

UNICORN

manchester's co-operative grocery

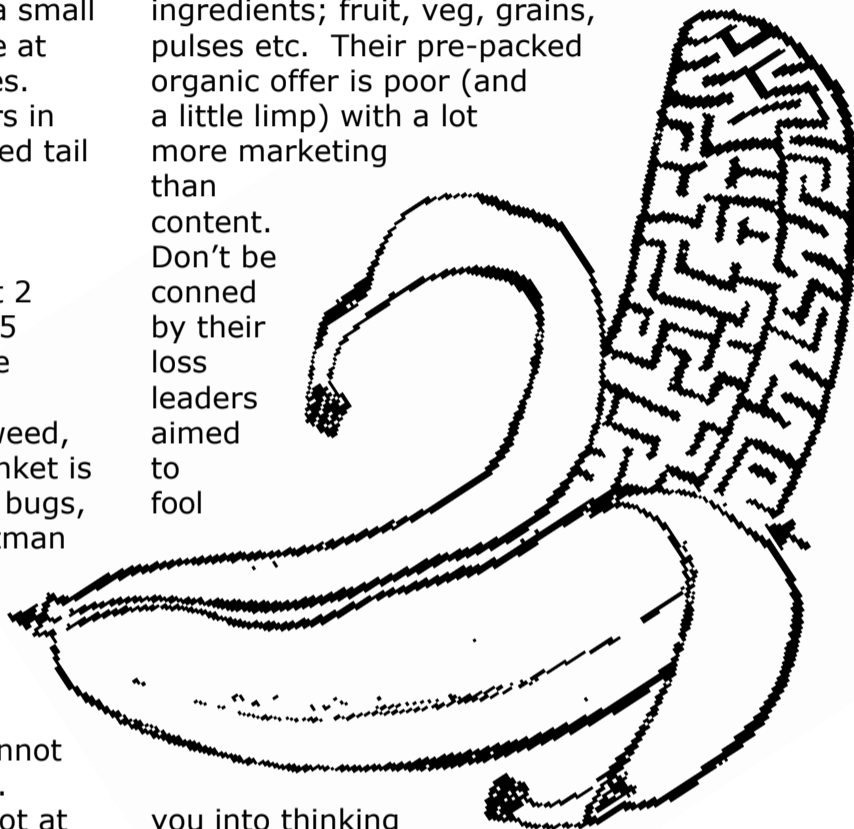
Foodzine, winter 2007/8



At the time of writing our last newsletter the work was just starting on our brown roof, a solution to our insulation problem and a habitat for the Black Redstart. This is a small robin sized bird that has adapted to live at the heart of industrial and urban centres. There are fewer than 100 breeding pairs in the UK. They are grey & black with a red tail and like to eat worms, spiders, berries, insects and seeds.

Now that the brown roof is completed Unicorn is definitely warmer and in just 2 months, the shoots & flowers of over 15 plant species have appeared amidst the rubble of the brown roof - including Mugwort, Eyebright, Mouse Ear, Chickweed, Groundsel and Clovers. The sedum blanket is thriving, attracting ladybirds and other bugs, while Whirlygig beetles and Water Boatman have already colonised the pond. We've even had a few brief visits from dragonflies. No Black Redstarts yet but we've already seen a couple of Grey Wagtails, Jays, Blackbirds, Woodpigeons & Sparrowhawks. We cannot wait to show it all off in the Springtime. We have also started work on a mini plot at the front of Unicorn where we will be growing vegetables. The plot will be especially useful when we have school visits so the children can see the full circle of how the food we eat is grown.

