

# TABLEHURST AND PLAW HATCH COMMUNITY FARM NEWS

SUMMER 2014

## Bovine TB at Plaw Hatch?

On 15<sup>th</sup> May, one of Plaw Hatch's best cows, Maria, tested positive for TB during the annual test that is a legal requirement on all farms which rear cows. Three other cows, Jude, Chalky and India, tested inconclusive. The law is extremely clear in these circumstances: Maria had to be given up immediately for slaughter; the other three cows are isolated from the herd and their milk cannot be processed or sold. The other major impact on the farm is that, for the time being, our licence to sell raw milk has been withdrawn. The entire herd will have to pass two consecutive tests, one in 60 days and another at 120 days, before we will be allowed to sell raw milk again.

In these circumstances, the farm has decided that the best course of action is, for the time being, to pasteurise our milk so that we can continue to sell it and you can continue to benefit from its many other good qualities. Our intention is to return to raw milk sales as soon as this is legally possible, hopefully in September. In the meantime, we ask you, our community, to support the farm through this difficult time by continuing to buy our dairy products. Plaw Hatch milk is still BIODYNAMIC, from cows with horns, that are individually loved and cared for, that amble gently up the track, are given loads of space, and that only eat grass with some oats, sprouted beans and fodder beet in the parlour. We hope you will continue to love our milk.

Bovine TB is a complex issue, and it is not possible to cover all aspects adequately in a short article. However, we would like everyone to be aware of the following:

- The bovine TB test is only about 80% reliable. A positive result does not prove the presence of TB, and an inconclusive test most certainly doesn't. We have had a number of inconclusive tests over recent years, and all of them have proved to be clear when retested.
- A post mortem has been conducted on Maria by the Animal Health and Veterinary Laboratories (AHVLA) and they have found no TB lesions. It seems unlikely that she had TB at all, but an additional test will be carried out. This test involves culturing a sample of her blood and takes a few weeks.
- **It follows that there is a high chance that there has not been any bovine TB at Plaw Hatch.**
- Even if the positive TB test is ultimately confirmed, there is no material danger to anyone who has consumed raw milk products from Plaw Hatch in the recent past, because it takes about 18 months from the moment a cow contracts TB before it becomes present in the milk.
- Although we are not allowed to sell raw milk for the time being, all the cheese and other dairy produce that was produced before the recent test has been declared safe to eat by Environmental Health. Unpasteurised cheese is still available.
- Plaw Hatch yoghurt is the same as ever. The yoghurt-making process requires the milk to be heated to pasteurisation temperature in order to give the (heat-loving) yoghurt-making bacteria the upper hand. Plaw Hatch yoghurt is live yoghurt because the added bacteria are not killed and have pro-biotic properties.

**Next steps:** This episode has reminded us to re-double our efforts to build the immune systems of our cows and prevent infection that can only come from three sources: humans, cows or other animals we buy in, and wildlife. If you have recently visited farms in other areas you may want to think about whether you might bring disease onto the farm. We only ever buy male animals for breeding and we need to be as careful as we can about that. Badgers are believed to be TB carriers, but the AHVLA assures us that there are no known cases of TB-carrying badgers north of Ringmer.



# First Forays in Pasteurising

Following our recent TB tests, we must temporarily stop producing raw dairy products until the herd at Plaw Hatch regains its officially TB Free status. Suddenly there was an immediate need to put in place the infrastructure to be able to pasteurise all our milk. For the first few days we managed to get by using the vat we make yoghurt in, but that doesn't even hold all the milk from one milking at this peak time of the year when the cows have calved and they're eating the lush spring grass, and it takes a long time to heat and cool the milk. Once pasteurised, we had no system to pump the milk back down the hill past the milking parlour to the bottling room, so those first few milk bottling sessions we had to carry the milk down in buckets after pasteurising. What we needed was a specialist piece of equipment - a pasteuriser.

