



# Summer News

Newsletter No.55 June 2015  
[www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org](http://www.StroudCommunityAgriculture.org)

## SPRING FARM REPORT

Summer is now truly upon us, the silage is baled, the ground has dried out and the farm team all have very sun tanned forearms!

We have just baled up most of this winters fodder at Brookthorpe. We still have Hawkwood to cut, but it is always a relief to get some winter fodder made, as this accounts for half the cows winter diet, which is collected and stored in just a couple of days. Fingers crossed its enough!



The lambing went well with a good crop of lambs. They were all born outside. In years past we have lambed indoors for many reasons including; fear of bad weather, ease of observation at night, and the ability to handle any difficult lambing. However lambing outdoors was a great success. The weather was pretty good, there were minimal interventions needed and its also cleaner out on the grass. Not to mention much more natural. We hope to lamb outdoors again next year.

We had a surprise litter of piglets two weeks ago, Ezmie our old sow had failed to get pregnant for months, so regretfully she was due to go to the butchers. However after missing her first appointment with destiny due to ill health she promptly produced four piglets! It was quite a shock as she had gone so long without conceiving even having lived with the boar the whole time. Needless to say I am very happy, as she is a wonderful old pig who is very well loved.

The cows are all doing good. We have Hercules the bull visiting, and going by his last crop of calves that are looking great, we can expect good calves in February/March time.



I would like to thank all those people who made the barn dance a success this year. Feedback suggests people had a great time. We even had a good turn out of people camping this year, which added a festival feel to the weekend.

The money raised will go towards the community building. On the subject of the community building I would like to share with you all, that we have been given planning permission and were successful with our grant application which will fund 21% of the build cost. We are excited to get going with the project soon. More details to follow....

The fields are looking really beautiful now and I would urge you to walk over the fields and enjoy your farm.

*Farmer Sam Hardiman*

## NEWS FROM THE VEGGIE FIELDS

The weather this spring has been rather pleasant, a little bit cooler and drier than normal but nothing too extreme (apart from a couple of sharp frosts in April that caught us out a bit). This means that we have been able to get on with all of our cultivations and plantings in a timely fashion. There are still many more plants to be put out in the next two months, but all of the winter root vegetables have been sown and all of the squash, sweetcorn, beans and leeks seedlings have been planted out (all 20,000 of them). The early plantings of cabbage, broccoli and spinach at Hawkwood have grown well. We began picking them before the solstice, taking us out of the spring "hungry gap" and into the summer season.



We produced a nice crop of spring cabbage in the new polytunnel. It is now planted up with tomatoes. We are trialing a new technique this year of mulching the tomatoes with grass cuttings, both to conserve moisture and provide extra fertility for the plants. One



row has no mulch and has been fed with compost as normal, and another row has been mulched and has no compost. We will see how they grow over the season. Now that we have five tunnels we are able to grow many more sweet pepper plants and early courgettes. The courgettes have been very productive, but we have had to hand pollinate the flowers each morning as there hasn't been adequate bee activity in the tunnel.

Unfortunately though, one insect that has been very active on them is the aphid, a tiny black sap sucking insect that has infested many of the plants. We have introduced a parasitic wasp to control the aphids and hopefully the plants will remain productive until the courgettes in the walled garden at Brookthorpe begin producing fruit.

I wrote in the March newsletter that we had the pigs out on the veg ground during the winter at Hawkwood, to dig over the soil and hopefully eat the couch grass (that obnoxious grass that spreads by sending out root rhizomes, and grows from the tiniest root segment). The pigs did a great job of turning over the ground, and they did eat a lot of the couch, but we still had to go over it by hand afterwards to remove bits left behind. So it was about 60% successful, successful enough to put them out again this winter. Unfortunately one of our tractors has required some fairly major surgery on the clutch and fuel system (quite expensive, unavailable on the NHS) which has meant that some of our tractor work has been a bit restricted, and we have had to drive the working tractor between the sites. Despite that though, we have kept up with everything at this busy time of the season. We have a great farm team, and work sharers (farm members working in return for their veg share) who have worked very hard.

*Farmer Mark Harrison*



----- **VACANCIES AT THE SCA** -----

**WANTED: NEWSLETTER EDITOR**

Claire Miletitch, who has done a fantastic job of editing this esteemed publication for the past few years, is now stepping down. We are looking for a new editor who could start with the next edition in September. The newsletter is produced four times a year and the role involves collating the articles, photos and items and putting them together for publication. All the articles are written by others.

The core group would be keen to see the role expanded to include other media, looking at ways to improve communication between members of the farm, the core group and the farm team (linking to our website and Facebook for example). This is not essential though. Editing the newsletter alone normally takes about 8-20 hours per edition. This could all be done in exchange for part of a vegetable share.

So if you fancy having a go publishing, and/or developing other means of communication, please contact Mark ([mark@plumtucker.co.uk](mailto:mark@plumtucker.co.uk)) or anyone else on the core group to discuss. There would be support from previous editors and experts on the core group.

*And finally, thank you Claire for all of your great work over the past few years.*

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**WANTED: TREASURER**

We are looking for a Treasurer who can support the SCA team and have oversight of the SCA finances.

The daily bookkeeping and finance is done by Mark and SCA member Keith Patterson, so the treasurers role is to;

- Have financial oversight of the cash-flow, income & expenditure and Budgets.
- Attend some Core Group meetings.
- Pay the monthly wages for the farm team.
- Authorise larger payments.
- Attend and review the SCA Accounts and Budget at the annual AGM.
- Deal with financial queries during the year.

