

Northern Ireland

NEWSLETTER

Issue 30 Winter 2016

Farming in a climate constrained future



CONTACTS

Friends of the Earth

7 Donegall Street Place
Belfast BT1 2FN
Tel: 028 9023 3488
Fax: 028 9024 7556
Email: foe-ni@foe.co.uk
Website: www.foe.co.uk/ni

James Orr
Director
Tel: 028 9023 3636
Email: james.orr@foe.co.uk

Declan Allison
Campaigner
Tel: 028 9089 7591
Email: declan.allison@foe.co.uk

Niall Bakewell
Activism Co-ordinator
Tel: 028 9089 7592
Email: niall.bakewell@foe.co.uk

Colette Stewart
Office Manager
Tel: 028 9023 3488
Email: colette.stewart@foe.co.uk

Local Groups

University of Ulster
Friends of the Earth
Bryn Mills
Tel: 07515 553073
Email:
Boothby-B@email.ulster.ac.uk

Banbridge and Mourne
Friends of the Earth
Bonnie Anley
Tel: 07730 401331
Email:
bonnie@mournecountrypark.org

Lagan Valley
Friends of the Earth
Jaimie McFarland
Email:
jaimiemcfarland@yahoo.co.uk

Craigavon Friends of the Earth
Maggie McDonald
Email: maggiemcd@hotmail.co.uk

Queen's University, Belfast
Freyja Bourke
Tel: 07512 353751
Email:
niall.callaghan@live.com

East Antrim Friends of the Earth
Niall Bakewell
Tel: 028 9089 7592
Email: niall.bakewell@foe.co.uk

Food wars

Two competing 'food paradigms', industrialized farming and agroecology, are the subject of recent debates about global food security. Industrialised farming features large-scale monocultures, intensive use of agri-chemicals and mechanisation, GM technology, and integration into global supply chains, dominated by transnational corporations controlling supply of agricultural inputs to farmers, and supply of food to consumers.

Advocates argue this approach is needed to meet the needs of a growing world population, projected to reach 9.1 billion by 2050. They claim food production will need to increase between 70% and 100%. The 'doubling narrative', frequently repeated by government scientific advisors and the agribusiness industry, assumes a continuing shift to dairy and meat-based diets in emerging economies, like China.

The 'meatification' of diets represents an inefficient diversion of crops, land and other resources from production for human consumption to production of livestock feed, reducing the affordability of staple foods for poorer consumers. It also contributes to increased levels of non-communicable diseases, such as obesity, diabetes, and heart disease, in more affluent societies.

The introduction of industrialised, export-oriented agriculture in the global South has often led to decreased production for local markets and diminished food security. Small-scale farmers, and their communities,

are often displaced, with many forced to join the urban poor or become economic migrants. Some find employment within industrialised agriculture as farm labourers or sub-contracted 'outgrowers', dependent on export markets and the supply of agricultural inputs, both of which are controlled by agribusiness corporations.

Industrial farming in the global South is also associated with soil fertility decline, and loss of biodiversity and ecosystem services. The industrial farming and food system is highly dependent on fossil energy for mechanisation and transportation, and on fossil fuel-derived inputs,

such as fertilizers, pesticides, and plastics. It is estimated that industrial agriculture contributes one third of global greenhouse emissions.

The alternative paradigm, agroecology, is practised by peasant farmers in much of the global South. It entails small-scale, labour- and knowledge-intensive farming methods that work with local ecology. It typically integrates mixed cropping and livestock farming. It goes beyond organic by emphasising self-reliance and minimising external inputs. Pest and soil fertility management is achieved using on-farm and local eco-system resources, such as: livestock and green manures; cover crops to suppress weeds; companion planting; and local predator insects. Agroecology prioritises production for local or national consumption, and equitable access to food. It's more

than a farming method; it's also a social justice movement promoting the right of farming communities to decide what they grow and how they grow it.

There is growing international support for agroecology, with leading agricultural experts claiming that agroecology outperforms industrialised agriculture in terms of land use efficiency, food security, human health, promoting biodiversity, and climate change resilience. An estimated 500 million smallholder farms in the global South practise agroecology. They sustain the livelihoods of 2 billion people, and produce 80% of food consumed in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. What then might agroecology look like in Ireland, and how could it begin to develop here?



