



Frequently Asked Questions

Do you have any criteria which you use in assessing applications?

Our vision is a well-managed and properly capitalised, small, mixed, agroecological farming sector. Generally, we want to pursue small on a large scale, supporting cooperatives, social enterprises and community businesses which are at an early stage of development but have already built up their local community of support. We rarely fund start-ups, so typically support organisations that are beyond start-up and usually before the venture is investment ready.

We will invest throughout the value chain from “farm to fork”, supporting food and farming enterprises that utilise or support agroecological methods of production and are rooted firmly in their own communities, trading largely through local markets.

We want LEAP to be about food and farming. We will therefore prioritise enterprises whose revenue from the production and/or sale of food and/or drink is more than 50% of their total revenue.

However, we recognise that diversification is very important to food and farming enterprises to ensure they remain viable and sustainable in the long term, and that often it is the subsidiary enterprises which generate the most social impact. We will therefore assess this on a case-by-case basis. Nevertheless, we are unlikely to fund care farms etc unless the LEAP funding will be used to significantly increase food and drink production.

Examples of the types of enterprises we will support are:

- Local food hubs that give people access to local food grown ethically and agroecologically
- CSAs, box schemes and community-based processors (e.g. micro-dairies, community bakeries, micro-breweries) that grow food and sell their produce to their members
- Growers and producers who are diversifying their activities to develop new products and new markets, and/or broaden beyond pure production to involve the community in activities such as CSAs, forest schools, therapeutic horticulture, cooking, on farm education

- Food processors, markets, caterers and retailers who are integrating small farmers into the value chain and providing local people with the opportunity to buy food that is ethically and agroecologically produced
- Replication of proven concepts in community food enterprises i.e. ones with a 3-5 year track record.

This list is not exhaustive, so if you run a community-based food and farming enterprise and are not sure whether you would qualify, please [contact us](#).

We will prioritise investment in the following ownership/governance structures:

- Community Interest Companies
- Community Benefit Societies
- Cooperative Societies
- Charitable Incorporated Organisations
- Companies Limited by Guarantee

We are NOT able to support or fund the following:

- Sole traders, partnerships, charitable trusts and other unincorporated organisations and companies limited by shares (although we will consider these organisations if they have clear plans to reconstitute to an acceptable model of governance)
- Any enterprise that produces food that is not grown according to our agroecological criteria (for example, we will not be able to fund enterprises using hydroponic or aquaponic systems)
- In the case of processors, caterers and retailers, any enterprise that does not source a significant proportion of its produce from farms, growers and other suppliers that meet our agroecological criteria
- Enterprises with operations outside the UK
- Retrospective funding
- Any enterprise which provides services which are regarded as statutory or Government provision
- Any enterprise which promotes the advancement of religion or that is party political in nature.

Please [contact us](#) if you need more detail on our investment criteria.

I am not sure if I meet your criteria; can I still apply?

Absolutely. We do not expect applicants to meet all of our criteria, but you must have an eligible form of governance. Our mentoring programme will identify any critical gaps and provide you with support to fill those gaps. We would always recommend an initial discussion, so we can understand your enterprise and advise you on the best way forward.

My business has a different governance model to your criteria; can I still apply?

We would recommend you [email us](#) to discuss your form of governance. As a charitable programme we cannot support unincorporated organisations (e.g. sole traders, partnerships) or companies limited by shares. We rarely support charities. However, if you would consider changing your governance model, we can provide you with support to do that.

Are you able to support organisations across the UK?

Yes, we can support organisations throughout the UK.

Can I apply for funds to start up a new business?

We can fund start-ups, but only do so in exceptional circumstances. We would look for a very strong team with a track record of delivery, a clear revenue model and business plan, and evidence of community support. We would recommend an initial discussion to see if LEAP is right for you.

What happens if our application is unsuccessful?

We will do our best to identify other sources of finance for you. We will also provide you with advice on how to increase your chances of success if you re-apply again at a later date.

Is there a deadline for applications?

There are four funding rounds per year. Please [contact us](#) to find out when the next application deadline is. LEAP will be accepting applications through to the end of 2022, but we strongly advise that you apply as soon as possible, as further application windows will only occur if funding allows.

Can I apply for more or less funding?

We cannot accept applications for less than £20,000 due to the costs involved; £100,000 is our maximum amount.

Can I repay the loan early?

We want to keep our interest rates, fees and administrative costs as low as possible and therefore do not typically allow early repayment.

Do you take any security?

No. All of our loans are unsecured.

What do you mean by investment readiness?

Investment readiness means getting your organisation to a point where it can approach a social investor like LEAP and reassure that investor that it can deliver significant social benefits, has a strong business model in place and the capacity to successfully take on and repay an investment over time. We help you get there through our mentoring programme.

How much mentoring is available?

We have our own mentoring budget provided by the Power to Change Foundation (for organisations in England) and Esmée Fairbairn (for organisations in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland), and we are also an [Access Point](#). As an Access Point, we can help you apply for Reach Fund grants which will pay for the investment readiness support; this grant can be used for specialist consultancy support, to boost capacity within your organisation or a mix of both.

We will complete an 'investment readiness diagnostic' with you which will determine the exact structure, depth and breadth of the mentoring programme. This will be summarised in an investment readiness plan. It normally takes around three months to deliver this plan with the help of specialists in the areas you need help; this could be in areas such as business planning, financial modelling, governance, community finance, social impact delivery and marketing strategy.

What is the Reach Fund?

The [Reach Fund](#) is a capacity building programme from Access – The Foundation for Social Investment that is managed by Social Investment Business. It is an investment readiness programme that offers grants to help social enterprises raise investment. The grants are for specific work to help raise investment. They are not general capacity building grants. As an Access Point, we are able to refer you to the Reach Fund in order to apply for grants to help you raise investment from us. We can help you with the application process.

If you have a question that isn't covered above, please [email](#) us.