

23 November

# Local Food News

## Growing News from Essex...

With more seasonal temperatures this week woolly hats and fingerless gloves are back on, both in the veg fields and in the packing barn. The majority of the week has been beautifully dry and bright. The weather forecast looks to be on our side and we hope to plant our young spring green plants next week. We've also got broad beans and garlic to plant. Any spare time in the last week has been spent walking around our veg field's fences and repairing rabbit holes. The rabbits must know that tasty veg is in the fields and it's amazing how they gnaw a hole through the wire fencing. We have to check our fences every couple of months as our fields don't remain rabbit free for long. The damage a couple of rabbits can do over night to young plants can be disastrous. At this time of year the plants don't recover from being nibbled as easily as they do in the summer. We have a high population of rabbits on the farm and we think that this is due to the light sandy soil. Once the colder weather gets here, with frosty mornings and some snow on the ground our annual battle against the pigeons eating our vegetables will be underway.

Best wishes, Sarah Green

## ...and from Hawkwood Nursery

**What's sowing:** ...garlic

**What's growing:** ...miners lettuce

**What's going to market:** ...spinach

## On the stalls this week

Produce from: Hughes Organics (Norfolk), Breckland Organics (Norfolk B), Woodlands Organics (Lincolnshire) and other small farmers in East Anglia, Sarah Green (Essex), our Hawkwood Plant Nursery growing site (Chingford) and local 'Cropshare' growers. Produce occasionally comes from organic farmer and local wholesaler Perry Court Farm (Kent) and from organic wholesaler Langridge (especially non-UK fruit).

## About the Produce

**New England Sugar Pie & Buttercup squash (Chingford):** Squash of the week...the

New England Sugar Pie is the classic orange American pie squash. It won't hold its shape when cooking so best for soups, mash or puds where you don't mind it breaking down. If you have ever wanted to make pumpkin pie this could be your moment. Buttercup has a green skin and orange flesh and should hold its shape roasted, in a curry or a risotto. Flavour wise, Buttercup is on the nuttier side and has had a big thumbs up from Adam who says it's his favourite Hawkwood squash so far. Soup flavour combo recommendations: squash with cinnamon and orange zest; with pear and ginger; with chilli and coconut; with garlic, nutmeg & cinnamon. **Many other squash available today!**

## Garlic (Hawkwood):

Garlic is incredibly good for you, and reveals upon cooking a smell which defines delicious . . . every year we grow a good crop at Hawkwood, but this winter we are busy planting it as our maincrop in the Old Kitchen Garden. We expect to harvest around 8000 bulbs next summer. It follows squash well in the rotation for several reasons – sown soon after the autumn harvest, it makes a good use of time – and the garlic benefits from the weed suppressing capabilities of the creeping squash plants. The garlic we are planting now will be harvested in July (earlier for Spring Garlic) and available in garlands or loose.

ORGANICLEA



=====  
**Organiclea Community Growers** www.organiclea.org.uk  
 Distribution hub: Hornbeam, 458 Hoe Street, E17 9AH ☎ 020 8558 6880  
 Growing site: Hawkwood Nursery, 115 Hawkwood Crescent, E4 7UH ☎ 020 8524 4994  
 Email box@organiclea.org.uk Join us online Facebook: Organiclea Twitter: @organiclea

**Golden Beetroot (Essex):** A more subtle taste than classic red beets, it also won't stain your dinner entirely red, roast or soup or slice thinly and bake into colourful beetroot chips!

### **Ru Kenyon's Dried Mushrooms**

**(Hertfordshire & Kent):** This is a good moment to announce our new Box Scheme Deliveries Worker – we are happy that Ru Kenyon will be joining our box scheme team! Why do we bring this up? As regular visitors to our stalls will know, we have small and wonderful bags of dried mushrooms foraged, dried and supplied to Organiclea by Ru K, as part of our cropshare scheme. Ru K was a trainee at Organiclea, volunteers regularly on our stalls and has great delivery experience, so if you see him on a Wednesday driving the milkfloat, please say hi!

Back to the foraged mixed mushrooms, Ru K says "Before you ask, these mushrooms are NOT from Epping Forest. For those with sharp eyes and the knowledge fungi can be found fruiting everywhere, they do after all form the very basis of all land based ecosystems. These little guys are from deepest darkest Hertfordshire." He certainly won't give away any more than that.. See the recipe below recommended by Ru.

### **Sauted Wild Mushrooms:**

This recipe is for one person or two smaller portions as a side dish. You could double the recipe by adding a mixture of regular mushrooms (which won't need soaking)

Soak your mushrooms in hot water for around an hour to allow them to reconstitute. Chop roughly. Add 1tbsp olive oil to a pan and heat over a medium heat. Add 1 small clove of garlic and a small amount of chilli (depending on heat and how you like it), stir gently until softened. Add the mushrooms and continue to stir, raise the heat a little and stir for a minute, then add about 20ml of stock and cook for 2 mins longer, allowing the liquid to evaporate a little. Add 1 tspn chopped parsley (if you have) and remove from the heat. Serve with a big crust of bread or on toast.

