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Integrating Community and Agriculture



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Many thanks to May Cameron for her help in preparing all the postal mailings each time we send out a newsletter.

Year One of the Stroud CSA Project

With our very first AGM taking place on February 1st we can reflect on what we have achieved over the past year. We have a fair amount to celebrate and we also have a long way to go. It was more or less one year ago that a clear commitment was made to launch the CSA Project in July. The consequence of this was that by then we would need to have something to show for it. We needed produce and we needed a circle of supporters.

The nascent CSA took the important decision of asking Mark to grow vegetables in the walled garden and on the field at Kolisko Farm. His hard work throughout spring and early summer ensured that the first produce was available by July 20th the date of the launch. Starting with 20 members with vegetable shares numbers soon increased and have now more than doubled to provide a strong core of support. As the prospect a fully mixed farm comes closer and with it the availability of other produce, it is hoped that many of our (nearly 150) other interested supporters will become full subscribing members and so strengthen the CSA for its next phase.

In the early part of the year Kolisko Farm was very much the focus of our attention and provided the goal towards which we directed our energies. In many ways Kolisko Farm was ideal for our objectives. As a farm it was already up and running. It had been farmed biodynamically and organically for the best part of 60 years. There was a group of core supporters around it. The community endeavor seemed to have a sympathetic ear and its existing milk round promised to provide the foundations upon which the CSA initiative could be built.

Sadly all this was not to be and by June it was clear that if a positive step were to be made at all, the whole project would have to base itself elsewhere. Kolisko Farm was and still is working through a very difficult period of transition. With the new farmers still finding their feet, it is not possible for the CSA initiative to be involved in the running of Kolisko Farm at present. Also it may not be possible for us to continue to use the walled garden beyond the coming season. On the other hand the new farmers do see the value in such a scheme and as committed farmers, are very keen to see it succeed. It was very heartening therefore when, during the course of a conversation, they suggested that the Stroud CSA Project take on the land at Hawkwood College under licence from Kolisko Farm for a few years.

In many ways this offers an ideal interim solution of mutual benefit to both parties. For the CSA it offers an opportunity to begin developing the livestock side of the farm. After a few years a strong nucleus of a farm will have been formed and will be ready to transfer in a few years time to the land which is surely waiting for us.

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The production of vegetables and other produce is only one of the aims defined for the CSA Project early last year. Meeting, celebrating festivals, working together and helping to forge new links with the land are equally central. During our first year we have had several celebrations. The first was in March on Palm Sunday when some twenty or so supporters gathered for a farm walk led by Adriaan Luyk the outgoing farmer, a musical contribution and a bring and share lunch. Next was the launch day itself which included brief addresses and a fun event and barbecue out on the field. Later in the autumn there was a harvest meal in the Painswick Inn and a bonfire night celebration at Days Cottage in Brookthorpe. There was also an opportunity to visit Radford Mill, a community cooperative near Bath. The regular planning meetings offered further scope for social as well as constructive interchange about the project.

Looking back over the work of the core group one realises how much has been undertaken during the course of the year. Producing flyers and newsletters, developing a list of working principles, writing contracts and agreements, arranging and minuting meetings and events, investigating land options and creating a forty page business plan. Nonetheless we are only at the very beginning. There is a great deal of work to do in setting up the formal cooperative structure, increasing the membership, establishing the new farming team, setting up the new focus at Hawkwood and of course continuing to keep everyone up to date, informed and involved with developments.

(Bernard Jarman)

Becoming a legally recognised organisation

Up to now the CSA has developed without a formal organisational structure. This has its drawbacks, and therefore the CSA is about to register as an Industrial and Provident Society, a key step in us becoming an established enterprise. Rather like a Ltd Company the CSA will become a body in its own right, rather than a collection of individuals, and the members will no longer be personally liable for the activities of the CSA (except for a nominal sum). This formal status will help us fundraise and make partnerships with other organisations.

