



Annual Report, May 2023.

Chairs Report

I have just spent an hour looking back on photos from the last year, and if I were to sum it up I think kids, ducklings, new .. would all be words that jump out at me. We had four goats giving birth to 8 kids, multiple hatchings of ducks and so many young humans coming to admire the young animals!

We got the funding to put mains water on the field, thanks to Awards for All and Penny for her work on this. There are pictures of Uri digging the trench for the water pipes while his baby daughter (and her mum) look on. It feels like there is new life and vitality everywhere.

We held a food processing event in the Youth Club in the autumn that we saw as a trial run to see if it was something to pursue. Amongst members we were able to demonstrate fermentation, dehydration, juicing, jamming, pickling, cheese making, bread making and soap making all with produce that we had grown. It felt like a positive day and since we have been donated an apple press by a local Family we are thinking this could be a regular autumn feature.



As ever we met to sing to the goats on Christmas eve, a fun way to mark the dark afternoons and our connection to our beautiful goat companions.

In the Spring we repeated the treasure hunt which was a lovely sunny afternoon and the spread of food was spectacular. Many families came for the second time and it was a cheerful event that feels like it needs to become a tradition.

I have taken our display boards to a few different events, community growing is acknowledged as a way of integrating local food and building community to tackle the global issue of climate change on the local level. We have had discussions about how the land can be managed to produce more of the food that the goats need, planting willow, and fruit trees, can we grow alfalfa for them? Can we grow more trees to produce more forage and maybe some coppice fence posts? All questions that we can challenge our selves with over the coming months.

Gloucestershire Live came and spoke to us on a piece about CSAs in Gloucestershire and I spoke at the launch of Feeding Gloucestershire that aims to have food as the focus of a network of producers, consumers and institutions to support and encourage circular local economies.

We have hosted Dirty Carrots, a group aiming to support new community growing initiatives and teaching in school gardens. The Thriving Communities Fund has been a lunch pad for them; they are very grateful that we have been able to support the initiative.

It feels as if Blakeney Hill Growers is relevant and of its time, we have done much but there is so much more we can do. It is for all there for us to do together. Exciting.

Our membership is steady, with new households joining as members and some taking part in the portions while a few have moved and decided to focus on other things. There are 25 households that are actively engaged in the smallholding each week or month and about another 20 that are social members that are on our mailing list and have access to the field and often come to our events.

We have met monthly as a management group over the last year and work well together to keep the annual cycles of the land and bureaucracy turning. I would like to thank everyone that is a part of Blakeney Hill Growers in all the capacities, together we have made something a bit special.

Beki Hoyland.

Finance Annual Report

During this year, I have been helping Steve Shaw with some of the finance reporting.

A mixed bag this year with Veg and Duck portions making a profit, and Goats & Bees making a loss. Bees due to having to buy a new colony and no honey production. Goats due to keeping all the female kids & buying lots of hay – but we still have a good stock. We were able to make a profit on the goat meat. So overall, we were down approx. £1500 during the financial year. However we are still in credit.



The grant money which we managed to secure has paid for water to be installed to the goat field and fencing repairs.

Whilst we are not in such a good starting point this financial year, we do have good assets and things are looking positive for this new financial year.

Kim Stevenson

Veg Portion

With every season the soil condition is improving as we cultivate and add compost and manure; this year we had a joint team working party to move the mature muck heap from the goat field up to the garden. The goat team loading bags onto our newly donated trailer, and Beki driving it up the hill for off loading by the garden team at the top. After thorough hand washing Beki hosted tea and cake for us all and we were able to meet each others portion members.

The working party has now moved to a Saturday morning between 10 and 12 am, opening up the portion to younger families and people at work during the week. It was felt the weekday session was too limited to older folk. Tom has stepped up to lead on Saturdays with support from me, and as hoped there has been new interest and younger muscle turning up reinvigorating us all.

The spring has been cold and wet with only a few bright spells so many seedlings have now stalled waiting for warmer weather, but the polytunnel is well stocked and has been producing salad leaves and kale through the winter, and purple sprouting and chard are still being harvested in the open garden.

It is a great satisfaction that so far we have been able to send everyone who comes to work on the garden home with a bag full of vegetables throughout the year, and even though we are heading into the 'hungry gap' pocketfuls of green are still possible.

As we embark on our penultimate season before our lease expires we continue to think about possible ways forward in the future and welcome any ideas for the next steps. What is clear is that the social aspects of the project are much valued together with the pleasure of growing, harvesting and cooking our produce.

Pauline Winstanely



Goat and Duck Potions

Having had 8 kids born last spring makes it feel like we have had a large herd this year. Much as this has been fun, they are all such characters, adorable and work well as heard animals it has felt that the field is being stretched. We had a very dry summer that meant there was limited forage on the field from July onwards so we had to use a lot of hay. We perfected our bracken technique and got on top of the orchard part, it will be interesting to see the effect on the growth this coming summer. As no one wanted to buy our male kids it was decided that we needed to send them to slaughter, this was not an easy decision but it means that we have some top quality local meat available to members and others to buy. Ava and Ami, who were the first goats that we bought in 2010 as twin kids both died this year. Both have been such great goats, the best any community group could hope for, friendly, patient, good milkers and kidders. Lets raise a glass to them both.

We have 8 households that have a weekly input into the goats and as we are now in the position of ensuring the future of the herd we are in an excellent position to take on the next 12 years.

We have 10 ducks, two families have bought a portion and the extra eggs are sold, they have been laying well over the spring and have settled into a good routine.

Beki Hoyland



Bee portion

Last year the bees moved to their new home from the treacherous slopes of the goat field to the purpose made terrace at Prospect House. One is told not to move bees more than three feet unless it's more than three miles and perhaps we paid the price because the colonies that seemed to make it through the winter all disappeared in the late winter and early spring. Of course this is disappointing and it's hard to know whether to be comforted or even more worried that this has also been the fate of bees across the Dean. We purchased one new colony from Caldicot and then were blessed to hear of a swarm down on New Road so now there are two hives that seem very busy building and breeding and pollinating. Let's hope for a good year and perhaps some more swarms.

Mark Moodie

