

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

AUTUMN '08

All change at Tablehurst Shop ...

When Tablehurst first opened a shop to sell its meat direct from the farm, there was no butcher and the meat had to be cut off site. As demand for the produce grew, the farm felt able to take the plunge and employ Barry Western to work in the shop as a full-time butcher. Demand continued to grow, and Richard joined us as a second butcher. For both men, the shop was a family affair, with Barry's wife Rosemary and Richard's wife Melanie both becoming established faces behind the counter.

This summer, everything has changed. We send a big thank you and a fond farewell to Richard and Melanie, who have left the farm to move to the West Country, and we offer a warm welcome to Simon Mass, our new butcher and his wife Susie, (who in time honoured tradition will be joining her husband behind the Tablehurst counter).

Barry, the founder member of our butcher fraternity, is still with us, although you may miss him at weekends in the future. He and Rosemary will continue to work in the shop but on a part time basis, three days a week.



... except for our excellent value

Stop Press – Pigs Promoted

In the last couple of days, we have received news that Tablehurst pork – long reared to organic standards or better – has, due to improvements in our feeding practices and a higher proportion of biodynamic feed, achieved Demeter certification and is now officially biodynamic!



Organic



Biodynamic

Not only is all our meat reared to the highest standards of husbandry, fed organically or biodynamically and as local as you can get, it also turns out that it is exceptional value. We compared our prices with two specialist meat websites * and with organic produce in two local supermarkets. Against the specialists, one of which isn't even organic, we were on average more than 20% cheaper, but perhaps even more surprising was our performance against Waitrose and Sainsbury's. The average price of our meat and poultry was about the same as the supermarkets were charging for equivalent organic (not biodynamic, not usually local) products, with Tablehurst coming out cheapest of the three for staples such as chicken breast, pork sausages, pork steaks and bacon.

So come to our farm and see for yourself how we rear the animals, buy our meat without hurting your wallet, and taste the real difference for yourself.

* "The Real Meat Company" and "Save the Bacon"

AGM Report

An excellent AGM meeting took place in Forest Row on 20th September. A few highlights:

- Robin Evans reported on the work of the Co-op committee. They are keen to widen participation in our community farms in as many ways as possible.
- The Co-op hopes to run an Open Day at Tablehurst next summer. Help needed! See page 8.
- Tablehurst Farm made a small profit last year, whilst Plaw Hatch returned a small deficit.
- The new Co-op committee comprises Martin Askew (newly appointed), Peter Brinch, Robin Evans, Richard Evans, Oliver Fynes-Clinton, Sarah Merryfield, Brian Swain and Jenny Wright.
- Plaw Hatch has a new shop manager and will be focusing on being a *farm* shop first and foremost.
- There is increasing collaboration between the farms, particularly on meat production and sales.
- Following an experiment with cross-breeding, Tablehurst is reverting to pure Sussex cattle.
- Plaw Hatch is now breeding its own laying hens
- Tablehurst plans to rebalance the farm with more arable crops and slightly fewer animals.
- The Soil Association is drawing directly on our experience to create new teaching materials on community supported agriculture for further and higher education courses.
- Tablehurst has acquired a new type of cultivator – the first of its kind in the UK.
- The *Learning on the Land* project announced new developments – see page 6.

Manya Parkinson – A Legacy

Just over a year ago Tablehurst and Plaw hatch Community Farm Ltd was informed that it was to benefit from a legacy from Manya Parkinson who died in July 2007. She was a Coop member and a participant in the Sunday biodynamic study group at Tablehurst farm. The bequest was a complete surprise! Manya left £250,000 to the Co-op to be split unequally between Plaw Hatch Farm (£80,000) and Tablehurst Farm (£170,000) with the funds being used to improve the infrastructure or for the purchase of additional land.

The solicitor administering the estate soon realised that because the Co-op is not a charity the estate would incur a sizeable inheritance tax liability which would affect the other beneficiaries. It was finally resolved that this situation could be changed if the Co-op entered into a 'Deed of Variation' of the will to divert the legacy to St. Anthony's Trust, the charity that owns the land of both farms. St Anthony's Trust agreed to accept the funds and administer them for the farms in the spirit of the bequest. A lengthy process took place between the Co-op and the estate's solicitors.

