



Stroud Community Agriculture Ltd is registered in England as an Industrial and Provident Society number 29578R

Newsletter 19 Stroud Community Agriculture Spring 2006

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.

Farm News

Once you read this, a change may have come about, but as I write (28th February) we are at that time of year that seems most contradictory. On the one hand, freezing biting winds drive snow in from the north, completely unhindered by our beautifully laid and replanted hedge, to freeze the fingers off our faithful vegetable-pickers – Sarah, Sue, Simon, Nicky and Finlay, to name but a few. On the other (fingerless) hand we have signs of new life appearing everywhere. In the barn there are several new arrivals: Dulci did have her piglets this time – all 12 of them being born within a few hours of each other one Tuesday morning. They are all O.K. and soon will be weaned – separated from their mother and eating only solid food. Also in January, Hazel had her second calf – again a heifer (female) calf, who is doing very well. She is as yet unnamed, unlike the piglets who were *all* named by the children during the January farm day.

There are also subtle signs of new life around the farm. In the field by the house there is a lovely swath of snowdrops well into flower. The catkins on the hazel are already finishing, and leaf buds are beginning to swell. It is always interesting over the next few months to observe the flush of leaves as they occur.

Now, some of you may say, 'Well, we would if you would stop cutting all the trees down', many of you having seen the effect of me and my chainsaw. So, I feel I need to explain/excuse/justify my actions. All of the trees that I felled this winter have been in the lower half of the hedge that we have been laying. This had been neglected for quite some time, and this had allowed many sycamore to become well established in the hedge – to the detriment of all other species. Much of the hawthorn had already been shaded out – some so much so that it was beyond rescue. Sycamore itself is a magnificent tree – observe for yourself the amazing specimen by the spring at Hawkwood – but it does have very invasive tendencies. It sets seed readily and then grows rapidly, shading out other trees, easily forming a monoculture. As it is an introduced species, albeit a long-established and naturalised one, it has not developed relationships with as many species of insects and fungi as native tree species and therefore is not as valuable to wildlife. So in my work on the hedge, I felt I needed to remove all of the sycamore for several reasons. Firstly, I wanted to re-establish the hedge, rather than having a line of trees. To this end we also planted many new hedge plants – hazel and hawthorn mainly. Secondly, I wanted to favour the native species, and so I have left a few trees in the hedge – ash and field maple – as well as planting an oak and a lime. And thirdly, it does make very good firewood, which has proved very popular this cold winter. We have actually run out of dry wood now, and all that we have needs to dry out over the summer in order to be ready for next winter.

Trees are a vital part of any farm from a simple landscape perspective right up to their positive influence on the crops and grass growing in their vicinity. There can also be too many trees in an area and so there does need to be a balance, otherwise the farm would be compromised and we would end up having a community wood and not a community farm. I feel we do have a lot of field and hedge trees at Hawkwood and ideally I would like less trees. But only if the surrounding farms had more trees. In a way we are the guardians of the farmland trees of our local area, so we have a responsibility to have a few more trees than a farm should and to look after them carefully.

Laurence Dungworth

NEWS FROM THE VEG PATCH

Despite the fact that as I write this winter is refusing to give way to spring we have begun some spring sowings. The propagation tunnel is full of young seedlings destined for the polytunnels and we have planted peas and broadbeans outside. In my greenhouse at home I have tomato and pepper seedlings growing on a heated bench under lights. This is the beginning of a sustained period of sowing and planting that will continue until July when we plant out the purple sprouting broccoli.

The supply of winter vegetables is beginning to dwindle now. Every year at this time I write about the 'hungry gap', that period of the spring when the winter veg has finished and the early veg not yet begun. We do our best to minimise this gap, with early veg in the polytunnels, but inevitably the veg share will be a little reduced and will contain more imported produce.

Yields of the Brassicas (cabbage family) have been down a little compared to last year due to the dry summer and the pigeons have decimated a lot of these plants over the winter. We covered the plants with nets early on but the birds just sat on top of the nets and ate the plants anyway. I have spent a few evenings searching the Internet; investigating modern scarecrows and good old fashioned farming advice. The most expensive option was Scaryman, a 5-foot rubber scarecrow that inflated itself every 20 minutes accompanied by a loud noise and a light. The cheapest option was black bags tied to posts (not blue bags, apparently pigeons can't see blue). The most community spirited method was to have children running around with sticks (as they do in Africa). We have now opted to cover the plants with white fleece. This offers total protection but can cause damage to the growing points when it flaps in the wind. I don't know if we will have much purple sprouting broccoli this year, which is a real shame because it is the mainstay of early spring veg.

