Since my last Farm Report the weather has been very changeable. Spring was late and cool, and the grass hardly grew but then it warmed up in late May and the grass raced away. This enabled us to make some good silage at Brookthorpe. Since then the rain has been on and off making it impossible to make any hay. However, the grass is long and ready now so all we need is the next spell of warm weather and we will be mowing hay on both farms.

Lambing went OK this year, the weather was good enough that most ewes lambed outside. The very last ewe to lamb had triplets and then got a large hernia and unfortunately had to be put down. This left us with three bottle lambs to raise. It is a lot of extra work but it does mean that we had some friendly lambs for children to stroke.

As I write it we have a litter of new born piglets that were born early Friday morning [on 24th of June – red.]. You are all welcome to visit them in the big barn at Brookthorpe. I have decided to reduce to just one sow on the farm. Our old sow Tansy was not managing her litters very well, she had mastitis (an inflammation of breast tissue) the last 2 litters and both her and the piglets suffered. And we have recently had a few more pigs than we needed and sold them instead of using them ourselves.

Another reason is that it costs us a lot to buy pig feed and having just one sow will mean we can use more veg scraps and brewers grains and thus reduce our feed bills. On our biodynamic farm we try to be as self sufficient as possible and buying pig feed is not ideal, but we will continue to produce a wide range of pork and bacon.
We have also recently said good bye to one of our cows, Kettle. She was nearly 17 years old and had a good and productive life. It is rare that a cow gets to this age nowadays, and it is wonderful to have these long lived animals. Cows are resistant to most parasites and ailments in their environment and know how to look after their offspring without any assistance! Our Kettle will be missed dearly.

We are considering buying our own bull this year. We have usually borrowed one from a farm in Herefordshire, however two cows failed to conceive this year and with the start of the micro dairy next door at Hawkwood (see note below) there will be enough work to keep a bull year round.

Farmer Sam Hardiman

Oakbrook Farm (known as Hammonds Farm, Lot 3) purchased by the community through the Biodynamic Land Trust will have a new tenant in November. The BDLT has given Kees Freedricks a lease to start his micro dairy.

The farm team and core group have worked hard to explore what our relationship to this new enterprise should be. We have decided to work cooperatively on some practical things and more closely on marketing the milk to our members. Kees will be in touch directly when the time comes to explain what he is offering and how you can get delicious milk and dairy products.

We will of course continue to lease land for the starter farm, about 5 to 6 acres in total, to give us the option to expand in the future.

News from the Veggie Fields

As ever, the weather dominates our farming lives and thoughts at this time of year, more so than at other times. We had a very cool and late spring with very slow growth, but that all turned round later in May when we had very good growing conditions. As a result, most of the vegetables have caught up and are actually beginning to crop a week or two earlier than last year (beans and courgettes in the polytunnels especially). That said, as I write this in mid June it has been a bit wet which has meant that it's been awkward to get onto the fields to weed and continue with planting. All of the root crops have been sown, and all of the sweetcorn, brussel sprouts and squashes planted out, but the leeks are still waiting in their seeds trays! We buy in many of the main Brassica (cabbage family) plants from a nursery in Lincolnshire, produced to organic standards. These will arrive early in July. Hopefully the soil will have dried enough by then that we can plant them up.

We have erected a small polytunnel against a wall in the walled garden at Brookthorpe. This lean-to tunnel replaces a rather out-of-shape glasshouse that was falling apart, and creates some good space available to raise seedlings.

We are just coming out of that lean time of the year when we don’t have many vegetables for the share. There is a wide range of Brassica vegetables beginning to mature in the field, at Hawkwood so it won't be long until you see them...
in your share! These include broccoli, cabbage, kale and cauliflower, and spinach.

We are growing more early courgettes in one of the polytunnels. Last year we had terrible trouble with aphids on the courgettes and cucumbers in the polytunnels, so much so that almost half of the plants were killed. This year the aphids have returned, but for the moment at least, not in such high numbers. We have introduced a tiny wasp into the tunnel which will parasitize the aphids. These wasps are delivered in the post as larvae in mummified aphids, 1000 of them (not that I have counted), mixed with woodchip in a small container and packed in a polystyrene box with an iceblock to keep them cool. We then scatter them amongst the leaves of the courgette plants where the adults hatch out and begin laying eggs on the aphid nymphs (young aphids living under the courgette leaves). The larvae hatch out of the eggs, burrow into the aphid nymph and eat it from the inside. Of course, all the while, the ladybirds and ladybird nymphs are eating the aphids from the outside. It’s pretty gruesome stuff in the courgette tunnel but don’t feel too sorry for the aphids, they can produce huge numbers of offspring in a short time and do a lot of damage sucking sap from the plants.

