



# SPRING NEWS

Newsletter No. 31 Spring 2009

## *The Stroud Community Agriculture*

### **AGM**

*Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March*

*2.00pm - 4pm*

*Brookthorpe Village Hall (on the main road)*

*with Leaving party for Laurence to start at 4pm*

*bring and share*

#### **NEWS FROM THE VEGGIE PLOTS**

Well we have survived this cold, cold winter very well. Personally I've really enjoyed it, and I do think that it is good for the land and soil, reducing pest numbers, and helping to improve the soil structure. The cold has caused few problems really. We covered the carrots and celeriac with plastic and straw before Christmas and that kept out that intense cold in January. The mice have enjoyed themselves under this cover though, feasting on carrots. A few bags of root vegetables that we had lifted and stored before Christmas did get frosted, but there wasn't too much damage.

The biggest casualty to the cold has been the purple sprouting broccoli. A lot of the flower buds (the bit that we want to eat) were frosted, but even worse has been the damage from pigeons. I guess that the birds get hungry in the cold and snow and they are drawn to feed on the broccoli and other cabbage family plants.

They hammered the plants so badly that reluctantly I had to resort to buying a gas gun bird-scarer. No doubt you have heard it (it has reportedly been heard in Whiteshill). It certainly scares me. Fortunately Hawkwood staff and the neighbours have been very understanding. And it works, when nothing else has.

March is often quite a productive month in the garden as the days lengthen and become warmer and the over-wintered plants reawaken and begin growing. At the moment we still have a lot of carrots, swede and parsnips in the field, and salad and spinach in the polytunnels. The pigeons haven't eaten all of the broccoli, and there are still some leeks at Brookthorpe. However this productive period is soon followed by what is commonly known as the 'hungry gap'. This is when this growth flush has turned to flower, and the new season plants

haven't yet matured. We try to reduce this hungry gap by growing plants in the polytunnels, but we will have to resort to buying in some imported produce from Spain and France to make up the veg share in the coming months.

The cold weather gave way to a very welcome mild dry spell in February. This dried out even the heavy soil of Brookthorpe sufficiently enough for us to be able to get on with some weeding, muck spreading, ploughing, and cultivation. We were also able to plant some peas and broad beans. Of course work has continued in the polytunnels regardless, and new season carrot, leeks and radish seeds are beginning to emerge now.

We have planted out five apple trees along the drive at Hawkwood, next to the veg field below the tunnels. This will hopefully partially screen the polytunnels from view as you come up the drive. These trees were budded by SCA members at a workshop last year.

The apple and pear trees in the walled garden have been pruned and thanks to a large group of volunteers on the January farm day a lot of weeds and growth was cut back and removed. In fact, I think that the amount of work done in those two hours would have taken us on the staff team about three years. So thank you, and come back.... anytime.

Mark.

### News from the Farm

It has been wonderful to have a real proper winter with a good few dustings of snow and some long hard frosts. Of course the snow makes it difficult to get around for a while and the frost sometimes freezes the water pipes, but these are minor inconveniences as compared to the benefits. The frost is great at killing off unwanted bugs and fungi, or at least keeping them in check. It is also great at breaking up the heavy cloddy earth down at Brookthorpe. As the water freezes it expands forcing the normally sticky clay apart so that it breaks down into a nice soil. Lets hope for not too much rain in the spring that will stick it all back together again! The snow itself is a picture of what is going on in the earth over this time. Each snowflake has a unique, amazing crystal structure and it is during the winter that the crystalline forces are at their strongest. These forces, which can create form and structure, can then be taken up by the plant kingdom to give form

and structure to the plants as they grow. If plants have a healthy form and structure they are less susceptible to pests and diseases later in the year.

As the soil dried out we were able to get on with some muck spreading with a borrowed muck spreader. Having this gives us the flexibility to spread when the conditions are optimum, which we were able to do and then even start on the ploughing in the vegetable field at Brookthorpe. It is very nice to be ahead, even if it is only a little bit.

The animals are all well. Wonderfully we had a calf born at Brookthorpe during the singing to the animals on Christmas Eve, and then another one born on the evening of Christmas day. Our last calf arrived in the middle of February. They are all very well and are having great fun tearing up and down the barn at great speed. The sheep are all well. One older ewe managed to get an abscess on the side of her neck, but we treated

her and she is fully recovered now. They are due to lamb in April. We have a visiting boar, Rufus, and hopefully he has done his job and we can expect piglets in May or June. The only slight problem at the moment is a shortage of hay. We are looking to buy some in, which is an expense, but it does mean that it gives the fields a chance to start growing.

