



# SUMMER NEWS

Newsletter No 28 SUMMER 2008

## *News from our farmers...*

After the depressing start to the year, the corner seems to be turning with a very successful haymaking at Brookthorpe at the beginning of June. I had planned an early cut in order to tackle the weeds (thistles and docks) in the fields, and had thought I would have to make haylage - the grass being baled before it is fully dry and then wrapped in plastic. I was a bit hesitant at this excessive use of an oil-based product, but felt it necessary as a one-off to get the land back in good shape. As it was, we were blessed with some great weather and the grass dried enough to make hay. I had wanted to make small bales and bring it in together, but as it was there was rain threatening and the grass was not completely dry - 'not quite fit' in farming terminology. So, in the end I had it made into large round bales that can be left in the field to finish drying even if there are showers. The danger with stacking small slightly wet bales is spontaneous combustion. A stack or heap of organic matter with a bit of moisture starts composting which can generate a lot of heat. This combined with some dry material can set the whole lot and the barn on fire - something to avoid. We still have one field at Brookthorpe and all of the fields at Hawkwood to cut, and this I hope to be small baled so that we can bring it in together. Thank you to those members who already offered to help - I hope the offer still stands for next time. If anyone else wants to help then drop me a line - 'laurencedungworth@yahoo.co.uk'.

Being able to sun-dry the hay as opposed to wrapping it up when it is wet not only wins on the sustainability side, but also appeals as it is bringing light and warmth into the winter fodder, as opposed to moisture and darkness. These two polarities are everywhere we look in the natural world. There is more of the latter over the winter whilst the summer is (hopefully) characterised by the former. When growing a plant we generally need moisture and darkness to sprout the seed, but for the plant to flourish and mature we need warmth and light. In this case we can see that moisture and darkness bring something into life, whereas the light and warmth bring about a more definite forming that enables something to be sustained. So when we have a dry spring it can be difficult to establish a crop, whereas a wet, dull summer means we get poorer cropping. With the poor weather last year I felt there was a definite deficiency of those forming and maintaining forces at work and it is possible that this could be seen in the losses of the animals even if there was not a direct connection. Interestingly a number of fellow farmers also experienced unusual and unexpected losses. Maybe nature was not strong enough to maintain her usual vibrancy after last summer. So, I am hoping, as I am sure you all are, for a light and warm summer to replenish the earth for the winter to come.

To keep you up to date with regard to meat I will try and send an e-mail around whenever there is new meat available. If you want to be kept informed but have not had an e-mail then please get in touch with Carol Matthews or Laurence.

## MYCORRHIZA AND THE T50 PLANTER

The weather has been fairly kind to us over the past three months. A bit cool maybe but enough rain and dry weather to make our spring cultivations go fairly smoothly. We have now ploughed about 2 acres of land at Brookthorpe, an increase on the area cultivated last year. All of our plantings are on schedule and will keep us busy until August. I bought a planting machine in April (a Stanhay T50 in case you're interested) from a farmer in Pershore (via Ebay). With someone driving the tractor and two operators sitting on the planter we will be able to plant the leeks and cabbages without the back breaking effort that it usually takes. We gave it a trial run on the May farm day at Brookthorpe and planted the brussel sprouts and celeriac. It did a reasonable job and kept the children entertained.

We are coming out of the 'hungry gap' now with plenty of beans, broad beans, spinach, spring cabbage and onions coming on in the polytunnels, the walled garden, and the field at Hawkwood. This is the time when the season really kicks off.

We have half of the walled garden in production this year. It is planted up

now with the courgettes and beans etc. The pigs are back in the other half doing their piggy thing and keeping the weeds down. Hopefully next year we will have the whole garden clear enough to use.

In an effort to increase the productivity and health of our vegetable land I am experimenting with infecting our plants with a fungus. Mycorrhiza is a fungus that naturally infects some plant roots and lives in a symbiotic relationship with the plant. The fungus exchanges nutrients with the plant for carbon, and vastly increases the plants effective rooting spread. I am trailing it with tomatoes, peppers and leeks, infecting some plants and not others. I'll let you know how it goes.

All in all the veggies are doing well. We have lost most of the peas to the various beasts that roam around Hawkwood when we're not looking and we didn't keep up with the weeds on our early sown carrots and decided to rotivate the lot in. But these are the only two loses and other successes will no doubt compensate. Let's hope that the proper summer weather returns soon.

