



**Farming
the Future**

**Our Approach to
Collaboratively
Resourcing
Systems Change**





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Introduction

The purpose of this report is to outline Farming the Future's approach to enabling systems change within the UK's food and farming sector for those interested in joining our work.

The urgency to act has never been greater. Accelerating crises in our climate, economy, and democracy demand that we build systems capable of serving people and planet more effectively. Philanthropy has a vital role to play in catalysing this transformation. To do so, we must honestly examine our current behaviours and practices, and assess whether they remain fit for purpose in building a better future.

We believe that meaningful change requires a cultural shift towards collective action—one grounded in trust, collaboration, and movement building. Since 2019, Farming the Future has worked alongside pioneering 'first movers' to develop the governance, values, and structures needed to support this systemic approach.

As we move into our next phase, we are seeking bold new partners—individuals and organisations ready to walk alongside us on this journey of transformation.



When funders join Farming the Future, they want to understand how their contributions to a pooled fund will drive real-world change and complement their other investments in this space.

This document is designed to offer insight into our approach, ambitions, and vision for impact—and to invite you to help us shape what comes next.



PHOTO CREDIT: CHERYL NEWMAN

Our Framework

Farming the Future was founded in 2019 with a clear Mission and Vision, supported by a Theory of Change that continues to shape our work today. Building on this foundation, we have a set of guiding principles to inform our actions and ensure accountability, alongside a clear articulation of Farming the Future's unique role within the wider ecosystem of change.



Vision

We strive for a less extractive, more socially just economy—one that places the wellbeing of people and planet at its centre. At the core of our work is a focus on the health and resilience of the whole system.

Purpose

Our purpose is to flow resources towards transformational change within the UK's food and farming systems—and to do so in a way that models the change we seek by working in movement-informed, participatory, collaborative and trust-based ways.

Mission

Our mission is to channel more—and better—funding to the diverse network of people and organisations building a future where nutritious food is produced through nature-friendly, agroecological farming, and where access to food is fair and universal, rooted in the principles of food sovereignty.

Theory of Change

At the centre of Farming the Future's theory of change are the movements and networks driving the transition towards agroecological and regenerative food systems in the UK. These movements bring together farmers, growers, communities, researchers, and advocates who are developing practical solutions, building fair and sustainable food economies, and influencing policy to create the conditions for systemic change.

This ecosystem comprises a diverse range of organisations and initiatives committed to transforming the food system to one that restores ecosystems, supports livelihoods, and ensures equitable access to healthy, nutritious food. Farming the Future focuses its resources at the intersections of these efforts—where collaboration among farmers, citizens, scientists, policymakers, and environmental groups can generate collective impact.

For these movements to succeed, cross-sector collaborations must be supported to pursue complementary strategies – as well as the capacity and skills needed to collaborate well.



This work includes the establishment of collective infrastructure like seed networks and agroecology training programmes, the development of new models of food distribution and land stewardship, advocacy for public policies that enable and protect agroecological approaches, and the development of positive shared narratives.

Through our funding, convening, and strategic partnerships, Farming the Future aims to strengthen and connect these multi-sector movements across the UK, building the capacity, coherence, and influence required to accelerate the transition to a just and regenerative food system.

The Agroecological Future We Seek

Agroecological principles provide a framework for designing and managing sustainable agricultural systems that work in harmony with nature. Grounded in both ecological science and traditional knowledge, agroecology promotes diversity, resilience, and the responsible use of local resources.

Agroecology is aligned with **food sovereignty**, ensuring equity, community empowerment, and local control over food systems. These principles shape a commitment to building sustainable and just food futures.

Farming the Future focuses its work on **transformational** levels of change in the UK (Principles 7–13).

