

TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

AUTUMN 2013

Please talk to us...

If you are reading this newsletter, regardless of whether you are a farm worker, volunteer, shareholder, shop customer, supplier or interested outsider, you are part of our farm community, and we would like to hear from you. In the middle of this newsletter, there is a questionnaire all about community engagement. Our farms aim to be sustainable in every sense of the word, and a vital element of that sustainability is to involve as many people as possible, in as many different ways as possible, in the work and wider activity of our farms.



Whatever your relationship to Plaw Hatch or Tablehurst, we would like to hear your views. Please take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire and to return it to us because we can only truly be community farms if we have the active participation of our community, i.e. you!

Fracking and Farming ...

Plaw Hatch and Tablehurst Farms are aware that many of our customers and supporters are concerned that exploratory shale gas drilling is likely to commence in our immediate neighbourhood at Balcombe, West Sussex.

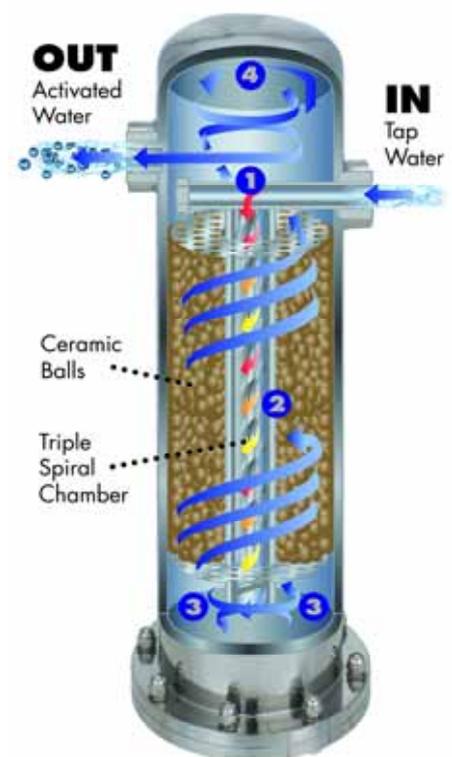
We are very concerned about the safety of fracking for shale gas. As biodynamic and organic farms we are dependent on an unpolluted environment and do everything we can to protect and nurture the land under our stewardship.

We would encourage everyone to investigate the safety concerns and the possible impact on the environment and our water resources.

Sustainability is at the core of our philosophy and so we seek to reduce the use of fossil fuels wherever possible.

For the foreseeable future the farms will remain dependent on fossil fuels to produce food, we would like this to change and so are supportive of research and investment into alternative energy sources.

We make best efforts to reduce energy consumption and seek, where possible, to support the production of sustainable, renewable energy sources.



This has nothing to do with fracking! See inside back page and all will be revealed

Tablehurst Farm Report

It is autumn again, the time to slow down and reflect on the past year:

We started coming out of a long bad weather period last year with many health and breeding problems, financially under pressure and with a challenging turnover of staff. Peter Brown went on sabbatical and will not return as a farmer due to his growing commitment to the BDAA and the Bee Trust. Amelia left us as commercial manager last April and Barry and Rosie left in June. Zoltan and Tobi left around Christmas already and Rebecca has just left the care home. She will stay the care home manager until Peter takes over in January. Also Tonno, Sergio and Tamas left to be replaced by Emile, Caroline and Luigi as apprentices. We also welcomed Clare, Verity, Holly, Maaike and Rachel in shop and café and Daan on the farm. All together we saw 11 people leaving and 12 joining us. This can be seen as a major turning point in the development of the farm.

During the last year, Peter had extended his important work well beyond the boundaries of the farm (BDAA, apprenticeship training, Bee Trust etc.) and a vacuum in the centre of activity became more and more apparent. At the same time we had to recognise that our environment has changed over the last decade and that we needed a new structure on the farm.

After a series of meetings with the whole team last winter we formulated a business plan. We decided to spread the responsibility for the whole farm over more people, guided by a strong group of directors. Julia, Oliver, Neil and myself took on responsibility for the finances while Rachael Pereira got involved in supporting both the shop team and the care home. Robin, Auke and Tomi took on responsibility for the agricultural side of things while I, as managing director, acting as support, took on the responsibility for the commercial side of the farm, the shop, processing and retailing.

