Spring 2011
Newsletter No. 4

SOUTH YEO FARM WEST

www.southyeofarmwest.co.uk & www.smallholdertraining.co.uk

Wassailing in style

Roundhouse audience

In January we brought the barns and the farm to life with help from our friends at Wren Music. A group of their young musicians are off to Cape Town later in the year to exchange traditional songs with African musicians. To help offset their carbon footprint they planted two mulberry trees in the orchard and gave a performance in the roundhouse, the first activity it's ever hosted.

As the dusk came on, sixty of us moved up to the orchard and indulged in some traditional wassailing, tying wishes for the year to come to an old apple tree, singing songs, banging some exceptionally noisy percussion instruments and passing round the wassailing cup of hot spiced apple juice. As night fell we chomped on cub scout food—bangers, beans and baked spuds with all the trimmings, accompanied by the Wren folk orchestra. To finish there was barn dancing by the bonfire, where we ceremoniously burned the wassail rattles. A magical evening.

Wassail rattles

A ring of wassailers in the orchard

Lambing is about to start and it's going high tech!

Any idea how long I've wanted lamb-cam, aka lamb TV? A screen in the bedroom connected to a digital wireless infrared camera up in the lambing shed? About ten years. And this year we are finally testing it out to see if we can get a bit more sleep and still ensure the safety of all the ewes and their lambs. It can be tough, over a three to six week period, going to bed at 3am and getting up at 5am to make sure the ewes are checked every 2 hours. Far easier in the middle of the night to open an eye, gawk at a screen and know that all is quiet or that something needs attention. Will report!

Funding for our courses in 2011

A small handful come from mainland Europe (Switzerland and France so far), the majority of our course participants come from across the UK, and a relatively small number from the South West, although the number is growing. So it's great news that participants in the South West region who have a CPH (County Parish Holding number) are eligible for a 50% refund of course fees. The Skills Project, a Rural Development Programme for England (RDPE) funded initiative, is operated by Duchy College Rural Business School, and is supporting our courses in 2011. Funding beyond July is still to be confirmed.

Our courses are also eligible for LANTRA's Women in Work scheme. LANTRA is the sector skills council for environmental and land-based industries. The Women and Work programme aims to redress the gender imbalance in the sector by funding training that will help women develop their careers in agriculture and associated sectors.

Do contact us for more information about either scheme.

LANTRA

South West RDA

Duchy College RURAL BUSINESS SCHOOL

defra Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs

European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development: Europe investing in rural areas.

Intermediate smallholding weekends

So many of our smallholder course participants have said that they want the opportunity to come back for more, so for 2011 we've developed Intermediate Smallholder weekends especially for those who are beyond the beginner stage and want to dig deeper.

The weekend is for smallholders with some experience of looking after land and livestock who may be thinking of scaling up in some way or want to get to grips with some of the detail, now knowing the questions to which you want the answers. You might want to start breeding your own stock, whether it's pigs, sheep or poultry. You might want to increase the numbers or varieties of stock you keep, or add to the amount of land you manage and want to know how to make the best of it.

We'll be updating you on current legal and statutory requirements and available grants; discussing how to make your handling facilities work better for you; considering how you make the best of your land with appropriate land management and layout. We'll deal with that tipping point when you finally consider if it's time for a tractor (or not). We'll also take a look at the realities of the costs involved in breeding your own livestock.

What's crucial is that you bring your experiences and questions with you, so that information can be shared, so if you have anything specific you want to cover, let us know in advance and we will do our best to accommodate it.

I just wish we could dream up a better but equally to the point name for these weekends, so ideas on an email please!

Hedging, banking, fencing

You'd think that winter was a time for putting away tools and curling up by the fire. But when the trees and hedges have lost their leaves and the sap has lost its rise, it's time for hedging, banking and fencing. With over 11 kilometres of hedges on the farm, it's hard to imagine a year when one boundary or another doesn't need attention.

As part of our Higher Level Stewardship agreement we've been laying hedges and restoring the Devon banks for five years and the farm landscape is unrecognisable. New vistas are revealed, and gappy useless banks eroded by hundreds of sheep's feet are laid, earthed up, planted and protected with new fencing. This winter we've restored 4 hedgelines, a total of 428metres (and that really needs doubling as both sides are attended to). These days, we get a man in to bump in the lines of new fence post, Tony and Hazel lay the hedges and Andrew restores the banks with Scoopy the digger and puts up all the fencing. If there's time I might help put up the wire fencing, and do my usual trick of hunting in the newly revealed banks for cast-offs from a previous era—bottles, plough shares, rusty tools, animal skulls. One of the wonderful advantages of all this work is that light reaches long hidden seeds and bulbs, and swathes of spring flowers appear as if by magic.

Apples and orchards

Every autumn there's this lovely scent that fills the cob barn, second only to the amazing late spring/early summer perfume in the scullery when we make elderflower cordial and champagne.

The autumn fragrance is the culmination of the apple harvest, when we mill and press a mix of culinary, dessert and cider apples for single variety and blended juices and cider. We pick barrels of apples, labelling each batch, then bring them into the barn by tractor, wash them, crush them in the mill and layer the cheeses of apple pulp in the press, catching the precious juice as it flows.

Andrew produces the alcohol—our very own Roundhouse Cider, and Debbie bottles and labels the juices.

If you want to learn about making the most of your orchard or want to plant one, join our Apple & Orchard day on 22 October 2011—it coincides with National Apple Day—and come and make your own juice.

Apple blossom

SOUTH YEO FARM WEST

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Black Orpingtons

Ever since the impulse purchase made many years ago of Winston, a huge Black Orpington Cockerel, I've wanted to breed them. So now there is a fine trio of them cackling away in a run behind the linhay. Isn't Winston II a fine big bird? And a Brylcreem sheen to boot.

Last opportunity for fab pork & gammon til 2012 (probably)

The cold weather has put a temporary spike in our pig breeding programme; Dahlia & Agatha rolled their eyes at the snow and refused to breed until things looked more hopeful for a successful farrowing. This means that the pork and gammon we have available this spring will be the last til December 2011 (or possibly even January 2012).

A quarter box of pork includes: thick cut chops, good sized family joints – from leg, shoulder and belly – boned and rolled, Tenderloin, sausagemeat – fab for stuffing roast chicken (or anything else), ribs & liver.

A quarter box of gammon/bacon includes : streaky bacon in 500g packs, back bacon in 500g packs, good sized family gammon joints. Delivery dates for pork will be Wednesday 13th April and the gammon/bacon on Thursday 28th April 2011, pork just in time for Easter, the gammon in time for our one-off extra Royal bank holiday ...

Prices include delivery to your door.

- Quarter pork box (10k)£95
- Half pork box (20k) £180
- Whole pork box (40k) £310
- Quarter gammon & bacon box (10k)£105
- Half gammon/bacon box (20k) £200
- Whole gammon/bacon box (40k) £350
- Whole mixed pork/ gammon/bacon box (40k) £330.

Gammon/bacon can be smoked or unsmoked (we love it smoked).