Membership Success!

We had so many people wishing to join the Farm this year that in April we felt we were becoming over-subscribed and so set up a waiting list. Now, with all of our lovely vegetables ready to harvest we will soon be accepting people back from the waiting list.

If you have friends or know people who would like to join then this would be a good time for them to put their names forward. There is always room for people to join, so please keep the word out there about the Farm and what a great project it is.

Dates for your Diary

- 15th July, Saturday  Community Building work day
  We will be putting the final coat of render to the building.
- 9th September, Saturday  SCA Fest
  Our experimental Community Event with music, conversations, barbeque and a lot of fun for the whole family. More details to follow closer to the time. All welcome!
Spring Farm Report

As I sit here writing this Farm Report at 7.45am (mid-June!) it’s already really warm! It is hard not to talk about the weather, it’s been so hot. Being out all day in this heat is tiring for man and beast alike, especially when doing physical work.

The good side of this almost tropical weather is that it’s easier to make hay - the task we are in the middle of doing as I write. The grass is cut and then it need few days to dry and then it’s raked/turned over several times until it’s completely dry. Over the years we have been fairly reliant on contractors to help make the hay, which is a specialist job that require an expensive baler. The contractor would mow the grass then we would turn it several times (we used to borrow the rake from a neighbour) and the baler would finish the job.

This year we got our own mower and a rake and we are now able to make hay all by ourselves! It is a good feeling to be able to cut the grass when it suits us and to be self reliant. We will still use a contractor to bale as actually this is a specialist job that require an expensive baler because our tractors are not strong enough to pull it up the steep banks at Hawkwood where we make hay on. For me it is a nerve racking time because we are making six month’s worth of winter feed for the cows and any rain could spoil half a year’s worth of fodder. I cannot relax until the hay is in the barn, so fingers crossed!

The cows have been outside since the late March. Three of the cows have calved and more are due in the next month or two. One of our favourite old cows Emma is not in calf unfortunately and might have to leave us.

The lambs are growing well and the ewes have nearly finished shedding their fleeces. Our breed of sheep shed their fleeces naturally rather than needing to be sheared. This saves a lot of work for us, and makes them less susceptible to external parasites. It does however make them look a bit moth eaten as their wool falls away bit by bit.

In the past we often had the sheep following the cows in the grazing rotation. This is quite a common rotation practice, however, we have been grazing the cows and sheep together this year, and this is beneficial for both the grass and the animals. For the animals it means less internal parasites because each animal ingests worm eggs in the grass that affect the other animal but do not affect themselves. The result is that there are far less eggs that infect the host species. For the pasture with grass and clover it’s beneficial because grass likes to be grazed down and then given a chance to re-grow. The way grass and clover grow is by using the suns’ rays to carry out photosynthesis to grow. When they are eaten, they use the energy stored in their roots to put out a new green shoot and then they can recharge their energy by photosynthesising again. If animals are kept on the same area for too long they continually graze the
Spring Farm Report cont.

young shoots making the plant use its reserves again and again weakening it and making subsequent re-growth slower.

So for this reason we divide fields up into smaller paddocks so that we can more effectively manage the cow and sheep grazing and move the animals to a new piece of land, giving the grass the critical rest period they need to re-grow.

We have a great team this year working with us, it is a good feeling having reliable staff that are so capable and willing.

As many of you are aware, most of our animals are at Brookthorpe farm, so please come an visit them (even if you pick up from Hawkwood). Brookthorpe has it's own special charm, as many of you will know! I hope you all have a great summer!

Farmer Sam Hardiman

News from the Veggie Fields

As I write this in mid-June the weather is stiflingly hot, in stark contrast to a week ago, (and probably the weather next week), but the main interest with the weather this spring was the sustained period of dry weather in April in May, not very usual for the spring, and of some concern at the time. There were some plots of the vegetable field at Brookthorpe that we were simply unable to cultivate as the ground was so hard and dry. Fortunately it rained mid-May and were then able to get on with many delayed jobs. We now have had adequate rain and hopefully that will continue throughout the summer.

As I wrote in my article in March, April and May are the hungry gap months, when we have very little to harvest on the farm. All of that is about to change as our spring planted crops begin to mature. We managed to harvest salad leave and lettuce throughout the spring, either from the polytunnels or the walled garden. We also had some nice spring cabbage and kale from the polytunnels and will soon have more, plus broccoli and spinach from the field at Hawkwood. The broad beans and French beans are beginning to ripen and we will soon plenty of our vegetables in the share.

We would have had more spinach in the share had the cows not escaped one evening and eaten a whole bed of spinach. They also managed to tromp over a lot of cabbages and generally make a mess of the field in the short time it took us to get up to Hawkwood and chase them out. It is not a nice sight to see a bunch of hefty beasts standing in the veggie field. Thank you to whoever it was who phoned me from the packing shed, it would have been much worse if you hadn't done so.