We favoured this non-hierarchical approach since it reflects the community spirit of the farm better and was supposed to create a more fulfilling working environment compared to a conventional one where a director makes decisions for everyone. Achieving this is a great challenge since it demands from everyone to be able to understand the farm as a whole while fully taking charge of their own enterprises within it.

We decided to extend the shop space and the opening hours, to focus more on our pig, cattle and sheep breeding, to allow more space for the apprenticeship programme, to start a small allotment project, to renovate Mill Cottage, to extend the garden area, to structure our financial management and monitoring better and to update and consolidate our administration.

Following these decisions we started to prepare for the new season. After spraying the three kings preparation with the whole team on the boundaries of the farm as a symbol of a new team taking charge of and protecting this beautiful place which is now in our care, we encountered various setbacks: A gas bottle exploded in the field with the chickens and destroyed one of the poultry houses, weeks after we had lost many birds due to the wrong feeds that got delivered to us, someone robbed us of a great range of valuable tools and equipment in bright daylight, I ended up in hospital with an eye injury the day before my holiday and was unable to work for nearly 2 months, we lost the biodynamic certification for our sheep due to a technical problem with some ewes we had bought in from another biodynamic farmer last year and one of our freezers packed in and we lost £2000 worth of meat. The winter did not want to stop, we ran out of straw, we had to put the animals out on no grass, feeding them with the left-over forage, this was followed by months without rain, and the care home staff came more and more under pressure by the authorities due to a huge backlog on paperwork resulting from (not so) new regulations.

I do not want to claim that it was an easy year, but things have turned out quite well so far.

Our animal breeding and health has improved and more meat comes from animals raised on the farm now compared to previous years. We had an excellent grain harvest, the garden produced more and better vegetables, we have found great people for shop and café, the sales are up by 20% and our finances, though still recovering, are looking much better now than forecasted. A huge deal of compliance work for health and safety, care, employment law and environmental schemes has been done, the accounting system was overhauled, policies written down, new apprentices integrated, many old fences repaired and all pig houses were renovated. I have spent weeks dealing with insurance claims, interviews, contracts and tenancy agreements, while Oliver took up many a fight with phone, water, electricity and other providers and levelled out all inconsistencies in our accounts. Robin completely renovated Mill Cottage starting with its (lacking) foundations.

This sounds all very boring, and in fact it is (!), but is part of catching up on past failings and necessary to give a complex farm like ours (yours!) a secure foundation for the future. Many challenges are still ahead of us but I can say with confidence that we collectively turned around a farm undergoing a problematic phase and I want to mention the great support from our management group, particularly from Neil Ravenscroft, who worked many late nights to help us on our way.

David Junghans



Plaw Hatch Farm Report

COWS: It is over a year now since Tom and Julia left the farm, and it must surely raise the question: how are the cows? The good news is that most of the cows are very well. The bad news is that we have had to cull 6 of them this year, with 2 still to leave the farm. The reason is an incurable infection of the udder caused by the bacteria *Staph. Aureus*, which is easily transmitted from cow to cow. It is little known among conventional dairy herds due to the routine use of antibiotic dry cow therapy at the end of lactations. Stress increases the risk of infection. While we do everything we can to reduce stress on a day to day basis, there has been unavoidable stress in the lives of these cows with Tom leaving, Merijn, Maya and I taking over the herd, re-doing the cow yard, etc. We are winning the battle with this disease by removing the most infectious cows, using a much stricter parlour routine and careful attention to individual cows. At the moment there is only one cow among the milkers, Little Orchid, who sporadically shows signs of infection. The proof of our efforts will lie in November and December when 20 or so of the cows will calve. The dry period, two months leading up to calving, is the most risky for new infections.

The key to the future health of the herd is a committed herdsman. Robin Hall will join us on 1 November 2013. Robin will be taking on the role of herdsman at Plaw Hatch - see his introduction on the back page.

SHEEP: Our lovely flock of ewes play quite a role on the farm. Over the winter they look after all the pastures that the cows have left in a bit of a mess, ready for even spring growth. In addition they produce wool that is available in the shop as fleece and spun balls of wool. Every year they produce 45 lambs for meat and their skins are tanned and sold through the shop. It is a satisfying farm enterprise because nothing gets wasted.

As many of you have probably heard, the sheep had an awful shock this year. They were attacked by two dogs on an outlying farm in Hartfield. An absolute massacre ensued, and we lost 13 ram lambs. It was a very difficult situation to deal with. The remaining ram lambs have recovered well.

