

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

SPRING 2009

Plaw Hatch Farm News

This time of year brings an abundance of activity and intensity. We are trying to keep up with spring. There has been a tremendous interest in people wanting to get involved from film crews to social and schools projects although at this busy time we really need to be mindful of taking on anything new but it is still very good to see people exploring the farm. We have recently opened our doors to WWOOFers (World Wide Opportunities on Organic Farms) and we have found motivated and enthusiastic people to help us with our daily tasks.

A group of us are now meditating regularly on the farm. This helps to manifest the spiritual vision, it has drawn us together as a group and is making us resilient to the everyday ups and downs of farm life.

We welcome Johannes and Anna to our community. Johannes is taking responsibility for all our machinery and field work taking care of the grassland and arable side.

After many years of dedicated hard work Ray Jones is now retiring.

The plans for the bakery are taking shape and we are looking forward to using our home grown wheat in the autumn.

Alison Waldegrave



The Plaw Hatch Team

The shade of my tree

“The shade of my tree is offered to those who come fleetingly. Its fruit matures for somebody whose coming I watch for constantly.” Rabindrath Tagore

What is the essence of our community farms? It's a good question. Essential to the biodynamic model of agriculture is the concept of the farm as an organism. This is akin to seeing the earth as an organism, the Gaia theory as it is known. One biological definition of an organism is its homeostatic impulse, its constant tendency towards balance. In a farm, human consciousness plays a key role in maintaining this balance. Sheep and cattle need to be fed, fields spread with compost, rotations attended to. And on a more subtle level the preparations both stimulate the life in the soil and help restore the balance which our interference in nature's own ecology has disrupted.

There is a natural ecosystem on the farm of woodland and hedgerow which is also part of the organism. As I walk the farm this Easter I take in with delight the emerging wild spring flowers and trees; primrose, bluebell, violet, veronica, and the hazel and willow which are always among the first trees to break from their winter shells. The delicate foliage of stitchwort peeps out from last years matted waste: flowers will follow. Honeysuckle breaks leaf early and begins its renewed run for the light. Such reflections are often more comfortable than art but the biological reality for the participants is no picnic. Every plant and animal depends critically for its survival and reproduction on the checks and balances inherent in the ecology of the whole system. Every empty space is filled and becomes an opportunity for something else. The human species must somehow fit into this infinitely complex web.

So the farmer plants his crop in a prepared seed bed at the right moment for maximum germination and growth so that it will compete well against the natural background seed bank. The farm animals flourish because they are given winter fodder preserved from the previous years growth, and allowed the best grass in summer. The balance of nature is being interrupted but the good farmer knows this and works with nature to support her processes

The farmer's effort is always designed to keep the farm's human community fed. Perhaps this is the essence of it all, and enough said. Perhaps, but I am not sure. If the farm is an organism existing within a multiplicity of organisms, it must coexist with them. The ecologically unbalanced systems of world trade and urban living have an inextricable relationship with our farm. Their economic resources enable the work on the farm to continue by creating our market and supplying much of our infrastructure. Part of our work as a biodynamic farm is to address these wider imbalances by affording good human nutrition and husbandry of the earth. This conscious human work is full of apparent contradictions. We know that our collective dependency on oil is creating climate change, that Gaia is dangerously out of balance. But we need energy to cultivate the land, our customers require their jobs to pay their mortgages and for food, and nearly all of us seem to have to drive cars sometimes. Our farms give livelihood and home to their workers, whose welfare depends on the farm's continuing prosperity, which in turn depends on yours. And that prosperity is linked to oil and its enormous presence in all our lives. While humanity works its way through this maze there seems to be much around us which defies a solution at least in physical and social terms. To see farms merely as food producers in the context of all this is to be myopic, to deny all this rich connectivity.

There is a bigger essence for our farms, one in which we can in no way claim to have an exclusive part, but which is I feel a crucial key to the door into a real future for our planet. As farmers our interest in food, though it is essentially linked, physically and symbolically, to our main work, is not its essence. During Holy Week the farm team sat round the table each day after lunch while Peter read from a meditation on the meaning of Easter, its Christian and cosmic context. Christ's teaching that we should love one another is echoed in some form in the teaching of every faith and moral creed. I experienced a binding power and deepening fellowship as we quietly listened to these texts. Human life, here on the farms as elsewhere, is made up of personal difference and struggle at times. But while we are earth bound and hungry it is the love within, between and beyond us that heals, brings joy and ultimately prevails.

