

# TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS SUMMER '04

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## Tablehurst Farm Notebook

Spring has come and gone and tomorrow it is midsummer. The weather has been good to us, although the ground is getting very dry now despite the weather forecasters continuously telling us that there is rain on the way! Most of the cereals are looking good, except one field of spring oats which remained a bit stunted. This field has been undersown to red clover (from our own seed) and the clover is growing well despite the lack of rain.

We have made quite a few hundred bales of silage or haylage, all of good quality. Before we could start we had an excavator in to prepare the site for a new barn and a chicken plucking building. This is behind the Sheep Barn, so in order to have a level site we had to move some soil, which we used to create a new flat area for storing our silage bales on. It then had to all be covered by rubble and crushed concrete to make a good strong surface to work on. It was completed just in time for the first bales to be wrapped. The steel framed building has not yet been ordered, as raising a loan is dependent on the land transfer to St. Anthony's, which has not yet happened. I had hoped that the barn would be up in time to store this year's hay and straw but that looks more and more unlikely now. At least the site is cleared and ready, which meant that the scrap metal and rubbish which was there had to go, which is a great improvement.

Silage making and mucking out the barns has been a lot easier this year due to buying a second hand but fairly new telehandler. This is a type of tractor designed specifically for loader work and is able to lift up to three tons seven metres high. It is also very maneuverable due to having four wheel steer, so it can get into places which our other tractors cannot. It is a machine that we have needed and wanted for a long time. We have also replaced our old tedder, for spreading and turning hay and silage as well as a tractor. This is a time of year when things are really busy for the tractors because as well as the mucking out, the silage making and the preparation spraying many of the fields have to be topped behind the grazing animals to ensure the thistles and docks do not flower and then seed.

### Pigs

We had some disappointing litters of pigs earlier this year, in numbers weaned, and we do not really know why. Some litters were just small, others were large but the mothers were nervous and stood or laid on piglets etc. Three of a group of six homebred gilt's (young sows) have just farrowed. They seem very good mothers, nice and placid, and after a number of days two still have litters of 14 and one of 11. This is much more like it should be so perhaps we need to replace more of our sows.

### Cattle and sheep

Most of the cattle have calved, including quite a few heifers, giving us fifty five cows now. A bit later we will have to cull a couple of the older ladies though. The sheep lambed well with lots of good strong lambs and they are now also shorn. It is getting tricky to keep them supplied with good rich pasture which had no sheep on them last year.



Farm Walk  
Tablehurst Farm  
Sunday 29<sup>th</sup>  
August  
3.00pm

# Farm Notebook con't ...

## Orchards

The trees blossomed beautifully this year and there was very little frost so there are lots of small apples on the trees. The trees themselves also look healthy and strong so Stein and Noor are planning for a good crop. Stein managed to acquire an apple grading machine so we will be putting some more concrete down in the sheep barn in order to be able to fit it in and use it.

## Personnel

As always there have been some changes. Andreas and Lucia, the Swiss couple, have moved on and are now in Italy helping renovate a house before going down to South Africa at the end of July. They will be going with Raphael Rivera and Steffi, to Raphael's father's farm in the Drakensberg Mountains, for a time. Until September, Sam Hardiman, one of the newly graduated third year agricultural students from Emerson College, is working on the farm. He is a great asset as he already knows the farm and its machines very well. From July Andrew Carnegie, who lives in Ashurst Wood (the next village), will work on the farm for six months. I am really looking forward to it. Andrew farmed Plaw Hatch Farm for 15 years before working as a consultant advising farmers on organic farming. He has been working a few hours a week over the last months helping me try and keep on top of the office work. Bernie Jamison, who has faithfully continued doing the income side of our book keeping for years, will take the chance to stop and let Andrew take it on. Gabrielle, our apprentice from France who joined us last September, is doing very well and has decided to join us for a second year. We have no second apprentice at the moment as Dorothea, who was with us, now works in the shop at Plaw Hatch. In September a new apprentice starts. A couple of months ago Melanie Pollard, who lives in the village, joined the shop team, working part time. It is nice to have Brigitte in the shop again, also part time, as well as cooking once a week etc. We have four second year agricultural students working in the afternoons on the farm and through the summer a steady flow of young people who come for a number of weeks or months for the experience.

