

# TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

WINTER 2012

## Goodbye from Raph and Steffi

As many of you are aware, we will be leaving the farm at the end of February, and after a holiday in South Africa, will be returning to Germany. The decision to leave this wonderful community, where we have spent an amazing six years of our lives, behind, has been the most difficult one that we have had to make. However, having made it, it feels as if a weight has been lifted from our shoulders and we look forward to whatever may lie ahead for our young family and us, with excitement and enthusiasm. The time here has been an incredible adventure, enriching our lives in many ways. Tablehurst farm and the community supporting it, IS very special, a place where we have been able to develop skills in the trade that we love, to make mistakes and grow; a home that gave us the security to embark on the most challenging, but fulfilling journey of all, that of starting a young family. For these and many more reasons the farm and community will be forever in our thoughts.

Having worked on the farm for many years, at first as an apprentice in the 90s and finally as a full time farmer from 2005 till 2008, I (Raphael) moved into the shop, as it had become apparent that there was a need for someone who knew the farm and farm ethos to be part of the retail side. So with limited knowledge of butchery, but a willingness to learn, I swapped jobs. I have loved most of the time there, especially the relationships that I have built up with many customers, but I have also come to realise that my passion is farming and the challenges associated with it. Once I had made that decision it was no longer possible for me to enjoy the shop as much as I had, leaving me with little choice but to look to move back into farming.

Steffi and I therefore took time to consider where our future lay and we came to realise that we would like to return to Germany to farm. Having witnessed the supportive interaction that an enlightened community can give to a farm and not wanting to be isolated on our own farm, we looked for initiatives in Germany that had a similar ethos. We soon realised that there is an opportunity for us, together with a young couple that we met here, to try and develop a community supported farm based loosely on principles that guide Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch. With this in mind we are now in the process of exploring suitable locations to found such an enterprise. Exciting times indeed!

So with a heavy, but excited heart we bid goodbye to all here, as members of the farming community, but hope to see many of you sometime on a CSA farm in Germany.

Steffi and Raphael Rivera  
with Hanna and Joschua



# Tablehurst Farmer's Notebook

A sentence you can hear quite often on Tablehurst goes: "We'll do it in winter when we have time". Only problem is that we never *have* time in winter and you will see why, in case you'll make it to the end of this article.

In the time leading up to Christmas we have finished the first stage of ground works for the new barns etc. and two nice gentlemen from *Browns of Wern* with a massive lunch box and a tiny digger poured the foundations for the new cow barn which is being made up for us at the moment.

While I was on holiday in November we had some worrying news about the feed-in tariff dead line for solar produced electricity. Instead of March 2012 the reduced tariff would start by mid December. That really jeopardized the whole project which we had planned for quite a while. Knowing that it would leave us with only six weeks to complete the whole project we were about to give it up. It is only due to the incredible support from the community, Southern Solar and Triodos Bank that by December 12 we fed the first KWs into the grid.

Soon after we had made the decision the farm looked like one of these places where they sell commercial vans. The scaffolding had to be put up, security nets underneath the roof had to be tied up, the roof itself had to be re-enforced, the PV panels had to be installed, inverters had to be wired in and finally everything had to be connected up to the grid. You could see Peter rushing around with a cluster of electricians around him, Oliver on the phone trying to coordinate between UK Power Networks, Southern Electrics and our local electrician John (thanks mate!) and the site managers from Southern Solar living in their cars and trying to coordinate a bunch of guys who were young enough to be in high school; yes they were glorious days!

Now we will be producing all electricity we need on the farm and it is a good feeling that Tablehurst has become a little bit greener again.

At the same time Zoltan has joined the shop team. He originally comes from Hungary and is about to take over the management from Raphael. Since I can't keep secrets I have to tell you that his Salami's are delicious and soon

available in the shop. Supporting him next to Barry and Rosie are Iona and Luke who does his apprenticeship with us.

