Increasing Small-Scale Food Production through Land Release

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Executive Summary

This report, commissioned by South of Scotland Enterprise, explores how to increase small-scale food production in the Scottish Borders through land release and improved access for new entrants. Despite the region's strong agricultural output, much of the food produced is exported, with limited fruit and vegetable production retained locally. The dominance of large-scale commodity farming, combined with barriers such as land ownership patterns, infrastructure deficits, and high start-up costs, significantly limits opportunities for small-scale producers.

The study highlights a growing appetite for change. A majority of landowners surveyed are open to discussions about land release, particularly through short-term leases or partnership models. However, legal uncertainty, lack of infrastructure, and unfamiliarity with community-led models remain obstacles. Conversely, aspiring growers face challenges including insecure tenure, weak negotiating power, and limited access to land or training.

Examples of successful land access models—both locally and internationally—demonstrate that progress is possible. These include share farming partnerships in the Borders, leasing arrangements on public and private land, and international cooperative models such as Terres de Liens (France) and the Ecological Land Cooperative (UK), which treat land as a common good and prioritise ecological stewardship.

To unlock the potential for local food production, the report recommends piloting diverse land access models, developing practical toolkits, supporting legal and infrastructure needs, and facilitating multi-stakeholder partnerships. Greater investment in mediation, mentoring, and public awareness is needed to support both landowners and new entrants.

A regional shift toward inclusive, sustainable land use could revitalise rural communities, increase food security, and contribute to Scotland's Good Food Nation ambitions. Coordinated action across government, landowners, growers, and support organisations is essential to realise this opportunity.

Introduction

Background & Context

Increasing small-scale food production in the Scottish Borders is situated within the broader aims of the South of Scotland Regional Land Use Framework (RLUF), which seeks to create a balanced approach to land management. Key objectives of this framework include:

Promoting Sustainable Land Use Decisions: Facilitating informed, integrated, and collaborative decision-making processes that carefully balance sustainability, economic vitality, and environmental protection.

Understanding Competing Land Pressures: Identifying opportunities where land can simultaneously provide multiple societal, ecological, and economic benefits.

Guiding Strategic Investment: Ensuring both public and private investments are channelled effectively into initiatives that promote fair, inclusive, and sustainable land use.

Supporting Land-Based Businesses: Encouraging local businesses to operate sustainably, in harmony with nature and communities, thereby fostering local economic prosperity, job creation, and skills development.

Connecting Communities with Land: Enhancing public engagement, understanding, and active participation in land management, enabling communities to positively influence and directly benefit from local land resources.

The South of Scotland region holds a significant place in Scotland's agricultural economy, home to nearly half of the national dairy herd, a third of all cattle and sheep, and responsible for producing almost 1/5th of Scotland’s cereals—including around a quarter of its winter barley, wheat, and oats.

While the statistics show a positive picture in terms of overall food production, they do not reflect the amount of food that stays within the region and which is consumed within the region. Most of the produce leaves the region and enters national and international markets.

Given this imbalance, sustainable and regenerative agricultural practices are increasingly recognised as essential methods in supporting a thriving local food economy. These practices nurture community-driven initiatives, local markets, and short, resilient supply chains.

Additionally, the regional planning framework aims to bolster public procurement policies that prioritise and promote locally produced food.

One critical strategy for increasing local food production in the Scottish Borders is through encouraging new entrants into small-scale agriculture. However, enabling access to suitable land remains a significant barrier for potential new producers, due to several interconnected challenges:

Limited Availability of Affordable Land: Most agricultural land in the Scottish Borders is already occupied by established, large-scale farms or estates. This restricts the availability of suitable, affordable land for small-scale producers or individuals who wish to enter the sector for the first time.

High Capital Costs and Financial Barriers: New entrants typically face substantial upfront costs associated with purchasing, leasing, or preparing land for food production. They often struggle to secure finance, particularly without an established agricultural track record or sufficient assets for collateral.

Competition with Established Land Uses: There is significant competition for land from traditional livestock farming, cereal production, forestry, and increasingly from renewable energy developments. These competing interests frequently drive land prices and rental values beyond what is viable for small-scale fruit and vegetable growers.

Long-standing Land Ownership Patterns: Historical patterns of land ownership and tenancy in the Scottish Borders often limit opportunities for new entrants. Land tends to remain in family ownership for generations, with few incentives or mechanisms encouraging established owners to make land available for smaller-scale, community-oriented agriculture.

Planning and Regulatory Hurdles: Complex planning systems and agricultural policy frameworks may inadvertently favour existing, larger-scale operations. New entrants often find it challenging to navigate planning permissions, agricultural subsidies, and land-use regulations designed primarily around established farms or larger businesses.

Lack of Infrastructure: Even when land becomes available, it may lack essential infrastructure such as accessible roads, water supplies, fencing, storage facilities, or buildings. The cost and complexity of establishing this basic infrastructure from scratch can further deter new entrants.

Skills and Knowledge Gap: New entrants frequently face a steep learning curve, including navigating sustainable or regenerative farming practices, marketing and distribution, and understanding local food systems and markets. Without robust training, mentoring programmes, or community support, these challenges can significantly affect the viability of new small-scale businesses.

Absence of a Robust Local Supply Chain: The lack of established local markets, distribution channels, and retail outlets dedicated to local produce makes it challenging for new entrants to find reliable routes to market. Without strong local supply chains, small-scale producers struggle to effectively sell their products, limiting their growth and long-term viability.

Policy Landscape

In addition to the Regional Land Use Framework, there are national policy considerations. Wider agricultural policy and support is managed by the Scottish Government, which has, in the past, implemented its own initiatives to support new entrants into farming. Notably the New Entrants Capital Grant Scheme provided grants to individuals new to farming, aiming to enhance their agricultural businesses and promote sustainable development. This scheme closed to new applications in 2018. The New Entrants Start-Up Grant Scheme offered capital grants to those who had started their agricultural business within the previous 12 months. This scheme also closed to new applications in 2018.

Current Initiatives

The Agriculture and Rural Communities Act passed into law in June 2024. Cabinet Secretary Mairi Gougeon said that the Act "is a significant milestone in reforming the support systems that will empower Scotland's farmers and crofters to cut climate emissions and restore nature." It is not yet clear how the Agricultural Reform Route Map and four tier support frameworks will impact on the support available for new entrants.

The Good Food Nation Act provides a critical opportunity to enhance and develop the local food system in the Scottish Borders by establishing a comprehensive national framework that supports and aligns with regional objectives. At its core, the Act addresses key local priorities such as reliable access to nutritious and affordable food. It actively encourages sustainable agricultural practices and regenerative farming, strengthening the environmental sustainability of local food production.

And the Act recognises the role of the local food sector in supporting economic prosperity and resilience, emphasising innovation, diversity, and job creation under fair working conditions. By promoting community education and engagement, the Act fosters greater public participation, awareness, and appreciation of local food producers and sustainable practices. Additionally, it positions the Scottish Borders as a contributor to Scotland's global reputation for high-quality food, encouraging knowledge exchange and collaboration with international best practices.

The Rural Delivery Plan, scheduled to be delivered in this parliament, will focus specifically on how the Scottish Government is supporting communities in mainland rural Scotland. The Plan will cover key areas, such as agriculture, land reform and economic development, which will impact future developments in the South of Scotland.

Objectives of the Study

To address the opportunities and challenges in supporting new entrants into food production, the study aims to:

Identify Farms and Estates Willing to Release Land: Engage with local farms and estates to explore their willingness to allocate or lease land to new small-scale food producers.

Identify Transferable Models of Land Use: Examine successful examples of land-sharing initiatives, cooperative models, and innovative tenancy arrangements from other regions. Identifying practical, transferable models can provide blueprints for viable and replicable solutions in the Scottish Borders.