PIGS: We have struggled with the fertility of our pigs this year. We have one sow and two gilts and until recently a Berkshire boar who has been re-homed to a smallholding in Turner's Hill. A Duroc boar will probably replace him. We are scratching our heads about how to improve this small enterprise. Pigs are an important phenomenon at Plaw Hatch in many ways, not only because they consume the whey from cheese making.

CHICKENS: The demand for eggs in our shop is insatiable. We could easily sell double the eggs that we produce. Unfortunately this year our flock was ravaged by foxes; we may have lost half of them. Anna Jobski, Johannes Nilsson's partner, looks after the chickens and has stocked up the flocks with new pullets and day olds. Egg production is on the rise again, and it looks like we will catch up with what was budgeted for the year. Anna has also managed to substantially reduce the amount of bought in organic pellets that the chickens eat, replacing them with home grown oats, whey and wheat. Our goal is to do without bought in pellets completely.

GRASS: Growing grass is the most important activity for a dairy farm. The grass that suffers most is the outlying grass that sees no livestock and gets cut for silage year after year. Every cut takes with it all the goodness extracted from the soil and brings it back to the home farm where we feed it to the cows in the winter. This year we have made a special effort to get all the compost that we make from the cow manure back to the outlying areas to build up fertility. To do so requires a lot of travelling by tractor, burning up fossil fuel! It begs the question: why not keep livestock on the outlying areas, and stop cutting and carting grass? The fate of our sheep in Hartfield answers part of that question. The other part of the answer is that we need the grass to feed our cows since we can't produce enough grass at Plaw Hatch.

CEREALS: Speaking of fertility brings us to the uneasy question of bedding. For bedding we need straw, cereal straw. Of course our cows also eat some oats, as do the chickens and the pigs, but our biggest demand for cereals is straw. Unfortunately we, along with most other organic and biodynamic farms, cannot produce nearly enough straw to meet our needs. Most of our straw comes from Simon Waters, Tablehurst's conventional farming neighbour. So conventional straw forms a big part of our compost and fertility programme. One of the benefits of this is that conventional straw has got loads of potassium and phosphorus which we are of course shipping off the farm with every pint of milk, and with every animal that leaves the farm for slaughter.

It is easy to see why "the farm as a closed organism", from a materialistic point of view at least, is an important goal of biodynamic farming. While we have not achieved that goal, it is our vision and constant striving. It means achieving a balance between numbers of animals and areas of grass and cereal. Achieving optimal yields of milk per cow, grass per ha, and cereals per ha is a necessary first step and this is where our attention is currently focused. My colleague Johannes Nilsson has a love and passion for producing biodynamic cereals and has it in his mind and heart to produce all the biodynamic cereals required for bread, muesli, porridge, straw and animal feed for this community. He deserves our enthusiastic support.

COMPLIANCE AND PROJECTS: Living and working in the Western World poses more and more challenges, particularly with regard to increasing regulatory requirements. One can see this in a negative light or one can adopt the view that the regulatory bodies are also part of our community and represent the collective efforts of all people to look after the rights of others and of the environment, "the common good". Farmers are particularly unaccustomed to being told what to do, what is safe and what not. When I was a child I was on my father's knee at the tractor's helm (or propped up on the mud guard!) from the moment I got back from school. I suppose and hope that those sitting in a central place receiving accident reports and research results from all over the world can see and prioritise the real problems.

So we are quite focused at the moment on meeting requirements. By the end of this year we will have spent £70,000 on dealing with slurry from the cow yards, at least £10,000 on health and safety and £3000 on getting retrospective planning permission for staff accommodation. In the interim frustration mounts as we want to get on with more exciting projects like building a community room, providing more spring water, investing in renewable energy and renovating buildings.

John Twyford



A Very Personal Garden Review

A couple of days ago I said I would write a garden report from Plaw Hatch. It seemed like a simple task. Review the figures from when I first came (2009) to the here and now... as we know it's all in the numbers!

So I thought I would look back at all the harvest records and the diary entries that have my weather observations and tell me when the first tomato was picked, or the date by which time all the onion sets had been planted in every year. All the information I would need to tell you where the garden is at now.

