

originated in Australia and is practiced around the world which models from nature to produce genuinely sustainable, productive systems. A system is said to be sustainable if it can meet its own needs from local resources and produce a small surplus for reinvestment. From the hilltops of Nepal to the valleys of eastern Zimbabwe there are fantastic examples of these ideas in practice around the world, it is an idea which has already demonstrated its huge value and potential but I guess the key questions for us here are will it scale and will it work to meet our needs in the UK?

Governments and large institutions tend to think at a very large scale, therefore big problems, like climate change need big solutions, mega farms, huge wind developments etc...whereas permaculture teaches us that the sustainability problem will be resolved from the bottom up, by ordinary people everywhere becoming much more engaged with their own local economies. So this is a transition that will be typified by decentralisation and re-localisation of much of what we do. Learning to live on a fraction of the energy and resources that we currently do greatly reduces the scale of the problem.

Lesson number two: Soil, soil is very important and is the key resource we need to be looking out for if we want to survive on this planet. We depend on it for our food and it is also the main reserve for fresh water and the best carbon sink.

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Simply put, a society that is accumulating topsoil has every chance of survival; those which are eroding theirs away have no chance whatsoever or long term sustainability.

Soil is alive and rather than obsessing about nutrients and fertilizers the realisation is that it is the soil biota which maintains fertility and protects plants from disease.

Hence organic systems which work with and enhance soil life have a massive advantage against the plough and fertilize approach to production.

Here in mid Wales, where I live I am surrounded by excellent examples of what is possible and that might serve to inspire producers around the world

that there is another way to go about things that enhance soils and protect biodiversity whilst being productive. It is often said here in Wales, with thin mountain top soils that pasture farming and nitrate fertilizers is the only way we can derive an income from our land.

Permaculture plots in Coed Y Brenin Dolgellau, or Glynceiriog near Chirk have demonstrated that our upland soils respond well to organic cultivation, whilst the Primrose farm near Hay on Wye, reputedly the most productive acre of land in the UK has successfully used permaculture technique to build soil, enhance biodiversity and produce a significant amount of food.

I strongly applaud any producer, on whatever scale who is seriously applying themselves to these challenges but strongly suspect that

small farms, horticultural and community growing schemes are the ones with the brightest future. I myself am working with an innovative organisation in Newtown in Powys, Cwm Harry, who have founded a successful business composting local food waste aerobically to produce a high nutrient compost for local growers, it is this kind of closed loop thinking and local scale operation that will generate solutions and models for others to follow.

Over the last two years we have developed a community garden behind the compost factory to demonstrate our ideas and to create a space for community engagement and shared learning in these areas. We have recently been awarded three years' worth of funding via the national lottery to take these idea forward as the Get-Growing project.. to stimulate interest and involvement in community scale gardening and to support the productive utilisation of unused spaces in and around where we live and work. We are in the process of establishing a community growing hub on the Coleg Powys campus, in Newtown and we welcome visitors and students, volunteers and helpers to come and see what we are doing.

Permaculture design opens up a whole new world of possibilities, it allows individuals to feel fully and usefully engaged in responding to global problems and it creates new pathways to employment, community engagement and most importantly productivity that also enhances biodiversity, carbon sequestration and soil formation. Permaculture is the applied science of sustainability and a big part of our collective future. ■



■ Diversity and abundance at Tir Penrhos Isaf, permaculture study group visiting Chris and Lyn Dixon