

Stroud Community Agriculture

Sharing the Harvest



Newsletter No 20 Summer 2006

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News from the Veggie Patch

We are now well under way with our spring planting. It has been a cold late spring but things are now catching up and the acceleration in growth brings with it an increase in the workload.

This is the time of year called the "hungry gap". In the week that I write this (late May) we will harvest lettuce, parsley and possibly coriander from the polytunnel. That's it. The rest of the vegetables in the share will be bought in, a lot of it from the Continent. However by the time you read this we should be harvesting a lot more of our own produce. On the farm day on Saturday, we planted out sweetcorn seedlings and strung up the tomato plants, all in the hope of summer sunshine and summer eating.

You may find that for a few weeks in June you will not get any onions in your veg share. At this time of year it is usually only possible to buy onions imported either from Argentina or Egypt. At the inception of SCA the core group decided that we should buy in vegetables produced as locally as possible, and if needed imported from no further afield than the Continent. We will have to wait until the Spanish onions are available, or our own spring onions (the ones the rabbits have left for us).

This year I am experimenting with a broader range of flowers for pick-your-own and I am increasing the amount of snap peas, sweetcorn and lettuces grown. I am also trying a wide range of peppers in the tunnels to try to find some varieties that will do well on our site and make them a worthwhile crop to grow. Last year the two varieties that I grew didn't really produce enough to warrant the time and effort needed to grow them. I'm also trialing some different tomato varieties to try to get an earlier crop. One of the varieties, "Urbikany" comes from Siberia of all places, a place where I imagine that a quick growing plant is the only one that will produce any fruit at all. These are some of the things that make gardening interesting.

The rest of the garden is planted up with similar crops to last year. Let's hope that the predicted drought doesn't materialise or you will have to put up with me moaning a lot in the autumn newsletter. Mark

Change of Farm days

Members have asked us to change the farm days from the third Saturday of each month to the fourth. This is to avoid the clash with the Stroud Farmers Market. This will commence in June. Hope to see you there then.

Farm Report

Laurence Dungworth

Well what an odd year it has been so far, and may well continue to be so. Looking back over my weather records, we had very little rain over the winter - in the four months from mid-November to mid-March we had 160mm. This is equivalent to roughly 1½" each month. The first half of April was still cold, and it was only really once Easter had passed that we could say spring had really arrived. And then in May, it was warmer, but oh so wet. In the month of May alone, we had 160mm of rain - the same amount as the entire winter!

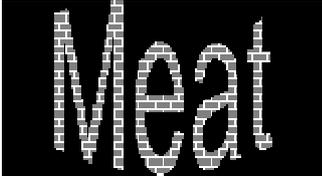
This has made things difficult on a number of fronts. As I am sure Mark has explained, it is a critical time for sowing and planting, and this can be hampered by the wet soil. Thankfully with our soil being quite thin and just above limestone that allows the water to flow freely away, we just need one fine windy day to be able to get back onto the land. This is very different on farms that are only a few miles away. The land at Brookthorpe (see Dave Judd's article) is more of a clay soil and I could imagine that at the moment it would be impossible to do anything down there.

With regard to the stock, I let them out into the fields in March, once our hay had just about finished, expecting the grass to be growing as they ate. However with that cold weather it didn't really grow and they have soon caught up with what little growth there has been and it has been a challenge to keep them happy. They now respond very quickly to my voice - just in case I have a few leftover cabbages for them. But despite this, or maybe because of the cabbages, they are looking extremely well. Most of them, and certainly our cows and our own farm-born calves have that sheen to their coats that is characteristic of a healthy beast. This is also born out in the fact that after their TB (tuberculosis) test at the end of May, they were given the all clear, which is always a relief.

I was helped to find a name for Hazel's calf - Lily. In June Emma, a replacement cow for Daffodil, is due to calve. We are also expecting the visit of a local bull - a Hereford this time - which will hopefully serve two of our cows to calve next March. To facilitate this we have had to separate two of the young heifers so that they are not served, but this has proven rather challenging because of their strong herd instinct. Already they have gone through and over fences as well as knocking one of the barn walls almost completely off. We shall have to wait and see if we manage. Things would be easier if we had another parcel of land just far enough away that they would not try to rejoin the herd. Maybe that will be a possibility soon.

