



# Spring News

Newsletter No. 35 April 2010

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

## Down on the Farm

The winter has been a cold one with harsh weather and plenty of snow; the landscape seems more battered and bare than usual. However this week spring really started to show. The grass has started to grow and the air is definitely warmer. The branches on the hedge we laid are covered with tender green shoots of hawthorn buds just beginning to burst. The daffodils are blooming and seeds are being planted.



No Easter lambs yet, but on their way.

I usually feel spring most deeply when I see the first baby chicks hatch or lambs running in the fields but this year I got that spring feeling watching an excited

gaggle of class three students busily barrowing compost from the farm up to the walled garden. They are so enthusiastic with their work it is a pleasure to be around.

We have a very busy month ahead with lambing, calving, TB testing and Demeter inspection, as well as all the planting and cultivating that happens at this time of year. Having said all that it is still one of the most exciting times of the year when the seeds of harvest are sown and another year's ambitions take root.

*Farmer Sam*

## SCA AGM March 2010

SCA continues to go from strength to strength. But, like any dynamic organisation, has to pay regular attention to good governance and facing the future. Times are tough, but our recruitment of members has risen by 8% at a time when many organic veg box schemes in the region have seen large falls. This Spring the core group proposed – and AGM agreed – some changes to update SCA as a mature and professional social enterprise. These are: to put the farmers on proper contracts, salaries and terms & conditions; to align our primary



and secondary constitutional rules to make it easier to raise money as an Industrial Provident Society; to raise the veg share by £2pcm from 1 April 2010, but to publicise the bursary scheme for low-income families; to join Co-ops UK; and to set an ambitious but realistic budget for 2010. The AGM also accepted the accounts, thanked the core group, especially the retiring Molly & Sue, and elected two new member directors: Tamsyn Widdon & Kevin Ashby.

*Francis Gobey*

## Winter is over, Spring is Here

Well, what a long cold winter it turned out to be. I wrote in the New Year issue about covering our crops against the cold, and preparing for Christmas, little realising how important that that would be. We weathered the snow and cold very well. Every job took that much more time to complete, but we got by and I think that most of you were able to collect your shares most of the time.

There was no frost damage to any crops left in the fields (all covered with straw), though there was a little bit of damage to beetroot and carrots stored in the shed. Once again though, the biggest casualty of the cold is the purple sprouting broccoli. The weight of snow on the leaves and intense cold damaged the plants and then the marauding pigeons went on to really hammer the plants more. The plants will survive, with a reduced crop, and very delayed crop. I hope to be picking it by the time that you read this newsletter, but it is over a month late.

We have had a lovely dry spell this month (March); plants are beginning to grow, and we have been able to get onto the land and begin preparations for the season. We have (well, Sam has) ploughed the final area of land in the veg field at Brookthorpe and we have planted the potatoes and onions, and



Now, those are carrots, Mark. See?

sowed the first early crops of carrots, beetroot and broad beans. The greenhouse in the walled garden is full of young seedlings of lettuce, spring onions, broccoli and cabbage, all to be planted out in the polytunnels or in the walled garden. Spring!

March is often quite a productive month in the garden as the days lengthen and become warmer and the overwintered plants reawaken and begin growing. At the moment we still have a lot of carrots, swede, celeriac and parsnips in the field, and salad and spinach in the polytunnels. The pigeons haven't eaten all 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 spring flush of growth 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.

Let's hope that we have a warm spring to make up for the prolonged winter.

*Farmer Mark*

## And the Children are Happy

Over the last 5 years I (and various others along the way) have been providing activities for the children on farm days. This generally involves encouraging them to join in the main task the farmers want done for as long as possible, and do a game, some crafts, story reading, tree climbing, treasure hunts, snack eating or whatever seems seasonally

appropriate. The main aim of this has always been to enable parents to get on with some proper farming work and not be dragged away from something they'd just got their back into to amuse or supervise their children!

I'd like to hand over the reins to someone else now, so that I can actually do a bit of

farming and get my hands dirty (instead of gluey or painty). If you would even be vaguely interested in taking over or sharing this role I'd be happy to talk over what it involves and give you some ideas (if you need any). It is not a heavy workload outside of the monthly Saturday mornings. The ideal might

be for 2 or 3 people to share the responsibility – and do a few Saturdays per year.

I can be reached on 07808 297682 or 01453 767689. I look forward to hearing from you!

[kate@fabandgroovyltd.co.uk](mailto:kate@fabandgroovyltd.co.uk)

*Kate Dougherty*

### **Stroud Festival of Nature – takes a break in 2010**

Some of you were involved with the SCA stall at Stroud Festival of Nature, which was part of the Stroud Show in July last year. SCA had planned to have a stall at Stroud Festival of Nature 2010 but unfortunately it has been cancelled, due to work pressures of the organisers. Stroud Show will still go ahead, as usual. Thanks all of you who supported the event in the past. *Carol Mathews*

### **Recipes: DIY Wild Salad**

#### **Dandelion salad**

(serves 4)

Dandelion can only be used before blossoming, later it is too bitter. Cut the whole rosette just above the root.

Use 2 handfuls of dandelion leaves

2-3 medium size potatoes



For the dressing:

1 garlic clove

1tbsp mustard

Yoghurt

Cream or crème fraiche

Salt

Cook the potatoes. Mix yoghurt, cream, mustard, the squeezed garlic and salt in a bowl for the dressing. Peel the warm, cooked potatoes, cut them in small pieces and add them to the dressing. Wash the dandelion carefully without taking the rosettes apart, cut it in small pieces and add it to the rest. Serve while it remains slightly warm.

You might add a boiled egg.

In the Austrian kitchen dandelion is commonly used because of its cleansing and draining potential. It has a positive effect on the metabolism of the liver.

