AUTUMN FARM REPORT

I just read what I wrote for last year’s autumn farm report and the description is very similar to this year. “It’s early September and there is already a nip in the air...the summer has been a really good one...”

The summer has been a good one again which makes life so much easier on the farm. We had a good mix of warm weather with enough rain to keep everything growing, especially the grass! We have had so much grass this year we have made a bumper crop of hay and still have more grazing than we can really stay on top of.

The cows are doing well. Our new cow, Ivy and her calf holly are settling in well. The rest of the cows should start calving any time now. Due to an amount of grass and hay on the farm we are looking for an extra few cows to buy in to help utilize the feed we have.
The sheep are also thriving on the wonderful grass. The spring lambs have grown well and some are ready for the butchers now. Unfortunately we had to say goodbye to our old ram, Ferdinand, but we now have a new ram called Ian. He is currently living with Jean Claude, the boar in the bachelors pad (the orchard to you and me)!

In my summer farm report I wrote about the problem we had been having with the pigs and getting them all in pig (pregnant). Well, I can announce that both sows farrowed since then. Ezmie, our older sow, had seven piglets. It’s not as many as I would have liked but they have made up for it by growing at an astonishing speed. They are a cross breed, half Gloucester old spot and half saddle back. Our other sow, Tansy, also farrowed, but she only had 4 piglets! This is far less than I would have liked and expected. I think it was due to the boar being a bit young and not quite up to the job! However, just like the other piglets these too are growing at an incredible speed.

For some time I have wanted to try cross-breeding our pigs. The old spots are excellent mothers and great foragers. They thrive well on leftover vegetables and grass with their diet but their offspring can grow a little slowly and have a tendency to lay down a little too much fat. To counter this I have tried out a few different crosses. Firstly I used George, a saddle-back boar from Ruskin mill, but he is still a traditional breed that’s a little fatty too. Then I bought Jean Claude, a Pietrain boar of Belgian origin. This breed is known for its leanness and ability to produce good, faster growing piglets. I hope this will give us the best of both worlds.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank Lucy for her work with us over the summer and wish her well in her new job. I would also like to thank Claire for her hard work and enthusiasm. Claire will be continuing on the farm with us over the winter and throughout next summer. Vasilis, our apprentice, has completed his Biodynamic training, but will continue to work with us through the autumn. He has been a great help and a good student.

Please feel free to have a walk around your farms when you collect your veg. There are piglets down at Brookthorpe and soon we will have calves too.

Farmer Sam Hardiman
NEWS FROM THE VEGGIE FIELDS

It has been an excellent growing season this year. Two good seasons in a row, what is going on? Although the weather in August turned quite cool and autumnal most of our summer crops have done very well. We were delayed in getting some crops established in the spring but most have grown well. We have a particularly impressive crop of sweetcorn growing at Brookthorpe. We usually seem to struggle to get it established. I know about counting your chickens before they hatch, but hopefully we will have plenty of corn in the share later in the autumn. We will also have some celery, pak choi, and the usual squashes and pumpkins.

The one exception to this good news is the Brassicas (vegetables in the cabbage family), which were heavily infested with a tiny beetle called the flea beetle, so called because of its ability to spring into the air when disturbed. Individually these beetles do very little damage, but in hot dry weather such as we had in July, the population can explode to such an extent that they cause terrible damage to young plants. We even resorted to swiping each plant in the field with a card covered in sticky glue to catch them. We caught thousands in this way but they were ultimately done in by a change in the weather. They don’t like cool damp conditions. The most effective way to control them is to cover the plants with fleece before the pest emerges but we try to avoid that as it makes managing the crop so much more difficult. Most of the plants have now recovered but it does look like we will have a fairly poor crop for the winter. It is interesting to note that chemical farmers, especially ones growing crops such as rape, which is sown directly into the ground (as opposed to planting out transplants) really struggle with this pest, as it can wipe out all of the plants when they are just emerging. That’s why they want to use the neonicotinoids, the chemicals implicated in the alarming decline in bee populations.

We have ordered the new polytunnel for Hawkwood. The site has been rotivated and we should start erecting it in the Autumn. We have sown some cabbages and red kale to plant in it later in the year, so I hope that we are able to get it up in time.

In the existing polytunnels the tomatoes, peppers and cucumbers should keep going into October. When they are finished we will quickly remove them and replant with the salad plants which are currently growing in the greenhouse at Brookthorpe. We have sown spinach and chard to provide some greens later in the winter.

Let’s hope that we have a long mellow Autumn..

Farmer Mark Harrison
SCA CORE GROUP VISION MEETING  
held on 23rd July 2014

Just before everybody went off on holidays the Core Group held a special session to reflect on all aspects of the life of the SCA that has developed up to now, and to develop a vision for the future.