On the bright side the carrots parsnips and scorzonera have been great. A group of enthusiastic children and adults lifted the last of the carrots on the farm day in February (six weeks more supply than last year) as well as lifting the parsnips for the week. The farm days have been very well attended and happy occasions over the winter; please come along if you fancy a bit of fresh air and good company on a Saturday morning (every third Saturday of the month).

I wish you all a bright springtime, Mark.

Annual Celebration and General Meeting Saturday April 1st 2006, 2.30pm until late

Everyone is welcome to join our annual celebration of our farm. This year we hope to include:

- A presentation and discussion on how we can make sure that any land that we take on is as secure as possible for the future. We are interested in how a Community Farm Land Trust could help with this.
- A conversation with members on how we can continue to provide organic, local vegetables and meat and all the other good things we get from our farm **and at the same time** how we can make sure that our farmers are being fairly rewarded (they are currently only earning £8.50 per hour).
- Voting in new members of the core group – any SCA members are welcome to stand for election (see separate article)
- Children's activities (we need someone to help with this)
- A farm tour
- Food and drink (bring and share)
- Music and other entertainment (we need help with this too!)

If you can help or if you have any ideas about what you would like the afternoon or evening to include, please contact Laurence (phone – 01453 753768, email – 'laurencedungworth@yahoo.co.uk') who will be chairing the meeting.

Hope to see you there
Nick

Annual General Meeting

Stroud Community Agriculture

Saturday 1st April, 2006, at Hawkwood

Item	Summary	Leader	Time
1. Farm walk	Meet at barn at 2.30	Laurence& Mark	2.30-3.30
2. Welcome introductions	and Convene in Studio 1 at 3.30 . Could each person give their name and share a wish for 2006.	Chair	3.30-3.50
3. Annual report	Overview of 2005, referring to the annual report. Questions.		3.50-4.05
4. Presentation of 2005 accounts	Expenditure vs. budget 2005 Questions. Approval.	Mark	4.05-4.20
5. 2006 budget	Proposals for the year. Comments and questions. Propose 2006 accounts not audited Acceptance	Mark	4.20-4.40
6. Secondary rules	Approval of amended rules		4.40-4.50
7. Core group	Retiring members. New members. Appointment of officers	Chair	4.50-5.00
8. Break			5.00-5.30
9. Discussion	A shared conversation about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Kolisko farm ▪ Wages ▪ Budgeting ▪ Farm day on different Saturday ▪ Any other points members wish to discuss 	Chair	5.30-6.30

Followed by bring and share supper

Changes to our secondary rules

Part of our agreement as a co-op is that we will only change the way we work with the agreement of at least 50% of the members. We propose making a couple of (very boring but the core group think) necessary changes to our secondary rules and need your approval. The changes are shown below. If you would like to discuss these changes or are not happy with them, please contact any member of the core group (contact details on the back page). If we don't hear from you we will assume that we have the agreement of at least 50% of our members!

Nick

Rule 2 used to be:

The project is managed by a voluntary "core group" of members which carries out day-to-day administration and planning on behalf of all members. The meetings of this group are open to anyone. Members of the group are elected each year at the Annual General Meeting. There are currently 7 members of the core group. Major decisions can only be made at core group meetings made up of at least 5 of them.

We propose rule 2 is now:

The project is managed by a voluntary "core group" of members which carries out day-to-day administration and planning on behalf of all members. The meetings of this group are open to anyone. The Core Group is made up of between 5 and 9 elected members. There is always at least one farmer on the Core Group. So we will have a maximum of 8 members from the community on the core group and minimum of 1 farmer. The farm team will decide which of the farmers sit on the core group (maybe for a year at a time), and the community will decide who are the other (maximum) 8. Each year either 2 or 3 of the longest standing members will stand down. This doesn't preclude others standing down as well. No one person can remain a core group member for more than 4 years without standing down. Anyone who stands down will be able to stand for re-election along with new nominees at the Annual General Meeting. The AGM can elect the Core Group if at least 20% of members are present. Alternatively a postal ballot can be arranged. There are currently 9 members of the core group. Major decisions can only be made at core group meetings made up of at least 5 of them.

Rule 10 used to be:

Any surplus produce not needed by the members is sold through local retail and wholesale channels. The proceeds from this sale go into the Stroud Community Agriculture bank account and are put towards capital development (e.g. polytunnels, equipment, etc)

We propose rule 10 is now:

Any surplus produce not needed by the members is sold through local retail and wholesale channels. The proceeds from this sale go into the Stroud Community Agriculture bank account and are put towards running costs and capital development (e.g. polytunnels, equipment, etc)

Orchard update

A community orchard group has been investigating several possible sites and hopes soon to start work on both revitalising an old orchard and planting a new one.

