



<b>CONTENTS</b>	<b>page</b>
News from the land	- 1
Picture gallery	- 3
New arrivals	- 4
Education project	- 5
Events	- 5
Summer party	- 7
Partner projects update:	
The Willows	- 7
Members' corner	- 8
Small ads	- 8
Flickr link and date of next newsletter	- 8

**MOTHER NATURE HAS PAINTED THE FARM** in shades of white and pink as the brush of blossom has swept across the orchard and along the hedgerows, and the trees and margins are fully greened now. With spring well advanced, the swallows are back in residence in the pole barn and announce summer on the distant horizon. The share's spring glut (which was abundantly leafy this year) has been and gone and we are now approaching the 'harvesting gap'. This is the time for patience as we wait for the early crops of 2017 to be ready to pick whilst we use up our supplies of 2016's vegetables which overwintered in the field or the pole barn stores.

In this issue's **News from the Land**, Dom reflects on spring-time seed sowing and drilling at Canalside in relation to where our seeds come from. Find out who has joined our community recently in **New Arrivals**. You can read about recent **Events** you might have missed and see what's coming up in the months ahead. There's an update from our partner project **The Willows** and the usual **Notices** and **Ads** from members at the end. With bright May-time wishes to you and happy reading, until the next issue in the autumn as we're switching to a bi-annual printed newsletter, with plenty of news in the weekly members' email in the meantime.

Ali, May 2017



A busy bee from Canalside Community Bees' hives nearby (photo: Tom Ingall)

### **NEWS FROM THE LAND** – by Dom van Marsh

So far we have enjoyed a fine spring: generally warm, extremely dry and very few strong winds (touch wood), which has made for some very pleasant days at Canalside. However us growers always manage to find something to complain about, and in this case it's that it really is *too* dry - I don't like irrigating in the fields, it is very wasteful and encourages our crops to develop shallow roots rather than searching deep down for water, but we



Sunshine bathed onion planters in early April

have been forced by these arid conditions to get the sprinklers out.

On the plus side, it being so dry means we have had the opportunity to strike our most fearful weed, the dreaded, couch grass. We have also enjoyed beautifully sunny Saturdays for our first two socials of the year: the onion planting and the blossom bake. Again, almost TOO sunny, as many of the members joining in cited heat exhaustion as a reason to leave the jobs and eat cake!



*Late winter seed sowing*

(Partenon F1) despite it being an excellent seller, as the seed company which owns the rights of production for Partenon F1 had recently been taken over by the agribusiness behemoth Monsanto, whose pockets Tamar refuse to assist in the lining of as a matter of principle. This prompted me to delve a little deeper into the issue and I discovered that an incredible 60% of global seed production is under the control of just three corporations (Monsanto, Syngenta and DuPont) – with considerable implications for the resilience of our food systems.

As it is the height of Spring, we have of course been sowing and drilling seeds in their hundreds of thousands, which has led the growing team to reflect on the seeds themselves. I imagine most Canalside members place great importance on the provenance of your vegetables, fruit and other foodstuffs, but what about those potent little pellets of concentrated life potential that start it all off? I was ordering some courgette seed the other day from Tamar Organics, our main supplier, and the proprietor told me that in future they will not stock the variety in question



*Polytunnel seed drilling*



*One of the first germinations of 2017*

The issue of F1 hybrid seed is also contentious. F1 hybrid seed (as opposed to "open pollinated") has been produced from parent stock that has been inbred for multiple generations, producing seed with "hybrid vigour" that is virtually guaranteed to produce a strong, reliable and uniform crop. Sounds great... except that these plants have been so profoundly inbred that they cannot produce viable seed themselves. Furthermore that uniformity is a weakness. The bedrock of a resilient ecological system is a diverse gene pool; if we are all growing genetically identical carrots, say, and a new carrot disease comes along then the whole nation's supply can be wiped out very quickly, whereas if there is broad genetic diversity then there is a high chance some varieties will be more resistant to the disease. In any case, do we really want all our crops to look identical?

