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NEWSLETTER - JANUARY 2004

- Place your fruit orders now!
- First pork
- Winter festival
- Notes from last public meeting
- Updates on beef herd
- Poetry
- Welcome Janet
- New Stroud Horticultural Society

*Stroud Community Agriculture produces organic food locally. It is supported by a community of people who share the financial costs of the farm. They also share the produce that comes from the farm.
For more details on Stroud CA – see back page.*

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HELLO FROM THE FARM! Laurence Dungworth

It was very nice to hear some feedback about my little introduction in the last Newsletter and as a result I decided that I would jot down some reflections on the last few months at Hawkwood - and who knows, this might become a regular feature.

While we are on the topic of communication we could think how information is shared, how people are kept informed about issues and events. The Newsletter is great for wider issues but of course does not come out frequently enough for some things. E-mail is wonderful - instantaneous, easy, accessible but for those of us who are on line, the over-saturation of information can mean some things slip through the 'net'. Then again, there is talking. Very old-fashioned I know, but extremely effective still. This can be shown with respect to the Christmas Eve singing to the animals. An e-mail went out to all and sundry to inform everyone that we would sing to the cows at 9.30pm on the 24th. At that hour a small number of us gathered sang a few appropriate carols and shared our thoughts on the animals and general good wishes for Christmas.

Afterwards I found out that there had been a much larger gathering at 6pm - a time that had at some point been mentioned and had obviously traveled around the community. And so the lucky cows got a double dose of singing. This was wonderful, not only for the animals, but because it shows that there is actually a community of people who communicate and share a common vision and are not only a list of names connected via e-mail. Long may it last!

Another community that has developed over the last few months is that of the cattle. There were 11 beasts that were surplus to Kolisko farm and had been at Hawkwood for some time. There were three heifers (young female cows) and eight bullocks (young males). Of the heifers there were two Shorthorns - one coming up for three years old and hopefully in calf, and another of two years and recently served by a Shorthorn bull. We decided to keep these two and they have been joined by a five-year-old Shorthorn heifer from Thornbury. She has already had a calf (heifers become cows after their second calf) and has just been served. She is more used to people and loves a tickle between her horns and under her neck. Hopefully the others will follow her example over the winter as they get used to me. Of the eight bullocks one has already had a trip to the butcher and has hopefully satisfied a good number of people (do tell me what you thought), and four have gone to market. The other three are in the barn and are all destined for the butchers before June. This is when the youngest turns 30 months old after which time they are deemed unfit for human consumption according to the BSE regulations. They have been joined by a 14 month old Welsh Black cross from Oaklands Park, and from Orchard Leigh two lovely, though bossy, Gloucester heifers. There is not enough room for these last two at Orchard Leigh at the moment though they will return once they are old enough to join the milking herd. Until then it is very nice to have them as they are amazingly beautiful animals and of course the local traditional breed.

With a group of cattle there is always a boss and there is always one that is at the bottom of the pile. And there is a long line between them, such that number 2 bullies number 3, number 3 bullies number 4, number 4 bullies number 5, etc. Age and size obviously influence this but it also has a lot to do with temperament. With so many disruptions recently this has taken some time to settle down, and it is a bit distressing to see how mean some of them can be. But things are more settled now, and they all have enough space, are enjoying the hay and seem quite contented. Long may it last!

On the next few workdays there will be some work to do preparing the fields for the spring and I look forward to seeing some of you then. There will also be more beef in the beginning of March (contact me to reserve some before it sells out), and after that then the season will start proper. For those that are interested then I will need lots of help to spray the preparations onto the fields. If you would like to know more or know already that you would like to help then I would love to hear from you. And best wishes for a joyful 2004!



Name that Cow! - Open to all children, no matter your age!

We now have three lovely Shorthorn heifers who are the beginning of Stroud Community Agriculture's beef-suckler herd. Each of them will be with us for a long time, but none of them have a name!

Come up with your best suggestion and we will have a special naming ceremony.

News from the veggie patch

Well the vegetable season is drawing to a close now, it is rather wet and cold out in the field, but still a beautiful spot. I am now thinking ahead to next season and this week have sown lettuce and spinach in anticipation of being able to plant them out in our new polytunnels in March. The tunnels will arrive soon and then there is the small matter of erecting them. We may need some extra hands to help cover them so anybody who thinks that they may be able to help for one day please let me know. Hopefully we will have tomatoes and peppers this year. We will be cultivating extra land on the other side of the road to increase our production but we will still have to buy in produce as we expect our membership to increase this year.

