



FarmStart placement: a one-year, part-time training programme

Full information for the 2025 programme

LESS, The Plot and FoodFutures are opening applications for the 2025 FarmStart training programme.

This programme is aimed at people who live in North Lancashire who would like to play an active role in setting up new food growing enterprises around North Lancashire.

- Dreaming of starting your own organic growing business?
- Are you excited about growing organic food that's good for people and the planet?
- Want to be part of building a better food system in North Lancashire?

If you answered yes to the above, apply to join our year-long FarmStart programme in North Lancashire.

Why do a FarmStart placement?

The global food system is increasingly vulnerable to climate change and external shocks like the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the Ukraine war. These challenges highlight the urgent need for shorter, more resilient food supply chains, adaptable business models, and stronger collaboration between local producers, retailers, and consumers.

All these issues and more are discussed in the [Our Food Futures community strategy](#) for North Lancashire.

The need to connect people with their food, nature and the land is crucial in building a local resilient food economy. It is also crucial that we do this in a way that provides meaningful jobs for local people.

The FarmStart model aims to combat some of the challenges involved with entering the food system as a new grower. It does this by providing:

- **Access to land (which can be unaffordable for many)**
[Our Food Futures 10 year strategy](#) envisions a ring of agroecological farms around North Lancashire that work together to provide Lancaster District with locally grown food. We have been actively scoping and planning growing sites in the area which could be run by FarmStart alumni once they have enough experience and expertise. By applying to FarmStart you begin a journey that supports this wider vision into coming alive.



- **Training on small-scale climate resilient approaches to food growing**
The FarmStart training site is a small scale organic certified market garden. The lead grower and the other trainers have 20 years+ experience of agroecological growing in different settings. Your training will include the theory and practice whilst introducing you to other pioneers in our local food system.
- **A community of support**
The FarmStart scheme and The Plot are part of a bigger movement in North Lancashire that is working to build a thriving local food system that is healthy, resilient and fair. The FarmStart scheme offers you an entry point into this wider community of support that wants to see you and other growers thrive.
- **Access to the local market**
The LESS team is working to build local demand for sustainable local produce and direct routes to market through community collection points, a CSA scheme and through [Gather](#), the North Lancashire-based food hub that connects local consumers with fresh, seasonal, and organic produce from small local farms and producers. The wider vision is that we build a ring of farms that collaborate to supply food for the local market
- **Collaborative approaches to developing local supply and distribution models**
The challenges our food system faces demands more collaborative ways of working in order to build local food sovereignty. You will be introduced to some of these approaches during your year on the FarmStart scheme.

The FarmStart journey so far

In 2018, LESS commissioned a feasibility study into a [Lancaster-based FarmStart](#) initiative. The work scoped the potential for sales of local produce; the interest of local people in training to be small-scale farmers and earning a living from growing food; and the logistics/partners for such a project.

In 2019, having secured grant funding, LESS ran a pilot [Growers' Support Course](#) for would-be FarmStarters. This engaged an emerging community of those wanting to access opportunities for training as small-scale sustainable farmers.

During 2018-20 we were seeking partners and a site for the programme. On 1 June 2020 we took over the lease of a small plot (just under an acre) of land at Old Holly Farm, located just off the A6 between Lancaster and Garstang. We subsequently took over a dual-span polytunnel at the Council's White Lund site near Morecambe.

From two small paddocks and a rocky polytunnel, using various agroecological practices, the sites have been developed into a training centre for would-be small-scale organic growers and a supplier of local organic produce. Over time, our vision is to support the education and training needed for a ring of farms and associated food processing in North Lancashire.

LESS (Lancaster District) CIC, Room PC22, The Storey, Meeting House Lane, Lancaster, LA1 1TH

□ **Web:** www.lessuk.org □ **Email:** admin@lessuk.org

LESS (Lancaster District) is a Community Interest Company limited by guarantee in England No: 6181400



The FarmStart programme

We are now seeking a small group of committed people to join the 2025 FarmStart training programme in North Lancashire, starting on 7 March 2025 and running until 24 October 2025.