After much searching we managed to find a second hand pasteuriser in good condition that can pasteurise 500 litres of milk per hour, which is perfect for our size of dairy. We also found a second hand bulk tank, that cools the milk quickly after milking and keeps it refrigerated. This is needed to hold the raw milk which goes through the pasteuriser and from there into our bulk tank in the bottling room, and from there it can be bottled or pumped up to the cheese vat or yoghurt vat in the dairy. These were driven down from Halifax late on Thursday night as Gala, Liz, Laurens and Laura cleared and cleaned the room next to the milking parlour that was to become the pasteurising room. On Friday the installation operation began, and it was no mean feat! Friday was a flurry of plumbing, electrics, installing refrigeration and a housing unit for the compressor, removing, painting and re-instating the door and frame to enable us to get the wide bulk tank in, as well as all the arranging a pipe network to enable the milk to be pumped to and from the equipment. I am grateful to so many people who came with short notice to make it all happen.

On Saturday we had our inaugural pasteurisation as, John, Robin and I learned to operate it. It seems to take about two and a half hours in total with the warming up and cleaning processes to pasteurise the evening and morning milk, which does increase the pressure in the mornings when we want to get started with bottling milk or making cheese.

Since we received news that we could no longer sell raw milk questions had been rolling around my mind about what this means for the milk, for the kefir and cream and cheeses we make with it. We have had to change our labelling and buy new glass bottles for the milk. We can no longer make kefir with milk still warm from the cows but have to warm it after the pasteuriser has cooled it, and it seems to take a little longer to ferment. We have to adapt our cheesemaking as we no longer have the help of the microorganisms naturally present in raw milk, relying on the cultures that we add to it, and we won't be able to fully see the effects until the cheese is matured. However, the milk is still delicious, with a thick layer of cream on top. It is still biodynamic. It is still from pasture-fed, well loved and cared for, generous cows, and then made into a variety of foods in the most natural and nourishing ways possible.

Tali Eichner

# Struggling with the questions of bovine TB

On a farm that sells raw milk it is a persistent question: will we get through the next TB test? Every year we are put through the testing process. I think we always approach it in a state of denial, firstly because it is such a stressful process for the cows and the people, and secondly because the thought of having a reactor is impossible to contemplate.

TB testing is such an unnatural process for the cows. Of course interrupting their day, morning and evening for milking, is also an unnatural process, but it is a process they have come to expect. Pushing them at midday toward the same facility, without the rhythmic sucking and humming of milking machines and the taste of freshly milled oats, but instead toward two uncomfortable jabs in the neck, is not easy. All to be repeated in two days' time to check the results: even more difficult.

About 80% of cows that test positive to the test actually have TB which is discovered by post-mortem as lesions in the lungs or lymphatic system. We have been told that Maria, our cow who reacted, has no lesions. From the government's point of view sacrificing the 20% that don't have TB is worth it if the negative economic and social consequences of TB at a national level can be reduced. This map shows how TB has advanced in the UK between 1998 and 2010. The darker the shade, the higher the proportion of TB reactors.

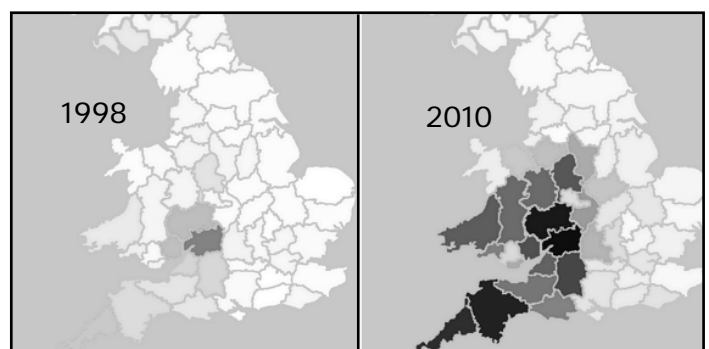
Scientific opinion is that this escalation has happened since the culling of badgers was banned. Perhaps the main cause of the spread of TB is the movement of intensively farmed cattle around country, which is the antithesis of the biodynamic (and organic ideal for that matter) of operating a farm as a closed organism.

Nevertheless, other countries in the EU have managed to reach Officially TB Free status by acting mercilessly against cows that react but may not have TB, and controlling wild life reservoirs, which in the UK means culling and/or vaccinating badgers - easier said than done.

