

Making a Living from Local Food 2017 - Bas van Kempen & Emma Stewart, Roseisle Gardens, Elgin

Bas and Emma joined *Making a Living from Local Food* in April 2017 after they had just taken on an established 3 acre-market garden with two polytunnels, and they were working alongside the previous owner to establish themselves independently by the end of the year. They grow for [Roots, Fruits and Leaves](#) (a Food Assembly-style local Food Hub), supply local shops and cafes, and run a small shop on site. Their turnover was roughly £24k last year, they have a 5-year secure tenancy, and are working roughly 2/3 of their land.



They are both passionate about improving the food system (locally and globally) by demonstrating how real change can happen and sharing their journey with others. Bas has heaps of growing experience as a long-term volunteer on a biodynamic farm. Emma is strongly interested in the socio-political aspects of food and has been learning to grow more recently. They joined [Newbold House](#) three years ago, liked the area, the people, its relatively mild climate and good soil. When the opportunity

came to take over this business they decided to take it. When asked how they thought MLLF could support them, they said on their application form: ***'We need to know basic financial and administrative tools in how to manage our business.... need to be part of a network or like-minded people doing similar things... for the emotional support, but also ... practically, we need to know more about the possibilities and limits to growing [here]... and to have a reality check about our vision and what our expectations can be ... and hopefully, others can benefit from our knowledge, ideas and support in the programme too...'***

Their experience on the programme has done exactly that for them, it seems: Emma describes this as the year during which ***'we became financially literate'***. Their mentor's ***'pertinent questions forced us hard to think about numbers'***. They started recording detailed cashflows which since helped them with forecasting realistic goals and defining what success means for their business. It also encouraged reflection on their relationship with their business partners and led them to investigate different legal frameworks to suit their business operations. ***'This was scary initially, but is has really helped make the farm ours.'*** The impact of their business on their lives (life/work balance, their relationships), they say, were also things that they had not really thought about properly before starting on this programme. Emma especially remembers discussing 'burn out', stress and social isolation at an early site-visit which she now recognises was an important warning for her. In her words ***'we have a huge do-list, but self-care now sits high on the agenda'***.

With their new knowledge, insights, and confidence, they feel much better prepared to start out solo this year: They have a brand new and viable detailed business plan for their new proper company. They will both be working full-time on it and employ three reliable local people part-time at busy times. They plan to take on volunteers (Woofers) and offer apprenticeships in future. They decided to consolidate and expand the shop by making it into an attractive place and marketing it more aggressively. They are also transitioning their plots from a tractor-based field system to a permanent bed system using a hand rotavator, which requires a lot of extra input now but they expect this to pay off in future. In this regard, Bas feels he gained a lot of practical insights from the site visits to other projects during the programme. ***'Seeing similar businesses at earlier and much later stages, and larger and smaller than our own has really helped with the practical side of things.'*** Emma also really enjoyed the wider political picture that Nourish has enabled them to connect with and talks enthusiastically about the friends they have made on the programme: ***'We see others struggling and flourishing as we are, which creates a powerful network.'*** It sounds like they have really been able to take their learnings on board and make for an excellent example of how this can be done in a programme such as this.

