



Broughton Grounds Farm Newsletter Autumn / Winter '14

As some local readers will no doubt remember

in 1939 my Great Grandad, Herbert Harry Taylor, purchased a threshing machine. Before self-propelled combine harvesters, these static machines were used to separate grain from chaff and straw for well over 100 years. Herbert Harry's machine was used here at Broughton Grounds and on neighbouring farms during the war and continued to be used to clean seed corn until the early 1980s, when Dad sold it to Conway Freeman in Epwell, who used it for his thatching business. It stood pretty much unused for the last 20 years or so, until Conway entered it into his farm sale in early November. To cut a long (but-really-quite-interesting) story short, it will be returning home to Broughton Grounds in the spring! Hopefully we'll be able to get some of the original crew to demonstrate it in action next summer, we'll just need some volunteers to cut sheaves of wheat by hand! I'll also write to the producers of Downton Abbey in case they want to borrow it, Lord Grantham could do with losing a bit of timber.



A pleasant peasant past-time as the autumnal colours roll in is to engage in a spot of 'over the hedge banter'. This happens throughout the year but in the autumn it is particularly well-practiced as the focus is on neighbours' seed drilling mistakes. "*Leaving bare skylark plots again this year, I see?*" or "*another blocked drill coulter, eh?*" are common expressions to poke fun at someone else's mistakes which will be proudly on show until the crops move through their growth stages in the spring. Its the first year I've drilled wheat and I've had one or two remarks, especially as one field was so dry it was almost impossible to see where I'd previously drilled.... that's my excuse for wonky lines anyway!

Crop establishment is an oft debated subject amongst arable farmers; each system has its pros and cons depending on soil type and next year's crop. We have a relatively small area of arable and usually plough, but this year we asked a contractor to use his 'one-pass' cultivator on 25 acres by way of an experiment. A plough based system uses more fuel, tractor and man hours but has the advantage of burying weed seeds and so potentially reducing next year's spray bill, and the cultivators and drill required are considerably cheaper than the equipment required for a minimal tillage system.

A brief summary of other recent happenings; autumn calving went well, each cow had a live calf; we bought three 'pet' calves and two piglets for visitors to help rear, but one piglet escaped upon arrival and took an hour and a half to catch (thanks to Penny Tasker and a passing cyclist for your help!), I must admit I had no idea piglets could run so fast; several visiting groups pressed apple juice; we've had the

hay crop analyzed for protein and energy and are planning the winter ration for pregnant ewes; Tommy was hit by a passing 4x4 but thankfully survived; we had a couple of kids' harvest days; oh, and in early October a few local chaps of various shapes and sizes decided to take their kit off for a good cause. The (tasteful!) naked farmer calendar is selling well, the proceeds of which will help pay for a new accessible path to the hen house with all additional proceeds going to Katharine House Hospice. We have sold about 300 so far and they make an, err, alternative Christmas gift! www.thenakedfarmer.co.uk

Other than preparing Christmas Cockerels and Geese, collecting wood and preparing for February lambing, the next couple of months are the slightly less busy times of year, where routine livestock feeding and maintenance jobs take up most time. On January 15th Dad is hosting a farm walk to mark "Plough Wednesday" and I've been asked by Friends of the Earth to speak at the "Real Oxford Farming Conference" to explain how our six year rotation builds up soil organic matter and encourages pollinators. I like to take a few props when I do a talk so will probably take a bag of turnips with me; stubble turnips are a key part of our rotation and are grazed by fattening lambs over the winter which adds fertility to the soil (thus reducing the need for fertilizer in the spring), reduces livestock 'poaching' of grassland and provides a habitat for birds such as the Grey Partridge. This winter's crop has turned out very well, as luckily we had a good rain after it was broadcast on in late July.

Over recent years the Common Agricultural Policy, short-term Farm Business Tenancies and a focus on each crop's 'Gross Margin' (rather than a longer-term systems approach to crop appraisal) has encouraged very short-term planning amongst some arable farmers, but rotations

are back in fashion as we wake up to problems caused by soil erosion (due to lack of soil organic matter) and weed resistance to some sprays. The new farm subsidy, coming in next year, also involves a 'three crop rule' and a requirement for 'ecological focus areas' so farmers who have just grown wheat and oilseed rape for years will need to think again, but fortunately we meet all requirements of the scheme without having to change anything.

At the time of writing, I'm on the way to a 'Care Farming' conference in Birmingham. I've also just co-authored a paper into the well-being benefits of sensory farm visits; if you are interested in finding out more please get in touch. Next year we hope to start work experience sessions for older students at Frank Wise, and if you are interested in getting involved a couple of hours a month please do drop me an email. I also hope to develop closer links with mental health support groups, something very close to my heart.

I mentioned last time about our Higher Level Stewardship agreement. One of the plants we grow in our 'wild bird seed mix' is shown above; if you can guess the crop you'll win a free weekend of hard labour lambing in February (just think of your saved gym membership fee!)

Free-range Christmas Cockerels and Geese are available 13th December and Christmas Eve.

Beef (hung for 3 weeks) is available Christmas eve, and lamb is available anytime. And your Great Aunt, like Tommy, might enjoy a calendar!



Merry Christmas and very best wishes for 2015!

01295 730315 / 07875 626590

www.broughtongrounds.co.uk

james@broughtongrounds.co.uk

