



Cambridge
organic

courgette

The Cambridge Organic Gazette

We deliver veg boxes to homes in and around Cambridge

July - August 2020 - Issue 151

Let's catch up

A lot has happened since our last issue...

Far too good!

Oven-baked *farinata* from Rosie Sykes

Food and Community

Three great initiatives to make good food more accessible

cook a rainbow!

For our new kids' competition

We've not been able to produce the last two issues of our bi-monthly magazine, as our local printer has been closed during the lockdown. Now we're back, let's recap a few key developments since we were last with you.

Things have changed so much since our February edition: in all our lives, and also for us here at Cambridge Organic. When lockdown began, demand for our service went through the roof. We had to refuse all new sign-ups and focussed instead on getting fresh produce to those in the most need – as identified for us by our wonderful team of 'Community Angel' volunteers. We expanded our capacity, moving from five to seven delivery rounds each day and we've added Saturday deliveries for the first time. We've added a team of auxiliary staff who work early mornings and afternoons, while maintaining as much social distance as possible. They also do a lot of the extra disinfecting we now need to do!

We hope we've now established a new normal. We have a consistent team and those who were new faces a few weeks ago have now become old hands. Veg box numbers are now at a stable level, albeit quite a bit higher than they were before.

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Duncan writes ...

It feels good to be writing an editorial for the Courgette magazine again.

The fact that we are able to get it printed indicates that, slowly but surely, local companies are starting to open up for business again.

If there is one positive to come out of the coronavirus crisis, it must be the sheer number of community-spirited people who have stepped forward to do their bit. People have been volunteering at community food hubs, sewing scrubs for the NHS, or doing shopping on behalf of their neighbours. I'm quite sure that our box scheme membership includes many such Samaritans, not least those who volunteered as one of our Community Angels. It's hard to single out one person for a special mention, but Rosie Sykes has been someone whose kind and generous nature has really left an impression. Rosie is one of the most superb chefs I know, but throughout coronavirus her only thought was how could she use her skills and knowledge to help others. You can read about what Rosie has been up to on pages 6 and 7. Rosie has also very kindly written a special recipe for our magazine. I was one of the fortunate people who got to eat the dish that had been made for the recipe/photo shoot and it was sublime. I implore you to try making it for yourself!

For quite a while now, we have been talking about our 'Good Food for All' scheme, which is the means by which the Food Hub will help improve access to healthy, fresh food for people on a low income. We are therefore delighted to be working with Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance on the 'Healthy Start' veg box pilot initiative. Again, there's more on pages 6 and 7.

Right at the start of the lockdown, I wrote a letter about our 'Dig In for Victory' coronavirus plan. In it, I made a promise that if Cambridge Organic profited as a result of the surge in demand for our veg boxes, that I would use that money to try and make the Sustainable Food Hub vision a reality. As it turns out, the increased turnover we have experienced during coronavirus has put us in a position where we are indeed able to go ahead with the Food Hub plan using our own resources. The fact that we are now in this position is entirely down to you, the members of our organic box scheme. It is through your continued support of our box scheme that we can demonstrate to the bank that we would be able to service a commercial loan. The main things that we need now are a suitable site for the building, and a huge amount of good fortune that things continue to go well for us. So, if you believe in what we are trying to achieve with the Food Hub project, and if you want to see a more just and sustainable food system in Cambridge, then the best way to help is to simply keep on receiving veg boxes from us. Thank you so much for helping us get this far already.

The catch up Session



catch up on changes to our veg boxes

To cope with the increased demand and the possibility of staff-members falling ill and having to be replaced at short notice, we streamlined our range of veg boxes. Those changes are now likely to be permanent, so I wanted to take this opportunity to say a little bit more about the decision to change some of our boxes.

Some changes I hope are win-wins: the introduction of Large and Giant Original boxes gives members with bigger orders the opportunity to save money if they don't need any preferences. The replacement of 'Favourites' boxes has involved a diminution in service for the members who used all the features available in the previous boxes. Now that we are making this permanent, I wanted to explain why we've taken this decision.

Favourites boxes were a great idea of how we might provide a veg box that goes beyond the basic, but they turned out to be incredibly difficult to pack. The bulk of our training of how to pack boxes for new recruits focused on just the complications of packing Favourites boxes. If a Favourites member had used all their options, there were nine different requests applying to a box which might contain only six or eight items. It was often a logical puzzle to work out what, if any, combination of items would both accommodate those preferences and add up to the correct amount of produce allowed for that box.

Bag or box?

We're starting a consultation to decide if it's time to go back to delivering our veggies in cardboard boxes. What do you think? We know that many of you are very keen to eliminate the plastic. It's harder to gauge how many of you feel it's still important to safeguard against the transmission of the virus from one member to another via the re-use of boxes. Please email us at bagorbox@cofco.co.uk

The other key constituency we need to consult is our own colleagues: the primary aim of moving to the non-returnable bags was to prevent any transmission to our staff by picking up boxes. We don't want to ask any member of staff to collect boxes if they judge it unsafe.