We are still looking for another farmer with experience to join us long-term and, with that in view, are starting to plan converting one of our old buildings into accommodation for a family. To rent a house in the village would require a wage which we would struggle to pay.

Peter Brown

## SHARE APPLICATION

I would formally like to apply to become a member of TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM INDUSTRIAL AND PROVIDENT SOCIETY (No 28403R) and enclose:

A cheque for £ ..... to buy ..... share(s) at £100 each

Please make your cheque payable to Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm Ltd and send to:

The Secretary, Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm Ltd, 15 Stonepark Drive, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5DG.

Full name..... Signature.....

Address .....Postcode .....

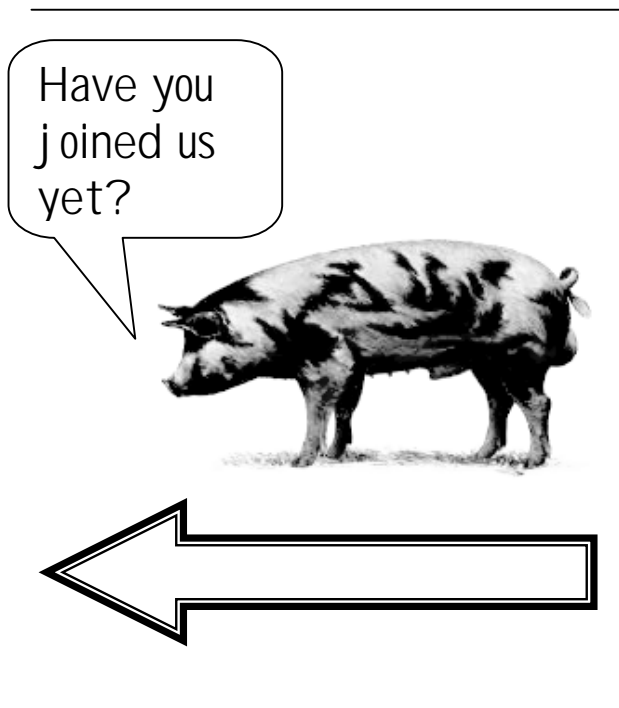
Telephone no.....Email.....Date.....

# Biodiverse Matters

The word biodiversity is often heard, but what do we understand by it? The idea of conservation of biodiversity was enshrined at the Earth Summit in Rio in 1992, and drew on science-based arguments that the presence of diverse ecosystems and species is an important indicator of environmental stability and health. When species become extinct it tells us that hitherto stable systems are being disrupted and the viability of other life, and ultimately human life may be being threatened. The importance of that summit was its recognition that all life on the planet is interdependent, and that human activity can be the catalyst for irreversible impoverishment of the natural world and a threat to our own survival. Well known examples abound; rainforest destruction, urbanization, a fossil fuel based civilization which pushes many species out into a diminishing wilderness or extinction. Intensive mono-crop agriculture creates huge diversity "deserts", emptying the soil of wild plant seed banks, insects and bird life. And of course global warming arches over all with its potential to massively disrupt virtually every ecosystem there is, with an accompanying loss of species.

Much of the richest biodiversity in heavily populated countries like Britain exists at the margins, the bits we can't easily use, or which are protected. It is an aim of organic and biodynamic systems to redress the balance by working with nature rather than against her, and in a variety of ways. Mixed farming is one, including a range of animal and arable produce, diversity being a key note, and with less intensive grazing and cropping regimes. Nature's own checks and balances, which are diversity in action, reduce the risk of total crop failure, so pesticides and herbicides are unnecessary. In an organic system the life of the soil with its thousands of life forms from the microscopic to the mammalian is supported. The preparations of the biodynamic farmer, and farming with the rhythms of season and cosmos go further by intervening to stimulate and harmonize the soil's life forces. So in fact the relatively new principle of conservation of biodiversity, the mantra of the Rio summit, has always been central to biodynamic practice.