Also Tobi, our new Café manager has started before Christmas. Yes, there is no café yet I know, but why break a Tablehurst tradition of being one step ahead of ourselves?

Unfortunately there have been delays with building the new processing kitchen for the pies but I can assure you that the café will be open latest by March 24 when our first lambing BBQ of the season happens.

Also the farm team has a new member: Oliver who has been on the Coop committee and member of our management group for uncountable years has joined us full time now and after a few months working with him I wonder how we ever managed without him in the past.

Also in December we have started a project group looking into community allotments on the farm which we would like to set up within the next year. Leading us is Selma from Brambletye Corner.

She is not only a big fan of smart phones but also very enthusiastic about children's allotments as part of the project so watch out for more news in the next newsletter.

Finally I can tell you the good news: we are going to have a concrete road leading up to the shop this year. We have bought the steel, forms etc. and we will build it in stages since we can only do 20m at a time. I won't tell you when it will be finished because I most certainly will be wrong, so be surprised!

On a last note: Clive, one of our residents, who has been with us for many years, will retire from the farm. Being in his 60's the farm work has become a little tough for him and it was his wish to move to Bognor Regis. We will certainly miss him, his humour and his loyal nature and we wish him well.

The free place in the care home will be taken by Andrew.

David Junghans

## The end of an era ...

Oliver Fynes-Clinton has been a stalwart of the farm Cooperative since its inception. He has been engaged as Secretary of the Coop Committee for nearly all of that time, over 15 years, as well as putting in many hours at Tablehurst in activities as diverse as building and accounting. Oliver is now working fulltime at Tablehurst and is looking to step down from his Coop role as secretary and so we are looking for someone to take on the position.

The Coop Committee meets every six weeks or so to discuss the management issues that arise out of its ownership of the two farm businesses. The Committee consists of members elected at the AGM (currently seven, their names are below), members co-opted during the year and representatives of the farms. The Secretary is the official contact person for the Committee, directing any inquiry to the right person. The role includes taking the minutes at meetings, maintaining the share register and liaising with the Treasurer.

Oliver's personal connection with so many of the Coop members, his knowledge of the history and development of the farms, his appreciation of the original intent, his deep affection for the farms as well as his diligent note taking, efficient administration capabilities and his carefully considered views will all be very much missed by the Committee. We are very grateful to Oliver for the exceptional service he has given.

If the role of secretary grabs your imagination, or you simply want to know more about what we do, please contact any of the Committee members.

The Coop Committee (Peter Brinch, Jenny Wright, Rod Hughes, Richard Evans, Brian Swain, Robin Evans)

# Roadmap for your garden in spring

## Concert

Michael Hall Mansion

Sunday 18<sup>th</sup> March

Songs and stories about  
animals, birds  
and fishes

The following is an attempt to give you a guide for what to do when in your garden, taking the Bio Dynamic Sowing Calendar into account. I'll concentrate on the sowings, based on what I do at Michael Hall Garden. I've given that plan to a few friends with the result that they had a continuous salad and vegetable supply.

I'll give you dates, which are based on the planting calendar, but these are only approximate, since moisture of the ground and temperature are just as important as the influence from the cosmos.

To start with a brief explanation of Maria Thun's sowing calendar. Maria Thun has done daily plantings of seeds over many years. Leaning on the indication, that short lived plants (i.e. annuals and biennials) are strongly influenced by the moon she observed (by meticulously measuring and weighing watching keeping qualities, etc), that the moon has a different quality according to which constellation of the zodiac shines through it. That's where here root, leaf, flower and fruit days come from. There are also other influences, mainly from the planets, which might overlay this. She also notes the time which is especially good for planting the 2 weeks of the month when the arch that the moon describes over the earth is getting more and more flat, the descending moon is the time when the earth is drawing in more, i.e it's good for planting also for pruning, for spraying horn-manure preparation the other 2 weeks when the moon's path is getting higher and higher is good for picking, also good for spraying horn silica preparation. About sowing seeds there are in fact different opinions. Some feel they grow better planted during the descending phase of the moon, some feel in the ascending. (a seed, of course is both, a bursting-out, which would correspond to the ascending moon and a growing into the soil (descending moon)

Dorothea Leber

I start sowing things for the new season just before Christmas, that's when I start heating the propagation house. Early vegetables I start under glass in trays and pots.

