6 March 2008

Dear friends,

In my newsletter a year ago, I wrote about people that we have made connections to through our work here at Loch Arthur.

Many of you will have noticed that our meat was butchered for several years at Whiteholme Farm near Longtown. The butchering has, more recently, been taken over by Askerton Castle Estate, a neighbour of Whiteholme. I'd like to tell you a little of the history of our connection to these butchers and how it arose.

Mike and Ruth Downham took a very bold step in their lives about twenty five years ago, giving up their careers and moving to a small-holding in Cumbria. Having developed that, they moved on to buy Whiteholme Farm and then the adjoining farm – Low Luckens. At Low Luckens, they started an Organic Resource Centre and their tenants at Whiteholme Farm started a butchery supplying Organic meat around Cumbria and offering a butchering facility to other Organic farms. Quite recently, they sold their butchery business to Askerton in order to concentrate more on their farming.

It is people like Mike and Ruth who were the brave pioneers who went out into the remote corners of the country, making a statement about their concern for the future of agriculture and food production. Really putting their money and their commitment, where their mouth is! And what a difference it has made! We all know how the public attitude towards food production methods, providence and food miles has changed. And now, in Cumbria, there is an amazing network of Organic growers, producers and suppliers and, according to Mike, new initiatives cropping up constantly, keeping him and Ruth, in their latter phase of life, very busy. Not to mentioning their own thriving resource centre providing resources, education and first-hand experience to countless groups of children, youngsters and adults.

It's situations such as this that give us hope and encouragement for the future and keep the network of good initiatives alive and thriving!

And so ….. back at the ranch……

- **<u>In The Shop</u>** We've recently got in a selection of Sprouters and Sprouting seeds which are proving very popular. Sprouting is a simple and wonderful way to provide yourself (from your windowsill) with nutritious and delicious salad sprouts, particularly throughout the winter, but at any time of year. Come in and pick up a leaflet or a simple starter pack to learn more about it.
  We've got some lovely 'Fair Trade' and Organic mini Easter eggs in and we'll do our best to produce some of our delectable Hot Cross Buns in the run up to Easter

  We are shocked, week-on-week by the spiralling prices of foods that we buy in …. but this is the global trend. Maybe food is actually starting to reflect something of the true cost of production. We have had to put increases onto the price of our breads, eggs and cheeses but have tried to keep them all within reason. Our meat prices have been held but will probably increase in the next month or two.

- **<u>Vegetables</u>**- We are looking forward with anticipation to the start of the growing season. Last year was definitely not our best – due to a number of factors. Hopefully better prospects for the coming year! But how fortunate we are to have a steady supply of fine vegetables and fruit grown in the UK and Europe. **We have just got in the first of the Purple Sprouting Broccoli** which is always a great treat at this time of year – don't miss it, the season is short! And it's been an amazing season for English apples which I've never seen lasting so long into the new year before. We're usually having to get them from all corners of the globe by now!

- **<u>Fresh-Meat Days.</u>** I am happy to see that our Loch Arthur Mutton is definitely gaining in popularity. It went down a real storm at our last Meat Days. There will be more available next week …. and, of course, some lovely Loch Arthur Lamb for Easter! Also, owing to a steady demand and much appreciation, we are now getting regular supplies of chicken – usually every fortnight. Bacon, pork sausages and various pork cuts are also regularly available between meat days.

Looking forward to some Spring warmth, sunshine and growth,

With best wishes

Barry Graham