Photo courtesy of Thinkstock

A farmer's perspective

East Antrim farmer, Robyn Hamilton, describes some of the difficulties farmers are facing.

"We produce beef, dairy and about 40 sheep. You need good silage to have good production of milk.

"We have two full-time jobs plus the farm. Ground rent is up. A lot of farmers are at the stage of just quitting and not farming themselves but renting their ground, because then they get their ground rent.

"I don't think anyone really knows what will happen if grants are cut after Brexit. Climate change is a problem too. The weather isn't on our side. Crop producers are completely reliant on the weather. Some farmers have lost a lot of potatoes. A lot of people are talking about it now.

"We're only milking 40, maybe 50. We're getting about 20p per litre, that's high. We'd need about 25p to break even. How much it costs us

depends on if you have your own ground and silage. The meal's gone up again in price. That's not including vet's bills or dosing.

"Better prices would make it possible to make a living. The earlier we can get lambs away the better money we can get, but everyone's in the same boat, trying to sell early.

"A lot of farmers have taken a risk going big, and put in big dairies and now milk prices have gone down. That's a lot for the bank to own. We're just sitting holding on.

"We're being encouraged to keep more animals, but more animals means more of everything - more cost price, more housing, more slats, more tanks for slurry.

"If there was money in milking, if we could get a decent price one of us could leave work and farm full-time. That's ideally what we'd like. We're struggling. We couldn't afford to leave

work to come home because it's not breaking even. A lot of our wages goes on the farm. Where's it going to be when our son is our age? I'd love him to be able to farm if there was an option for it.

"Someone somewhere is making money, but it's not the producers at the bottom. The costs are passed down and we take the blame.

"The UFU is helping the big farmers but not the small farmers. Anyone going big is going to be flooding out the small farmers. Support for the little farmers, the average farmers? Probably not.

"No farmer expects a big wage, but it would be nice to keep going, to cover your costs at least. Someone wouldn't go to an average job for a week to come home with no wage. It's for the love of the animals."



Photo courtesy of iStock

Editor: Declan Allison Contributors: Wayne Foord, Robyn Hamilton, Kierra Box, Elli Kontoravdis, Dawn Patterson, Tiziana O'Hara, and Sacha Workman.
The views expressed are not necessarily those of Friends of the Earth. Designed by: Dogtag Creative. Printed on paper made from 100 per cent post-consumer waste.

For more than 40 years we've seen that the wellbeing of people and planet go hand in hand – and it's been the inspiration for our campaigns. Together with thousands of people like you we've secured safer food and water, defended wildlife and natural habitats, championed the move to clean energy and acted to keep our climate stable. Be a Friend of the Earth – see things differently.

Friends of the Earth is a collective name for Friends of the Earth Trust, registered charity 281681, company number 1533942, and Friends of the Earth Limited, company number 1012357, both of which may use the above information. In both cases the registered office is at 26-28 Underwood Street, London N1 7JQ Tel: 020 7490 1555 Fax: 020 7490 0881 Email: info@foe.co.uk Website: www.foe.co.uk, company number 1012357 © Friends of the Earth 2016. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced by any means nor translated into a machine language without written permission. Friends of the Earth would like to keep you up to date on our work and what you are helping us to achieve. If you would prefer not to receive any further communication from us please contact: colette.stewart@foe.co.uk or call 028 9023 3488 with your contact details.

Christmas dinner

The smell of roasting turkey fills the house. The table is crammed with crackers... It must be Christmas.

We all have traditions that make December 25th special - from icy morning strolls to festive jumper competitions. Christmas dinner might be the most important of all.

But the choices we make don't just impact on our waistlines. The food we eat is responsible

for almost a third of global emissions. And meat contributes more to climate change than all the planes, trains, cars, and ships in the world. The average Christmas turkey is responsible for the equivalent of more than 33 kg of CO².

