Dates for your diary!

Singing to the cows
Monday 24th December, 5PM Brookthorpe

We will be singing to the animals as usual this Christmas Eve. It will take place at our Brookthorpe farm at 5pm. Please make your way to the barn quietly, there will be carol sheets by the door. This is a very special event with a unique mood of reverence and rejoicing. To help maintain this, parents please keep your children with you throughout. Please don’t drive down to the farm yard, park on the Brookthorpe drive where you can.

Three Kings Preparation
Monday 6th January, 1:30pm, Hawkwood

We will be spraying this special preparation on the land. Meeting point is at Hawkwood Community Building at 1:30pm. See more details about the event on page 4.

Candlemas
Sunday 2nd February, Hawkwood, time TBC

Every year we celebrate the very beginning of spring by lighting candles on the farm at Candlemas.

Merry Christmas!

www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org
News from the Veggie Fields

We have a rain gauge on the farm and I regularly make a note of the rain fall totals. It's nothing very scientific, but in October and November, we recorded total rainfall of 270mm. This is double our average for these months. It rained on about 51 days of the 61 for these two months. We have been lucky in avoiding the huge deluges that other areas of the country have experienced. This rainfall has not been that unusual, but nevertheless, it is sodding wet out there, and doesn't look like drying out much soon. The heavy soil fields at Brookthorpe are looking particularly wet, and the access onto the vegetable field is quite a quagmire. The worst aspect of all this is that the crops aren't growing much, they are drowning rather than growing.

But despite all of that, we do have plenty to harvest over the winter. We have moved on from those autumnal crops now to a decidedly winter veg selection. We are currently harvesting those winter root vegetables such as beetroot and celeriac to put into store. They won't tolerate any intense cold, so need to be kept somewhere frost free but cool. The carrots we leave in the field, as they keep best there, but we cover them with four layers of fleece to protect them from the cold. Most of the other vegetables are winter hardy.

The polytunnels are all full of salad and greens which we will harvest throughout the winter. Hopefully we will be able to get three cuts from all of these crops.

Now is the time when we both begin to look forward to planning for the next season. The seed catalogues begin to arrive and all of the photographs show promise of shiny healthy vegetables for the next season. It is also the time when we say goodbye to some of the farm team. Ruth has been with us all year and is setting off to new places in the New Year. Thanks Ruth for all of your hard work and interest in the farm, it has been a pleasure to work with you.

Happy Christmas and New Year to you all,

Farmer Mark
You probably noticed, this autumn has been wet! There has been standing water in parts of the farm for months now. But we should count ourselves lucky as there has been serious flooding in other parts of the country.

The cows are all in the barns now and the winter routine of feeding and bedding has started. Before we brought the cows in we made some repairs to the barn floor and drainage. Instead of using concrete we used crushed chalk. Concrete is both very energy intensive to make and has a large carbon footprint as well as being expensive. The chalk was a bit of a challenge to deal with as it came in quite hefty lumps but we managed and we will see how well it holds up. It has certainly made the cows more comfortable and dry.

The sheep remain outside during the winter. After Christmas they will start getting some Mangold Wurzels too. These are a root crop we grow on the farm, high in sugar that helps to keep their energy levels high and to stay warm. It also gives them a boost in the later stages of pregnancy when they don’t get enough from the grass alone.

We had a lovely litter of piglets. They are now 8 weeks old and growing fast! They get a mixture of feed including waste milk from Stroud Micro Dairy, beetroot and other waste veg. We are still on the look out for a new tractor, who knows maybe Santa will have a surprise for us.

We had put in an application for hedge row trees from the Woodland Trust, I am happy to say we were successful, very successful in fact; we accidentally ordered two lots and got them both! We will be planting a hedge on our new land at Days Cottage and another at Hawkwood. The trees aren’t due to arrive till March. So I will send out an email looking for volunteers to help plant them both, nearer the time.

We will be singing to the animals on Christmas eve at Brookthorpe as usual this year (5PM start).

If you are new, this is a popular event held every year on Christmas eve where we gather in the barn and sing carols to the animals. Its a quiet, reverent event that traces its origins back to old European myths.

I would like to thank Ruth Pulan who has worked with us the last couple of years and is now headed to pastures new.

Please feel free to visit the farm any time over the holidays. It’s a nice opportunity to see the cows up close. I hope you all have a restful and peaceful Christmas.

We are on Instagram and Facebook if you want to get pictures and updates.

facebook.com/StroudCommunityAgriculture
instagram.com/stroudcommunityagriculture
The Three Kings Preparation
Monday 6th January 13.30 Roundhouse, Hawkwood

Each year on January 6th – the day that the three kings of the orient paid their respects to the new-born Jesus child – we stir and spray out a special preparation and pay our respects to the land. Unlike the biodynamic preparations used on the farm, it is not used to bring vitality and enhance fertility. It is an offering to the elemental world and a blessing to the land around which we walk.

