





LAND

/

WORK

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This publication is a celebration of UK landworkers and the land and beings they steward. The images and words within these pages are intended to offer an expansive view of the varied experiences and possibilities of land-based work. This is just a tiny snippet of a much bigger conversation, and many more people have done and continue to do this work. We hope that these pages provide some inspiration and encouragement to you on your journey in land-based work, whatever form that may take.

Landworkers attended a photography workshop to expand their skills, in return they offered some insight into the varied work that they do in response to the questions; 'Tell us about the land/ beings that you steward' and 'Tell us about the work that you do on the land.' Participants were fairly paid for their time and commitment to making content for this publication.

This publication forms part of the 'Cultivating Justice' project, a larger project which intends to build lasting mobilisation and promote justice for marginalised communities who are resisting colonial, patriarchal and imperialist food/farming systems. The project is coordinated by three grassroots organisations: *Land In Our Names*, *Landworkers' Alliance 'Out On The Land'* branch, and *Farmerama*.









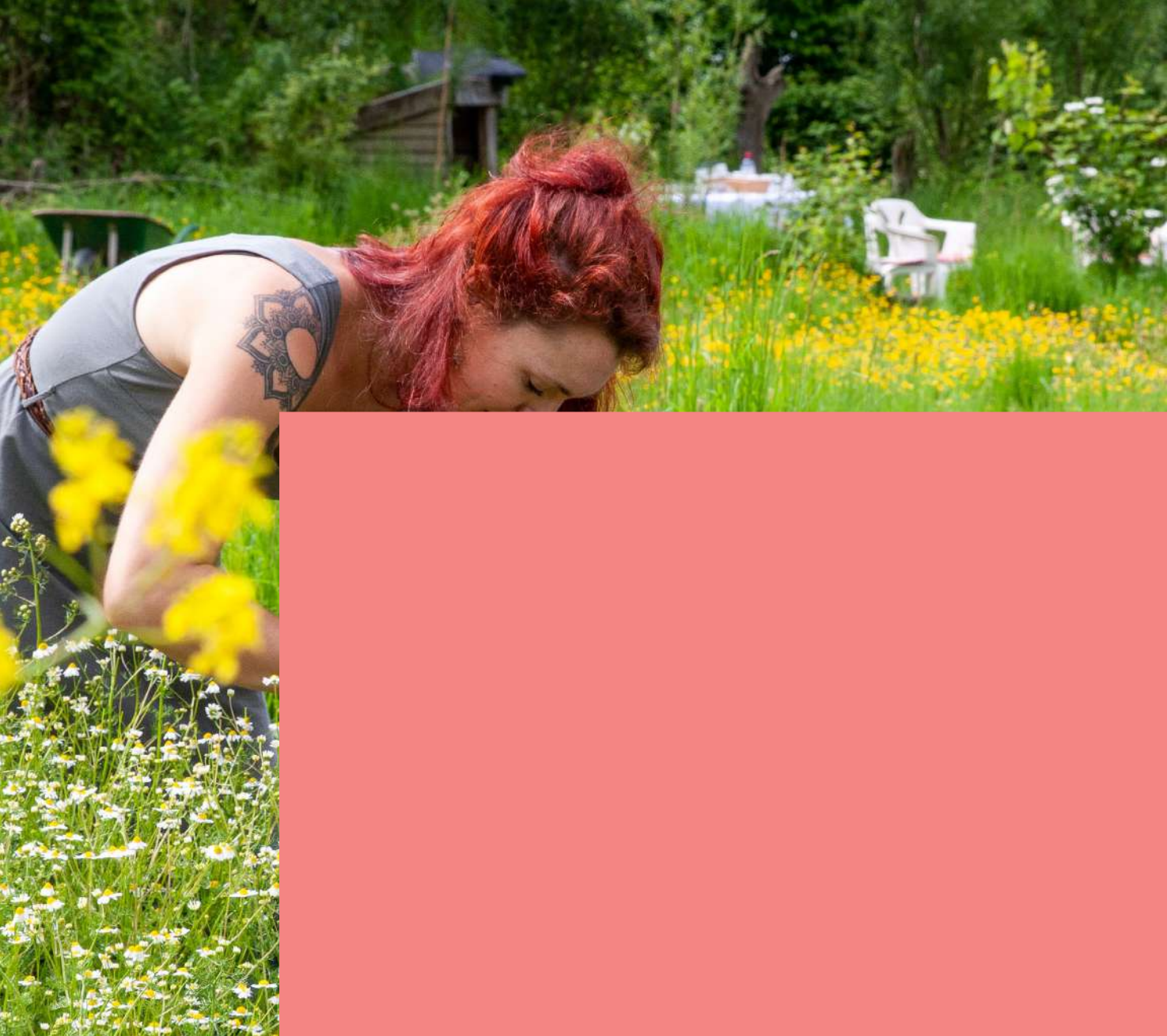






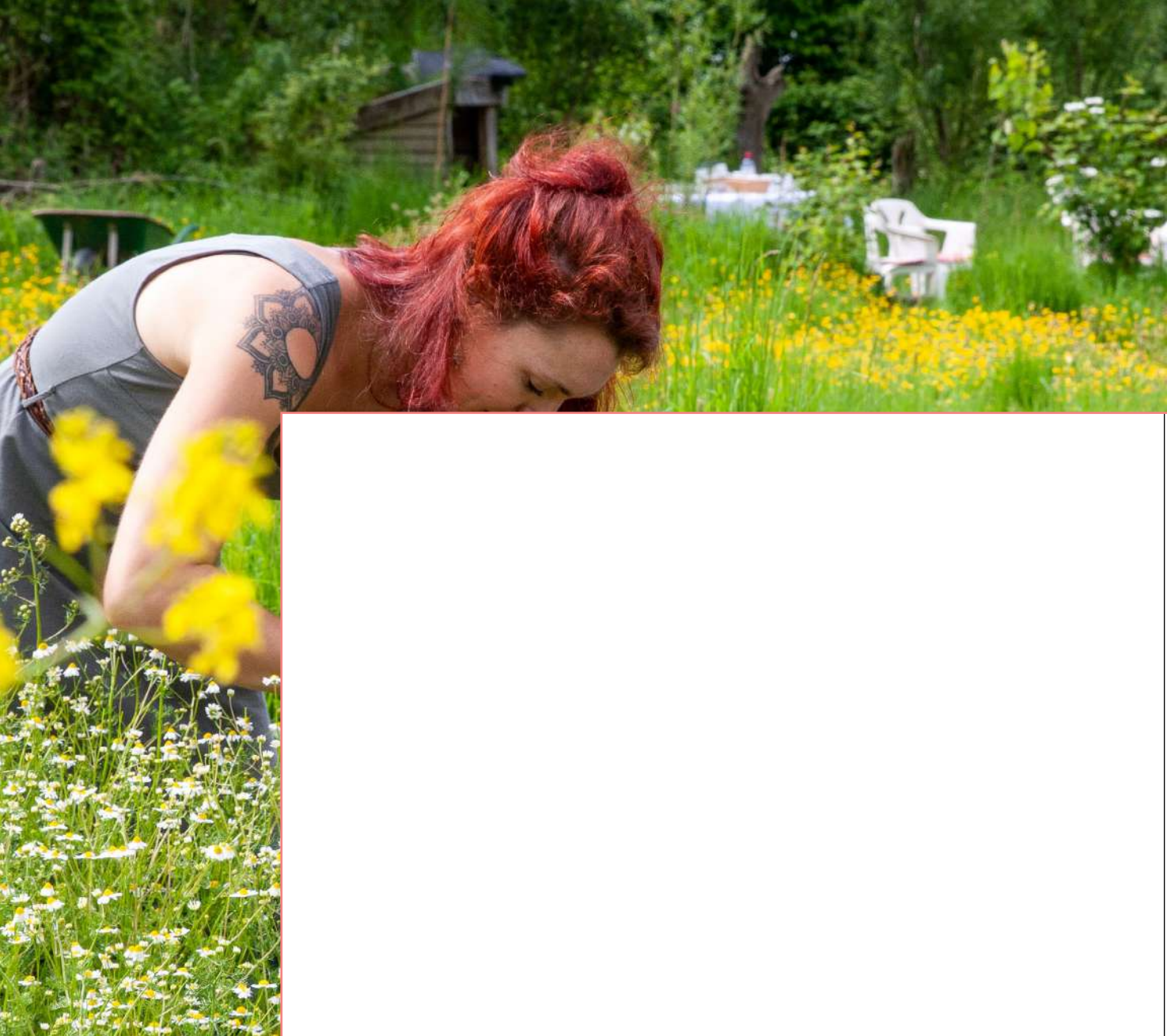






INTERVIEWS





HANNAH GIRVAN

At the timberyard the woodland is young. Ash, Oak and Redwood. As you clear the canopy you can see the spaces between the trees where the ash has died back or been removed. It feels quite a brutal change really. Ash is such a brilliant wood to work with – straight grain, easy and reliable to use. The dieback has really changed how we'll make things from UK woodland species. Pickled softwoods, African hardwoods and knotty oaks are used more but the social and environmental cost of this remains unclear to me.

