



Canalside Community Food

a community supported agriculture scheme

SPRING/SUMMER 2019

newsletter no. 46

THE SEASON IS GETTING OFF TO AN EARLY START THIS YEAR, in stark comparison to the cold, wet, early spring of 2018. The land was so dry in the winter that the team was able to plough in January in readiness for the early season crops. This is unheard of! With the potatoes in the ground in good time - nearly a full month earlier than last year - and onion planting taking place on schedule, it's easy to be optimistic about the 2019 season and the promise that it holds. Dom has been pondering a key aspect of our



New Beginnings

farming system – read his **Musings from the Land** for some fascinating insights into green manures. Last year was exceptionally busy and the tail-end of 2018 was time for wrapping up the big project of the year: the purchase of the land – read the latest on this in **Land Purchase Update**. It's looking like there's a busy year ahead for the **Education Project**, with a number of classes already planning visits to the farm: find out more in the update on this. Check out the calendar of planned events in **Events & Socials** - we hope you'll be able to join us at the farm for something this year. You'll also find all the usual regular features: updates from our **Partner Projects**, the **Willows Project** and the recently renamed **Bee Club**, along with the **Members' Corner** (advertising some exciting new activities) and **Small Ads** for members' business projects. Grateful thanks go to Canalside member Sukhi Dhillon, for editing the last newsletter and this one.

Ali, April 2019

MUSINGS FROM THE LAND

by Dom van Marsh, the grower whose views do not necessarily reflect those of Canalside Community Food.

Take a walk around our fields and you'll probably notice that perhaps more than a third of our land is covered in what looks like grass (the precise area will depend upon time of year).

This is ley land that is being “rested”, and has been sown with green manure: beneficial plant species whose presence boosts soil fertility and improves soil structure. If done well it is similar to, or better than, spreading tonnes of cow muck on the land (hence the name).

Green manure is the cornerstone of organic agriculture (or, as our great-grandparents called it, agriculture). Without a break from cropping, soil quickly becomes exhausted as nutrients are exported (in the form of crops) and soil structure is damaged by cultivation. A year or two in ley has the potential to replenish nutrients through biological processes. I used the term “rest” but in actual fact the soil is far from resting: there are uncountable trillions of complex associations between uncountable trillions of different microbes - living, dying and reproducing, mining and processing nutrients in a staggering orgy of chemical and biological interactions. There are more microorganisms in a **teaspoonful** of soil than there are people on earth. And to think, it just looks like a field of boring old grass!

In organic farming we talk about feeding the soil, not the plant – but what we are really doing is feeding the microbiology: the bacteria and fungi, nematodes, protozoa, arthropods and numerous other species that power the soil

food web¹. Herein lies the most fundamental distinction between organic and non-organic agriculture: the latter uses water-soluble, mined or synthetic minerals to feed plant roots directly. The soil is merely incidental, a physical location in which the plant sits.² For the former, soil is an ecosystem, both a habitat and its inhabitants, with whom the plant dynamically and constantly interacts. Plants form symbiotic associations with the soil's communities, which enable all to thrive.



Green Manure in Action in Big Gorse Field

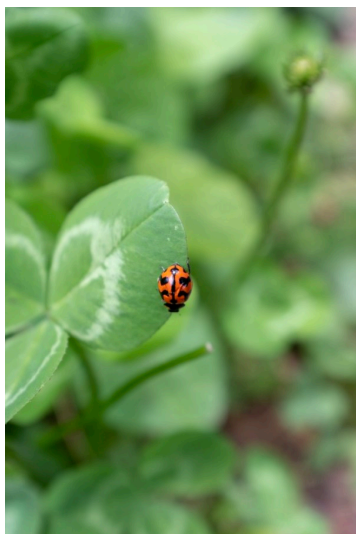
1 “Teeming with Microbes”, Wayne Lewis & Jeff Lowenfels, Timber Press, 2006

2 I am aware that this is a sweeping generalisation, intended to illustrate a point - apologies to any offended non-organic farmers.