These responsibilities should be no more than a few hours a month.

If you may be interested to take on this role please contact Mark on 07891 615103, [mark@plumtucker.co.uk](mailto:mark@plumtucker.co.uk)

## **BDLT Fundraising to Purchase Farmland for Possible SCA Expansion**

As many of you will have heard, SCA is supporting the Biodynamic Land Trust (BDLT) on an exciting opportunity to secure a parcel of farmland next to Hawkwood College. The land is part of the sale of Hammonds Farm, which surrounds Hawkwood on the north, west, and south. Fundraising is currently on-going to raise money for the BDLT to purchase Lot 3, a roughly 40 acre plot running south down the valley adjacent to our current farm at Hawkwood.

The BDLT has asked SCA to manage all or part of this land through a Farm Business Tenancy if the purchase is successful, an opportunity that the Core Group and Farm Team believe would present an opportunity for SCA to naturally expand both our vegetable growing and livestock at Hawkwood. It would enable us to become a fuller, richer entity in time. Having viewed the fields, Core Group members appreciated the beauty of them as well as the potential for bringing us closer to Stroud Town. We are clear that there is good potential for vegetable growing on the roadside field as well as good grazing and hay potential on the other fields.

As I write this on 19 June, initial fundraising efforts are already well on their way, with enthusiastic initial responses showing that support is strong from the local and biodynamic communities to ensure that this land is enriched through sustainable agriculture with strong community ties. With further fundraising and support from the community – including SCA members – we believe it is possible to raise the total £360,000–£400,000 needed to make an offer on Lot 3. The BDLT has also pledged to contribute up to £75,000 of their own funds towards the purchase if necessary.

On Thursday, 2 July, SCA will be holding an Extraordinary General Meeting for all members to discuss the possible purchase and management of Lot 3. This meeting will begin with an opportunity to view the site itself from Hawkwood and will be an important forum for the entire SCA community to discuss how we can best take advantage of this opportunity, including other projects we might work with on the site. We'll meet at 7pm in the car park at Hawkwood to view the lot, moving to Studio 1 at 8pm to discuss the project. As with all great opportunities, there are also challenges that we will need to identify and address as a community.

In line with our principles, we would want to expand organically into Lot 3. To do this, we would need to have improved equipment, higher stock levels and an increased capacity in the farm team over time. Initially we would want to convert the land to Demeter Biodynamic certification standards.

For SCA, the land could enable increased production of vegetables as well as meat. This extra production could be distributed through more share numbers and Stroudco, as well as the potential to consider a Farmer's Market stall. There have also been several preliminary discussions with other, complimentary agricultural projects that are interested in utilising part of the land alongside SCA. These could allow us to provide an even greater variety of local, biodynamic products to our members and the wider community. SCA could also explore new ways of engaging people in agriculture and helping to educate and nurture future farmers.

If you would like to read more about the land and how to give financial support, please visit the BDLT website at [www.biodynamiclandtrust.org.uk](http://www.biodynamiclandtrust.org.uk).

## **STARTER FARM UPDATE**

The starter farm project, which I wrote about in the Winter newsletter, has been gathering pace – or rather chugging along, with fits and starts of frenetic activity. Although we're some months away from getting our hands into the starter farm's soil, we're already learning a lot from the process! We've got the ball rolling with applying for funding for the starter farm's infrastructure and machinery. This led Sylvie and me to attend a useful 'Introduction to Enterprise' course run by the Prince's Trust, and a crowd funding workshop in London, which got us thinking creatively and upped our enthusiasm for asking people for money! We also got our heads down to write a five-year business plan with the help of the core group and farmers, which crystallised our ideas and brought up important discussions. We haven't yet landed any cash, but are confident that some of the things we've explored will bear fruit.

Mark and I went up to Manchester for the day at the end of May, for a workshop with the Kindling Trust, who set up the first starter farm in the country. They've also established an interesting and successful consumer-producer co-operative with local restaurants, grocers and caterers, which buys the starter farmers' produce. Their model is a bit different from ours – an 'incubator farm', with multiple starter farmers each taking on a quarter of an acre, with the option to expand year by year, if successful. They're aiming their project at people with very little horticultural experience, so there's a more significant training element than we're intending with ours (Mark and Sam will provide some mentoring, but quite low intensity). It was great to hear about all the different participants' projects, and to see their land (which has got just as bad of a couch grass problem as ours!). All in all, an informative and inspiring day.

Our land search has moved forward significantly. We've been negotiating with the family who produce Day's Cottage juice about renting some of their land. The field in question is 5.5 acres, just down the road from SCA's Brookthorpe farm, with friendly and supportive landlords who would prefer a long lease. Until a few days ago, we were looking forward to signing a contract in the coming weeks. However, events have overtaken us – with Hammonds Farm next door to Hawkwood up for sale, and the BDLT's rapidly progressing fundraising campaign. We've put negotiations for the Brookthorpe land on hold while we wait to see what emerges and what role SCA will play if the land at Hammonds is secured. Whichever piece of land we end up on, it's a very exciting time – we can't wait to get on the ground and start creating what will hopefully be a beautiful and empowering resource for SCA and young growers for many years to come!

*Clare Whitney and Sylvie Planel* (summer workers and prospective starter farmers)

## 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. For dates, venues & times, contact Mark Harrison

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