**Business Plan for**

**The Crossing, Forest Row**

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**Table of contents**

Executive Summary: The Crossing – Forest Row 3

Introduction to The Crossing 4

Elements of the business 6

Our Vision & Mission 6

1st Objective: Community Supported Agriculture Scheme 7

2nd Objective: Pig Club & Lamb Share 10

Pig Club 10

Lamb Share 10

Highest welfare standards, highest quality meat, better for the environment 10

3rd Objective: The Crossing CIC 12

4th Objective: Educational Courses 13

Biochar Courses 13

Nutrition courses (‘Paleo Coaching’ in Grandma Alchemy’s Kitchen) 14

Appendices 15

# Executive Summary: The Crossing – Forest Row

This project delivers a replicable example of sustainable small-scale agriculture. The Crossing is a ‘triple bottom line’ initiative, putting the health of the soil first as this is the base for all life to thrive: triple bottom line means we care for the Planet, for People, and for Profit. These are the three pillars of sustainability: environmental, social, and economic.

Working in a closed loop energy system we physically create top-soil, build fertility and sequester carbon whilst producing mineral-dense, unpolluted, and zero miles to market food for people of Forest Row and East Grinstead.

The four key elements of the Business Plan are as follows:

* Supplying locally and sustainably grown fruit & vegetables
* Provide locally reared pig and lamb meat to the highest environmental and welfare standards
* Develop the community supported agricultural (CSA) scheme into a community interest company (CIC)
* Provide educational courses in relation to the activities undertaken at The Crossing

We have already made a considerable investment in The Crossing. Acquiring the land and installing all infrastructure, including live/work units, borehole, landscaping and provision of reservoirs has so far cost £150,000 including:

* Private investment: £ 115,000
* Donations: £ 35,000

The Crossing will initially provide full time employment for one person and part time employment for one other. There will be the potential for more people to be paid as the project evolves and we collaborate with other interested parties.

Current and projected financial figures are set out in the appendices.

# Introduction to The Crossing

We began to look at, and be concerned by, our ecological footprint at the turn of the new millenium. We began to look at, and be concerned by, our food quality in 2006, when our youngest daughter, at the age of three, refused to eat anything but white bread and pasta. We began to understand that something was not right. Despite buying organic and cooking from scratch, our family was not thriving.

Following the work of Dr Natasha Campbell McBride and The Weston A Price Foundation we began to regain our health. It is becoming clear that the use of unnatural agents is responsible for our ill health. There is an alarming correlation between the use of the herbicide Glyphosate, known as “Round-up”, and the incidence of Coeliac disease and gluten intolerance, as published in a study of the data between 1990 and 2010[[1]](#footnote-1).

We are beginning to understand the importance of foods that are grown naturally, completely free of toxins, pesticides, herbicides and fungicides. Where can we find clean food? Even Organic supermarket vegetables grown on a field scale can be sprayed with compounds that are accepted by the organic certification board but which some consider unnatural and toxic. Organic foods are also considerably more expensive to buy. This is when we decided to become food producers.

In spring 2007 our journey back to the land began as we left London to ‘WWOOF’[[2]](#footnote-2) (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) around Europe. WWOOF brings together host farms and gardens with volunteer helpers in an exchange of work for board and lodging. We travelled through Portugal, Spain and France working on organic smallholdings with our two small children, one aged 9 months, the other 4 years old.

We learnt that it is only possible to work the land naturally with many hands: in community. Having gained valuable experience in market gardening, animal husbandry and rural living we returned to England in autumn 2008 to the intentional Steiner Community of Hoathly Hill, West Sussex. Emma began work on site growing vegetables for Hoathly Hill Community Supported Agriculture scheme.

In 2010 we bought the land known as The Crossing: an 8.5 acre field bordering The Forest Way in Forest Row and began to create a community small holding, replicating the CSA of Hoathly Hill. The land is unimproved pasture: an ‘assart’, according to a botanical survey we commissioned, a field hewn from the forest for use as grazing, never cultivated. The pasture is rich in herbs and flowers, a precious source of biodiversity, which we intend to preserve whilst running the business.