Mark Haughton

Get more involved in your farms

As a shareholder, I was reminded by Chris Marshall's piece in the Autumn 08 News that all the farm land and buildings now owned by St Anthony's Trust has been financed entirely by gifts, much of it from you and me. So not only the working capital for both farm enterprises but also the land and buildings have been made available without consideration of personal financial gain of any kind.

It might interest you to know that this all started in the late 1970's when Old Plaw Hatch Farm, which had been farmed biodynamically for about 10 years, was threatened. A number of us at the Hoathly Hill Community, persuaded the then owner to donate a third of the farm's open market value if we came up with a charitable owner and the balance of the purchase money. When we finally came to launch the appeal in 1979 the Trustees of St Anthony's Trust had agreed to "buy" the farm and a number of Anthroposophical banks and charities had agreed to lend and donate the other two thirds of the original purchase money. In the intervening years the loans have been paid off again largely by donations from hundreds of individual. It has truly been a community effort for the benefit of all who value responsible agriculture and local quality food on your table. The gesture of selfless gift finance underpins every aspect of our local Community Supported Agriculture; long may it stay that way!

Christian Thal-Jantzen

A global land grab

Wealthy countries and agribusiness want farmland, poorer countries need capital – but what happens to the locals?

Rising food prices, the drive for food security, biofuels and profit are fuelling a massive global landgrab by predatory transnational corporations with the collusion of corrupt, greedy governments. The corporations sell crops at high prices to the rich north. The result is that millions of people are being cleared from their customary land and forced into poverty. In the 1990s the Argentine government allowed large parts of Patagonia to be sold off. 'If we don't stop this intrusion,' said Adolfo Pérez Esquivel, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1980, 'we will live in exile in our own land.'

The 'internationalisation' of land has resulted in a frenzy of purchases by the rich and famous. Luciano Benetton has bought 900,000 hectares of Argentinian land for the production of wool for his clothing business. Media magnate Ted Turner owns a modest 55,000ha, which he says will be used for the protection of the environment and breeding and conservation of local endangered species. Douglas Tompkins of North Face clothing owns 800,000ha in Argentina and Chile as a conservation land trust. Tompkins, the second-largest private property owner in Chile, has used the purchase to create the Pumalín National Park in that country, and the Monte León Park in southern Argentina.

Well-publicised good intentions aside, however, some of these *estancias* also enclose massive areas of freshwater, and because they are privately owned, local people no longer have access to this resource. Pérez Esquivel says that the law favours the wealthy *estancieros*. In Benetton's case, for instance, 'the police are allowed to evict indigenous people by force'. In 2002, two indigenous Mapuche formally requested to reclaim 385ha of ancestral family land from Benetton. There was no response, so they occupied the land with their animals, only to be evicted 10 days later.

In 2007, Nahuelquir, Curiñanco and other members of their community reoccupied and set up camp on the land which belonged to their ancestors. The dispute is ongoing. The tragic story of ownership, clearance and dispossession is familiar in our own history. Scottish chiefs signed away their clansmen's land in the Highland Clearances of the

18th century, and dispossessed Highlanders were shipped off to Canada to make way for Cheviot sheep. The House of Lords passed more than 10,000 Enclosure Acts to drive Welsh and English country people off the land. Opposition to enclosure was put down by the landed elite with savagery and deportation. Domesticating their peasants at home prepared British colonialists to expropriate land in Patagonia and around the world. And as Anon says:

The law will hang the man or woman / Who steals the goose from off the common / But lets the greater thief go loose / Who steals the common from the goose.

Agribusiness is displacing small farmers: Korea's Daewoo is buying a 99-year lease on a million hectares of land in Madagascar. In 2007, the Philippines gave Chinese companies access to 1.24 million hectares. In 2008, the Saudi Middle Eastern Foodstuff Consortium announced plans for acquiring 500,000ha of basmati rice land in Indonesia. There is a fire sale of Laotian land going on, with China seeking a million hectares. There is a similar, if less well documented, land-grab commencing in Central and Eastern Europe. In northern Ukraine, for example, northern European farming companies are buying long leases of large blocks of land. They are then turning this land over to a new form of industrialised farming, based on exporting hemp and flax fibres to China and grain to the northern hemisphere, often with biofuels made from by-products. The farming companies offer jobs to some of the local farmers, and they also borrow back the lease payments that they have made to buy northern European machinery. In place of the stable small-scale farming communities of rural Ukraine, therefore, a new cash economy is emerging in which foreign farming companies are pivotal, and in which many of the dispossessed cannot participate.

