

Sustainability Champions



Market garden



Café



Farm shop

The Organic Farm Shop and Café, Abbey Home Farm

Hilary Chester-Master, Farm Partner and Farm Shop Director

Abbey Home Farm is a fully organic, sustainably focused farm near Cirencester. Farm Partner, Hilary Chester-Master tells us how their sustainability practices underpin all aspects of their business.

Tell us about Abbey Home Farm

"Abbey Home Farm is 100% organic; we began conversion in 1990 and are registered with the Soil Association. This is a mixed farm with many enterprises including 400ish sheep, a beef suckler herd, arable including oats, barley and wheat. For local consumption only we have a few pigs, 300 laying hens and raise 40 table birds a week.

"On the market garden, where we also train future growers, we produce over 180 varieties of veg, fruit, herbs and cut flowers. It sits at the heart of the farm next to the farm shop and café, which is vegetarian except on Sundays. There is on and off grid self-catering accommodation, including a green field campsite. We have a venue for events and meetings, wakes and occasional weddings, run a mainly outside day nursery for 2-4 year olds and, as The Farm Project CIC, host residential weeklong visits from tiny groups of young people from challenging backgrounds (often inner cities) for around 20

or more weeks of the year.

"We are committed to producing local organic food, alongside protecting biodiversity, ensuring high animal welfare, providing education around where food comes from and welcoming visitors from all backgrounds and cultures."

Why is being organic important to you and how can businesses bring this into their own practices?

"We farm organically and only use and sell organic ingredients, as we believe this is better for the soil, wildlife, our livestock and human beings' health and wellbeing. We never offer food grown with the aid of artificial chemicals, fertilisers and preservatives.

"Obviously, buying organic can be financially challenging, but self-catering and B&Bs serving breakfast with local organic bread, bacon, eggs, jams, etc can maybe put that onto the tariff they charge and not lose

money, plus it's a wonderful tool for marketing – even if your customers don't always buy organic food, people do like the idea of it, especially on holiday.

"Growing a few veg, such as tomatoes, keeping a few chickens (not feeding them GM feed), or growing a few cut flowers without spraying can be both satisfying and set you aside from any competitors."

How do you manage your produce to reduce waste?

"Do you know that 400,000 tonnes of avoidable waste is produced from the food sector every year? So, we are determined to limit our food waste to nearly nothing.

"We use ingredients efficiently, not wasting by cutting carelessly, and we really minimise food waste by turning all unused café food into frozen dishes on the same day. We make our famous Sunday roast gravies with the vegetable peelings through the week.

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Café kitchen



Woodchip boiler



EV charging



Hilary Chester-Master

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continued

"All our uncooked waste goes into making compost for the veg garden and we are planning on getting a cooked food waste rocket next year."

What recycling and reusing practices have you implemented?

"We have around 35 edible products that can be bought loose in our farm shop, such as nuts, coffee beans, oats, muesli, lentils, and much more. We try to encourage customers to bring their own containers to save on single use 'anything', not just plastic. We also offer shampoos, liquid soaps, and household products loose, so customers can bring in their own containers."

"We have a vending machine for our milk, customers bring any sort of container to fill themselves. Yoghurts and cream are sold in returnable glass jars, through a deposit system. It is challenging though, as glass is getting nearly prohibitively expensive and lids are single use, but glass remains the best, sustainable option, I think, because of the reusing ability – the jury is out though..."

"We are strict on recycling for cardboard, paper, tins, glass etc and reuse where possible."

How do you minimise your energy usage?

"Most of our heating is from our 50kw woodchip boiler, we use either local or our own wood chipped on site as fuel. We have two small wind generators and 60kw of solar so far. A good chunk of our electric is generated by the solar, but we need more!"

"The only fossil fuel we use is gas for the ovens in the café."

What are you hoping to do next?

"We're looking into buying a waste food composter and plan to increase our solar panels to become self-sufficient in summer months, at least."

Do you get comments from customers about your sustainability?

"Sustainability in every meaning is what we are focused on; looking after the planet to the best of our ability, the soil, flora and fauna, insects, birds, wildlife, our livestock, our customers, our wider community and our staff are forever foremost in our minds. Many customers who come to shop, eat or drink here do so because of this and often refer to it at the tills or in conversation."

What advice would you give to businesses who are starting on their journey?

"Small things matter! Juggling financial sustainability with eco-friendly practices can be very challenging and if you go too far too fast your business won't be financially sustainable. Maybe start with real eco-friendly products and concentrate on low or no waste, recycle everything possible, if you have time and space grow some flowers to add value to your offer, fresh homegrown flowers are the best."

How are your staff involved?

"There is a great diversity in why people work here – one will say because they believe in local food, another champions organic, or looking after the animals well, or wildlife and encouraging biodiversity, but all our staff are fully on-board with our ethos and understand the benefits of organic produce. They're involved in recycling, trying not to waste food through careful planning, growing and using as much farm produce as possible to avoid food miles, and using gluts efficiently and quickly in the kitchen."

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