



Newsletter

Common Cause Co-operative
Supporting a local sustainable food economy

The Wealden Farmers Network

Simon Bishop

Introduction

Wealden Farmers Network (WFN) is a collection of several livestock farms in the Netherfield and Brightling area that are working together to produce, prepare and supply locally grown, fully traceable meat to local people.

Currently the Network consists of five farms totalling approximately 425 acres of grassland and 60 acres of IACS registered arable land. Livestock is mainly single suckled beef cattle and breeding ewes, taking as much progeny as possible through to finish and sold directly to local customers. We are concentrating on using local breeds such as Sussex cattle and Kent sheep, and overall the farms have about 50 suckler cows and 400 breeding ewes.

We have set up WFN as a private limited company with three members of the Network as shareholders. We have invested in the building and equipping of a meat chiller store with an attached butcher's room for cutting and packing the meat and have applied for a DEFRA grant. Each farm within the Network trades independently, but the benefits of networking are present for all.

Organic Practices

One of the farms is certified through the Soil Association as fully organic. However



Simon Bishop co-ordinates production on the farms, Angie Wilkins co-ordinates the cutting room, and Jo Amos (not pictured) co-ordinates the marketing.

all the farms are run organically and we have devised our own set of 'farming principles' that all the farms adhere to. As the Network grows, or where we procure meat such as pork from other local farms, we must be sure that the farms manage their land and animals according to our farming principles.

Product Planning

The five farms currently in the Network are managed in order to produce a continuous supply of fresh beef and lamb. This has required the five farms to develop a 'production plan'. This involves for instance, staggering the lambing on the farms over 5 months (January to May). There are short term benefits such as the sharing of rams between the farms. There are also longer term benefits such as breeding ewe lamb replacements for flocks within the Network to maintain a 'closed flock'.

Clean grazing

Each farm is managed with a strict 'clean grazing' system in place. One aim is to reduce the need for anthelmintics for all live-

July 2002

Volume 2 Issue 2

Inside this issue:

Farmer's Networks	2
Organic Centre Update	2
Organic School Meals Update	3
Organic Farm Audit Update	3
For Sale and Wanted Items	4
About Common Cause	4

**See back page for:
For Sale and Wanted
Items**

Common Cause is sometimes asked by local caterers or restaurants for local sources of produce. If you are able to and interested in supplying retail outlets please contact Common Cause

(Continued on page 2)

Wealden Farmers Network cont.....

(Continued from page 1)

stock, and this is being achieved by following a set pattern where cattle, sheep and conservation follow in consecutive years on each field. Another aim is to reduce the need for concentrate feeds for livestock by producing high quality home grown forages. Any concentrate supplementation is planned to come from cereals grown on the arable ground on one of the farms.

Direct marketing

We stress to potential customers that we do not have a farm shop. As and when we have animals ready, we prepare the meat and sell it directly to customers. This means we cannot necessarily satisfy orders straight away. We pre-sell our meat as much as possible so it is supplied fresh. The meat is vacuum packed, fully labelled and can be prepared to order so if, for instance a customer requests joints halved, or boned and rolled this will be done.

Although we can, and do sell individual joints of meat we prefer to sell in packs. We supply large and small packs of beef, whole and half lambs, whole and half hoggets, local wild venison as joints, large and small packs of free range pork, sausages, bacon, gammon and ham. We are currently looking into free range poultry as an enterprise.

Quality and flavour

All the meat is hung in our chiller room; beef and venison for at least three weeks, lambs for one week, hoggets for two weeks. Currently we hire in a professional butcher to prepare the meat. Customers refer to the tenderness and intense flavour of the meat and are reassured by the traceability we guarantee, we can trace each

animal we sell back to the farm it was reared on.

Shared machinery, labour and forage

We are now sharing machinery between the farms. For example one grass topper can be shared and used on all the farms, likewise one shearing trailer, one livestock trailer etc. We also have a roller mill and livestock feed mixer on the farm that grows cereal crops so our own livestock ration can be formulated and used on each of the farms. There is, of course, one chiller room and one butchers room being shared.

Labour can also be shared. We are now employing one recently qualified student who works on each of the farms in turn, or as and where he is needed. This means he is in effect employed full time, but the cost of his wages is paid for on a pro rata basis according to the number of hours he works on each farm in the week. Busy days or periods can also be covered with other Network members assisting on any of the farms as required, for example when we blood test cattle or gather lambs for selecting for finish.

We employ a local contractor to make all our forage. A small individual farm making about 15 acres of hay often finds him/herself near the bottom of the list of priorities of a busy contractor. As a network of farms we have about 150 acres of hay and silage to make. We find we are much nearer the top of the local contractor's priority list. This is important when we are making a lot of forage, some of which needs to be of high quality, and we need to be able to rely on the contractor when the grass is ready and the sun is shining!