This global land-seizure destroys rural livelihoods and the environment, leading to conflict, rising poverty, a corporate stranglehold on food, dislocation, social inequity and hunger, so it is vital to reflect on the causes. First, the land-grab is being driven by the ideology of the free market which is in conflict with the co-operative patterns of food-growing

and complex customary land rights characterising traditional agriculture. Second, free market economics treats such commons as air, water, natural resources and land as commodities to be enclosed and traded. Institutions such as the World Bank favour the marketisation of land, finding customary tenure systems hard to support. This is a different paradigm from traditional land systems, which are governed by custom, overlapping rights, and deep cultural and spiritual attachments.

Landed property is a modern invention. Massasoit, a leader of the Wampanoag, asked the Plymouth colonists in the 1620s: 'It cannot be the earth, for the land is our mother, nourishing all her children, beasts, birds, fish, and all men. The woods, the streams, everything on it belongs to everybody and is for the use of all. How can one man say it belongs only to him?'

There are three key questions that need addressing:

1. How can the multiple and layered rights of land-users be secured?
2. How can land access be secured for both land-users and overall societal benefit?
3. How can land be managed to recognise cultural diversity and tradition?

So what to do? Active research needs to be undertaken into how nations can secure their land for local farmers and indigenous peoples, not profit-hungry corporations, though it may be that some companies can be sensitive partners. On the demand side, we need to ask how rich importer countries can provide more of their own food, thus lessening the burden on the rural communities of the south. What we need to underpin these initiatives is a new associative approach to the management of farm land; one in which multiple interests in, and uses of, land can be encouraged, such that food chains can be shortened and the land tilled according to the principles of long-term sustainable production. At its core, this is about creating, in the words of agricultural pioneer Trauger Groh, a culture of community supporting agriculture and agriculture supporting community.

This is an edited version of an article by Martin Large and Neil Ravenscroft, originally published in the Ecologist in March 2009.

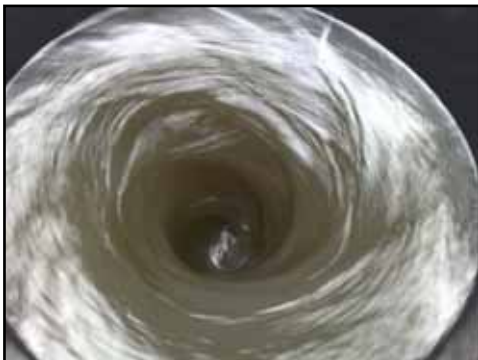
Michael Hall Garden Workshops

The garden at Michael Hall is a wonderful place. It is enclosed by walls with a grandly decayed entrance to the main house, and a wrought iron gate toward the wood yard. The school classes have their beds at the low end beyond which is a lovingly tended collection of raised beds, bordered by permanent poly-tunnels and topped off with an antique glass house. Pop into the poly-tunnels and you have a pleasant flavour of the garden even in wintry weather: mixtures of salad and radishes surrounded by self-seeded mixed leaves recalling last year's vibrant crop, with a splash of tulips near the door. I have to admit that I am biased: I like my gardens edible and I like this garden a lot. So I was delighted to learn about biodynamic gardening here. On the day, I was pretty sure that it would go well over my head with preparation numbers, stellar timing, crop rotation and other arcane intricacies.



The biodynamic preparations crew

I missed the first workshop on composting. It must have been jolly hard work for the compost heaps in the garden are several yards long and needed turning. We met in the gardening room amid hand illustrated gardening plans and wool carding machines. Ranging from experienced gardening enthusiasts to the wholly ignorant (well, me), we relaxed into Dorothea's engaging introduction to biodynamic preparations.



A well-stirred spray preparation

There are several preparations, each with their different effects to regulate the plants' local environment and growth, such as encouraging root formation or leaf development. The preparations are used in minute quantities and often in combination on the compost heap, recently prepared beds or sprayed directly on to the plants according to their needs. But first we needed to prepare the preparations.

