

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

SPRING 2010

Plaw Hatch Farm Shop

How did we first sense that spring hadn't forgotten us after all - well first it was the hens stepping up and responding to the growing demand for their eggs, and then the highly sought after Plaw Hatch salad bags began to appear in ever greater numbers!

As this has been my first month working full time in the shop at Plaw Hatch I have been as excited by these subtle changes as some customers. It is very clear that those of you that shop here are very discerning and care greatly for how your food is produced and where it comes from. All produce from the farm itself sells before anything bought in and produce from the garden is snapped up almost as soon as it appears.

Having been coming to Plaw Hatch as a customer for over 7 years now I realise how easy it is to forget just how unique this place is and I have been reminded of my own initial reaction to shopping here 7 years ago by customers coming into the shop and onto the farm now for the first time. What a pleasure it is in comparison to shopping at a supermarket, and in addition to be positively encouraged to look around the farm....



Many customers come great distances for the raw milk, cream, yoghurts and cheeses and we are lucky enough to have all this on our doorstep (well not quite on our doorstep anymore but you know what I mean!).

We are very fortunate to have strong links with many local biodynamic and organic producers and it is very rewarding to be dealing with others who have the same values. What we can't supply ourselves we try to source locally, biodynamic if possible but otherwise organic.

We are now stocking some excellent biodynamic wines from Italy, produced by Tom Dean who grew up in Forest Row and we will be extending the wine range shortly to include wines to suit most pockets and tastes. We are expanding our range in many areas and will try to source more directly from producers. This way, not only will we know more about where our food comes from but will be supporting local, small producers.

I made the decision to become a shareholder a few years ago when I thought about what it would mean to me if these farms weren't here and following that I joined the Farm Co-op Committee. Being part of the team organising the Open Day at Tablehurst Farm last summer brought me closer still to the core values of the farms and gave me a taste for more. So when an opening came up to help out at Plaw Hatch Farm Shop I jumped at it - and how rewarding it has been. Gradually as I became more integrated into the farm team I felt more able to take on the running of the shop, supported by an enthusiastic, stable shop and farm team who are teaching me the ropes!

We would welcome thoughts, suggestions and feedback from those of you that shop here - we are after all a community farm shop whose main aim is to provide for its community.

Jenny Wright

An Early Shift

It is 5.30 am; I am in the lambing shed at Tablehurst Farm, in late March. Half an hour ago the first glimmer of light began to appear over a band of flat grey cloud on the easterly horizon. The stars were out when I left home. I have been here since 4 when I took over from Tom who enjoys the night shift.

The lambing shed is divided into large and small pens with most of the Tablehurst flock in here. Each pen is supplied with silage, water and a salt lick. At one end of the shed the tups (male sheep) have their own quarters. They are not part of the lambing. They've done their job, but there is still no grass out in the fields because of the late spring, so I guess they're here to share the silage. I am perched on a high stool which looks more like it belongs in an office than a barn, except that its seen better days. But its here to be sat on during these vigils, and it's very welcome right now. Behind me is a group of small individual pens. In each one is a ewe and one (or two if they are twins) newborn lambs. Here mother and offspring have a chance to get to know each other and for us to see that the lamb is suckling and both are healthy. It's a sheep maternity ward if you like!

Down the middle of the the barn is a walkway from which the sheep can be viewed on each side. Most of the pens contain still-to-lamb ewes. Some of the sheep in these pens look a bit heavy and distracted; there time is not long. But the majority sit munching and dozing, in a manner appropriate to the hour one feels. The only sheep making any noise are the ones in the "nursery pen" where the slightly older lambs, (just a few days), are with their mums. Here mothers and lambs instinctively bleat to avoid losing each other, sound (and smell) being more important to sheep than sight, for keeping in contact. Even here the sound level is subdued.

It is said that sound has a different resonance and clarity in the dawn air, some atmospheric subtlety I believe. This has the effect of making every noise seem a little more significant. Birds use this with their dawn calling. At the other end of the barn is the rather jarring sound of the cooling fans attached to the farm shop which kick in at regular intervals and create a drone which flattens all other sounds. When the fans stop the peaceful munching of the sheep and bleating from the nursery resumes, increasingly accompanied by the birds. I hear the wistful warble of a blackbird in a bush behind the barn, collared doves and pigeons which have made themselves at home on every beam and truss of every barn on the farm, sparrows squabbling somewhere, a dunnock invisible but singing sweetly as always. A different kind of bird, an early arrival at Gatwick, lazily banks across the expectant light in the east towards its runway approach.

