Spring Farm Report

I am writing this farm report sitting in beautiful sunshine, the birds are singing and insects are buzzing in the air. It feels like spring is here. The sunshine is a welcome break from all the rain.

We are expecting lambs in the next week or two, they are at our Brookthorpe farm. I have given them access to the barn should the weather turn foul. However if it continues like this they will lamb outside. You are welcome to come and visit them. While you are there you will also be able to see the calves we have had so far, they love racing up and down the barn.

Stop Press: Lambs have arrived!
We have started lambing with twins born on Monday the 14th, please come and visit them, they are at our Brookthorpe farm.

We have a group of young pigs outside at Hawkwood some of you may have seen, they are doing a useful job of breaking up the clover lay before we plant potatoes in April. Their manure helps to fertilize the ground while saving us the task of ploughing.

Something that has taken up quite a bit of time and energy this winter is our part in the Hammonds Farm lot 3 planning process, we are working with others to plan the future of this piece of land. Now that the BDLT have secured the land work turns towards exploring how and who will use the land. Several people have put forward projects which they would like to start on lot 3, including our very own starter farm. Alongside this SCA has requested some land to grow vegetables on as well as a micro dairy, care farm, herb garden are just some of the projects looking to make lot 3 their home.
In the end of January all the projects got together for a permaculture design planning workshop weekend. During this time we explored how various projects might work together. We made some good progress. We have had another weekend workshop on the 19-20 March where we continued the work.

One project in particular has expressed an interest in working closely with SCA, the micro dairy project proposed by Kees Freedricks. Kees has asked SCA if they would consider his project of becoming an integral part of the farm. The Core Group has the task of exploring the possibility of this proposal. Some of you may have received a survey about this already.

We have a visioning session in April that will be ideal for exploring these possibilities.

While all this is going on SCA has agreed to steward the land on lot 3 for the first year while this planning work is finalised.

Farmer Sam Hardiman

News from the Veggie Fields

We have been slowly slogging our way through the sodden fields, steadily harvesting the winter veg. It has been so wet this winter that some of the cabbages roots had begun to rot! The good news is that there are a lot of leeks and cabbages left at the Brookthorpe farm, and plenty of salad and chard in the polytunnels at Hawkwood - but alas, there's not so much of anything else! The purple sprouting broccoli matured very early in the winter, when we were expecting it to sprout much later, and so we have little at this time of year when we most need it.

We are heading towards that time in the veggie year known as the “hungry gap”, a time when all of the winter veg has finished but none of the new crops have matured. During this time we buy in extra veg to make up the veg shares. We try to get produce from as local as possible, but sometimes buy produce that comes from afar afield as Italy and Spain. We are fortunate in that there are some local organic growers who grow in heated glass houses so we can get veg from them.

In anticipation of the coming warmth and light we have sown thousands of seeds into trays in the greenhouse in
the walled garden at Brookthorpe. These trays are kept on heated benches to keep worst of the cold off. The peppers and tomato seedlings are grown under artificial light on their own heated bench, covered with plastic, heated to 20 deg c. All of these seedlings will be planted out in the polytunnels and fields at Hawkwood as the weather warms and the soil dries out. The first crops sown in the polytunnels in February were the carrots and radish.

The pigs have been kept out on what will be the potato ground at Hawkwood since January. They have done a marvellous job of digging over the clover growing there. We have moved them regularly round the plot to limit the damage they may do to the soil if they dig it too much. It’s great to see them outside doing what they enjoy most, rooting around and eating.

Bring on the warm dry spring!

**Community building update**

I am pleased to announce we have a date for starting the construction of the farms community building. We will be having a breaking the ground celebration on Monday the **28th March at 3pm**.

We will celebrate the start of the work as well as explain a bit more about the process, how you can get involved and what it will finally look like whilst enjoying a cup of tea and cake.

We will also be offering places on a week-long green building workshop that will both offer the participants the chance to learn how to build a straw bale building and help fund this crucial part of the build. (more details to come)

There will be other opportunities to help as well in a variety of ways from hard digging to preparing lunch for the workers.

I will be sending out an email detailing what help we will need so you can sign up for what you are willing to do.

It is really exciting that this project is finally getting off the ground.

See you there!

Farmer Sam
Starter Farm update: We are getting there!

