

De-commodifying agriculture: A critical hindsight & foresight analysis of one of the world's oldest CSAs (Community Supported Agriculture Farm Temple Wilton, NH, USA)



Coventry University (CU) is inviting applications from suitably-qualified graduates for a fully funded PhD studentship (subject to completion of contracts*).

Funding	Bursary plus tuition fees (UK/EU)
Start Date	May 2019
Duration of Study	Full Time – between three and three and a half years fixed term

Background

Temple Wilton Community farm (www.twcfarm.com) in New Hampshire, USA is one of the oldest CSAs in the world. A CSA is a community supported agriculture scheme. Although, communal and community agriculture have existed at least since the reformation, e.g. Schleithemer Bekenntnis Switzerland (1525), *Bruderhöfe* and various types of community farms of Mennonites in Europe and the Americas. Later, in the early 20th century, biodynamic farms like Hof-Community Marienhöhe (www.hofmarienhoehe.de) existed since 1928 in Weimar Germany, 4 years after Rudolf Steiner's historic *Landwirtschaftlicher Kurs* on biological agriculture at Koberwitz near Breslau, Silesia, Poland (1924). However, the birth of the modern concept of CSA where the community is not only rural and connects farming with urban dwellers and many other professions then farming can be traced back to the ideas of Trauger Groh and kindred spirits like Lincoln Geiger and Anthony Graham starting the Temple Wilton CSA (1985), more than 30 years ago. Therefore, the farm provides a long-term timeline and study material for the ups and downs of this movement and the attempts to de-commodify agriculture. It triggers profound research questions like is there a new association between consumer, farmer and the earth in which cooperation is the principle, thereby decoupling the notion of crops being traded under a unit cost and being commodified under the economics of scale 'rule', as if it is a law of nature. Ecological economics

thinking on entropy and the de-growth school of thought, going back to the Rumanian Nicholas Georgescu-Roegen's work 'Entropy Law and the Economic Process' (1971), indicate that this cannot be the case long-term. There are several more works of ecological economists being mathematicians and statisticians like Georgescu-Roegen with abstract theories on the subject. However, what is lacking is a long-term 'reality-check' where principles and ideas akin to this new economic thinking are actually used to run a farm business and feeding the supporting community over many years and generations. This research, going beyond the state-of-the-art, will contribute to this knowledge gap and propose new ways of social business management for farms and other businesses or charities, grounded in practice and theory.

Research Questions

- What are the strength and weakness of the Temple Wilton?
- How have they developed and what detailed lessons can be learned from a 30-year long term perspective?
- How does Temple Wilton compare with other CSAs and community led businesses in the world?
- How can the practical and theoretical lessons learned shape the trajectory of Temple Wilton and, particularly interesting, other community led businesses and the wider de-commodification and transition to a post-capitalist global economy?

Programme and methodology

The research will adopt a mixed-method transdisciplinary research approach. For the case-study farm analysis it will start with classical farm economics, analysis of balance sheets, P&L accounts. Then it will add further layers of deeper analysis, yields, inputs, labour, education, eco-system services, combining natural and social science approaches. Then, going further, it will use social return on investment methodology (SROI). This will first capture the values of the CSA funders, ongoing value change over 30-years and then measure and quantify the outcomes against the values of the CSA. This will give an intrinsic (internal to the community values) value-based measurement of environmental, social and spiritual outputs. Because it is also monetised it can be compared to farm business data and capture the de-commodification of agriculture, while equally critically analysing it.

While Temple Wilton will be studied in detail, other selected CSA and literature data will be used to compare and contrast the results with other CSAs. A comparative case-study method will be employed and comparative methods e.g. SWOT analysis will be conducted. In the foresight part mixed modelling (socio-economic and political) will be used to map the trajectory of Temple Wilton in the next 30 years but also develop wider holistic models and policies for key factors and impulses for de-commodification and transition to a post-capitalist economy in agriculture and food systems , eventually on a global level.

Training and Development

The successful candidate will receive comprehensive research training including technical, personal and professional skills.

All researchers at Coventry University (from PhD to Professor) are part of the Doctoral College and Centre for Research Capability and Development, which provides support with high-quality training and career development activities.

To find out more about the project please contact [Dr. Ulrich Schmutz \(ab6217@coventry.ac.uk\)](mailto:ab6217@coventry.ac.uk)

Entry criteria for applicants to PHD

- A minimum of a 2:1 first degree in a relevant discipline/subject area with a minimum 60% mark in the project element or equivalent with a minimum 60% overall module average.
PLUS
the potential to engage in innovative research and to complete the PhD within a 3.5 years
- a minimum of English language proficiency (IELTS overall minimum score of 7.0 with a minimum of 6.5 in each component)

How to Apply (Expressions of Interest subject to signing of contract)

This position has been advertised pending finalisation of contracts. Expressions of interest are invited and can be submitted to [Dr. Ulrich Schmutz \(ab6217@coventry.ac.uk\)](mailto:ab6217@coventry.ac.uk)

To apply, please see:

<https://www.coventry.ac.uk/research/research-students/making-an-application/>

Candidates submitting full applications to this position prior to the notification on this site, may please take heed of a possibility that this opportunity may be withdrawn.