Premium price

Each farm is responsible for the cost of getting animals to the local slaughter house, after that costs are paid by WFN. The farm supplying the animals to WFN are then paid 10% above the stated national average per kg dead-weight as printed for that week. This allows all suppliers to WFN, either from within the Network or approved suppliers from outside the Network, to calculate what their return is likely to be and it does guarantee a small price premium. This 10% premium is reviewed annually.

Conclusions

We are very pleased with the way the Network is operating. The meat sales are going well, little advertising has been done as we are relying on the best method of recommendation, word of mouth. Almost without exception people who have purchased meat have come back for more. We have no doubt that there are customers who are looking to buy traceable, local meat farmed as near to natural methods as possible. Economies of scale, labour, and machinery sharing, incentives to produce high quality livestock coupled with careful production planning are all benefits of networking together. We feel that the success of the Network is due to its small size, to our direct marketing strategy to local customers at reasonable prices, and to the very high environmental and animal welfare standards that we apply.

For more information contact:
Simon Bishop at Ivyland Farm,
Netherfield, near Battle
Tel: 01424 838 620

Farmer Networks

There are now 16 members of the West Sussex and Surrey Organic Livestock Network. The Network meets monthly and has included three excellent farm walks. Representatives from the Organic Livestock Marketing Co-operative and Sussex Enterprise have also attended to discuss marketing approaches.

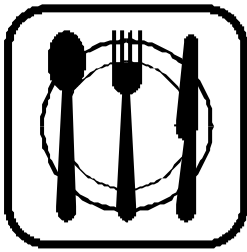
The Organic Vegetable Network has had one meeting and a visit to Riverford Farm in Devon.

Organic Centre

Plans for the Organic Centre continue.

This is a partnership project between Common Cause and Plumpton College. The Centre has been renamed the *Sustainable Food and Farming Centre* and will be located at Netherfield Place Farm, an organic farm near Battle, and a member of the WFN (see above). The Centre will offer advice and training for farmers as well as promote market development and consumer demand for local produce. We hope to open the Centre in January 2003.





Local and Organic School Meals Update

Lottery Funding

Common Cause has been awarded Lottery funds for a three year programme to link public sector catering (PSC) with local production in

East Sussex. The funds form part of a Healthy Living Centre award received by a partnership of organisations: the Food and Health Partnership. Common Cause is amongst a growing number of organisations nationally working to support local food links in PSC (including schools, care homes, NHS, government departmental and agency catering). There is currently a great opportunity to develop local and sustainable food supplies through PSC, which accounts for 1.8 billion meals eaten annually.

There are also many constraints including:

- ?!!!!Local government regulations that prohibit the letting of contracts on 'non-economic' grounds
- ?!!!!EU law that does not allow territorial preferences being specified in public purchasing contracts.
- ?!!!!Shortage of suitable suppliers e.g. of vegetables
- ?!!!!Lack of school catering facilities and time to administer more local and possibly more numerous contractors.
- ?!!!!Lack of suitably processed and semi-processed local products for catering.

To supply PSC, producers will need to create collective structures for processing and distribution, suitable infrastructure for meat cutting, packing, catering, etc. There is also the need for training for both producers and public sector caterers.

Organic Farm Audit Update

Katharine Rayner

So far 17 producers have replied to the audit questionnaire that we sent to organic farms in East Sussex in February this year. If you haven't done so already, please do fill it in and send it to us. The audit has been designed to provide information to help you with market development, accessing inputs and to help us identify training needs and to demonstrate to regional investors where support would be most effective. Information will be managed by and accessed from the Sustainable Food and Farming Centre once it is up and running (see p. 2) and in the mean time by Common Cause.

We are still analysing the responses but can give you a brief resume.

- ?!!!!Many producers are looking to expand their direct marketing routes
- ?!!!!Capital and market identification are common limiting factors to growth
- ?!!!!There is a need for more training in organic farm management, using machinery and marketing.

Somerset Food Links

Local Food For Local Schools? Initiative

This initiatives arose in response to local communities' wishing to see quality, locally sourced meals available to children in schools and Somerset producers wishing to supply Somerset schools. A feasibility study identified the need to develop a county based partnership to implement practical ways of achieving greater levels of local supply, as well as work on the development of the production side infrastructure to allow small local producers to be part of the supply chain for school catering.

See www.somersetfoodlinks.org for more information.

Good Food Guide

Common Cause is preparing a *Good Food Guide* for schools in East Sussex, Brighton and Hove. The Guide is funded by the Healthy School Scheme. It gives ideas and signposts for information on healthy eating initiatives in schools such as fruit tuck shops and breakfast clubs. It also gives contact details for local producers. If you would like your details to go in the *Good Food Guide* and have not already informed us (we sent a questionnaire out with the Oates Newsletter Vol 1, Issue 1), please contact Common Cause.

