



“...an intimate connection with nature is both a basic right and a basic need...For all our time we have shaped nature, and it has shaped us, and we are an emergent property of this relationship. We cannot suddenly act as if we are separate. If we do so, we simply recreate the wasteland inside of ourselves.”

Jules Pretty

www.soilassociation.org/organicfutures

July 2007

Welcome

June has been an incredible month of weather, officially the wettest ever recorded in Britain. Not just wet, but windy too, with many areas battered by gales. On the whole it has provided exceptional conditions for plant growth, but also many areas have experienced flooding and totally unacceptable conditions for farming.

What this confirms is a change in our climate. The major fluctuations in our weather conditions are undoubtedly a product of climate change, caused by greenhouse gas emissions from the industrialised. How many extreme climatic events does it take before we realise, as a society, that we must take immediate and substantial action to moderate the effects of climate change?

Never has an impetus of fresh thinking, energy and enthusiasm been required in food and farming in Britain. As a major world polluter, we should be setting an example to other nations on how to live with robust, adaptable and sustainable food production systems.

We need more young people on the land as soon as possible. Yesterday would have been good, but tomorrow is the next best option. This is not an optional extra to a secure future, this is essential.

Climate change and farming are intricately linked.

Organic Futures...

- Is a ground-up movement led by young people
- Aims to break down the barriers preventing young people entering the organic food and farming professions
- Provides inspiration, facilitates networking and offers information
- Wants to engage with interested people of all ages and levels of experience
- Wishes to help foster a new, positive culture of farming and growing in Britain

● Podcasts

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

Classified adverts

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

Information

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

Technical information

Lots available on the Soil Association's [Food and Farming](#) pages

News

Get [Today's News](#) from the Soil Association to keep bang up to date with news from home and abroad

Biodynamic agriculture

Our cousins practising biodynamic agriculture and horticulture have an excellent [website](#) detailing courses, events and much more.

The Organic Growers Alliance is launched

An idea that was put forward at an organic producer's conference held at Cirencester Royal Agricultural College conference on 12th Dec last year has now become a reality. The Organic Growers Alliance (OGA) is a grower's support group for practising producers, working in co-operation with the Soil Association, the Organic Research Centre - Elm Farm, HDRA, Organic Farmers and Growers and other organic organisations.

The aims of the OGA are to provide representation to the Soil Association, DEFRA, and the Advisory Committee on Organic Standards (ACOS), organic certifiers, research organisations and regional support centres. It will also look to liaise with the horticultural supply trade and with organisations offering advice and vocational courses etc. Already the OGA has established a working party with the Soil Association to develop an organic grower's apprenticeship scheme and lobbied for continued funding of organic variety trials. Member support will be a key feature of the Alliance with a biennial conference and a number of farm walks each year in different parts of the UK. These events will be technical and practical in nature, but with a strong social element. The first issue of *The Organic Grower*, a journal dedicated to covering all aspects of organic growing will be published in June. The OGA will also host a website as a means of grower communication.

Full membership will be open to all who are actively engaged in commercial organic growing; with associate members having an interest in the Alliance activities. For more details please contact: Organic Growers Alliance, Bradshaw Lane Nursery, Pilling. Preston PR3 6AX

oga@gwnhome.demon.co.uk

www.newoga.org.uk

- For media interviews please contact Iain Tolhurst. Tel: 01189 843428
- A newsletter announcing the formation of the OGA can be found at:
<http://www.organicinform.org/oga/OGA%20Newsletter%20March%202007.pdf>
- Full membership costs £25 and a student concession is available for £15.

Removing barriers

This month we look at **training**.

Framing and growing are, in new educational speak, "vocational", or more appropriately "hands on". There is a certain amount of knowledge to be gained from theoretical learning, but most of it will come from practical experience.

For those who are new to the profession, a good start is to go [WOOOFing](#) or to attend short courses. These can help to gain the confidence, skills and mindset to take the individual on to the next level.

People wishing to make a career out of farming or growing must work for someone else before going out by themselves. This has a number of benefits, including gaining from others experience, learning without responsibility and making mistakes at someone else's expense!

There is now a formal apprenticeship scheme in existence for young people wanting to learn more about organic growing. It is in its infancy at the moment, but in association with the Soil Association and the Organic Growers Alliance, it is expected to grow rapidly in the near future. More news on this will be found in this newsletter soon.

Having gained sufficient experience in all aspects of growing, preferably for at least a year, a person may be ready to start up their own business. But as important as practical skills in developing a business is the marketing. If the demand for produce is there, the mentality behind production is completely changed and the whole operation has much more security.

Farming and growing skills are not necessarily difficult in themselves, it is the sequence in which they are done and the timing in how they are applied that makes the difference between good and bad practice. Having a clear overall plan and holistic thinking is very important to achieving a sustainable business.

Future farmers – Zena Walker-Reed

Zena is 22 and has studied for the two year HND in Organic Horticulture in one year at the Welsh College of Horticulture. She received a VON student bursary to assist her financially.

