

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

AUTUMN 2009

Bees !

Plaw Hatch has long upheld the tradition of beehives on farms. They have come and gone as successive beekeepers have come and gone. In recent years Alastair Lee has kept some of his hives at the farm and currently has two vibrant colonies. Some more hives have recently appeared - but more about these later.

The keeping of bees on farms makes good common sense. We hear in the USA of colonies being shipped from one end of the country to the other, in their thousands. We have also seen

the heart rending photographs of trucks overturned, the debris of broken hives littered across the roadside, and the air thick with clouds of disorientated and distressed bees, many of which have to be destroyed. Maybe, like me, you stared at those pictures and thought 'how madhow absolutely madsurely we can do better than this?'



Possible location for new bee garden

In this context the word 'surplus' is all important. There is no true honey surplus If we have taken the bees' winter stores and replaced them with sugar. The fact that bees can, and have, survived on sugar feeding is no reason to suppose that it does them no harm, in the long term. If we also consider the myriad manipulations which are regularly visited on bees by many beekeepers, a picture of something akin to factory farming arises. One unfortunate result of such practices has been the devaluation of honey into a sort of cheap flavoured sugar paste, rather than the precious, life sustaining substance which it is when produced sustainably.

(continued overleaf)

Certainly on a mixed farm with varied forage and an absence of pesticides the honey bee can thrive, crops can be pollinated, and, as long as there is a surplus, we can share in the bounty of delicious honey and pure beeswax.



Bees (continued)

The biodynamic method of beekeeping differs markedly from that of conventional and commercial beekeeping. Some of the principles are given below:

- The bees build natural honeycomb without the use of prefabricated wax or 'plastic wax'. The body of the hive is constructed of natural material such as wood, straw or clay, (some modern hives are now made of polystyrene and other plastics).
- The queen is not confined to the brood box by a mesh panel, but is allowed to roam throughout the hive. Her wings are not clipped to prevent swarming, neither is she replaced systematically by the beekeeper (who may think that she is getting a little too old for the job). Thus, the unique relationship between the queen, the workers and the drones is honoured.
- Enough stores of the bees' own honey and pollen are left in the hive for their use, and only in an emergency is sugar fed. (In such cases the sugar is rendered more digestible to the bees by being mixed with chamomile tea, a percentage of honey and a tiny amount of salt.)
- The bees use their own pollen and are not stimulated into early colony growth by the supplying of artificial pollen feeds, (which, unbelievably, are usually made of soya and peas)
- The beekeeper takes all possible steps to maintain the vitality of the colony, using only biodynamically approved control measures against disease, and guarding against causing unnecessary stress.

This last principle is a very important one in this day and age. The stresses imposed upon our bees are not only environmental, such as pesticides, overhead power cables, mobile phone masts etc., but also the stress that can be caused by the beekeeper's own manipulations of the colony in order to gain greater output. The subject of these manipulations would comprise another article of considerable length. Suffice to say here that such 'industrialisation' of bee colonies has no place on a biodynamic farm.

Returning to Plaw Hatch - as I mentioned before, some different hives have now been placed at the farm. These are 'alternative' hives' and constitute ongoing research to discover the most 'bee friendly' hives, which are suitable for our environment and climate. At present they are situated near the path to the woods, and one is outside the students' house.

We have recently located what we hope is an ideal location for our new bee garden. Its creation will be ongoing throughout the seasons and we hope to organise work parties to help us with various tasks. The garden and hives will be managed by the newly formed Natural Beekeeping Trust, whose headquarters are situated at Plaw Hatch. The bee garden will eventually contain an information point, and this structure will replace the 'disappearing log cabin' which was opposite the shop. The new structure will be a little more modest than the cabin (which became subject to the rigours of planning permission).



We are very grateful to Tom Ventham for giving our fledgling project such enthusiastic support and also to Susan Cram and other members of the Plaw Hatch team who have been so helpful over the past few months. Two beekeeping courses for beginners have been arranged for October, and these will be based at the farm. Details and other information can be found on our website at www.naturalbeekeepingtrust.org The website is still undergoing construction - comments and ideas are very welcome. Finally, we hope that if you are walking on the farm, you will pay a visit to the bees and, keeping a respectful distance of course, will introduce yourself to them.