We will provide:

- A dedicated season-long programme to help you to develop the skills, expertise and experiences that are required for running a small-scale commercial organic horticulture enterprise
- An opportunity to work on-site two days a week (for 34 weeks) to work alongside an experienced grower and the wider Plot team
- A chance to shape and input into our wider sustainable food strategies to build local, agroecological food supply and distribution mechanisms
- A dedicated weekly training session, delivered by experience staff and a guest trainer team, who last included: Dr Emma Cardwell, Lancaster University; Dr Henry Russell, Regen Russell; Anna Clayton, FoodFutures; Rachel Marshall, Closing Loops; Sean Ruffell, Organic North; Diana McIntyre, Composting for Closing Loops.
- Support for those FarmStart trainees who want to transition towards a role as an organic grower at the end of the programme
- Membership of the Landworkers Alliance for one year
- The option of a bursary of £50 a week for 34 weeks while you are participating in the FarmStart programme. (Please note that there are limited funds available, and they will be allocated on a case by case basis. More information is available [here](#) about the criteria for eligibility)

You will commit:

- A minimum of two days a week (from March to late - October 2025) to be onsite, working practically alongside the lead grower, or in classroom based training. One of these days must be a Friday, but the second day can be any of Mon/Weds/Thurs, to be agreed
- To work collaboratively and respectfully with the FarmStart team, including The Plot grower, The Plot volunteers, FarmStart trainees and FarmStart coordinator
- To undertake flexibly a range of roles that are required to manage the growing, sales and distribution of organic produce

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- To contribute financially to the costs of the training programme if you're able to
- To attend FoodFutures meetings and events, where and when possible (in addition to the time commitment to be on site), to support you in seeing how the Plot and FarmStart's work fits within the wider local food movement of North Lancashire

The course curriculum will include dedicated training on:

- Horticulture (pitched at a Level 2 standard):
 - o Monitoring and maintaining health and safety
 - o Establish and maintain effective working relationships with others
 - o Preparing ground for seeding and planting
 - o Propagate plants from seed
 - o Establishing crops or plants in growing medium
 - o Carry out harvesting operations
- Setting up a small-scale growing business:
 - o business planning
 - o organisational/business models
 - o site planning and set up
 - o crop planning for a north west location
 - o organic certification processes
 - o pricing, marketing, distribution and selling, including wholesale and retail
 - o volunteer management
- Agroecology and the wider food system:
 - o Regenerative enterprise
 - o Exploring the agroecology movement
 - o Composting systems and approaches
 - o Introduction to Permaculture
 - o Seed Saving (biology, politics and networks)
 - o Understanding the work of Food Futures, Closing Loops and North Lancashire's food networks
 - o Building a local culture around local food - cooking skills, chefs and menus

The curriculum combines specialist classroom sessions, training from in-house and guest experts, hands-on experience, mentorship, and farm visits to local projects.

A big part of the training will be hands-on farm work. As a FarmStarter you will be required to work alongside the grower under realistic commercial farming conditions. These will include a range of working conditions, including working in a hot polytunnel in the summer (~35°C) to a muddy, wet and cold field in the winter on a 9-5.30pm basis (with a short lunchtime and breaks). You will learn to be able to complete repetitive tasks (e.g. weeding, sowing large numbers of seeds) in a timely manner and with attention to detail, as these efficiencies are at the heart of making a viable horticulture business.

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The Plot is a commercial organic farm and sells vegetables via a crop-share scheme and retail to shops, other farms and restaurants. We are unique in that we enable you to practise and hone your skills during your time with us as a FarmStarter.

The focus will be on certified organic growing at a commercial scale and on commercial terms, and building a resilient local food production and distribution system within north Lancashire.

Find out more

If you are interested:

- please join us for a voluntary work session on-site at the Plot, on any of these dates, 9-1pm:
 - Wednesday, 11 December 2024
 - Wednesday, 8 January 2025
 - Wednesday, 15 January 2025

Please register for these sessions here please email Dennis: [Dennis Touliatos](mailto:Dennis.Touliatos@theplot@lessuk.org) (theplot@lessuk.org)

It's important that you come and visit the farm, and do a few hours on-site in advance of making an application. If you are not able to join on the dates mentioned, please contact us to arrange a suitable time.

We are also running an in-person session in the evening of Tuesday, 14 January, to share more about the programme and for you to meet some of the team and get your questions answered! Book [here](#).

Apply for FarmStart 2025

Apply [here](#).

The deadline for applications is by 10am on Tuesday, 21 January 2025.

Interviews will take place on Friday, 24 January 2025.



You can read about experiences of our previous FarmStart trainees [here](https://foodfutures.org.uk/the-plot/meet-the-plot-team/):
<https://foodfutures.org.uk/the-plot/meet-the-plot-team/>

Further monthly news articles are available on www.the-plot.uk

The Plot and FarmStart programme is coordinated by LESS (Lancaster District) CIC in partnership with FoodFutures: North Lancashire's Sustainable Food Network.