

# Head Growers Report 2020

Well, what a year it has been, and we're not over yet! 2020 on the farm has of course been dominated by the Covid-19 pandemic. At the start of the year, we never expected that we would become key workers running a lifeline service in a global health crisis! Our main focus has been on supplying the needs of our local community, and to do that we have had to keep our staff and volunteers safe and healthy, and to adapt on our feet as a lot of things changed very quickly. Thanks to the incredible dedication of our staff and volunteers, we not only kept going throughout, but we ramped up production and distribution to (almost) meet demand. A brief snapshot of our efforts can be seen on the Guardian documentary "Daisy Chain – can a Cornish town adapt to survive another lockdown?".

[www.theguardian.com/uk-news/ng-interactive/2020/nov/02/daisy-chain-can-a-cornish-town-adapt-to-survive-another-lockdown](http://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/ng-interactive/2020/nov/02/daisy-chain-can-a-cornish-town-adapt-to-survive-another-lockdown)

## **Veg Boxes**

In March and April our veg box scheme had an unprecedented surge in membership, rising from about 50 weekly boxes at the beginning of March, to over 150 by the end of April, at which point we had to stop accepting new customers before we broke ourselves. Somehow, we managed to supply this number through the hungry gap, mainly by working with several local growers, but also buying three pallet-loads of veg from a national organic wholesaler. 35 of our new veg box members were "Pupil Premium" families organised through Pendeen School, which agreement came to an end at the close of the academic year in July. By then we were filling our boxes with all our own produce, and box numbers had tailed off slightly. By the end of the summer numbers had dropped to around 75 per week, but we have now built this up again to around the 100 mark, so around double the pre-lockdown membership. We are currently buying-in one item per veg box per week (from Cargease Organics at Cockwells), and the rest is our own produce. All these extra veg boxes has meant we have had to find extra volunteer delivery drivers willing to use their own vehicles – each driver gets a free veg box – but in November we bought a second bigger van to help. Special thanks here must go to Chris Ing-Simmons who spends about 10 hours per week volunteering to organise deliveries and then deliver the bulk of our boxes himself – and also to all other volunteer drivers who have helped this year – Andy, Shelley, Joe, Katie, Sue, Lucy, Maggie, Neil and Chris.

## **Farm Shop**

As well as veg box numbers going through the roof, during the first lock-down (much less so in the current second lock-down) the farm shop saw a surge in sales, with queues (socially distanced) across the farmyard, and shop volunteers run off their feet. We sourced what we could to try to meet people's needs, and have kept the shop surprisingly well stocked throughout, the bulk of it local and/or organic. As every local farmers' market stopped running, and local caterers closed their doors, the farm shop became very important to a lot of people. We had to place a table across the shop entrance at which to serve customers, to protect our volunteers, and a handwashing station outside the shop (which now has hot running water!). We set up a rota for local volunteers to come and help in the shop, and some weeks we staffed the shop entirely in this way – many thanks here to all the volunteers who have helped in the shop this year – Shelley, Sue, Yvonne, Mary-Ann, Niki, Holly, Fran, Ali, Caroline, John, Maureen, Chris, Nick, Louise and others.

## **Veg Production**

Having spent 9 years building the farm slowly almost from scratch, this year we had to ramp up production to try to meet demand, just at the time when most of our residential volunteers had to leave. Thankfully, we had those 9 years of knowledge, experience, improvement and groundwork behind us to act as foundations on which to build. As in every growing year we have had successes (salad, kale, tomatoes, spring greens, beetroot, onions, turnips etc...) and failures (leeks, swedes, carrots etc...), but this year the weather has been kind, and with plenty of local people coming down to help we have so far had a bumper harvest.

I keep detailed harvest records, the end result of which is an annual monetary value of everything harvested from the farm – there are lots more data in there, but this is the simplest way of presenting them. Our previous best was the 2019-20 growing season, when we harvested £39,000 of produce from the farm; but this year (2020-21) we have already – up to the end of October – harvested £40,000 of produce, and there are still 5 months to go. Admittedly we did raise our prices slightly at the start of the financial year, but this increase in production goes way beyond that.

## **Chickens and Eggs**

We have increased our flock size to around the 400 mark, as demand for “the best eggs in the world” has increased (quote from several of our regular shop customers). At the time of writing, we are in the leanest period for egg laying, when we must remember that chickens are living things with their own natural cycles, and egg production cannot be turned on and off at will. That said, our girls are laying about 130 eggs per day at a time when other flocks in the area have stopped laying altogether, although we do run out of eggs in the shop on most days. We introduced 75 new birds in October with the hope of them being in full production by Christmas and will do the same again in spring ready for summer.

We also set up a rota for local people to come and help with the chickens, and many thanks go to Lucy, Caroline, John, Kathy, Holly, Deb, Cameron and Ailsa for stepping forward.

Now that we have more than 350 in the flock, we are required to test them for salmonella four times a year (which incurs lab and vet fees), and both tests to date have returned negative results.

Back in January we changed our feed to better reflect the farm's ethos, and we now feed our flock on guaranteed GM-free soya-free pellets, which meant the price of half a dozen eggs rose from £1.60 to £1.90. Strong sales and demand have shown general customer approval.

### **Volunteers**

Very little of the above would have been possible without our wonderful team of local volunteers who give their time and expertise to the farm regularly, and who stepped up during this strange and busy year (our busiest ever by some distance) at no small risk to themselves. Many have already been thanked above, but some have not, so off the top of my head here are some more! – Rob, Dom, Linda, Kate, Matt, Danny, Ben, Helen, Ian, Beth, Shaun, Mel, Jenny – and there will of course be others. We have also had some wonderful residential volunteers through the year, although our capacity for hosting them has been greatly restricted due to social distancing and other Covid-related guidelines. For the first lock-down we were blessed with a household of Andy, Shelley, and four long-term volunteers in Rex, Ilaria, Adrien, and Gary, which made it so much easier to cope with everything that was happening.

### **Camping and Hay**

We decided this year that we would not offer any camping, or make any hay, because we needed to concentrate fully on producing and distributing food to our community and keeping the farm and all its workers as safe as possible in order to continue to do so.

**Hugh Taylor**

21<sup>st</sup> November 2020