

Kirkby fruit project report 2014 – 2015

This is a summary of the activity of the fruit project from the date of the last report (February 2014) to April 2015.

VOLUNTEERS

A couple of our original volunteers left the project this year, either because they moved away from the area or to pursue other interests. However, we gained a number of new people so we ended the fruit gathering season with 20 active volunteers which is an increase in numbers from the previous season. The age range of the people involved in the project is still very wide and we have found a role for people of all abilities.

APPLES AND JUICING

The juicing of surplus apples is our main activity. The 2013 fruit harvest was regarded as a 10 year high so, as expected, the 2014 harvest was around 40% less. Despite this we still collected and processed 1.35 tons of apples, thanks in part to donations of fruit from 2 additional orchards. Analysis of the juicing results from the 2013 – 14 season had shown that the new, more efficient, equipment gave a substantially higher juice return so we were able to offer those who kindly donated their surplus apples more juice in return. From every 5kg apples juiced we are now able to produce around 3 bottles of pasteurised juice. One bottle is given back to the fruit donor, one is sold to cover the costs of the project and the third one provides surplus income which can then be used to fund community activities. If the project is asked to pick and transport the apples the return to the fruit donor is lower to cover any expenses. Using the donated apples our volunteers carried out 7 juicing sessions producing a total of 1096 bottles of apple juice. The juice is sold direct by the project and through the same 2 local outlets as last year. Feedback from customers remains very positive. We encourage people to return their empty juice bottles to us and this has been very successful with around 50% of all bottles returned then washed and reused.

COMMUNITY JUICING DAYS

We ran 2 community juicing days this season to give local people the chance to bring their apples for juicing and take all of the fresh pressed juice home with them. The concept was very popular but the low apple crop meant that fewer people were able to use the opportunity. Several people contacted us expressing an interest but regretting that they would not have surplus apples to juice this season.

CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER GROUPS

We offered a 'profit share' scheme to other volunteer groups in the area to provide them with a way of raising funds but only one group took up the offer. They collected their own apples and then they helped with the processing of the juice so they will

receive a proportion of the final surplus from this year. The funds will go to Normanby village hall.

We have developed strong links with the Northern Fruit Group and are able to benefit from the considerable expertise of their members.

OTHER PRODUCE

Some fruits other than apples were donated to the project and these were used to produce jams, chutneys and cordials to put into gift boxes for sale through the Christmas market. After feedback from various sources the design and composition of our gift boxes was changed slightly this year and they once again proved very popular. Some boxes were pre-ordered by customers from the previous year and we have already had enquiries about gift boxes for next Christmas.

FINANCE

We keep detailed records of all fruit donated, juice produced, income and expenditure on spreadsheets and these are circulated to the project volunteers at regular intervals throughout the year for information. The project is under the umbrella of the Kirkbymoorside Environment Group and they are the body that hold the bank account so all money is transferred to them and ultimate responsibility for it lies with them. The project financial year runs from 1st October to 30th September to link in with that of the Environment Group.

From our income each year we set aside a sum of money to cater for any future equipment replacement. This sum of money has been worked out on the basis that it will provide the full replacement cost of equipment originally purchased from grant money in around 6 years. This will ensure that the project has a secure financial future.

Accommodation and storage facilities continue to be provided free of charge by two of the project volunteers with the project paying only for the cost of electricity and water used in juice production. This arrangement is able to continue for the foreseeable future.

SUPPORT FOR OTHER COMMUNITY GROUPS

The surplus funds from the 2013 -14 season provided support for other community groups. The largest amount was £350 given to the junior section of the town brass band to purchase a baritone horn. The community first responder team received £110 for the purchase of satnav equipment which will accept map co-ordinates to enable them to reach addresses more promptly. Other donations were given to the Friends of Moorsbus, Kirkby in Bloom, to support the printing of the town shopping guide, and a local cycling initiative. Details are available in the KMEG accounts. This makes a total of £956 given back to the local community.

A clear system for allocating surplus funds each year has been developed and is published on the KMEG website.

- All requests for financial support will be considered at the end of the financial year (Sept/Oct)
- voluntary groups and organisations with links to Kirkbymoorside can apply for money for a specified purpose
- all requests for money to be submitted in writing through the chairperson of KMEG.
- any request received will be circulated to fruit project volunteers for comment prior to decision being made and the decision will be based on the consensus from the active fruit project volunteers. The views of the volunteers will then be reported back to the KMEG meeting.
- as a general principle no more than 25% of total surplus for the year can be allocated to any one application
- A summary of how the profits have been used will be published on the web page

This system will be in place for the allocation of surplus from the current season.

OTHER ACTIVITIES

A pruning workshop and grafting course were organised and run in February to improve the skills of our volunteers and spare places on the course were offered to other local residents. Both were led by Hilary Dodson, chairperson of the Northern Fruit Group and acknowledged fruit expert. Our close links to the Northern Fruit Group meant that we paid only petrol expenses in return for this expertise.

Using our new skills we have begun to explore the fruit growing heritage of the town and over the winter our volunteers collected scions (cuttings) from a number of old fruit trees in the town and grafted them on to new rootstock. These are being grown on in a nursery bed before planting out once the graft is established. This activity will help to preserve the old apple varieties grown in the town as the parent trees reach the end of their natural lives. We are working with the History Group to collect both oral and social history relating to these trees.

It is still early days but we believe that we have identified an apple variety which is unique to Kirkbymoorside because it has grown in a hedgerow, probably from a discarded apple core more than 100 years ago. Scions have been grafted from this old tree and the apple is provisionally being referred to as the Kirkby pippin. More will be known about this in the coming year.

We have also been able to establish that an apple tree growing in an old orchard nearby is probably a unique local variety possibly bred by a head gardener on a local estate.

PUBLICITY

Information relating to fruit project activities is published on the town blog and has featured several times in the Handymag. There have also been reports in the Moorsider and our funding of the equipment for the Community First Responder team was reported in the York press. There have been enquiries from other parts of the country in response to this publicity and our web pages.

We were also invited to take part in the apple weekend at Rogers Nurseries in Pickering. As this was a last minute invitation (in response to our article in the Handymag) we could only provide a display about the project but we have been invited to take a more active role in the apple weekend this autumn.

FUTURE PLANS

The pruning workshop focussed on the 3 rather overgrown apple trees in the Millennium garden and we have undertaken to continue the pruning and care of these trees. Alongside this we have begun to look at other help and input we can give to this local space.

We will continue our exploration of the fruit growing heritage in the town and develop this project in conjunction with the history group.

Both the above activities and participation in apple events should help to promote the project and the town to a wider audience and we hope to be able to develop these further to provide wider benefits for the town.

The fruit project continues to thrive and grow thanks to the energy, commitment and good humour of its volunteers. Of course none of this would be possible without the generosity of the fruit donors and the people who buy our produce. We are very grateful for their continuing support.

Chris Simmonds,

fruit project co-ordinator.