TRANSFORMATIONAL

INCREMENTAL

FOOD SYSTEM LEVELS

LEVEL 5

Rebuild the global food system so that it is sustainable and equitable for all

LEVEL 4

Re-establish connections between growers and eaters, develop alternative food networks

AGROECOSYSTEM LEVELS

LEVEL 3

Redesign the whole agroecosystem based on ecological processes

LEVEL 2

Substitute alternative practices and inputs

LEVEL 1

Increase efficiency of industrial inputs

Thirteen Agroecology Principles

- 13 **FAIRNESS**
- 12 **PARTICIPATION**
- 11 **LAND & RESOURCE GOVERNANCE**
- 10 **SOCIAL VALUES & DIETS**
- 09 **CO-CREATION OF KNOWLEDGE**
- 08 **CONNECTIVITY**
- 07 **ECONOMIC DIVERSIFICATION**
- 06 **SYNERGIES**
- 05 **RECYCLING**
- 04 **BIODIVERSITY**
- 03 **INPUT REDUCTION**
- 02 **ANIMAL HEALTH**
- 01 **SOIL HEALTH**

SOURCE: GIESSMAN (2007) AND HIPE (2019)



Fairness

13

Support dignified and resilient livelihoods for all actors in food systems, especially smaller-scale producers and landworkers, through fair prices, fair employment, and respect for their knowledge. Promote equitable access to agroecology training and solidarity spaces for diverse growers.

Economic diversification

07

Improve the diversity of farm incomes, empowering smaller-scale farmers with financial independence and value-adding opportunities that both meet community demands, reduce waste and advance viable, regenerative alternatives to the extractive agroindustrial model.



On Farm Practices

1–6

Promote diverse, low input, efficient farming eco-systems that recycle resources, enhance resilience, nurture soils and support adaptation and mitigation to climate change. Support skill sharing on nature-friendly farming practices that foster greater biodiversity, environmental and human health, and provide a more productive and sustainable, long-term alternative to extractive and exploitative practices and policies.



Participation

12

Encourage social organization and inclusive participation in decision-making by food producers and eaters—expanding opportunities to connect with our food and the land it grows on. Support decentralized governance and local adaptive management of agricultural and food systems to build community food resilience, agency and democratic voice.

Land & Resource Governance

11

Develop equitable access to land and responsible collective stewardship of resources, including supporting seed and grain sovereignty and genetic diversity of animals and plants. Advance just opportunities for food growing, and strengthen local control of assets to boost economic resilience within agricultural and food systems.



Co-creation of knowledge

09

Foster peer connection and producer-to-trader knowledge sharing in the community. Enhance institutional and scientific innovation through participatory processes and opportunities for co-creating based on local expertise and needs. Create viable pathways for diverse new entrants, inclusive skill sharing in sustainable practices, and fair access to direct markets.



Connectivity

08

Build proximity and trust between producers and consumers by promoting fair and short distribution networks that connect people and producers more directly. Shorten long and extractive just-in-time supply chains, and strengthen local economies through public food procurement and community eating.



Social Values and Diets

10

Build food systems rooted in the culture, identity, tradition, and social and gender equity of local communities. Uphold the right to good, nutritious food through affordable access and culturally appropriate, sustainable and healthy diets.



Our Role in the Funding Ecosystem

Farming the Future exists to accelerate the transition to fair, sustainable, and resilient food and farming systems by pooling resources and amplifying the collective impact of funders, movements, and communities.

As the only pooled funder for agroecology in the UK, our funds enable broader reach and deeper impact, allowing us to listen closely to the needs and priorities of the agroecology movement and respond with flexibility and purpose.

Guided by our ambassadors and funded partners, we use participatory approaches to make collective decisions and ensure that our strategy reflects the lived realities and ambitions of those driving change on the ground. We practice trust-based and relational approaches and have personal catch-up calls with all our funded partners, rather than relying on written reports.



Our movement listening and signposting for funders can be found [here](#)

We focus our efforts through three interlinked strategies:

- **Listening and responding to needs** – grounding our work in the knowledge, experience, and priorities of farmers, communities, and movement partners.
- **Supporting collaborative work that builds the enabling conditions for change** – funding initiatives that strengthen the social, economic, and policy foundations of agroecological transformation, rather than isolated interventions.
- **Advocating for more and better funding** – influencing the wider philanthropic and donor landscape to channel greater and more equitable investment toward agroecological solutions.