At a general meeting of the Coop held on the 28th July the appropriate resolutions were passed enabling the 'Deed of Variation' to be completed. Probate of the will has now been applied for and it is expected that the funds will be available early in 2009.

Such a sizeable legacy is very welcome as it goes a long way in helping the farms to be more self sufficient and sustainable and progress can be made on some of the projects that the farmers long to achieve as part of the overall plan to provide biodynamic produce for the community.

A further report will appear in the future outlining the projects on which the funds are to be spent.

Oliver Fynes-Clinton

CO-OP AND FARM CONTACTS

Co-op officers	Oliver Fynes-Clinton (Secretary) 823966	Robin Evans (Treasurer) 822682
Newsletter and general enquiries	Chris Marshall 822611	farmco-op@hotmail.co.uk
Plaw Hatch FarmShop	810201	Old Plaw Hatch Farm, Sharpthorne, West Sussex, RH19 4JL
Tablehurst Farm Shop	823173	Tablehurst Farm, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5DP

Get more involved in your farms

When the “Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm” Co-operative was founded in 1995, it was an extremely unusual, pioneering venture with few parallels anywhere in the UK. Today, the ideas of local food and community supported agriculture are becoming much more widespread, with many different approaches to community engagement being tried out. In our co-operative, the founding concept is that individual members of the local (and not so local) community should become co-responsible for the land and for food production on that land, and that this should be achieved through ownership of the farm businesses by a large population of individuals. The farm land is held in trust on behalf of the community by a local charity, but the two enterprises have no owners other than the 500 or so individuals who have elected to purchase a Co-op share.

If our farms are to remain vibrant, and truly “community supported” we need to constantly refresh our shareholder population. If you are not already a shareholder, please do consider purchasing a share, and hence becoming a joint owner of the farms. The cost for a single share is £100 – a small investment in such an important initiative – and the application process is simple. Just fill in the form below (a photocopy is fine) and return it to the address shown with your payment.

People sometimes ask “what do I get for my money?” It is a fair question and one with many answers. Here are three:

The legal answer. You become a shareholder in the Co-operative and hence legally joint owner of the two farm enterprises.

The financial answer. Basically, there are no financial benefits for shareholders. The shares are not tradeable and any profits will be reinvested in the farms, so there won't be any dividends. Buying a share is an investment but not (in the conventional sense) a financial one.

The real answer. Here I have to respond personally, though numerous conversations convince me that others feel similarly. I have been a shareholder in the Co-op for over ten years, and for a modest financial contribution, I have obtained both the enormous satisfaction of joining others in making our community farms possible, and the inestimable benefit of being part of a wonderful, purposeful local initiative which is striving to produce real food in the right way. Please do consider joining me (and the 500 others) if you can.

Chris Marshall

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.....

Plaw Hatch – Changes in the garden...



Hello, my name is Tony Davis and I am the new garden manager at Plaw Hatch Farm. I have enjoyed immensely this first season which has been both challenging and uplifting.

I've come from that community in the north – Findhorn – where living together is the norm if not always easy. Here the focus is very much about how to thrive as a working farm, and as such, has a solid feel to it. The earthiness and being surrounded by nature is conducive to a contemplative life, and the rewards from hard physical work balances that out.

Not always a gardener, I have much to learn – the intricacies of the web of life – the needs of the soil foremost. Here, there is a chance to apply all the principles of the farm as an organism. It's great to use straw as a mulch gathered from our own combiner, to sow clover saved from last year's seed; to enliven the compost with the preparations and to try and cover the ground with green manures.

Together with Alison we are deciding how to utilise next year's crops to the best advantage of the

shop. New this year are carrots which are just delicious, and coming soon are winter radish, oriental greens, kales and purple sprouting broccoli. Next year we hope to be planting strawberries, more raspberries for the autumn, and maybe even asparagus... worth the wait. There are plans afoot to build a preparations shelter in which to make the barrel pit compost.



