

THE ecologist



EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
with **Mikhail Gorbachev**

RAINFOREST SAVER

After 20 years work a British tropical ecologist thinks this seed can save the world's rainforests



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THIS MONTH: All you need to know about reusable nappies; urban composting; easy box scheme recipes; how to cut your fuel bills in half **PLUS:** Top 10 organic wines; the finest organic jams; 7 seasonal soups



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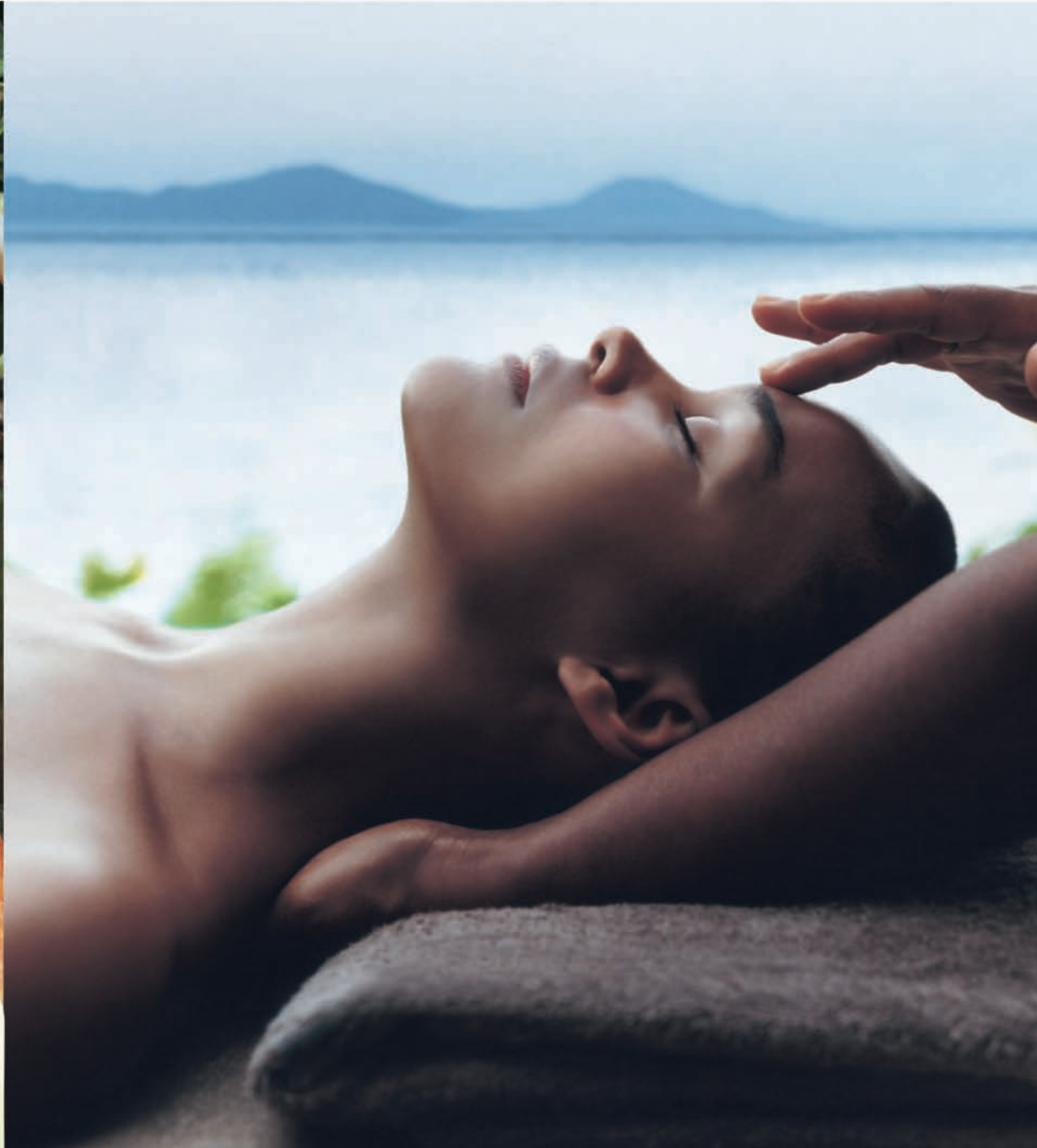
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In a few months time, if the French and German governments have their way, the EU will overturn an embargo and begin selling high-tech weapons to China. Whichever way you look at it, it's a decision that's hard to reconcile with those same countries' apparently pious opposition to the Iraq war.

China's human rights record is unambiguously bad. The arms embargo itself was created as a direct result of the massacre in 1989 of hundreds of peaceful protesters in Tiananmen Square by the Chinese state. That was 15 years ago, and since then there is very little to suggest China has taken a different view of human rights, as family members of any one of the 800 or so supporters of the Falun Gong spiritual movement who have reportedly died in official custody (for the crime of heresy) could testify. Or the countless people imprisoned for accessing the internet or sending emails making reference to the Sars epidemic... Or the still greater numbers of people detained and tortured for various other 'political crimes'.

Nor can China's foreign policy be regarded as benign. Just three years ago the Chinese army was instructed to carry out a simulation of an invasion of Taiwan. In Tibet, meanwhile, you can expect a lengthy prison sentence (with all the trappings) if you're caught carrying a picture of the Dalai Lama. Routine abuse of Tibetans is relatively well documented. But less well known is the repression experienced by the ethnic Uighur community in the Xinjiang Uighur 'autonomous region'. There, the people are experiencing a cultural revolution of their own, with the closure of mosques, restrictions on the use of their own language and the banning of various Uighur books and journals. Mass imprisonment and routine torture have been widely reported - all in the name of the ever-convenient 'war against terrorism'.

Given that the past is probably the most reliable indicator of the future, the EU will be knowingly providing the tools for massive suffering - for the sole purpose of throwing a bit of business the way of the already mighty arms manufacturers.

It goes without saying that this is a deeply immoral position. But it's worse than that. It's a deeply stupid position. And the chances are we will all pay the price. For one thing, China is growing faster than any economy in the world. In fact, it is quickly out-growing itself. China became a net importer of food last year for the first time. Its northern plains, where nearly two thirds of its grains are grown, are being transformed into deserts at a rate of nearly 10,000 square kilometres each year. The water table in the same region is dropping by up to 12 feet each year.

Meanwhile, 500 cities are being hurriedly built to accommodate the migration from the countryside of hundreds of millions of previously self-sufficient people. All of them will become to varying degrees modern consumers with ecological footprints far greater than those of their parents.

Which means China will soon be competing with America and the EU over resources that are dwindling. And unless we manage to achieve a dramatic reduction in our own consumption very soon, there will be a collision. In the short term, if I were a wealthy inhabitant of a resource-rich neighbour of China, I'd be packing my bags to leave.

In the medium term, the EU itself will be in direct competition with China over oil, water and control of the world's remaining breadbaskets. When that happens, as it must unless by some miracle an explosion in the price of oil punctures the global economy, how can we expect China to react? If it has to, China will fight. And it will do so with the very same weapons supplied by the EU as a result of this dirty deal.

Thankfully, the US is opposed to the move, and so the British government is in a bit of a pickle. At the moment, the government is saying simply that it supports the EU review process and will await the findings. But given half a chance, I suspect Mr Blair will want to get his fingers in the till. Which means it's probably up to his backbenchers. But will they be able to divert their gaze from Otis Ferry's Gloucestershire fox hounds in time to start campaigning on a real issue?



The Unknown Rebel

It was 5 June 1989, the day after the Chinese government began cracking down violently on the protests in Tiananmen Square. The 'Unknown Rebel', as he is known, stood alone in the middle of the road as the tanks approached. They repeatedly attempted to drive around him, and every time he just stepped into their path. After half an hour he climbed up onto the top of the lead tank to talk to the driver. Reports of what he said range from: 'Why are you here? My city is in chaos because of you'; 'Go back, turn around, and stop killing my people'; to a blunt 'Go away'. Finally, a nervous crowd pulled him down and concealed him in their midst as the tanks rolled on their way. In April 1998, Time Magazine named the Unknown Rebel in its list of the 100 most important people of the 20th Century.

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The tsunami is a terrible disaster, but the magnitude of its visual drama makes it ripe for manipulation by the forces that control the world's media and economy.

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No defence for hunting

I had heard your magazine was a serious publication highlighting issues affecting nature, the environment and human and animal rights. I was therefore surprised to be immediately confronted by your editorial defending fox hunting ('editorial', November 2004).

You raise the issue of relative cruelty, putting fox hunting below things like live exports and vivisection. I would reply that cruelty is cruelty, whatever form it takes, no exceptions. I doubt the individual fox involved would appreciate the fact that their torment and ultimate death was the result of a practice that was considered by some commentators to be relatively less cruel than others.

You then try to explain that hunting with dogs, compared to the alternatives, isn't really that cruel anyway. I have heard this argument before and wonder how the pursuit of an animal until its state of exhaustion allows it

to be caught by hounds and ripped to pieces can fail to be cruel? A clean, quick, efficient kill? Don't make me laugh. You consider hunting with dogs to be less cruel than trapping, shooting and poisoning, but ironically the inefficiency of hunting as a form of fox control means that these other methods are already widely used.

I also find the bleating of 'country folk', echoed by yourself, about the supposed disaster facing traditional country life if fox hunting is

banned pretty hard to stomach. What is the problem with drag hunting? I have yet to hear a hunt spokesman say why this is not an alternative that would allow them to continue to enjoy their 'sport'.

Instead, all we hear is that if fox hunting is banned, hunts will be forced to shoot all their hounds and thousands of people would be cast into poverty. Rather, I can see opportunities here for increased employment in the countryside with a growth in the number of licensed fox controllers. These people would be properly trained marksmen employed by local



farmers to tackle any perceived fox problem.

This is the 21st Century and it is time that cruelty-for-fun 'sports' ended. By rights, fox hunting should have gone the way of pig sticking, bear baiting and cock fighting many years ago. Any political reasons for the current legislation, which will hopefully result in a total ban on this cruel activity, don't make it any less valid.

John Gittins
By email

Go organic and veggie, too

Jane Clark claims that organic livestock farming benefits the soil, the environment and human health. (Letters, December 2004/January 2005). She's right. Organic farming doesn't have to be a perk for the few; it can be the solution to the world's food and fuel problems, but only if we also stop eating animal protein.

We live in a world of 6 billion people and rising. Modern chemical farming provides us with just enough food to go round, but at a price. Animals need food to grow: when we eat them, we are, in effect, also eating the food, water and fertiliser it has taken to grow them. There is nowhere near enough land to grow organic animal protein for 6 billion-plus people. Chemical farming produces just enough animal protein by turning fossil fuel into nitrogen fertiliser. According to *National Geographic*, it takes eight barrels of oil to grow just one cow.

Animal farming causes global warming. It is also killing the soil through chemicals, spreading diseases

like BSE and avian flu, using up the land needed for bio-diesel and other bio-fuel production, and is a major contributor in the ongoing rape of the last few areas of rainforest and other biodiverse wildernesses.

Richard Girion.
By email

Dental colonialism

I read with interest your recent debate on the pros and cons of water fluoridation ('Should our drinking water be fluoridated?', December 2004/January 2005). I, like no doubt many people, find the idea of having medication forced upon me through something so essential as the water system very disturbing.

The cynic inside me (and who can fail not to be a cynic when reading the 'truth' about so many issues in *The Ecologist*) says that the idea of imposed water fluoridation, which flies in the face of European standards, may not necessarily be the best way to tackle dental health and may indeed cause the serious side effects described by Dr Paul Connett.

However, I was prepared to give time to Professor Liz Kay's reasoned arguments in defence of water fluoridation. But by the end of the article I was absolutely incensed by her attitude.

She said: 'Still too many families... do not have access to a toothbrush, let alone fluoride toothpaste... For a parent living on a housing estate who has to struggle to make ends meet... choosing toothpaste is not as high on the list as feeding their children.' For 'housing estate' read 'run-down inner city

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Fluoride debate *The Ecologist* December 2004

council estate', and by 'parent' I assume that Kay is referring to the much maligned 'single mum'.

I have never read such a load of condescending claptrap. It appears that in Kay's middle-class view of the world those at the bottom of the financial heap are so hard-up they have to choose between a bag of chips or a toothbrush. Or perhaps the poorer one is, the less one cares about hygiene? This is a developed country where there are very few financial excuses for not buying a toothbrush and toothpaste (using them is another matter).

In my opinion Kay's proselytising attitude is not far off from that of the 19th Century European imperialists, forcing 'civilisation' on the 'savages'. She seems to share with much of the British media the notion of the great 'unwashed', who are not fortunate enough to lead a perfect middle-class life and therefore need almost parent-like guidance and care from those of higher moral authority.

John Reber
By email

Holistic Dentistry

I have just finished reading your debate on water fluoridation and was absolutely appalled by Liz Kay's ignorance of the facts. Like many people working in health today she needs to step back and remember that the body is one whole living system. Putting a toxic chemical into it, even if it does have a benefit to one part of the body, isn't going to do the rest of it much good.

To say that there isn't sufficient evidence to show that fluoridation is harmful is ridiculous. Dr Paul Connett cited many examples of studies that illustrated these problems, but Kay kept ignoring him and saying that fluoridation did indeed help the teeth. There's more to the body than teeth.

The very obvious problem with tooth decay is sugar. Kay mentioned children having all their teeth removed because of their eating too many sugary foods. I'd never even heard of this before. For children to have *all* their teeth removed they must have to eat absolutely tons of the stuff, and consequently suffer related medical conditions

such as obesity. These other conditions would then have to be treated with more public money.

So health officials have decided that the best way to deal with the problem of tooth decay is to put a toxic chemical into a fluid crucial to life because children are eating buckets of sugar. The anti-GM movement takes action against a forceful government (that seems increasingly deaf to public opinion) by ripping up GM plants. Maybe the only way to stop this mass poisoning is to hijack trucks delivering Mars bars.

Matthew Woodward
By email

Coke in space

Regarding the article 'It's time to take down Coca-Cola' (December 2004/January 2005), it seems vital to mention an additional issue that warrants a boycott of Coke. With the annual production of 39.5 billion cans of Coke we could make a tin tower to the moon. Imagine how much air, water, metal and other resources are wasted to make and distribute those 39.5 billion cans.

Coke's crimes are not just a matter of polluting the environment. By proliferating (in a way unparalleled in history) the false impression that convenience-consumerism is totally risk-free, Coke pollutes the world's mind. The world needs to develop an attitude of conservation and respect for the environment and resources, even if that means losing some modern conveniences. Coke undoubtedly stands in the way of that attitude.
YMD Fremes, by email

Last month *The Ecologist* announced plans to sell short Coca-Cola shares. Here are some of the reactions from around the world:

'[A] unique strategy... to take profits out of corporations and give them back to ordinary folk around the world'
Al-Jazeera

'Keiser and his group of investors are looking to combine socially conscious investing with short-selling strategies to jujitsu corporations with their own capital market power. Some may fall'
CBS Marketwatch

'Financial genius... The mechanism is judicious... and it's working'
Herald de Genève

'A new twist to the age-old tactic of boycotting'
The Washington Post

'The first activist hedge fund'
Hedgeweek

'When consumers in more than 200 countries enjoy the company's beverages at a rate exceeding 1 billion servings each day, there is a temptation to be smug. But there are newer problems, too, such as what [Max Keiser proposes]... Too real for the Real Thing?'
The Hindu Business Line

'This so-called campaign is based on blatant falsehoods. It's unfortunate that anyone would attempt to hurt Coca-Cola shareholders by waging such an effort without knowing and recognising the facts'
Ben Deutsch, director of financial communications, Coca-Cola

US can't escape climate change

Climate change is dramatically affecting the migration routes, breeding habits, and blooming cycles of animals and plants across North America, according to a three-year study by the international conservation network the Wildlife Society. The North American group's study is the first comprehensive look at the effects of global warming on the continent's wildlife. Ecologist Doug B Inkley, who supervised the eight scientists who wrote the report, said: 'We are changing the environment and climate in which our wildlife live like never before.'



Fatcats prosper under Labour

Redistribution of wealth? According to a recent report by the Office for National Statistics, the richest 1 per cent of the UK's population increased their share of national wealth from 20 per cent to 23 per cent in the first six years of Tony Blair's time as prime minister. Furthermore, 54 per cent of the UK's wealth is now owned by the richest 10 per cent of people in the country.

Natural disasters cost global insurance industry \$35 billion



Even before the tsunami disaster in the Indian Ocean, 2004 was the most expensive year ever for insurance companies paying out for natural disasters. During what was the fourth warmest year in history there were a record 10 typhoons in Japan, as well as South America's first ever hurricane; all of which, along with floods and droughts the world over, cost insurance companies \$35 billion in the first 10 months of the year. Of that figure \$26 billion was paid out in the US.

Nonetheless, Washington continues to refuse to ratify the Kyoto Protocol or do anything meaningful about climate change. At December's international climate conference in Buenos Aires, US representative Conrad Lautenbacher said: 'There's no scientific direct evidence connecting storms to climate change.' Faced with such intransigence, could 2005 be the year when the world's battered insurance industry leads the corporate backlash against George W?

Arabic mag wars heat up

A few months ago *The Ecologist* announced that the US military was publishing an Arab-language magazine in an attempt to promote its good works in the Middle East. Not to be outdone in the propaganda stakes, the Arabian Peninsula Women's Information Bureau (which is said to be affiliated to al-Qaeda) has published the first issue of its new magazine. Online mag *al-Khansaa* claims that it is designed to help women with the thoroughly modern dilemma of balancing their obligations to their family with loyalty to the holy jihad. The words of wisdom in the first issue include: 'The blood of our husbands and the body parts of our children are the sacrifice by means of which we draw closer to Allah.'