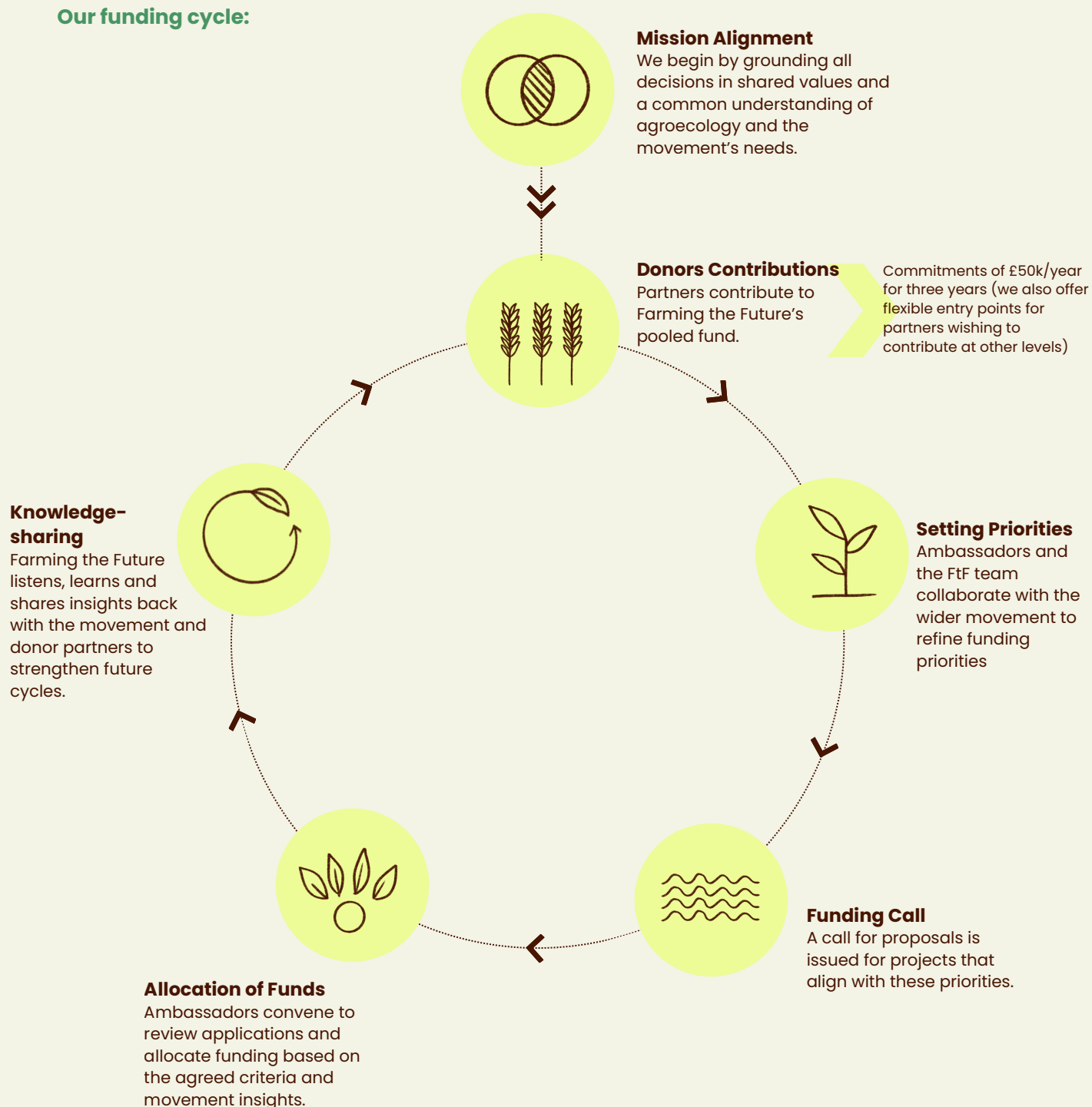
Together, these strategies define **Farming the Future's niche**: a collaborative, movement-aligned steward of pooled funds that connects philanthropy with grassroots action to drive lasting systems change.

Grant-making Process

We distribute our pooled fund through annual semi-open grant rounds, inviting previously funded partners to introduce new collaborators across diverse types and stages of work.

We take a proactive approach in providing resources through our [Field Building](#) and New Growth funds, focusing on specific areas of inequity that require additional support.

