



Food Research Collaboration

Exploring diverse business models in the sustainable food sector: FRC blog series

At its simplest, a business model is a plan that outlines how your organisation will stay in business. That may mean showing how you will make a profit – or it may mean showing how you will cover your costs, or generate some surplus income that can be ploughed back into the business.

We know that in the sustainable food economy, there are many different ways of setting up and staying in business – often complicated or fragile patchworks of income, grants and loans – and different reasons for doing so. We also know that there are lots of fledgling sustainable food businesses, still figuring out what to do – and many seasoned operators, who have experience to share. Some of these organisations may not see themselves as ‘businesses’, as their motive may be to provide a community resource or to avoid the negative connotations of commercialism (or competition over cooperation). But they will still have a plan and rationale for what they are doing.

We want to use our blog series to highlight these different business models or approaches – whether they are thriving or struggling, new or long established. We’ve drafted these guidelines so the information we publish is fairly consistent, but all the organisations will be different, so don’t worry if your story doesn’t fit the guidance. You don’t have to answer all the questions, and although financial details are always interesting don’t provide any information you don’t want us to publish.

Please tell us:

1. What your organisation is called, where it’s located, and what it does
2. Why you do it
3. How you got started
4. What type of organisation it is, e.g. a social enterprise, not-for-profit, or limited company
5. What the ownership model is e.g. private, cooperative, community ownership
6. Who your customers are, where they are located in relation to where you are, and how many you have
7. How big your organisation was to start with and how big it is now (number of staff, turnover)
8. Where the money comes from (e.g. sales, loans, grant, other), in what proportions
9. What your costs are (i.e., what you have to pay for and if possible some idea of what this costs in ££)

10. Whether your workforce includes volunteers or trainees
11. How has the reality compared with what you expected?
12. What have been the biggest triumphs and difficulties?
13. What would you do differently if you were starting again?
14. Is there something – a piece of equipment, a policy – that would make what you do easier?
15. What ambition do you have for your enterprise?
16. What advice do you have for other people wanting to do something similar?