

June 2010

The tractor moves across the field, trailer stacked high. There are big bales everywhere, giant cylinders bound with netting. I walk among them. They're like checkers of backgammon. The sun is everywhere. Upon me, the bales, the wings of the hawk.

The field's bounded by a moat. Glints of silver, swans' nests. Archeological remains lie deep down marked by gentle mounds on the land's surface. I've no wish to explore the depths of the soil. Jewels, a crown, bright sovereigns? Those secrets belong to the field. Let them be!

Away to the left a small gang is weeding onions. They're on their hands and knees. Fathen, chickweed, nettles. For eight hours. The sun is relentless. There's no shade apart from the brim of a hat. The gang led by Danny is following the tractor hoe. Up and down the field they go, pulling the weeds, leaving them in the row to shrivel in the heat. Hard, unrelenting work. Work to give you a thirst.

Tuesdays and wednesdays are reserved for brassica planting. Mark collects the modules from the glasshouse the night before, gives them a drink, then takes them to the field first thing in the morning. We use a yellow five row pelican planter which makes a slit in the soil into which the plants are dropped. Someone walks behind to fill in the gaps. Cauliflowers on tuesday, broccoli on wednesday, regular as clockwork. Like the rules of a monastery. And the challenges? Pigeons, hares, rabbits. Mark's tried everything, even a miniature rocket launcher which sends a firework into the sky. The pigeons scarper. Ten minutes later they're back.

Adrian's made good progress with the arable crops. They look clean and healthy with the wheats, the barleys, the oats and the beans all tractor hoed. Andy's used the Garford guidance hoe for this which affords a greater degree of accuracy than the naked eye. He can hoe around 50 acres a day. Where the fields have reached the end of their rotation the cereals have been undersown with clover. Clover helps build fertility. Five years of cropping followed by two years of fertility building...

Main crop potatoes grow with vigour. Tim's ridged up the rows and started irrigating today with an inch of water from the farm lake. It's likely he'll apply another inch next week if we don't get rain. Deans Front, Trumpet Hall, Chittle Lane. These are the names of this year's potato fields. Meantime Simon started digging new potatoes in the polytunnels a fortnight ago, in quantities sufficient to supply our farmers market stall. The new potatoes growing outside in the market garden are about a fortnight away.

Bruce has turned out the cows in groups of twenty, each of which will run with a bull (in the wilds a bull would run with approximately twenty females). Meshach, Hero, Wizard and Chino. Preceding this Peter and Chris installed and secured the fencing and hung the gates. The fields really do look a picture. I think well-installed fences have the capacity to transform a landscape every bit as much as woods and trees, especially in the Lincolnshire Fens.

The turkey chicks are basking beneath the warmth of their infra red lamps. Our first batch hatched about three weeks ago, bronze and black mainly although we produce the occasional Bourbon Red and Lavender Blue for interest and colour. The adult birds strut about with great self-importance. The other day Stella met them on the way to Kirton. They'd hopped over the fence and appeared to be going shopping.

Market Garden News

The polytunnels have produced good crops of radish, turnip, lettuce and salad leaves. Once cleared Simon plans to lay the re-cycled mypex (a mulch) before planting the peppers and aubergines.

The dry weather has suited the alium family, notably the spring onions and garlic. Adam and Marcin are able to bunch around 35 bunches of spring onions each in an hour. Garlic bunches, which contain fewer heads, are quicker to prepare.

We're almost in the thick of the strawberries. The cold spring weather has had the effect of holding the crop back and the yields are lighter than normal. Asparagus yields are also down.

Biodynamic Update

Tim is in the process of mixing and applying the special biodynamic tonics with our new sprayer (it has a boom 24m long which means he can cover up to 70 acres a day). Last night, by contrast, I sprayed the inaccessible areas by hand, notably the turkey paddocks and orchard (the birds were fascinated). It was 11.15pm by the time I'd finished! I'd covered 2 acres in 2 hours!

GAVIN AND STACEY

There are definitely piglets on the way! Stacey is enormous. She waddles out of the arc in which she likes to snooze and promptly sits down. She's not going anywhere, no siree. A quick wallow and she's back snoozing again. Any minute now...

BEEF, LAMB, PORK & TURKEY
Individual cuts of meat and oven ready turkeys are available to order on-line with your box or by phoning Rachel on 01205 724778.

Warm wishes, Andrew Dennis

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