

Edinburgh Cyrenians Farm – a hub of excellence



The charity Edinburgh Cyrenians have a farm just outside the city boundary. This is a social enterprise which produces local fruit and vegetables at a profit both for retail sale in the city and wholesale for local restaurants.

The farm is also the site for a community where some vulnerable young people with a variety of backgrounds live, but it is important to note that the farm and the community are interdependent but separate projects run by Edinburgh Cyrenians. The young residents are usually referred by the local authority who will pay for their care there, and the residents have the opportunity to work on the farm and then receive a share of the produce. Most say they benefit from improved self-confidence and motivation as a result.

We met Rob Davidson, the farm enterprise manager, who explained the central ethos on the farm is to create a hub of excellence producing good food which raises money for the charity by being sold at a profit. But there is really rather more to it than that as we found out when we visited.

[Edinburgh Cyrenians Farm](#) from [Phyllis Stephen](#) on [Vimeo](#).

The farm employs staff and gives day volunteers the opportunity to work there too. Residents have the chance to help out on the farm as and when they can in amongst organising their lives, including finding somewhere more permanent to live or work after their stay on the farm.

As well as the central farming strand the charity offers team challenges to corporate clients who may wish to have a day out

of the office. (Go on, there are loads of wheelbarrows spare!) So anyone can go to the farm and get involved with the work there, either on a day volunteer basis or indeed as an employee if there are vacancies.

By 2020 Edinburgh Cyrenians aim to make about 50% of their income from their commercial activities.

There are hens, poly tunnels, a wide range of fruit and veg, with the notable exception of potatoes and carrots which Rob says he leaves to the 'experts down in East Lothian'.

Rob was brought up on farms and has a background in growing food, but explained he became a bit disenfranchised as a result of machinery being introduced on the farms, so did not initially pursue a career in farming.

Instead he first of all studied ecology, worked on the Cyrenians Farm for a while, and then worked as a chef for a while. He then worked for a spell at RBS but decided to come back to the farm to pull all of his talents and networking together.

Cyrenians have big plans to expand elsewhere in Scotland in due course, but principally they want people to learn by working there and then take their skills to other parts of the industry.

The farm will be running a pilot Small Box Scheme later this year by which they hope to sign up clients in offices where several boxes of fresh vegetables can be delivered to the one place (usually a place where the customers have a car). The farm will also offer their own jams, and already sell their eggs freshly laid by the beautiful hens that we met at fairly close quarters.

Day volunteers can go along to the farm anytime but if you wish to sign up then you should contact Cyrenians first through their [website](#).

Rob explained: "The community is the biggest building on the farm. There are three members of staff working there alongside peer mentors who are volunteers and the residents. Residents have usually been referred to the charity as a result of poverty or homelessness."

As well as donating your time you can of course make financial donations to the charity who point out very clearly what your money would pay for:

£10 would buy a chicken and feed it for two months.

£50 would buy two fruit trees.

£125 would pay for a day of land based skills training for a trainee.

£275 would buy a new bee colony.

£1500 would refurbish a polytunnel and provide hard paving and an irrigation system.

The charity has a page [here](#) which outlines the many ways you can donate.

The Cyrenians have a philosophy which is one of journeying together on the road to change, and the farm is one of the ways they fulfil this.