

# TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

SPRING '06

## Plaw Hatch Farm Shop

"A pleasing atmosphere, high quality produce, local and UK sourcing, Demeter standards, avoiding air freight". These are some of the hard-to-achieve ideals Kate aspires to in managing the farm shop at Plaw Hatch. As well as all the produce from the Plaw Hatch farm, garden and dairy, the shop sells a selection of produce from Tablehurst Farm, bought in fruit and vegetables to maintain a



balanced year-round supply, sheep's cheese from Horsted Keynes, apple juices and cordials from East Anglia, bread from Nutley Hall, Brighton and Whitstable, local cakes and (recently added) a range of Demeter grains and muesli.

Finding the right balance of goods to offer whilst at the same time chasing those ideals is a permanent challenge to Kate, who says that she is constantly searching for good local suppliers, and agonises over whether to stock fresh produce from beyond Europe. Through the summer and autumn, the garden provides as much as 75% of the vegetables, but through the winter and early spring, more bought-in produce is needed to keep the customers satisfied.

Direct from the farm, garden and dairy in Plaw Hatch Shop

- Raw milk
- Cream
- At least a dozen varieties of yogurt
- Cheddar and Dutchman cheeses
- Pork, beef and lamb
- Over 100 varieties of fruit, vegetables, herbs and salad
- Eggs

...and from Tablehurst Farm

- Chicken, sausages and burgers
- Apples and apple juice
- Flour and eggs



## Plaw Hatch Farm Shop (cont'd)

From the dairy herd, Patrick and the dairy team produce raw milk, cream, yoghurt and cheese for the shop. Yoghurt products now include more than a dozen lines, including natural yoghurts, fruit yoghurt, drinking yoghurts, luxuries such as choc pots and the new vanilla yoghurt (delicious!) and seasonal specials, currently rhubarb and ginger. Two main types of cheese are made on the farm – the familiar cheddar and “Dutchman” – a Plaw Hatch special! Both are available in mild, mature and smoked forms.

Local suppliers are important to the shop, supporting the local food ethos and providing distinctive, interesting products for Kate to sell. They include The Seasons and Harvest Wholesale for the bought in vegetables, Nutley Hall for bread, Sussex High Weald Dairy for sheep's cheeses, and both the Organic Cake Company in Forest Row and Jean Smith for cakes.

Kate hopes to be able to refit the shop in the foreseeable future to make it more attractive for customers. However, like everything on the farm, this will be dependent on funds being available. Longer term, Kate would like to have a bakery on the farm, and possibly even a café.

Chris Marshall

## Plaw Hatch Farm in May

We are so pleased to be coming out of the winter, six months of feeding and bedding cows with straw, the dog looking overweight and wondering when she can do some work again. Winter feed has just lasted and we have surplus straw to carry us through to next year.

All the building work is going well. We now have two new large barns which don't leak and look to last for many years to come. Tomorrow the pole barn outside the shop is due to be dismantled. Its been up for about 30 years and almost tells a story of use by how it looks! We are going to keep as much of the structure to re-assemble somewhere. With this coming down I think the farm will have a completely new face, very open except for a large listed oak tree to dominate the new car park.

The milking cows are waiting for the field gate to open for a taste of the lush spring grass. The spring calving has gone really well, we only had the vet out once. Most of this is down to having a good bull. He is a Sussex breed and father to all calves, most of whom have been sold to a nearby organic farm. Five have been kept to rear on for beef. We are now milking 40 cows which produce 3000 litres / week. All the milk is processed on the farm.

We've just had our second litter of pigs and the first litter is now being sold through the shop and is able to satisfy Demeter standards. The pigs not only use up the whey from cheese making but also provide a valuable source of soil fertility, and are excellent for working over soils which are too rocky to plough. No lambs this spring due to the ram being infertile and was too late before we realised. We did put another ram in so can expect so lambs this summer.

The new hens look very strong having been brought in as day olds instead of 16 weeks. We are managing to feed them on much more of a home produced grain diet to try to produce eggs to Demeter standards rather than organic. We are getting just over 1000 eggs / week at the moment which will increase as the days get longer.

The fields have changed now to a bright green. We sowed some spring barley and peas as a combination two weeks ago and just about to undersow with a grass mixture which will last for the next five years. Getting the seed on for the right calendar time is a challenge but so far we have been lucky with the weather as the spring has been quite dry. The winter oats look healthy, we have been saving the same seed variety now for five years and it's beginning to adapt to our soil conditions. Now when I walk the fields I secretly imagine the newly acquired combine harvester (1976 model) thundering across the field!! It made such a difference last year being able to harvest when the time was right and not wait for rainy days and a contractor!