Our funding cycle:



Pooled Funds

By pooling resources and aligning strategies, our funds unlock **transformative potential for agroecology**—delivering systemic impact, fostering innovation and knowledge exchange, and ensuring long-term change.

We fund networks, alliances, partnerships, shared infrastructure, campaigns, knowledge sharing and convening, at all life-cycle stages, to lay the vital groundwork for resilient, democratic food systems.

Since 2019:



£3M+

Grants Distributed



119

Initiatives Funded



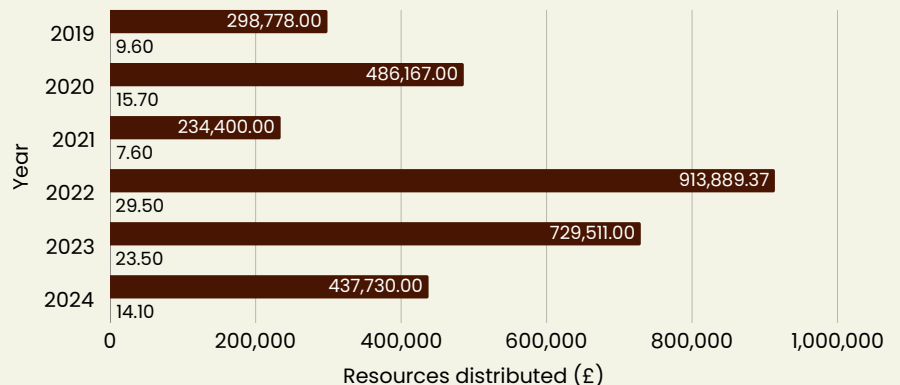
140

Partners Supported

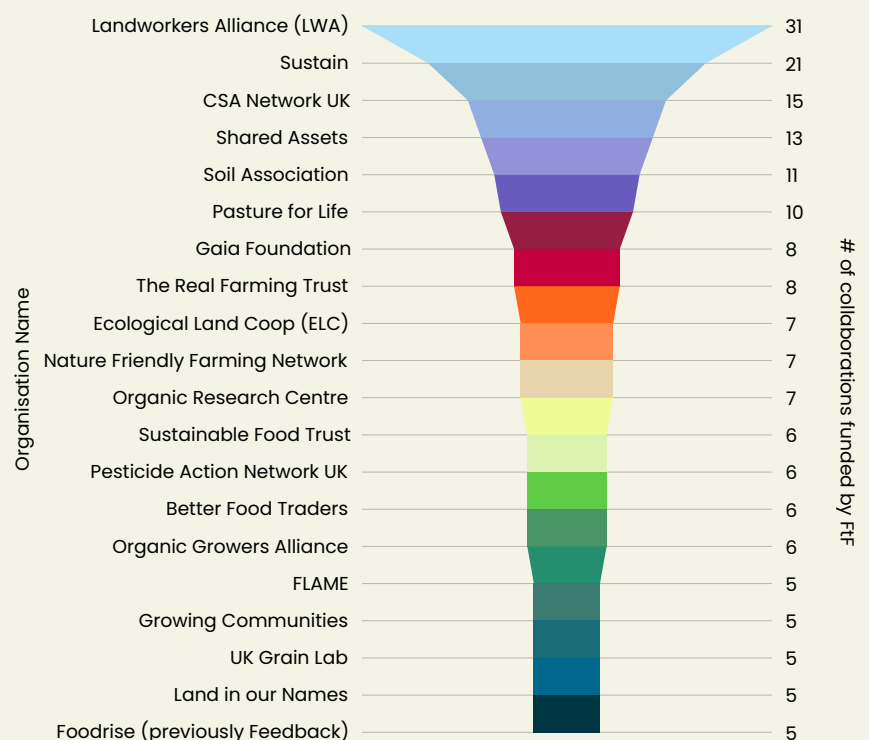


More information on our funded initiatives can be found [here](#).