The core group have made investigations about the best structure for us. Although the reading material made us yawn, it is important to get it right as it will determine our shape over the coming years. We are neither exactly a business, nor a charity - we handle money like a business, but exist for the benefit of our principles not for shareholder profit. It has been difficult to adopt an off the peg legal format. We have taken advice and in the process helped to come up with a structure that may help other new CSAs too.

In selecting a structure, we want to enshrine the principles the members set for the project. We have therefore chosen a structure where members have one vote regardless of their investment. This is because we want members to be able to take responsibility for the way their food is produced, rather than the farm being controlled by attempts to increase return on shares. An Industrial and Provident Society can still issue shares to raise capital and it is legally possible to offer a return on shares.

We will have certain legal responsibilities to record and report activities, hold an AGM, appoint officers, etc. If anyone would like further details about the new legal structure, please ask the core group.

Findings from the survey of members

In December, the members were surveyed about the CSA and the findings have been useful in planning for the future. 10 out of the 25 households returned their surveys.

Members are very positive about the CSA saying 'I really like being part of the CSA'. People are enthusiastic about the vegetables, the emerging farm community, low food miles, providing local employment and the events. They say 'I like the CSA because there is good care of the land and a sense of ownership', 'I like the collaboration of genuine and inspired people' and 'social willingness surrounding the garden', they also wrote 'The best organic vegetables I have ever tasted' and 'the healthiest food I have ever been able to eat'.

Many people have views about what we should produce. Half of respondents want meat, and most request dairy produce. Herbs, grain, firewood, fruit, and various new vegetables are also mentioned. Most members say they would like to offer a loan if it helped us secure some land. Offers of loans are spread from £50 to £1000. Nearly everyone wants the farm to be within 5 miles of Stroud. A couple of people said Stroud or Kolisko. Only one person said Kolisko not Stroud.

Members want to collect vegetables from Kolisko or to have a home delivery and more than half are willing to pay extra for home delivery. Everyone thinks that the membership cost is about right - but perhaps that's not surprising since the survey was sent to people who have decided to join. Most people like the social aspects of the project. One person thought we should have less social emphasis, more commercial management and more mainstream scientific philosophy. We'd also like to hear from people who are interested in the CSA but have not taken a vegetable share - what would make it easier for you to share in the produce?

Britain's food industry is on the brink of collapse,

A survey of farm incomes said yesterday (22/10/02). The Deloitte and Touche's study of 1,000 of the most successful farms found that it no longer made economic sense for farmers to produce food. The report predicted that farmers would lose £8 an acre on food production this year, with no likelihood of recovery in the foreseeable future. It said the Government was partly to blame for imposing too many regulations. Mark Hill, who heads the company's farm and agriculture department, said that only big, highly-capitalised farms were likely to survive - the opposite of the Government's desire for small environmentally friendly family farms. "We want a statement of long-term support from the Government. Then farmers will have the confidence to invest. Without it, there is no future for farming".

