



# Farm News

SPRING ISSUE

## From the fields...

Spring really is here! The tree leaves are starting to bud, the grass is growing again, farmers are being sighted in t-shirts and in vegetable land it means the salad in the tunnel is growing well, the rhubarb doesn't look far off, and the seedling tunnel is filling up with the promise of the season ahead. As usual our first sowings are of tomatoes and peppers which get mollycoddled for two and a half months before we plant them out.

We've also been sowing lettuce, spring onions, beetroot, kale, spring cabbages, sprouting broccoli, herbs and flowers for pick your own. These will all get planted out sooner than the toms and peppers and are mostly what we think of as hungry gap or early season crops so getting a head start on sowing can be really beneficial.

Elsewhere on the farm we're beginning to wonder when we can first start to plough and cultivate the ground for planting. It's a lot drier than last winter which is a real godsend for getting these early crops out on time.

On the entrance field as you come into Hawkwood we've got garlic and broad beans growing nicely, sown in November. Over at Oakbrook Alex is busily pacing out a new field that we'll be moving our field scale veg growing into, watch this space for more exciting developments there!



We've spent the last few months recruiting for new members of the farm team and we're excited to announce 3 new staff members joining us part time so they'll be some new faces round the farm. Welcome to **Anna, Eva and Ethan!**

In sadder news, we'll be losing Emilija, our livestock manager, who is now overseeing the transition away from SCA managing animals. Emilija has been a pleasure to work with, her dedication and care for the cows is incredible. As well as her hard work and focus on the veg. She is a huge part of the farm team and will be greatly missed.

- Beni



# The future of livestock at SCA



Mainly driven by pressure on our finances, we launched a process to consider whether we should continue to have livestock on our farm back in the autumn of 2024. This culminated in a members' meeting at the end of February to reach a decision.

The core group is grateful to Nigel Westaway, who led a detailed process that involved all farm team and core team, some discussions at our AGM, and a survey of our members. We sent the report of this process to members ahead of the meeting - and you can also access it [via our website here](#).

We are also grateful to **Emilija Legzdina**, who has nurtured and cared for our herd for the past year. She has done an amazing job and was a great support through our process of making the decision.

This is an issue where our members hold a wide variety of views. Some members are vegans or vegetarians, while others believe strongly in the importance of us being a mixed

farm. It was difficult to find a route through that would make everybody happy but we hope we have reached a decision that is in the best interests of the farm.

The following recommendation was adopted with some reservations but no votes against:

**That the best option is for another party to graze cattle on SCA land to produce meat for SCA members.**

We should say that we recognise a sense of sadness by many members that we will no longer have our own cows, but we are seeking a partner who will allow us to continue to interact with the animals on the farm, including singing to them at Christmas, and to use their valuable manure.

Watch this space as we'll have more announcements about developments.

## Livestock report: Spring comes to the cows



As I'm writing this we are preparing for our annual whole herd TB testing next week – all fingers crossed, please. We will find out the results on Thursday the 13<sup>th</sup> of March.

The mother cows with their calves and the bull (and the two younger bulls/bullocks from last year) are still in the barn at Hawkwood, but they are really looking forward to going out into the spring grass. If the weather stays as beautiful as it has been for the last couple of weeks, they could go out sooner than usual (hopefully!).

If you've visited the barn in the last month, you may have noticed a new piece of interior there – the cow brush! Vanessa Clarke, Paul Smithson, Crossley & Byng, Henry Osborne – thank you from the cows! It's great to diversify their environment in the barn, as you can imagine it's not very entertaining. Several studies have found that any sensory or otherwise interactive addition to their environment can help to improve their overall health and wellbeing whilst being housed. As much as I love to scratch and cuddle them, it's better if they can help themselves to a good scratch any time they want to. Whenever they go out to pasture, our fields are full of wildlife, hedges and some trees that provide them with plenty of natural sensory nourishment (or scratching posts) and obviously nothing can compare or replace that in the barn.

Another thing you may have noticed is the dwindling amount of hay bales in the barn. It is quite mind-blowing (at least for me) to see the barn filled with hay bales and realize that all of it is for the cows to eat over winter and turn into warmth, milk and of course the black gold – muck. This simple feature of our landscape gets made into dried fodder for cows that know so well how to make it into these valuables.