The lettuces that you have in your share so far this season have either been grown in one of the polytunnels, in the walled garden or the field at Hawkwood. But soon we will be getting them from the starter farm next door on the new land at what is now called Oakbrook. Sylvie and Clare will be growing all of our lettuces, the first of their crops, throughout the summer. These crops won’t be certified biodynamic or organic, as the land is in the first year of conversion to organic (they are inspected by Demeter though, our certification body). However, there have been no chemicals applied to the land since 2014, so we have been fortunate in that respect. Any vegetables in your share produced on the starter farm will be clearly labelled.

We hope that you enjoy your vegetables, wherever they have been grown.

Farmer Mark Harrison
Starter Farm update: Growing in process!

When I last wrote, the space designated for the starter farm was still a featureless bit of field covered in short wintry grass. What a change!

First came Sam with the muckspreader; then a local farmer with a plough, carving out two squares of brown earth in the expanse of green; then Sylvie and myself with disk and chain harrows, preparing the soil for planting. With the help of our friend Jed, the bones of a small polytunnel grew out of the earth (having been leaning against the barn for many years undisturbed), and Mark and Page came down to help us skin it. As the bare hoops transformed into a propagation space – the heart of the new plot, where the seedlings start their life – I couldn't help dancing about, beaming and laughing...

Since then, we've planted out 2000 leeks, 500 squash plants, hundreds of lettuce, red cabbage, and chard seedlings; and direct sown ten beds of root vegetables, and two of dwarf beans – plus a row of sunflowers, for the bees, and for our eyes! We covered a quarter of the plot in phacelia, a green manure, which has grown well, and will be turned in in the coming weeks to make way for the brassicas (plants in the cabbage family). We've been sowing seeds in trays each week, and raising them in the tunnel; mowing the grass, which has grown tall and revealed scattered flowers; digging out docks, and doing plenty of hoeing (Shepherd's Purse seems to be our primary weed).

We now also have a tool shed, have made some sturdy benches for our trays of young plants, and have acquired a good number of the tools we need (though we're still nipping up to Hawkwood to borrow things more often than might be convenient for the SCA team!). Everything's been going pretty much to plan – there have been a few scary moments (seedlings dying of drought on a hot day; tender young squash plants getting a battering from the wind; the beans which as they emerged were pecked out by inquisitive birds) but they all seem to have recovered and are growing well. With each week that passes, the site feels more homely, and that it's developing its own character.

I've already learned so much from this experience! It feels like a great level of challenge, navigating a lot of the tasks we've never had to do as apprentices and summer workers. Yet with Mark and Sam at the end of a phone, to help us out of perplexities, I think the plan's working...

Farmer Clare

www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org
Starter Farm project details

The starter farm is an educational project, aimed at helping people on their way to becoming organic growers. Mentoring, a guaranteed market for produce, and all the necessary infrastructure for a market garden, provide a supported environment for those with some farming experience to take the next step towards setting up their own agricultural enterprise. Each starter farmer (or pair of starter farmers) will take the plot on for a two or three year period, leaving with the skills, experience and confidence to thrive elsewhere, and leaving space for a new entrant grower to step into their shoes.

It’s starting to come together: Community building update

Thank you ever so much to everyone who has contributed to the project so far. It has been really satisfying to see it happening, and to see so many people coming together.

In the last week of May we ran a workshop on building with straw. During the week-long course participants learned to build with straw bales, to apply a lime rendering, and made a start on a reciprocal roof.

Following the workshop week we undertook another volunteer work day, and despite some wet weather it proved to be another rewarding experience. There is still lots of work to be done, not least finishing the roof. We will be running a series of volunteer days to help get the job done.

We have made some great progress on the Community Building, and there is still plenty of opportunity for getting involved, old hands and new, everyone is welcome. Remember this is your project as much as ours.

If you have the time to help, keep an eye out for the dates so check your inbox. Also there are regular updates on our progress on our Facebook page.
Making sauerkraut at home

Fermented vegetables are becoming more and more popular in England, but it is not even close to the popularity they enjoy in Poland - the country from where I come.

I was born in a big city, but I always enjoyed the country side the most since I was a little girl. I used to spend every summer in a little village in the north of Poland where my grandparents had a little smallholding.

