

# UNICORN

manchester's co-operative grocery

## Foodzine, Autumn 2011

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## Voice from the fields

### Moss Brook Growers

We've had a great few months at Moss Brook, getting to grips with our first year of commercial-scale growing. Weather-wise we think we've had it pretty good, apart from the dry March & April, and we're pretty happy with how our crops are looking.

Right now, we're in the thick of the season, where every job in the growing cycle needs doing in abundance – sowing seeds, weeding, harvesting, and turning in old crop residues to prepare for the next crop in our rotation.

Some of our crop trials this year have been surprisingly successful – spinach and radish in particular. The speed at which these two crops emerge from seed has made a big difference to the cost of weeding, though, for both, the most labour-intensive part of the process is harvesting.

Our main crops are now ready too – leeks, celery and cabbage – so hopefully you'll see plenty more of these on Unicorn's shelves in the next few weeks & months. In fact all the crops are coming thick & fast at the moment, and one of our challenges is trying to fit a day's delivery into our cars... (If you know anyone selling a reliable van, let us know!)

Overall, the fields are looking wonderfully productive. It's hard to imagine the rough hay meadows that Unicorn bought three years ago. Thanks to loads of voluntary help, the Lottery giving us some funding, guidance from other growers, and long days all round, we're at a stage where we're hoping to produce 6 tonnes of leeks, 5,000 cabbages, 3,000 bunches of celery, and half a tonne of spinach. And we're only using 7 out of the 21 acres, so that's just the start... Rob & Stuart



MANCHESTER  
**Veg people**

Keeping it fresh, organic & local

Four of our nearest veg suppliers – Glebelands City Growers, Moss Brook Growers, Dunham Massey Organics, and Tom Rigby – are continuing to develop a unique co-operative called Manchester Veg People. The aim of the group is to get more organic veg sold and eaten in Manchester and, essentially, the group will be a marketing and distribution co-operative – that is, growing and delivering Gtr Manchester-grown vegetables to Manchester outlets, but also working together on branding and publicity.

The first target market is the catering industry, as there appears to be a big opportunity to bring truly local & fresh ingredients to commercial kitchens around Manchester. The uniqueness of the co-op is that membership will be open not just to growers but to the buyers (i.e. chefs) too. The hope is that by working together, rather than pitching against each other (as is so common in food & farming), the growers and buyers will create an example of a local food chain that is fair (e.g. honest pricing based on real costs of production) and dead simple (local vegetables travelling very short distances).

## Seasonal Update



*If you ate today  
thank a farmer*

Late summer and autumn is a great time of year for UK fruit and vegetables. The English apple season started in late August, with varieties like *Worcester Pearmain* and *Red Windsor* harking back to an age when Victorian growers dedicated themselves to developing new & exciting apples. Crisp and bursting with flavour, expect UK apples to be available into the New Year – despite a lower yield due to late frosts. October will see apples joined by quince, filling the shop with its sweet perfume, a real winner for puddings jams & jellies. As usual, look out for beautiful Sicilian blood oranges from late November onwards.

Soft-skinned summer squashes are now being joined by strange-shaped early autumn squashes like the *Turk's Turban*, and the range will grow massively over the next month. Fresh sweetcorn has arrived early this year thanks to Martin & Rachel Carey of Whitehorn Farm in Herefordshire and should be available through until late October. When summer recedes, winter roots like celeriac & Jerusalem artichokes will become abundant, and fresh nuts from France will make for hearty fare on cold November nights!

Fresh fruit and veg are the heart of our shop; it's where we learn about the first taste of the season and where we touch base with the farmers and discover the realities of getting food on our tables. Over our 15 years of trading organic food has gone from being a niche product and often misunderstood to being pretty mainstream and a little better understood. At Unicorn we still believe passionately that farming organically offers the most sustainable model of food production and we work with a lot of farmers who believe the same and they see the difference it makes to the land and the produce on a daily basis. We are pretty optimistic that as the costs of fuel and chemical inputs needed in conventional agriculture continue to rise, organic farming offers an alternative that is sustainable, both for the land and the people, which will commercially make more and more sense. See overleaf for a chance to meet your local growers.

Unicorn Grocery, 89 Albany Road, Chorlton, Manchester, M21 0BN.  
[www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk](http://www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk)

# Manchester Food & Drink Festival Oct 2011

## Unicorn events

In Unicorn's 15<sup>th</sup> year we hope our programme of events sums up what we are and have always been about – affordable, nutritious, tasty food that you can make yourself from decent ingredients. Food that comes from suppliers we know and respect. And some good times thrown in. Enjoy!

### Unicorn Street Café, Sun Oct 9<sup>th</sup> 12-4pm

It's squash season and Unicorn will be serving up hot squash curry and pumpkin cheesecake outside the shop. All made with veg sourced from organic UK growers, including Glebelands City Growers in Sale. Eat the seasons!

