

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

Winter 2009

Market values

For millennia, traders have been bartering and selling their wares. Think of spices, the Silk Road or the New World, where markets were the centres of activity. It must have become ensconced in our genes – this buying and selling of goods that took us out of the hunter-gatherer period and into the agrarian-social era. It is almost as down to earth as farming itself and as such, connects us with life, land and people.

This is what I felt as I headed down to Forest Row Festival last year, full of joy and pride at selling only what my team and I had grown, plus the beautiful cheese from the farm. So there we were: Alison and I – the first to set up, while a panicked organiser looked nervously around for other stallholders to arrive. Eventually the well practiced team from Tablehurst rolled up and fired up the grill - we were in business.



On the Plawhatch stand we encountered a mixture of curiosity and surprise – apparently we had not been heralded far and wide. We were, I felt, perceived as a bit of a novelty. Never mind, we were there making a point, and we did sell some veg. One customer remarked “How do you guys make any money?” As I pondered this the clouds gathered, the sky darkened and sure enough, it rained. We watched as the precinct emptied, leaving a few bravados walking up and down the stalls. A couple of young buskers took refuge under our canopy and made some noise which descended into a parody of the day – “ it’s raining, it’s raining...”

Yeah, we know.

Not daunted by that day, our next engagement was the Advent Mansion Market at Michael Hall. This was definitely worth it, out of the thousands of visitors, some were bound to come to our stall and buy some



cheese. But the next date was for me the most significant because it really symbolised what markets are about. This was the Forest Row Community Market (FRCM) at the Community Centre, every first Saturday of the month. It's got coffee and cake and BACON BUTTIES! and, oh yes, people selling stuff. We were greeted with such great enthusiasm by the organisers that I committed there

Market Values (cont'd)

and then to attend regularly. Also, Transition Forest Row food group was very happy to see us. This fits in perfectly with, local, community-spirited ideas. It is a place to meet and greet people, and to get producers together. I see huge potential for stalls of all kinds, bringing and buying homemade goods like jams and cakes; even swapping items such as clothes, tools, books and CD's.

I feel the need to vision in these times and something regular like the FRCM provides a base for something built to last. It has been around for 14 years or so, after all. People know about it and it is within 5 miles of both Plaw Hatch and Tablehurst.

I only take what is fresh and seasonal, plus what I have stored in sand, so people see what is available. If we were to reduce our imports, this is what we would have to work with.

So please come to the next Forest Row Community Market and let the organisers know about ideas you have. Here's why you should attend:

- ❖ Meet your neighbours
- ❖ Build community and resilience
- ❖ Have a go at the farmers
- ❖ Buy what is grown locally and seasonally
- ❖ See selling at its most basic - without miles of choices and neon lights
- ❖ Share your ideas
- ❖ Taste the quality of Biodynamically certified produce, and
- ❖ Witness the real value of food.

Contact for FRCM:

Forest Row Parish Council

01342 822661

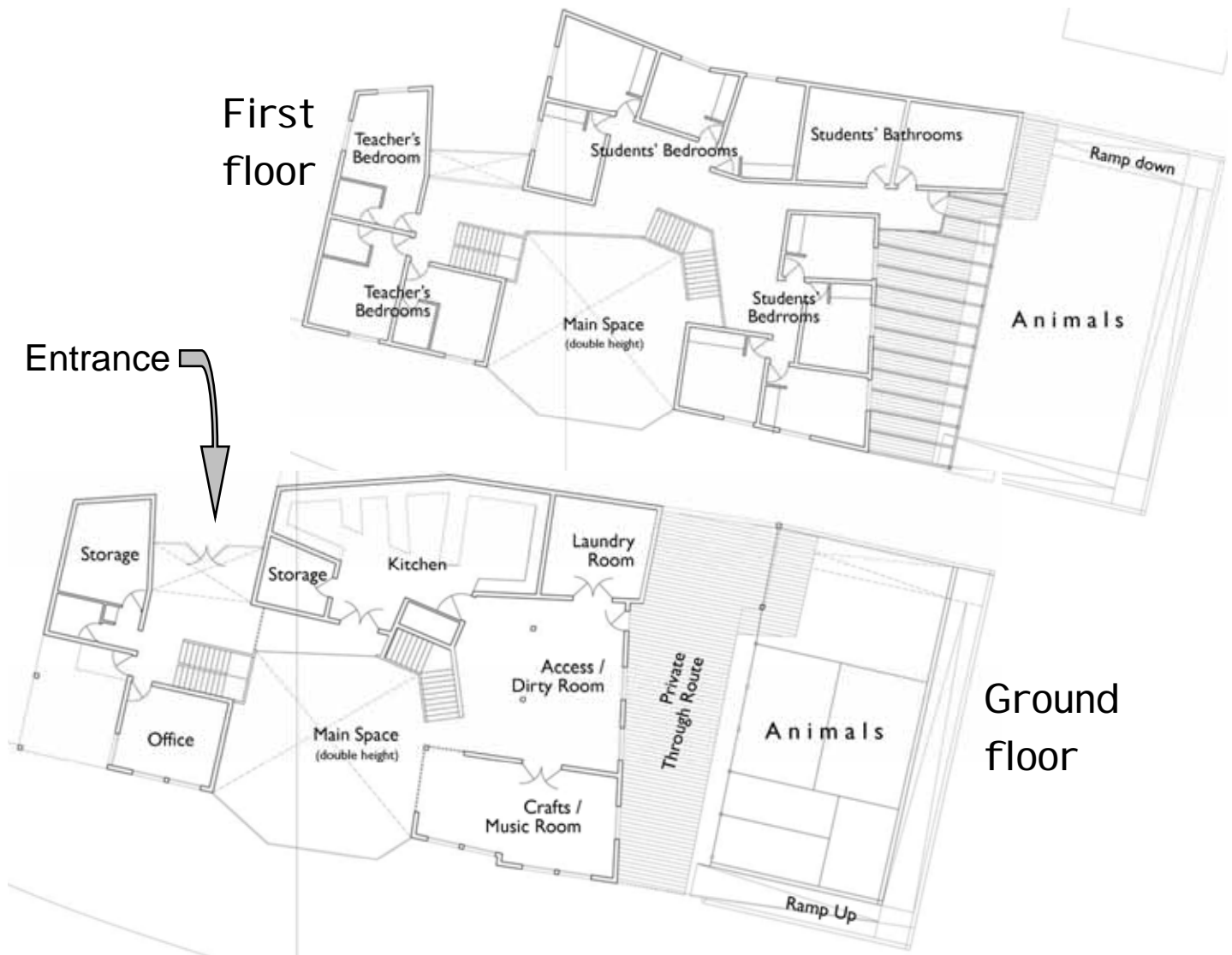
Tony Davis , Plaw Hatch Gardener



A
frosty
day
at
Plaw
Hatch
Farm
10
Jan
2009

Learning on the Land update

As you may remember, Learning on the Land is a residential farming education project to be based on Tablehurst Farm. 1000 school children will live and work on the farm for a week each year to learn about farming, cooking and the importance of links with the land. A building is to be constructed (subject to planning permission) on the farm where the lower cow barn currently stands. Below are the plans that have been developed out of a consensus design process with local adults and children from two local schools. Any comments and suggestions should be sent to georgiat@btinternet.com



Call for letters and emails of support for Learning on the Land

If Learning on the Land is to go ahead, our imminent Lottery (Local Food Fund) application for £290,000 towards our building and start-up costs is vital. To reinforce the bid we need to gather letters of support from as many interested individuals and organisations as possible. We have quite a few from the relevant organisations, but would also like some from the community who support the farms. Please send emails to Georgia Taylor at georgiat@btinternet.com or letters to: Hindleap East, Priory Road, Forest Row, East Sussex RH18 5JF. You might want to mention the following points:

- Interest in farm visits from a school you are involved in (either as a parent, teacher, governor etc)
- Belief that this educational project will enhance the farm and will bring to life some of its educational ideals.
- Belief in experiential learning and the importance of farming for children's education.
- Interest in farming and environmental holiday activities for your children.