### **FRP: Job Opportunity**

Forest Recycling Project is recruiting for a Volunteering Development Co-ordinator to lead on their 'Environmental Action Through Volunteering' project. Find out more at [www.frp.org.uk](http://www.frp.org.uk)... deadline for applications is Monday 9<sup>th</sup> December at 5pm.

### **Fork to Fork: Seasonal Supper Club**

• **Saturday November 30th** • **6.30 - 10.30pm**

Hornbeam Café and Organiclea invite you to a vegetarian autumnal heart-warming feast at the Hornbeam Café. All 3 courses sown, grown, harvested or foraged locally. Celebrate the changing of the seasons as we transform our late Autumn green tomatoes, our nutty Uchiki Kuri squash, hardy Pentland Brig kale, and locally foraged sweet medlars into a meal that will leave you and your friends seasonally gratified. All three courses for just £15. There are limited spaces so advance booking is essential. Call 02085586880 or book online at the Hornbeam website.

### **Hawkwood Open Day – Seed Saving & Forest School**

Sunday 24<sup>th</sup> November, 12-4pm.

The focus of this month's skill share is the wisdom and practice of saving seeds including an introduction to the heritage varieties that we save and grow each year at Hawkwood. The seed saving workshop will take place at 2pm. From 12pm there will be a seasonal horticultural activity, a chance to share knowledge and work together. Lunch from 1--2pm, soup from local produce (donations welcome). From 12-1pm Liz will be leading the Forest School activity for Children, with woodland free play from 2-3pm. Space are limited for the Forest School, so if you are interested to come with your child(ren), please email [liz@organiclea.org.uk](mailto:liz@organiclea.org.uk)

### **Winery Update! Tasting notes...**

Our winery is in its first year of production and a lovely alchemy of wine making is underway. From our 400 young vines in the Hawkwood vineyard, we had a very modest harvest of grapes now fermenting in three small casks. This created an opportunity for us to open up our new winery for the creation of community wine- an open invite which brought 36 growers and their 480 kilos of grapes now settling into our first community vintages: two casks of white and three casks of red to be decanted into 350 bottles. Each cask has a distinctive flavour brought about by the unique mix of grapes and their home grown yeasts, but the first tastes are promising and wine it will become. So throughout the winter, we in the winery will be moving, shifting, tasting, and as the French say 'raising up' the wine with hints of blackberry, notes of citrus and perhaps even liquid gold.

## Organiclea's AGM (2013)

Last Friday was Organiclea's annual general meeting. Our workers' co-operative (now 16 people) gathered, sheltering from the rain in our straw bale insulated classroom up at Hawkwood Plant Nursery. The agenda was official, election of officers (Treasurer, Secretary, Chair), financial reporting and working in groups to develop smaller strands of our strategy. In the spirit of Organiclea we also worked together to decide how regularly we should come together and what each gathering is for – from signing off our accounts and policies, to working together on the land, to visiting other projects for inspiration and advice, these regular get-togethers help frame our year's work. Much of our self-organising is now structured by smaller work groups, so finding time to come together as a larger co-op is also an opportunity for celebration. Below is an extract from a quiz we did on 2013 at Hawkwood, which was followed by a delicious shared meal with lots of home made pickles, preserves (and even some scrumpy). The quiz is rather number focused, we hope to bring you more about the different areas of our work in this newsletter soon!

### Organiclea 2013 in numbers!

- 430** - kg of apples scrumped this year
- 814** - number of visitors to Hawkwood this year
- 49** - average number of weekly volunteers at Hawkwood
- 72** - number of varieties of leaf in the Hawkwood Salad
- 14** - number of learners with City & Guilds, Level 2 in Horticulture this year
- 0** - kg of produce thrown away at Hawkwood
- 5** - new growing sites set up by Common Sense Growers (our outreach project)
- 18** - number of regular sites under the guidance of Common Sense Growers
- 4** - number of 7-12 week training courses at outreach sites in 2013
- 140** - number of gardeners in Newham sharing work with Common Sense Growers.
- 41** – value in £s the value of tomatoes per square metre grown at Hawkwood.
- 1646** - in kg the total amount of salad harvested at Hawkwood (Nov-Oct)
- 41** - in £1000 approximate value of produce grown and sold from Hawkwood (Nov-Oct)
- 75**- % increase in value of yield per metre of Basil, 2012 to 2013
- 2002** - amount in £ of Hawkwood produce sold to our Farmstall at Hawkwood

- 1369** - amount in £ of our biggest single order from Hawkwood this year
- 100** - amount of bottles of MaMa V chilli sauce we will have grown chillies for (see our stalls!)
- 6342** - number of veg and fruit bags packed since April (7 months)
- 1084** - amount in £s cash that Cropshare growers took home from our stalls in the last 6 months
- 306** - number in £1000s, income for Organiclea this year
- 42** - % of Organiclea income generated from grants
- 40** - % of Organiclea income generated from sales of plants, fruit and veg sales
- 18** - % of Organiclea income generated by training

## An Open Letter to The Cooperative, Ru's grower's blog 12/11/13

Thankyou and cheerio, Cooperative Bank, and please wait for your receipt. In the last few weeks, as a result of its bad debts, branches are crashing down and it has literally become more the property of hedge funds than the venerable Cooperative Retail Trading Group. Whilst its spokespeople sincerely assert that the commitment to ethical investment remains, I can't help thinking that without the backbone of a democratic structure, the culture of fairness and responsibility is somewhat weakened.