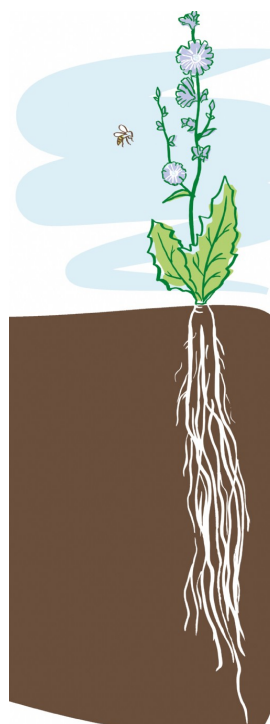
But when we cultivate – tilling, hoeing weeds, walking or driving on the soil, and everything else that we do to produce annual crops – we are constantly damaging this ecosystem, and green manure has the potential not just to heal and restore but to improve and build on what was there before.

The most obvious way in which nutrients are restored is through nitrogen fixation. This is where bacteria that live on the roots of leguminous plants (most importantly clovers but also beans, peas and others) take nitrogen from the air and “fix” it in the soil, via the plants that those bacteria associate with, for free! This biological process can be contrasted with the Haber-Bosch process used to artificially synthesize nitrogen fertiliser, a

staggeringly energy-intensive operation that is responsible for up to 2% of the entire world’s energy usage³. Generally speaking, clovers fix the most nitrogen, and of the many types white and red clover are the most widely used – in summer you can explore a smörgåsbord of clover flowers dancing with delighted bees and other insects in our fields. Clovers are usually sown with ryegrass, as they are excellent bedfellows and the grass provides extra groundcover over winter, when it is most needed.



Getting a fix



*Deep-rooting
Chicory*

Another important mechanism of some green manure species is “dynamic accumulation” or nutrient lifting, whereby their deep roots are able to access hard-to-reach nutrients lower down in the soil. These nutrients are then “lifted” into leaves that are made accessible to other plants when cut or eaten and excreted by animals. Chicory is one of the best dynamic accumulators, and you can spot lots of it at Canalside. (Glance over the hedge towards Leasowe Farm in midsummer and you might spot its magnificent flower stalks, up to head height, speckled with beautiful purple-blue blossoms, throughout the Leasowe pastures and hay meadows.) Interestingly, this is precisely the role that the much-despised dock plays in nature; its powerful taproot breaks through compacted soil layers and taps into subsoil resources, bringing

them up for everyone else to enjoy – a bit like an adult reaching for the biscuit tin from the top shelf to share with the toddler (sugar-free, organic, homemade, fairtrade biscuits, of course). Allotment and home gardeners, console yourself as you curse a pernicious dock root this spring!

Finally there are the short-term species, which are possibly the most useful to your veg patch. Phacelia, buckwheat, mustard and crimson clover are all very quick growing, short-lived, extremely good at out-competing weeds and most importantly of all have fabulous flowers that are bloomin’ brilliant for the bees (particularly phacelia). Before a late-planted crop such as squash that isn’t due to go in until, say, mid June, I often cultivate and prepare the soil in late March to allow for a few months of phacelia growth first; as it grows it feeds the soil food web, when it flowers it’s a feast for the bees, and when it’s tilled in it’s Christmas and birthday all at once for those marvellous microbes, which puts them in a fine mood to help our squash plants do their thing.



Buzzy at work

What are the limitations of green manures? In order to reap many of the benefits of nitrogen fixation and nutrient accumulation, it is necessary to mow the topgrowth repeatedly. We use a tractor for this that runs on diesel, pollutes the air and causes soil compaction, none of which are desirable. It is far better to graze the sward with ruminants, which if done well has the potential to multiply the fertility benefits of green manures and even to sequester vast amounts of carbon.⁴ For small farms like ours, however, it is impractical to keep cows or sheep and unacceptable for some of our members.

