

# Great Cummins Newsletter

[www.greatcumminsfarm.co.uk](http://www.greatcumminsfarm.co.uk)

May/June 2008

Hi everyone

Well, April and May have been roller-coaster months (again!) Birth of another grandson (Chas Elliot) at the end of May was wonderful if somewhat delayed (the grandfather is expected to make a complete recovery from the stress of the labour). Leo and Scruffy have spent an inordinate amount of time deprived of our company whilst we were in London anticipating the event, which I hope they regretted as much as we did.

First grandson, Arun, had his first birthday party the week before and is a lovely, smiley young man destined, we're told, to be at least 6ft5in tall. Interesting progression - my father was 5ft 9in, I'm just under 6ft, son Jon is 6ft 3in...I'm glad I won't be around for generations 2+ from now - they wouldn't detect me under the radar! Anyway, the Garaway clan is starting its plan to take over the world with five births over the last three years - one in the US (a Grill), two, including one very recently in Australia (Birchalls), our two and, I've just heard another Grill is on the way. Watch out everyone!

Farm-wise life has been up and down as well. Lambing was OK - all those we numbered (i.e. got to 24hrs old)

have been fine and they are all looking very healthy, but we lost four premature babies whose mothers produced in appalling weather conditions and another set of twins died before they could be delivered. Anyway - we seem to be on top of that job at the moment. We should be shearing next week which will give the ewes some relief - given the weather they've either been carrying one heck of a weight on their backs or been steaming gently in the heat. Shearing is now a welfare business - we spent £150 on the process last year and received £18 for the wool - something to do with Foot and Mouth in the UK and the collapse of the Chinese export market (we're told by the Wool Marketing Board, to whom we have to sell). They say this year is going to be much better - we should hope to receive about £54. Big deal.

In terms of vegetables, Linda is insisting on something like normal production so that "we can take advantage of any new opportunities that come our way". Fair enough, so I'm busy planting out at the moment - two polytunnels out of three, beans, mangetout peas, spinach, chard, lettuce, potatoes and we're now harvesting the strawberries. Busy, busy but it is a real pleasure

to spend extra time planting rather than rushing around narrow country lanes delivering. And, as a thought, given that the price of diesel is more than double what it was when we started deliveries (for the US readers it is now \$14.30 a gallon so stop complaining!) the economics would have been quite horrendous had we continued.

We haven't really got going on the cut flowers yet. We weren't able to direct sow until very late because of the weather, so tried sowing in modules with limited success. Also the slugs seem to like the flowers even more than the vegetables - if that were possible! We'll track progress over the summer but maybe we'll have to get one of the tunnels ready early next year. We've re-covered the big tunnel (that lost its cover in the gales in February) but its exposure to the rain whilst lying in abject misery meant that all the dormant weed seeds had a ball and the whole area is now rampant; it's almost a machete and flame-thrower job at the moment.

Defra-wise life remains an obscure mystery. They occasionally send me little bits of money (the reason is usually unclear but always less than I was expecting) and when our record-keeping sleuth (Linda) got on the trail, I had to make some phone calls: first to the "Single Payment Scheme" people - "I don't seem to have received any payment from the 2007 Scheme" "You should receive something by the end of June" (Better late than never!) and then to the "Farm Woodland Premium Scheme" people "I don't seem to

have received anything in 2007 - I remember filling in an application form" "Oh yes we got the form and it's all been approved" "And?" "The officer doesn't seem to have activated the payment. I'll do it straight away" Which, to be fair, she did.

We've just been told that the Blue Tongue vaccines are now available which, I suppose, is good because an infection could wipe out the whole flock, without compensation.

Another £100 down the drain though. I asked the vet if there was any problem with interaction with the anti-pasteurella vaccine that I was about to give the new lambs - he had no idea - the vaccine was too new. OK.

Linda is now spending time in London with Caroline and the babe so I need to take the opportunity to get hold of the farm. Lots of rain and sun have made everything grow like tryfids - the hens spend ages trying to find their way back into their house in the evening, peering around nettles and docks to try to find the door. Need to get onto that, plus the fields plus the shearing plus the hay cutting plus, plus. I enjoy it really. Course I do.

Love to you all.

David and Lind