We have three very able students at the moment. Rafal, Anna and Esti. I have to struggle to get a place in the milking parlour. Some more students will be coming in the summer to help with the extra field work. Always hoping for couples to save on accommodation..

Please come and walk the farm, see the animals, you are most welcome always to see what is happening.

Tom Ventham

# Dorothea on sabbatical

Sometimes dreams become true. I'd been dreaming about time off for about two years but couldn't find anyone replacing me for a year at Michael Hall Garden. In fact, I'd given up looking and was quite content, planning for the next year, when Tarry Boulgar came along and asked whether I was still looking. It took me by surprise and I nearly said no, but then luckily thought of the better.

I had to organise what to do in this wonderful time off. Last year, Peter and Gill Bacchus from New Zealand gave a lecture on the homeopathic use of the biodynamic preparations at Emerson College. Some of you might have been there. Peter talked about how he observes what is out of balance in a plant and remedies it with sprays of the seven preparations in homeopathic potencies. After the lecture I invited Peter and Gill to have a look around Michael Hall Garden because I really wanted to see his observation skills applied and wanted to know more of how, what, when, why etc. So the next day, they came and we spent a morning looking, explaining, having lunch together and I ended up with an invitation to New Zealand.

So off I went on 19<sup>th</sup> of January for my first time to the southern hemisphere. I stopped in Australia because I've got friends there. One of the highlights was building a small stone circle in my friends' garden. And I absorbed everything being so different: the eucalyptus trees with their scent, the light, Orion being "upside down", the sun going the other way round ...

Then I went on to New Zealand – another 3½ hour flight and completely different again. I was able to go with Peter Bacchus on a consultation job – a farm converting to organics with a ragwort problem. It was a comprehensive consultation looking at the results of soil tests – conventional and holistic – that tested the availability of minerals in the soil. Also tests of the grass and blood tests of the cows. We dug and looked at soil structure and worm population, at the compost and at earth energies – why did the cows not like a certain field. I hadn't known until I became friends with Peter that he too was a dowser and earth-healer. The plan of action was:

1. Making and spraying liquid manure from the ragwort because a weed growing in excess on a piece of land will always have what the land is deficient in – the weeds make up for what is lacking. Liquid manure needs to be stirred every day so that it doesn't become anaerobic.
2. Making a pepper – that is burning the ripe seeds of the weed, dynamise them and spray, in this case large scale – it meant mixing the ashes with sand in a cement mixer.
3. Stirring and spraying the biodynamic preparations

4. Improve the compost making on the farm. Again, it is so clear that the compost, the manure treatment really is at the heart of a farm or garden, really everything depends on it, yet often one sees quite "dead" composts.

Nearly three weeks with Peter and Gill were inspiring, with a lot to take in and exchange. Peter and Gill went to a course by Arden Anderson, an American doctor surgeon and farmer who teaches a system which he calls biological farming. He has written a book called "Science in Agriculture" which I now need to study ... His experience and view is that the health of the population lies in the hands of the farmers since soils get so depleted that the food growing on it hasn't got the nutrients in it any more. He is very scientific on one hand but also very aware of forces at work, interplay between plants, earth and cosmos etc.

The next place I explored was a place called Treedimensions on the South Island. It literally is paradise: 700 varieties of trees with edibles on them. Again a biodynamic place. Again the importance of compost, of keeping, encouraging the life in the soil and of the elemental world. And also, I again learnt about summer pruning fruit trees.

My last stay was a wonderful biodynamic market garden of exactly the size of Michael Hall Garden – 2½ acres. Wonderful people who've been very active in building up health food shops growing vegetables all the time, really wanting to cut back ... but wholesale is so unsatisfying to them that they are just building a café on the site. I got spoiled rotten with Janice trying out the recipes on me.

Biodynamics in New Zealand isn't that big, but what is happening is very special. There are not many young people starting out though. The biodynamic movement is slightly split between the more experimental, moving forward people and the traditional ones. I always ended up with the "progressive" side – the people who know that Steiner gave the advice to experiment in your situation, on your land. I also got a glimpse that the potential of the preparations is vast.