Argentine cooperative thrives without bosses



Officials in Argentina are attempting to clamp down on a workers' cooperative that turned a factory it took over after its closure into a model of efficiency and productivity. When its then owner closed down the Zanon ceramics factory, claiming it wasn't

making enough profit, the plant's former workers simply occupied it themselves and went back to work. Since then the cooperative running the factory, situated in Neuquén

Province in Argentina's Patagonia region, has taken on 50 per cent more workers than was the case under the previous management and overseen a 300 per cent increase in production levels. Workers at the factory have also built a health clinic for the

local community, who had waited 20 years for the government to provide such a facility. None of this has had any effect on the Argentinean authorities' determination to effect the cooperative's eviction. At the time of going to press five attempts to evict the factory have been resisted by the workers, who believe that with enough international support they can hold out even longer.

To show your support for the Zanon cooperative, visit: www.petitiononline.com/zanon/

No such thing as humane animal experimentation



Animals that are experimented on show measurable physiological stress responses to laboratory procedures that have until now been viewed as relatively benign, a new study claims. The study, published in the journal *Contemporary Topics in Laboratory Animal Science*, suggests that routine procedures, such as removing blood and using stomach tubes, are terrifying

for animals.

'In essence, there is no such thing as a humane animal experiment,' says the report's author, Dr Jonathan Balcombe. 'Fear or panic ensues when the animal is touched or stuck with a needle.' Balcombe is research consultant at the Washington-based research and pressure group Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine.

Recently a paper

published in the *British Medical Journal* under the title 'Where Is the evidence that animal research benefits humans?' found that in many cases trials on humans are conducted concurrently with animal studies, and that in other instances clinical trials go ahead in spite of evidence of harm from the animal studies.

Meanwhile, Jane Goodall, the world's foremost authority on chimpanzees, has urged the immediate cessation of animal tests. Goodall said: 'People should understand the experiments are completely unnecessary because alternative ways [of testing] have already been developed.'

For more on these issues, visit the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine website at www.pcrm.org [last sentence all in italics]

Inuit initiative

In what may well be a sign of things to come, the Inuit people of the Arctic are recasting global warming as a human rights issue. They are seeking a ruling from the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights that the US is threatening their very existence by warming the planet through its excessive release of greenhouse gases.



Although the commission has no enforcement powers, a favorable ruling could establish the basis for a lawsuit, either against the US government in an international court, or against US companies in a federal court inside America. If the precedent is set, the number of similar cases could potentially dwarf those brought against tobacco firms in recent years.

Another bitterly ironic sign of global warming's effects on the Inuit is that they are increasingly finding their world populated by animals for which they have no names. While they famously have many words for snow, they have none for such species as elk, salmon, barn owl and robin. These creatures are now regularly found in their ancestral lands.

The power of poo

Residents of village of Matimangwe in the northwest of Mozambique have come up with an ingenious revenue source: their own faeces. At a cost of just \$20 they have converted their pit toilets to composters that use a human-waste compost-latrine system called EcoSan. The 2,500 villagers are using the compost to help them produce enough crops to feed their families. And Money raised from selling surplus compost is helping to pay for the construction of clean wells for drinking water and for school materials for local children.

Are you wearing GM cotton?

Half of China's crops may be genetically modified by 2014, according to a report sponsored by the biotech industry.



China is now the second highest funder of research into GM (after the US), and is currently developing and testing a wide variety of gene-altered crops, including GM corn, soya, rice, potatoes and tomatoes. Furthermore, the Council for Biotechnology Information

report says that China increased its biotech cotton production for the fifth year in a row in 2003/04, and that 68 per cent of its cotton crop is now GM. So next time you go shopping, remember: if it's made of cotton and comes from China, you're probably wearing GM.

EU poverty plans would devastate Africa



European nations, including Britain, are bullying African countries into signing free-trade deals that could push millions of people into poverty, the development charity ActionAid claims. In the report *Trade Traps* the NGO reveals that many African states fear the EU will withdraw aid and deny them access to its markets if they reject the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) currently being piloted by EU trade commissioner and former UK cabinet minister Peter Mandelson. But the report argues that

EPAs, which would force open African markets to cheaper subsidised European products, threaten the livelihoods of 750 million of the world's poorest people. Thus, three million people who depend on the Kenyan sugar sector and two million people in Ghana who are reliant on tomato farming in that country could be made destitute. The collapse of such domestic industries could result in severe cuts in public services like health and education. Kenya, for example, would lose about £100m in sugar taxes.



Squirrels use tricks to hide their nuts

There's more to the way squirrels bury their nuts than meets the eye. Sylvia L Halkin, a professor of biology at the US's Central Connecticut State University, has been studying deceptive behaviour in squirrels and learnt that after burying acorns they sometimes feign interring a second one nearby. Halkin interpreted this behaviour as activity designed

to confuse other animals attempting to locate buried acorns. She also observed squirrels digging several holes before burying their nuts in just one, or hiding their nuts in their nests to prevent them from being seen by her team of researchers. '...It gives us a glimpse into the kinds of mental processes that may be going on in their heads.'

Aid scandal

Meanwhile, a scandal has been unearthed concerning the way UK accountancy firms have been profiting from aid projects in India. In the past few years the Labour government has used more than £60m of UK taxpayers' money from the overseas aid budget to pay accountancy firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers and KPMG and development consultancy Adam Smith International to 'advise' Indian states on how to privatise their public services.

John Hilary, director of campaigns and policy at War on Want, said: 'The government has turned UK aid into a giant Indian takeaway for privatisation consultants. While millions of Indians live in desperate poverty, UK aid money is being given away to companies whose privatisation plans actually make matters worse. If the UK government wishes to restore the credibility of its aid programme, then the aid budget must be used solely for genuine poverty reduction initiatives.'

To read War on Want's report 'Profiting from Poverty: privatisation consultants, DFID and public services', visit www.waronwant.org

Bush may not be the worst...

While the world may not be too delighted to see George W back in the White House, it may at least be glad that some of the even more maverick presidential candidates didn't get in. According to a report on New Jersey website *NJ.com* some of the more outlandish of the failed candidates include: Jack Grimes of Maryland, who admires the leadership methodology of Saddam Hussein but would rely on telepathy and astrology to make tough presidential decisions; Sterling Allan of Utah, who alphabetised and then numbered every word in the Bible and said that the codes he produced told him to return the US to the gold standard; and Randy Crow of North Carolina, who says that there is a government-implanted chip in his brain and that an administration led by him would crush the 'Omega Agency', the organisation that was really responsible for Nine/11, and which may have the ability to vaporise everyone on earth.

Do the maths

Money raised by first Band

Aid single: £9.5m

Sub-Saharan Africa's debt:

\$256 billion

Security budget for the 2005

G8 summit in Scotland

(where Blair reckons Africa will top the agenda): £150m

Cost of Iraq war so far to

UK taxpayer: £8 billion.

Amount pledged by UK

government to the Indian

Ocean tsunami relief fund

by 6th January 2005 £50m

Shell blames itself for Niger Delta violence

Poverty and ever increasing income disparities in the oil-rich Niger Delta are causing violent conflict resulting in more than 1,000 deaths a year, according to a report prepared by consultants for none other



than oil giant Shell. The delta's petroleum industry, which accounts for almost all of the 2.5 million barrels of oil Nigeria produces a day, has generated billions of dollars for the Nigerian government and oil companies like Shell, yet very little of that money has trickled down to the region's impoverished inhabitants. Instead, they have had to put up with such inconveniences as the 221 oil spills reported by Shell last year alone. The report concludes: 'It is clear that [Shell] is part of Niger Delta conflict dynamics and that its social licence to operate is fast eroding.'

Sugar the bane of Florida wildlife



Not only is sugar consumption making America fat, it's also killing its wildlife and environment. Of the almost 700,000 acres of the Florida Everglades that have been drained to create the 'Everglades Agricultural Area', about 80 per cent is used by the state's powerful sugar industry to grow cane.

Phosphorus and nitrates used on the farms have leached into the waters of the Everglades, stimulating faster grass growth, which has made it harder for wading birds to feed and altered the chemistry of the water so that algae can no longer support species that feed on it.

Conservation giants failing the environment claims Worldwatch

Three of the world's largest conservation organisations have been accused by the independent research body the Worldwatch Institute of failing in their stated purpose. In an article titled 'A challenge to conservationists' in its *World Watch* magazine, the institute said the World Wildlife Fund,



Conservation International and the Nature Conservancy 'are allying themselves with forces that are destroying the world's remaining ecosystems... while ignoring or even opposing those forces that are attempting to save them from destruction'.

Read the article at www.worldwatch.org



1/4 of world's birds on brink of extinction

By the end of the century 10 per cent of all bird species currently alive may be extinct and another 15 per cent could be on the brink of extinction, a new study by conservation group BirdLife International claims. The study's worst-case scenario goes even further, predicting a loss of 17 per cent of the world's bird species within the next 100 years. As the authors of the study, *State of the World's Birds 2004*, stress, the loss of so many of the world's birds is of more than just aesthetic or emotional value. 'Birds are excellent environmental indicators,' says senior editor Dr Leon Bennum, 'and what they are telling us is that there is a fundamental malaise in the way we treat our environment.'

EU campaign for arms fund

Britain in Europe, the campaign group most likely to lead the 'yes' campaign in the UK's proposed euro referendum, is to seek funds from foreign arms companies, according to leaked documents seen by *The Sunday Times*. The companies listed for targeting by the campaign's fundraisers include Thales, EADS, Boeing and Lockheed Martin, all of which are leading players in the 'defence' industry.

Hermit found living in nuclear power station

The international nuclear industry is always at pains to tell the world how safe it is, and that its stringent safety checks ensure Chernobyl-style disasters are highly unlikely ever to happen again. However, the rigour of

its safety checks was called into question at the end of last year when nuclear officials at the US's Los Alamos National Laboratory evicted 56-year-old Roy M Moore from their premises. Apparently, Moore had been

living undetected for several years in a hard-to-access cave on the grounds of the nuclear weapons research facility. His cave was kitted out with a wood-burning stove, solar panels, a bed, a glass door and a satellite radio.

IN OTHER NEWS

With 10 million being born in China every year, the country's population reached 1.3 billion at the beginning of 2005. The world's next most populous countries are India, with 1.06 billion; the US, with 291 million; Indonesia, with 214 million; and Brazil, with 177 million.

Former *Two Fat Ladies* star Clarissa Dickson Wright has accused fellow celebrity chef Jamie Oliver of 'selling his soul' because of his decision to take Sainsbury's shilling to promote farmed salmon. Dickson Wright said: 'Jamie Oliver is supporting what is probably a defective farm and he is supporting a product which he doesn't eat... I think he's a whore. Isn't that what whores do, take money for something they wouldn't do otherwise? Jamie has sold his soul carte blanche to Sainsbury's and turns up wherever they want him.'



Zimbabwe's information minister has proposed an unusual strategy to combat the country's many problems. He has suggested an 'obesity tourism strategy', whereby overweight tourists would be encouraged to take their holidays in Zimbabwe, where they would then provide labour for government-confiscated farms and in the process shed weight.

CORPORATE NEWS



McDonald's resists eviction from heart clinic

An interesting fast food fight is heating up in the US. The chief executive of Ohio's Cleveland Clinic, Dr Toby Cosgrove, is trying to get a McDonald's restaurant removed from the hospital, one of the leading cardiac care centres in America. But undeterred by Cosgrove's previous success in having a Pizza Hut ousted from the clinic, McDonald's is fighting back. The corporation claims its menu is healthier than those of rival restaurants sited at the hospital such as

Starbucks and Subway. Following an initial meeting with the clinic, McDonald's commented: 'We feel our menu can fit into any balanced, active lifestyle, given that there is a variety of choice in every menu option. You can customise your meal.'

As always the same 'freedom' argument is used: it's a free world; you have the choice to go to McDonald's or not. The impact on that choice of the company's multi-billion dollar advertising budget and

the fact that its food is laced with additives is apparently immaterial.

Here, as a reminder, is what the good doctor is up against. In 2002 McDonald's held a summit of the 125 PR firms (yes, 125) it employs. Mike Donahue, the fast food chain's head of communications in the US, explained: 'McDonald's had a great story to tell, and we weren't telling it.' Since then in the US McDonald's has teamed up with actor Paul Newman, whose sauce manufacturing business is providing the dressings for the company's new 'healthy' salads, and with Oprah Winfrey's personal trainer on its Go Active! American Challenge 'balanced lifestyle' campaign. In the UK it has introduced a new golden question mark logo and the slogan 'it's McDonald's... but not as you know it'.

To keep up to date on the Cleveland Clinic story, visit: www.mcspotlight.org [all last sentence in italics]



UK's love for local and organic food grows

Not only is organic food a booming business in Britain, with retail sales growing at around £2m a week, but the supermarkets' share of the market is dropping. According to figures released by the Soil Association, sales in the organic sector grew by more than 10 per cent in the year to April 2004. The decline in the supermarkets' share of the market is attributed to consumers' apparent preference for sourcing organic food locally: purchases at farm shops and from home delivery schemes rose by 16 per cent in the 12 months to April 2004; they are now worth about £108m a year.



Fossil fuel addiction unrelenting

Worried about dwindling fossil fuel supplies and the potential for further wars in oil-rich regions? Then you probably won't be glad to know that the US government's Energy Information Administration predicts American petroleum demand is expected to grow by 37 per cent by 2025. Or that China's combined imports of thermal and

coking coal were 18 million tonnes for 2004, a 64 per cent increase on the 11 million tonnes imported in 2003. China is the world's largest producer and second largest exporter of coal, and the increase in its need to import has seen prices for coal shoot up by 50 per cent in the last year.



World Bank seeks cycle rickshaw ban

Who do the people at the World Bank think they are? The bank is currently pressuring the municipal authorities of the Bangladeshi capital of Dhaka to ban cycle rickshaws because 'they shouldn't be allowed to clog the cities' main arteries'. But are cycle rickshaws 'clogging' the streets of Dhaka?

Not really. In 1998 cars made up 9 per cent of traffic on the city's streets but took up more than 34 per cent of road space. In contrast, rickshaws accounted for 54 per cent of journeys in Dhaka but took up only 38 per cent of road space.

To register your objection to the World Bank's plans, visit: www.worldcarfree.net/dhaka/

Protesters unfurl a banner outside Tesco's flagship store on the Cromwell Road in west London. They were participating in the Just Milk campaign of independent farmers' pressure group Farm. According to Farm, the low prices supermarkets pay their milk suppliers are forcing an average of 40 dairy farms out of business a week. For more info go to www.farm.org.uk



Appearing on a TV near you

Watch out for representatives of the International Policy Network (IPN) cropping up on TV and radio programmes in 2005 as commentators to provide 'balance' when there's an environmentalist present. The latest report of the new think-tank includes such startling revelations as the notion that global warming 'benefits' include 'increasing fish stocks in the north Atlantic'. It is worth noting that the IPN has received funding from ExxonMobil, which listed the donation as 'climate change outreach' work.



HSBC makes one (small) step in the right direction



While it is undoubtedly good news that banking giant HSBC has announced it aims to make its operations carbon-neutral by 2006, it is worth putting that pledge into perspective. HSBC has 10,000 bank branches in 76 countries. The multinational estimates that it will cost up to \$7m to account for the more than 600,000 tons of carbon dioxide that it contributes to the atmosphere each year via energy consumption and business travel. But if it really wanted to make a difference, it would stop providing loans for dams, oil exploration, mines, and other earth-unfriendly projects, all of which do considerably more damage than a few HSBC executives flying first class to Shanghai.

'You've felt it your entire life, that there's something wrong with the world. You don't know what it is, but it's there, like a splinter in your mind, driving you mad,' Morpheus says to Neo in 1999's blockbuster *The Matrix*. He then offers Neo the choice of either the Blue Pill, the one that allows him to hold on to his delusions, or the Red Pill, a pill that allows him to glimpse the horror underlying the world's economy, what some might argue represents today's neo-liberal, American Business Model (aka the Washington Consensus) and the needless ecological devastation it wreaks for short term gains at the expense of long term survival. The following are Blue Pill stories ripped from today's headlines followed by some Red Pill realities. Which do you swallow?

Max Keiser takes a look behind this month's headlines

Blue Pill:

Hindustan Times, India - 1 Jan, 2005
 'Expressing his "horror" at the tsunami tragedy, British Prime Minister Tony Blair has said long-term efforts from the international community were needed to overcome the consequences of the "global catastrophe".'

Red Pill:

Far from seeing it as a catastrophe, there are some in the neo-liberal camp thanking God for the tsunami. Fred Bergstenof, former US Assistant Secretary of the Treasury, who now runs the Institute for International Economics in Washington, said on America's National Public Radio (NPR) three days after the tragedy: 'Like any disaster, you get negative effects through destroying existing properties and people's health, but you do get a burst of new economic activity to replace them, and, on balance, that generally turns out to be quite positive. When they put up new resort hotels, they'll be more modern, they'll be more attractive. They'll probably bring in more people in the future.' Mr Bergstenof goes on to say that it's too bad Britain didn't get obliterated during World War II like Japan and Germany. If it had, Britain could have enjoyed the economic benefits of rapid rebuilding and GDP boosting 'growth'.

Blue Pill:

Tesco Plc, the UK's biggest food retailer, will lower prices of 500 products by a total of £80 million (\$154 million), starting Monday. The goal is to become the cheapest supermarket in the UK.
 Bloomberg - 31 Dec, 2004

Red Pill:

What appears cheaper is not always so. We live in a globalised world where falling prices in one area of the economy can cause nasty disruptions in others and not always in ways obvious to non-economists. You feel like you're getting abused, but you're not sure how.

Swallow the red pill and look at your monthly incomes and outflows this way, and maybe some light will be shed on the reason for your unease. It's true that Tesco is offering lower prices, and since £1 of every £8 in sales in the UK goes through Tesco, consumers believe Tesco is a mighty force for savings in their lives. Is this really true? Probably not, because the same ease with which capital, goods and services circle the globe (making it possible for ultra-cheap labour in China to manufacture goods that end up getting sold in the UK for super cheap prices) also allows for jobs to go the same route. Jobs are getting outsourced to China as easily as China is exporting cheap plastic dolls and calculators to the UK. Chinese workers end up competing for UK jobs (both blue and white collar) and since they get paid a fraction of the wage of their UK counterparts, downward competitive pressure is forcing down UK wages in the global employment market. Classic economics tells us that this is not necessarily a problem as long as wages don't fall faster than prices, but that is exactly what is happening. You're making less than you're saving, that's why you feel poorer. So if you are only taking into consideration the savings you are collecting by shopping at Tesco without also taking into consideration the potential loss of earnings power that comes when all your local food and



clothes shops have been gobbled up by a ruthless, transnational hyper-discounter, you may be overlooking the reason why, at the end of the month, even though you are 'spending less every day' at Tesco, you still can't pay the bills.

