Permaculture Farm Project

Survey Results
&
Phase One Project Design

January 2012

Section One

Key results and observations from the permaculture farming project survey, released November 2011.

Part One

- Who answered the survey?
- How much farming experience do they have?
- What size holdings and farms do respondents have?
- What are their main activities?

Figure 1. Chart showing how survey respondents would best describe themselves. 89% of the 110 respondents described themselves as farmers or smallholders.

Figure 2. Farming experience of survey respondents

Figure 3. Main activities of respondents and frequency of occurrence
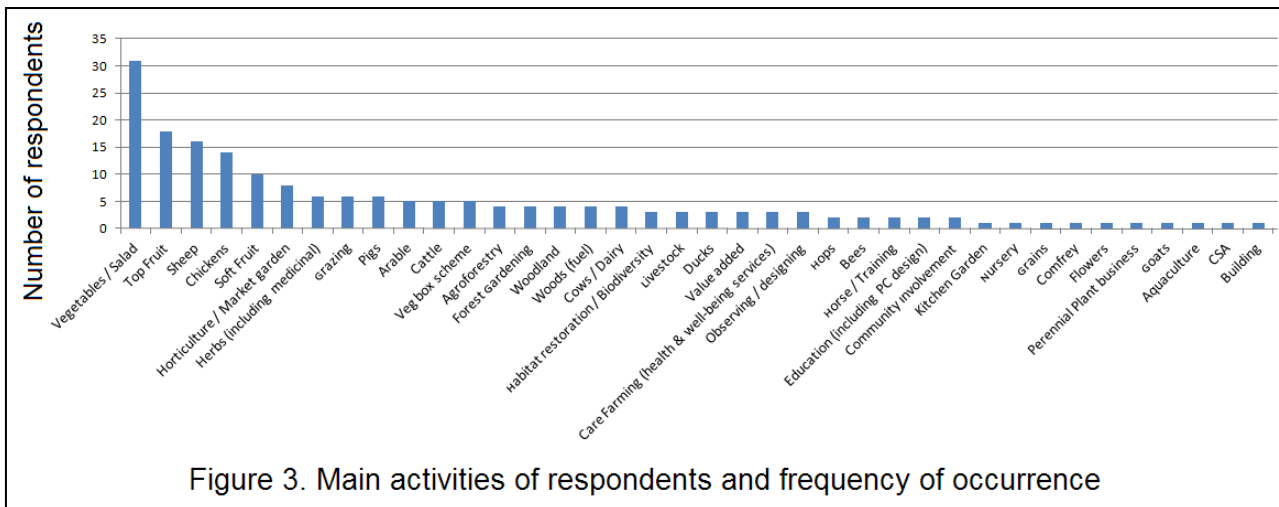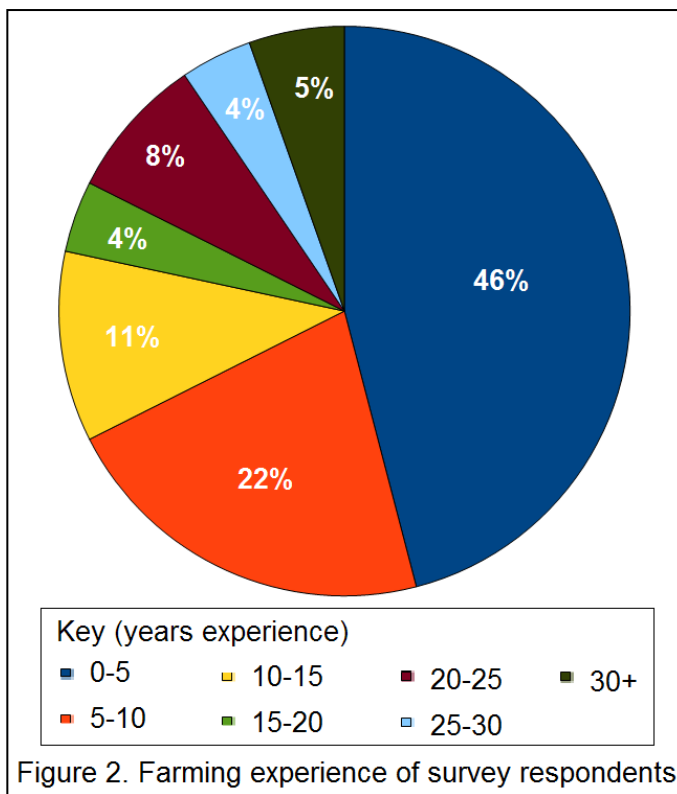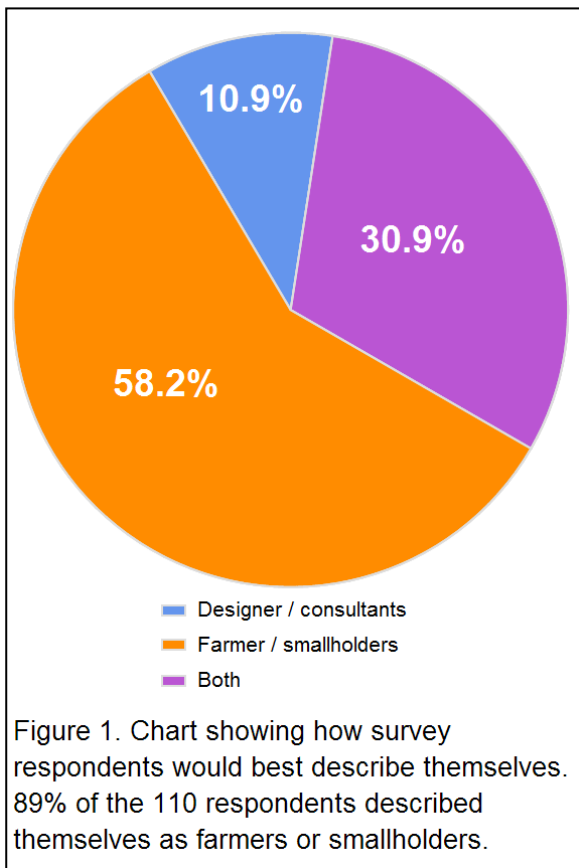
Bin (acres)	Number of respondents	% of total acreage	% of total respondents
0-5	18	1%	25%
5-10	14	2%	19%
10-25	18	5%	25%
25-50	8	5%	11%
50-100	9	12%	12%
100-300	5	21%	7%
300+	1	53%	1%