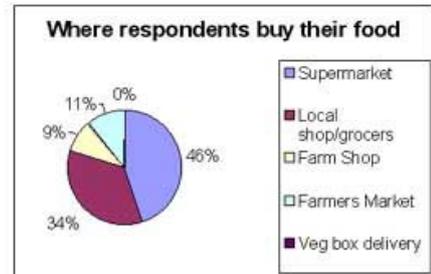
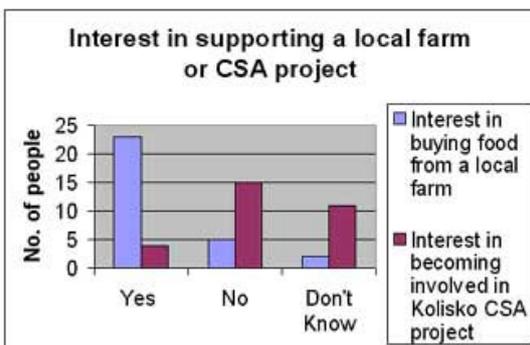
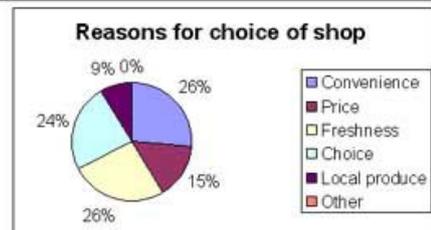
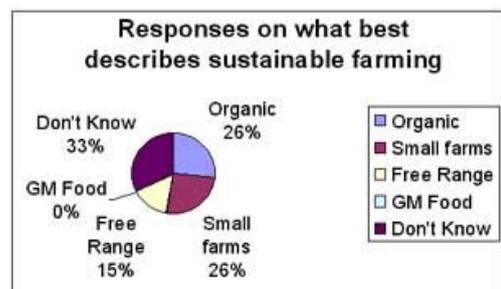
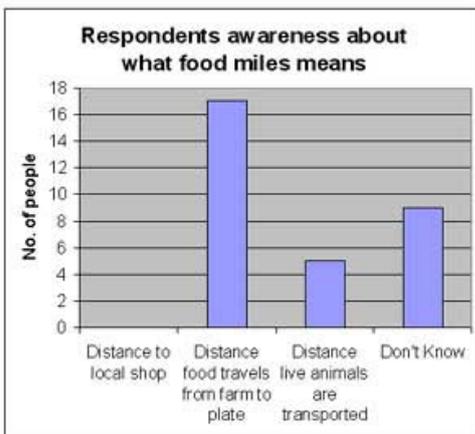
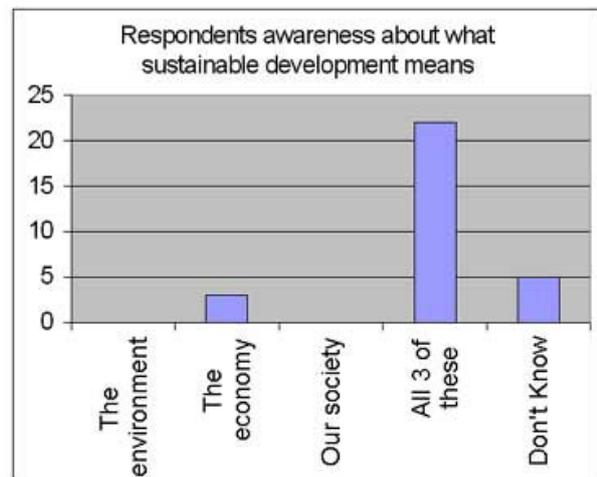
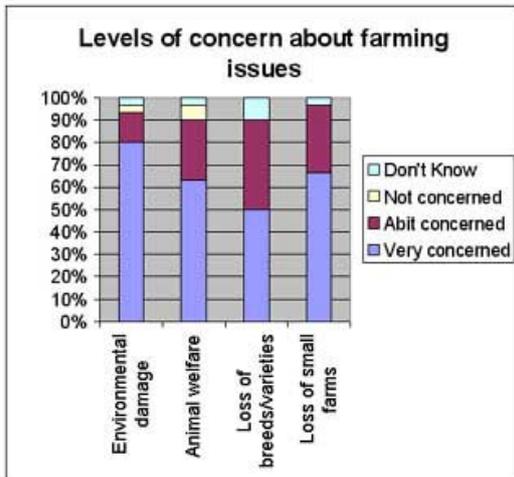
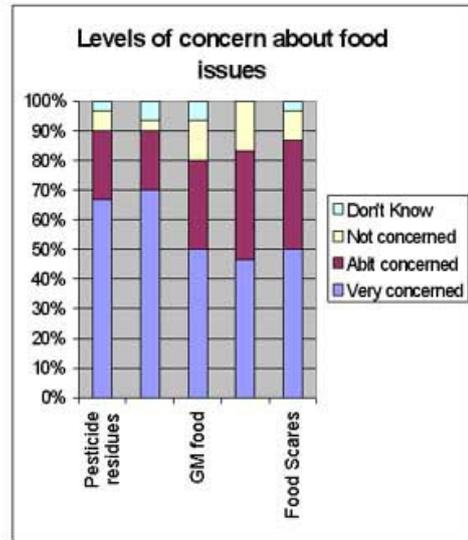
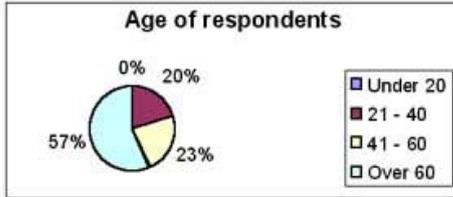
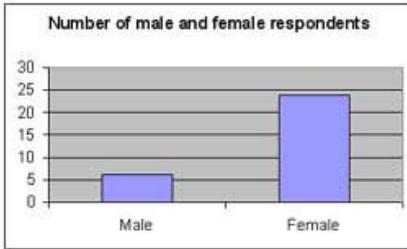
(The Daily Telegraph)

