

CAMBRIDGE ORGANIC GAZETTE

courgette



Who's Hungry?

What does the hungry gap mean?

Most Egg-cellent
An adventure around Organic Orchards

Local Finds
Discover some new local producers

Simply Sauerkraut
Try team members Crow's go-to recipe

Comment from Duncan:

Founder and owner of Cambridge Organic.

This is quite a big moment for me. After having been at the helm of The Cambridge Organic Food Company for almost 24 years, the time has come for me to hand on the reigns of leadership on to someone new. I therefore have great pleasure in introducing our new Chief Executive, Dean Jenkins. Dean comes to us with an excellent pedigree of working in the organic food industry. In fact, he's got even more experience in this business than I have.

More importantly, Dean really gets our ethos and the philosophy that underpins Cambridge Organic. I really feel that we have found the right person to lead the company through the exciting period we have ahead of us.

As for me, well, don't worry, I'm still very much going to be around. The main reason for Dean's appointment was so that I can concentrate on the task of creating the Food Hub building, which is likely to be a full-time occupation over the next eighteen months.

It has been a tough winter for us, I won't lie. Trade has been great. We're still regularly delivering well over a thousand veg boxes each



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week, which is terrific. The thing we've been struggling with is staffing levels. We've been really on it with our coronavirus policy and making sure staff stay at home if there is any risk of contamination. Of course, this means that barely a week has gone by without at least one member of staff being off, and this puts extra burden on everyone else. To top it off, we're finding it really difficult to recruit new staff (if anyone knows someone who is looking for a job right now we'd love to hear from them). From what I

understand these sorts of problems are rife at the moment, and I guess there is some comfort in knowing there are many of us in the same boat. So please spare a thought for our amazing colleagues: they have been under a great deal of strain lately but they keep on going, and more often than not with a terrific attitude.



Mind The Gap



One of my favourite places to go for a walk is Therfield Heath on the outskirts of Royston. It boasts the finest collection of prehistoric barrows in East Anglia and, despite the golf course which co-exists fairly peacefully with the nature reserve, it's home to a pretty diverse range of chalkland wildflowers. There aren't many wildflowers to be seen at this time of year, but if you park near the sports club and follow the path cut into the chalk westwards, you'll pass a clump of fresh-looking green leaves (to be precise, they are close to the dog-poo bin, but let's not dwell on that). These are Alexanders – and no, they are not the latest superfood, which we'll be putting into your veg boxes. They are edible. In fact, it's believed that the plant was brought over by the Romans as a spring vegetable, and has now naturalised and now lives quite happily in the British countryside, especially near the sea. You can tell you're getting close to Dunwich, when the hedgerows teem with Alexanders. Guidebooks say that the leaves taste like myrrh, which is only really useful to those of us who know what myrrh tastes like, but I have nibbled on the leaves and they do taste like incense smells.

As a taste, that's pretty weird, and while the Romans may have had different tastes than we modern types, I think the reason they went to the trouble of importing and growing the plant was that there is so little else which can be harvested and eaten fresh at this time of year. We are entering the months which are traditionally called 'the hungry gap', the time when winter's brassicas have gone to seed and the stored roots of winter are either depleted or shrivelled. And while the days are getting warmer, most crops are still being sown, or if in the ground, then are still growing to a stage where we can eat them. It's a frustrating time for us and our box scheme, because as spring progresses, the countryside seems at its most verdant, while we still don't have much local produce to put in the boxes. The disconnect between all the trees budding, the blossom blooming and the hedges overflowing with new life on one side and the lack of fun stuff to put in our boxes is an annual heartache.

Of course, in the twenty-first century, the hungry gap has very little effect on the fruit and vegetables we see on our supermarket shelves: they manage to display much the same range throughout the year, and merely switch where they are sourcing their raspberries and tenderstem broccoli to a different continent. Even for us, things have changed quite a bit since Roman times! The polytunnels of Hughes Organics and the glasshouses of Wildcountry Organics can bring forward the harvest of greens which wouldn't grow in the cold soils outside. And we have a duty to keep our veg-box members well-fed and healthy, so, at this time of year, you will see more produce imported in from Spain, but we don't air freight any produce so we don't have the very tender fruit and veg which needs to be flown to get here the southwest hemisphere. We also have a duty to keep members happy and on board, so that we retain as many of you as possible for the abundance of local produce we'll have in the summer months to come. [David Booth](#)

Organic Orchards



We're so excited that we can now offer local organic eggs from 'Organic Orchards' near Saffron Walden that we just had to go for a visit. I'm exuberantly welcomed at the gates by farm owner Laura, a gaggle of waggy dogs and her son, three-year old Henry in his mini John Deere tractor. The farm is 27 acres of certified organic land, with mature trees producing plums, pears and apples, as well as soft fruit, which you have already been receiving in your veg boxes. It's also now home to 3,000 organically reared egg-laying chickens.

Laura's lifelong dream was to own her own land and fill it with the animals she loves – a dream that she and her partner Gideon realised nine years ago. After a

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life-altering loss of a beloved dog, Laura became focused on working in nature and with nature.

Serendipitously, some nearby organically certified farmland was up for sale, including a shed for egg-laying chickens. They took the plunge and bought the farm.

