

SMALL FARM TRAINING GROUP

June 2021 Newsletter

This month's newsletter includes:

- 1000 years of traditional farming
- Best Mojito recipe (probably)
- Sow Grow and Cook Squash



SMALL FARM TRAINING GROUP
INVITE YOU TO THE



WELCOME BACK BBQ

Sunday July 4, 2021
12-3pm

Hosts: Jenny Huggett & Cliff Baylis
Oast House | Sandy Cross Lane
Heathfield | TN21 8QP

£5 per person
Book on the SFTG website

BRING A CHAIR OR A BLANKET



**BBQ by Catriona Bush from
her free range Oxford Sandy
& Black pigs.**



Letter from the Chair

By Zoe Chinman

I am writing this with a quiet optimism that life will be starting to get somewhat back to normal, the rain will stop and the sun will come out as we go into "flaming June". Fingers crossed. The committee are really excited to get back to our core training and workshop values, and with so many new members in 2021 we can't wait to get properly back into the swing of things. With the longest day just around the corner, June is every smallholders dream month, with daylight hours being priceless.

May saw us getting back to normal with some socially distanced workshops, with the ever popular introduction to smallholding course, cider making, and bottle feeding baby lambs, as well as a sheep handling course followed by a pub lunch, which was a novelty! There is so much to look forward to as part of the SFTG family as we move into June and July, with new courses being added almost weekly, our stand at the South of England Show, as well as the "Welcome Back BBQ" on the 4th July where we hope to see as

What courses are coming up..

Please note all courses will be run in accordance with government guidance

JUNE

19th June - Small Small Farmers, Jacks Farm Walk

19th June - Strawberry Tea

20th June - Mole Catching

26th June - Day Old Turkey Chick Collection Weekend

JULY

17th July - Potash Farm Cobnut Walk

many of you as possible (don't forget to book your ticket so we know to cater for you).

June also sees the official launch of our "Toolshed" where you can hire items that a smallholder may find useful, for a fraction of the cost. We are gratefully accepting donations to the shed, and of course, suggestions for items you want to hire. Take a look on our website for a list of current items available, the apple press is already proving to be popular for September hires – a result of our recent cider making course I think.

Our "meet the member" events are going to be fully up and running as we go into summer. This is a lovely opportunity to meet other members, get new ideas, and make new friends, so do look out for these events and book on any that take your fancy. We are also keen for our members to host these events, so if you think you can open your doors for an hour or two, please do get in touch, we'll organise the rest!

Wishing you all a lovely June, and I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the welcome back BBQ in July.

Zoe x



Figure 1: January, Julius Calendar

1000 years of traditional farming

Part 1 - Ploughing and Sowing

By Paul Lovatt-Smith

The picture above is from the January page of an ecclesiastical calendar made by monks in Canterbury in the first half of the 11th Century, just before the Norman Conquest. It is housed in the British Library under the name "Cotton MS Julius A VI". The name derives from the saviour of the manuscript, Sir Robert Cotton, who retrieved it and others from destruction after the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII. He catalogued the manuscripts in a system which followed the names of Roman emperors, hence Julius after a certain J. Caesar.

AUGUST

14th August – Peg Loom Weaving

15th August – Introduction to Keeping Pigs Workshop

SEPTEMBER

4th September – Hedgerow and Fruit Wines Workshop

11th September – Meet the Member, Lee Maitland

16th September – Selecting the Right Breed of Sheep at the Dolphin Sheep Fair

16th September – SFTG Social Cuppa at the Dolphin Sheep Fair

26th September – Dehydrating for Beginners

OCTOBER

2nd October – Autumn Cider Making Workshop

9th October – Introduction to Smallholding

NOVEMBER

7th November – Macrame Morning Workshop

7th November – Candle Making Workshop

13th November – Bacon curing and sausage making

If there is a course you would like to do but haven't seen listed, please don't hesitate to let us know.

Get Social

Don't forget that we're also on Facebook and Instagram...why not follow us and see what we're up to!

Insta:

@small_farm_training_group

These drawings, done by an unknown person 1,000 years ago, are some of the oldest pictures of farming in Britain and are a fascinating insight into what was going on throughout the farming year in Saxon England. For a traditional farming enthusiast and practitioner like me, they are even more interesting because they offer a chance to directly compare and contrast what I am doing with those ancient farmers.

In traditional farming nothing changes very fast, so it is not surprising that much of what was being done 1,000 years ago is in essence the same today. After all, traditional farming in Britain was already 5,000 years old when the Julius calendar was made, so it had had plenty of time to be tried, and tested and to develop into what I consider to be a highly-evolved, sustainable and ecological way of producing food.

