



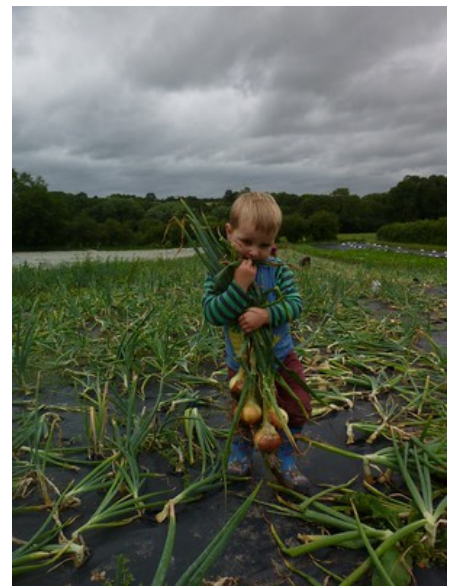
Canalside Community Food

a community supported agriculture scheme

**AUTUMN/WINTER
2019**

newsletter no. 47

WE'RE HEADING INTO AUTUMN FROM A SUMMER OF NOTABLE EXTREMES *as we increasingly notice the effects of the climate crisis that is playing out around the globe. Whilst record breaking temperatures were recorded around the world, melting (at unusually high levels, even for the summer) of Arctic sea ice and glaciers have been in the media. Locally we have seen the hottest day since 1890 recorded in July (the mercury hit 35.2°C at Bablake weather station) and the summer and early autumn have been affected by frequent, torrential downpours and regular thunderstorms. Luckily our farming system seems to have been relatively resilient to the weather we've had this year (despite the weed-friendly conditions of alternating spells of sun and rain) – in fact some crops have recorded fantastic harvests with a massive ten tonnes of potatoes being brought in across the season, and the maincrop onions having a yield of a stonking two tonnes and growing so large they dwarf last year's tiny, drought affected specimens! Meanwhile, Dom has been thinking about how we manage pests on the farm – you can read the full lowdown in his **Musings from the Land**. We've held a number of events throughout the summer and early autumn with support from members, most significantly the Summer Party – read **Events & Socials** for those you missed and find out how to get involved in future activities. As always, there's an update on the **Education Project** (which had a very busy summer of visits) and **our partner project, 'The Willows'**. And finally don't forget the **Members' Corner** at the back for details of a few local fundraising events. At this time of abundance and harvesting the bounty of our land, why not come down to help with a work morning as the farm transitions from the peak growing season to the quieter pace of the winter. If you aren't able to, we hope to see you at the farm soon in whatever capacity works for you! The next social will be on Saturday 16th November alongside the beetroot harvest. Until then, happy reading – perhaps curled up somewhere warm and snug as the weather outside cools.*



Ali, October 2019

His hard work pays off!

MUSINGS FROM THE LAND – by Dom van Marsh

Probably the question I get asked the most at Canalside, perhaps disappointingly, is not “is this your tenner that I just found on the floor?” or “will you marry me?” but “what do you do about pests?”.

As with nearly all aspects of organic crop husbandry, pest control is all about a systems approach. We tackle pests in numerous ways, most of which - and the most important of which - are indirect, and focus on the plant, the soil and the system rather than the pest itself. We try to learn from what a pest infestation might be telling us about our plants, soil and system rather than solely concentrate on eradication.

The first pillar of pest control is a healthy plant. Pests attack weak plants; pests target imbalanced plants that aren't growing to their full potential. So you must try to create for the plant conditions that it

thrives in. This of course includes making sure it has access to the right amount of water, nutrients etc, but above all it means a healthy soil, rich in organic matter, well aerated, packed with microbial life and full of fungi and insects. Healthy soil gives healthy plants which are unattractive to pests – this point cannot be overstressed, so I'll say it again: healthy soil gives healthy plants which are unattractive to pests. I referred to “balance” above, which is also critical: getting healthy plants isn't about just piling more and more manure on; a surplus of nutrients can be just as harmful as a deficiency, which is most obviously seen in aphid attacks – an excess of nutrients, particularly nitrogen, can lead to excessively lush, sappy growth which aphids adore. Too much of a certain nutrient can also “lock up” others, for example in our polytunnels we have a problem with excessive potassium, which can lock up magnesium – even though the latter is in good

supply our plants often show symptoms of magnesium deficiency due to the potash surplus, making them vulnerable to pest attack. So the grower must be finely tuned to the specific needs of plants, whilst always bearing in mind the most important principle of all: a healthy, biologically active soil is of universal benefit.

