

# TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS SPRING '05

## Where next for Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Farms?

On 16 April, Brian Swain, chairman of the Co-op, called a special meeting to discuss the future of our community farm initiative. The meeting was attended by representatives of the four entities that make up the enterprise, namely: Plaw Hatch Farm; Tablehurst Farm; St Anthony's Trust (owner of the land and buildings at both farms); and The Co-op (owner of the businesses at both farms and representative body for our community of shareholders).

The objective of the meeting was to reconsider, at the most fundamental level, what the Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch initiative is aiming to do. Why does it exist in its current form, and what does it hope to achieve in the coming years?

The work of the meeting was only a first step along this road. It concentrated on two topics. First, it aimed to clarify and if necessary update the overarching *objectives* of the initiative, then it attempted to define the appropriate *roles* of each of the four entities within it.

The meeting comprised two working sessions. The first discussed the objectives of each entity (without considering how they could be achieved). The second then asked the representatives of each entity what they needed from *each other* in order to achieve their objectives. The output from these sessions is reported overleaf exactly as it was summarised by the participants at the end of each session.

### The formal stuff

- The Co-op is an Industrial and Provident Society and is answerable to it's shareholders.
- The farm businesses, although both owned by the Co-op, are separate legal entities,. For the purposes of this meeting, they worked together.
- St Anthony's Trust is a charity and as such it is strictly bound by both charity law in general and the contents of its Trust Deed in particular.

### **What do you think?**

For practical reasons, it was necessary to restrict the attendance at this meeting to a representative group of individuals. However, the work they undertook is only a beginning. If you have views on any of the material published here - if you disagree, or think something important was missed, or have a different light to shine on any of the topics mentioned, above all if you have views on what needs to be done next, please drop me a line by post or email. Our Co-operative is a community initiative and we would warmly welcome wider community participation in these important deliberations.

Chris Marshall  
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### MEETING ATTENDEES

#### **St Anthony's Trust**

Warren Ashe  
Paul Shanahan  
Bob Wills  
John Thompson  
Hugh Salvesson

#### **The Co-op**

Brian Swain  
Krista Braun  
Steve Harvey  
Peter Brinch  
Oliver Fynes-Clinton  
Chris Marshall

#### **The Farms**

Brian Infield  
Jonathan Wellman  
Peter Brown  
Tom Ventham  
Mark Haughton  
Patrick Shaw

# Where next? Meeting Outcomes ...

On this page, the objectives identified at the meeting by each group are presented. Opposite, the question "what do I want you to do for me?" is answered six times, with each group setting out what it believes it needs from each other group.

## Objectives

### The Co-op

Community participation in agriculture  
Good food, produced ethically, sold locally  
Promotion of biodynamic agriculture and knowledge about it  
Sustainable, accountable and transparent enterprises

### The Trust

The achievement of education (with particular regard to the principles and methods based on the teachings of Rudolf Steiner). (Quoted from the Trust Deed).  
Compliance with the Charities Act  
Training of biodynamic farmers  
To hold land and buildings for these purposes  
To support enterprises and individuals which help to further the above aims

### The Farms

Biodynamics  
Financial security, including viability, a surplus to reinvest, and good employment conditions, wages and pensions  
Adequate land and buildings  
Community participation including shared risk  
Education  
Creating show farms - something to be proud of  
The means to realise our vision

# Who needs what from whom?

## The Co-op

### *The Co-op wants from the Farms*

Good food, produced ethically, sold locally.  
Social, cultural and economic development plans  
To achieve sustainable enterprises  
To be open to community involvement  
To actively promote the Co-op  
To seek beneficial co-operation with each other  
To educate themselves and the community

### *The Farms want from the Co-op*

To take an active role in education, promotion and fund raising  
To expand the community base & to reflect the wider community  
To be an effective link between the community and the farms.  
Good working relationships and clear lines of communication  
To take responsibility for fund raising, e.g for accommodation and community projects such as a farm centre or a café.