Contact Gary for details Gary@morter.force9.co.uk

FINANCE REPORT 2005

We have received our completed end of year accounts. We made a slight loss this year of £290. However the core group did decide to pay our farmers healthy end of year bonuses, the first time they felt able to do so. We did also make capital investments to the farm of £2500, mostly of second-hand farm machinery and the propagation polytunnel. We also had over £400 of meat stolen from the freezer.

We have £14 000 cash reserves, £7000 of which is held in a share account with the Co-op. This of course is the same as last year.

If you want to see all the gory details then please see the accounts that will come with the Annual Report.

Mark.

TREASURING OUR TREASURER

Our current treasurer is Mark, who in his spare time grows our vegetables. Much as we treasure our treasurer the core group has decided to give him his marching orders, due to concerns that the two roles could create a conflict of interest. So we are looking for a volunteer to share this valuable post with Mark. It maybe possible that this work could be paid in the future.

The job involves approximately 3 hours work a month plus attending the core group meeting every few months. You will need to have a computer and email and be reasonably computer literate. SCA will supply the software. Mark will continue to manage the farm account, which includes all the day to day transactions.

The main tasks of the treasurer are to manage the membership account.

This involves:

1. inputting the information from the monthly bank statement and checking that all the membership payments have been received.
2. chasing up any unpaid monies
3. making occasional cheque payments and deposits
4. liaising with Mark (who will be managing the farm account)
5. liaising with the membership secretary (Carol Matthews) and updating the membership lists.
6. occasionally attending the core group (possibly two or three times a year)
7. filing the accounts with the accountants at the end of the year
8. presenting the accounts to the AGM (along with Mark)
9. managing any grant funding that we may receive (along with the core group and Mark)

Mark will offer all the training and support needed. The farmers will continue to put together the annual budget.

The treasurer does not need to be a trained accountant or bookkeeper, you just need a head for computers, numbers, and detail. This job is vital to the running of SCA and is a great way to become more involved in the running of SCA.

For more information please contact Mark on 01453 753 866.

BURSARIES

SCA currently offers a bursary scheme into which members who wish can pay, thus allowing us to offer a few vegetable shares at a reduced rate. Currently this scheme is running at a deficit of about £264 a year. The core group is currently looking into this in order to set clearer guidelines. In principle the core group is happy that SCA should put some funds into the bursary fund but it is felt that £264 is more than we would like.

If you would like to contribute to this bursary fund then please alter your standing order and let Carol Matthews our membership secretary know.

If your circumstances have changed and you would like to reduce your payments please contact Carol to discuss the options.

Mark.

Work share

One of our principles is “To be fully inclusive. Low income shall not exclude anyone”. This led us to set up a bursary system which encourages anyone who can afford it to pay a bit more on their monthly standing order. This allows us to offer a limited number of veg shares at a reduced rate to low-income families. See separate article on the bursary fund.

This bursary fund is, of course, limited and we have found that some people feel uncomfortable applying for a bursary. So we have decided to try out another practical action to make sure that people who wish to become members and receive a veg share are not prevented from doing so on economic grounds. This will be separate from our bursary system and will mean that these members can work in return for a vegetable share. ‘Work share’ members will agree in writing to provide a certain number of hours’ work per month or per year. This will be work of real value to SCA; it may be work on the farm (in agreement with the farmers) or work providing some administrative support to SCA. In return they will receive a vegetable share. Work share members will still have to pay the SCA’s membership fee (£2/month or £1 concessions).

We are introducing this on a limited basis to see how it works. We would like to start with just one or two ‘work share’ members. We hope to expand the scheme as the farm grows.

Applications for ‘work-share’ membership will still have to join our waiting list for vegetable shares. Alternatively, you could apply to be a work-share member if you are already receiving veg or if you are already on our waiting list.

If you would like to apply for a ‘work-share’ please get an application form from Carole Vaughan on 0845 458 0814 or Carol Mathews on membership@stroudcommunityagriculture.org. When your name comes to the top of the veg share waiting list, we will contact you to see if we can set up an agreement that works for you and for SCA.

Nick

Kolisko

As you may know we are looking to expand the variety of produce offered, as well as increasing what we already produce, in order to welcome more members. Both of these would require us to have more land at our disposal and the core group have been looking at any possibilities that have come up. We were therefore interested to be contacted by Wynstones School at Whaddon, about their farm, Kolisko, at Brookthorpe. The current tenant is leaving in September, so they are looking for a group to take on the land and manage it as a small-scale, diverse farm with a strong social element. A few of us met with some of the school and Mark and I looked around the farm (Mark has worked there previously and SCA began life there). There are 22 acres – similar to Hawkwood – but with extensive buildings. The land is mainly gently rolling pasture where the Cotswolds meet the Severn Vale. There is one very flat field that has been used for vegetables. The soil is quite heavy and therefore complements the soil at Hawkwood. In some ways it would be a good step into the future.