The concept of biodiversity begins as a dry scientific argument for good environmental practice. But Rio recognized the responsibility to educate and this has been achieved less by scientific reasoning than by appeals to the heart. Children understand and enjoy counting the number of species in different soils and easily absorb the message that the one with more species is more interesting. Equally a pond with plenty of fish, frogs and associated life is more fun than stagnant water full of rubbish. David Slingsby and Susan Barker, at a Symposium of the British Ecological Society in 1998, drew attention to the educational challenge which confronts us. The widely held public feeling that "biodiversity is there, it is beautiful and it is morally wrong to destroy it" is acknowledged as a valuable starting point. The success of an organization like the RSPB is cited as an example of the power of co-opting this viewpoint for the benefit of the environment.



Linking all this to our own little farms in densely populated East Sussex, we too are part of this wider movement. Not only are the farms practising good husbandry of the cultivated soil, but, in common with many other farmers, we are supported by DEFRA in our organic status and in efforts to maintain, diversify and increase the field margins and hedges, where the richest biodiversity exists. This is not a sentimental indulgence; beauty is spiritual food and we certainly need it, but these ecosystems of the margins are literally part of the health of the whole farm. They make what is a practical way of producing our food viable in the wider context, geographically and over time. We are community farmers, and it's not stretching a point too far to say the bugs and weeds are part of the community, and conversely we are part of that biodiversity. That's really what biodiversity is about. Tell your kids!

Mark Haughton

# Biodynamic Agriculture Training at Emerson College

New applications are coming in. In September there will be the fourth group of students studying biodynamic agriculture and horticulture in the three-year training which began in 2001. Though biodynamic courses have existed at Emerson College since 1969 this is a training with a new shape, aiming at the highest vocational level. The students learn in class and apply their understanding in practical experience on Tablehurst Farm, on Bore Place Farm and in Emerson College Market Garden. A five-month placement contributes to a broader comprehension of farm cycles. The training, set up in collaboration with the Warmonderhof Training Centre, is fully accredited; graduates receive a state recognised diploma, European Level 4.

## Knowledge

Classes make up for half of the study and comprise five major areas of subjects:

- Agriculture includes animal husbandry, arable farming, vegetable and fruit growing.
- General science offers subjects like Goethean science, botany, zoology, embryology, chemistry, soil science, geology and astronomy, often combined with artistic activities such as drawing, painting or clay modelling.
- Anthroposophy provides the opportunity of studying the Biodynamic Agriculture Course, three and four fold human being, destiny, karma and evolution of consciousness.
- Technology comprises a wide range of subjects from tractor driving, welding and electricity to the function of a milking system or using the computer as a tool of modern farm management.
- Economics classes give an understanding of bookkeeping, balance sheets and profit and loss accounts as well as gross margin calculations and other management tools.

## Practical experience

Tablehurst Farm and Bore Place Farm near Edenbridge contribute greatly to the success of the training with their flexibility in introducing the students to the whole diversity of practical farm work. Three groups of students rotate through the farms and Emerson College Market Garden before they go on their placement farm for five months. After this intense work experience they choose an area of practical afternoon work for the rest of their study in one of the three designated areas: Tablehurst Farm (with arable farming, meat production and an orchard); Bore Place Farm (with a large dairy herd and arable cropping); or Emerson College Market Garden (with a variety of vegetables and top and soft fruit).



## The highlight

All of this leads to the final project, project presentation and oral exam. The students find a local conventional farm and work out a comprehensive plan to convert it into an agriculturally and economically viable biodynamic farm. They have to work closely together with the farmer of their chosen farm calling on all their knowledge and experience from the three years to bring together a creative, idealistic and realistic vision of what a farm can be.

## Plawhatch Farm in June

Probably our busiest time with much activity outside in the fields, long days, new students, and children that don't want to go to bed when it's light! Tonight we have some proper rain for the first time since the cows were turned out in early May. Having taken our first cut of silage and grazed round once with the cows the dry conditions were making me a bit nervous, maybe we have too many cows now? Especially if these dry summers prevail. Only three cows calving this month slightly out of season. Dill the oldest just had her ninth calf at the age of twelve. The older cows are lovely to have around. They have seen so much, so wise, and nothing seems to bother them. When reintroduced into the milking herd after calving, there is simply a sideways glance at the other cows to assert their position, they know everything in the parlour, which gate to go through to the field, how slow to walk up the track for milking! We have 46 cows now, some of which are due to calve for the first time in August, they are Ayrshire cross MRI with horns that extend to the heavens and the temperament of a stag, very strong and I hope will produce plentiful milk?? All the dry cows relax in a beautiful place right at the top of the farm in Richard Evans' field with the bull. Well worth a walk up there if you have time to see them browsing as a herd.