Working in Dartmoor you hear so many birds throughout the day and visit properties that are designed for the environment – stony Devonshire cobblestone with mossy growths entwining. The wild ponies often get curious when we're on site and come see what's going on. I moved from Iceland which has a similar stony wet landscape, making me feel immediately connected to the land on arrival.

I feel like I have roots. If I work too far from green spaces I feel all wrong; stretching myself, tired, sad and generally rubbish. I left a corporate role to connect with my body and the land. Now working as a joiner and on a timberyard, I get to understand the full cycle of a tree. Planting saplings, checking signs of healthy growth, cutting and drying timber, turning the timber into parts of a home and seeing humans in the home interact with the wood. Houses on the Moors are rooted in the land. Parts of the habitat exist inside the home such as doors, stone fireplaces, twigs in the insulation, and even nesting birds.

Seeing ancient human – land interactions and practices continue today feels comforting and like the morphing of the past and present. Knowing some of the trees planted or the items made will outlive me feels cyclical too. I feel rooted.

@sunturnd on instagram





BEN ANDREWS

All sides of my family have farmed in Herefordshire or the neighbouring counties for centuries. Mostly as tenant farmers like today, where I farm on the edge of the market town of Leominster with my dad whose grandfather took on the tenancy in the 1930s. The River Arrow flows through the farm like farming runs through my veins. But like the water that travels from our farm to the Lugg then the Wye in the south of the county, my family's time here is temporary. I hope we will always be custodians of the land in some capacity, producing food and caring for the environment. If not here then somewhere close by. The river brings benefits and challenges. Extensive flooding covers a third of the farm for up to six months of the year, but it's a lifeline for irrigating our vegetable and flower crops. Intensive agriculture and urban development have poisoned much of the waterways of the Lugg Valley, but being organic we're still fortunate to support ample invertebrate aquatic life which in turn supports fish and the otters and birds that feed on them.

We've been organic for 20 years and feel a mixed organic system works best for us and the land. We farm beef, cereals, vegetables and cut flowers as well as agri-environment schemes to ensure we make space for wildlife to thrive whilst still producing food. What we farm and how we do it is fluid and has changed considerably in the time I've been involved. We have to adapt to new challenges – economic and environmental, and I feel that the resilience we need comes from reducing our reliance on external inputs. We grow what works for the land, not what we feel we should be growing. There's so much more work to be done, and so much I still want to improve. I honestly believe there's not been a more exciting time in the last 40 years to work the land. There's so much lost knowledge from our past that can inform how we should be farming in the future.

KYLÉE FORT

It was a mess when my partner and I took it on. The first year consisted of battling the Brambles and Nettles, getting used to the constant hum of Nettle stings and slices from the aggressive shark toothed Brambles. Trying to figure out the land – what was there. A Greengage tree, Rhubarb, Gooseberries, Raspberries, Strawberries, Salsify, Jerusalem Artichokes, Marjoram, Mint, Horseradish. All still alive but slightly suffocating. We didn't want to rotovate and start again – not with all of the plastic pollution and carpet that was placed here to suppress the 'weeds'. It has been painstaking, like unravelling insight into the previous tenant, learning why they planted Salsify, Strawberry and Jerusalem Artichoke in one place. Was it intentional? We are trying to feed the land and hope that we have brought it into a better state than we found it with minimum disruption to the soil.

The space has taught me so much, about myself, about resilience. It was a lifeline to me during the pandemic. It gave me purpose. It is a place to experiment. We have repurposed and reused as much as we can. We are making the walls for a found materials hut with last year's Raspberry and Elderflower canes. The 6 baths already here house our Tomatoes in the patched-up greenhouse. The plot is wonky, it is far from perfect – but I wouldn't want it any other way. I have learned about seeds, how to save them, that it's an act of rebellion, seeing the power in that tiny speck, how much potential and new life it holds. I was inspired to grow by the wonderful late Esiah Levy through his seed swap initiative. I would love to have a larger patch of land and make this my work. I am using this land to learn in the hope of getting there.

