Picture of the polytunnels at Hawkwood taken with a drone during the drought in July

Photo author: Adam Croft

Dates for your diary!

SCA Harvest Meal
Sunday 30th September

12:30 PM for a bring-and-share lunch at 1pm, followed by apple juicing in the Community Building at Hawkwood. Bring your own apples for juicing and a container to take some home.

Everyone is welcome!
Autumn Farm Report

I often start my Farm Reports with some observations on the weather but you don't need me to tell you what an exceptional summer it has been!

It was the driest summer I can ever remember, on the bright side it meant we could make some lovely hay in June but on the down side by August we were feeding it to the cows as the grass had stopped growing!

We got off fairly lightly by comparison as some farmers are desperately short of winter feed having fed a lot of their winter provisions and will have to buy-in hay and prices are rocketing up!

The price of straw that we use to bed the animals over winter has also shot up, we are paying twice as much for straw this year than last year due to reduced cereal yields in the area.

The sheep are also well, however the lambs are several weeks behind in their growth than normal. The first batch have only now gone to the butchers.

With me going away I have tried to simplify the role of looking after the livestock. I decided not to keep any pigs over the winter as we feed our pigs twice a day and this is quite a lot of labour to cover every day of the year including holidays. We shall, however, still have pork available until the New Year. When I get back we will start with pigs again.

The cows did well considering the weather, but we still have to manage the grazing very carefully as there is still less grass than usual. It is vital we keep the cows out grazing for as long as possible to ensure we have enough feed for the winter.

We bought two calves from Stroud Micro Dairy, the idea is to raise them up for meat and see if this collaboration is something that could work long term. As a dairy they always produce calves but with limited land they are unable to keep them on themselves.

This will be my last farm report for a while, I intend to send a report from America on how we are getting on over there but for the mean time it is goodbye and see you in the spring!

Farmer Sam
News from the Veggie Fields

I signed off my veg report in June with the hope that the hot dry spell of weather we were experiencing at that time would be broken before that article had been printed. My hopes weren’t met, and the drought and heat continued throughout June and July. We all experienced a huge sigh of relief when it rained on the 30th of July. This really saved the day as many of our crops were really struggling with the drought. We have very limited capacity to irrigate, and watering just about keeps the plants growing but not really thriving. Since then we have just about had enough rain and most crops have recovered and grown well. Many of the crops we grow don’t really like hot weather, and we did experience some significant losses; all of the carrots due to be harvested throughout September were lost to marauding rabbits and drought, a quarter of the leeks failed to get established, all of the cabbages, cauliflowers and broccoli harvested in July were well undersized, and half of the parsnips and later sown carrots didn’t germinate.

The sun and heat loving summer vegetables, where we have been able to keep them watered, have done very well. We have had very good crops of tomatoes, courgettes, peppers, cucumbers (the best crop ever) and beans. We grow a range of crops, in different locations, and this helps to spread and reduce the risk of failures. We are buying in extra veg at the moment, and will have to continue to do so over the year, but the veg share shouldn’t be affected too much in the coming months.

We have continued to sow seeds throughout the summer, and we will soon be planting up the polytunnels with winter salad and spinach.

Farmer Mark

Farmer Sam is taking a break

As some of you might have heard, I am going to be taking a break from SCA for the winter. My family and I were offered the opportunity to look after my in-laws farm in the states for a year, and send the girls to school over there too.

It took a lot of thought and deliberation but with the support from Kalihi’s employer - Wynstones School and agreement from the farm team and core group we decided to take on this amazing offer. Kalihi and the girls left in August in time for the beginning of the school year. I will be joining them in October. I will then return in March for lambing and preparing for the new growing season and the family will follow in June once school gets finished for the summer.

While we are there we will be helping with picking and preserving fruit including apples, peaches and persimmons. Then pruning and mulching the orchards. I will also be visiting some local CSA’s and farms in the area.

As much as I love working at SCA it has not been without its challenges and frustrations so it will be a great opportunity to recharge the batteries and gain some perspective, after the break I hope to return re-energized and ready to take on the challenges of seeing the farm develop and grow into the future.

I want to thank Mark and the whole farm team for supporting me in this and for taking on the extra work. I wouldn’t feel OK about going if I didn’t have such a capable team to look after things while I’m away, thanks!

Farmer Sam
Thinking of joining Stroud Micro Dairy’s Raw Milk Share - the time is now!