Resources Distributed by Farming the Future since 2019



Top 20 organisations involved in Farming the Future's funded collaborations since 2019



Our approach to supporting Systems Change

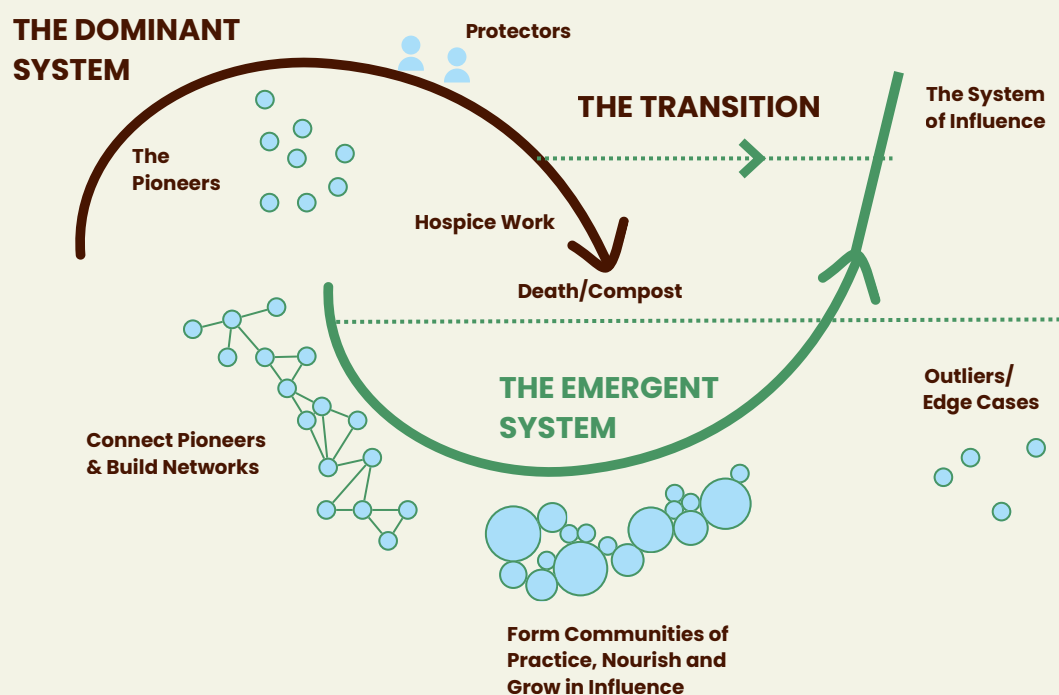
Through targeted funding, thoughtful convening, and strategic partnerships, Farming the Future strengthens and connects multi-sector movements across the UK. We work to build the capacity, coherence, and influence required to accelerate a just and regenerative food system.

OUR APPROACH TO Growing a New System

We focus on connecting and supporting the networks and alliances working to create the conditions for systems change. Our role is to strengthen their capacity to collaborate and to ensure their efforts are grounded in fairness and justice—so the food system serves everyone more effectively.

For us, supporting connection and collaboration includes:

- Building shared purpose by shaping collective visions, narratives, issues, and solutions
- Exchanging knowledge and experience to inform strong strategic planning
- Developing work together in ways that deepen and strengthen relationships
- Creating the conditions for effective collaboration by providing time, space, resources, and expertise to build skills



Berkana Two Loops Model

We use the [Berkana Two Loops](#) model to understand our role in supporting the emergence of a regenerative future for food and farming.

The model helps us to understand the different roles needed to guide a system through transition. **Pioneers** at the edges experiment with new ways of thinking and doing. **Protectors** work within the existing system to

create space and support for this emerging work. Hospice workers help the old system decline with dignity, carrying forward what is still useful into the next phase.

The model is a reminder that meaningful change depends on all of these roles working together. **We don't all need to be pioneers—each contribution is essential to the emergence of a more regenerative future.**

OUR APPROACH TO

The Conditions of Systems Change

True systems change requires aligned shifts across six interdependent conditions—policies, practices, resource flows, relationships, power dynamics, and mental models. These conditions range from the visible structures above the surface to the deeper cultural and psychological drivers beneath it.

We focus on creating the enabling conditions for this kind of transformation. We recognise that change must happen across multiple fronts: some interventions influence formal structures such as policies, resource flows, or new practices, while others shift relationships, redistribute power, or evolve the shared mental models and narratives that shape the system.