In 2018, Laura paused the poultry side of the farm to focus on raising young Henry, but now he's a little bit older, she's restarted it. It was a challenge getting the shed back into working order, updating to the new organic policies and re-buying required equipment. However, her

3,000-strong flock are now laying between 2,500 and 2,800 eggs a day.

Laura is a true animal-lover, with a farm filled with horses, llamas, greater rheas (the cousin of ostriches and emus), dogs, donkeys, and, of course, chickens. She explains they will only ever raise organic chickens because of the increased welfare standards that being organic ensures.

“Animal welfare is the most important side of it for me,” Laura explains, “and then on the other side of it the environmental impact is so much better.”

Laura takes a truly natural approach to the farm with no added input into the ground. She explains that, although this means you get a lower yield, it's much better for biodiversity and wildlife.





Laura goes above and beyond what the organic standards require. She offers the chickens more land than is stipulated in the organic regulations (which in turn are much more generous than non-organic free-range



rules). She also employs a no-kill policy. When a flock stops laying eggs they will usually go for what is euphemistically called 'processing', meaning they are euthanized and used in other products. Laura's hens are rehomed to live on through organizations such as Fresh Start for Hens, The British Welfare Trust as well as some smaller rescue groups.

If you want to buy local, support a family-run business and be assured of the highest standards of animal welfare, then Organic Orchards eggs are the perfect option for you. Go to the Cambridge Organic website to add to your veg-box. You'll see

Laura's eggs alongside those from Haresfield Farm, who have been our main supplier for many years now. We'll continue to have Andrew Jackson's eggs as Laura won't be able to produce enough to supply all our needs.

Organic vs. Free-range - what's the difference?



1. Organic chickens are kept in smaller flocks that encourages more hens to get outdoors, and makes it easier to take care of animals on an individual level.
2. Truly free-range: organic chickens must have unrestricted access to green outdoor space with lots of exit holes. Their outdoor area must be covered with suitable vegetation and they have more space to range than standard free-range hens. Outdoor access starts at a much younger age which encourages its use.
3. Higher standards of animal welfare. For example, beak trimming is not routinely permitted.
4. No routine use of antibiotics: only to be used when animals are sick.
5. Organic chickens are fed a GM-free organic-only diet: that's better for the health of the animal and the environment where the crops are grown.

Look Out For Local



Many of the products we sell as additional grocery items at Cambridge Organic come from local producers. We believe in supporting small-scale producers to establish their businesses, and luckily it's a win-win situation as they're also top-quality. Here are three new local product lines we've introduced recently:

Fen End Farm Organic Apple Juice, 750ml

£3.92

A heritage blend of ten varieties of apples, lovingly picked from Fen End's traditional family orchard, based in Cottenham. The farm, which is fully organic and also includes an eco-campsite, supports nature conservation in a number of ways. This includes planting several kilometres of native hedgerow and a small native woodland, leaving field margins uncultivated, using bee and bird-friendly seed mixes, and putting up bird and bat boxes.

Find in the 'Fruit Juice' section of the website.



Cambridge Mushrooms Dried Mushrooms, 12.5g

£3.75

Cambridge Mushrooms are based in the village of Coton just outside Cambridge. Here in their polytunnels and mushroom shed they grow all their produce, including Shiitake and three types of Oyster mushrooms. The use of careful cultivation methods, including organic and sustainably-harvested growing mediums, results in delicious food of the highest quality.

Their dried mushrooms come in 'Forest style', 'Asian style' and 'Mixed'. Simply rehydrate in water before use. A great cupboard staple to pop into soups, stews and more!

Find in the 'Ingredients' section of the website.



Orriss and Son Hot Sauces, 125ml

£4.99

Orriss and Son are a local hot sauce company based in Cambridge, created by David Underwood. David brought over 20 years of experience as a chef to his creation of these fermented chilli sauces, which bring a depth of taste to transform a simple meal into a culinary experience.

We currently stock two flavours, 'My Wave' and 'Fresh Tendrils', perfect for marinades and dressings.

Find in the 'Preserves and Sauces' section of the website.



RECIPE: Simple Sauerkraut

Ingredients

- Appox 1kg cabbage – finely sliced or grated
- 1 medium carrot
- Salt
- 1 tablespoon caraway seeds

Method

- Weigh vegetables in grams, multiply it by 0.02 to equal the grams of salt needed.
- In a large bowl add the salt to the vegetable mix and work it with your hands. Leave for 10 minutes. Then squash it about again. The resulting mix should be wet.
- Add the caraway seeds and mix.
- Pack it tightly into a 1-litre clip-top jar or use any jar and cover with a cloth secured with a rubber band – it needs to allow bubbles to release. Tuck a cabbage leaf over the top of the mix and add a glass pudding pot (or something heavy) into the jar to push it down. Leave for 24 hours - keep checking and pushing pot down.
- If the vegetables are not completely covered with liquid after a day, dissolve 1 tsp of salt in a cup of water and add to cover.
- Keep in a cool, dark place for 3 to 10 days.
- Check each day. Press down any veg that have floated to the top. While it's fermenting, you'll see bubbles and perhaps white scum. Don't worry, this is normal. If you see any mould develop, skim it off.
- After 3 days, start tasting the sauerkraut. When it suits your taste, remove the small pudding jar, screw on the cap and refrigerate. Your sauerkraut will keep in the refrigerator for 2 months or longer.

