



Farm News

WINTER 2026 ISSUE

News from the Fields

Notes from the Fields is a new Stroud Community Agriculture blog, published monthly on Substack, and written by Alice Williamson, the partner of one of our growers. Here's the first issue - and you can subscribe for more [here](#).

We recently marked the Winter solstice, both the longest night and the shortest day of the year. These darkest days of the year have been celebrated since ancient times, where communities would gather for feasts, fire, songs and dancing.

In Pagan traditions, the solstice was thought of as a time of death and rebirth. Mock battles were held between the Holly King, who rules from midsummer to midwinter, and the Oak King, who rules midwinter to midsummer. The solstice is the time when the light begins its slow return, a steady turning towards new life.

While November brought heavy frosts, covering the fields in silver each morning, December was wet and wild, with rain and wind sweeping through the valley.

It's been a month of behind-the-scenes work as the farm team have settled into a slower, steadier rhythm. Reskinning the polytunnels has been a mammoth task, spread out across November and December with the help of our wonderful volunteers. We've been fuelled by hobnobs, chatter and lots of laughter.

Scattered among the grey and dreary days, there have been some beautiful sunrises and sunsets, lighting up the sky with fiery reds and oranges. One volunteer morning, we worked up in clear skies while Stroud lay hidden below, wrapped up in fog.

With trees now bare, wildlife has become easier to spot. Birds are more brave this time of year, finding the courage to forage without the canopy of green to hide behind. Jays are suddenly in plain sight, moving between hedgerows, oak and lime trees.

Our weekly harvests have continued to be abundant, with lots of root vegetables now coming into their own as plants' energies have pulled back down into the ground. Beetroot, celeriac and squash have been gathered in, along with our winter salads. We've also begun harvesting leeks, and in the run-up to Christmas the team harvested and prepped over 900 leeks for the bumper Christmas share, a no mean feat in the cold and rain!

Elsewhere on the farm, Farmer Sam has welcomed 10 piglets, and the cows have moved into the barn for the winter, leaving the fields to rest. The quieter pace of the season brings time for maintenance jobs, tidying, sorting, and crop planning for next year, laying foundations while the land sleeps. It's also a time of transition for people, as some farm team members celebrated their leaving do's, with fresh faces joining us in the new year.

- Alice



Stroud CSA needs YOU!

We know you love Stroud Community Agriculture's delicious veg, heart-warming events and really appreciate our hardworking growers. **But did you know we're looking for volunteers to help spread the love even wider?**

In a world that can sometimes feel heavy, SCA is making positive change: creating healthy local food, restoring nature, and building a community that genuinely looks after one another. And our volunteers are at the heart of it all.

We've got so many amazing opportunities to help our beautiful farm thrive - whether that's helping organise events, strategising our finances, becoming a core group member, or helping out with practical stuff around the farm. Many hands make light work, and we need your energy and enthusiasm now more than ever!

Why get involved?

Well, you'll be helping keep the dream of community-owned and run agriculture alive and thriving, for starters. But there's more!

Helping out at CSA means you can make new friends, see old friends, connect more with the community, learn skills that can open new paths, be part of something hopeful and purposeful - and, of course, have fun. All while making making a real difference and building a resilient local food system that nourishes our town!

Join in

To keep this vibrant community thriving, we're inviting members to get involved in ways that suit their interests, skills, and time. You don't need experience, just enthusiasm.

Choose what sparks your interest and let us know via the short form:

- Love numbers, spreadsheets, or **accounting**? Help us manage the farm's finances and business model
- Enjoy bringing people together? Join an **events** team and create joyful moments
- Have **coaching** or HR experience? Help our farm flourish through mentorship and wellbeing training
- Curious about being a **director** in a team? Help guide the long-term strategy of SCA
- Prefer hands-on **practical** tasks? Join in with maintenance jobs and essential improvements
- Got a gift for **communication**? Help us recruit new members and spread the word.

Interested?

Just fill in [this short form](#) and we'll get in touch.

Let's grow this farm together. Join the SCA Farm Community today!



Join us for Imbolc to celebrate the new year



Our first event of the new year is always Imbolc, the celebration of the light returning and our wish to warm the soil ready for the planting of new crops. This traditional early spring festival was turned into Candlemas as Christianity spread across Europe and we celebrate it by lighting candles in the soil of our farm.

Imbolc falls on a Monday this year so we'd like to welcome you all to share it with us. As the dusk turns into dark, it is a magical sight to see the candles glowing across the land. We'd welcome children coming to help us pour the wax and spread the candles across the fields.

So please do join us on **Monday 2nd February**— from 3.30pm if you would like to help us pour the wax, or 4.30pm to enjoy the ritual. Help to celebrate our conviction that the cold days will soon be past and that the earth is just waiting to spring back into life.

If you are able to make a cake to share or have a verse you would like to read, please contact molly@gaianeconomics.org. And we are collecting wax in the packshed so please drop off any old candles you have hanging around when you pick up your veg.

