

## **Land & Biodiversity Breakout Room – Questions, Discussion, Links and Contacts**

### **1. Phil Holden's Presentation**

How can we build up humus in denuded soils with so little bulk organic manure now available?

### **2. Daphne du Cros' Presentation**

How do you fertilize?

Have you considered a share option?

Are you offering training for people who want to grow?

I wonder if there would be a way that local gardeners could distribute their excess produce without incurring many road miles?

Response: See your local food bank or food share or FB group. Also check Shropshire Larder, they are mapping community gardens and orchards

Do you have any idea how many calories your land produces compared to an intensive wheat field for example?

Response: This is something we'll be working to track next season. Metrics are very important to building an argument for small scale horticulture and the business case for new entrant growers.

What sort of land area begins to be interest in terms of market gardening and land sharing?

Response: Flat-ish certainly helps! But soil building can be a key part in developing a market garden - we're always working on building our soil up. That being said, just about any space has potential

### **3. Mark Measures' Presentation**

I asked an nth generation local farmer who had gone organic (originally purely for health reasons) what stopped his colleagues and neighbours from following suit, and he said 'Pride'. How do we make the kind of farming practices that are needed become 'cool' and acceptable to the mainstream?

Response from Daphne du Cros: We've had a very positive reception from established conventional farmer neighbours... once we proved (just by years 2&3) that it's working.

Are soil improvement activities such as use of biochars or enhanced terrestrial weathering being used widely in Shropshire and if not what can be done to encourage them?

I am concerned that the majority of people at this meeting are older and have moved into the locality. There might be barriers for indigenous people to get involved.....the us and them scenario. How could we address these issues?

Response: Link in with Shropshire Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs

I see the weakness of the 1987 hedgerows regulations as a stumbling block to bolstering nature recovery networks. How do we convince farmers of the broader values of maintaining and enhancing hedgerows over bigger fields and how do we get a review of these almost redundant regulations?

Will call for more chicken/pig meat products lead to yet more factory farm units in the county?

#### **4. James Evans' Presentation**

Resource recommendation: Well worth having a look at "Continuous Grain Cropping" developed and piloted by John Letts (archaeo-botanist and cereal grower):

<https://www.thelandmagazine.org.uk/articles/continuous-grain-cropping>

Continuous Grain Cropping (CGC) draws on the philosophy and farming practices of rice farmer Masanobu Fukuoka as described in his book *One Straw Revolution*, and of Marc Bonfils who adapted some of Fukuoka's principles to wheat cultivation. It relies on the use of a genetically diverse and constantly evolving population of traditional varieties of wheat ("heritage populations").

Organic farmers could feed the UK if they adopted a low input CGC approach, which would preserve crop genetic diversity, increase biodiversity and sequester massive amounts of carbon.

Comment: Heritage grains offer many advantages, particularly for smaller growers:

- They are hardier than modern varieties, and can be grown on soils now considered unsuitable for growing grain, or not included in arable rotations.
- Since there is no need for a clover-grass ley to be mown and ploughed in, much less land is needed to produce a wheat crop of a given size, and no equipment is needed for operations such as mowing and ploughing in the ley.
- Fields previously considered too small for growing modern varieties within a rotational system could grow heritage cereals every year, without animal or green manures. Small producers could make a significant contribution to the local grain economy whether they operated mixed farms or stockless systems.

Are there ways to influence/involve young people at local agricultural universities? As James said - what they learn at college is important.

Response: Harper Adams have a large outreach programme to support /develop Agri- Tech.

Response from Mark Measures: There are a number of organic courses available such as SRUC Aberdeen but we should engage with Harper Adams and other local colleges to get change in their courses.

Response from Daphne du Cros: There's also a sustainable Agriculture course at CAT as well

James, do you make use of hedgerow management for fodder?

Are you regularly driving home these positive points to other farmers and making the argument for organic production methods?

Comment: Another local example is Smiling Tree Farm at Chapel Lawn. Christine there also really stresses the nutritional benefits of the 'mob grazing' systems as the soil and grass provides the animals with a much richer more diverse diet.

Does the prospect of a trade deal with the USA and potential imports of lower safety, lower animal welfare, less eco-friendly, cheaper food concern farmers on the ground in Shropshire?

Response from Daphne du Cros: As a Food Policy researcher and farmer, this is a big concern with huge knock on effects.

James, you clearly have the right animals for your system - was that made in line with going organic or were you already doing that?

How do we tie up south Shropshire plans to county wide Shropshire Climate Action Partnership?