Then back in Australia, I joined in the preparation making. There are some things they do differently, partly because of the different dimensions. The most interesting thing was the horn, which I'd never seen done before. Again there seems to be a bit of a split in the biodynamic movement in Australia – personalities I think. These things feel so painful to me that I nearly want to scream, shout, why can't people unite in what they have in common rather than getting stuck in differences, egos etc? I very much hope for our community and biodynamic work that we can always see our common higher goal.

I'll be back at Michael Hall in November. Until then I'm available for advice, gardening, environmental healing and singing lessons.

Dorothea Leber

## Co-op masterclass and dinner with Mark Raffan

On Saturday 29 April, around a dozen lucky amateur cooks had the privilege of spending an afternoon in the kitchen with Mark Raffan, Michelin-starred head chef of Gravetye Manor. Mark donated his time to help us prepare a special Co-op dinner in the Long Room at Michael Hall School. He proved to be a charming and effective teacher, and managed to turn out a superb four course meal for 48 guests despite our assistance. Pictures overleaf. Our special thanks also go to Francis and Tatiana Rainey and Ashley Ramsden, who provided music and storytelling respectively to entertain us during dinner.

Chris Marshall



Getting to know the lamb



Mark and Harry tackle the fish

The liquidizer!

# The Masterclass



Chop chop

The pastrycooks



Happy diners



## The Dinner



"Thank you chef!"

## Co-op masterclass and dinner 29 April 2006



The Kitchen Crew

# Vegetarian thoughts

This is a weird subject for the coop newsletter surely. Animals are the backbone of the business of both farms aren't they? The farms' success in both cases is based on the evident demand for meat and dairy produce coming from local, biodynamic and trusted sources. All the more reason perhaps to get underneath the familiar presence of animals on the farms and ask what we are doing. So what is the place of this kind of food in our diets, culturally, environmentally ethically? Vegetarianism is a big subject. The farm newsletter does not allow space for a comprehensive exploration but a few thoughts can be gathered to help see the subject in the round.

In the latest Resurgence magazine there are two book reviews which drew my attention. One is called "Outgrowing the Earth" by Lester Brown. It questions the "myth" of sustainable growth in a world of finite life support systems. There is an extraordinary picture next to it of Chinese workers in a chicken processing factory dressed in pink hats and overalls and blue aprons and white face masks. There must be at least 500 people in the picture, row upon row of figures with knives and chopping boards and bits of chicken. The obvious question raised by the picture is, has the lack of compassion for the life of the chicken spilled over into a soulless world of work for those people? It is a disturbing image and the answer to me is all too clear. The other review is of a book by Jonathan Porritt called "Capitalism As If The World Matters". Porritt's assertion is apparently that we are "spectacularly in denial about the fact that we live in a finite world and that we cannot use up natural capital indefinitely without facing terrible consequences". I struggle to handle too much eco doom; it is seductively sensational but depressing; but I know he's right. One of the reasons I'm backing the coop and the farms is that I believe they are part of the solution. They are trying along with more and more other people everywhere to offer a way that **addresses** the problems; I want to be part of a group that is **not** in denial. But am I kidding myself because the meat is too good to resist?

For some strange reason I was reading Homer's Odyssey recently, having not picked it up since I was at school. On almost every other page the wandering warrior and his friends are putting the world to rights by slaughtering herds of hapless goats, sheep or bulls to make sacrifice to the Gods and follow it with a good feast. That this is man's (as in male of the species) work is emphasised at one point by the wailing and weeping of the women who witness one particularly large butchering. These Greek legends stand as some of the earliest markers by which we identify our modern culture. While we have moved on a bit, some of the heroic mythology that goes with meat eating still lingers. To wit; meat eating and hunting are stereotypically male activities and are associated with aggression and physical prowess; meat is food of the highest value; eating it necessitates a killing with shedding of blood, and even though it is not human blood there is a need to acknowledge that it is a significant event requiring active reference to the spirit world. The Homeric heroes with their sacrifices give thanks and honour to something sacred in the life cycle, and they hope in doing this to secure continuing good fortune from the Gods. In our own terms we can do the same by each acknowledging our small place in the universe and our responsibility for and oneness with it.

Our biology seems to dispose us to eat meat as well as other foods. It is true that nutritionally all the necessary components of a human diet are obtainable from the plant world; even the well known example of vitamin B12 can be produced by the body. And too much meat can have adverse consequences for our health. There is clearly a balance to be struck. But our teeth and digestive tracts enable us to eat meat when it's there and most of us seem to be wired to enjoy it.

