



# SPRING NEWS

Newsletter No 27 SPRING 2008

## *News from our farmers...*

The year began on a slightly sad note for me with the death of a month-old calf. The vet's prognosis was a twisted gut, and she said there was almost nothing we could have done. However we did have another calf born the next month and we are expectantly awaiting the arrival of lambs and piglets during April.

A more recent arrival on the farm has been horses. They are not new-borns, but are new for us. One of these, a black Percheron mare named Kate, has been lent to us by Ruskin Mill. She has been worked before and I hope to continue this, using her for grassland and cultivation work. To keep her company is Bolle, a Mecklenburger Kaltblut from Germany. He is Katja's horse and has been ridden and used for cart work. This move is an experiment albeit a rather contentious one, as there are justified concerns about the cost and time commitment necessary. Maybe it would be better to invest our resources in something else currently. However, having a horse on the farm is a very positive move as they bring a particular element with them. There is also the whole aspect of the skills necessary for working with horses. In a world with an uncertain future it is a good thing to maintain as wide a range of skills as possible, and personally I am very keen to be able to develop this realm. We will have Kate until the autumn when we can review the situation and decide how to proceed. It would be good to hear your views on this subject, as ultimately it will be the members who make this decision. In the meantime, do come to Brookthorpe to visit them.

A question that came from one of the members just before the recent AGM, was that of the reason for having so many animals when we are having to sell our meat to non-members. The main reason we have the animals

is to be able to produce enough manure to have the fertility to grow our wonderful vegetables. Without this then it would not be possible in the same way. I also then looked at the amount of meat we produce. From a bullock we get about 150kg of beef, and from a pig, between 25 and 40 kg of pork. With about 4 bullocks/heifers a year and up to 20 baconers that gives about 600kg of beef and 600kg of pork. If this was to be shared equally amongst two-thirds of the 150+ members (assuming one third of them are vegetarian) that would give 6kg of each kind of meat, for the whole year. This amounts to a packet of sausages and 500g mince each month. Which in my view is not an excessive amount and still gives scope for people to buy some meat from elsewhere i.e. chicken etc. The question remains however: How to get the meat from our wonderful animals to the plates of more of our wonderful members (apologies to all vegetarians amongst you).

We are currently discussing with both our landlords (Hawkwood and Wynstones) the lengthening of our leases with them. The signing of a more secure lease with Hawkwood has been mentioned before and this is nearly completed. The initial lease with Wynstones was for three years reflecting the caution displayed by both sides. This is due for renewal next year and we are beginning discussions with them now.

At the beginning of the month we had our Demeter inspection. All went well and although we have not had official correspondence to confirm, it is safe to assume that as of the 13<sup>th</sup> March, all of our land has been certified as biodynamic.

Laurence.

## NEWS FROM THE VEGGIE PATCHES

This is the time of year when we begin to finish with the winter crops and begin sowing and planting crops for the new season. We have already begun ground preparation at Hawkwood and in the walled garden at Brookthorpe. Among other things we have planted broad beans and shallots, and sowed carrots and leeks both outside and in the polytunnels.

We have now repaired and recovered (with a plastic polytunnel sheet) the old greenhouse in the walled garden. There is a heated bench in the greenhouse and it is already full of a wide range of seedlings, all of which should be ready for planting out in the coming weeks.

March is often quite a productive month in the garden as the days lengthen and become warmer and the over-wintered plants reawaken and begin growing. At the moment we have a lot of purple sprouting broccoli and leeks in the field, and salad and spinach in the polytunnels. However this productive period is soon followed by what is commonly known as the 'hungry gap'. This is when this growth

flush has turned to flower, and the new season plants haven't yet matured. We try to reduce this hungry gap by growing plants in the polytunnels but we will have to resort to buying in some imported produce from Spain and France to make up the veg share.

Thank you to all those people who have supplied reusable bags for the veg share. Please keep them coming and please bring back any of those bags that you may have lurking in your cupboards. Some of you have donated bags with your own name marked on them. We will try to keep them for you but as the use of reusable bags increases sorting out each individual's bag will get to be more and more difficult. I hope that you will view it as a donation to the whole system rather than just for your own veg.