The pigs are all well now. Dulci is looking good and should be farrowing in July, but after last year then I am not guaranteeing anything! The weaners that were born in January are all healthy and growing. Because of the severity and length of the winter they caught cold and a few really suffered. The vet gave them antibiotics and eventually they all, bar one, recovered. The boars (male) will go off to the butchers probably in July, and the gilts (females) we will keep until October.

As I write this I wait expectantly for what June and July will bring weather-wise. These are critical months in the farming calendar, as it is haymaking time and what we are able to achieve in one busy week determines the well being of the cows for the next nine months. We want a spell of warm dry weather, with a gentle breeze preferably, to allow the grass that we will cut to dry without losing its nutritional value - as shown by its colour and aroma. In addition to this, we need to actually know when this spell will be, so that we don't go and cut the grass only for it to be rained on and have all the colour and smell washed out. And of course, we will need lots of help to actually bring the hay into the barn. It is a lovely job to do as a community and an exhausting one to do as a small group, so the more people we have the better. Even if it is only for half an hour it can make a difference. If you want to be part of this then the best thing would be to contact me to say when you would probably be available. For instance if you are away the first two weeks of July, I will know not to phone you. Likewise, if you can't do evenings because of children. An e-mail (laurencedungworth@yahoo.co.uk) is easiest for me to deal with in this instance though you can also phone. It would also be great if someone would volunteer to do the phoning when the moment came, as I will be a bit busy. This could be a good job for a hay fever sufferer!



We currently have plenty of beef, with fresh due in early September.

Pork is just about finished, with fresh due in early August.
To place an order contact Laurence - laurenceclungworth@yahoo.co.uk,
Or phone - 07799 015499 / 01453 753768.

Minimum order amount of £40, though this can be shared as a joint order
(though if you order enough joints you will reach the £40 mark!)

Kolisko Farm update....

Prior to this year's AGM, SCA had begun tentatively piecing together a tender for acquiring the land at Kolisko Farm over at Brookthorpe. At this stage no decision had been taken as to whether or not SCA should pursue this option: it was just an idea, albeit an attractive one.

At this year's AGM, the SCA "core group" decided to engage members in a discussion about Kolisko. The discussion raised many issues to the fore, including the perceived advantages and disadvantages of such a venture. The main disadvantages surround the practical difficulties involved with running an agricultural enterprise on two, separate sites, particularly the movement of livestock and machinery. Other potential disadvantages could involve so-called "management stretch": do we have the necessary knowledge, skills and resources required to successfully take on and manage an area of land that would effectively "double" the responsibilities of SCA? It was noted that this could involve the risk of overwork and burn-out, and that it could upset the working balance and status quo of SCA. Others raised concerns that close links with Wynstones School might enhance the perception held by some that SCA is a Steiner-based enterprise.

The disadvantages, however, are counterbalanced by many potential benefits. SCA has been searching for more land for some time now, and finding a site that meets our requirements has proved to be very difficult. At present, Kolisko Farm is by far our best option! Taking on Kolisko farm would also enable SCA to feed more people and increase its membership-base, as well as branching out into new agricultural enterprises. Furthermore, it has a history of organic food production, and the added (potential) bonus of enabling a farmer to live on site. Both Mark and Laurence are currently in favour of farming at Kolisko.

Having borne much fruit, the AGM discussion was instrumental in the final decision to submit a formal tender for Kolisko Farm. It was felt that, although some reservations were expressed, the core group had been given the "green light" to pursue the option further. Following the AGM, The tender for Kolisko Farm was polished, primed and posted off. On Tuesday 16th May we were verbally informed that our tender had been accepted - we were in business!

