

Tolhurst Organic Partnership C.I.C.

A Hub for AgroEcology at Hardwick

Specialist Growers of Organic Vegetables for Over 30 years

Deliveries through Local Box Scheme

Organic Consultants & Horticultural Advisors



Farm Walks at Hardwick

Since we started at Hardwick in 1988, having been organic growers in Cornwall 12 years previously, we have conducted farm walks. This has grown over the years to become a very regular activity particularly during the growing season from March through to November. Visitors are coming from all over the world for a variety of reasons, the main one being to study our close relationship with bio-diversity within food production and the fact that we have a long term closed-system avoiding the use of any animal derived materials for fertility maintenance. Our approach to local marketing and optimisation of local resources has also become a major attraction. Visitors are from all backgrounds, practicing or aspiring farmers/growers are the main clients followed by academics from universities and colleges, Ministers of Agriculture; we have had 4 so far, we are keen to demonstrate the possibilities of organic production to as many as possible and welcome everybody.

We are conveniently located in the middle southern area of the United Kingdom in an area designated as "Outstanding Natural Beauty" The farm is 2 miles from our nearest railway station with direct links to all areas and airports. It is one hour drive from Heathrow airport and 15 minutes from the M4 motorway. Hotel accommodation is available close by.

So what is there to see at Hardwick? Our site is quite compact just 8 ha of rather poor quality stony thin land nestled below the edge of the Chiltern Hills at the edge of the floodplain of the River Thames. It is divided into several areas of cropping with a well developed infrastructure:

- 1. Field crops** distributed over a seven year rotation in two separate fields a total of 7ha This is where we grow the most common staple crops such as potato, brassicas of all types, onion/leek, root crops, squash and sweet corn interspersed with a variety of different green manure crops for long and short term periods within the rotation. Within this patch-work of crops, (there will be up to 25 different ones) will be the diverse features of bio-diversity in action, this will include a selection of different beetle banks and areas where nature is allowed to inter-act with our crops to protect and enhance their growing environment. We also have a working area of small scale woodland within field boundaries and an established (2006) coppice area providing raw materials and firewood as well as encouraging a wide range of bio-diversity. Field crops are grown using mostly tractor equipment with some hand labour.
- 2. Agroforestry site.** This was planted during 2015 and is on 6 acres in one of our vegetable growing fields, This is a trials into a new system of vegetable production and contains some fruit trees within other trees in an alley system. It is to be monitored by Organic Research Centre and Woodland Trust and will demonstrate a range of different options for food and fibre production.
- 3. Compost area,** this is using locally produced waste-tree material around 250 cubic metres annually. It is a windrow system turned using a small excavator. The resultant material is used on some field areas and within our Walled Garden area. It is the main ingredient for our plant growing media.
- 4. Walled garden,** this is 500m away from the field crops and is just under 1ha. This is where we grow a huge range of small area very intensive crops mostly using pedestrian machinery and hand methods. Over 50 different crops will be grown here in a season, along with around 120.000 plants for use in the field and gardens. Plant propagation



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is an important part of our system and we grow all our own material either as bare root plants for field work or as modules for the garden. The rotation in the garden is 9 years with many examples of green manure fertility building crops and relay green manures. The latter is a system that we have pioneered here to allow the growing of green manures and crops together at the same time.

5. Dedicated plant raising greenhouse. This is within the garden area and produces around 60,000 plants each season using our home produced plant substrates (growing media) this space is in use for 9 months of the year.

6. Tunnel area within the garden this is an area of 1500 square metres were we have an all year around cropping rotation growing a wide selection of salad crops, as well as some plants for field use. Some relay-green manure are grown also within crops.

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8. Packing shed, purpose built for preparation and packing of our produce, this also includes an insulated storage area for cool crops and winter storage of other produce. The shed also serves as a meeting and seminar room with the farm office and additional storage upstairs. We have a purpose built kitchen for catering and can provide meals for up to 30 persons.

9. Machinery shed, this is an old converted engine house which we use for repair and maintenance of our equipment. It is adjacent to the packing shed.

So if you are interested in learning how bio-diversity can work for you within a food producing system then you need to see how this can be done on any scale by visiting this long established working example.

For more details of what we do visit our website www.tolhurstorganic.co.uk

Or email info@tolhurstorganic.co.uk

The average farm walk takes around 4 hours in total, the larger the group then generally the longer it takes. Standard fees are:

Up to 3 persons £140 + VAT

Up to 12 persons £180 + VAT

Up to 20 persons £200 +VAT

Larger groups can be accommodated, please enquire for prices. Weekend farm walks are not usually possible, if there is one available then the price is as above but subject to an extra 50%. A range of other options are available such as in depth meetings to look specifically at a subject.

We are happy to provide group vegetarian home-made lunch/refreshments as well, made to order.

Study tours We know all the best organic farms to visit and have a wide range of contacts within the UK, we have a lot of experience of designing and setting up study tours, anything from one day to a week can be organised along with overnight stops and catering. Let us know what you would like to study and we will set it up.



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