In this version here I start for those who have a greenhouse with

## February

- 2 Radish under glass (from now on every 2 weeks for a continuous supply)
- 7 Annual Spinach under glass, propagation in slight heat: lettuces in trays, rocket ,mizuna, Kohlrabi, corn salad
- 9 Broad beans (if it's too cold still, you can plant them in pots, and then plant out later
- 15 lettuce (in trays)
- 25 Florence Fennel in trays in slight heat, annual spinach
- 29 Bunching beets Bolt hardy under glass (you have to get a bolt resistant variety for any sowings before April)

## March

Spray the garden with Horn Manure in March

- 2 Radishes outdoors, if you have, cover with vlies
- 5 Lettuce annual spinach, rocket mizuna parsley in trays chervil
- 6 Tomatoes and peppers in trays (for germination they like a temperature of around 18°C)
- 7 If you've planted your Broad beans in pots, plant them out now
- 8 Peas
- 9 Plant onion sets, early carrots, parsnips celeriac in trays
- 12 Sweet peas (broad beans, peas and sweet peas do well from early sowings)
- 14 Lettuce, annual spinach, kohlrabi in trays red kale for summer use in trays basil in trays in

heat Florence fennel in trays, broccoli in trays plant out any lettuce plants that are ready, also rocket and mizuna

- 20 Flowers: calendula, larkspur, cosmos, cornflowers snapdragons etc.

## April

Spray horn manure again. On dry days you might start hoeing. That cuts off the small weeds, aerates the soil, and cuts open the crust on top. Old gardeners say one hoeing is better than 3 waterings.

- 2 Lettuce, rocket, mizuna, etc. Swiss chard, spinach beet, basil under glass if not yet sown plant out your lettuce plants
- 3 Courgettes and squash/pumpkins (in pots) glasshouse beans in pots
- 7 Radishes, carrots, scorzonera beetroots
- 8 Flowers: sunflowers, asters, rudbeckia, coreopsis cosmos, snapdragons
- 19 Spray Horn silica on leaf vegetables (those that are big enough, not the seedlings)
- 12 Cucumbers in pots
- 22 Plant out glasshouse beans
- 27 Plant out any calendula, larkspur, etc that are ready

## May

- 2 Plant out glasshouse tomatoes sow beans
- 4 Radishes beetroots carrots
- 7 Sow Brussels sprouts Florence fennel lettuce
- 10 Spray strawberries, apples, soft fruit, any peas and broad beans that are flowering with horn silica
- 16 I plant out tender vegetables and flowers like tomatoes, courgettes, squash, beans, dahlias zinniums basil from mid May.
- 26 Sow radicchio, endive, sugar loaf, lettuce

# Farewell to Tom and Julia

The Plaw Hatch Management group has received confirmation from Tom Ventham that he and Julia have come to the difficult decision to leave the farm this year. Please see Tom and Julia's letter below for details of their decision.