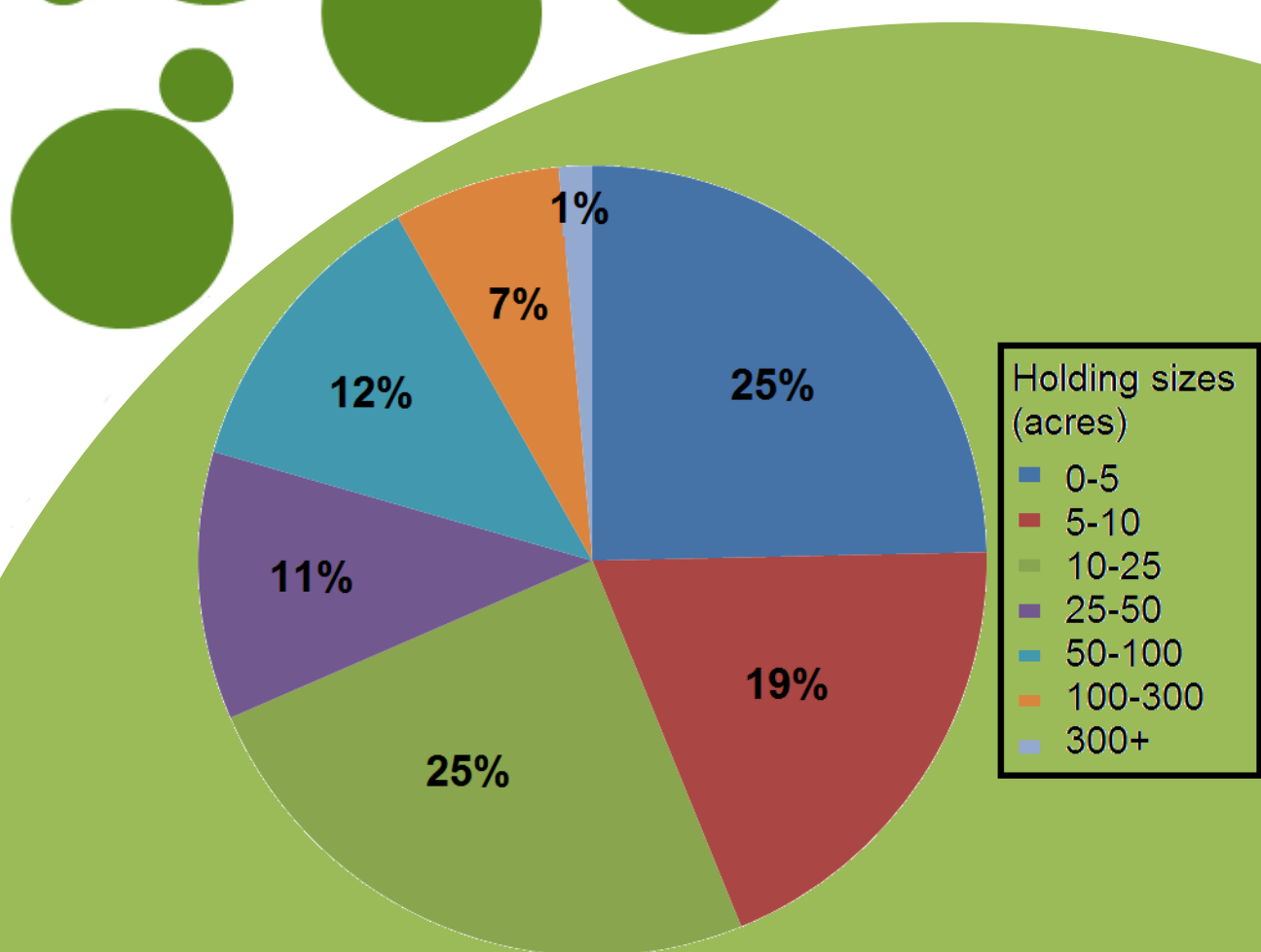Table 1. Holding sizes of survey respondents