- Molly

Pack shed update & a farewell to Beni

We hope you all enjoyed your Christmas shares as much as we enjoyed putting them together. We were really pleased with how the Christmas veg turned out this year - the Brussels sprouts in particular were a standout - and we hope you enjoyed the oranges from Oranges for Justice too.

It always feels a little strange in the days between Christmas and New Year when the pack shed falls quiet. It's the only time all year that it's empty, and it always gives us a moment to pause and reflect. That brief stillness is a reminder of what a collective achievement this is: a community coming together to keep a steady, reliable supply

of nutritious, land-friendly food moving from fields to shelves all year round.

It's also with great sadness that we say farewell to **Beni** who is leaving the SCA for pastures (and polytunnels) new. Beni has been a grower with the team for almost three years and brought considerable skill, expertise and ideas to the farm, that we have all benefited from in our fabulous weekly vegetable shares. We wish them the best of luck in their new endeavours.

- Jamie



Core Group report



The wheel of nature turns, and each day is getting a little longer and early signs of spring, such as the emergence of glorious snow drops. As SCA welcomes in the New Year, we also welcome new members to the farm team: Dan and Joe (see pen portraits [below]) join Anna, Jamie and Ethan (our seasonal grower), as well as Ruth and the fantastic gang of 'Wednesday' volunteers.

The Core Group is a small, but beautifully formed, team who, acting as the organisation's directors, represent the interests of you, the members, to ensure the sustainable running of the farm.

This includes facilitating the provision of a share of delicious, healthy, organic and biodynamically farmed vegetables in a way that enhances nature and provides a fair and fulfilling employment for our brilliant team of growers.

As you know, SCA is a different social and economic model. Your share payment is not just a money-for-vegetables trade; it is a contribution to sustaining the community agricultural model. And importantly, you are sharing in the uncertain process of vegetable production in the variable English climate. This of course means that over the growing season, and driven by the weather, there will be times of abundance and inevitably, times when the harvest (range and size) is smaller. That's farming.

As well as supporting the day-to-day administration of SCA, the Core Group has recently been doing some head scratching and working with members and the farm team to explore ways to improve its effectiveness. We're also holding a strategy morning, to work through some of the bigger structural issues facing the SCA. There is always lots to do in support of this fantastic SCA venture and we'd love more of our members to offer to help – by joining the Core Group or providing specific skills or donating a bit of time.

- Mike

Find out how decisions are made about your farm

The amazing thing about SCA is that we are not just a place to find wonderful, seasonal organic vegetables, grown in an ethical way, we are also a co-operative that belongs to you.

At the AGM you elected the members of the core group, who are also the directors of SCA. We have an in-person meeting every month and you are welcome to join us to see how we make decisions and maybe think about joining us?

We meet at 5.30 every third Thursday of the month so the next core group meetings are:

- Thursday 19th February
- Thursday 19th March
- Thursday 16th April

Venues change during the winter so contact Molly if you'd like to join us: molly@gaianeconomics.org

- Molly

Community farmers from Patagonia visit CSA



Back in the summer we were delighted to welcome some Argentinian visitors to the farm. Verónica, Cecilia and Alex got in touch to say that they were attending a conference in Cirencester and would like to visit us and find out more about Stroud Community Agriculture.

They come from a couple of community farms close to the town of Cipolletti, in the north of the province of Rio Negro in Patagonia. It was named after César Cipolletti, one of the forerunners of the study of the irrigation system of the Negro River, and is in the heart of an area famous for growing apples and pears.

Their visit gave us a chance to reflect on some of the principles of CSA and how we apply them on our farm. The purpose of community-supported agriculture is to make a direct connection between

the livelihood of the farmer or grower and the price paid by the people who eat the vegetables. So how do we fix the price for a monthly share?

Alex told us that on their farm, they begin in the winter by considering what they want to achieve on the farm that year. As the farmer, he draws up a budget to achieve their dreams and then tells the families who are part of the farm how much they would each need to contribute to make that happen.

There then follows a negotiation where some people offer to pay more than their share and if other's can't afford it, state what they can pay. Then he, as the farmer, adjusts his hopes, budget and crop-plan for the year. By the end of the process he knows exactly how much money he has to work with: the families who support the farm have committed for the whole year and this supports him and their shared ambition for the farm.

We're not suggesting shifting to such a model for SCA but it does help to emphasise the importance of a full-year's commitment to making any CSA work. And thinking of the farm in terms of an annual growing cycle, which helps us connect to the land and the seasons. It reminds us how far away our model is from a trip to the supermarket to choose whatever has been flown in from the other side of the world. In our case, that was only our visitors!

Farm Team report

We are now closer to Imbolc, the return of life after the winter months, than we are to the winter solstice. We now still have light when we close the tunnels at the end of the working day, at 4.30pm! The growing team has had to thaw their fingers before mixing the salad leaves, which miraculously keep growing albeit slowly, and a few times, they've waited hours for the cabbages and leeks to defrost before being able to harvest them.

The new year has landed with many changes, with Joe and Dan stepping into their roles of growers, while Alex, Beni and our seasonal grower Eva have moved on to new adventures.

