

## February 2009

Quel surprise! I'd put a saucepan of soup to warm on the Aga when I heard a tapping at the kitchen door.

'Andrew'

(tap, tap, tap).

Then, more insistently 'Andrew'

(the door opened).

'Quick' said Stella

'Come and look'.

So I went to look, squelching through the sodden orchard to where Gavin and Stacey live among the oak trees (all is quagmire now).

'There' said Stella, pointing to the lorry unit which once belonged to Argos and which now serves as a spacious pig sty.

'In there. Can you see them?'

And I did see them. Six pairs of beady, coal-dark eyes, six sets of trotters, and six tails in the shape of a question mark. One of them squeaked.

We hadn't even known Stacy was pregnant!

The arrival of the six piglets marks something of a new beginning. Pigs were last kept at Woodlands in the mid 1960s when my grandfather, Frank, and father, Peter, kept a herd of native Essex pigs. Now they've returned again, this time in the guise of Gavin and Stacey and family who are Mangalitzas, a rare breed of Hungarian pig related to the extinct Lincolnshire Curly Coat. This last detail is perhaps of interest. The Mangalitzas, of which there are less than fifty animals in the country, might reasonably be considered a part of Lincolnshire's heritage.

On subjects animal, the cattle, the cattle! Today, down at Lammings Marsh Yard in the great single span shed, Bruce is bedding down the Lincoln Reds. It's been quite a job this year, especially in the open fronted crew yard. Fresh straw is provided one moment and it rains the next. Or it snows. Or a biting wind tries to blow the straw away. It's most irritating for the cattle. They love the fresh straw and they like to bathe in it as Bruce blows it towards them with our special straw spreading machine. For them it's rather like taking a shower. Across the way I notice the young bulls are filling out and gaining condition nicely. My brother David has bought one of them - Thor (named after the God of Thunder). We're retaining Thor's brother, Chino, who in the course of time will become our new stock bull. A point of interest: the two young fellers both have sets of tiny horns, a rare thing among Lincoln Reds. I'm happy with this. Visiting children tell me cattle without horns are incomplete.

Last weekend I went to Basel in Switzerland to attend the annual conference of the BDAA (The Biodynamic Agricultural Association). As you may recall biodynamic farming, known sometimes as 'organic plus', has long interested me, largely because the biodynamic farms I've visited here and in other countries seem to possess a special quality rarely found on other places. I'm thinking now of Botton Village on the North Yorkshire Moors, Dottenfelderhof in Germany, and the biodynamic market garden I visited near Warsaw, all described in previous newsletters.

To continue, I found the Basel conference both interesting and imaginative, and having slept on the idea I've decided to set up a biodynamic pilot project at Woodlands. The pilot land, running to some 300 acres, has been carefully chosen by my colleague Adrian Johnson and me so that it's easily visible, our hope being that you'll be able to monitor progress as we go along. For interest biodynamic produce carries the *Demeter* logo. Biodynamic standards meet and fulfill all organic standards.

So, come and see, come and see. It'll be up and running by spring...

## Market Garden News

Large puddles speckle the land giving to the market garden the appearance of a swamp. Strawberries lie submerged in low places, vetch struggles valiantly to withstand the wet, broad beans peep up shyly beneath the crop covers as if to implore us to leave the covers where they are. We will! The seedling beans are too tender to withstand a heavy frost.

The list of jobs still to do remains a long one, chiefly because of the wet and the impossibility of doing any land work.

There are things to plant and sow (rhubarb, broad beans, artichokes). We wait for other things to grow and harvest, (purple sprouting broccoli and cavolo nero). The poor old shallots have rotted in the field.

We have root crops a-plenty, and once the weather warms early cauliflowers followed by spring cabbage. I expect it'll be a late spring this year but on the positive side the crops should look healthy. The cold weather will have cleaned up and polished off some of the potentially damaging fungal spores.

**Box Price Review** Just to say that we're needing to look at the box prices now. There was no increase at all last year (boxes were last reviewed and adjusted in Autumn 2007). I'll keep you posted...

## BEEF AND LAMB

**Orders are now being taken for Lamb and Beef boxes which will be ready for delivery the weeks beginning Monday 23<sup>rd</sup> February and Monday 30<sup>th</sup> March respectively.**

**Individual items are also available – joints, steaks, chops...**

## Warm wishes

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