We have once again been carrying out price checks with the major multiples and they fail to compete on the price of everyday ingredients; fruit, veg, grains, pulses etc. Their pre-packed organic offer is poor (and a little limp) with a lot more marketing than content. Don't be conned by their loss leaders aimed to fool

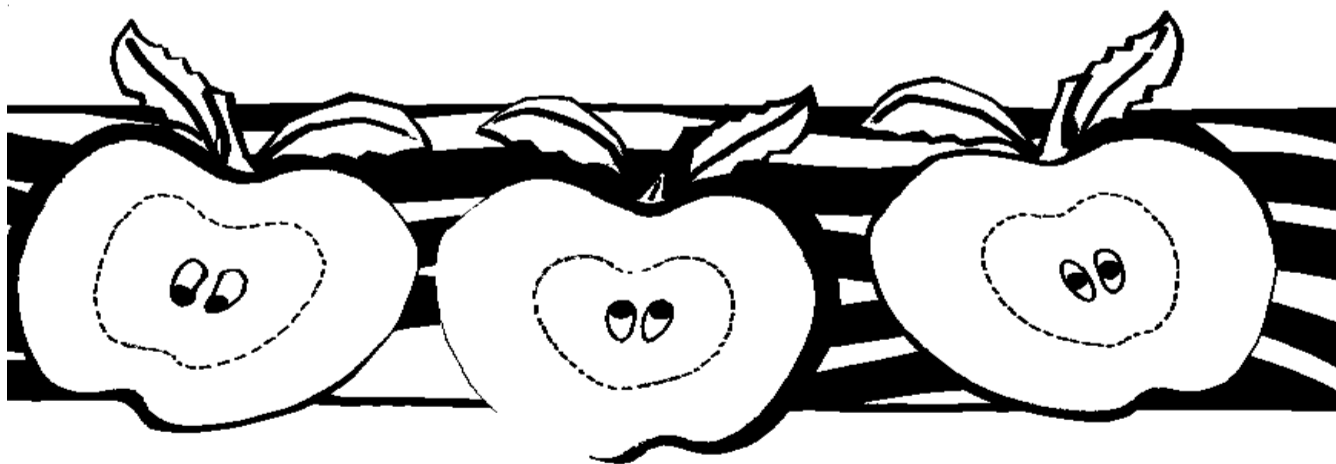


you into thinking they offer good value on general groceries. See the back page for a sample of our price check. As we buy direct with many growers our fresh range is as fresh as it can get.

However, as you can see in the veg outlook, this season has been affected by the horrendous growing conditions UK farmers suffered in the summer. We have had photos from one of our suppliers, Strawberry Fields, where they were wading through fields (as they described them 'paddy fields') so they could pick their crops. We will keep you up to date with how this will affect the availability of produce on our weekly veg news in the shop and on the website. Being flexible with your shopping basket and choosing 'the best of the crop' i.e. best of the season, will always mean you have the best value and tastiest meals. Another way to reduce your shopping bill is to use the groceries you buy. We throw away a shocking 1/3 of our weekly shop either as cooked food or food just allowed to die a slow and painful death in the fridge - how have we got so wasteful? A great new website lovefoodhatewaste.com give tips on how to stop the rot. Meanwhile we have an update on the Northwest Land Fund on page 2 and see the back page for the surprisingly good news about the Tesco campaign so far, but we are sure there will be more to come!

Hurray, 4 out of 10 bananas bought in the UK are now Fairtrade!

Veg outlook



The main story for UK growers this year has been the terrible summer weather, and all its effects. Two months of solid rain in June & July meant damaged crops, stunted growth, low harvests, and an inability to plant seedlings.

July is when a lot of winter crops normally get planted (sprouts, leeks, cabbages etc.), so the wet summer is likely to mean a lean winter. In these circumstances, it's a testament to the skill and hard-work of our suppliers that we've had such a wide range of UK crops on our shelves. This strong range of seasonal fruit & veg looks set to continue. Cavolo nero, sprouts and January king cabbages are some of the seasonal delights, and then there's the great range of UK apples & pears - hopefully set for their longest season yet.

Into the new year, however, the picture is less clear. Will UK spuds run out? Will Cornwall be mild enough to keep us supplied with greens? It's hard to say, but we're hoping for the best for our UK growers after a very difficult year so far.