Young calves and lambs are growing well together, but the pigs are always getting out; it must be the breed (old spot x middle white). One in particular 'Babe' has fallen for Moss the horse and spends all spare time planning escapes.

Our hens are in their third year now and laying when they wish which is not very often, so with such a big demand on the milk round and through the shop for eggs, we have decided to replace the old flock and take on two new flocks which will mean we have around 250 hens. We are building two new houses for them under the trees towards the pond, and letting them range the piggery field outside Ray and Serena's house.

We brought a 'new' tractor in the spring (New Holland 85hp) which has been a dream and necessary with so much field work through the summer. Also we brought a new mower and hay tedder, so no excuses now not to make really good winter forage. All the winter and spring cereal crops are looking healthy thanks to Peter's care with biodynamic preparations. The Dairy is busier than ever. We carefully process around 3000 litres of milk every week into various cheeses, yoghurts, creams etc. Most of it sold through the farm shop now, much better for us. We are down to our last box of printed yog pots, that will be 50,000 sold in the last two and a half years. Patrick Shaw our yoghurt maker and dairy entrepreneur has designed an excellent new pot, which will be out in a few weeks, so watch out for that. The yoghurt will be the same!

Mike Eichner has joined our management group and has taken on the long awaited job of getting the new entrance in place to the farm. Planning permission has been granted and he is in the process of getting estimates to do the work. We will have to lose the character of the poll barn outside the shop but will gain so much more in safety.

You are always welcome on the farm at any time, even just for a walk. It's your farm as much as ours, so please come and see what we get up to behind the shop.

Tom Ventham



# Letter from the Co-op Chairman

Dear Friends and Members

Recently I gave a public talk on Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in which I tried to explain the emerging model of CSA that the Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Farms Co-op are creating. I say emerging as we are not following a predetermined framework brought from the outside so much as responding to our local social and economic community. In my talk I spoke about what we are doing in terms of Community, Support and Agriculture. In this letter I will report to you a condensed version of this talk.

The farm community is divided into four groups, friends, Co-op members, Co-op customers and the local community. Our friends are those people who are neither members nor consumers but who have a definable interest in the health and well being of the farms and the Co-op. These people may receive the newsletter or contribute money to the Co-op or St. Anthony's taking a close or distant interest in the activities and future of the farms. This group, which are geographically widespread, is surprisingly important for our Co-op as they often step forward during times of crisis with active support and form a type of outer warmth body of good will for our enterprise.

Our members are really the core supporters of the Co-op and farms. They are that group of people who have stepped forward to back the ideals, purpose and activities of our initiative. It is this group that defines the supporting structure of the Co-op and ultimately dictates the size and stability of what we are trying to accomplish. I believe the future of the Co-op rests firstly with this group.

Our customers, those people who purchase the produce from the farms are on the enterprise level the reason that the Co-op exists. These are people who freely recognise the quality of our products and buy them because they meet their aspirations to eat well and secondly to support an initiative that is meaningful. Because they come to the farms to make their purchases they are also enjoying the experience of being able to see where and how their food is grown and raised. Additionally they are also able to see and support

the direct producers, which is a significant different experience to buying food commodities from conventional stores and supermarkets. I also think that this aspect of freedom in our customers' choice of our products to be an essential element in the strength of our model, keeping both producers and consumers awake to the relationship.

Finally there is the local community who do not support the farms in any direct way but consciously or unconsciously have a sense that there are some wonderful farms in their neighbourhood, which do not pollute their local environment and are good to walk through.

In terms of support there are three types of active economic support, gifts for land, investments for capitalising the farm businesses, e.g. stock, equipment and working capital and importantly the purchase of farm and bought in product. There is also the active contribution of time, work and expertise from a number of Co-op members who work without pay to advise and support the Co-op and the farms.

