



Whitmuir Farm  
 Lamancha  
 West Linton, EH46 7BB  
 T. 01968 661 908  
 E. handerson@onetel.net

## ABOUT WHITMUIR ORGANICS GROWING FOR PEOPLE WE KNOW

Whitmuir Farm is a Soil Association certified organic farm 15 minutes drive from Peebles and 20 minutes drive from Hillend, Edinburgh.

We are on the A701, (the Moffat road) 4 miles south of the Leadburn Inn junction and 2 miles north of West Linton.

Farm supporters are invited to join our farm club. We supply organic beef, lamb, pork, eggs, soft fruit and vegetables grown on the farm. We let supporters know what's available on a weekly basis; they order what they want. They decide how much they want to spend each month and pay by standing order and we balance the accounts every three months.

It's that simple. Supporters get fresh, organic food at a good price and can visit the farm as often as they like to see what's going on. We grow food for people we know and have some regularity of income. We also aim to organise and run educational events throughout 2007.

We run a Saturday morning shop for farm supporters and also do Edinburgh and local delivery runs fortnightly.

## WORK IN PROGRESS

Farm supporters will be relieved to learn that we have finally made a start on constructing the farm butchery, and have been digging out the shell in preparation for the builders. All being well, we should be ready to chill by the end of March.

We have put up a polytunnel for lambing, which will double up as a turkey tunnel in the autumn, with a salad crop in between. We have run out of space in the cowshed now that we are keeping the young stock until they're ready for beef from about 20 months.

We are also planning to convert another shed to provide a warmer and less windy shop. "You know it's windy when the kale you are weighing for a customer blows off the scales!" This will also mean we can stock a wider range of organic products such as pasta, flour, cheese, fruit juice, coffee and tea.



## WHOSE LIFESTYLE IS IT ANYWAY?

David Miliband, Minister of the Environment for England, cheerfully displayed his lack of joined-up thinking in early January when describing organic food as a 'lifestyle choice'. Peter Singer uses a bigger canvas in his recent book *Eating*:

"No other human activity has had as great an impact on our planet as agriculture. When we buy food we are taking part in a vast global industry. Americans spend more than a trillion dollars on food every year. That's more than double what they spend on motor

vehicles, and also more than double what the government spends on defense.

In addition to its impact on over six billion humans, the food industry also directly affects more than fifty billion non-human land animals a year. For many of them, it controls almost every aspect of their lives, causing them to be brought into existence, reared in totally artificial, factory-style units and then slaughtered. Additional billions of fish and other sea creatures are swept up out of the sea and killed so we can eat them."

**All this happens because of our choices about what we eat. We can make better choices.**

## DEGREES OF FREEDOM

The RSPCA 'freedom foods' standards set out five freedoms as the foundation of animal welfare:

- Freedom from hunger and thirst
- Freedom from discomfort
- Freedom from pain, injury or disease
- Freedom from fear and distress
- Freedom to express normal behaviour by providing sufficient space, proper facilities and company of the animal's own kind.

We work hard to ensure that our laying hens experience the first four freedoms: but these are essentially 'negative' freedoms. A dead hen is free from all these things.

We struggle a bit with the last one, though. Our hens have plenty of space inside their houses and when they are let out to pasture every day. They choose their company: the second batch of hens keep themselves to themselves even though they would have much more room if they went into the other house with the older hens. (Apparently, hens can recognize up to 90 other individual hens and know whether each one is higher or lower in the pecking order).

But here's what they consider normal behaviour. Getting up onto the outside of the nest boxes so they can launch themselves like Dumbo over the poultry netting. Getting into the cowshed so they can rake over the cows' silage in case there's anything interesting in it. Paddling in the stream. Finding a space between the hay bales where they can squeeze in to lay their eggs – and then moving to a new one if we rumble them. Holding on to the egg until they are let out

and rushing for the barn, only to drop it halfway when their muscles finally give up.

So we've been busy limiting their behaviour, making the netting higher and further from the houses, and giving them a boring bath to compensate for the lack of a stream. They all still insist on staying out from the moment the pop hole goes up to well beyond dusk – even in filthy wet weather - and the last ones in still do a final tour of the house to show who's in charge. (Which makes us wonder why in larger 'free range' systems nearly all the hens spend nearly all their time inside. Perhaps they have Sky Sports).

But we're not the only ones challenged by balancing the hens desire to express themselves and the commercial realities of producing eggs. The RSPCA standards still don't require laying hens to have access to the outside at all, and still permit beak trimming (to prevent stressed birds from hurting each other).

### Does this matter?

"The avian beak is a complex sensory organ which not only serves to grasp and manipulate food particles prior to ingestion, but is also used to manipulate non-food articles in nesting behaviour and exploration, drinking, preening, as a weapon in defensive and aggressive encounters. The beak of the chicken has an extensive nerve supply with numerous mechanoreceptors, thermoreceptors and nociceptors. Beak amputation results in extensive neuromas being formed in the healed stump of the beak...which give rise to abnormal spontaneous neural activity in the trigeminal nerve."



Gentle, Michael J.; Waddington, David; Hunter, Louise N. and Jones, R. Bryan: Behavioural evidence for persistent pain following partial beak amputation in chickens. Applied Animal Behaviour Science 27: 149-157, 1990.

The good news for the UK's 28 million hens is that the RSPCA 'intend to move away from this practice in the next five years'. The Soil Association's organic standards forbid beak trimming (full stop).

### Edible hedges

We've been lucky to get a grant from the traditional boundaries project towards the cost of new hedges to divide the vegetable field into four 2 acre paddocks. Each year we'll rotate round, with two for vegetables and two for a grass/clover break. As well as providing some shelter from the wind and stock control, the hedges will be a great source of pick your own fruit, with elder, hazel, crabapple, rowan and damson as well as hawthorn and bird cherry. We expect to be planting in mid March.

### Farm walks

As part of the Borders Banquet celebration of food and drink we are hosting two farm walks on Sunday 11 March 2007 - one at 12.00 and then again at 3.00. All welcome – if possible, let us know if you're coming so we know how much soup to make.