How do biodynamic, community owned farms react to this? We feel that every cow is important, that they are individuals. We firmly believe in and experience the benefits of raw milk. If others farmed the way we do, we believe there wouldn't be a TB problem yet we are affected by their actions and lose our own liberty. We are however farming in the context of a huge regulatory world that changes very slowly. Doctors were convinced of the link between lung cancer and cigarette smoke in the 1930s, but the UK smoking ban was finally implemented in 2007.

The question we are being asked by many customers and members of the community in different ways appears to be this: is there a miscarriage of justice at play? Do we need to be challenging the government at law? We haven't decided whether there is a legal case, or on what grounds a case would be built, but we are exploring what it will cost to get a legal opinion.

John Twyford



# Stay at home grower

After what felt like a very long and tiresome winter, spring finally started to take hold of Tablehurst, lambs coming, sunny days, fields worked and tractors serviced. It's great when things get going around the farm, there is always a real buzz of excitement with all the new jobs that begin with the change of the season. We do a lot of planning in the garden through the winter, deciding what to grow, when to sow and where to plant the crops that year, we apply what we have learnt from the previous year and try to adjust our plans to make the coming year run more smoothly.

One thing you can't plan for is sick leave, and this is the challenge that appeared for us this year. I had an accident in April and fractured my fibula when I twisted my ankle, this was most unfortunate especially considering the time of year. Luckily for Tablehurst Stephen and Lien have now had several years of experience between them and Peter Leake joined us again this year who also has quite a few years work experience in the garden, so between the full time team and some extra help from Luigi the farm apprentice and our array of summer volunteers the season has been progressing as planned.

For me it is quite hard to sit back and watch as things happen in the garden, having been so involved with its development for the past 6 years; letting go hasn't been easy for me. Every time I have visited though things have always looked good, fields worked at the right time, crops harvested our vegetable stall looking excellent and our wholesale customers still happy so I have nothing to complain about. Physically my body has been grateful for the rest, I haven't ever in my life spent so much time sitting around before and this has given my time to read and catch up on some work which had been sidelined, I've even made a start on the planning we normally do over winter.

I have also taken this time as a gift to spend more time with our 2 year old daughter Hazel and my wife, I can't go for long walks or trips to the seaside but I can read stories with our daughter and play with her. All the time I have spent at home have given our family an opportunity to bond in a way we don't normally have the chance to because of the working hours needed at the farm. So this experience for me has been a blessing in disguise, to see how our daughter is developing every day.

Rob Tilsey

# Every season different

Luigi was reflecting how when he arrived this time last year to start his apprenticeship, and stayed with me for those first few weeks, we were lighting my wood fire every night to beat back the cold. Now I'm concerned with getting the irrigation ready and working for the new field - where the old apple orchard stood

But

Really we could do with first moving that old blue lorry body, clearing the headland, so we can get the digger in to dig the drain along the back, because that field is a quagmire after a good rain, in that way the irrigation we lay won't have to be moved ...

Will it rain this week?

There were two exciting and big changes for the garden team since those cold days with Luigi, the new shop opening hours and the new field.

We are fortunate to have this contact with our customers; for us it completes the journey from the working of the soil to the harvest and preparation of the vegetables we grow

And now everyone will be able to see part of this process as they enter the farm, and how wobbly we drove while planting!

It is all new, new days, new customers, new field, so yes it is an exciting year, warm with a long list of crucial jobs.

We also wish Rob a speedy recovery; mend that broken bone fast man.

Oh no, someone drank my tea and the key board is covered in cat fur.

Stephen Mills

# Thank you for your feedback!

Thanks are due to all those people who responded to our recent community involvement survey. For community-owned farms such as Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch, few things are more important than engaging with our customers, shareholders (farm partners) and local people so as to be sure that we are continuing to reflect your interests and priorities in sustainable food production.

## What really matters to you

The factors about the farms that you considered most important were:

- Organic and biodynamic food and farming
- Locally-produced food and community involvement in farming
- Opportunities for children to experience life on a farm
- The training of future farmers
- Farming that cares for the land, the plants and animals and people

## Ways you've offered to help

We're also very grateful to those of you who kindly offered your time and skills to help the farms develop, as well as for telling us what you would like to see the farms offer in terms of community facilities for the future. For example, it's been very encouraging to receive offers of help with items such as:

- Organising farm walks for members of the public
- Participating in study groups for biodynamic farming
- Running social events such as barn dances, barbecues or cooking sessions
- Providing learning opportunities for children

We've also been glad to hear from people with particular skills to offer, such as:

- IT and graphic design
- Woodland management and fuel production
- Publicity and PR
- Educational outreach

Representatives from the farms or the Co-op committee will be contacting everyone who has responded so far - and we will of course welcome any further offers of help!