Some of the present Core Group members who were there at the beginning told us how they dreamt up the idea of SCA but had not really believed it would happen. Well, it has! We realised in building up a full picture how much has been achieved and how community-rich we are. It was particularly heartening to hear what each of us felt to be the most valuable ideas inherent in this Community supported agriculture scheme. In our discussion we took on board the responses to a members survey in early July and the founding principles, then began dreaming of the next 5, 10 and 20 years. The main desire was to develop the sense of community – linking members to one another and to the farm. To put it another way, ‘how do we enable more people to be touched by the farm in the same way as we are?’ With this in mind we’ll hold occasional ‘new members evenings and establish a buddy system for new members so that they are immediately made to feel welcome. We’ll be setting up an event groups with a view to involving more members in organising events (possibly organising a procession / carnival down Stroud high street) and occasional farm work days.

We recognised that 2013-14 was a major landmark in the development of CSA as we now have over 200 members and are much more financially sustainable. We want to make the farm even more sustainable by harvesting solar energy and developing a rainwater system in the future.

The third major idea was to develop a starter farm with the aim of enabling young farmers to get the opportunity to run their own farm knowing that the experience of CSA is there for them. With this in mind, we would be pleased to hear about availability of land for lease (up to four acres) within a few miles of Hawkwood or Brookthorpe.

Adam Briscoe

REAL Bread for SCA

REAL bread is available to SCA members to pick up from the veg sheds at either Brookthorpe or Hawkwood. This is handmade to order from ChickPeas in Ruscombe, using organic and locally sourced ingredients together with love and care in the careful production of good, nutritious REAL bread. Workshops are also offered by ChickPeas, to share the art of bread making and all the benefits of homemade bread.  
Contact Claire: 01453 757348
TIME TO CELEBRATE THE HARVEST

All Welcome on Sunday October 5th
2pm – 4.30pm at Brookthorpe Village Hall

HARVEST MEAL

This year we enjoyed a gorgeous summer. July was hot which for once coincided with the summer holidays. A number of impressive thunderstorms brought enough rain to keep vegetables and grass growing! We are looking back to favourable, harmonious growing conditions. Accordingly, we have early and thriving vegetables, our cows and sheep enjoy rich pasture with lambs developing well on the grass.

This year Nature provides for us with abundance which is in contrast to the dark shadows that are cast in human affairs.

Like in previous years we will celebrate the harvest and give thanks to nature, the farm team, volunteers and all the eaters of our vegetables with our traditional Harvest Meal. It is held on Sunday the 5th of October in Brookthorpe Village Hall at 2pm. We will begin with pressing apples for juice, have children's activities, and finish with a bring and share meal. Please bring your apples and a container for the juice!

As you may know, our plans to build a straw bale building at Hawkwood are taking shape. Sam will present the plans for our community building. You are invited to discuss these plans and to bring your ideas and suggestions. We will create a model of the building as part of the children's activity and young and adult members can share their ideas with drawings.

Brookthorpe Village Hall has a fully equipped kitchen and is set up for children indoors and outdoors. You will find us in Brookthorpe on the right hand side of the second round about coming from Stroud.

Ute Schlossmacher
FARM CAMP 2014

We had a lovely farm camp this year. The rain threatened but stayed away and it turned out to be a beautiful evening. We had a camp fire and cooked our meals over it. The children made a rope swing, which they played on happily for hours, as well as playing in the little stream that runs along the field boundary.

Thanks to all those that came. It was most enjoyable.

Next year I propose a two night camp starting on a Friday night!

Farmer Sam

'COMMUNITY FOOD FERMENTATION GROUP' ...

For those who have shown their interest in The Food Fermentation Group, there will be an initial gathering to look at food fermentation process on Tuesday 7th October from 7.00 – 9.00pm at the Open House Community Kitchens in Stroud. With that in mind, please bring some carrots and onions, graters, knife for chopping, glass bowl for mixing, a small kilner jar and tea towel.

If you need directions to the kitchens, please telephone Simon Hanks on 01452 812608
At the heart of our farm we find our members and our farmers, but where can we meet, learn together and keep warm?

Farmer Sam is leading a keen team towards making a straw-bale building that does this job. "It will probably be round, "off-grid", and covered by a green roof", says Bruno. The team is working together on all aspects of design, fundraising, building and operation. We lease our land at Hawkwood from Hawkwood College and so we are working closely with them.

If you like the sound of giving our farm the heart it needs, here are some ways you can help:

1. Raise funds - Members can donate towards capital projects like this at any time
2. Manage the project - Volunteer your time and skills to make it happen
3. Help build it - The reward of getting stuck into something real

The project promises fun, challenge, and the chance to work with other farm members. For details please visit "Latest News" at www.stroudcommunityagriculture.org

Sally Daley

Stopping to smell the manure...

We all know the joy of collecting our veg at Hawkwood – beautiful manor house, energy laden gardens, fresh spring water and a quiet walk in the wood. Recently I have discovered the joy of collecting from Brookthorpe.

I began collecting my share from Brookthorpe when my son, Chad, started class 1 last year at Wynstones. I would rush through the shed between drop off and toddler group, occasionally stopping long enough to enjoy how beautiful the walled garden was looking.