## The Farms

### *The Farms want from the Trust*

A good working relationship and clear lines of communication  
An available channel for charitable fund raising  
Financial clarity and accountability

### *The Co-op wants from the Trust*

Continuing stewardship of land and buildings  
Assurance that other Trust activities create no conflicts of interest  
A conduit for charitable fund-raising

### *The Trust wants from the Co-op*

Help in ensuring good relations between the farms  
Help in ensuring that both farms meet our requirements  
Take the lead in fund-raising, promotion and advocacy

## The Trust

### *The Trust wants from the Farms*

Compliance with the lease, including payment or rent  
Visible training activity and achievements  
A good training environment  
Evidence of working to biodynamic standards  
Development plans  
Open sharing of information

# Where next? The next steps

Dear Members and Friends

As you will have read about the meeting of the Co-op committee, St. Anthony's Trust and the two farms, we have taken good steps in aligning the three structures in terms of roles, responsibilities and requirements. We are now looking toward the future and the next steps that need to be taken.

During the last two years the farms have steadily improved all aspects of the farming business and infrastructure. We have created the tripartite structure of the land in trust ownership, the two farm enterprises as limited companies run and managed by individual management groups composed of farmers and local community members and finally the Co-op which owns the limited companies, is composed of members and represented by an elected committee. This is a wonderful achievement that is respected throughout the UK community-supported agricultural and organic farming movement, but is far from complete or secure.

The Co-op came into being as a vehicle that enabled the forming of a community farm, Tablehurst. When Plaw Hatch farm experienced difficulties a few years ago, the Co-op was the vehicle that was able to step in to provide funding, structure and management support to help bring it around.

We are now in the much more subtle crisis position of going from almost there, to there. There being building stable and sustainable farms of the right size with the right buildings, the right farmers, good equipment for the right mix of enterprises for well a defined and supportive consumer and Co-op community. This is what is required of our Co-op so that it can become a fantastic asset for the community and a legacy for the future.

We have much of this in place now but in the near future we need

- Improved housing for the farmers
- Better working buildings, barns and processing areas
- Shop expansion and improvement
- An expanded Co-op membership that more closely matches the size and population of the consumer community
- A fundraising drive for the above
- Individuals from the community who are capable, have the energy, time and inspiration to bring the Co-op and the farms into its maturity.

The Co-op community are all of us who benefit from the goodness of the farms, as consumers who buy the excellent food, as visitors who appreciate the land and as people who are support the ideals and potential of such an enterprise. It is this community of individuals that I am calling for a new engagement and active support. We are not in a dire crisis but we are in a critical stage of development that needs time, money and good will to reach its promise.

With warm regards

Brian Swain

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## Tablehurst Farmer's Notebook

At this moment, looking at the farm, I am filled with a deep sense of gratitude as it feels that we have been blessed. Blessed by the weather, blessed with the team of people we have on and around the farm and blessed by being where we hoped to be with the spring work.

I am a farmer and therefore ever conscious that we are living and working with living soils, plants, animals (and people!) and that things can quickly change, usually just when one least expects it. No doubt that is why most of us become wary when things go well, but that should not stop us saying thank you when they do. So what has been happening?

### **The animals.**

The cattle have all been weighed, had missing ear tags replaced and are out in the fields. About half of the 58 cows have calved. The sheep have all lambed, been dagged (had the wool trimmed away around their tails and bottoms to keep them clean) and had their feet trimmed. Half the flock are in fields at Springhill and half have just been moved to the fields at Michael Hall from Tablehurst. Lambing itself went very well and we have beautiful lambs although there are a few limping with 'scald' between their toes, something similar to athlete's foot!

The pigs are all out in Oak Field, beyond the car park, where they will be for the next two years. Some of them make quick work of digging up the pasture, which is a shame, but they love doing it! We bought ten more of the green tin pig houses or

arks, which we have put together and placed in the field. The farrowing house by the pond is empty and so is just getting its spring clean before the next sows go in to farrow.

The hens in the top orchard are happily scratching under the blossom-laden trees. We are putting up a divider fence splitting the orchard into two so as to be able to keep Stein's ducks separate from the laying hens. This is to stop them coming and raiding the chickens feed instead of 'mowing' the orchard grass as is intended.

The chickens in Clay Field are happy (as we are) with the new houses, which we bought in November. They are so large and spacious compared to the old lorry bodies that not only will we have to place the water drinkers outside to encourage them out but the feeders, too. We have been using pheasant 'letter box' feeders for the turkeys and laying hens for quite a while now as they can be placed outside, but more importantly rats cannot reach the food. We intend to try the same with the table birds, if we can train them. When small they cannot reach the food without a platform to help them, which, of course, the rats will also use. Hopefully, as the birds grow, the platforms can be lowered to the point where the rats will no longer be able to reach them.