(Anyone who's seen the Canalside carrot share certainly couldn't accuse us of *that!*). And it will come as no surprise to learn that much of the breeding of these F1s focuses on appearance rather than flavour. Additionally, many brassica (cabbage family) F1s use a form of genetic engineering where a gene from the radish is inserted into other species; this technology skirts GMO legislation on a technicality relating to how the extracted genetic material is sourced, but many activists believe it is essentially genetic modification, and that vegetables grown from seed produced using this technique should be labelled as such. Finally, whilst anyone anywhere in the world can produce open pollinated seed and even breed new varieties with nothing more than a bit of a soil, to produce an F1 you need state-of-the-art laboratory conditions and multi-million dollar backing from a huge corporation – putting it out of the reach of farmers and growers, and wholly controlled by faceless agribusiness giants.

What was meant to be a muse on the profundity of seeds has swiftly turned into an anti-corporate rant! For this I apologise, and I should make it clear I am no purist – for a small number of crops we do use F1 seed at Canalside, usually to counter a specific problem that otherwise might cause complete crop failure. However we are constantly trying out open-pollinated alternatives with the aim of eliminating F1s from our production.

At Canalside we are proud to source our seed from small, independent producers/retailers – most of what we buy in comes from the aforementioned Tamar Organics and also the Seed Cooperative (a new incarnation that formerly traded as Stormy Hall Seeds). The Seed Co-op has raised hundreds of thousands of pounds through a share issue to members of the public (sounds like a good idea!) to buy a small farm in Lincolnshire, not just to produce seed for sale but also to breed resilient, open-pollinated varieties that will thrive in organic growing conditions in the UK – a most welcome development. They have been nominated for the Future Food Award in the BBC's Food and Farming Awards. Both these companies sell to home gardeners too and I would strongly recommend them. I couldn't possibly be plugging seed merchants without mentioning The Real Seed Catalogue, a small business in west Wales, and although Canalside can't buy from them as they aren't certified organic, their website has some excellent information on F1s and loads of instructions on how to save seed and breed your own varieties! I believe that ultimately the most sustainable and resilient approach would be for farmers and growers all around the country to save some of their own seed, perhaps specialising in particular species and sharing their harvest through an organisation such as the Seed Co-op, and one day I hope we can do so for at least one or two of our crops at Canalside as part of a movement for food production driven by growers and eaters together.

*Dom, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2017*

## **WINTER TURNS TO SPRING IN PICTURES: FEBRUARY**



*One of the new manure hotbeds loaded up*



*Planting early potatoes in one of the polytunnels*



*Planting seedlings in one of the polytunnels*



*Damage caused to polytunnel 5 by storm Doris*



*La Jimena delivery of Spanish produce*

**MARCH**



*Brassicas ready to go*



*First ploughing of the year using Leasowe Farm's John Deere tractor*



*Courgettes potted on and growing well*

**APRIL**



*Early 'garden plot' planting out*



*Polytunnel 5 secured and awaiting re-skinning*



*Rolling out the new fencing*

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/65686573@N02/sets/> for more!



*Asparagus with one more year to wait to try its deliciousness*

**NEW ARRIVALS...**

*Sumithra Konduru* joined the workshare team over the winter and has now had a good few months to settle into the work. When I caught up with her recently, she told me how much she



enjoys her weekly workshare workouts. She is also enjoying learning new things and seeing the veg grow before her eyes, having never really done any gardening before. Sumithra was definitely keen to join Canalside last summer – she got in touch as soon as she found out about us! Sumithra says that from the start she had a sense of familiarity about being here. We are grateful to Sumithra for her regular work contribution at the farm and, being an amazing cook, we have also feasted on wonderful fare (which is often deliciously spiced Indian food) from her kitchen at social events.

Winter is the time at the farm for making plans, and building and maintaining our infrastructure. Our community has continued to build too, and we welcome the following new members to Canalside who have all joined in the late winter and early spring:

- *Andrea Cortezar* • *Sujatha Menon* • *Iliana Pavlova* • *Andy and Maddie Vicat-Brown* •
- *Dave Lindsay* • *David Legrand and family* • *Amy Beaumont and family* •

We hope all these new members are enjoying their share and the experience of witnessing the turning of the seasons through it.

