



# Spring News

Newsletter No. 39 April 2011

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

## News From The Fertile Fields

We are at that time of year now where the old season crops end and the new season ones begin. But there is a gap between the two, commonly known as the 'hungry gap', when the winter crops are either beginning to flower or rot, and the new season crops have yet to mature. We grow crops in the polytunnels and walled garden to try to bridge this gap, crops such as spinach, spring cabbage, and broad beans, but it still takes time for them to grow.



This year the hungry gap will be a bit more pronounced as we lost some crops completely to the cold (cauliflower, spinach and purple sprouting broccoli). Of the 2000 or so purple sprouting broccoli seedlings that we planted out in August, and which we should now be harvesting through to May, precisely four plants survived. These plants were grown in the polytunnel as an experiment, and Ute and I ate the entire crop. I can inform you that they were particularly delicious. Sorry about that.

So, moving on to the new season, with the very dry weather during March, we have

been very busy. We have planted all of the potatoes and onions, and prepared some of the land for plantings later in the month. The greenhouse is full of seedlings ready for planting out.

Sam has ploughed up two acres of pastureland land at Brookthorpe, with the aim of resowing it in a year or two. In the meantime we will grow some vegetables on a third of this land, and feed for the cows on the other two thirds. The extra vegetables produced will go towards the share, and will be sold to Hawkwood and other places. There can be problems with planting in newly ploughed land with pests that inhabit pastureland carrying over and feeding on the roots of subsequent crops. Wireworm, the larva of the click beetle, are particular culprits. We can't predict how bad this may or may not be, but any pests will decrease in subsequent years.



I would like to mention some of our non-edible crops that we have growing on the farms at the moment. During the summer and autumn last year, after we had harvested

a crop we sowed one of five different types of clovers, vetch or rye. These plants have grown slowly over the autumn, just covering the soil and creating a stable soil ecology over winter. Their growth is now beginning to accelerate and they will be cultivated into the soil in May to provide some extra fertility to the soil and the following crops. It is of interest to us to compare their different characteristics and benefits, and if you are ever on the farm walking round the vegetable fields you may also be interested to look at them.

Tim has now left the farm to work on his own projects in Bristol. Thanks Tim for all your hard work, good humour, and interest in all things horticultural during the past two and half years. I have enjoyed working with you and wish you all the best in your new ventures.

We now have two new members of the team joining us for six months, Sam and Estelle from the biodynamic agriculture college in Sussex. Welcome to the farm, I hope that you enjoy your time with us.

*Mark*

## Dates for your Spring Diary

**Farm Days:** – Fourth Saturday of each month, 10.00 to 13.00: Check email for dates.

## Farmer Sam's Latest

Spring is really here. There are flowers everywhere, bees flying about and the farm team are wearing sun hats.

On the farm we have had some calves born. They are out on the field at Brookthorpe enjoying this beautiful weather and fresh spring grass. The animals have made the transition from living in the barn to being outside again. This is a very special moment to watch as even old cows kick up their heels and leap about. They will remain outside now till late autumn.

The sow, Ezmie turned out not to be pregnant which was a big disappointment, however she is now due in late June. This was due to the boar not being up to the job. The silver lining on the cloud is that at least it will be warm when they are born and will soon go outside. I will send an email around when she has them, so you can come and enjoy them. We are still waiting for lambs.

This year we have ploughed and reseeded telegraph field at Brookthorpe. We decided to do this as the field was very weedy and not as productive as it could be. We also have been unable to make enough hay last year and the reseed will help with our winter

feed shortage. The seeds are in but we have had almost no rain on the last few weeks so it is struggling to grow. Has it rained yet?

I would like to remind all of you about our monthly farm days. These are days held on the fourth Saturday of the month at either the Brookthorpe farm or at Hawkwood. Members come and help out with various jobs, while the children play. It is also a great opportunity to get to know fellow farm members as well as the farmers. Attendance has been very low. I would like to ask people what would make them more likely to come as we feel it is a really important part of a community farm and would like to see it increase in popularity and not dwindle to just a few dedicated members. If you have any suggestions or questions about the farm days please email me at

[samueljhardiman@hotmail.com](mailto:samueljhardiman@hotmail.com)

We are still looking for someone to provide children's activities on these days so the parents are free to help out. If you are willing to do this or be part of doing this, I would love to hear from you.

*Sam*

## SCA v Supermarket Pricewatch

Occasionally over the past couple of years I have noted down the prices of organic vegetables in our local supermarkets in order to compare with the SCA veg share. This is a very unscientific comparison. I have only done it if I happened to be near a supermarket and had the time. I actually don't go into supermarkets that often.

However I now have a comparison (a snapshot comparison) for one week of four different seasons, February, May, August, and November. Where possible I compared like with like, for one share. I have used conventional produce prices when they didn't have an organic equivalent.

I'm not going to list all the prices here but I found that in the summer, when the SCA share contains more vegetables, the equivalent supermarket veg cost about 10% more. In the winter and autumn they were roughly the same, and in the spring the



supermarket veg were about 5% cheaper. This is for one share. If you have more than one share from SCA, then the comparison would be different as each extra share or half share costs less than the first share.

Of course price isn't the only consideration when joining the farm, and maybe it isn't your most important consideration, but it can be important, and it is helpful to know that they are equivalent. I think that if you shop at the supermarket and buy fruit and vegetables you may not realise how much they do cost when they are mixed in with all your other items.

When making up the share each week I aim to include 8 items, more in the summer and autumn, and maybe only 7 items in the spring. I do buy in vegetables if we are particularly short (especially now in the hungry gap) so as to maintain a balanced share.