The January activity, ploughing, is one exception to this rule, however.

The picture shows a man ploughing with a wheeled plough and a team of 4 oxen. The coulter and plough share (see the shaded bit on fig.1) with its mouldboard to throw the upturned soil to one side are clear. The plough looks like it can be adjusted to go deeper or shallower. There is a man/boy with a long pole or "goad", walking before the team to keep them going in the right line. A team could plough around 200m, or a furlong (furrow-long) before they needed a rest, then they would be turned around on the un-ploughed "headland" at the top of the field before going back on another set of furrows. A man follows scattering seed from a sack. Some artistic licence must be assumed here as seed sown this early in the year would almost certainly rot.

Presumably these farmers would have followed the medieval arable rotation which was called the "three-field" system. The first year was a cereal crop, the second a root crop and the third year fallow to recover fertility. Arable land was kept separate from permanent pasture and ploughed so often that wide ridges and furrows developed marking each rotational strip, which also helped with drainage. These "ridge and furrow" features can still be seen today in subsequently un-ploughed fields and are recorded on OS maps.

Today, for spring-sown crops, ploughing still begins in January whenever the weather allows (which in my experience is not that often!). The Sunday after Epiphany which falls on 7-15 January is called "Plough Sunday", when the plough is brought into church to be blessed. The advantage of ploughing at this time of year is that the soil has time to "get some weather on it" before spring sowing - it is easier to cultivate ploughed ground to create a seed bed after it has been broken up by frost and rain. The disadvantage of early ploughing is that the longer the soil is left bare, the more soil erosion there is and nutrients are leached downwards by winter rain out of the reach of plant roots. Also, natural soil fertility decreases the

Facebook:

Small Farm Training Group



Why not let us follow you and your Facebook/Insta accounts and we can help you with your smallholding dreams and promote your goods to SFTG followers?

Jobs for the month

By Caroline Upton



Rhubarb

Rhubarb can bolt for many reasons (stress being one of them!) but you don't want it to flower so now's the time to remove any flower stalks that you see. This allows the plant to focus its energy on providing you with lots of tasty rhubarb.

Planting out annuals

Now's the time for planting out those annuals. These can be used to bolster your borders and containers or just to give you a good excuse for growing more plants! Early June can sometimes be tricky for frosts but looking at the weather, we seem to be good!

longer it is left bare, as soil life needs vegetation cover (more on this later).

When I started to try and grow spring cereals, many years ago now, I followed the same method as the farmers in the calendar. Instead of oxen, which would have been great but impractical, I had a two-wheeled or pedestrian tractor of 10.5 HP fitted with steel cage wheels and wheel-weights. The plough attachment was in essence the same, the only difference being that it was doubled-up ("reversible") which means that I could come back down the last furrow and still throw the ridge the same way as before. With a bit of effort and when the pigs had done some ground-breaking the previous year, this set-up had just enough power to plough at 6 inches depth in the sandy loam of our smallholding. Then in the spring I used a rotavator attachment to create a fine-tilthed seed bed, a much easier operation than ploughing. There is a video of such ploughing on my YouTube channel at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qBShA-ZMAIk>



Figure 1 Two-wheeler ploughing, 2011

In 2015, having had variable success with ploughing, I went to Tablehurst Farm to listen to a seminar given by German stockless biodynamic farmer, Friedrich Wenz. I have never met anyone with such a good understanding of the soil. He views ploughing as bad for fertility as it destroys soil life and structure. His key principle is to leave as much of the soil as possible undisturbed and to add in more fertility from a cover crop. The method involves shallow (2") cultivation of the cover crop with a rotavator in dry weather in April into a mulch of plant debris and soil. The seed is then drilled through the mulch onto the top of the undisturbed soil where it immediately germinates using the plentiful soil moisture and the plant roots into the living soil below. The cover crop mulch buries the seed away from predation, provides extra fertility by its decomposition and acts as a weed suppressant.

Provide support for top heavy perennials

Now's the time to put supports in for top heavy flowering perennials like delphiniums. Stake or support them now when they're young and it will look more natural as the leaves grow.

Tie in new shoots on climbing plants such as wisteria and honeysuckle

Keep on top of weeds

Clear them now and clear them frequently. Spending 10 mins a day weeding is far less daunting than having to spend an entire day at it.

Best Mojito Recipe (probably)

By Caroline Upton



As we head towards summer and nice long evenings, why not make the most of it and serve yourself one of these fine mojitos! This is probably one of the nicest and easiest mojito recipes I've found. But as always, give it a go and if you think you have a better recipe, email it to me editor@sftg.org.uk and I'll publish it. Or send me your favourite cocktail recipe and I'll publish that too. This recipe is from allrecipes.com.