Figure 4. Proportion of respondents on different sized holdings

Summary

Interesting findings about who answered the survey include the fact that nearly half of respondents have less than five years farming experience (Fig 2). In addition, nearly 70% of the survey respondents have holdings smaller than 25 acres (Table 1). These two facts suggest that this project should, at least in the main part, focus on supporting new entrant smallholders to learn how to incorporate permaculture in the design and running of their holding.

Also significant, however, was the level of respondents due to inherit large family farms and keen to learn how permaculture could be applied on a much larger scale. This highlights the importance of considering succession planning as another key aspect of this project design, as it is broadly the case that very large farms tend to be family-owned and thus will only pass to the management of another through inheritance.

The graph of main farming activities shows that respondents are clearly involved in a diverse range of activities (fig 3), with many listing two, three or more as central to their farming work. However, this question received inconsistent responses, with some people answering with only one word (typically, "mixed"), others giving much more detail. Therefore, the value of these results is questionable and arguably we still do not have sufficient understanding of what people are doing on their land in order to best direct our support.

Part Two
- What are the aims of the survey respondents?
- What challenges are farmers and smallholders currently facing?
- What skills and experience do we have already in the permaculture network?
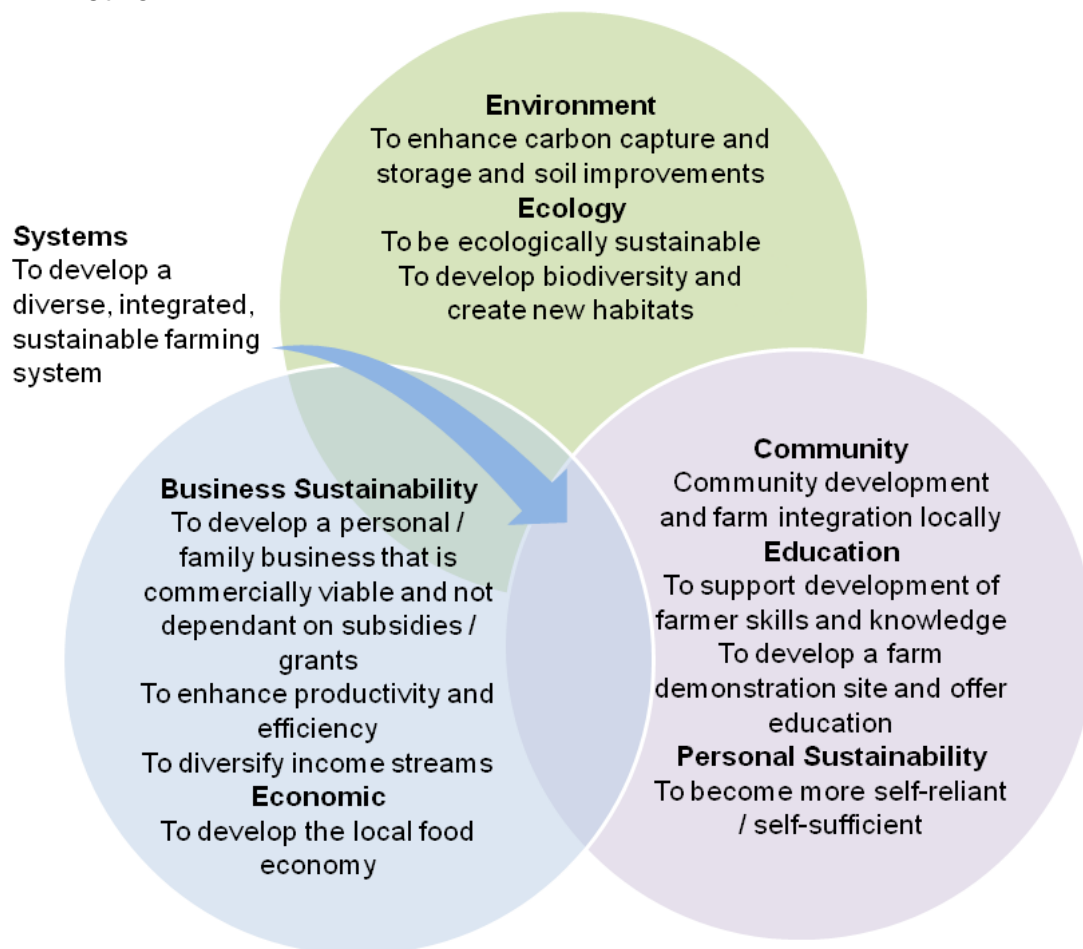

Systems
To develop a diverse, integrated, sustainable farming system

Environment
To enhance carbon capture and storage and soil improvements
Ecology
To be ecologically sustainable
To develop biodiversity and create new habitats

Business Sustainability
To develop a personal / family business that is commercially viable and not dependant on subsidies / grants
To enhance productivity and efficiency
To diversify income streams
Economic
To develop the local food economy

Community
Community development and farm integration locally
Education
To support development of farmer skills and knowledge
To develop a farm demonstration site and offer education
Personal Sustainability
To become more self-reliant / self-sufficient

Figure 5. Summary of broad aims listed by survey respondents.

Summary