### **The fields.**

The spring crops are all in and coming up, as are many weeds! Minepits West Field, where the pigs were last year, has been sown to spring barley together with vetch on half the field and lupins on the other half. These lupins are bred for feeding to animals instead of peas or beans and have 40% protein instead of 22% in beans. It will be interesting to see how they do and if they are something for the future or not. We have two small fields sown to oats and three to wheat, all except one being under-sown to a grass/clover ley. The triticale sown in Lower Parklands Field in the autumn is looking good.

The whole farm has been sprayed with 500 or the horn manure preparation and today we started spraying some of the crops with 501 or the horn silica preparation. We have started mucking out some of the barns and bringing the manure to the compost areas.

All the land is now fully biodynamic and Andy Green, the fencing contractor, has made good progress putting up fences at Springhill. We in turn have managed some at Tablehurst and Brambletye Field, although there is still lots and lots to do. The hedges planted in January have come up nicely and the straw mulch, which we made thicker, is keeping the weeds down so far.

Andrew has spent hours and hours completing forms for the new Single Farm Payment, which has to be with DEFRA by the 16<sup>th</sup> May. It is very complicated for a farm such as ours, made so by the land being owned by many landlords, by the Rural Payments Agency not managing to get maps and areas right, and by advisers in all departments not knowing what is going on and giving contradictory advice. The consequences of making some mistakes could be far reaching, so a great deal of time is required. Andrew has been doing a good job.

St Anthony's has paid the deposit for the large new barn, which the manufacturer has promised to have up by the end of July. We therefore have to clear away all the machinery etc from the site so that they can get started.

Gabi left us at the end of April, together with Stephen, having been with us for one and a half years. We are sorry to see her go, but wish them all the best for the future. They are going down to Spain, where they will be working on a farm for at least five months, and longer if it goes very well.

Fionn Harms from Germany started in March on the farm and Ligio Alarma, originally from Chile, came in the beginning of April. They have both come as apprentices, joining Susan, although Fionn now intends to start the BD course at Emerson in September. Sebastian van Rooij who is studying BD agriculture in a college in the Netherlands has just joined us for the summer as a placement from his college. We have Stefan Groenwald who is at school in Germany with us for six weeks and then later a young chap from Switzerland will be coming.

An old classmate of mine, Gaye Fanner, came to visit us for a while in February and has enjoyed it so much that she has stayed on and is now in the house with Robin and Laura, Stuart, Terry and Clive. She has done gardening for many years in Devon so there is plenty to keep her busy between the house, our residents, the gardens and the polytunnels.

Raphael Rivera, who many of you will know through past newsletters as he has previously been an apprentice here, will be joining us as part of the permanent staff in October together with Steffi, his partner. Raphael has completed a degree in organic agriculture since leaving here and Steffi is still studying and hopes to do the same by the end of the year. They will be a wonderful addition to the team and will be able to help us take the farm onto yet another level.

## **Join our study group?**

Every second Sunday for the last two years or more, a small group of interested individuals has met at Tablehurst Farm to study a variety of books and lectures, in particular the writings of Rudolf Steiner.

At our next meeting on 22 May, we are going to begin studying Steiner's Agricultural Course.

If you would like to join the group, please call or email me for more information. My contact details are on the back page.

We meet at Mill Cottage on Tablehurst Farm from 7.30pm until about 9.15pm.

Chris Marshall

Peter Brown

# Plaw Hatch Garden in Spring

To the casual observer (i.e. me) Plaw Hatch garden occupies an idyllic site surrounded by stunning views of the Sussex Weald and the North Downs beyond. To the expert gardener (i.e. Jonathan Wellman, who gardens 56 hectares at Plaw Hatch) the site is indeed a wonderful place to work, but its aspect and setting create challenges not apparent to the layman, as I was to learn when I visited the garden on a beautiful May Day morning. Jonathan had very generously agreed to give up a chunk of his Sunday morning to show me his domain and answer my questions.



We started, appropriately enough, with propagation. One polytunnel is dedicated to this most essential of tasks and, unlike the others, it has heating and ventilation systems to maintain the germinating seeds and growing seedlings in optimum conditions. Given the huge quantity of produce that starts its life in this tunnel, space is at a premium. Jonathan explained that his plants are constantly on the move here as he attempts to give every seedling the right conditions to suit its stage of growth.

