

BGP Stories from the front-line

Tim Hopkin on how BGP helped to create a REALLY BIG vision for both his business and the planet

“Land App started with the simple question – how hard can it be to create a piece of mapping software to help me turn our family farm into a demonstration for regenerative agriculture, by combining the idea of mapping like SimCity, and real-time collaboration like Google docs?”

Tim Hopkin, Founder and CEO of Land App, BGP 2021.



On Friday 22nd April Tim Hopkin blew the minds of the current BGP cohort wide open, when he presented his vision for the business he founded in 2015. Land App is seeking to transform the way the world understands and values agriculture, and all who have a stake in it. It's a huge vision, with potential application to the entire global economy.

It didn't start that way. From a fourth-generation farming family, Tim grew up knowing the precarious financial state of Britain's agricultural sector. He studied regenerative farming after finishing university, and travel further broadened his understanding of the environmental pressures on land management everywhere. But it also alerted him to opportunities. Land App was founded with the initial purpose of helping land managers get an interactive “digital version” of their land, which provides all the information to map entire managed landscapes in minute detail, the aim being to support all farmers to build future resilience plans.

For landowners and their advisors the software serves several purposes: it captures the entirety of the land assets under management, enables farmers to model and plan future development and usage, and simplifies the process of applying for government grants. “Technology amplifies what we are able to do, and leverages our impact,” says Tim.

The business is based on the “freemium” model, which has encouraged adoption. Farmers – of whom there was one enthusiastic Land App user in the Cranfield audience – use a version free of charge, and own the data created. Other stakeholders pay for premium versions with enhanced features. Mostly by luck, according to Tim, the launch of Land App was timed just right. Along came Brexit and the UK government had to rethink its agricultural support strategy from scratch. A working, easy-to-use set of software tools was exactly what was needed. Around the same time other players in the food industry, such as supermarkets, were faced with more stringent reporting obligations, and a requirement to strengthen the resilience of their supply chains. Land App allows suppliers' data to be shared and presents it in a way that can be easily understood and applied. Water companies have also beaten a path to Tim's door. United Utilities is one. Required to fund phosphate mitigation across its regional customer base, United Utilities subscribes to Land App data and aggregates individual data to create a unified picture of land use change.

To finance the firm's development, Tim has raised a series of funding rounds. Most of the money has come from Land App's own customers, who see the potential of the platform's ability to transform the national and global land economy. The cash has enabled him to recruit the skills required and to reinvest in the business.

People are attracted to the company by the strong sense of purpose and a vision which was strengthened by Tim's participation on BGP. “I pivoted on the

programme,” he says. “I went from focusing on mapping hectares to thinking about how we can support the UK to become a case study for the rest of the world to restore nature through an exemplary natural capital market, which we are now working on with Defra, eNGOs, Ordnance Survey, food retailers, banks, water companies, and the TNFD.”

Natural capital is a term now commonly used, but Tim was well ahead of the curve in embracing the concept. He is convinced that climate change is a reality and that we should focus on creating national resilience through nature by seeing it as risk-mitigation infrastructure, rather than trying to reverse climate change. That means stemming the rising tide of desertification by greening the planet wherever possible and deploying technology adroitly to do so.

In developing his business Tim strikes a careful balance between idealism and pragmatism. The cash streams from the commercial contracts which underwrite

Land App’s profitability create a sustainable business model, which will in turn allow him to fund the planned not-for-profit foundation. Partnering with respected organisations such as Ordnance Survey will open the door to international development – Commonwealth countries are next in his sights: “Our aim is to provide an integrated digital framework that others can simply adopt and apply to their own situations. I’m interested in technology only insofar as it can help us achieve our mission: to connect and align the land economy and create a prosperous future for the next generation to come.”

If success to date is anything to go by, we’ll all be hearing a lot more about Land App and Tim’s vision of a more resilient world.

To find out more about Land App, visit www.thelandapp.com/about-us

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About the companies

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Land App

With nearly 8 billion of us consuming an ever-greater amount of land, it is vital – now more than ever – that we make the right land use decisions. Competing priorities for land use don’t make this an easy task. We need it to grow our food, purify our water, plant our trees, nurture our biodiversity, store our energy, build our homes and develop our infrastructure. The priorities are endless; the land for them isn’t.

That’s where Land App comes in. Land use simply must be made easier to understand and analyse. Ultimately, we need a digital twin that allows us to plan for ecological and financial resilience to address the twin crises of our time: rapidly declining biodiversity and climate change.

W: www.thelandapp.com