

FarmStart is a multi-level training programme that supports people to become small-scale organic commercial growers, supplying Greater Manchester with fresh, local and organic produce.

FARMSTART



The
Kindling Trust

Igniting passion & fuelling action for social change

ABOUT OUR MULTI-LEVEL TRAINING PROGRAMME

For two days a week you'll be based at our 2 acre site at Woodbank in Stockport. You'll be guided through this process by our FarmStart Co-ordinator and have the benefit of an army of volunteers helping you throughout the growing season.

Level 1

Running from February to October, the aim of Level 1 is to provide practical experience in commercial growing - to help participants decide if this is what they want to do - and to build a solid foundation of knowledge, confidence and experience to develop trainees' skills as small-scale commercial growers.

Progression from Level 1

Progression on the programme can be flexible depending on needs and circumstances, however, we strongly advise participants stay on the programme for more than one season before setting out to establish their own growing business. This is both to experience the huge variability (weather, crop success/failure, fluctuating customer demand) that occurs over successive seasons; and to take advantage of this supported, low risk environment to build up the experience, skill, technique and speed needed to make a farming business commercially viable.

Levels 2 and 3

For those who decide that commercial growing is for them, Level 2 aims to embed year-one learning and further develop commercial growing skills. Level 2 starts with crop planning sessions in November, trainees then join us on site from January to the end of the season. As well as continuing with practical training and experience through increased responsibilities on the growing site, this level focuses on the 'non-growing' elements of commercial horticulture, from finances and record keeping to site maintenance and infrastructure development.

Level 2 builds further on the practical skills but additionally focuses on the non field-based elements of becoming an independent grower. Classroom training and support will be given on soil and site assessments, business planning and finance forecasting and analysis. A final full year of crop planning, plant raising, tending and harvesting gives participants the best chance to see the huge variables that occur in growing from year to year, from changeable weather to shifting patterns in customer demand.

Level 3 is about supporting you to become an independent grower on your own area of land. Classroom training will focus on broader skills like financial forecasting, marketing and business planning. We will support you to explore your own enterprise ideas and begin developing a business plan, with an emphasis on cooperation both within your own project and with other local growers and customers.

Our FarmStart programme offers a unique training programme, working at an organic market garden learning how to become a commercial organic grower. With a mixture of classroom and practical training, you'll gain knowledge on everything from soil nutrition, to managing pests and disease, to crop planning for a commercial operation.



► Time Commitment

Trainees are asked to commit two days a week to the programme from the start of February to the end of October. Participants must be available on Wednesdays, plus either Tuesdays or Thursdays.

As for any commercial grower, the length of the working day varies depending on daylight hours. In the Summer we start at 8 am, where as days in February will be shorter.

The majority of this time will be hands-on practical learning in the field, through working alongside our experienced FarmStart Co-ordinator and fellow trainees for the duration of a full growing season.



Classroom training

Subjects covered over the three levels include:

- Food hygiene, farm health and safety.
- Safe tool use, storage and maintenance.
- Organic standards and requirements.
- Soil and fertility.
- Crop planning and estimating yields.
- Harvesting, storing and packaging produce.
- Crop pricing
- Financed and record keeping
- Forecasting and analysis
- Marketing
- Business planning

► Practical Experience of Commercial Growing

The major part of the programme is hands-on practical learning, growing produce for sale to Manchester Veg People and Veg Box People; two cooperatives established and supported by The Kindling Trust. We also sell our produce to Unicorn Grocery in Chorlton and to local residents on site. Income from these sales helps fund the FarmStart programme.

During the season we grow in polytunnels and on the field. Participants are involved in all aspects of production, from propagation to harvest as well as the daily tasks of site maintenance, tool care, weeding and so on. Training and tasks are carried out as a team, in pairs and individually. Trainees are given the opportunity to take on greater responsibility for specific tasks as the year goes on.



▲ Physical Demands

FarmStart is a physically demanding programme, including lifting, bending, repetitive movement, tool use, long days and working in all weathers. This is a window into the reality of life as a commercial grower!

We support you by providing training and support with correct tool use, protective equipment and the safest and most efficient ways of carrying out tasks.



◀ Farm Visits

Two visits to organic farm businesses in the region supply participants with an understanding of different commercial models, growing approaches and scale of operations.

HOW TO APPLY ►

Applying to join FarmStart

- ▶ Applications for FarmStart open each Autumn. Applicants must attend one of our "Do you want to be an organic farmer" sessions. We also advise applicants to volunteer with Kindling's Land Army before they apply, both to see if this is for them and to gain additional experience in a commercial setting.
- ▶ We have limited places on the programme and prioritise applicants with some previous growing experience, be that as seasonal labour, volunteering on farms or trying out growing at an allotment scale.
- ▶ Applications are made via an online form found on the Kindling website: <https://kindling.org.uk/Farmstart/ApplicationForm>
- ▶ We inform applicants on the outcome of the selection process in mid-November.
- ▶ The cost of the programme is £600 a year, plus a £100 deposit.
- ▶ Some years we are able to offer subsidised places for those on a low income, or for whom the cost is a real barrier. Please get in touch with us if you are concerned about the cost of the programme.
- ▶ If you have any further questions please don't hesitate to contact us: FarmStart@kindling.org.uk

The Growing Site

Woodbank Community Food Hub is home to a family of organisations and activities including Kindling's Social Prescribing Programme, community events and community garden, volunteer days and Stockport Beekeepers. So, as well as being a working commercial growing and training site, it's a real hive of activity with a great variety of people.

Woodbank is certified organic with the Soil Association. We also grow veganically, avoiding animal inputs like manures, relying on green manures and compost to feed the soil. Field production involves permanent 25m long beds and we operate a minimum tillage system with a six year crop rotation. We grow a variety of vegetables that responds to the demand of our varied markets while providing as full a training experience as possible.



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The Kindling Trust is a social enterprise with charitable aims, working to create a fairer, healthier, more sustainable food system for all; from the growers producing our food, to the communities eating it.

▶ For more information about our work please visit: kindling.org.uk

▶ For more information about FarmStart please visit: kindling.org.uk/FarmStart