Emma became a Director for WWOOF UK from 2008 to 2011. We now enjoy the benefits of being Wwoof Hosts. In spring 2011 Emma became a Demeter Certified grower at Hoathly Hill Community Supported Agriculture scheme. This is akin to Organic certification inspected annually by the Biodynamic Association. Emma was responsible for sourcing seed, the rotation plan, planting schedule, harvesting and marketing.

We are members of the Permaculture Association. Permaculture stands for **Perm**-anent agri-**culture**, growing systems that allow nature to self regulate, with minimum input and maximum outputs, cultivating an approach to self reliance that is based on respecting Life, especially the life of the soil.

In 2012 we dowsed for and dug a bore-hole. erected deer fencing, launched the Coop Co-op, designed and implemented a whole site water reticulation system, including swales, ponds and a WET system with Biologic Design. In 2013 we opened up 50 x 8m raised beds growing vegetables using no-dig techniques, on poor clay ‘rock stone’. The Crossing was invited to speak at The Oxford Real Farming conference 2013 about the swale system at The Crossing.

In 2014 we moved on to the land and began practicing regenerative agriculture, moving the sheep to fresh pasture daily. Emma hosts Paleo Coaching sessions, sharing experience and transformation gained by changing our food choices.

We intend to become a landmark project for Agro-ecology providing affordable, ‘0’ miles to market, nutrient dense, high mineral content foods for local people, whilst offering educational opportunities and seasonal celebrations for community cohesion.

# Elements of the business

## Our Vision & Mission

Our vision is that The Crossing is a thriving community smallholding feeding local people via membership scheme, aiming to be a centre of excellence and education for Agro-ecology, Natural Farming and Healing practices.

Our mission is to use Agro-ecology to maximise food, fodder and fuel production whilst re-integrating local people into agriculture, letting all life thrive.

The broader goals inform the four following business objectives that we wish to manage in a way that is environmentally, socially, and economically sustainable:

* Supplying locally and sustainably grown fruit & vegetables via a CSA
* Provide locally reared pig and lamb meat to the highest environmental and welfare standards
* Develop the community supported agricultural (CSA) scheme into a community interest company (CIC)
* Provide educational courses in relation to the activities undertaken at The Crossing

We address each of these objectives in more detail in the following sections.

## 1st Objective: Community Supported Agriculture Scheme

The first element of the business is to produce and sell mineral rich, nutrient dense foods free from pesticides & herbicides via Community Supported Agriculture scheme.

*What are ‘mineral rich, nutrient dense foods, free from toxins?’*

When we enliven and enrich the soilby feeding it with mulches and compost, we enliven and enrich the plants that grow in that soil. When animals are grazed on fresh herb rich pasture every day they are healthy and well, with out the use of toxic biocides or pharmaceuticals. Enlivened and enriched plants and animals grown without pharmaceuticals and biocides make nutrient dense, mineral rich foods for humans that are free from toxins.

*What is CSA?*

Community supported agriculture (CSA) is a partnership between farmers and the local community, in which the responsibilities, risks and rewards of farming are shared.  CSA’s have been operating in the USA for over 25 years. There are currently about 180 CSA’s in the UK with a UK network evolving funded by The Soil Association.

From 2010-2013 Emma ran a CSA scheme at Hoathly HIll, West Sussex for 4 years, with 12 members each paying £5 per week, 52 weeks of the year, and taking a share of the harvest, regardless of what is grown on one third of an acre. The raised beds at The Crossing currently cover a half of an acre with plenty of room for expansion.

The benefits are many. Farmers receive a stable secure income and gain closer connection to their community. Members have access to nutrient dense, high mineral content, biodynamic vegetables grown naturally without the use of any toxic life threatening substances (herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, antibiotics)

The most common produce for CSAs are vegetables, but they can also include eggs, poultry, bread, fruit, pork, lamb, beef and dairy produce.

*How will the work get done?*

The Crossing is listed as WWOOF UK host. This means we are in a directory of farms, smallholdings and gardens, which welcome volunteers to work in exchange for board and lodging. Every day there are requests from “WWOOFers” wishing to come and learn on the land. Emma has extensive experience in handling untutored helping hands and organising many people with different levels of knowledge and ability to achieve the aims of the CSA. Wwoofers are expected to work 6 hours a day 5 days a week in exchange for tuition, board and lodging. Wwoofers arrive by bicycle or on foot.