But there have been many famous vegetarians through history. A less well-known one perhaps is Daniel in the Old Testament who, with his brothers, refused the meat of King Nebuchadnezzar. They were perfectly healthy on their preferred vegetables. Steiner said he could not have done all he did without abstaining from meat, although he is known to have had the odd piece! Leonardo da Vinci was a vegetarian. In all three examples not eating meat might be associated with prodigious amounts of wisdom and visionary intelligence. Abstinence might also denote a certain gentleness of spirit in some people. Ghandi comes to mind. Bhuddism and Hinduism espouse these qualities too, which are embodied in a refusal to commit violence against another life. But there are examples in history where the opposite seems to hold true; being vegetarian is no guarantee of spiritual enlightenment or world peace, any more than eating meat is necessarily a socially retrogressive macho activity.

Steiner has a lot to say about nutrition and meat eating. He seemed to feel that people would continue to eat meat, though less so as time goes on, and his quote that "not everyone can become a vegetarian in one lifetime" suggests among other things that this might be the direction we **should** be going in.

The issue of whether we should stop eating meat because its production is an uneconomic use of land is a serious one; the thinking goes that if we all gave up meat there would be enough food to feed the hungry; vegetarianism is an altogether more efficient use of land. But the problem of human over-population and world hunger is not really addressed by saying we can allow the projected increase to 10 billion people on the planet **only** if we all become vegetarian. The problem has many dimensions beyond **what** people choose to eat

A consequence of being vegetarian, usually lacto-vegetarian, ie not truly vegan is dependence on the relationship between animals and soil cultivation. Farm animals *are* vegetarian and produce manure which is the most effective means of adding back what cropping takes out. Dairy farming supplies the milk and its by products in the vegetarian diet. To maintain this supply economically is very difficult for the farmer if the other elements in the system, the cow and its calves are not also valued. But the cow in fact has a central place in the organism of the farm in that it is able to convert grass and clover into something that we can digest. Farmland is kept in better health and with more biodiversity, (not just farm animal diversity!) if grazing pasture is part of the picture. Domestic farm animals also provide many other things such as wool and leather. And they enrich our lives just by being there. Humans are the dominant species on the planet. If we are going to feed everybody *and* have a balanced ecological relationship with the land it is hard to see how we could achieve it without cows and other ruminants being included in the system.

The truth for me is that an ethically acceptable, and I can only hope globally sustainable approach, is to eat meat and dairy produce as part of my diet without overdoing it. Meat is one of life's sensual delights. When I do eat it I should be conscious of the gift of another life before me and enjoy it. And with regard to that life there must obviously also be a concern for its welfare at every stage.

Among other sources for thinking about this subject was Wendy Cook's wonderful book, "Foodwise". (published by Clairview). Anyone with a food conscious attitude cannot fail to find it interesting; in it she discusses, among much else, the present subject at more length. She is also launching a new biodynamic cook book (Ask in Seasons Shop).

# Tablehurst Notebook

It has been a cold late spring, which means that the grass has been slow to grow, but it is here at last. Most of the cows are still in the yards waiting for their feet to be trimmed but are getting restless to be out in the fields. The yearlings are out having all been weighed and any missing ear tags replaced. Lucia, our milking cow, was the first to be out but is not very well. Raphael and I came back at 9.30pm one evening a week ago to find her flat out in the field unable to move. She was diagnosed with an often lethal condition called Hypomagnasaemia (Grass Staggers) which is due to the unavailability of magnesium in spring grass. The vet came and treated her and was astonished that she did not die immediately. Anyway, a week later, though she is still hardly eating and not looking wonderful, she is still with us and we feel that she will pull through. In all the 12 years that I have been here we have not had grass staggers in spring like this. Many farmers put magnesium flakes in the drinking water for this condition, but we have never had to do this in the past.

Lambing has finished having gone very well under Susan's supervision. The ewes and lambs are in the fields at Kidbrooke on good grass. The 10 Dorset ewes which we lambed in December as an experiment have done well so we have bought in some more young Dorsets which will soon go to the ram to lamb in October. This will mean we can supply lamb throughout the year in future.

Over the winter we did a lot of coppicing and cutting back of hedgerows in order to be able to replace fences. For the first time, instead of burning the wood that is not big enough for firewood, we have hired a wood chipper to see if it will be economic to utilise it for heating water. As the wood is not dry the chips can start to heat up like compost so we are storing them in wire cylinders and hoping that there will be enough air movement to dry them naturally; otherwise we will just end up with some expensive compost!