Celebrity Pope wannabes offer no help. Sir Bob Geldof complained recently that after a 'major supermarket' opened in his town of Faversham the town had been 'denuded'. He blames charity shops like Oxfam and Age Concern. Instead of shutting down the life-sucking supermarket, Sir Bob suggests that the charity shops be closed. 'If there was zero tolerance in policing then they would immediately raid charity shops and shut them down.' Methinks Sir Bob needs to get beaten with a clue stick.

Blue Pill:

'...The EU concedes its carbon trading system might push up power prices and says the Kyoto cost of reducing carbon emissions could be as much as 3.7billion Euro.'

The Australian, Australia - 27 Dec, 2004

Red Pill:

Don't believe the hype. After you factor in health costs, carbon trading is a bargain. Figure it this way, as carbon prices go up, corporations and 4x4 drivers are less able to afford it - which means less of it gets burned - which means less of it degrades our environment and health. Long term health costs will go down in increments greater than any incremental pickups in price savings consumers might pay in the short term.

If you're really concerned about rising energy costs, you can eliminate the risk by opening a spread betting account and making bets on rising energy costs. Use any profits to offset your monthly energy bills, and live

longer too.

But what about jobs? Won't putting carbon abusers out of business eliminate jobs? Not if the government is smart about the transition to the new less-carbon economy. With the government's encouragement, companies should start staffing up now and begin competing in the new, lucrative, carbon efficiencies business. The near future is a brave, less-carbon world where carbon credits gained through carbon efficiency give companies the incentive to chase even more carbon efficiencies, (thus giving them the opportunity to sell more of their unused carbon credits) As more of these credits flood the market, governments will, to keep the price of carbon from dropping, reduce carbon caps - thus creating a virtuous cycle of more jobs and less carbon.

Blue Pill:

'Microsoft has bought privately held Giant Software, which specialises in making security products to detect and remove unwanted software from Windows Operating System.'

TechWhack, India - 16 Dec, 2004

Red Pill:

There probably wouldn't be any need for an anti-spyware company like Giant to begin with had Microsoft not been allowed to grow into an unhealthy predatory monopolist turning cyberspace into a killing field of buggy, unreliable code. This deal will add to Microsoft's monopoly by giving them a chance to monopolise the anti-spyware business, which in turn means another industry will be prevented from growing into a diversified, healthy business, and soon we'll need an anti-anti-spyware to combat the effect of Microsoft monopolising the anti-spyware business. Thinking ahead, Microsoft will probably buy the new anti-anti-spyware company

too and the whole process will go on ad infinitum until we will all just give up and go back to paper cups and strings to communicate with and the good old reliable abacus to figure out how much money we're wasting at Starbucks.

Blue Pill:

'Instead of letting the damn things [sharks] cruise around eating us, we should start eating them. Of course, this would mean hunting them to extinction, which would cause all sorts of loonies to wave their arms around saying that we were changing the world. To which we could reply: "Absolutely. We're making it better." And then we shall start on the tigers.'

The Sunday Times Review - 19 Dec, 2004

Red Pill:

Free-marketeers love Clarkson because he's an unrepentant troglodyte who supports the 'animal spirits' Keynes talked about as the primal motivating force driving individuals to conquer the world and lift us all with their vision and courage. Rubbish. Those 18th century economic concepts were developed when the idea of the Earth running out of natural resources seemed about as likely as Clarkson running out of nasty things to say about French drivers. Instead of wasting time trying to disabuse Jeremy of his Neanderthal views, here's an idea: What could be worse for Clarkson than losing his driving license? Here's how to do it. Post details of Jeremy's license plate on the internet and then get as many people as possible to make magnetic copies and stick them onto their own vehicles before committing as many traffic violations in front of CCTV cameras as possible - until Jeremy's mail box is flooded with enough court orders to keep him off the road for a long time.

A close shave

Wet shaving with a blade is one of the oldest ways of removing unwanted facial and body hair. There are now a wide variety of shaving gels and foams on the market for both men and women. They look nice, they feel nice and some even smell nice. But they can contain some not-so-nice ingredients

by Pat Thomas

The Mach3 range of shaving products and razors is the flagship line of industry leader Gillette. Helped along by a four-year global advertising campaign featuring David Beckham, it has conclusively carved its way into the male psyche. But would the 'epitome of the well-groomed man' be so enthusiastic about the range if he knew that Mach3 shaving gel contained several skin irritants, four potential carcinogens, three central nervous system poisons and two reproductive toxins? The £40m Beckham is earning from the campaign might pacify his conscience somewhat. But for most average men, for whom shaving is a daily necessity, there may be more important things than being the best-looking corpse in the graveyard.

M for metrosexual... and money

Men's grooming habits have shifted radically over the last few years and continue to change at a dramatic rate. Today market's is booming as more men are buying products for themselves rather than relying on female partners, friends or relatives to purchase them, or secretly raiding their products. Manufacturers know this and are keen to exploit it with advertisements that link the purchase of their products with the promise of promotion at work, better performance in sport and an irresistible attraction to the opposite sex.

Men's increased interest in grooming has given rise to a new marketing niche, the metrosexual: a modern, urban man in tune with his sensitive side, grooming and fashion needs and social awareness. It's a gag-worthy concept, but its power is undeniable. In the last year the men's grooming market in the UK raked in £519m. While deodorants (£225m) and fragrances (£99m) accounted for the lion's share of this, shaving products came a respectable third in sales terms, yielding £61m. Gillette is far and away the UK's most popular shaving brand (and the biggest selling globally), accounting for more than two thirds of the market in this country.



Gillette Mach3 Turbo Gel ingredients

Aqua, palmitic acid, triethanolamine, isopentane, glyceryl oleate, stearic acid, parfum, isobutane, sorbitol, hydroxyethylcellulose, polytetrafluoroethylene, tocopheryl acetate, propylene glycol, aloe barbadensis leaf juice, silica, BHT, CI 59040, CI 42090

Palmitic acid

Purpose: Emulsifier

Adverse effects: Contact dermatitis

Triethanolamine

Purpose: Detergent; surfactant

Adverse effects: Contact dermatitis May contain carcinogenic impurities

Isopentane

Purpose: Solvent

Adverse effects: Breathing difficulties; Has anaesthetic effect on the skin; Dry skin; contact dermatitis, Altered heart rhythms; Dizziness; headaches; Irritating to nose and throat

A major component of gasoline vapour, and a chemical relative of isobutane (see next column).

Glyceryl oleate

Purpose: Emulsifier, Emollient

Adverse effects: Skin allergies; dermatitis

Stearic acid

Purpose: Emulsifier

Adverse effects: Skin allergies

Parfum

Purpose: Fragrance

Adverse effects: Allergen; Triggers asthmatic reactions; Skin irritation; Headache; mood swings; depression; forgetfulness.

'Parfum' is a collective name given to hundreds of different chemicals used to produce fragrance in cosmetics and toiletries. Most are neurotoxic and many are persistent (ie, they don't break down in the environment and they accumulate in human tissue and breast milk). Artificial musks, common ingredients in fragrances and toiletries, are hormone-disrupting.

Isobutane

Purpose: Propellants

Adverse effects: Headache; Mood swings ;Nausea; vomiting; dizziness; High doses can cause convulsions and coma

These highly flammable volatile organic chemicals accumulate in human breast milk. While isobutane doesn't destroy the ozone layer, it does contribute to the formation of ground-level ozone, or smog, which can cause serious breathing problems.

Polytetrafluoroethylene

Purpose: Film former; Friction reducer

Adverse effects: Carcinogenic; Birth defects; Weakens immune system.

Also known as Teflon, this chemical belongs to the same family of perfluorinated chemicals (PFCs) as Scotchguard (now withdrawn from the market for safety reasons) and a range of other fabric treatments such as Stainmaster and Gore-Tex. A recent report by the US pressure group the Environmental Working Group on the PFC perfluorooctanoic acid revealed that it can be found in the blood of some 90 per cent of US citizens. PFCs are indestructible and widespread in the environment, and some observers believe that their effect on humans may make DDT look safe by comparison.

Propylene glycol

Purpose: Solvent

Adverse effects: Penetration enhancer

Propylene glycol alters skin structure, allowing other more toxic chemicals to penetrate more deeply into the skin, and eventually the bloodstream.

BHT - butylated hydroxytoluene

Purpose: Antioxidant

Adverse effects: Contact allergies; contact dermatitis

Potential carcinogen; May cause birth defects

If absorbed, BHT can accelerate the breakdown of vitamin D, which helps maintain immunity and healthy bones and teeth.

CI59040, CI 42090

Purpose: Colourings

Adverse effects: Skin irritation

42090 is a potential carcinogen

59040 is an irritant to the mucous membranes of the eyelids, mouth, nose, respiratory tract and genitals; the EU does not allow it in any preparations that come into contact with these areas

42090 is also known as FD&C blue 1,

CI 59040 as D&C green 8; both are synthetic coal tar dyes.

Grapes of wrath

By Joanna Blythman

With our supermarket shelves groaning under the weight of so many wines, why do they all taste the same?

I was one out of a total audience of seven at a Friday night screening of the Palme d'Or nominated documentary *Mondovino*. That's the sort of reaction you get in the UK to a film that runs for two and a quarter hours, is subtitled for substantial chunks, and whose subject is wine- something that the great British public still feels inadequate to discuss, despite the best empowering efforts of Richard and Judy's new wine club. Indeed it suspects that anyone taking anything approaching a serious interest in wine is elitist and possibly ever so slightly pretentious too. In the UK and US, wine buffs have long been viewed as members of a strange sect, versed in the arcane and labyrinthine complexities of obscure foreign labels that dare to eschew the lingua franca of world trade - English - and which cling to antiquated grading systems such as the French *Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée*.

But director Jonathan Rossiter's thought-provoking documentary raises issues that should resonate with anyone concerned about globalisation and the homogenisation of taste. The film consists of illuminating interviews with winemakers and influential figures in the wine trade. What it flags up is an historic stand-off in the wine world. In one corner of the ring you have small-scale traditional wines from essentially family or co-operative-run vineyards. These

unique and diverse wines are variable in quality, sometimes magnificent, other times disappointing. But they are not cloned. They have 'terroir', that is to say they speak of geographic specificity, of different soils, climates and grape varieties. They reflect the eccentricities of their makers, the most dedicated of whom view wine as a vocation, a symbol of civilisation even. In the other corner is a new, homogenous, internationalised wine style, which is now spawning fast-maturing, easy-drinking wines with approachable Anglophone labels in countries as distant as Chile, India, Portugal and the Czech Republic.

Typical here are the wines produced in California's Napa Valley, where companies with multi-million dollar

Supermarkets don't want to muck around with a small grower here, another there, or waste time haggling with local wine co-ops.

turnovers such as Mondavi turn out vast quantities of uniform wine from manicured, wall-to-wall vineyards that would not look out of place on *The Truman Show*. Their high priest is the American wine critic Robert Parker who is seen in *Mondovino* congratulating himself on what he sees as the American-led democratisation of wine drinking.

Parker's palate is what you might expect from a country that has come late to wine drinking, a nation more inclined to partner food with milk, cola or soda than wine. Old World oenophiles are prone to see wine as more of a debate over style rather than rightness or wrongness. In Italy, for example, the celebrated Tre Bicchieri Awards organised by Slow Food and Gambero Rosso rely on a judging panel with several participants to reflect a range of views and tastes. Not Parker though. He

is judge, jury and potentially executioner all rolled into one. His blousy tasting notes - 'outstanding ripeness, elegance and focus...earthy floral scents...packed with minerals, white flowers, pears and anise' - and verdicts (marks out of 100) are clear-cut, accessible and resound with certitude. This is why they appeal to people who feel bamboozled by wine.

Such is Parker's influence in the wine world, if he likes a wine, it will be blessed with commercial success. If not, it is fated to gather dust in some dank cellar- and not because it needs maturing.

Parker favours wines that are deeply coloured, high in alcohol, heavily oaked, low in acidity and free from any challenging tannins. They have an in-your-face fruit pastille sweetness about them -he calls them 'fruit bombs'- which palls quickly and lack subtlety. Some of

the wines he champions are generally well rated, others merely reflect Parker preferences. The most worrying thing about them, however, is that

they are all terribly similar.

Parker has created a one-size-fits-all commercial wine style template that can be adopted anywhere. Its drip-down effect means that it is ever more likely that when you buy a wine from Europe it will resemble a wine from South America or Australia or the US. The palate of younger generations of wine drinkers is becoming accustomed to Parkerised wines. So, unless they are content to cater for a minority of more sophisticated wine aficionados, winemakers are changing their style accordingly to suit the market trend.

There is opposition. *Mondovino* features winemakers like Hubert de Montille in Burgundy and Aimé Guibert of Mas de Daumas Gassac in Languedoc who refuse to alter their unique winemaking philosophy and cultivation methods to accommodate what they consider to be US wine imperialism.



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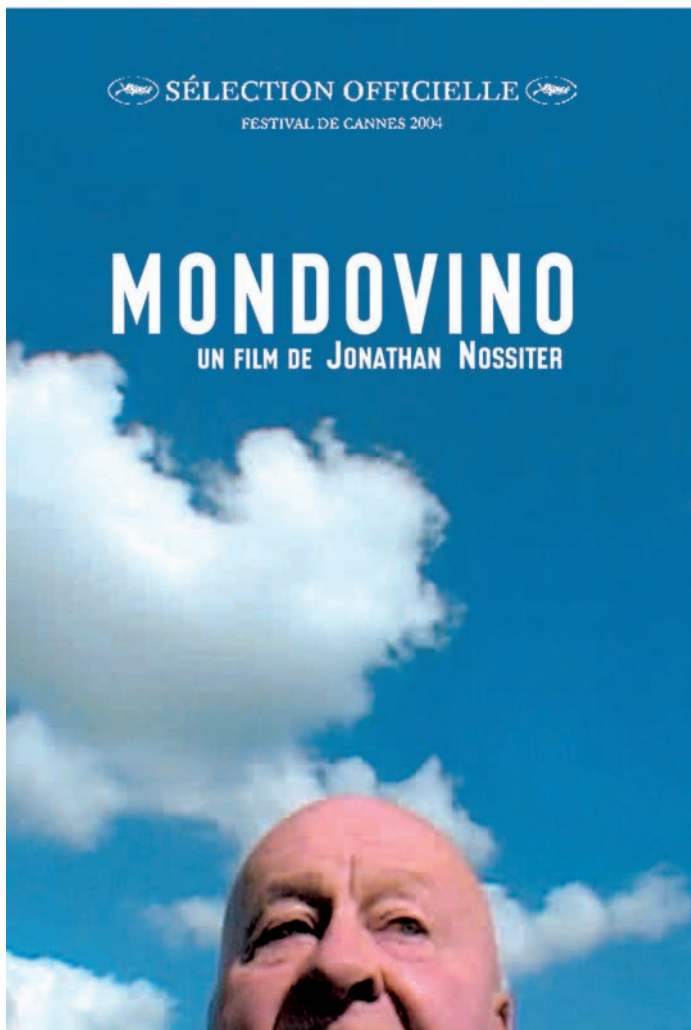
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DOWN'T MISS OUT



a sweetener to get their wines onto the shelves. Supermarkets don't want to muck around with a small grower here, another there, or waste time haggling with local wine co-ops. They can't be bothered with small quantities, annual variations in the vintage and so on. This is why they love big brands like Gallo, Fetzer, Penfolds and Lindemans which can be relied on to come up with a standardised, Parkerised product with an unthreatening label in English. Scared of ceding even more territory to the supermarkets, a chain like Oddbins, once keen on

Guibert, assisted by an incoming communist mayor, other vigneron and local environmentalists who objected to swathes of trees being felled to make way for easy maintenance industrial vineyards, succeeded in blocking the Mondavi Corporation's plans to move into the Aniane forest. Amongst critics, both Jancis Robinson and Michael Broadbent in the UK continue to question both Parker's palate and his hegemonic grip. In *Mondovino*, Broadbent says that he would rather take the chance of drinking a wine with faults than drinking a series of Parker-perfected wines that are all tediously alike.

But wine consumers may not get the chance to make that choice. Big Retail loves Big Wine. As with food, our supermarkets favour concentrating their purchases with giant wine brands who can afford to pay thousands of pounds as

quirky individual wines, is dumbing down its range accordingly. In this brave new world of wine democratisation our shelves now groan under the weight of an unprecedented number of wine labels. Unfortunately, not many people know enough about wine to realise that they are becoming pretty much the same.

Mondovino rings an alarm about this creeping monoculturation of our wine-drinking habits. Watching it I felt a strong urge to go right out and buy wine from the small independent wine shops and wholesalers that remain pockets of diversity by listing wines too small, too diverse, too whimsical or immune to Parker-led, big brand fashion for the supermarkets and big chains to bother with. Post-*Mondovino*, every bottle of wine now strikes me as a profoundly political purchase.

Highway to hell by Kevin Harrison

Weaving across the road after driving 1,000 miles without stopping; keeping awake through coffee alone; only stopping for a spliff or to go to the toilet: it's all in a day and night's work for the drivers ensuring we can buy cheap food at the supermarket

Our prime minister recently admitted in Parliament that he had no idea what his government was doing to combat the problem of food miles. Well, unlike him, I used to be an international HGV driver, so I do know some stuff about food miles: stuff like the answer to this question: 'Why are some international HGV drivers forced by the threat of unemployment to drive non-stop for periods of up to and well beyond 24 hours?' (Answer: so supermarkets can provide their customers with unrealistically cheap food.)