## Future developments

Tablehurst and Plaw Hatch are not only busy working farms but also give a very high priority to enhancing community involvement with what happens on the farms. In the future both farms are planning to improve facilities for school visits, educational activities and leisure provision. Plaw Hatch has already started work on converting a large space in the farm buildings for use as a community room and will complete this as and when funds allow. Tablehurst is responding to requests for a bigger café area with more indoor seating with a plan to develop over the next 3-5 years a new building that will act as a focal point for events at the farm including a bigger café and a community/seminar room. In the shorter term, there is a need for more covered or protected seating for winter days so as to expand the capacity of the café to meet demand from visitors.

If you can help in any way with these projects - for example with fundraising or building skills - we would love to hear from you! Please call Jeremy Smith on 07940 859495 or email [jeremysmith33@mac.com](mailto:jeremysmith33@mac.com) for an initial discussion. Thank you!

# Plaw Hatch Garden Update

Last newsletter was about the challenges of constructing (or actually not constructing) a new propagation tunnel. Due to the wet and stormy weather at the beginning of the year the site was more of a pond than a base for the new tunnel. Since then we have our new tunnel. In early March the weather settled and Warren (the tunnel construction man) finished constructing the tunnel and not a moment too soon. Even before it was completed we were already in the midst of the sowing season. The makeshift propagator was bursting with seedlings and the next sowing date was approaching. Once ready, it filled very quickly. Now, thanks to it we can sow more and the other tunnels are full of growing plants.



*The new propagator tunnel filling up with trays*

This year we have been growing more. Beds in the tunnels are often turned over (from one crop to another) within a day or even while still harvesting the previous crop. The peppers, for example, are being planted as soon as a patch of beetroot is harvested. Also we decided to grow more flowers and herbs. The aim is that the garden is more productive and a beautiful place to be in and walk around.

We are now in the middle of the 'quickening' season. All the plants in the garden are growing very fast and are getting ready to bear their fruits. Some of them have already started. This year crops are particularly early and we are already harvesting, in addition to the regular vegetables for the season, cucumbers, mange tout and the first tomatoes are hanging on the vines.

I experience this period as the most intense and exciting time of the year. On top of planting and sowing in the tunnels, plants need maintaining and harvesting. In the fields, not all the crops are planted and 'settled'. Leeks, for example have just been planted and the root vegetables have just germinated. They all have a way to go before we can talk of a crop. Of course the fast and vigorous growth of plants is also seen in the growth of weeds. They are growing as fast as the vegetables if not faster. This is where the garden volunteers come in.

This year we feel fortunate to have a good team in the garden. In addition to Liz and Nir who manage the garden, Rose and Marleen are part of the regular team.

Rose and Marleen are both students. Rose, the garden apprentice and is well into her second year. Marleen is a Dutch Biodynamic horticulture student who has come for a summer placement. Both are playing an active role in the everyday running of the garden. Also, we have had occasional help from other volunteers: Laura (another Dutch student) was very dedicated to plating the onions. She was planting them between feeding the animals on the farm and learning to milk the cows, Annette and Valerie from Switzerland and Lilly and Laurence from Germany helped with weeding beds in the tunnels and other jobs in their 'spare' time. Over the last couple of weeks the last 4 in the list left and already new volunteers are arriving.

It is really thanks to these helpers that the garden is not only full of vigour and growth but also maintained and looks beautiful. Please feel free to come and walk around the tunnels and see the vegetables growing.