There are some concerns that have been raised though. The first one is that of distance. Brookthorpe is 5 miles from Stroud, and though this may not seem far, it is ‘over the hill’, and the road is very busy, making walking or cycling to it rather challenging. It is however, on a bus route, which cannot be said for many farms. The other issue is related to potential (or current) members’ misperception of Stroud Community Agriculture. SCA is not aligned to any particular philosophy. In fact one of our principles is to be open to everyone. But due to a number of reasons, such as:

- We are based in Stroud,
- We are a community,
- We farm biodynamically
- Our current landlord (Hawkwood) is an anthroposophical institution,

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...there could be a misperception that we are an anthroposophical organisation. For some people this is reason enough not to get involved. If we now started renting land that had been a biodynamic farm for decades from an anthroposophical school that misperception may be reinforced and may exclude more people. Ultimately the decision rests with the members, and so it would be great to hear from you. Contact a core group member or send comments for the next newsletter to 'laurencedungworth@yahoo.co.uk'. Alternatively bring it up at the AGM on the 1st of April.

Laurence Dungworth

A new member's view, by Michelle Newbold.

The following article appeared in Cotswold Family Life (Jan/Feb 06):

When I read in a local paper about the community farm, situated in the grounds at Hawkwood College, I thought it would be worth checking out.

As a regular consumer of organic vegetables obtained via a box scheme, my son Joseph and I had the chance to experience a wide variety of vegetables in their natural state, and not in standardised sizes as demanded by the supermarket.

Having vegetables delivered was good, but it didn't show Joseph where they came from, or how they are grown. So one fine day, off we went to the farm for a family day event, which are run once a month.

There is an active community life around the farm with picnics, shared meals, bonfires, night time walks, seasonal festivals and children's activities.

I was a little curious to know what sort of people we would see there, and was pleased to meet with other local families with an interest in growing and eating healthy vegetables, raising organic livestock, and just having a great day out together in some particularly beautiful countryside. We helped with the clearing of the rows of sweetcorn stalks, which were then fed to the cows, who were patiently waiting in the next field for another armful of lush stems. Following this came some pumpkin and squash harvesting. It was really amusing to see the children all rushing to push and roll the biggest pumpkins to the edge of the road, with much huffing and puffing along the way! The last job of the day was the mushroom picking in the cabbage patch, which the children were best equipped for with their small feet and hands.

After a bit of a wash and brush-up, we all gathered at the picnic tables for a shared feast of food and drink, that each family had generously contributed to.

As it was nearly Halloween, we had a game of apple bobbing and some stories and games with a Halloween theme.

Joe now understands more about where his food comes from, and we plan to go back regularly as the seasons change so he can watch the crops grow.

Everyone is welcome to visit the farm, and you don't have to become a member to join in with the family days.

For general enquiries & information: Carol Vaughan. Tel: 0845 458 0814. Email:

info@stroudcommunityagriculture.org

Web: www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

NUTRIENT LEVELS IN FOOD FALLEN

Joanna Blythman, author of '*Shopped: The Shocking Power of British Supermarkets*', reports on the current state of modern foods and the need for farmers to receive higher prices for their produce. She writes, "Chemically dependent, intensive farming methods do not produce good, nutritious food and for one good reason: they are simply not designed to. **Five years ago the Soil Association quoted figures from the Department of Environment and Rural Affairs showing that trace mineral levels in UK fruit and vegetables had tumbled by 76 per cent.** Similar figures from the United States Department of Agriculture indicated that it wasn't just a British problem. And it isn't; **it's a modern farming problem.** Down on the commercial farm, quantity now triumphs over quality at every turn...pushed by their supermarket masters to produce high yields at low costs".

What is Stroud Community Agriculture?

We have 116 members who share the costs of running a 23-acre organic farm at Wick Street, near Stroud. Two farmers and an apprentice 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 new member "I just received my first bag of vegetables and they are great and bursting with health". We have some pigs and cattle for meat and hope to expand towards a 100-acre farm for eggs, milk, bread, fruit, and other produce. Members agree to support the principles below, 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.

We work to 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.

Stroud Community Agriculture contacts:

General Enquiries & Information

Carole Vaughan - Tel: 0845 4580814 Email: info@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Membership Admin

Carol Mathews - Email: membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Stroud Community Agriculture core group

Jade Bashford - 01453 885233 - jadebashford@hotmail.com

Laurence Dungworth - 01453 753768 – 07799 015499 laurecedungworth@yahoo.co.uk

Mark Harrison - 01453 753866 – mark@plumtucker.co.uk

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Ali and Dave Judd – 01453 889069 daveandali@phoncoop.coop

Carole Vaughan - 01452 310077 - cv005a6380@blueyonder.co.uk

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