

UNICORN

Voice from the fields



With spring on its way, we're on the verge of starting another growing season and the main thought we have is just hoping it's nothing like last year. 2012 was a truly terrible year of weather for farmers and growers around the country and for us at Moss Brook, new growers with a new business, we really struggled. We are trying to banish the memories of all the rain, of us on our hands and knees caked in mud hand-planting tens of thousands of seedlings, of all the weeds we couldn't control, and the army of slugs literally everywhere we looked...

Hope springs eternal... We're hoping for better weather. We're hoping slug predator populations (toads, beetles etc.) increase and regain the natural balance with the slugs. We're investing in some new weeding implements and we hope they make a big difference to our weed control. Two of the biggest problems that most growers will have experienced last year is a loss of soil fertility, because the rain will have washed out so many nutrients, and compaction, because most growers will have had no choice but to take tractors onto wet soil and, in the process, ruin their soil structure – we hope we can correct these problems on our site. Most of all, we hope we're still in business this time next year!

continued overleaf...

Foodzine, Spring(ish) 2013

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Payback Time

In 2008 we asked our local community if they wanted to invest in Loanstock, many of you decided to. Below is the 'Summary of Intent' explaining why we wanted to raise the cash:

Unicorn has always been a business based on strong principles. We strive to meet these while being wise to the economic climate that affects our success as an independent trader. We are confident that our model of trade can be resilient and successful and we want to continue to inspire others to start up similar ventures.

One key aim is to buy/secure land in the Northwest to convert to organic growing. The produce grown will supply Unicorn and other regional independents. More regional produce obviously reduces transport; helps secure future supply lines and provides the freshest produce possible. Our study into the feasibility of buying land and managing land for local fruit & veg growing has proved very positive.

We are currently raising funds through Loansock to invest in the future of Unicorn Grocery.

(from Summary of Intent 2008)

So we did manage to buy 21 acres of land 14 miles away. Many of you will have seen the updates, some of you have volunteered there and many more would have eaten their kale, parsnips, leeks and garlic.

continued overleaf...

Seasonal Update

stores of rooty staples such as beetroot, carrots & spuds begin to dwindle.

The excitement will come with the arrival of the first new-season crops. Lines such as local rhubarb from Dunham Massey and Sale, spinach & sorrel from Lincolnshire's Strawberry Fields, plus asparagus from Nicholas Watts of Spalding will herald the end of this Hungry Gap.

Come May, we should be into the first local broad beans from Glebelands in Sale. Speaking of Glebelands, expect the balance of

different leaves in their salad mix to change with the season... as things warm up, rocket, frizzy mustards and butterhead lettuces will add to their ever-spectacular selection!

In mainland Europe, apple stores are low at the end of a poor harvest, so we'll be looking to the Southern Hemisphere sooner than usual. While citrus fruits will become less abundant, the first stone fruits will begin to fill our top shelf display. Loquats will be first, and cherries, apricots and peaches shouldn't be far behind. Fresh French garlic in May is always a treat, plus we should have some from our own land courtesy of Moss Brook Growers.



Spring is both a challenging and exciting time for sourcing UK fruit & veg... brassicas such as kale and leafy cabbages become scarce, as warmer longer days encourage them to flower, while

Unicorn Grocery, 89 Albany Road, Chorlton, Manchester, M21 0BN.
www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk

Payback Time cont...

The land is farmed by tenant farmers; another workers co-operative called Moss Brook Growers. Your investment has helped create a brand new organic farm just a few miles from our city, providing us (and you) with fantastic local veg. In addition to farming Moss Brook have hosted visits with many groups helping to pass on a deeper understanding of how the food is produced.

So back to the Loanstock reminder. Thanks to all of you who invested, many of you have sent wonderful messages as we have paid back the investment over the last few months however we still have some Loanstock here that hasn't been claimed. Maybe you moved house so the recent letter went to the wrong address? Or you put the forms under a pile of other things to do? Or maybe it has simply slipped your mind? Anyway we would love to pay you back so please get in touch and thank you for your support.

