

*November 2012*

I have a feeling that I said recently that I wouldn't mention the weather at the moment. I take that back. It is seriously wet out there and the showers have just started again as I write. Driving from Pegsdon to Shillington there is standing water where I haven't seen it before and on my travels to Bedford this afternoon there were flooded patches in the fields all the way up the A6. It is quite incredible really, how the rain is affecting us all and yet we can do nothing to stop it.

The Autumn sowing has come to a standstill and our drill has been put away in the barn for the winter. If and when the fields dry out enough for us to get on them again in the next month or so, we still need to try to plant approximately 100 acres of wheat. Instead of using this high-tech, precise and satellite guided piece of kit we are resorting to old fashioned broadcasting. This involves spinning seed onto the surface of the soil (with a rather slap-dash seed rate) and then cultivating it in with a set of tines. This is obviously less accurate but is in fact a relatively quick way to sow a field and in the past has been very successful. We had to broadcast two fields of wheat at Pirton a couple of years ago and were initially concerned that these fields would produce relatively less grain. With our combine computer system, however, we were able to compare the yield maps with adjacent fields that were planted with our drill and there was hardly any difference.

Following a successful foraging outing by Dave, Millie & Wellie the dog, this season's sloe gin is made and tucked away in the pantry, gradually changing colour and getting darker and more syrupy every day. Stocks are running a bit low and previous year's vintages are proving too tempting to leave alone. I discovered last year's raspberry and lemon gins, stewing away in bottles in the back of our cupboard. I tried them and discovered that although they are yummy (and rather powerful) they need a bit more time. Hopefully they will be perfect for a hip flask on a cold day in January.

I recently read some of the results of a UK survey of 2000 people aged between 16 and 23 year old. Of those questioned, 11% thought that eggs came from wheat or maize and 36% didn't realise that bacon came from pigs. I found this astonishing and terribly sad, but I don't believe we can criticise if we don't act and try to teach the youngest generations about farming and the countryside.

To do our bit we are in the process of organising next year's farm walks and have decided to include a couple of school visits as well as the usual adult groups. This is going to involve a bit more planning and we are now compiling a list of things to do that are suitable and entertaining for primary school children. We are going to show them seeds from each of our crops alongside foods that are made from each of them and if possible, bake something from flour ground from our wheat. Other activities on the list are comparing woodland and grassland plants, creating "journey sticks" and most importantly bug hunting! When I was younger I used to spend hours out in the undergrowth collecting snails and ladybirds, leaves and soil, trying to create a mini zoo. I have a feeling history might repeat itself in our house as yesterday I found two little composty hand prints and a house plant looking a little sorry for itself. A one year old's version of rummaging around outside under the trees!