Critics of organic agriculture often cite the large amount of land that is “wasted” in ley at any time. If the whole world was organic then at least a third of the world’s arable land would need to be green manure, which could impact food security. The response to this is that we could free up far more than a third of the world’s arable by not growing staggering amounts of grain to feed to imprisoned animals for cheap meat, and the ley can in any case feed people whilst providing its other benefits, via grazing animals.⁵

(Also, if we carry on producing food by a system of

⁴ “The Omnivore’s Dilemma”, Michael Pollan, Bloomsbury, 2006

⁵ “Meat: A Benign Extravagance”, Simon Fairlie, Permanent Publications, 2010

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haber_process

synthesizing nutrients using fossil fuels, and poisoning air, land, water and all life forms with pesticides and herbicides, we'll all be dead anyway).

and find me if you want to chat about green manure. Leave a day or two free in your diary as it really is my favourite topic of conversation!

Dom, 14th April 2019

On that cheery note: I'm off to sow some phacelia. Come

LAND PURCHASE UPDATE

In the last newsletter, we reported on the phenomenal success of the land share offer and the speed with which we reached our target. This has enabled us to buy our veg fields and social area (where we also have our polytunnels) from the Ingall family who live on Leasowe Farm.

Now, as you may already know, we have the fantastic news that we (Canalside Community Food Community Benefit Society) are the full and legal owners of this small piece of the Warwickshire countryside, meaning it is preserved in perpetuity for food production for the local community.

As with any purchase of property, there was a lot of to'ing and fro'ing between the solicitors, especially as buying land for community use is not especially common and they

needed to reach a suitable legal contract regarding future uses of the land.

The sale being complete, we can now focus our attentions on the season ahead, and other plans for the future can take the energy that they need to develop and grow.

We will also be holding our first AGM of the company under its new legal structure. We plan for this to take place on Saturday 14th September, the day of the potato harvest. Look out for more details nearer the time!



Our newest member sowing seeds in our newly-owned social area!



Visitors from Leeds by our polytunnels!

NEW ARRIVALS...

Our grower **Lena** and her partner **David** were glad to finally greet their first child, **Kria** when she arrived Earthside on 15th January weighing 8lb 8oz (3.8kg) after a very long and exhausting labour.

Members **Maddie** and **Andy Vicat-Brown** welcomed Wren Arlo to the world on the 16th November 2018 after a 4.5 day labour and a beautiful birth. He started life as an 8lb 12oz bundle of pure magic and he continues to thrive and bring happiness every day with his insatiable curiosity, determination and good humour.

May these little ones thrive on the produce of the land and enjoy its abundant gifts as they grow and explore.

There is new energy in the land team too: we welcome **David Luff** and **Anna Maria OFlynn** who have joined us as volunteer workshares and spend half a day in

the fields each week. The work mornings, especially on Wednesdays, are also benefiting from the regular input of several social and produce share members, meaning these sessions are highly productive times on the farm. Thank you all for your hard work through the winter and we hope you enjoy the changing work as we transition through spring into summer.



Baby Wren and family

The last six months have seen a number of new members join our community, both as social members and produce share members. There is currently a strong desire locally to be part of what we're doing, as enquiries have been at a record high and an unprecedented number of people are wanting to subscribe to a share of the harvest.

A warm spring-time welcome to all these new members: we wish you many happy times of connection with the land and your food through Canalside:

Natalie Stafford-Johnson . Emma Meehan . Jane Brace
Huimin Zhang and family . Lisa Godfrey . Izzie Grove.
Yashmin Rawbone and family. Joe Pollert and family .
Laura Vera. Sue Boniface . June Wilson .

Polina Vytnova . Ellie Ball . Catherine Steele and family
. Nicky Hall . Laura Fuller . Petrina Bowen . Kerry
O'Grady . Tim Gadd and family . Emma Weatherill and
family.

...AND DEPARTURES

In November we bid a partial goodbye to our wonderful grower, **Lena Sucker**, who is now on maternity leave until later in the year. Taking her place in the field we have long-standing volunteer workshare, **Stephen Hayward**, who has

stepped up to a paid role. Meanwhile Lena is maintaining her links with the land and the work through the Wednesday work mornings. We wish Lena a fabulous leave, during these precious early months with Kria.



New life on every front – we wish you well Lena!

EDUCATION PROJECT – by Ali Jeffery



Last Year's Woodloes Visit

After a relatively quiet past year on the education project, things are already looking busy for the year ahead.

