

# UNICORN

**Foodzine,  
Winter, 2014**

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## As we move into 2014 there will be a few changes at Unicorn.

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 look 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 horrorshow 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 ill-fated 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

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