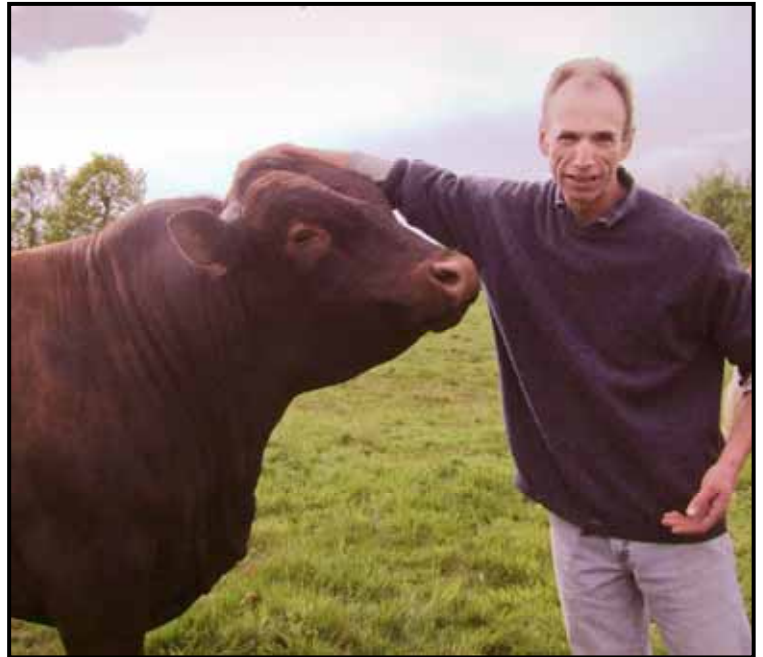
The current management team has only been in place for approximately 12-18 months and in that time we have seen the farm strengthen its position considerably, both financially and otherwise. We are all very aware that the current strong position is due in no small part to the huge amount of energy and love that Tom as farmer, and Julia as a very present community builder, have poured into the farm over the previous 11 years, a time that has not always been easy for them. Plaw Hatch, as it is today, is strong because of their tireless contribution, and we hope we are in the process of co-creating a legacy of which they can rightly be proud.

So, we find ourselves excited for them as a family as they go off in a new direction, saddened by their loss, and so very grateful for what they leave behind.

We will now be working very closely as a team, and with Tom's full involvement and support, to identify how we meet the challenge of finding the new farmer to take the farm forward on its next stage of development. "

## A personal message from Tom Ventham

"After much discussion and soul-searching, Julia and I have decided we would like to leave Plaw Hatch. I would like to stress that we have taken this decision on family grounds. I'm not getting any younger and dairy farming does have its own unique demands - it feels right to make way for someone younger to take the farm into its next phase. The farm team seems very strong at the moment and the financial situation is certainly the most positive since we have been here. We both feel that there is now a space for us to explore a new direction together. It's been the most amazing place to be for the last 11 years, and a secure environment for our children to grow and develop. I can only feel privileged and fortunate to have had this opportunity. The broader community have also been incredibly supportive to us as well and we thank them for the love we have been shown. We would like to leave at the end of May and will support the recruitment process for the new farmer in every way and make the transition as smooth as possible."



## Tom's legacy at Plaw Hatch

Since my first visit to Plaw Hatch as a student at Emerson College, I have known that there is something very special about Tom's approach to farming and animal husbandry in particular. I think the lasting lesson I have learned from Tom is that animals' needs are very simple and that they seldom get sick if they are allowed to express their natural behaviour as completely as possible. I suppose one can say the same for humans.

Since we launched our Plaw Hatch e-newsletter, we have learned that our customers feel the same way. In a recent e-newsletter, we announced our decision to allow the autumn-born calves to stay with their mothers over the winter, purely for the sake of animal welfare. The report said: *"If you walk around to the yards you will behold a rare sight on dairy farms: two to three month old calves with the herd, drinking from their mothers and their mothers licking them in turn. We will probably wean them at three months and the boys will go to our sister farm Tablehurst at four months to be reared for beef. For the rest of us, it means we have had to give up some milk so that the calves can have their share. The benefit to them is that they get the best possible start to life."* It then went on to comment on the shortages of halloumi and cream that will result from this decision. Over the page is some of the feedback we received from customers:



"YAY for you guys!! I shall now buy ALL my milk and dairy products ONLY from Plaw Hatch. Commitment. I have for years wrestled with the hypocrisy of my not being vegan but being a vegetarian on animal welfare grounds ... and have tried to turn a blind eye to the fact that calves are torn away from their mothers, in my opinion, too early. Also that male calves are slaughtered as 'by products' and not used even for beef. This I see is resolved with your wonderful new farming initiatives and it makes me VERY happy ..... THANK YOU!!!

