

July 2010

You can just glimpse the cattle if you search hard. Waist-high grass punctuated by chicory, buttercups, chamomile. I look out across the meadow where the sward blocks the A16 from view (I can neither see nor hear the traffic anymore) and then I find them. Pricked ears, glittering eyes, Lincoln Red against the green. How lovely to look at the meadow, the cattle. And lose yourself in them. To sense the mirage which is the everyday world slip away.

The grass has grown like sunflowers. Everything has grown this past month when rain dripped though the gray corrugated roof and tuned silence into music. It was like being in Kenya – the drops of rain on the tin roof and the wet ground singing. We fetched buckets and collected the rain and drenched the magnolia with it. Now the leaves bloom.

Adrian's making haylage of the grass. Chris came and mowed the field. He left the grass to settle in swathes overnight and turned it next morning to assist its drying. Then Tim baled and wrapped the haylage so the ground was as if swept and pristine. Today leverets are playing on this even surface. Owls hunt. A cock pheasant sits on the gatepost observing the changed landscape. The grass will grow quickly again.

Intense heat: Bernice snoozes beneath the Ionicera, Gavin and Stacey cake themselves with mud (homemade sun cream), chickens dust and preen and sit among the shadows. I reckon the sheep anticipate their shearing with relish. All that wonder-wool. Bruce starts on Saturday.

The plants have been closing themselves down in order to retain moisture. Broccoli and spinach turn yellow, strawberries melt, lettuce wilts. This is when they're *in* the ground. Imagine how they change once harvested. (It sure is difficult keeping produce fresh in the heat). Mark starts cutting early, sometimes as early as 5.00 am and well before the heat of the day. The brassicas are cut and packed into boxes or crates in the field and then taken to the cold store as quickly as possible where the field heat's 'removed'. It's a race against time...

But the heat has advantages. Weeds shrivel quickly, crops flourish in the absence of competition. An uprooted thistle withers and fades in just a matter of moments. Where Roy's tractor hoed the beetroot and onions in Deans Field the crops have seldom looked cleaner. So long as we don't get a downpour during harvest we'll get a decent result. Roy's been using his specially adapted hoe for this purpose. Impressive.

This great summer season of which July is the heart. You long for sea breeze, rain, less dust. Humidity hangs over. Small wonder calves drop down in the long grass to stay cool. We irrigate, the potatoes bulk up gaining yield and leaf canopy, the evenings produce skies in which the sun is a Chinese lantern and the moon of molten honey.

We've caught up with the planting: sweetcorn, squash, celeriac, kale, purple sprouting broccoli. Fields are bursting: long-eared wheats and barleys like horses heads, cauliflowers curded with cappuccino froth, pointed cabbages (the sweetness of chestnuts). You stand looking over this momentous time, across the fields, over the uneven sea-wave hedges and the cattle in the chicory. Your eye moves to the dappled corner of the orchard, across the dyke to the honeybees, and the low grass area of the paddock where selfheal grows in patches.

And you have to wonder at all this. I have to wonder at all this.

Market Garden News

Beginning to crop heavily now: broad beans, spring onions, spinach, kohlrabi. It's best to keep leafy vegetables in the fridge (and where possible refresh with water). I'm thinking now of lettuce, chard, bunched carrots).

Runner beans curl round bamboo canes, their tendrils writing letters (what mysterious manuscript is this?) We lost some of the early plants to hares and Simon needed to replace them. Now he's weeding round. The crop looks promising.

Strawberries have been disappointing this year with an unusually short shelf life (hot weather again). Last week we invested in some expensive curved lids to try and protect the fruit in the punnet, to give them more room to breathe. With luck this'll help.

Biodynamic Update

Our annual inspection has now taken place, a full day during which all our field records and procedures were checked and audited by an inspector from the BDAA (Biodynamic Agricultural Association). Adrian organized this and we're on track and everything is in order. This year more of our crops will be biodynamic: sweetcorn, celeriac, squash, cereals and brassica. Exciting stuff!

GAVIN, STACEY and BERNICE

Stacey's piglets have arrived, two female and five male. Meantime we've acquired a second female pig, a gilt or maiden female, who arrived last week. She's ten months old and her name is Bernice. Judging from Gavin's reaction she's quite a looker.

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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