Provide Recommendations for Stakeholders: Develop recommendations tailored to different stakeholders—farmers, landowners, policymakers, and support organisations—to facilitate greater land access.

Existing Support

There is some existing support for land release in the Scottish Borders, including for models such as farm sharing and community growing. A small number of landowners have shown willingness to explore shared use of farmland, offering opportunities for new entrants, small-scale growers, and community food initiatives. Local authorities and third-sector organisations have supported efforts to bring underused land into productive use, though such initiatives remain relatively limited. Existing examples highlight the potential of collaborative approaches to land use. With further coordination and support, these models could be scaled up to improve access to land and strengthen local food systems.

Scottish Land Matching Service (SLMS)

Established in October 2019, the Scottish Land Matching Service (http://*slms.scot*) was formed in response to concerns about the lack of opportunities for new entrants to the sector relating to availability of agricultural land in Scotland. The SLMS acts as a free service making connections throughout Scotland. It engages with those seeking or offering joint venture arrangements in relation to land and facilitates discussions with a view to parties progressing to successful arrangements. It, therefore, provides a platform for opportunities for the next generation of farmers and crofters and forms part of an exit strategy for those wishing to take a gradual or complete step back from farming and crofting.

Examination of the website showed that there are currently no offers of land in Lothian and Borders, while six people are seeking land partnership opportunities, five in livestock and one arable.

Ian Davidson – National Advisor to SLMS

For six years, Ian was the Principal Agricultural Officer in Scotland before becoming the Head of Agriculture Policy Division at Scottish Government, a post he held until 2019, when he took on the role as National Advisor to the Scottish Land Matching Service.

Ian highlighted critical issues regarding land use and access to farming opportunities in Scotland, particularly for younger generations eager to enter the sector. He emphasised the challenges young aspiring farmers face, including limited access to land and capital. He pointed out that around 10% of Scottish land is publicly owned, managed by local authorities and entities such as the Crown Estate, potentially offering significant opportunities for innovative land-use solutions over and above farm release models.

The introduction of a land matching service in Scotland, was inspired by a successful model from Southern Ireland. The service has seen substantial interest, particularly among younger people, receiving around 750 inquiries. Previously, there was approximately one farmer for every eight searchers, but this ratio has improved significantly to about one farmer for every four searches. To date, the service has facilitated 55 successful matches and recently expanded to include opportunities specifically for crop production, leading to around 550 engagements overall. The service remains free at the point of use, welcoming small-scale operations, even as modest as market garden size.

Examples from the Scottish Borders illustrate the practical impact of the matching service. In Newcastleton, seven individuals were introduced to a farmer, with one young person ultimately entering a successful joint venture. The older farmer provided land, equipment, and livestock, while the younger supplied labour and management expertise. This arrangement includes a contract fee and the sharing of surplus profits. Another example is from Reston, where two older brothers sought a partnership as their children wished to retain ownership but not actively farm. This resulted in a partnership focusing on sheep farming, which allowed the land to remain productive while addressing generational transition concerns.

Ian highlighted another significant hurdle: accommodation availability, particularly in rural areas like the Borders, where on-farm housing is limited. He suggested exploring partnerships with larger land-owning bodies, such as Oxygen Conservation Limited, which recently acquired 10,000 acres. Even modest contributions of land from such organisations could significantly support new entrants.

Land Workers Alliance (LWA)

The Landworkers' Alliance is a grassroots union of farmers, growers, foresters, and land-based workers in the UK that advocates for sustainable agriculture, food sovereignty, and agroecological practices. Of particular interest in the context of this report is the **Farm Start** project. Farmstart is a programme, like SLMS, aimed at helping new entrants access land and establish land-based enterprises. Through the Farmstart Network and the South West Land Matching Service, new entrants gain access to land, equipment, routes to market, and business support, including training and mentoring. These initiatives help reduce the financial risks for new farmers, allowing them to focus on developing sustainable business models. Current Farmstarts include the Kindling Trust in Manchester, Tamar Grow Local in the Tamar Valley, OrganicLea in London, Mach Maethlon in Machynlleth, and LESS in Lancaster.

Peter Samsom, Resilient Local Food Systems Project Worker

Peter joined LWA as a member in 2015 and started work on the Resilient Local Food Systems and the Welsh Food Hubs projects early in 2022. He runs a farmers' market in Northumberland and with his partner keeps Shetland sheep and a variety of poultry on their smallholding. Most recently he worked as one of the coordinators for Food Durham, the County Durham Food Partnership and before that, in the nature conservation sector.

Peter noted that the current population of UK farmers is an ageing one, and therefore we are facing a major renewal crisis in farming and food production. New entrants, eager to replace retiring farmers and rejuvenate the sector, currently face multiple barriers to entry, including the ever-increasing price of farmland, a near absence of starter farm opportunities, a lack of suitable training and funding, and the discouraging ongoing sell-off of county farms. Not only do we face a crisis of renewal, but also a crisis of diversity and accessibility, with the farming sector statistically the least diverse employment sector in the UK.

Peter noted that there were only a handful of LWA members on both sides of the border, and only The Plot Thickens and Abundant Borders in The Scottish Borders local authority area. Peter identified himself as likely the employee closest geographically, with Tara Wight based near Edinburgh, emphasising that the entire borderlands area had relatively sparse membership.

However, he highlighted that membership was not the primary issue for him; instead, he emphasised the importance of collaboration among all involved in agroecological farming and growing. He referenced Abi Mordin from Propagate, who facilitates the Dumfries and Galloway Food Partnership, who reports that while there is available land in the southwest they struggle to find individuals willing to cultivate it. Peter observed this issue was not unique to the South of Scotland but was equally applicable to his own area in Northumberland, noting that throughout the Borders, there had been little emphasis or support for enhancing local resilience, particularly concerning fruit and vegetable production.

He also mentioned significant voluntary engagement through groups like Abundant Borders, orchard groups, and biodiversity projects. Nevertheless, he observed very few people actively seeking land to establish small businesses or community growing initiatives. Reflecting on his previous experience with the food partnership in County Durham, he highlighted similar difficulties in bringing people together specifically for growing projects. Peter acknowledged that while growing itself was manageable, the greater challenge lay in sustaining these initiatives over the long term, especially given the challenging current environment.

Consequently, he noted that most new entrants into agroecological farming were now appearing south of Manchester and are particularly concentrated in the South West of England and West Wales.

Peter commented that the approach being taken in Wales to encourage more people to engage in agroecological vegetable growing was interesting, particularly because it was linked to procurement through the Welsh veg-in-school project. He explained that regular farmers were being incentivised by having ready-made contracts, encouraging them to grow vegetables at field scale. He also mentioned a similar initiative in Cumbria from two or three years earlier, though he wasn't sure if that was ongoing or had been limited in duration. This project had involved working with existing farmers to supply locally grown vegetables to Cranston's butcher shops in Cumbria, and Peter noted it appeared to have achieved some progress. He concluded by emphasising that, given the very low starting point in the Borders, any small step forward that we could make would be valuable.

Share Farming in the Scottish Borders

Share farming is a collaborative arrangement in which two or more parties work together to farm land, sharing responsibilities, inputs, risks, and returns. These agreements typically involve one party owning or leasing the land and another providing labour, machinery, livestock or technical expertise. The structure is flexible and can be adapted to suit a wide range of circumstances and goals.

One of the primary opportunities offered by share farming is access to land for those who might otherwise be excluded due to financial barriers. This can be particularly valuable for new entrants or younger farmers who lack the capital to purchase or lease land independently. By lowering the threshold for entry, share farming has the potential to support generational renewal within the agricultural sector.