*When will this happen?*

We signed up 10 members in the first growing season, 2015, at £7 per weekly share of the harvest, Year 2 has 13 members signed up at £10 per week (this is all the garden can support with a poor start to the growing season and lack of propagating space)

Working up to 30 members at £12 per week by year 4. By our 3rd year of production, many bushes and trees will begin to bear fruit, increasing variety and quantity of the shares, which is reflected in the pricing. By year 4 and 5 we may increase share price again to reflect the added variety and quantity.

*Annual income from CSA scheme*

Below we have set out the current and projected weekly and annual takings from the CSA membership scheme. These figures are set out in more detail, including associated costs, at Appendix 2.

* Year 1 10 members @ £7 per week £70
* Year 2 15 members @ £10 per week £150
* Year 3 20 members @ £10 per week £200
* Year 4 & 5 30 members @ £12 per week £360

Annual takings, (allowing 4 weeks holiday, equivalent to 48 weeks in the year):

* Year 1 £70 x 48 weeks £3,360
* Year 2 £150 x 48 weeks £7,200
* Year 3 £200 x 48 weeks £9,600
* Year 4 & 5 £360 x 48 weeks £17,280

*Growing principles*

Emma is a Demeter Certified Biodynamic Grower and has been inspected by the Biodynamic Association during the 4 growing seasons of 2009 -2013 as the main horticulturalist for the Hoathly Hill Community Supported Agriculture scheme.

During this apprenticeship and after receiving a bursary to attend Schumacher College, to study Agro-ecology, Emma has:

* Understood that vegetables grown in small-scale poly-culture, can offer increased health, vigour, vitality and flavour.
* Learnt of beneficial companion planting techniques where one species benefits it’s neighbour in symbiosis. ie nitrogen fixing legumes next to nitrogen hungry greens.
* Learnt and applied natural farming recipes for fertilisers.
* Developed techniques & implemented design that preserve soil moisture content to avoid watering.
* Identified and used techniques to minimise pest damage with out the use of toxic chemicals.
* Learnt how to measure and recognise high mineral content in vegetables using a refractometer.
* Collaborated with Biologic Design and Swansea Biochar to create a resilient landscape, drought tolerant and flood resistant.

*How will surplus be sold?*

Surplus produce will be sold to as Salad Bags and “Smoothie” Bags for sale at One the Square. ‘Friends of The Crossing’ will be informed of availability. “Green Smoothies” are an excellent method of upping your raw leafy green intake, in liquid form, and are becoming an extremely fashionable way to improve health and vitality.

We are aiming for a weekly supplemental income of £100. The salad and smoothie bags or cut and come again greens: kale, chard, lettuce, endive and chicory will be supplemented with a variety of foraged plants from The Crossing, including more unusual leaves such as borage, nettle, ramsons, chickweed, sow thistle and dandelion. Wild greens have good nutritional value, and paleo Coaching clients have expressed great interest in these products.

Projected figures associated with the salad bags and boxes, and smoothie bags, are set out at Appendix 3.

## 2nd Objective: Pig Club & Lamb Share

### Pig Club

Pigs are extremely efficient earth-movers. They can rotivate and clear an area prior to cultivation. Pigs root out and eat weeds, whilst fertilising. This is a great amount of work. Pigs are co-workers in land management.

With portable electric fencing we can control where the Pigs clear and fertilise and use their services, naturally expressed in natural behaviour.

Kune Kune pigs are small and easy to handle. A variety of volunteer helpers could cope with the care of the pigs.. Thriving on pasture requiring only 450gr of concentrated feed and plenty of fruit and veg, which will be supplied by our spoiled fruit and veg.

We will run the pigs around the perimeter of the garden fence to keep grass down and minimise slug habitat close to crops. Mature at 11-12 months.

The pigs would be run behind the sheep unless employed to clear an area. This breed of pig thrives on roughage. Feeding with sprouted peas and barley is an efficient and affordable method of upping their nutrient intake when farrowing. This requires a dedicated temperature controlled area for soaking and watering trays of seed over a 5-7 day period on rotation. As one lot is fed, the next lot is put into soak.