The two Year 3 classes from Woodloes Primary School in Warwick are already planning a

return visit as part of their topic 'Where my Wellies Take Me' based on the story/poetry anthology book by Michael and Clare Morpurgo. This will be the third year of visits from Woodloes School for this topic; the activities and experiences we offer are greatly valued by the teachers of these classes.

We are also planning a visit from the oldest children from Milverton Primary School as part of their Healthy Eating Week. For the first time in our education project's history we will have the opportunity to really focus on seasonality, and consider the provenance of food that we eat in the UK. We will be looking at food air miles and which imported produce can be grown in the UK. Seasonal menu and meal planning are also on the cards.

All these visits are provisionally booked for June. Once

arrangements are a bit firmer, look out for details of how to get involved – as always your hands-on, practical support makes all the difference to the richness of the experience we can offer the visiting classes.

New education visit leader needed in 2019

At some point this year we will need to have new people to lead educational visits to the farm as, sometime in 2019, Ali will need to step back from the role for a while. We are looking for members who have educational/teaching experience, especially with primary aged children, who could be part of a team who can cover this aspect of the farm's work.

If you would like to know more about leading occasional visits to the farm (between April and October) for classes of (usually primary aged) students, please contact Ali: mail@canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk



Radford Year One in Deep Contemplation

EVENTS – by Ali Jeffery

The winter is always a quieter time on the farm, as the pace of work slows and social events lessen. Nonetheless, there have been enjoyable times of gathering in different ways in our community. If you weren't able to join us, see what you missed below.

December – pub social:

Our now traditional pre-winter closure pub social was a lively and convivial evening spent in the Somerville Arms with a mix of staff, volunteers and share members.

– mid-winter social:

We enjoyed mulled cider round the fire at the farm as the year turned through the winter solstice. We even had a festive minstrel to serenade the workers on one of the collection days!



Festive Minstrel

April – onion planting and spring social:

Thanks to a really good turnout of super efficient members, the sets for the entire onion crop were planted in one morning during our Big Spring Work Day. The hard work was followed by time in the social area to relax and refuel with a delicious bring-and-share lunch that was accompanied by Nanda's tasty leek and parsley soup



Onions ready to go!

(making the most of the leek abundance!).

Upcoming events:

- May:** Sun 5th – stall at Ecofest with activities
June: Sun 9th – Open Farm Sunday tours and picnic
Sat 15th–Sun 16th – Peace Festival publicity stall and plant sales
July: Sat 13th – **big summer social** – annual summer party
Sept: Sat 7th–Sun 8th – Leamington Food and Drink Festival publicity stall and veg sales
Sat 14th – **big autumn social** – potato harvest, shared meal, AGM
Oct: Sat 12th – apple pressing, bring a picnic
Nov: Sat 9th – **big winter social** – beetroot harvest, shared meal
Dec: date TBC – final social of the year

Do you have an idea for an event? In addition to the events we already have planned, you may have an idea for another event to add to Canalside's 2019 calendar. Please get in touch if you have an idea for an event, workshop or activity that you would like to offer to other members. Maybe you are a budding restaurateur and would like to run a pop-up cafe! Or perhaps you have a skill that you could share with other members. Whatever your idea, contact Ali to discuss possible dates.

Socials team helpers wanted: We're always on the lookout for new people to come and help out with Canalside events and socials. If you enjoy catering / meeting new people and would like to help with this side of things, get in touch with Ali to be added to the googlegroup so that you can hear about opportunities to help.

Contact Ali on:

mail@canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk



Onion-planting!

Springtime at Canalside in Pictures



Tractor Stowaways!