Our total hay harvest this year was the equivalent of 120 big round bales, roughly around 33,000kg of hay. This has been thoroughly processed by the outwintered cows until they go out on pasture to eat just grass from mid-Spring onwards. And then one day in the summer the hay will be made again... All these magnificent cycles that we are part of on the farm make me feel humble and grateful to witness the beautiful transformations of all the beings and substances that we work with.

If in the last couple of months you've walked up to the farm from Stroud on the footpath through Oakbrook Farm, you have probably noticed our five outwintered youngstock grazing in the agroforestry field. Our farm has now secured this field for growing veg in the coming years, so before the plough turns the furrows the cows enjoyed the grazing and left some good fertility there. Now they have moved on back to Hawkwood Homefield, grazing directly below the main house.

# Livestock report continued

They have been doing really well and managed to carry on growing healthy even over the winter. We are practising a hybrid of bale grazing – every day they get a new area of fresh grass and some hay, either manually loaded in tone bags and given to them or by unrolling a large round hay bale.

It takes a good eye to get the amounts of both grass and hay right, and it's my first year doing it, so let's see what the soil and grass will be like in summer. My teachers (the cows!) sometimes tell me off for mistakes in my guesstimations and giving them not the right amounts or the best quality. But being such good cows they always seem to forgive me whilst munching on the new grass that they know they will get if they see me fiddling about the electric fencing.

By now probably all of you are aware of the difficult decisions regarding livestock that have been made in the recent months. Although our cows will no longer have a part in SCA's daily work and routines, nevertheless there will be cows on the land as well as 'present' in the soil enrichment for veg growing through their manure.

The cows will stay cows and it's been quite a strange experience to participate in all those meetings knowing that they are just there, chewing the cud whilst we are talking about them and coming to decisions that will change their lives. SCA has stopped the grazing licence at Days Cottage and Hawkwood, as our landlord is looking into the potential future tenants of the grazing land, which will also determine what will happen to the cows – they will have good homes regardless of what decision is made. You will hear more about that in the coming weeks/months.

This process also leads to my time in the SCA coming to an end. I can hardly believe it myself. The cows have become my closest companions, and the farm a place to understand my limitations and try to grow beyond them. This year has been incredible in all possible ways. I've learnt so much about farming, life and myself, and I'm extremely grateful that I had a chance to look after these amazing creatures and work in the SCA with all the people that are connected to it.



The farm has been going through a transition, which at points seemed very difficult, but somehow the spring has brought some beautifully brave hope for the season ahead. Thank you everyone from the depths of my heart for this experience.

I feel moved by all the support from the farm members, but at the same time a great worry lives in me about all small-scale agriculture and livestock's role in it in general. There is a massive difference between industrially raised livestock and an enterprise like ours. It's the difference between a business in industry, and a small scale holding or a community supported agriculture farm where each bit of land, crop, animal and human mean a lot to the health and wealth of the whole organism. That difference can't be ignored. Seeing our neighbours the Microdairy go was a wakeup call, and now saying goodbye to our cows is a reality check (hopefully they won't go far).

Local food systems are fragile and need the support from the community that surrounds them, so that they can sustain life in a fair and just way for everyone within them. My wish is that the SCA flourishes and grows into an amazing and shining oasis where the whole ecosystem is nourished and thriving.

With lots of love and gratitude,

- Emilija

# Volunteer Thursdays:

A story told via WhatsApp 👍



*In the SCA Volunteer's WhatsApp group, a Thursday morning in February...*

**Grower Alex:** Thursday volunteers! Hello! Ruth is off this week and a few other staff members so we very thin on the ground, so could really do with your help 🙌 the plan is to sort out/tidy the prop tunnel at oakbrook. The first seeds are due to be sown this week 🌱

I will be there at 9 tomorrow brief @Eleanor SCA Member Chard who has gallantly stepped in to lead the session as I have to be in a budget meeting. Hope u can make it xxxx

**Volunteer Rhia:** I can come!! Xx

**Volunteer Elles:** Me too 🙌

**Volunteer Simon:** I will be at farm, if there is nothing in urgent need of fixing can help sorting out prop tunnel ...

