

# HARCOURT ORGANIC FARMING CO-OPERATIVE

*Prospectus for potential members*



HARCOURT  
ORGANIC  
FARMING  
CO-OP





*We acknowledge that we live and farm on Djaara country, and that sovereignty on this land has not been ceded. We pay our respects to the Dja Dja Wurrung people as the traditional custodians of this land, and to their Elders past, present and emerging. In particular, we acknowledge the enduring spiritual significance of this place, Leanganook, to the Dja Dja Wurrung people. We are grateful to Djaara for their leadership and commit to working towards Djaara management of Leanganook.*

*In solidarity, we also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout so-called Australia and their connections to land, sea and community. We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today.*

*We would also like to acknowledge the generous contribution of First Nations people to the Harcourt Organic Farming Co-operative. First Nations Sovereignty, healthy country and healthy food systems are inextricably connected and we will continue to strive to reinforce and strengthen this connection.*



## About this document

This prospectus has been developed by HOFC to support recruitment of potential new members to our co-operative.

This document contains work developed through funding from WWF- Australia as part of the Innovate to Regenerate Challenge. Where appropriate, we acknowledge direct use of work from documents developed by Annemaree Docking at Thriving Rural and Open Food Network.

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## About HOFC

The Harcourt Organic Farming Co-operative (referred to as 'HOFC' or 'the Co-op') is a group of enterprises based on land owned by Katie and Hugh Finlay in Central Victoria, on Dja Dja Wurrung country. In 2018, HOFC started as a way to organise multiple lessees renting productive land on the farm. It has consisted of 5 different enterprises in that time, with many iterations of structure and personnel within those enterprises.

The farmers are all passionate about learning their craft, feeding their community, and making direct and meaningful connections with their customers, through short supply chain marketing models such as Community Supported Agriculture. The collective is conscious of landscape health and the local and global impact of their farming enterprises, as well as of each other. They work together to identify synergies and supports that make all their lives easier and their enterprises more productive and profitable.

Current enterprises include [The Orchard Keepers](#) (Fruit), [Sellar Farmhouse Creamery](#) (Cow's milk), [Carr's Organic Fruit Tree Nursery](#) (Fruit trees), Bushfoods by [Murnong Mummas](#), and [Grow Great Fruit](#) (Fruit tree education).

Previous members of the HOFC include Gung Hoe Growers (Vegetables) and Tellurian Fruit Gardens (Orchard).

HOFC is the governance structure that facilitates group decisions about the use of shared resources & infrastructure. All enterprises are represented in HOFC governance. The landowners (LO) are also represented in the HOFC governance structure in two positions — as a landowner and as an enterprise owner. Current directorship at present is made up of three enterprises, one landowner, and one non-member director.







## Structure

HOFC is a non-distributing co-operative, governed by its model rules. This means the Co-op can make a profit, but cannot distribute these profits to members. Any profits can be used to expand or make improvements, such as buy equipment or infrastructure, or pay wages. As it currently stands the co-op's only income is from a levy charged to members (all enterprises in the co-op) as needed to cover expenses such as organic certification, power and water, and bookkeeping.

The co-op has five directors. Currently each co-op entity has one director, the landowner has one director, and there is one independent director. If voting is required, 'consensus minus one' is needed for a vote to be carried.

The co-op's directors meet on a monthly basis. The co-op's model rules can be downloaded [here](#).

## Financial information & Lease arrangements

Enterprises joining the co-op hold a lease with the landowners. These were originally 9-year leases (starting on 1 July 2018) and contained options to renew at the 3 and 6-year mark. Any new lessees will be offered a lease that finishes at the end of the original 9 years, so 30 June 2027.

Enterprise leases define the conditions which the enterprise must comply with. The main one is farming organically to the Australian Standard as the whole farm currently holds NASAA organic certification. The decision to be certified organic is made by the coop. The cooperative's future composition may prompt a reconsideration of its organic status.

The leases also define the dedicated area the lessee has access to, along with water and any other infrastructure. There is also communal infrastructure that enterprises can access (tea-room, bathroom, toilets).