Whenever, we canvassed our staff for their suggestions of making things better, a simplification of Favourites boxes was always top of their list.

I think it's fair to say that well under half of Favourites members used all the features available. For many, a box with a nice selection that avoided the things they really didn't like was the key thing. Our new OriginalPLUS+ boxes provide that service. For those who want the ability to further tailor their order, our Choice boxes offer an even higher level of customer service, but are actually more straightforward to pack. Because all the contents of the box are specified, there is no puzzle to work out.

When we made the switch away from Favourites boxes, we tried to offer all Favourites members the option of switching to a Choice box with a discount to drastically reduce the price difference. If you didn't receive that message, or haven't taken us up on that offer yet, please get in touch!

catching up to our best

At the height of the surge in demand, when we were struggling to cope, we asked that you be patient with any mistakes made. Now that we've expanded our capacity and have a fixed team again, we'd like to put all our focus back on reaching the highest levels of customer service. We want to make sure that all orders are of the highest quality and accuracy. There's more on how we are trying to ensure that the produce you receive is of the best quality on page 7. The best way to help now is by letting us know if there's anything wrong with your order! We both value your feedback and are keen to correct any mistakes we make.

Baked farinata red pepper, courgette and olive dressing

We're very excited to have a sneak peak of a recipe from Rosie Sykes's new book. Rosie is a local chef, food writer, budding food social entrepreneur and a wonderful friend. After the photo-shoot, we devoured the dish she had prepared, so we can certainly vouch for how delicious it is!

Farinata is made with chickpea flour - it is like a sort of set thick pancake. This version is vegan but it can easily become vegetarian where I would serve it with some soft goats cheese or feta crumbled into the lovely olive dressing or even on top of the farinata before baking it. I used the water from the tin of chickpeas to make the chickpea batter which gives it a very light almost eggy quality, This is the beauty of aqua fabada as this pulse water is known; it is used to make meringues and other puddings too. Farinata can be made without roast veg in it as an accompaniment in which case I tend to add rosemary and chilli flakes to the batter.



Serves 4
150g chickpea flour also known as gram flour
1/2 tsp baking powder
1tsp salt
4 tbsp olive oil
3 courgettes, washed and cut into 3cm thick circles
2 red peppers, cut in half lengthwise, seeds and top removed, each half cut into 4 long pieces
2 red onions, peeled and cut in 2cm thick circles
1 large sprig rosemary, leaves removed from thick stalk and roughly chopped
1 x 400g tin chickpeas - drained, (reserve the liquid to use in the farinata) and rinsed

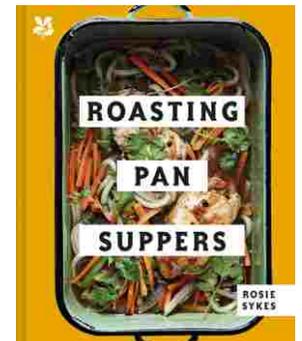
For the dressing:

120g pimento stuffed olives or any olives of choice
1 clove garlic, peeled and crushed or finely grated
1 small red chilli, seeds removed and chopped (optional)
1 lemon, zest of half and juice of all
Small handful of basil, roughly torn up

Preheat the oven to 200°C/gas 6 with a medium-sized roasting pan with 2 tbsp of olive oil in it to heat at the same time. When the oil is hot, throw in the courgettes, peppers and onions, the rosemary and a good dose of seasoning. Shake the pan to get them all coated in the oil and then return the veg to roast for about 25 minutes until it is all soft and yielding with a bit of colour.

While the veg is roasting, make the chickpea flour batter: put the flour, baking powder and salt into a bowl, make a well in the centre and whisk in the liquid from the chickpeas made up to 300ml with warm water until you have a smooth batter. Rest while the pan of vegetables is still in the oven. When the vegetables are soft and a little bit golden take them out of the oven and turn the oven up to 210°C/gas 7. Now add the chickpeas to the pan and then 1 more tbsp of olive oil, stir everything together really well and then pour the chickpea batter on. Return to the oven to let the whole lot set and become crisp and golden brown around the edges - this will take 20 minutes or so. Check after 15 and cover if it is browning too much and not setting. While the farinata is cooking make the olive dressing. Put the olives, basil, lemon zest, chilli and garlic in the food processor and whizz to a rough paste - a bit of texture is good. Add the remaining olive oil and lemon juice and season to taste.

When the farinata is set, bring it out of the oven, let it sit for 5 minutes then turn out onto a board and cut into squares, serve with some of the olive dressing on top. This would be delicious with a tomato salad.



This recipe is from Roasting Pan Suppers (National Trust Books, £14.99) by Rosie Sykes, out on 3rd September.

