



LINSCOMBE FARM NEWSLETTER

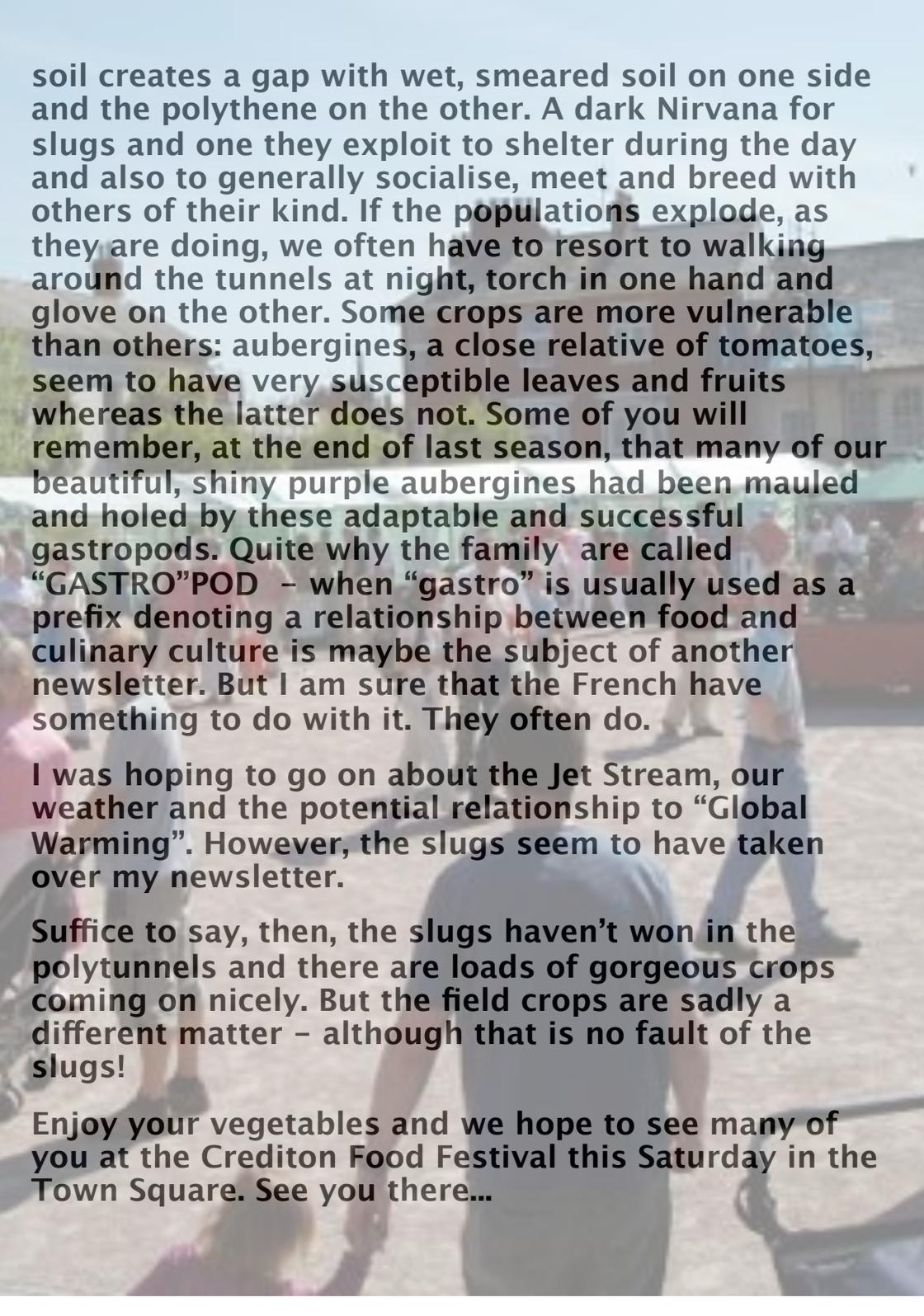
Thursday 14th June 2012

Time for a bit of an update:

Phil has appeared on BBC Spotlight talking about how the wet weather has been providing excellent breeding conditions for slugs. If we do have problems with slugs then these tend to be restricted to crops in the polytunnels. This may seem somewhat counter-intuitive; after all, what is a polytunnel for unless it keeps the cold wet weather off the crops?

However. Organic philosophy holds that if the soil is managed correctly then many of the problems that we can see when cropping simply don't appear. The argument with the slugs runs along the line that the slugs are successful because, firstly, the conditions for them are right and, secondly, the numbers are not being controlled by natural means. If we get the soil conditions right then we won't get slugs.

To a large extent this is true, especially out in the fields. Good, well cultivated and fertile soil in an open field on a well managed organic farm (note all the provisos there!) rarely contains damaging numbers of slugs. Whereas the polytunnels do keep the worst of the effects of the weather at bay, there are also some seemingly intractable problems. Amongst these, the one that gives most encouragement to the slugs is the microclimate created where the polythene cover meets the soil. Any condensation running down the inside of the cover meets, at this point, the soil. Continual flexing of the polythene against this wet



soil creates a gap with wet, smeared soil on one side and the polythene on the other. A dark Nirvana for slugs and one they exploit to shelter during the day and also to generally socialise, meet and breed with others of their kind. If the populations explode, as they are doing, we often have to resort to walking around the tunnels at night, torch in one hand and glove on the other. Some crops are more vulnerable than others: aubergines, a close relative of tomatoes, seem to have very susceptible leaves and fruits whereas the latter does not. Some of you will remember, at the end of last season, that many of our beautiful, shiny purple aubergines had been mauled and holed by these adaptable and successful gastropods. Quite why the family are called “GASTRO”POD – when “gastro” is usually used as a prefix denoting a relationship between food and culinary culture is maybe the subject of another newsletter. But I am sure that the French have something to do with it. They often do.

I was hoping to go on about the Jet Stream, our weather and the potential relationship to “Global Warming”. However, the slugs seem to have taken over my newsletter.

Suffice to say, then, the slugs haven’t won in the polytunnels and there are loads of gorgeous crops coming on nicely. But the field crops are sadly a different matter – although that is no fault of the slugs!

Enjoy your vegetables and we hope to see many of you at the Crediton Food Festival this Saturday in the Town Square. See you there...