This method works very well and I am now converted to minimum tillage. I started off rotavating with the two-wheeled tractor but graduated onto a four-wheeler after a year or so as I was developing vibration white-finger. The four-wheeler at 35 HP is much more powerful and faster. I do two or three passes at right angles to each other with the rotavator set on its shallowest setting (Figure 3). I then make furrows at 1 ft spacing by hand or with a ridging plough and sow the seed by hand into these. Wenz sows with a seed drill, which is essential for larger areas.



Figure 2: Tractor and rotavator on a minimum-tillage seed bed, 2019

It is possible to do such a method by shallow ploughing and there is strong evidence that prehistoric farmers followed such a min-till method. However at some point this changed to the deep ploughing/cultivation/broadcasting method indicated by the Julius calendar. I have tried broadcasting but it is very wasteful of seed, hence the saying "One for the rook, one for the crow, one to rot and one to grow". It is far better to drill and bury it out of reach from those pesky varmints.

It's quite a far cry from the medieval wintertime, deep ploughing method involving two men, four beasts and plough to the modern springtime, shallow cultivation method using tractor and rotavator. So, with the recent advent of min/no-till, the familiar plough as depicted in the Julius calendar is becoming less common. Although I miss the satisfaction and skill of ploughing, I prefer the more harmonious relationship with the soil that reduced tillage brings. However, the goal - cereals and other arable crops - is the same.

I may add that, like those Saxon farmers, I don't use any poisonous chemicals. My cereal field has a bountiful understorey of wild plants and hums with insect life, which for me more than makes up for the reduced yield compared with my conventional neighbours. Medieval

Ingredients

10 fresh mint leaves
 ½ lime, cut into 4 wedges
 2 tablespoons white sugar, or to taste
 1 cup ice cubes
 1 ½ fluid ounces white rum
 ½ cup club soda or lemonade

Method

Place mint leaves and 1 lime wedge into a sturdy glass. Use a muddler to crush the mint and lime to release the mint oils and lime juice. Add 2 more lime wedges and the sugar, and muddle again to release the lime juice. Do not strain the mixture. Fill the glass almost to the top with ice. Pour the rum over the ice, and fill the glass with carbonated water. Stir, taste, and add more sugar if desired. Garnish with the remaining lime wedge and serve.



Bring a bottle..

By Jenny Cloke

My six cade lambs were keen to welcome visitors if they came with a bottle! They need bottle feeding for about 7 weeks and during this time become far more friendly than normal lambs and so are a delight to feed. On my farm, sock lambs are usually the third lamb from a family of triplets. Ewes only have 2 functioning teats and

arable farmland must have been a wildlife paradise compared with today's monocultural deserts.

I hope that those of you with a historical leaning have found some of this interesting. Next time it's hedging and ditching!



Figure 3: Sowing wheat, 2020

with limited supplies of grass there is a risk of the ewe getting mastitis, so normally I orphan one of the lambs. I keep my orphans and a few ewes with their own lambs in a barn with a connecting field so that these selected animals can move from barn to field freely once the orphan lambs are safe from the fox. All the animals in this group get fed more concentrate than my main flock so it is also a good way of assisting any thin mothers or lambs.

Several SFTG members came to bottle feed my lambs. Wendy Holman came with different grandchildren 3 times! So, she obviously enjoyed it as much as the lambs. In the picture above she is helping Max feed one of the lambs. Harry and Ali also fed lambs on that day.



Sow, Grow and Cook

By Jenny Huggett

This year a lot of sowing should have been delayed due to the cold weather, it's just not a good idea to sow seeds if they are going to rot in the cold soil. So although April is normally the best month to sow summer and winter squash, this year May and early June is not too late. Sow one seed to a 3-inch pot of compost and place in a warm place, such as a greenhouse or potting shed. If you have left this until

Letter from the Editor

By Caroline Upton

When it comes to booking courses it usually crosses my mind 'well how useful really is that course going to be for me..?'. Having

mid May, speed up germination by putting them somewhere really warm such as an airing cupboard. Grow on in pots, potting on into larger ones if necessary, until all chance of frost is past. This is important, as few vegetable plants are more susceptible to frost than squash. In Sussex this is usually mid May, but don't hold me to that! Plant them out in well-manured soil. If you have an abandoned manure heap, or a mound of well-rotted grass cuttings, plant a couple of squash plants on these, they will love it. In the first few weeks you will need to protect them from slug damage, ideally with the Grazers Slug spray (which deters rather than kill slugs) or with pellets such as Sluggo (which kill, but are organically certified). The first flowers are usually male, do not fret, the females are not far behind. If you pinch out the growing tips, the side shoots produce more females than do the main leaders, and these are what you want most of. Once your plants get going a little slug damage is the only problem you are likely to have until late summer when the leaves may develop mildew. This can be controlled with a spray of 50/50 milk and water. It really works, if you catch it in time.

