

Chairperson's Report :The Field 2013

In my report I am going to focus on the field, its soil and how we use it, the people and how we use them and the wonderful produce, location and surroundings which we enjoy.

This time last year we prepared for the winter by storing tatties in a pit, building compost and leaf mould heaps and planting garlic. We also planted fruit trees and bushes with the assistance of pupils from Butterstone school. Mairi planted a wild harvest hedge. A perennial bed for rhubarb and comfrey and other deep beds were created in the kitchen garden.

In January and February, we spread dung on the frozen ground and planted leeks in the polytunnel. Dave and George ploughed and harrowed in March and we limed the ground to raise the PH to 6.5.

Through April, we used the polytunnel to bring on beans, brassica, tomatoes, courgettes, herbs and flowers and sowed onions, potatoes and leeks, followed by beans, peas, spinach and root crops in the plots.

In May and June which were unseasonably cold, we slowly planted out the contents of the polytunnel into the remaining plots. We made use of membrane to retain moisture and suppress weeds and fleece to retain warmth and protect from insect pests. Wild flowers were sown at the margins to attract bees. Much time was spent weeding and mulching the onions and leeks.

This was also a busy time as we had weekly visits from school pupils, cubs and beavers to prepare for. We also had some help from pupils of Breadalbane secondary school and Hamish Reader who dug and

dunged a huge number of courgette stations! The oyster catchers reared 2 chicks among the tatties were away by the time Dave earthed them up.

The sun started shining in June and it didn't rain till October! We all went on holiday in July and the weeds grew! We started harvesting on the 20th of July (In retrospect we could have started earlier as salads were already going to seed). We soon discovered that a successful crop came with its own challenges in getting it out of the ground and down to market. Fortunately Jim, William, Ron and Agnes were on dawn patrol each market day to pick, prepare and bag the produce which sold itself with the encouragement of our attentive sales staff, Lorna, Elspeth and Sarah. We have not as yet calculated yields but can say that in terms of revenue, we have doubled our turn over this year and still have produce to see us well into the winter.

As a result of this increased revenue, those of us who were feeling the burden of work, felt we could pay local gardeners on a contractual basis to take a little of the pressure off us. We used this help to weed ,mulch and tidy up the margins of the plots to prevent the spread of perennial weeds. We also had help from the Hilton staff ,eight of whom came for an afternoon and did a power of work, saving us days of labour. Grass cutting was a full time job for one trustee who, despite his passion for riding the mower in his Stetson across the High Chaparral, is too valuable an asset to spend indulging his train driver fantasies. Next year, Dave Muirhead has offered to "top "the grass with an implement on his tractor a couple of times a year, after the wild flowers have blossomed.

In terms of crops we were particularly pleased with the garlic this year and thanks to the tender ministrations of Jim Sutton, the carrots

and beetroot have been lovely. The wee tomatoes were delicious, basil and cucumbers from the polytunnel provided a treat. Thanks to Maddy and Jim, the cut flowers kept coming and proved very popular. Jim and Sandy provided a steady succession of salads.

Main crops were bountiful. Despite the drought our soil seems to retain moisture well. 30% of the onions did bolt but they did not go to waste as workers took them for their own use. Courgettes and marrows exploded; in fact it was dangerous to enter that plot alone for fear of being engulfed by giant marrows which mushroomed overnight! We discovered that marrow is an extremely versatile vegetable which can be used for soup, main course and sweet dishes every day of the week...we still have hundreds in storage....Similarly the beans, sown as a space filler to provide nitrogen and ground cover produced huge volumes of particularly dwarf French beans on a daily basis. They freeze well so you will enjoy them later tonight in the harvest supper..

The tatties were lifted thanks to George and Dave's tractor and a small but skilled and dedicated squad over 4/5 weekends. 2 of our youngest members Shona and Lizzie Small have turned out for most of the planting and harvesting tasks through out the year and deserve a round of applause tonight! The earlies were delicious and main crop, particularly Cara appreciated and stored well in Vicki's cellar, Sarah's garage and now in the new machinery and storage shed built for us by Kenny Allan. Only one variety Robinta showed blight this year.

Due to generous mulching, the leeks have been fantastic. We enjoyed some broccoli and cauliflower but the mainstays for the winter are kale, spinach, parsnip and swede.

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Sustainability and the future? Well there is no question that the soil seems to appreciate our low tech, organic approach which ploughs back more organic material each year than we take out(thanks to Karen, Fiona and Suzanne's dung collecting efforts!), bark from the mill and cardboard from Kettles and the Co-op. Next year we will have more ground under cultivation and fruit trees and bushes to look after and crop. Our work force is small but with an average age of only 62 it still has a few more years to serve. Our contingency plan is to continue our efforts with the school and the community to attract young families, encourage work parties from organisations, institutions and businesses and use our increased revenue to buy in local contractors for specific seasonal tasks.

So there we have it! All from a couple of acres of alluvial soil and a lot of hard graft from a small but dedicated group, most of whom I am glad to see here tonight. I would like to express my gratitude to you all for your efforts. The sense of common purpose and satisfaction at the end of a task completed by a willing group of workers with APPARENTLY no clear leadership or direction is as

uplifting as the sight and taste of the produce and the daily spectacle of the field and its surroundings. It is always a lovely place to be in any season, from the low winter sun filtering through the bare trees, the vibrancy of spring, the lushness of summer and the spectacle of autumn colours.

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