

# **The Auroville Farm Group Strategic Plan**

## Introduction

The assessment team has put together this strategic plan as much as possible in plain language. This is to make sure that the translation is clear and that the plan can be owned, implemented and used by all those who participated in putting it to together.

The plan summarises the findings of our planning sessions carried out over three weeks in September 2004. Included in the plan are the Vision and Goals of the AVFG as well as three strategic objectives to address each Goal. The assessment team carried out the strategic planning process with the benefit of the findings of the assessment process, enabling less time to be spent on analysing the current context.

## Background and methodology

Our main objective for the process was:

For the people involved in the Auroville Farm Group to determine where they want to go, choose how they will get there and plan what needs to be done.

In addition, there were a number of secondary objectives:

- To create a plan that is SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and time-bound) and helps us to fulfil the strategic objectives.
- Create a sense of ownership in the strategic plan among AV farmers, and in the longer term, processors, and consumers.
- Develop managerial skills, particularly in terms of planning and prioritising.

Each of the planning sessions was held with at least ten participants out of a possible fifteen. The participants were given the opportunity to stand back from the day-to-day issues of the AVFG and explore the nature and purpose of the AVFG, and in the process were introduced to the concept and process of Strategic Planning.

A brief outline of the sessions is given below:

### Session 1

Description
1. Description of work plan and an outline of the objective
2. Introduction to strategic planning
3. Short review of historical survey, pertaining to the original intention of farming in Auroville.
5. Determining the Vision for AVFG.
6. Evaluation and close

### Session 2

Description
1. Review of session 1 and outline of session 2
2. In groups, determine the Goals of the AVFG
2. Identifying strategic objectives according to the farm and market assessments
4. Begin defining objectives and identifying activities and indicators

In between session 2 and 3 the working groups met once in order to develop their strategic objective(s) and identify relevant activities and indicators.

### Session 3

Description
1. Review session 2 and outline of session 3

2. Group presentations of strategic objectives
3. Feedback on presentations and finalise strategic objectives, actions and indicators
5. Specify who, when, what, and how of the new strategic plan

The plan is tentatively for a five-year period with substantial reviews after each year. Therefore, the first review is planned for September 2005. Necessarily, the activities at this stage tend to focus over the medium-term and will be revised as the plan unfolds.

## Vision, and Goals for the Auroville Farm Group

Vision, goals and values give us shorter and longer-term targets to work towards and a framework to work within. They bind us together with a shared purpose and commitment and positively reinforce our organisational culture.

### Vision

The AVFG’s Vision is as follows:

A healthy and conscious farming system, integrated with and providing food for the community.

### Goals

To achieve our vision for the AVFG, the following Goals were specified:

- Serving the community by growing healthy produce in response to the needs of the community; Involving and informing them in the process.
- To improve quality and increase production, whilst sustaining the environment by farming ecologically.
- Efficiently managed and financially viable farms with transparent and detailed record keeping, supported by the community and outside interested parties, moving towards a collective economy.

Details of the current operating environment were drawn out during the assessment process, including a Historical survey, a Market survey as well as a Farm’s assessment. Please refer to the relevant sections of this report for details.

## Strategic Objectives and Actions

The strategic objectives include the main issues identified, what we want to achieve and how we will achieve it in order to make progress towards the Goals. The indicators show how the AVFG will be able to gauge if sufficient progress is being made.

The following tables provide the outcome of the process:

### Goal:

Serving the community by growing healthy produce in response to the needs of the community; Involving and informing them in the process.

Key Strategic Issue	Strategic Objective	Strategic Actions	Indicators	Responsible
As a link between	1. Food Link	1. Assess what Food Link is	• The number of	• Sumathi and

the producers and the consumers, Food Link is currently not functioning to its full potential <sup>1</sup> .	effectively promoting and harmonising production and consumption within Auroville and beyond.	doing now. 2. Determine what Food Link should be / could be doing. 3. Develop an action plan to address the gap which currently exists between reality and potential. 4. Implement the action plan.	outlets being served. • The proportion and volume of AVFG produce being sold in Pour Tous and other outlets. • Progress made against the action plan.	Laxmi in a supporting role. • See action 1 in objective 2.
AVFG produce is insufficiently and ineffectively promoted <sup>2</sup> and therefore the consumer is relatively unformed.	2. Consumers will become increasingly informed about AVFG produce and what it stands for in two ways:  • Improved point of sale information; • General information.	1. Develop a job description for a marketing coordinator, advertise and recruit. 2. Come up with an agreement between the AVFG members about appropriate certification. 3. Design and produce appropriate labels. 4. Carry out a marketing campaign.	• Results of a mini-survey demonstrating increased consumer awareness. • New labels and certification in place.	• Sumathi and Laxmi in a supporting role. • See action 1.
All farmers currently collect and distribute produce independently, and the consumer often doesn't get the service required.	3. Options for a common collection and distribution system will be investigated and implemented.	1. Organise and facilitate a special AVFG meeting including representatives from major outlets to come up with the best options available. 2. Investigate the cost-effectiveness of the options and make a decision on which is the most appropriate. 3. Write up a proposal and secure funding, see objectives under Goal number 3. 4. Implement.	• A common collection and distribution system in place. • Results of the meetings.	• John? • A driver?

**Goal:**

To improve quality and increase production, whilst sustaining the environment by farming ecologically.

Key Strategic Issue	Strategic Objective	Strategic Actions	Indicators	Responsible
Low volumes of production	1. To substantially increase the volume of AVFG	1. Revisit the AVFG farms assessment and build on the action points outlined. 2. Provide support and technical assistance both on-farm and off-farm. 3. Carry out research and disseminate the results	• Increased production for the AVFG as a whole, as well as for	• John • Dave

<sup>1</sup> It should be noted at this point that there was not common agreement in the group about whether Food Link should also act as a common food processor for AVFG produce. This issue needs to be finalized, largely depending on whether there will be a person available to facilitate this process.

