

SCA Annual Report 2021 - 2022

SCA Core Group Report

The Core Group looks after the aspects of SCA life that aren't doing the actual farming, growing and sharing the produce.

Last AGM four new members were co-opted onto the CG (Ruth, Seb, Clare and Iris). Adam was a returner after several years away and so Greg was the only continuity for the group. Halfway through the year Greg stepped down for personal reasons. It's been a really busy 12 months.

Inevitably, the year has been a steep learning curve for us. And several unforeseen challenges faced the farm. Within two months of the AGM, Kate Winters resigned, as she didn't feel she had the support she needed – two new head growers leaving within the year following Mark's resignation left the farm reeling and questioning.

Support for the Farm Team

We decided to make some changes to support the Farm Team and improve communication. Each Farm Team worker was allocated a CG 'buddy' to meet with individually. We invited **all** the Farm Team to the Core Group meetings. We also had several meetings with some members, founder members, the CG and FT to look at SCA governance. Out of this we agreed to move to a flat management structure. Our Farm Workers are young, enthusiastic and skilled and appreciated the chance to learn about being their own managers. Moving to a flat management inevitably takes time to iron out who is responsible for what – we've been told to expect it to take two years by another farm who did the same.

Meanwhile it has become obvious that the farm is in serious need of improved infrastructure. For example, not having decent tools and vehicles to hand, that work, is a big drain on worker's time and morale. Not having a fit-for-purpose irrigation system during the drought this summer was a huge stress for the FT. There is more. It demonstrated to us that we need to raise funds asap. The Farm Team doesn't have the time; the Core Group are volunteers, and we simply don't have the capacity to fundraise as well. So, we agreed to employ a person to fundraise for up to two days a week for six months. Only Adam Biscoe replied to the ad – we interviewed and appointed him. One early result after a big team effort has been the award of a grant from the Farming in Protected Landscapes fund of £15k.

New Website

Aleks, who does the newsletter, has designed a new website. She chivvied us into doing some of the content but the look, and several of the pages were her brilliant idea and skilful work. A big thank you.

Please take a look at <https://stroudcommunityagriculture.org/>.

Hello and Goodbye

We have welcomed Alex to the Farm Team following her work as a very experienced seasonal worker. We also welcomed Rachel as a new Finance manager who has been

helping us navigate the necessary rise in cost of the veg share and the commitment to pay the workers well.

Very sadly, we accepted Sam H's resignation. He has been a huge part of the SCA since 2009 when he arrived at SCA to lead the livestock side of the farm. He and his buddy Iris have been working hard to allow Sam to leave the animals and wider farm machinery and maintenance in a manageable way for the FT.

Looking Forwards

We've all had to make some tough decisions, but we hope that as we move into 2023 the farm will have stabilised, and we can all look forward to a number of exciting projects to make the farm fit for purpose going forwards.

Current and future CG work

Aiming for efficiencies (good infrastructure and planning in place) to facilitate the FT to be on the same, decent wage.

Sourcing appropriate accommodation for a seasonal worker – any ideas welcomed.

Ongoing work updating and writing policies - a compassionate leave policy, a probation process and an exit interview with two CG members have already been recently trialled.

Helping to recruit a new experienced farm worker asap.

Monthly CG meetings chaired and minutes by CG.

Rainwater harvesting.

Finding ways to encourage members to participate in the life of the farm including helping with events.

Establishing a suitable office space and returning the Roundhouse to community use.

If you wish to join this small, dynamic group to help steer SCA into the future please get in touch (preferably before the AGM on 22nd October). We will be happy to answer your questions.

From the Core Group

Annual farm report - November 2021 to October 2022

The autumn of 2021 was a bright and cold one, we even had a bit of snow, but it then turned wet!

We brought the mother cows and bull up to Hawkwood for the first time having previously always lived at Brookthorpe. It was great to give them the farm yard at Hawkwood where they enjoyed the fresh air and visits from members collecting the shares. Our young cattle moving to Brentlands in Brookthorpe where we tried out wintering them as long as possible.

A spell of fine cold weather in February enable us to plough the field at Brentlands that is our new veg field.

The sheep remained out all winter as usual insulated from the cold and light enough not to damage the wet ground. Our sow Roseanne however was in the relative warmth of the barn to have her second litter of piglets born on the last day of January.

By spring the cold weather had been replaced by wet weather, and a storm that damaged one of our poly tunnels.

In February, we had Candlemas or Betaine festival, this was a time we came together as a farm community post Covid lockdown. This quiet, reflective festival marks the very first faint signs of spring on the way. Then, as spring really gets going, the weather and the farm work hots up. We were getting on with the spring workload without a head grower, we had said goodbye to Kate in early January and after not finding a new head grower, the farm team collectively took on managing the day to day running of the farm.

We were greatly helped by Carol the amazing membership admin pro and relative newbie Rachel on finance answering loads of questions and helping keep us on track financially.

