

UNICORN

manchester's co-operative grocery

Foodzine, Summer 2012

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“Cooperatives are a reminder to the international community that it is possible to pursue both economic viability and social responsibility.” UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon



International Year of
COOPERATIVES 2012

International years are declared by the UN to draw attention to and encourage action on major issues. The International Year of Cooperatives is intended to raise public awareness of the invaluable contributions of co-operative enterprises to poverty reduction, employment generation and social integration. The year will also highlight the strengths of the cooperative business model as an alternative means of doing business and furthering socioeconomic development. Have a look at the official 'Year' website for more info; social.un.org/coopsyear/

Meet the Co-operators Event in September

On the 24th September, during the Manchester Food & Drink Festival we're planning an evening event exploring and celebrating the co-operative model and inviting you to meet some of our co-operative suppliers. Plus there will be some food and drink, of course. Keep an eye on our website & in Unicorn for details of this and other events.



2012 is proving a difficult one for growers. Summer may finally have flickered into life, but the seeds for a challenging year have already been sown by a terrible Spring.

The 3 month period from April - June was the wettest on record. Soil, and the health of its structure, is the lifeblood of any organic farm. Not being able to get onto the land for fear of damaging this causes a wealth of problems... weeds get out of control and planting falls behind. Some Scottish farmers were still planting potatoes in July! Wet fields bring another problem: slugs. The phrase 'army of slugs' has been a common feature in conversations with growers around the

Seasonal Update

country, as they feast on spinach, brassicas and lettuce alike. Along with the rain, there was a distinct lack of sunshine. Low light levels and cold soil means plants don't thrive.

So, what are the implications for our range in the shop? Everything is coming into season later than we would normally expect - UK brassicas (cabbages, broccoli etc.) have been particularly scarce through June & July. With decreased supply and a high demand, we are seeing some increases in prices from our growers; not unreasonable given the conditions. As always, we are doing our utmost to maintain a strong range of good value UK produce, but inevitably we are supplementing it with more European stock than is often the case.

It's not all doom and gloom though! There have been scary stories in the press about the UK apple season. While yields of some varieties have been hit by cold weather at pollination time, growers tell us that many seem unaffected. Expect the first (tart) UK apples sometime in August, with the range expanding to its magnificent peak in the Autumn. Similarly, after a difficult start, the potato situation seems to be easing, with an ever increasing range of

varieties. The next few months will see an influx of weird & wonderful squashes - many from Strawberry Fields in Lincolnshire. Rooty brassicas (swede & turnips) are up and running for the year, while leeks from our own land will make an appearance in late-Summer. Another slow-starter has been French beans, but expect a steady supply from the wonderful Whitethorn Farm of Herefordshire over the coming months.

*“How are you?”. I don't know how to answer politely these days.
“Have a good day”. I wouldn't count on it.
I have been in a grey place lately.*

*Quote from one of our growers Pam at Strawberryfields. An excellent, human & honest account of life in the field.
www.strawberryfieldsorganics.co.uk/news*

The overriding message is that we'll be working hard to bring you an excellent range of fresh UK organic produce. You might have to bear with us through gaps in continuity in what is a difficult year, but being flexible with recipes is part of the fun isn't it?!

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

Voice from the fields

Update from Moss Brook Growers Co-operative, our tenants at Glazebury

It's been a difficult year so far, with cold and wet growing conditions, and plenty of infrastructure work to distract us from our growing - but amidst the mud and the rubble, we've made some great steps forward.

Growers around the country have been getting to grips with some of the worst growing conditions for many years - cold temperatures and persistently wet. Most crops are arriving significantly later than in the last couple of years and, for us, we've seen particularly slow growth to our salad crops like lettuce and celery, smaller bulbs on our garlic, and a completely failed block of spinach. Worst of all, however, has been the slugs... We've heard some reports saying that slug populations are up by 50% this year. It's certainly been perfect weather for them. They've done a good job at eating through many of our brassica seedlings, in particular. But... that's just the way it goes some years.