The last few months have been pretty busy, with a lot of progress made – it feels like we're gathering pace, getting all the necessary elements in place before beginning work on the land in a few weeks' time.

The biggest cause for celebration is that the starter farm has landed its first two chunks of money! First, a local foundation called The Summerfield Trust generously granted SCA £4000 for the project. The second chunk is from the Prince's Trust. They've awarded us a £2000 grant, with which we'll buy seeds, compost, a bunch of hand tools, and other basic equipment we need to get going. We're very grateful to both these bodies for their support.

We've also taken the first practical step towards creating the starter farm, in bringing mains water down from Hawkwood to the newly acquired land. Sylvie and I spent a rainy day with Sam laying the pipe using a clever device Sam had constructed. Page and Sam finished off the plumbing the following day, which also leaves SCA with better water access in the Hawkwood fields. It felt great to be out there doing something physical on the new plot.

For me, however, the most exciting part of the process so far was undoubtedly getting out paper, scissors and glue to make a model of the coming season's crop plan. We cut a strip of paper to represent each of the 50 beds we'll be growing on; having started with a somewhat sketchy idea of what we might be growing, and how much, moving the strips around helped us see where the gaps were and what we might be able to fill them with, and ponder a rotation. We met with Mark and talked it all over; having come up with a definitive plan, the next task was the seed order! Putting that together was GREAT. We got particularly dreamy over the squash varieties.

One question Sylvie and I have been discussing is whether or not we'll use horse power in our first season. Sylvie trained with horses at Ruskin Mill, and has pursued this interest on other horse-powered farms in France and the UK. At this point, it's looking likely that we'll wait till the autumn before trying to acquire a horse. We've set some wheels in motion already, however – Sylvie has just come back from a metalwork course in Brittany, making a horse-drawn tool called the 'Neo-Bucher' – a great piece of equipment which will allow us to do various
cultivation and weeding tasks. As I've never had much to do with horses we went up to Ruskin Mill for the afternoon a couple of weeks ago, and I had my first go at driving them round the pasture, doing some harrowing. At first I was holding the lines much too loosely and not talking to them enough, which led to them running off at one point which was mildly alarming. Luckily I managed to keep hold of the lines and they didn't go far! After that I got the hang of it and was firmer with them (though we left an interestingly wiggly wake in the turf). It was exciting to feel that we were working together and they were responding to my instructions.

Spring will see us on the land, putting up sheds, cultivating, sowing and planting – by the time of the next newsletter, we'll have a space we can welcome volunteers to. We hope to see you in the field before long!

Farmer Claire

For the starter farm to be viable, SCA needs to recruit 30 new members by July, and a further 20 by October! From July, the starter farm's produce will be feeding into everyone's weekly share. We'll be growing a selection of crops for the whole membership, rather than everything for 50 shares – so the new members will be part of the main farm just like everybody else, not separate 'starter farm' members. Their monthly payment will come through to the starter farmers, however, allowing us to operate and earn our crust...

SCA has committed to supporting the starter farm financially, whether or not the members are recruited, so we really need to ensure that we bring enough new people on board! This is where you come in. Do you know anyone who might want to join? Friends, family, neighbours, colleagues? Please encourage them to become members! Could you advertise SCA at your workplace, children's school, etc? If anyone out there has marketing experience and would be happy to advise us or put some time in recruiting new people in the coming months, please get in touch with us at scastarterfarm@gmail.com. Thank you!

Ute's memorial bench

Dear SCA members and friends

Just over a year has passed since my sister Ute (pronounce Oota) died. She was a member of the farm team from 2007 until summer 2013 when due to increasing disability she could no longer do active work but still engage with teaching apprentices until her illness claimed her ability to speak.

On Candlemas day, the anniversary of her death, there was a beautiful gathering of some 30 people who came to remember Ute and try out her memorial bench at Hawkwood College. People helped to finalise the text for a memorial plaque which we all felt captured something about her. Thank you all for making it what it is now!
A few candles were put into the earth by the bench but the wind was too strong and wouldn't allow them to burn before much later that evening. We did the Hallelujah, Simon Charter read a poem by T.S. Elliot and we spoke the star verse by R. Steiner. To me it felt like Ute joyfully participated in the event.