Preserving your vegetables

Traditionally, when there are lots of vegetables in summer and autumn, we think of preserving things: sterilizing, drying, pickling, putting things into clamps and cellars, freezing, etc.. My favourite way is lactic fermentation, (or making cultured vegetables is another name), because it's about the only method that adds to the goodness of the vegetables, rather than taking away from it.

Lactic fermentation is an ancient form of preserving food. The traditional German "sauerkraut" is one example, but there are more ancient ones in many cultures. When I was a child, we made Sauerkraut every year. We used to drive to the Biodynamic farm at the "Kaiserstuhl", where we bought our vegetables ever since I got a bad rash from conventional ones. We loaded our car with carrots, potatoes, apples, etc. to store in our cellar for the winter, and also bought about 50kg cabbage to store as sauerkraut.

It was always fun to make it. My mum washed everything, the cabbages got cut in half, the cores were taken out with a special drill like tool, and my dad would shred them with the "Krauthobel", the "cabbage plainer". It is made from wood, the blades are metal and very sharp, the kind of thing one isn't allowed near when one is little. There is a kind of wooden box, into which the cabbage goes, and then my dad moved that forwards and backwards over the blades and the shredded cabbage fell into the bath tub. My mother weighed the salt, and the herbs, I think it was just juniper berries, (which I used to hate), and caraway. We were quite progressive, using about half the salt of the traditional recipes.

In the beginning we still used the oak barrel from the grandparents. A layer of shredded cabbage was put in, some salt, juniper berries and caraway sprinkled on top, and then it got pressed in with fists and the potato masher, as soon as the juice came, the next layer went in, got pressed, and so on. In the end there would be so much juice, all just from the cabbage, that everything was completely covered. Then some large

cabbage leaves got put on top, then the boards, which fitted the barrel exactly, then 2 large heavy stones, then a sheet. Later came the "Gärtopf", a huge improvement, my mum didn't have to wash the top of the sauerkraut every week. It has something like a trench round the top, and the lid sits in water, which prevents air from getting in. Once it starts fermenting, it bubbles. We also made lactic fermented gherkins, beetroots, beans in large glass jars.

The beauty about the lactic fermentation is that you don't need to cook, heat, boil, add sugar, etc. The friendly bacteria are inherent in the vegetables. The fermentation is an anaerobic process, that's why we press, all the air comes out, that's also why it's very important, that the vegetables are weighed down and covered with liquid. One doesn't need a lot of salt, but some to stop putrefying bacteria in the very beginning of the process, once the various lactobacilli got going, the "baddies" haven't got a chance anymore. For a big barrel in the cellar it takes at least 4 weeks to be ready, for a one litre jar 3 days to a week.

As a child I wasn't especially fond of the sauerkraut, we had it as salad or lightly heated (my mum always took care to not heat it too much, to not destroy all the life and goodness in it). As a student I lived on it all winter. Lately I started experimenting with mixed vegetables, which I like much more than just cabbage. Everything, that needs using, or is in danger to be hit by a frost will go into my "Gärtopf": Florence fennel, celery, daikon, red kale, some cabbage too of course, peppers, I love to add sea weed, just anything I feel like. Really nice is just carrot by itself, lactic fermented.

Why lactic fermentation is good for you ...

The raw fermented vegetables help to re-establish your inner ecosystem - they are full of natural probiotics.

They are easy to digest, because the friendly bacteria have done some of that already, i.e. converted sugars and starches into lactic acid, and the enzymes in the fermented vegetables help to digest the food that you eat with them.

The friendly bacteria in the fermented vegetables are something like enzyme powerhouses.

They are very alkaline and very cleansing.

And most of all they are tasty.

How to do it ...

I shred, grate, or cut finely, everything. 60 – 80g salt per 10 kg of vegetables.

In a large bowl I work some of the veg. and some salt with my hands, like kneading bread, until the juice starts coming. Then I put it into a large jar (minimum is 1liter, it doesn't work if it's too small) or into my 10l Gärtopf. Then I press that layer, put some caraway, or coriander, mustard seeds, etc .with it. And add the next layer. - Never fill the jar more than three quarter, because things bubble.

