



Members Handbook

January 2022

Sims Hill Shared Harvest Members' Handbook

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Sims Hill Shared Harvest Members' Handbook

Welcome to Sims Hill!

Sims Hill provides local vegetables and fruit in Bristol raised using natural farming methods. Similar to a veg box supplier, but member-owned and co-operatively run by and for our members, growing people as well as produce.

You can find out about our Data Protection and Privacy Statement [here](#).

In this handbook you will find a lot of the information you need to participate as a member of the Sims Hill co-operative. It contains answers to many of the questions you might have – such as: What is Sims Hill? Why was it set up? How is it run? Who's in charge? Who owns Sims Hill? What is a co-operative? And more ...

However the best way to find out how things work and to meet other members is to come along to our regular members' meetings, work-days and social events.

We hope you will find the handbook helpful – if you can't find an answer to your question here, take a look at our website:

www.simshill.co.uk

or email us at:

General enquiries: simshillsharedharvest@gmail.com

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What is Sims Hill Shared Harvest?

Sims Hill is a CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) scheme, run as a co-operative and inspired by permaculture and community development principles¹. The Japanese name for the first CSA was “Teikei”, which translates as “Food with a Face”. There are two underlying principles:

1. Sharing the Risk, Sharing the Harvest

The members of a CSA come together and invest in the running of the farm, sharing the risk with growers and receiving a share of the harvest, instead of being customers who pay for specific products. The budget for the farm and what members contribute is negotiated between members and growers, seeking to establish a fair and transparent deal for all concerned. This may include subsidised membership for members on low incomes.

2. Diversity, Seasonality and Efficiency

Being a member of a CSA involves a commitment to adapting to cook and eat what the farm is best suited to produce. For many of us this may involve changing the range of vegetables and fruit we eat and getting used to local seasonal availability. Sims Hill seeks to grow a diversity of vegetables best suited to local conditions, crop rotation, building soil health and the needs of the whole community. To minimise waste and maximise efficiency some vegetables that would be wastefully “graded” out of supermarkets (because of aesthetics or long supply chains) will be included in your share.

Sims Hill is a co-operative

What does that mean? It means it is a business owned and democratically controlled by its members, and run for their benefit and for the benefit of the wider community. Sims Hill is registered with Companies House as a non-profit distributing cooperative company limited by guarantee with multi-stakeholder co-operative rules.

BELONGING

So as a member, Sims Hill belongs to you. You also belong to the Sims Hill community. As a member, you have rights and also responsibilities.

You become a member when you buy a full share, a half share, a work-share or become a supporter member. As a member, your rights include a vote, a right to be kept informed and a right to a share of the harvest at a price agreed by everyone.

¹ Principles of Permaculture

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RESPONSIBILITY

Your first responsibility is to participate in Sims Hill activities. These include

- ⤴ regular members' meetings about 4 times a year. (We know that people can't attend every meeting, but it is helpful if you can send an apology if you aren't able to get along)
- ⤴ Annual General Meeting
- ⤴ various pop-up sub-groups as and when they occur –



this has included a group to look at social activities and one to focus on membership and how we promote our activities.

Also, as a member you have a responsibility to keep yourself informed, to read information circulated by the Board, to have an opinion and to express that opinion in meetings.

There are three types of members:

- Harvest Share members, who buy a veg box on a regular (weekly) basis,
- Supporters who make a financial contribution to the project to support it, but don't want to take a veg
- Work-share members who give time working to earn their share – this is mainly helping out in the fields but could be to do with other tasks like marketing/publicity or book-keeping

We have two paid workers: one Farm Manager, and one assistant grower.

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How did Sims Hill start?

Looking for land

The story of Sims Hill Shared Harvest began with an idea and some growers looking for land. Then there was a phone call from the council: 'There might be some land coming available. Are you interested?' A public meeting was held to consider the question 'There is land available for a community purpose. We could do a some form of community agriculture project. If so, what would you want it to look like?' The people at the meeting sketched out the sort of thing they were looking for.

Project team

Then a small project team began to meet to put some flesh on the bones and clearly express our values and purpose. All of us were clear from the start that Sims Hill would be member-owned and work on the basis of shared risk, shared harvest, but we had to develop most of the detail. There was envisioning to do.

One day we met in the railway carriage in the empty field and spent some time dreaming and writing poems. Other times we struggled over detail like the design of the field, how we could make sure to include people in difficult circumstances, or our proposed governance structure.

Launch to the public of Bristol

Finally, about two years after the first thoughts, we were ready. In autumn 2010 we held a series of launch meetings introducing people to every aspect of the proposed scheme and inviting people to become 'pioneer' members, whereby they joined and paid for six months before they received any veg. It felt like a big ask, but to the delight of all, people responded and we were off! This process had the double benefit of ensuring that the first tranche of members were people who were deeply in tune with the vision and values of Sims Hill. Many of these pioneer members have stuck by the scheme ever since, including bearing the results of the dreadful 2012 growing season. Never has the idea of shared risk, shared harvest been so tested!