We have 2 apprentices in the garden; Katie and Martin who will be starting their block courses soon, organised by the BDAA. We have also had a steady stream of summer workers, volunteers and regular visitors whose help has been invaluable. There must have been at least 15 young people this year who have stayed on the farm, to experience this beautiful environment. Hopefully a seed has been planted with all of them, to emerge sooner or later as a definite impulse to continue farming and gardening. It does feel wonderful to be a part of this skill sharing aspect, and the more people that

can benefit, the better. In fact anyone who is interested is welcome in the garden to look around and it has been a pleasure to see people do so.



Tony Davis

... and in the farm shop

It is just 5 weeks since I arrived at Plaw Hatch yet it is all strangely familiar and very comfortable, like slipping into a favourite pair of slippers. And what a wonderful time of year to arrive as the garden is bursting with gorgeous vegetables and milk yields have been going through the parlour roof.

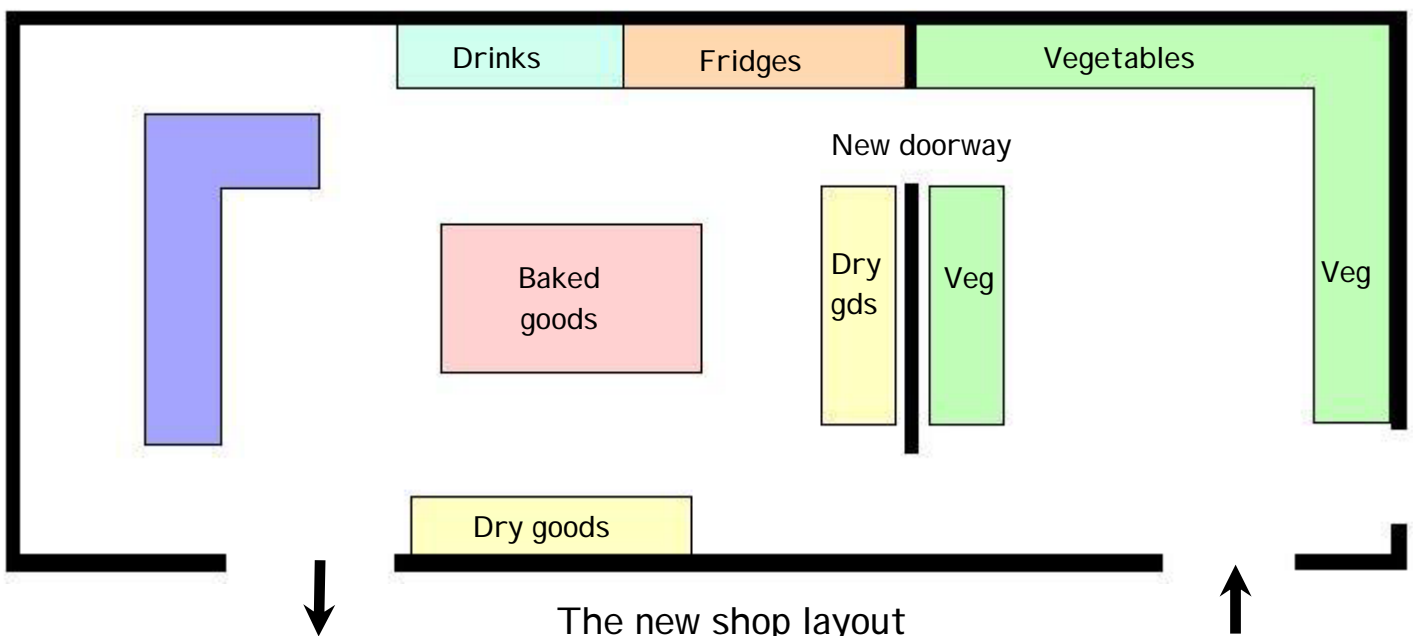
As an enthusiastic/compulsive cook, good food has always been important to me. I feel most fortunate to come from a family of food lovers and learned the principles of seasonal eating from a very early age. The most fundamental truths are often incredibly simple; to eat well you need good food produced with love and a respect for nature, something Plaw Hatch offers in abundance.

I have had a varied and enjoyable working life which has included establishing my own organic restaurant and wholefood shop. Having spent many years working in the safari business I felt ready for a change and returned to the UK with the idea of returning to the food business and perhaps joining a community.