Alternatively you can sign the support sheet that will be in Seasons and the Community Centre during February. Please send some words of support to help us gain these funds!

Our application and business plan will be on the Co-op website by 13th February. www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk

Soil cultivation – finding the right way for the future



For many years the farmers at Tablehurst have been looking for alternatives to ploughing – the usual way of cultivating the soil. Ploughing offers many advantages like burying trash and weed seeds but it is time consuming, uses a lot of diesel and it easily creates compaction- especially on heavy and wet soils like ours.

While conventional farmers have been provided with special cultivators, replacing ploughs, for quite a while now, organic and biodynamic farmers could not use these implements: shallow cultivations are usually not sufficient to keep cereal or other crops free of grass and tap-rooting weeds, which are treated with herbicides on conventional farms.

Less than a year ago we finally found an implement which seemed to be the right one for us. The so called “Eco-dyn”, developed during the last 10 years by Manfred and Friedrich Wenz in Germany is being used by several dozens of biodynamic farmers already and we are excited to be the first ones in England. But

what is different compared to other cultivators developed for reduced tillage? The key is accuracy. Shallow cutting of grass and tap roots just below the soil surface allows organic matter to break down quickly and can already create a seedbed after the second cultivation.

The implement is extremely versatile and suitable for all arable crops and conditions. It also comes with an integrated seed drill which enables us to cultivate and drill at the same time. The development of the Eco-dyn is a breakthrough for organic farmers and offers many benefits: time and fuel saving, less compaction, less disturbance of soil life, more organic matter in the topsoil, decrease of weed pressure over several years etc.

The cultivations only reach a depth of about 1-2 inches while deeper layers are not disturbed and wormholes as well as Mycorrhiza remain untouched. With all the organic matter in the top soil, earth worm activity is stimulated and enhanced. In return, the activity of soil organisms and plant roots have to substitute the benefits of ploughing by creating pores for air and water and the translocation of substances like clay etc – a long process. The horizontal cutting of the 12 inch wide shares creates a consolidated surface below the crumbly top soil on which the seeds are laid down. The capillary water can reach the seed there and makes mechanical consolidation like rolling unnecessary. This change of cultivations requires a new way of looking at the soil and we have to learn as we go along. However, just looking at the soil texture and all the worm castings after the autumn cultivations gave us the feeling that we were going the right way.

But not only technical reasons have brought us to a change in cultivations: a common vision of the future of Tablehurst has been established amongst us farmers last May and reducing cultivations has been the first step in realizing this vision. A biodynamic farm as an ideal is a closed organism producing all necessary fertility and feeds on site but one essential thing is rarely being considered: energy. Using the Eco-dyn, in future pulled by a recently purchased Deutz tractor which can be run on pure rapeseed oil, is one small step towards energy self-sufficiency. At



the same time we plan to extend the acreage of arable crops to produce all feeds on the farm (biodynamic field beans and organic chicken food are being bought in at the moment), while the number of animals will be slightly reduced.

Balancing the farm in this way and the planning of new livestock housing with less bedded area and added outside area for the animals we hope will enable us to produce all the straw on the farm in the future. These changes are a real challenge for us and we want to express our gratitude to all the supporters within the growing community around us without whom we would not have been able to make the necessary investments. All the support, advice, interest and participation we are blessed with is vital for the farm and makes it so fulfilling to work here.

David Junghans

Have you heard of the herd of Haffies?



