Grant Aid for Orchards

It may be possible to attract grant aid for some orchard activity

Community orchards

Starting out

Local residents are the lifeblood of community orchards, donating money and volunteering their time and energy to make projects succeed. For example, offering tree sponsorship is a well proven and popular method of helping with initial start-up costs.

There are a lot of points to consider when working up your plans and at the outset it is sensible to draw up a management plan to ensure the orchard is cared for properly as it matures. New trees will require formative pruning in their first few years, watering in dry periods and occasional feeding, and the ground around them will need to be kept weed free to ensure they thrive.

Useful contacts:

- EEAOP offers general advice and runs annual workshops on creating orchards. It also offers the largest range of local variety fruit trees in its region. More information can be found in these pages.

- Common Ground has a ‘Community Orchards Handbook’ contains all sorts of useful guidance for groups considering starting an orchard project, including sections on writing a constitution, dealing with health and safety, insurance and tackling leases. ISBN 1 870364 26 0.

- Also worth consulting is the publication ‘Protecting Our Orchard Heritage - a good practice guide for managing orchard projects’ published by Sustain

Finding a site - Town, City, Parish, District and County Councils

Under-used council owned allotments and other parcels of undeveloped land are good sites to consider for community orchard projects, because councils prefer seeing land used by, and for, the benefit of the community they serve.

Leases, or annual rents, are often small when compared to the cost of actually purchasing land. Furthermore, councils may also help with initial site preparation work using their own machinery and labour, as well as contribute to the annual running costs, such as paying for site insurance. They may even help with small grants towards fencing, planting costs and site interpretation, in the form of leaflets or public information boards.

Small orchards also make useful and popular additions to school wildlife areas. The school may fund these directly or use county council funds for this sort of enhancement project. Alternatively parents may wish to contribute.

Useful contacts:

- Your local council’s Landscape Officer, Green Spaces Officer, Allotments Officer or Tree Officer will be able to help you with enquiries about possible new orchard sites.

- Your local council’s Community Development Officer will know about small grants for local schemes which your project may be eligible for. They should also have access to national directories of grant making trusts and other funding databases such as Grant Finder and Grant Net.

- The Rural Community Council - most counties have these (or an equivalent organisation) - is a useful source of free information and advice regarding funding opportunities, particularly at a local level.

- The National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) has a helpful web site listing funding opportunities. Many counties have their own local branches offering free advice.

- The National Lottery supports community projects.

- Funding may be possible from the Landfill Communities Fund, if your orchard site is near to a landfill site.

- The Tree Council, which organises National Tree Week every autumn, now offers grants for planting local varieties of apple and pear trees. Certain conditions apply. For example, a level of public access to the
orchard is expected.

- Local Councils and Biodiversity Partnerships who have grant aided community orchard schemes, school orchards and individual projects where they are beneficial for biodiversity include:

  Essex Biodiversity Partnership 01621 862975
  Huntingdon District Council 01480 388388
  Lincolnshire County Council 01522 782070
  Norfolk County Council 01603 222770
  South Cambridgeshire District Council 03450 450500

Local Businesses will often donate money towards purchasing trees and equipment for community orchard schemes, particularly if a ‘sponsor a tree’ scheme is being offered as an option. They may also donate machinery to help with site preparation, as well as volunteer labour.

**Old community orchards**

Former commercial orchards are sometimes adopted by community groups, under a rental agreement with the landowner.

Taking on mature trees will still require a management plan as they will need periodic pruning and possible replacement. Their fruit will offer an immediate and useful source of income for a community group and they can offer picturesque opportunities for public events, such as blossom walks, picking days and apple days. It is important to respect the greater biodiversity value of older orchards wherever possible.

Useful contacts:

- EEAOP offers general advice and workshops on the maintenance of old orchard trees
- Common Ground produces a range of useful booklets on orchard customs and uses.
- Your local Wildlife Trust will help survey the flora and fauna of old orchards.

Orchard owners may apply for funding under Defra’s Environmental Stewardship Scheme. This pays them an annual amount to assist with general management and replacement of trees, usually with local varieties. Older ‘traditional’ orchards are most likely to qualify.

Useful contacts:

- For Defra assistance in the East of England contact Natural England’s Agri-Environment Adviser on 01233 533579