



**November 2007**

*"The thawing of the Arctic ice is happening so much faster than anyone had ever thought, nearly 100 years ahead of the IPCC projections and before we have even reached a 1 degree rise in global temperature"*

David Spratt, Carbon Equity

### **Climate change – talking in a new language**

Two weeks ago I read one of the most shocking reports I have ever seen, the latest findings from a long running climate monitoring study by Australian NGO [Carbon Equity](#). Their latest reports, [The Big Melt](#) and [Target Practice](#) are based on research carried out in the 2007 Arctic summer combined with past data.

Its findings are nothing short of shocking. The key points include:

- There has been an identifiable 1°C increase in average global temperatures
- Arctic sea ice is disappearing 100 years ahead of previous predictions
- In turn, sea levels could rise by as much as 5 metres before the end of this century

What is perhaps unique about this report is that it looks at natural feedback mechanisms. Anyone who has studied [Gaia theory](#) will recognise the importance of such an approach, and it emphasises that positive feedback cycles are increasing the effects of climate change quicker than anyone has ever predicted.

The implications are enormous, for everyone. Organic food and farming offers enormous benefits over non-organic on many levels, including a lower carbon footprint. But this is not enough. We must all, individually, look at our carbon footprints and reduce them dramatically. NOW.

I was banging on about carbon footprints last issue, so for those of you that haven't already, go and work out your carbon footprint using the [Resurgence Carbon calculator](#). Go on, now – it shouldn't take more than 10 minutes!

If your carbon footprint is 2 tonnes per year or less, well done, that's impressive. Inspire others! If it's more, which I suspect it is, then you've got some work to do to reduce your footprint. Perhaps aim for the 4t/year mark to start with and work down from there.

Large contributors to your carbon footprint will be travel, home heating and manufactured goods – as well as food, of course.

The science has now become very clear – there is no case for complacency or ignorance, climate change is causing very serious problems already. If we fail to take any actions (personally and collectively) the consequences are severe and frankly unknown.

Jonathan Smith

### **Get involved with Transition Towns**

The perfect antidote to a depressing editorial! Transition Towns initiatives are a very positive tool for engaging people in a lower energy lifestyle and bringing about collective energy descent.

To find out about your nearest Transition initiative (or find resources to set up your own!) have a look at their [website](#).

For a really informative and enjoyable blog from the master of Energy Descent, Rob Hopkins, read his excellent [Transition Culture](#) blog.

## Ode to Autumn

Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness!  
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;  
Conspiring with him how to load and bless  
With fruit the vines that round the thatch-eaves  
run;  
To bend with apples the mossed cottage-trees,  
And fill all fruit with ripeness to the core;  
To swell the gourd, and plump the hazel shells  
With a sweet kernel; to set budding more,  
And still more, later flowers for the bees,  
Until they think warm days will never cease,  
For Summer has o'er brimmed their clammy  
cells.

Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?  
Sometimes whoever seeks abroad may find  
Thee sitting careless on a granary floor,  
Thy hair soft-lifted by the winnowing wind;  
Or on a half-reaped furrow sound asleep,  
Drowsed with the fume of poppies, while thy  
hook  
Spares the next swath and all its twined  
flowers;  
And sometimes like a gleaner thou dost keep  
Steady thy laden head across a brook;  
Or by a cider-press, with patient look,  
Thou watchest the last oozings, hours by hours.

Where are the songs of Spring? Ay, where are  
they?  
Think not of them, thou hast thy music too, -  
While barred clouds bloom the soft-dying day  
And touch the stubble-plains with rosy hue;  
Then in a wailful choir the small gnats mourn  
Among the river shallows, borne aloft  
Or sinking as the light wind lives or dies;  
And full-grown lambs loud bleat from hilly  
bourn;  
Hedge-cricket sing, and now with treble soft  
The redbreast whistles from a garden-croft;  
And gathering swallows twitter in the skies.

John Keats

## News

### Soil Association Air Freight consultation

The Soil Association's Standards Board are proposing changes to the standards on air freighted food carrying the Soil Association symbol. From January 2009 all such products will have to meet ethical and fairtrade standards as well as Soil Association's.

View the full press release [here](#).

### Wales leading "eco principles" race

A combination of Transition Town initiatives, private individuals and organic farmers and growers are helping to ensure Wales leads the way in getting ecological principles on to the agenda and in to people's lives.

See the article from the Western Mail [here](#).

### "What will we eat when the oil runs out?"

In this year's Lady Eve lecture, organised by the Soil Association, world authority on peak oil Richard Heinberg has delivered a groundbreaking lecture that outlined the major problems humanity will be facing post peak oil.

Global food production faces four simultaneous crises arising from our relatively recent pattern of dependence on depleting fossil fuels. As these crises grow and mutually interact, the consequences for humanity and the biosphere are likely to be profound and unprecedented in scope.

Read the transcript and listen to the podcast [here](#).