Landowners also stand to benefit. For those who no longer wish to farm actively, or lack the capacity to do so, share farming provides a mechanism to keep land in productive use without the burden of day-to-day management. In some cases, this can help maintain land quality, improve biodiversity outcomes, and contribute to the local food economy.

However, these opportunities are not without challenges. Share farming requires clear and detailed agreements that outline the respective roles, contributions, and expectations of each party. Without this, there is a significant risk of conflict or misunderstanding.

The success of any share farming arrangement is highly dependent on mutual trust, open communication, and aligned objectives. Where these are present, share farming can offer a practical and effective model for land use. Where they are absent, the arrangement may become unsustainable.

Case Study: Interview with New Entrants, St Boswells

The interviewee is a farmer with ten years of experience. Without the capital required to purchase land outright, they turned to farm sharing as a more accessible route into the sector. Leasing enabled them to begin farming without the prohibitive financial outlay of land ownership.

The farmer currently leases 160 acres of mixed-use land. This land supports a diverse range of agricultural activities, including livestock production—specifically beef and sheep—barley cultivation, and the growing of wildflower seed. The farm operates under organic certification and adheres to Soil Association standards, which guide its farming practices and influence land use decisions.

The land was secured through direct negotiation with the landowner. Rather than a traditional rental agreement, the arrangement is structured as a share farming model, with revenue and profits shared between the parties rather than paying a fixed rent. Contributions are often made in-kind, particularly through labour and produce exchanged for land access.

While the partnership is underpinned by a formal agreement, the financial elements remain fluid to account for the inherent unpredictability of farming. Although there is mutual trust and cooperation, the interviewee feels that the financial returns do not always reflect the labour invested.

The relationship with the landowner is characterised by daily communication and a collaborative approach to work. While the landowner is interested and engaged in the activities of the farm, their limited physical involvement and knowledge of practical farming can create tension. Nevertheless, the landowner has occasionally contributed to capital investments, with the farmer reciprocating through labour and time.

The long-term nature of the partnership provides a sense of security and stability, which is valued by the farmer. When communication flows well, the arrangement is mutually supportive and effective. However, differing perspectives and varying levels of knowledge about the day-to-day demands of farming can sometimes present challenges.

Challenges Encountered

Several challenges were identified in the current leasing arrangement:

- Land Use Restrictions: The organic certification imposes constraints that limit flexibility.
- Financial Pressures: The financial model can be tight, with unexpected costs significantly impacting profitability, especially at a smaller scale.
- Conflicting Visions: While both parties share a long-term vision for the land, there can be differences in short-term goals, leading to occasional misunderstandings.

The interviewee highlighted a need for mediation or support during lease negotiations, especially for new entrants unfamiliar with the process. They also noted that infrastructure support or incentives for investment would significantly ease the challenges associated with starting out in farming.

Despite the difficulties, the farmer strongly recommends leasing as a viable option for aspiring food producers. They believe it remains one of the most accessible pathways into agriculture for young or first-time farmers. Looking ahead, they hope to expand their sheep enterprise and potentially lease additional land.

For others considering a similar route, the farmer offers clear advice: “Communication is essential and write everything down.” Regular meetings, transparency, and clear documentation are key to maintaining a functional and fair partnership with a private landowner.

Case Study: Interview with Landowner, Reston

William Davidson farms just outside Reston on land that has been in his family in some form since approximately 1886. William himself returned to the farm in 1976. The 850-acre holding is a medium-sized mixed farm, producing cereals - feed wheat, and malting barley, alongside a substantial sheep enterprise, currently occupying approx. 420acres. The farm is not regenerative or organic. Traditionally, the farm operated with up to 1,000 sheep, but with William looking to reduce workload the sheep numbers have been reduced and he has sought a partnership for managing the remaining flock.

Motivation for Partnership
With his children interested in retaining the farm but not pursuing active farming roles, William explored alternative models to secure the farm's operational future. He sought to bring in a younger farmer (Steven) to help carry forward the business while maintaining family ownership of the land. William already knew Steven through earlier connections with Stevens father. The familiarity and trust between them created a strong foundation for collaboration.

Engagement with the Land Matching Service
To initiate the process, William contacted Ian from the Land Matching Service. William's farm is currently held within a family partnership of six members. The developing model involves that partnership entering into a separate agreement with Steven and his wife. Since June 2022, Steven has been employed on a salary basis while the legal partnership is being finalised. Although the process has been lengthy, the aim is to develop a model that can be replicated elsewhere to simplify future arrangements.

Partnership Structure
The planned partnership includes the following elements:

Gradual Transfer of Livestock Operations: Steven will progressively take over the full sheep enterprise, eventually managing 100% of the flock.

Profit Sharing: The enterprise will operate under a 50/50 profit-sharing model.

Financial Responsibilities: Steven will cover all day-to-day operational costs related to the sheep, while the farm partnership will continue to manage overarching farm costs, such as infrastructure and land upkeep.

Reflections and Advice
William emphasised the importance of patience and careful relationship-building. While finalising legal agreements can be time-consuming, investing the time to get it right is worthwhile. His advice to others is clear: "For the new entrant, find the right farmer, and for the land owner, find the right person with the right intentions that you want to work with."

Case Study: Jedburgh

Stephen Withers, Upper Hundalee Farm in Jedburgh, faced the challenge of managing a 700-head sheep flock without a successor or full-time support. With no family member interested in taking over the 405-hectare mixed farm, and after experiencing difficulties with part-time help, he explored alternatives to reduce his workload.

Rather than selling the flock or hiring a full-time shepherd, he chose to enter into a share farming arrangement with Neil Sandilands, with whom he had previously worked. This partnership allowed him to continue farming intensively without increasing staff costs, while providing Sandilands the opportunity to build capital and gain experience with the aim of eventually running his own farm.

Five years into the arrangement the farm ran a 1,000-head flock, alongside 162 hectares of arable crops, a 70-head suckler herd, and a steer finishing enterprise.

The agreement is structured as a simple legal partnership, with the sheep enterprise accounted for separately from the rest of the farm business, though it operates as part of the overall unit. Initially, the landowner retained 100% of the partnership, having contributed all assets at current market value. The new entrant can gain shared ownership by reinvesting his share of profits.

Profits are shared 50:50 up to an agreed level, then split 60:40 in favour of the landowner, with loss liability divided on the same basis. The agreement includes a buy-out clause, allowing either partner to terminate the arrangement with three months' notice. Upon retirement or death, the remaining partner is obligated to purchase the other's share at an agreed current market value, payable in ten half-yearly instalments starting six months after the partner's departure.

Landowner Perspectives

Survey

A brief online questionnaire was created and distributed amongst networks of farmers and landowners in the Scottish Borders. The aim was to identify farms and estates that may be willing to release small parcels of land for new entrants into food production and to better understand the opportunities, challenges, and support required to make this a viable pathway for new growers. While the number of respondents was small (10) the consistency of answers make the survey a useful indicator of the appetite for land release and potential challenges.

Survey Findings

Most survey respondents (75%) manage holdings of over 200 hectares, with only a small number farming smaller areas between 30 and 200 hectares. Most identified their land use as mixed farming (75%) and livestock (62.5%), while a quarter (25%) also include arable crops. No respondents reported involvement in horticulture.

When asked about current participation in land-sharing, leasing, or partnership schemes for food production, just over a third (37.5%) indicated involvement, while the majority (62.5%) are not currently engaged in such arrangements.

Encouragingly, there is significant openness to the idea of releasing land to new food producers. While 12.5% said yes outright and another 12.5% said no, a large majority (75%) expressed willingness to discuss the possibility. For those open to it, the most commonly available land size was between 0.4 and 2 hectares (57.14%), although options ranged from less than 0.4 hectares to over 4 hectares.