As well as planning and managing, we got a lot done, setting up our new propagation space, sowing all the seedlings, planting, watering, weeding, lambing, checking animals and all the while preparing a veg share twice a week. The team really did an amazing job!

During the madness, we put on a fantastic Farm Fest. It was such a joy to see so many people enjoying themselves on the farm. To me it's what sets us apart from, the closeness between the farm, its farmers, and the community.

As spring turned to summer, the heat cranked up another notch! It was the hottest summer on record! The team spent a lot of time watering crops just to keep them alive. Despite our best efforts, some crops were lost, this wasn't due to lack of effort, the team regularly starting at 6 am to beat the heat to harvest crops and water seedlings.

Now as Autumn approaches again, the frantic weeding and planting eases as we focus on harvesting crops like squash, pumpkins and winter roots and then on to winter projects start. There is an exiting amount of changes and upgrades coming soon, but that's for next year's report.

So, with this annual report, I say good bye to SCA, it's been a wonderful time and I'm sure I'll see you round.

Farmer Sam

Membership report

Summary comments from Carol Mathews, Membership Administrator

My main observations are:

- Member numbers have started moving again. During lockdowns, few people left so few new people could join.
- 2021 was a pretty steady-state year in terms of members: 50 joined and 46 left
- We aim to maintain shares at around 280 per week
- Our waiting list is shrinking fast, which is probably a good thing. Sept 2021 we had 116 veg shares on the waiting list; Sept 2022 we have 50.
- New people are waiting just over 1 year to get a veg share. (Down from its peak of over 2 years.)
- It is a good thing that people are not waiting so long – often people find other solutions if they wait 2 years and then don't want an SCA share when offered..
- It looks like we will have about 64 new households join us in 2022. If we continue this turnover of members, our waiting list will have gone by about summer 2023, which may then cause us a problem.
- The price increase due in Nov 2022 is causing some anxiety for some members alongside the current cost of living. We may need to review the decision about how much we offer in bursaries. The current-standing decision is to give up to 1% of veg turnover (currently £118.70/month) from SCA core funds towards bursaries. This, on top of members' contributions, means we can give bursaries up to £233.20. This is a little more than double the bursaries that we give now, so may be enough.

Membership figures as at 19/9/22

	Apr18	May19	July20	Sept21	Sept22
Households who are members	332	375	382	382	386
Adult members	472	524	520	530	532
Households collecting veg shares	326	328	328	324	326
Number of veg shares collected every week	279 (1% dec)	281 (1% inc)	278 (1% dec)	275.5 (1% dec)	278.0 (1% inc)
Number of veg shares collected from Hawkwood (Tuesday harvest)	74.5	79	78.5	109.5	114.5
Number of veg shares collected from Hawkwood (Friday harvest)	112	121.5	124.0	118.5	122.5
Number of veg shares collected from Stroud (Tuesday harvest)	7.5	7	11.5	14.5	11
Number of veg shares collected from Stroud (Friday harvest)	15	11.5	11.5	11	10
Number of veg shares collected from Nailsworth (Tuesday harvest)	10.5	13.5	11.5	14	13
Number of veg shares collected from Brookthorpe (Tuesday harvest)	39	35	30.5	0	0
Number of veg shares collected from Gloucester (Tuesday harvest)	2.5	2.5	2.0	0	0
Number of veg shares collected from Minchinhampton (Tues)	18	11	8.5	8	7
Total number of veg shares from Tuesday harvest	152 (54%)	148 (53%)	142.5 (51%)	146 (53%)	145.5
Total number of veg shares from Friday harvest	127 (46%)	133 (47%)	135.5 (49%)	129.5 (47%)	132.5

	Apr18	May19	July20	Sept21	Sept22
Households on waiting list for veg shares	4	13	56	115	54
Length of time that people on the waiting list generally wait before they get veg	3 months (estimate as waiting list is new)	1 month	6-7 months	18 months	14 months

New members during 2020

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of households joining as new members during the year	85 (27% inc)	74 (22% inc)	46 (16% inc)	19 (5% inc)	50 (9% inc)

We asked all our new members **how they heard about SCA**. 44 new members responded. Their responses were:

- Word of mouth x 26 (59%)
- Previously a member x 6 (14%)
- Hawkwood / Stroud MicroDairy / Bee Observatory x 4 (9%)
- Farm visit x 3 (7%)
- Wynstones x 3 (7%)
- Online / Google / Facebook x 2 (5%)
- Stroudco x 1 (2%)
- Global Organics x 1 (2%)
- Transition Stroud website 1 (2%)

We also asked all our new members **“why are you joining SCA?”** 43 new members responded.