We are in the business of shifting attitudes. We know about those who are comfortable with present conditions/arrangements, and see no reason to put themselves out by changing. But what of those whose economic circumstances render the very thought of change terrifying? For a family that is struggling to put food on the table, climate change is not a priority, and they cannot see beyond the immediate. Surely we need to link to social justice?

Comment: Working with school children is a priority. As seen on Countryfile, schools have gardens where children learn about growing food AND THEN learn how to cook it.

Comment: Influence groups: never underestimate the Women's Institute

## Discussion

Local community engagement crucial. Land, Life and Livelihoods asked farmers and non farmers what they valued, what was under threat and barriers to caring/what help needed. 15 years on still crucial to listen, learn, encourage and provide advice and support.

Is there scope for a really big Buy Local campaign?

Response: There is a recently established group called Marches Grow Local that is looking at way to develop a more resilient local food system. More information here:

<https://middlemarchescommunitylandtrust.org.uk/the-hub/marches-grow-local/>

Would like to see other town/parish CAP and see how we can help each other.

Buying local is only part of the story, the method of production is crucially important.

My priority would be to help to find ways to help the main land use - traditional livestock farming - transition. James's journey is inspiration but we need this at scale.

Response: I agree. Small initiatives are important by how do we get the large land owners especially corporate land owners on board.

Is there a case for bringing back the travelling village to village veg van? For that matter, the baker and the fish-monger and .... I ruminated on these aspects of my village childhood during lockdown.

Food is so cheap in supermarkets, local growers have difficulty making a living

We do have to remember that restoring biodiversity is every bit as important as reducing carbon outputs

Commitment to public procurement is a good way to provide markets for larger scale farms. Efforts with schools in Shropshire have foundered because of lack of commitment by the buyers

On marginal hill land we need to look at the full range of benefits and not just manage for food.

Organic certification provides the most effective means of demonstrating delivery of good farming practice

In the EU there is now a target of 25% organic and reduction of pesticide use by 50%. This is the basis of meeting their GHG targets.

Intensive poultry production units are being put up at an alarming scale. These are economically viable and small producers are only providing for a few middle class consumers.

A priority has to be reaching outside the bubbles we are all in and ensuing that engaging with these issues and taking action is not a privilege only for the people with the spare money and spare time to care. How do we break out of our bubbles?

Response from Manda Scott: Breaking out of bubbles - maximise bubble reach. Talk to the plumber, to the people you stand next to in the supermarket queue... everyone. I'm writing a book called PART TIME ACTIVIST'S HANDBOOK which will help. I hope. :)

Can I add an additional point about linking "buy local" and "grow local" ?

I was told the other day that we export chicken, from our intensive poultry units to China, does anybody know of that is correct?

Response: Some chicken exported but we import about 25% of poultry

Not burning out is huge. The Transition Town network developed systems for that - chief amongst which was that every alternate meeting was about process rather than procedure. It helped a lot.

Re biodiversity & nature recovery networks, how important are efforts of (individual) gardeners?

Lack of fuel tax on airline and shipping fuel also doesn't help buy local aims

Leadership from government is important - the private members Climate Change & Environmental Emergency Bill has not had much support from local MPs bill and it looks like the Environment Bill will not go to its final stages until 2022 which may be after we start negotiating trade agreements which is a concern.

On biodiversity what does anyone think of the 20% pledge on wilding becoming popular in many localities?

### **Links / groups of interest**

CPRE Shropshire has a page on the Local Plan Review consultation which has recently been updated, please look here: <https://www.cpreshropshire.org.uk/local-plan-review-new>

For those that use Instagram, Daphne's account is a brilliant way to follow the Little Woodbatch journey: @littlewoodbatch.

Link in with Shropshire Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs <https://sfyfc.org.uk/>

<https://www.thelandmagazine.org.uk/articles/continuous-grain-cropping>

This is a US-based podcast, but also well worth a listen:

<https://podcasts.apple.com/gb/podcast/regenerative-agriculture-podcast/id1372359995>

We have a group called ' Ludlow Constituents Climate Action Group', formed to work with P Dunne, EAC etc.

<https://wearetheark.org/at-home/>

**Contact details posted on Land chat**

Jo Blackman, from Berrington Hall Housing Co-op (20 acres land) - [joannablackman63@gmail.com](mailto:joannablackman63@gmail.com)

Lynn Mann Transition Telford <https://transitiontelford.wordpress.com/>

Dan Wrench : Dan Wrench. Shropshire Council / Shropshire Wildlife Trust  
[dan.wrench@shropshire.gov.uk](mailto:dan.wrench@shropshire.gov.uk)