Dates for your diary!

Farm walk

1 August (Thursday), 7PM at Brookthorpe

We will meet by the walled garden then walk around our Brookthorpe farm and the new land at Brentlands. We will visit the sheep and cow herds and veggie fields.

SCA Farm Fest

14 September (Saturday), time TBC Hawkwood farm

Following on from the success of the previous farm festival (back in 2017!) we hope that this year's will be even bigger and better. We hope you all come along in September and bring the community together to celebrate the farm and have some fun!

There will be games, food and drink, children's activities, music and camping. It's an event for farm members and their friends and families.

SCA day for Biodynamic Preparation

Wednesday 28th September, 10AM onwards, Hawkwood Farm

We will be making biodynamic preparations. Join us outside of the Round house. More information on page 4.
I'm yet again rushing to get my farm report in, it is late in part due to hay making. As I write this we are half way through, having baled up two fields and have two fields at Hawkwood to bale later. For a while I thought we would never get a hot, dry spell long enough to make hay after what feels like months of rain.

The land belongs to Day's Cottage who produce cider and apple juice from their heritage orchards, and on one of their field our animals will be grazing.

We have recently got a new sow named Jackie, she is on loan from a farmer friend. She is settling in and has a boar visiting her from another local farm.

Since returning to the farm there have been some changes to tell you about. In my last article I wrote about how I wanted to expand the livestock and to move towards having pedigree animals. Well, I have made some progress. Currently our livestock are primarily there to provide meat (and fertility to the land), however I would like to expand this role to include supporting the survival of our rare breed of cattle.

Our cows are mostly traditional Herefords but I would like to register them as pedigree and start breeding animals to sell to others farms. This would support the preservation of these old native and rare breed of cows and sheep. These native breeds are well adapted to thrive on a grass based diet producing delicious healthy meat. We have recently bought 5 lovely pedigree Traditional Hereford heifers and 10 pedigree Wiltshire horn shearlings (teenage sheep). The cows are all looking well and we have two young calves - all currently grazing the cover crops in the veg field.

In order to facilitate this we have taken on some more land near our Brookthorpe farm. It's 15 acres and it consists of flat fertile land for grazing and making hay.

The sheep flock are grazing on the new land, we had a very successful lambing with no assisted births needed and only one bottle fed lamb that is being looked after by a neighbour.

Finally I would like to thank the farm team for doing such a great job of looking after everything while I was away. It was great to see everything in such good heart upon my return from my sabbatical in America.

Farmer Sam
News from the Veggie Field

Since my last report in March Sam has returned from the States and jumped straight back into working on the farm.....thank goodness. In fact, he has been so busy I’d almost forgotten that he had been away. We did a good job of running things over the winter, but are very glad that he has returned and taken back the responsibility of the stock and the myriad other roles that make up his work.

The weather has been much kinder to us this year than it was last spring and early summer but it has not been without challenges. Again we have had a prolonged dry spell, creating conditions where it has been too dry to plant out seedlings and sow crops. However, we have now had over 100mm of rain in a fortnight, and are still not able to do those tasks as it’s too wet! It usually comes out okay in the end though.

We are coming to the end of the “hungry gap”, that period of time when there is very little produce from the farm (or the UK), and we have to buy in a lot of vegetables to make up the share. We are fortunate that we have supplies of organically grown veg from southern Europe, not ideal, but still necessary if we want a varied veg share. All of this will change quite rapidly now as we have carrots, broccoli, leaf beet and the like starting to mature.

We put a new plastic cover on one of the polytunnels in May. The old cover was degraded and beginning to break up. We needed to time the work carefully, removing the old cover when most of the winter crop (chard) had been harvested, and getting the new one on before the summer crop (cucumbers) needed planting. Things went well but the cucumbers were planted a bit late and suffered a little. (They are looking even sadder now though as they are heavily infested with aphids).

We came into work one Monday morning in May to find three crop covers that were covering all of the cabbages and leaf beet missing from the field at Hawkwood. We found two of them draped over an ash tree on the neighbours farm, 20m up in the air, and the third one lying in the field over the other side of the stream. It appears that a whirlwind had picked them and carried them over the valley and into the trees. These covers are measure 50 x 13 m and are very heavy. There was absolutely no damage to crops that had been under the covers....not a leaf. We managed to retrieve one of the covers from the tree by pulling it from the tree with the tractor, but the other one is still there.