*Mark*

## Learn something wild at Westley Farm

Westley Farm is branching out from their holiday cottages and yurts to encourage more people to get active, enjoy the great outdoors and re-connect with nature. We kick off with a **weekend of Bushcraft and Foraging Friday 29th April - Sunday 1st May**, with Chris Holland, author of best-selling outdoor guidebook "I Love My World". Chris will introduce young and old to the joys of the wild: what to eat, how to make a shelter and the all-important skill of lighting a fire, and cooking on it too! (Adult, child and concessionary prices.)

Other courses include:

- Building an Earth Oven (28-29 May) - with Oliver Weight from the Cherry Wood Project
- The Art and Craft of Herbalism (11 June) - with Nathan Hughes from Ruskin Apothecary
- An Introduction to Permaculture (18-19 June) - with Sarah Pugh from Bristol permaculture
- Rustic Furniture Making (2-3 July) - with Oliver Weight
- Charcoal Making (9 July), Spoon Carving (10 July) - with Oliver Weight
- Contemplative Photography (23 July) - with Nikki Simpson and Ruth Davey

For more details and to book please visit [www.westleyfarm.co.uk/courses.htm](http://www.westleyfarm.co.uk/courses.htm) or call the farm on 01285 760262.

For opportunities to volunteer with the Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust to create and improve the habitat of the marsh fritillary butterfly, or to get involved with managing the woodland at the farm, please get in touch with Ruth Davey on 07789 958895.

## Black Mountains Wild Garlic Festival

A wild garlic festival in celebration of woodland and wild food will soon become Wales's latest gift to lovers of good eating and unspoiled places.

Llwyn Ffranc, a new community forest farm in the Black Mountains, will launch the festival on **Saturday April 16**. The farm is on the slopes of a holy mountain called the Skirrid, and festival-goers will be able to stroll through its woodland and pick the pungent leaves of *allium ursinum*, so called because brown bears have a particular liking for the plant.

"Of course we don't have brown bears at Llwyn Ffranc," said festival organiser Stephen Powell. "Participants will be able to relax and forage at their leisure."

The festival will be a one-day event and will include a guided tour of the farm. On March 1 Llwyn Ffranc Limited, a community benefit society, launched a community share offer to raise £132,600. The money will buy 63 acres of land, including 50 acres of woodland, and help Llwyn Ffranc develop as a biodynamic farm.

"Community farms won't just change farming. They will change the whole national mindset by helping more people reconnect with the land," said Mr Powell, who is



secretary of the society. "We want our festival to remind people that food provision should ideally be about two things – the crops we plant, of course, and the food for free that is just out there for the picking, everything from nettles to elderflower, from mushrooms to wild garlic. For me an awareness of wild food then leads on, among other things, to a deeper sense of connection to woodland."

There is a longer piece about Llwyn Ffranc on the Campaign for Real Farming website.

<http://www.campaignforrealfarming.org/2011/03/a-community-forest-farm-in-wales/>

Llwyn Ffranc asks that anyone wishing to take part in the festival get in touch beforehand by email or by telephone. The email address is [communityforestfarm@gmail.com](mailto:communityforestfarm@gmail.com), telephone 01873 890032 or 07791 297014.

The festival organisers will be seeking a £5 donation. They ask participants to bring any items which they don't want any more to sell on the day, with proceeds going to the community forest farm project. For more information on the festival go to [www.communityforestfarm.co.uk](http://www.communityforestfarm.co.uk)

### **FARMER SAM'S BARN DANCE BASH**

Where: Brookthorpe Farm

When: Saturday May 21<sup>st</sup> 3pm till late

How: Bring and share, there will be a BBQ

Who: All welcome, young and old!

RSVP or questions contact

Sam

01452 814440

07531 270206

[samueljhardiman@hotmail.com](mailto:samueljhardiman@hotmail.com)





## Rhubarb, Rhubarb

### Ute's amazing Rhubarb Streusel Cake

200g unsalted butter  
300g sugar  
400g whole spelt flour  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
Pinch of salt  
50g oat flakes  
250g cut and soaked  
dry apricots  
400g rhubarb  
250g sugar  
150g chopped walnut  
1 apple  
1 teaspoon cinnamon  
300g yoghurt  
50g sugar  
100g cream  
1 egg

Mix the soft butter, sugar, cinnamon, flour and salt together and make a dough of it. Put 2/3 of it in a greased tin (9in Ø), keep the other third for the topping.

Chop the rhubarb in small pieces and mix it with the sugar. Cut the apple and the soaked apricots in small pieces and add them. Add the walnuts and cinnamon and let it soak.



In the meantime mix the yoghurt, sugar, egg and cream.

Spread the oat flakes over the dough, and add the rhubarb mixture. Pour the yoghurt topping over it. For the Streusel crumble the remaining dough over the top.

Cook it in the preheated oven for an

hour at 180°.

For those, who asked for the recipe of the apple cake we had at the AGM, it is more or less the same. Replace the apricots, rhubarb and walnuts with apples. The rest is the same. Enjoy!

*Ute*

## 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

The core group meets 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.

**Core Group** meetings - Tuesday 19th April: Venues & times - Contact Sue Dance 01453 752068

Sam Hardiman	01452 814 440	<a href="mailto:samueljhardiman@hotmail.com">samueljhardiman@hotmail.com</a>
Simon Ryder	01452 504607	<a href="mailto:s.ryder@artnucleus.org">s.ryder@artnucleus.org</a>
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For more information please contact Jade on [jadebashford@hotmail.com](mailto:jadebashford@hotmail.com)

#### General Enquiries & Information

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