The idea for the project was developed by the Moffat CAN Board and senior staff, in conjunction with Charlie Price of Aquaponics UK. In addition to these, the project liaised with Buccleuch Arms Hotel, Moffat, as a potential customer, and brought in an architect Finola Fingleton, who did voluntary work to help realise the project.

The aims and objectives were to create Scotland’s first aquaponics greenhouse, growing both salad vegetables and fish for sale to local catering outlets. The greenhouse is a small scale demonstration project, showing the viability of this innovative new low carbon food growing system.

Funding was a mixture of Climate Challenge Fund (56%) and LEADER (44%). LEADER funding provided £16,865.

The start of the project was delayed by LEADER queries to OSCR, following which the start and end dates were re-profiled and the project was finalised within
the revised timescale, lasting a year and finishing in October 2011. The greenhouse continues to produce and raise a high level of interest, with tour groups visiting most weeks.

The greenhouse was designed over November 2010, and the area cleared of the former outhouses. Builders moved in at the start of December, but almost instantly had to stop work because of last winter’s lengthy freeze. Construction was not fully resumed until mid-January 2011.

Demolition, concreting and roof building to create the new Greenhouse
Meantime the fish and vegetable tanks were ordered, and installation started in March. The system was up and running, with fish and plants installed in time for the opening of CAN’s new site on Easter Saturday 2011.

First sales of plants took place in June 2011, and the first tasting of the fish took place at the Buccleuch Hotel, Moffat, as part of the Savour the Flavours fortnight in September 2011. The Buccleuch was chosen as its owner and chef both come from an area of the world where tilapia fish are a standard part of the diet and are therefore very familiar with cooking and presenting them.
Dumfries and Galloway Standard and the Annandale Series press were both contacted by phone for the initial launch. Both toured round the site and gave CAN and the aquaponics project excellent coverage. The Moffat News also visited in July to spend an afternoon volunteering in the greenhouse, for a full page article as part of Volunteer Week. The project was visited by the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment in July, and both papers gave that good coverage too. BBC Radio Dumfries has also done a short feature on the project, and it will feature in BBC TV’s Landward on November 25th 2011.

Generally CAN has found it more effective to build up relationships with individual journalists and then speak with them directly, rather than through press releases, but this has made it harder to ensure reference to funders.
CAN has been invited to speak about the project to a wide variety of groups – Federation of City Farms and Community Gardens, D & G SEN, MiCRE, SMALLEst (two European funded projects), D & G CAB, and numerous local groups such as the local WRI and Women’s Rural.

Moffat CAN has benefited from the project both in terms of raised profile (as has Dumfries and Galloway) and in terms of developing a small extra income stream. CAN has appointed a young graduate of Barony College as Scotland’s first aquaponics Manager. There have been visits from local children, both from Moffat, and Lockerbie Academy, and CAN is currently liaising with Moffat Academy on further visits and educational work. Charlie Price of aquaponics uk ran a lengthy training course over 4 sessions, training CAN employees Chris Ballance, Katrina Tait, Edward Malone, Reg Fairbairn, Keith Murray, and Alan Young. Frank McMaster, of the Dunbarton Road Corridor Group gave training in worm composting and harvesting to Reg Fairbairn and Edward Malone. Edward Malone has now been employed as Aquaponics Manager (outwith the LEADER project)

Edward showing Moffat Academy pupils how to sow seeds

Watch your fingers!

The final budget was somewhat higher than anticipated due partly to the delay in starting, the length of time since the original quotation had been given, and rises in the price of fibreglass, and also the addition of various unanticipated extra costs, such as delivery. CAN has met these extra costs out of its own funds.
CAN is still learning the delicate balance between the size and quantity of fish required to produce enough nutrients for the system, and the size and quantity of plants required to clean the nutrients from the system.

The system has proved to be significantly more labour intensive than we had previously been expecting, but apart from that it is working well, and CAN is delighted with it. Fish are expected to become fully sized for sale for eating in time for the Christmas holidays.

Visitors have come from all over, notably Slovenia, Australia, Brussels and Nepal, to see the project, and a large number from Scotland. A variety of community groups, private businesses, and individuals from Scotland have visited and are now considering installing their own system. Following visits to CAN, aquaponics systems are being actively considered by groups in Auchinleck, East Ayrshire, South Ayrshire, Biggar, South Lanarkshire, Peebles and Stirling. The project is capable of being replicated on a similar community-based scale, as well as large agribusiness scale, though we understand that two agribusiness plans in northern Scotland being supported by Scottish Enterprise have now failed to get European Fisheries Funding.

The project forms a part of CAN’s overall local food and waste reduction activities, and a number of exit strategies are planned. In the long term CAN is looking to develop a community energy capacity to enable it to continue to provide green collar jobs across its range of activities. For the coming year CAN has been funded by a BLF People’s Millions Award, and is using that to develop a raft of activities increase its trading income and move it from grant funding. The aquaponics greenhouse project is just one facet of this.

The project has successfully created a sustainable, low carbon, innovative method of producing local food, embracing a technology which is a first for
Scotland, with minimum inputs and all energy requirements supplied by renewable energy, installed as part of the development of the Old Church Depot in Moffat.

Chris Ballance
Development Officer
8.11.11