In my Musings on green manure in the previous edition of this newsletter, I rambled on about providing habitat for beneficial fauna: this is the next crucial pillar of organic pest control. Glance around our site and you'll see hedgerows containing standards (full-grown trees) around all the fields; the field size is smaller than you'll typically see in the English lowlands, which gives us a better ratio of hedgerow-to-cropping-area. This habitat is vitally important for populations of creatures from all sorts of insects right the way up to birds, reptiles and small mammals, many of which predate on pests such as slugs and caterpillars.



Aphids on a leaf

Insects are of course highly useful for keeping the likes of aphids and whitefly at bay – ladybirds, hoverflies, lacewings and predatory wasps are the most prized “livestock” you can farm on a vegetable holding! In addition to the hedgerows these insects



*Nature's pest control:
ladybird feasting on aphids*

thrive in green manure too and also in the headland (the uncultivated strip around the outside of each field – rarely seen in conventional arable fields, though it is making a comeback). They can be purchased and introduced as a direct way to tackle an aphid explosion, but this is very expensive and unless there is habitat for them it is only ever a short term solution.



Slug on the lookout for veg!

Certain weeds too, those oft-cursed competitors of our crops, can have a beneficial effect in reducing pest numbers – I recall a few years back when we kept on top of the weeds for most of our brassica beds but the redshank in particular was rampant in one patch of brussels sprouts. Glancing out across the redshank forest on a warm still day it seemed the plants were shimmering and wobbling; on closer inspection this was the movement of uncountable thousand of hoverflies gorging themselves on the weeds' pink flowers in bloom. Then in late autumn picking through the sprouts we found aphids abundant on the crops in the weeded beds but largely absent from those where the redshank had dominated! But there is a balance and slugs will enjoy a weedy habitat more than a weeded one, and such is the nature of growing that we never need to deliberately allow the weeds to grow – even with our optimum efforts there are plenty of them across the site! I have discovered the benefits of letting them grow up where they are not in competition with the crop, for example the nettle wilderness behind our polytunnels, where the stingers can reach over 2m in height, is a haven for an army of insects that willingly migrate into the tunnels when aphids are active. Although clearing such messes away in autumn is highly tempting, almost an annual ritual, we are nonetheless advised to leave untouched as many dying nettles as possible until spring as their hollow stalks provide critical overwintering habitat for many beneficial insect species.

So healthy plants, healthy soil and habitat are always the starting point of pest control, but of course nothing is perfect and we still need to take

additional interventionist methods to keep pests away. Physical barriers are the next line of prevention. On our site these primarily take the form of sheets of mesh, which keep butterflies, cabbage root flies, carrot fly, pigeons and leek moth off the relevant crop without causing harm to these animals or their predators higher up the food chain; rabbit fence all the way around each field, although often breached, largely does an effective job of keeping the bunnies out.



Pulling mesh over the onion crop

predators to bother them.

I also find the meshes ugly, they're made from plastic, are extremely time-consuming to handle and can encourage fungal growth due to limiting airflow. Consequently we do try and remove mesh whenever possible, although south Warwickshire seems to have more hungry pigeons (with a particular taste for organic veg) than anywhere else on the planet! Indeed, purple sprouting broccoli crop is very vulnerable to being nibbled by our pullastrine friends, but can't be meshed when the sprouts are emerging as they are damaged by rubbing – and this is at a time of year when the pigeons are

most active. So, to keep the birds off we erect lengths of fishing line above the crop, which is both effective and ecologically benign.



Replacing the rabbit fence

Physical barriers are a double-edged sword, however, and often cause further problems – they prevent predators from eating pests that manage to sneak through, and I have found in the past that it only takes a few cabbage white butterflies to sneak through the mesh then their larvae are safe from



The damage large cabbage white caterpillars can inflict

harm under the mesh and are free to chomp away on your caulis! So all you've succeeded in doing is trapping the pest in with their favourite food and no



Basil the ferret caught in a humane trap

Where physical barriers are ineffective – voles, mice and rats for example can get over, under or through almost anything – trapping is one option, with “humane” live traps available for all these pests. Many farms will of course keep a dog or cats which are work well against these extremely troublesome pests, and although that is impractical at Canalside I always encourage dog owners to take their mutts for walks around the fields, ideally urinating as they go (the dog not the owner!)– just the scent can be a deterrent for rodents and also rabbits. Some relatively harmless substances can also be a deterrent, such as mint oil against mice and onion essence against carrot fly, though I have yet to try the latter – trials of onion oil dispensers, placed in carrot fields, are underway in Holland at present.

The final solution is to take the conventional agriculture approach: apply a substance that will kill the pest. Under organic standards these are very tightly controlled, special permission must be granted from the certifying body (in our case the Soil Association) and even then you are limited to a small range of products considered to have minimal harm: soft soap against aphids and Iron Phosphate slug pellets are the most commonly used of these. We would only resort to these in rare cases under threat of total crop failure, although we keep some stock of "organic" slug pellets we haven't used any at all for

NEW ARRIVALS...

