UNICON

Foodzine, Winter, 2014

Printed at Marc the Printers on 100% recycled paper

cheep cheep



As we move into 2014 there will be a few changes at Unicorn.
Growth in sales, particularly fresh produce, has

Growth in sales, particularly fresh produce, has meant it's a very tight squeeze in our veg cold store so we are expanding the storage space. This will result in a little rejig with our customer toilets which will reduce from 3 to 2 but will get a much needed refresh and will have better disabled access.

We will also lose a little shelf space by the toilets so some products will be finding a new home on the shop floor. As the sales of the fantastic food made by our deli team has increased we are building a new kitchen on our roof where they can make even more wholesome ready meals. These will be more affordable than products we buy in, tastier and fresher. We have been working with local co-operative architects Loop on the plans for these changes and we keep you up to date on when things are happening and keep disruption to a minimum.

With growth comes more work and more workers. One of our new workers Lee talks about joining Unicorn overleaf. There is also an update on donations we have made from our 1% and 4% fund (see our Principles of Purpose). We are very proud to be in a position to support such amazing projects in the UK and around the world.

We don't just want Unicorn to grow though, we want to grow the idea that our kind of business is a viable option for others, and our toolkit developed to support similar start ups, the Grow a Grocery Guide, (see our website) continues to be really well received and there is an exciting new venture in Prestwich, Village Greens Community Co-op, opening very soon. Shares in the venture are still available.

Below we have a little more optimistic piece from the growers co-operative Moss Brook who farm on our land near Leigh. After a truly awful season last year their hard work seems to be paying off, but as are all farmers, they are at the mercy of the elements.

If you want to find out more about who we donate to, growers we trade with, or more about how we trade please looks at our website which has a wealth of information on why and how we trade.

Voice from the fields



After years of wet summers 2013 finally brought us a hot and sunny one, and what a difference strong sunshine makes to plant growth. The better weather helped us finally (in our fourth year of growing) achieve 'commercially respectable' yields in a few of our crops, notably kale, broccoli and perpetual spinach. It can't be emphasised enough just how much difference the weather makes. In the horrowshow of 2012, with the deluge of failed crops, we produced something like 6 tonnes of vegetables. This year we produced over 18 tonnes. Along with the gradual improvement in our growing skills, it's all been very heartening. As ever, though, the year brought its fair

share of challenges, most of all our illfated irrigation system which broke just as the July heatwave started. With such low rainfall all year, this caused too much stress for crops like celery and lettuce and affected yields all round the rotation. We've also struggled with the lengthy process of bringing electricity to the site but remain wearily hopeful that this can still go ahead pretty soon.

So, we've had a better year but we continue to hope for a year with





commercially respectable yields across the majority of our crops (and not just one or two), with manageable stress levels and with - hope beyond hope - maybe even a small bit of profit at the end of it. After lots of ups and downs we just about remain on course for financial break-even by the end of our 5th year of growing (i.e. this time next year).

Looking ahead - we're currently planning our crops for next season, probably looking to grow more broccoli, beetroot and squash and otherwise tweaking with the growing schedule. Celery and true spinach continue to be really tricky to grow well, but we'll be cautiously trying again. And after two years of establishing our asparagus bed, we're very excited about the first harvest around May time. Oh and Stuart's having another baby, due in early spring! Between us that's four Moss Brook babies in three years, not a bad yield... Stuart & Rob



New Faces

Year on year Unicorn keeps getting buisier, which means more work and more members. All good stuff, we love our work and new members bring new enthusiasm. We are very proud to be a workers cooperative, we all share the roles needed to keep the shop running efficiently; everything from strategic planning, to packing bags of grains, sourcing new products and serving you on the till. Here Lee, one of the new faces around, says how it's been starting out. I was excited to join the Unicorn team, not only because I loved the shop, I also wanted to be a part of a vibrant worker co-operative. In my previous job I was a retail manager, and have found that working in a co-operative at Unicorn rewards me with the positives of



management, such as responsibility and involvement in the wider business. However, it doesn't include some of the more challenging issues such as managing people within a formal hierarchy. Three months into my role as probationary member, I have been involved with most of the day-to-day tasks as well as gaining more knowledge of the business and planning within the grocery. I feel that there is still plenty more for me to learn and I know that there will be experienced, supportive Unicorn members to guide me through.