Mark.

### **WE NEED MORE MEMBERS**

This year we would like to increase our membership from the current 169 to 200. Although we have had a number of new members joining this year we need to recruit more. If you enjoy your veg and being a member of the farm then please tell your friends (well actually, tell everyone). With all of those lovely summer vegetables just coming into season this is a great time to join.

There are joining forms available in the packing shed at Hawkwood or online at our website. Please get the word out that **Stroud Community Agriculture welcomes new members!**

On a slightly different note the core group has decided to name our farm at Brookthorpe "Brookthorpe Farm". We would particularly love to continue to build the community around this farm as well as the one at Hawkwood. Thanks, SCA Core Group.

### **Please can you help make SCA a 'model CSA'**

We are putting together a funding bid which will do 2 things:

- a) set up a rainwater harvesting system and other capital projects that will make SCA even more environmentally sustainable and
- b) respond more effectively to the steady stream of people who approach SCA for help, support and advice in setting up similar projects.

We need someone who can put some time into completing the funding application form and updating our business plan. Probably 2 or 3 days' work spread over the next 3 months or so. Please contact Nick on [nick.weir@localfood.org.uk](mailto:nick.weir@localfood.org.uk) or 01453 840037 if you can help.

### **Do you have time to help set up a Land Trust for Stroud?**

We are looking for someone who can spare a few hours to work with Stroud Common Wealth and Gloucestershire Land for People to finalise plans to set up a Stroud Land Trust that will raise money to buy land for community agriculture, education and social benefit. The project needs some administrative work to get it ready to launch. If you might be interested please email [nick.weir@localfood.org.uk](mailto:nick.weir@localfood.org.uk) or phone Nick on 01453 840037. Thanks, Nick Weir, Stroud Land for People.

Thanks to those of you who showed an interest in buying unpasteurised milk through SCA. There was not enough interest to justify taking the idea forward. Nick Weir.

## *News from La Jimena:*

Dear All

Here is the latest news from your farm La Jimena in the south of Spain!

There are several levels where things are happening here. The farm as such is doing well.

The spring has been relatively speaking cool and wet with some five or six days of rain over the last three months! which is good news as in that we will have enough water for the coming summer coming down the slopes of the Sierra Nevada to provide for irrigation and housewater !

The farm is green and lush, and everything is flowering and blooming! It is a beautiful time of the year!

Our garden is growing, and is providing veg all year round!

The latest idea is to participate in a CSA scheme in which four producers will cooperate, and fill the boxes of some 100 local families all year round with fruit and veg [the producers being on different altitudes of the slopes for a staggered supply].

We would welcome advice on how to promote a CSA scheme to new members!

Another level is the entering into the second building phase, whereby we plan to renovate existing ruins on the farm into further accommodation!

This will be a project which will keep us busy for at least a couple of years, and will require a lot of help and material!

A third level are the very lean booking levels in our holiday wing!

This is causing us to rethink our concepts and ideas, and we'd welcome feedback from your side!

Also the recent drop of the pound sterling has affected us quite seriously in that we priced our produce last September, yet will exchange the pounds into euros at a very different and unfavorable rate!

This combined with the rising fuel cost will invariably result in a review of prices for the coming season, and we hope you will meet us with understanding!

It does highlight to us the need to strengthen the bond between the farm and the members in a more CSA like fashion to ensure the survival of both the farm and the people!

Last, we have had grandparents staying with us for a month, and it has been delightful!

Yours, Mathis, Mariann and Birta, Milan, Florina

Dear fellow SCA members,

In October, we visited the Rosenbusch family at their beautiful small farm, La Jimena, in the Alpujarras south of Granada. We travelled by train from Stroud to Granada, an exciting and interesting journey. For those of you who don't know, La Jimena deliver an annual fruit, nuts and oil box direct from their farm to us here in Gloucestershire. We were lucky enough to see the place where these wonderful tasting organic goodies come from and to witness the love and commitment which goes into producing them. La Jimena has no mains electricity and no mains water or drainage ... but you would never know unless you enquired. By combining ingenious use of modern solar and wind technologies with equally ingenious use of irrigation technologies originally installed by the Moors thousands of years ago, Mathis and family have made a sustainable and idyllic lifestyle, producing organic fruit, olives, nuts and vegetables. We thoroughly recommend their produce .... If you have not sampled it yet then you are missing out on something special.