It's been a busy six months since the last newsletter, with a number of people taking up spaces for produce with a new subscription and lots of people who have come across Canalside for the first time or who are waiting to be able to receive produce taking up social membership. We wish our new members long enjoyment of the land and the community. A warm Canalside welcome to the following new members:

Victoria Lindsell - Tom Head - Katharina Jurashek - Rachel Goodwin - Abigail Collins - Rosemarie Pfeffer-Ward - Lucie Titchmarsh - Kate Metcalfe - Fran Reed - Marie Coyne - Erin & Tim Riley - Mechthild Lathom - David Mullins - Susannah Maione - Joe Bates - Amelia McColl - Paula Palade and family - Alan Wilkinson & Jo Crozier - Liz Thiebe - Tonia Morton and family - Joanna Groves & Adam Clifford - Christine Leigh - Diana Guibalca and family - Tom Wilks and family - Sarah Taylor - Anna Rivers - Maddy Wylie and family - Patrick Shannon-Hughes & Inès Kander - Teresa Carroll - Marie Willington - Jamie Brooks - Lea Renaux & Benjamin Qadar.

We also have some new energy joining the team on the land, and welcome the following new volunteer workshares to the volunteer team on the farm:

*Esthie & Johan Hugo
- Stephanie Palmer -
Eleanor Brown*

These people each do half a day a week working in the fields, polytunnels or orchard,



Vendy, champion tomato picker!

over a year now, and my hope is that we can eliminate them entirely through good husbandry. I am pleased to say that in the case of severe aphid attack on the cucumbers back in late Spring of this year we held our nerve and waited for the ladybirds to move in, which they did in their thousands. The wonderful thing about our CSA structure is that we grow so many different crops that we can afford to take a hit on cukes and don't need to reach for the poisons, which may be harder to resist for a specialised commercial organic cucumber grower.

joined by the rest of the volunteer workshare team and the social and produce share members who come down to help out – you are most welcome to join any work morning too: Wednesday and Saturday, 10am-1pm. Come for as long as you are able and no need to let us know whether you are coming! The location of the work and a contact number is always displayed on the chalkboard just inside the collection space.



Haruki drives the tractor!

Throughout the summer we have had the benefit of two hard-working full-time volunteers who have made big contributions to this season. Firstly we hosted **Haruki Yaumara**, an intern from Japan who wanted to know more about CSAs like ours. Haruki lived on the farm for a large part of her 3 months at Canalside, and immersed herself fully in the farm community and work on the land, bringing a sense of 'joie de vivre' to all she experienced. Haruki left in July to continue her research at farms around the UK and across Europe.

The latter part of the season saw the return of **Vendy Donatova**

who had already done a placement with us last season when she was studying at Moreton Morrell agricultural college. Now an undergraduate agriculture student in Prague, we were delighted to have Vendy back at the farm for a summer internship, with her relaxed, hard-working and pragmatic approach to the work. Vendy has now



Stephen continues his work at Canalside

EDUCATION PROJECT – by Ali Jeffery

It was all go on the education project this summer with diverse visits of students taking place.



Exploring food provenance

We kicked off the season with visits from all three Year 5/6 classes from Milverton Primary School (including a good handful of children from Canalside membership households!). This was to explore the concept of seasonality in detail – something we've never had the opportunity to do before as demand is more often for much younger classes. The visiting classes found out how far different fruits and vegetables might have travelled by investigating packaging, assisted by a world map, and considered

returned to the Czech Republic to continue her studies, and we wish her all the best with the coming academic year.



Welcome back Lena, whilst Kria goes to nursery

The configuration of the staff team has also changed as **Lena Sucker** (assistant grower) has returned from her maternity leave on a part-time basis. **Stephen Hayward**, who was a great addition to the staff team while Lena was on leave, will continue with part-time work so that we still have the equivalent of 2 (almost full-time) growers.

when the produce would be in season here.

They then looked at menus, working out when they would be in season by using a detailed seasonality chart. Finally, after a tour round the fields and polytunnels to see what was in season in June, the students used a host of recipe books (and their own creative ideas) to plan a menu for a specific month.



Menu planners at work

Each class spent a full day at the farm, and the teachers told me that, back in school, the visit had prompted a lot of discussion and thought about where food comes from and what is the real meaning

of seasonal.

Visits from the two Year 3 classes at Woodloes Primary School followed, with each class spending half a day here as part of their topic 'Where My Wellies Take Me'. The sessions allowed the children to find out which animals we do and don't want near our crops and how we try to ensure this, through a game and a tour of the farm, as well as discovering helpers in the compost and sowing a bean seed to grow on in school. Some of the beautifully written letters from the children can be seen in the collection space.