I wander up and down the walkway checking the progress of the ewes then go to the farm kitchen to make some tea. The hot mug warms my hands, cold from the chilly air. As I look down the barn from here I notice the steam too rising from the sheep in the strengthening light, every sheep a little steam factory. No births tonight though, which suits me fine. It will suit Steffi too who is on call in case of need. The watch during lambing is round the clock, but the farmers are generally spared the night shift unless there is a problem, with students and volunteers like Tom filling these shifts.

There really is something magical about the dawn. Wherever you are the experience of being alone and having nature and the world all to yourself somehow brings a sense of the essence of life a bit nearer, if you let it. And it is very possible to experience this in a barn full of sheep and lambs on a spring morning, with its unique atmosphere and mix of life in process. As I come to the end of the shift at 7, the farmers begin to appear for their day's work. I join them briefly for their early morning meeting, and as I sit there I notice that something of the night's stillness, those sheep munching, the lambs, shaky but full of purpose on their gangly legs, has lodged itself in me....and I feel glad.

Mark Haughton

Flow forms, Soil, Compost and "Teas"

Whenever I talk about gardening, I keep saying, that the heart of the garden is the compost, (and the heart of the compost is the Biodynamic Preparations and the heart of the preparations is the stinging Nettle preparation) and - when somebody asks me about how to start a garden, I tell them how to make a compost, and assure them, as long as they make good compost their garden will flourish.

All this is because of billions of invisible creatures. The plant needs the soil to be "predigested", so that it can absorb what it needs. We then eat the plant, and in our intestine, again, there are lots of beneficial bacteria, which make the nutrients available to our bodies.

The more soil life there is, the better. Compost is one way of breeding it. It's like a sourdough. You add just a little of it, when you bake, and the whole bread comes alive and rises. There are more ways of encouraging soil life, one is to have things growing in your soil, green-manure in winter, other plants in summer, and ideally mulch whatever isn't covered with plants. The microbes like it dark, and they also live on the excretions of



the plant roots. You can go and look, how the soil is around plants with big root systems. Look at chickweed, cornsalad, purslane, leeks, nettles, and most probably you will find a beautiful crumbly structure. It's obvious, that this approach is just the opposite of the chemical approach, killing, what we don't want (and at the same time a lot of what we do want as well), this approach nurtures the beneficial bacteria, so that through that a balance is created.

There is yet another way of helping the soil life, and that is aerated compost tea. Important is that it is aerated, because the beneficial microbes need oxygen. The more conventional way of doing that is to use an air pump to bubble air through a bin filled with water, and some of your best compost in it. The soil life from the compost multiplies, and after about 48 hours you will get a tea, which is teeming with life, and you just simply spray the soil and also the leaves of your plants with it.

The even better way is to use a flow form to aerate the tea. With the rhythmical flowing and gurgling the air becomes integrated into the water and research shows that the water which has run through flow forms actually keeps the air, while the water which was aerated with an air pump, loses the oxygen very quickly.

To put all this into practice, to get even more life into my garden, also to help my constant shortage of manure, and in addition to that to save myself some wheelbarrowing, I've decided to get a flow form, which will make my compost tea, and will improve the quality of the water I use to water my seedlings with hugely. The flow forms will arrive very soon.

Dorothea Leber

A special welcome to Marie Franco who has joined me as assistant gardener at Michael Hall Garden

Bacon ...

Tablehurst Farm's reputation for producing bacon without the use of nitrates or nitrites, which are commonly used in the curing process of meats, is spreading. The EU is trying to ban the use of preservatives with nitrates and nitrites in organic production but is meeting strong resistance from many of the certifying bodies around the world. The DEMETER standards already prohibit their use, and so Tablehurst, has over the last 15 years or so, developed a brine cure that we are happy with and it appears that various other organisations have noticed us. We have also recently developed a dry-cured bacon and now offer both versions in our shop.

Dry-cured vs brine-cured.

Dry curing is probably the oldest method of preserving meat. This is where a salt mixture is rubbed into the meat and left for a number of days depending on the weight and thickness of the meat. This is the tricky part and what has prevented us from using this traditional method in the past. The dry cured bacon also has less moisture than the brine cured version as it is drawn out of the meat during the curing process.

A brine cured bacon is a bacon that is immersed in a salt water solution. At Tablehurst we add molasses and sugar to our brine to give us our distinctive taste. All ingredients are dissolved in water and the brine is then allowed to cool. The bacon joints are then added to the mixture and allowed to cure for up to 7 days. We use the same brine for our hams, but these are allowed to cure for up to 4 weeks.