I have received such a wonderful welcome from the community and have enjoyed hearing your views on the shop and what you would like to see. People have such strong feelings about this (in the most positive way). With all its quirks and vagaries it truly is a community shop. The message seems to be quite simple – all you are asking for is seasonal food of the highest quality alongside friendly service.

Over the next few weeks we will be making a few changes in the shop, with a lick of paint and some new shelving (volunteers most welcome once we have confirmed the date). This will enable us to display produce properly and make the working day a little easier for the shop team. To make your lives easier over the coming months we hope to enhance the farm produce and offer a range of soups and other home cooked food all made from our own produce.

Alison Waldegrave



Tablehurst Farmer's Notebook

As usual, we farmers always have something to complain about, but this time I feel it is more justified! Summer just did not come this year and so it has been a case of trying to make silage between the showers, harvest the grain whenever possible and try to fit the autumn cultivations in somehow. As a result we are about a month late with everything.

The harvest has fluctuated between very good, where we harvested over 2t/acre (winter and spring oats) to medium (barley and winter wheat) and some very poor (spring wheat) less than 600 kg/acre. The very poor wheat yield is a result of a number of factors, like the late sowing date and the deer. We hope that we have found the solution to both of these problems! Now that the government has relaxed the game regulations we can sell venison through our farm shop, so we hope to cull from the herds which graze on Spring Hill farm. This should make them a little more shy and hopefully the cereal crops won't suffer as much. As to the cultivations; we are now using the machine mentioned in the last newsletter, which changes the way we cultivate the soil allowing us, we hope, to be able to plant the crops at the optimum time.

Peter mentioned in the last newsletter that there are many personal changes taking place on the farm. We have been very lucky with our search for a butcher with Simon Mass now part of the team, bringing brining experience, enthusiasm and a range of new products with him. Susie, his wife, is also joining the shop team on four days a week. This will allow Barry and Rosemary to slowly move towards retirement as they will, from the end of September, work only 3 days a week. The farm and shop team's dedication to producing good quality produce has not gone unnoticed, with the farm being nominated and selected as one of five finalists for the South East region in the UKTV Local food hero program. This means we are in with a chance of winning the grand prize of £40,000, so fingers crossed as judging takes place in November.

Simon is not the only new face on the farm as Aaron Mirkin, a friend of Peters' from South Africa has joined us for a couple of months. Ellie Woodcock has also just arrived on the farm to start her two year apprentice training, and in a few days time we will be joined by two people from Hungary, for part of their work experience. With so many people coming it also means that some have left and we would like to thank Jors for his contribution. Robin Evans has now also completed his 5 month work experience and returns to his studies at Emerson, studying biodynamics, where he will be joined by Max. Max will still, however, be around the farm as he will continue to run the house together with Lucy. Finally Sandia leaves us in a few weeks time to return to Germany. We will certainly miss her around the farm as well as the wonderful bread she has been baking twice a week with Clive. We wish them all the best for their respective journeys and hope that their time at Tablehurst has many fond memories.

Finally, a brief summary of the animals on the farm. The cows are all doing well enjoying the autumn grass, as are the sheep. As you may know every summer and Autumn, particularly when it is hot and humid, we have a problem with fly strike (flies lay their eggs in the wool, which then hatch into maggots.) Conventionally this is dealt with by spraying a chemical on the sheep as a preventative, which clearly we do not want to do, although on occasion we have had to. We have noticed that we rarely had a case of fly strike for a couple of months after shearing, when the wool is very short. This year we brought in the shearers a second time a couple of months after the first shearing to shear the ewes and also the lambs. This has worked very well and so we shall continue this every year. Although the wool is worth nothing, shearing is not really more expensive than using chemicals, so we are very pleased. The pigs are still up at Spring Hill and will be for another year. The chickens and the turkeys are doing well in their respective fields, growing fast, reminding us that Christmas is just around the corner!

Raphael Rivera

Learning on the Land - an update and an invitation

We are now proposing to develop the residential building for our "farm school" within the main farm complex at Tablehurst. Our aim is to create a sustainable, energy-efficient building consistent with the values of the farm. This will occupy part of the existing lower barn, facing out onto the Medway.