A couple of months ago, with a restless toddler on hand, I decided to take a walk down to the barn to see what we could see. We made it as far as the first enclosure, the bachelors’ pad, on the left where the ram was being housed. We stopped and watched him for a while and then I plucked up the courage to touch him. (Having been brought up in the city I didn’t have much contact with animals). What a surprise, he was as welcoming to us as a puppy on your lap. We spent 45 minutes that day just scratching his head, feeding him grass and chatting to him. My toddler was as enthralled with him as I was.

After our initial foray into the farm, we have now made it a part of our weekly veg collection. We’ve seen the pigs hunkered down in the barn, the sheep roaming and the cows, bless them, as
inquisitive of us as we are of them. We’ve played on the horses’ wagon, pretending we’re on an adventure with the horses pulling us along and picnicking along the way. We’ve also enjoyed the lambs frolicking in the field, running circles around their mamas. 

Over the summer break we got to do a little impromptu helping around the farm. On one occasion we got to giggle with Sam, Claire and Lucy as we were trying to move the boar to the bachelor pad. There were copious amounts of thick, wet mud, a boar who wouldn’t budge and wellies getting stuck. My Chad got to make up a bed for the older of the piglets and then rode with Sam when he moved the piglets into their new abode. 

What has been a real treat has been watching the three sets of piglets grow. We missed the early days of the first set and only connected with the second set when they were 5 weeks old. It has been remarkable to see them week on week and see how quickly they grow. Our first experience with the eldest piglets was when they were in the bachelors’ enclave – I suspect at this time the bachelors had other business to attend to. We were walking towards the barn and as we rounded the corner and they noticed us, they came charging towards us with great interest. This captured Chad’s imagination and he spent the next while running up and down besides the enclave with all the little piglets running besides him. It was such an amusing sight, all the little barrel bodies skedaddling after him with their little ears bouncing up and down. It astounded me just how fast and agile these little being were. 

The last sets of four little piglets were born three weeks ago. We were told that because the sow only gave birth to four babies they were actually rather large. That may be so but how tiny they looked next their gargantuan mother, and how quickly they are growing, doubled in size the first week! 

What an amazing education we’ve had in this short time and how blessed we are to have farmers, and their co-workers, who are so free with their knowledge and who get such joy from sharing ‘our’ farm with us. For our farm it is and it is so much more than just collecting your bags of veg once a week. I hope that you will all find the time to connect to the beautiful land that makes up our farm. Blessings..

Andy Evans

...Time to show our enormous gratitude: 

"It's been such a huge gift to be apart of the SCA, we've totally loved it, including our two little ones. We speak many times every week about what farmer Sam and farmer Mark may be up to on the farm, how the animals are, how yummy the veg is, whether we can help some time... Especially our son loves everything farming. Even before having a family, I loved coming to Hawkwood to get my veg. In short, the SCA is so much more than a veg scheme, what an amazing community resource to have".

Tina Weston
**Seasonal Recipes..**

Some quick and delicious recipes to feed the soul!

**Pumpkin and Tomato Soup**

2 tbsp light cooking oil (sunflower, vegetable, rapeseed)
500g pumpkin or squash, peeled and seeds removed
2 medium onions, finely chopped
2 stalks celery, finely chopped
2 cloves garlic, finely chopped
1 400g tin chopped tomatoes
800ml vegetable stock (may need a bit more or less)
salt and pepper to taste

1. Peel and roughly chop pumpkin or butternut squash. Place in a roasting tray and drizzle with 1 tbsp of oil. Roast at 200C or Gas Mark 7 for about 20 minutes or until nicely brown and soft.

2. Chop the onions and celery and fry in 1 tbsp of oil until soft. Add garlic and cook for a couple more minutes.

3. Add tin tomatoes, roasted squash and enough vegetable stock to just cover the ingredients in the pot and bring to a boil. Reduce heat and cook for about 20 minutes.

4. Remove from heat and carefully whiz using a hand blender. Taste and adjust the seasoning. Add more vegetable stock if too thick. Top with some grated cheese!

**Cheese & Apple Scones**

250g self raising flour
salt and pepper
75g butter
75g strong Cheddar, grated
1 apple, grated
100 ml milk mixed with 2 tsp cider vinegar

Preheat oven to 200C. Cut butter into flour, salt and pepper using your hands. Grate cheddar and apple straight into the bowl. Add milk/vinegar mixture and gently fold together a couple of times with a spoon. Carefully turn onto floured surface and knead into a dough. Do not over mix. Add more flour if it is too wet or milk if it is too dry. Form a circle about 1 inch thick. Slice into eight pieces or cut with a cutter and place on baking tray. Top with additional grated cheese. Bake for 15 minutes, until light, fluffy and golden on top.

*Let us know your recipe ideas... chickpeas@hotmail.co.uk*
STROUD COMMUNITY AGRICULTURE

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

We are looking for new members for the farm. Please tell everyone you know about us. If you know of an event or somewhere that you think would be good for us to promote the farm, please let the core group know. 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 be transparent in all our affairs. To make decisions on the basis of consensus wherever possible. To strive towards social justice.

* To encourage practical involvement on all levels.

* 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.

Core Group

The core group meets one evening a month. For dates, venues & times, contact Mark Harrison

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For more information on CSAs please contact Jade Bashford at jadebashford@hotmail.com

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