Curiously, the preparations are rather unexciting to look at. Stored in peat to protect them from environmental effects, the foundations of biodynamic gardening sat in their small jars looking like different textures of earth or browned seeds with no odour even from the cow pat pit. After treating a compost heap and beds directly by burying tiny pellets of preparations in a certain order we set to work to spray the garden.

First was the stirring. The preparations for spraying the beds are diluted in large quantities of water and then 'woken up' by hand stirring ideally for an hour. There is something immensely soothing about gazing at the smooth deep whirlpools in the bin to the sound of roaring as the water vigorously changes direction. So far, so good. However, the preparation 'cow pat pit' is not an accidental name. Think of it as sour dough needing care and the right environment, or perhaps a green yoghurt. The maturing pit needs occasional but thorough mixing. Trying to emulate Dorothea's practised example of shovel work, I helped to move the mixture from its resting spot to the mixing board. Well, I tried but in truth I succeeded only in spraying someone with deep green manure while simultaneously leaving most of the shit on the shovel. I retired to the safer pastures of stirring the water.

In keeping with later mornings, Dorothea interspersed the practical and theoretical so I never felt like I was doing a lot of work or overwhelmed by information. After our stirring and mixing, we had time for a chat and discussion before we ranged across the garden with brushes and buckets to spray the beds like priests blessing the flock wholesale.

The third workshop was on bed preparation and crop rotation. From the paddy fields of China to the mountain agriculture of South America, bed preparation does much to define the agricultural landscape. The strip system still echoes through the land in many parts of Britain when the sun is low. To work the land, each continent seems to have invented the hoe and rake, to which Dorothea adds the fork to make her choice of prized tools. Versatility is key here. The sharpened hoe makes easy work of removing surface growth, raising and re-pointing beds or drawing a seed line. The fork and rake make a great weeding combination amongst many other uses. Dorothea likes her beds raised partly for superior drainage, greater surface area and also because they are closer to the hand. After an hour of dragging couch grass from an infested bed, my back agrees with the raised bed argument.

Following Dorothea's example we wielded our hoes to cut away the weeds in the top layer, formed the shifting waves of paths and beds before aerating the soil using forks. Then the rake appeared like a well trained masseur to find hidden weed roots and ease the rough edges from the beds, refining the rich crumbly soil in preparation for planting.

Rotation of crops considers not only what the plant takes from the soil but what it fixes there. Growing the same crop on the same plot tends to create one sidedness in the local environment which rotation moderates. Whether rotating a rich feeder with a lighter one, or rotating across plant families or following a root, stem, leaf, flower, fruit and fallow approach, the quality of the land is central to the ethos of sustainability and abundance. Perhaps it is for this reason that the biodynamic approach is so vital for it is in the measure of what we give that we receive.

The final workshop was on growing from seed. Working mainly in the nursery which is insulated throughout by bubble sheeting, the first impression is the lively density of the humid air. Just past the old horse tackle still hanging on the whitewashed wall, every surface is covered with full seedling trays, one corner has an enormous pile of compost bags and another has a fittingly tiny store of seeds from which the whole springs.

We set to work planting fresh seeds in the initial trays, then transferring larger seedlings from the initial trays into larger planting trays. Maintaining a consistent supply of varied vegetables over the growing season requires growing seedlings in batches over a period of weeks. Lettuces are planted every week, radishes every two weeks, and other plants at different intervals. I am not quite where in this the basil falls, but its dull seeds turned a magnificent azure blue after the first shower and glistened amongst a light layer of sand.



Transferring seedlings in the nursery - press from the side!

Transferring seedlings is simple. Roots go down, leaves go up. Only, if you are like me, you want to press down the top of the earth around the seedling. This is not the way to do it at all, for the roots get squashed and crushed by such amateur planting. Using dibbers, we pressed the earth close to the seedlings from the side. And then it was time to plant some Kohlrabi in the poly-tunnel. Naturally, there was a good tip: plant in a triangle formation to maximize the use of space. It was lunchtime. The luxuriant, warm air of the tunnel only stimulated my hunger. Beds of mizuna, rocket and winter parslane were only too close to hand. Unable to resist, I munched happily as I planted, finding the mizuna quite comparable to horseradish and with a wonderful full texture. Leaving a full bed, I felt surprisingly full myself.