<sup>2</sup> General agreement was reached by the participants that eventually Food Link should eventually become financially self-sufficient.

	produce.	of best practice for increasing food production within the AV context.	individual farmers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Evidence of an improved farming environment indicated by improving soil fertility, reduced pest attacks, and more efficient water management.</li> </ul>	
Variable and unproven quality of AVFG produce.	2. AVFG will provide a visually attractive product of proven quality.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>To facilitate the members of the AVFG to agree on best practice and quality standards.</li> <li>To reflect quality standards through adjusted grading and pricing.</li> <li>Carry out periodic testing of produce.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agreed standards written up and available.</li> <li>Test results.</li> <li>An increasing proportion of produce falling within the higher quality grades.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>John</li> <li>Dave</li> </ul>
A lack of support and human resources both on the farms and as part of the AVFG.	3. An increase in the number and skills levels of the people involved with the AVFG.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Efforts will be made to promote farming in Auroville as a valid and fulfilling occupation.</li> <li>The AVFG will agree and develop guidelines for providing a carer structure and support to farm in Auroville<sup>3</sup>.</li> <li>Capacity building of all members of the AVFG will be made possible through an increased emphasis on skills development.</li> <li>Increased support will be made available in the AVFG for technical and managerial issues, including a resource centre.</li> <li>Research and dissemination will be carried out in a systematic, demand led and productive manner.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>An increasing number of people in the AVFG.</li> <li>A resource centre</li> <li>Increased production and sales of AVFG produce.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Priya, John and Dave</li> </ul>

**Goal:**

Efficiently managed and financially viable farms with transparent and detailed record keeping, supported by the community and outside interested parties, moving towards a collective economy.

Key Strategic Issue	Strategic Objective	Strategic Actions	Indicators	Responsible
The AVFG is currently not economically self-sufficient, for the short-term substantial investments are required.	1. The AVFG will develop a funding strategy by March 31 <sup>st</sup> 2005.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Develop the role of a AVFG donor liaison coordinator, including a detailed job description.</li> <li>Provide the necessary support to this person to carry out the task in hand.</li> <li>Develop a donor database.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increased income from fund raising.</li> <li>Donor database in place, number of organisations contacted and replies received.</li> <li>Number and quality of</li> </ul>	Lloyd, John.

<sup>3</sup> In terms of support, on-farm housing was stated as a very important requirement.

		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>4. Use the strategic plan to identify a number of priority projects.</li> <li>5. Write up the proposals for the projects and apply for the necessary resources from the appropriate donors.</li> <li>6. Monitor and evaluate progress.</li> <li>7. Make necessary changes.</li> </ol>	proposals written up.	
The current accounts system is deficient in providing the necessary information.	2. Obtain a user-friendly and detailed farms accounts package.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Locate two to three options for a “whole farm” accounts package either in India or abroad.</li> <li>2. Make a decision about which package to purchase and use.</li> <li>3. Provide the necessary training to Sumathi for her to use it on a daily basis.</li> <li>4. Explain the new accounting set up to the farmers and ask them to use it.</li> <li>5. Monitor the practicality of the package and make the necessary adjustments.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Timely and comprehensive submission of accounts and production figures.</li> <li>• Financial records sufficiently useful to work as a management tool.</li> </ul>	John and Sumathi.
There is currently no formal structure to the AVFG, often hindering progress on difficult matters.	3. According to the outcomes of the assessment process, the AVFG will identify gaps in our knowledge and practice of institutional development and seek ways to rectify this situation.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Carry out a Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities and constraints (SWOC) analysis on the way the AVFG currently operates.</li> <li>2. Investigate best practice within AV and further a field.</li> <li>3. Facilitate decisions to be made by the AVFG about the most appropriate systems for decision making and learning.</li> </ol>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Written records of investigations carried out and decisions made.</li> <li>• AVFG institutional guidelines written up and available.</li> </ul>	Lloyd, Dave, John, Jeff, marketing coordinator plus an AVFG sub-group.

## **Implementing the plan**

Many outstanding issues for immediate attention were identified during the planning process. Most of these will begin to be addressed to some extent within the first year, depending primarily on the available human and financial resources. It would be very useful for those people identified during the planning process as implementers of specific strategic objectives, to write up activity plans for the first year. There is particularly a need to be realistic in what can be achieved. Priority needs to be placed on recruiting a marketing coordinator and ensuring that the support is in place for Lloyd to be able to carry out his role as funding coordinator.

Annual reviews are planned in September of each year with a major evaluation of the process planned for September 2009 when the period for the implementation of the strategic plan will be complete. It is advisable that this process of evaluation, and perhaps developing a new plan, would benefit from the help of an external facilitator.

## **Conclusion**

By the end of the assessment and planning process, a certain level of momentum has been built up and the AVFG is in a strong position to be pro-active in determining its own future. There does however, remain a risk of the plan faltering without the continued energy that has sustained the process up to date. To ensure that this does not happen, the AVFG office will need to receive considerably more attention than in the past. The farmers must also see that the AVFG office and Food Link can only function to its full potential, if there is a genuine demand for the services that it provides.

In many ways, the last year has been a unique experience for any group in Auroville and the AVFG has responded very well to the sometimes abstract process of strategic planning. It is now up to all of the participants who were involved in the strategic planning process, as well as all of the people who are interested in the future of farming in Auroville to make it happen.