I remember picking soft fruit - black and red currants, strawberries and goosberries, feeding the chickens and collecting the eggs from the chick house and, most of all, I remember the smell of fresh, unsprayed veg - the smell that I forgot for a long time until I re-discovered it with the SCA. And I am really grateful for that!

I remember my grandad was using a special lunar calendar to sow the seeds and to take care of them. I remember one of these calendars - you could buy them in every newsagents, so common they used to be. I know now that this was a Biodynamic Sowing and Planting Calendar.

Apart from the smell and the taste of the vegetables I remember the never ending shelves with jars in a small sunken cellar next to my grandparents house. My grandma was always making preserves, and I was always very keen to help her. We used to make lots of tasty things, but what I remember the most was making sauerkraut which is basically fermented cabbage. This isn't like so-called sauerkraut that you can buy nowadays in the supermarket. It is really easy to make and there are only two main ingredients - cabbage and salt. There are however some key points that are crucial to successful fermentation.

I am delighted to present you with my gramma's favourite sauerkraut.

Aleks

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**Home made Sauerkraut**

- 2.5kg cabbage (white or any other will be good, feel free to mix different types)
- approx. 50g salt
- 3-6 cloves garlic (optional)
- a piece of horseraddish root, roughly chopped (optional)
- herbs, spices - I usually use 1-2 bay leaves, 2-3 all spice berries, 6-10 juniper berries, marjoram

1. Prepare a fermentation vessel - a big glass or stoneware jar will do the job. You will also need something to press your cabbage in the jar so another smaller jar filled with water will be needed. Remember to keep everything as clean as possible to avoid contamination with yeasts and bad bacteria. Also it’s best not to use any metal utensils.

2. Now this is the hard bit: chop the cabbage very finely with a sharp knife (or use a food processor so save time and energy). Save 2 or 3 big leaves.

3. Cover the bottom of your jar with a whole cabbage leaf, then put a layer of cabbage (about 1-1.5 inches) then spread a good pinch of salt on it. Pound it vigorously with a pestle or something similar (I use a simple wooden rolling pin) until the cabbage releases its juices. Sprinkle some herbs and spices, add a clove of garlic and some horseraddish. Repeat the process creating layer upon layer until you use all of the cabbage and salt.

4. Use the last of your whole leaves to cover the cabbage and press it all down firmly with something heavy, like a jar filled with water (my gramma used to use a washed pebble). All the cabbage MUST be covered with the juices at all time (you may top it up with boiled salty water if the cabbage didn’t release enough juice but let the water cool down before you add it). This is necessary to create oxygen free atmosphere and prevents mould. Cover the whole thing with a muslin. Leave it in room temperature in a dark place (cupboard, pantry etc.)

5. Wait. Fermentation will start after 2-3 days, depending on the temperature. Check your cabbage every 1-2 days, remember that it needs to be covered by water so top it up if needed. The cabbage will start bubbling slightly and there may be some bubbles appearing on the surface. It’s worth releasing accumulated gasses by piercing the cabbage mixture from the top to bottom by a wooden skewer. If there is any scum on the surface just spoon it out. During the first few days the smell of fermentation may be unpleasant, but after a week or so you will start smelling a typical sauerkraut smell.

6. After about 2-3 weeks (I keep it for 3 weeks) your sauerkraut is ready to eat. Put it in smaller jars with the liquid and store in the fridge. Consume within 2-4 weeks.

Next Newsletter I will give you ideas about cooking with your sauerkraut.

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

We are looking for new members for the farm. This is especially so, now we have the starter farm up and running. 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.

- Mark Harrison 07891 615103 mark@plumtucker.co.uk
- Jade Bashford 01453 885233 jadebashford@hotmail.com
- David Cook 01452 813342 david.cook2@gmail.com
- Page Dykstra 07869 630376 page.dykstra@gmail.com
- Adam Biscoe 01453 759241 aj.biscoe@gmail.com
- Francis Gobey 07890 042877 francis.gobey@phonecoop.coop
- Simon Hanks 01453 812608
- Clare Whitney 07837 024552 clarewhitney22@gmail.com
- Sam Hardiman 07531 270206 samueljhardiman@hotmail.com
- Bruno Sabin 01452 507533 brunosabin@yahoo.com
- Michal Chodasewicz 01453 825103 mich0281@gmail.com

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

General enquiries and information: Clare & Paul Sheridan 0845 4580814 info@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Membership Admin: Carol Matthews membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Newsletter: Aleksandra Osinska creativealeks@gmail.com