

# 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:

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 established (2006) being a 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. All of our farm is certified as organic, we have held the Soil Association standard since 1976 we are also certified as Stockfree Organic. Our farming system excludes all animal inputs and demonstrates a very high level of self-sufficiency in fertility building.
3. Agro-forestry. This was established in 2014 as a tree and fruit planting on 3ha with vegetable crops in alley cropping.
4. Compost area, this is using locally produced waste-tree material around 350 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.
5. Strawberry production. We have over 45 years of experience of organic strawberry production and plant propagation and can demonstrate a variety of cropping systems designed for local sales. We have continuous trials into strawberry varieties.
6. 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 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

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- 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.
7. 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.
  8. Cut flower production. This is small scale primarily for our retail outlet and for weddings and events.
  9. Tunnel area within the garden this is an area of 1500 square metres where 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.
  10. 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.
  11. 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.
  12. Carbon footprint study. We have done a considerable amount of work over many years and have a clear picture of the carbon footprint dynamics of the farm. We are able to demonstrate the reality of monitoring and ways of improving the farms carbon cycle.
  13. Re have had a close affiliation with Organic Research Centre since its inception in the early 80s and have regular trials work in progress on our farm. For 2019/20 we have three trials under various stages.
  14. Lin's VegShed. This is our new replacement farm gate sales outlet. It has become an important sales outlet and a community hub much loved by local residents. It is run on an "honesty box" system.

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. We have a great deal to see here and there is something for everybody.

For more details of what we do visit our website [www.tolhurstorganic.co.uk](http://www.tolhurstorganic.co.uk) Or email [tolhurstorganic@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tolhurstorganic@yahoo.co.uk)

The average farm walk takes around 3.5 hours in total, the larger the group then generally the longer it takes. Standard fees are: Up to 3 persons £160. Up to 12 persons £210 and up to 20 persons £250. 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 or seminars to look specifically at a subject, we are happy to provide meals/refreshments as well, maybe you would like to stay the whole day, or maybe need a quick snack before moving onto another farm. Our kitchen is EHO certified all food and drink is organic with the bulk coming from our own land.

**Study tours** We know all the best organic farms to visit and have a wide range of contacts within the UK.

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