Afterwards we had a gathering in the barn with coffee, tea and a cake - the recipe of which Ute discovered when she had just moved to England - cheese-cake chocolate brownies. I am happy to say it was polished off without any problem.

The community text for the memorial plaque has moved me personally very much. Looking back on her life, certainly in this country but also earlier on when she lived in Belgium, Ute's life seemed always concerned with community. She would have loved to have a community agriculture concept in Belgium and they had planned to develop something but it never happened. Therefore Ute was extra happy joining the work here where her dream of many years came true. During the years at Hawkwood College Ute kept mentioning conversations she had with members of the farm in the packing shed, or by the flower beds when she was weeding. These conversations were important to Ute, they made her think about the community and the members' needs in relationship to the farm.

The bench was commissioned from the collection at Ute's funeral. It was made from a very nice piece of oak by a group of 4 to 5 men working as a team in the community workshop “The men's shed” in Nailsworth. Here the young and old and people of all abilities are welcome to meet in a creative space under Gavin's and Pam's stewardship. So community all the way through!

In the evening of Candlemas day I sat on the bench with all candles burning, looking into the bright starry sky above. There was a gentle glow from the candles in the five holes in the earth and I got this sense of Ute greeting from the stars... When I came back at midnight the candles were still burning peacefully, the stars had moved and the stillness was beautiful. The earth candles in the poly tunnel burned for another two days.

You are welcome to sit here, picnic, chat with a friend, watch your children play or enjoy the view by day and the stars by night.
Thank you to those who came on the day and made it such a special occasion.

Zambodhi
Beetroot delicacies

Minty Beetroot Dip With Chilli Pitta Crisps

- 250g cooked beetroot, drained and coarsely grated
- ½ small cucumber, halved, seeds scooped out, cut into small chunks
- ½ x 500ml pot Greek yogurt
- 1 small garlic clove, very finely grated or crushed
- ½ large bunch mint, leaves picked and finely chopped, plus some small leaves to serve
- 1 tsp golden caster sugar

For the pitta crisps
- pack of 6 pitta breads, each cut into 6 small triangles
- 2 tbsp olive oil, plus a little extra to serve
- 1 tsp chilli flakes

Put the beetroot, most of the cucumber, the yogurt, garlic, mint, sugar and some seasoning in a large bowl, and mix well. Chill until ready to serve. This can be made up to 1 day ahead.

Heat oven to 220C/200C fan/gas 7. On a large baking tray, toss together the pitta triangles, olive oil and chilli flakes. Bake for 10-15 mins, turning halfway through cooking, until really crisp.

To serve, give the dip a good mix, then spoon onto a plate. Scatter with the reserved cucumber and mint, and drizzle with a little oil. Serve with the pitta crisps.

Beetroot falafel

- 1 tbsp olive oil
- 2 onion, chopped
- 2 tsp ground cumin
- 2 x 400g cans chickpeas, drained
- 500g raw beetroot, peeled, trimmed and coarsely grated
- 100g fresh breadcrumb
- 1 egg
- 1 tbsp tahini paste
- vegetable oil, for brushing or frying

To serve
- 1 tbsp tahini paste
- 2 x 150ml pots natural yogurt
- pinch of sugar
- flatbreads
- few pickled golden beetroot, diced
- 3 handfuls beet leaves or a bag of beet

Heat the olive oil in a frying pan and fry the onions until softened but not coloured. Add the cumin and cook for 1 min, then scrape the mixture into a food processor with the chickpeas, two-thirds of the grated beetroot, the breadcrumbs, egg and tahini. Whizz to a rough paste, then scrape into a bowl and stir in the remaining grated beetroot with plenty of seasoning.

With damp hands, shape into about 20 balls and space on baking parchment-lined baking sheets. Chill until ready to serve.

Heat oven to 200C/180C fan/gas 6. Brush the falafels with a little vegetable oil and bake for 20-25 mins until crisp and hot through. Alternatively, heat 2.5cm oil in a deep wok and fry in batches, turning, until crisp and hot.

To serve, mix the tahini with the yogurt, sugar and some seasoning, then dollop onto the flatbreads with the warm or room-temperature falafels, diced beetroot and beet leaves or salad.

The recipes were tried and selected by our treasurer David and come from www.bbcgoodfood.com
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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