

## May 2009

Making our way in the form of a crocodile's tail, one by one like so many ducklings, or the legs of a centipede, or leaf after leaf, we arrived at the place where Scarecrow Charlie faces the wind. We needed to look for him, mind. He wasn't obvious. In his gold sou'wester and lemon jacket, he appeared to be invisible.

'There!' said my goddaughter Consuelo.

'Can you see him, Panda?' (Panda being my nickname)

'Look!'

I peered through the hedge following the line of Consuelo's finger. And there he was, a sea of primrose-flowering broccoli at his feet, above him the clear spring sky. The landscape of the field was yellow and sandy and desert-like. Into all this Charlie blended as snugly as a rabbit in a hat.

Observed by the nearby red, red cattle, members of the crocodile's tail had begun by now their Slow Food quest. In the spirit of the remarkable naturalist Richard Maybe who some time ago wrote a book entitled *Food for Free* they'd come to Woodlands to harvest nettles. Bundles of them, just the tips which they picked by the bag full and prepared, before they were transformed by Sarah Lyon, cook and food correspondent for *Stamford Living Magazine*, into the most delicious soup and soufflé. I'd not eaten nettles before (these were stinging nettles) and I was impressed. They reminded me of spinach but with a more interesting texture. My tip: for a nettle soup try adding some blue cheese. And to find your local slow food convivium (mine is Slow Food, Rutland with Lincolnshire) log on to [www.slowfood.org.uk](http://www.slowfood.org.uk)

Work gathers momentum on the farm. At the end of each week farm manager Adrian Johnson produces a progress report detailing what's happened on the farm during the past week and what's upcoming. Likewise I write a report detailing all the farmer's market and box scheme activity. It's a useful way of keeping in touch and at this time of year, such being the level of activity, our reports begin to assume epic proportions. To give you a flavour, this past week the team have been (in no particular order), discing, ploughing, power harrowing, bed forming, drilling, muck spreading, hoeing and rolling. This refers to the arable fields only (arable meaning land producing cereals like wheat, barley and oats, field beans, peas and potatoes.).

Over in the brassica fields Mark Gott's in the middle of the busy planting program. This week, if it's not too dry, we'll be planting summer cauliflowers beside the meandering London Road, and calabrese or broccoli in the field called Ying Yangs. (What, I wonder, could *Ying Yang* signify in the Lincolnshire Fens?). It's a lovely sight to see the land being turned over, to run the silt soil through your fingers and sense the teeming invisible life. Which reminds me, when in Rampart Field the other day watching Charlie Briggs power harrowing in advance of the planter, a sparrow hawk dropped from the sky and brushed past my leg. Another source of wonder...

Mamba is the name given by Consuelo to a lamb which was in need of adoption. She was born a twin only her mother had sufficient milk for just one lamb. I'm happy to report that after several days bottle feeding, of times when Mamba was weak and ailing and sickly, she's now prospering having been successfully adopted by a ewe which had lost her own lamb. This little story is emblematic of the difficulties and challenges faced by the keeper of livestock. Most new born animals do prosper and flourish but occasionally they weaken, taking you with them. Lambing, calving, tending and then turning them out on to summer pasture, Bruce Easterbrook has been in the thick of this rewarding, amazing, bittersweet cycle.

While over the way the chicks pip pip, and the piglets snooze in the lee of the lime.

## Market Garden News

This year we've managed to mechanize some of the more laborious planting jobs. This is how it happens: first of all Simon creates the 72 inch beds with the bed former; then in one simple operation Roy Burton follows behind with the four row planter. All we need then do is cover or fence the crop against hares if needed, or water them in. We're finding what might've taken five people four hours to do is now taking twenty-five minutes!

In the market garden we're planting and drilling every week with dwarf beans, radish, turnips, rocket and lettuce planned for this week with runner beans to follow. Meantime the broad beans and strawberries are flowering and the rhubarb is cropping well.

**ASPARAGUS** Mark is supervising the asparagus harvest and picks every other day. To add to your box at £2.75/bunch or £5.00/two bunches (same as last year) please phone Claire on 01205 724778 or order on-line [www.woodlandsfarm.co.uk](http://www.woodlandsfarm.co.uk)

## Biodynamic pilot project update

Marcus is presently wiring up our new stirring machine so we can mix the biodynamic 'preparations' or tonics. These will then be sprayed on to our BD land in minute quantities. Interestingly, the BD preparations are stirred for one hour before being immediately applied to the fields. Warm water, sooner than cold water, is used. In this way the preparations are deemed more effective.

## Beef and Lamb

**Orders are now being taken for Lamb and Beef boxes which will be ready for delivery the week beginning Monday 8<sup>th</sup> June. Individual items are also available – joints, steaks, chops...**

**Warm wishes, Andrew Dennis**

**Tel 01205 724778**

**[www.woodlandsfarm.co.uk](http://www.woodlandsfarm.co.uk)**