Respondents expressed interest in a variety of land use arrangements. The most popular was a short-term lease (1–3 years), which was supported by 57.14%, followed by long-term leases and cooperative models (42.86% each). Contract or profit-share models, partnerships, and other bespoke arrangements were also considered by smaller proportions (28.57% each).

Market gardening was seen as the most suitable food production type for available land (37.5%), followed by mixed use (25%). Notably, no one identified fruit growing or agroforestry as preferred options.

Several key concerns were identified as potential barriers to making land available. Land tenure and security topped the list (37.5%), followed by legal and financial concerns, infrastructure challenges, and other unspecified issues (each mentioned by 12.5–25% of respondents). Interestingly, none cited lack of skills among new entrants or competition with existing farming as concerns.

To make land release easier, half of the respondents highlighted the need for better advice on legal agreements and tenancy models. Over a third (37.5%) also saw infrastructure investment (e.g., water, fencing, polytunnels) as helpful. There was little interest in financial incentives or training programmes for new entrants.

Detailed Responses

Landholding

Less than 30 hectares	0.00%
30 to 100 hectares	12.50%
100 - 200 hectares	12.50%
Over 200 hectares	75.00%

Land Use

Arable	25.00%
Livestock	62.50%
Mixed Farming	75.00%
Horticulture	0.00%

Are you currently involved in any land-sharing, leasing, or partnership schemes for food production?

Yes	37.50%
No	62.50%

Would you be open to releasing a small parcel of land for new food producers?

Yes	12.50%
No	12.50%
Open to discussion	75.00%

If yes, what size of land might be available?

Less than 0.4 hectares	14.29%
0.4 - 2 hectares	57.14%
2 - 4 hectares	14.29%
More than 4 hectares	14.29%

What type of arrangement would you consider?

Short-term lease (1–3 years)	57.14%
Long-term lease (5+ years)	42.86%
Land-sharing or cooperative model	42.86%
Contract Fee/ Profit Share model	28.57%
Partnership arrangement	28.57%
Other (please specify)*	28.57%

- Depends on the demand and if it fits with our land use strategy
- Would consider all options depending on mutual need

What kind of food production do you think would be most suitable for the land you could offer?

Market gardening (vegetables, herbs, salad crops)	37.50%
Livestock	12.50%
Fruit / Orchard	0.00%
Mixed Use	25.00%
Agroforestry	0.00%
Other (please specify)*	25.00%

- Not sure about soil quality
- All except agroforestry

What challenges or concerns might prevent you from making land available?

Land tenure/security concerns	37.50%
Legal/contractual complexities	12.50%
Financial viability concerns	12.50%
Infrastructure and access issues	12.50%
Skills and experience of new entrants	0.00%
Competing with existing food production/farming operations	0.00%
Other (please specify)*	25.00%

- Land Tenure + Financial viability + competing with existing food producers

What additional support would make it easier for you to release land?

Advice on legal agreements and tenancy models	50.00%
Financial incentives or grants	0.00%
Infrastructure investment (e.g., water, fencing, polytunnels)	37.50%
Training or mentoring schemes for new entrants	0.00%
Other (please specify)	12.50%

Potential New Entrant Perspectives

Interview: Peter Abernethy

Peter, and a group of around 20 people living in the Tweed Valley area, has been working to establish a new community food growing initiative, initially with hopes pinned on securing a site within Peebles. This opportunity was discussed with landowners, primarily on the Benson and Wemyss estate. However, while there has been encouragement from intermediaries, there has been little direct communication with landowners—something the group recognises as a significant challenge – and this opportunity appears to have fallen through.

It has become apparent to Peter that landowners are more comfortable with the concept of a single-operator, private business model, compared to community management. While the language of "community" is appreciated in theory, there appears to be discomfort with the practical reality of a collaborative, group-led approach to food growing. This reflects a broader hesitancy around unfamiliar organisational models and indicates that efforts to present community-led initiatives within a framework that landowners can relate to may be key to securing land in future.

This experience highlights a wider issue in the Scottish Borders, where despite the abundance of agricultural land, very little is allocated to fruit and vegetable production. The region is characterised by commodity farming, livestock, and grain grown for whisky, and there are only two members of the Land Workers' Alliance across the entire area. The disconnect between land use and community food needs is stark.

Within this context, local interest in food resilience is growing. Community members in and around Peebles, Innerleithen and Walkerburn are expressing increasing concern about the fragility of supply chains and a desire for more reliable local access to fresh produce. The group working on this initiative has been cautious about promoting their plans widely, preferring to wait until they had clarity on a site. However, given recent setbacks, they are now shifting focus toward direct outreach and local promotion, including newsletter articles and potentially knocking on doors to identify willing landowners.

The group's vision remains flexible in terms of structure. They aim to ensure that food is made accessible to all, and while most members see their involvement as voluntary, they are open to having a lead grower in a paid role. They have not yet established a constitution, preferring to adapt their legal and organisational form once a site is confirmed. Ideas under discussion include cooperative membership models, "pay what you can" pricing structures, and direct contributions to local food banks to support those in need. There is a strong desire to create a model that does not replicate the exclusivity seen in some community-supported agriculture (CSA) projects, which often disproportionately serve more affluent members.

Previous discussions with the local food bank and estate representatives had shown early promise of a collaborative approach, but the group now recognises the need to broaden engagement. A key barrier has been uncertainty around land ownership in areas most suitable for growing, particularly where hill farming dominates. Although some mapping of land ownership exists, further investigation is required.

In terms of land requirements, the group is seeking around four to six acres. Based on consultations with experienced growers from other parts of Scotland, this would be sufficient to support food production for approximately fifty households. While a veg box model may not be the outcome, the goal is to feed a meaningful portion of the local community from a relatively modest footprint.

This case reflects a broader challenge: the complexity of establishing a community growing project when land, an organisational model, and a constituted group must all align. These elements are often interdependent, and the absence of any one can stall progress. Supporting community groups to access even one of these components—whether through clearer landowner engagement, model templates, or startup funding—could significantly accelerate the development of new local food systems across the region.

Interview: Dougal Barr

Lowood Plant Nursery, situated on land owned by Scottish Borders Council (SBC), had housed a plant nursery for years, but after illness forced its closure, the site fell into disrepair. Where others saw an overgrown patch destined for development, Dougal Barr saw potential.

Initially turned down by the council due to plans to use the land for housing, Dougal didn't take no for an answer. With a clear vision and some political backing from his local MSP, he eventually secured a short-term lease — just two and a half years — but enough time to test out a new venture.

The growing space is modest — less than 0.1 hectares — but Dougal has established a partnership with The Hoebridge, a well-regarded restaurant in nearby Gattonside, to supply fresh produce through a "product hero" model. Instead of supplying a wide range of vegetables, Dougal will grow small batches of standout ingredients to take centre stage in one or two dishes on the restaurant's menu, four or five times a year.

This direct grower-to-chef relationship showcases the potential of micro-scale growing. By focusing on quality, flavour, and collaboration, Dougal is demonstrating that even the smallest plots of land can be profitable and provide a viable way in for new entrants to the food sector.

Lowood Plant Nursery may be temporary, but its impact could be a model of how a bit of land can open the door to a new way of thinking about local food production.

Common Concerns from Landowners and New Entrants

Landowners:

Legal and Financial Uncertainty: Concerns over land tenure/security, legal complexities, and the financial viability of shared arrangements.

Infrastructure and Investment Needs: Some landowners are open to releasing land but require investment in infrastructure (e.g., fencing, water, polytunnels) before doing so.

Lack of Familiarity with Alternative Models: Hesitancy around community-led or cooperative models, with a preference for private, single-operator businesses.

Time and Process: Establishing formal agreements can be time-consuming, but landowners value getting it right to build lasting partnerships.

New Entrants:

Access to Land: Limited capital and traditional ownership models act as significant barriers. Share farming is seen as a viable workaround.

