

Head Grower's Report for 2020-21

AGM (to be held on 10 February 2022)

Overview

It's been another difficult year overshadowed by the continuing Covid-19 pandemic. This has affected every area of the farm (and our lives) in both negative and positive ways. Continuing to serve the needs of our farm community has been rewarding and affirming, and our efforts have been recognised with two recent awards:-

- St. Just Town Council's "Community group of the year" award on St. Just Feast Sunday;
- And "highly commended" in the "Growing Greener – sustainable food and farming" section of the Cornwall Sustainability Awards.

Veg boxes

Providing fresh veg boxes weekly anywhere within Penwith is the cornerstone of the farm's income and reason for being. 2021 has been another very good year, surpassed only by 2020, in number of boxes delivered. We are currently (January 2022) producing around 90 boxes per week, with the majority of the vegetables being grown here on the farm rather than bought-in (we buy-in some organic veg from local growers to supplement our own production, and occasionally we buy a pallet of UK organic veg from a wholesaler based in Herefordshire, mostly during winter and the hungry gap). The offering in our boxes has been increased to include various items of shop stock and local organic yoghurt, in addition to the eggs, bread, milk and honey. A new spreadsheet was created for us in March 2021 to allow us to manage the veg boxes more efficiently, streamlining the process, and easing that weekly pressure.

Farm shop

The shop has had another busy year, retaining its importance for income and trade, as well as volunteer recruitment, veg box sign-ups, and interacting with members of the community. We have 4 regular shop volunteers (many thanks to them) but we do need more, as this would free up the growing team to get out onto the farm more.

Farmer's markets

Of the three markets we used to sell at pre-pandemic only one is now operational, being Sennen, every Tuesday 09:30-12:30. We are now the only veg stall there. The market re-opened in September 2021, and has so far been quiet, but we hope that 2022 will see it becoming busier. Many thanks to the volunteers who facilitate this market for us.

Veg growing

It has been a good year for veg, with very few failures, and some notable successes. The failures were swedes, turnips and peas, and most of our broad bean and beetroot crops were destroyed by rodents in the field (something must be done about this, but we are not sure yet what). The successes were mainly centred around creating 1m-wide beds of greenwaste-compost mulch on the

market garden, which produced superb crops of carrots, parsnips, leeks, lettuces and onions, and is a technique that we will expand upon in 2022. Polytunnel tomatoes were a huge success as always. We had a salad-shortage in August and September, but pulled this around to an amazing crop during October, and through the winter so far. This was also the first year when we had no red-spider-mite inside the polytunnels, due to tackling the issue with crop rotation, polytunnel hygiene, and a simple overhead irrigation system; so we had the best cucumber and French bean crops for several years. The “permanent” raised beds had become unproductive over recent years due to weeds, infertility and compaction, so these have been levelled and covered in compost then a mulch, to become 2022’s sheltered courgette patch. It was another good squash harvest, yielding almost 900kg. We grew enough potatoes to supply ourselves for 6 months, so this is something we will need to look at for the 2023 season, and begin any necessary ground work in 2022. And this being the far end of Cornwall, we have just sown our mange-tout, the first sowing of the new growing season!

The monetary value of our crops harvested this financial year 2021/2 is £43,600 with three months yet to go, making this already the second-best year so far. 2020/1 is the record to date, being £55,800, which we will not quite emulate this year, with our projected estimate being around the £51,000 to £52,000 mark.

Chickens

Bird flu has returned to the UK for the second winter running, and our birds are now shut into their sheds and enclosed outdoor runs by law, as of the end of November, probably for 16 weeks. This does lead to a drop in egg production, and increased fatalities in the flock due to boredom/bullying, so we are very much looking forward to being able to let them out again. For the first time we have had to limit veg box members to a maximum of half a dozen eggs per week, during the winter, to ensure that some eggs are available in the shop and at market. If bird flu is going to come every winter like this, then we need to adjust how we manage our flock, to improve their quality of life during outbreaks, whilst keeping them safe (sound familiar?).

Hay

Having not cut any hay in 2020 due to time and help constraints, we managed our best cut ever in the heatwave of July 2021 – cut on Monday, baled on Wednesday, and all stacked in the barn by the end of Friday – from four fields. An exhausting week! The hay is our best ever, but is not a big seller, even though we are the only farm in the area producing it.

Camping

We did not offer camping in 2021, as we were too busy to manage it properly, and as a precaution against Covid-19.

Land management and nature conservation

We are continuing to prove that nature conservation, productive farming, and community can all go hand-in-hand. Thankfully the zeitgeist is catching up with us. Mainly thanks to the Tree Love and Care group, hundreds of trees have been planted on the farm over the past year, and those that were already here have been rescued / looked-after; mainly as shelter belts around some of the fields, but also in the Community Woodland. We have also coppiced two areas of willow and planted

the whips produced around the perimeter of the upper crop/chicken field. And thanks to the Penwith Landscape Partnership we have been able to create wetland areas in three of the fields; and are in the process of installing a barn owl box on the farm.

Volunteers and staff

All of the above has only been possible because of the incredible collective effort of our staff and volunteers, whether short-term or long-term, one-offs or dedicated, who have continued to drive the project forwards during testing times. We'd like to thank all the people who have had a positive impact on the farm, not just in the past year, but since the project's inception more than a decade ago. The foundations laid over that decade have allowed us to serve our community as well as we have since the start of the pandemic.

This year we have been hugely assisted by the staff and participants of the Training and Work Experience programme, led by Katie and assisted by Ross and Ali, both on the farm and in the community.

We are still limiting resident numbers in the farmhouse to a "bubble" of six at a time, with a minimum stay of four weeks, and so far this has kept the farm Covid-free (touch wood) – we are immensely grateful to Polly for managing the farmhouse for the past twelve months, as live-in volunteer WWOOF host.

We'd also like to especially thank Andy / Otta, our Assistant Grower, for sticking with us and turning his hand to almost anything; Chris for being our main volunteer delivery driver, putting in 1½ days every week, and also creating the new veg box spreadsheet; our other regular delivery driver Joe; and Ailsa for being a fairy godmother to all the WWOOFers and chickens, and driving the TLC group; plus all our regular volunteers.

Hugh Taylor,

Head Grower, Bosavern Community Farm

8/1/2022