The next step is a *Consensus Planning Process* beginning in November and involving members of the local community over four Saturday sessions. We hope to bring together a team of around 20 volunteers with skills and experience in education, building and design, farming, gardening, cooking, and children's activities.

If you are interested in sustainable buildings and would like to participate, please contact us.

Georgia Taylor: georgiat@btinternet.com 07717 222 953

Tom Forward: tmforward@gmail.com 07877 574 554

A bird in the Hand

Regard if you will the bird in your hand, by which I really mean look at what a beautiful and amazing part of you are your hands. Hands are present in almost everything human beings achieve, in how we work, play, communicate and express ourselves, feel emotion, and eat. We take them for granted, but in our energy-hungry era, where machines do much of the work hands used to do, it may be good to pause, and appreciate them a little more deeply.



The soil is a hard task master and bare hands alone are not sufficient for its cultivation, so human beings have made tools for working it to produce their food ever since settled agriculture began. Our farms, like all farms today, are very dependent on machines for cultivation and harvesting of crops. But machines and tools need hands to operate them; hands to steer the tractor for a good straight row, to locate vital steel pins which connect tractor to the implement being used, to check the tightness of nut to bolt, to refuel and lubricate. Managing farm animals brings constant hand contact which is good for people and animals; pigs, in particular, love a good scratching! Hands are intimately involved in lambing, especially if a ewe is having difficulty. Small but strong (and experienced) hands are useful here. Hands are everywhere on the farm. Hands making and mending fences, hands checking the quality of grain, hands in the soil feeling its condition, planting and harvesting vegetables and fruit, cooking and washing up too. The sight of Sandia making bread with Clive, one of our residents, shows that kneading bread dough is definitely in the class of "therapy through hands". Clive loves his bread making sessions and is proud of his bread which is shared by the everyone on the farm.



In the farm shop at Tablehurst we have recently been joined by a new butcher, Simon. Barry's task for him when he came for interview was to "bone out" a piece of beef, an important test of a butcher's manual skill. He passed with ease by the way! But in both farm shops there is endless other work for the hands; restocking shelves, serving customers, writing down orders and operating phones and tills to name only a few. At Tablehurst cooking of farm lunches or Charlotte's new pies and pasties require diverse and often repetitive work for the hands; whipping eggs or cream, rolling pastry, peeling, chopping, stirring. And the biodynamic preparations get stirred by hand too, an important acknowledgement of the centrality of the hands in a farms life. Steiner doesn't mind people using stirring machines but suggests it's worth thinking about "what passes through the hands".

Are you getting bored of this list? Working with the hands can be like that: repetitive and often tiring for the whole body. And yet it needs to be done, not just here but everywhere in the world in all our lives. And there is a nobility in this kind of work, in contrast to the work of a machine, because the human relationship to it is more direct. St Benedict, founder of western forms of monasticism, revealed a great truth when he said that for a monk, to work is to pray, "Oratre est orare". For Benedict, in the sixth century, it really was all manual work, whether it was in the fields or manuscript illumination, but it was as much to the glory of God as singing of divine office. In the space somewhere between the thought and will necessary to sustain good work and the correct physical action of the hands in carrying out a task is a consciously or not one can let go into an inner physical and non-physical duality of our being is



A map of the human body showing where there are the greatest numbers of nerve endings, along with face parts, the evolutionary importance to us of hands, though impressive is no surprise. This picture it is born into through its hands. The little fist that holds the rattle gradually becomes a superb instrument of great precision and sensitivity as it grows. It is very important that children experience "play" with their hands and indeed with their whole body to develop their full human potential.

discipline which has a natural kinship with meditation or prayer. space and be held at the same time by the physical action. The then somehow in balance.

are higher numbers of nerve endings shows the greatest nipples and genitals. Well, that's how we are made, and given alongside our ability to communicate and procreate, the picture doesn't arise from nowhere. A child discovers much of the world holds the rattle gradually becomes a superb instrument of great

So the two hands in front of me at the keyboard are, in mechanical terms, one of the most complex parts of the body, with a mass of bones, muscles, blood supply and nerve endings, "designed" to be our most important interface with our physical world. Humans uniquely have fully opposing thumbs with a precise and powerful grip between thumb and finger, and we walk on two not four feet. These are the two most important and defining external physical attributes distinguishing us from other creatures. Along with our large brain they have allowed us to become the dominant species on our planet. Without the wisdom of the hands, their obedience to the eye and our clever intentions, we could not be homo sapiens, man with wisdom. The loss or absence of one or both hands is a profound one for any human being.