Hopefully you will have seen a copy of our news sheet recently. If time and energy allows we would like to produce this on a regular basis to keep you more in touch with what is happening around the farms.

Thanks,  
Mark.

## The SCA AGM

The AGM, this year at Hawkwood, was a well attended gathering of both familiar and new faces. Five members of the core group stood down: Laurence Dungworth, Ali Judd, Dave Judd, Bernard Jarman and Jeannie Ireland. Mark Harrison replaces Laurence as the farmer on the group, and we also welcomed Naomi Walker, Andy Jones, Simon Hanks and Simon Ryder. Thank you to those outgoing core group members for their contributions, time and effort, and welcome to those coming onto the group.

One of the main issues emerging from the AGM discussion is that of whether the farm is ready for or needs a working horse. This debate lead onto the wider and related debate on the place of animals on the farm.

The following articles are a result of these debates and we would welcome the views of members on this. These are real and important questions. It is your farm, so please let us know your answers. Letters or articles to the editor, Sue Baker: email. sue.baker @talktalk.net

## To Eat or Not To Eat Meat

Why should farm members who don't eat meat subsidise the keeping of animals when they cost more than the value of meat sales? Why do we have animals at all when most of the meat produced is sold outside the group of farm members? And how can vegetarians be members of SCA when the farming system relies on the keeping—and killing and eating—of animals?

These were some of the issues raised at the recent AGM at Hawkwood. There appears to be a tension between keeping the price of shares low, and having the maximum amount of diversity on the farm. For some members, a farm isn't a real farm unless it has animals. But is there a more scientific basis for this emotional reaction? Students of biodynamic agriculture would be able to answer that. My own basic understanding extends no further than realizing that without manure we wouldn't have the fertility we need to grow the lovely healthy vegetables every week.

As we make our way towards a low-carbon future, how does our decision to eat meat or not contribute? I remain unconvinced by George Bush's claims that the farting of farm animals contributes more to greenhouse gas emissions than driving a 4x4—surely only covert support for the massive increase in the amount of land used for growing biofuel crops. The natural cycle of decomposition and fertilization is a stable one—it is our manic economic activity, fuelled by fossilized energy, that has caused the instability.

Some members do leave the farm, and it is the core group's job to make sure we are keeping the support of our members. Comments about the cliquy, middle-class nature of other members may suggest that we are not considering people who cannot afford the luxury of enjoying seeing animals if it makes their food budget harder to manage. The emergence of two CSAs in the Stroud area shows what a successful movement we are part of, but they also offer us competition. Will this be a benefit to us all, allowing the Hawkwood-Brookthorpe SCA to pioneer a farm with maximum diversity based on biodynamic principles? Or with this extra competition will we find that we will need to have more vegetarians as members and take a more hard-edged financially focused approach to how we manage the farm?

Molly Scott Cato, Core Group Member

We'd like to hear member's views about us taking on a working horse. We have been offered one on loan from Ruskin Mill for no cost for the first 6 months, and the opportunity to buy it after this. Others costs will include the farmer's time, barn space, vets bills, insurance etc. It will be able to do a bit of work on the farm in place of some of the tractor work, but we will still need to run both tractors for other work. With forecasts about oil becoming scarcer and much more expensive ('Peak Oil'), we are interested to see how a horse can work on a farm, and to share what we discover more widely. Also a new member, Justin, from Cirencester Agricultural College is interested in studying our progress.

The issue is that the farm belongs to members, and the income for the farm comes from members, so it is up to us to decide whether to go ahead. This is an opportunity to get to know and understand a working horse and there will be some reduction in tractor use. We have to ask whether taking on a working horse at this stage is the most efficient way of serving our principles.

Do we at this stage in our development have other priorities such as increasing our numbers to our target membership to reach our budget goal? Maybe our energies should be spent on a marketing campaign, for example in Gloucester?