CSA Treasurer

This is just a short item to introduce myself. My name is Paul Sheridan and I am the new treasurer for the CSA project. Together with my wife Clare we have been members of Stroud CSA since we first heard about it early last year. I enjoy working with numbers and through my involvement am keen to see the CSA grow and succeed.



Food survey results by Beth Sidaway



Annual planning meeting - open to everyone

Please come along and have your say in how your community farm project develops. We will be discussing our plans for 2003 and beyond, including what we grow, meeting the farmers who will be doing the work and various practicalities of how you want the project to work. We also plan to have a tour of the new land we hope to take on at Hawkwood - so bring your wellies!

Saturday 1st February 12 noon at Hawkwood College, Painswick Old Road, Stroud

This meeting will also be part of an outdoor winter festival so please dress warmly and do bring and share something simple for lunch.

Candlemas is one of the less well known festivals and a Christian successor to the more ancient Celtic festival of Imbolc. It also became associated with the legend of St Bride.

February 1st is St Bride's day. **February 2nd** is Candlemas which is also one of the quarter days being placed midway between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. It has always been celebrated as a festival of purification and to welcome the returning light. There are many ways of marking this time. Within the Camphill movement it has become a tradition to make candles in the earth and then light them as it grows dark. Bringing light to the earth in this way can be experienced as a blessing for her future bounty during the season to come.

When we arrive at Hawkwood we will begin by making candles in the earth on the land which will produce our field vegetables in the coming season. Later on after our meeting and when the wax has set, we will light these candles and allow them to shine out across the field.

Please assemble on the field near the new barn at 12.00pm to make and plant the candles. After a bring and share lunch we will meet in Hawkwood College from 2.00 - 4.00pm for our first Annual Planning Meeting. We will then conclude by lighting our candles around 4.00pm.

CSA veg drop off point in Stroud

Following lots of requests to make it easier to pick up veg grown at Kolisko we are setting up a veg collection point at:

**the British School,
Gloucester Street,
Stroud.**

There will be a small charge for a key for anyone who would like to collect their veg from here.
Please contact a member of the core group for details.



In the corner of a foreign field

I'm writing this, on holiday, in my brother's study, in the sultry heat of a Brisbane summer's afternoon, a long way from Stroud and the British winter. By the time that you read it though, I will be back and this place will seem in more ways than one a long way away.

It has been a good season at Kolisko for the garden and the CSA. Early on the spring was difficult, rather wet and cool, exacerbated by the fact that we started up the CSA later than was ideal and we missed that earlier good weather. For me, the second workday that we had in the garden really launched the CSA. It really marked the beginning of the whole season with everyone mucking in (pun intended) and spreading the muck in the walled garden. Some of the veg in the garden did very well this year; especially the beans, courgettes and spinach, and some did quite poorly. Next season I hope to improve it all. "Next year", of course, is every gardener's mantra.

The area of land that we took on in the field created an intense period of work, again because it was all rather late. Because of this and the fact that the transplants went in during a fairly dry period I rather despaired that we would get much produce, but in fact the field has been very productive and will keep us going for a while yet. It has been a pleasure for me to work there this autumn, picking the vegetables and enjoying the fruits of our labours, knowing also that the hardest work time of the year is finished.