Nir Halfen

*Liz, Rose, Marleen and Lily (with Laurence in the background) planting leeks. The pointing finger on the left is Nir taking ice cream orders*

# Flowers for bees



Some of you might have heard already, that since I left Michael Hall I'm paying my rent by growing flowers for bees. I have grown bee-flowers in the past but now it's more specific. And I have a little more time to find out more about the flowers and the bees. Heidi Hermann has lent me a most beautiful book (which I keep borrowing): "Plants for Bees" by W.D.J. Kirk and F.N. Howes

First of all there are 3 different groups of bees, all of which have declined in the last years. There are Bumble Bees about 6 common species in Britain, while there used to be 8. The scientific name of Bumble Bees is really easy to remember: *Bombus*, so *Bombus hortorum* is the Garden Bumble Bee.

Then there are the solitary bees, about 90% of the World's Bee species are solitary bees, 243 species in Britain. Some build their brood nest in the soil, some in cavities, some excavate nests in solid materials. These bees do collect nectar and pollen and pollinate by doing this, but they don't make honey. The only bee, that overwinters as a hive is the honey Bee. There is only one variety of it in Europe: *apis mellifera* and it has accompanied humanity over thousands of years. With such a variety of species around it is not surprising that growing flowers for bees means lots of variety and at every time of the year.



All the different bee species have different tongues, suiting different shapes of flowers. Bees need pollen, nectar and plant resins, which they make propolis out of, that is used to seal, as antiseptic, as material to close holes to mummify anything that's foreign or toxic to the hive and too big to carry out etc. Nectar of different flowers has different qualities. Some plants provide nectar, some pollen, some both.

Here are things we can do to help the bees:

- Watch which plants the bees are visiting and grow them
- Plant flower species that will provide pollen and nectar from January to October (see list below)
- Manage hedges in a way that lets them flower and plant hedges of mixed species including: hazel, hawthorn, dog rose, blackthorn, honeysuckle, holly, ivy, crab apple, willow, wild cherry and wild pear.
- Leave plants and weeds until they stop flowering before pulling them up, and make sure to wait with cutting back the late autumn/winter flowering nectar plants holly and ivy, until after they have flowered.
- Mow your lawn less often: let the white clover flower, and then mow, it will flower again.



In all the gardens I'm currently working people want me to grow bee flowers. - Wonderful! How do I do that? I'm focussing on things you can do at this time of the year still.



- Plant single flower varieties, (asters, roses, Dahlias, rather than the double flowers, which are heavily bred, often hybrids, and don't have nectar)
- Borage is an easy to grow plant and at the top of the list for all bees
- if there is any Rosebay willowherb in the garden I advise not to pull it out, again a top bee plant
- I sow Phacelia, Buchwheat, Crimson Clover in successions, just like I grow lettuce in successions when I feed people... and I'm thinking of under-sowing the courgettes and squash I'm growing with white clover. I'm very busy taking turf off at the moment to grow successions of bee flowers. You can sow Phacelia and buckwheat until the middle of August it will then flower in October, when it's a very precious late flowering food source.
- I've started sowing some wild flower seeds in pots, mixing compost and some sand. Once they are up I start with a small patch in the lawn, taking the turf and some of the richest soil off take out any perennial weeds and plant what's in the pots in that spot.
- I've also found that growing plants for bees means growing food for ourselves, not just because bees pollinate our food, also because blackberries, Raspberries, red and Black Currants, gooseberries, apples pears, cherries etc. are all visited by bees a lot. This spring we've seen a field bean, that appeared from nowhere being visited by the bees all the time. The broad beans seem to be visited by the bumble bees. I've seen squash and courgette flowers, runner beans all visited by bees. I love that idea. I might plant fruit bushes, thinking even if I can't eat all the fruit, I'm providing food for the bees.



Bee flowers through the year (top ten in **bold**)

Jan/Feb: Snowdrop, Bodnant viburnum, winter aconite, sweet box, crocus, mahonia and hellebore

Mar.: Celandine, blackthorn, **cherry**, plum, marsh marigold, **goat willow** and stinking hellebore

Apr & May: **Dandelion**, blackthorn, arabis, damson, pear, **apple**, grape hyacinth, glory of the snow, violet, gorse, firethorn, hawthorn, cotoneaster, forget-me-not, the early rose "Canary-Bird"

Jun & Jul: **Bramble**, lime, Butterfly bush, Portugal laurel, barberry, **white clover**, thyme, oregano, sage, catnip, mint, lavender, single and semi-double rose, false acacia, **borage**, phacelia, broom, veronica

Aug: Heather, heath, hebe, stonecrop, fuchsia, **rosebay willowherb** and mallow.