Otherwise, over the next few months, it's a story of Southern Europe providing for the North - chestnuts, sweet potatoes, avocados & leafy celery are some of the star winter crops to look out for.

Last but not least we have the fantastic bounty of citrus fruits from Sicily, already underway. The distinctive smell of clementines, the spraying zest when you peel, the rush of juice from a blood orange, the vitamins that hit the back of your sore throat... it's exciting stuff!

Unicorn Grocery, 89 Albany Road, Chorlton, Manchester, M21 0BN.
www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk

Grower profile – Robert & Catherine Bates

Robert and Catherine Bates are our newest local vegetable suppliers from 34 miles down the road in the village of Whitegate near Winsford in the middle of Cheshire. The Bates farm 125 ha all of which is fully organic, at Marton Villa Farm, a mixed farm that has been farmed by the Bates family since 1972. The succession of the tenancy by Robert and Catherine heralded the change to farming organically in 2001. In the past the Bates had always adopted a more conservational approach to the way they farmed. “We had always farmed in a traditional fashion and were becoming increasingly disillusioned by the direction of modern day farming”, says Robert. With rising chemical fertilizer costs and an interest in building up soil fertility naturally – using composts,

manures and the nitrogen fixing capacity of clover and other legume crops – the reasons mounted up as to why organic farming was the right way to go. Robert and Catherine supply us with potatoes, carrots, parsnips, beetroots, swede and squash. The vegetables are grown in rotation with grass and clover leys and arable crops on a sandy loam soil. This Halloween they supplied us with carving pumpkins – other growers were not so fortunate and suffered poor or minimal pumpkin harvests due to the summer downpours washing nutrients out of the soil. The Bates have been growing potatoes for many years and are keen to experiment in growing new varieties. They now grow and supply us with the main crop varieties of Orla and Robinta and the waxy and tasty Pink Fir Apple. Robinta is a particular favourite of Robert’s for its excellent flavour and its hardiness out in the field.

Trees, hedgerows, grasslands, ponds and brooks provide an important habitat for a broad range of wildlife to coexist with the farm activities. This in turn helps to keep pests in check. Butterflies and bees thrive in the clover rich grassland. Buzzards, foxes, hares and badgers are common. Lapwings, sparrowhawks and skylarks are often seen, as well as many other birds in and around the farm. Marton Villa Farm aims to build a relationship with the public all too rarely found in modern farming. Robert and Catherine are happy to host farm walks and talks for groups throughout the year by prior appointment. “Farming organically has completely changed our outlook on life and the impact we all have on the planet. We have regularly shopped at the Unicorn and are now proud to be one of their producers.” Robert and Catherine Bates.

Urban Peasant Cooking up One Pot Wonders

There is a certain irony about peasant dishes like when you find Lancashire Hotpot on the menu of a pricey restaurant or when you’ve seen a celebrity chef having to make stale, dry bread for the cameras so he can create a wonderful panzanella. Peasant dishes do have some romantic attraction, especially if they come from warmer climes. Recreating wholesome, hearty and tasty without the antediluvian poverty. They are also easy to prepare, with simple ingredients and, while many are feeling the pinch, they are cheap. This is real good cheap food not the processed nonsense full of water and industry by-products. One pot wonders on low wattage

for slow cooking is the peasant way. But traditionally peasants aren’t big on shopping. Better to spend time in the kitchen instead of traipsing around supermarkets filling trolleys with soups, sugary breakfast cereals and prepared foods. It may sound strange for a grocer to recommend less shopping but you know it turns out we are the best place in town to get your basic ingredients and we do believe you can buy less and eat better. If you have any recipes you want to share please do, we can add them to the selection on the website. Please feel free to multiply the ingredients as much as you like, make a huge pot and share with friends or save for another day!



