

“Over the Grid”
PONDHEAD FARM

Pondhead Farm is a traditional New Forest holding at Beaulieu Road Lyndhurst. Its current owner, Pat Mabbutt, is the third generation of her family to own the Farm. Each month Pat writes her farm diary for the Community Centre Newsletter.

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2005

I write this immediately following the second of our two open days. All seemed to go very well, two lovely sunny December days, two groups of excited youngsters and parents (and Grandparents) who were really interested in the mechanics of a New Forest Farm; finishing up with coffee and a beef roll (our own beef, of course). Our collection for Children in Need raised £49.00, thank you for your generosity.

Apart from the fact that “Babe” (our eldest and largest sow) is yet to give birth, everything I wrote about in the last edition went according to plan – both our house cow (Rosa) and prize winning heifer Daisy had their calves. As a result we are now drinking our own milk – fresh each morning.

Sows come into season every three weeks and although we did not see Babe “repeat” she must have done so and we must wait a little longer for her to pig. A quick way we all remember the gestation period of a pig is “the threes” – three months, three weeks, three days. Like any species they can vary by a few days.

Normally when the pannage season comes to an end the pigs must return to the holdings. Only with the consent of the Forestry Commission may they graze out on the Forest after the end of the season. We have successfully applied for these extended grazing rights.

November saw the last of this year’s Beaulieu Road pony sales. Commoners have traditionally sold their ponies at the 5 sales which are held in May and again throughout the autumn. We sold all our foals apart from 2 which we have kept – one as a replacement for aging mares and another as a potential stallion.

This is just as well since one of my mares was recently seriously injured in a road accident and had to be destroyed by the Agister (Agisters are employed by the Verderers as keepers for the New Forest stock). The mare had been wearing a reflective collar, there is no record of any skid marks and the damage to the vehicle is said to be “extensive”. I can only assume for whatever reason – be it speed, blinded by headlights or whatever - the motorist did not see the pony.

Wherever you stand on the hunting debate, it cannot be denied that the New Forest Hunt do a sterling job in these circumstances. Immediately they were notified of the death of the pony they collected her from the roadside and disposed of her.

We now have a regular contract with New Forest Soaps for our goats milk. The milk is used in the making of goats milk and honey soap. To qualify for the New Forest Marque the ingredients must, wherever possible be sourced from within the Forest.

We have now finished our calvings until February, giving us the opportunity to catch up with the ever increasing amount of paperwork that farming in these times seems to engender and the wealth of new regulations that seems affect everything we do.

We have now decided to commit to our own cold store in which to hang our meat on its return from the abattoir. This is another major investment in establishing our beef and pork business. The beef hangs for a period of three weeks and to be able to hang it on the farm will not only provide us with considerable savings in cost, but will afford other local producers the opportunity to use local facilities for their own product. Naturally, in accordance with our ethics, we will be using local labour to fit out the cold room.

We are hoping that during 2006 our grant application will go ahead and provided it does, we can also have our own cutting room which our freelance butcher can use.

By the time you read this, Christmas will be over but may we wish all readers a prosperous New Year and say a grateful thank you to our customers and friends who have helped us establish our business.

Pat Mabbutt