On top goes a large leaf, in a jar I use a smaller, clean jar, filled with water as weight. The juice does need to cover the veg., if there isn't enough, one needs to add some boiled and cooled down water. The fermentation likes to happen in the dark. Therefore I wrap a towel round. If I'm impatient and can't wait with eating, I put it in a very warm place.

Later it's best kept in the fridge to stop it from getting too acid. The yeast which develops on top is harmless, just wipe it off.

Tablehurst



Open Day

19 July 2009



Tablehurst Farmer's Notebook

The farming

Well, it has been another busy summer on the farm. As ever the weather played a major part in things and has not made it all easy. Our biggest concern is that we are going into the winter with much less fodder than ever before. We made a first cut of hay and silage earlier than usual, expecting then to have a good second cut. A very dry spell followed here in the south east and the grass just did not grow. The clover kept going, giving enough for the animals to eat but not enough to make the silage we so badly need.

David did well with the harvest despite the old combine giving a few problems (as usual!) Some fields yielded well and others not, pretty average for the farm. We grew field beans for the first time and were very happy with the result. Beans are an important part of the pig ration as they are high in protein. It has been the first season with the new cultivator and David is busy, as I write, preparing the autumn seedbeds but in extremely dry ground. The machine works very well in some conditions such as stubble but it is not all easy in the matted grass of old pastures. We have been trying different ways of using it, a steep learning curve! We can see some differences after the one year but it is going to take several years before we know if it will bring about the changes we are hoping for.

The stock has done well on the whole but our biggest frustration has been with the sheep. As you know we have a strict grazing plan to try to prevent intestinal worms. We give our fields a complete break from sheep for a whole year which should deal with the problem. For instance we grazed the fields at Kidbrooke with sheep last year and this year they were at Springhill again. The frustrating thing is that the deer, which also damage our crops, carry a particular worm which affects our sheep badly. We have then been forced to worm them, which we have been taking so much trouble to prevent. This has only happened during the last two years and we do not really know yet what action to take, as we can not realistically kill or keep the deer off the farm as we sit right next to Ashdown Forest!

The people

There have been a number of comings and goings over the summer. Gaia, who completed her two year apprenticeship, has gone on to study biodynamic agriculture further in Holland. Bernado has joined us as a new apprentice from Portugal and is doing well. Ellie, who is just starting her second year as an apprentice, has become indispensable! We have had a number of short term helpers over the summer, mainly from Germany and Austria who have all played their part. Bryony, who studied at Emerson with David, has split her time between here and Michael Hall garden. She has particularly helped us gather the ingredients, make and use the BD preparations. She is shortly off to India for some months to help with biodynamics there. Lastly, we are all waiting in anticipation for Steffi to have her baby which is due any day now. Lily, Max and Lucy's daughter, born six months ago, is doing well.

The buildings

In July we had a little gathering to celebrate the completion of Raph and Steffi's house and the apprentice rooms. We now have a blueprint of how we want to develop the buildings into the future. We shared this at the AGM last week and the plans for the ones we want to tackle now are being submitted this week. In the next newsletter, by which time we hope the planning permission will be approved, I will explain our plans.

The Open Day

We had a very successful Open Day with lots of people who really enjoyed themselves despite the slightly dodgy weather. I would like to thank everybody who came and helped but particularly the group of ladies who met week after week to prepare it and without whom it could not have happened.

Peter Brown

Stop press!
Steffi's baby has arrived! A boy named Joshua. Mother and baby are doing well.

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.....

AddressPostcode

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

Raw and Wild ...

Saturday September 12th saw the first of what I hope will be many market days at Plaw Hatch.

The courtyard to the side of the shop, which is usually full of our cars, was transformed into a colourful market square for the Raw & Wild day. Why hadn't we seen the potential of this part of the farm before?

Raw and Wild day was an idea born out of my interest in eating raw food and wanting to share the benefits, that I am experiencing, of eating a less cooked diet with others.

Various 'raw foodies', came out of the woodwork, wanting to share their delicacies and their knowledge. There were stalls selling cakes, biscuits, crackers, sandwiches, chocolates, superfoods and books, as well as craft stalls and recycled clothes. There were various food preparation demos going on throughout the day and we made use of one of the barns for talks.