Sep & Oct: **Michaelmas daisy**, knapweed, aster, late stonecrop, sneezeweed, bellflower, goldenrod,

Nov & Dec: Ivy, stonecrop, laurustinus, Farer's viburnum, and Bodnant viburnum.



Dorothea Leber



# The 'collateral damage' of open data

## Reflections on the UN's Working Party on Land Administration

I have just returned from attending the latest meeting of the United Nations' Working Party on Land Administration (UN-WPLA), which was on the theme of developing the 'socio-economic benefits of land administration services'. Like many UN bodies, the UN-WPLA is largely representative of western governments and institutions seeking to export their services, to each other and the rest of the world. In this case it was land administration - the mix of land registry and mapping services by which all governments seek to regulate and administer rights in land.

To the officials who run these administration services, the link between good data and good services is axiomatic. However, with the advent of the G8's Open Data Charter (2013), which commits signatories - including the UK - to make certain and available all data on all aspects of public life, land administration is taking on a new - and sinister - role as an 'engine of economic growth.' As numerous governments have recognised, making land rights more certain and accessible makes land a more marketable commodity, which leads to increases in land prices as more people bid for what is available. This version of economic growth - the one that fuelled the 2008 crash - is already being felt in many parts of the world, despite warnings from the Bank of England and others that it is a danger to economic and social recovery.

Yet, the supporters of open data continue to argue that the benefits of access to land tenure data outweigh the disadvantages, because land tenure is inextricably linked to food security. The argument is that farmers can only invest in efficient technologies when they have a secure asset against which to borrow money. Land is this asset, and open data legitimises tradable rights over it. But, as a number of delegates to the UN-WPLA argued, there is no evidence that current approaches to land administration necessarily hinder smaller farmers, while there is evidence that once land markets are opened to all, poor farmers are rapidly displaced by other interests, primarily large, often state-backed, farming companies. It is these companies that tend to supply global food chains, thus making them attractive to western governments seeking to underpin their own food security. That smaller farmers lose out is dismissed as little more than the collateral damage necessary to underpin global food security.



*The remains of a collective farm in Ukraine, now run by a French company*



*A water town near Shanghai, now producing turf rather than crops*

So, what does this mean for us, both as consumers and as community farmers? The former is clear: that the 'transparency' of globalised open data is a mixed blessing: it may bring certainty in the realm of land access and occupation, and this certainty may allow farmers to plan for the future; but it also dispossesses those who do not have the political and economic clout to protect themselves from state and corporate interests. The latter - our potential community role - is more complex. How do we respond to the multiple and conflicting pressures being placed on land? Perhaps it is a start to reflect on the poverty of rights and the need for a new vocabulary that does not compromise land by making market-based claims on it? At the heart of this new vocabulary is, perhaps, a return to the concept of co-responsibility that underpinned so many community supported agriculture initiatives. But whereas our responsibility was initially towards the farmers and businesses (our cherished 'ownership' model), perhaps now it needs to be with respect to the land? And here, of course, it is not about ownership,

but about a commitment to ensure that land is no longer asked to perform the impossible task of supporting the farm in both ecological and economic terms. To date, our vocabulary in this respect has been to raise capital funds to purchase rights over land, in the process transferring these rights to a land trust. This is a start, and it must continue, but is it enough? Is the land really protected, or do ahimanic forces continue to undermine it? And how might we act as a buffer to these forces, so that land can flourish in its role as part of the commons that are required to meet current and future social needs?

Neil Ravenscroft

**Forest Row Energy Fair, Saturday 28 June 2014, 10am – 4pm, Village Hall & Community Centre, Free entry**

Forest Row Energy is holding an Energy Fair on Saturday 28 June. Local residents are invited to come along to discover how to pay less for their energy bills and find out more about community energy. A full programme of talks and activities will showcase a wide range of money-saving and renewable energy opportunities for home, business and motoring. At the Energy Fair you will find all the latest technology for insulating your home and becoming more energy efficient, including where to go for funding and 'goodie bags' with free gifts to help you save energy. There will be a free Energy Surgery to see if you are on the right tariff. It only takes ten minutes and could save hundreds of pounds a year. People living in rural areas and using oil to heat their homes can get information and advice about a number of alternatives which are both cheaper and greener, such as biomass boilers and air or ground source heat pumps. Motorists can see the latest electronic cars and find out how convenient and efficient an option e-motoring really is. Along with outdoor activities such as the Smoothie Bike, traditional woodland crafts and café featuring special energy menu, the event promises to be a great educational day out for all the family.



