

AFTERWORD:

What's in it for the future?

July, 2016

To look back through a lifetime of work is a sobering, nostalgic and at times - a somewhat unnerving experience. I had never planned to produce a book of articles. A properly written work perhaps detailing my life and how I got to being where I am today, spiritually and physically, would have been more my wish. So this book is something of a surprise, and a very pleasant one at that, as without Tamara this would not have happened.

On reading through my old stuff I have at times winced at what I had written. Some things inappropriate or just not quite right, my English is not that good and my grammar is appalling. So some subtle editing was needed, but nothing has been added or omitted from the contents. The temptation to make changes was great and hindsight is indeed a powerful medium, but I can honestly say, that what you read is what I wrote.

If I was to go back and write these articles now, the technical content would be basically the same, but I would include a major component of the very make up of what I have done and that is - people. I realised that there is almost no mention anywhere of people in the articles. It is as if I have been alone for 40 years beavering away at developing a 'systems approach' to sustainable food production, all on my own. This is, of course, not the case at all. I have received a great deal of support from family, staff, friends and the thousands of people that have been to see what makes it all work. I have been spoilt with encouragement and support, and this has played a major part in keeping my interest and involvement in food production for so long. It is to these supporters that I am hugely grateful, as they have allowed me to find the space and time within a busy farm life to think and record what goes on.

As a child I had no idea that I would one day become a farmer, as far as I can tell nobody in my past family was involved in the land, and it was certainly not something that I was interested in or given any encouragement towards. From a young age I developed a keen interest in nature and what it could teach me, especially birdlife. And it was from that interest that I have been able to develop a 'systems approach' to managing biodiversity on the farm in an endeavour to produce a more efficient food production system. It has been a long process, and looking back I can't believe that it has taken 40 years to get to where I am now. It all seems so obvious now, so why did it take me such a long time?

If you were to ask me 40 years ago where we would be with organic food today I would have been very clear about the vision. By now I would have expected at least half of the nation's food would have been produced organically and that the country would be a wildlife haven, people would be well fed with a decent sustainable diet of food. The reality is quite a disappointment though, as the organic market is still seen as a niche and consumption of organic food is pitifully tiny. To analyse why this is the case would take a whole book and not a job for me. But I am ever hopeful for the future, as I know that there can only be one way to feed a nation properly and that somehow by whatever act of fate comes about it will eventually happen.

Looking forward to the next few decades I have a vision for where I would like the farm to go. The farming system here at the farm is well developed and continues to innovate and push the boundaries of what is possible within a commercial setting. The farm has to continue well into the future and for this we need to find a person or group of people to take it forward beyond my allotted time here. I am gladdened to know that there is an emerging group of young people who aspire to become involved in food-producing farms, so I feel confident that in time suitable candidates will be available to continue the work that I have only managed to start.

At a time when the world, politically and climatically is at a point of great change, the need for reliable and resilient food systems has never been greater. I intend to continue to the goal of sustainable food production, a system that feeds people and planet equally. I shall see where I may improve my tiny piece of the planet to show what is really possible by working alongside the natural systems that are so well tuned to their role. To farm within a closed system is practically possible, given the economic restraints within which I find myself having to work.

Not to farm as an island in isolation, but to involve and share the experience for those who also wish to follow the craft of proper food production - the feeding of people.