I got stuck though. I thought 'writers block' and asked for an extra 24 hours. Truth be told though I do not think I can write such a report because in this moment the season that I am in is one that is mixed with the abundance of harvest and the death of my Mum.

Her journey has so much to do with all the journeying I have made whilst here at Plaw Hatch. As I arrived all the way from Scotland so she was diagnosed with cancer and as an ex oncology nurse it seemed that the timing was right. And so whilst growing vegetables and reaping many harvests in the intervening years, I have been enriched in many other ways that have nothing to do with production numbers and everything to do with life and death.

She made it possible for me to buy a camera and in the last few weeks and days I have snapped away at the abundance that is Plawhatch garden right now. All I can say is that it has been a good growing year and she would have been so pleased for us all.

Liz Charnell



Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Involvement Survey for Customers, Shareholders and Friends

1. Introduction

Thank you for taking part in our community involvement survey for farm co-op shareholders, customers and friends. Both farms are owned by the local community and were founded on the principle that a sustainable farm needs conscious co-operation, or “co-responsibility”, between food producers and food consumers. The purpose of this survey is to explore the theme of community involvement, learn more about how you would like to be involved with the farms, and – hopefully – encourage more community involvement with our (your) farms in the future.

The survey should take less than 15 minutes to complete. Please answer as fully as you can as this information is really important to us.

If you have any comments about this survey, please email Jeremy Smith, Co-op committee member, at jeremysmith33@mac.com

2. About you (just to give us a sense of our community)

i) Are you male or female? Male Female

ii) How old are you? Under 25 25 to 34 35 to 44 45 to 54
55 to 64 65 to 74 Over 75

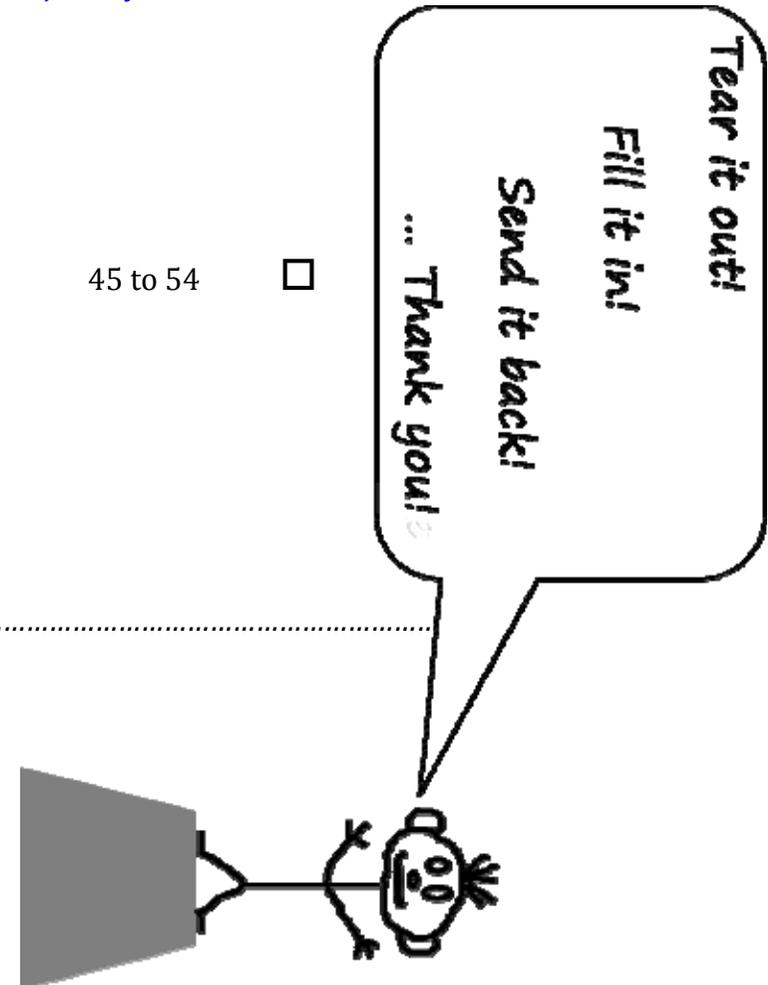
3. Your existing connection with Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farm

i) What is your connection to the farms? (please tick all that apply)

Shareholder Customer Other (please describe)

ii) How long have you been involved with Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch Community Farms?