Hotbed Makers



Pepper Potts



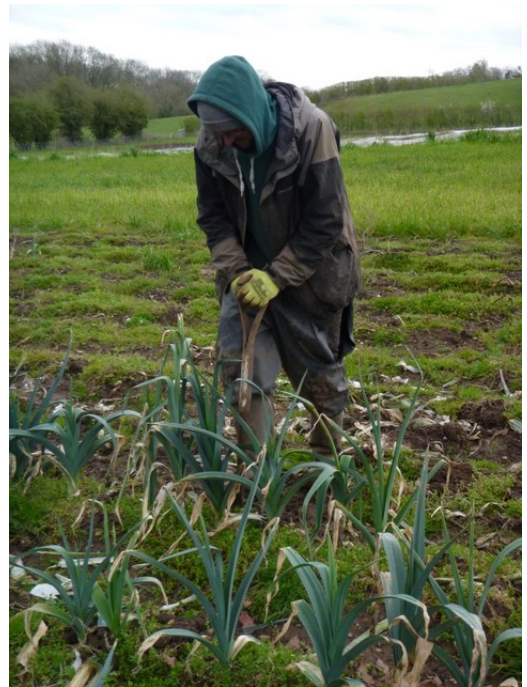
Another day at the office...



Oranges and Lemons from La Jimena



Bean Hoeing



Leek Harvesting

CANALSIDE COMMUNITY FOOD - PARTNER PROJECTS' UPDATE

The Willows Care Farm, by Ness Ainscow

All continues to run well at the Willows Project. We would like to welcome Paul Snell and Dave Luff to our team. We are presently running our 2nd Grow to Grow Project funded by Tesco's Bags for Life scheme, as well as our regular Farm Experience and Enterprise days. We've been busy sowing our flower and herb seeds and clearing the ground for planting when it's warmed up a bit.

This year we are focusing on the recruitment of regular participants in order to keep the project sustainable. Please help distribute our leaflets, which you will find in the pole barn, and do approach us if you would like to use our lovely space for an event. Thanks everyone for your continued support in purchasing our enterprise products.

Heartnut Bee Club, by Nanda van Marsh

We've rebranded from Canalside Bee CSA to Heartnut Bee Club, as we felt it better reflected who we are – the apiary is based in a heartnut orchard.

We did our first inspection of the year on a sunny April 1st – and what a lovely sight! The ladies all survived the winter and look very healthy – one colony even had two frames of this year's honey capped already! Such a change from last year's depressing start. I always find it fascinating to see how closely the bees are related to the weather, so I often know the bees will be well if my husband (grower Dom van Marsh) comes home happy and relaxed from a



Bees!



Living Willow Heart Gifts

day in the fields.

We have 3 National colonies and it was interesting to see how each colony has their own way of building a nest. We also have a Warre hive, which has done very well in the last two years.

This season, we are ready to increase our membership, so please get in touch if you are interested. We'll be running a couple of intro sessions in the coming months, for you to familiarise yourself with some bee lingo and equipment, so that if you'd like to join us in the apiary you won't be baffled straightaway! If you're interested get in touch: heartnutbeeclub@gmail.com

MEMBERS' CORNER

Do you have any interesting projects, charity fund-raisers or other not-for-profit activities you'd like to promote to your fellow Canalsiders? If so, then this is the space for your free advert! Get in touch with Ali for advertising in future issues of the newsletter.

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Foundry Wood



Lots of activities at Foundry Wood over the Easter Holidays – Pizza Making, Forest School Camp, Tie dye t-shirts, Marbling, Felted bees...PLUS our AGM and Spring Event on Sunday 28th April. Visit www.foundrywood.co.uk for details

Play in the Woods

An outdoor playgroup for 0-5 year olds and their parents, come rain or shine!

Based at Tallis Wood, the wood on the right hand side of drive as you go down to the Canalside car park.

Running every other Saturday 10am-11.30am (during pick up time!) Dates: 27/4, 11/5, 25/5, 8/6, 22/6

£2 suggested donation per family

Contact Nanda on 07510777927 or just turn up

SMALL ADS

Do you have any business or money-making ventures you'd like to advertise to other members of Canalside? Then this is the space for you. Please contact Ali for future adverts.

OddJobs

Home and garden repairs and maintenance

Dave Fenton

39 St Mary's Road

Leamington Spa

07799 596394

davefenton44@gmail.com



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Link to our Flickr photos for a fuller selection of photos of the past 6 months:
<https://www.flickr.com/photos/126538300@N02/albums>

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Next newsletter due out during October 2019.

Deadline for ads with payment, and notices – to be advised nearer the time.

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