Someone came up with a statistic which suggests that machines allow us to do 300 times more work than we could do without them. As statistics go it's more than usually vague but watching telehandlers lifting and moving on the farms makes me think it has a ring of truth, and is a slightly frightening thought! When the oil really does run out change will surely come! But we should take courage from our forbears who managed without oil. They built pyramids and cathedrals and great art. And if you say that these wonders came from civilisations with slaves and feudalism, it is true, but surely the challenge is to build a future with a more just social structure. As a species we like a challenge and we certainly have one here! So I want to say working with the hands and tools fashioned by them doesn't have to be a condition of slavery from which we are liberated with wonderful high energy machines; it can be a joy in itself, as well as rewarding through the unique and beautiful things hands can do and make. One of the best examples of this is music which remains one of the most manually demanding areas of human expression, in which fingers playing an instrument can execute staggering feats of dexterity and with results which can affect us deeply. In any case the culture of technology we currently enjoy relies on many social injustices, (and even slavery) of its own, a fact we can easily choose to ignore. There may be something in valuing our hands more which points another way; away from high consumerism towards balance, within ourselves, with each other and our environment. So what is that bird in **your** hand?



Tablehurst
Barn Dance
Saturday 27 Sep 8pm
All welcome

Get involved in your farms

Join the Open Day planning team for 2009

Become a farm shareholder (page 3)

Vote in the Sussex Food Awards

Plan a building for our farm school (page 6)

Attend a walk at Plaw Hatch (1st Sat every month)

Help decorate the Plaw Hatch shop (page 5)

Dance at Tablehurst

Attend the Harvest Festival at Plaw Hatch

And please keep buying our produce!

The Co-op is looking for a team of about six lively and enthusiastic people to help plan an Open Day on Tablehurst Farm in summer 2009.

If you would like to get involved, please contact Robin Evans on 822682 or robin.evans@mac.com or Raph hael Rivera on 07746 632866 or rwrap@yadoo.co.uk



Plaw Hatch
Harvest Festival
Sunday 28 September
4.00 - 6.00pm
All welcome

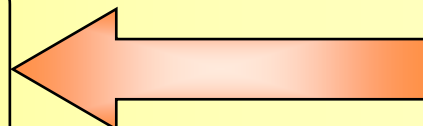
Vote for us!

When you farm as extensively, as considerately and with as much passion as our farmers do there isn't much time to get out there and tell the world about what you are doing. And banging one's own drum often doesn't feel quite right. I think we would all agree though that recognition is well deserved. This year Tablehurst Farm has been nominated for the UKTV Local Hero Food Awards and has made it through to the finals. Thanks to everyone who voted to help the farm get this far. It is one of five finalists for South East England and we are hopeful of topping our region to go on to the grand final in November. A prize of £40,000 awaits, so fingers crossed! You can see all the finalists at www.uktv.co.uk/food/localfoodhero.

Less grand but no less prestigious are the Sussex Food Awards, the posters for which you will no doubt have seen in Tablehurst butchers shop and probably you have been informed about it by Rosemary. Both farms have been nominated in the categories of Sussex Food Producer and Sussex Food Shop of the Year. Barry has been nominated for Best Butcher and Tablehurst Orchards have been nominated for Sussex Drink Producer of the Year. The voting for Best Farmer has already closed, so good luck Peter and Tom!

If you have not already voted we would encourage you to do so, the deadline is October 17th 2008. So as to maximise our chances of making it through to the finals and to make the best use of your votes can I urge people to vote in the following way:

Sussex Food Producer of the Year	Tablehurst Farm
Sussex Butcher of the Year	Barry Western, Tablehurst Farm
Sussex Food Shop of the Year	Plaw Hatch Farm
Sussex Drink Producer of the Year	Tablehurst Orchards



Voting is most easily done via the website www.sussexfoodawards.com (click on vote, you will need to register your email address) or pick up a leaflet from the farm shops.