Stroud Community Agriculture Quarterly Newsletter Issue No. 99

Farm News

Autumn 2026 Issue

Farm Report

The two early heatwaves of the year each followed a good rain, and even in temperatures above thirty-five degrees Celsius the farm's sandy soil didn't feel dry much below the surface. We celebrated it in our last newsletter. That changed as the heat continued in waves through the summer with weeks of unbroken sunshine becoming months.

The vegetables on the farm are arranged into growing areas in part due to the adversities endured and adaptations inherited through their ancestral lineages, but also according to the scales at which they are required in order to sustain our year-round cropping.

Think of the waxy leaves of coastal brassicas whipped by salty sea winds – a trait that can help them to pull through an unforgiving summer. Leeks' roots are comparatively shallow and, though winter-hardy in their layered leaves, they're high and dry without rain. But looked after well and in great enough numbers they'll provide flavour straight from the earth through the hungry gap.

That the sandy soil was anything more than dust is owed to the presence of organic matter. Here, gratitude is due for Farmer Sam's herd which has added lots of this, and continues to do so via the farm's most barbarous tractor implement: the muck spreader. Thanks and appreciation go also to two longstanding members, Clare and Nicky, for generously lending their car jack when the tractor's tow hitch got stuck.

We like to build the soils and fuel their ecologies with green manures too. As you pass through the Orchard field, see the haze of purple phacelia, many species of clover and occasional cheery wildflower undersown below the squash after a month's head-start. These too need consistent moisture to germinate and establish, so we thought that getting them going alongside a vegetable crop made for an economical use of the water.

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Farm report (continued)



Surviving is one thing; to thrive is another. Many of the established crops also require a moist environment during specific later life cycle phases. Our sweetcorn harvest looked to be abundant until opening the husks and sadly finding gappy cobs – in dry conditions the silks emerge late, even after the pollen is released.

The drought really hit during the successions of later plantings in the fields. Each of these required a prolonged soak from the sprinklers and also often covered a lot of space. In order to water in all transplants in one session, we branched the header pipe into four lines to sprinkle a whole field block at a go.

Quadrupling the flow rate saw our ten cubic metre tank empty in under two hours. This was just enough to wet the surface in the context of a month without even a drizzle, encouraging shallow roots vulnerable to the sun's evaporative power.

The tank is filled from a water main shared by all tenants at Oakbrook, with a full twenty-four hour rota to time-share the pressure in the summer. It occurred that we could be getting better value for both the climbing private water company rates and our labour by irrigating the fields after the sun had set, with both the watering efficiency of the expanded coverage and the water resilience granted by cooler night temperatures.

The infrastructure wasn't quite ready for this automation, and so huge thanks are due to the members of the community who volunteered their time to operate the pump and outlet valve manually in the after hours of the midsummer.

Since the rains began again in August, something a bit like spring has been in the air as the land has greened up. Outdoor crops that struggled through the arid months, whose growth barely kept pace with the herbivory of millions of tiny flea beetles, now stand vibrantly amid a lush backdrop.

The SCA harvest festival this month saw our twinned project, Somali Kitchen join us for a happy day of welly wanging, wheelbarrow races, feasting and sowing new seeds. It was organised by the wonderful Eva and Anna from last year's Farm Team. It is to Anna for staying for another season that we owe the thread of continuity in the working culture and knowledge of the farm through a time of change.

We've arranged a less manual solution to the night-time irrigation on the farm for next year, which we're hopeful will help us to take care of this most precious resource.

- Daniel



Our crowdfunder launches soon!

Later this autumn, we're launching a crowdfunder to help us improve the farm's water resilience, in order to help us weather future droughts like those we have endured for the last 2 seasons.

The biggest intended investment is the drilling of a borehole at Oakbrook, giving us more reliable access to water through dry spells, and reducing our ongoing water bills.

Stroud District Council can match donations up to £10,000. The amount we receive from the council will depend on how much support and community engagement we can show early on, as the Council makes its decision on 9 November - so every pound donated before then will make a big difference to how much funding we can secure!