The three kingly gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh are carefully mixed together and potentised beforehand and then stirred in water for an hour like the biodynamic preparations. The liquid is then sprayed out with a bucket and brush along the boundaries of the chosen area. The plan this year is to include all the land at Oakbrook, Stroud Community Agriculture and Hawkwood – the whole side valley.

Meet at the Roundhouse for a prompt start with stirring at 13.30.

The afternoon is short and spraying needs completing before dark. Come prepared for all weathers.

You can also bring a bottle to spray at home afterwards if you wish. This year the event will be led by Christian Gruetzmacher FFI
email: chr.gruetzmacher@gmail.com

Bernard Jarman

Plastic packaging

As those of you who collect your veg share from the farms will know, we are now presenting the mixed salad loose, in plastic lined crates, for you to weigh out yourselves. Thank you to everyone who left us feedback about this new system. It has mostly been positive, with people saying that they appreciated the reduced use of plastic packaging for the salad. We did have some comments that it wasn’t keeping as well as when we packed the mix individually. My experience is that if you take it home in a paper bag and then store it cool moist place, a sealed container in the fridge being best, then it keeps well. I think that it keeps well in the crates in the packing shed for a few days as well, especially at this time of year.

For those of you who collect your veg from one the drop off points we still need to pack the salad in a plastic bag. I think that I have found a supply of biodegradable bags suitable for the salad, but we still a have a stock of the old bags and will use them all first. We have stopped packing the whole head lettuce and some other items in plastic now, and hopefully you will have found that they have kept well enough.

Farmer Mark
**Fresh from Southern Spain**

For those of you new to the farm, you may be interested to know that each year in February we receive a delivery of fresh citrus, olives and olive oil from our friends at La Jimena in the south of Spain.

The Rosenbusch family manage an organic farm there, and each year deliver their produce to a number of places in northern Europe, including Stroud. This high quality olive oil comes from olives harvested by hand from ancient trees. The citrus are from old varieties valued for their full flavour, something you won’t find elsewhere in the UK. If you would like to order some please see their internet shop at https://www.openfoodnetwork.org.uk/la-jimena/shop. If you have any further questions or need assistance with ordering, please feel free to contact me at mark@plumptucker.co.uk.

Mark

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**Starter Farm news**

As of this Christmas, I (Kit) will be moving on from the Starter Farm. The plan for the project was hatched nearly six years ago, when my friend Sylvie rang me up with an ingenious idea, and I’ve been closely involved in it ever since. I want to thank everyone at SCA for helping to bring it into being and supporting it to continue.

The Starter Farm has been through significant changes in its short life, and more are to come. In the first year, everything Sylvie and I produced was going into the share. This was great in terms of income and financial stability, but restricted our independence in choosing what to grow, and didn’t give us the chance to figure out the marketing side of things. Then it swung the other way – last year and this year SCA didn’t buy any Starter Farm produce, so I’ve had a lot of freedom to grow what I want, and have been finding my own routes to market. I’ve definitely learned more this way, but it’s also been quite a lot more stressful! And significantly less lucrative – which is OK for me as I’ve got some family money to rely on, but could be tough for anyone without that backup. I’ve often wondered if we might be able to come back to a bit more of a halfway house in future, balancing independence and security.

Other changes have been in land allocation, and more are on the horizon in this regard. The Starter Farm plot went from an acre in the first year, to a quarter acre plus a large polytunnel. The issue of how to enforce a crop rotation on a changing cast of starter farmers was resolved by the outside plot moving around year on year within the SCA growing space at Oakbrook. However, the Core Group have recently decided to stop using that land, making way for some
exciting new projects at Oakbrook. So the Starter Farm will have a more clearly defined space from now on, with ample space for green manures, and new neighbours, with whom I’m sure fruitful collaborations await.

2019’s been a bit of a funny year for me to end on – my Mum died last October and for much of the spring and summer I was feeling quite impacted by that, and everything was a bit of a slog. Then in July I got shingles, and wasn’t really back at work till early September. Nell (who was working with me May-September) was amazing at holding the fort, but our productiveness definitely suffered. You might have noticed there wasn’t much of our stuff in the Hawkwood packing shed this summer. Quite a contrast to last year, when I was full of energy and manically busy the whole time with the excitement of

figuring out how and where to sell my wares! I guess this was never going to be an easy year for me, and I’m feeling much more positive about 2020.