Workshops ended with tea and a munch of homemade bread, or nuts or some other delicacy to sate the appetite while we considered the questions we had been nurturing. I had expected to feel tired after 3 hours in the garden yet each time I left with a sense of energy and well being.



Dorothea makes light work of tray preparation

Dorothea brings a graceful and nurturing enthusiasm to the workshops which is quite irresistible. Her depth of knowledge and tremendous breadth of experience radiates through the lectures and practice. Yet what makes the morning so vivid is how she lives deeply in the world she is sharing here. She has made the garden inviting as much by this quality as by what grows there. While the lengthening days bring to a close the workshop series for this year, there are ample opportunities for volunteering in the garden and sharing in Dorothea's knowledge and vision. Or just visit this remarkable garden that is all but hidden behind the red brick walls that stretch up the hill. See you there!

Roger Lyon

*For further information, contact Dorothea at
Michael Hall on 01342 822275*

Community involvement in managing the farms

When we think about community supported farming, we tend to think in terms of Co-op shares, the AGM, volunteer work on the land, the study groups, visits to the shops, open days, farm walks and the wonderful barn dances. Yet, community involvement in our farms goes deeper, through community participation in, the Farm Management Groups. Alongside the farm teams, the Management Groups are core institutions of the farms, and represent a direct link between the Co-op, its members and the everyday operation of the farm.

At Tablehurst, the Management Group meets formally once a month. Membership is by invitation from the group. There is no minimum or maximum membership, and there are no fixed terms or reappointment. Rather, the group forms around the farmers and those in the group remain active while they feel that they have a part to play in guiding the farms. There is relatively small turnover of members, with continuity being important. The Group currently comprises 4 Tablehurst farmers, 1 Plaw Hatch farmer, 1 Emerson student and 6 community members. The 'community' members are:

Neil Ravenscroft (Director and Chair)
Julia Frazer (Director and Company Secretary)
Rachael Pereira (Director)
Mark Haughton (Director)
Oliver Fynes-Clinton (Secretary)
Juergen Schumacher

The other members are:

Peter Brown (Managing Director), David Junghans, Raph and Steffi Rivera (farmers), Susan Cram from Plaw Hatch and Robin Evans (Co-op Committee member and Emerson BD student)

The purpose of the Management Group is to guide and support the farmers in their work, to make key strategic decisions, and to carry out legal governance functions in areas such as finance and health & safety. The Management Group thus combines the role of a Board of Directors with that of an advisory group standing around the farmers. In legal terms, the community has a strong presence in the management of the farm. And this is important in terms of ensuring connection between those who have put up the share capital and those who run the farms. But this is just the start. The real strength of the Management Group lies in the way that it works to support the farmers and to share, as far as possible, the burden and responsibility of running such a complex organism on behalf of our community.

Tablehurst Farmers Notebook

Spring is in the air! The seeds are sown, most of the ewes have lambed and are out in the fields again, and the pigs are out too. They are in a different field to last year but also up at Springhill.

Coppicing

We have many hedgerows on the farm. Some are trimmed back every three years by our neighbours' hedge-cutter, some are laid by hand and some are coppiced. The hedges which have not been trimmed but have just been left to grow, for maybe fifteen to twenty years, then need to be cut or coppiced. This is done nearly at ground level during the winter months, so that the new growth in spring will then produce a good thick hedge from the bottom up. We have to complete this task by the end of February. After fifteen years growth much of the wood is of a useful size which can be used for different things but particularly for firewood. We coppiced a lot this winter and one can still see

And this is about bringing a balance to the management of the farm, in terms of: producers and consumers; external and internal views of the farm; farm and business management skills; and the Co-op and the everyday operation of the farm.

We see this as providing the thinking realm, set alongside the willing realm of physical work on the farm and the feeling realm of the farm team. This combination of head (Management Group), heart (farm team) and limbs (those who work on the farm and in the shop) is the central and indivisible whole that guides the farm in its work. Central to this – at the heart of the farm - is the farm team; the farmers. Yet, what is a heart without head and limbs? Everyone on the farm and in the Management Group has a part to play in running the farm – and the strength of the farm is a reflection of the strength of all who are involved. In this way, community support goes to the core of the farms and their work.