We know we cannot claim sole credit for systemic change. Instead, we act intentionally within a wider ecosystem—clarifying our contributions, learning from others, and ensuring that the shifts we support lead toward a fairer and more equitable future for all.

Our approach draws on *The Waters of Systems Change* (below) to understand where and how shifts can occur, from visible structures to the deeper patterns of thinking and relating that sustain them.



Six Conditions of Systems Change

01

Structural Change
(explicit)



Policies

Resource Flows

Practices

02

Relational Change
(semi-explicit)



Relationships & Connections

Power Dynamics

03

Transformative Change
(implicit)



Mental Models

From the Waters of System Change



Read more about how our work supports structural, relational and transformative change in the Appendix on page 20

OUR APPROACH TO

Funding

Our funding model goes beyond distributing resources. It is designed to bring people together, share decision-making, connect different areas of work, and support long-term, meaningful change.

Through ongoing listening and engagement, we identify clusters of activity that advance the health of the wider system. This enables us to direct resources toward near-term opportunities that build momentum for long-term transformation.

While Farming the Future maintains strategic oversight, these clusters evolve organically in response to emerging needs and opportunities. By investing in learning, connection, and shared capacity within and across clusters, we strengthen the movement's resilience and accelerate innovation—making the whole greater than the sum of its parts.

Guided by the priorities voiced by the agroecology movement, we currently focus on three areas in our collaborative funding:



1 | New Economies for Food and Farming

Shifting economic power in food and farming systems toward producers, citizens, and communities by shortening supply chains, promoting ethical and sustainable distribution, ensuring dignified livelihoods for land workers, advancing collective and equitable governance of key resources such as land and seeds, and building supportive policy and financial frameworks to enable a just transition to agroecological practices.

2 | Diversifying the Movement

Addressing barriers to agroecological farming by improving equitable access to resources for marginalised communities, fostering progression pathways and support for new entrants to the movement, and centring diverse and underrepresented voices and experiences in storytelling and collective learning.

3 | Movement Infrastructure

Strengthening the movement's capacity for collaboration by building the shared infrastructure, resources, and capabilities needed for coordination, learning, and impact across the agroecology movement.

Pando Funding

Pando Funding serves as an example of the approach Farming the Future takes to financing complex systems change. It shows how pooling capital can increase the likelihood of transformative impact by investing in a system change network—what Pando calls a Pando Network. This model brings together system leaders to co-create a shared vision, place decision-making in their hands, and enable adaptation to on-the-ground realities.

More than a funding mechanism, Pando Funding shows how finance can serve as a framework for rebalancing power, fostering collaboration, and sustaining long-term commitment. By aligning the strategic use of capital with the collective intelligence and shared purpose of change leaders, it creates the conditions for deeper, more resilient transformation—principles that also underpin Farming the Future's funding approach.



PHOTO CREDIT: JASON TAYLOR

OUR APPROACH TO Impact

When we assess impact, we look beyond individual short-term grants and projects to understand our contribution to field building and strengthening the wider system.

We focus on the collective impact of our partners — paying close attention to how collaborations and relationships evolve, how partners work across different issues, and how their collective capacity to develop strategic, systemic solutions grows over time.

As part of a broader funding ecosystem, we also consider the ripple effects of our portfolio —how partners connect with and complement other funders' efforts, and how these interconnected actions contribute to wider change.

These insights are brought together through our Collective Impact Strategy and Learning Framework, where we develop and share ripple-effect stories that illuminate emerging patterns, connections, and lessons.

We believe that building the capacity for shared vision and collective action—within philanthropy and across movement networks—is essential for long-term transformation. Collaboration is not only a pathway to change; it is itself a core outcome and a necessary condition for deeper, more resilient systems change.

OUR APPROACH TO Learning

We use learning to stay grounded in the food system, improve how we work, and understand our contribution to long-term change. This framework helps us track context, reflect on our activities, and assess progress toward a fairer, more resilient food and farming system.



Context Understanding the System

Purpose: Identify where resources are needed and the conditions required for systemic change

We look at:

- Where funding is needed in food, farming and agroecology
- Where funding is currently flowing—and the gaps
- The enabling conditions required to shift power for a just transition
- External factors that influence the success of our work

This gives us:

Clear insight into needs, opportunities, power dynamics, and risks.