Rishtaye, a dish from Palestine (serves 2)
a) Make the garnish first which is a chopped onion fried in olive oil until golden brown .
b) Put 180 gms of split red lentils, 100 gms tagliatelle (or any ribbon type) pasta in a deep thick bottom pan and cover with water. When the water boils, turn down the heat to medium and add at least 1tsp of salt and 2tsp of cumin. Stir and stir - it becomes one big broth like mixture. I find I have to add more water, and more spices. About 20 minutes later it is done.
c) Serve the lentil mixture, re-heat the onions a little and garnish on top. As a finishing touch sprinkle with sumac
d) Goes well with a green salad.

Braised Roots & Tofu
One crock of simmering comfort food. This recipe slow cooks the food in an inch of liquid.

a) Chop into chunks several different root vegetables e.g. carrot, parsnip, potato, sweet potato, swede, Chioggia beetroot (looks pretty and doesn’t stain), sometimes celeriac.

b) Add something from above ground, like red pepper, big rounds of courgette or a few Brussels sprouts.
b) Chop some deep fried tofu into big cubes.
c) Take a big heavy pan and add a little groundnut oil, water, bouillon, dash of shoyu or tamari, drop of rice vinegar, a thumb length of kombu. Get it hot on the hob.
d) Drop in your veg and tofu. Stir it around. Set the heat to low, lid on.
e) Go and find something else to do whilst it simmers for 50 minutes or so.
f) I usually faff about on the internet and then boil some brown rice which takes about 40 mins to cook.
g) Serve the rice on the plate, put the veg & tofu on top and pour over any remaining liquid.

In Olde English Chorlton means peasant settlement.

“NorthWest Land Fund?”

As we mentioned in our last newsletter we have started our feasibility study into buying land in the North of England for sustainable food production i.e. growing veg. When we bought the Unicorn building 5 years ago we raised a substantial amount through Loanstock, this was extremely successful working well for us and investors.

It is possible we will again raise funds to buy



the land for regional organic production via loanstock. If you think it’s something you may be interested in investing in (don’t worry, you can change your mind) or you happen to be some kind of land buying expert with advice to offer, or you just have some questions, please get in touch.

veg@unicorn-grocery.co.uk

Bread

Matters

Andrew Whiteley, founder of the Village Bakery in Cumbria, summed up the state of British bread as “sad, soggy, nutritionally depleted and adulterated with hidden additives”. But it does keep “fresh” thanks to a good coating of E282 - Calcium Propionate. It’s all down to Chorleywood. Not the station on the Metropolitan line but an industrial triumph that produces 80% of UK bread. Most of that comes from just three big companies. How can you tell you’ve got a slice of Chorleywood? Well it’s light and forms a sticky starchy ball when squeezed in the palm.

Unicorn sells bread from Pauls in Melton Mowbray, Saker in Todmorden, and Village Bakery in Melmerby. Barely 3% of the UK bread comes from ‘craft bakers’ like these. There are only 3,000 left in the country - France has 30,000. The bread we sell is an entirely different product from Chorleywood. It’s denser, dries out, has taste, doesn’t keep for weeks and makes great toast. Really we’d like to have an in-store bakery or find an organic craft baker based in Manchester. If you read any bread recipe for home baking it usually have four ingredients - strong flour, water, yeast and salt. You won’t find E471, E472e, E300, or E920 because you can’t go into a shop and buy them. But, you’ll see them as ingredients of a supermarket sliced loaf. What you won’t see listed are the enzymes used. It’s modern baking’s big secret. A loophole classifies them as “processing aids”, which need not be declared. They have intriguing names like amylase, chymosin, and transglutaminase. They have some puzzling origins - maltogenic amylase is usually made from a genetically modified bacterial source, or phospholipase which may be derived from the pancreas of pigs, tasty hey! Further reading at : <http://www.breadmatters.com/>



Above, a picture of a proper baker, Paul, who’s bakery provides some of the fine bread we sell at Unicorn. This photo was taken when he spent the day outside Unicorn baking many, many pizza’s with local kids. He is passionate about his profession and surprisingly optimistic about the future, ‘I’m hungry. I like to know where my food comes from. I don’t want adulterated food. We need to localise food production and consumption. What an exciting time to be alive!’

