

LOG

December 2017

Welcome to the LOG Newsletter for December 2017.

We decided not to hold meetings in December 2017 and April 2018 during this programme season, partly as a cost saving exercise, and will assess this at a future committee meeting. The Wholefood supper in October and the talk about hedgehogs in November were both well attended and enjoyable events.

Everyone should receive this newsletter, by email or post by the end of December, and we wish you all season's greetings.

2018 will mark the 70th year since the Group was founded.

Campaigns Update

Glyphosate, the key ingredient in the world's bestselling weedkiller has won a new five-year licence in Europe, ending the most bitterly fought pesticide relicensing battle of recent times. The possibility of Monsanto's Roundup disappearing from store shelves and a potential farmers' revolt has been stopped. In 2015, the World Health Organisation declared glyphosate "probably carcinogenic", though the European Food Safety Authority disagreed. However, the approval falls short of the 15 year licence that had been originally sought.

Overuse of antibiotics in farming has been highlighted by the UN as one of the biggest emerging threats to human health, a risk that can spread resistance to vital drugs and endanger millions of lives. Concerns have to date focused on resistance to the drugs among livestock and farm workers, but the UN report states that the problem goes much further and is much more dangerous.

WINTER PROGRAMME

2018 Dates

Friday January 12th

The Principles of Organic Gardening

An evening based on the new booklet by Garden Organic.

Bob Haskins

Friday February 9th

Forest Schools

Carol Homa

Friday March 9th

To be confirmed

Friday April 13th

No meeting

Protected Cropping Re-visited

Following our meeting earlier in the year that tackled protected cropping, I was interested to come across an article in National Geographic magazine on greenhouse farming in The Netherlands. In the late 1990s the Dutch made a strategic decision to target more sustainable agricultural production, aiming to halve resource use whilst doubling production. One of the principle ways they have pursued this is through greenhouse agriculture. The controlled conditions and improved seeds and growing techniques have allowed many farmers to eliminate chemical pesticides entirely, using biological controls within a closed system of growing. It has also allowed massive reductions in water use – with 4 gallons of water per kilogram of tomatoes produced, for example, compared to 16 gallons in open field crops. A greenhouse system the author visited only uses water that falls as rain on the greenhouse itself.

The combination of low water use, minimal pesticides, combined heat and power systems, LED lights and geothermal heat enables each tomato vine to produce up to 70kg of tomatoes over a 12 month period, before being replanted. From systems such as these The Netherlands is now the second largest exporter of food in the world. Only the USA, with 270 times the land area, exports more by value.

So what are we to make of such a system. The agriculture being described is clearly not Organic, and the article was not very explicit about how the plants gained their nutrition, other than via a ‘ball of basalt and chalk’, rather than soil. The system uses a hydroponic growing environment, with nutrients supplied by high-tech systems that test and monitor what the plant ‘needs’. Where these nutrients come from, and how that fits with claims of ‘resource independence on every front’, is not made clear. However, in all vegetable production, the Netherlands has reduced its fertilizer use by 29% from 2003 to 2014, whilst increasing production by 28%.

In a world facing food shortages and unsustainable production methods, it would appear the Dutch have some valuable experience to share. The techniques, and an underlying incremental approach to their development, spring from research facilities such as the university of Wageningen, and a still-fresh memory of their desperate food shortages after the war. With a large student intake from all around the world, they are actively working to develop achievable and appropriate advances in other countries and cultures very different from The Netherlands. By identifying minimal resource inputs, and maximising food production from the land, rather than some notional profit per worker which has been the defining model of both western and western-led ‘development’ aims, just maybe they will be part of a solution to world food problems, rather than the all too familiar unsustainable innovations that have been foisted on the farmers of the world.

Robin Stevenson.

Frank Viviano (2017), A Tiny Country Feeds the World. *National Geographic*, Sept 2017.

Leicestershire Organic Group Annual report 2017 (extract)

It is now over 70 years since the Soil Association was formed but its aims and campaigning seem just as important as ever. Only this week, I read in the newspaper a story about the free fruit that is provided daily by the Government to young school pupils at a cost of approximately £40 million a year. This reaches 2.3 million children, but the Department of Health commissioned testing for pesticide residues and found that 84% of the items tested contained at least one pesticide and 66% contained multiple residues with as many as 13 different chemicals in extreme cases, though the vast majority did contain residues below the maximum allowed. The Pesticide Action Network recommended switching the school scheme to organic produce at an estimated cost of about 1p per child per day, but a spokesman for the Food Standards Agency said that it is confident that pesticide maximum residue levels provide a good level of protection to consumers, including the most sensitive groups. I think I know which approach we would favour.

Group Web Site

We have now produced a simple web site at:
www.leicsorganicgroup.org.uk

This will contain latest information about the programme and our newsletters. Please take a look and if you have any suggestions then contact us below or email info@leicsorganicgroup.org.uk
Follow us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/leicsorganicgroup

The next Newsletter will be produced in April 2018. Articles can be sent to info@leicsorganicgroup.org.uk

**Leicestershire Organic Group is a joint local group of
The Soil Association and Henry Doubleday Research Association
(Garden Organic)**

For further details contact group secretary, Bob Haskins, 01509 842449, or publicity officer, Leon Marvell, 0116 269 4978.