Winter 2011
Newsletter No. 7

SOUTH YEO FARM WEST

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

It's been a full year

I can't believe that it was only mid-May when I wrote the summer newsletter describing our plans for the next twelve months. We'd taken stock of what we'd achieved so far and what we still wanted to do and committed ourselves to making things happen. And they have.

The first dream to be made real was starting a small suckler herd of Devon Rubies sometime in 2012. Well, it was only August 2011 when our starter herd boinged out of the trailer and onto lush grass with a swish of their generous tails and a click of their hooves. That meant dream no.2 had to be put into action—the conversion of one of our barns into suitable overwintering accommodation for the cows. Some parts of the country may have firm enough ground to keep hardy cattle out in their fields during winter, but our heavy clay and Devon rain makes that a non-starter. We waited in vain for a builder to actually gives us a quote, so Andrew decided he'd do the conversion himself with (a very little) help from me. Calling on pals to help with laying the concrete, things progressed and in mid-November we brought the cows inside, just as the ground started to squish underfoot.

Dream no.3 was having a go at raising meat goats. Well we did that, and decided that the meat might be glorious, but that having goat breeding stock is not for us.

Dream no.4 was to take on one more breed of sheep of a type that contrasted with our Welsh Mountain Badger Face flocks. Andrew had a fancy for Swaledales, and I wanted something indigenous to the area. We looked at Devon Closewools, Devon and Cornwall Longwools, Greyface Dartmoors, Exmoor Horn, Dorset Horn and Whiteface Dartmoors and plumped for the Whiteface Dartmoors (more about them overleaf).

Dream no.5 was renovating the old cow shed, the derelict nasty with rotting and collapsing concrete walls. As I write, the building has been cleared and we're just waiting for someone else (not us this time) to put up replacement walls and roof so that the building becomes usable once more.

So, in just 7 months we've almost fulfilled our 18 month plan... But to tell the truth we are a bit tired!

One of our lovely Devon Ruby calves. Moo!

The South Yeo flock of Whiteface Dartmoor sheep

You'll have realised from the previous page that I rather got my own way about the breed of new sheep, but all the same, Andrew is delighted with the Whiteface Dartmoors. They are certainly more docile than our Badger Face flocks, their curly locks are gorgeous, and they have faces that look like a child's drawing of a sheep. Our new sheep have come from a local flock on Dartmoor and have whopping great permanent stock paint markings on them. When grazing up on the almost fenceless moor, the farmers need to be able to distinguish their sheep, and subtle marks aren't helpful, so we'll have to wait until shearing time when their new fleeces will grow back a little less colourfully.

We've taken on six mature ewes, all of which should be in lamb, and six ewe lambs born spring 2011 that will be ready to go to the ram in autumn 2012, so we'll be looking for our own ram next September.

Andrew has joined the Whiteface Dartmoor Sheep Breeders Association and we went to their 60th anniversary dinner, where Jonathan Dimbleby gave the after dinner speech and also where my car conked out in the middle of Dartmoor. Perhaps we'll go next year in a horse and trap.

Berkshire pork & gammon

Our pedigree Berkshire pork, gammon and bacon boxes will be ready to be delivered in April/May 2012. You can choose from:

- Quarter pork box (app. 10 kilos) - £85 collected/£100 delivered
- Half pork box (app. 20 kilos) - £170 collected/£185 delivered
- Whole pork box (app. 40 kilos) - £300 collected/£320 delivered
- Quarter gammon and bacon box (app.10 kilos) - £95 collected/ £110 delivered
- Half gammon/bacon box (app. 20 kilos) - £190 collected/£205 delivered
- Whole gammon/bacon box (app. 40 kilos) - £340 collected/£360 delivered
- Whole mixed pork/gammon/ bacon box (app 40 kilos) - £320 collected/£340 delivered (arrives in two lots, with pork box & gammon/bacon box delivered on different days).

To place an order or if you have any questions call Debbie on 01837 810569 or email: debbie@southyeofarmwest.co.uk

Berkshire gammon and bacon box

Tractors—all change!

For quite some time I thought this slot was going to be empty. But finally, the new (to us—it's actually 18 years old) John Deere tractor has arrived. And why is this noteworthy? Well, we've managed brilliantly for years with two even more ancient Massey Ferguson tractors, but the arrival of the cows means we need to be able to lift and shift much greater weights and needed a 4WD vehicle to do so. Cows require a lot of feeding in the winter and we had to have something sturdy to shift their big round bales of haylage . The straw for their bedding is also in quarter tonne bales—no more of those namby-pamby small bales that I can lift and trundle about in twos and threes in a wheelbarrow. So, for those of you who care about these things, here it is!

Andrew in his John Deere 6200 - Happy Christmas!

Turkeys

We don't do turkeys commercially as plucking and dressing heaps of birds is not our idea of fun. We dispatch all our own poultry and waterfowl for our own use, but these days you have to be licensed to slaughter birds for sale. But each summer we bring home a few young turkey poults to rear for ourselves & family for Christmas, and what a hoot these birds are. Even though they are hefty birds, they head up into the trees at the first sign of dusk and we have to encourage them down to put them in their hut for the night.

Some of our Norfolk Black turkeys

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Case study

We are really proud to have been a mini case study for organic duck farmer Rona Amiss's report on *New entrants and opportunities in farming* arising from her research scholarship for the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust. Rona's fascinating report included farms in the United States, Cambodia, India, France and Britain. Her description of hardship alongside passion for the land in Cambodia is particularly moving—truly another world.

If you want to have a read, you can download the report here: http://bit.ly/s8Sk30

RIP Humphrey

In the mid 1990's we were settling into our first smallholding & had taken on our first sheep, a flock of Jacobs. We were appallingly unlucky when a pair of straying Jack Russell terriers killed three of our sheep. A friend suggested, partly in jest, that we get a llama to guard the flock, & amused by this idea, started to do our homework and decided to visit a couple of llama farms. The first was a quintessential Cotswolds farm, apart from the bizarre sight of seventy or more llamas scattered over the fields. We were hugely taken by these quiet, softly stepping creatures, and started to look in earnest for a young male to bring home. Humphrey, originally called Snoopy (far too comical a name for such a superior gent) came from Ascot and was, appropriately, brought home in a borrowed, posh horse box. As a young chap he was incredibly fast and threw himself in the air, body twisting and stretching, leaping easily over five-barred gates. But as with all of us, he slowed down in old age and it's been some years since we've seen him gallop—a dignified trot has been his style for some time. Sadly, in his dotage (at least 16 years old) he broke his leg and had to be euthanized, but he had led a very carefree life with us, welcoming each lamb to his ever increasing flock of sheep. We'll miss his banana-shaped ears poking over the hedges & his curious nature.