

Organic Futures - April 2007

“One way or another, re-ruralization will be the dominant social trend of the 21st century...Millions more people than today will be in the countryside producing and distributing food.”

Richard Heinberg

Welcome

Apologies for the late release of this edition of the Organic Futures newsletter – a sign of the madness that is April for all growers.

It's been an interesting weather year so far, with a ridiculously warm and very dry April for most of the country. After the wet winter, this has given us all some challenges on the farming front, especially if trying to establish spring sowings and plantings.

Trends in our climate undoubtedly point to dramatic changes to weather systems. Most climate change scientists agree that in Britain we are more likely to experience a Mediterranean climate in the future.

If this is the case, our rural areas must adapt to the change by the way we produce and consume food, socially, agronomically and culturally. We will also have to massively reduce our own carbon footprints and hence our dependence on cheap oil.

As Rob Hopkins, founder of the [Transition Towns](#) initiative, has said

“The transition away from dependence on cheap oil will not be an easy one, but it will happen whether we want it or not. Creating a low energy, more localised, self-reliant agriculture is not an overnight job. It takes planning, time, imagination and creativity.”

This is why we all need to pull together to help re-create living landscapes.

As always, please get in touch with any thoughts, suggestions or comments.

News, events and information

To keep bang up to date with **news** surrounding organic, GM and environmental issues, subscribe to the Soil Association's excellent [Today's News](#).

And for those of you that have generic MP3 players (or on your PCs), there are [Podcasts](#) available from the Soil Association too!

There are many **events** going on around the country associated with organic food and farming. The most comprehensive list can be found on the [Soil Association](#) website.

If its **classified adverts** on organic food and farming you're looking for, click [here](#) for an up to date list.

The Soil Association [Library](#) has lots of very useful and interesting articles

Book of the month

A feature looking at books that are central to understanding environmental, economic or social issues.

A Sand County Almanac by Aldo Leopold (Oxford, 1949)

This is perhaps the most important book on environmental ethics ever written. Aldo Leopold's extraordinary powers of perception led to the writing of this very readable but very powerful book. This quote from the foreword sums it up:

“That land is a community is the basic concept of ecology, but that land is to be loved and respected is an extension of ethics. That land yields a cultural harvest is a fact long known, but latterly often forgotten.”

NGO focus

A feature to look at Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) that have something to offer anyone interested in Organic Futures.

Organic Growers Alliance

At the end of 2006, the Organic Growers Alliance (OGA) was set up by a number of respected and long established organic growers. It aims are:

“To bring growers together so that we have the ability to promote our interests, wherever matters affecting our work are determined, and the means to benefit individually and collectively from opportunities to share our experience of growing and all that goes with it.”

Anyone in to organic horticulture should find out more about the [OGA](#).

LEISA

The magazine for Low External Input and Sustainable Agriculture has an international outlook and exists to:

“Promote the exchange of information for small scale farmers in the South through identifying promising technologies involving no or only marginal external inputs, but building on local knowledge and traditional technologies and the involvement of the farmers themselves in development. Information about these technologies is exchanged mainly through the LEISA Magazine.”

As anyone who has read Sir Albert Howard's *An Agricultural Testament* will know, we have an awful lot to learn from farmers in less industrialised countries.

Visit LEISA [here](#) to read about the organisation or subscribe to the magazine, which is a very interesting read indeed. Many interesting articles are available on the website also.

Removing barriers

Here we look at some of the barriers facing people wishing to enter the food and farming professions. The first one under scrutiny:

Access to Land

Wars have been fought over land for millennia, for it is our most intimate and essential connection to the Earth, providing us with the basic essentials for life along with a multitude of other benefits.

Nowadays it is not so much wars, as battles with money that affect access to land. The price of decent land is, in many parts of the country, astronomical and utterly out of the reach of anyone wishing to start a farming or growing business.

So what are the options?

Rental is the next best option. Whilst an Englishman's home is his castle, a secure tenancy should not throw any obstacles in the way of creating a successful farming business. Indeed rent can be easier on cashflow than a mortgage.

But is land available in the right location, size and price bracket for the new entrant in to business? In areas popular with horse riders, the market rental price for land is skewed abnormally high.

Rather than trawling through estate and land agents, a more successful way of acquiring land may be to talk to local farmers who may be happy to rent out some land.

Organic Futures and the Soil Association would like to start a 'matchmaking service' with those who are looking for land and those who are offering land. We know there are farmers out there willing to rent out land or offer bigger propositions such as share farming, but there is currently no mechanism to bring such people together.

In the long term however, if many more farmers are to be attracted to the countryside (as will be needed), changes will have to be made at Government level, in the form of tax breaks and laws if more opportunities for land are to be made available. Like housing, it is virtually impossible for young people to get their feet on the 'land ladder'.

Future farmers

In the first of a new series of people who will be central to the food revolution in this country, Alice Holden describes her life as a farmer of the future.

The Art of Living

At Coleshill Organics spring is upon us and things are growing at a pace.

Tucked in a shady corner of the garden, in amidst the wild garlic patch, the most recent growth in the six acre walled garden is a small dome like tent. Made from canvas and local willow poles and built along the design of a Mongolian herder's tent, this fifteen foot dome is my new and first personally owned home. After three years working on various farms and struggling with the problem of how to find good accommodation on an agricultural wage I finally have found an affordable and environmental, temporary but transferable way to live.

Admittedly I seem to have moved in at a good time of year where April seems to have shed her showery reputation. Though you do have to be organised and develop what I now term as 'yurt systems' (which may be the subject of a future book) it is a very enjoyable way to live. I am cosy and comfortable whilst at the same time close to nature and the elements. I always liked William Morris' specification that a thing should be both useful and beautiful. I will add to that sustainable and so far the yurt meets all criteria. Hopefully when the weather begins to turn this will still be the case.

Through practical necessity I also find myself living a very low impact, green existence. A solar panel and small wind turbine have bypassed the disruption of laying wiring down the garden. Difficulties such as how to get electricity to the yurt have forced me to be creative and enhanced my awareness of what it is easy to take for granted. Initially at least I have had to focus on my basic needs. This forced individual living audit has been an interesting process to engage with and it has fuelled in me a desire to take it further. It has also reinforced to me that sometimes the effort involved in doing something is often indivisibly linked to the very enjoyment of the act.

The only pay off I suppose is that my new home seems to have over-shadowed all other aspects of my identity. I am no longer referred to as Alice but generally known as the girl who lives in the yurt. I think I can live with that.

Alice Holden (26) has been working for Coleshill Organics since February. She hopes to go on (with her new home) to set up her own organic growing enterprise once she has completed her two year skill gaining apprenticeship. If you would like to get in touch or find out more about the apprenticeship scheme please contact Alice at belle_alice@hotmail.com
www.coleshillorganics.co.uk