Raphael Rivera

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.....

Natural beekeeping course 29-31 May 2010

The Natural Beekeeping Trust is offering a three-day course at Plaw Hatch Farm. The course is designed for complete beginners and new beekeepers and will cover all aspects of sustainable beekeeping with a special emphasis on what bees need in order to thrive.

Morning sessions will be classroom-based (in good weather in an open barn) covering history of beekeeping, the life of a bee colony, health and illness, dealing with swarms, planting for bees and preparing colonies for winter.

We will also explain the fundamental concepts of natural beekeeping in the light of the Demeter Beekeeping Standards as well as the Guidelines developed by the Natural Beekeeping Trust. Different hive systems which lend themselves to meeting the essential needs of colonies will be demonstrated, in particular the Warre Hive, the Demeter One-Room-Hive by Uwe Bodenschatz and topbar hives.

In the afternoons we will meet the bees themselves in a variety of settings, with guided observation in small groups and some practice in handling bees, where appropriate. We will approach colonies in different apiaries with an open mind and a willingness to learn to listen to the bees in order to find what we may or may not do in our husbandry.



Latest news – the Natural Beekeeping Trust will shortly be establishing a hive at Tablehurst Farm – part of a wider initiative to encourage beekeeping on biodynamic farms.

Participants will also have the opportunity to learn the basics of making a Warre-Hive (one box only) with John Haverson who will share his extensive experience with this bee-friendly hive which is enjoying growing popularity in natural beekeeping circles.

On Friday evening before the start of the course there will be a public lecture entitled "Beekeeping and Spiritual Development" by Michael Kientzler. The fee for this course is £130 which includes all lunches and refreshments. Please contact anne@naturalbeekeepingtrust.org or telephone 01342-823324 if you would like to find out more or reserve a place. Number of participants is limited to 15.

And, if you cannot join us for the three day course, then how about this one ...

INTRODUCTION TO HONEYBEES AND THEIR CARE

Saturday 1 May 2010

Plaw Hatch Farm

What is involved in looking after bees?



History of beekeeping, the life of the colony throughout the year, concepts of biodynamic/natural beekeeping, minimum requirements for caring for a colony successfully will be among the topics covered on the morning. In the afternoon we will meet the bees in a NBKT Bee Garden and practice observation at the hive.

Greetings from Emerson College Garden

Hi! My name is Robert Tilsley. I am running the vegetable garden up at Emerson College, initially I was employed by the college to provide fresh fruit and vegetables for the college meals and give the Biodynamic students the opportunity to gain more practical experience over their time at the college. Since the closure of the college I have been taken under the wing of Tablehurst Farm to grow vegetables for the shop and because the Biodynamic training is committed to staying in Forest Row I have had great support to continue the work in the garden to support the new Biodynamic Horticulture Course which will start September '10.

Jumping from one role to another is no simple task and to change gears from supplying a kitchen to supplying a shop at this point in the year has been a little challenge. I started a steep learning curve at the end of February which I now seem to have overcome and am getting into the more natural rhythm of the year, sowing, planting and harvesting.

My first year at the college was a success. Although we didn't produce massive quantities the quality was excellent and I found good ways of managing the garden and communicating with the kitchen as well as learning a thing or two about what grows well here. With the support of a community such as Emerson you can also learn lots from the young and old community members, some of whom had experience working on the grounds previously. A conversation over lunch could lead to me running off to sow a crop to get there earlier or later than I had planned.

I started last year with a clean sheet, a garden that had not been used for a couple of years with more soft fruit than one could only imagine. With just a small two-wheel tractor for cultivating it was a little ambitious to cover the whole area in the first year. I worked through the season with a full time helper from the Biodynamic Training course (Colyn Cameron) who did his placement with me. This year I will be working with another Emerson Graduate, Sarah Vaughan who has kindly given her summer to helping me develop the garden further.

I work with the Students on the BD training in the garden, providing a practical experience in the afternoons on market gardening. We spend most of the winter working on the fruit trees, compost heaps and hedges. They are always providing fresh intellectual challenges and often practical ones too when the numbers fluctuate with the weather.

I had the delight over the summer of exchanging produce from the garden with Plaw Hatch Farm. We had a Green Dollar system going where most of our soft fruits were given to the Dairy for processing for the yoghurts, and in exchange received cheese and yoghurt for the kitchen at the college, I'm sure we can find a way to keep such exchanges going between the farms again this year. I had often hoped for such a relationship and the concept fits in beautifully with the principles behind the transition town.