As part of our 1% & 4% funds (see our Principles of Purpose available in the shop) we support a variety of groups locally and globally. Here we look at one of the projects, Just Haiti...



Would coffee growers in a remote corner of Haiti want to create their own coffee-export business? We asked some of them, as rain poured down. Their answer: “Yes!”

Most coffee is grown by subsistence farmers. But they get little of the profit, even with fair-trade pricing. Under our fair-trade-plus model, the farmers’ association will control the whole business, from growing to marketing. This can allow these growers—and hundreds more like them—to lift their families and community from

the poverty and other unjust conditions characterising Haiti for six centuries.

Many of us start the day with a cup of coffee. Our goal is to allow more people to start with coffee that is the fruit of just and fair relationships between consumers and producers. Donations to Just Haiti support project expenses including a revolving loan fund. We are extremely grateful to Unicorn for their strong support.

Jim De Quattro, co-director, Just Haiti
www.justhaiti.org

Booze news

All of Unicorn’s wine is vegan and organic and over the last year we have been able to add fair-trade wines as well, but what does a fair-trade winery really look like?

Stellar Winery, in the northwest of South Africa is the first organic wine to receive fair-trade accreditation. The cellar processes upwards of 5,000 tonnes of grapes from farms along the Olifants River and Namaqualand. The Rossouw family have owned the cellar for several generations and believe that sustainable organic farming and employee empowerment is the only way to run a successful business. The Stellar Fairtrade Workers Trust has been set up as a forum for workers to identify needs and also manage income derived from fair-trade sales. The Trust is made up of members of the Rossouw family and workers, and the workers have definitely been reaping the benefits of fair-trade and organic farming. All workers receive free housing with electricity and water, subsidised schooling, there is a crèche on site for childcare, they receive healthcare and a neighbourhood watch scheme. The winery recently bought a bus, which is used to transport workers to work, their children to school, and families into town if needed. Workers are encouraged to buy shares in the winery and, to date, own 26%. Recently the Trust has purchased a farm next to the cellar and it is managed and owned by workers who will sell the organic grapes to the winery. Maria Malan has been working for the Rossouws for 30 years; she started in 1976 as a domestic assistant to support her brothers and sisters after her mother died. Now she is the Farm Manager and acts as owner in the owners’ absence, she also acts as a councillor, represents rural workers on various committees, and has completed a 2 year course on table grape cultivation (only the second woman and first black person to ever do so). She believes that fair-trade has opened up possibilities, to improve their lifestyle and security and offers optimism for the future, the possibility of independence and self-employment.



So, have a look at our fair-trade range, there are several different grapes and should be something to suit most pallets. Cabernet Sauvignon, no added sulphur, £6.69, blackberry fruits and gentle tannins. Stellar Fair-trade Merlot £6.25, delicate red fruits, spice, smoky and fairly full. Moonlight Organics Fair-trade Shiraz £5.59 spicy nose with raspberry flavours, smooth and balanced, very drinkable. Stellar Sauvignon Blanc £6.69 Dry with aromas of crisp green peppers and cut grass. Moonlight Organics Fair-trade Chenin Blanc £5.49 delicate floral nose, balances fruit and a soft rounded finish.

Every little hurts

The Competition Commission

has been undertaking another enquiry

into the grocery industry. It's the fourth such enquiry in eight years, instigated – yet again – by complaints about the behaviour and suffocating strength of supermarkets. So, yet again, farmers, independent retailers, producers, and communities have spent a lot of time giving evidence – showing all the ways that supermarkets are bullying suppliers, killing off local shops, reducing choice, encouraging more car journeys and food miles. After all this, what's the Commission's recommendation? Build more supermarkets.