At 16, I became enamoured with many of the ideas and ideals of permaculture, although until that time I had never even thought of a life involving horticulture. I decided to enrol in a permaculture design course in my home town of Falmouth, Cornwall, run by Trevor Lawrence, who was a great inspiration to me as were the others students. I had no access to land or even a garden, but began to have grand ideas of how this was maybe the only thing I could do for a positive future for myself and those around me. I attended the Duchy College, Rosewarne, where I was able to study a Horticulture, Design and Plantsmanship foundation degree, studying ethnobotany, propagation, plant science, landscape design, conservation and much more. I really enjoyed my time there as the course was well run and the standard of teaching, very high. However I still did not have a good understanding of vegetable growing or in-depth organic principles.

I came across The Welsh College of Horticulture by accident, on the Internet and after talking with and visiting the head of horticulture decided to move away and study Organic Horticulture. It was here that I was introduced to stockfree-organic concepts and on hearing their ideas on a sustainable future, have vowed to soon become a vegan. The subject is excellent, however it is very unfortunate that there is not more funding available for horticultural courses, particularly organics and stockfree-organics; groups such as the Vegan-Organic Network have undoubtedly assisted projects and students considerably. To me the idea that business studies or I.T. should take precedence over inspirational courses, which give each student the potential to begin grassroots movements within our society, is ridiculous. But obviously our leaders in government and closer to home have their own ideas. It is true, and everyone knows it, that we are all too distant from nature and ourselves. Far from being obsolete or archaic, reconnection with our and the planets systems and the revival of our traditional cultural values is the key to our future.



Zena Walker-Reed

Poetry

Toil for the Soil

Who will help the bees
when we're up to our
knees
in rivers
and seas?

and what of the trees
who've lost their leaves
in frosts
of minus degrees?

what are the reasons
for the restless seasons
which toss and turn
through our blinkered
treasons?

did you see the wind?
did you see it flee?
straight through the
trees
and out to the sea

and what of the rain
that fell on thirsty grain?
has it long gone, far
away -
to a more deserving
plain?

the abundance of seed
and life it does feed
are disappearing
through fiscal greed

the sun and its rays

scorching our days
leave empty fields
where nobody plays

so now do you see?
do you really see?
this, our bequeathed gift:
this wanton, barren
legacy?

without the bees:
we're on our knees
without the trees:
we cannot breathe

without seed:
we cannot feed
what little else left
for life to succeed?

the Soil, the Sea,
the Land and Tree,
mean everything,
everything, to me

the Soil, the Sea,
the Land and Tree
are all we must toil for:
you and me.

By Jemima Roberts

The Student Bursary Fund for Organic Horticulture

We are aware that many young students who would like to have a qualification are often discouraged because they do not have the financial resources. The Welsh College of Horticulture, a Stockfree symbol holder, has ten students enrolled this year on the organic horticulture course. In discussion with some of them and their tutors, it was clear that receiving financial help with either part or all of the cost of the course, or assistance with other relevant expenses would relieve much stress. Furthermore such a scheme could encourage more students to enrol. The Bursary Fund is available to anyone who is taking a qualification to further their knowledge of stockfree-organic growing but preference is given to vegan and vegetarian students.

At present the Welsh College of Horticulture is the only establishment offering suitable courses but this is set to change in 2008 with a new educational project establishing alongside Sow & Grow Organics, a vegetable box scheme near St Helens. The WCoH will continue to offer long-term qualifications but it is hoped the new project will be able to offer one day and weekend courses geared towards the production of local food.

The Welsh College of Horticulture offers a Higher National Certificate (HNC) and Higher National Diploma (HND) in Organic Horticulture. The courses are ideal for those who are aiming to manage or work on an organic horticultural holding with fruit and vegetables. They are suitable also for those who are interested in organic crop production and who wish to develop their knowledge, skills and gain a qualification. The entry qualifications for those under 21 are one or more passes at GCE A2, or BTEC National Diploma in a related subject or NVQ3 in a related subject or relevant GNVQ Advanced or suitable experience or successful completion of an Access to HE Course. Entrants over 21 years old will be considered without formal qualifications. Past and current employment experience will determine suitability for the course.

It is possible for students to gain their necessary work experience on the WCoH's own holding

which is certified with the Soil Association and the Stockfree-Organic symbol. "Stockfree" in growing terms this means that no animal inputs are used within the production of crops. Within this 10 hectare unit there are research & development areas and demonstration areas which are organically cropped on a long-term rotation basis. One of the key features is to develop the biodiversity of the site and there are also substantial protected cropping areas.

Students are the growers of the future who will be pushing forward by example the practice and theory of sustainable farming and growing. More information about the Organic Horticulture courses is available at the website www.wcoh.ac.uk or contact Robert Mackay at the college. Interviews for the WCoH are held in August for September enrolment. If you would like to be considered for a bursary please contact David Graham at Vegan Organic Network Student Bursary Fund, Anandavan, 58 High Lane, Manchester, England M21 9DZ Email: veganorganic@supanet.com. Tel: 0161 860 4869 www.veganorganic.net

Jenny Hall, Stockfree-Organic Services

Book review

Agri-Culture by Jules Pretty (Earthscan, 2002)

The subtitle of the book, *Reconnecting People, Land and Nature* accurately describes the focus of this remarkable piece of writing. Jules Pretty is one of those rare breed, a highly respected academic who can write in a very readable manner.