I can spot an international trucker a mile off by their bloodshot eyes and telltale wallet on a chain: they're so spaced out by sleep deprivation that they would forget where their wallet was otherwise. I once checked my tachograph driving records for a one-week period and realised that I had had a stonking 10 hours sleep in the entire seven days. That's less than one and a half hours sleep per day. I survived on a diet of coffee. Sometimes I used to drive at night wearing shades, because the motorway lighting was too strong for my eyes. Sometimes I simply forgot what side of the road I was supposed to be on.

This is the true cost of buying German-made Müller Fruit Corners. The 'added ingredients' of said Corners are: one truck driver with his eyeballs hanging out of his head due to lack of sleep; and one 40-tonne truck coming straight at you on the wrong side of the road. They should carry a health

warning saying: 'Purchasing this product may well induce weaving of large trucks on motorways at night.'

Of course, it's not just Fruit Corners that this applies to. The list of such products is endless... Take Kraft cheese triangles, those seemingly harmless, semi-plastic, semi-cheese objects that kids love to eat. From Calais, it's an eight-hour round trip to the factory that makes this stuff in Belgium; and once you're back in the UK you will then probably have to do a six-hour trip to Manchester, for example, to deliver the damned things too. Some people may well think that the triangle of death is in Iraq. I know that it is really in the dairy counter of the local supermarket.

And what about the 'Tesco frozen chicken fiasco'? Every time I loaded this product at the producer in central Europe, the truck was always overloaded. My truck was soon five tonnes over its 40-tonne capacity. No wonder the M25 needs to be resurfaced every five minutes. As Tesco says in its adverts, 'every little helps'. Nice one Tesco.

So my load of frozen chicken for Tesco was usually five tonnes overweight. A normal load was 20 tonnes, so effectively Tesco got one free load delivered for every four loads that were carried. Now you try going into a

down the slip road of the motorway and plonk themselves a suicidal 100 metres in front of my monster, I used to think: 'If you have to slam your anchors on you'll stop alright; only to be wiped out by this motorised steamroller behind you. You might well have airbags, side-impact bars and anti-lock brakes, but 45 tonnes at 40mph up your arse has absolutely no respect whatsoever for all of that: it's like dropping an anvil on a Dinky Toy.'

While I'm on about Tesco, do you know it now uses its own vehicles and drivers to take goods from its depots to its stores, because it doesn't want scumbags like me turning up in sight of its customers with my eyeballs hanging out of my nut due to lack of sleep, after having mown down a family of four on the motorway with an overloaded truck? No, it wants its drivers to wear ties and shit like that to make them look like they are respectable. I can tell you, if Tesco drivers had to 'do Europe', they would turn up at the supermarket stinking of diesel and sweat, wearing cut-off jeans and T-shirts, with shades hiding their eyes on strings, saying: 'I've been on the road for 24 hours non-stop, I'm hyper on coffee. Do you mind if I park up over there, and skin up a big spliff to smoke because that's the only way I can get to sleep, and that's what

Sometimes I used to drive at night wearing shades, because the motorway lighting was too strong for my eyes. Sometimes I used to simply forget what side of the road I was supposed to be driving on

Tesco not-so-supermarket and taking £10 worth of goods to the till and saying: 'Seeing as you get a 20 per cent discount on the transport of your goods, I will pay you £8 for this £10 worth of shopping. Fair enough?' They would throw you out on your ear.

Overloading trucks also compromises their braking capabilities. At 45 tonnes I would need about half a mile of clear road in front of me to be able to stop. When I saw people in tiny cars whizz

everyone else does when they do this job?'

I worked as an international lorry driver for four years. I once did six countries in 24 hours: Italy, France, Luxembourg (I pulled in to have a crap at a service station, that's all I went to Luxembourg for), Belgium, Holland and Germany: breakfast in Italy, tea break in France, crap in Luxembourg, chips in Belgium, scored some stuff to smoke in Holland, big spliff in Germany while



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parked up. Mind you, I also did Austria, Germany, Holland, Belgium, France and England in one day; and England, France, Belgium, Holland, Germany and Poland in the same time, as well. You wanna' go on a long drive? Try Calais to Lisbon, because that's one fuck of a long drive: only 1,375 miles; it's as mind-numbing as doing Calais to Bari right down in the southeast of Italy. The halfway point on the latter journey is a place called Aosta, and that's already in Italy. I've done Bari to Calais in one go non-stop; that's equal to doing Calais to Lisbon in one go. It's because of all this that I reckon I know a bit about the food miles issue.

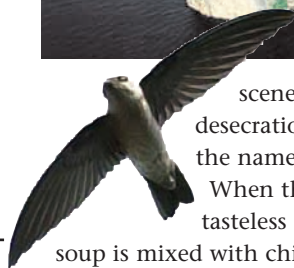
•Former truck driver Kevin Harrison is now head of UK5 Organics, a fruit and vegetable box scheme based in London; www.uk5.info

Death on The Beach

By Malcolm Tait

Leonardo di Caprio. Birds Nest Soup. And now a Tsunami. Phi Phi's edible nest swiftlets never stood a chance

One of the many islands affected by the violent tsunami that destroyed so much life around the coastal rim of the Indian Ocean at the end of December



scene of an annual desecration of wildlife in the name of cuisine.

When the relatively tasteless dish Bird's-nest soup is mixed with chicken and spices it is viewed in parts of the East as a delicacy and aphrodisiac. The nests that create the dish belong to the edible-nest swiftlet, which makes them entirely out of gelatinous strands of its saliva, which it winds into a half-cup bonded to a coastal cave wall.

The bird is found in many coastal regions of the Indian Ocean, but its numbers have been plummeting in recent years as trade in its nests has

Coastal breeding begins as early as December in some of the swiftlet's locations, and as the Andaman and Nicobar islands, another of the bird's main strongholds, were among the worst hit by the tsunami, the effect of the disaster on the swiftlet may be disastrous. But what about the human loss of the disaster? The main beach on Phi Phi Le is called Maya beach, and due to the aforementioned environmental concerns it is not open to the public. Thus, when the waves hit, there were no holiday-makers around waiting to be ripped from the sands to their death. Yet two men, and two men alone on this beach, did die. Their tales, at least, are known: they were from Thailand, they were alone, they were armed, and they were doing a job. They were protecting the swiftlets.

Malcolm Tait is the former managing editor of *The Ecologist*

Phi Phi is the scene of an annual desecration of wildlife in the name of cuisine

was Phi Phi Le off southern Thailand. This mini-paradise came to the attention of the world a few years ago when it was chosen as the location for the Leonardo Di Caprio film *The Beach*. The filmmakers planned to bulldoze part of the island, and aghast environmentalists protested in great numbers. They gained a vague promise that the island would be left more or less as it was found. Yet Phi Phi Le hasn't just suffered at the hands of movie moguls; it's also the

ramped up. The business is worth about £15m per year in Hong Kong alone, making poachers hungrier than ever to get hold of the precious foodstuff. In the past nests were only taken once the swiftlet's chicks had fledged, but since numbers started to dwindle poachers have been doing their thing even before the bird has had a chance to lay its eggs. This is completely unsustainable and will, it has been calculated, lead to the bird's extinction within the decade.

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Time for a new Ecology party

By Aidan Rankin

The zealous participation of European Greens in the campaign to thwart Rocco Buttiglione is indicative of the capture of green politics by an unreconstructed, unreformed and unelectable left

When the Green movement first erupted onto the political scene a generation ago, its message was often confused, sometimes refreshingly naïve, occasionally even absurd. Yet the Greens provided a ray of hope. This was because, at best, they pointed towards a politics that transcended the shop-worn prejudices of right and left and took a holistic view of the individual, society

and humanity's place in the web of life.

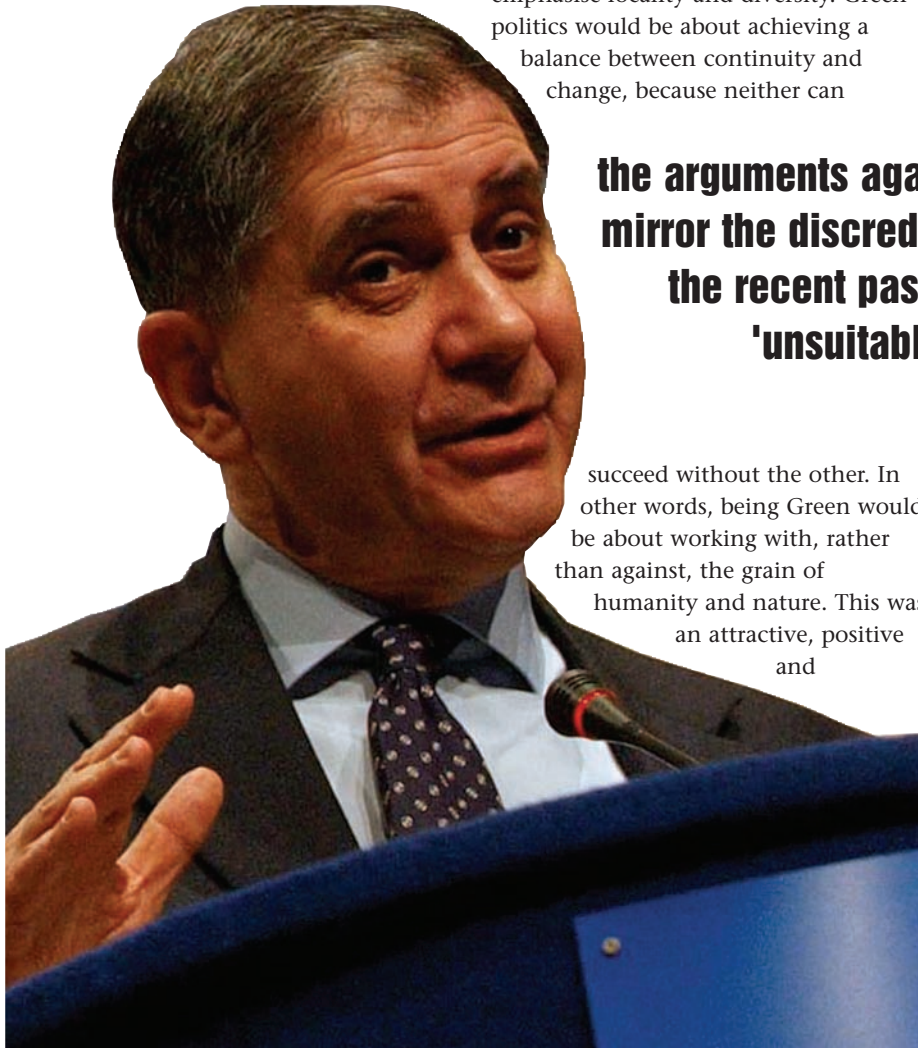
Green politics, defined as beyond left and right, would, it seemed, balance individual freedom with human interdependence and the interconnectedness of all life. They would challenge the narrow, linear view of 'progress' measured by continuous economic growth, the uncritical casting aside of tradition and the centralisation of economic power. In place of that 'progressive' formula, favoured equally by socialists and conservatives, Greens would emphasise decentralisation, diversity (both ecological and cultural), cooperation in place of competition or 'struggle', small-scale enterprises, and decentralised political institutions that emphasise locality and diversity. Green politics would be about achieving a balance between continuity and change, because neither can

thoroughly workable alternative, both to the various socialist models and the free-market ideology that was rapidly gaining ground at the time.

Green politics have failed to live up to this promise. In Britain, North America and much of Europe, they have become an appendage of the left's culture of protest and authoritarian group-think. The extent of this sad transformation was apparent last autumn, when the Green Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) united with the left in blocking the appointment of Rocco Buttiglione as European commissioner for justice.

This was because of Buttiglione's professed belief that homosexuality is a 'sin' and his traditionalist view of women as mothers and homemakers. The campaign against him evoked the two-minute hate sessions in George Orwell's *1984*, in which brainwashed workers were compelled to chant vitriolic slogans against Goldstein, Big Brother's semi-mythical enemy. Nonetheless, the anti-Buttiglione

the arguments against Buttiglione sinisterly mirror the discredited, prejudiced claims of the recent past that homosexuals are 'unsuitable' for certain jobs.



succeed without the other. In other words, being Green would be about working with, rather than against, the grain of humanity and nature. This was an attractive, positive and

campaign was hailed by the Greens as a triumph for 'progressive values' against the forces of reaction. Greens competed with, and often outdid, the conventional left in their predictable, ritualistic denunciations. The website of the Green Party of England and Wales spoke gleefully of 'the homophobic Buttiglione' and the progressive political stake placed through his heart. Other prospective commissioners received a remarkably easy ride from the Greens (and the left), including those who support war as a legitimate means of problem-solving, or who equate obeisance to 'market forces' with progress, or who are seemingly unrepentant former members of Stalinist

regimes.

The treatment of Buttiglione tells us little about the right-wing Italian politician's shortcomings, or the problems associated with his ultra-conservative interpretation of Catholicism. It tells us more about the ethical, indeed spiritual, crisis of Green politics, and the need for the Greens to return to first principles to fulfil their promise of human and ecological liberation.

First, the Green's position took a patronising view of the two constituencies they claimed to defend: namely, women and homosexuals. By no means all women regard themselves as feminists. Indeed, a growing number dislike the term itself. Those who are feminist are a far more diverse group

sinisterly mirror the discredited, prejudiced claims of the recent past that homosexuals are 'unsuitable' for certain jobs.

In the Buttiglione affair, the Green MEPs displayed an essentially totalitarian attitude towards the human person. They assumed that personally held, religiously-based views preclude an objective approach to issues of discrimination. This is to acknowledge a concept of 'thought crime' and make a presumption of guilt rather than innocence. Furthermore, the Green stance mistakes for objectivity the highly subjective, one-sided claims of left-wing activism. It therefore discriminates against any women who fail to be enthused by unisex feminism and the left's promotion of struggle

of the Greens is expressed through a lengthy position paper called 'Leaving Labour', which has the ringing endorsement of the party's principal speakers, Margaret Wright and Darren Johnson.

'Leaving Labour' is aimed at the type of left-wing campaigners who made the Labour Party unelectable in the 1980s (and thus aided enormously the neo-liberal agendas of Margaret Thatcher and John Major). It is trenchant, and quite accurate, in its critique of New Labour as the extension of Thatcherism by other means. But instead of proposing a Green alternative, it invites nostalgia for centralising, bureaucratic forms of nationalisation, and appeals for a radical extension of state control over the lives of individuals and

Green politics have failed to live up to their promise. They have become an appendage of the left's culture of protest and authoritarian group-think

than political activists usually assume. Some base their philosophy on nurturing, and reject the career-woman model promoted by the left - and zealously imposed by the free-market right. This principle of nurturing extends to the relationship between humanity and planet, between human beings and other species, and between men and women, who respect and complement each other, rather than being in competition or conflict. Thus, it is the nurturing version of feminism that has relevance to the Green vision, rather than the left's unisex model, which is a travesty.

In the same way, most homosexuals reject the left's slogan-chanting, flag-waving version of gay liberation as the political counterpart to 1970s disco music: noisy, vacuous and out of date. Some are traditionalists by temperament or religious by inclination. Others take a more thoughtful view of gay, and human, rights, and so oppose censorship and denunciation. After all, the arguments against Buttiglione

between the sexes. It discriminates equally against homosexuals who do not identify with the agendas and methods of gay pressure groups. Buttiglione became the foil for a campaign of invective not against conservative or fundamentalist religion but religious belief in general. This inflexible variant of secularism discriminates against millions of European citizens and runs counter to the original Green approach, which was to reconcile politics with the spiritual impulse in its broadest sense.

Political thought can, and should, adapt and evolve, absorb new influences and respond to fresh challenges. But it can also mutate beyond recognition or be taken over by narrow-minded, sectarian interests. This seems to have happened to the Green movement, at least in its party-political incarnation. The Buttiglione saga is but a prominent symptom of a far greater malaise: the capture of Green politics by an unreconstructed, unreformed left. In England and Wales, the explicit leftism

communities. There are no equivalent appeals to disillusioned Conservatives or Liberals. The preference for attracting former Labour Party militants is clear, and makes a mockery of the Greens' claim to be 'inclusive'. Much of the rhetoric of inclusion is aimed at attracting support from ethnic minorities and gays. But rather than being valued and respected as individuals, people from these sections of society are appealed to insultingly as nameless, faceless 'minority groups' or 'communities'; as are women, who are not even a minority at all.

Most tellingly, 'Leaving Labour' proclaims that 'many former Labour supporters have joined the Green Party, and many more could do so without needing to change their outlook'. This would seem to be the ultimate negation of Green politics, which are based on the assumption that *everybody* needs to change their political outlook. They are about a change of consciousness in the individual, as well as a wider cultural and political shift. At the individual

level, green consciousness points away from acquisition and consumption as ends in themselves. Instead, the emphasis is moved towards creative and sustainable work, friendship, voluntary activity, a sense of community, and 'family values' - without the bigoted or exclusionary connotations put on them by the right. These are already the priorities of much of the population, except for a small minority of authoritarians and workaholics, many of whom are political activists. Most people, therefore, are small-'g' greens without knowing it, and are prevented from realising their true goals by a distorted economic and political system.

The Green transformation of society is about realigning economics and

are compelled to fit.

Green politics are therefore very far removed from the left's preoccupations with struggle (based on class or the more modern obsessions with race or gender), the proliferation of state bureaucracy, and group consciousness without respect for the individual. Indeed, Green principles are as far removed from the left as they are from the right's dogmatic and superstitious cult of market forces, or the darker right-wing tendencies towards imperial ambition and racism. It would be destructive and dangerous for green politics to identify itself with the toxic political culture of the right. But equally, the present identification with the left is grossly compromising to Green political thought. More than that,

principles are genuinely democratic, in that they can be grasped by men and women from any political background whatsoever. Liberation from the left would enable the Greens to emerge as the party of genuine diversity and choice in real contrast to the post-Thatcherite Tories and New Labour and their pale imitations of these ideas.