I think that the produce that we have had from Duchy Home Farm has been excellent and I have enjoyed liaising with Anne and Ian Cox. They work very hard up there at Tetbury and they will have vegetables for us for a couple of months yet. Now is the time for us to plan for next year but at the moment we have not made any firm decisions concerning our options. I have planted some crops for the early summer, broad beans, onions, and cabbage, and I have ordered some seed to sow soon in the new year. This has all been done in the belief that soon we will have made our decisions and that we will be able to move on into the next season and make it as successful as this one has been. This is the full crop list for 2003 which we will discuss at the planning meeting on 1st Feb.

EARLY CROPS

spring greens
mixed salad packs
radish
lettuce
spinach/chard
broad beans
snap peas
carrots
beetroot

SUMMER CROPS

calabrese
courgette
sweetcorn
calabrese
fennel
cucumber
potato
onion
squashes
basil
parsley
coriander

LATE CROPS

cabbage (red white green)
brussel sprouts
cauliflower
leeks
celeriac
kale
purple sprouting

Some crops such as spinach and calabrese will be available for much of the season.

I would like to thank everyone who has helped at one time or another over this past year, and to thank you all for supporting the CSA. I would also like to thank everyone on the core group for all your hard work and positivity. May you all have a great new year,

(Mark)

Home Grown: The Case for Local Food in a Global Market

A new report by Worldwatch shows that the supposed economic efficiency of the long distance food trade masks a range of environmental, social, and cultural costs. While it theoretically affords communities and nations the ability to buy their food from the lowest-cost provider, the agglomeration within the food industry has left consumers hostage to the whims of a dwindling number of food companies. The loss of local food-reliance is hurting local economies, making an increasing number of farmers go hungry, contributing to increasing carbon emissions and global warming, and challenging food security. www.worldwatch.org/pubs/paper/163

'At one of the first meetings, people said that they wanted to work together develop a new model for sustainable farming and to promote this model to others. Stroud CSA is breaking new ground in the UK and our activity may have importance beyond the local area.

As our work has progressed, members have been telling the story and finding considerable interest. Bernard Jarman gave a workshop about our CSA at the national conference on local food and the Soil Association have used us as a case study in briefing sheets and presented our work at seminars around the UK. Stroud CSA has featured on local radio and had 4(?) very positive articles in the papers. Several growers have been to visit and ask questions from as far away as Ireland and the Isle of Wight. We have been interviewed as part of a study into social structures. We have held an exhibition at several events. The Plunkett Foundation who advise agricultural co-ops have taken keen interest in our business plan for possible replication, as has the County Council estates manager.

We hope that Stroud CSA is demonstrating that there are better ways to eat and to farm.

Thanks to CSA helpers

The progress of our enterprise is thanks to the action of members and it seems like a new year is a good time to acknowledge all the help received to date.

We don't intend to name everyone who has helped out growing vegetables and administering the start up of our CSA project but as well as the core group, key people over recent months have been:

Sean Nolan and Carolyn Buckley who produce these amazing newsletters;

May Cameron who folds all the newsletters, stuffs them in envelopes, addresses them (up to 200 in each mailing) and posts them;

Simon Hanks - who works in the walled garden most weeks and has been very involved in setting up the nutrition study group;

...and all the people who have been helping out in the walled garden, not just on CSA farm days, but in between farm days too. These include:

Clare Sheridan. Liz Deering. Liz Webster. Anna Stott



New land

The past season has seen our little community succeed at organising ourselves to grow vegetables to the principles we envisioned at the start of the year. We set out to produce together as much of our food as we could do. The next step is to take care of some stock and to do this, we will need more land. Since last spring the CSA has been able to work the walled garden at Kolisko farm in Brookthorpe, which can we continue to do in the short term at least. This season we also used some extra land in the fields at Kolisko but we cannot do so next year and there is no land available for us at Brookthorpe for animals.

The CSA community has therefore been seeking new land. We have written articles in newspapers, approached various land owners, and asked for leads. Several options arose and the core group have visited a number of sites and the landlords. Members have clarified what sort of land they would like to take care of at public meetings and through a written survey.