## Greener Wardrobes

I need hardly tell anyone reading this that ethical choices extend far beyond food, and in fact take within their embrace and commitment a far wider vista.

Within this remit and indeed with any intention of working towards a more sustainable path ahead for us all, a consideration of the choices and efforts we should all be making as consumers, retailers and producers, must extend to clothing and textiles as well as much else. It is of even greater pertinence now than ever before - the realities of our changing climate necessitate a radical rethink of the ways we live our lives and the choices we make.

Aside from the pragmatism: we all wear clothes after all, to dismiss stylish clothing and fashion as something which is frivolous and throwaway and thus jarring with a 'green' lifestyle or ethical choices, is not only short-sighted but naïve too. Fashion is a *huge* industry and for that reason alone, to ignore or dismiss it would be both misguided and irresponsible. In fact, we ignore it at our peril.

Wool and leather are important and valuable by-products of the farming and meat industry, and cotton for example, is the world's most important non-food crop. A holistic approach to farming is one that actively works within this economical and ecological framework.

If we take the case of conventional cotton – one of the heaviest users of pesticides -for example:

- Conventional cotton is big news: it is the world's most important non-food crop, grown in over 80 countries and valued at \$35 billion annually.
- It's a development issue: around 75% of global cotton production takes place in developing countries
- It is an environmental/health issue: conventional cotton production

accounts for up to 23% of global insecticide releases and is responsible for the release of chemical pesticides that are considered toxic enough to be classified as hazardous by the World Health Organisation.

- It's a back door to GM: 70% of cotton grown in the US is genetically modified.
- It kills: One teaspoon of 'Aldicarb' (a pesticide used in conventional cotton production) on the skin could be enough to kill an adult, yet this pesticide – and others with similarly lethal effects – continues to be used in some of the world's poorest countries.
- All in all, extensive environmental and human rights abuses occur during the production of conventional cotton, aside from the excessive and unsustainable use of pesticides and freshwater.

This is a pretty bleak picture but one that *is being* and *can be* countered. The organic textiles sector has been burgeoning in recent years and now slowly beginning to flourish. Alternatives to the deeply entrenched, cheap, throwaway, mass-produced fashion that is swamping the market *can change* and indeed, *are changing*. Fashion need not be unethical and cotton and textile production need not be so catastrophically destructive to the environment or hazardous to our health.

Organic cotton production uses none of the harmful, toxic chemicals of its non-organic counterpart and needn't be any less stylish either. Wool, a fantastic by-product yet scandalously it has no market value in its raw state, however, it can be used to make an enormous range of clothing and textile items which adds considerable market value. Organic leather too is an important and often forgotten by-product of the meat industry and can be used to produce a wide range of products so customarily taken for granted by us all.

Such is the exponential growth and interest in the organic clothing and textile sector in recent years, there has been a huge surge in textile certification applications to the Soil Association. This is enormously encouraging and reflects a wider shift in the fashion and textiles industry in general: the default image from yesteryear of organic clothing being of a functional, one-size-fits-all ilk, is rapidly being debunked.

On the back of an explosion of public demand and interest, greater awareness and commitment to organic clothing and textiles has ricocheted out of the farm and into the mainstream. High street stalwarts have been swept along in the tide of greater public awareness surrounding 'ethical' clothing with many introducing organic and fair-trade cotton ranges. People Tree, a leading fair-trade and organic fashion brand secured a two-month concession of its range in Topshop's flagship store on London's Oxford Street and it was so successful that it was extended.

There are many counter critiques to be asserted in consideration of these wider industry trends. Charges of tokenism, bandwagon jumping and dubious organic standards are just some of these negative reflections. The fashion industry is hugely influential on both a social and ecological level but also, widely seen as being one of a number of industries at the zenith of destructive, environmentally damaging practices. It is also awash with charges of human rights abuses and lacking in integrity and morality. So in light of this, recent developments on the high street bring with them a double-edged sword. On the one hand they can only be welcomed as an encouraging step in the right direction, on the other, they need to be seen in the wider context of a history of highly dubious business ethos, trading and production practices.

So how do we navigate a clear path through all of this? My personal opinion is that small is *always* beautiful (thank you Fritz Schumacher),

put simply, it is fundamental that we honour and cherish the small farmers, producers, designers and makers out there with our patronage. On a fundamental level, fashion needs to be drastically rethought, Paul Hawken and Mark Lynas, author and journalist respectively, have said, 'fashion is the deliberate inculcation of obsolescence. Each new trend that sweeps the high street renders the obsolete. Its difficult to imagine a more wasteful system'.

For too long, the fashion industry has lead the way in proliferating the idea that we must race to keep up, that our clothes must be renewed before we've even had the chance to pull the jumper over our heads, that in order to be stylish we must run breathlessly alongside this juggernaut as it drives roughshod over its own-made path. In this way we have been lead up the garden path; neither pragmatism, comfort nor style (whichever 'look' is yours) depends on keeping up with the over-zealous turnover of trends in fashion; style comes from within, comfort and pragmatism come from our own practical choices and all three are encapsulated in clothes that are durable, well-made and well-designed. In short: by small, highly skilled farmers, producers, designers and makers working with integrity.