The book is packed with references throughout to real life examples of people reconnecting with land and nature. It not only dissects the problems with current agricultural systems both in the industrialised and less developed world, it offers positive solutions.

Interestingly, Jules Pretty uses the language of *Ecological Agriculture* rather than *organic*, to emphasise the imperative need for functioning ecosystems on a landscape scale. A fascinating, if long, read that is to be recommended.

Jobs and opportunities

An up to date list of jobs and work opportunities is always available on Soil Association [Classified Ads](#). Look for [jobs](#) and [work opportunities](#) on Biodynamic farms.

Work in the Organic sector can be found at [O People](#). There are also some more specific opportunities below.

Land in Cornwall

20 acres of Soil Association certified land on the Roseland Peninsula in Cornwall is available for rent. Currently down to grass, it would provide an opportunity for livestock and/or horticultural enterprises. In a good geographical position, it is south facing and adjacent to a river estuary. Water is available on site and a large disused barn is situated on the land. Truro, a large and growing local and organic food centre, is half an hour's drive away and St Mawes, a wealthy holiday destination, is just down the road.

This land is available at a very sensible rent to anyone wishing to take it on as a long term organic farming or growing business due to the desire of the land owner to see the land used properly.

Please contact David Halsey on 01872 580776 if you are interested in this exciting serious business opportunity.

Share farming in Pembrokeshire

'We are currently advertising on the SA website for a share farming partner who would be interested in expanding an embryonic horticultural enterprise, and now also seek individuals with ideas, experience and confidence for using more of our land, either for establishing new enterprises e.g. micro dairy (we have a redundant milking parlour) or pigs, or for expanding our existing poultry enterprise.

We farm on the north Pembrokeshire coast near Fishguard and Goodwick (population 7,

500 - but a lot more in the holiday season). There is currently a shortage of direct sellers of organic produce in north Pembrokeshire, and we are not able to do justice to demand that we experience at our local farmers' market. Please contact tom.latter@btopenworld.com or ring 01348 873315

Grower opportunity

The market for local and regional foods has been increasing for a number of years. The early demand for local products was met with the opening of farm shops and farmers markets, which made locally sourced products more accessible to the general public.

The market for local food is still growing as consumers are becoming increasingly concerned with the quality, environmental and social factors associated with large scale production. However, at present the demand for local food is not being fully met.

Over 80% of all food purchased in the UK is bought in a supermarket as this is the most convenient way for the majority of people to do their shopping. By increasing the availability of local foods in the supermarkets we believe that local produce will become more accessible to the general public and the market will grow.

We are currently supplying a range of fruit and vegetables to the multiple retailers and are looking to collaborate with passionate growers of high quality fresh produce from throughout the UK in order to grow this market.

If you are interested in finding out more please contact Charlotte at charlotte.falkingham@produceworld.co.uk

NGO focus

Charities and organisations working for core aims of Organic Futures

Schumacher Society

EF Schumacher, author of *Small is beautiful: economics if people mattered* was one of the great thinkers of the 20th Century. He promoted human-scale technology and organic agriculture as a means towards a more sustainable future. And all this in the 1970's, against the enormous tide of an oil-driven consumer society.

The [Schumacher Society](#) is dedicated to “promoting human scale sustainable development”. This must be taken in its broadest sense, economic, ecological and social.

Publishing regular, very practical and readable *Schumacher briefings* and organising the annual *Schumacher lectures*, it is a practical organisation that has also brought together the [Schumacher Circle](#) of related charities that promote EF Schumacher's beliefs.

The place to start to learn more about the great importance of EF Schumacher.

Garden Organic

Formerly HDRA, Garden Organic is a major force in organic horticulture. It has two distinct parts, one aimed at gardeners, the other at research for commercial growers in the UK and abroad. It is now a substantial organisation with many staff, three gardens and tens of thousands of members.

[Garden Organic](#) has a lot to offer people wanting to convert their garden to organic management and its gardens are hugely inspirational. They also organise frequent events and produce an interesting and practical member's magazine, *The Organic Way*.

A very important organisation to all organic growers, Garden Organic has organic principles at its heart and does more practical work than any other organic organisation in the UK.



Bumblebee on Phacelia, a wonderful green manure that is very important in organic growing

Organic Futures event

Get your diary out now and clear this weekend:

Sat 15th & Sun 16th September

We are organising an event at Abbey Home Farm near Cirencester in Gloucestershire. [Abbey Home Farm](#) is a large mixed farm with many enterprises and has been organic for many years.

The event will be very cheap – you will only have to pay to get there, camp, food and drink. It'll be very informal but enjoyable and a great way to get together. More details to follow...