## **EDUCATION PROJECT** – by Ali Jeffery

The school visit season has now started, and I have a few visits that are almost booked for the summer months. This is the season when children will be able to learn about what the plants need to grow well and how the growers keep pests off our delicious vegetables. As soon as the dates are confirmed with the teachers I'll be sending out an email asking for help. If



*A game to find out what plants need to grow*



*Look what we found! Hunting for minibeasts in Canalside compost*

you would like to help enrich the visit for the children, by being an additional adult for them to talk to about what they are experiencing during their visit at the farm, and to help with logistics of the visits, please look out for those emails and let me know if you can help at all. As always, if you'd like to promote the opportunity for these free visits to your child's teacher or another teacher who you know, please take a flier from the hook by the pinboard in the collection space.

## **EVENTS** – by Ali Jeffery

The season is just beginning to get going on the socials front, as evidenced by two events in the last month kicking off both the growing season and the socials for 2017 at the farm.

### *April – the big spring work morning and social:*

The hottest weekend of the early spring heralded our annual event to plant the maincrop onions. This year, we are trialling planting the sets into black plastic, with expected benefits ranging from soil warming and moisture retention to weed suppression. The plastic sheeting was perforated with an ingenious roller that was designed and made by Dom using reclaimed,

waste building materials, such as guttering and a short piece of gas main. Running this along the beds created a hole for each individual onion, perfectly spaced, making planting easy on the workers.

After around 15,000 sets were planted, the workers enjoyed a delicious bring-and-share lunch. In the afternoon, a workshop about how to preserve vegetables by fermenting was run by member Erica Moody, which went down well with those who attended. Special thanks to Erica for her valued contribution overseeing lunch and running the workshop!



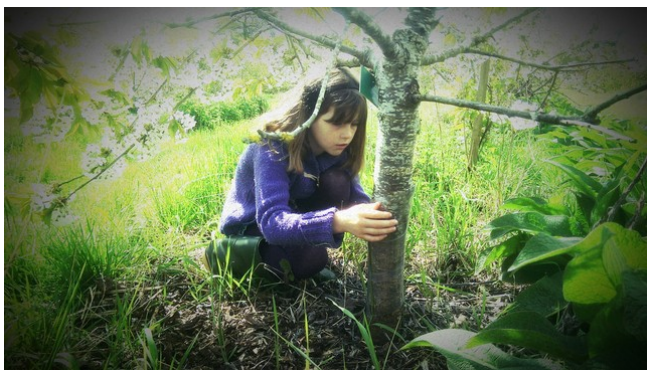
*The onion hole making device in action*



*A fieldful of onion planters*

**– Blossom Bake:**

Another sunny April day, and a special work morning in the orchard gave members the opportunity to enjoy the blossom as they



*Putting on tree guards*



*Cakes galore at the Blossom Bake*

worked, putting down a straw mulch around the trees and protecting the trees from deer and rabbit damage with spiral guards. The work was fuelled with a range of home-made goodies including cakes, flapjacks and brownies.

**Upcoming socials and events**

- June: Sun 11<sup>th</sup>** – Open Farm Sunday tours and picnic
- Sat 17<sup>th</sup>–Sun 18<sup>th</sup>** – Peace Festival publicity stall
- July: Sat 15<sup>th</sup>** – **big summer social** – annual summer party
- Aug: date TBC** - jam-making workshop
- Sept: Sat 9<sup>th</sup>–Sun 10<sup>th</sup>** – Leamington Food and Drink Festival publicity stall
- Sat 16<sup>th</sup>–Sun 17<sup>th</sup>** – **big autumn social** – potato harvest, camping weekend, harvest meal
- Oct: Sat 14<sup>th</sup>** – apple pressing, bring a picnic
- Nov: Sat 4<sup>th</sup>** – **big winter social** – beetroot harvest, shared meal

**Dec: date TBC** – final social of the year

**Jan: date TBC** – AGM

There may be additional events such as socials in the pub and skill share workshops which are added at shorter notice. Keep an eye on the weekly updates and other emails for details.