Pork will be sold to Friends of The Crossing and CSA members lists. Financial figures and projections regarding the pig enterprise are set out at Appendix 4.

### Lamb Share

Lamb Share members are encouraged to learn about the principles of Regenerative Agriculture, understanding how carefully managed grazing can capture carbon and the different quality in the meat

We started with 10 sock lambs in 2015. 3 didn’t survive, they are somewhat sickly having been taken from the mother. We sold 4 lambs small as they were not respecting the electric fencing. Now we have 3 healthy extremely tame and easy to handle ewes to breed from.

Lamb will be sold to Friends of The Crossing and CSA members lists. Financial figures and projections regarding the lamb share enterprise are set out at Appendix 5.

### Highest welfare standards, highest quality meat, better for the environment

Cows and Sheep naturally graze on grass outdoors in fields. But the majority of meat now available in the supermarkets is from intensively raised meat fattened indoors in what are termed "Controlled Animal Feeding Operations" or CAFOs. These are not only inhumane, and cause pollution but the meat produced is a far inferior both in terms of flavour and nutrition.

Fattening grazing animals on grain causes digestive upsets and imbalance, making the animals sick, requiring antibiotics to keep them alive. The antibiotics are then passed on into the food chain and we ingest them, further interfering with our own digestive processes. CAFO meat is lower in vitamins and minerals, and lower in omega 3 essential fatty acids and CLA (another healthy and important fat), while being higher in the highly inflammatory omega 6 fatty acids.

Ruminants ie: Grazing animals are not capable of properly digesting grain. Pigs and Chickens are omnivorous, and should be allowed to roam free and eat whatever they desire - From apples and acorns, to insects, mice and slugs. They can be fed on sprouted grains and pulses. Sprouting requires daily routines of soaking, watering and temperature control.

Free Range Pork and Chicken, and Grass Fed Lamb, that is allowed to grow and develop naturally is much higher in fat soluble vitamins A, D, E and K, contains much more omega 3 fatty acids and is a valuable source of CLA. (Conjugated Linoleic Acid)

Moving to fresh pasture daily means much higher welfare and hygiene practices. The animals stay healthy, and do not need routine treatment with antibiotics. This requires attention to detail, careful observation of the pasture, frequent moving.

Meat reared this way will attract a higher premium.

## 3rd Objective: The Crossing CIC

The third business objective is to become The Crossing CIC (Community Interest Company), engaging local people into agriculture via the CSA scheme and membership.

*What is The Crossing CIC?*

A Community Interest Company is a type of company limited by guarantee or by shares, introduced by the United Kingdom government in 2005 under the Companies (Audit, Investigations and Community Enterprise) Act 2004, designed for social enterprises that want to use their profits and assets for the public good.

We will be limited by voting shares (for directors) and non-voting shares (for public supporters or shareholders). Directors may take a salary for their time, non-voting share holders will be supporting the enterprise for the common good, will be invited to the AGM and have access to the annual returns reports for information only.

Share-holders will benefit in many ways other than financially. Shares will be £1 each up to a maximum of £1,000. Shareholders will become members of The Crossing CIC or **Friends of The Crossing.** They will be included on our mailing list and receive online access to educational workshops and courses

*Friends of The Crossing tiered membership*

Birch family membership £25 single members £10

Alder family membership £50 single members £20

Oak family membership £100 single members £40

Life time Friend of The Crossing £1,000

Clover volunteers who work the land Free

**Friends of The Crossing** will be invited to join the **Community Supported Agriculture scheme** and receive email updates about salad bag & greens availability to be bought on Saturdays from One the Square, when veg boxes in season.

NB: The figures set out above have not been taken into account in our financial forecasts on the basis that we do not want the success of economic sustainability of The Crossing to be contingent on the CIC membership, as well as the principle of the CIC being in place for the benefit of members rather than of The Crossing as an enterprise.

## 4th Objective: Educational Courses

As part of our wider goals it is important to us that part of what we achieve with The Crossing is to provide workshops as well as online educational resources regarding Biochar Stoves, Soil Fertility & No-dig Farming, and Nutrition. Details of the courses are set out below. The online educational resources will be publically accessible free of charge.

These courses are an excellent marketing tool for the food we produce at The Crossing.