There are still one or two sticky issues to be resolved, however. These mainly concern the condition of some of the farm buildings (so-called "dilapidations") and where the onus of responsibility lies for their maintenance and/or upkeep: with SCA or Wynstones. There has also been some confusion as to whether there would be a house available for Laurence to live in. Although both of these issues are potential problems for SCA, we are optimistic at this stage that these issues can be resolved. Acquiring the 25 acres or so at Kolisko Farm is a fantastic opportunity for SCA, providing an opportunity to build on its successes at Hawkwood, expand into new enterprises and increase the number of families it can feed. At present we have most of the knowledge, skills and resources available to make this venture a success. However, it will be a strong learning curve for SCA and the strength of our success in this venture will also depend upon the continued support and enthusiasm of its members.

Dave

HELP! with Children's Activities on Farm Days

Our work with the kids on the monthly farm days continue to keep us busy (in the run up) and the kids mostly engaged (on the days themselves). They've impressed us with their staying power (sometimes 30 minutes on one task!) and skill with veg harvesting, and last month, sweetcorn planting. They really seem to enjoy themselves whilst familiarising themselves with the land, the seasons, plants, creatures and farming. Just as importantly, their parents are free to make a significant contribution to the farm and have a couple of hours of good ol' hands-on physical work in adult company with very little interruption.

*We would love a few people to volunteer to help us
either regularly or just once or twice a year
especially over the summer.*

Remember, from June farm days will be on the 4th Saturday. We will happily share everything we have learned about what works and what doesn't and give you ideas or materials if you are short of them. Occasional help will give us a chance to do some farming, give the kids a new face and voice to engage with, and cover for when we are away on our summer holidays. Just call 01453 767689 if you want to volunteer or find out more.

Thanks

Jade, Kate and Lesley.

Camping..... August 5th!

There will be camping at the farm again this year. We will arrive from about 3p.m. Please bring food to share for supper and breakfast. There will be a fire. It would be nice if one or two people came with ideas for children's activities, also musical instruments, but not stereos. If you have not been before, the facilities are basic - no showers, but the toilets will be open on the other side of the field and they have wash basins. You will need to park a short, dark walk from the camping spot.

Jade

CHANGES AT THE TREASURY

In the last issue I requested for volunteers for the post of treasurer. I didn't actually expect to get any offers but have been surprised to have received two. However we can only have one treasurer and I am pleased to introduce Richard Swann as that person. I will be handing over the role over the next few weeks. I will still manage our farm account, which we use for the day to day running of the farm finances.

Thank you to Doreen Frusher for also volunteering.

Our finances remain in a very healthy state. The first few months of the year always entail a lot of expenses and this year has been no different. We still remain on target when compared to our budget. We have also received a subsidy of £1240 for the work carried out on the hedge.

Mark (treasurer, soon to be ex)

We have been asked to bring the following to your notice:

SAVE Fordhall Farm NOW!

Fordhall Farm has been chemical-free for over 65 years. It is now under threat from developers.

The Fordhall Community Land Initiative was established in February 2005. It is one of the first organisations in the UK to place farmland in common ownership. It has until July 2006 to raise the £800,000 required to purchase the land and to save it from industrial development. To date they have raised £260,000 & have 1850 shareholders.

By purchasing a £50 not-for-profit share in Fordhall you become a member of the Initiative and a part owner of the farm. Do this and you will also be taking practical action to help secure a small piece of precious English countryside for the common good of future generations.

I've put some of their leaflets in the packing shed.

For more details see their website:

www.fordhallfarm.com

or an article in the Observer via the following website:

<http://www.fordhallfarm.com/Press%20Articles/2005-10-09%20Green%20farm%20in%20£1m%20to%20survive%20-%20Observer.pdf>

Carol Mathews

Community Orchard Update.....

Gary Morton came to visit a core group meeting and keep us all up to date with news from the Community Orchard group. They had been offered a chance to use one of the orchards at Prinknash but, as they were only cider apple orchards, the group felt this was not the best use of efforts. Therefore the hunt goes on for suitable fruit producing orchards that we can use. At that time, a decision will be made on how the orchard group will interface with SCA.

In the meantime, if you know of trees in need of management or would like to be involved with this group, please contact Gary Morter at Gary@morter.force9.co.uk.

