



As part of a busy day at Abbey Farm, Redgate School pupils harvested leeks (photos) and spring greens

Sowing seeds for the future

In March we had the pleasure of a visit from Year 6 of Redgate School, Hunstanton. About 28 pupils came along to find out more about where



their food comes from. The morning was spent doing practical tasks: seed sowing, planting and harvesting. The children were good workers and returned from the field with crates of lettuce, leeks and spring greens. After lunch we looked at cereal growing: a recently sown crop, the machines that will be used at harvest, and some of last year's crop (a heap of 16 tonnes of organic wheat, about enough to provide everyone in Lynn with a small loaf of bread). Last came the cattle on the farm (introduced by their owner, Nick Barrett), and then it was time to distribute goody bags, including a share of the day's harvest.

We were very pleased with how the day went and the head teacher described it as "absolutely fabulous". This event was funded by DEFRA as part of their Year of Food and Farming. We have further funding to contribute to running other educational visits. If you know of schools that may be interested in this kind of work, please put them in contact with us. Year-round, the farm can usually illustrate the process of seed to plant to food. ■

Open Day 6 July 2008

As a change from our usual farm walks we are holding an open day on Sunday 6th July. This gives you the chance to visit at a good time for you and walk round at your own pace. The veg field will be open, as will a circular walk on the farm (both midday-5pm). There will be a demonstration of bee-keeping, guided walks on birds, bats, flowers and butterflies. There will be light refreshments in the garden which will be open for your enjoyment. Also, as promised in the last news letter, Pimms and lemonade will be served in the flowery meadow.

Provisional programme

6-8am: Early morning birds — before the heat of the day builds up (fingers crossed...) we'll try to track down some of the farm's birdlife.

10am-midday: The veg field a tour aimed at those who really want to talk organic growing.

Midday to 5pm:

Circular walk on the farm, taking in several wildlife conservation features, nice views, flowers, and the West Norfolk Beekeepers Association.

Midday to sunset:

Garden open for light refreshments and sitting about etc. (you are welcome to bring your own picnic). This is NOT a show garden, just a nice space with plenty of soft, mossy lawns and shade.

7pm to 9pm: Nightlife, hopefully owls and bats.

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Celery seedlings enjoy the new greenhouse we were given by St. George's Middle School, Dersingham

Down on Little Springhead

This is a great time of year in the veg field. The recent ploughing marks the end of the previous year's efforts and everything seems fresh and clean. New shoots and greenhouse plants are coming along and the field is starting to fill with new crops.

Although we have had a fairly mild winter it seems reluctant to go. The cold start to the spring has meant that early growth has been slower than usual. However, a couple of weeks of reasonable weather and a concerted effort have meant we are up to date with our tasks. The winter crops are all but over and we are now concentrating our efforts on filling the field with new sowings for the summer and next winter.

This is the time of year when local fresh veg is at its most scarce. It is always a challenge to keep this period of scarcity as short as possible. We currently have about a dozen crops that we are able to harvest including leeks, lettuce, spring cabbage and

sprouting broccoli. All of these were sown or planted before the winter. Some will come to an end soon and it will be a few weeks before the first spring crops start to be productive.

There are a number of crops which were planted in the autumn (seems a long time ago) and which will be ready in the late spring or summer. These include garlic, early broad beans, early carrots and onions.

In our last newsletter we said we were looking for a new greenhouse for plant-raising. We were directed by one of our customers to St George's Middle School in Dersingham where an old lean-to greenhouse (photo, above) was being offered to a good home. This and our other greenhouses and propagator are now bursting at the seams with young plants almost ready for transplanting to the field. These include celery, broccoli, spinach and many of our polytunnel plants such as tomatoes, peppers and French beans. ■

Putting the chirp back into life

Sparrows are master chirpers, as any of you will know if you live near a flock. Abbey Farm has a good record of conserving house sparrows and the less common tree sparrow. However, tree sparrows have been in low numbers this winter and in February we had no records. So, in mid March we started a programme of regularly putting out some of their favourite food to try and attract them back. Six feeding stations were regularly stocked with a mix of local origin seeds – either weed seeds and

thin grains dressed out of our cereal crops, or millet bought from a grower in Lincolnshire. Three weeks in and the right chirp had not been heard, but then in mid-April tree sparrows returned. We hope they will stick about to breed and then spend the coming winter enjoying the wild bird food plots that are in our new conservation agreement with DEFRA (see *Ten more years*, above right). ■



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Any ideas from you about things you would like to see or do, let us know. More details of the final programme will go out in late May/early June.

Kingfishers back

A pair of kingfishers are having another go at breeding after failing last year. Their nest can be seen from the bird hide at Abbey Farm. They are not very active at the moment (mid April), probably because they are on eggs. If all goes well, in the second week of May they should start feeding young, when they become much easier to see.

Ten more years

In our last newsletter we wrote about the possibility of the farm getting a new environmental protection agreement with DEFRA, called Higher Level Stewardship. We are delighted to say that this has now all been finalised. This provides us with funding for another decade of work to conserve wildlife, the landscape and historic features. Our thanks to our landowners, Sandringham Estate, for their support in negotiating this agreement.

Since 2001 Abbey Farm Organics has been growing over 50 different organic crops. We sell our produce through a box scheme, local market stalls and Eostre Organics, a cooperative of East Anglian organic producers.

Abbey Farm Organics
Abbey Farm, Flitcham,
King's Lynn,
Norfolk PE31 6BT
tel/fax **01485 609094**
organics@abbeyfarm.co.uk
www.abbeyfarm.co.uk



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tel 01485 518025

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