In short, the Greens should jettison much of their 'Manifesto for Sustainable Stalinism'. They should become the anti-bureaucratic party, committed to politics and economics on a human scale. Greens must appeal over the heads of the left-wing and right-wing chattering classes to the uncommitted majority of the electorate, especially to the poorest citizens, who bear the brunt of

It would be destructive and dangerous for green politics to identify itself with the toxic political culture of the right. But equally, the present identification with the left is grossly compromising to Green political thought.

politics with human and much wider ecological needs. To be 'Green' is to be simultaneously radical and conservative: radical in the sense of addressing social issues from their roots upwards; conservative in the sense of restoring underlying concepts of society to their original, workable meaning. In the case of politics, this means restoring the link between citizens and government and appealing to 'real' voters over the heads of special interest groups. be they the corporate lobbies of the right or the 'politically correct' lobbies associated with the left. Politics, after all, derives from the ancient Greek word for citizen. Economics must also recover its true meaning: the law of the household, which implies wise use of resources, learning to live within limits and awareness of the surrounding environment. This contrasts with the left-right consensus of relentless expansion, growth for its own sake and inflexible, one-size-fits-all 'models' into which individuals and whole societies

it denotes a poverty of ambition. In Britain, the electorate has consistently rejected the programmes and ideologies of the Labour left. By becoming a left echo of Labour, the Green Party can hope at best to occupy a small and parochial niche in British politics.

Electoral facts bear this out. The Green Party's highest vote - 15 per cent - was achieved in the 1989 European parliamentary elections on the strength of appeals to 'soft' Tory voters instead of the 'hard' left. This was the highest Green vote in Europe and has not been approached by the party since. The party's determination to position itself on the left has alienated large swathes of the population, both from the party itself and also, far more dangerously, from ecological consciousness in general.

Appealing across the political spectrum would offer the Greens more rewards, as well as more human interest, than the present clinging to the left's ideological wreckage. Real Green

environmental degradation and suffer most from the emphasis on consumption. To voters of all backgrounds, left/right politics have become irrelevant and dangerously disconnected from their experiences of life. This is a gap that Green politics should fill.

Is the existing Green Party up to this task? Regrettably, 'Leaving Labour' and the Buttiglione affair suggest otherwise. They suggest that the party is fatally attached to the authoritarian left. If this is so, then it will be necessary to rescue Green principles from that attachment. This means nothing less than a new Ecology Party.

In the next issue Aidan Rankin will describe what a new Ecology Party might be like

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The Debate

Is organic food healthier than conventional food?

'Free of antibiotics, chemicals and GM, surely nothing could be better for you than organic food?' Peter Melchett

Not according to the available science
Gareth Edwards-Jones



Peter Melchett

Peter Melchett is Policy Director of the Soil

Association, the UK's leading organic certification body. Before he joined them, Peter was head of Greenpeace UK for 10 years, and before that he a Government Minister, where his responsibilities included environment, industry, education and health.

Dear Gareth,

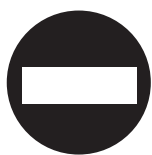


Last year 77 per cent of UK households bought some organic food; sales were worth more than £1 billion and are rising at more than 10 per cent a year. Retail sales are growing at £2m a week. Direct sales through box schemes, farm shops and farmers' markets, worth more than £100m, are growing at 16 per cent a year.

More and more people are buying organic food because they enjoy eating it, it tastes better, and they trust it. They trust it because it comes from farms that benefit, rather than destroy, farmland wildlife, and which treat farm animals with respect, allowing them to live lives free of cruelty. They trust it because it comes from farms that pollute far less, and contribute far less to climate change, than non-organic farming. Organic food comes from independently inspected farms and is fully traceable.

People also trust organic food because it does not contain artificial colourings or sweeteners (only 30 additives are allowed in organic, compared to 300 in non-organic), and it is almost always produced without pesticides (four pesticides are allowed by the Soil Association, against 350 in non-organic). And, crucially, they trust organic food to be healthier, because it does not contain pesticide residues, GM ingredients or artificial additives, and because it contains more nutrients and vitamins than non-organic food.

The Soil Association is clear that people are right to trust organic food, for all these reasons. I don't claim we have all the answers. There is a lot we don't know about the links between the health of the soil, crops and farm animals, and human health. There are things we can't yet prove, and things we may never be able to prove. But the presumption should be that people's gut instincts are right, unless there is evidence to the contrary - which there isn't.
Yours, Peter



Gareth Edwards-Jones

Throughout the 1990s Gareth Edward-Jones worked for the Scottish Agricultural College in Edinburgh. In 1998 he took the Chair in Agriculture and Land Use at University of Wales, Bangor. And from 2000 to 2004, he was a member of the Government's Advisory Committee on Pesticides.

Dear Peter,

I agree with much of what you say. My family is among the 77 per cent who regularly buy organic food. Our particular motivations for buying relate to localness of production and the ethics of animal welfare. I also acknowledge that organic farming can offer environmental benefits. However, nowhere on my list of motivations for buying organic is the fact that it is healthier than conventional food, and that claim causes me problems both as a scientist and as a conventional farmer.

As a scientist, I of course would like to see the evidence for this claim. As a farmer it seems to me that if organic farmers say their produce is healthier than conventional, then it somehow suggests to consumers that the food coming from my farm is unhealthy. This does not seem to be backed up by the available science.

As you know, professor Christine Williams of Reading University has recently published a paper reviewing a series of articles that claim to have compared the nutritive quality of organic and conventional food. Her major conclusion is that very little research has been undertaken in this area, and that therefore no clear trends are apparent. She does find evidence suggesting decreased nitrate and increased vitamin C in organic crops compared with conventional, but finds no difference in protein quality, B vitamins or minerals like calcium, magnesium, iron and zinc.

My soil-scientist colleagues have good explanations for the observed increased levels of nitrate in conventional crops: they say they relate to how plants store excess nitrogen. I am persuaded that this is true: we have good evidence and a mechanism. But the real question then relates to whether or not this converts into a health benefit to consumers. In this instance we would need to ask the very specific question: 'All other things being equal, is the different level of nitrate which I get from organic vegetables, compared to what I get from conventional ones, sufficient to improve my health?'

Once we have answered this, we then need to ask a series of other very specific, but similar, questions. Until we do I think it is a little disingenuous to conclude that all organic food is healthier than all conventional food.

Yours, Gareth

'People trust organic food to be healthier, because it does not contain pesticide residues, GM ingredients or artificial additives, and because it contains more nutrients and vitamins than non-organic food'. Peter Melchett

'As a farmer, it seems to me that if organic farmers say their produce is healthier than conventional, then it somehow suggests that the food from my farm is unhealthy. This is not backed up by the available science'.

Gareth Edward-Jones

Dear Gareth,



I'm delighted you buy organic food. And we agree that the animal welfare benefits of organic farming are important. Indeed, I believe that farm animals encouraged to live a life that fulfils their natural needs for fresh air, plenty of space and a natural diet are likely to be happier and healthier, and provide better-quality, and healthier, food.

Let me clear up a couple of points. Organic farmers saying their produce is healthier does not mean that the alternative is 'unhealthy'; just that it is less healthy. Professor William's review found more vitamin C in organic food and fewer (potentially harmful) nitrates. Eating organic food is the best way to avoid pesticide residues. Only 30, rather than 300, additives are permitted (no aspartame, no tartrazine food colouring, which is linked with hyperactivity). Organic standards exclude GM ingredients and hydrogenated fats, which contribute to the build-up of trans fats in our bodies. US medical advisors say that there is no safe level of trans fat consumption.

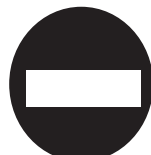
In organic farming no prophylactic or regular use of antibiotics is permitted. There is growing concern that antibiotic use in farming could contribute to the development of antibiotic resistance in bacteria that are prevalent in humans. Organic cattle must be fed on predominantly forage-based diets, and research suggests that a diet high in forage, rather than grain, reduces saturated fatty acid concentrations and enhances the content of omega-3 polyunsaturated fatty acids in beef. Organic milk has similar benefits.

Scientists who take a different view of the evidence from yours say that, overall, organic food also contains: more beneficial minerals like iron and magnesium; more conjugated linolenic acid; and higher levels of some phytonutrients: natural plant compounds that include antioxidants which may be beneficial to our immune systems.

I don't think science can tell me whether any of the billions of different combinations of pesticide residues are safe, because the tests would take thousands of years to conduct. Feeding cows' brains to my cattle was banned by organic standards, without any scientific evidence, years before mad cow disease, simply because it seemed wrong. And there is no science to tell me that parents who buy organic baby food are wrong to think it is healthier.

Yours, Peter

Dear Peter,



Good scientists spend a lot of time designing experiments that will answer questions in a way that is not subject to alternative explanations. Unfortunately, some of the comparisons of organic and conventional produce that are sometimes cited by organic advocates do not comply with the principles of good experimental design. Specifically, they fail to account for all possible variation in the experimental system; they are therefore difficult to interpret.

For example, in some countries, notably the US, some beef is finished in feedlots. Cattle are kept at high density on artificial surfaces and fed specially prepared diets that enable fast weight gain. Comparing the quality of meat from a US feedlot animal with that from an organic beef animal from Devon is clearly a flawed experiment as so many things vary between the two systems - eg, breed, weather, feed, age at time of slaughter, etc.

A much more meaningful scientific comparison would be to compare the same breed of animal farmed in comparable geographical locations. We should compare Devon Red cattle from organic and conventional farms in north Devon. I would be fascinated to see the results of such experiments, and am not sure that they would be clear-cut. I say this because the majority of animal production in western Britain is extensive in nature, usually maximises grass-based diets and makes little or no use of prophylactic antibiotics: it's much closer to 'organic' than to 'feedlot' production systems.

So-called 'conventional' agriculture is extremely varied: there are numerous ways of producing the same basic foodstuffs like milk, beef, lamb and wheat. I sometimes feel that advocates of organic production pick the worst possible example of 'conventional' agriculture and compare this with good organic practice, and when they find a difference they then extrapolate it to all conventional products. While this may suit their 'marketing' needs I don't feel it's a valid scientific approach.

Yours, Gareth

'Failure to provide evidence that supports claims by groups involved in our food chain leaves consumers entirely at the whim of the powerful, committed and persuasive'. Gareth Edward-Jones



Dear Gareth,

There *has* been some poor research comparing organic and non-organic. Governments and companies with no love of organic have funded much of it. Some research assumed that not fertilising or spraying a crop makes it 'organic'. In fact, organic soils take years to develop and provide the slow and balanced release of nutrients a healthy crop needs. Some researchers insisted on organic systems using unrealistic, conventional rotations or breeds, to make comparisons 'valid'. Better research is now being done, which is why more evidence is emerging of real differences in the quality of organic and non-organic food.

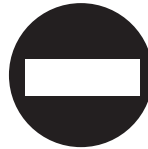
For example, Aberdeen University has just found that organic milk contains almost three quarters more omega-3 than conventional milk. Omega-3 is a polyunsaturated fatty acid important for nervous system development in babies, and which is reported to make schoolchildren more attentive and to prevent blood clots developing in adults; one pint of organic milk contains the entire daily recommended intake of it.

I want to return to my starting point in our debate. We know that, overall, organic farming is better for the environment: it's good for farmland wildlife, less polluting, uses less energy, especially in inputs, is better for soil and fresh water resources, and no other system is better for animal welfare. People trust organic standards to deliver food that has these advantages for the planet on which all human and animal life depends. These benefits play an indirect but vital part in promoting human health.

And people trust organic food to be good for their health. Healthy plants and animals that are not stressed to the point that they need routine medication (like antibiotics for animals or fungicides for crops) are less prone to diseases that could affect human health. They are more likely to contain a full range of nutrients, minerals and micronutrients that human beings have come to rely on over millennia. Plants and animals that mature slowly, that receive full and healthy nourishment, are likely to provide more nutritious and healthy food for humans.

This, in scientific terms, is a reasonable hypothesis, and is in line with current scientific knowledge and theory. When tested, the limited evidence there is suggests this hypothesis is correct. No serious science suggests it is wrong. Why do you?

Yours, Peter



Dear Peter,

The simple answer to your last question is because you haven't presented me with convincing evidence. In my first letter I readily acknowledged the issue of nitrates in crop plants. As I said then, there is a combination of reasonable experimental observation and a potential physiological mechanism that explains this. So in this particular instance the difference between organic and conventional is plausible. This is not true across the board, however, and in my last letter I outlined some sampling issues that need to be addressed as part of any convincing science.

I searched standard databases of peer-reviewed scientific articles (Web of Science and CAB Direct) but was unable to find the Aberdeen dairy study you mentioned. I did, however, find lots of scientific articles detailing how the quality of milk from conventional systems can change depending on the composition of the food given to cows. This supports much of what I said in my last letter, that in many cases there are no clear differences in food quality between organic and conventional systems.

My job as a scientist requires me to be critical of all claims regardless of who makes them. The Soil Association is an esteemed organisation, but no amount of rhetoric can substitute for facts. I am always amazed when people don't apply the same principles to themselves as they do to others. I seem to recall that at the height of the GM debate proponents of organic agriculture quite rightly challenged apologists for GM to prove that technology was safe for the environment. I doubt that you would have simply accepted a multinational company's repeated assertion that GM was safe. I certainly would not accept such an assertion, regardless of who said it or how often. So regardless of the personal value judgements I make about the Soil Association, agrochemical multinationals or others, my professional integrity requires me to treat the assertions of *all* of them with the same critical eye.

Failure to provide evidence that supports claims by groups involved in our food chain leaves consumers entirely at the whim of the powerful, committed and persuasive. History suggests this does not always lead to good outcomes. So let's find the evidence and let the consumers decide.

Yours, Gareth



Dear Gareth,

I'm grateful that, unlike some critics of organic farming, you haven't used the spurious arguments often thrown at us, such as the recent claim from Michael Pragnell, CEO of chemical company Syngenta, that organic food is 'highly toxic'.

You ask me for scientific proof that organic food is healthier than non-organic. Yet, given their environmental costs and risks to human health, surely what we should all have demanded when synthetic pesticides and chemical fertilisers were introduced was evidence that *they* would make our food safer.

You accept the need to challenge the safety of GM technology, but the changes in food production methods since WWII have involved other major new technologies, and these have been imposed on us all without public debate and *with* a grossly inadequate scientific understanding of the consequences.

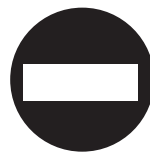
More research is due to be published, like the Aberdeen study (interim results only are available so far), which will show greater nutritional benefits of organic food. I agree that we should conduct this debate on the basis of scientific facts, but science is often decades behind in finding the answers we need today. What discerning consumers are doing in the meantime is using common sense and human instinct: two of the strengths that have helped our species to survive and prosper.

Your argument is flawed because until now food and agricultural policy has not been decided by science or rational debate, but by power and money. All my life as a farmer the power in farming has been in the hands of the government and Brussels, big chemical companies and large-scale farmers. Based on a sprinkling of research, most of which did not even address fundamental issues, farming was headed in the direction of bigger yields, fields, farms and machinery, and lower costs, fewer farmers and farm workers.

This was all wrong. It caused the decimation of farmland wildlife: birds, flowers and animals. In the same period, food became more plentiful and cheaper, and people became more subject to diet-related diseases. Science is still struggling to understand why.

I think we have had a disastrous 50 years of farming going in the wrong direction, driven not by public wishes or consumers, but by big business and politicians. As the fate of GM food has shown, power over farming and food has begun to shift away from big business to the public. We agree in welcoming that. But I, for one, trust people's instincts about the benefits, including for their health, of organic food.

Yours, Peter



Dear Peter,

You are right. We have seen many tremendous changes in our countryside and food systems over the past 50 years. Few, if any, of these changes were the subject of scientific scrutiny before they occurred (although, perhaps ironically from your point of view, pesticides have been subject to scientific review prior to their registration). While planning restrictions abound, and the 'nanny state' continues to grow, we will undoubtedly see increased restrictions on what we can, and cannot, do in the countryside, but we can never depend on science to guide our every move before we make it.

We *can* use science, though, to suggest broad guidelines for policy, and to provide accurate information to consumers. So, given current scientific evidence, the public health message for consumers is clear: you will get a large nutritional benefit from eating five portions of fruit and/or vegetables a day; these benefits are enhanced through taking regular exercise, and partaking of certain other items of food and drink in moderation.

The science that is informing public health is not suggesting that health benefits will arise from eating organic food. In view of this I feel it is wrong for those who sell organic food to make any such claims. This does not mean that such evidence will not emerge in the future. Nor does it mean that there are not many good reasons for buying organic food; just don't think that eating organic food will make you healthier.

Yours, Gareth

'As the fate of GM food has shown, power over farming and food has begun to shift away from big business to the public. I, for one, trust people's instincts about the benefits of organic food'. Peter Melchett

Max Keiser, founder of investment activism website KarmaBanQue, provides his monthly guide to consumer boycotts



Smart boycotts Taking control of the stock market

BOYCOTT

REASONS TO BOYCOTT COKE

Why target Coca-Cola?

Besides human rights violations, health concerns, theft of water from the world's poorest farmers and groundwater pollution, the time is right.

Why is the time right?

Coke's share price is currently \$41. The company has sales of \$20 billion a year and a market capitalisation of \$100 billion. This means that for every one of us who doesn't drink a 50 pence can of Coke, the company's shareholders will lose £2.50. That makes Coca-Cola very vulnerable to a boycott.

So What do we do?

First, stop drinking Coke. Second, register your Coca-Cola boycott at www.KarmaBanQue.com, and get as many of your friends and family to do the same.

And What will KarmaBanQue do?

Make money out of your registered boycotts for the victims of Coca-Cola, and fund further campaigns against Coke.

What do you mean 'make money' from the boycott?

By selling short Coca-Cola shares in the market, KarmaBanQue will use the markets to make money as the company's share price falls.

What assurances can you give that my boycott effort will make money for those who deserve it and not financial fat cats?

The Ecologist will be auditing the whole process and ensuring the money made by KarmaBanQue from the fall in Coke's share price is sent to those who are campaigning against Coke or are the victims of its greed and power.



and make money for the victims of Coca-Cola.
How much can we make?
That depends on three key factors:

1. The number of people who stop drinking Coke

Since calling for a worldwide boycott of Coca-Cola in last month's *Ecologist*, KarmaBanQue has registered a 160 per cent increase in Coca-Cola boycotters. And the good news doesn't stop there...