If our priority is reducing use of fossil fuels, then setting up a new drop off or working harder at encouraging lift sharing for pickups would be more effective. If our priority is increasing diversity on the farm then we could we invest in laying hens and fruit? If our priority is enabling a relationship with a horse, then should we get a riding pony (or a welsh pony that can do work and be ridden) and set up a member's riding club (which should pay for itself), not get a big horse that few people can work closely with.

Jade Bashford

**“A horse, a horse, my kingdom for .....**” So, dangerous at both ends and uncomfortable in the middle, or worthy helpmate and companion on the land? It would seem that the subject of a working horse on the farm has stirred some interesting debate within the farm community. Some members are concerned that a horse would prove expensive and would take up too much of the farmer’s time, that it would be of little practical use, or indeed that it would promote an image of the farm as “middle class” and thus put off potential members. Indeed, if the farm is to take on a working horse (beyond the current experimental 6 month period), there must be a careful consideration of the full implications involved. To do less would be irresponsible, both to the membership whose weekly share pays the farm bills and to the animal itself.

I myself feel strongly that working horses on the farm can only be a good thing, when set against a background of rising fuel prices and the need to reduce CO2 emissions. Costs need not be prohibitive; as the horse will not be working on metalled roads, it will not require shoeing, only regular foot trimming at a cost of about £250 per year. Food costs will be very low, mostly grass and hay (virtually free, as we grow it ourselves) with some additional feed when the horse is working for long periods. Insurance (to cover vets fees in the event of illness or injury) would be around £350 per year. Equipment for working with horses can take some tracking down. However, a large percentage of it is old and relatively inexpensive. It is also fairly simple and much cheaper to repair than modern tractor accessories. Brand new harness is not cheap, but second hand tack is available and affordable (as a leather worker myself, I would be happy to carry out any repairs or adjustments required).

So what can a horse do that a tractor can’t do better? Some tasks that were once carried out by horses can now be done much more quickly using machines. Tasks such as ploughing or mowing hay fall into this category. There are other tasks however that a horse can perform as well, if not better. Horse hoes can go up and down rows of vegetables, clearing weeds and saving many man hours in the process. Horses can be used in spaces too small or too steep for tractors. They can pull carts, starting and stopping on command, making jobs like distributing compost much easier. They could conceivably pull a small cart along rows of veg to assist with harvesting. They are lighter than tractors and cause less soil compaction. On a large scale commercial farm they might struggle to find a useful niche, but on a small, diverse farm such as ours, they could more than pay their way and provide free fertiliser as a bonus.

Those are some of the practical arguments in favour of working horses, but there are other arguments as well. There can be no doubt that a working horse on the farm creates a wonderful atmosphere. Somehow they form a link between the land and us, building a sense of harmony that a tractor just can’t match. This might not help the veg grow better (but I wouldn’t count on that), but it can help us as farm members feel a greater sense of connection between ourselves, the food we grow and eat and our agricultural heritage. It might even encourage us to turn up to farm work days more often!

At the end of the six months that we have the horse on trial from Ruskin Mill, we will collectively need to decide whether we want to continue with working horses and if so, we will need to raise funds to purchase one. The core group, who are mandated to make decisions on the running of the farm, have a duty to ensure that farm funds are spent wisely and with the support of the membership. If you would like to see working horses on the farm, please let them know. Phone or email, or speak to one of the farmers if you bump into them at the packing shed. There may also be ways that members could help out with the care of the horse, just as some of us already help with feeding the cows and pigs.

Jeannie Ireland

**Please remember that we still have places for more members. If you know anyone who might be interested in joining please mention the SCA. Also if anyone is interested in helping to publicise the SCA please contact a member of the core group.**

### **Leonard Stanley Food Group**

We are a group of local people who are currently setting up a food buying (and producing) co-operative that is able to source fresh, local seasonal food for local people and in so doing actively support the local farming and food producing economy to help establish a more sustainable community. The scheme is aimed at the very local community – Leonard Stanley and its immediate neighbouring communities.