Finally, another first took place in the form of a visit from secondary aged students, with a group of Year 9 students who were about to start either GCSE Food Preparation and Nutrition or a V-cert in Food Technology. The focus for this group was again food provenance, seasonality and farming methods, with the students having the chance to tour the farm and plan menus.

The weather added an extra level of challenge to

EVENTS – by Ali Jeffery

This summer has been filled with a range of different events at the farm, with familiar faces and newcomers joining in with these diverse activities.



Blossom Bake eaters

May – Blossom Bake

An superb array of baked goods graced the tea table in the orchard to feed an enthusiastic group of workers who spent the work morning dealing with the the strawberry bed and weeding around the fruit trees.

many of the visits, with unseasonably heavy rain making conversation and teaching in the pole barn somewhat difficult (as anyone who's been there during a deluge will know), and strong winds and intermittent downpours adding logistical issues to the days! Huge thanks to the team of volunteers who helped with these tricky matters and in generally assisting the sessions in running smoothly.

New Education Visit Leader Needed in 2020

For the new visits season starting in April 2020 we will need to have new people to lead educational visits to the farm as, sometime soon, 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 to 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

- Ecofest

Our stall on the first Ecofest, organised by Action 21, was busy with numerous children wanting to get a sticker for their passport. They matched seeds to vegetables and worked out which blossom would turn into which Mediterranean fruiting vegetable.

June – open farm Sunday

Some 35 adults visited and toured the farm with Dom on this miraculously dry day – an annual opportunity for members and non-members alike to have a guided tour of the fields and polytunnels with the head grower.

- Peace Festival

This annual event was an opportunity to tell locals about CSAs like ours and also to furnish local gardens with a range of vegetable and flower plants. Cornflowers were particularly popular this year, and our hard-working volunteer members had conversations with plenty of passers-by about CSA – often when they were seeking shelter from the many deluges of the weekend!

July – Summer party

Our annual event was, once again, a triumph of the power of community, with wonderful food cooked by an enthusiastic team of volunteers under Sumithra Konduru's expert guidance, fabulous toe-tapping

tunes from the home-grown Kale-y Collective for a whirling, spinning ceilidh of an evening and a team of bar volunteers who kept us all hydrated. Late night chai and a mid-ceilidh open mic added yet more to the vibe, which continued well into the wee small hours, and the evening left many of us sleep deprived and foot-sore – and not a bit sorry!



Party site prep team

September – Food & Drink Festival

We had another opportunity to spread the word of Community Supported Agriculture and our volunteers certainly worked hard at that brief! Enthusiastic volunteers had endless conversations with people who were interested to learn more about local food systems, and there was a spike in interest in trial shares through the website too (increasing our already long waiting list!).



Delivery of little potato pickers

- Potato harvest and AGM

For the first time in the history of Canalside, our AGM was held at the farm, and we were so lucky to be blessed with a sun-filled day meaning we could relax

in the social area before, during and after the event. The AGM followed a hugely successful day of work to bring in the substantial potato harvest. In the gorgeous weather, the volunteers (including toddlers and parents from 'Play in the Woods' who visited for the morning) brought some 6 tonnes of potatoes in from the field!

October – apple pressing and open day

An incredible amount of juice (over 300L) was made by around 100 people at our recent apple-pressing day. We were joined by parents and toddlers by 'Play in the Woods' who, at the peak time, brought numbers to 50 people extracting the nectar from sacks full of apples. About 200 litres of juice were taken away by the many juice-makers for drinking, and perhaps also for making into cider or cider vinegar. In the afternoon, a dozen interested people joined Dom for a tour round the farm.



Apple pressing

Upcoming events:

Nov: Sat 16th – big winter social – beetroot harvest, shared meal

Dec: Sat 21st – 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, or something to put into the yet-to-be-discussed calendar for 2020. 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

CANALSIDE COMMUNITY FOOD - PARTNER PROJECTS' UPDATE

The Willows Care Farm, by Ness Ainscow

The Willows have had a great summer again! The Grow to Grow sessions targeted at more vulnerable adults were well attended with lots of great feedback, and our regular groups have created our lovely flower beds and produced lots of nature based crafts for sale.

We had a group of CGI and Npower volunteers who came and helped us reskin our polytunnel and a group of National Grid volunteers have recently repainted our cabin inside and out.

We are presently in the process of bidding for funding for a much needed accessible loo on site. Also we are looking to recruit someone in the new year, for a few hours a week, to recruit more participants with specific and general learning difficulties for our regular Wednesday Farm Experience Day and regular Friday Enterprise Day and hopefully start up another regular session or 2.

Thanks for everyone's continued support. Do join our Facebook page for more regular updates.

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.



SMALL ADS

There are no small ads this time. 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.

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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 late April/early May 2020.

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

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