### What do I do with..tofu, Sat Oct 15<sup>th</sup> 12-2pm

Tofu's where it's at for cheap, tasty, nutritious meals. Yes, tasty, really. Let Unicorn's Danny show you how.

### Lunchbox Treats, Sunday Oct 16<sup>th</sup> 12-2pm

Using store cupboard essentials (nuts, seeds & dried fruits) Erika will show you a variety of quick and healthy sweet snacks for the kids.

### Meet the Growers, Mon Oct 17<sup>th</sup>, doors open 7.00 for a 7.30 prompt start. £3. Tickets IN ADVANCE from the shop.

Meet the people putting veg on your plate. Come and hear Unicorn's most local growers talk about the realities of organic growing and trading. Glebelands City Growers (Sale), Tom Rigby (Warrington) Moss Brook Growers (Unicorn land near Leigh) and Chris Hewitt (Dunham Massey) plus local social enterprise The Kindling Trust will talk about their highs, their lows, and how they're working together to build a more sustainable food system for Manchester. Plus enjoy a free organic soup made from the growers' veg, courtesy of Unicorn's deli.

£3, tickets in advance. Mon 17<sup>th</sup> October. Doors open 7pm for a 7.30 prompt start.

## 15 years of 'sharing our vision of community and society'



From an environmental community festival in Wythenshawe to a tree enterprise project in West Africa, over the years we've been delighted to see what our money can achieve in the hands of passionate, committed people and charities, working both here and abroad.

We have supported some really great projects sharing our vision of a fairer and more sustainable society from our 1&4% funds (so called because they represent a total equal to 5% of our annual wage bill). We have developed long-term relationships with several charities abroad and we now commit three year terms of funding to some of these projects so they are able to plan their work more effectively. Here are a few highlights from the 1&4% funds over the years:

Al-Zaytouna is a farmers' co-operative of Palestinian olive oil farmers. From the original 120 it now represents 600 farmers. Unicorn donations in 2006, 2007 and 2011 have enabled research to be done into production problems, and provided training for two women's co-ops in management and marketing.

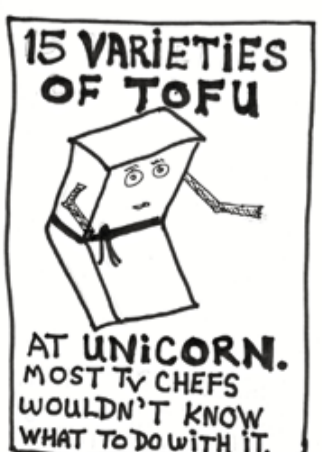
The Permaculture Institute of El Salvador (IPES) trains subsistence farmers in ecological techniques (pictured above). Located in very poor areas with badly degraded environments, the farmers have taken on these methods wholeheartedly and the centre is now staffed by many of those who were trained in the early days. Unicorn

funding has already helped set up a new permaculture centre & is now helping train 160 more leaders in techniques for improved food security and resilience to climate change. An inspiring project that one of our co-op members actually visited in 2008.

In 2008 Unicorn contributed to a revolving loan fund run by Just Haiti, enabling coffee growers to produce, and crucially to process coffee for export under a 'Fairtrade Plus' model that brings a far better returns to the growers. Café Lespwa ('Coffee of Hope in Haitian Creole) is organic and shade grown, and has brought about real change for the producers involved. This connection with Haiti also enabled us to support relief work carried out by the Café Lespwa farmers after the 2010 earthquake.

Back here at home, some of our organic growers have been amongst those we've supported. We appreciate the dire state of horticulture in the UK means their situation is precarious at the best of times, and bad weather at the wrong time can spell disaster. Snow funds and flood funds have helped some of our growers get through hard times, and we've also helped one grower insulate her barn so that freezing winter temperatures don't hurt stored veg in future. Other examples of support include helping smaller wholefood shops get off the ground, providing equipment to Abundance Manchester which is a local fruit harvesting project, and donations to Climate Camp, Herbie mobile fruit and veg van, I Bike M'cr, and an anti-GM rally held in Norwich this year.

For more information on our donations see our website; [www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk/projectsupport.php](http://www.unicorn-grocery.co.uk/projectsupport.php)



## UNICORN PRICE CHECK.....FRUIT\*

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.

	Unicorn Organic Produce		Morrisons Non-Organic Produce	
Product	Price	Grown in	Price	Grown in
Red Grapes	£3.72/kg	France	£3.49/kg	Italy
Fresh figs	58p each (med)	France	59p each (med)	South Africa
Plums (loose)	£2.84/kg	Sussex	£5.99/kg	Israel
Blueberries	£2.49/125g	Devon	£1.99/125g	Canada
Watermelon	£1.29 (small)	Spain	£2.99 (med)	Brazil
Kiwis (loose)	25p each	New Zealand	25p each	New Zealand

\* Price and provenance comparison 13/09/11.

**TO SEE OUR WEEKLY PRICE COMPARISONS ON FRESH PRODUCE COME INTO UNICORN OR CHECK OUT UNICORN'S WEBSITE.**