The project was prompted in August 2007 by concerns over the possible selling-off of a county-council owned starter farm in the parish. A core group of like-minded persons quickly formed and held a well supported public meeting to raise awareness and seek support for the retention of the farm and lobbied Gloucestershire County Council. The farm was successfully re-let in October and the Group is currently in discussions with the tenant about how we can help find a route to the (very) local market for his produce.

We have held discussions with the main local producers of meat, cheese, vegetables, honey and preserves (who are keen to be involved) and we have organised a trial pre-order scheme at Christmas which proved to be very successful.

We now plan to set up a formal and legal framework to enable us to offer a regular pre-order scheme and occasional village-based market, hopefully by the spring of this year.

David Newton

### **Unpasteurised milk – is there enough interest out there?**

We have found a farmer producing unpasteurised, non-homogenised milk and cream. The farm also makes ice cream from this milk but, by law, ice cream has to be pasteurised. Now we need to get together a large enough group of SCA members to make it worthwhile bringing it over from Bosbury near Ledbury.

Beaconhill Farm has a small herd of Jersey cows managed by John Barron to high standards of health and welfare. Although not officially 'organic' (due to problems with the length of the lease on the land) John does follow most organic practices and uses no artificial fertilizers, pesticides or prophylactic antibiotics. The cows are fed on a diet of grass and some fodder beet in the winter. John is happy to talk about his methods and show his farm to anyone who contacts him.

To minimise the 'milk miles' involved we plan to buy a freezer that can store our milk (which is delivered fresh – unfrozen) so that John can bring larger quantities on fewer trips. To put another freezer in the packing shed we will need to upgrade the electrics (which are already a bit overloaded). The cost of this work, plus the cost of an environmentally-friendly freezer is £720.

We are proposing that we raise this initial cost by selling 'milk shares'. The deal is that the first 36 members to put in £20 (non-returnable payment to cover capital investment) get a permanent discount on milk, cream and ice cream.

Even if you don't want to buy a milk share **we need to know if you are interested in buying milk** on a regular basis. If there is not enough interest in buying the milk we won't take the plan any further.

These are the current prices for produce;

	<b>Standard SCA members pay</b>	<b>'Milk Share' SCA members pay</b>
Full fat milk 1litre	£1.43	£1.36
Full fat milk 2 litres	£2.86	£2.72
Ice cream 500ml	£4.29	£4.09
Ice cream 1 litre	£8.36	£7.98
Very thick cream 100g	£3.02	£2.89

Milk will be delivered fresh (unfrozen) every week or fortnight. You will need to commit to a fixed number of litres per week and we hope you will be able to collect these weekly - maybe with your veg.

Ice cream & cream – we propose buying some stock and keeping it in the freezer. Members can then buy it on a 'pay as you go' basis – maybe as part of the red file system.

If you are interested in buying unpasteurised milk or even in buying a 'share' to help cover the set up costs, please complete the 'interest' form on the SCA website [www.stroudcommunityagriculture.org/milkshare](http://www.stroudcommunityagriculture.org/milkshare) and return it to Nick Weir. Alternatively phone Nick on 01453 840037 to let him know, a) how many litres of milk per week you think you would be able to commit to and b) how much ice cream and cream you think you would buy.

Please also let Nick know if you already travel out to Ledbury regularly and could bring back the milk or if you would be interested in being the regular phone or email link between SCA and John.

If you would like to discuss milk share in more detail, please contact Nick on:

**Tel: 01453 840037**

**Email: [nick.weir@localfood.org.uk](mailto:nick.weir@localfood.org.uk)**

## ***Snippets.....***

### **'Food Security: are we sleep-walking into a crisis?'**

Tim Lang, Professor of Food Policy at City University, was interviewed on the BBC Radio 4 Today Programme on 4<sup>th</sup> March about his lecture that evening in London titled 'Food Security: are we sleep-walking into a crisis?' He urged the Government to support a sustainable farming system in which people ate less meat and dairy and grew more of their own vegetables and fruit. He highlighted that currently in Britain we only produce 60% of our own food - the same as at the end of the Second World War. He explored the clash between our cheap food culture and the challenge of providing a sustainable food supply for the future. He will discuss the current remarkable decline in home-grown food at a time when, perhaps, we need new forms of farming and sustainable food systems. He will also question the current position of Britain which implies that we are contributing to global food inequality and will consider the fundamental questions for our national policy: what is land for, what skills are necessary and where does the public interest lie?