The grant money is now available so we are on the lookout for a tractor and various implements. There is a lot of work to be done this winter and spring and it is going to take some time to settle in to this new phase of development.

Paul Sheridan has kindly fitted some lights in the pack house; the switch is on the right as you go in the door. The lights are run from a car battery so please turn them off on when you leave, the battery soon runs down. I know that it is still rather basic in there but it will have to do for a while yet. I know that the door has been difficult to open; we'll try to do something with it.

Well a happy new year to you all, and a bright and productive year to us all.

Mark.

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Fruit Share- Reminder

There has been such a high level of interest in the Fruit Share option mentioned in the last newsletter that John Meletiou has kindly offered to be the local coordinator for orders instead of asking you to order direct from Spain. So if anyone else is interested in buying a share of organically grown citrus fruit, nuts and olive oil, please contact John on: 01453 833985 or john.meletiou@btclick.com

This produce is grown on a community supported agriculture project in Spain by people who work on a similar project in Scotland in the summer. They will be dropping off our fruit shares in late February on their way up to Scotland. The cost of a share is:

- £49 for 10kg of citrus fruit and nuts plus 5 litres of extra virgin cold pressed olive oil plus a bunch of herbs.
- Or £28 for just the 5 litres of olive oil

having a bigger farm supplying a wider range of food. Janet will also be spreading the word about the new model for agriculture that we are pioneering in Stroud, to inspire people from further afield. She will welcome help from anyone who would like to support her.

Janet's wages will be paid by a grant from the Social, Economic and Environmental Development (SEED) Programme and the New Opportunities Fund

She will be paid at the same rate as the farmers. We intend for the farm itself to be a viable enterprise so the farm running costs will not be subsidised by the grant.

Pork

Stroud Community Agriculture will have Pork for sale this month. There will also be the opportunity to be involved in a pork-processing day in the spring. There will also be more beef in March. If you are interested then contact Laurence at 'laurencedungworth@yahoo.co.uk' or phone 07799015499."

Stroud Community Agriculture public meeting 6.12.03

This is a summary of the meeting, but if you would like more detailed minutes, contact Nick.

- Finance update
The budget from 1.1.03-31.10.03 was presented and is available on request from the Core group.
- Stroud Community Agriculture has received £20,500 SEED funding. Part of this will be used to employ Janet Smithson, who will be helping to recruit membership to Stroud Community Agriculture. See article!
- Stroud Community Agriculture Update
There are currently 40 vegetable shares. Mark took feedback on changes to the vegetables being grown. A bursary fund exists to support people who could otherwise not afford to join.
The lease with Hawkwood has been signed.
We also now have a freezer at Hawkwood!
2 polytunnels are planned to go up at the edge of the existing vegetable plot in January, so we can expect vegetables earlier and we will try to grow tomatoes, peppers and maybe aubergines in them!
Egg production is something to look at in the future, but there are no current plans to start this immediately.
- New capital items
In the last newsletter a request was made for people to contribute towards the purchase/ acquisition of capital items. People donated barrels, a trailer, a bee- keeping set, an electrifier fence (which we are currently using for the pigs), bird boxes and

money for small tools. Mark has still got a wish list but it's a great achievement. A big thank you to the contributors!!!

We are looking for somebody who is interested to take on the bee-keeping equipment. Or maybe you know somebody who has got bees and would like to use it?

- Social events

Jade, Francis and David will start a children sub-group in order to establish an agenda for children for the year. Suggestions were hay-making and making a children's plot, where they can grow their own things. Contact Jade if you would like to contribute.

- Next meeting

The next meeting will be held at Hawkwood on **20.3.04 from 2-4pm. This will be the AGM.** If somebody would like to stand for the Core-group, let Nick know.

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Mid Winter Festival
Bernard Jarman

A very practical and enjoyable way of enjoying the changing seasons on the farm is to mark and celebrate key moments in the cycle of the year. In older cultures this was always done. It was seen as vital for ensuring a good harvest and a healthy people. Festivals on the land, being close to the earth, are always inclusive by nature. No matter whether someone is Christian, Islamic, Hindu or agnostic, the rhythms of the earth and of agriculture are universal. True tradition is never static and new insights can be continually be brought to these festivals to refresh them each year.

