

# Dean Organic Fund interest free loans

The second round of applications for the interest-free Dean Organic Fund loans, with a closing date of Monday 17th September 2018, has now opened. The Dean Organic Fund was established following a major bequest from the late Jennie Bone to the Organic Research Centre (ORC), along with the transfer of funds from the former Dean Organic Trust which she established in 1993. Her idea was to support the conservation of wildlife in the farmed environment by providing interest free loans to organic producers. ORC is committed to continuing this process with the new Fund.

Launched at the Oxford Real Farming Conference this year, the new Dean Organic Fund providing interest free loans to small-scale organic/agroecological producers and food businesses, attracted a lot of interest.

After the first round of applications closed in March 2018, 13 were approved and loans totalling £260,000, and ranging from £6,000 to £25,000, have been paid out. A wide range of businesses have been supported, from crofts planning meat processing operations in Scotland to growers expanding their vegetable production and protected cropping facilities in eastern and southwest England. Other farms and food businesses are using the funds to develop farm shops, nano-dairy production, vineyard management equipment, expansion of organic granola production, and organic chicken production systems.

Nic Lampkin, CEO of ORC said "We have been very encouraged by the wide range of applicants and the quality of the applications, and we hope this standard will be continued. Many applicants benefited from taking advice on their business plans, and we are working with a number of like-minded organisations to try to secure funding to provide further assistance for business advice and mentoring."

The next round of applications is now open with an application deadline of Monday 17th September 2018, and applications to be determined and agreements finalised by the end of November. In the second round, we expect to be lending £100-150,000. We will be progressing to a six-monthly cycle of applications (deadlines in March and September each year) with about £100,000 lent each time.

If you are interested in applying, and would like further information, please contact Gillian Woodward at ORC for an application pack

## Stephen and Lynn Briggs, Whitehall Farm, Cambs

Stephen & Lynn Briggs farm are tenants of a 250 acre organic farm in Cambridgeshire growing cereals, vegetables and 125 acres of Agroforestry. The Farm has a Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement and Stephen & Lynn are passionate about adding value and engaging with customers and the



public. After more than two years in development in early 2018 they opened Harvest Barn Farm Shop, which retails local, organic and farm produced produce along with a Cafe, and outdoor visitors and education area.

"We applied for the Dean Organic Fund (DOF) to help in developing the new farm shop business. The £25,000 loan has helped fund the purchase of retail and butchery equipment, and outdoor education and visitor infrastructure. The DOF loan has helped us manage cash flow for a rapidly developing new business venture and allowed us to expand and broaden the offering to customers quicker than we would have been able to without the DOF loan."



Photos: Stephen and Lynn Briggs

## Lauriston Farm, Essex

Lauriston Farm, Maldon, Essex received a DOF loan for capital investments for a new horticultural enterprise.

Farm Director Spencer Christy said: "Lauriston Farm Limited heard about the Dean Organic Fund through the Biodynamic Association as we are a Demeter certified biodynamic holding that last year was put into community ownership. Part of the five-year business plan associated with this initiative involved initially cultivating two acres of grassland. We would establish a horticultural enterprise to supply thirty weekly seasonal vegetable boxes to our members/shareholders. We raised significant funds to cover revenue costs of the set up and were looking for a fund to help with the capital infrastructure required. We undertake extensive conservation work as ninety percent part of the farm's 210 acres has SSSI status so the DOF seemed like the perfect match for us.

"The loan has paid for an 85 x 24 ft wide polytunnel with side ventilation, a Tracmaster 740 two-wheel tractor with rotary plough and 80cm wide rotavator, an irrigation system for the tunnel and outdoor beds, two broad forks, various trays and boxes, fleeces and woven crop coverings.



Lauriston Farm team outside new polytunnel

“The rapid approval of our application and receipt of the loan enabled us to have the funds in place for the start of the 2018 growing season. Now, in mid-August, we are supplying twenty weekly boxes within a twelve-mile radius of the farm, two local farm shops and attend two local artisan monthly markets. The interest free aspect as well as the twelve-month repayment holiday gave us the ability to develop the new enterprise this season and be ready for the start of the 2019 growing season with an existing customer base to generate the income to start repaying the loan.

“It has been a great pleasure and honour to be in receipt of such funding and we welcome visitors to the farm to see what we do and, in particular, how the DOF has helped us.”

## Albury Vineyard, Surrey

Nick Wenman of Albury vineyard in Surrey said: “The major challenge for vineyards in the UK is our variable weather conditions, which can lead to significant fluctuations in fruit yield and quality. This is particularly acute for organic vineyards with yields typically 20% less than conventional vineyards. Of the 500 commercial vineyards in the UK less than 20 are certified organic so there is no alternative supply of fruit in difficult years. It is important therefore that we do everything possible to ensure the maximum possible yield whilst maintaining quality. This is accomplished by various canopy management techniques, one of which is to trim the vines several times during the growing season. This encourages good fruit set, exposes the grapes to the maximum sunlight available and allows airflow around the grapes to prevent disease.



“Up until now this operation has been performed by hand using hedge cutters, but this is inefficient and time consuming, which means that it isn’t always done effectively. We therefore applied to the Dean Organic Fund to provide the funding to purchase a tractor-mounted vine-trimmer to automate the process. This has already been used to great effect at the vineyard to help prevent disease and expose the fruit to sunlight.”



ERO-Trimmer Modul line

## Lynbreck Croft

Lynn Cassell and Sandra Baer of Lynbreck Croft, Grantown on Spey received a loan for the establishment of meat processing facilities. “We applied for the DOF as we saw it as an opportunity to grow our new croft business. We are only a small set-up with very little funding other than that we can get through grants or through our part-time jobs. The DOF gave us a once in a lifetime opportunity to secure investment to grow our business in a way that promotes the values our croft is based on – healthy soils = healthy land = healthy animals = healthy food = healthy people.”

## Taw River Dairy, Devon

Sam and Katie Bullingham of Taw River Dairy, Okehampton, Devon received a loan for the expansion of their livestock herd and development of dairy processing facilities. Sam Bullingham said: “We applied to the DOF as we saw it as a great way to aid our sustainable organic farming system, being first generation farmers without land to secure against, access to capital is often difficult and always expensive! We used the money to buy ourselves a reliable modern tractor that should future-proof our farming for the foreseeable future, with the remaining capital we invested in more cows for our rapidly growing dairy & processing business.”

*Phil Sumption*