Farmers revolt

One thriving farmers' market in Pennsylvania was recently offered a \$20,000 sponsorship deal by Coca-Cola. Armed with a copy of last month's *Ecologist*, one of the market's organisers convinced its coordinating committee to reject the company's offer.

Student protest

So far nine colleges and universities, six in the US and three in Ireland, have banned Coke from their campuses. New York University will vote on a ban this month. Following a public debate between Coke and Leeds University students, the latter said: '[Coca-Cola] formed no coherent defence to the allegations of crimes in Colombia, or to the allegations of violating the UN millennium development goals by the pollution and use of water in India. With a crowd of 300 [present], Coke had to leave with their tail between their legs.' A resolution was passed that the students hope will lead to the removal of Coke from Leeds University property. In November around 100 University of Montana students and faculty members along with local activists marched into the office of the university's president, chanting 'kill the Coke contract'.

Union action

The large US unions that have called for a boycott of Coke products include the Service Employees International Union, the AFL-CIO, the American Postal Workers Union, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union and the California Federation of Teachers. The Communications Workers of America and the American Postal Workers Union have also passed resolutions supporting a boycott and divestment campaign targeting Coke's chief financial ally, Suntrust Banks.

On this side of the Atlantic, Unison, the largest union in the UK, and the Northern Ireland Public Service Association, the largest union in Northern Ireland, have both called for boycotts.

2. Coca-Cola's share price falling

Since we first flagged up Coca-Cola's vulnerability to a boycott in the August 2004 *Ecologist*, Coke's share price has fallen from \$51 to \$41. Given the numbers joining Coca-Cola boycotts across the world, there is no reason why we can't take the company's share price down to \$22.

3. The amount of money selling Coca-Cola short

For example, if we'd set up a £500,000 fund selling Coke in August 2004, it would have made £98,000 to date. (The company's share price has fallen by 19.6 per cent; multiply that by £500,000 and you get £98,000.) With the 2 per cent standard handling fees subtracted, this would have meant £96,040 would now be going to support the campaigns and victims of Coca-Cola. And to think all you had to do was not spend money on Coca-Cola. That's what we mean by 'smart boycotts'.

And finally... Where should the money from the boycott go?

- To support Indian communities who have seen their groundwater and soil polluted, suffered shortages of drinking water, and been exposed to toxic waste as a direct result of Coke's operations in their country...

The India Resource Centre is a bi-national (India-US) group that campaigns actively in the US and internationally on behalf of community struggles against Coca-Cola in India. Find out more at www.IndiaResource.org.

- ...To support efforts to stop the gruesome cycle of murders, kidnappings and torture of union leaders and organisers involved in daily life-and-death struggles at Coca-Cola bottling plants in Colombia...

The Campaign to Stop Killer Coke is a US-based organisation working closely with the Colombian food industry trade union Sinaltrainal to publicise what is happening in that country. It is encouraging people to buy shares in Coke in order to gain access to its shareholder meetings and then attempt to table resolutions challenging the company to change its ways. And it supports students, unions and other individuals and organisations who are attempting to ban Coke from their facilities and events. Find out more at www.killercoke.org.

- Alternatively, you could help fund further research into the effects of carbonated drinks or pay off the debts of farmers ruined by Coke's depletion of their water sources. If you have any other ideas as to where some or all of the money from boycotting and selling short Coke should go, email: editorial@theecologist.org.

Isn't it time you joined the boycott? Just stop drinking Coca-Cola and sign on to the boycott at www.KarmaBanQue.com.

Spread-betting activism

For those readers of *The Ecologist* who want to put their money where their mouths are, why not sell Coke shares short through one of the reputable spread betting firms, such as IG Index, Tradindex or CityIndex? You will then have an added incentive to convince your family and friends not to buy Coca-Cola.

Or why not get a syndicate together? All your syndicate's members can put in money, short-sell Coke and then use their powers of persuasion in your local community to get others to boycott Coke, too. As the pressure mounts on Coke's share price it will continue to fall, making money for the syndicate and, if you're feeling generous, the victims of Coca-Cola, too.

If you aren't familiar with spread betting, log on to www.tradindex.com and click on the 'try before you buy' icon. Then register for a 'player' account and you will be allocated £20,000 in virtual money to bet with. To sell Coca-Cola short, click first on 'stock indices' and then the US flag icon. Then select 'Coca-Cola', and by clicking on the sell button you will have 'virtually' sold short the company's stock. Trading opens for US shares at 14.30 GMT. You can then keep track of your position each day by logging back in and

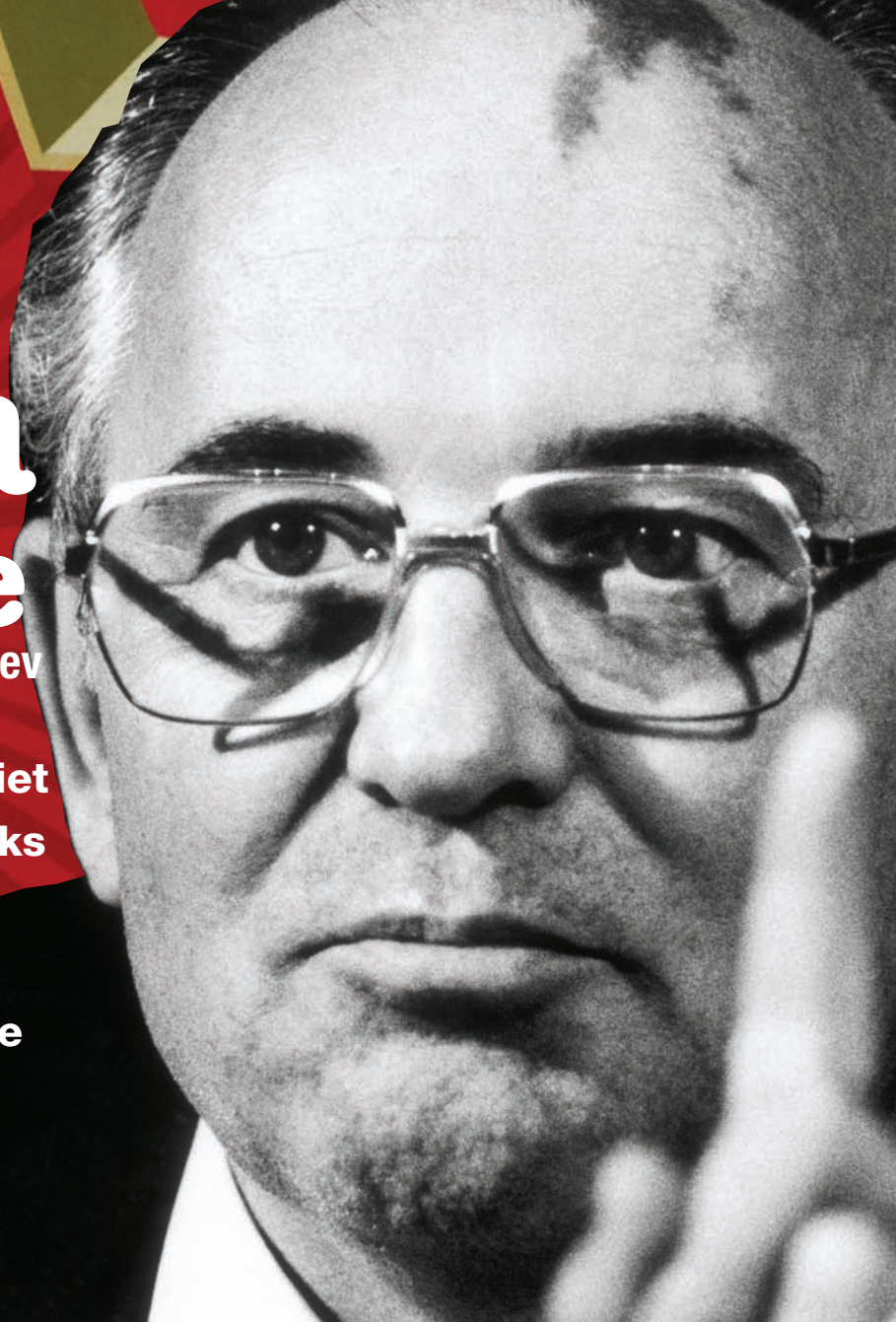
Investors should be cautious about any and all stock recommendations and should consider the source of any advice on stock selection. Various factors, including personal or corporate ownership, may influence or factor into an expert's stock analysis or opinion.

All investors are advised to conduct their own independent research into individual stocks before making a purchase decision. In addition, investors are advised that past stock performance is no guarantee of future price appreciation.

from Russia with love

Interview with Mikhail Gorbachev

Former president of the Soviet Union Mikhail Gorbachev talks to Ecologist editor Zac Goldsmith about debt, development, democracy, the new imperialism and the demise of the Washington Consensus



The Ecologist: The conflict today is between the right of poor countries to develop and the massive implication that this has on resources. Can it be reconciled?

Mikhail Gorbachev: My first trip abroad after I had ceased to be president was to San Francisco. I was with a group of experts from the Gorbachev Foundation and we met the then US secretary of state George Schultz. I said to him, 'George, you so staunchly promote the American way of life and standard of living as a model for others to follow, but I think this is the wrong approach. The

American way of life is a remarkable achievement, but it relies on the consumption of a huge amount of resources. Just look at how much energy you use. What would happen if everyone achieved the same standard of living as you? Where would we get the resources from?' We started talking about models of society, and what soon became clear was that the consumer model has exhausted itself and is no longer viable as a model for the development of other countries. The US itself is now facing a resource problem. And, in fact, poverty in America has been on the increase over the last 15 years.

The big question, though, is whether the 2.8 billion people who live

in the developing world on \$1 or \$2 a day can reconcile themselves with their current standard of living. I don't think they can. And given that virtually all of today's problems stem from poverty, we need to start looking for a way to help impoverished countries. Already there are a few countries searching for their own model of development according to their own historical experience. And they are not in any way aspiring to copy the 'American Way'. What's notable is that those countries that have simply followed the instructions of the IMF have been much less successful. It is clear that the Washington Consensus has failed; what's less clear is whether Washington has learned the

Ecologist: Do you see the global free market as the best vehicle for delivering prosperity to the poorest countries?

Mikhail Gorbachev: First of all, I think we all have to accept that globalisation, in the way that it has so quickly developed, has made all these problems many times worse, and it has dramatically widened the poverty gap. Second, we need to acknowledge the fact that most of the subsidies that benefit industrialised Western nations in world trade are still in place, and the cost of Western-style consumerism to the environment is absolutely not taken into account. So the 'free market' isn't as 'free' as its advocates claim. This is going to have to change if we are to find a sustainable model of economic development.

Ecologist: Do you see debt relief as a potential solution?

Mikhail Gorbachev: I believe that the allocation by the US and Europe of billions of dollars to aid developing countries \$10 billion here, then another \$10 billion there - does not solve the problem; nor does cancellation of Third World debt. Of course, it helps in the immediate term, but what happens is that if the system responsible for generating debt remains the same, more debts will accumulate and the problem will return.

Ecologist: So what needs to be done?

Mikhail Gorbachev: If we are serious about ending poverty, we need to reorganise the way international institutions function. The WTO and IMF, for instance, still work to rules set by developed countries during the Cold War. So the system needs to be reformed and adapted according to the realities and the challenges we are now faced with.

That means developing regional cooperation over the issue of resources, without which we will see

'The consumer model has exhausted itself and is no longer viable as a model for the development of other countries. The US itself is now facing a resource problem. And, in fact, poverty in America has been on the increase over the last 15 years'

these problems escalate. It means addressing the huge discrepancy between the prices of goods from developed countries, and the prices of natural resources from developing countries: the gap is enormous. How

can these countries ever hope to break out of this cycle if their resources are so undervalued? And above all, it means finding ways to restrict the activities of large multinational companies, which routinely inflict serious damage to the economies of entire countries.

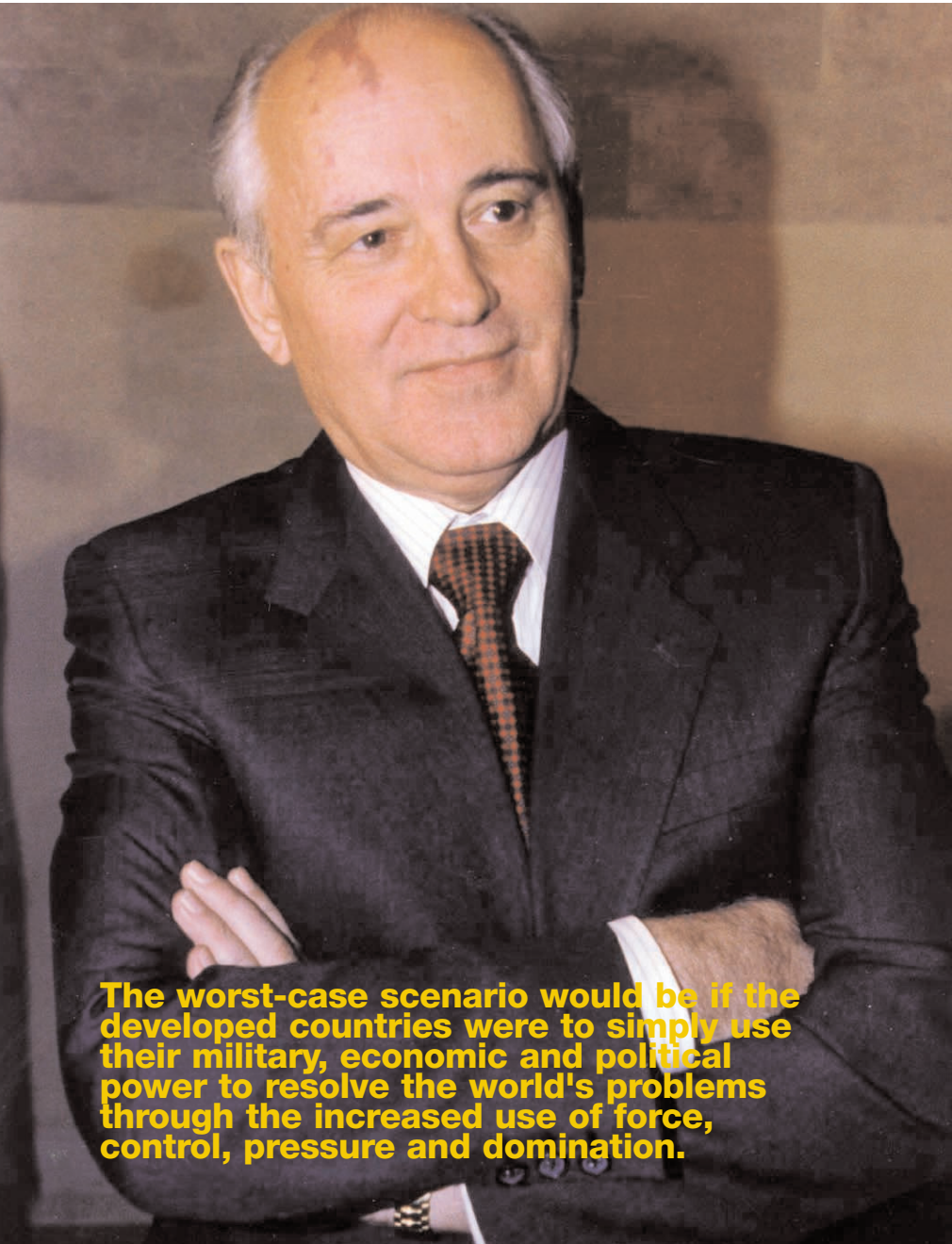
For me, as both a politician and an environmentalist, it is absolutely clear that the developed countries must take the main financial burden upon themselves for the use and preservation of the world's natural resources.

Ecologist: Do you think the political will is sufficient for the task ahead?

Mikhail Gorbachev: I've been president of the International Green Cross for 12 years now, and during that time we have witnessed endless well-intentioned and wide-sweeping declarations. But none of them, in real terms, has translated into action.

Time is not on our side, and my main fear is that we could get ourselves into a situation where we





The worst-case scenario would be if the developed countries were to simply use their military, economic and political power to resolve the world's problems through the increased use of force, control, pressure and domination.

don't have any choice about how we deal with these problems. The worst-case scenario would be if the developed countries were to simply use their military, economic and political power to resolve the world's problems through the increased use of force, control, pressure and domination. This is already happening now and has been evident over the past few years since the end of the Cold War.

Ecologist: Do you think the war in Iraq falls into this category?

Mikhail Gorbachev: Absolutely.

Ecologist: So are you concerned that the most powerful states might be using terrorism as an excuse to expand their own political and economic interests?

Mikhail Gorbachev: The danger inherent in the so-called war against terrorism is that it can now be used to justify more or less anything, including almost any restrictions on human rights and freedoms. Terrorism needs

to be fought, but within the context of respect for people's rights and for international law. If force has to be used to strike at the infrastructure of terrorism, I believe this should be done with a UN Security Council mandate.

First and foremost, we must fight poverty and inter-ethnic tensions: problems that can only be tackled in a peaceful world. You see, people just won't tolerate the degradation and humiliation that poverty brings. The longer it goes on, the less tolerance people will have. Civil society needs to take the initiative and exert control and pressure over political society.

Ecologist: What role does democracy play in all this?

Mikhail Gorbachev: Debating problems and then finding a solution for them is the surest guarantee of happiness for man. Democracy is, therefore, the only way we can be truly happy as it allows each and every one of us to be involved in the decision-making process and to have influence over the political, economic and social welfare of our country.

I remember when demonstrations and protests sprang up in cities across the whole of the Soviet Union against the mishandling of environmental policy and the country's natural resources. The demonstrators would hold out for days on end and, as a result, we, at the head of the Soviet Union, were forced to take the decision to close down 1,300 factories. Today, the environmental movement in Russia has slowed down, but in those days people were starting to believe that they could really make a difference. This was the beginning of real democracy. And it was very exciting.