"I wanted you to know I wholeheartedly applaud your decision to wean the calves later. It is

something I've felt uncomfortable about, being a great supporter of breastfeeding and in some respects I'm sure calves are similar to babies! It just shows what a special organisation you are."

"Thank you so much for this email. It really made my day and really made me thankful to be a part of this community. Let the cows have their milk!"

"Thank you for your letter.....The well being of the calves and the natural procedure for the cows and their offspring is more important... I hope everyone else feels the same way, there are lots of alternatives to keep every one going! Best wishes to all."

"Thank you for this news and thank you for your decision regarding the calves. It is of enormous importance to us as a family and will ensure our loyal and enduring support."

This feedback reminded me of the responses we got from our customer survey last year. It showed that our farmers' values are more important to customers than anything else, and they are highly satisfied with them. While we are a team, Tom is the driving force behind our values with respect to animals and the land.

It is clearly a deep legacy for the farm, the land, the animals and the wider community that will be left by Tom and Julia when they leave. I am sure I speak for us all at Plaw Hatch when I say we will do our very best to uphold that legacy.

John Twyford



# A Farewell to Raph and Steffi

I vividly remember the time when I came to Tablehurst as a student. It was about 7 years ago when I came back from my placement in Norway, starting my afternoon work on the farm, when I encountered a very young girl with a German accent in the sheep barn. She was trimming sheep feet. Soon enough a small man in a green overall and with a beard emerged from the background, shouting orders at two anxious looking apprentices. I didn't know at the time that I had just met the two new managers of Tablehurst Farm: Raph and Steffi.

Now, many years later I have worked with them, eaten with them, celebrated with them, attended their wedding, seen their two lovely children growing up, cried with them, fought with them and laughed with them.

And now, seven years later these two dear colleagues and their children are about to leave us, starting a new life in Germany. I know how hard this step is for them. They truly poured their hearts into this place, treating the farm as one of their own children and worked very, very hard to help it develop.

It was a time with ups and downs, finding their feet next to Peter and without them the farm wouldn't be what it is today. The pace and intensity of Tablehurst's work life can be challenging and they not only achieved a great deal in consolidating the farm but they also managed to raise two beautiful children at the same time.

I remember Steffi giving me instructions on the phone while two kids scream in the background as if all hell breaks loose and me trying to understand what she is saying without losing my sense of hearing. She never loses her temper and to this day I am still amazed by it. Amazed also by how she managed her work on the farm while raising two kids. Her calm energy brought balance to this place and it was very much needed.

One of my first memories I have of Raph was seeing him sorting out one of our residents; Stuart. Stuart is 6ft tall, a bit on the heavy side and can be stubborn at times. This time he certainly was and Raph took him aside to one of their "belly to belly" talks after which Stuart happily did what he was asked to. It looked a bit like David vs. Goliath and that is the image I have of Raph: he never gives up when facing big challenges.

It is due to him that the farms administrative side didn't collapse after Andrew Carnegie had left and also due to him that the shop is doing better than ever before. When things weren't going well in the shop Raph just changed



his green overall with a white apron and set out to become a shop manager. None of us could have done this and I am ever so grateful Raph that you did.

We all have grown a lot since the day when I met both of you in the sheep barn for the first time. Our understanding and appreciation for each other has grown into friendship and I will miss the four of you a lot. Be assured that we won't forget you and that you will be welcome here at Tablehurst anytime!

I wish you all the best and I am sure that whatever you do will be successful.

David Junghans

Would you like to become a Co-op shareholder?