**Grower Alex:** Amazing! That would be fab. See u at OB at 9. I will sort hot water and biscuits for u guys in a thermos. Xxx 🙌🙌🙌

**Grower Alex:** THANK YOU TO Simon, Rhia, Eleanor, Elles and Jack for smashing through the tasks today and doing it solo! SO APPRECIATED!!!! This farm would not be possible with all your help and support! 🙌🙌🙌

**Grower Beni:** I almost wept going into the propagation tunnel folks, it is soooo tidy and organised, such a great way to start the season.

**Volunteer Elles:** It was a pleasure, we got to see the beautiful sunshine/blue sky above the fog in the valleys.

Some heavy lifting with the compost, pretty challenging for me but thankfully plenty of muscle around (hope I catch up soon). 🌞 🙌

**Volunteer Simon:** Great company, great views and great coffee and satisfaction of a job well done.

If you'd like to help out on one of our weekly Thursday morning volunteer slots, just get in touch! [ruth@stroudcommunityagriculture](mailto:ruth@stroudcommunityagriculture).

# News and announcements

## Planning our 2025 budget

As outlined at the AGM last autumn, this year has been very difficult for the farm financially, with members leaving, leading to a significant loss that has eaten into our reserves. This is mainly caused by a loss in membership because it has been a bad growing season and an increase in spending on bought-in vegetables for the same reason.

We have started working on the budget earlier than usual so that we can make sure it balances this year. We want to be able to do this without putting extra pressure on our hard-working farm team. We have made decision to trim the budget

for bought-in vegetables and casual labour, and boosting the energy put into the farm through volunteering. We're also planning some fund-raising events so please do support those!

We are grateful to all our members who buy a weekly share. If you are a member who doesn't buy a share please think about stepping up this year to help see us through. And please also share the word with your friends and neighbours. Many people still think we have a waiting list!

## Paid role with SCA

We're sorry to say that our longstanding and hugely efficient Membership Administrator Carol Mathews is leaving her role. We must start by saying a huge thanks to her for working so diligently with SCA from the very beginning!

Her work includes maintaining our membership database and dealing with new applications; managing deliveries and the bursary scheme; ensuring payments for shares match membership records.

At present this is a one-day-per-week role, but we are thinking of extending it to include work to increase our membership numbers and member engagement.

If you think you have some of the skills needed for either or both of these roles and are looking for an additional part-time salary please do get in touch.

This willow weaving workshop was part of the Growing Places Project: Art linking people with food, farming, well being, nature and landscape.



# Working with our Somali Friends

Hello, this is a brief update from Mateo, your new(ish) Twinning Coordinator for SCA. For those who don't know, I took over the Twinning Coordinator role from Steph in December. Since then myself and Suad have been designing a schedule of fun things for 2025.

I'm pleased to report that despite some awful weather, our first Twinning event of the year was a success. Somali Kitchen brought a group of around 25 mothers and children to the farm last Sunday to participate in a nest box building workshop kindly organised by the one and only Simon Pickering.

Setting up the work stations in the barn proved a real hit as the children were working right next to our overwintering Herefords, who became celebrities for the day.

The roundhouse proved a warm and cosy space to shelter us from the rain during lunch. And the weather didn't stop the children from running around the farm slipping in all kinds of mud.



Some of the volunteers at the bird box building workshop

Next on our radar for the Twinning project will be on Wednesday 9th April, when SCA and Somali Kitchen will be organising a joint trip to another member of the Twinning project, Cae Tan CSA in Swansea, to learn from another project and have a nice day out by the sea.

These trips will be publicised in due course but if you are interested in attending either one, please do get in touch with me at [mateolewis@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mateolewis@hotmail.co.uk).

We intend to publicise a full calendar of Twinning events for 2025 soon. **Watch this space!**

## Join us in Bristol for the Grand Iftar!



Somali Kitchen have invited SCA members to attend the annual **Grand Iftar** held at St Marks Road in Easton, central Bristol.

Muslims sit down to eat Iftar at the end of a day of fasting during the holy month of Ramadan. Muslims and non-Muslims are invited to partake in this family-friendly event, which is held outside - the road closed for this special occasion.

Let me know by phone or email ([mateolewis@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:mateolewis@hotmail.co.uk)) if you would like to attend. If enough people express an interest we can organise car shares down to Easton.

**- Mateo**

# News from the Core Group

As a community farm, we are run by a group of voluntary directors who together make up the core group. Together, we hold responsibility for the farm, for your vegetables, the land they grow on, and the livelihoods of the wonderful people who grow them.

