For me the first sign of winter is when the cows and pigs come into the barn to spend the winter there. There is nothing like the sweet smell of good hay as you open a new bale, or the smell of cows and the rich manure. I know this might not sound appealing to all of you but I love it and I recommend coming down and experiencing it for yourselves.
The cows started coming in for the night in early November. They do this for a couple of weeks to get them accustomed to their winter rations and more generally being indoors on straw bedding. Some of our cows are rather old and have done this many times remembering the routine well. Even the young stock up at Hawkwood trotted along happily into the barn as half of them had been in the winter before and two had been in twice before.

They would happily stay outside year round if they had the choice but with our heavy ground at Brookthorpe it would soon turn the fields into a mud bath. We also need the muck to make compost to build fertility across the farm and especially on the vegetable fields.

In my last farm report I wrote that we’d had one calf born already and were waiting for the rest. Well since then all the other cows have calved and we now have six healthy happy calves. There is a lovely video on our facebook page if you’re interested in seeing them.

www.facebook.com/StroudCommunityAgriculture

One dark cloud that hangs over every cattle owner is the risk of their cows contracting bovine TB. In our area we have to test every year routinely but recently we have been ordered yet again to test early as a neighbouring farm has gone down with TB again. This is standard practice if this happens but is always a worry. Thankfully after testing all our cattle, including any calf over 42 days of age, of which we had four, we were given the all clear. It’s a terrible situation that all people who keep and love cows dread.

On a lighter note we had a very unique, strange, yet oddly sweet occurrence in the barn recently. The young pigs had been sharing the barn with the cows and calves, and while
for the most part they got on ok, the pigs would sometimes get the cows a bit worked up and the calves enjoyed running around with them. So it was with great surprise that one morning upon arriving at the barn I saw a pig happily suckling from a cow. This was a total shock to me. A cow normally never lets even another calf drink from it, let alone another species! Cows regularly smell their suckling offspring, to make sure someone else's baby isn't getting a free drink. If a stranger is detected they are usually dealt with by a hard whack. I have had to move the pigs to another barn as at least four pigs had learnt to do this from at least three different cows!

Now that the cow and pigs are in the barns they need feeding twice a day, this is quite a lot of routine but enjoyable work. It involves measuring out the right amount of food for the pigs and putting it into their trough and spreading out a set amount of hay for the cows. If there are any members who would like to help with this, please get in touch. You don’t need to get in with the cows but you would need to be ok with getting into the pig pens possibly. There would be clear instructions on how to do it and a couple of feeding sessions with a member of the farm team to make sure everything is ok and clear. However you would need to commit to a regular day and time. It is important for the animals and the farm team to know it is definitely covered.

If you would like to just enjoy the animals please feel free to visit them in the barn. I would just ask that you don’t enter the animal’s pens, and please wash your hands after any contact with them. (It’s a health and safety thing). If you or your children would like to help out with a feeding but would rather not commit to anything long term please feel free to still get in touch with me to find a time you can feed with me.

I wish everyone a happy and peaceful festive period.

Farmer Sam Hardiman

**NEWS FROM THE VEGGIE FIELDS**

We are well into the winter crops now, though the autumn has been fairly mild, if a bit wet. The fields are very wet, making harvesting root crops, especially on the clay soil at Brookthorpe, very muddy and mucky. No doubt you do have to wash a lot of soil off those parsnips and celeriac. Most of the crops are doing very well, apart from one plot of Brassicas (veggies in the cabbage family). One plot recovered really well from the flea beetle attack that I wrote about in the last newsletter, and for some reason, one plot has not. This means that we will be short of a lot of winter Brassicas, and we will have to buy some in occasionally during the winter (along with the potatoes and onions).
We have erected the main frame of the new polytunnel at Hawkwood, and in an unusually calm and mild November day fitted the plastic. We have still to build in the doors, but the ground inside is nearly prepared and we have plenty of cabbage and red kale seedlings in the greenhouse ready to plant up. The other tunnels, bar one, are full of chard and salads for the winter. The last tunnel still contains the now dying tomato plants. These will be removed soon to make way for the early carrots which should be ready for harvest in June next year.

In the summer we purchased a large 10,000L water tank on Ebay. We intend to put this just below the barn at Hawkwood to harvest the rainwater from the barn roof. This will allow us to water the polytunnels with fresh water for at least some of the year. There are bound to be periods when it will run dry in the summer. The polytunnel soil will benefit from the fresh water rather than the mains water that we use all of the time at the moment.