**Do you have an idea for an event?** As you will see there are some months with no events planned. Please get in touch if you have an idea for an event, workshop or activity that you would like to offer to other members. Last year we had a fantastic pop-up cafe run by member Xandra Gilchrist, which raised money for her chosen charity, Adoption UK. Maybe you are a budding restaurateur and would like to run one of your own! Or perhaps you have a skill that you could share with other members. Whatever your idea, contact Ali to discuss possible dates ([mail@canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk](mailto:mail@canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk)).

### **REMINDER: the social area is yours to use!**

With the summer weather hopefully on the horizon, your thoughts may be turning to a family party, a get-together of friends or some other outdoor event for which you'd like a venue. The social area is available for members to use for their own events. If you'd like to book it for a child or adult's birthday party, a camping weekend or any other kind of private event, please contact Ali to find out more ([mail@canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk](mailto:mail@canalsidecommunityfood.org.uk)).

### **THE SUMMER PARTY** – by Ali Jeffery

Thank you to the many wonderful people who have volunteered their time to help organise this year's summer party. We now have individuals and groups of people overseeing the food, the ceilidh band, the site, the bar ordering and the design work for publicity materials. This will enable everyone to enjoy the event, and is bringing a fantastic, new energy to the organisation of it.



*Summer party fire circle*



*Dancing in full flow at the summer party*

There are a few areas still needing volunteers to oversee the work. These are:

- publicising the event
- overseeing ticket sales
- organising a team to serve on the bar

It's a great opportunity to get to know other members and to help make a memorable event. We'd love to hear from you if you can spare some time to help with any of these aspects.

## **CANALSIDE COMMUNITY FOOD - PARTNER PROJECTS' UPDATE**

### *The Willows Care Farm, by Ness Ainscow*

The Willows Project continues to run its 'Farm Experience Day' on Wednesdays and 'Enterprise Friday' sessions, for adults with special needs and autism. £45/day/participant 10am-4pm. The

participants are thoroughly enjoying the extended growing season this year, for their flowers and herbs, provided in the protection of the small polytunnel. The Enterprise products you will see for sale in the Canalside barn, in Gaia wholefood shop in town, and in Lighthouse Pavilion Café.



If you would like to hire our cabin at Canalside, join in current sessions or have new sessions you would like to run with us, do contact us: [thewillowsproject@gmail.com](mailto:thewillowsproject@gmail.com)  
[www.thewillowsproject.org.uk](http://www.thewillowsproject.org.uk)



**MEMBERS' CORNER** Do you have any interesting projects, charity fund-raisers or other not-for-profit activities you'd like to promote to your fellow Canalsiders? If so, then this is the space for your free advert! Get in touch with Ali for advertising in future issues of the newsletter.

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*Dear Canalsiders, I am in the process of making liveable my first land-based home of my own and am looking for the following second-hand items:*

*kitchen base units / cupboards*

*washing machine*

*fridge and freezer as one / separately*

*lengths of timber, various sizes, 50-120cm long*

*light shades for ceiling pendant lights*

*pieces of vinyl floor covering, various sizes*

*carpet*

*rugs*

*curtains, curtain rails / rods*

*bedside cupboards*

*kitchen trolley max 80cm long*

*chest of drawers*

*4' 6" wide mattress*

*If you have help with any free or reasonably priced items you no longer need, please send details including measurements and a photo to [ali\\_jeffery@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:ali_jeffery@yahoo.co.uk) Thanks so much! Ali*

**SMALL ADS** Do you have any business or money-making ventures you'd like to advertise to other members of Canalside? Then this is the space for you. Please contact Ali for future adverts.

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**Holiday cottage in north Norfolk: For four people, in a quiet village near Burnham Market. Private garden and parking, pub with restaurant is five minutes' walk. See pics and details at [www.cosycornernorfolk.co.uk](http://www.cosycornernorfolk.co.uk) or call Pat on 01926 427917.**

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Link to our Flickr photos for a fuller selection of photos of the past 3 months:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/65686573@N02/sets/>

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Next newsletter due out early November 2017.

Deadline for ads with payment, and notices – Sunday 29<sup>th</sup> October 2017.

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