The Christian festival of Candlemas stands at a very important moment in the cycle of the year. It marks the mid-point between the solstice and the equinox, between the Christian festivals of Christmas and Easter. The beginning of February is, like the equivalent hour before dawn, potentially the coldest and most wintry period of the year. By St.Valentines day (14th February) however, mid winter is past and spring is fast approaching.

At this mid winter festival the living world is largely dormant and we can celebrate the return of the light, for at this time the daylight hours are increasing rapidly.

This year our festival will be celebrated on Sunday 1st February. This is the feast day of St. Bride - so important in the Celtic world. It is also a celebration of Imbolc, the pre-Christian Celtic festival of purification (from where perhaps the traditional idea of spring cleaning originated). Another legend (from Greece) is that of Persephone who was taken into the underworld and who to this day must spend half a year below and half a year above the earth. Candlemas is the time she could return to the surface of the earth. I find it fascinating to learn of the very different ways in which this festival period is celebrated

across the world and also discover what each has in common.

Those who were present last year will remember how we made candles in the earth, allowed them to harden before lighting and seeing them twinkle in the darkness. This year we will again make candles in the earth. While they harden we will walk over the land to a little forest cabin to have a bring and share meal around a fire. Afterwards when it is completely dark, we will walk back over the fields carrying lanterns and see the now lit and twinkling candles shining from the fields.

We will meet at the barn at Hawkwood on Sunday, 1st February at 4.30pm sharp to make the candles. Bring and share meal will be at about 5.30pm and the candlelit walk will begin at around 6.30pm. We hope to have soup and are looking for one (or more) volunteers for this. Please let Bernard know. Please bring your own lantern. Everyone, especially children welcome.

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Newsletter: Volunteer needed urgently!

Congratulations to Sean and Caroline on the birth of their daughter Rowenna! This means for us that we need somebody who could take on the newsletter and production of leaflets. All the information will be provided in a file, the volunteer just has to make it look pretty and readable. The work involved is approximately 4 hours every 3 months. We would also very much appreciate contributions of yummy recipes for vegetables that are in season (for such occasions when the courgettes flooded in and the like...).

Please let Nick know if you can help.

Ed: Thanks to Nadine for her work producing this newsletter.

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Stroud Horticultural Society welcomes new members

The Stroud Horticultural Society is a new gardening club in Stroud and would like to welcome members. Details from EDNA POWELL on 01453 883646.

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Diary dates

Mid Winter (Candlemas) Festival - Sunday, 1st February at 4.30pm at Hawkwood

Farm days are on the 3rd Saturday of every month from (the dates are: 17.1.04, 21.2.04, 20.3.04 and so on through the year) 9.30am to 1pm followed by a bring and share picnic at 1pm.

The farm day on 20 March will be followed by the Annual General Meeting from 2-4pm.

What is Stroud Community Agriculture?

In 2001, a group of people came together wanting to care for land and grow food in a new way. We agreed the following principles:

- To support organic and biodynamic agriculture.
- To pioneer a new economic model based on mutual benefit and shared risk and ensure that the farmers have a decent livelihood.
- To be fully inclusive. Low income shall not exclude anyone.
- To encourage practical involvement on all levels.
- To be transparent in all our affairs. To make decisions on the basis of consensus wherever possible. To strive towards social justice.
- To offer opportunities for learning, therapy and re-connecting with the life of the earth.
- To network with others to promote community supported agriculture to other communities and farms and share our learning (both economic and farming).
- To encourage Stroud Community Agriculture members, in co-operation with the farmers, to use the farm for their individual and social activities and celebrations.
- To develop a non-exclusive sense of community around the farm.

We have about 60 members who share the costs of running a 23-acre organic farm at Wick Street, near Stroud. Two farmers work with us. The farmers are paid a fair wage and the farm works for the principles above, not for profit. Members can work on the farm if they wish, but this is not compulsory. They can also use the land for celebrations and social events, and we often come together for work days, bonfires, picnics, meetings etc. We are a co-op and the members decide collectively how to run the farm. A 'core group' of members undertake most of the organising. Members share the produce and receive a weekly box of vegetables. This is a quote from a recent new member "I just received my first bag of vegetables and they are great and bursting with health". We have some pigs for meat and hope to expand towards a 100-acre farm for eggs, beef, milk, bread, fruit, and other produce.

We would like to welcome more members. Members agree to support the principles above, and pay different contributions according their means and how much food they would like.

Everyone is welcome to join in and enjoy the farm, including non-members.

Stroud Community Agriculture core group contacts:

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