For the Co-op, agriculture means Biodynamic Agriculture. I read an article recently about a winery in Spain that produces the most expensive wine in the world, applies Biodynamic standards and practices the biodynamic agricultural approach. When asked what Biodynamic meant, the vintner replied "it's super organic". Although I find this comment amusing, I think what it does clearly indicate is that the Biodynamic approach to agriculture seeks a deep and comprehensive understanding of man's agricultural relationship to nature and the land - and seeks to convert that into practice. The results are delicious, healthy food.

The above is a condensation of the talk that I recently gave and is an outline for the work that we as a Co-op have to bring the various aspects of our community into a dynamic and fruitful alignment for the benefit of us all.

With warm regards

Brian Swain

# Slow Food – World Meeting of Food Communities

The “Slow Food” movement was founded in 1986 in Italy as a direct reaction to everything that is wrong with “fast food”. It went international in 1989, and now has over 60,000 members. Slow Food summarises itself as “a movement for the protection of the right to taste”. It undertakes a wide range of activities: examples include awards, e.g the “Slow Food Award for the Defence of Biodiversity”; events; publications; and an ambitious project to catalogue local foods and farm animals worldwide that are in danger of disappearing.

At the heart of the slow food movement is the desire to champion food and food products which are of the highest quality and produced in an environmentally sustainable fashion, but which are also local, distinctive, and representative of the places and regions in which they are produced. With all this in mind, Slow Food is mounting a meeting in Turin this autumn. To be called “Terra Madre”, this event aims “to be a forum for those who seek to grow, raise, catch, create, distribute and promote food in ways that respect the environment, defend human dignity and protect the health of consumers”.

This event, which hopes to draw 5,000 participants, is not open to just anyone. Instead, the intention is that every participant will represent a food community and will be able to exchange with others ideas on how to promote and produce high quality, distinctive, sustainable local food. I submitted an application to Terra Madre on behalf of our Co-op some weeks ago and we are invited to send one or more participants to the event. Participants have to fund their own travel, but food and accommodation is provided free of charge.

If you are interested in participating in Terra Madre as a representative of Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm, please can you contact me immediately, as I need to advise the organisers of whether we will participate within the next two weeks.

Terra Madre takes place in Turin, Italy on 20 – 23 October 2004. Further details can be found at [www.slowfood.com](http://www.slowfood.com) and [www.terramadre2004.org](http://www.terramadre2004.org).



Chris Marshall tel: 01342 822611 email: [chris.marshall@capita.co.uk](mailto:chris.marshall@capita.co.uk)

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## Celebrating 80 years of Biodynamic Agriculture

Conference in Botton Village 27 – 30 May 2004

Set in the picturesque surroundings of Botton Camphill Village in Yorkshire, graced by beautiful weather, this Whitsun conference was truly a celebration. It was extremely well organised, everyone receiving a welcome pack with the programme, participants, summary of lectures, maps and information on the venue.

Many households in Botton took in participants, while others stayed in B&Bs nearby. The hospitality and the quality of every aspect of life in this village was awe inspiring, and their contribution to the artistic part of the programme was beautifully varied and of a high standard.

Speakers included Manfred Klett who has been the focal point of the annual biodynamic conference for many years when he headed the Agricultural Department at the Goetheanum in Dornoch. His ideas on farms beginning to build into cultural centres with the active involvement of the communities surrounding them very much inspired us when we took on Tablehurst Farm with the idea of creating a community farm. He spoke on “The farm conceived as a kind of individuality”.

Other speakers were Alan Brockman, farmer from Kent on “Planetary influences”, Richard Smith, farmer from Devon on “The feeding of farm animals – the polarity of force and substance”, Nic Raeside, a forester, on ecology, Nikolai Fuchs, Manfred Klett’s successor, on Nitrogen and protein, Aonghus Gordon on “The healing power of the biodynamic landscape” and Patrick Holden, director of the Soil Association, on the spiritual background of the Soil Association and the need to work together with the biodynamic movement.

There were interesting workshops, and I was personally very glad to be able to take part in one on herb growing, taking home lots of ideas and practical tips. Others worked on nutrition, biodynamic gardening, compost making, seed breeding, living water, tools and the biodynamic preparations – a rich variety of essential aspects of biodynamic work. Themed farm walks and artistic activities also took place

It was a privilege to be able to take part and a wonderful break for Peter and myself.

Brigitte Brown