Build more supermarkets! There was a telling off for supermarkets for how they treat their suppliers (and hopefully an industry ombudsman will now be appointed), and the



Commission also expressed concern at how much land the big supermarkets own. But the basic recommendation was that we don't have enough supermarkets, particularly on the edge of towns.

As such, for all those working towards sustainable food, the Competition Commission has become a bitter joke. You can forget about a serious, long-term, sustainable vision for the industry from them. We can only hope that the Government sees the lack of logic in the CC's recommendations and, in the meantime, just get on with what we do.

Unicorn versus the multiples

Now, we are not advocating a price war with the supermarkets and we don't want to promote 'cheapness' as the holy grail. Groceries should be good value with those producing them getting a living

wage. However, we have price-checked our fresh fruit & veg (sample below) and as usual we come away beating them on price & quality. By buying real ingredients that you cook into wholesome goodness

you'll have the best value shopping basket and you won't have all that nasty packaging to deal with.

Veg & Fruit	Unicorn	Asda	Tesco	Sainsbury's	Waitrose
Carrots	92p/kg N. Yorks	£2.23/kg Holland	£1.04/kg UK	£1.04/kg Shropshire	£1.88/kg UK
Leeks	£2.40/kg Wales	£4.98/kg Notts	£3.98/kg UK	£4.97/kg Perthshire	£4.98/kg UK
Onions	£1.06/kg N. Yorks	N/A	£1.16/kg UK	£1.27/kg Holland	£1.46/kg UK
Potatoes	75p/kg Cheshire	79p/kg Devon	78p/kg N/A	83p/kg Shropshire	£1.33/kg UK
Parsnips	£1.52/kg Cheshire	£2.11/kg Notts	£2.98/kg UK	£3.98/kg Shropshire	£3.98/kg UK
Salad Leaves	£10.76/kg Sale	£16/kg many countries	£17.60/kg many countries	£15.80/kg USA/Spain etc.	£18.10/kg many countries
Apples	£1.96/kg Suffolk	N/A	£2.49/kg US/Italy	£2.74/kg UK/NZ	£2.49/kg Kent
Pears	£1.96/kg Suffolk	N/A	N/A	£3.14/kg Italy	£2.92/kg UK



KEEP CHORLTON INTERESTING!

On Thursday 22nd November the Planning Committee attended the proposed Tesco site here in Chorlton. They were met by a large crowd of local people & shopkeepers who wanted to express their support for the campaign and to voice their grave concerns about the positioning of a Tesco Express at the Esso site.

There were 4 speakers who covered specific planning issues. Councillor Sheila Newman aired her concern about Chorlton losing its individual charm and identity and how Tesco might have a detrimental impact upon the numerous independent shops. John Leech MP and Paul Ankers Lib Deb Councillor, were concerned about the increase in traffic and the dangers this would impose on the many school children crossing at a point

very close to the proposed site. Martin Tonks, an independent planning consultant working with the campaign, emphasised that the site was not in the primary shopping area. The Chair of the committee then talked to the gathered supporters who had an opportunity to air their views about the impact the proposed store would have on the area.

The Planning Committee met in the afternoon at the Town Hall. The Chair of the committee expressed that he had never witnessed such a strong opposition to a proposed development before.

After the four speakers passionately responded to the Planning Department's recommendation that the development should be approved, the Planning Committee then voted, unanimously, that the proposal should be '**minded to refuse**'.

This means that the Planning Department has to prepare a report for the next committee meeting with reasons to refuse the application. The Planning Committee meets again on December 20th for the final decision to be made. We expect the report to be made available to the public approximately one week before the meeting. If any further action is required we will inform people as soon as possible, via the e-mail list (see below) and displays at Unicorn. 'Keep Chorlton Interesting' aims to channel community feeling into action against the proposal, working on evidence to present at a Planning Committee meeting later this year.

To get involved email;
sayyestolocalshops@hotmail.co.uk