

# Organic Futures

January 2008

*"There is a clear and urgent need to localise food production and distribution, given the challenges we face from climate change and peak oil. Countries like the UK should be building their food supplies around their indigenous population, with limited trade to fill the gaps."*

Phil Stocker, Soil Association Head of Food and Farming

## Welcome

Happy New Year. Those who have read previous issues will know all too well that I keep banging on about carbon footprints, peak oil and climate change. There's a reason for that and I make no apologies for it, because carbon is going to get ever more important in our lives individually and collectively.

I was only thinking the other day back to the Soil Association conference in London in January 2006, because it was here I first really latched on to the critical importance of carbon cycles for the future. The speaker was Jonathon Porritt, one of the first speakers of the conference and his opening message was succinct, decisive and memorable.

"Wake up and smell the carbon"

By the end of 2006 he was proved right, carbon was the new currency. During 2007 the issues of Peak Oil and Climate Change have come to the fore and the need for action became ever more urgent. Following high profile reports, very successful films like *An Inconvenient Truth* and successful community initiatives like Transition Towns spreading like wildfire, carbon was one of the main talking points of the year.

In December was the important Bali summit on Climate Change that appeared to have made

some progress in global emissions reductions - though many would say didn't go far enough. However, it was headline news and that's not something to be underestimated...and the USA was forced to join in with the international community for the first time on this issue.

So what will 2008 bring? Many people are now aware of the global and local issues and there is no shortage of solutions available. The question often comes down to willingness to change, because moving to a low carbon life requires (for most people in industrialised countries at least) a big change in lifestyle. These changes may however be forced upon people as oil prices rocket.

Local food and rural communities will be an ever-important issue in a more decentralised, oil-independent world. People need to eat and only local organic food will really fit the bill post-Peak Oil. I see it as an inevitability that, in the medium-term, the sorts of agricultural and horticultural systems I believe supporters of Organic Futures would like to envisage, will become reality.

However we have to try and manage that transition, from agribusiness to local production, from dependency to resilience if it's going to work. There are massive barriers to be overcome such as land ownership, financial structures, education, planning systems and psychology.

But it must start at ground level, with people in their own local area and with food. Consumer demand is a force to be reckoned with, which cuts both ways - it enabled the rise in capitalism and globalisation, but there's no reason why it can't reverse that. It is up to us to help that process on its way.

Here's to continued re-localisation in 2008.

Jonathan Smith

## The Peace of Wild Things

When despair grows in me  
and I wake in the middle of the night at the  
least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives  
may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great  
heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting for their light. For a time  
I rest in the grace of the world, and am free.

**Wendell Berry**

### Scholarships

Financial support for young people wanting to learn more about food and farming, with a view to furthering their professions, are available in the form of scholarships. These can be a really good opportunity to broaden horizons and gain knowledge from other people and countries.

The Nuffield Farming Scholarship is well known and supports up to 20 people under 45 every year. This is available for a study tour anywhere in the world, for at least 2 months and can fund all travel and subsistence costs. [Read more...](#)

Tropical Agricultural Association is more specifically aimed at young people from the UK, with qualifications in rural land-based industries wishing to travel to tropical countries. This can be used towards a project in, or to experience tropical agriculture. [Read more...](#)

The knowledge gained by Sir Albert Howard in India led to the seminal work *An Agricultural Testament*, so undoubtedly we all have much to learn from the tropics and people who have very few material resources.

### News

#### Farmers affected by Climate Change

A survey by Farming Futures shows more farmers expect to be affected by climate change, and are increasing on farm action to mitigate against it. [Read more...](#)

#### Changing buying habits

Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall appears to have had some success with his high profile campaign, as part of the Channel 4 TV programmes, at getting people to eat more free range poultry. Whilst the ideal would be for people to eat organic poultry, this is an important first step and such TV "campaigns" do tend to raise a lot of awareness. [Read more...](#)

#### Organic carp

A few hundred years ago not only carp but fish such as tench, perch and chub were considered good for eating. Many monasteries and villages had their own carp ponds. "We've got to get back to eating food like this for the benefit of the planet" says Jimmie Hepburn. [Read more...](#)

#### Food prices on the rise worldwide

The effects of climbing food prices are being felt across the globe, with prices of several different staple foodstuffs reaching record levels. [Read more...](#)

#### Farm shop in hospital

Warborne Organic Farm has opened the first farm shop within a hospital, at Southampton General, in Europe. "We've got a great production base but we need another outlet and rather than go to the high street, why not put it in the heart of human health?" says George Heathcote. [Read more...](#)

## Can Britain Feed Itself?

This is the title of a recent report by Simon Fairlie, published in [The Land](#). A massive and very important subject in its own right, the question of food security for the nation has not really been a priority issue since World War II.

In these days of rising oil prices, the necessity to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and an unstable international political climate, there is a clear need to redress this question for a secure future.

[Can Britain Feed Itself?](#) takes a good look at the current state of play and then looks at a number of future scenarios, comparing which ones are likely to be able to feed the UK population. It is not as simple as comparing land area and population, because there are obviously many different types of land – some more suitable for grazing than cultivation.

This is where the analysis leads at the end of the report. Not only are the types of farming and growing systems employed (i.e. chemical or organic) important, but also the balance of animals and crops. Then there is the amount of land given over to wildlife, for fuel supply and fibre production to be considered.

The report largely concludes that if we eat less meat then organic agriculture and horticulture can feed the population of the UK. This approach would be strengthened if these organic systems employ Permaculture design principles to further integrate people with land use.

This is encouraging but will require big changes in diet, farming systems, land ownership, planning regulations and larger values in society as a whole. There is also no getting around the fact that the urban conurbations will still rely heavily on other parts of the country for food, fuel and fibres. Nonetheless an interesting report that will hopefully spark much needed further debate.

## Links

Soil Association: [Library](#)  
[Classified adverts](#)  
[News](#)  
[Events](#)  
[Land exchange](#)  
[Food and Farming](#)  
[Organic heroes](#)

[Transition Culture](#)  
[Biodynamic Agricultural Association](#)  
[Organic Inform](#)  
[Garden Organic](#)  
[Organic Growers Alliance](#)  
[Organic apprenticeship scheme](#)  
[Why Organic?](#)  
[Organic grower's blog](#)