Outcomes What change are we effecting

Purpose: Understand our contribution to a more resilient well-resourced agroecology movement

We assess:

- Whether resources for agroecology have increased
 - What contributed to this shift
 - Where the resources are coming from (new funding, redirected funding)
- Whether resilience and collective power of the agroecology movement have strengthened
- What evidence from our work shows movement toward a fairer, more viable food and farming system

This gives us:

Evidence of progress and clarity on our contribution to system change.

Activities How we work to enable change

Purpose: Ensure our actions are strategic, effective and values are aligned

We examine:

- How our activities contribute to the changes we seek
- What features make them effective (e.g. collaboration, shared narratives, capacity building)
- How can we improve or adapt what we deliver
- Whether our work is guided by our values
- Barriers and enablers to delivering work in a way that fully aligns with our principles

This gives us:

Stronger practice, better collaboration, and continual improvement.



OUR APPROACH TO Collaboration

Our strength lies in stewarding pooled funds—bringing together resources from funders who care about different aspects of the food and farming system, and directing them toward collective action for systems change.

Whether your focus is food poverty, human health, biodiversity, pollution, new economies, nature-friendly farming, animal welfare, climate change, food security, or community resilience, our collaborative approach strengthens the network of actors building viable environmental, economic, and social alternatives. Together, we create the conditions needed for broader transformation.

The challenges we face are too complex for any single organisation—or funder—to address alone. Collaborative funding is both symbolically powerful and practically effective: it signals a shared commitment to

systemic change while enabling pooled resources to generate greater collective impact without compromising individual missions.

Working together also allows funders to learn, innovate, and experiment—funding collaboration, convening and movement building work, testing trust-based and relational practices such as participatory grantmaking, mutual partnership agreements, and Open Collective funding for unincorporated groups and individuals—all within their existing operational frameworks.

As a collective, we not only amplify our impact but also model the cooperation and trust needed to transform the wider system.



PHOTO CREDIT: VERONICA WHITE

Building our fund together

With greater and longer-term funding, Farming the Future could deepen and expand this systems approach—cultivating an interconnected, dynamic ecosystem in which funders and movements see themselves as part of a shared whole. As the Pando approach suggests, this would allow us to develop coherent, adaptive portfolios behind shared visions, flow learning across the system, and navigate the “messy zone of transition” with resilience.

We are open to developing new collective funding models—from pooled funds to co-created strategies—always led by movement needs, not just funder priorities.



PHOTO CREDIT: JASON TAYLOR

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Appendix: How our work enables systems change

PHOTO CREDIT: JOYA BERROW



Using the Six Conditions of Systems Change as a framework, this Appendix shows how our pooled resources help create the conditions for change at different levels within the UK's food and farming systems.

With more resources and stronger partnerships, we can deepen this work as a collective. We can also help other funders find their place in the wider ecosystem of transition and regeneration.

Six Conditions of Systems Change

01

Structural Change
(explicit)



Policies

Resource Flows

Practices

02

Relational Change
(semi-explicit)



Relationships &
Connections

Power
Dynamics

03

Transformative Change
(implicit)



Mental Models

From the Waters of System Change



01



Supporting Structural Change

i. Policies

From our inception, Farming the Future has focused on identifying key moments where **targeted interventions can shift the policy landscape**. Emerging in the wake of Brexit, we initially supported organisations engaging with the Agriculture Act and have since collaborated on policy and regulatory work relating to pesticides, GMOs, soy, and the development of national and local food strategies.

Our approach centres on supporting collaborations between anchor organisations—those representing networks of practitioners—to influence **policies that create the conditions for more equitable, healthy, and less extractive food and farming systems**. We also back initiatives that seek to return autonomy and control over supply networks, seeds, land, and other resources to the people who produce and consume food.

You can read our Ambassador Vick Hird's [reflections on our policy work here](#).

ii. Resource Flows

A core element of our theory of change is to influence how philanthropic resources flow within the system. Through deep listening across the movement, we advocate within philanthropy and make connections with social investment for more and better funding to support transformation in food and farming.

