

## Harvest 2008

Normally when we reach the first week of September, harvest is finished, the barns are full and we are hard at work on cultivations and planting next season's crops



and for us as farmers the memory of combining is well behind us. Not this year. I'm sure I don't need to tell you that this has been one of the worst summers on record and certainly none of our farming community can ever remember one like it. It will go down in the record books and in farming memories for all the wrong reasons.

Harvest started easily enough. The winter barley was done easily in July and the Oilseed Rape didn't seem too much of a problem although by then we were getting some delaying rain.

### **The Weather Just Got Worse**

Then the rain started with a vengeance at the beginning of August. The Spring Barley crop was grabbed between storms and by that point at the middle of August we were already very late to begin harvesting the wheat. Wheat takes much longer to dry out after rain to be combinable. Within an hour or two of rain you can be combining barley but wheat takes much, much longer. Every week we would watch the *Countryfile* forecast for the week ahead and every week it seemed that the forecasts got worse. We were just grabbing odd loads between storms. The continual rain that

fell during the first week of September is what has made this harvest the most disastrous on record. Overripe crops standing in the fields, continually lashed by rain meant that the grain in the ear started to grow and produce shoots. This then retained moisture and did not dry out.

### **A Trying Year for Farmers**

Although the bread-making and biscuit-making wheats were given priority for harvesting, the quality has suffered enormously and the market will now be flooded with low- quality grain fit only for animal feed. The last wheats to be harvested grown specifically for animal feed were the worst quality we have ever seen. We have harvested wheat at 27% moisture content when normally it would be at 14% and dried for free by the summer sunshine. Physically harvesting this wet grain produced its own problems. It did not flow in the combine like dry grain does. It blocked it up and put huge strain on the augers and elevators resulting in time-wasting and expensive breakdowns. One Sunday morning a trailer load of this wet grain which had been left in a trailer overnight was tipped up over the pit in our drier shed. Instead of pouring out as normal, it all came out in one solid lump smashing elevators and doing a lot of damage. Vast amounts of fuel were needed to dry all of this wet grain and while it was drying it smelt like a brewery (because of the fermented and sprouted grains).

Not only were we unable to harvest but there was also the knock-on effect with cultivations and planting for next year's crops. I'm sure I don't need to tell you what the condition of the soil was like at the beginning of September if any of you tried to put a fork into your garden. It was worse than the middle of winter.

### Next Year?

Next year's Oilseed Rape needed to be planted at the end of August and that was a bit of a problem when there was still a crop standing in the field unable to be harvested. So this year we had to try something new. The seed was broadcast on to the field while the crop of wheat was standing. When the combine came along it chopped and spread the straw

providing a mulch as a seedbed. That seemed fine but then because of the wet conditions we had a monumental invasion of slugs, again mirroring what you have seen in your gardens. Some people have now lost a high percentage of next year's crop.

The rain has affected the quality of the grass available for cows which in turn affected milk yields. Animals have been brought in earlier than usual for the winter because their fields have been so poached, which means that they have to be fed for longer in a year when there is a great shortage of quality hay and silage. British farmers are notoriously stoic and resilient but this year has really tried everyone.

**Rose Hartley**

## Lawrence House Nursing Team

### Christmas Events

**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> December.** The Akeman Voices Chamber Choir performing at a Carol Concert at Ditchley Park.

**Friday 19<sup>th</sup> December.** Candles of Remembrance and Celebrations will be held at Town Hall, Chipping Norton. For further information or to hear from anyone who would help with fundraising events, please contact the LHNT Fundraising Co-ordinator Nikki Knott on: 01608 677665 or by email [nikki@litchfieldfarmhouse.co.uk](mailto:nikki@litchfieldfarmhouse.co.uk).

### Flower and Vegetable Sale

During 2008 our sales of surplus vegetables and flowers have enabled us to send £225 to Lawrence Home Nursing.

This is particularly fitting as they looked after Marjorie Thorpe, one of our late MUWAGA committee members, during her last days.

We send our thanks to all of you who contributed so generously.

**David and Joanna van de Poll**

### Let's Get Cooking!

I have compiled a collection of recipes from local doctors, nurses, patients and celebrities to sell in aid of the **Lawrence Home Nursing Team**. They all sound delicious and would make interesting gifts for Christmas.

They will be on sale for £5 each from *Liquorice* in Milton and the Post Office in Shipton and from me. Telephone: 01993 831091 or email me on: [mavins66@hotmail.com](mailto:mavins66@hotmail.com)

Christmas cards, also in aid of LHNT, are on sale in both Shipton and Milton Post Offices.

**Jill Mavin**