Co-operatives Fortnight 22nd June to 6th July 2013

Local
For every £1 spent in a co-operative, an additional 40 pence is generated for the local economy

Loved
Co-operatives give people an equal say

Trusted
Where trust is low, like energy and food, co-operatives are thriving

Voice From the Field cont.....

On the positive side, demand for our crops is up. Most of our produce is sold to Unicorn, but we're lucky to have other great customers – a couple of box schemes and a catering supply & distribution co-operative called Manchester Veg People. Funnily enough, the horsemeat scandal has been providing an interesting backdrop to our situation – it has exposed the long and murky supply chains that lie behind mainstream food retail, and the inevitable cut corners of our supermarket-driven cheap food culture. Amidst all this we feel really lucky to be part of such a simple and honest set-up – we pick our crops and drive them straight to Unicorn or our other customers. It's ridiculous but that feels slightly radical in this day and age.

We also feel enormously grateful to all the people who have volunteered with us – including lots of Unicorn customers. There's been such an interest in what we're doing, as well as the wider ethics and production methods in food and farming, we can't help but feel we're supplying an enlightened customer base here in south Manchester. Big thanks to you all, and here's to a better growing season! (Moss Brook Growers)

Co-operation came to Chorlton when the Manchester & Salford Equitable opened a grocery branch on Tuesday 24th March 1896 on Wilbraham Road . The building is now a bookmakers next to the HSBC bank. The Equitable word was put in there because there was another Manchester co-op called the Industrial but that went into administration in 1870. 100 years later Unicorn Co-operative Grocery opened..

The fortunes and global extent of co-operation is not well reported. It doesn't make dramatic headlines. It doesn't feature at business schools. The old saying is hiding your light under a bushel. A bushel is eight gallons dry measure, and sometimes apples still arrive here in 5/8 of a bushel. Some commodities like wheat, oats and soya beans are still traded in bushels. We're glad we only have use the metric measures and no fractions.

Co-operatives are local, loved and trusted. Whether it is sparkling wine, bread and toys or energy providers. Seventy five per cent of all fairtrade commerce is by co-operative producers and retailers. You can find UK organisations that are co-operatives by searching the FSA Mutuals Register online. There are more quietly trading than you think.

UNICORN PRICE CHECK.....INGREDIENTS (23/4/10)

We sell organic fresh produce at similar prices to our non-organic competitors. We are able to do this because; we buy direct cutting out wholesalers & packers wherever possible, we minimise wastage (ever looked in the bins outside a supermarket?), and we choose an affordable mark-up - most supermarkets choose to make organic produce a premium brand when it doesn't need to be. As a workers' co-operative with no external shareholders we are not driven exclusively by profit.

Providing decent food at affordable prices is at the heart of Unicorn. Everyone should be able to afford good food.

Price per kg	Unicorn	Asda	Sainsburys	Tesco
Almonds 250g	£1.99 n/o	£2.53 n/o	£3.05 n/o	£1.93 n/o
Brazil Whole 250g	£2.19 n/o	£2.19 n/o	£2.50 n/o	£2.45 n/o
Coconut Desicated 250g	49p org	96p n/o	£1.00 n/o	£1.99 n/o
Chick Peas 1kg	£1.85 org	£1.90 n/o	£2.18 n/o	£2.18 n/o
Red Lentils 1kg	£1.59 org	£2.00 n/o	£1.79 n/o	£1.99 n/o
Linseed 1kg	£2.49 org	£13.50 n/o	£8.00 n/o	£8.70 n/o

TO SEE OUR WEEKLY PRICE COMPARISON ON FRESH PRODUCE COME INTO UNICORN OR CHECK UNICORN'S WEBSITE. UP TO DATE PRICE LISTS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE FOR MOST PRODUCTS ON THE WEBSITE.