In 2021, we funded the **Credit Where Due report** (*New Economics Foundation, the Croatan Institute*), which outlined how policymakers, financial institutions, impact investors, and philanthropists could support a just transition to agroecology in the post-Brexit context.

Within our collective—which itself represents a philanthropic collaboration—we continue to explore how we can use our position to unlock additional resources. This includes:

- **Acting as a network connector** e.g. we help connect funders to initiatives like [Loans for Enlightened Agriculture](#), [Common Nature](#) and [Banking for Change](#).
- **Developing shared funding opportunities**, such as a capacity support and peer-connection platform for agroecological producers.
- **Advocating for more, unrestricted and long-term funding.**

We also **co-fund research and coordination initiatives**, such as the [Food Issues Census](#), and engage in philanthropic advocacy to strengthen the funding ecosystem with partners like the [Environmental Funders Network](#).

Through participatory grantmaking and continuous feedback, we ensure that the movement itself shapes how resources are allocated—so that **capital serves collective strategy**, not the other way around. This approach strengthens networks, builds resilience, and ensures that funding flows toward genuine solutions.

iii. Practices

Supporting transformational change in food systems requires enabling incremental shifts in practice at scale. Rather than funding isolated local projects, we invest in shared infrastructure that enables change across the sector, including on how resources other than money (e.g. seeds and land) are governed. This includes:

- Supporting farmer-led research to strengthen the evidence base, for example through the [Agroecology Research-Action Collective](#)
- Developing national-level land-matching mechanisms, like [Land Match England](#).
- Improving access to business and technical support for agroecological producers.

Many of our collaborations involve membership networks and collectives that directly support farmers, growers, land workers, and landowners to transition their practices and advocate for fairer economic and social conditions - like [The Landworkers Alliance](#), [Nature Friendly Farming Network](#) and [Pasture for Life](#).

By aligning and co-developing solutions, these networks drive broader adoption of diverse, regenerative, and biodiverse farming practices, improving soil health, reducing inputs, and enhancing resilience across the food system.



PHOTO CREDIT: JASON TAYLOR

02

Supporting Relational Change

iv. Relationships and Connections

Collaboration and relationship-building sit at the heart of everything we do. We support the early-stage convening, trust-building, and infrastructure development that enable the movement to thrive. We move at the speed of trust, responding to the energy and opportunities already emerging from within the system, rather than imposing direction.

As a funder intermediary, we act as a bridge-builder—connecting movement organisations with philanthropic networks, and fostering collaboration within philanthropy itself. Our work as a field-builder and network funder strengthens the movement's collective capacity to develop shared visions and align strategies, including amongst those with different viewpoints.

In building on the Pando Funding approach, we:

- Connect key system actors and build trusting relationships
- Develop a shared understanding of the complex system we work within
- Identify key drivers of system health and align projects accordingly
- Facilitate continuous learning and knowledge flow across the ecosystem
- Enable adaptation, cross-pollination, and innovation
- Provide the backbone support that makes collaboration possible

v. Power Dynamics

As a collective of funders, members of the movement and staff, making decisions together, issues of power distribution in decision-making, authority, and both formal and informal influence among individuals and organizations is at the forefront of our minds. We are continually reflecting on this and improving our approaches – internal governance, to application and reporting processes.

We use sociocracy to manage our decision making and also provide training in this non-hierarchical governance structure for members of our network. It is as important to us to shift power dynamics within philanthropy as it is to shift power in food and farming systems into the hands of producers and communities.

03



Supporting Transformative Change

vi. Mental Models

We are continually reflecting and adapting—learning from the needs of those we support as we work together to nurture a better system. Grounded in agroecological principles, we aim to embed fairness, participation, social values, and connectivity throughout our work. This involves evolving our own mental models as funders and collaborators, and remaining open to diverse perspectives and strategies that drive systemic behaviour change.

We also recognise that narrative and cultural transformation are essential components of systems change. Accordingly, we support the [Agroecology Comms Network](#) to strengthen communication capacity across our partners, and are increasingly focused on cultural strategy, storytelling, and narrative change—helping to expand the collective imagination of what a fair, regenerative food system can look like.



In our next phase, we aim to deepen this work—developing new partnerships that amplify shared values, shift public consciousness, and support the cultural foundations of systemic transformation.