We now have three new members of staff working on the farm for the season. Else, (pronounced Elsa) who is from Denmark and is living in the mobile home at Brookthorpe. Sam (Samantha), who lives locally and joined us after volunteering for a while earlier in the year. David (pronounced David) who comes from the centre of the Universe (I always thought that was Stroud but apparently it's Leicester) and is living in the other mobile home. Anyway, wherever they are from I am grateful that you all are great to work with and I hope that we all have a good season.

Farmer Mark Harrison
Activities and topics covered by the Core Group over the last 12 months include:

**SCA Visioning Workshop** in June 2016 we hired an external consultant to help us explore topics as varied as our relationship with the new Micro-Dairy, growing our community both in depth and breadth and considered Oakbrook Farm, and its potential for SCA. Also considered was the importance of the SCA constitution and regulations.

**The Starter Farm project** has grown and has moved leaps and bounds because we secured additional membership to support it. Thanks to all of you who spread the word! The land at Oakbrook was cleared of brambles and the two planned fields have been tilled and sowed, and food grown contributes to the SCA vegetable share.

**The Community straw bale Building** is coming along very well. The initial part of the structure went up in early summer 2016. There was a big turnout of SCA members that helped in the rendering of the building and we completed construction of the roof this year.

SCA core group attended several BDLT (Bio-Dynamic Land Trust) **Community Meetings** about the Oakbrook Farm land and its usage. We bought and grazed cattle to help with stewarding of the land at Oakbrook Farm. The cattle have now been sold.

**Financial Governance and budget actions** as a result of the earlier Visioning Workshop and the drive of our Treasurer. Some steps have already been taken (we now use My Accounts Office) and we are still working on simplifying or improving our processes. We also welcomed Tarra Gilder-Rai as our new SCA treasurer.

**Investment in the farm equipment**, like a harrow and post-knocker.

**HR actions**, including review of the Staff Insurance status, introduction of the Pension Scheme for the staff and revision of the staff pay structure.

**Joining the WWOOF organisation** (WorldWide Opportunities On Organic Farms) to attract Summer Work volunteers. This came as a result of reviewing our arrangements for Summer Workers.

Introducing **Together Wednesdays** (farm work days) and a few very well attended **Community Building work days**.

Re-design of the **SCA website** by our Newsletter Editor. The new website is mobile friendly and has a handy on-line joining form.

New, improved way of delivering the **e-mail announcements** to the community maintained by our membership administrator.
Supporting a Syrian refugee family

A Syrian refugee family will be arriving in Stroud soon. We are thinking about how to welcome them and help them settle in. Maybe they have not had access to good food over the last years. We are looking for someone (or several people) to contribute to the farm bursary fund to pay for a veg share for them and someone else to fetch the veg and drop it to their house each week. It will be near Bisley Road. If you’d like to help please email Jade at jadebashford@gmail.com.

The bursary fund is also available for other families on low incomes, ask Mark if you’d like the details.

Starter Farm update

2016 was a year of significant expansion on the Farm. Sylvie and Clare set up the Starter Farm on Oakbrook, next to Hawkwood, cultivating an acre of land and setting up a small propagation polytunnel. They then supplied us with plenty of vegetables for another 50 shares throughout the summer and autumn.

Unfortunately, both Sylvie and Clare have now withdrawn from the project, but we will continue to grow on that piece of land along with our existing cultivated land. The project is now on hold.

Community Building update

We’ve nearly made it! The Community Building is standing strong and it’s nearly finished. One of the last big tasks we did was putting the turf on the roof and making it a living space. We still need to apply the final coat of render on the walls. If you want to give it a go don’t miss out our next Community Building work day on the 15th July!

Here’s how we made it happen!

- December 2014: First sketches
- March 2016: First timbers arrived, Ground levelling
- May 2016: Installing the floor
- June 2016: Putting the walls together
- August 2016: The building’s shape starts to emerge, More rendering and installing the roof
- October 2016: Harvest Meal - First SCA community event in the building
- March 2017: The door is fitted
- May 2017: The roof is growing nicely
- June 2017: AGM in the Community Building

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
- Adam Biscoe 01453 759241 a.j.biscoe@gmail.com
- Francis Gobey 07890 042877 francis.gobey@phonecoop.coop
- Simon Hanks 01453 812608
- Sam Hardiman 07531 270206 samueljhardiman@hotmail.com
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- Tarra Gilder-Rai 07981 760982 tarragilderrai@gmail.com
- Bernard Jarman
- Aleksandra Osinska 07435 344640 creativealeks@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