Live music, a café, face painting and activities for children, topped off by a gorgeous dose of sunshine, made for a perfect festival day.

Visitors to the festival had the opportunity to wander around the farm, many had never been before and the feedback about the shop was particularly positive. The amazing variety and colourful display of our biodynamic produce mean that the shop sales doubled on that day compared with usual Saturdays. Our raw dairy produce was very popular.

Tony, our gardener, took a group on a tour of the garden, while a man called Rob took others on a wild food forage.

The atmosphere in our market courtyard was one of contentment. "The only thing missing", said a participant "was the smell of food cooking!". You can't please all the people all the time!

We are now thinking of having themed market days throughout the year, with the next one being a Christmas market in December. There will undoubtedly be cooking smells on that day. Hope to see you there.

Julia Ventham

Venison at Tablehurst

Did you know that you can now buy venison at Tablehurst Farm Shop? Supplies cannot be absolutely guaranteed, but we expect to have a full range of cuts available most weeks, including roasting joints, steaks and casserole meat. The flavour is rich and delicious and well worth experimenting with if you are unfamiliar with it. The animals are all culled locally from the very plentiful wild stock in and around the farm.

Venison and beetroot casserole (serves any number of people)

Take a generous quantity of stewing venison and brown thoroughly in some oil in a large casserole dish. Add some onions and fry for a minute more. Keeping the heat high, splash in some red wine and drive off most of the moisture. Sprinkle some flour into the dish, stirring enthusiastically so that it mixes smoothly with the juices in the pan. Cook for another minute then lower the heat. Now add raw beetroot which has been peeled and cut into large cubes. If you are nervous of beetroot use a little, but actually you can put plenty in if you like it. Now add stock* or water to cover, bung on a lid and leave in a very low oven for several hours. An hour before serving, add a mixture of diced turnips, carrots and potatoes if you feel so inclined. Alternatively, have the pure venison and beetroot experience without all these distractions.

* Home-made stock is easy if not particularly quick. Cover a couple of Tablehurst chicken carcasses, an onion and a carrot with water. Bring to a simmer and keep it there for three or four hours. Strain, cool, refrigerate and scrape off any surface fat. Ready to use and freezes well.

Are you feeling inspired?

We have to report the sad news that the "Learning on the Land" lottery bid, which we hoped would contribute almost £300,000 to our project, was unsuccessful. We are not defeated however and hope to proceed with planning permission for our building shortly. We are also applying for other sources of funds.

All that said, we would welcome any inspired ideas to fund this project. If you are bursting with ideas, or money, or spare time, please contact the Learning on the Land team via Georgia Taylor on 07717 222953.

Farmhouse Finale



On July 11th this summer Tablehurst celebrated the completion of work on the conversion of the old building on the farm known as the "veg store" into a family house and apprentice accommodation. All the donors were invited to come and have a look at what their generosity had achieved, as well as share cake and later our Saturday BBQ! There was a good turnout though inevitably many were not able to come.

Building work began in early 2007 with a massive clearing of cobwebs and junk, and was completed shortly before July this year with the installation of solar panels for under floor and water heating, as well as a final lick of paint; (all paint kindly supplied by IEKO natural paints). The now highly insulated building comprises a self contained flat for Stefanie and Raphael and their growing family, and three apprentice rooms which share a small kitchen and communal conservatory space. These rooms are already constantly occupied and much appreciated.

With support from The German trust Software AG, who since June 2007 agreed to match fund donations up to €25,000, the fundraising campaign has raised almost £150,000, and has enabled the completion of this project. It is now a beautiful and sustainable living space, and a powerful statement of the commitment and loyalty to a long term vision for biodynamic farming shared by our community.

Mark Haughton

Volunteer needed
to coordinate vegetable and salad production at Tablehurst Farm for the farm team lunches. If you have time, enthusiasm and some experience this is a very rewarding way of getting involved with the life of the farm as well as providing for your own vegetable needs. You would be working with an existing small team of volunteers. Phone Mark for more information on **07990 581 270**

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