Power Imbalances: New entrants often lack negotiating power or knowledge, especially in legal or financial aspects of leasing or partnership arrangements.

Mismatch in Operational Involvement: New entrants may do the bulk of labour and if landowners remain more distant, this can lead to tensions.

Infrastructure and Start-up Costs: Lack of initial infrastructure and support adds pressure, especially at small scales.

Desire for Security and Longevity: Short-term leases or fluid agreements create uncertainty for those looking to build a business and livelihood.

Challenges & Support Required

Replicable Legal Partnership Templates

Currently, every farm-sharing agreement is negotiated from scratch, resulting in high legal costs and lengthy timescales. To streamline the process and encourage wider adoption, there is a clear need for adaptable, off-the-shelf legal templates. These should outline roles, responsibilities, profit/loss sharing, and options for phased ownership or flexible tenure arrangements. Access to such templates would give both parties greater confidence, reduce barriers to entry, and make the principle of farm sharing more accessible and practical.

Proactive Land Matching and Support Structures

Existing land-matching services need to shift from a passive to a proactive approach—actively identifying landowners who could benefit from sharing arrangements and supporting them through the process. In addition, comprehensive support structures should be in place, including access to legal and infrastructure advice, training and mentoring programmes, and mediation during lease negotiations. These services are essential to ensure equitable and sustainable partnerships.

Partnership Mediation and Communication Support

Successful farm sharing depends on trust, transparency, and regular communication. Support is needed to help facilitate and mediate partnerships from the outset, ensuring both parties understand their roles, responsibilities, and expectations. Regular check-ins and facilitated dialogue can help prevent misunderstandings and ensure partnerships remain productive over time.

Landowner Awareness and Education

There is often limited awareness among landowners of the benefits of community-led food production models. Education and outreach—potentially delivered through trusted bodies like NFUS—could help change perceptions, build trust, and encourage more landowners to engage with new entrants and small-scale growers. Highlighting successful examples and offering practical guidance could significantly increase uptake of farm sharing models.

Alternative Land Release Options

It may be useful to look at other land that could be made available in the Scottish Borders, alongside the farm share model, because a wider range of land types — such as public land, community-owned sites, or underused private plots — could offer more flexible, affordable, and accessible opportunities for growing food, supporting biodiversity, and engaging communities, especially where farmland is scarce or costly.

Land Leased from Scottish Border Council

Case Study: Lowood Plant Nursery, Melrose

Lowood Plant Nursery is situated on the Lowood Estate, land owned by Scottish Borders Council. While the area around, and including the nursery, is scheduled for housing development a short-term lease has been issued to a new entrant to horticulture. While most of the land is developed for plant sales, a smaller area is earmarked for food production, with agreements already in place to supply The Hoebridge, Gattonside with fresh produce. This model, a short-term lease on land scheduled for redevelopment but on which work is not due to start for several years, may offer a way forward in allowing new entrants to test their ideas and improve their skills at low risk to both land owner and tenant.

For Dougal Barr, the new nursery operator, it is a chance to put his theoretical knowledge into practice. Dougal has a degree in Environmental Law and has worked in Landscape Design and Landscape Management.

Wilton Lodge Park, Hawick. The Walled Garden is home to a Community Garden where fruit, vegetables, flowers and herbs are grown organically by and for the community who volunteer. The community garden is run by Scottish Borders Council.

Land Leased from a Private Company

Case Study: Greener Melrose

Greener Melrose (GM), a community-based organisation focused on food growing and education, currently leases a mixed-use site at Drygrange from the Borders Forest Trust (BFT). The site was identified as suitable for food production due to its local accessibility and previous light use for grazing. GM chose to lease land rather than own it, aligning with its community-led, volunteer-based structure and its interest in supporting local sustainable food systems.
The leased site at Drygrange is of mixed use and was previously grazed by a small number of sheep. GM has since developed the site for food growing and community education activities. The location is particularly suitable for GM's aims due to its proximity to the local community, although it is spatially constrained by surrounding trees and nearby road infrastructure.
The arrangement between GM and BFT was facilitated through direct negotiation, enabled by the dual involvement of Hugh Chalmers and another GM representative, both of whom were serving concurrently as Trustees of BFT and Directors of GM. This relationship enabled open

dialogue and eased the process of identifying a site and developing a mutually agreeable leasing model. The initial proposal came from Hugh Chalmers, following GM's proactive search for a suitable growing space in the area.

GM holds a formal 20-year lease on the site, with a fixed rent structure. The lease agreement is written and includes the key terms of duration and payment. There are no additional restrictions or obligations imposed on GM as part of the contract. This long-term arrangement offers stability for the group and reflects a supportive stance from BFT.

The relationship between GM and BFT has historically been positive and has evolved into an informal partnership. In recent years, BFT has shown increased interest in the activities at the site, further strengthening mutual engagement. Good communication and a foundation of trust underpin the success of this arrangement.

Despite the positive overall experience, GM has encountered practical challenges typical of volunteer-led growing initiatives. These include limited access to infrastructure such as water supply, on-site storage, and fencing. The group notes that such infrastructure constraints can significantly affect the viability of land-based projects and would benefit from targeted support or investment.

Greener Melrose identifies several types of support that would make leasing land more accessible and sustainable for new entrants, especially community groups. These include:

- Legal guidance on lease agreements
- Mediation or negotiation support
- Infrastructure investment or incentives
- Networking opportunities with landowners open to leasing arrangements

Without these forms of support, establishing and sustaining a lease can be difficult, particularly for groups reliant on volunteer capacity.

GM considers leasing a viable option for new food producers, particularly where costs are manageable and aligned with the group's resources. The group does not have plans to expand at Drygrange due to physical site constraints and limited availability of other suitable BFT land within the Borders region, as BFT has indicated that most of its remaining land is under heavy tree cover and is not suitable for cultivation.

GM recommends that prospective leaseholders identify underused land on the edges of towns, villages, or urban areas and approach landowners directly. They emphasise the importance of understanding land ownership and engaging in open dialogue, noting that some landowners may lease for minimal rent or even on a goodwill basis. Temporary use of land for food growing can also benefit landowners, as the land may be returned in better condition than it was initially. Both Greener Melrose and Borders Forest Trust indicated that they are open to follow-up discussions.

Case Study: Comrie Croft

Comrie Croft has a long history, with evidence of crofting in this part of Perthshire dating back to the 1700s. By the 1960s, the land was home to a single tenanted farm, but by 1992, it could no longer sustain the farmer's livelihood and reverted to the surrounding estate. In 1995, the old farm buildings were repurposed as a bunkhouse. In 2008, the land was purchased from the estate, paving the way for diversification. Some upland areas were developed into bike trails, while woodland and pasture were converted into camping areas.

In 2015, **Tomnah'a Market Garden** was established on a previously unused piece of land beside the main Crieff to Crianlarich road. Due to its roadside location, the land was unsuitable for tourism development. Instead, it was leased to new horticultural entrants. The market garden is a five-acre agroecological project founded by four individuals experienced in community gardening, allotments, floristry, and visual arts. Tomnah'a operates as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) initiative. Through this model, participants become members by purchasing a seasonal "veg share," committing in advance to regular produce collection.
Produce from Tomnah'a is sold directly at Comrie Croft's farm shop, alongside locally sourced foods. This gives Tomnah'a a way to get produce to consumers and Comrie Croft gets quality local produce for the shop, and for the catering enterprise which also runs on the site.

This model of land release may be considered as part of larger land diversification/agritourism projects.