Community membership of the farm management groups is thus connected primarily with commitment to the farms, rather than to the specific skills that individual members bring. Some community members do bring skills – farming, property management, finance and accounting, and the like – but even their value lies as much in the generic skills of listening, questioning, contributing, supporting and communicating that are possessed by all of us. And, as anyone who has shopped at the farms at Christmas, or come to a barn dance or other function will attest, even these skills sometimes have to be subordinated to the higher skills that all Management Group members must possess, namely: lighting and cooking BBQs; making salads; packing sausages; retrieving turkeys from the cold store; catching escaped pigs; completing grant applications; writing letters; hosting visits; making speeches; and washing up ... So, community, there are jobs for all, and important ones at that.

If you want more information about the Tablehurst Farm Management Group, or you feel that you have something to contribute to the farm, please do contact me, or any member of the group.

Neil Ravenscroft
Chair, Tablehurst Farm Management Group
Tel 01342 824598
neil@reevesravenscroft.co.uk

heaps of wood in the fields. We will cut out all the useful firewood in the next weeks and burn what is too small to use. Most of our houses are heated with wood fires so this is important to us.

Swimming

As many of you will know about 10 years ago we built two ponds on the farm. The one you see as you drive into the farm is mainly for the ecology and wildlife. The other is larger and is to enable the farm to irrigate crops and to provide water for all the livestock. We have a pump beside the dam which pumps the water to the poultry, to the various water troughs and to the polytunnels and buildings. The pond is beautiful and has become part of the landscape. In the summer ever more visitors go there to swim, many who have no other connection to the farm. Often rubbish and even glass is left although most people respect it and look after it. This has become an ever bigger problem, which has created quite a dilemma for us. On the one hand we do not want to deprive people of the use of the pond but on the other there is an ever larger risk that an accident will happen as more people use the pond. This could put the farm in a difficult position as there is the possibility that we would be made liable and our insurance would not cover us. We have therefore made the difficult decision to fence off the pond properly with large signs stopping access for everybody. We are sorry but I am sure you will all understand why.

We hope this Easter has been a joyful time for you all. Peter Brown

A day in the life of a farm apprentice.....

It's 5.45 am and I have just poured my first cup of coffee for the day. It has been an uneventful night in the sheep barn so I decide to find a bench to perch on and watch the sun come up. Before leaving I take one last stroll through the barn to see if there are any suspect-looking sheep about to give birth. No, they are all quietly munching silage or sleeping so I head for the door. When I reach the end of the barn I accidentally stand on a plastic bag which we use for feeding grain from...I freeze on the spot....did they hear the rustle of the plastic I wonder....i slowly turn around to see one of the big Dorset ewes poke her head out of the pen behind me, she gives me an inquisitive look.... "I could have sworn I heard her pick up the food bag" I imagine her thinking, but luckily she doesn't make a sound and goes back to eating silage. "Phew" I think to myself "that was close" and I carefully step off the bag.....it rustles again and that's it, the Dorset is back again, and she lets out a loud "Baa" that informs the rest of the barn.... 'It's Feeding Time!' Within seconds all the sheep are up creating a mighty chorus of bleating "baaa's, 200 little faces looking at me wanting and expecting food, I give them an apologetic look and exit the barn!

After a while they settle down and I watch the sun come up in peace, it is a rare moment on the farm to sit and appreciate the landscape around and I try my hardest not to let my thoughts wander to my work for the day ahead and to just enjoy the quiet time.

At 7am the farm team comes together to discuss the work for the day. Every day is different so it is important to all meet first thing. There are routine jobs each day, and for me that starts with Lucy, our Jersey cow. It is my first job to milk her and it is such a nice way to start the day, I milk her by hand just kneeling on the straw bedding in her stable. At the moment it doesn't take very long as she doesn't give so much milk, I expect this will go up soon when she goes back out to the pasture. The milk we get is used for the farmer's breakfast and when she produces more we will probably make yoghurt to go with our muesli!

After milking I start to get the pig food bagged up and on to the trailer ready for feeding. The pigs are my responsibility at the moment. As an apprentice I will get to focus on different areas over the two year program, I have found this a really good way to learn because I have to be conscious of everything that happens with the pigs from health care to record keeping.