Less than a year Less than five years Over five years



iii) Which of the following matter to you? (please tick all that apply)

	Very important	Quite important	Not at all important
Organic food/farming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Biodynamic food/farming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Local food/farming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A chance for your children to experience a farm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Community involvement in farming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training of future farmers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Farms that care for plants, animals, the land and people	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

What else is important to you about the farms? *(please write in)*

iv) How much of your household food needs are met by produce bought at the Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch?

All or nearly all About half Less than half Little or none

6. Developing your involvement with the farms

Community involvement can take many guises. Please indicate below whether you might be interested in each of the ideas listed.

	I'm not really interested in this type of activity	I'm might <i>participate</i> in this type of activity	I might help to <i>organise</i> this type of activity
Being on the Co-op committee	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Helping us find new supporters and shareholders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Walks around the farms to learn more about farming practice	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Writing for the Co-op newsletter and/or the farms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Creating excellent guides, signage and posters for the farms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Talks by farmers or other experts explaining biodynamic farming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Cooking sessions and/or food tastings of farm produce	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Group study sessions to deepen your understanding	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Farm social events such as open days, barn dances and markets	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Being a "community involvement representative" for one farm	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Volunteer "work day" events on the farms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Individual volunteering on the farms on a more sustained basis	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Short courses, e.g. on adapting biodynamics to the domestic garden	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Opportunities for children to learn about and/or experience farming	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Fundraising for the farms or for farm land	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Please indicate below any other areas of involvement which would interest you, or skills you could offer:

7. Next Steps

We believe that more community engagement means stronger farms in the long term, so we, the Co-op committee, are keen to engage with you and learn more about your particular interests if you are willing. Would you be willing to participate in:

A short telephone discussion?

A face to face meeting?

The purpose of these contacts would be to hear your feedback, to explore your interests further and to see how you could get involved in ways that suit you. There would be no obligation at all as a result of taking part. In addition, please let us know if any of the following apply to you:

Please put me on the mailing list for the Co-op newsletter

Please tell me about how to become a shareholder

Please put me on the Tablehurst Farm mailing list

Please put me on the Plaw Hatch Farm mailing list

8. Your contact details (these will be kept confidential and used only to contact you, with your permission)

NAME _____ PHONE NO. _____ EMAIL _____

9. Any other comments

If you have any further thoughts about why Tablehurst and/or Plaw Hatch is important to you, or what we should do to sustain them into the future, we would really welcome them. Please write your comments below or on another sheet of paper, or if you prefer, just email them separately to Jeremy Smith, Co-op committee member, at jeremysmith33@mac.com with "Community Involvement Survey" in the subject line.

Thank you for your help with this survey! When completed, please return to either of the farm shops at Tablehurst or Plaw Hatch, or else post to: Community Involvement Survey, Plaw Hatch Farm Shop, Plaw Hatch Lane, Sharpthorne, East Grinstead, West Sussex RH19 4JL.

"Welcome to Tablehurst Farm Shop and Cafe . . .

we are now open **TUESDAY, WEDNESDAY, Thursday, Friday & Saturday 9 - 5pm**"

Change has been afoot at Tablehurst in recent months. Over the summer, the shop, cafe and garden teams have been hard at work improving the shop layout, produce availability and customer service. This has included not only making the shop space larger, introducing new lines, but also extended opening - we are now open on **Tuesdays and Wednesdays!**

Many of our customers have appreciated the five day opening which allows us to sell fresh garden produce, dairy and bread daily - so we are seeing familiar faces more frequently, often daily. We have installed a new deli counter so you will now be able to purchase pies and pasties through the main shop - this allows for the cafe to focus more on an eat-in menu and service. An alcohol licence has been applied for and we now stock a wide selection of biodynamic and organic wines, beers and ciders.



I'm sure many of our customers miss Barry and Rosie as much as we do (Barry and Rosie retired in June after many years of service), but we have the pleasure of working with two new members of the shop team, **Verity Vince** and **Clare Adams**.

Clare joined the team in June and is responsible for looking after our valued customer order book. Many of our customers already know Clare as she managed the veterinary practice in Forest Row for 10 years. Verity joined the team in August and is responsible for "front-of-house" and is doing a fantastic job introducing new lines and "recipe of the week" which include seasonal Tablehurst produce. Both Clare and Verity are also very much part of the team supplying the shop with the wonderful array of sausages, burgers, bacon, etc . . .