The core group would now like to propose to the members that we seek to take on a 2 year lease this spring, for 22 acres at Hawkwood in Spring 2003. We think that Hawkwood comes closest to meeting the needs of the CSA in the medium term. It is a beautiful site, suitable for animals and vegetables. There is sufficient flat land, reasonable soil, water, grazing, fencing and housing for animals. It is close to Stroud and suitable for organic/biodynamic methods. We can afford the rent with the income that members provide. There is no protected area for vegetables, but we should be able to manage if we can continue to use the walled garden.

In the long term the CSA intends to belong to a bigger farm, perhaps about 100 acres, with diverse production. The CSA may eventually be able to buy land rather than rent it. We think it wise to bring this about in steps, each undertaken with care. If we take on a 2 year lease at Hawkwood, we will be able to develop a longer term arrangement at a bigger farm in the meantime.

The next steps...

The core group are currently talking with Hawkwood about what sort of lease might be possible. The members will decide whether to proceed. And everyone can come and see the land at Candlemass, or on their own from the public footpaths that cross the land around Hawkwood college. If we decide to go ahead, we'll need commitment from members who'd like to support meat shares.

(Jade Bashford)

New farmers proposed for the CSA project

We will also need to take on one or more farmers to work with Mark Harrison who has been growing vegetables for the CSA project since March 2002. The new farmers will need to have experience of managing stock. Their commitment to the CSA will be part-time initially.

Claudia Weiss and Eden Cormack introduced themselves to the CSA public meeting in September 2002. They are currently managing a smallholding in Hampshire and the ideas and intentions of the CSA Project appeal very strongly to them. They are keen to come to Stroud and be involved in helping to develop a mixed organic/biodynamic farm. They have been working as part of the core group since October 2002 and are available to start work in Stroud from April 2003. The CSA core group recommends that we take on Claudia and Eden as the next two farmers for the CSA project, initially to work part-time alongside Mark Harrison. Their main responsibilities would be to manage stock on behalf of the CSA. If anybody has any questions about this or would like to propose alternative farmers, please contact a member of the core group.

(Nick Weir)

Valuing our veg

In reality, any attempt to express the "vital" inner nature of a plant is fruitless. What we observe with our senses are effects, and a complete record of these effects should encompass this "vital" inner nature. We labour in vain to describe a person's character, but when we draw together their actions and deeds, a picture of their character will emerge.

(Goethe)

Heightening our awareness and appreciation of our food

Following a positive celebration of "Harvest Supper" (Oct 2002) a small meal, that combined with nutritional interests took place. A leek plant, part of the veg soup, was observed from different aspects and a picture built up around it, giving insight into "its life and soul". The meal also allowed us to meet and share common interests and experiences. We intend to meet as a small group every other Thursday evening. We are seeking a good venue with a kitchen. Suggestions are welcome and if this style of occasion "whets your palate" connect with either Simon Charter or myself.

(Simon Hanks)

Blue cheese and leek pie

Preheat oven to gas 4/175°C/360°F

Chop 1 1/2 lb (600g) leeks,

1 small onion and 4 chestnuts.

Fry leek and onion in 2oz butter.

Add chestnuts, 1/2tsp carraway,

3 tsp wholegrain mustard, and fresh ginger to taste. Remove from heat.

Add 4oz (100g) chopped mild blue cheese. Line flan tin with pastry.

Put in filling and put a pastry lid on the top. Glaze with egg and milk.

Bake 30-40 mins.

Can be eaten hot or cold.

(thanks to Riverford for this)

Future Meetings and Other Events

Saturday 1st February 1st Annual Planning Meeting at 12 noon at Hawkwood College, Painswick Old Road, Stroud.

This meeting will also be part of an outdoor winter festival so please dress warmly and do bring and share something simple for lunch. Please assemble on the field near the new barn at 12.00pm to make and plant the candles (see article on page 4 for more detail). After a bring and share lunch we will meet in Hawkwood College from 2.00 - 4.00pm for our first Annual Planning Meeting. We will then conclude by lighting our candles around 4.00pm.

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Please submit any reports, or anything else you might like to Bernard Jarman. bdaa@biodynamic.freeserve.co.uk