# Visions for Sussex – a review

The VISIONS FOR SUSSEX event held at Emerson College on 26th April was planned to offer a receptive and neutral space to discuss the future of the Wealden area in view of the government's energy plans. 120 people and 12 speakers attended. One attendee commented 'people speaking is the heart of the democratic process - not authorities working behind closed doors'.

The first speakers were from the realm of farming, forestry and nutrition, the realms which would be most affected by pollution of the water-table. To date, as we read in 'Nation of Change', the online reporting channel, chemicals from oil and gas pits have contaminated water sources at least 421 times in New Mexico alone, so farming seemed a good place to begin.

Peter Brown, who has farmed here for twenty years, made the case for sustainable farming, ensuring that the farm largely meets its own needs. Dams that supply the water needed by the animals and crops are a striking asset. Peter contrasted the Tablehurst vision with the strategy of the Agriculture Minister, who promotes industrial farming using chemical fertilisers, pesticides and GMOs, all of which carry a penalty for the land and the tax-payer. Conventional farming works with an illusion, the dangers of which are as serious for the environment, the people and the landscape as fracking itself.

John Marking spoke of the history of the Ashdown Forest, showing the harmony that existed in Neolithic times between man and the environment. "The concept of the land as the source of communal good, and for which all shared responsibility, which survived until 1700 was finally overturned by a new emphasis on individual progress." John showed how man's attitude to the forest had passed from reverence to exploitation, naming the Old Lodge reserve as one of the few surviving areas still inhabited by rare songbirds, silver-studded butterflies and unusual species of dragonfly. The extremely rare nail-fungus, that grows only on the dung of wild ponies, is found there. The effect on this habitat of short-term oil extraction remains critical.

Wendy Cook brought a table laid with raw milk and honey, wine, salt and the seven grains to show the richness of food available to us locally. A cook with all the hands-on experience that choosing and preparing food for 25 nationalities at Michael Hall involves, she reminded us that whatever is prepared by hand is sacred. She extended the theme of using sustainably grown produce into a picture of home life supported by the sharing of food round the table.

David Pinnegar, a physicist from Hammerwood, showed that if the outer surface of the earth floats on an underground ocean, then the drilling of many deep wells may ultimately cause the earth to fracture along those drill lines, allowing the deep water to escape. Then the outer core would bond with the inner core and rotate at its speed, spelling disaster.

The next three presentations concerned arguments for and against fracking in this part of Sussex, and after a convivial lunch we enjoyed a vision of water in its whole nature as envisaged by Rudolf Steiner. A new note was struck by Lydia Dagustino, the defence lawyer for the Balcombe trials. She spoke of the issues concerning our right to freedom of speech and the apparent one-sidedness of the police protection, which had resulted in a caution being given by the judge to the Sussex Police. Balcombe resident Sue Taylor spoke of the experience over the last 18 months of the threat of disruption to their drinking water, air quality, noise level, road safety or wildlife. Ian Crane extended the picture to a world-wide scale, and Keith Taylor MEP for the Green Party concluded the day with his hopes for avoiding fracking in the south-east.

A youngster of sixteen had attended the day, and he said: "I did not expect to understand much of what was said today, but in fact I followed every word, and it all made sense." Thank you to this youngster. We are doing this work, above all, for you.

Vanessa Underwood

## Tablehurst Farm Summer Events

**Sunday 8 June**, 11am Farm Walk. Gardener Stephen Mills will be sharing the secrets of why our garden produce tastes so good with a guided tour of the gardens and poly tunnels. Meet outside the Shop for 11.15am start. Café from 10.00am

After lunch at 2pm, in association with the Forest Row Natural History Society, Dr Nikki Gammans of Sussex University will introduce us to the **bumblebees of Sussex** and will teach us how to identify the common species. The talk will be followed by a guided walk identifying bees. The talk is in the Sheep Barn (behind the shop) and costs £5 (£3 concessions), children free.