We also recommend La Jimena as a perfect venue for a holiday. Their recently built holiday accommodation ensures that soft town dwellers like us have all they need – with excellent solar and wind powered showers and “proper” toilets in a beautiful, traditionally built cottage with staggering views into the (often snow covered) mountains. A basket of freshly picked fruit and vegetables and freshly baked bread appeared on our doorstep whenever we needed it and we were welcomed to take part (or not) in the life of the farm as we wished. In fact, we just helped out

on the family vegetable picking day and spent time at the beach and a lot of walking. There is a Buddhist monastery nearby with an extraordinary peaceful atmosphere and there are markets and unspoilt walks into high mountain villages which are a wonderful mixture of ancient and modern. We fell in love with the La Jimena goats and we are working on Laurence to let us have some at Hawkwood as part of the SCA (hint, hint).

The growing season is quite amazing there – they harvest strawberries for nine or ten months of the year. When the olives and nuts are ready to bring over here in February, the first flowers are already blooming and by the time Mathis returns from his delivery trip (he also delivers to other CSAs in the north of England and in Scotland), Spring is already well underway. I asked him about the winter and he said “ we don’t really have a winter... not that you would recognise of course we get rainy times when the track is difficult and we get winds .... but we know there will always be warm weather soon.” While we were there in October, the weather was apparently unseasonably “cool and cloudy” (i.e. only baking, not scorching), for which the locals apologised. But we were very grateful for the occasional cloud and the weather was always warm enough to sit outside on the roof in the night looking at the brilliant starlit sky and to sleep with just a sheet on the “chilliest” nights. So find some time in your busy schedules and book a few weeks at La Jimena. Not only will you find a wonderful, hard working, sustainable enterprise but you will rapidly slow down to appreciate a more human pace of life that feels like it has endured relatively unchanged for hundreds of years.

For holiday details see: <http://www.lajimena.de/> .And if you really can’t make it to Spain this year, then at least get a taste of that sunshine by ordering a fruit and olive box: Please contact [john.meletiou@btconnect.com](mailto:john.meletiou@btconnect.com) or 01453 836134.  
From Nicky, Clare and Finlay

***Come and spend an evening round the campfire at our beautiful Hawkwood site for the SCA summer camp. It will be on the weekend of the 6<sup>th</sup> / 7<sup>th</sup> September. Further details will be posted in the packing sheds nearer the time.***

### **Valuing our veg.**

There is much emphasis put on quantifying and analyzing the ingredients of food – proteins, fats, carbohydrates etc., with little regard for its’ qualitative properties that are ‘measurable’ with a more holistic attitude of understanding of the plant. For some years a small group met to deepen our connection with food through observation and imaginatively looking into a plants biography, which culminates with being consumed. Being a group allowed differing perceptions to be put forward and gave a comprehensive insight into the life (and death) of a food-plant. At the same time a practical understanding was nurtured of the continuity of its unique character through the transformative processes of cooking to become a fully crafted product. I would like to resurrect what became known as the ‘fig’; (the food integrity group), meeting maybe once a month to put a seasonal fruit or vegetable under the scrutiny of appreciative senses. Starting in the Autumn of this year, time and place to be arranged. Please contact Simon Hanks, (01452-812608).

***I am looking for someone to take over the role of Newsletter editor. If you are interested please contact Sue Baker on 01453 757259***

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.*

**General Enquiries & Information:**

Claire and Paul Sheridan- Tel: 0845 4580814

Email

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Website:

[www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](http://www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org)

**Membership Admin:**

Carol Mathews - Email: [membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](mailto:membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org)

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**Upcoming Diary Dates:**

**June**

28<sup>th</sup> Farm Day 10-1 at Hawkwood

**July**

26<sup>th</sup> Farm Day 10-1 at Brookthorpe

**August**

23<sup>rd</sup> Farm Day 10-1 at Hawkwood

**September**

6<sup>th</sup>/ 7<sup>th</sup> SCA camp. More details nearer the time.

*All newsletter contributions, letters, views, recipes, poems, gratefully received. Deadlines:*

**Spring** 15<sup>th</sup> March

**Summer** 15<sup>th</sup> June

**Autumn** 15<sup>th</sup> September

**Winter** 15<sup>th</sup> December

**Publication dates:**

21<sup>st</sup> March, June, September, December