Co-operative models on National Trust Land

Case Study: Gibside Community Farm

Gibside is a Grade I-listed Park and Garden just outside Newcastle, owned and operated by the National Trust. Gibside Community Farm (GCF) (gibsidecommunityfarm.co.uk) was founded in 2013 as a member-owned cooperative, operating as a Community Interest Company (CIC). Originally based within the historic walled garden of the estate, the farm relocated in 2017 to a larger 14-acre (5.8ha) site near Burnopfield, also leased from the National Trust. This expansion enabled GCF to increase production, diversify crops, and strengthen its role within the local food network. Gibside Community Farm (GCF) operates as a Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) farm, providing fresh produce to the local community through multiple distribution channels.

The Friends and Neighbours Scheme offers a subscription-based model where members receive weekly vegetable bags. These can be collected from the farm on designated workdays or picked up from community-based collection points. At the Gibside National Trust estate, GCF supplies an honesty shelf, where produce is available on a self-service basis. Visitors can take what they need and leave a donation. GCF also sells directly to consumers at local farmers' markets, supplies the neighbouring veg box schemes, and has an online ordering system.

This model of land release may allow the unused/underused walled gardens or other land on larger estates to be repurposed for community benefit and economic regeneration. Some estates are already taking steps in this direction.

Paxton House, Community Garden – This community-based project has two key aims. Firstly, to combat the impact of loneliness and isolation for people over 55. The second is to support and nurture local school children with the intention of teaching gardening and encouraging them to eat more healthily.

Marchmont House. During its peak in the late 19th and early 20th century, the gardens would have contained ornamental beds and borders along with productive areas within the walled garden, providing fruit and vegetables for the house. In partnership with Abundant Borders, surplus produce is shared with Duns Fair Share. Marchmont is currently looking for volunteers to help develop the garden.

The Hirsel. Field to Fork is a learning programme that makes use of the resources of the Hirsel estate to deliver free educational visits for schools and community groups. The 'Food and Farming' days focus on food production using the example of the five working farms on the Hirsel estate to explore the crops grown locally, how they are cultivated and harvested, and the ways in which they are processed into food.

Mellerstain. The estate is currently working with a new business to use game from the estate in the café and for pop-up supper clubs. This may present an opportunity for the walled garden to be brought back into productive use.

Land for Community Food Growing

Community food growing across the Scottish Borders encompasses a wide range of sites and models, including traditional allotments, community gardens, orchards, and mixed-use spaces. These are in both urban and rural areas, with a concentration in towns such as Hawick, Peebles, Galashiels, and Kelso, as well as in smaller villages like Yetholm, Foulden, and Lamancha.

The list of growing sites (see Appendix) includes long-established allotment areas, as well as more recent community-led developments. Several projects are operated by Abundant Borders, which manages community food gardens in eight locations. These sites often combine food production with education, skills development, and support for people experiencing food insecurity.

In addition to standalone sites, food growing has been integrated into wider community initiatives. Examples include gardens located at schools (e.g. St Ronan's Primary School), healthcare settings (e.g. Borders General Hospital), and community hubs (e.g. Burnfoot Community Hub in Hawick). Several projects also incorporate orchards and woodland, such as the sites at Drygrange and Crailing.

These sites have been acquired or are leased from public bodies, are sited on Common Good Land or have been formally purchased through Community Asset Transfer, like Cockburnspath Allotments. While the use of the land is restricted to community benefit, these spaces may have potential for wider, more focussed food production, where the produce grown can be shown to have wider community benefit, eg through links with community larders or Community Supported Agriculture models.

These sites may also provide opportunities for new entrants to gain the skills needed, primarily in horticulture, as a pathway to accessing larger plots of land for commercial production.

Case Study: Abundant Borders

Abundant Borders is a Scottish Borders-based charity using food growing as a tool for social inclusion, skill-building, and community empowerment. With access to approximately two acres of land spread across eight community garden sites, the organisation works with individuals experiencing food insecurity, social isolation, and poor mental health, offering opportunities to learn how to grow food in an environmentally sustainable way.

What makes Abundant Borders particularly noteworthy is its flexible and innovative approach to land use. The charity does not own land but instead operates through a patchwork of short- and long-term arrangements with a variety of landholders. These include private landlords, community-owned spaces, Private Social Landlords (PSLs), and Scottish Borders Council. This mix of tenures enables the organisation to establish gardens where they are most needed—often in housing estates, small towns, and rural villages with limited green space or few opportunities for residents to grow their own food.

The community gardens serve as inclusive learning environments. Volunteers help design and manage the sites, choosing what to grow and taking responsibility for day-to-day care. Projects such as the Ayton Community Garden, Hawick's Wellbeing Garden, and the Eyemouth community plots offer both structured learning through seasonal gardening programmes and informal drop-in sessions that encourage social connection. Gardens often include quiet spaces, wildlife-friendly planting, and therapeutic herb beds, and they supply fresh produce to local cooking groups and food insecurity initiatives.

By working across different land ownership models, Abundant Borders demonstrates how small-scale growing projects can thrive without land ownership, provided there is local commitment, flexible partnerships, and community-led vision. This approach allows resources to be directed towards people and programmes, rather than land acquisition, and showcases a replicable model for grassroots land access and community food resilience.

Case Study: Chirnside Allotments

In Chirnside, a community-led initiative has successfully established allotments on privately owned farmland through informal leasing arrangements. The group initially approached the local authority to identify land for community growing, but no suitable public land was available. As a result, they turned to local landowners, directly requesting access to underutilised land for food production. One landowner agreed to lease a two-acre corner of a field that was difficult to access with modern agricultural machinery and was otherwise of limited commercial use.

The land in question, like many similar sites across the region, is a remnant of traditional field layouts and has become impractical for large-scale livestock or arable production. The group's experience echoes that of other community initiatives, such as one in Pitlochry, where marginal land was also repurposed for small-scale cultivation. These examples suggest that land deemed unsuitable for conventional farming can present opportunities for community food growing when made available on a smaller scale.

The leasing arrangement is informal, based on verbal agreement, and operates on a rolling annual basis. While there is no formal contract, the group reports feeling secure in their tenure and maintains a positive relationship with the landowner. The lease operates on an in-kind contribution model, where the group undertakes land management and food production in exchange for use of the space. The landowner offers additional support when needed, such as assistance with heavier tasks.

The group identifies good communication and mutual support as key elements of the success of the arrangement. However, they note that accessing land in the first instance was challenging. They highlight the value of informal engagement with landowners and recommend a persistent, relationship-based approach to securing land access.

In reflecting on their experience, the group expressed the need for structural support mechanisms to facilitate similar arrangements elsewhere. In particular, they identified the importance of legal guidance for lease agreements, access to mediation or negotiation support, infrastructure investment, and platforms for networking with landowners open to community food initiatives.

While the group does not intend to expand or take on additional land, their experience demonstrates that even informal leasing arrangements can provide a secure and effective basis for community food production when supported by mutual trust and cooperation. It also reinforces the potential of marginal agricultural land to be repurposed for community benefit under the right conditions.

National and International Models

France- Terres de Liens

The Terre de Liens model in France is a community-led approach designed to secure agricultural land for sustainable farming, combat land speculation, and encourage rural development. Terre de Liens is structured around three complementary organisations: A **Non-profit Association** raises awareness about land preservation, sustainable agriculture, and ecological farming and mobilises citizens and local communities to support sustainable farming initiatives. A **Solidarity Investment Company** gathers private investments from individuals who buy shares. These shares finance the purchase of agricultural land. Investors receive modest social returns rather than significant financial returns, prioritising ecological and social outcomes. A **Charitable Foundation** facilitates land donations and manages properties entrusted permanently to sustainable farming.