We were pleased to elect a strong core group of six people at the AGM. They are: **Christian Gruetzmacher, Mike Williams, Diya Mukarji, Molly Scott, Jamie Sumner and Sebastian Billing**. This is Sebastian's fourth year and he is pulling back from direct involvement and focusing on a few key issues for the team. We recently had an awayday together when we refocused the vision for the farm—and learned some interesting things about each other's travel adventures!

The newest member of the core group is Diya, who lives in Chalford. She is interested in sustainable food systems and how we adapt as our world changes and we need to continue to feed a growing population with locally sourced nutritious food. Her experience is in programmes for international development, with experience in fund-raising, finance and governance. She is keen to help CSA as a local, really important project not just work but thrive but be an excellent service and opportunity for sourcing food and providing community in Stroud district.

We are looking for a couple more directors, especially women to keep a gender balance.



*Our newest CG member, Diya Mukarji*

Please email me if you would be interested in finding out more ([molly@gaianeconomics.org](mailto:molly@gaianeconomics.org)).

And you are always welcome to come along to a core group meeting to see what happens. Next meetings are at 5.30pm on the following dates:

- Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> March
- Thursday 17<sup>th</sup> April
- Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> May

If you would like to be more involved but think this would be too much of a commitment please do think about volunteering on the farm either on the regular Thursday morning or at the new weekend volunteering days we'll be organising.

**- Molly**





# Why community agriculture?

We all love the farm for different reasons but, at its heart, it is about creating a different relationship between ourselves, our food, the people who grow it, and the land that produces it.

When the sun is shining and it rains just the right amount this feels perfect. Crops flourish and the share feels bountiful. But community-supported agriculture means that some years conditions are not ideal and our crops are meagre or fail altogether. That is why we say it is about sharing the risks and rewards.

The past year has been the worst growing year anybody can remember. It started with a cold, wet spring so germination was poor. The crops that were established then failed to thrive because of continuing cold and a wet summer without much sunshine. Finally, we had a lot of flooding in the autumn that meant we lost whole crops.

We have lost members because they compared their share with something they could buy at the farmers' market or supermarket and found that was better 'value



for money'. If you've stayed with us it's because you understand that CSA is about a different sort of commitment to the farm. Thank you for staying with us.

We're optimistic about the coming growing season. The farm team have planned a varied crop regime, to ensure variety in your share but also to hedge against weather conditions. We ask you to recommit to the CSA model and stick with us through this year and we'll share the ups and downs together. Thank you.

- Molly

## Sharing your veg collection trip

If you occasionally find it difficult to get up to the farm to pick up your veg - or if you're interested in helping out with sharing the veg collection run with some of your fellow SCA members - then do take a look at our [Collection Sharing Contact List, here.](#)

When new members sign up to join the SCA, they are asked if they would be open to be contacted by other members interested in sharing the pick-up duties. All those who registered their interest are listed on this

form - so if you find a name there, do feel free to reach out to contact them and see if they'd be interested in "veg-pooling"!

We hope this will enable some collective picking up and helping SCA members collect shares for each other - thus saving people time and trips in the car up to the farm.

If you'd like your name and details to be added (or removed) from this list, please [just let us know.](#)

# About Stroud Community Agriculture

Everyone is welcome to join in and enjoy the farm, including non-members. We work to the following principles:

- To support organic and biodynamic agriculture.
- To pioneer a new economic model based on mutual benefit and shared risk and ensure that the farmers have a decent livelihood.
- To be fully inclusive. Low income shall not exclude anyone.
- To be transparent in all our affairs. To make decisions on the basis of consensus wherever possible. To strive towards social justice.
- To encourage practical involvement on all levels.
- To offer opportunities for learning, therapy and re-connecting with the life of the earth.
- To network with others to promote community supported agriculture to other



communities and farms and share our learning (both economic and farming).

- To encourage Stroud Community Agriculture members, in co-operation with the farmers, to use the farm for their individual and social activities and celebrations.
- To develop a non-exclusive sense of community around the farm.

## DONATING YOUR SHARE?

If you'd like to donate your share to a volunteer or the food hubs while you're on holiday, please send an email to:

**membership@stroudcommunityagriculture.org**

Or text **Ruth**: 07957313404

## CONTACT US

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