For nine years, Liberty and Abracadabra have been at Tablehurst Farm, so hardly need an introduction, but on 12th May last year at 2.15am Aslan arrived, appropriately looking quite leonine with his curly mane. The three are well and truly bonded and Liberty keeps a good eye on her two sons as they groom each other or play. There is a feeling of a herd when I take them up to their field each morning, leading Liberty and Abra, with Aslan frolicking behind.

Two years ago I pondered about having Liberty put in foal again. She was 13 years old and had had Abra as a four year-old. I asked Peter how he would feel about the idea of having a foal on the farm. He was positive, but the problem was stabling. Up to that point, Liberty and Abra had shared a stable, but that would not be possible with a foal. At that point, I proposed that I should have new stables put up, which would eventually be for the farm's use.

Applications for planning permission were made when Liberty went to stud. There seemed endless complications and procrastinations before we were given permission to put them up, but the "maternity unit" was up with just two weeks to spare.



Aslan was born with an "undershot" or "sow jaw" which meant that his lower jaw protruded an inch beyond the top one. The vet was very pessimistic about this and conferred with an expert from the Royal College of Vets who proposed a major operation to correct it. X-rays were taken and an operation was planned to take place within three months. However, when the time came and more assessments were made, nature had taken over quite wonderfully and corrected the mouth. Aslan is a very fine specimen of a haflinger.

It has been my privilege to share my love of this wonderful breed in a very special place with so many "young" people. Some people have asked "why haflingers?" when we have so many fine indigenous ponies in Britain. They originate from Austria where around 150 years ago a mountain pony was crossed with an arab to produce a medium-sized, elegant pony. The modern haflinger stands about 14.2 to 15.2 hands. They are known for their excellent temperament. They are free going and adaptable, so suitable for driving, dressage, jumping, endurance as well as RDA work.

It is said that happiness is a haflinger!

Sarah Merrifield

I'm a shareholder....in what exactly?

Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm Limited is a unique community supported agriculture (CSA) enterprise. What does that mean in practise? A traditional CSA model involves a group of people contributing a pool of money at the beginning of the year which then allows a farmer to budget and live for the forthcoming year. The group then share in the highs and the lows of the year and the harvest. In some cases they will contribute labour through the season becoming intimately involved in the life of their farm. CSA's may become box schemes where individuals contribute an annual fee for the farmer's initial outlays and then pay per box to help meet running costs. Land may be leased or purchased by the CSA. In the USA where CSA's are more common there are many different structures. The key is that everyone shares in the risks of weather and crop as well as the bounty of the harvest.

Our CSA is a bit different. The risk is distributed through a shareholder structure and the produce is sold through shops. However, the principle is the same, namely locally grown high quality food sold into the community.

The Co-op was incorporated as an "Industrial and Provident Society" (IPS) in 1996. The rules of an IPS reflect international co-operative principles of one member one vote, limited return on capital, fair profit distribution and no artificial restraints on ownership. Our Co-op has about 500 shareholders, who are entitled to attend the AGM and vote on the decisions taken there. The farm businesses are structured as limited companies, Tablehurst Farm Ltd and Plaw Hatch Farm Ltd. The Co-op is the sole shareholder in both. The land and buildings of both farms are owned by St. Anthony's Trust, a local charity dedicated to the promotion of biodynamic agricultural education. The separation of land and business takes decisions on land out of the businesses and allows them to focus on farming.

This structure didn't arise overnight, it was the culmination of a long process of discussion and planning. Tablehurst Farm was owned and run by Emerson College Trust, the neighbouring adult-education college, from 1968. Plaw Hatch Farm was left to St. Anthony's in the early 1980's. Both farm's struggled to operate commercially in the 1990's and both Emerson and St Anthony's were keen to find a way to allow the farms to continue operating without going into conventional agriculture. A group of local people saw a possibility of saving Tablehurst Farm for the community. Over a short period of time £150,000 was raised to buy the assets of the farm business. Tablehurst Farm Ltd was established and the Co-op was born with an initial 100 shareholders. The land at this stage was still held by Emerson College but was later transferred to St Anthony's. The purchase of Plaw Hatch into the Co-op required another fund raising exercise and in 2001 £65,000 was raised and Plaw Hatch Farm Ltd became part of the Co-op. The land stayed with St. Anthony's. So, in 2009 we have the Co-op, owning 2 successful farm businesses and a charitable trust, St. Anthony's, owning the land and buildings of those farms.