You will know our butcher team - full-time butchers are the "Lukes" (**Luke E and Luke H**) supported and mentored by **David Coldman** who works with Tablehurst three days a week (David himself was trained by Barry many, many years ago).

After volunteering on the farm for 4 years, in September I finally succumbed and became part of the team and now work part-time supporting MD David Junghans as Retail & Marketing Manager. When I'm not in the shop I continue to work with the Sun Hive project.

So, are the changes working? overwhelmingly our customers have said "yes". But of course, not all feedback has been positive. We have received many comments about the introduction of the wire "supermarket-type" basket. We would like to assure all our customers we have no intention of getting rid of the wicker baskets - its just they seem to grow legs spirit themselves away. . . We also had reservations about the trolleys . . . the majority of customers do not have the need to use them but for some their introduction has been very useful, particularly those with babes-in-arms and for those less abled. Some of our customers felt the space was more crowded and we have addressed this by removing the central "market stall".

Finally, not only a very big thank you to the farm team for also being part these changes but to you, as farm partners and customers, who continue to support Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch.

Rachel Hanney



We would love to hear your thoughts on the "new shop" and any suggestions you may have. Here are some recent comments:

"Beautiful new shop - lots more space and very welcoming"

"New shop looks lovely - welcoming and full of good food!! Always a pleasure to shop here"

"It's great to be able to shop here on more days and have a sneaky cup of coffee at the same time"

"I think it is absolutely wonderful to see your farm, how you run it and the things you sell. Thank you for all you do"

"I really like the new shop, well done"

"...we've ALWAYS LOVED love your cafe.....BUT.....especially now it's open until 5.00. The FOOD and ambience is fabulous and your welcoming, cheerful warm service is a tonic. THANKYOU. You're one in a million"

Gone full circle..

The Autumn has arrived.. chilly breeze and first cold fingers while harvesting celeriac this morning! With the days shortening, a change in mood is setting in too.. one of reflection of how the past year in the garden has gone for a garden novice..

Lesson learnt: once the season starts, there's no slowing down! But what a joy, what an energy emerges when you get to go try and keep up with the powers of Earth and Sky..

The garden's vision to grow 'as wide a variety of vegetables as possible' for our community inspired me hugely when I first landed here a year ago. This commitment adds to Nature's challenges with a more complex rotation and constantly having to prioritise jobs. I have observed Rob thinking out loud all season long: harvest the garlic, steerage hoe the leek beds, weed the carrots, hoe the salads in the tunnels, string up the cucumbers, plant out the brassicas,.. what first? What do we fit in when this week?



A challenge this year was a late start to a glorious season. Tomato and cucumber plants sat in pots, crying out to go into the ground when other crops were still happily occupying their spots in the poly-tunnels. Soon after, the garden beds demanded their share of attention with weeding requests. And when rain didn't fall, a daily ritual of moving drip tape along the beds unfolded.

It's been a privilege to witness the fragrance and colourful bounty of sweet peas, mange-tout and broad beans from beginning to end. It's been incredible to nurture cucumbers and tomatoes: side-shooting, feeding nettle/comfrey tea and harvesting abundant fruits. I reluctantly embraced the ingenuity of machinery for field crops: the wonders of the transplanter and steerage hoe and the powers of an antique, gypsy-caravan look-alike potato harvester. Above all it has been the variety of crops and the range of tasks that have made the past year such a joy. The morning harvest is a definite favourite.. to cycle out to the farm, greeting the sunrise, day after day, is pretty special. To then greet the sun among the sunflowers, rainbow chard and fennel tops as it shines its rays through the headlands shrubs is absolutely priceless.

The past year has been a mere introduction to an intricate web of cycles, all interrelated and interacting! How fascinating, yet daunting at the same time! There's so much to observe: the insect world, birds' behavioural patterns, the emergence of various weeds as the season progresses, the ripening of forage fruits.. On the periphery I am watching the animals on the farm and realise the role they play in our vegetable growing cycle, the character they add to the farm.. So much to absorb!

Filled with gratitude for the land and its stewards, I look ahead and know that winter too will now take on different meaning. It may be a time to turn inward and re-charge, yet the work to be done is just as integral a part of a bigger cycle: a time for planning, a time for building infrastructure, for maintenance, for study and research, but also a time for reflecting on our wider relationship with nature, beyond production.