So when I see that, according to official UN data, more than 80 states that have experienced democratic revolutions over the last 25 years are once again turning towards authoritarianism because they have lost faith in democracy, I regard that as a tragedy. And the one thing we must not do is back away from the issue.

Mikhail Gorbachev: Biography

Ecologist: Is this process happening in Russia?

Mikhail Gorbachev: Well, I'm concerned about that. It is inevitable that during a major political transition, some authoritarian methods will have to be used to keep everything in order. My fear is that this will become the norm rather than the exception, and that the voice of civil society will be pushed to one side in favour of rule with an iron hand, as was always the case in the past.

Right now, we are witnessing the centralisation of power under [Russian president Vladimir] Putin. If the current reform process continues in all the essential institutions that support a democracy, then his actions today can be justified as a stage on the road to a truly democratic society. But if current centralisation is leading Russia back to a new form of authoritarianism, then Russia can only lose.

Some people are afraid that the latter of these two processes is already taking place in Russian society. In my opinion, Putin is not going down the authoritarian path, but I have to say that the situation in Russia could easily fall under the influence of other forces, which could aggravate the situation and change things for the worse.

Ecologist: How optimistic are you?

Mikhail Gorbachev: If we had come to power in 1985, the beginning of perestroika, and simply carried on as before, apart from maybe modernising and adapting a few things, nothing good would have come of it. We had to come up with new ideas, we had to re-examine our relationship with America and Europe. We even had to look at man's relationship with nature in a different way. All these problems required a new outlook, a new vision. What we need today is a fundamental shift in thinking, no less dramatic than what happened here in Russia under my leadership.



1931: Born 2 March in the Stavropol territory in the North Caucasus. Son of an agricultural mechanic on a collective farm.

1945: Begins work as an assistant to a combine harvester operator on the collective farm where his father works.

1950: Enrols in the Faculty of Law, Moscow University.

1952: Joins the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU).

1955: Marries Raisa Maximovna Titorenko. Receives his degree.

1962: Appointed to key position in Stavropol Communist Party: responsible for personnel in administration, farms and industry.

1964-1967: Studies for second degree at Stavropol Agricultural Institute.

1970: Put in charge of Stavropol territory.

1977: Appointed to the editorial commission responsible for the final draft of the new Soviet Union constitution.

1978: Moves to Moscow as secretary of agriculture in the CPSU Central Committee. Receives Order of the October Revolution.

1980: Becomes youngest full member of the Politburo: appointed head of agriculture and begins work on Leonid Brezhnev's 10-year food plan, but a series of bad harvests casts doubt over his future.

1982: Death of Brezhnev. Yuri Andropov takes over as CPSU general secretary.

1984: Death of Andropov. Gorbachev made second in command, behind Konstantin Chernenko, and chairman of the Supreme Soviet Foreign Affairs Commission.

1985: Death of Chernenko. Gorbachev elected general secretary and travels to the UK, where he meets Margaret Thatcher.

1986: Starts wholesale reforms of the Soviet Union, including glasnost ('openness'), perestroika ('restructuring') and uskorenief[itals] ('acceleration' of economic development). The Chernobyl disaster.

Meets Ronald Reagan, which leads to the signing of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces treaty in 1987.

1987: Gorbachev's calls for democratisation lead to multi-candidate elections in the Soviet Union. Introduces the Law on Cooperatives, which for the first time since Lenin's New Economic Policy allows the private ownership of businesses in the USSR's services, manufacturing and foreign-trade sectors.

1988: Announces the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. Breaks with the 'Brezhnev Doctrine', thus allowing Eastern bloc nations to determine their own internal affairs.

1989: Berlin Wall comes down and reform movement spreads across eastern Europe. The Soviet Union begins withdrawal of its remaining forces from central Europe.

1990: Awarded Nobel Peace Prize. Lithuania declares independence from the USSR in March, the same month that Gorbachev is declared president (a new role) of the Soviet Union.

1991: Failure of hardliners' August coup attempt. Afterwards, the elected presidents of the Soviet Union's constituent republics choose to replace the old USSR with the Confederation of Independent States. In December Gorbachev resigns as president and the USSR ceases to exist.

1992: Becomes head of the think-tank the Foundation for Social, Economic and Political Research. Founds the Gorbachev Foundation

1993: After the 1992 Rio Earth Summit, Gorbachev founds Green Cross International, an environmental organisation promoting cooperation between business and civil society in pursuit of a sustainable planet.

1996: Runs for the Russian presidency: receives only 1 per cent of the vote.

2001: Founds the Social Democratic Party (SDP) of Russia.

2004: Resigns as SDP leader following disagreement over election strategy.

My favourite Retreats

Stafford Whiteaker, editor of *The Good Retreat Guide* (www.thegoodretreatguide.com), lists ideal places for all those seeking post-Christmas calm

Scargill House, North Yorkshire

1. Winford Manor Retreat

Winford, Bristol BS18 8DW;
tel: 01275 472262;

email: info@winfordmanorretreat.com

Peaceful, comfortable, space to be yourself in, with retreats like this January's Bio-Spiritual Focusing programme designed to help reawaken your body's awareness to greater wholeness.

2. The Abbey

Sutton Courtenay, Oxon OX14 4AF; tel: 01235 847401; email:

Admin@theabbeysc.demon.co.uk

A very special place: ancient buildings, youthful community, charming and dynamic. Wide range of speakers and retreats, with a Poetry for Season of Advent event this year.

3. St Rita's Centre

Ottery Moor Land, Honiton, Devon EX14 8AP; tel: 01404 42601; email:

StRitas98@aol.com

Beautiful setting in east Devon.

Comfortable rooms in an ideal place in which to get away from the daily worries of life, wind down and be at peace in the hospitality of the community of friars.

4. Convent of the Incarnation

Fairacres, Oxford OX4 1TB;
tel: 01865 721301;

email: prioress.slg@amservice.net

A safe haven of peace in busy Oxford.

Emphasis on prayerful silence and restful solitude in a place of kindness.

5. The Llan Retreat House

Twitchen, Clunbury, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 0HN; tel: 01588 660417;

email: LlanT-P@beeb.net

A landscape heaven with home-made bread. But book early as very popular.

6. The Grange

Ellesmere, Shropshire SY12 9DE;
tel: 01691 623495; email:

rosie@thegrange.uk.com

A country family house with charm, quiet and cosy comfort.

7. Charney Manor

Charney Bassett, Nr Wantage, Oxon OX12 0EJ; tel: 01235 868206; email: charneymanbor@quaker.org.uk
Renew your hope in the future with new Quaker-Christian perspectives at this well-run old manor.

8. The Listen Centre

Glen Mount, Rivelin Glen, Sheffield S6 5SE; tel: 01142 517679; email: thelistence@aol.com

Male and female spirituality days and other courses with rooms in a cottage plus a hermitage. A simple place with a great vision of the meaning of being human.

9. Taraloka Buddhist Retreat Centre for Women

Bettisfield, Whitchurch, Shropshire SY12 2LD; tel: 01948 710646; email: taraloka@compuserve.com

Situated on the plains of the Welsh Marches, women providing inspiration and new spiritual vistas for women.

10. Gaia House

West Ogwell, Newton Abbot, Devon TQ12 6DY; tel: 01626 333613; email: gaiahouse@gn.apc.org

Roomy place in quiet countryside with Buddhist-tradition retreats, including meditation practice. Friendliness and silence prevail.

11. Scargill House

Kettlewell, Skipton, North Yorkshire BD23 5HU; tel: 01756 760234; email: bookings@scargillhouse.co.uk

Open-hearted spirituality in the heart of the Dales with a rich programme that ranges from dry-stone walling to the spirituality of sharing home-made bread. A 'Whose forest is it anyway?' eco-spirituality retreat on planting trees and global deforestation is scheduled for February.

12. The Orange Tree

Rosedale East, Pickering, North Yorkshire YO18 8RH; tel: 01751 417219; email: relax@theorangetree.com

Unwind in an informal family-run house where relaxation is the key word.

13. Les Cotils Christian Retreat Centre

Les Cotils L'Hyureuse, St Peter Port, Guernsey, Channel Islands GY1 1UU; tel: 01481 727793; email: lescotils@aol.com

Grand place with glorious views to port and sea. Pretty furnished rooms with a programme of retreats and workshops.



14. Centre of Light

Tighnabruaich Struy, By Beaully, Inverness IV4 7JU; tel: 01463 761254; email: linda@centreoflight.co.uk

A loving environment for spiritual or therapeutic healing in a purpose-built cottage where woodlands, gardens, rivers and mountains abound.

15. Othona Community

East Hall Farm, East End Road, Bradwell-on-Sea, Essex CMO 7PN; tel: 01621 776564; email: centre@othona-bos.org.uk

In the far reaches of Essex's Bradwell



estuary, rough and ready, deeply British in concept, with wildfowl, bird watching, sea and wilderness all around and a Seventh Century chapel where ancient calm calls to the heart.

16. Padmaloka Buddhist Retreat Centre for Men

Lesingham House, Surlingham, Norwich, Norfolk NR14 7AL; tel: 01508 538112; email: padmaloka@padmaloka.org.uk

For men only who want to get into stillness, meditation, Buddhist principles and away from the illusions of materialism. Bring sleeping bag, work clothes and a heart willing to listen.

17. Capuchin Retreat Centre

Creeslough, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal, Ireland; tel: 0749 138005; email: ardmhuire@irishcapuchins.com

Fresh air on the Irish shores of Sheephaven Bay, with warm hospitality from the Capuchin friars who dispense home-grown food from a family kitchen. Book in for a retreat or some quiet time.

18. Hampton Manor

Stoke Climsland, Callington, Cornwall PL17 8LX; tel: 01579 370494; email: hamptonmanor@supanet.com

Quaint old house set in the Tamar Valley: a Christian place open to all who seek spiritual and physical refreshment. Chapel, gardens, comfort and peace.

19. Self-Realisation Meditation Healing Centre

Laurel Lane, Queen Camel, Nr. Yeovil, Somerset BA22 7NU; tel: 01935 850266; email: info@selfrealizationcentres.org

Yoga, meditation and healing self-development with a team of counsellors and healers working together with a fresh approach to spirituality.

20. Rosminian House of Prayer

Glencomeragh, Kilsheelan, Clonmel, Co. Tipperary, Ireland; tel: (0)52 33181; email: theglen@rosminians.iol.ie

A splendid country-house place with sparkle and verve run by a Catholic community of men. Try the Taize Mass and the soda bread.

Order 81

Under the guise of helping get Iraq back on its feet, the US is setting out to totally re-engineer the country's traditional farming systems into a US-style corporate agribusiness. They've even created a new law – Order 81 – to make sure it happens.

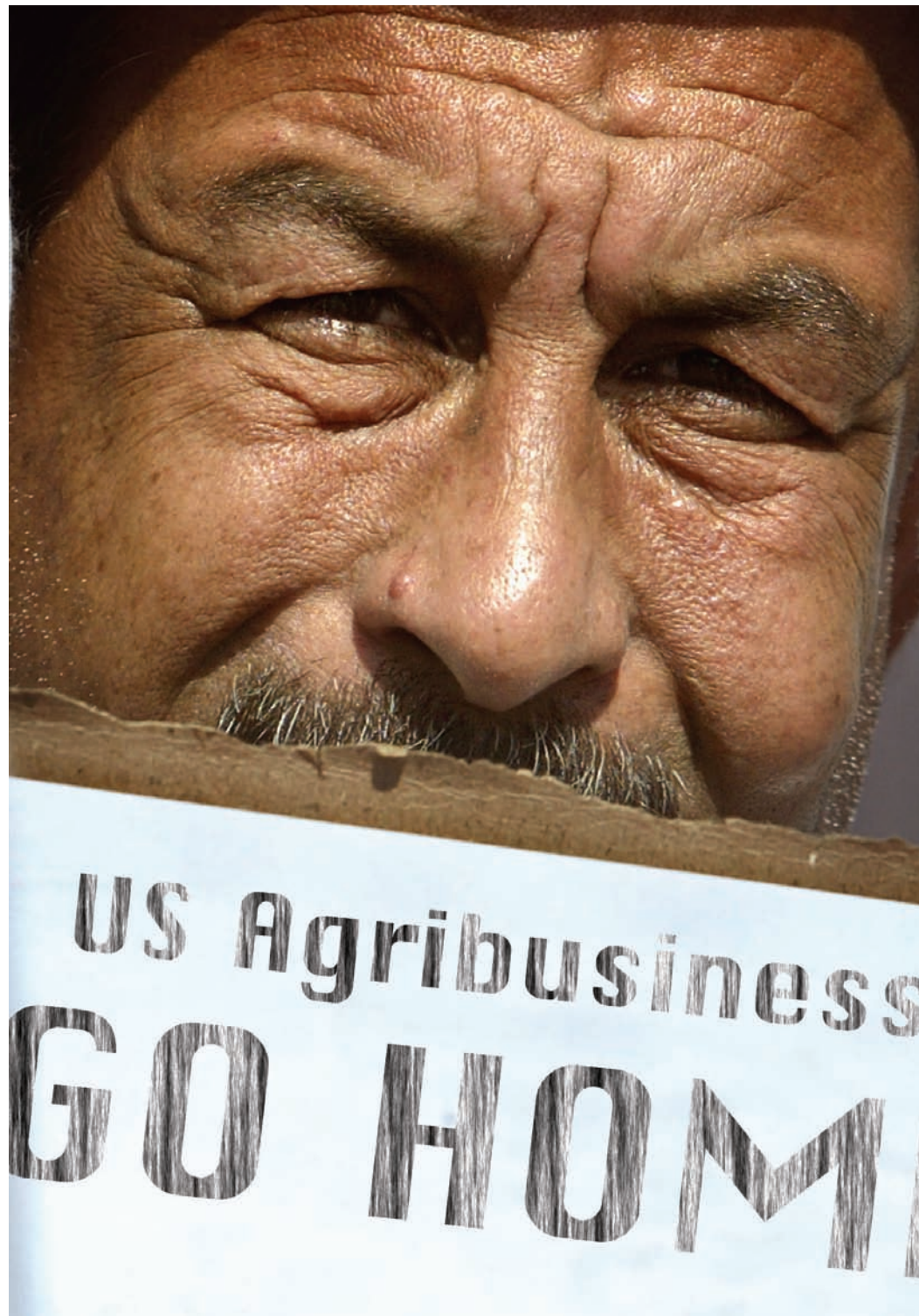
Report by JEREMY SMITH

Coals to Newcastle. Ice to Eskimos. Tea to China. These are the acts of the ultimate salesmen, wily marketers able to sell even to people with no need to buy. To that list can now be added a new phrase - wheat to Iraq.

Iraq is part of the 'fertile crescent' of Mesopotamia. It is here, in around 8,500 to 8,000BC, that mankind first domesticated wheat, here that agriculture was born. In recent years however, the birthplace of farming has been in trouble. Wheat production tumbled from 1,236,000 tons in 1995 to just 384,000 tons in 2000. Why this should have happened very much depends on whom you ask.

A press release from Headquarters United States Command reports that 'Over the past 10 years, this region has not been able to keep up with Iraq's wheat demand. During the Saddam Hussein regime, farmers were expected to continuously produce wheat, never leaving their fields fallow. This tactic degraded the soil, leaving few nutrients for the next year's crop, increasing the chances for crop disease and fungus, and eventually resulting in fewer yields.' For the US military, the blame clearly lies with the 'tactics' of 'Saddam's regime'.

However, in 1997 the UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) found: 'Crop yields... remain low due to poor land preparation as a result of lack of machinery, low use of inputs, deteriorating soil quality and irrigation facilities' and 'The animal population has declined steeply due to severe shortages



of feed and vaccines during the embargo years'. Less interested in selling a war perhaps, the FAO sees Iraqi agriculture suffering due to a lack of necessary machinery and inputs, themselves absent as the result of deprivation 'during the embargo years'.

Or it could have been simpler still. According to a 2003 USDA report, 'Current total production of major grains is estimated to be down 50 percent from the 1990/91 level. Three years of drought from 1999-2001 significantly reduced production.'

Whoever you believe, Iraqi wheat production has collapsed in recent years. The next question then, is how to get it back on its feet.

Despite its recent troubles, Iraqi agriculture's long history means that for the last 10,000 years Iraqi farmers have been naturally selecting wheat varieties that work best with their climate. Each year they have saved seeds from crops that prosper under certain conditions and replanted and cross-pollinated them with others with different strengths the following year, so that the crop continually improves. In 2002, the FAO estimated that 97 per cent of Iraqi farmers used their

own saved seed or bought seed from local markets. That there are now over 200,000 known varieties of wheat in the world is down in no small part to the unrecognised work of farmers like these and their informal systems of knowledge sharing and trade. It would be more than reasonable to assume that somewhere amongst the many fields and grainstores of Iraq there are samples of strong, indigenous wheat varieties that could be developed and distributed around the country in order to bolster production once more.

out the fruits of their knowledge. It could scour the country for successful farms, and if it miraculously found none it could bring over the seeds from ICARDA and use those as the basis of a programme designed to give Iraq back the agriculture it once gave the world.

The US, however, has decided that despite 10,000 years practice Iraqis don't know what wheat works best in their own conditions, and would be better off with some new, imported American varieties. Under the guise, therefore, of helping get Iraq back on its feet, the US is setting out to totally reengineer the country's traditional farming systems into a US-style corporate agribusiness. Or, as the aforementioned press release from Headquarters United States Command puts it: 'Multi-National Forces are currently planting seeds for the future of agriculture in the Ninevah Province [in northern Iraq].'

First, it is re-educating the farmers. An article in the *Land and Livestock Post* reveals that thanks to a project undertaken by Texas A&M University's International Agriculture Office there are now 800 acres of demonstration plots all across Iraq, teaching Iraqi farmers how to grow 'high-yield seed varieties' of crops that include barley, chick peas, lentils – and wheat.