At the core of the Terre de Liens model is the principle of community ownership, ensuring that farmland is safeguarded against speculation and remains a shared resource for future generations. By using collective financing, the organisation acquires agricultural land and leases it to farmers on long-term, affordable agreements. These leases are not just financial arrangements but commitments to ecological farming, embedding sustainability into the very structure of land tenure. The model is built on the active participation of citizens. Individuals can invest in farmland by becoming shareholders, donate land to the organisation, or contribute their time and expertise as volunteers. This broad engagement not only provides financial support but also fosters a deep sense of collective responsibility. People feel directly connected to the land, the food it produces, and the farmers who work it, reinforcing a culture of solidarity and shared stewardship.

Through this integrated approach—combining community ownership, sustainable farming, citizen engagement, and strong governance—Terre de Liens has not only protected thousands of hectares of farmland but has also created a replicable model for others to follow. Its success may offer valuable lessons for any developments under consideration in The Scottish Borders.

UK

Ecological Land Cooperative (ELC): Acquires farmland and leases it to small-scale ecological farmers at affordable rates, similar in ethos to Terre de Liens. It aims to address barriers to land access for new entrants into agroecological farming.

Shared Assets: Works with landowners and communities to make land more accessible for community benefit, supporting new models of land stewardship.

Kindling Trust (Manchester): Though not a land trust, it supports access to land for sustainable growers and is developing a farm to support training and new entrants.

Germany - Kulturland Genossenschaft

A cooperative model where citizens collectively buy and hold farmland to lease it to ecological farmers. Like Terre de Liens, land is taken off the market and used for the common good.

Belgium – De Landgenoten
A cooperative and foundation that buys farmland to lease long-term to organic farmers. It also involves citizen investors who want to support local food systems and ecological agriculture.

USA
Agrarian Trust: Aims to transfer land to the next generation of regenerative farmers. It sets up regional land trusts under the umbrella of the Agrarian Commons model, balancing community control with long-term farmer tenure.

Equity Trust: Works to help farmers access land through community ownership and long-term affordability, often using conservation easements and ground leases.

Canada
FarmFolk CityFolk: Helps new farmers access land through partnerships with landowners.

Land Matching Programmes: Match landowners with land seekers, supporting tenure agreements that foster sustainable agriculture.

Scotland
While not identical in structure, Scotland's community land ownership movement (e.g., Community Land Scotland) has similar values. Though mainly focused on broader rural regeneration, many community landowners include sustainable farming, food growing, and land justice in their aims.

Key Similarities Across Models

Land Taken Out of Speculation and Treated as a Common Good
Across all models, farmland is removed from the open market to prevent speculative buying and selling, which drives up prices and undermines long-term land stewardship.
Land is instead viewed as a shared, finite resource to be held in trust or collective ownership for the benefit of current and future generations.
This redefines land not as a commodity but as a *commons*—a shared inheritance with social, environmental, and cultural value.

Implication: These models challenge dominant patterns of land ownership and tenure by prioritising land justice, food sovereignty, and ecological health over profit.

Long-term or Secure Leases for Agroecological or Organic Farmers
Farmers are offered secure, affordable tenure—often through long-term leases (e.g., 99-year ground leases or rolling tenancies)—specifically tied to ecological land use practices.
Leases include stewardship conditions, ensuring the land is farmed sustainably and regeneratively.

Implication: Security of tenure allows farmers to plan for the long term, invest in soil health, biodiversity, and infrastructure, and pass their farms on to successors, supporting multi-generational sustainability.

Community or Cooperative Ownership

Many models are based on community benefit societies, cooperatives, or charitable trusts, giving citizens a direct role in land governance.
This democratic ownership structure decentralises power and embeds accountability, transparency, and inclusivity into decision-making.

Implication: Community ownership builds local resilience, strengthens social cohesion, and fosters a sense of collective responsibility for land and food systems.

Public or Citizen Investment in Land Stewardship

Models actively engage citizens as investors, donors, or volunteers. Many accept small individual investments in land purchase schemes, often offering modest returns prioritising social or environmental impact.

Implication: This broadens participation in land access solutions beyond farmers and funders to include anyone who values sustainable agriculture, local food systems, and environmental protection—mobilising collective action and local capital.

Support for New Entrants into Farming and Food Production

These models prioritise access for new and young farmers, often those who cannot inherit land or afford market prices.
They typically include support beyond land access—such as mentoring, training, infrastructure, and connections to local markets.

Implication: By lowering the barriers to entry and fostering a new generation of ecological growers, these models contribute to rural regeneration, food system diversity, and climate resilience.

Scottish Borders – Specific Reflection

The principles underpinning these international land use models resonate strongly with the Scottish Borders' current challenges and aspirations around sustainable agriculture, land access, and rural revitalisation.

The region is characterised by extensive farmland, ageing farming populations, and significant barriers for new entrants—especially those without inherited land or capital. At the same time, there is growing interest in community-led food systems, agroecology, and local resilience. The Borders Food Forum, ongoing discussions around Food Hubs, and community growing initiatives demonstrate a clear appetite for more inclusive, regenerative land use.

These international models offer practical inspiration for how the Scottish Borders could:

Enable secure access to land for new ecological growers, helping revitalise the farming landscape with fresh energy, skills, and enterprise.

Harness citizen investment and support for land acquisition or stewardship, connecting local people to land and food in new ways.

Strengthen community resilience and ownership, especially in rural areas where depopulation, land concentration, and economic fragility are ongoing concerns.

Complement existing community land ownership models, such as those championed by Community Land Scotland, by focusing more directly on productive farmland and food systems.

Pilot cooperative or charitable structures that secure land in perpetuity, ensuring it remains affordable and ecologically stewarded over generations.

A Scottish Borders land access initiative inspired by these models could start with a small-scale pilot—perhaps in partnership with local community organisations, landowners, and funders—to test the viability of cooperative land purchase, long-term ecological leases, and new entrant support. By combining international insights with local context, the Borders could lead Scotland in developing innovative, community-centred land use approaches fit for a Good Food Nation.

Recommendations

For Landowners & Estates

Promote long-term leasing and licence-to-occupy models that provide new entrants with security while allowing landowners to retain ownership and flexibility.

Encourage land partnerships (e.g. share-farming, contract growing) where landowners benefit from a share of production or rent in kind, reducing upfront costs for new entrants.

Support co-investment models where estates contribute infrastructure or capital improvements in exchange for profit-sharing or discounted produce.

Use environmental or regenerative goals as incentives, such as enhancing biodiversity or soil health, and apply for relevant agri-environment payments.

Public recognition and CSR benefits: Develop awards, certifications, or case studies to celebrate landowners who support new entrants, enhancing their reputation.

Promote model agreements and legal templates, including those developed by organisations like the Ecological Land Cooperative and Soil Association, to ease legal processes.

Encourage the use of flexible tenure arrangements such as rolling licenses with review clauses, assignable leases, and collaborative agreements that can evolve as trust builds.

Support legal frameworks that enable Community Interest Companies (CICs), cooperatives, or land trusts to act as intermediaries, providing land security for the new entrant and peace of mind for landowners.

Advice to New Entrants

Develop a clear land proposal: Define your land needs, enterprise vision, environmental goals, and community benefit.

Map available land through local networks, land matching services, or estate registers, and prepare to pitch to private and public landowners.

Strengthen your case with a robust business plan including diverse income streams (e.g. food production, education, agritourism), financial projections, and routes to market.

Seek advice on tenure and legal options to choose the most suitable arrangement for your stage of development.

Connect with peer support networks such as the Landworkers' Alliance, Propagate, or Organic Growers Alliance.

Use mentoring and land matching schemes, like Scottish Land Matching Service

Tap into training, planning, and land access toolkits from models like FarmStart (UK), Agrarian Trust (USA), and Ecological Land Cooperative (UK).

For Government & Policymakers

Prioritise land reform policies that support diverse land tenure, community ownership, and agroecological land uses.

Introduce a "right to grow" or "community right to land" for small-scale enterprises and community groups, inspired by legislation in France and Scotland's Community Empowerment Act.