Just go to [www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk](http://www.tablehurstandplawhatch.co.uk) and click on "share form" to download an application form. The form tells you how to apply.

# Open pollinated seeds

Hopefully some people would have noticed by now at both Tablehurst and Plawhatch Farm shops, the small A6 cards showing this logo. These cards are placed by the vegetable products accompanied by A3 posters hung up above the produce giving brief information about what open pollinated seeds are.



It has become necessary to draw distinction between the methods used today in the breeding of our vegetables. As we shop and fill our bags with carrots, parsnips, onions, a couple of peppers some tomatoes, a few leeks and a cabbage we do so in all good faith that these vegetables are as wholesome as we can get them. Certainly this is the case regarding the Biodynamic and organic cultivation methods used, but with the seeds used the story may be different.

Less than 50 years ago, most of the world's population enjoyed their vegetables coming from what is called 'open pollinated seeds'. These seeds are the original types which the world's farmers developed, cultivated and saved for thousands of years to nourish the world's people. It is because of their unique traits that such wonderful diversity of food crops the world over was able to be created. One important trait, (which we take quite for granted) is the inherent ability when the plants are seed-saved from generation to generation to 'breed true to type', which means the offspring resemble parent plants.

The last five decades however have seen the open pollinated seeds rapidly being replaced by modern F1 hybrid seeds, not because they necessarily are inferior but because hybrids are non-reproducible, they do not breed true to type so no one can save seeds of them successfully and therefore they give the breeder sole control of those varieties.

In 2005 a study of the European seed catalogue to find out the effect of modern plant breeding on open pollinated varieties revealed that of cauliflower varieties 74% were hybrids, of carrot varieties 80%, of calabrese varieties 85%, of spinach 87%, of tomato 89%, and salad cucumbers 92%. Today we should expect these figures to be higher still.

The skill and expertise surrounding plant breeding aim for genetic uniformity in our food crops. Supermarkets demand that the crops are all of one size and shape. In the breeding of many crops this leads to discarding genetic diversity to obtain the uniformity and has led to 80% diversity loss in Europe alone this last Century and 75% worldwide.

To put the hybrid breeding emphasis into perspective, in 2001 the seed company Seminis withdrew 2000 open pollinated varieties from their seed list and in 2005 the company with all its seed varieties and genetic material was bought up by the Monsanto seed corporation, the World's largest GM crop producer.

The Biodynamic movement became aware of the danger signals more than 25 years ago and initiated their own network of seed producers using open pollinated seeds. A few years later they realised they had to breed new varieties too.

In 2007, Kultursaat (cultural seeds), a no-profit Association of Central European Biodynamic plant breeders, set up a gene bank for the collection and in-situ maintenance of open pollinated varieties. More than 800 OP varieties were bought from all over Europe as the sense was they would likely be taken off seed lists in the near future.

Open pollinated seeds can be successfully saved by farmers, market gardeners, home gardeners and allotment holders because they breed true to type. They are genetically variable and therefore able to adapt to climate change, to particular landscapes and environmental conditions and evolve along with them and are ideal for developing local varieties. These are exactly the criteria we need when thinking into the future with the focus on more locally adapted food crops.

Both Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Farms have agreed to display the small A 6 OP seed cards and logos for your information to help distinguish the open pollinated varieties that the farms grow.

The open pollinated seed initiative now seeks to work with Biodynamic and organic farm shops, vegetable box schemes and farmers markets as these are the most hands on retailers who would best know what seeds has been used for their produce.

We hope through more people being aware of this so far rather hidden fact about seeds for our vegetables and wanting to support it that it would encourage their continued cultivation and the breeding of new improved varieties and also contribute to crop biodiversity.