We are applying for a small grant to have a feasibility study done to look at all our energy needs on the farm and to see what will be the best and most economic way of meeting them. We have already put in a new wood burning heating system in Tablehurst Farm Cottage in February where Andrew, Clive, Terry, Stuart, Jacob and Charlotte live. We have also ordered an incinerator for burning the waste from the shop instead of having it picked up at great cost. This will also be able to heat water at the same time. But we also use a lot of gas to brood the chicks and a lot of electricity to heat water in other parts of the farm. This is an area which really interests me. When I lived and worked in South Africa the first nuclear power-station was built 16 km away from our farm and village, which spurred us on to try and find positive alternatives. We then built two Gas Producers, which enable you to run an engine on wood. One ran a standby generator for electricity for the dairy and a borehole and the other ran a bus which we used to take the school kids and our dairy

produce to Cape Town. Of course, there were a few problems too and when I left the project did not continue but clearly, if a couple of 'not so clever' chaps like myself could get that far, then there must be a lot that could be done! Don't worry, I will be looking at more mainstream alternatives this time!

In the **Forest Row Community Centre on May 20<sup>th</sup>** between 10.00 and 17.00 there will be an event called "Eco-footprints" being organized by Elemental (solutions for living) looking at the areas of eco-energy, eco-build, eco-gardens etc.

## The building program

At last we have heard back about the grants we applied for. The good news is that we are being given a grant where many other applications have failed; the bad news is that it is only 30% whereas we had applied for 50% for the shop expansion and 40% for the chicken processing building. This means that we will have to find an extra £37,000 over and above what we had planned. We are also conscious that the bird flu could easily affect our poultry enterprise and therefore our ability to repay loans. Despite all the above, our Management group was unanimous in its decision to go ahead to protect the future health and strength of the business.

There will therefore be building going on directly next to the shop very soon for about 14 weeks. We ask our customers to be a bit patient with any disruption and we will do our best to keep it to minimum.

Those of you who have been to the farm lately will have realized that we have had the road tarmaced from the A22 to around the first farm buildings. It is of course a vast improvement and has been done with the same sort of tarmac that is used on motorways etc. so we are hoping it will hold up to the traffic. It was quite expensive but we hope you agree it was worth it!

## Holidays!

As those of you who read the last newsletter will have realized, (as Raphael wrote the Notebook) Brigitte and I had a month's holiday together in South Africa in February. We lived and worked in a Camphill village and farm for fifteen years near Cape Town and we had not been back in the fifteen years since we were there. We had a marvellous time meeting many more friends than we thought we would and taking in the wonderful landscape and climate. What in a sense made it more special is that shortly before going we heard that Brigitte's breast cancer had moved into her bones. Since coming back she has been receiving radio-therapy and has been a couple of times to Park Attwood Clinic where she has been in the care of the competent doctors there. Despite being very brave it is not easy and she is basically taking each day as it comes.

So there is a lot going on down on the farm! It is going to be a very busy summer but we have a good farm team and a good management team.

Peter Brown

## Tablehurst Farmhouse Fund Update

We are now about half way to our £120,000 target that would allow us to rebuild the old veg store as permanent accommodation for six farmers and apprentices. We are still collecting individual donations, and all contributions are warmly welcomed. Over the coming weeks, we plan three additional initiatives aimed partly at fund-raising and partly at raising the profile of the farm and the Co-op in Forest Row. These are:

- Seeking sponsorship from local businesses
- A leaflet drop to (nearly) every house in Forest Row
- A farm walk and barbecue with a special welcome for people who have never been to the farm before.

We plan to hand-deliver leaflets to (nearly) every house in the village around the end of May, so if you might be able to join our team of volunteer postpeople, please phone or email me

Thank you

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Help please!

## FARM WALK & BARBECUE

Tablehurst Farm, Sunday 11 June

Meet at 3pm for the walk or at 5pm if you just want to eat!

Bring a picnic or enjoy our barbecue.

Everybody welcome, but especially newcomers to the farm



Here today, gone today! The Plaw Hatch pole barn was demolished on 2 May to allow construction of the new entrance.



A big thank you to Mark Raffan, Head Chef and co-owner of Gravetye Manor for generously giving his time for the Co-op masterclass and dinner at Michael Hall on 29 April.



### Contacts

For all general enquiries about the Co-op, please contact Chris Marshall. **Please note my new email**

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#### Shops

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Tablehurst Farm 823173  
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## 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.....

BE A TABLEHURST POSTMAN FOR A DAY (PLEASE!) SEE PAGE 7