Plaw Hatch garden has 14 polytunnels in all. Jonathan is aware that they are not a particular asset in the landscape, but demand for the produce they allow him to grow is sufficiently strong that he could easily make use of several more. They are used both to grow crops that cannot be grown outside, and to extend the growing season of others. Probably the biggest challenge in the tunnels is irrigation. Having shut out the rain, every drop of water has to be provided artificially. This is mostly achieved through a maze of drip-feed pipes as this minimises evaporation and hence water usage. This is important because, although Plaw Hatch is blessed with its own spring water, the supply is not sufficient to meet the garden's needs in the summer. Mains water - the garden can use twenty cubic metres a day - is metered and expensive.

Although the polytunnels are prominent, they actually only cover 1900 square metres, or 3% of the total garden area. We soon left the tunnels behind us, and headed out into the open garden. The first thing one notices at this point is those magnificent views. If you have never ventured beyond the farmyard and shop at Plaw Hatch, it is worth the (very short) stroll past the shop and dairy to see it for yourself.

Vegetables are nearly all annual crops, and as such, very greedy of nutrients in the soil. Soil fertility in a biodynamic garden - where artificial fertilisers are forbidden - is maintained by crop rotation (see box) and by the addition of manure and compost at the right times. Manure is of course provided by the Plaw Hatch dairy herd, who are thus vital contributors to the vitality of our vegetables as well as to our milk, yoghurt and cheese supplies.

As we strolled through the fields full of baby plants, Jonathan explained that, although he now has a basic pattern of working the land established, he feels constantly challenged to improve his techniques. One perennial problem for the biodynamic gardener is weeds. With some reluctance, Jonathan uses a biodegradable black "plastic" manufactured from corn starch on some of his fields to suppress weeds. The only real alternative would be more labour, something that is often in short supply in the garden.

The slope of the land and the big views to the west and north are lovely, but as Jonathan explained, the aspect of the land, and the fact that it is 150m above sea level means that his garden is exceptionally exposed and windy. In some locations, it has been possible to grow hedges to break the wind, but mostly the slope of the land - rolling downhill into the prevailing wind - would render them ineffective. So more local protection measures and "putting up with it" have to do.

## Crop rotation - the key to maintaining soil fertility

A typical five year rotation at Plaw Hatch:

- Field is planted with a mixture of grass and red clover and, apart from mowing, left for 18 months. This fixes nitrogen and builds soil fertility.
- The newly-fertile land grows brassicas - the cabbage family - which are particularly hungry plants. The brassicas are followed by leeks.
- Now manure is added to the soil in preparation for a crop of spinach, beetroot, squash or celeriac.
- The final crop is early potatoes. Then back to the red clover ley for another 18 months rest.