Another part of the apprenticeship program is to complete a farm project of your own. I have been trying to decide what to do that is both useful for the farm and something that interests me. Through working with the pigs I have come across a few problems and I have at the moment something that I call the 'injury pen' where I have a few sick piggies residing. One of them is a sow who jumped over a gate and injured her foot in the process. I called the vet out to look at her and he suspected a possible fracture. He administered some pain relief and anti inflammatory, and advised me to observe her over the next few weeks and if there were no improvements to call him back. During the next week I watched carefully to see how she was progressing and there was no sign of improvement, I started to wonder if there would be any good herbal remedy that I could give her, then I remembered that when I broke my wrist I was given comfrey tea as a remedy. Comfrey has a Latin name meaning 'bone knit' and so I thought I would try to feed her some comfrey leaves or make some tea from the leaves and add it to her food. I can't say that this treatment has cured her, as she still has quite a limp but she is definitely doing better.

I am keen to use herbal treatment wherever possible in the healthcare of the pigs and even to use herbs grown on the farm would be best. It is a subject I know little about and am interested in learning, perhaps this could be a good subject for my farm project!?

After a good hearty breakfast it's time to go 'bedding and feeding'. This has been a routine job over the winter for me as it coincides with the feeding of the pigs. Today I have Stuart and Terry with me in the car so I turn on George Michael and do a little 80's dancing as we head down the drive, this gets them laughing and we arrive at Springhill in good spirits and full of energy ready for rolling the bales of straw and spreading it throughout the barns. The next stop is the pig field for feeding, I just moved them out this week from the barns. It is so nice to see them on the land again; they are contently rooting around and sunbathing when we arrive. I have spent a lot of time working on the set

(continued overleaf)

A day in the life of a farm apprentice (continued from page 7)

up of the field for them; I learnt lots of new skills in the process and it's very satisfying to see them in it. For the rest of the morning we go around all of the cattle in the barns feeding silage and bedding down with straw.

After a good few helpings of lunch I head in to the sheep barn for the afternoon. This involves the trimming of the ewes feet, ear tagging and castrating of the lambs, dagging the ewes bums and numbering the ewes and lambs. I start by working my way round the pens trimming the feet, it's quite a work out getting them on their backs to cut their feet. After doing a few sheep I am down to my t-shirt and a little red in the face, a family walk in and watch me as I turn over one of the nice dainty Lleyrn ewes "Wow" the mother say's to her children "Did you see the lady pick up the sheep, she must be very strong", I contemplate telling her it took me twenty minutes to turn over the big dorset in the pen behind but I decide to avoid the humiliation and I just smile. Once the feet are all trimmed we begin ear tagging the lambs and recording the numbers, some of them Steffi has chosen as possible replacements and they are tagged with a different colour to set them apart, then the tails are docked and if they are male castrated, then the number of each ewe and lamb is sprayed on its side. They are then moved to a group pen for a few days and from there out to the field. It is almost 5pm and we have finished clearing out the pens and have moved the new mums in so I go and get the grain ready for their evening feed. I bring it up and leave it for Steffi to feed the bleating mob of ewes and I retreat to Lucy's stable to top up her hay rack and separate her calf so that we have milk in the morning, and so I end my day as I started with the jersey cow!

Ellie Woodcock

Dates for your diary

2 May	10am	Plaw Hatch Farm Walk
6 June	10am	Plaw Hatch Farm Walk
7 June	3pm	Tablehurst Farm Walk
27 June		Tablehurst Barn Dance
4 July	10am	Plaw Hatch Farm Walk
19 July		Open Day (see below)
1 August	10am	Plaw Hatch Farm Walk
5 Sept	10am	Plaw Hatch Farm Walk
18 Sept	8pm	Co-op AGM
19 Sept	4pm	Michael Hall Woodland Walk and Concert
26 Sept		Tablehurst Barn Dance

Can you help?

Michael Hall Garden, Plaw Hatch Farm and Tablehurst Farm are interested in running a joint stall every Thursday morning at East Grinstead Farmers' Market and are looking for volunteers to help man the stall.

If you can assist, please contact Dorothea Leber on 01342 825604 or dorothea.leber@michaelhall.co.uk

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

TABLEHURST OPEN DAY

A family day out with a difference

Hot food, entertainment and countless activities to get to know the farm and entertain your children

Don't miss it!

Sunday 19th July 2009