Food in the time of coronavirus

community initiatives to combat food insecurity



During the coronavirus pandemic large numbers of people have experienced food insecurity. Whether it was difficulty accessing online deliveries, or a new financial insecurity, the challenge of accessing good food has been heightened in the past few months. Even before coronavirus, Cambridge had significant levels of food poverty. According to a 2018 report by the Cambridge Food Poverty Alliance, 11.5% of households in Cambridge are at risk of, or may be experiencing, food poverty.

However, a positive outcome of the pandemic is the way in which communities have come together to support each other, forming mutual aid groups to look out for the most vulnerable members.

We have been trying to do our bit to support a number of these initiatives. We have also recently started our own veg box scheme for families on a low income with the Cambridge Food Hub and the support of Cambridge Sustainable Food.

Cambridge Community Fridges

Before the coronavirus outbreak, Cambridge had two community fridge and there were plans to establish three more. Since the start of the pandemic, another seven community fridges have been set up across Cambridge.

So, what is a community fridge? Often also called a Community Food Hub, it's much more than just a fridge. The fridges or hubs are set up in church and other community halls on advertised days each week. They accept donations of food from businesses, many of them local, and provide these donations for free to any member of the community.

Community fridges work on a different principle to food banks: most food banks require you to be referred to them by a social worker, GP or other professional, while community fridges are open to any member of the community. While food banks tend to offer only non-perishable items, community fridges focus more on items with a more limited shelf life, be they foods that require chilling or bread or other baked goodies.

They serve a two-fold benefit: ensuring that food is available for people who might be experiencing food insecurity and reducing the amount of food that is wasted across the city. Many of these fridges have over 200 people visiting in a week. Every week we donate boxes of produce that is surplus, or not quite the quality required for our boxes

(but still perfectly edible). These donations are then delivered as part of our wholesale or collection rounds ensuring it is as efficient as possible.

Melbourn Community Meals

Another destination for our surplus veg is to the Melbourn community meals, set up by local chefs Liz Young and Rosie Sykes as part of the Melbourn Coronavirus Community Response. Using the unit and resources provided by Steak and Honour and Jack's Gelato, they have been cooking meals for 160 residents in Melbourn and Meldreth. Every week they cook a hot meal and cake: meals have included beetroot feta filo rolls with tomato salad and bean chilli with roasted veg and cornbread top, with desserts including pear crumble cake and yoghurt and lemon cake (yum!).

The Melbourn Coronavirus Community Response is able to identify which residents are in particular need and delivers the meals to their homes. This project has ensured that families had a regular source of nutritious meals during the pandemic. It also means that food that might otherwise be wasted is turned into delicious meals with the creativity and talent of skilled chefs.

Healthy Start Box Scheme

In the second week of June, we started our Healthy Start veg box scheme. Families across Cambridge, for whom an organic veg box is prohibitively expensive, can receive either our Original Medium Veg or Small Fruit and Veg box for the cost of a Healthy Start voucher and a small weekly membership fee. The produce is not donated, or surplus. It comes from the same top-quality source of fruit and veg, much of it local, that goes into our boxes for Cambridge Organic members. The boxes are delivered as part of our normal rounds, meaning the delivery cost associated with them is negligible.

For now, this is just a pilot with ten places, but the aim is to make this long-term and sustainable. We believe high quality, fresh produce should be available to everyone, regardless of income. The issues that the pandemic have highlighted, including food insecurity, will not go away once the lockdown is over. Hopefully this scheme will take us a step forwards in addressing unequal access to good food.

If you receive Healthy Start vouchers, remember that although you may have missed out on this pilot scheme, we accept the vouchers as payment towards any of our veg boxes.

Donations up = Quality up!

We've changed the way we plan the produce we order. We're intentionally ordering a little more than we think we need, so that we can commit to making weekly donations to the causes we are supporting. That gives us a bit more leeway in rejecting produce that isn't quite up to standard, as we know that anything we divert from going into your veg box will find a really good home with one of our community partners. So, we hope our members will benefit at the same time as the causes we support.



Send us your rainbow food

Cook rainbow food with help from an adult. Ask the grown-up to post a photo of it to their Facebook or Instagram page tagging us @camorganic to make sure we see it. The best one will win a goodie bag.



20% off your first veg box

If you're not yet getting veg boxes delivered, why not join us? Just sign up on our website and enter the code 'SUMMER20' to get 20% off your first veg box.

Joining Cambridge Organic is a great way to ensure a regular supply of fresh, locally grown, organic vegetables, delivered to your door (or left wherever you like, if you're not in). With our veg boxes, you can choose the contents yourself, if you prefer – or trust us to put together a great selection, based on any likes or dislikes.

This offer doesn't apply to existing loyal members: sorry! But if you know someone who might like to join, then please pass it on. If they join – and put your name in the 'How did you hear about us?' box when they sign up – we'll make your next veg box 20% off as well.



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VEG BOX YET?
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