Taking one step at a time though, Autumn's harvest frenzy has only just started.. Prop house benches filled with squash.. one storage crop ticked off the list! Celeriac, beetroots, swedes, carrots, parsnips to follow.. Garlic bulbs, broad beans and winter salads to go into the ground, etc.

Now what first?

Lien Stephens

... in Tablehurst Garden

Get involved ...

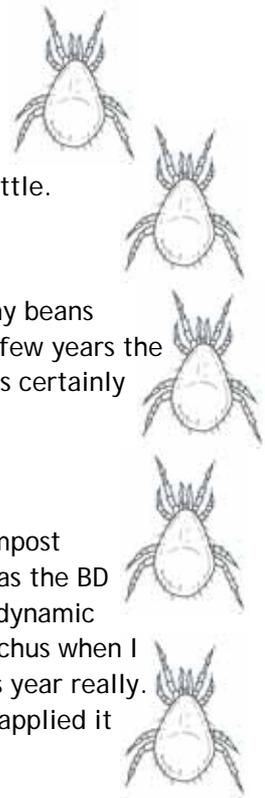
The Co-op Committee is looking for two new members who have the time and passion to contribute to the welfare and management of the Co-op and the farms.

The Committee meets monthly in its governance role as the representative body of the shareholders.

Enthusiasm and a passion for community farming are the key requirements. We are particularly keen for people with skills or experience in the following areas: fund raising, event organisation, community engagement, the law (especially employment and planning issues), education and schools liaison. If you are interested kindly email a short resume of your background and relevant experience to robert@mensinga.com or contact a committee member. Many thanks and we hope to hear from you.

... join the Co-op Committee

News from Michael Hall Garden



There are so many exciting developments going on in Michael Hall garden that I'd like to share a little.

This year we had hardly any spring but an amazing summer. The garden is abundant.

This dry and hot summer should have been a feast for the red spider mite, which used to plague my beans aubergines and cucumbers ever since it first appeared here, I think it was in 1999. During the last few years the problem has become much less. Last year I thought it might be the cold and rainy summer, but this certainly won't explain this year. Red Spider Mite thrives in hot and dry weather.

So what have I been doing ?

Since about 3 years we have our flow-form installed in the propagation house to make aerated compost tea. (compost nettles comfrey, suspended in the water and being bio-dynamic, the tea obviously has the BD compost preparation in form of "Barrel-Compost" added to it, and sometimes I use individual Bio-dynamic Compost preparations in homeopathic form to balance one-sidedness (I learnt that from Peter Bacchus when I visited him 8 years ago in New Zealand) I've also used food grade diatomaceous earth, but not this year really. When the spider mite first appeared I made a "Biodynamic Pepper" from it, but probably haven't applied it consistently enough.

The new addition this year is our SEM water vortex (picture on front page), which does 2 things, the water flows through a bed of special ceramic beads (their composition is copied from very ancient earthenware pots, in which water was found to still be fresh after a very long time). The beads work as catalysts to transform chlorine into molecular chlorine, which leaves the water as soon as gets in contact with the air. And it flows through a triple vortex. The vortex being one of the archetypal forms of creation and growth, imitating the waters natural gurgling in brooks.

I find this water wonderful and definitely enjoy watering a lot more (it might increase the water bill?), it feels so much softer. And we can drink water straight out of the garden tap. I now take garden water to my house as drinking water and I feel good about watering the plants we eat with good water.

This summer I also have had a wonderful team of amazing people working with me.

Jessica, who's coming to the end of her 2 years training, Peter Leake, who's so wonderfully good with our continuous flow of teenage students, mostly from the continent, and at the same time works so hard himself. He's been in charge of the tomatoes, which are doing really well this year. Wilkie arrived for a visit and turned into a long term volunteer, And he will soon start his apprenticeship here. We've had Jamie, as a part time volunteer, Kate Ayling who miraculously arrived just when we really needed her, and some amazing young people, Roman and Paul from the Eckernförde Steiner school, who walked from Dover to Forest Row in 3 ½ days, Caroline, who made the most amazing flower bunches, and so many more each of them bringing something special to us. Our last student Florian, just left and this hard working, observant and really friendly young man gave us a good ending to our "student-season".