The survey elicited a wide range of broad aims and specific goals that people are working to achieve on their farms and smallholdings (fig 5). While there was a lot of overlap between respondents, ultimately people will have their own priorities, which at times may conflict with others'. Awareness of this diversity is important in order to be able to design a project that suits as many different needs as possible.

Challenges and Opportunities

The following sections summarise the challenges and opportunities described in survey responses. 'Challenges' refers to any of the major obstacles respondents have faced and would like this project to help them overcome. 'Opportunities' is a term we have derived from the survey question that asked respondents to tell us what elements of their holdings are working well or have been successful in the past. This elicited a wide range of responses; indicating the high level of skill, innovation and achievement already occurring in the permaculture network. This project aims to harness these opportunities in order to address the challenges currently being faced by permaculture farmers and smallholders.

Please have a look through the challenges and opportunities, considering which you feel ought to be the priorities for this project and how they might be best tackled.

Challenges – things that are holding us back as a network	Use this space for notes or comments
Business development	

Policy and planning issues
Planning permission
       Ability to live on-site
       Lack of support for low-impact living
       Achieving change-of-use permission
       Conservation rules and regulations
Access to advice
Access to land	

Farm conversion process Design skills: knowing the options and making choices	
Project management skills Managing staff and volunteers Marketing	
Land management skills Learning horticultural skills Acquiring appropriate tools and equipment	
Lack of start-up capital Finding grant aid Delaying planning and implementation To establish structural infrastructure	
Achieving a sustainable income	
Finding a reliable market Limited local markets Cannot sustain a viable income Consumer apathy / ignorance Competition from / control of supermarkets Turbulence: fluctuating prices Dependence, e.g. on contractors	
Marketing	
Land management skills	
Project management skills Managing staff and volunteers	
Limited Time To design For office work By having two jobs	
Business finances High input costs, e.g. fuel, animal feed, labour, etc. Debt management The need to diversify business activities	