In addition, the information in these courses are used as a basis for paid public speaking opportunities and consulting: Women’s Institute, Small Farm Training Group, Oxford Real Farming Conference, Food Sovereignty meetings, Brighton Permaculture Trust.

### Biochar Courses

Biochar is charcoal made with the intention of incorporating it into the Earth as a soil improver. A Biochar stove is a wood-burning stove used for cooking and heating hot water that produces Biochar. Many benefits include:

* increased **soil fertility** and water retention in soil.
* Biochar is a stable form of carbon, it takes a long time to decompose. Adding biochar to soil is a method of long-term carbon capture.
* The energy released whilst creating biochar can be used for heating and cooking.

Using biochar in conjunction with high carbon mulch, a minimal dig system and with the permanent presence of plant roots, we can provide optimal conditions for Arbuscular Mycorrhizal Activity, ‘Arbuscular’ is to do with trees, ‘Mychorrhizal’ is to do with symbiotic fungal relationships with trees. Mychorrizal fungal filaments distribute nutrients from one plant to another, exchanging sugars and minerals. They are service providers to the plant world and take a cut for their troubles. Growing nitrogen-fixing trees close to your no dig vegetable plot allows A.M.A. to provide nitrogen to heavy feeding vegetables, in a no dig system.

When biomass such as wood is turned into charcoal, the carbon in that wood becomes stabilised. Being stable, the carbon in the biochar is sequestered. It can take hundreds, even thousands of years for biochar to decompose in soil. This is known from studies of soils such as terra preta (black earth) of the Amazon basin, a type of soil made by indigenous Amazonians between 450BC and 950AD. Terra Preta is characterised by large amounts of charcoal and organic matter in otherwise nutritionally poor soils.

We intend to hold 3 workshops per year demonstrating the closed loop energy cycle of growing fuel, burning fuel with a Biochar Stove, incorporating Biochar into a no-dig growing system, sequestering carbon, improving soil fertility and water retention, growing more food and fuel. (3 workshops per year for up to 12 people at £60):

* Soil Fertility & Biochar workshop income = up to £2,160/year

Financial projections relating the Biochar stove workshops are set out in Appendix 6.

### Nutrition courses (‘Paleo Coaching’ in Grandma Alchemy’s Kitchen)

Paleo refers to Paleolithic, ie before the age of agriculture. It is also known as The Specific Carbohydrate Diet or SCD, developed in the 1930s by Dr Haas and taken to a wider audience in the 1950’s by Elaine Gottschall in her book Breaking The Vicious Cycle recounting the story of how she healed her daughter of ulcerative colitis with food.

The principles behind this healing knowledge are that food is medicine and there is no disease, only deficiency. Hundreds of thousands of people have enjoyed greatly improved health and diminished symptoms by going “Paleo” including those with Irritable Bowel Syndrome, Crohn’s Disease, Coeliac’s Disease, Multiple Sclerosis, Arthritis, Type 2 Diabetes, Autism, Depression and Bi-polar.

Emma’s experiences with her own family’s health are the basis upon which she shares information with cooking demonstrations on how to improve and optimise the health of the family, especially the children.

Paleo Coaching courses are in a group setting, 12 people per course of 6 sessions, an hour long, once a week during term time. We expect that we would sufficient interest for six courses per year, one every half term following the academic calendar, however we have made conservative projections below based upon only three courses per year. (Three courses per year x 12 participants x £120):

* Paleo Coaching income = up to £4,320 per year

Financial projections relating the Paleo Coaching courses are set out in Appendix 6.

# Appendices

List of Appendices:

* Appendix 1: Summary and annual totals
* Appendix 2: CSA Harvest Share Scheme
* Appendix 3: Salad bags and boxes, and smoothie bags
* Appendix 4: Pig Club
* Appendix 5: Lamb Share
* Appendix 6: Courses
* Appendix 7: Other Costs

1. A Samsel and S Seneff. “Glyhosate, Pathways to Modern Diseases II: Celiac Sprue and Gluten Intolerance” Journal of Interdisciplinary Toxicology. Vol 6(4) 159-184, 2013. as quoted in The Land Magazine issue 16, Summer 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. [www.WWOOF.org](http://www.WWOOF.org) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)