In the next month we will be harvesting many of the root crops to store, protecting them from any severe cold weather. We did keep back some of the squash in store so they will be put out in the share now and then over the winter. The leeks and cabbage family plants should keep growing slowly over the winter and should survive any cold weather that we may have. We will leave the carrots in the field and cover them with straw and plastic if the weather threatens to get very cold.

I did a quick price check at Sainsbury’s at the beginning of November to compare with our values. Each week I keep a record of what goes into the share and the wholesale organic price of the produce for that week. I can then calculate the average mark-up on the share each week and so compare it to the supermarket prices. The value of our share was, for the 1st Nov, on average, about 30% cheaper than the supermarket veg. This included the fact that 40% of the veggies that we get in our shares each week weren’t available organic in the shop. Ours may be muddier, and at times a bit misshapen or blemished, but they are fresh, all organic/biodynamic, and cheaper.

I would like to welcome our new apprentice, Page, to the farm team. She has joined the
two year Biodynamic apprenticeship and will be with us for that time. Vassilis, our out-going apprentice, is still working with us part-time till the end of year. Clare, our summer worker is also staying on to work part-time, becoming our winter worker. Thank you for your hard work throughout the year.

I wish everyone a happy Christmas and New Year.

Farmer Mark Harrison

COMMUNITY FOOD FERMENTATION GROUP

"Practising food fermentation is an active statement against our biologically dead food. The art of fermentation revives and restores what is dying with a natural vitality and wholeness”

The SCA fermented food group had a very successful evening meeting in November. There were ten of us there – a wide range of ages and experience of fermenting – with all of us agreeing that a big part of the fun was experimenting, sharing and learning new things. We made kimchi, yoghurt, kefir and Japanese pickles, talked a lot, shared books and recipes, had differences of opinion as to whether some things were disgusting or delightful! The main results of our evening’s work are sitting happily in jars in kitchens across Stroud, to be opened and sampled in a few weeks’ time. Meanwhile, we have settled on January 20th at 8pm for our next meeting. New enthusiasts or just-feeling-curious are both very welcome ...

Contact Nicky –nf@therightplace.net – or ring Simon Hanks on 01452 812608

How SCA and Stroudco are helping each other

Stroudco Food Hub has very similar principles to SCA. Both are building closer links between farmers and eaters and both are not-for-profit social enterprises owned by the community.

SCA is one of Stroudco’s largest suppliers providing Stroudco shoppers with surplus vegetables and meat from the SCA farms. Before Stroudco was established, these surpluses were sold to local wholesaler, Global Organics. Now however, SCA sells its surpluses through Stroudco where producers are encouraged to price their products at between wholesale and retail prices which makes a better return for SCA than selling to Global.

Another reason the SCA farmers like selling through Stroudco is that they can limit the
amount of produce that they offer each week on the Stroudco website and then only harvest exactly what has been ordered by the Stroudco shoppers that week. They can harvest on the Friday ready for the Stroudco boxes on a Saturday morning. Delicious fresh produce for the shoppers and no waste for the farmers!

Stroudco also provides additional flexibility to SCA members who can supplement their vegetable share with a wide range of other local produce from Stroudco’s 67 local producers. Some Stroudco shoppers who don’t want to commit to an SCA veg share or would like their SCA veg bags delivered to their homes can use the Stroudco website to build their own veg bag with no weekly commitment.

Stroudco is growing steadily with new producers joining every week. The range now includes a wide range of cheeses and fish including organic trout from Ruskin Mill, delicious cold-pressed raw fruit and vegetables juices, paleo snacks and cereals, Cotswold Kidmeat, unpasteurised Jersey cow milk and cream, amazing soaps made from Thrupp goat milk and delicious soups made with surplus SCA veg by the enterprising Weston O’Neill family who have also designed a tea towel celebrating all the best things about Stroud – including SCA and Stroudco!

To see the full range of local produce available on Stroudco Food Hub or to download a catalogue go to www.stroudco.org.uk or just pop in and see the food hub in operation any Saturday from 11am to 1pm at Stroud Valleys School on Castle Street, Stroud GL5 2HP

Nick Weir

**DONATIONS TO FOODBANK**

Thank you once again to everyone who has made donations of non-perishable foods via the packing shed at Hawkwood. All the items have been passed to the foodbank. They are used to put together food parcels and these are given to local people in crisis. There are now quite a number of collection points for food around the district, including at large supermarkets and local charity shops. If you would like to continue to make donations please use these drop-off points. I won’t be collecting any further items from the packing shed.