This will be my last newsletter article, and my last few weeks on the farm. I have greatly enjoyed being a part of SCA

for the last five and a half years and will miss it greatly. I am glad to have met so many of you as well as having the knowledge that all of you are supporting what we do. The project is something that you should all be proud of and it deserves to continue getting the support it always has. I hope I see many of you at the AGM or just on the farm in the next few weeks.

*Laurence*

### **LAURENCE IS LEAVING**

*Laurence will be leaving us at the end of April and I suppose I'd better say something good about him before he goes. Something about how we will all miss him, and about how good it has been to work with him etc.*

*Well Laurence, seriously, it has been great to work with you. I'll miss your humour, grounded integrity, and the support that you have given me over the past five years. I'll really miss the ease with which we have worked together as a team. It has been a pleasure for me to work with you, and you have taught me a lot over the past five years (has it really been five years?). I appreciate the fact that you have just got on with the things that needed to be done, and I really appreciate your dedication to the good care of the farm, the animals and the SCA community.*

*So, good luck to you, Katja and Isabelle in your new venture in Yorkshire. Don't forget about us, and keep in touch. Mark.*

### **FRUITSHARE**

Annie and I had about a quarter inch of olive oil left in our container when our fruit-share arrived this year. Thank you Mathis and Marianne for sending up such a wonderful box of Spanish goodies. And also thank you John Meletiou for organising it all at our end. I think that there were about 60 fruit-sharers this year and that takes a lot of arranging, before, during and after the fruit arrives, all done voluntarily by John.  
Mark.

### **Forest Garden near Nailsworth?**

We have heard that a piece of land near Nailsworth might be available to plant a forest garden. This is a Permaculture idea which involves planting crops at several different layers (trees, bushes and ground cover). There will be a conservation aspect too, and an education angle. It should be an interesting experiment to see if organic food can be harvested as well as the land supporting wildlife. If you are interested in exploring this idea and seeing if we can get it started, please contact Paul on [paul.sergeant@ecotricity.co.uk](mailto:paul.sergeant@ecotricity.co.uk)

### SCA Survey

**Thank you** to everyone who responded to my recent survey on the SCA. The majority of surveys were answered with a lot of enthusiasm and effort. The survey was distributed to current and ex-members of SCA and with over 50 responses a representative set of results was obtained.

#### **Overview of Data**

I am currently still in the process of evaluating and analyzing the scrambles of data that I have collected over the 6 months. However some particular areas of these results I do find interesting. There is clearly a high satisfaction with the vegetable share in which cost and quality nearly always received highest opinions ratings from respondents. As expected environmental considerations and supporting local produce are important reasons for people joining SCA. It was perhaps surprising to see lower ratings for motivations centered on community involvement, opportunities to attend festivals and price. A general impression I get from the data as well as from speaking with many of the members and attending a farm day, is that there is definitely something special about community supported agriculture and Stroud in particular. It clearly moves away from conventional methods of food provision, with a distinct focus on social relations which represent a driving force within the initiative. Many members showed a clear interest in supporting their local community and becoming re-connected with the land and how their food is produced.

Some of the comments from members which support this are:

-“local food initiatives are the answer to many of our questions and problems”

-“I can quite happily spend a couple of hours strolling though the farm with my children to do my shopping”.

-“I really appreciate the farm and the example of how a local community can support farmers work. I also am aware that there are few biodynamic farms and I'd like to see the farm developing further i.e. dairy production. I hope the farm will continue working with animals because they give the farm a particular life and attraction.”

-“Stroud SCA veg is so good that I don't want to eat any supermarket vegetables anymore”

-“It's a joy to be part of - big thanks to the farmers”

-“The sense of community is fantastic - I have really enjoyed working along side others, and attending events like Harvest supper, or ceremony on the land. It has given me a sense of my own land, even though it is rented and none of us 'own' it.”

Toby Fenn

## **Stroud Festival of Nature 2009 Saturday 18th July, Stratford Park**

SCA will be having a stall at this festival, along with a host of local and county wide organisations, involved in the environment, conservation, green lifestyles, etc.



We will be looking for volunteers to help set up the stall in the morning, be on the stall for 1 hour slots between 10am and 5pm, and to help take the stall down at the end of the day. We intend to have a good time and engage lots of new people with our fantastic farm! Please book it into your diaries to come along to the festival and also consider whether you could spare an hour to share your love of our farm with others (technical information will be provided!). Children welcome too!

If you are interested in possibly volunteering (no commitment at this stage!), do let Carol know on [membership@stroudcommunityagriculture.org.uk](mailto:membership@stroudcommunityagriculture.org.uk) or on 01453 751696

The organisations listed below have confirmed their attendance along with SCA.