The farms are run day-to-day by their respective management teams with little interference from the Co-op. The management committee of the Co-op, consisting of 8-12 shareholders, meets every month or so to hear from the farms, discuss projects, fundraising and the newsletter. Any shareholder wishing to become involved in the Co-op committee should contact myself or the secretary; if you are interested in community agriculture, have a passion for organic farming or just want to get involved we would love to hear from you. (Contact details on back page.)

Shares in the Co-op cost £100, they cannot be sold, there are no dividends (any profit goes back into the farms) and there are no discounts. The benefit of ownership is the knowledge that your money is going towards capitalising a sustainable, local farming business that upholds the highest standards of care and health for its livestock, its crops and its soil. You own a part of the responsibility that farming is and you are part of a valued community enterprise. Treasure it well.

Robin Evans

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.....

Tablehurst Farmer's Notebook

The time of change has continued at Tablehurst. First let us look at the shop. In the last newsletter we told how we had taken on Simon as a new butcher enabling Barry and Rosemary to go on to a three day week. After a couple of months it became clear for Simon that this was not the place for him. We realised that this was for the best but it left us approaching Christmas without enough help and an urgent need for another butcher. We therefore advertised again and have been very lucky in finding Gary, who has had years of experience and Kieran, who has butchered for a couple of years, is eighteen and is just starting his career. We realised though, that if all is to work well, it would need one of the farm team to be involved to help carry it. This is particularly important at Tablehurst, where we want the customers to have the possibility of contact and interaction with the farm and its workers. Raphael was happy to take this on. He has therefore moved from his tasks on the farm, where his work will be missed, to working in the shop. He will have a lot to learn, first getting an overview of all that happens in the shop, and then going on to help manage its further development.

Like others, we cannot see what is coming towards us in the coming months but we hope that our customers will continue to shop with us and that we will not face a big drop in sales. Certainly over Christmas and to date our sales continue as before. Nevertheless we are planning to try selling our meat, one day a week, in some Farmers' Markets. This will be done by David Dean from Sussexway Meat, who has his own small farm and special butchers van. On those days though, he will only sell our products.

Another change in the shop area is that Charlotte will be leaving. She has put a lot of work into developing delicious pies and processed products before starting the café itself. Charlotte has been with us three years, first running the house with our three residents in an excellent way, together with Andrew Carnegie, before taking on the processing work on the farm. We would like to thank her for all she has done and wish her all the best for the future.

On the farm the farmers are Steffi, (Raphael's wife), David and myself. Gaia and Ellie are the two apprentices (we are hoping for a third soon). Max and Lucy are running the house with the residents. Max is studying Biodynamics at Emerson College through the winter and will be back on the farm with us for the summer. There is great excitement building up in the house as Lucy's second baby is expected on February 14. Prior to this, we are also looking forward to Holly, a young lady from Australia, joining the house for a year. She is to take the place of Sandia, who left a few months ago, and will help in the house and on the farm with the residents.

There has been a great deal of looking ahead and planning going on during the last months. On the one hand, since the 'Learning on the Land' project heard it would not be able to use the Emerson College building it was hoping to use, we have had to look at other possibilities where it might best go on the farm itself. It soon became clear that the site of Lower Barn, which houses cattle, is old and in need of replacing, would be the best site. There followed an exciting consensual planning process involving those who wished to partake in the project. The plans have now been drawn up, the drafts presented to the planners and a site visit arranged.