Useful local links: strouddistrict.foodbank.org.uk
www.thewigglyworm.org.uk/no_child_hungry_gloucestershire.html, local campaign recently launched in Gloucestershire by Chef Rob Rees.

Sally Daley
CAROL SINGING TO THE ANIMALS

In old Scandinavian legends, people believed that at midnight on Christmas Eve animals could speak. Also legend has it; Jesus was born at midnight surrounded by animals in a stable who were granted the ability to speak to praise the Christ child. So it is with this in mind each year we sing to our animals in our own stables.

This is a beautiful experience for many. However I would like to make a request. In the past couple of years it has grown busier and has meant some of the quiet reverence has been lost.

This year I would like all children to stay with their parents. We are on a working farm and there are many hazards especially in the dark. When you arrive please do so quietly as people might already be singing. This event is for singing and quiet reflection and not an opportunity for playing with friends.

I look forward to seeing you at 5pm on Christmas Eve.

Farmer Sam Hardiman

Events for your DIARY to look forward to ...

Wednesday 24th December - Singing to the cows, 5pm in the barns at Hawkwood and Brookthorpe farms. Bring a safe lantern. Carols will be sung and a great atmosphere created on Christmas Eve.

Tuesday 6th January 2015 - Three King’s biodynamic preparation to be made at Hawkwood starting at 1.30pm by the big tree level with the barn, look out for the barrel under the tree where we will stir the preparation for one hour with gold, frankincence and myrrh. Then it will be distributed around the farm to help next years harvest go well. Bring a bottle to take some home for your own plot.

Sunday 18th January 2015 - Wildlife walk at Hawkwood with Nadine from 2-4pm

Sunday 1st February 2015 – Candlemass from 3pm at Hawkwood. Meet at the barn. Please bring old candles to the packing shed during the weeks before. They will be melted down to make candles in the earth for around the farm. These will be lit after dark. Bring a poem or a song to share as we light the candles.

Wednesday 11th March 2015 - The SCA Annual General Meeting will be held from 6.30-8.30pm at the Exchange Rooms, Brick Row, Stroud
WINTER WILDLIFE WALK
2 - 4pm Sunday 18 January

Come and explore the animals and plants in winter at the CSA farm at Hawkwood with a wildlife expert. Stroud Community Agriculture farms to high environmental standards and so the farmland is a rich habitat. We will see what we can identify and chat about the ecology. There will be cakes and kids' activities.

The event is free. There will be a full refund to anyone who does not learn something new (ha ha).

Jade Bashford

AGM

The SCA Annual General Meeting will be held on Wednesday 11th March 2015 at the Exchange Rooms, Brick Row, Stroud. All members are very welcome. This is an opportunity for members to hear about what has been happening over the last year and to have your say about what will happen over the next year. Some Core Group members will be standing down this year and there will be an opportunity for new members to be appointed.

The SCA constitution requires 10% of members to be present for the AGM to be quorate – so please come along, 6.30-9.00pm on Wednesday 11th March 2015. More details to follow in the New Year.

Adam Biscoe

REAL Bread for SCA

REAL artisan 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, to learn and share the art of bread making .. there’s nothing better than the smell of homemade fresh bread!

Contact CLAIRE: 01453 757348 or chickpeas.bread@gmail.com

Seasons Greetings
STARTER FARM

There's an ambitious new project afoot for Stroud community Agriculture, and we want your help to make it a reality!

Like many youngish people I know, I've spent a long while scratching my head and wondering what it is I wanted to do in life; sometimes feeling sure, then trying things and realising they didn't fit for me after all. Since April this year though, when I came to the farm as a summer worker, it has felt pretty clear that I want to keep growing vegetables. I love this work and I want to dedicate myself to it, and gain the skill and understanding to be able to run my own economically viable growing project. A huge relief, on the whole, but when I look at the situation beyond the supportive nest of the CSA – the scarcity and price of land, the capital needed for infrastructure, the difficulty of finding a market for produce that would provide a liveable return – it seems like an alarmingly large mountain to climb!

At the SCA Visioning Meeting last summer, I proposed the idea of setting up 'starter farm' linked to SCA. Here, entrant farmers with some training or experience could learn to grow vegetables and run a business independently in a supported environment. Together with my friend, Sylvie who has just finished a two year biodynamic apprenticeship, we are keen to help get this project off the ground, and to take on the starter farm for its first three-year term. It would provide us with an intermediate step to setting up our own agricultural enterprise, and would be a resource we could pass on to other prospective growers. For SCA, this could be a new venture to support the growth of small-scale sustainable agriculture.