Those of us opting for something different on our plates aren't off the hook either. Just 1kg of beef might be responsible for up to 129kg of climate-changing emissions. 1kg of lamb might contribute up to 150kg. That's the same carbon

footprint as flying from London to Berlin for your Christmas dinner.

The climate isn't the only casualty. If your roast isn't labelled as organic or free range, it is likely to have been intensively farmed, where health problems are widespread and antibiotic use is high.

With that many animals crowded together, the huge amounts of manure produced can leak ammonia and nitrous oxide, destroying surrounding soils, and polluting water courses. And unless your meat is 100% grass fed, it will have been fed on a diet including imported soy, which is not only responsible for rainforest destruction in Latin America but is likely to be genetically modified too.

What we're eating and how it was produced has a greater impact on our planet than how far it has travelled. But this doesn't make it any less bonkers that our Brussel sprouts may have journeyed over 300 miles across Europe to make it to your plate – despite the fact they're grown across the UK throughout December.

When dinner ends, don't forget to think outside of the bin. Every year we throw away 5 million Christmas puddings, 2 million turkeys, and 74 million mince pies – and with thousands going hungry across the UK, that can't be right.

So this year, why not have a low-impact Christmas? Give the meat a break, or invest in something reared ethically and sustainably. Buy local where you can, and think before you buy it or bin it to avoid needless food waste.

We're predicted to spend £19bn on food and drink over Christmas and New Year. So take the chance to cook up something better this year, and make sure your plate is planet friendly.



Farms not factories

Who would have thought that a farm planning application in Northern Ireland could get international media attention? Surely farming, often the subject of children's storybooks, is inoffensive although I haven't noticed any set in the modern factory farm. The reality of which, at least in the US, is covered by AgGag laws.

Even so, people continue to dispassionately discuss pros and cons. The arguments typically go along these lines.

Factory farming is superior as it is inexpensive, efficient, delivers goods to market faster, provides employment, is profitable and given world hunger we have to be realistic. The other side is often portrayed as artisanal, superior products but only for those who can afford it. The arguments against factory farming usually debated include animal cruelty and welfare issues, substandard food, environmental pollution and massive contribution to climate change. Along with the moral argument of cruelty towards sentient beings, it would seem to me that the climate change issue should be enough to sway people to rethink going for growth at all costs, but climate change is still something society can ignore.

The elephant in the room which we can no longer ignore with respect to super farms are superbugs. Keeping huge numbers of animals in cramped conditions results in a high disease risk. Preventative antibiotic use creates perfect conditions for the emergence of antibiotic resistant strains of bacteria, for example MRSA CC398 (persistent infections and seriously harms people with compromised immune systems).

Other examples include stronger versions of salmonella, campylobacter and E. Coli. This is not

futuristic alarmism, this has already happened. The UK's Review on Antimicrobial Resistance, states that "antibiotic resistance could claim 10 million lives worldwide by the year 2050 if we, as a global society, fail to act." They add the expectation that more people will die from this than cancer. This is not just another point we can add to the debate, this is a stark fact we cannot in good conscience continue to ignore.

It is a rare, costly, and difficult thing to develop an effective new antibiotic. Humanity

has successfully farmed animals for meat consumption for generations. I suspect that with a mature problem solving attitude, instead of winner takes all point scoring debates between capitalist verses environmentalists, we could solve this issue. Northern Ireland's farmers are real people who are in crisis. The last thing this economy or society needs is another serious disease issue. Both farmers and the people who live around them deserve to live in a sustainable environment.



Good Food Bill

Our food system is characterised by inequality and exploitation at all levels.

Though there are still some reasons to be hopeful - the Scottish Government have confirmed that they will introduce a Good Food Nation Bill in to the Parliament in 2017/18. This Bill could be the first of its kind in Europe by taking a framework and rights-based approach towards a fairer food system.

One of the biggest challenges with food is that food governance is fragmented across a large number of decision-making portfolios with very limited strategic direction, and few opportunities for cumulative assessment. And the voices of people at the sharp end of food injustice are often drowned out by the powerful agribusiness lobby.