Labour
Availability of skilled growers
Finding (motivated) people
Supporting workers
       Accommodation needs
       Wages: Unviable	

Environmental	
Wind exposure Slowing growth of orchard	

Water
Too much
       Affecting animal health
Too little
       Establishing catchment and storage systems
       Irrigation requirements	

Disease	
Pest management Establishing an integrated system	
Weeds Dealing with annual weeds	
Weather conditions Short growing seasons Harsh winters Erratic climate	
Wild animals Foxes Deer	
Soil Acidity Low fertility Water retention Shallow topsoil Compaction	

Social issues	

Community
Public understanding of contemporary farming issues
       explaining CSA concept
       the role of soil in carbon sequestration
Developing links with local community
       Building relationships and understanding	

Quality of life No leisure time Stress Tough physical work Isolation	
Succession planning Low status of farming / few opportunities for new entrants / old age of farmers	

Opportunities – what we can already do as a network	Use this space for notes or comments
Business development	

Farm-scale design and planning
Policy and planning
      Gaining planning permission for structures, e.g. polytunnels and storage
      Gaining charity status
Permaculture design process going well
      e.g. Zoning, surveying, developing a renewable energy plan
Innovative design, e.g. use of vertical gardens	

Internal learning Attending courses Networking: Local contacts & advice e.g. "My managers have organised for 2 local organic growers to be on hand and act as mentors for any questions we have on the production site."	
Labour Engaging volunteers Finding skilled workers	
Capital Successful grant applications Environmental Stewardship schemes	

Finding a reliable market
Some success found through:
      Farmers' markets
      Veg box schemes
      CSA business model
      Food festivals
      Farm gate sales
      Local co-operative markets
      Supplying local health food shops	

Successful diversified activities, e.g.:
      Fishing
      Accommodation
      Value adding activities	

Succession planning Some success in engaging parents	
Environmental	
Productivity High productivity from established polycultures Good for the amount of labour / inputs Ablility to supply veg boxes soley from farm	

Integrating Perennials
Forest gardens: Successful establishment
Woodland management
      Coppicing improving woodland
      Creating a windbreak	

Soil management	

Soil quality improving through:
       Minimum / No tillage
       Adding organic matter

Pasture management
Multi-species rotational grazing
       Improving biodiversity
       Benefitting animal health

Water management
Improving water regulation by using:
       No-till in dry years
       Mulch layer
Reducing requirements in polytunnel

Pest management
Design and implementation of strategies
       e.g. successful method of catching rats

Livestock
Improving stock
Dairy farming skills

Chickens
Crossing pullets

Bees
Bee keeping skills

Achieving environmental objectives
Improving biodiversity
Habitat creation

Social

Engaging community
Designing and hosting events
       Workshops
       Open days
       Parties
       Gatherings
Care farming

Education
Running courses, e.g. Intro to permaculture, PDCs
Hosting skills events e.g. "Lost Art of Compost Toilets"
Establishing a forest school
Guided short tours

Building Collaborative Local Networks
Attending events
Cooperative approach to land use
       e.g. "Others use our land for bee keeping
       and flower growing which dovetails quite
       well with the veg"

