

FARMER AND GROWER BOARD VISITS TO CUMBRIA, 15-16 MAY 2012

A combination of weather, personal circumstance and distance led to a very low turnout for these away days, however what we lacked in quantity was more than made up with quality. There were some very interesting discussions and visits both around the new Duchy programme and following on from the farms we visited and from our Speaker at the evening meal – Richard Leafe Chief Exec of the Lakes National Park.

Perhaps the connecting theme is how by doing what you are good at, really well, you can make organic enterprises work even in marginal farming country, this often means that farming itself is not the only or sometimes even the main driver in a business.

The board were based at **Willowford Farm** – www.willowford.co.uk

Immaculate and modern B&B and sheep farm with Hadrian's wall going through the farm as well as a busy walking path, excellent food. Lauren Harrison and Liam McNulty – vibrant marketing models, currently hosting Emma Hesaltine (SA apprentice) for one day a week.

Low Luckens – www.lowluckensfarm.co.uk

Beef farm with education centre, they have had a long history with SA. Recent change in management means they are now installing a small scale 50kW AD unit to run off, manure and silage cut from the farm. They also rent out some land to Eva's Organics – Mike and Debbie Simpson - www.evabotanicals.co.uk the plan is that the heat from the CHP plant which will be run on the methane from the digester will heat the tunnels to enable more serious veg production capacity. They are also considering using some of the electricity from the unit to run LED lighting.

Slack House – www.slackhousefarm.co.uk

Small dairy farm, cheese making and farm shop/café. Also selling raw milk. All about local and organic! Served us great evening meal with wine sourced from small organic producers in France through a small wholesaler.

Very interesting talk from **Richard Leafe** – National Park Chief Exec – discussed the challenge of balance the needs of 24 partnership organisations that help run the park. Among others; farming, tourism, transport, wildlife, water companies.

The Watermill – <http://organicmill.co.uk>

Licensed by Demeter. Current owners looking for passionate individual or group to buy them out as they are nearing retirement age. Passionate about real bread and milling.

Strickley farm - <http://www.strickley.co.uk/>

5th generation dairy farm went organic when the current son took over. They have done the figures and decided that on balance they are considerably better off being organic. Love farming and seem to have life balance right – supporting 2 families from 100 head dairy shorthorn herd.

Growing well – www.growingwell.co.uk

CSA and care farming, working particularly with people recovering from mental health problems. **James Smith** is the inspirational grower there. Also a good talk from **Bill Grayson** around conservation grazing and innovative methods of running a herd without owning a farm.

Summary

The farmer and grower board were exposed to some new thinking and farming challenges that were very different from their own.

Ben Raskin
Head of Horticulture