Summer squash, courgettes, marrows, pattipans all have a delicate flavour and do not store well. I favour Italian Striped courgettes because they grow long without getting fat like a marrow. The yellow varieties have the advantage that they are easy to spot before they turn into marrows. The North American Crookneck squash is a bright yellow and has a little more flavour than regular courgettes. These days a large number of winter varieties are available, but for flavour go for Crown Prince, Queensland Blue or Marina di Chioggia. They are not heavy croppers but produce one or two large fruits that are delicious roasted. Of the small squash, the butternut types are the most flavoursome, and one plant can produce 5-8 fruits. These are perhaps more practical for people who live alone or don't eat a lot of squash. Other little winter squash varieties are fun to stuff, but that's about it. The culinary uses of squash are many and diverse, from bread to curry, to just good old plain roasting of wedges. This month's recipe is one of my own:

Squash Pasta

Ingredients: Squash, garlic, sun dried tomatoes, basil, olive oil, Parmesan cheese, pasta of choice. Dice enough squash for 100g / person. Boil until just tender, drain. Heat the oil, cook the sliced or mashed garlic, add the tomatoes, basil and squash until all is hot, then combine with cooked pasta, and sprinkle with Parmesan and lots of black pepper. Other additions that work well are tinned anchovies or chorizo (which should be fried with the garlic).

Another bonus of squash is they require nothing more than curing to store through the winter until spring. Harvest your squash once the leaves die back, usually in late September, and place them somewhere warm and light to "cure" for two weeks. This allows the skin to fully dry out and minimizes the chance of them rotting in store. Don't be tempted to save your own seed though, unless you grow only one variety and no one else is growing squash within

attended a few of the SFTG courses I think I can provide an answer to that. Very.

I was lucky enough to attend Edwina and Richard's 'a chance to chat chickens' and I thought I already knew enough to get by and raise some happy (if a little bit molly coddled) chickens.

Then I met Edwina and Richard and realised I had a lot to learn. I attended the course on the Saturday and on the Sunday we'd ordered poly tunnel sheeting, extra food and water containers, neem oil and sourced some cardboard (that trick with the cardboard and neem oil totally works by the way) and now our chickens are definitely happier and more productive. So I'd like to say a big thank you Edwina and Richard, you are total legends at this chicken rearing game. And for all those other SFTG members who either want to keep, or do keep chickens, get yourselves booked on the next available course. You won't be disappointed.

200m of yours, especially if you or anyone else is growing gourds (which have a horrid bitter flavour).



Farm Ramblings

By Jenny Cloke

Wildlife and farm livestock have found the late spring difficult. I have been feeding my ewes far more pellets this year as there has been so little grass. A badger has been a frequent visitor after the evening feed. She usually waits until most ewes have left the area and only a few are looking for the remaining pellets. The bulk of a badger's diet is earthworms but as the ground has been so compact it has been hard to dig for them. Badgers occasionally attack sheep - usually animals that are unable to move away, for example a ewe that has become cast or while she is giving birth. They will also eat animal carcasses. I was amused to watch my curious 3-week-old lamb approach the badger, she moved 10 yards away and then as soon as the lamb lost interest the badger came back to forage for pellets!

In April Cliffe Vets in Lewes were awarded a 5-year contract worth more than 2 million pounds to run a Badger Tuberculosis (TB) Vaccination Pilot in East Sussex. This will be delivered with the help

Plumpton College - Work Experience Placements required

By Lee St Clair

Plumpton College has a range of courses, aimed to inspire students and give them all the necessary skills they need to succeed in the agricultural sector.

As part of their programmes, Level 2 and Level 3 students are required to complete a minimum of one day a week's work experience, to enable them to put into practice the knowledge they're gaining at college.

As well as classroom learning, the college's 780 hectare commercial estate allows students to experience different livestock and arable farming. There is a modern, 300 cow dairy unit with 36:36 milking parlour, as well as a sow pig unit, a herd of Sussex beef cattle, and an extensively managed flock of 550 sheep.

The BTEC Level 2 Diploma is designed for school leavers, introducing students to the basics of machinery, crop and animal husbandry. During the one year programme, studies include environmental and land-based business, introduction to farm animal production, introduction to land-based machinery operations,

of farmers in a 250 square kilometre contiguous area. Although the contract gives no details, I suspect this is in the area south of the A27 towards Brighton because TB in cattle is a particular problem in this area.