### **Stand by your Ham**

Hundreds of pig farmers protested in Downing Street on 4<sup>th</sup> March in protest at what they claim is a crisis in their industry. High feed prices mean some are losing £25 on every animal they sell - and there's no sign the price they're paid is about to go up. Among them were a group of farmers

who've just recorded a song entitled - "Stand By Your Ham" - a reworking of the Tammy Wynette classic.

**An innovative community group in Gloucestershire** is developing a farming system designed to reduce their dependence on imported foods. Stroud Community Agriculture is a community supported agriculture farm (CSA) which has been producing biodynamic meat and vegetables for 6 years. Founder member, Nick Weird, cycling up to the farm with 3 children, 5 forks, and 4 sacks of surplus potatoes from his allotment in his trailer said that the produce from the farm had reduced his families shop at Tesco each week by 1%.

Laurence Dungheap, the project's farmer explained that they were now adding to the farm diversity by branching out into horse meat production. Jade Bashful, arriving in her 4 by 4 to collect her vegetables said that she was looking forward to introducing her children to the delight's of horse meat as they were starting to tire of tinned lamb's mince.

Mark Harrisod, SCA's grower had introduced a new protein source to the farm carrots this winter. Carrot root fly was an attempt to boost the nutritional content of this crop. It had been met with some resistance from the membership. "I don't think that he has quite got the carrot root fly to carrot flesh ratio quite right yet" said Nicky Fergustation.

Sue Barking-M regularly brought her dog to run with the farm's pack of dogs, adding to farm diversity and fertility. Simon Hankerchief, a regular volunteer at the farm, carefully wiping his boot, said that the farm was also fostering a sense of community between the members, but added that he was going home for a cup of coffee.

A word from Katie Lloyd-Nunn, Development Coordinator at Hawkwood:

*We very much appreciate our tenants Stroud Community Agriculture and we wish all the membership a Happy Eastertide!*

**Courses by SCA members:**

WATER, POTENTISATION and HEALTH of the LAND on Saturday 26th April 2008, 9am-5pm. Agriculture and the natural ecology are beset with "unhealthy" influences. Some are man-made problems some perhaps not. Can potentised preparations address such issues? Come and find out!

Tutors: *Simon Charter* designs and builds ecological water systems. *Mark Moodie* is a trained homeopath and has run an ecological water management business for 15 years. £64 including lunch.

ENCOUNTERING NATURE A *Spring Experiential Workshop* on Sunday 18 May.

Includes perception exercises, plant observations, weather observations, practical imagination, the four elements, discussion and conversation. No previous experience or knowledge is necessary.

Tutor: *Jonathan Code* teaches at Ruskin Mill, Waldorf College and Hibernia. He is inspired by the work of J. W. Goethe, Rudolf Steiner, Dennis Klocek and the Western alchemical tradition.

Fee: £36 including refreshments, but not lunch

Hawkwood College celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year and we invite everyone to our Open Day on Bank Holiday Monday 5th May 10am - 5pm, celebrating 60 years! Contact Hawkwood College, Stroud GL6 7QW Tel: 01453-759034. [www.hawkwoodcollege.co.uk](http://www.hawkwoodcollege.co.uk)

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.*

**General Enquiries & Information:**

Claire and Paul Sheridan- Tel: 0845 4580814

Email [info@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](mailto:info@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org)

Website: [www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](http://www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org)

**Membership Admin:**

Carol Mathews - Email: [membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](mailto:membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org)

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**Upcoming Diary Dates:**

<b>April</b>	<b>Piglets and lambs due this month!</b>		Brookthorpe
	<b>26th</b>	<i>Farm Day</i>	Hawkwood
<b>May</b>	<b>24th</b>	<i>Farm Day</i>	Brookthorpe
<b>June</b>	<b>28th</b>	<i>Farm Day</i>	Hawkwood