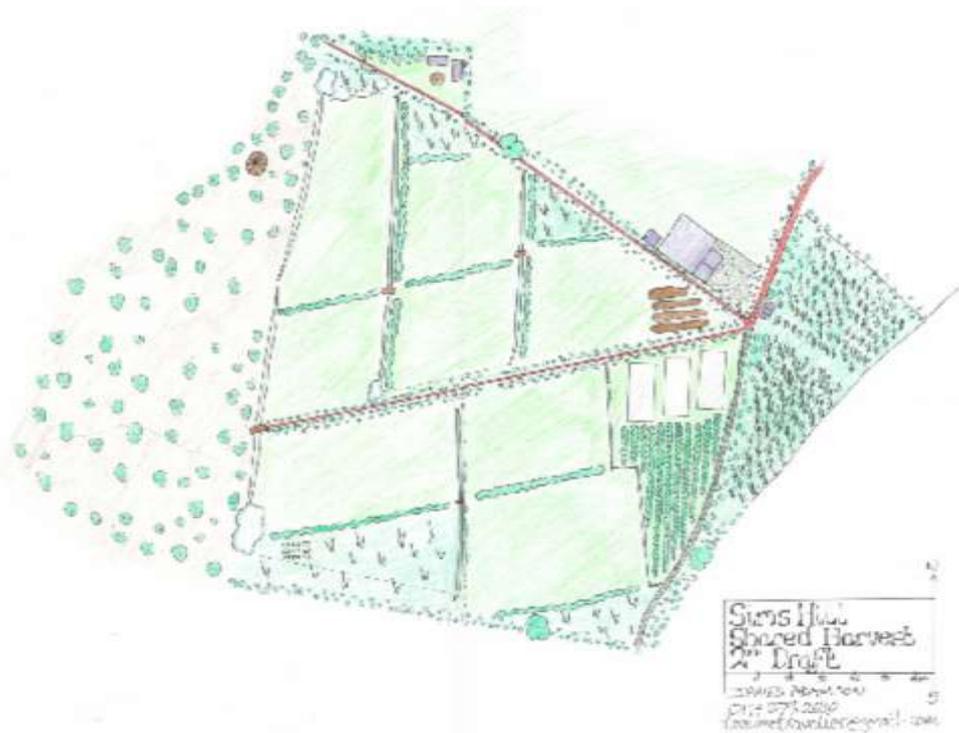
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Where is Sims Hill?



An aerial shot of Sims Hill

Sims Hill is a 6 acre field leased by Bristol City Council. The site is located on Frenchay Holdings, Stoke Lane, Frenchay, Bristol. The ordnance survey map details for the site are described here (pdf). We also have use of a large multi-span polytunnel and some associated land on the Grow Wilder site in Frenchay. You can find directions on our website - simshill.co.uk



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How does the veg get to me?

Deliveries are organised in those areas of Bristol where we have most members. Collection points have a cupboard or point where deliveries are stored for collection by members, see below for details.

Area	Address	Pick up time
St Werburghs	29 Mercia Road, BS2 9XG. Access to the shed is round the back of the house.	Thursday 5 pm
Easton	BASE Social Centre 14 Robertson Rd, Easton, Bristol BS5 6JY	Thursday 5pm
Gloucester Rd	Harvest 11 Gloucester Rd, Bristol BS7 8AA <i>Open Mon-Fri 9am-6.30pm, Sat 9.30am-5.30pm</i>	Thursday 5pm
Frenchay / Stapleton	1 the Prk, Frenchay, BS16 1PL The veg can be collected from the porch.	Thursday 5pm
South Bristol	Windmill Hill City Farm Philip Street, Bristol BS3 4EA <i>Open 9am-5pm</i>	Thursday late afternoon
Fishponds	18 Straits Parade, BS16 2LE The shed is temporarily located now by the bins next to the student accommodation flat building.	Thursday 5 pm
St. George	St. George Community Centre Church Rd, Bristol BS5 8AA right after the bike racks	Thursday 5 pm

Each Thursday the cupboards (or in some places bags) are filled ready for you to collect on Thursday evening or Friday morning. The areas with cupboards have numbered locks on them and you need to call your grower for the code. When pick-up timings vary, like at Christmas and Easter, we will let you know using notes at the pick-up point and email reminders.

If there are five or so people who live near each other then we will work out whether we can open a new drop-off point – ie if it makes financial and environmental sense and can be feasibly dropped by the growers on a Thursday.

If you have friends who would love to have a box from Sims Hill but who simply can't pick up, let us know and when we have a critical mass we can look into other delivery methods – like delivery bike. It will cost a little more, but probably not much and may help people participate.

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How are decisions made?

The Board

The co-operative is run on a day to day basis by the Board, which is elected at the AGM and is accountable to the members. The board can also co-opt members with particular skills throughout the year.

At any one time we need to have at least one grower and 3 members on the board. The rest can be made up of supporter members. See Appendix 1 for a list of the current board members.

The Board takes day to day decisions relating to fund-raising, purchasing equipment, tools, seeds etc. It also takes responsibility for the payment of wages, keeping records, press and publicity, organising district groups around collection points, deliveries to collection points, supervision of growers, work-share members and volunteers.