The base lease fee is decided by the landowner, but currently ranges from \$2,500 to \$6,000 per year, depending on enterprise size and intensity. Other outgoings for the enterprise comprise a proportion of the property rates, water and power used (metered), and a proportion of joint co-op expense for power and water used in the shared facilities.

Enterprises have full autonomy in how they run their own business, within the bounds of the lease conditions and co-op structure.



## Key principles of HOFC

- Drawn from our collaborative [Whole Farm Plan](#) process, we draw on the following guiding principles for our work together:
- Bring a Collaborative Spirit
- Apply Regenerative Organic and Biological Farming Principles
- Highest Possible Animal Welfare
- Biodiversity protection and enhancement
- Soil protection and enhancement
- Adherence to legal requirements and general good governance in business
- Transparency and honesty in all dealings – with each other and our customers/community

## Current HOFC priorities

The following priorities were identified during our [Whole Farm Planning](#) process and form the current focus of our work together:

- Attract new players to HOFC
- Support Djaara leadership and management at Leanganook
- Collective and farm legal structure decision
- Perennial pastures and fodder trees
- Moving resource storage site
- Ongoing biodiversity monitoring on the farm
- Gully rehabilitation and repurposing Harcourt Channel
- Access track





## About the farm

- Improvements/Assets:
  - Homestead and garden
  - Large dam – 10 ML storage, 30 ML annual water right
  - Small dam, back paddock
  - Smaller leaky dam – Carpet rock block
  - Irrigation infrastructure
    - » Diesel pump
    - » Pipes to each enterprise
    - » Individual enterprise meters
  - Extensive shedding
    - » Packing shed
    - » Coolroom
    - » 5m x 5m Polytunnel
    - » Toolshed (Bushfoods)
    - » Shipping container with electricity and windows for potential packing space
    - » Small chiller (requires rehabilitation)
    - » Small shed (equipment storage)
    - » Barn
    - » 3 sheds on Carpet Rock block
  - Communal infrastructure
    - » 'Lunchbox' (shared kitchen & seating)
    - » Bathroom with shower
    - » Farm shop with refrigeration
    - » Shop garden
    - » Composting toilets
    - » Rainwater tank and fire system
  - Orchard plantings ( approx 3,000 trees)
    - » Cherries
    - » Plums
    - » Apples
    - » Pears
    - » Apricots
  - Fruit tree nursery
  - Bushfoods plot

- Vacant blocks available for horticultural opportunities
- Kangaroo fencing (partial – eastern boundary between property and La Larr Barr Gauwa)
- Harcourt channel (decommissioned)
- Carpet Rock bush block (≈ 6Ha)

Annual Rainfall: 601.6 mm

## Organic certification

- The farm has been certified organic since 2008 with NASAA (#3683) and it's a requirement in the lease that all enterprises must comply with organic certification.
- All enterprises are audited under Katie and Hugh's pre-existing certification. The arrangement offered by NASAA in 2018 to certify multiple businesses under a single cert number is unusual, and there is no guarantee it will continue into the future.
- The farm is certified organic by consensus decision of existing Co-op members, so this may be renegotiated in future depending on who joins.







## What we're looking for/offering

- Well-developed enterprise concepts championed by people with appropriate skills, interests and capacity.
- One of the most important things we're looking for are people who genuinely want to be in community. You don't have to be a 'people person', but it's really important that you want to farm collaboratively with other people.
- That means making an effort to get along with people, leaning into social activities, and having the personal resilience and commitment to working through issues as they arise.
- In particular, any EOIs will need to include a business plan.

## Business plan

There's a lot of work between having a great idea and being ready to launch your business. This usually involves getting as much experience as possible, writing a business plan, doing budgets, and sourcing start-up capital. Finding a mentor can also be helpful in getting your business off the ground and successfully established.

Successful applicants will have completed most of these

steps before applying to join the Co-op. Experience has shown us that it's fine to start small but at the same time, it is important to understand what "viability" means to you and have a plan for how you're going to get there within a reasonable time frame. We've got a lot more detail on how we've approached this in our [Small Farm Viability report](#) soon to be released.

A business plan doesn't have to be a huge document, but it should be thorough and realistic. New business owners often get stuck on the fact that it feels like guessing the numbers when preparing future budgets. While this is true and there might be many variables, it's still a very worthwhile exercise.