Autumn calving is just around the corner and our lovely neighbours at Stroud Micro Dairy have milk spare for new members to join. The farm team are all members and love their creamy milk! I know a lot of you are already members but if you haven’t joined yet visit their website (www.stroudmicrodairy.co.uk/join-us/) and fill in the joining form (it’s short I promise!

Frozen mash

This is a great way of making the most of a potato glut and can be a super time-saver later on. Making mashed potato isn’t difficult but there is a bit of time to prepare and a bit of starchy washing up. So when I have quite a lot of spuds, I get my biggest saucepan out and make a large batch which means I only have to prep once. Make the mash as follows:

• peel and cut spuds into even sized chunks
• mix and match different varieties, it all works fine
• boil until soft and mash using your preferred method (I swear by my potato ricer)
• add your usual ingredients (butter, milk, oil, cream, etc.) but not quite as much as you normally would
• season to taste with salt
• put portion sized dollops of mash onto baking sheets (you can prepare these with greaseproof paper or a little oil if you think they might stick, but I find they don’t normally – possibly because of the quantity of butter I like to use in mine...)
• cool potato quickly and then place the sheets into the freezer
• once frozen (a few hours or overnight) you can transfer the blobs of mash to bags or freezer containers

To use, defrost as many portions as required. I usually defrost and then reheat in microwave but you can defrost normally and use a saucepan to reheat if you prefer. Then add in the extra milk/cream/butter or whatever you left out earlier and any other flavours such as pepper or mustard. Make sure it’s thoroughly reheated before serving.

Quick Tip: one other thing I sometimes do is to lay out the mash in the size and shape of one of my oven-proof dishes and then freeze. Then I have a slab of potato topping ready to pop onto a bit of left over mince or stew for a quick and easy shepherd’s style pie.

Jules
Veggie Mendley

One of my favourite (and simplest) methods of using up the odds and ends of vegetables in the drawer is based on an idea I saw on TV from the delightful James Martin.

• Put cold water into a saucepan (for which you have a lid) to a depth of about 1 cm.

• Add a generous knob of salted butter (very generous in my house)

• Cut whatever vegetables you like into various sizes so that they will take approximately the same time to cook (e.g. small cauliflower florets, medium broccoli florets, 1cm carrot chunks, etc.) and place in the pan.

• Put the lid on, bring to the boil and then turn down and simmer for about 5 minutes (until cooked to your liking)

• Don’t strain the veg but serve with a slotted spoon and drizzle over a bit of the buttery liquor from the pan.

That’s it.

You can ring the changes with whatever veg you like; if you want to include leafy greens then you can add them part way through the cooking. Here’s a couple of my favourite combinations.

The SCA Medley

I use thick slices of carrot, sliced rainbow chard stalks, green beans (sliced on the diagonal for effect) and 1cm wedges of cabbage. Then I put in the shredded chard leaf about 2 minutes before the end of cooking.

The Mediterranean Medley

This takes a bit more time to cook but is a simple version of ratatouille: I use roughly chopped peeled tomatoes (yes, it really is worth the effort of peeling but no need to remove the seeds or juice – chuck that all in), peppers cut into squarish pieces, thick slices of courgette and a few green beans cut into bitesize pieces. Use vegetable stock instead of water and add a squirt of pomegranate molasses or tomato ketchup to give it a bit of sweetness. Add chopped basil, oregano or parsley at the end if you have some. You can use olive oil instead of butter for this one (or use butter in the cooking and a little drizzle of olive oil when you serve).

I managed to grow on one of the pepper plants which were in the share a few weeks back and have found I’ve got loads of peppers at the moment plus some slightly squasy tomatoes, so these work really well in this.

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

For almost a year now we have had a long waiting list to join the farm, but now we have the starter farm up and running we have spaces for new members. 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
• Francis Gobey 07890 042877 francis.gobey@phonecoop.coop
• Simon Hanks 01452 812608
• Sam Hardiman 07531 270206 samueljhardiman@hotmail.com
• Michal Chodasewicz 01453 825103 micho0281@gmail.com
• Tarra Gilder-Rai 07981 760982 tarragilderrai@gmail.com
• Bernard Jarman 01453 757436 orion@phonecoop.coop
• Aleksandra Osinska 07435 344640 creativealeks@gmail.com
• Jane Thatcher 07989 382337 jane@thewildflowergarden.co.uk
• Joe Mancell 07989 382337 joe.mancell@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 Mathews membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Newsletter: Aleksandra Osinska creativealeks@gmail.com