Section Two
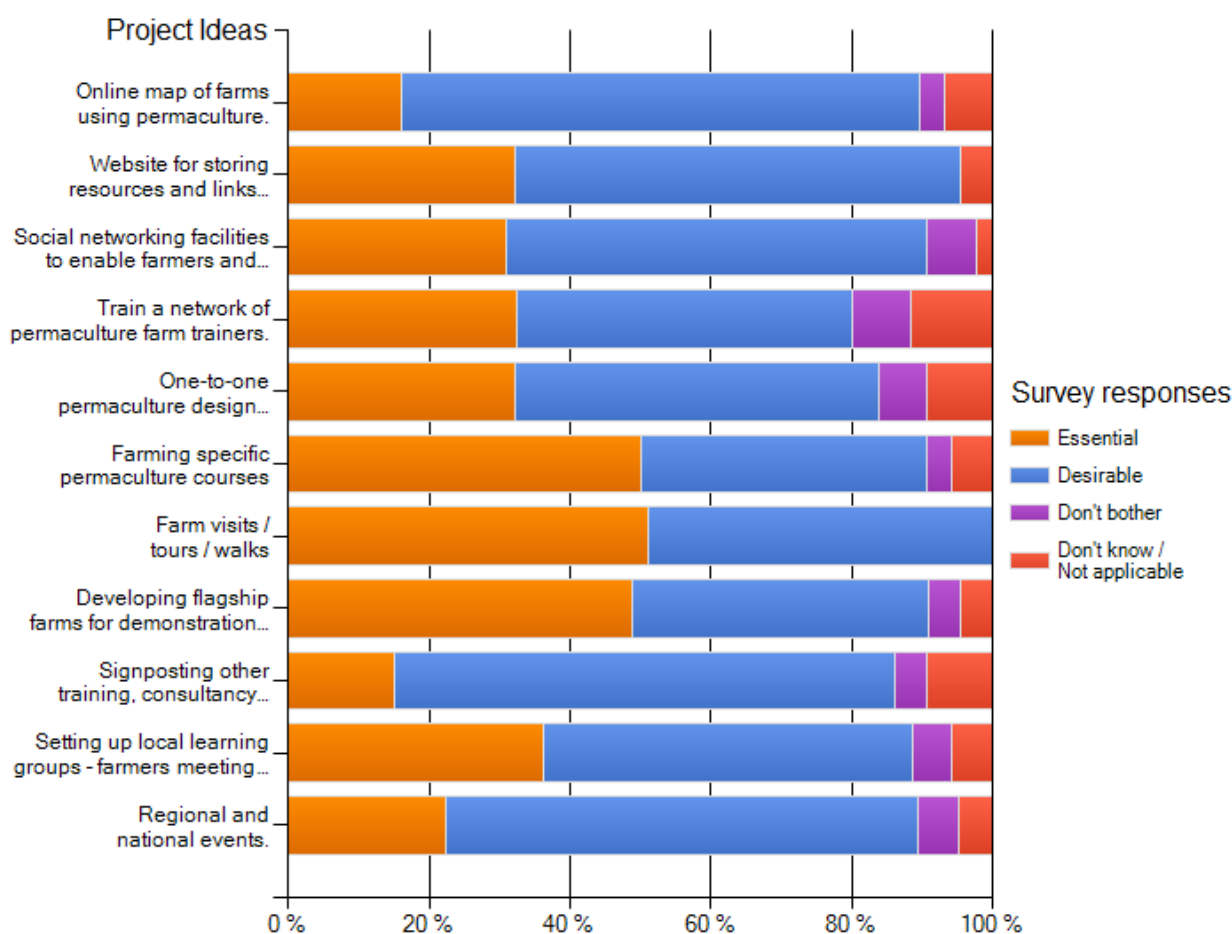
Phase One Project Design

Figure 6. Potential project ideas as rated by respondents.

When considering the potential project ideas, it can be seen that some ideas are more popular than others, e.g. 'farm visits / tours / walks' was rated as either *essential* or *desirable* by all respondents, suggesting it should be considered a priority (fig 6). In contrast, the idea that received the most negative responses was 'train a network of permaculture farm trainers', so on this occasion can perhaps be disregarded. However, overall there does not appear to be any clear winners or losers. This may be due to different interpretations of the ideas put forward, and may also reflect the diverse needs and requirements of respondents.

Given this complexity, we have decided not to disregard any of the ideas at this stage of the project design, but explore further the practical options for delivering the ideas.

Comments from the survey have been integrated into the project ideas, so that some have already been developed further. We now want you to look through the ideas already listed and comment on which ideas this project should focus on and how they could be effectively delivered. Now is the time for prioritising the ideas and clarifying the details of delivery.

The diagram below displays the ideas in an alternative way, considering the ways in which each may contribute to supporting farm-based or online learning and networking within the project. You may find this a useful way to decide which idea(s) ought to be focused on in this project design.