Seasonal Update

This time last year we were all doom and gloom... UK apples were coming to a premature end, potatoes were small & scarce, while UK brassicas were virtually impossible. It is so nice to be able to report that our UK growers have fared much better this time round.

Locally, from our own land near Leigh, Moss Brook Growers should have a leeks and kale right through to the spring. As ever, the winter Glebelands salad mix will be packed with hardier leaves such as winter purslane – but as thermometers drop in Sale, we will be more reliant on French lettuces.

Elsewhere in the UK, there will be cauliflowers & cabbages from Francis Sampson in Cornwall. He farms on a coastal patch of land that generally misses frosts, meaning he can serve up produce at a time when other growers struggle (including his ever-fantastic purple sprouting broccoli). The Wass family in Yorkshire still have plenty of potatoes, so we hope not to turn to Europe as early as in 2013.

Fruit-wise, a strong UK apple crop should see us through to the start of April, but pears are coming to an end. January to April is prime European citrus time, with oranges (navels & bloods) really hitting their peak.

Supporting Food Sovereignty

During 2013 we've been introduced to the concept of Food Sovereignty, which has emerged from peasant farmer movements worldwide and really sums up the kind of food system we'd like to see. This approach calls for a fair, sustainable and democratic food system that is controlled by producers and consumers, rather than the traders and agribusiness corporations who currently have so much power over the food we grow and eat. It goes way beyond the free-market 'food security' approach and rejects inappropriate, corporate-controlled solutions to hunger such as GM technology and cash crop monocultures.

Through our 1 and 4% Funds, we support a number of agriculture-focussed organisations around the world. Although they are all different and although they don't all use the term, we've realised that the Food Sovereignty approach is the thing that links them together, and we're really pleased to be supporting that.

Here are some of the things we've been able to help them with over the past 12 months.

Tree Aid's programme of business support and agroforestry training has helped develop 45 tree-based enterprises in 10 communities in Ghana, making tree protection and planting economically viable.

Via UK social enterprise Zaytoun, olive oil producers from the Palestinian Fair Trade Association and Canaan Fair Trade have received training and advice on quality control, food safety and EU standards to assist them in exporting their produce to Europe.



Through the El Salvador Permaculture Association, 18 rural communities have established a local Permaculture Association in one of the most impoverished and isolated districts of the country. Over 1000 subsistence farming families are now implementing a range of sustainable practices to improve soil fertility, reduce chemical use and diversify their food crops.

We bought a shipping container (tool store and shelter) for the Kindling Trust's new Farmstart project in High Legh. Through providing low-cost access to land and machinery, advice and access to a ready market, this project incubates new commercial organic growers that will hopefully go on to supply veg to our city.

If you think your school would be interested in a visit to Unicorn please hand this in to the teacher.

Dear Teacher,

As a local business that is keen to be involved in our local community we are happy to take part in school visits talking about things that are closely related to us e.g. being a worker co-operative, seasonality, fair-trade.

Over the years we have visited many local schools and had visits by them to our shop. In spring time we often combine visits with the local community allotment, Grow for It. We split the class into two halves (around 15 in each group) and while one group has a tour of the shop the other half has a trip to Grow for It where they can see produce growing and have a chat about how things grow.

If you think this is something your school would be interested in please get in touch. We are often limited by suitable times and the amount of kids we can have in the shop at once so we need a bit of notice to plan for this.

If you are interested please get in touch with kellie@unicorn-grocery.co.uk, we look forward to hearing from you. In the meantime here is a fun video to share with the class.

Store Wars.....http://youtu-be/hVrIyEubh_E