If you're able to, please donate when the crowdfunder launches - keep an eye out on our website and social media for the link, and we'll also email a link too. Sharing it with friends, family and local businesses who might support the farm will also make a real difference. Thank you!

Bonfire night is nearly here!

Come and enjoy an autumn evening on the farm, with a big bonfire, good food and friendly company on Thursday the 5th November.

If you haven't been before, our Bonfire Night is a homespun affair, with no fireworks - just the pleasure of gathering around the fire together.

There'll be a big BBQ featuring Farmer Sam's delicious produce, with veggie options available, plus soup and rolls, hot chocolate and a bar with local beers. If you haven't been before, it can be quite dark (despite the massive fire!), so it's a good idea to bring a torch. And please bring a mug for soup/hot chocolate too.

We have permission to use the car park at Hawkwood this year, so feel free to use this – although it might get full, in which case we will use the bottom field (next to the polytunnels) for overflow. And of course the lanes can get congested, so if you are able to walk, cycle or car share, that would be very much appreciated.

Whether you're a familiar face or haven't joined us for an event before, you're very welcome. And do bring along friends and family to the bonfire – this event isn't just for members!



Pack shed update

The chiller is finally fixed! Thank you for your patience while we got it sorted – the replacement parts were extremely difficult to come by over summer while everyone was after tham. We're sorry for any dips in vegetable quality during the heatwave, particularly for those collecting towards the end of their collection window.

Having the chiller working again will help us keep your produce fresher throughout the week – although we encourage you collect near the start of your window where possible – that is when the veg will always be at its best.

Many of you will have noticed that we're trialling selling **kimchi and sauerkraut** from a small organic producer in Wales, introduced to us by a longstanding member. We'd love to hear what you think! We're also investigating the possibility of producing our own in future seasons.



Please help us make sure there's enough veg for everyone. We are frequently running out of vegetables over the weekend, despite calculating our harvest quantities accurately and including a buffer. Please collect within your allocated window and stick closely to the weights and quantities displayed.

Our collection windows are:
Tuesday collection: 6pm Tuesday to 12pm Friday
Friday collection: 6pm Friday to 12pm Tuesday
Collecting in the wrong window, or taking more than your allocation, means taking vegetables intended for someone else's share. If you need to change your collection window, please contact us beforehand so we can account for it.

Thank you for helping keep the pack shed fair and well stocked for all our members.

- Jamie





Help our community farm grow

Sadly our membership numbers continue to decline, and recruiting new members is increasingly important to the future of Stroud Community Agriculture. Membership contributions fund the work of growing our food, so **every new member helps strengthen the farm and keep it thriving.**

One of the most valuable things you can do is spread the word among friends, family, neighbours and colleagues. Tell them what you enjoy about being a member, share a favourite meal made with your veg, or invite them to visit the farm. A personal recommendation can make all the difference to someone thinking about joining.

We'd also love your help reaching people beyond our existing networks. Do you know a workplace, community group or local event where we could introduce SCA? Have an idea for promoting membership, or some time and enthusiasm to help with recruitment?

Please get in touch at **membership@stroudcommunityagriculture.org** with ideas or opportunities, or if you'd like to get involved in a more active way. Whether you can make an introduction, help distribute leaflets around your community or support a wider recruitment effort, we'd love to hear from you.

What is the value of a share?

We've now completed nearly a full year of benchmarking our vegetable shares against Soil Association organic veg price data, and we're happy to say that the average value has exceeded our weekly share fee by approximately **£3 a week** over that period – a figure which excludes extras such as pick-your-own produce.

We expect the weekly value to dip naturally over the coming months as we move through winter and into the hungry gap, when stored crops are running low and new-season harvests are still getting going. Sharing those seasonal changes is part of belonging to a community-supported farm, and looking across a full year gives a fuller picture than any individual week.