This Festival of Nature is running alongside the annual Stroud Country Show, so there should be a great atmosphere with plenty to see and do.

Ecotricity	Vision 21
WWT Slimbridge	Big Classroom
National Trust	Helen Shackleton (Wildlife artist)
Cotswold AONB	Iain Green (Wildlife Photographer)
Soil Association	Ian Redmond (BBC Natural World)
RSPB	Cotswold Water Park
Butterfly Conservation	Cotswold Canals Trust
Cotswold Way National Trail	Natural England
Ebb and Flow Ltd	Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust
St Augustine's Farm	Stroud Valleys Project
BTCV	Walking the Land
Westonbirt (Forestry Commission)	Oak and Furrows Wildlife Rescue Centre
Stroud District Council	Specialist Nest boxes
Stroud Town Council	Museum in the Park
Transition Stroud	

We are looking for new veg. collecting members for the farm. 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.

**At the AGM this year the core group will welcome two new members:**

**Sue Dance**

I would like to introduce myself, my name is Sue Dance. I live in Whiteshill with my husband Greg. I moved to Gloucestershire in August 2006. We have been members of the farm since November 2006 and receiving a veg share since January 2007. We have had a work share for the majority of that time. I have enjoyed working in the summer at Hawkwood and Brookthorpe. I have also participated in some of the farm days.

I would like to support the farm by becoming involved in the core group. I would like to see the farm continue in a similar direction with both vegetable growing and livestock rearing in a sustainable way.

I really value the encouragement of participation by members of the farm and the sharing of information through the newsletters. I would like to see the development of the community events and celebrations .

I have previously been employed by Social Services in Leicestershire and in schools in Gloucestershire, working with people with learning disabilities. I am currently taking time out from paid work. I am a volunteer with Stroud Valleys Project, undertaking a variety of practical projects including erecting kissing gates, hedge planting, hedge laying and pond clearance. I also volunteer with Stroud Country Market serving on their stall in the Shambles market on Friday mornings. I am a member of Transition Town Stroud Energy group.

**Justin Tate**

I joined SCA in February 2008 having just moved to the area and believe that this model of food production and community activity has a lot to teach us and has great potential for growth in the UK.

I am keen to support SCA and to see it continuing to develop for the benefit of its members, farmers and the local community. Over the last couple of years I have been studying and working at the Royal Agricultural College and have been involved in a number of agriculture, food chain and business development projects. Previously I have worked in various resource management, technical assistance and trade development roles overseas. I would very much welcome the opportunity to use my knowledge and skills to contribute to, and further the aims of, SCA.

## Welcome Sam!

Towards the end of February four of us – Mark, Laurence, Jade and myself – came together to interview the candidates applying to take over the farming from Laurence, when he leaves in April. A daunting task, not least because each of the four candidates presented such different approaches to the job, and brought such a varied range of skills, that the choice was not easy. Some of them had been able to visit the farm previously and had met Mark and Laurence. It was good to have Mark on the interview panel, as he will have to work closely with the new farmer, and Laurence to check out whether each applicant was ready for the day-to-day tasks involved in being SCA's farmer.

All of the candidates could have easily done the job, and it was fascinating to imagine the future with each of them. They brought considerable energy and imagination to the interviews, and we were really grateful to have such a strong field from which to choose. Afterwards we discussed our preferences before 'sleeping on it' over night; the next day, following further discussion, we all agreed to offer the job to Sam Hardiman. This choice was then supported by the core group meeting that evening. Thankfully, Sam accepted a few days later!

Sam is currently managing his inlaws farm in Oregon, USA. He hails from Gloucestershire and studied biodynamic farming at Emerson College. He has worked on a number of biodynamic farms in Germany and the UK (including Kolisko alongside Mark some ten years ago) before moving with his wife, Kailihi, to America. His inlaws farm, although not biodynamic, is part of a local CSA, and Sam is very keen on working for our CSA and biodynamically too.

Sam will be joining the farm at the beginning of June, slightly later than we originally intended, however Mark, Tim and Ute will bridge the gap between Laurence's departure and Sam's arrival, taking on the farm work during May. It is hoped that Laurence will be able to spend a few days in June with Sam to help him settle into the job.

So, welcome Sam!

Simon Ryder

**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 [info@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](mailto:info@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org)  
Website: [www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](http://www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org)

**Membership Admin:**

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

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*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.*

***Farm Workdays alternate between Hawkwood and Brookthorpe farms on the fourth Saturday of each month. The next one is at Brookthorpe on Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> March.***