Loan Guarantee Scheme

Where capital is a limiting factor the Governments' Loan Guarantee Scheme may be useful. A booklet about the scheme can be obtained from DTI publications T: 0870 1502500 and quote the ref: URN02-883. Or call Common Cause for a copy.

We have information on producers who are interested in: Co-operative marketing, processing, and purchasing, Machinery rings, Farmer Networks, Farm Walks and Open days.

Animal feed/Inputs

Farmers producing animal feed who have stated an interest in linking with producers who buy animal feed and other farm inputs are: Boathouse Farm, Isfield, Bosney Farm, Rye, Court Lodge Farm, Rye, Horselunges Manor, Hellingly.



Green Room
20 North Street
Lewes
BN7 2PE

Answer phone: 01273 470900
Fax: 01273 470900
Email: comcause@commoncause.fsnet.co.uk

We are on the Web
www.commoncause.co.uk

Common Cause Co-operative was established in 1991 in Lewes, East Sussex. It is a not-for-profit co-operative company limited by guarantee. Common Cause supports activities that have long term social, economic and environmental benefits. One of our objectives is to support sustainable food production and consumption.

Recent activities include Just Trade, an organic food co-op, the Lewes Farmers' Market, and OATES. The OATES project has run training in organic horticulture, researched the needs of organic agriculture in the Sussex area and run training courses, demonstration farm visits, and network meetings for farmers. A report of the OATES project is available on request. Common Cause is currently working with Plumpton College to establish a *Sustainable Food and Farming Centre* in East Sussex.

Common Cause is also a member of the Food and Health Partnership and is working to link public sector catering, including the school meal service, with local producers.

For Sale..... and Wanted Items

For Sale:

Fully organic certified field and polytunnel vegetables, salads and herbs as from Spring 2003. *Contact Alan Meneilly* T: 01306 883365; E: alanmeneilly@compuserve.com

Pedigree Sussex Bull (pure bred) *Contact John How*, Weppons Farm, Wiston, Steyning, W. Sussex, T: 01903 813270

Pure Kerryhill ewes, lambs and rams and x ewes. *Contact John Goodman*, Rowner Farm, Billingshurst, W. Sussex, RH14 9HT, T: 01403 783725.

Organic Store Cattle, turkeys at Christmas, Organic lamb and pork, additive free beef. *Contact Jennie Wisher*, Drydown Farm, Hound House Road, Guildford, Surrey, GU5 9JG. T: 01483 203821

Organic in-calf Blonde Belgium Blue cows, organic beef and veal. *Contact Peter and Erica Bargman*, Canfields Farm, Lynwick Street, Rudgwick, E.Sussex, RH12 3DL, T: 01403 822219, E: erica.bargman@horsham.gov.uk

Tamworth pigs and pork. *Contact Ray Parker*, Cranleigh Organic Farm Shop, Lower Barrihurst Farm, Dunsfold, Cranleigh, Surrey, GU6 8LG, T: 01483 273486, E: organicfarmshop@netscapeonline.co.uk

Pure Aberdeen Angus heifers and in calf heifers and cows. *Contact Rosanne Heagerty*, Marchants Farm, StreetLane, Hassocks, W. Sussex, BN6 8RY, T: 01273 890616, E: rosanne@heagerty.free-online.co.uk

Venison. *Contact Andy Challis*, Steepwood Farm, Broadford Bridge Road, Adversane, near Billingshurst, W. Sussex, RH14 9EG, T: 01403 785 435, E: val@steepwoodfarm.fsnet.co.uk

Organic barley, wheat and beans and replacement heifers. *Contact Paul Redmore* Wintershall Estate, Bramley, Guildford, Surrey, T: 01483 208023, E: paulredmore@wintershall.freeserve.co.uk

Shetland heifers and Shetland cross heifers. *Contact Humphrey Devereux*, Padwick's Farm, Woulbeding Cottage, Betton, Midhurst, W. Sussex, T: 01730 816620, E: Humphrey.devereux@virgin.net

For Loan

22 month old Belgian Blue bull. *Contact Humphrey Devereux* above.

Wanted:

Organic hay or silage made this year. Preferably off the field depending on distance. *Contact Rosanne Heagerty* above.

Pedigree Sussex Bull (pure bred) *Contact John How*, Weppons Farm, Wiston, Steyning, W. Sussex T: 01903 813270

Store lambs in August/Sept. 2002 to finish by Christmas 2002. *Contact Rosanne Heagerty* above.

Organic hay and organic rough grazing. *Contact Humphrey Devereux*, above

If you would like to advertise here contact Common Cause with the details.