But retail price is only one way to measure value. By this measure alone, a cucumber is worth about twice as much as a beetroot. Perhaps it is to you - but if you love roasted beetroot and aren't as keen on cucumber, you might feel differently!

And no price comparison can capture the view across the farm from Hawkwood, seeing the lambs in spring, pushing your children on the rope swing, or knowing that your membership supports local growing that cares for our community and the environment.

So, while we're pleased that the figures show good value for the vegetables themselves, we hope that being part of SCA gives you much more besides.



Update from the Core Group

As leaves turn and days shorten fast, we're yet again reminded of the reliability of change. It's the time where the core group also changes as at the recent AGM two stalwart members, Rachel and Molly, recently stepped down, and a number of new members joined the core group.

The core group are simply members, like you, who have volunteered to share for a time in the running of the SCA. We have a great deal to thank both Rachel and Molly for, as they have steered us through a very challenging recent period, committing to see things through despite the personal cost that this can sometimes bring. On behalf of all of the members, Rachel and Molly: thank you.

It was exciting to come together at the AGM, with the opportunity to hear some reflections on the past 25 years of the SCA, a sense of where we currently are, and to hear from a young member Ilyan, about aspirations for the future. While the time seems to go too quickly, meeting fellow members and hearing what is important is always valuable. Thank you to everyone who chose to attend and engage with this important process.

Aside from the AGM, at this time of year, we reflect somewhat on how the year has gone (water, anyone?) and look ahead to next season, with a clear-eyed understanding that it may be exceptionally challenging. There's no question in my mind that adversity tends to rally communities together. And while, of course, we'd rather not have to face difficulties, knowing that we can face them head-on, alongside other intelligent, caring human beings is perhaps one of the privileges of being human.



For the core group, we focus on those longer-term challenges — like investments in infrastructure, equipment, financial stability, culture — that can help make the day-to-day work on the farm easier, more productive, and more enjoyable. Alongside this, there are loads of very practical and down-to-earth things to be done.

On the farm, our wonderful farm team, with help from weekly volunteers, continue working hard to provide such a marvellous share of veg every week, and prepare for next season. Elsewhere, a new-ish core group looks to settle in, and despite the shortening days we have a host of wonderful events to look forward to together. Wishing you all the best.

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- Mark



Recipe corner:

Cheesy curried swede and bean pie

Preheat the oven to 200C/180C Fan, then roast the swede with oil, salt and pepper for 25 mins.

Fry the leeks over medium heat with a pinch of salt for 10 mins, then stir in half the curry powder and cook until fragrant before adding the garlic. Cook for another minute then remove from the heat.

Melt the butter in a saucepan, whisk in the flour and the remaining curry powder, then cook for 2–3 minutes. Add the milk in thirds, whisking to combine each time. Cook for 10 minutes, stirring regularly.

Stir in the cheddar, mustard and lemon zest and juice, then season to taste. Add the kale and beans to the mixture and stir to combine.

Remove the swede from the oven, add the the cheesy white sauce to the dish and mix to combine. Brush 1 sheet of filo pastry with melted butter, then scrunch it in over one-quarter of the dish to create an attractive ruffle. Repeat with the remaining filo. Sprinkle over the cumin seeds. Return to the oven for 25–30 minutes until the filo is golden and the pie is bubbling at the sides.

Ingredients

600g swede, cut in 2cm chunks
2 tbsp light olive oil
2 leeks, finely sliced
2 tbsp medium curry powder
2 garlic cloves, finely chopped
100g butter
50g plain white flour
750ml pint full-fat milk
100g cheddar, grated
1 tbsp Dijon mustard
1 lemon, zest and juice
100g kale
400g tin haricot or butter beans
4 sheets filo pastry
½ tsp cumin seeds

Adapted from BBC Good Food

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're currently sorting out the next dates for the Core Group meetings, so if you're interested in coming along, keep an eye on our website or drop us an email. Do get in touch - we'd be delighted to see you there.



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