We will be strolling around the farm and garden again on **Sunday 29 June**. Meet at 2pm outside the shop for a 2:15 start.

Afterwards, we will be celebrating the heights of the summer with a **Cream Tea Concert** featuring the ever popular **MALOO** – the local band who plays folk, soul, latin and more! Dancing starts in the Sheep Barn at 4pm – cost of dance £5, children free. We will also be serving scones (made by Adele) and tea for those who wish to indulge. MALOO are generously offering this concert as a fundraiser for Tablehurst and monies raised will be put towards farm and community educational resources.

*(This family event replaces our traditional Mid-Summer Barn Dance. But don't worry – the **Michaelmas Barn Dance** will in full swing on **Saturday 27 September**, BBQ starts at 7:30 and dancing from 8pm (for those aged 14 years and above).*

**Sunday 7 September**, we will be admiring Family Allotments at Tablehurst. Hopefully the allotmenters of all ages will be proudly showing the fruits of their labour. There will be a small prize for the best kept allotment. Meet at the Allotments (next to the first poly tunnel as you enter the farm) at 2pm, followed by a stroll around the vegetable garden and a look at the pigs.

... and finally, don't forget the Saturday BBQ is back, every Saturday 12:30 – 2pm!

If you require further information regarding any of the above events or more information about Tablehurst, please call Rachel Hanney on 01342 823 173 or email [tablehurstfarmshop@gmail.com](mailto:tablehurstfarmshop@gmail.com).

# Tablehurst Farm Report



Welcome back sun! is what I said out loud when we had a warm spell earlier in May. We managed to do an early cut for silage which is unusual for that time of year. It suggests that the grass is growing well,

especially in comparison with last year. The animals are thriving on all the lush and tasty pastures, and clearly enjoying the spring.

Leading up to June a lot has happened, and believe it or not some parts of the farm are already focussing on Christmas. The lambing in March was enjoyable and successful, despite a bumpy start with a few problems here and there. The lambs are thriving and growing like cabbage, and clearly starting to eat a considerable amount of grass. All cereals and crops have been drilled and looking very good already, all we can hope for is good weather in August for harvesting. All the pigs are outside in the new pig field which we set up in a different field every year. As you can see from the road the garden has started working the land where the orchard used to be, and the first crops have been sown and planted. The biodynamic preparations have been made, dug up and we have applied the preps on the field's which will continue throughout the year. The goslings have arrived and are already out eating their first bits of grass. The turkeys will come very soon and will become part of our daily routine work until Christmas. A lot of planning went into the development of the new farm yard which includes animal housing, compost, straw and hay storage.



Tablehurst has grown over the last years, the shop, the garden, the pies and the café are doing well and we have seen a growing amount of visitors and customers over the last few years. As a farm we aim to meet the demand in all areas but that is not always easy. As a biodynamic farm it is important to find a balance in what we grow, produce, buy in and sell. This balance is something which is constantly brought to our attention and is constantly being discussed, reviewed and on the move. We have taken on more land to be able to supply the butchery with our own meat, we grow more cereals to be able to feed our pigs with our own grain, aiming for 100% in the long term. We are responsible for a large amount of land that all needs fertility, bio dynamic preparations and consciousness. Buying in good quality biodynamic or even organic produce is not always easy, or available when we have a shortage. Where do we find, or where is that balance...?

Our most recent big change concerns the sheep. Tablehurst will establish and contract farm a new flock of sheep on another farm.

We will establish a flock of 200 ewes with the intention of them staying and living all year around on Burrswood farm in Groombridge which is currently converted from organic to biodynamic. The offspring will come the Tablehurst farm every

September and live with us until ready for slaughter. We felt that this was a good way forward, pursuing the importance of land farmed biodynamically and securing good quality biodynamic lamb produced locally.

We know that sheep are important at Tablehurst, so we will keep a small flock of ewes on the farm to embrace all the aspects of sheep husbandry. This means there will still be lambing and lambing events on the farm in the future.

From July onwards we will be selling biodynamic beef from another farm for about 12 weeks. The breed is Aberdeen Angus and come from Yatesbury House Farm in Wiltshire.



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