For me, the Starter Farm has been the perfect bridge between being an employee at SCA and feeling capable of setting up an independent project. It’s been a chance to learn by doing, experiment with new ideas, make mistakes and adapt my practices in response. This process has built my skills, increased my confidence hugely, and shown up some holes in my knowledge which I can now go out and fill! I started with a shaky understanding of what, when, and how much to grow, and how to price and market my produce. It all felt like a bit of a leap in the dark! There’s plenty more to learn around those questions, but I’ve now got an excellent base to work from. The next steps in my journey will be learning more about soil care, and becoming more efficient and streamlined in my work, both practically and when it comes to creating sensible business models! I’m planning on taking some time this coming year to help out at different farms and gardens and pick up some tips about how others solve those puzzles. Then it’ll be time to get planning my next venture...

In February, Nell will be back and will be joined by Rosie, who’s just finished an apprenticeship at Abbey Home Farm in Cirencester. They’ll be the starter farmers for the next two years. It feels very satisfying to be handing the project on to the next generation. I’m really proud of the Starter Farm, grateful for everyone who’s contributed to it, and I look forward to seeing it continue to evolve as the years go by.

**Farmer Kit**

A small subgroup is responsible for overseeing the Starter Farm, choosing new starter farmers and making sure everything’s running as it should. Currently it’s just Mark, the starter farmer(s) and Joe from the Core Group – it would be great to get another impartial volunteer, so if anyone’s interested, please do get in touch with Mark (mark@pluntucker.co.uk) or Joe (joe.mancell@gmail.com) about it! It’s a fairly small commitment – meetings are roughly once a month.
SCA Bonfire soup

If you made it to our Bonfire Night in November and liked the soup here is the recipe.

Prepare the veg: peel the squash, scoop the seeds out and cut the flesh into 1-2cm cubes. Cut the carrots into 0.5-1cm cubes. Finely chop the onion and fry in a little bit of oil. Add carrots, stir and cook for a bit (5-10 minutes), stirring occasionally (you may add a dash of water). Add squash, mix with the onions and carrots and leave to sweat for a few minutes. Add water and boil untio squash is soft, then add the lentils and boil until they are cooked and the carrots are soft.

Add spices and herbs (be generous with cumin), salt and pepper and a dash of soy sauce (use less/no salt if using the stock). A dash of cider vinegar will give it an additional bite. Taste until you are happy with the flavour. Leave it to cool down a bit and blend with a stick blender. The soup will taste best the next day when all the flavours blend. You can add a bit of coconut milk or drink as well as some butter. Serve with bread (or squash chips - see below).

Recipe is courtesy of Simon's friend Pauline, Thank you!

Simon and Aleks

Squash chips

Preheat the oven to 180C (350F) degrees (Gas mark 4). Peel butternut squash and cut into chips size chunks. Chop finely rosemary and mix with salt and olive oil. Spread the chips in the ovenproof dish and pour over the herbs and oil mix. Bake until slightly brown and crispy.

Squash bread

1. Preheat the oven to 180C (350F) degrees (Gas mark 4).

2. Slice the sweet potato or squash in half and bake for 45–60 minutes until tender. Remove the skin, weigh out 200g, and blend in a food processor.

3. Mix in the rest of the dough ingredients until smooth; then knead in the seeds and raisins until completely combined.

4. With lightly floured hands, shape the dough into a loaf. Make shallow slices with a knife along the top and bake for 40 minutes until nicely golden. Let cool slightly before slicing.

Beth

Ingredients (serves 4-6)
- 1 butterun squash (or other squash)
- 2 carrots
- 1 medium onion
- 3/4 cup red lentils
- 4-5 cups of water (or stock)
- oil of your choice for frying
- spices: ground corriander, tumeric, cumin, mixed herbs, salt and pepper
- dash of soy sauce
- dash of apple cider vinegar

Ingredients
- some butternut squash
- 1 tablespoon rosemary
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- salt

Ingredients (1 loaf)
- 1 large sweet potato or half of a squash
- 100g buckwheat flour
- 4 tablespoons arrowroot (can also be substituted with more buckwheat flour)
- 1/4 teaspoon baking soda
- 1/2 teaspoon sea salt
- 1 tablespoon ground flaxseed
- 2 tablespoons of lemon juice

For the seed-and-raisin mix:
- 50g pumpkin seeds
- 50g sunflower seeds
- 50g sesame seeds
- 80g raisins (optional)
Everyone is welcome to join in and enjoy the farm, including non-members. 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
- **Tarr Gilder-Rai** 07981 760982 tarrgilderrai@gmail.com
- **Bernard Jarmen** 01453 757436 orion@phonecoop.coop
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- **Jane Thatcher** 07834 740408 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

Community Building booking and enquiries: Joe Mancell at joe.mancell@gmail.com

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