Best wishes from the garden

Robert Tilsley



Plaw Hatch Farm News

It seems an age since I've written for Co-op news! Just to re-cap what animals we keep at Plaw Hatch. 45 Milking Cows, 8 heifers, 10 heifer calves. 37 sheep. 4 sows and a Tamworth boar. 350 laying hens. Doesn't sound much but seems to keep us busy. The winter seems to have been long and I can't wait for the time to put all outside again. A late spring means a late turnout as we wait for the grass to really get going. It's been a good winter for milking, with some new heifers coming into milk and the steady old ladies who seem to thrive on hay and a few rolled oats. Average yield has been 14 litres / cow / day, which has kept the dairy busy with fairly regular cheese makings. Spring calves are just being born now ready for the mums to enjoy the new grass. Last years lambs (14) just went to Tablehurst and were sold out over the Easter weekend. Our ewes are now just getting ready to lamb outside at the end of April, they have a tendency to get stuck on their backs due to their size, so regular checking is needed. The hens eggs have just picked up with spring in the air and only just keeping pace with demand in the shop. Sadly our old boar JOHN had to go a few weeks back, toothless and tired. He has been replaced by a not so placid Tamworth, who has lots to say, but often not in the best way, with tusks like razors, he has already managed to puncture one of our poor volunteers in the backside.

I am so pleased to welcome Jenny in the shop and Liz in the garden both of whom bring experience and enthusiasm and I'm really looking forward to working with such a dynamic team. Susan continues to produce such a large range of dairy produce to very high standards, along with training endless students to make the cheese and yoghurts. There are mutterings of an icecream machine coming on trial so watch out for those frozen delights. Johannes is getting all the machines ready for field work in the summer. All the Biodynamic preparations have been put on the fields and the earth worms got quite a shock at how early it was this year. Spring cereals have been planted and the birds have had a feast making the crops look a bit thin.

Farm walks are well underway... the first Sat of every month at 2pm with tea afterwards. There is lots to see and lots going on a Plaw Hatch. Anyone is welcome, its always good to see new faces.

Tom Ventham

Plaw Hatch Garden News

Hello everyone - let me introduce myself. My name is Liz Charnell and I have just become the Garden Manager at Plaw Hatch. I have spent the last year here mainly as the Garden Apprentice working alongside Tony, although through the winter months I worked with Tom learning how to milk the cows, and even spent some time in the dairy helping Susan. As a result of all of this I feel I have experienced the whole farm and that can only be an asset in understanding the biodynamic organism which is Plaw Hatch.

My background in gardening comes from working in the Biodynamic Garden in the Findhorn Foundation Community in Scotland. Here we produced not just for our community but also for an organic box scheme. I spent three years there learning the fundamentals and then became the Production Manager....this after a lifetime of being a paediatric nurse in the NHS.

The garden is waking up and it is tremendously exciting to look forward to the coming year's harvest. We are nearing the end of the winter lettuces, and the early sowings of oriental greens, rocket, purslane and tatsois will soon be in the salad bags. It won't be long before the first lettuces are ready also.

At the moment there is much work getting all the tunnels ready for the main summer crops of tomatoes, cucumbers, aubergines, peppers, herbs and of course lettuces. We are working around the early crops of peas, spring onions, beans - French, runner and broad, as well as the kohlrabis and a whole tunnel of spinach. The field work is well underway and we are hoping for some dry weather so we can sow the potatoes and start to prepare for the fields of carrots, beetroot leeks and brassicas. All the onions are in already!!

I feel very positive to be working with Jenny, our new Shop Manager, and through her and your feedback I envisage growing what you love to eat as much as is possible given the resources of the land and people, whilst at the same time honouring all the life forces of nature.

Working alongside me at the moment is Robert - a volunteer from Slovakia - and also Janice who is combining learning the art of story telling with all her gardening skills. As I am sure you know we are an open farm, and I would like to invite any of you out there who may want to get their hands in the earth to come along and volunteer. Come and experience this beautiful and vibrant garden. There are big jobs and small meditative jobs that can really nourish the heart and soul. If you feel inspired to do so then come by the garden and it would be my pleasure to show you around and allow you to feel into what you might want to do... I am there most days and love it!!!

Liz Charnell

A brief note from the Coop Committee

The farm management teams were asked at the 2009 AGM to present their 3-5 year plans to the Cooperative Committee. Both teams have been working hard on these and, although later than anticipated, we look forward to reviewing them before this year's AGM.

The Cooperative Committee has been involved closely with developments at Plaw Hatch in particular following the disappointing financial results last year and is writing separately to shareholders with more information.

