

## **SUPPORT NEEDED FOR EXPANDING THE AVALACH CENTRE FOR PLANT STUDY TO A VEGAN ORGANIC STOCKFREE GROWING CENTRE**

**Proposal for requesting MCL legacy funding to develop “The Arc Project”,** a building of 121 sq m that would accommodate volunteers and participants on stockfree farming & plant study courses, with a teaching area, toilets and showers and be constructed using eco friendly material. It would also incorporate a glass frontage that would act as a greenhouse.

### **About us**

We are a vegan family of 5 with 3 life vegan boys aged 11, 8 and 2 and we moved to the Isle of Arran from Glasgow 8 years ago for the benefit of our children. My husband, Keith and I set up the Educational Charity, The Scottish School of Herbal Medicine in 1992 with a strong ethos on cruelty free research, environmental awareness in terms of vegan and sustainable horticulture and the energetic philosophy behind the traditional practice of herbal medicine. Through the school, we have been running courses from evening classes and 1 year home help herbal correspondence courses to BSc and MSc University validated programmes.

### **Educational Experience at Drimlabarra Herb Farm**

We have already run many educational plant and landscape study workshops over the last few years, 2 open days and 5 volunteer weeks in 2008 and would be happy to extend these to VON training workshops and VON specific volunteer weeks with other trainers leading all advertised as VON activities on a beautiful, unique site in Scotland. We have extensive experience in teaching vegan nutrition and plants as medicine from our 16 years leadership of the Scottish School of Herbal Medicine and would be happy to run VON events in training in these areas as well as stockfree. A nominal delegate rate of approx £25 full board to cover costs could be charged and leasing of centre for VON and MCL would be inclusive of any funding.

### **Resources available**

We own 16 acres of land. Drimlabarra Herb Farm is sited on 8 acres on the southern tip of the Isle of Arran off the west coast of Scotland. It comprises of single storey house, tool storage shed, plant study workshop, 4 berth caravan, camping field and active stockfree growing area of approximately 1 acre with diverse habitat on other areas e.g. Wetlands and pond, species rich grassland, medicinal trees hedgerow. We have recently installed a ground source heat pump and solar panel and now have geothermal underfloor heating with additional solar heated water. A further 8 acres is located a short distance away further up the glen which has agricultural planning restrictions on it and has been planted with approximately 3000 medicinal trees over the last 5 years. Out of our 8 acre site, we can offer 0.5 acre fruit crop and orchard sheltered garden, 0.6 acres approx existing veg beds and herb garden space and 1 acre in the species rich grassland field surrounded by shelter belt hedgerow specifically for demonstration and working of stockfree farming. The other acreage supplies our own herb growing area, main house and outbuildings including plant study workshop, caravan and camping area (see map of herb farm).

The plant study workshop is approximately 36m<sup>3</sup>, can easily fit up to 20 participants

and we already have 20 foldaway chairs and drawing boards to lean any paper and writing material on. This space has a wood burning stove in it and plenty of natural light as well as mains electricity. Water would need to be piped in or could be accessible from a large container with tap. The workshop could act as a breakout space in the evening for the participants as well as providing a space for tea breaks and lunch by use of a table at the back.

We are at an elevated position with open aspects to the south of the island experiencing the south westerlies coming off the Atlantic, hence we suffer relatively little from midgets compared to more sheltered spots.

We have a rotovator and a compact lawn tractor used for cutting grass as mulch. Any surplus of harvest could be sold at the Farmer's Markets held monthly throughout the summer at the community centre in the next village to the south west. This would also be a good way of advertising open days and the stockfree organic method to our local community. An annual visit aimed at farmers and growers could be easily incorporated into the existing Farming and Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) farm visits organised throughout the summer aimed at farmers participating with FWAG in Ayrshire of which we are members.

We have broadband access Skype video conferencing facilities using a web cam and could perhaps use web casts for training and demonstration.

### **Aims**

This request for funding/support from MCL comes about following a site visit from VON in Oct 08 to discuss the possibility of expanding our already established plant study centre to promote VON's work of demonstrating to market gardeners that the stockfree method is eco-friendly, sustainable and economically viable. We can offer two acres of land for this purpose as well as our experience in running courses and promoting veganism.

The funding requirement of £69,500 would be solely to finance the Arc building project with the greenhouse being the most important aspect of improving our ability to promote stockfree growing to an eventual level of commercial activity. Depending on how the funds are able to be allocated to us, there is the possibility of match funding from the Scottish Rural Development Fund (SRDP). All applications to SRDP are to be made in conjunction with advisory bodies. We are awaiting our meeting with the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) in Feb 2009 to prepare the application with their assistance. Arran has just been granted Croft status as an island which means that if we register as a croft instead of a farm, we are freed from planning restrictions re building any buildings for accommodation. We will be advised by FWAG whether to remain as a registered farm or convert to croft status in terms of SRDP funding.

### **Objectives**

#### **1. Mission Statement**

We would like to promote the whole vegan lifestyle, where stockfree growing is one part and nutrition, food preparation/cooking and health from Nature are also factors.

We are interested in building community where folk support each other and social interactions are encouraged eg. Music, dance, creative arts and ceremonial observation of the seasonal festivals. We want to attract more volunteers, especially vegans and in general create a **sanctuary** where vegans can come and relax in an atmosphere seeped in educational possibilities.

**Our vision is for a Centre for Green Living** with availability of learning menus based on growing, cooking, medicine making and self-help, massage, plant study, nutrition, personal development and personal health consultations.