Hopefully we won’t have any more freak weather this year.

Farmer Mark
Barn Dance report

The barn dance this year went well despite slightly less than great weather in the lead up to it.

We had an exciting new band - Celtic Conspiracy - with a great sound and a new caller with some fun and unique dances.

There were trailer rides for kids and camping, BBQ with our farm sausages and burgers, Day’s Cottage cider and Stroud Brewery’s beer.

We started off with some kids dances then moved to more adult dancing, finishing with an 80s disco. Below are some pictures from the event.

Thank you to everyone who helped make it happen!

Making biodynamic preparations

Each autumn we make a number of biodynamic preparations and then commit them to the winter soil. Influenced by the sleeping earth, the in-streaming power of stars and planets and the changing conditions within and above the soil, they gradually ferment and become sweet-smelling compost-like substances. When retrieved in spring time they are ready to use on this and many other farms and gardens across the country to improve the soil, increase its vitality and help the plants growing in it to thrive and provide high quality, flavoursome and nourishing food. The main task on this preparation making day is to fill a large number of cow horns with some of the wonderful fresh cow pats that our SCA animals have been producing. Do come and join us on Wednesday 28th September outside the Round house from 10.00 onwards. Bring a packed lunch and be suitably prepared for English weather. Children are also welcome.

Bernard

Stroud Community Agriculture on social media

If you want to keep up to date with farm happenings why not follow us on Facebook and (our brand new) Instagram account. We can promise you a lot of cute pictures of animals.

facebook.com/StroudCommunityAgriculture

instagram.com/stroudcommunityagriculture

www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org
Homemade natural beauty solutions

This issue’s recipes are a bit different. I thought I would share a couple of homemade beauty options this time. They consist of ingredients that can be found in most kitchens and don’t come in plastic. The idea to make my own cosmetic came from my own experience of a quite bad allergic reaction to a face moisturiser I used a couple of years ago. It wasn’t a nice experience and I started to look for more natural solutions. Over the last couple of years I’ve made various ointments and tried different recipes, but I have a couple that I absolutely love. These are for homemade deodorant (that really works!) and dry shampoo.

Homemade deodorant

Ingredients (makes a little jar):

- 1 teaspoon of baking soda (make sure it's pure with no aluminium!)
- 1 teaspoon of tapioca starch (can be other starch like potato)
- 4 teaspoons of coconut oil
- 1 teaspoon of grated beeswax (for summer months it’s better to add a bit more beeswax and less coconut oil so the deodorant keeps it’s solid form)
- few drops of essential oil of your choice (optional)

Method

Melt the coconut oil together with grated beeswax (I usually place it in a small pyrex dish and put it over a pan filled in with boiling water - it may take 5-10 minutes and require occasional stirring)

When both coconut oil and beeswax are liquid add baking soda and tapioca starch little by little and stir it in trying to remove any lumps. At the end, add few drops of your favourite essential oil for a nice scent - I use rosemary & bergamot. Pour it into a little jar and leave to settle. Use with a spatula or your finger and rub into your skin as needed.

As with any cosmetics I would recommend doing a test on a small part of your skin to check for any allergic reactions and don’t use on freshly shaved skin.

Homemade dry shampoo (instant hair refresher)

I haven’t used or even heard of a dry shampoo until I died my hair bright pink. It was a washable colour, but I wanted to keep it as long as possible and the hair dresser recommended washing it occasionally and using a dry shampoo to keep it looking respectable between the washes.

I don’t have pink hair anymore, but I’ve been using a dry shampoo on and off - mostly as an emergency, when I didn’t have the time to wash my hair. And in one of these emergency days I realised that I run out of the dry shampoo! In the moment of panic I got an idea, what if... I take a little bit of baking soda (that has cleaning properties) and a little bit of tapioca starch (that soaks moisture) and sprinkle it on my head...

And so I did, I put a little bit of each in my palm (roughly half a teaspoon of each) and put it over my hair, massaged gently and left for 3 minutes. I then brushed it off and... voila it worked! Maybe not as strongly as the commercial solutions, but I was definitely able to show myself to other people.

Aleks
Everyone is welcome to join in and enjoy the farm, including non-members. We currently have a long waiting list to join our veg shares, which means that on average you will have to wait 5-6 months.

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 cooperation 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.

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