



A Matter of Scale:
A study of the productivity,
financial viability and
multifunctional benefits of small
farms
(20 ha and less)
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Summary

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Executive Summary

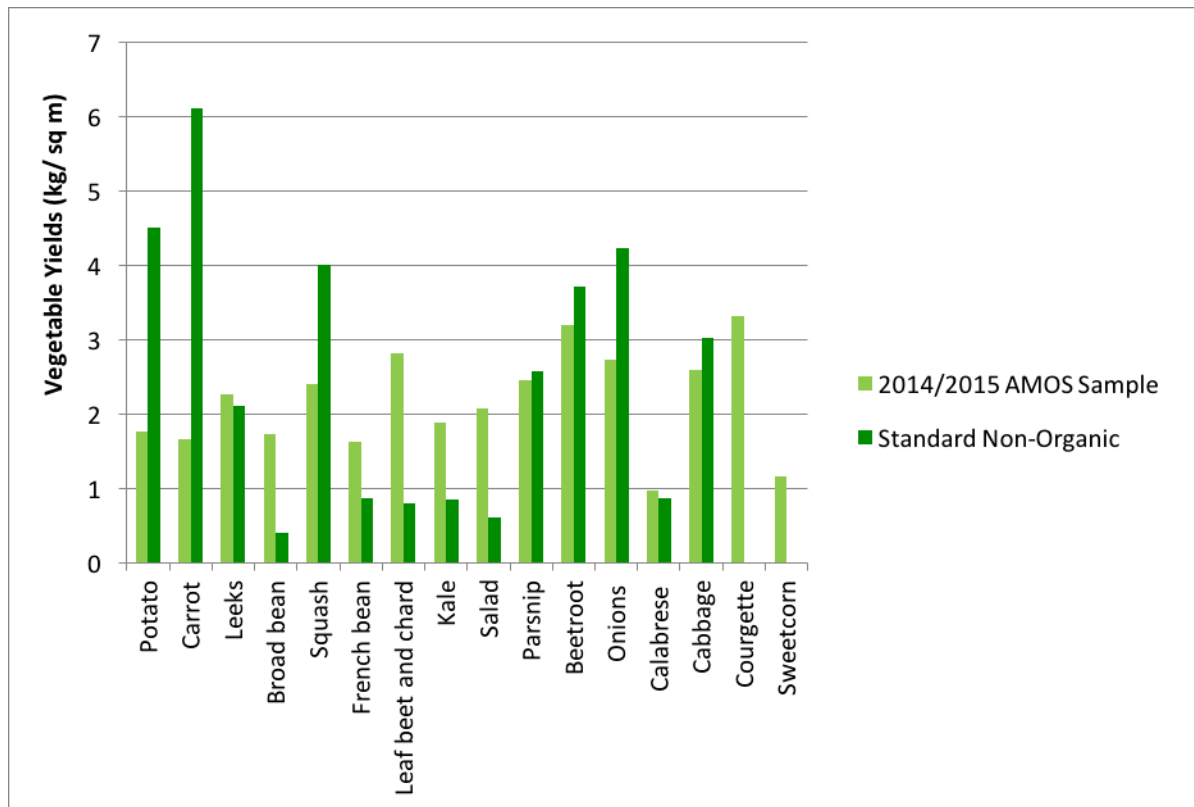
A Matter of Scale (AMOS) aimed to gain a better understanding of the productivity, financial viability and multifunctional benefits of small farms (20ha and less). A survey of 69 small, agroecological farms showed a diverse and vibrant sector, which attracts new entrants and incubates entrepreneurs. Many of the holdings were five hectares or less and, while some were focussed on horticulture, others were operating several different enterprises including eggs, meat and micro-dairy. Key findings include:

- Productivity data for 18 indicator vegetable crops showed small farm yields being higher than non-organic field-scale yields for those which benefit from more intricate husbandry and hand picking (e.g. salad leaves, French beans, kale leaf-beet and chard). At a few established market gardens vegetable yields were much higher than average non-organic yields.
- The prevalence of integrated, mixed farms, means that inputs and waste are reduced compared to monoculture farms. Such diversity may also lead to resilience, by spreading economic risk, improving ability to cope with extreme weather and increasing resistance to disease.
- Despite low average net farm income levels, when compared to average UK farm incomes the 'A Matter of Scale' (AMOS) sample were performing well financially. 78% were receiving no farm subsidies, and subsidies made up less than 20% of the income for 19% of those who were receiving subsidies.
- Most of the farms were adding value either by direct marketing or processing their produce into cheese, juices or preserves. Vegetable box schemes, farmers' markets and community supported agriculture schemes enable better incomes, while building customer trust through provision of fresh and sustainably produced food. Many holdings supplemented income with off-farm employment, or had diversified by running courses, campsites or holiday lets.
- An average of 2.3 full time equivalents work on each holding, with the average per hectare being 3.2. This is much higher than the mean for the UK of 0.026 annual work units (AWU) per hectare (Eurostat 2011, p. 5). Workers are attracted by the meaningful nature and variety of agroecological farm tasks. Despite this, labour issues were frequently mentioned as a limiting factor in increasing productivity.
- Other barriers to productivity included: lack of capital to invest in equipment and infrastructure, meaning the efficiency of some holdings was less than optimal; affordability of land and accommodation; and lack of technology suitable for small scale farmers.
- Small farmers are highly motivated to provide environmental and social benefits. Care of the soil, water and biodiversity, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, as well as provision of public education about farming and the building of community were cited as multifunctional benefits generated by the farms.

Until now, little research has been conducted into the productivity and viability of small-scale, agroecological farms in the UK. This study shows that they deserve closer attention by both policy makers and academics as they simultaneously address many of the challenges facing twenty-first century food production, including efficient UK provision of vegetables and fruit, fulfilling

employment opportunities, reduction of greenhouse gas emissions and food waste, and the re-building of rural communities.

To accompany the “A Matter of Scale” report, five short films were made to showcase the most productive of the small farms, according to five themes arising from analysis of the survey: Productivity; Financial viability; Employment; Barriers to productivity; and Multifunctional benefits. These five sheets provide facts from the report to correspond with those five films.



Comparison of yields (kg/m^2) from ‘A Matter of Scale’ survey with data for non-organic producers (British Growers’ Association, pers. comm.)

Recommendations for Policy and Further Research

- 1) Recognise the value of small farmers as efficient producers of good food, providers of employment and custodians of the environment, by moving away from area based payments to a system that rewards the delivery of public goods.
- 2) Improve access to land for new entrants by safeguarding and rebuilding the County Farms network and encouraging land owners to rent out or sell underutilised land.
- 3) Fund agricultural/horticultural training and capital investment in infrastructure, to encourage efficient and ecologically sustainable food production.
- 4) Include farms of under 20ha in the Farm Business Survey to improve knowledge of the yield capability and viability of small-scale, agroecological farms.
- 5) Fund a comparative study to measure total inputs and outputs of large scale monoculture farms and diverse small-scale systems, and also research to quantify the multifunctional benefits delivered by large and small farms.



Conclusions

- Small farms produce high yields of vegetables, and there is potential for further yield increases as many of the farms in the survey were new entrants, who have yet to become established and develop their skills.
- Small-scale farms are attracting and incubating a new generation of highly skilled entrepreneurs
- Small farms sell mainly via local supply chains, increasing their share of “the food pound”. Food is also fresher when it arrives with the customer, and has travelled less far.
- Small-scale, agroecological farms deliver valuable social and environmental benefits
- Small-scale farms face significant barriers to increasing productivity
- Small-scale agroecological farms contribute to a healthy diet and lifestyle by producing mostly vegetables and less meat, but are often highly diverse.

This leaflet is a summary of the report:

Laughton, R. (2017) “A Matter of Scale: A study of the productivity, financial viability and multifunctional benefits of small farms (20 ha and less). Landworkers’ Alliance and Centre for Agroecology at Coventry University.

The full “A Matter of Scale (AMOS)” report can be found at:

https://drive.google.com/file/d/0B5dw4mKBC3yEdzRIOHhNbkFwUFg1MWNycHNpZW5JaD_BnWVNr/view

The five films that accompany the AMOS report can be found at:

<https://vimeo.com/landworkersalliance>

The Landworkers’ Alliance (LWA) is an organisation of farmers, growers and land-based workers that campaigns for policies to support the infrastructure and markets central to our members’ livelihoods, builds alliances and encourages solidarity. LWA also raise awareness of the role that small-scale producers, family farmers and land-based workers play in providing food security, environmental stewardship, rural livelihoods, strong communities, animal welfare and high-quality affordable food. To find out more, please visit: www.landworkersalliance.org.uk



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