The team has been busy planning for the season ahead, with seeds now on their way, ready to start sowing in less than three weeks. We have also been busy with infrastructure and maintenance, fixing paths and mulching. Simon and Beni, with the support of volunteers and growers, have almost completed the rain water harvesting tank installation, which will allow us to save rain water and connect an overhead sprinkling system in the polytunnels. This will improve our soil health, boost biodiversity in the tunnels.

- Anna

Welcome to our new co-head grower

Hello, I'm Dan. I've been working in small-scale production horticulture for four years on farms from the West Midlands to East Lothian, having trained at nearby Abbey Home Farm in 2022.

I enjoy the seasonal puzzles of growing veg successionally for diverse home-grown flavour and texture throughout the year.

Outside of the farm, I make herbal medicines and enjoy fermenting things.

- Dan



Three cheers for volunteers

*SCA hosts weekly volunteer sessions on the farm - every **Wednesday from 9AM til 12**. Here's what some of them said about why they like it:*

I love volunteer Wednesdays because it's good to work together on a different project each week, and learn something new. I enjoy the chats I have with the people I meet, it's a lovely open and friendly group. It's satisfying to see how our combined efforts make a difference in just one morning!

The farm is in a beautiful setting, which is good to watch change through the seasons, and add to that getting your hands in the soil, good coffee and treats, yoga stretching on the hillside afterwards- it's a pretty uplifting morning!

Well, I like the fresh air and digging in the earth makes any stress go away and I always come back feeling better.

I was new to the area when I started volunteering at the farm. For me it was a relief to feel that I am doing something worthwhile alongside such a great bunch of people. It's a delight to be working outside come rain or shine through the seasons (poly tunnel work in severe weather 😊) and learning as I go along.

I miss the weeks I can't make.

You can just turn up or if you let Ruth (07957313404) know you're coming, we'll make sure we have enough biscuits for the coffee break!



Recipe Corner

Winter Squash Gnocchi

Dice the squash into 1-2cm chunks. Drizzle with oil, salt, pepper and a pinch of chilli flakes, and roast in the oven until soft, 20-25 minutes.

While that cooks, finely dice the onion, and slowly fry in oil. When they are soft and sweet, add some crushed garlic to the pan, followed by thinly sliced cavolo nero). Season, and add a pinch of thyme (fresh or dried).

Boil some gnocchi for a few minutes and drain, reserving some of the water. Add the roasted squash to the pan, followed by the gnocchi and a splash of the gnocchi water.

Give it a good mix and serve, topping with parmesan and toasted pine nuts.

- Jamie

Ingredients (serves 4-5)

- Squash
- Kale (cavolo nero is perfect, but other greens would do)
- Small onion
- Garlic -1-2 cloves
- Thyme
- Chilli flakes
- Parmesan
- Pine nuts (optional)



Oranges for Justice

It's that time of year again - time to buy beautiful oranges, clementines, lemons, or avocados and help make a real difference!

When you buy supermarket fruit, you're often supporting a system that exploits workers with harsh conditions and extremely low wage.

In Calabria, Southern Italy, the Mani e Terra co-operative is doing it differently. They produce organic oranges harvested by workers who are employed under fair contracts and paid a living wage.

In addition, [Oranges for Justice](http://www.orangesforjustice.co.uk) aim to pay 10% more than the amount our fruit costs. This premium is used to support the work of renovating empty or derelict buildings into dignified accommodation for migrant workers in the region who would otherwise live in terrible conditions in camps.



How to buy our oranges, lemons & avocados

Many customers buy a whole 10kg box to share with others – family, friends and neighbours.



Oranges (50-70 per 10kg box) £33
Lemons (60-80 per 10kg box) £36
Avocados (24-32 per 4 kg box) £27
Avocados (60-80 per 10kg box) £67.50

To order please use the **QR code** below
or use this link: www.orangesforjustice.co.uk/orders
Our next deliveries will be **March** and **Dec 2026**

Our SCA Principles

1. To farm in a way that enhances biodiversity and reduces our carbon emissions.
2. To develop a sense of community around the production of our food.
3. To ensure our farmers have a decent livelihood and can afford to live in Stroud District.
4. To continue to pioneer a new economic model based on mutual benefit and shared risk.
5. To offer opportunities for learning, therapy and re-connecting with the life of the earth.
6. To practice organic and biodynamic agriculture.
7. To be inclusive in welcoming people from any background or situation, including those with low or no income.
8. To encourage members, in co-operation with the farmers, to use the farm for their individual and social activities and celebrations.
9. To be transparent in all our affairs. To make decisions on the basis of consensus wherever possible. To strive towards social justice.
10. To network with others to promote community supported agriculture to other communities and farms and share our learning (both economic and farming).
11. To work co-operatively with other enterprises that share our principles.



**Thank you for being a member of
Stroud Community Agriculture!**

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 **Jamie**: 07758 237078

CONTACT US

General enquiries and information:
info@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Membership Admin:
membership@StroudCommunityAgriculture.org

Website: stroudcommunityagriculture.org