This development in turn has put pressure on the farm team to get its act together, so that a twenty year development plan could be presented to the planners. A synopsis of this can perhaps be presented in a future newsletter. We farmers are still working on what would be the best building for housing cattle and pigs. There are many considerations to take into account and no easy answers. For example one of the few things we buy onto the farm in large quantities is straw. We produce some of our own but the rest we buy in from our neighbour. Although bedding the animals on lots of straw to absorb the muck and urine is a wonderfully simple system producing a great deal of compost, the straw is not organic so we are wondering if we should change the system slightly. This would entail putting some of the barn area down to concrete, where the animals would feed, and the slurry regularly scraped from the yard and then stored in a large container or tank. Even better would be if the cows could have access to an outside area where they would be able to get more sun and be able to feel some rain on their backs. Then there would be even more slurry though as the rain would also end up in the

tank too! The slurry would then have to be carted out on to the fields in summer, when the ground is hard enough not to be affected by compaction. Such a set-up is of course expensive so we are looking at the issues very carefully.

We want to put more emphasis in the next years on the arable side of the farm. With that in view we bought in the summer the Eco-dyn, a cultivator and seed drill (see David's article on page 4). He also mentions the new tractor we have just bought. This was a big decision in the present economic climate. It is the first tractor we have bought for over five years now and so was very necessary, not just for the arable but also for silage making etc.

We chose this model because the manufacturers supply an integrated system to allow it to run on both diesel and pure vegetable oil, with the full warranty. This will be fitted to our tractor next year. We are aware that it would be wrong if large numbers of road vehicles were to use rape oil instead of diesel but we feel it is the right direction for farm tractors. In the past, farms used to keep large numbers of horses to provide the power for ploughing etc and quite a few acres of grass and hay were needed to feed them. In the same way we will have to grow rape but perhaps not quite as easily as grass! It will no doubt be an interesting journey.

40p

is the roughly what a single copy of this newsletter costs to produce.

We would welcome donations towards the cost. Please send a cheque payable to "Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm Ltd" c/o Robin Evans, Westmorland, Park Road, Forest Row, RH18 5BX or make a transfer to our account, sort code 402009, account number 41311050.

Thank you!

Michael Hall Garden

Forthcoming events

Biodynamic gardening workshops

with Dorothea Leber all 11.00am – 2.00pm

- 8 Feb Compost-making, theory and practice
- 22 Feb Biodynamic preparations & how to use them
- 15 Mar Bed preparation
- 29 Mar Propagating from seeds

Earth healing workshop

with Dorothea Leber, Karmit Evenzur and Marion Briggs

28 Feb 10.00am – 5.00pm

Woodland walk and concert

1 May 4.00pm – 6.00pm

Contact Dorothea on **01342 825604** for more information

Plaw Hatch Volunteer Work Days

Third Saturday of every the month 2 – 5pm

Join in some of the seasonal tasks on the farm such as pulling fodder beet, digging docks, weeding carrots and harvesting potatoes.

Tea and biscuits supplied afterwards.

Contact Tony Davis for details

07894 515748

OPEN DAY 19th July 2009

Tablehurst Farm will have its gates wide open to welcome you all to what promises to be a great day out 'down on the farm'. Many exciting and interesting activities are planned for children and adults alike. This will be a memorable day out for all the family - look out for more details.

If you are interested in joining our group to help with the organisation of the day we would love to hear from you.

Jenny Wright 01342 826269 or
jenny.maryw@freeuk.com

New longer opening hours at Plaw Hatch



Opportunity to train at Michael Hall Garden (2 years) under the umbrella of the Biodynamic Apprentice Training Scheme. Includes block-courses by the BDAA & training weekends with the SE Training Group. Contact Dorothea for details 01342 825604

WANTED

Are you a keen photographer?

Capture the essence of our farms, or the events that take place on them, and we will publish your pictures in a future newsletter.

Just send your photos with a brief description to chris marshall at farmco-op@hotmail.co.uk

You can write for us too. Any aspect of the farms or the local food scene that interests you.

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 |