Integrate small-scale food producers into rural development, economic, and climate plans to legitimise and support their role in food systems resilience.

Reduce planning and regulatory barriers for infrastructure like polytunnels, mobile processing units, and on-farm retail.

Provide targeted start-up and capital grants for agroecological and smallholder farming, similar to Young Farmers' schemes in other EU countries.

Offer incentives or reliefs for landowners leasing land to new entrants or community groups, such as roll-over relief or business rate reductions.

Fund incubator farms and cooperative land purchases, helping to bridge capital gaps for emerging growers.

For Support Organisations & Funders

Act as trusted intermediaries between landowners and new entrants, managing leases or land stewardship while building relationships and accountability.

Provide wraparound support, including legal advice, business mentoring, access to tools and shared infrastructure, and conflict resolution services.

Facilitate land access workshops, matchmaking events, and directories of land seekers and landholders to build networks and reduce isolation.

Invest in shared services and cooperative infrastructure—such as cold storage, packing sheds, or transport hubs—reducing overheads and encouraging collaboration.

Support pilot initiatives and community-led land acquisition, using examples like Terres de Liens (France), De Landgenoten (Belgium), and Kulturland Genossenschaft (Germany) as scalable models.

Develop advocacy and evidence-based campaigns to influence policy reform and bring visibility to small-scale agroecological food systems.

Opportunities for Collaborative Funding Models

Pooled investment funds: Bring together philanthropic, public, and private sources to create revolving funds for land purchase or infrastructure investment, as seen with the Ecological Land Cooperative and Agrarian Trust's Agrarian Commons model.

Establish place-based food systems funds that support a portfolio of initiatives (e.g. land access, training, distribution, and enterprise development) within a region such as the Scottish Borders.

Enable community shares or bond offers, allowing local people to invest in land or equipment and become co-owners or stakeholders in food system resilience.

Encourage multi-stakeholder partnerships (e.g. local authorities, health boards, food partnerships, and landowners) to co-fund projects with environmental, health, and social benefits.

Summary of Key Findings

This study highlights that enabling new entrants to access land for food production in the Scottish Borders is both essential and challenging. The region, though agriculturally productive, is dominated by large-scale commodity farming, with very limited land used for fruit, vegetable, or horticultural production. Access to affordable land remains the primary barrier, exacerbated by high capital costs, entrenched ownership patterns, infrastructure deficits, and limited support for community-led models.

While most landowners are not currently involved in land-sharing schemes, a significant majority are open to discussions. They express interest in short-term leases or partnership models but have concerns over tenure security, legal complexities, and infrastructure investment. Conversely, new entrants often lack negotiating power, financial resources, and clarity on legal arrangements, which can undermine the sustainability of early-stage ventures.

Successful case studies demonstrate the viability of share farming, long-term leases, and creative land-use partnerships. However, replicability is limited without streamlined legal frameworks, proactive land-matching services, and mediation support. Community-led models face added challenges due to unfamiliarity and risk aversion among landowners.

International land stewardship models—such as Terres de Liens (France) and the Ecological Land Cooperative (UK)—offer valuable lessons. These models treat land as a common good, provide long-term tenure tied to ecological practices, and are supported by citizen investment and community governance.

To unlock small-scale food production, the report calls for joined-up action from landowners, new entrants, government, and third-sector organisations, underpinned by flexible legal structures, cooperative funding models, and a cultural shift toward inclusive land access.

Next Steps

Support a Pilot Land Access Programme

Fund and coordinate a series of pilot projects that test different models of land release in partnership with estates, local authorities, and new entrants. Pilots could include share farming, community leases, or market gardening on public land, with embedded monitoring and evaluation to inform future scaling.

Develop a Practical Land Access Toolkit

Commission or co-produce a regional toolkit that includes model agreements, legal templates, and step-by-step guides for both landowners and new entrants. This would streamline negotiations, reduce legal costs, and increase confidence in alternative land use arrangements.

Facilitate a Regional Land and Food Partnership Forum

Establish a dedicated forum bringing together landowners, growers, planners, and funders to coordinate activity, share best practice, and develop collaborative solutions to land access and food resilience challenges in the Scottish Borders.

Invest in Shared Infrastructure and Start-Up Support

Provide micro-grants or capital funding for new entrants and community groups to access essential infrastructure—such as water, fencing, tools, or cold storage—as well as business planning and mentoring support.

Explore Collaborative Land Investment Models

Lead on scoping a place-based land investment vehicle for the region (e.g. community share offer, revolving land fund, or blended finance model), drawing on international examples like Terres de Liens and the Ecological Land Cooperative to unlock long-term, secure access to land for agroecological growers.

APPENDIX

Community Food Growing Sites

Project Name	Address
The Gytes Allotments	The Gytes, Walkers Haugh, Peebles
Burgh Hall Allotments	Burgh Hall, Peebles
Moss Park Allotments	Moss Park, Peebles
Miller Street Allotments	Miller Street, Innerleithen
Wilton Park Road Allotments	Wilton Park Road, Hawick
Guthrie Drive Allotments	Guthrie Drive, Hawick
Twirlees Terrace Allotments	Twirlees Terrace, Hawick
Braid Road Allotments	Braid Road, Hawick
Wellogate/Langdale Allotments	Wester Braid Road, Hawick
Borthaugh Road Allotments	Borthaugh Road, Hawick
Lee Brae Allotments	Wheatlands Road, Galashiels
Mossillee Allotments	Mossilee Road, Galashiels
Yetholm Yewtree Allotments	High Street, Town Yetholm
Kirk Yetholm Allotments	
Weensland Road Allotments	Weensland Road, Hawick
Bannerfield Allotments	Bannerfield, Selkirk
Rodger Fish Gardens Allotments	Rodger Fish Gardens, Kelso
Tweedbank Allotments	Essenside Drive, Tweedbank
Eyemouth Allotments	Gunsgreen, Eyemouth
Walkerburn Allotments	Tweedholm Avenue East, Walkerburn
Community Allotments, Orchard & Woodland	Drygrange, Melrose
Cockburnspath Allotments	Cockburnspath
Abundant Borders Ayton Community Food Garden	Summerhill Park, Ayton
Abundant Borders Hawick Community Food Garden	Behind Salvation Army Store, Hawick
Abundant Borders Eyemouth Community Food Garden	Gunsgreen, Eyemouth
Abundant Borders Duns Community Food Garden	Todlaw, Duns
Abundant Borders Lowood Community Garden	Lowood, Tweedbank
Abundant Borders Foulden Community Garden	Kerrigan Way, Foulden
Abyndant Borders Kelso Community Garden	Rodger Fish Gardens, Kelso
Greener Peebles Community Garden	Kingsmeadows Road, Peebles
The Secret Garden	Dean's Wynd, off High Street, Peebles
The Courthouse Garden	Beside Parish Church, High Street, Peebles
Burnfoot Grows Together Community Garden	Burnfoot Community Hub, Hawick
Selkirk Community Shed	The Argus Centre, Selkirk
Space to Grow Community Garden	Huntlyburn, Borders General Hospital, Melrose
The Glebe Project	The Manse, Innerleithen Road, Peebles
St Ronan's Wells Garden	St Ronan's Wells, Wells Brae, Innerleithen
Lamancha Community Hub	Old School House, Lamancha,
The Edible Garden	St Ronan's Primary School, Innerleithen
Wilton Lodge Community Garden	Wilton Lodge Park, Hawick
Love Langlee Community Garden	Langlee, Galashiels
Orchard Park Community Garden	Orchard Park, Kelso
Kelso Community Orchard	Mayfield, Kelso
Community Allotments, Orchard & Woodland	Drygrange, Melrose
Crailing Community Orchard	Crailing