#### **Nettle soup**

(serves 4)

2-3 handfuls

young nettle (150g)

1 onion

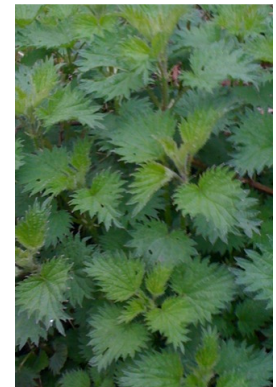
20g butter

2 tbsp whole flour

Salt

1egg

Cream or crème fraiche



Wash the freshly cut nettle and boil them in 750ml water for a few minutes until they are soft. Sieve the water off and keep it. Chop the onion into small pieces and fry with the butter in a saucepan. Sieve the flour over it and stir it well. Continue stirring while adding the nettle water. Chop the nettle finely and add them to the soup. Add salt and heat it. When it is coming to boil take it off the heat and stir the raw egg in. Before serving add some cream or crème fraiche.

*Ute*

## Carrot, Beetroot, Ginger and Celeriac Salad

Peel the vegetables (beetroot stains your hands so leave the skin on one side to hold it.) Grate 2 - 3 carrots, 1 beetroot, 1/2 inch root ginger and 1 celeriac.

Mix in a bowl with 3 fluid ounces of fresh orange juice and 2 oz sultanas or raisins. Leave to stand in the fridge for 1/2 hour

before serving.

Looks lovely and tastes fantastic. In the winter this can be warmed up by adding some boiling water, or vegetable water from previously steamed vegetables. Enjoy!

*Sue Dance, from the Energy 21 Cookbook*

## Sustainable holiday to La Jimena – our fruit share farm

In October 2008 Paul and myself, accompanied by Sue & Greg Dance, travelled by train to southern Spain to see where our lovely fruit share comes from.



We took a train from Stonehouse and were joined at Stroud by Sue & Greg for the journey to London. Then Eurostar to Paris where we visited a lovely park near the station before getting the night sleeper to Madrid. Arriving in Madrid, we discovered that it was quite some way to the bus station. On the bus to Granada they played loud films with shooting and bombing in, in Spanish, and we just wanted to sleep. There is a high-speed train from Madrid to Malaga and, if there is a connecting bus, this may be a quicker option.

The scenery was lovely, though, especially as we came to the mountainous area. During the train ride we read to each other from the book *Driving over Lemons* by Chris Stewart, the original drummer from Genesis. He lives in the next valley to our destination, near

Orgiva in the Alpajarra mountains. It gave us a taster of the landscape and the people we might encounter.

Mathis met us and drove us up the hillside and down a bumpy track. We stopped in total darkness till our eyes got accustomed. We followed him down the path and came to our home for the week. It had taken 36 hours to get there. A fabulous welcoming meal was waiting for us: tasty vegetable soup, crusty home made bread, fresh peppermint tea, olives and home made preserves. We crawled into bed and slept very well. In the morning the view took our breath away.

The farm was still work in progress, terraces being dug out, trees planted, irrigation put in place, shrubs cleared. The sheer volume of



work done and yet to do was overwhelming. Mathis and Mariann have Woofers to stay

and help over the summer, which eases the burden slightly.

We helped with some planting, and we sorted olives – now feeling some ownership of the olives that came with our fruit share this year. The olive fly leaves a pinprick hole where it has laid its egg, and those olives go to be pressed for oil.

An hour walk took us down to Orgiva, an attractive market town where we had a leisurely lunch and did some shopping. Carobs grow wild on trees in the area as well as pomegranate and sharon fruit. We passed many orange and lemon plantations.



Our longest trip was to Granada to see the famous Alhambra. Paul and I were accosted

on the steps by a gypsy lady who told our fortune, all we understood was that I would have lots of babies and that Paul loved his family and then she got angry because she was not given notes, only cash. The Palace is amazing and so ornate with all the gorgeous mosaics and towers.

The neighbours were friendly, but most of the farms are empty now because the young people don't want to be farmers. Mathis and Mariann's boy, educated him at home, loves the farm, though, and doesn't want anything to change. He knows all about farming, renewable energy and goats, but says he would not know how to open a computer. So refreshing!

Our last night was Halloween and we were invited for acorn pancakes served with lots of jams and honey and fresh fruit – delicious! We made hats from newspapers to wear. Our peaceful relaxing holiday came to an end all too soon.

Travelling by train was an adventure and taken as part of the holiday and well prepared for, with books to read, games to play, knitting to do and good company on the way the journey was a pure joy. We will definitely return to La Jimena. Thanks again to Mathis, Mariann and their lovely family.

*Clare Sheridan*

*If anyone would like advice on travelling to La Jimena, please get in touch: 01453 827286 or Clare@solarious.co.uk Useful site [www.seat61.com](http://www.seat61.com)*

SCA does have a fund from which to offer bursaries. Should you need a reduced cost share - or, conversely, be able to contribute to the bursary fund - then please email Carol on [membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](mailto:membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org).

### **Dates for your Spring Diary**

**Farm Days:** Saturdays 10.00 to 13.00: 24th April at Hawkwood; 22nd May at Brookthorpe; 26th June at Hawkwood; 24th July at Brookthorpe. Come if you can – bring a picnic or hot flask or cool drink or children's activity to share.

## Stroud Community Agriculture

**Everyone is welcome to join in and enjoy the farm, including non-members.**

We are looking for new 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. 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

There are eight of us on the core group, meeting one evening a month. At each meeting we get a report about the farm and then discuss all those issues that support the smooth running of SCA.

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For more information please contact Jade on [jadebashford@hotmail.com](mailto:jadebashford@hotmail.com)

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