Despite that, we have set up more bits of machinery, put up a building and continued work on our irrigation system - all big,

foundational jobs that should last for many years. With the building we are now able to keep our machinery onsite, instead of going back and forth from a neighbour's farm, and we can enjoy our lunchtime butties in the dry! You wouldn't have thought it was a priority, given the weather we've had this year, but we're also pleased to be a few steps closer to a irrigation system, as this will be essential to the kind of successional salad growing (lettuce, radish, celery in particular) that we want to do. There's a submersible pump now in position 50m down our borehole, and that's connected up to a mains pipe distributing water around our site - just a control panel to go now. We always said that sod's law would give us plenty of wet weather in the year we put in our irrigation...

So it may be muddy and the slugs may be winning a few battles, but we feel like we're making progress towards making this land a long-standing and well established vegetable farm. We just hope the sun comes out a bit more often over the new few months.

Rob, Moss Brook Growers



Five Go Co-operative Visiting

Unicorn members have always enjoyed strong links with other co-operative businesses, and during the International Year of Co-operatives we decided it would be nice for some of us to visit some co-ops we'd never been to, to learn about how they do things, build relationships between ourselves and others in the movement, and generally have some nice trips out of Manchester. So far, five of us have visited a total of five other co-ops, with more to come later in the year. From a huge veggie wholesaler in Bristol to a little Fairtrade emporium in the Pennines.

A write up of the visits can be found from the co-ops page of our website - unicorn-grocery.co.uk/co-op.php (and click the link near the bottom of the page).

Co-ops Rock and Co-operation among Co-operators. Two new organic tea towels made in the UK to celebrate the International Year of the Co-op. On sale soon.



UNICORN PRICE CHECKINGREDIENTS (16/7/12)*

We sell organic fresh produce at similar prices to our non-organic competitors. We are able to do this because; we buy direct cutting out wholesalers & packers wherever possible, we minimise wastage (ever looked in the bins outside a supermarket?), and we choose an affordable mark-up - most supermarkets choose to make organic produce a premium brand when it doesn't need to be. As a workers' co-operative with no external shareholders we are not driven exclusively by profit.

Providing decent food at affordable prices is at the heart of Unicorn. Everyone should be able to have good food.

Price per kg	Unicorn	Asda	Sainsburys	Tesco	Waitrose
Mango 100g	£1.39 org	£1.47 n/o	£1.19 n/o	£1.75 n/o	£1.99 org
Quinoa 1kg	£4.39 org	£7.27 n/o	£7.58 n/o	£5.63 n/o	£5.98 org
Basmati Rice 1kg	£2.19 org	£1.68 n/o	£3.58 org	£4.98 n/o	£3.19 org
Mixed Herbs 50g	69p n/o	£1.50 n/o	£6.50 n/o	£2.68 n/o	£3.19 n/o
Peanuts 1kg	£2.99 org	£4.00 n/o	£4.32 n/o	£5.98 n/o	£5.76 n/o
Red Lentils 1kg	£1.79 org	£1.75 n/o	£3.18 org	£1.80 n/o	£1.89 n/o
Linseed 1kg	£2.09 org	£8.53 n/o	£10.90 n/o	£6.90 n/o	£3.98 n/o
Pumkin Seeds 1kg	£5.96 org	£9.70 n/o	£8.30 n/o	£8.33 n/o	£8.60 n/o

***ALL ORGANIC UNLESS MARKED N/O (NON-ORGANIC)**

TO SEE OUR WEEKLY PRICE COMPARISONS ON FRESH PRODUCE COME INTO UNICORN OR CHECK OUT UNICORN'S WEBSITE. UP TO DATE PRICE LISTS ARE ALSO AVAILABLE FOR MOST PRODUCTS ON THE WEBSITE.