbs.org/> and via the online ethical trading platform, Ethex <https://www.ethex.org.uk/>

Ends

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Editor's notes

1. BBC Radio 4's farming serial, The Archers - the world's longest-running radio soap opera – was written and recorded at Rush Farm in the early 1950s. The farm appeared on a front cover of the Radio Times (image available). Olympic showjumper Pat Smythe used to ride at Rush Farm, then a stud farm breeding bulls and horses in the 1950s and '60s. <http://stockwoodcbs.org/rush-farm/history/>



2. Stockwood Business Park is a 27-unit, fully-let mix of offices and light industrial units. It provides resources including print services, storage and recycling. The business park offers on-site child care with an Ofsted-approved Steiner-Waldorf kindergarten, operating in working hours. The rental income from Stockwood Business Park is about £200,000 a year.
3. Working in a farmland setting means opportunities for employees to get involved in farming life; for instance, two employees are on the feeding rota for orphan lambs.
4. Stockwood Community Benefit Society (Stockwood CBS) was set up in 2012 by the Elysia Partnership and Martin Large of the Biodynamic Land Trust to buy the farm and business park from its current owners, Elysia Partnership, to keep it in trust as a biodynamic farm and rural work-hub in perpetuity.
5. Stockwood CBS launched its first share offer 17 May 2013. The offer ends 31 October 2013. The share offer includes 150 acres of Rush Farm and Stockwood Business Park. Investors can invest between £100 and £20,000, with shares valued at £1 each. Stockwood CBS expects to pay interest on shares, anticipated to be 5%. So far, £415,325 has been raised.
6. Shares are available direct from Stockwood CBS.
Telephone 01386 791012 <http://stockwoodcbs.org/>
7. Shares are also available via Ethex, an online ethical stock exchange. Ethex offers potential investors the opportunity to invest online from a wide range of savings and investment products, offering strong social and environmental benefits, as well as financial return. <http://stockwoodcbs.org/> <https://www.ethex.org.uk/>
8. Ethex has joined with Resonance - which helps social enterprises structure and raise investment from investors sharing similar ethical values – its aim is to raise £1m for Stockwood Community Benefit Society. It is their first collaboration.
<http://www.resonance.ltd.uk/news/stockwood-cbs-launches-1m-share-offer/>
9. The Biodynamic Land Trust (BDLT) is an anchor investor in SCBS, as it aims to secure bio-dynamic organic farms into trust for affordable access to farmers. ‘We see SCBS, like Fordhall Fram as a pioneer community farm land trust and look forward to every county having such a body to secure affordable access for farmers.
The Biodynamic Land Trust is an exempt charity which secures land into trust for biodynamic farming. As anchor investor, Biodynamic Land Trust has committed to invest £150,000. <http://www.biodynamiclandtrust.org.uk/news/securing-rush-biodynamic-farm>
10. Sebastian Parsons co-founded Elysia in 1994, and is the exclusive UK distributor of Dr. Hauschka’s organic skin care range. In 1998, he moved Elysia to the newly-opened Stockwood Business Park, converted from the farm’s listed Victorian stables. Sebastian Parsons blog, Living Business: <http://sebastianparsons.wordpress.com/> Elysia <http://www.elysia.biz/>
Links: Twitter: @CoOwnRushFarm
Buy shares: <http://stockwoodcbs.org/> <https://www.ethex.org.uk/>



About the Family and Farm Ownership

- Sebastian Parsons and his two sisters, Tabitha and Sophie, own Rush Farm and Stockwood Business Park. Their parents, Anne and Adrian Parsons, manage the Demeter-certified biodynamic and Soil Association-certified organic farm.
- The story of Rush Farm begins on another farm, also in Worcester, called Broome Farm, bought in 1933 by Sebastian's grandfather, David Clement, a pioneer of Britain's organic movement. As well as the family farm, Broome Farm was the Biodynamic Agricultural Association's headquarters for over half a century.
- Sold in 1980s, Broome Farm vanished from organic and biodynamic management. It is this loss which has driven the Parsons' family to secure Rush Farm's sustainable future.
- Sebastian Parsons says: "After Broome Farm was sold, my sisters and I resolved to one day buy it back. We never did buy Broome Farm back. But when we purchased Rush Farm, we realised we had achieved our aim - we fulfilled our commitment to the land."
- Sebastian Parsons is available for interview. He is co-owner and CEO of Elysia, which includes Dr Hauschka organic skin care range, and Liv, the sustainable textile and homeware range. He is also chief executive of the UK Biodynamic Association, and chair of the English Symphony Orchestra.

About Rush Farm

- Bought in 2005 by the Parsons, Rush Farm is a mixed family-run Demeter-certified biodynamic and Soil Association-certified organic farm in Worcestershire, with annual inspections from both certification bodies. The 150-acre farm, in Stock Wood, near Inkberrow in Worcestershire, includes 22 acres of ancient woodland, Gannow Wood.
- The farm has a breeding flock of 200 Lley sheep, and a herd of 30 pure-bred traditional Hereford cattle. The animals are kept to the highest animal welfare standards and treated with homeopathy as a preventative measure. The farm also produces 30 acres of cereals.
- Rush Farm is working with the Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) scheme to encourage lapwings and curlews. It has several different habitats including woodland, wetland, herb-rich pasture and grassland, making it rich in wildlife and birds.
- Rush Farm carries kite marks from the Red Tractor scheme and citations for best practice from English Nature. The setting is classified as a Site of Interest by Worcester Wildlife Trust and frequently studied including by the RSPB.
- Biodynamic agriculture was outlined by Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner in a series of lectures in 1924. One of the first modern ecological farming methods, it emphasises the holistic relationship with the soil. One of the longest studies conducted over 30 years found soil fertility was greatly enhanced in biodynamic and organic systems, and that they used approximately half the energy of conventional systems.
http://www.organiccentre.ca/researchdatabase/res_switzerland_long.asp