Key words included	No of new members in 2021	% of new members in 2021	No of new members in 2020	% of new members in 2020	% of new members in 2019	% of new members in 2018
Support local food project / farmers / decent income for farmers/ keep finances local	20	47%	4	29%	10%	7%
Local food	19	44%	9	64%	49%	49%
Organic food	13	30%	6	43%	12%	30%
Quality / healthy / fresh food	8	19%	2	14%	32%	28%

Seasonal veg	6	14%	1	7%	0%	0%
Part of community / co-operative	5	12%	1	7%	34%	35%
Biodynamic food	5	12%	1	7%	2%	4%
Sustainable future / climate change / reduce CO2	4	9%	2	14%	10%	0%
"Part of this fantastic, forward-thinking organisation"/"great project"/"sounds like the best thing ever!"/"Why would you not?"	4	9%	0	0%	0%	0%
Returning member	3	7%				
Avoid supermarkets & capitalist values / better food system	3	7%	3	21%	5%	7%
Unpackaged / plastic free / reduce waste	3	7%	2	14%	15%	7%
Agree with what the project stands for / ethos	2	5%	1	7%	15%	25%
For the meat	1	2%	0	0%	10%	0%
To learn about growing / to volunteer	1	2%	0	0%	0%	4%
Connection to where food comes from / educate children	0	0%	1	7%	5%	3%
Be on the farm	0	0%	0	0%	2%	0%
Nurturing of soil / soil enrichment / care for land	0	0%	0	0%	2%	0%
Reasonable prices / affordable	0	0%	0	0%	0%	1%
Came from another CSA	0	0%	0	0%	0%	1%

Members who left veg shares during 2021

	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021
Number of households cancelling veg shares during the year [this does not include those who reduce their veg shares]	65 (18%) (4 of these stayed on	76 (23%) (7 of these stayed on	39 (14%) (3 of these stayed on	38 (10%) (5 of these stayed on	46 (14%) (3 of these stayed on

	as members)	as members)	as members)	as members)	as members)
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During 2021, we had 46 households leave our vegetable shares. We ask every 'leaver' to give us feedback. We received feedback from 30 households.

Reasons for leaving included:

- Moving away x 9 (30%)
- Collecting veg is too difficult (NB this included people leaving because Brookthorpe collection no longer available) x 5 (17%)
- "I don't feel we take full advantage of the scheme" / no time / away a lot x 5 (17%)
- Doesn't suit my diet x 4 (13%)
- Change in family circumstances x 4 (13%)
- Moved to household that already gets an SCA veg share x 2 (7%)
- Growing our own veg x 2 (7%)
- Don't want to use car to collect veg x 1 (3%)
- Finances x 1 (3%)

There was one (kind-of) suggestion for improvement

- Personally I am not eating too many potatoes now, and for health reasons eat more sweet potatoes and rice, so the choice of root veg all year round is wasted on me.

And many forms included appreciation for SCA:

- Wish you all the very best post covid and with a new grower or team of growers and in future gatherings and events. Many many thanks for all you and the team do to make this fantastic enterprise work for so many local people
- I love being part of SCA and have been for many years.
- ...with a sad heart that I have to say we will no longer be part of your lovely farm scheme.
- That we have loved you very much and are so grateful for all the veg and hard work that goes into the project.
- the quality of the veg was good and lovely to be able to pick our own as the seasons allowed
- We both have fond memories of SCA.
- its been a really good service for us up until this point.
- SCA is a good scheme and I am sure it will continue to inspire and educate people about sustainable agriculture.
- We have been very satisfied members of SCA for three years
- We've enjoyed being SCA members for the last decade. Good luck going forward
- It's brilliant and we will miss it! Thank you dear farmers, growers and members.
- We have loved our membership with the farm and are truly sorry to be leaving.
- Very sad not to have your tasty veg every week.
- I think you have an amazing healthy offer and I wish more people can get the privilege to get a share.
- I appreciate the time and effort everyone has put into SCA
- Thanks, it's been great

- SCA is awesome :) if my situation was to change in the future I would consider rejoining. I always recommend it to friends and people moving to Stroud.
- I will miss coming to the farm and wish you luck for the future.
- Over the last few years I have enjoyed collecting my weekly share and have always greatly appreciated the quality of your produce, recognising the hard work and thought that goes into the production
- Thankyou to all your team for years of happy healthy vegetables. I wish you all many more years of providing such a valuable resource to Stroud
- I have loved being a member
- I absolutely love the veg, and thank you so much for all the hard work everybody puts into producing them
- We thank you for the past few years we have been members and for all the hard work and dedication.

Bursaries & capital improvement fund

We offer bursaries to households on low incomes to make our veg shares affordable. We ask all new members if they would like to donate into our bursary fund. We currently receive donations of £114.50 per month (£20.50 less per month than in September last year). These are for either bursary fund or capital improvement fund, as SCA sees fit. We are currently paying out £106.25 per month in the form of bursaries (£4.50 more than in September last year, but still less than members are paying in). The standard bursary is up to a third off the cost of a share, e.g. £16 off a £49 veg share; soon to be £21 off £63 share.

Membership enquiries

Huge thanks again to volunteers Paul & Claire Sheridan who deal with all initial enquiries.