Treasure Ground; Poetry and Art on the Farm

It hardly feels the time to be talking about fundraising with so many calls on limited resources at the moment, but I will anyway. Don't turn the page; read on and you will be cheered!

Several years ago, Tablehurst raised about £150,000 to build space for the apprentices on the farm, an amazing achievement. That project was finally finished and formally opened last year, although the occupants had moved in ages before that. Back copies of the newsletter will reveal the long process, but there is one final chapter to this story. The German Charity, Software AG, donated a lot of money towards the project, 25,000 Euros of which was offered as matched funding. With the incredible generosity of you all - hundreds of our local supporters, the matched figure has reached 21,200 Euros. This leaves another 3,800 to be doubled by Software AG. The exciting thing is this offer to match fund ends on May 10th!

It's just too good an opportunity to miss to ask you once again to join in, with every pound you give becoming two. And of course we do really need the money! The end of the apprentice block, which we haven't touched in the previous work, is the bit which was lived in by Stein, Noor and family. They have now moved up to Brambletye, nearer to the heart of Stein's apple business. David Junghans needs to get out of his caravan into somewhere more long term, and this is the obvious space. Before this happens it's an ideal moment to carry out some refurbishment work on this end of the building- to redo this bit of the roof which is still the original, to damp proof the floors, install an efficient wood burner for heating and hot water, insulate and create a living space.

Conscious as we are of the financial squeeze out there at the moment, the best way to engage you in this project is to enlist your appetite for pleasure! Knowing that what you give will be doubled is a nice starting point. The little house collection box in the farm shop is always there on the counter eagerly accepting your offerings.

On Saturday 8th May at 6.00pm, we will be holding a Poetry Reading at the farm with Clare Best, a well known poet from Lewes. She will be reading from her own harvest of poems, Treasure Ground, written whilst attached for a year to Woodlands Organic Farm in Lincolnshire as poet in residence. Clare will be accompanied by two friends reading their own work, Liz Bahs also a Lewes poet, and local writer, Monica Suswin. Music and refreshment will be provided.

A further artistic impulse is an invitation to the farm for a group of local artists to come and draw animals and life on the farm. The idea is they would come on a specific day and work "from life". The result will be shown in an exhibition and sale of work, proceeds from which will go to the matched fund.

Two great ways to express farming as a community owned activity and add to everyone's feeling of connection with it. But of course if the idea of bricks and mortar and a solid future for the farm makes you just want to get your cheque book out then, unlike your local supermarket, we happily still accept them. You can make them to St Anthony's Trust and send them to Tablehurst Farmhouse Fund, Tablehurst Farm, Forest Row, RH18 5DP. Thank you.

Mark Haughton

CO-OP AND FARM CONTACTS

Co-op officers	Oliver Fynes-Clinton (Secretary)	823966	Robin Evans (Treasurer)	850330
Newsletter and general enquiries	Chris Marshall	822611	farmco-op@hotmail.co.uk	
Plaw Hatch Farm Shop	810201		Old Plaw Hatch Farm, Sharpthorne, West Sussex, RH19 4JL	
Tablehurst Farm Shop	823173		Tablehurst Farm, Forest Row, East Sussex, RH18 5DP	



Have you discovered the other shop at Tablehurst Farm yet?

SPRING festival

saturday
24th april
10 - 4

plaw hatch
biodynamic
community
farm
sharpthorne
(01342) 810201

Biodynamic BBQ
Café Shush
Raw Food
PH Cheezy Fondue tasters
Food & Craft Stalls
Biodynamic Vegetable-
Seedlings to buy
Natural Beekeeping Trust
Live Music
Storytelling
Garden Tour
Talk: "What happens in the
Spring on a Biodynamic
Farm?"
OPEN FARM - come and
have a walk around

come join us in celebrating the
magic in the air that is spring!

Michael Hall Mansion, Forest Row, 4pm
1st of May

WALLED GARDEN
guided walk

SONGS

Purcell, Schumann, Mendelssohn, Brahms,
Julian Broughton
sung by

Dorothea Leber, Diane Howard
Julian Broughton - piano
Donations

Sowing the Future Revisited

Come and see how the crop is doing.
Meet at Plaw Hatch Farm Shop at
2.15pm on Saturday 22nd May.



On the 1st of May 4pm, on the guided walk through the walled garden you'll be able to see the flow forms (see page 2), the compost, and I'll share the walled garden's secrets with you. Afterwards there will be songs about witches, spring and love by Schumann, Mendelssohn, Purcell and Julian Broughton.

No fixed entry charge - any donations will go towards the flow forms.

Dorothea