@allotmentkylee on Instagram





ELSIE HARP

I grow flowers and herbs on a peri-urban community farm in Bristol, lulled gently by the constant hum of the M32. I am part of a collective of growers who have occupied land ear-marked for development by a community action group. It's around 3.5 acres, and acts as wildlife corridor, and I share land with roe deer, badgers and bats, along with the non-corporeal beings in the space. I feel blessed to have access to green space in the city, and my favourite thing about the land is how it makes me feel. I feel connected to the land, to my community and to myself. Working in a community space like this does come with some challenges. The vision is in constant flux, and the lack of security is a concern. We are in the middle of a housing crisis, and so I hear the need for affordable, ecological homes, but access to land in its elementality is equally important for human life.

I work the land because the land calls to me. It has been the only constant in my life, for as long as I can remember. Over the years I have had the opportunity to develop an intimate relationship with the plant kingdom, and it continues to intrigue and fascinate me. It's infinitely creative, resilient, and constantly communicating with us. My background is in mental health. More recently I ran an ecotherapy project for young people, and so my interest is in the intersection between the personal and the transpersonal experiences we can have in nature. I grow flowers with the intention of seeding hope and healing in my community. We have an innate, biological reaction to beauty and awe, and flowers facilitate those moments so readily. Flowers hold unique energetic signatures, as well as mathematical patterns found throughout the fabric of the universe, so to work with flowers is to work with the flow of life itself, and thats pretty f*cking cool.

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NAVARATNAM PARTHEERAN

The animals that I support range from cows and sheep to pigs, chickens and alpacas. They vary from small farms of 1 or 2 animals to larger farms with 1000's of animals. I have a real passion for cows who are very inquisitive animals. The diversity in breeds of cow makes farming interesting with Belted Galloways being my favorite, shortly followed by Holstein Friesians. I did have a small flock of sheep that were all orphan lambs. Animals that have been hand reared are extra friendly and will follow you around the yard. Unfortunately, my sheep were not scared of anything and would regularly walk through an electric fence, breaking it and letting out all the other sheep. This did lead to me having to use extra fencing to keep them in.

It has been and is still my passion to work closely with livestock. With cows being so sacred in my religion and animals playing a huge part in my culture, I feel that supporting and helping them as a farm veterinary surgeon is my life's calling. There are never two days the same which means I am always learning and enjoying my time with them. As a vet, I can promote and support their health and welfare which is essential for them thriving. Sometimes it is a struggle to keep motivated when the weather is cold and rainy, and you have no cover to protect you, but that's a small price to pay for the privilege of being able to work all year outdoors. The highlight of my job is delivering new life into this world and being able to see them grow and flourish.





MARIAM SALAH

We feel lucky to be stewarding a herb garden that is already 5 years old. There are already lots of amazing perennials and herbs that keep self seeding, and come back more gloriously each year, like the Chamomile patch and Elecampane. So I feel the garden has more of a wild feel to it and it's really exciting when we're weeding and we spot a Mullein or Mugwort that we didn't plant, and we're like "yeah you can just stay there nestled amongst the Lavender".

Alongside the herb beds we also manage a wildflower meadow for wildlife. Our fire space/hang out spot is tucked into the meadow and it feels so magical to be hidden amongst the tall grass and flowers.

It has also been a challenge learning how to manage a wildflower meadow for the first time, and we hope next year to really increase the diversity of wild flowers.

Myself (Mariam) took on the garden last year and alongside Ruby we have transformed the space into a community garden with the aim of making the herbs and knowledge of herbal medicine and growing accessible to all in our community. I (Mariam) grew up in London without much access to nature, so everything we do is really around increasing accessibility. We run regular volunteer days and community medicine making workshops and I work really hard to make the garden a safe and inclusive space, particularly for BIPOC folk and parents with small children as we're both mums with small children!

It brings us so much joy to be outdoors in white rural England yet be in a space that is multicultural. We eat together on our volunteer days. We've created a culture here where we take care of each other's kids so mums can have a break and garden, it's really beautiful!

KARIS BEATTIE

I am the tenant of a croft in Lewis in the Western Isles. The land consists of one 2 acre section of better land called the 'in-bye', where I can grow veg, fruit and trees. There are another 2 acres of the croft up a steep hill only accessible by foot, and this is much rougher grazing, but the sheep love getting on to eat the heather here. As a crofter I also have a share in the large common grazings of the village which is moorland split in to 3 sections. We graze our sheep here at different times of year and gather them in together. Sheep gather days are my favourite. The land in Lewis is challenging for growing crops, but I now have a polycrub (polycarbonate tunnel) which allows me to grow lots of things which require protection from the elements and some warmth.