NOTICE OF A PUBLIC MEETING

Although not strictly Stroud Community Agriculture business, pure and simple, the growth and development of the sustainable Community is very much part of our reason for being so we are sending out notices in veg parcels and via the newsletter to advertise a meeting which will be held in Stroud and which might be of interest to our members.

Stroud Public Meeting on Community Decline and Proposed Solution : The Sustainable Communities Bill

Contact Steve Shaw, Local Works Campaign Co-ordinator) steve@localworks.org or 020 7833 9898

Details for the meeting:

Date : Thursday 22nd June

Time : 7.30 to 9.30

Venue: St. Lawrence Church Hall, The Shambles, off the High St. Stroud GL5 1AP

Speakers : David Drew (MP for Stroud)

Steve Shaw (Local Works Campaign Co-ordinator)

Claire Gerbrands (Made in Stroud and Fresh n Local Co-ordinator) TBC

Chair : Kevin Cranston (Mayor of Stroud)

Core Group Changes

As we reported, at the AGM, Nick Weir and Jade Bashford stepped down from the core group after successfully supporting SCA from the outset. They have been very much appreciated and whilst it is recognised that they are still very much a part of the farm, they have been missed at Core Group meetings.

However, Nadine Smykatzkloss has joined us and is very welcome. She is already known to other members and will surely bring much to the group. Her email address is Nadine@smykatzkloss.fsnet.co.uk

Nadine writes:-

"I have been involved with the farm since its beginnings in Brookthorpe and think you can taste the difference between "our" carrots and supermarket ones.

I'm a keen supporter of sustainable living, be it in the way we grow our food, the way we travel (have helped to set up the Stroud Car Club) or how we look after our countryside and wildlife. Currently working with the Stroud Vale Biodiversity Project, where I help people to look after the wildlife in their parishes.

My experience lies in working with community groups, knowledge of the new environmental stewardship schemes for farmers and fundraising. Ah, yes, and in making yummy things out of BEETROOT. "

***How about a Farm Fresh cookbook? Please send in your favourite recipes and remedies. We also need some for the website
Carole at: cv005a6380@blueyonder.co.uk***

Community Farm Land Trust Discussion

Notice of Meeting

***Anyone interested in finding out more about how community farm land trusts work, is invited to a Stroud Common Wealth evening at
The Long Room, The SPACE
On Thursday July 6^h at 8.15 p.m.***

***We will discuss:
The Fordhall Farm community buy out,
How CFLTs work, and examples
What are the choices for developing a local,
Stroud Based Community Farm Land Trust?***

With Nick Weir, Simon Charter, Greg Pilley and Martin Large

Martin writes “ As human beings our greatness is not so much in remaking the world as in remaking ourselves” (Mahatma Ghandi)

What is Stroud Community Agriculture?

We have 116 members who share the costs of running a 23-acre organic farm at Wick Street, near Stroud. Two farmers and an apprentice work with us. The farmers are paid a fair wage and the farm works for the principles below, not for profit. Members can work on the farm if they wish, but this is not compulsory. They can also use the land for celebrations and social events, and we often come together for work days, bonfires, picnics, meetings etc.

We are a co-op and the members decide collectively how to run the farm. A 'core group' of members undertake most of the organising. Members share the produce and receive a weekly box of vegetables. This is a quote from a member

***“I just received my first bag of vegetables
and they are great and bursting with health”.***

We have some pigs and cattle for meat and hope to expand towards a 100-acre farm for eggs, milk, bread, fruit, and other produce. Members agree to support the principles below, and pay different contributions according their means and how much food they would like.

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 encourage practical involvement on all levels.*
- • *To be transparent in all our affairs. To make decisions on the basis of consensus wherever possible. To strive towards social justice.*
- • *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.*

Stroud Community Agriculture contacts:

General Enquiries & Information

Carole Vaughan - Tel: 0845 4580814 Email: info@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Membership Admin

Carol Mathews - Email: membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Stroud Community Agriculture core group

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|----------------------|------------------------------|---|
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