Cheap clothes are a fallacy. Nothing comes cheap without considerable cost elsewhere along the line. In a world where money speaks far louder than anything else, active citizenship must replace sleepy consumerism: voting with our purses has far more impact than voting at the polling booth. Keep your pragmatism, keep your style and spend your pennies with conviction.

Jemima Roberts

Find out more about how socially and ecologically [damaging](#) non-organic cotton production really is. PAN UK are running a "[Wear Organic](#)" campaign

## Future Farmers

*A welcome return to Future Farmers with this inspirational story from Bridie Whittle of [The Good Egg Company](#) in Herefordshire.*

After 5 years living in Bristol and working for the Soil Association, I returned to the (council owned) family farm with high ideals, high hopes and great plans to build my chicken empire, and my life, in the countryside.

During the time I was in Bristol, there had been some changes back at the ranch. My brother and sister-in-law, who had been farming with my parents had moved on to other things. I had met and was planning to marry a lovely city boy who wanted to be a country boy. And so we hatched a plan.

With my brother out of the way, there was an opportunity to get involved in the family farm. And poultry seemed to be way forward. I had learnt next to nothing about poultry at agricultural college but during my time at SA had become involved (against my will!) in all things chicken. It's a very intensive and highly politicised industry and I was tired of the politics and keen to put the principles into practice. And so we returned to the family farm to embark on a life with chickens.

I was in the extremely fortunate position of having;

- use of land/machinery/buildings,
- use of my dad's welding skills (between us we built the hen houses)
- great contacts through my work with the Soil Association,
- thorough knowledge of the poultry standards, and,
- a ready market for all my Class B eggs (my brother makes organic ice cream of which one of the ingredients is my lovely organic eggs).

Having been familiar with the organic poultry

industry for a few years, I was also confident of my market. I knew I would have no problem selling everything I could produce, such is the shortage of good organic eggs. And so 'The Good Egg Company' was born.

If I'd been asked to write this article 6 months ago, I would have struggled to paint a positive picture of life as an organic poultry farmer. In its first 18 months of operation, The Good Egg Company has been blighted by health issues (the chickens, not mine), feather pecking problems, and low productivity. The work has at times seemed endless, thankless and profitless, and I have, on many occasions thought 'what the fuck am I doing?' But I was driven on by the thought that if I couldn't do it, who else could? I had everything in my favour (see above list). I had to make it work. It was that, and the knowledge that I had £20,000 of someone else's money invested in the business.

Now, 18 months down the track, things finally seem to be fitting into place. My original plan to build and populate 5 x 200 bird mobile houses has been whittled down to a more realistic 3 x 200 bird houses. This will not give me a full-time income, as had been the original intention, but it is complemented by a part-time job and leaves me with a workload that is manageable (hopefully) with a small baby which will be added to my flock in the spring. The hens that I have now are a more productive breed than the ones I started out with and that, (I hope) I've discovered, is the key to making a profit.

Chickens have always seemed to me a good way to get started in livestock farming. They don't require an enormous investment and they do give you a relatively quick return. Fortunately, at the moment, the market for organic eggs (and table birds) is booming. People get excited about really good eggs and there just aren't enough to go around. Poultry farming is also (on a good day) a very fulfilling and engaging career choice. Its rewarding

when it works well and the hens are happy and the eggs are plentiful and the yolks are golden and the customers are satisfied.

Technical information on organic poultry production is still relatively scarce. Luckily I've had the benefit of knowing the phone numbers of some kind, experienced organic poultry producers. I've shared my problems with them and they've shared their solutions with me. Fortunately there is now a poultry producer group (Better British Organic Poultry, [www.b-bop.co.uk](http://www.b-bop.co.uk)) designed to fulfil this requirement and to encourage good practice in organic poultry production. The group will organise quarterly farm visits and the website will include a forum where producers can post problems and solutions and exchange information. For anyone wishing to get access to kind and experienced poultry producers with a view to getting started on a career with chickens, this might be a good place to start.

### **An apology**

Apologies for the lateness of this edition of Organic Futures newsletter, due largely to some major problems with my computer a couple of weeks ago.

Although these are now rectified I also lost a lot of files and e-mails – including the Organic Futures e-mail list. Whilst I have recovered at least 95% of the names, I am aware that there will be a few names that I am missing. For that reason, if you know someone who should have received this and hasn't, please get in touch.

Likewise, if you have sent me any name and e-mail address to add to the mailing list since March 2007, please get in touch again at [organicfutures@scillyorganics.co.uk](mailto:organicfutures@scillyorganics.co.uk)

Thanks,  
Jonathan Smith.

### **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](#)

A blog about a young farmer's experiences at the [Prince of Wales summer school on food production](#).

### **Events**

Organic Producers' conference at the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester on December 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>.

Look at the programme [here](#).