## **2. Growing local food for Arran's Farmers Market meetings and other outlets**

The development of our centre to include stockfree growing would create educational and monetary opportunities through the local Farmers Market. We already have good relationships with other growers and farmers, especially through the Farming & Wildlife Advisory Group (FWAG) and our membership of this organisation would allow us to host one of the farm visits they organise each summer. This would allow a unique opportunity to demonstrate to other farmers in North Ayrshire as well as Arran what we are doing re stockfree growing and herb farm activities.

There is only one hotel and food outlet in our village, the Kildonan Hotel and we have good relations with them. Their chef, the owner, is interested in preparing speciality and quality menus as seen with their ability to prepare vegan food for us on request and use of local food where possible. They would be an ideal first outlet for the first commercial produce.

Any income from supplying the farmers market and the Kildonan Hotel would be used to pay for 1 person's consistent labour for the first year of increased growing (such a local, island based employee would have to demonstrate consistent volunteering initially and payment in kind with produce until income is forthcoming, although we might be in a position to contribute to paying a part-time worker).

Our involvement in the initiative Transition Arran will also provide a basis for promoting outlets for local produce (as well as bringing a vegan influence to activities developing through this group).

**3. Continuation of our Herbal work and plant study courses whilst incorporating new stockfree courses as marketed through VON and our own networking contacts.** We aim to extend networking particularly with the main agriculture college in Ayr on the Ayrshire mainland to generate interest of students for possible volunteering and attending stockfree courses. A long term plan is to build on an existing contact within the academic department to work on any possibility of academic input into their course with respect to stockfree farming.

Situated off the west coast of Scotland, Arran is a major tourist destination with its 5000 resident population doubling during the tourist season between Easter and October half term. According to ferry statistics, well over 100,000 visitors each year come to Arran. Its particular charm of a get away from it all destination plus its outstanding beauty successfully counters any aspects of its potential isolation.

#### 4. Networking

The Transition Arran Initiative we are involved in is currently applying for funding from the Climate Change Fund. We are organising for a Vegan Permaculture course to run for transition members on the farm as well as hosting a transition training day run by a member who attended a recent workshop run by the wider transition network.

We are actively involved in developing the Forest School aspect of the Community Woodland Trust (Roots of Arran – a registered Charity), to establish an Early Years education provision by registered Forest School members of the charity. Keith is going to undertake this training also with a vested interest in how we wish our 2 year old to be educated.

#### Building Specification

The initial proposal is for a structure 14m x 8.65m giving a square metereage of 121m<sup>2</sup>. This is laid out to Golden Mean proportions. To the south, the glass frontage is a cedar and 4mm toughened safety glass structure provided by Woodpecker joinery <http://www.woodpecker-joinery.co.uk> .

The rear of the building is of timber framed construction from locally sourced sitka spruce and eco beams (this is Stirling board with 2 x1 glued in a ‘H frame’ construction).

As the building is below 280sq m and we are a registered farm unit in Scotland, we are exempt from planning permission.

#### COSTINGS Does not include any internal furnishing or equipment

Architects plans, drawings and procurement of building warrant	£5,000
Preparation of site, foundations and dwarf walls	£4,000
Construction of building 121sq m @ £500/sq m*	£60,500
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£69,500</b>

\*Current price per sq m for building a bungalow on Arran is £800/sq m. The glass house section works out at £350/sq m, therefore, we have a quote for an overall building cost of £500/sq m.

£70k for a building is relatively cheap because we already own the land and it will be a rustic grassroots affair. The match funding would be to cover all internal furnishings, equipment and alternative energy provision. The cost of the building goes up by trying to make it a year round centre as opposed to an agricultural building with no planning requirement useful for working with people willing to camp or stay in the caravan.

Plumbing costs for inside the building are included in the above construction quote. We will also install a rain water gathering and storage system and a grey water disposal system. We will have one wet and one dry compost toilet inside and a further one of each outside could be funded by the Scottish Executive (Scottish Rural Development Plan –SRDP). The SRDP aims at providing funding for projects falling

under the following categories:

Business viability and competitiveness;

Biodiversity and landscape;

Water quality;

Climate change

Wider rural development

(see [www.Scotland.gov.uk/topics/rural/SRDP](http://www.Scotland.gov.uk/topics/rural/SRDP))

This match funding could then provide the necessary other infrastructure e.g. Wind turbine, photovoltaic batteries and inverters to make the Arc self sufficient in power adding up to £70k with all internal furnishing and equipment included in this. This could complement the alternative energy initiatives that are already in place on the farm.

### **Services – Water and Electricity**

Our mains water supply pipe is approximately 12metres away and possible to tap into for a supply to the Arc.

Heating will be by a mixture of passive and active solar with back up from a highly efficient wood burner. There will be a high thermal mass of material within the greenhouse which will help to store solar heat passively. A system of small fans and ducting will channel excess heat from the greenhouse to a heat store underneath the workspace section comprised of boulders and recycled glass. This can then be vented into the workspace as required. Heat can also be vented from the workspace back into the greenhouse at night through the dividing wall, which will have thermostatically controlled vents.

### **Conclusion**

We would very much like to contribute to the vision of MCL by applying the legacy in your care to support a centre aimed at the elimination of animal exploitation and cruelty and for a compassionate, non-violent and just world.

**Maureen & Keith Robertson Drimlabarra Herb Farm, Isle of Arran  
Jan 2008**

**NB Visual images of The Arc are on the page below.**

# "The Ark Project"