Draw on experience in similar businesses and try to work with a mentor in your chosen business who can help you create realistic forecasts. If numbers are 'not your thing' we strongly recommend that you find a financial mentor and/or establish relationships with a bookkeeper and or accountant (we can recommend great people) who can help you set up excellent and simple financial processes from the beginning.

There are lots of great business plan [templates available](#) online. You might also consider joining the NEIS program, as this provides income support while you are getting a new business off the ground.





## Information for different enterprise types

We embrace the concept of stacking enterprises, where multiple enterprises, where multiple businesses operate synergistically on the same land. This maximises the use of resources, increases resilience, and enhances the overall stability of the farm.

### Horticulture enterprises:

Small-scale, intensive horticulture enterprises align perfectly with the Co-op model due to several key factors. We have small parcels of land available to suit various small-scale, intensive horticulture operations including market garden, berries, nursery, garlic, and flowers.

The direct sales approach we've developed through CSA, the local weekly farmers market (that we helped to establish), and our farm shop allows us to reach consumers immediately and offers easy access to sell produce.

The modest size of the farm ensures that each enterprise gets the focus and support it needs to thrive, and the land's free-draining soil and ample water supply create ideal conditions for growing a variety of crops. Find out more here.

### Grazing enterprises:

The fact that we have an existing grazing enterprise on the farm (Sellar's Farmhouse Dairy) is no impediment to welcoming a new grazing business. In fact, there are potential synergies between two grazing businesses, or between a new grazing enterprise and other existing Co-op members such as the orchard.

### Orchard enterprise:

This property has had orchard trees for the last 160 years. When Katie and Hugh first came home to the farm (Katie grew up here), they replanted the orchards to move away from monoculture and to mimic the diverse, multivariety plantings that had originally been on the farm. There are currently more than 65 varieties in commercial production, with at least another 80 varieties on the farm either as young trees or in the nursery collection.

The orchard is in a different category to any other enterprise in the Co-op because it was the existing business before the Co-op was established, and because the orchard trees are permanent plantings. It is therefore offered as a complete business including all the equipment, systems, and resources required to run as a profitable business from day 1.

### Business-in-place enterprise

Looking to the future, the Co-op welcomes innovative enterprises that align with our broader goals, while not necessarily farming in the soil.

This is in recognition of the fact that our farm and our community offers strengths that are highly sought after but hard to find for many small-scale entrepreneurs, including space, facilities, a beautiful workplace, and - most importantly - community.

Our growing relationships with First Nations peoples has also helped us to recognise that this land offers unique opportunities to connect people with nature and provide the healing opportunities that come from being on, and connecting with, country.



## Recruitment process

### 1. Launch

If you'd like to hear more about our love you to come to our [online launch event on Thursday June 6th 7-8pm.](#)

### 2. EOI process

If you're seriously thinking about joining the Co-op, come to our [second webinar](#) on Tuesday June 11th 7-8pm. We'll be explaining the process of how to join in more detail, and asking your questions to help you decide if the Co-op is a good fit for you.

### 3. Application to join the Co-op

If you decide to apply to join HOFC, send your application to [info@hofcoop.com.au](mailto:info@hofcoop.com.au). APPLICATIONS CLOSE ON 30 JUNE 2024. Late applications may be accepted, so please get in touch. Your application should include the following:

- A brief resume and draft business plan for your enterprise. Your business plan should address your personal definition of "viability" and how your

enterprise will help you achieve this – including considerations of livelihood, off-farm income, values and intentions.

- A brief cover letter that includes answers to the following questions:
  - » Why are you interested in this opportunity?
  - » What are your intentions for your enterprise and how do you see that fitting with HOFC?
  - » Do you plan to have an off-farm income or other livelihood supports?
  - » Do you have any experience with farming, or with using farm machinery, e.g. tractors and implements, forklifts?
- We'll shortlist applicants, and get in touch to arrange a Zoom interview or let you know you were unsuccessful. We anticipate that interviews will take place during July.
- We'll aim to make a decision and offer any successful applicants the opportunity to join HOFC by the end of July.