The resulting scale of the problem is daunting – from around 27% of people having incomes too low to enable access to a nutritious diet, to two thirds of adults being overweight or obese, to 70% of people working in catering and hospitality having jobs that pay below the real Living Wage, to 46% of farms failing to recover their annual costs, to 44% of eco-system services being in decline, to agriculture and related land-use alone contributing 23% of climate emissions, to a third of food being wasted at all stages of the food chain.

That's a lot of simultaneous failings, and that's just the domestic challenges. More than two thirds of the land used for our food and feed consumption is outside of the UK – the externalisation of environmental and social responsibility with limited oversight has serious impacts ranging from land-grabs to child labour.

So what could the Good Food Nation Bill do?

It's not yet clear what exactly the Scottish Government's plan for the Bill is, but it could and should protect and progress the right to food by placing a duty on Scottish Ministers to create a Food Rights and Responsibilities Statement. This would bring cabinet-level coherence and direction to food policy, and create a structure for reviewing progress. An aide to this could be the creation of a statutory and independent Food Commission that would report annually to Parliament on a series of statutory targets, scrutinise relevant law and policy, and with the power to initiate research and hear complaints.

Whilst this may be a novel approach in Europe, it's not a new concept globally. In fact, all UK nations currently have right to food obligations from Westminster's ratification of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights in 1976. However, those rights were never incorporated into our domestic legal system meaning effective socio-economic rights have somewhat always been an empty promise. Prompted by the dramatic rise of household food insecurity two separate UN Committees made strong recommendations to the UK Government this year to take a framework approach towards resolving these challenges.

Stormont has the power to legislate here and could introduce a similar Bill. Though the Northern Ireland Executive's failure to even send someone over to the recent UN review of socio-economic rights compliance doesn't inspire much hope.

Northern Ireland NEWSLETTER

Issue 30 Winter 2016

Waste not, want not.

Food waste is now all the rage. The sheer scale of the waste, local, national, and global, juxtaposed so sharply with food banks and world hunger, has hopefully brought it to a tipping point in western consciousness. The numbers are vast; 1.3 bt or a third of what is produced wasted globally, while 795m people have inadequate quantities of food.

WRAP research has provided us with a total of 14.8mt UK food and drink waste. They found that 10mt are post-farm and 7mt of these wasted in our homes. Worse, over 50% of household food waste was still edible when chucked.

Through “love food hate waste” WRAP campaigns to prevent the average family throwing away

£700 of food and all its embodied carbon, water, and other resources annually. Useful buying, cooking, and storing advice can only help our wildly consumerist society take responsibility and do their bit. It's starting to work: 2007-12, usable food waste reduced by 21% - that's 23 million wheelie bins.

If your maths is up to speed, you'll realise that leaves a 7.8mt UK waste food mountain; target of the Stop the Rot campaign. The UK only redistributes 2% of its retail waste where France diverts 20 times the volume we do. Despite this, and some supermarkets persuaded by Stop the Rot to publish the amount they waste, UK retailers are still pushing the problem down the food chain to the farmer.

The Courtauld Agreement puts the UK on track to reduce food waste by half, in accordance with UN Sustainable Development Goal 12.3. It now includes on-farm waste and is projected to reach a 30% reduction from 2009 level by 2025. However, it is a voluntary agreement. Stop the Rot wants to see regulation plus a 30% reduction against 2016, as advocated by Kerry McCarthy's 2015 Food Waste Reduction bill.

Meanwhile, multiple visionaries have been working hard to buck the trend. The Real Junk Food project, a mushrooming network of 43 social franchise cafés, has established deals with certain supermarkets whose rescued “waste” it cooks, allowing diners to pay as they feel. Silo in Brighton is a regular restaurant with a difference, their cooking and dining style aims for zero waste. FoodCycle has 29 outlets where volunteers use spare kitchens to cook surplus food for those in social isolation or poverty. From Farm to Fork is the Feedback and FoodCycle initiative to train 4000 to glean and cook veg at local charities.

Only FareShare, who collate and distribute damaged dry goods donated by supermarkets to local charities, exists in Northern Ireland.

The response to food insecurity is surely not to reach for fossil fuelled, GM, and chemical fertilizer farming. While such would just add to the vicious cycle of reduced biodiversity, soil degradation and dependence on food miles, reducing the amount of global food waste by 25%, would provide enough to feed everyone.

principles and values now spread and maintained by the International Co-operative Alliance.