We are also continuing our inspiring work facilitated by Barry after we've come to our value statement, which is a reference-point for everything we do, we are continuously looking where we are now, for that purpose we did the questionnaire, you might have had one of early this year. One of our primary goals is to become more and more sustainable, in our case this includes very much the human level as well making sure that no one here works too much.

We've had volunteers coming forward to redecorate and improve the shelving in our garden shop, it hasn't happened yet, because of holidays, episodes of illness and the fact that people coming forward to help so often are people who have got so much to do anyway, but it is planned. It will happen over 1 week when we will need to move the garden shop into a gazebo or something similar. There will be one weekend of cleaning and painting, the next weekend for the woodwork. If you feel inspired to join in, especially if you are good at painting and or woodwork, please ring me on 01342 825604 or email dorothea.leber@michaelhall.co.uk since many hands will make the job easier.

Dorothea Leber

WOULD YOU LIKE TO JOIN THE PLAW HATCH MANAGEMENT GROUP?

We have an exciting opportunity at Old Plaw Hatch Farm for two people to join our Management Group with a view to becoming Non-Executive Directors. You will not necessarily be involved in the management of the Farm on a daily basis. However, the Management Group is collectively responsible for the success or failure of the Farm. We are particularly interested in people who are regular customers and who share our values. Whatever your experience or skills, you could be the right person if you love the farm and are willing to share the responsibility with us for its future.

The successful individuals will need to acquire a proper understanding of the Farm's business in order to challenge and participate in the decisions of the Management Group. The position will require closely working with the Executive Directors of the Farm and other Management Group Members, to ensure that strategies are broadly agreed and the vision is shared. A key requirement will be regular attendance at the Management Group meeting once a month, plus any others that may be relevant. If you are interested in helping with the farm's various projects, such as building a community room, energy usage, or drilling a borehole that would be a great bonus to us.

Although this is a voluntary position a 20% discount in the Farm shop is offered to the successful individuals. If you are a regular customer that could mount to something! More than anything the reward is in supporting this valuable farming initiative and seeing it thrive.

If you wish to be considered, please e-mail your CV to info@plawhatchfarm.co.uk or call 01342 810652 or 01342 810201 and ask to speak to Jenny.



OUR FARM VALUES STATEMENT

"We at Plaw Hatch Farm employ a biodynamic agricultural approach that values sustainable husbandry of the land and responsible and loving welfare of the animals. We value the people who contribute to the farm's day to day activities and seek to create a working environment that honours integrity, peace, happiness, honesty, personal responsibility, passion, love, authenticity, freedom and balance, and which celebrates the beauty of the farm's natural environment.

"We embrace challenges. We highly value our connection to the local community, of which we are all also individual parts, and strive to operate a farm business that is a transparent example of ethical and sustainable agriculture on every level, offering on living display the full cycle of food production. We seek to provide a working farm environment which honours learning, teaching, and personal and community growth and development. We operate an ethical financial approach which is in harmony with our values. We see ourselves as stewards of the farm, embodying man's sacred relationship to the land, creating a legacy of richness at every level for future generations."

My name is Robin Hall and I am the new Dairy Herdsman at Plawhatch Farm. I am from Scotland and have been working on a mixed Biodynamic farm near Edinburgh where we were hand milking a small herd of cows. I have been involved in agriculture and related trades for most of my career and have a great interest in the successful integration of landscape, community and sustainable farming systems.

In 2007, I enrolled in the Biodynamic Training at Emerson College and it was there that I met my future wife Kristen Ram Kleps, a former Steiner Kindergarten Teacher who was studying Visual Arts and Sculpture. Kristen has recently been working as a carer for learning disabled adults. Along with her background in art and education, she has a great interest in curative nutrition. We have a three year old daughter, Rose and I am father of two teenage sons, Marlon and Jerome.

Kristen and I firmly believe in the benefits of raw milk. I am committed to maintaining the healthy herd at Plaw Hatch, and the supply of top quality milk that people love. It is a pleasure for us both to be returning to the area and we look forward to meeting friends, both old and new.



Tablehurst Christmas Order Book NOW OPEN

Turkey, Goose, Duck alongside Tablehurst Beef, Pork, Lamb and wild venison. Adele is cooking up some tempting morsels including the seasonal cutting pies.

The shop team are happy to help with your questions. Orders can be placed in person or by calling 01342 823 173.

Every year we take over 400 orders, so don't delay.

