

Chairperson's report 2014

As I wrote this report as the season of mists and mellow fruitfulness had only just arrived. What a wonderful summer! It just seemed to go on and on , unrelenting dry sunny days which made working on the land a pleasure.

For most crops ,our yields , for reasons which I will explain later, are still increasing and harvesting is becoming one of our most labour intensive activities. This is not what I had in mind when we set up D&B community growing. I anticipated that the volunteers would harvest according to their need and the surplus would be distributed in some way to the village. In reality ,we now grow far more than the small dedicated group of volunteers require . We spend much of our time harvesting,(thanks to Val, Barbra, Viki) transporting(Alaisdair,Sarah and Dave) and, thanks to Lorna and other helpers , marketing the produce. This has opened up a new dimension of community activity and engagement and delivers revenue which we hardly would have dreamed of.

So , what have we achieved over the last 12 months? The garlic sown on Sandy's no dig plots in November produced a bumper crop which ripened and dried beautifully in the high midsummer temperatures. Sandy and Jim Sutton provided us with successional salads and beans from early June till late October. Hari did the same for us with spinach so we were never short of greens.

Thanks to a grant from the UHI we were able to be lavish with weed suppressing and crop protecting membranes: twice the quantity of onions and almost as many more leeks were planted through it and **never hoed or weeded**, a massive saving in labour! The same went for the brassica which , like the carrot and parsnip, thrived safe from the predations of pigeons, caterpillar and and carrot fly under

protective fleece and netting. Despite the rogue tatties, the onions and leeks have been superb, large and clean obviously benefitting from the lack of weed competition.

Green manure was sown last September to over winter and more sown in any bare harvested soil over the summer. This builds soil fertility and stops weeds spreading especially the insuppressible creeping choking buttercup which gives us nightmares.

Two new plots were opened up for tatties in order to stretch our rotation to at least 4 years. The need for this has been seen by tatties from the two previous years popping up everywhere providing a welcome bonus but crowding out this year's crop, especially the onions. Geordie Ness ploughed, harrowed, dreeled, ridged up and lifted the tatties for us ,.He also moved dung and saved us a lot of mowing by topping the grass and green manure. Without him and the wee grey Fergie it would be impossible to cultivate the field on the scale we do and Dave R. would be mowing the grass by night as well as by day .

Root crops were clear of fly and delicious, large quantities of beetroot proved very popular at market .French beans covered the plot and were too prolific to harvest completely yet they will fix nitrogen and when the pods ripen provide haricot beans and seed for next year. Peas and runner beans provided a welcome variety to the legumes.

Maddy's flowers were hugely popular and she kept us supplied right through the season,.The bees and butterflies appreciated her "guerrilla" sowing along crop boundaries and in odd corners where they are now self seeding.

Crops which were brought on in the pollytunnel in fish boxes filled with our own compost,(leeks, courgette, brassica and broad beans) got off to a flying start when planted out . Despite planting only half the number of courgettes, we still had to harvest almost daily to keep up with production and avoid the surfeit of marrows which we experienced last year! (Ode?) Tomatoes and Basil filled the pollytunnel all summer and were faithfully tended by a rota of volunteers especially William , Elspeth, Hari and Claire..

Our new fruit trees and bushes looked very bonny this year and supplied a few tasty apples , pears, plums , gooseberry, blackcurrants and blueberry but this is just a taster for the crops we expect in future years. We protected them by building a fruit cage covered with netting from the UHI grant. We also planted a new Victoria Plum tree in memory of one of our founder members ,Vicky Hammer. William has supplied us with globe artichokes and we are thinking about where to put an asparagus bed next year.

The shed....thanks to Elspeth's initiative and Chris's handiwork.... has become more ...shall we say.....domesticated. We now have a kitchen unit and a table to sit round drinking tea and, if Pam has been baking , eating cakes.....despite my reservations at the loss of work and storage space and the possible degenerating effect on the work ethics of volunteersI must concede that it can occasionally be congenial and good for morale when weather, fatigue or tedium threaten to reduce the workers' productivity . However , please note that I shall be monitoring its use carefully.

As you may have noticed, we now have a stall at the gate with an honesty box,.This has proved remarkably popular with passers -by and even more remarkable, no one has run off with the cash or

taken advantage of the produce, perhaps the size of the marrows is a disincentive....?

On the topic of currency, we have created a new economy in the village called Field Fare , beautiful wooden tokens stamped with our logo in 1 to 5 hour denominations, exchangeable for produce @ the field , and apparently on the black market for other goods and services about the village., Alec Salmond has consulted us on how to establish a a new fiscal system and we will be reporting to Holyrood on the success of the system ,subject to evaluation by the IMF at the end of this financial year.

We combined our open day and tattie fest in a Summer Fest in August to take advantage of the spectacle of the produce at their peak and the fine summer weather. The event assumed the atmosphere of a festival of fruit , vegetables, cakes and produce with the usual whacky competitions, longest tattie peel, marrow monsters, potato croquet, onion plaiting and getting the tattie in the wellie containing the bottle of malt. Mark Hand's band added to the festival atmosphere .But this year, we had a new twist : a literary competition which brought to prominence the Field Bard ,John Small (John's and others poems are available on the display board)...read poem?

I would like to finish by thanking you all for working at the field , buying our produce or just supporting us with your membership, We want this project to be a long term resource to this community and hope that future generations will have as much fun, eat so well and appreciate the environment as much as we do . To this end, we welcome younger folks up to the field at any time and will enjoy sharing what we have grown and learned.