If you want to be on the Board, we have an AGM every year where 2 board members step down and there are elections. We also have the option of co-opting people on to the committee to add skills or capacity if place are empty. Please let us know at any point during the year if this interests you.

Sub groups

Sometimes members' sub-groups are created, with at least one board member and they take decisions relating to the areas of work that have been delegated to them, such as recruitment campaigns or organising social events.

Members

Members in general meetings take decisions with more long term impact, such as: monthly charges, wage levels, what tools and equipment we can afford, what risks are we prepared to take! Members can join in ideas and criteria development which are then researched by the board and brought back to members as proposals.

The board makes every effort to make it easy for you to join in, and to make the meetings as fun and interactive as possible. Information is circulated in advance, including an agenda (or list of what is to be discussed) and papers relating to developments at the field, financial performance, fundraising activities and recruitment, so members are fully informed and ready to participate in discussion and decision-making.

Regular Members' involvement

We find that members have different amounts of time and different skills to offer, and that's fine, people get involved practically as much or as little as they want. Some of the events we organise include:

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- Work days, where people can come and help on the land – currently the third Sunday of the month. Details are on our Facebook page here <https://www.facebook.com/simshillsharedharvest>, or email our growers on simshillgrowers@mail.com
- Celebrations at harvest and any other excuse we can find – pot luck dinners, apple pressing
- Courses, not just in veg growing or permaculture, but other projects like coppicing, bee keeping, managing the orchard and other things we may get into
- or of course we can go there just to relax and enjoy the site. It is ours. If you would like to volunteer some time or have a look round please contact us: email simshillsharedharvest@gmail.com

Serious Vegetable Growing

We aim to grow a selection of veg. Sometimes through heavy rain, drought or disease we may not have enough, so with the agreement of members we buy in the essentials (e.g. potatoes, carrots and onions) from local suppliers to supplement what we grow. This is also something we often need to do in the hungry gap in late spring.

In order to have vegetables year round a wide diversity of vegetables are grown in rotation using organic methods on three different scales:

1. Field scale vegetables (albeit small fields) such as onions and leeks, potatoes, carrots, beetroot, sweetcorn, squash, plus cabbage, swede, broccoli, kale etc.
2. Garden vegetables (e.g. Walled garden scale) such as courgettes, runner beans, lettuce, and other crops that require more attention or irrigation
3. Polytunnel vegetables including winter salads, early crops and cucumbers and tomatoes in the summer.

The quality of soil life and fertility are built up using green manures (e.g. clover and trefoil) and compost (preferably our own, if not, well sourced).

How can I contribute my ideas?

There are several ways in which Sims Hill members communicate with one another:

- you can send a message to our facebook page:
www.facebook.com/simshillsharedharvest
- you can send an email
 - for general enquiries simshillsharedharvest@gmail.com
 - to communicate with the board kristinsponsler@gmail.com
 - to communicate with the growers simshillgrowers@mail.com
- or you can attend a members' meeting or a work day or social event. Details of events

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are posted up on our website.

- If you have a story you could write a blogpost for the website and send via email

FAQs

What if I can't pick up one week or I go on holiday?

You pay by standing order, so in the first instance we suggest that you ask someone else to pick it up – and use it if you are on holiday.

The veg is picked to order, so if you can't get someone to pick it up the very best thing is to leave it in the field to grow a bit bigger. If that's the case please contact Membership Support: email simshillsharedharvest@gmail.com We need to know this by Wednesday morning.

What if I want a bigger or smaller share?

If you want to change the size of your share please

1. email us at simshillsharedharvest@gmail.com to let us know &
2. at the same time increase or decrease your standing order accordingly Then from the beginning of the month (or earlier if you also do a manual transfer) we can change your order.

What if I don't like onions/carrots/cabbage etc.

Just don't take it. Or if there seems to be an awful lot of something left over (there are often rolling stocks of tubers) then take a couple more of them to compensate.... But please don't do much of this because we'll be all over the place!

At a few pick-up points the veg is pre-bagged so unfortunately this isn't an option.

I sometimes have a glut of pears/fruit/other veg - can I share them through Sims Hill?

Yes, it's a lovely idea. We suggest you take gluts to your local pickup point, perhaps leaving a note that people can help themselves?

What if I'm leaving Bristol? How long am I tied into membership for?

We request that you tell us at least a month before you leave, but the longer the better so that we can fill your space.

What if I have a complaint?

Of course we hope you won't have any problems, but from time to time there may be issues arising, and we want to be the first to know about it! If there is an issue, please email:

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simshillsharedharvest@gmail.com

Do you do bursaries for people on benefits?

We can offer a small bursary, please email us to have a conversation about this.

Contact details

Website: www.simshill.co.uk

General enquiries: simshillsharedharvest@gmail.com

Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/simshillsharedharvest>

Phone number: 07897636706

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Appendix

Board Members as of December 2020

Currently the Board consists of:

- Kristin Sponsler - Secretary
- James Miller - Farm Manager
- Simone Osborn
- Julian Harrison
- Alex Reuer
- Freya Widdicombe