Type of knowledge exchange	Where	
	Farm / land based	**Online**
Practical	- Farm visits / tours / farm walks - Farming specific permaculture courses - Developing flagship farms for demonstration and learning - One-to-one permaculture design support for farmers - Train a network of permaculture farm trainers.	- Website for storing resources and links to other initiatives and resources. - Signposting other training, consultancy and advice - Case studies and reports
Networking	Facilitating face-to-face networking - Local learning groups: people meeting to exchange experiences, improve their own activities and realise their visions - Regional and national events for information sharing.	Facilitating self-organised learning - Online maps of permaculture practitioners, projects, case studies. - Social networking facilities to enable farmers and permaculturalists to self-organise, share information and experiences. - National 'themed' learning groups, e.g. based on similar size holdings; soil types, etc.

Farming project ideas and practical options for delivery

Project activity	Options to deliver it	Your comments and notes
Online networking ideas: creating a platform for farmers to share knowledge and skills		
Support farmers to set up local learning groups and national 'themed' learning groups: farmers meeting to exchange experiences, improve their own activities and realise their visions	• Local learning groups: Connecting people up to others nearby or on similar holdings – matchmaking system • National learning groups: based on similar size holdings; soil types, etc. • Advice pack for farmers wanting to set up / join a group? (based on experiences of others)	
Social networking facilities to enable farmers and permaculturalists to self-organise, share information, exchange experiences	• Identify existing forums and social networking sites (e.g. RegenAg google) and link to on the website. • For our website make links to: Facebook; Linked in; Twitter; etc • Create forum or google group for project? • 'organic Groups' functionality on website e.g. "permaculture and sheep", seed saving/sharing group, etc. • Use videos, workshopping and exchanging experience from across the world.	
Online map of farms using permaculture	• Google map based on information given via PA web profile *Available to members only?* • *Distinguish different scales / types?* • Tags / taxonomy would be key to find the right places; including e.g. holding size, main activities, skills to share	
Online practical resources & links to others		

Website for storing resources and links to other initiatives	• Use existing websites - develop farming section of Permaculture Association website:
	
	    • Develop signposting – taxonomy and tags.
	
	    • Practical resources – may need 'drop box' for larger resources.
	
	    • Indication of how well tried the idea is – e.g. "it works, go for it", or "needs researching"	

Case studies and reports	• Specific angle (e.g. zone 2, planning permission, community funding and/or support of local sustainable agriculture) or specific places (e.g. Ragmans Lane) • Good practice guides?	

Signposting other training, consultancy and advice, e.g.:
   – marketing
   – funding & financial planning
   – design skills/ courses
   – specialist advice
	• Via website (& e-bulletin?)
	
	• Develop Association consultancy / brokerage	

Farm-based practical project ideas		
Farm visits / tours / walks	• Group Visit Scheme (funded for a group)	
	• LAND walks type approach (self-organised, small fee, website used for admin?)	
	• Develop a 3 day tour – minibus and itinerary covering WETsystems, agroforestry, etc.	
Farming specific permaculture courses	• Trial a series of different options – 1 day, 2 day, 3 day.	
	• Connect people to RegenAg course listings, marketed as distinct / connected.	
	• Permaculture farming advocacy pack – presentation plus info for local activists – for farmers meetings etc	
	• Consider internships and apprenticeship opportunties	
Developing flagship farms for demonstration and learning – for farmers *and permaculturalists* to learn about the realities of working at commercial farm scale	• Encourage and support network to do this – use LAND type criteria – FarmLAND project. • Identify other demonstration networks (LEAF etc)	

One-to-one permaculture design support for farmers	• Like LAND Learner support • Shadow designers working on farms; Design partnerships / teams • Use diploma holders to deliver this – but only those with sufficient land based design experience. • Ensure good mix of farmers and permaculture trained people in the project mix.	
Train a network of permaculture farm trainers	• Develop a register of particular skills • Support existing permaculture farmers to learn about ways of promoting it to others. • Farming Connect offers funding in Wales for Whole Farm Planning but they have no advisors for Permaculture, therefore see if we can get permaculture advisors into other people's advice systems.	
Farm / land-based networking ideas		
Regional and national events	• Minimise national events, focus more on local / regional • Work out when best times are to hold events • Attend other people's event – NFU • Host events with other organisations eg OGA	
Other		
Involving people in the running of the project	• Working group • Distributing roles and responsibilities	
link all this in with the existing agricultural colleges and schools with farms	• Signpost college courses • (Farm)LAND centres to host education events (some already doing this) • Teach teachers • Develop apprenticeship scheme	

Send us your feedback

Please email us at farm@permaculture.org.uk with your comments and ideas.

Thank you for taking part in the design of this project.