Similarly, today's people are getting together to buy food that they want and cannot widely access. Many buying clubs such as SUMA groups, are often run from neighbour's kitchens. The purchasing power of the group makes food more affordable. Vegetable and fruit box schemes are now available and reduce the distance between growers and consumers. These schemes also help the growers to predict what they need to grow to satisfy their loyal members/customers and reinforce demand for fresh, naturally grown local food.

Co-operation does not stop at purchasing or producing food, it is also about community-driven projects to save public spaces or services. For example, the Loughmore Community Co-operative Shop is a community run grocery store in North Tipperary with a tearoom for the locals to meet and socialise. The shop now sells local produce, arts and crafts including homemade breads, cakes, jams, preserves, honey, and locally grown vegetables. This co-operative began with the support of local people who bought €10 shares to get the venture up and running.

Co-operation is also essential for reducing food poverty and

Tackling food inequality



Photo courtesy of iStock

Footprints Women's Centre in Poleglass is a great example of what can happen when a group of determined women decide to take matters into their own hands. Established in 1991, the centre aims to enable women and children to grow to ensure their voices are heard, and that they take their rightful place in a just and equal society.

Footprints developed because of a need to find new and innovative solutions to social and economic issues facing women in the Colin Area of Outer West. Developing the social economy is a major theme. It is acknowledged that by using solutions to achieve not-for-profit aims, the social economy has a distinct and valuable role to play in helping create a strong, sustainable, prosperous and inclusive society.

Access to healthy food can be problematic. Footprints decided to help to protect and enhance the health of the population and contribute to tackling health inequalities. Evidence and practise shows the need for effective Community Development approaches to ensure that food and nutrition work is appropriate to local people.

A kitchen garden was established in 1997 to provide fresh, quality food for the centre. The harvest this year included cauliflower, broccoli, peas, carrots, onions, tomatoes, chard and

beetroot. The fresh produce was used in the catering service providing the children in the Daycare facility and the Senior Citizens group with healthy, tasty soups and casseroles.

The kitchen garden also enables the centre to offer skills development and training in growing fruit and vegetables to local residents who are encouraged to volunteer in the garden. Not only does this enable people to grow food, but it also increases and improves the physical activity levels and mental well-being of participants.

The central principles of Footprints Women's Centre are to create a healthier food culture in the area, a healthier food economy for local people, and a safe food environment. The Centre has prioritised nutrition as key to improving health and in May 2009 successfully obtained 5 years' funding from the Big Lottery through the Colin Empowerment Project for a range of Nutrition and Physical Activity programmes. Each programme combines cooking skills with a fun physical activity and a food growing project. All programmes are accessible to the local community.

By working together the centre staff, volunteers, and local people develop a keen understanding of healthy eating, grow the food they need, and provide mutual support.

improving health and well-being. Take for example The People's Supermarket. This co-operative operates in a deprived area of London and has grown a membership where four volunteering hours per month gives members 20% discounts on their shopping. The supermarket has now a People's Kitchen and pop-up supper events involving local suppliers and the surrounding community.

Even the Rochdale Pioneers had in mind more than food when they set up their first shop. The objectives of

their co-operative were not only “the establishment of a store” but also “building a number of houses” for its members, “to create employment” and rent or purchase an estate of land “to be cultivated by the members”.

In our present days, food co-operatives could still be the centre of an alternative network that connects urban communities to the local farming communities, creates jobs, and educates about growing opportunities and food in general, and open spaces to community use.

Cultivating co-operation

Co-operation is all about a few people joining forces together to do things that by themselves they are not able to do.

When the Rochdale Equitable Society opened the first co-operative shop on the 21st December 1844, those pioneers motivation was, “selling pure (i.e. healthy) food, fair price and honest weight and measures”. Their vision was rooted in the conviction that a different way to respond to the needs of their community was possible and, that coming together, people could work to mutual benefit. That shop in 31 Toad Lane, Rochdale is regarded as the birthplace of the co-operative movement, and its objectives formed the basis of the