I have always felt that it is insane to cull or vaccinate badgers when the problem is cows with TB – we should tackle this directly. Sheep can get TB but it is rare, whilst last year 28,000 cattle in England were culled because they had TB or might have had TB. Scientists at the University of Surrey (with others) have developed a novel vaccine and complementary skin test to protect cattle against bovine TB. The problem with current BCG vaccine (which is effective in humans, badgers and cows) is that the tuberculin skin test is positive for animals with TB and, also for those that have been vaccinated. The Surrey group have identified genes that code for certain immunological proteins that can be removed from the BCG vaccine without affecting its ability to work. They have then made a BCG-minus strain of the vaccine and a new synthetic skin test which is negative for the animals vaccinated with the BCG-minus strain but positive if the animal has TB. So far, they have tested and shown the new vaccine works in guinea pigs. The next step is to try it in cattle. Let's hope it works!

Small Small Farmers

By Debbie Gordon

Huge thanks to Jenny for running our first small small farmers aimed event by offering us the opportunity to bottle feed her lambs. In June we will also be bringing you a chance for younger potential farmers to look around Hale Farm on a tour guided by 8 year old Jack.

I hope that you have been busy planting, don't forget to get the sunflowers and pumpkins in to enter our autumn competitions - it's not too late to get growing! If you want to grow something quickly radishes are a good bet, and of course cress seeds on the windowsill are super speedy, and tasty in an egg mayo sandwich too!

You will need-

Hard boiled eggs, cress seeds, cotton wool balls.

Step 1

Carefully remove the tops from the eggs, leaving the bottom two-thirds of the shells intact. Empty the shells (save the eggs for another time), then carefully wash them out. Decorate the shells with pens or paint, then leave them to dry.

participating in providing estate maintenance, and assisting with agricultural crop production.

The BTEC Level 3 Diploma consists of a suite of qualifications that can be studied in a variety of combinations to allow flexibility and help students develop their practical and farm management skills. The number of subjects studied can vary. The Level 3 Subsidiary Diploma consists of 6 subjects studied over one year. The Level 3 Diploma is a top-up of the Subsidiary Diploma which allows students onto a second year place, completing 12 subjects.

The Extended Diploma covers all 18 subject areas of study over a 3 year period.

Level 3 is designed for people with some experience of the industry. The course covers many aspects of modern agriculture, allowing students to further develop their skills, and gain certificates such as Rough Terrain Fork Lift Truck Use, and PA1 and PA2 Sprayer. Subject areas include plant science, soil science, livestock husbandry, dairy production, crop production, pig production, beef production, grassland management, machinery operations, using spreaders and sprayers, managing agricultural environments and estate skills.

If you feel you may be able to support a Plumpton College Student with the

Step 2

Dip the cotton wool balls in a little water, squeezing off any excess. Place 1 ball inside each shell, then sprinkle 1 tsp cress seeds onto each one. Sit the filled shells in eggcups and leave in a dry, well-lit place for a week – a windowsill is perfect. Your cress will start to grow within a few days, perfect for making egg & cress sarnies!



Welcome....

We'd like to give a warm and hearty welcome to the following people who have joined the SFTG in the last 6 months.

We are very much looking forward to learning more about you and what you are doing over the coming months. Our new members are:

Sheenagh Ward, Caroline Cook, Jo Sodeau, Gabrielle, Paul and Luke Dolan, Alison Freeman, Tania Freezer, Kat Turkova and Nic Goodman, Sue Carnell, Monique and Timothy Rudman, Kim Davis, Kate, Julian and Maggie Bloomfield, Matt Wilkinson, Michelle Pearce, Lisa Weaver

work experience aspect of their course, please contact Lee St Clair, Work Experience Coordinator, **01273 892017**, lee.stclair@plumpton.ac.uk

Charles Diplock Cremation Services

By Jenny Cloke

For those of you who use the Charles Diplock cremation services in Ringmer be warned. They have moved. I recently transported a dead sheep in my trailer and was horrified to find that their premises are now a building site! I am the world's worst at trailer reversing but it used to be that you could drive in the back of Diplocks and out their main gate – and as no reversing required, my other half could stay at home. I was lucky though, one of the mini-digger operators informed me that Diplock's still had an office in the vicinity and my sheep was duly loaded into a cremation truck and someone kindly reversed my trailer for me. Diplocks plan to build a new facility in Ringmer, but for now they are loading any animal brought to them into one of their own vehicles and they are cremated elsewhere. I suggest you phone Diplocks before you set off (01273 812313) to find out where they are located.