This might seem like a straying from a gardening column (though good gardens should always lead you slightly astray) but my particular amble from global justice campaigning to urban market gardening pretty much starts with this very financial institution. As a student agitating for the boycott of Lloyds and Midlands (now Santander) because of their reprehensible role in perpetuating the *Third World Debt Crisis*, I became only too aware of the need to offer people positive alternatives: to build as well as destroy or, in my now-found horticultural parlance, to plant as well as pull up. The Coop were never a panacea: they were still a *bank*, after all: but they represented, in theory and practice, a genuinely different, yet widely accessible, way of *doing money*.

Scroll on a couple of decades and, on Thursday, I sat amongst a very different Cooperative, that of OrganicLea Limited, for our Annual General Meeting. Accounts duly dispatched, we pored

over Roger's annual *Top Of The Crops* charts, which rank the performance of all the Hawkwood crops in terms of their yields – kilograms, and pounds sterling, per square metre. Hannah, our Chair, invited me to comment on the findings.

Overwhelmed by the sheer detail of the charts in front of me, I enthusiastically announced that Basil had slam-dunked in at Number Two. On reflection, this probably wasn't the kind of stirring invective likely to steel the huddled cooperators into redoubling their efforts to confront, at the grass roots, the triple terrors of climate change; the destructive food system; and the widening gulf between the haves and have-nots. As ever, it was only on the way home that I thought of something to say, that might help add up the figures for the coop, and the wider *cooperative group* of volunteers, customers, supporters, blog readers. It goes something like this:

2012/13 saw us producing and getting to market, over ten thousand kilograms of fresh produce. On the one hand, that's a lot of grub: on the other, it's a drop in the ocean of groceries shipped in and consumed in this borough. This is why the other OrganicLea activities – the outreach gardens; the distribution of organic veg from the wide fields of East Anglia; and the *System Change* work (that does the pulling up), are so vital: Hawkwood can provide a practical demonstration, an education, maybe even an inspiration, but real movement depends on our doing it together.

That tonnage generated £42,000 gross income. At the start of the Hawkwood Community Plant Nursery, four years ago, our business plan projected £48,000: an ambitious target that we're within a respectable salad's toss of. More impressive though, is that *we did it our way*, as Ol' Blue Eyes would have sung if he'd been a member of a coop. By which I mean, we haven't "gone commercial". Only two of the twelve acres are in intensive veg production: the rest belongs to extensive fruit and wildlife. We grow what must seem like a frightening amount of "unproductive" plants to anyone business-minded: thousands of green manures and companion flowers, but these are central to our soil and pest management plans, and these in turn have been key to our year-on-year increase in yields of those plants that do actually pay the rent.

We grow heritage cultivars that are not the highest yielding, but which carry a song that

needs to be heard. We nurture a diversity of species too complex to be ruthlessly efficient, but through which we've created a fantastically elaborate salad mix (seventy two varieties of leaf made it into the salad bags this year) and a whole World of Chillies. Thankyou, everyone, for believing in this.

And who, the astute bank manager might ask, is this *we*? That's perhaps the most impressive and confounding bit. *We* are volunteers, trainees, course participants, coop workers. We come together for the fun of working with nature, and the serious matter of making a contribution to a better food system, a better world. Of the coop workers, Jonny, Mary, Jo, Vi, Adam and Clare have been there, week in week out, to steer this great tractor of people power over the ridges and furrows of the seasons, but each person in the whole coop has spun an integral thread in the web that's held it all together: from Marlene's website wizardry to Huf's wondrous watering system to Brian's flair for fundraising.

So, at the end of a long, hard, sweet growing season, there is a tale between the lines of the Top Of The Crops table, one that should give us all a warm glow of satisfaction as the temperatures, productivity and hedgehogs drop off. Going forward, is there anything this little coop can learn from the plight of the big Coop Bank? One obvious thing is that we can and should be cheerful now, in the knowledge that it won't always be rosy – or indeed tomatoey – in the garden. And it is a monetarist myth that growth, however much and at whatever rate, is always good: the organic grower knows that lush, sappy growth, the kind that results from an excess of available nitrogen, is a pest and disease problem in the making. *Balanced* growth, that's the thing: and in the cool times, little or none is only natural.

And, in the week that we harvested the *Cherokee Trail of Tears* bean seed, and began pondering sunchokes, it may be worth quoting another, earlier, American – a gentleman named Black Elk: "Only when the last tree has died, and the last river been poisoned, and the last fish caught, will we realise we cannot eat money".