Peter Brinch [www.open-pollinated-seeds.org.uk](http://www.open-pollinated-seeds.org.uk)



# New arrivals at Tablehurst



Hi my name is Luke Elliott and I am the new butcher's apprentice at Tablehurst Farm. I am local and live in the village since I was born. I went to Forest Row Primary School and then Sackville Secondary which I finished in June 2011. Previously I have worked at Java & Jazz and now I am full time here at Tablehurst which I am enjoying incredibly as I am already learning so much about the butchery trade.



Hi, I'm Tobias Crowder and I grew up in Forest Row. I went to Michael Hall School and started training to work as a chef when I was 17. I then travelled the world working as a chef in France, Switzerland, Australia, Peru and other countries. I have just become a father and live with my wife and daughter in East Grinstead. I am very excited to run the organic café on Tablehurst, because it was just the task I was looking for. If you want to know more about me or the farm come and enjoy coffee or delicious lunch in the new café next to the Farm shop! We will officially open in March.



Hi I'm Iona. I moved here from Brighton 4 years ago having been brought up in an intensely foody family. My father owned a game restaurant and instilled in us a massive respect for the highest quality food. Since moving here I have worked with pastry etc. at the local bakery and begun teaching my other passion which is wild food foraging and fungi identification. I now work alongside Zoltan supporting him in running the shop. I am very pleased to have found this work which ties in so well with my interests and values, at the source of the highest quality local organic biodynamic food, especially with such a fantastic team in such a beautiful location!



My name is Zoltan and I am father of five children. I joined Tablehurst 3 months ago and will be managing the shop once Raphael has left. When I was 14 I went to a food industrial high school to learn butchery and became a certified butcher. After the school I worked in several butcher shops but as a young person I did not take it seriously until I got a job for a large food supply company. This was my first managing position. Unfortunately the Hungarian economic climate was very difficult so we came to England. My first work was at Morrisons supermarket as meat and fish manager. I was looking for a more fulfilling task and I found Tablehurst Farm. I feel lucky to be part of this fantastic team and I strongly believe in biodynamic farming.

## Tablehurst Diary Dates

- 24 & 31 March – Lambing days and barbecue
- 20 May, 11am – Walk, talk and discussion on pigs and cows
- 17 June, 11am – Walk and barbecue for National Open Farm Sunday
- 11 August, 8pm – Summer barn dance
- 29 September, 8pm – Michaelmas barn dance

## Biodynamic Land Trust & Brambletye Field Update

Many thanks to those who have purchased shares in the Biodynamic Land Trust for the purpose of retaining Brambletye Fields for use by Tablehurst Farm. To date we have 17 founding shareholders with contributions totalling £26,500, a fantastic start to attaining our goal of raising £65,000 from share investors.

The Biodynamic Land Trust has been established with the aim of securing biodynamic farmland to be held in trust in perpetuity. The benefits include supporting biodynamic agriculture, providing affordable access to land for young BD farmers, countryside stewardship, conservation and supporting local food growing.

The minimum investment is £100 and t

he maximum £20,000. The Trust is also able to take loans from individuals and we have been approached on this basis. Similar to the Coop the Trust does not envisage paying dividends on the shares issued, the investment made is the knowledge that your money has gone toward securing land that will be farmed using the most sympathetic, sustainable practises. However, unlike the Coop, shares in the BDLT will be redeemable subject to conditions.

Brambletye fields is the first land to be purchased by the BDLT and will be leased to Tablehurst. The land sale should be completed soon, in the meantime it is vital we continue to raise funds through the share sale and donations. If you have been considering making a contribution please contact us as soon as possible.

Robin Evans, Coop Treasurer and director of the BDLT.

'We welcome the launch of the BDLT. Brambletye Fields are very important to Tablehurst Farm and to our community who have participated in improving them. Lets support the Trust securing the fields in perpetuity for biodynamic farming by investing in shares.' Neil Ravenscroft, Chair of Tablehurst Management Team.

'The BDLT meets the urgent need for enabling young farmers to gain access to land without the crippling burden of debt, and help build sustainable food systems.' Patrick Holden, patron, Biodynamic Association.