The proposal so far is to find a piece of land, 2-4 acres in size, and set up the basic infrastructure and equipment needed for a small growing project. The starter farmers would receive support from the SCA in the form of mentoring, the occasional use of larger machinery, and a guaranteed market for some of their produce. A farm with trainer wheels, if you like... Hopefully, 3 years on, they'll emerge far more confident, knowledgeable and able than they went in. Having tested out potential pitfalls of various kinds, and equipped with the tools to prosper as they move on to the next stage of their journey as growers, they'd leave the space for a new grower to step into their shoes.

We need your help to find land, get funding, and ultimately form a permanent support group to choose new tenants for the starter farm and ensure it's continuation. If you're interested, please get in touch and come to our first open meeting in January. Date as yet undecided – email: scastarterfarm@gmail.com if interested and we'll let you know as soon as we set a date.

Clare Whitney and Sylvie Planel

Merry Christmas to you All
Would you like to buy organic olive oil and a citrus fruit box direct from a farm in Andulcia?

La Jimena Olive Oil, Olives and Fruitbox

Will be delivered to a location near you in February 2015 from our family farm in Southern Spain!

Once again we are excited to offer to you our organically grown:
- Olive Oil of high quality harvested by hand from ancient olive tree varieties
- Fruitshare Boxes containing La Jimena olive oil, Sunripened Citrus with the full flavour you would not find elsewhere in the UK, almonds and sundried figs.
- Olives dried or in Brine

La Jimena Olive Oil is available in the following sizes:

- 3 litres £35
- 5 litres £52
- 25 litres £230

Olives in Brine

- 1 kg £8

Dried Olives

- 0.5 kg £8

Extra Oranges

- £2.80 /kg

Extra Mandarins/Lemons £3.50 /kg

NEW Sundried Tomatoes £3 /100gr

Once again Herbsalt £3/200gr

A standard fruitshare box contains 5 litres of La Jimena olive oil, and 10 kilos of citrus, almonds and sundried figs. Price £80. Please order other items additionally if you’d like them!

A small box contains 3 litres of La Jimena olive oil, and 5 kilos of citrus, almonds and sundried figs. Price £55. Please order other items additionally if you’d like them!

A good Olive Oil is an investment in your health and fine cooking!

Orders: as soon as possible or the latest by the 10th January

to: oliveoil@lajimena.co.uk

please make your cheque out to Mathis Rosenbusch and send it to

Mark Harrison

60 Peghouse Rise, Stroud, GL5 1UR

Delivery: mid February to SCA Brookthorpe, GL4 OUN

please note your phone no. with your order, make sure your Cheque is present at delivery and you’d order in time before 10 Jan.

More info at www.lajimena.co.uk

Mathis & Marianns Farm
in Andalucia Spain

La Jimena olives are grown on the sunny slopes of the sierra nevada without pesticides. They are picked from the ancient trees, carefully washed and dried, then milled within 48 hours of harvesting.

For a number of years, SCA has had a direct relationship with La Jimena, an organic farm run by Mathis and Mariann Rosenbusch. Mathis and Mariann used to run Earthshare CSA in the north of Scotland before moving to the south of Spain (we’re still not sure why?). They maintained their connections with many CSA’s in the UK and each year, in mid-February, Mathis drives up to the UK, delivering fruit boxes, olives, and olive oil to CSA’s from the south coast of England to the north of Scotland. This high quality olive oil comes from olives harvested by hand from ancient trees. The citrus are from old varieties valued for their full flavour, something you won’t find elsewhere in the UK. If you would like to order some, please see the flyer in the newsletter or visit their website www.lajimena.co.uk for more information.

Peace and Joy to All
Some FUN FACTS about Farm Animals!

- Pigs are considered the 4th most intelligent animal (after chimpanzees, dolphins, and elephants).
- Cows can recognize their names (though they may not come when called!).
- Sheep have two toes on each foot.
- Cows can sense a storm coming and will lie down.
- Goats and sheep don’t have teeth on their upper jaw. They have a hard palate that helps them grind their food.
- Chickens have over 200 distinct noises they can make for communicating.
- Cows have a memory of about three years.
- Pigs don’t have sweat glands, so they must roll in mud to stay cool and prevent sunburns.
- Sheep make a bleating sound. A baby lamb can identify its mother by her bleat.
- Cows are social animals who form bonds with each other. In a herd of cows, many will form cliques together.

Wishing you all blessings for a Happy New Year.
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 jadbashford@hotmail.com

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