



IMPATIENCE EARTH



Photo: Bonnie Hewson, 2023

# Collaboration and Pooled Funding with Farming the Future

## 2024 Case Study Series



# Background

---

Less than 2 per cent of global philanthropy currently goes towards tackling the climate crisis; a fraction of what is needed to meet the scale of the challenge. [Impatience Earth](#) was launched in 2020 in response to this, and our pro bono advisory support has helped funders to take confident and impactful action on climate issues they care about, across a range of sectors and approaches.

The Impatience Earth core model involves working directly with individual funders and organisations, and our support is highly bespoke. Over time, the team realised that many of our clients share similar challenges in relation to funding in climate, as well as common thematic interests. We believe that part of our role is to convene likeminded organisations and in 2024 we brought together a group of funders to explore the idea of launching a new, pooled fund.

To inform this work, we set out to learn from established funder collaboratives, and one of the organisations we spoke to was Farming the Future. We're pleased to share this case study which is written from the perspective of its Director, Bonnie Hewson.

Stay tuned for updates from Impatience Earth about our work convening and connecting funders, and in the meantime please enjoy this comprehensive and insightful account from one of the UK's most ambitious pooled funds.



# Case study: Farming the Future

## How did Farming the Future start?

In 2019 the A Team Foundation and the Roddick Foundation joined forces to create a new pooled fund focused on collaborations within the UK agro-ecology sector. Five years on, there are a number of funders contributing between £10,000-100,000 per annum to the funder collective now known as Farming the Future.

## Why does collaborative funding matter?

The changes we need to make to our society, economy and culture are huge! Whatever sphere you are involved in transforming, it is unlikely that you will be able to do it in isolation and that will rarely bring about a sustained, just transition. Funders may find it easier to stick to their own ‘thing’ but their resources will go much further and catalyse more change if they fund alongside others. In addition, by choosing to give up some control and power over decisions, they may find it easier to build trust with the sector they are resourcing.

We have no wish to reduce the size and diversity of funds available for potential projects – we don’t want to redirect into our fund any resources that would in other ways already be going into the agro-ecology sector. We keep our pooled fund focused on areas where others don’t fund – mostly collaborative work that helps connects up the movement and supports the enabling conditions for a just transition. In short, we want to both grow and flow the resources into the sector, not become a gatekeeper for them.

## How are funding decisions made at Farming the Future?

Organisations applying to Farming the Future can secure grants of between £10,000-£60,000 for their projects. Funding decisions are made through a participatory grant-making approach: the practice of ceding decision making power to people who are most affected by an issue. At Farming the Future the process is held by ‘Ambassadors’ who are working in the agro-ecology sector. These are paid positions to reflect the active role that Ambassadors play in development and decision-making.



Photo: Bonnie Hewson, 2023



## 10 benefits of Farming the Future's pooled fund approach

- 1. More impact:** An opportunity for funders to work together on critical issues and combine resources, energy, attention, and expertise to exponentially increase the impact of our work together so more organisations can be supported with reasonable grant sizes.
- 2. Greater reach:** An opportunity to connect funders with lesser-known organisations, enabling them to support in places and ways they may not be able to do on their own.
- 3. Less risk:** By joining our pooled fund, funders can support new ideas or help emerging organisations and movements to build their organisational capacity through more flexible grant-making of all sizes, whilst sharing the risk with others. For example funders have an additional layer of certainty as they know that the Ambassadors (who have deep expertise) will have reviewed applications and made the final decisions.
- 4. Deeper learning:** A chance to co-create and disseminate knowledge and funder learning across a field of interest.
- 5. More efficient:** An opportunity to reduce the duplication of workflows (by both potential grantees and donor partners) through joint grant making.
- 6. More strategic:** An opportunity to align strategies and more easily identify and meet gaps and needs.
- 7. Opening avenues:** Donors who don't give direct grants are able to channel funds towards a just transition to an agro-ecology approach in the UK. This could be in the case of a funder who has a partnership based model and is not open for individual grant applications – here Farming the Future enables them to fund new types of work through the collective, without compromising their Foundation's approach.
- 8. Grassroots experts:** Grant decisions are made by experts and leaders from the sector (our Ambassadors).
- 9. Shifting power:** Our participatory grant-making approach supports power distribution both within funding and within the funded sector.
- 10. Authenticity:** If we want our grantees to collaborate, we, as funders, should also be willing to do so!







***At a time when we were very much in the early stages of developing our funding strategy in this area, Farming the Future provided a valuable space for us to learn about the sector and its funding needs.***

***The opportunity to work alongside and learn from other funders and ambassadors with expertise and firsthand experience from within the food and farming sector, gave us a really nuanced understanding of how and where our funding could be best leveraged – both within and beyond the Farming The Future pooled fund.***

**– Emily Kerr-Muir**

**The Savitri Trust (a member of Farming the Future's pooled fund)**



## What was the process to launch and grow Farming the Future's pooled fund?

Our systems, structures and processes are constantly evolving as we develop and reflect with our funded partners; you can expect pooled funding to be an iterative approach. Success and longevity depends on developing and maintaining good relationships and finding common ground upon which to build something coherent that others can join without destabilisation.

For our fund, conversations began in 2019 and the first grants were awarded in September 2019, using the A Team Foundation as the grant holder and administrator. At the start we had sector advisors involved in the grant decisions alongside funders, but now we have more policies that define the roles of different participants and the different circles they work in (we use sociocracy, a consent-based decision making process within a horizontal structure). Funders and Ambassadors both remain involved but when it comes to grant decisions the Ambassadors take the lead.

From March 2020 there were efforts to expand the pool of funders and the participatory grant making approach was formalised. From July 2021 the pooled fund itself was shifted to Prism the Gift Fund so it could be held outside of the A Team, and from the end of 2023 we moved to using Social Change Nest as our agent for grant distribution. The fund began as a closed fund (meaning grantees are approached rather than an open call), which it still is to some degree, but every year the pool of previously funded partners grows through collaborative work – so now we have about 100 organisations in our network.

## What advice do you have for other funders considering launching a pooled fund?

Firstly, take some well facilitated time with allies to work out what it is you are trying to achieve, what your sector needs and what role you are seeking to play in it - your theory of change. This is helpful to ensure everyone is clear what they are signing up to, the difference they can make, what is expected of them and why it is important they take the extra effort (as it definitely is more effort!) to collaborate with others.





Secondly, consider asking contributing funders to commit to a minimum amount over multiple years. Doing this avoids a situation where funds fluctuate year on year, where you have to be constantly fund raising to keep funds steady and importantly, you will be able to give multi-year grants.

Finally, don't be afraid to get different opinions. This includes from others in the sector – you are in service to them and the last thing anyone wants is a fully formed offering they had no input on. As you move forward, take time to build trust with your collaborators and involve people in governance decisions as much as time allows, as well as in the learning and visioning. Consider joining some philanthropy infrastructure networks and communities of practice, like the Environmental Funders Network, Regenerosity's Trust Based Philanthropy Community of Practice or Philea's PEXforum - there is a whole world of change going on out there and you don't have to reinvent the wheel, or do this work alone.

If you want to learn more about our journey, or are interested in establishing a pooled fund related to food and farming, Farming the Future would be more than happy to hear from you. You can reach us at [info@farmingthefuture.uk](mailto:info@farmingthefuture.uk) or via the Impatience Earth team.

---

**Edited by  
Impatience Earth**





# Get in touch.

---

To learn more about our work, or to start your transformational climate philanthropy journey, please contact the Impatience Earth team through our website or email.

[info@impatience.earth](mailto:info@impatience.earth)