I don't come from an agricultural background, but after firstly having a small allotment I found a passion for growing and managing the land, which is what led me in to crofting. Crofting is done part-time alongside paid employment in my day job, and some tasks such as sheep gathering are still done communally with others in the village. I get a lot of joy from learning skills from more experienced crofters in my village, and feeling a sense of achievement at getting more knowledgeable myself, the longer I am working the land. I enjoy the fruits of my labour in the veg I grow myself, meat I rear and peats I cut for the fire.





ANNA BARRETT

The land which I work is an intensively farmed plot of 2 acres in Barrow Gurney, near Bristol. Many of the other tenanted plots are farmed using pesticides and chemical fertilisers, but I trained to grow organically and am keen to help promote diversity on farms and in the food system. The neighbouring natural beekeeper is very keen on the meadow which we keep as over half of the plot, it's humming with life and I saw a hare the other day which was a first!

I work the land to use my hands, be in my body in the elements, feed people and be creative. I find that land-based work suits my mental health better than working in a dark theatre which is what I used to do. The market garden is rented for solely supplying a green Michelin starred restaurant (@wilsonsbristol) and it's just as creative as my previous career, with much better food! As a queer person I also find that I can bring my whole self to this particular place of work, and am working on increasing representation within farming by making publications like this. It has been so rewarding meeting all of the participants and hearing their stories, everyone has been so generous.

@theannaseed on Instagram

NAOMI LEAKE

One of the pleasures of stewarding our land is that we do it as a community. Fifty two people live at Old Hall including fourteen children. We live in one colossal building that has been a manor house, a nunnery and finally a monastery before the hippies bought it in the 70's. We have no ethos or charismatic leader. We just farm the 72 acres of land organically and are mostly sustainable in fruit and vegetables, meat and dairy.

One of the agonies of stewarding our land is also that we do it as a community. The economy of our food production and processing makes more and more sense in a world dealing with climate change and an ecological crisis. Not everyone can live like this I know that but I am glad that places like Old Hall exist, that other ideas about how to live are being tried out.

At Old Hall one can try out many different land based jobs. When we had lots of piglets, my daughter and other children would come and feed them with me, scratch their backs and be there when we moved them from site to site. Now the pigs are big and boisterous I'm a little scared to get in and feed them and the kids are no longer interested. I no longer sign up to feed them but if we have more piglets I will.

I love processing the beans either on my own, listening to a book when I'm podding in the greenhouses, or with the kids round a kitchen table. I used to milk our cows which is done twice a day by hand. I made cheese once. I like splitting wood, the Potato harvest which we all do together makes me feel like a peasant - in the best way. Fruit picking is another favourite.

Intergenerational land activities bring me joy. I feel we are equipping the next generation with an understanding they are going to need about the natural world, about working together, other species and the complexity of it all. I tell my daughter that beans are the future and she just laughs at me!





Image credits

Cover: Compost heap, Anna Barrett, Bristol, UK

Image 1: Community, Totnes Community Herbal, South Devon, UK

Image 2: Flower harvest, Elsie Harp & Tasha Hylton, Bristol, UK

Image 3: Meadow, Ben Andrews, Herefordshire, UK

Image 4: Feeding the pigs, Naomi Leake, Suffolk, UK

Image 5: Flower harvest, Kylee Fort, Sheffield, UK

Image 6: Watering, Mariam and son, South Devon, UK

Image 7: Cutting peat, Karis Beattie, Isle of Lewis, Scotland, UK

Image 8: Making tea, Ruby and daughter, South Devon, UK

Image 9: Lettuce field, Ben Andrews, Herefordshire, UK

Image 10: In the workshop, Hannah Girvan, Devon, UK

Image 11: Leg and Devon shovel, Anna Barrett, Bristol, UK

Image 12: Hay Barn, Naomi Leake, Suffolk, UK

Image 13: Herding sheep, Karis Beattie, Isle of Lewis, Scotland, UK

Image 14: Rhubarb harvest, Anna Barrett, Bristol, UK

Image 15: By the polytunnel, Karis Beattie, Isle of Lewis, Scotland, UK

Image 16: Cattle shed, Navaratnam Partheeban, Essex, UK





















This project was conceived and executed by Anna Barrett (@theannaseed) and Gwen Hendry (@gwenyowl) both members of Out On The Land, the LGBTQIA+ member led group within Landworkers' Alliance.

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landinournames.community
@landinournames

Landworkers' Alliance, the union of farmers & land-based workers.
landworkersalliance.org.uk
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