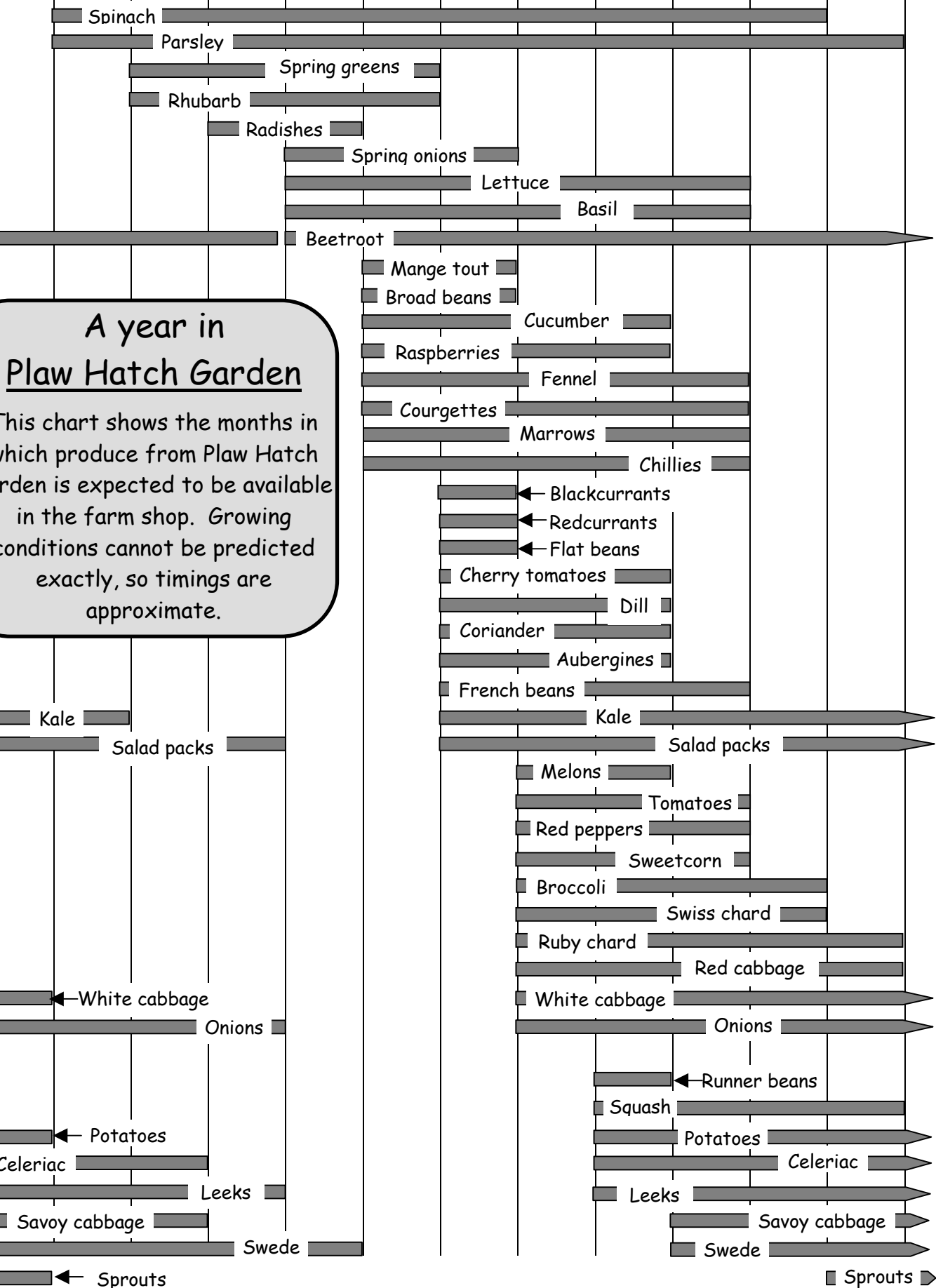
In a corner of one field, I noticed that about a dozen leeks had been left standing in an otherwise empty area. Jonathan explained that, wherever possible, he likes to collect seed from his own plants for the following year's sowing. He was just waiting for his leeks to flower.

Finally, a running thread in our conversation was the environment. Jonathan is very keen that his garden should be a good environment for wildlife and he has undertaken a number of projects to improve its attractiveness to wild plants, insects and birds.

My thanks to Jonathan for kindly giving up his Sunday morning to show me round.

Chris Marshall

Jan Feb Mar Apr May Jun Jul Aug Sep Oct Nov Dec



## A year in Plaw Hatch Garden

This chart shows the months in which produce from Plaw Hatch garden is expected to be available in the farm shop. Growing conditions cannot be predicted exactly, so timings are approximate.

## Learn more about biodynamic farming

On 9 April, Peter Brown gave a fascinating talk on the theme of sheep on a biodynamic farm. As well as obtaining numerous insights into sheep breed characteristics, the lambing process and the day-to-day practicalities of sheep husbandry (such as why Tablehurst sheep have to have their toenails clipped), we learnt about the profound interdependence between the animals, crops and soil on a biodynamic farm and how the sheep make a critically important contribution to the whole organism. This view - that the farm is a single organism in which all parts depend on one another - is central to biodynamic agriculture.

This was the first of a series of Saturday afternoon talks planned at both farms in the coming months. Please do join us next time if you can.

**SATURDAY 14<sup>TH</sup> MAY, 2.30 - 4.30 PM, PLAW HATCH FARM**

**THE SECRET LIFE OF THE MILKING COW**

**SATURDAY 11<sup>TH</sup> JUNE, 2.30 - 4.30 PM, TABLEHURST FARM**

**HAY-SILAGE - HOW IT IS DONE**

## Where next for our farms?

We want your views on the future of our community farming initiative. See page 1 for more details

### Contacts

For all general enquiries about the Co-op, please contact Chris Marshall in the first instance

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#### Co-op Officers

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Oliver Fynes-Clinton, Secretary 823966

Steve Harvey, Treasurer 824808

#### Shops

Plaw Hatch Farm 810201

Tablehurst Farm 823173

Michael Hall Garden 825604

Are you a community farm owner yet? If not, please do consider becoming a Co-op shareholder, as we are very keen to broaden our farm community.

## 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, Trees, Priory Road, Forest Row, RH18 5HF.

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

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

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