There can be only two reasons why 50 per cent of the grains being developed in Iraq by the US are for pasta. One, the US intends to have so many American soldiers and businessmen in Iraq that it is orienting the country's agriculture around feeding not 'Starving Iraqis' but 'Overfed Americans'. Or, and more likely, because the food was never meant to be eaten inside Iraq at all.

Likewise, long before Abu Ghraib became the world's most infamous prison, it was known for housing not inmates, but seeds. In the early 1970s, samples of the many varieties used by Iraqi farmers were starting to be saved in the country's national gene bank, situated in the town of Abu Ghraib. Indeed one of Iraq's most well known indigenous wheat varieties is called 'Abu Ghraib'.

Unfortunately, this vital heritage and knowledge base is now believed lost, the victim of the current campaign and the many years of conflict that preceded it. But there is another viable source. At the International Centre for Agricultural Research in Dry Areas (ICARDA) in Syria there are still samples of several Iraqi varieties. As a revealing report by Focus on the Global South and GRAIN comments: 'These comprise the agricultural heritage of Iraq belonging to the Iraqi farmers that ought now to be repatriated.'

If Iraq's new administration truly wanted to re-establish Iraqi agriculture for the benefit of the Iraqi people it could seek

The leaders of the \$107 million project have a stated goal of doubling the production of 30,000 Iraqi farms within the first year. After one year, farmers will see soaring production levels. Many will be only too willing to abandon their old ways in favour of the new technologies. Out will go traditional methods. In will come imported American seeds (more than likely GM, as Texas A&M's Agriculture Programme considers itself 'a recognised world leader in using biotechnology'). And with the new seeds will come new chemicals – pesticides, herbicides, fungicides, all sold to the Iraqis by corporations such as Monsanto, Cargill and Dow.

Another article, this time in *The Business Journal of Phoenix*, declares: 'An Arizona agri-research firm is supplying wheat seeds to be used by farmers in Iraq looking to boost their country's homegrown food supplies.' That firm is called the World Wide Wheat Company (WWWC), and in partnership with three universities (including Texas A&M again) it is to 'provide 1,000 pounds of wheat seeds to be used by Iraqi farmers north of Baghdad.'

According to Seedquest (described as the 'central information website for the global seed industry') WWWC is one of the leaders in developing proprietary varieties of cereal seeds – ie varieties that are owned by a particular company. According to the firm's website, any 'client' (or farmer as they were once known) wishing to grow one of their seeds, 'pays a licensing fee for each variety'.

All of a sudden the donation doesn't sound so altruistic.



WWWC gives the Iraqis some seeds. They get taught how to grow them, shown how much 'better' they are than their seeds, and then told that if they want any more, they have to pay.

Another point in one of the articles casts further doubt on American intentions. According to the *Business Journal*, 'six kinds of wheat seeds were developed for the Iraqi endeavour. Three will be used for farmers to grow wheat that is made into pasta; three seed strains will be for breadmaking.'

Pasta? According to the 2001 World Food Programme report on Iraq, 'Dietary habits and preferences included consumption of large quantities and varieties of meat, as well as chicken, pulses, grains, vegetables, fruits and dairy products.' No mention of lasagne. Likewise, a quick check of the Middle Eastern cookbook on my kitchen shelves, while not exclusively Iraqi, reveals a grand total of no pasta dishes listed within it.

There can be only two reasons why 50 per cent of the grains being developed are for pasta. One, the US intends to have so many American soldiers and businessmen in Iraq that it is orienting the country's agriculture around feeding not 'Starving Iraqis' but 'Overfed Americans'. Or, and more likely, because the food was never meant to be eaten inside Iraq at all.

Iraqi farmers are to be taught to grow crops for export. Then they can spend the money they earn (after they have paid for next year's seeds and chemicals) buying food to feed their families. Under the guise of aid, the US has incorporated them into the global economy.

What the US is now doing in Iraq has a very significant precedent. The Green Revolution of the 1950s and 60s was to be the new dawn for farmers in the developing world. Just as now in Iraq, Western scientists and corporations arrived clutching new 'wonder crops', promising peasant farmers that if they planted these new seeds they would soon be rich.

The result was somewhat different. As Vandana Shiva writes in *Biopiracy – the plunder of nature and knowledge*: 'The miracle varieties displaced the diversity of traditionally grown crops, and through the erosion of diversity the new seeds became a mechanism for introducing and fostering pests. Indigenous varieties are resistant to local pests and diseases. Even if certain diseases occur, some of the strains may be susceptible, but others will have resistance to survive.'

Worldwide, thousands of traditional varieties developed over millennia were forsaken in favour of a few new hybrids, all owned by even fewer giant multinationals. As a result, Mexico has lost 80 per cent of its corn varieties since 1930. At least 9,000 varieties of wheat grown in China have been lost since 1949. Then in 1970 in the US, genetic uniformity resulted in the loss of almost a billion dollars worth of maize because 80 per cent of the varieties grown were susceptible to a disease known as 'southern leaf blight'.

Overall, the FAO estimates that about 75 per cent of genetic diversity in agricultural crops was lost in the last century. The impact on small farmers worldwide has been devastating. Demanding large sums of capital and high inputs of chemicals, such farming massively favours large scale, industrial farmers. The many millions of dispossessed people in Asia and elsewhere is in large part a result of this inequity. They can't afford to farm anymore, are driven off their land, either into their cities' slums or across the seas to come

knocking at the doors of those who once offered them a poisoned chalice of false hope.

What separates the US's current scheme from those of the Green Revolution is that the earlier ones were, at least in part, the decisions of the elected governments of the countries affected. The Iraqi plan is being imposed on the people of Iraq without them having any say in the matter. Having ousted Saddam, America is now behaving like a despot itself. It has decided what will happen in Iraq and it is doing it, regardless of whether it is what the Iraqi people want.

When former Coalition Provisional Authority administrator Paul Bremer departed Iraq in June 2004 he left behind a legacy of 100 'Orders' for the restructuring of the Iraqi legal system. Of these orders, one is particularly pertinent to the issue of seeds. Order 81 covers the issues of 'Patent, Industrial Design, Undisclosed Information, Integrated Circuits and Plant Variety'. It amends Iraq's original law on patents, created in 1970, and is legally binding unless repealed by a future Iraqi government.

The most significant part of Order 81 is a new chapter that it inserts on 'Plant Variety Protection' (PVP). This concerns itself not with the protection of biodiversity, but rather with the protection of the commercial interests of large seed corporations.

To qualify for PVP, seeds have to meet the following criteria: they must be 'new, distinct, uniform and stable'. Under the new regulations imposed by Order 81, therefore, the sort of seeds Iraqi farmers are now being encouraged to grow by corporations such as WWWC will be those registered

What America has done is not restructure Iraq's agriculture, but dismantle it. The people whose forefathers first mastered the domestication of wheat will now have to pay for the privilege of growing it for someone else. And with that the world's oldest farming heritage will become just another subsidiary link in the vast American supply chain.

under PVP.

On the other hand, it is impossible for the seeds developed by the people of Iraq to meet these criteria. Their seeds are not 'new' as they are the product of millennia of development. Nor are they 'distinct'. The free exchange of seeds practiced for centuries ensures that characteristics are spread and shared across local varieties. And they are the opposite of 'uniform' and 'stable' by the very nature of their biodiversity. They cross-pollinate with other nearby varieties, ensuring they are always changing and always adapting.

Cross-pollination is an important issue for another reason. In recent years several farmers have been taken to court for 'illegally' growing a corporation's GM seeds. The farmers have argued they were doing so unknowingly, that the seeds must have carried on the wind from a neighbouring farm, for example. They have still been taken to court. This will now apply in Iraq. Under the new rules, if a farmer's seed can be shown to have been contaminated with one of the PVP

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registered seeds, he could be fined. He may have been saving his seed for years, perhaps even generations, but if it mixes with a seed owned by a corporation and maybe creates a new hybrid, he may face a day in court.

Remember that 97 per cent of Iraqi farmers save their seeds. Order 81 also puts paid to that. A new line has been added to the law which reads: 'Farmers shall be prohibited from re-using seeds of protected varieties or any variety mentioned in items 1 and 2 of paragraph (C) of Article 14 of this Chapter.'

The other varieties referred to are those that show similar

characteristics to the PVP varieties. If a corporation develops a variety resistant to a particular Iraqi pest, and somewhere in Iraq a farmer is growing another variety that does the same, it's now illegal for him/her to save that seed. It sounds mad, but it's happened before. A few years back a corporation called SunGene patented a sunflower variety with a very high oleic acid content. It didn't just patent the genetic structure though, it patented the characteristic. Subsequently, SunGene notified other sunflower breeders that should they develop a variety high in oleic acid it would be considered an infringement of the patent.

So the Iraqi farmer may have been wowed with the promise of a bumper yield at the end of this year. But unlike before he can't save his seed for the next. A 10,000-year old tradition has been replaced at a stroke with a contract for hire.

Iraqi farmers have been made vassals to American corporations. That they were baking bread for 9,500 years before America existed has no weight when it comes to deciding who owns Iraq's wheat. Yet for every farmer that stops growing his unique strain of saved seed the world loses another variety, one that might have been useful in times of disease or drought.

In short, what America has done is not restructure Iraq's agriculture, but dismantle it. The people whose forefathers first mastered the domestication of wheat will now have to pay for the privilege of growing it for someone else. And with that the world's oldest farming heritage will become just another subsidiary link in the vast American supply chain.

MEDICAL DOCTORS, SCIENTISTS and STUDENTS

FROM: MONEIM A. FADALI,
M.D., M.Ch., F.A.C.S., F.R.C.S. (C.), F.A.C.C., F.A.C.P.
PRESIDENT, DOCTORS & LAWYERS FOR
RESPONSIBLE MEDICINE*

Stunned and dismayed to learn that Oxford University is building a new biomedical research facility for Animal Experimentation. This misguided, utterly unnecessary undertaking by the venerable Oxford University prompts this response:

As a practising surgeon of long-standing I have no doubt that animal experimentation (vivisection), chiefly because of interspecies differences, misleads research, harms people and justifies human experimentation. Extrapolating from animal to human is a risky venture. Vivisectionists may try drugs, procedures and gadgets on animals a thousand and one times, but the moment they move on to the human condition, they will be experimenting on humans. Pseudoscience! No wonder humans pay the price. One of the latest disasters is "Vioxx" of Merck Co. Inc., announced only weeks ago - a grim reminder of the folly and falsehood of animal experimentation "Vioxx", to relieve the pain of arthritis, silenced the hearts of many who used it.

Breakthroughs in medicine did not come out of animal experimentation as its advocates and practitioners claim: momentous discoveries, too numerous to include here, have been made that had nothing to do with animal research.

While reliable methods are available, why opt for the deceptive and tormenting? Cell culture, tissue culture, organ culture, epidemiological studies, clinical research (not experimentation), autopsy, bacterial cultures and DNA studies - all are dependable and worthy of our confidence.

I hope Oxford University will reconsider its decision, in the name of the countless numbers of human beings that have been seriously harmed by animal experimentation. Certainly the toll will keep rising if this misguided practice is allowed to continue.

Moneim A. Fadali, M.D. DLRM: PO Box 302, London N8 9HD

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Seedy Sunday

Come to the 4th annual community seed-swap on Sunday 6 February Old Market, Hove, Sussex, England

Some 97 per cent of this country's vegetable varieties became extinct in the last century. For many of the 'heirloom' varieties of horticultural plants that remain the only way they stand a chance of surviving is if people keep on planting them year on year.

That's where Seedy Sunday comes in. With its fourth annual event taking place on 6 February, Seedy Sunday will welcome people from all over Sussex and beyond for a day of seed swapping, talks and displays - all around the theme of preserving our natural heritage.

Around 1000 people attended last year's event to swap the seeds they had saved from their gardens or allotments. An astonishing range of fruits, vegetables, flowers and even tree seeds were available to exchange or purchase for a small donation. For example, at least 36 varieties of tomato were on offer.

Each year Seedy Sunday continues to grow. People who came for the first time last year and swapped half their onion seed for one packet of cabbage seed are now returning to swap 1 packet of onion seed and 1 packet of cabbage seed

for something new.

The organizers are also looking to encourage the setting up of similar events across the UK. They took a stall to many of last summer's festivals which was so well received that 2005 will now see seed-swaps taking place in February in North Devon, Machynlleth and Dulwich. Lancaster Seed Savers also held their seed swap event on 8 December last year and are holding a potato day on Saturday 5 February.

Organising a Seedy Sunday provides an opportunity for people of all ages and backgrounds to come together. More importantly though, the event provides an enjoyable and practical way to do something to help preserve seed diversity and reclaim control over the food chain. The

simple act of swapping seeds can be an action of local, national and international political significance, available to anyone with a garden or even only a window box in which to grow that seed.

For more information on how to get involved or start your own seed swapping event please see www.seedysunday.org or call 01273 381686.



Varese Ligure

by Giovanna Dunmall

Photographs by Simeone Ricci

Once in seemingly terminal decline, the Ligurian community of Varese Ligure is thriving like never before; and all because of one man's vision of organic agriculture and sustainable energy





It's a sunny and breezy day as I walk around the old centre of Varese Ligure, a small rural community in the heart of Liguria. Like many a tourist I take in the medieval stronghold in the main square, the winding alleyways, the burbling river and its stone bridges, and the circular *borgo* of ancient houses with freshly painted and renovated facades. But that's not why I'm here.

People first started deserting the Ligurian hinterland for the coastal cities of Genoa and La Spezia in the 1950s. By the end of the 1980s the situation had reached a critical point: the population of Varese Ligure had dropped from 6,000 to 2,200, essential services had vanished, and unemployment was widespread, forcing locals to commute to jobs in factories in nearby Sestri Levante instead.

Varese Ligure's mayor Maurizio Caranza, however, hadn't given up hope. He believed that the factors contributing to Varese Ligure's decline - its isolation (the only road to the town is winding and slow and there is no train service), lack of industry, decaying property and rudimentary farming techniques - could also become its strengths and provide the basis for regeneration and renewal. Seen from a glass half-full, here was a 14,000-square-kilometre environmental haven 'untainted' by pollution, free from real-estate speculation and development, and filled with verdant and productive valleys, woodland, olive groves and hilltop villages.

Fourteen years have passed since Caranza began his mission, but it is easily apparent that Varese Ligure, or the *Valle del Biologico* ('Organic Valley') as it is also known, goes from strength to strength.

I'm walking through the town with Caranza and current mayor Michela Marcone. (Caranza had to step aside as mayor in June 2004, following Italy's introduction of a new law limiting mayors to three consecutive terms. He is now deputy mayor and environment councillor to his longtime younger ally Marcone.) The pair tirelessly point out the World Wildlife Fund's environmental education centre; the board in the main piazza highlighting all the local tourist sights; the new shoe shop and bakery that have sprung up since the community went organic and energetically self-sufficient; and the hotel that has reopened its doors. Locals greet Caranza and Marcone with a smiling *'buon giorno'*, which is tantamount to genuine affection for a Ligurian and very different from the reserved, wordless nod they give to visitors.

The reason for this affection is obvious. More than 140 new jobs have been created in Varese Ligure's agriculture, food, tourism and services sectors; people are staying and having babies (there are 15 new births a year and almost 50 children in the local kindergarten, despite its seeming doomed to closure 10 years ago); and tourism has tripled over the last decade, with a season lasting six months a year instead of the previous typically Italian 40-day period around August. The family-run *Hotel degli Amici* now stays open year-round, and several B&Bs, farm holiday houses and restaurants or bars have opened up for business. 'It's been difficult,' smiles Caranza when we first meet, 'because inland areas are not popular as tourist destinations in Italy, and they have to have a very strong identity to attract people at all.'

With this in mind, Caranza and his administration



'If the public administration obtains public funding to redo the roads, the sewers, the aqueducts, and the lighting, will you, in return, repair and renovate your houses?'. 200 people said yes.

embarked on a radical programme for rehabilitating the depressed and dwindling local community. He started by asking the locals: 'If the public administration obtains public funding to redo the roads, the sewers, the aqueducts, and the lighting, will you, in return, repair and renovate your houses?'

The funding for the communal infrastructure was to come from the EU and would provide for, among other things, 21 new aqueducts, two water purification plants and two giant wind turbines. The administration also promised EU incentives to citizens willing to renovate their century-old homes.

However, what was remarkable and innovative was the 'integrated' nature of this large-scale renovation project. As Caranza explains: 'For every lira we put towards renovating the old *borgo*, another four came from the citizens themselves.'

There was a psychological factor at work here, or, as Caranza likes to call it, a 'virtuous circle'. 'If you go to someone's house and it's much nicer and cleaner than yours, then when you go back to your home you want to improve it too.' So, though only 20 per cent of the old town's inhabitants bid for renovation at first, many more soon followed suit, and in the 14 years of Caranza's administration more than 200 houses were renovated.

As a heady mix of hard facts and socio-political jargon stream out of Caranza's mouth, it seems hard to believe that this eloquent and loquacious man is locally born and bred. Marcone sums him up by saying, 'he could talk to a stone'.

Indeed, in this region where people are loath to talk in public or to strangers, Caranza, both literally and politically, speaks for everyone. Varese 2000, the left-leaning party of which he is the leading candidate, has won the local elections with more than 65 per cent of the votes for the last 15 years. Given the amount of convincing he has had to do over this same period, this is an amazing result. And an even greater achievement, Caranza proudly points out, considering that conventional 'green parties usually get about 1 or 1.5 per cent of the vote in this country'.

The next step in the Caranza project was encouraging farmers to switch over 'officially' to organic methods. Most, he explains, were already farming organically 'unofficially', but just had not gone through the necessary certification procedures. 'This is a poor area,' he adds, 'so no one had the money to use fertilisers and so on.'

Caranza and his deputies explained that organic agricultural products could be sold at higher prices and without the presence of wholesalers and intermediaries. They also told farmers the EU had grants to help subsidise organic farms.

Just a few years on and now more than nine out of 10 local farms are organic and two cooperatives dedicated mainly to organic meat and dairy produce have been founded. The

cooperatives sell from two outlets in the area and also to other shops nearby, such as the socially minded Co-op chain of supermarkets, and school canteens. 'It is difficult for us to compete on price with production in the plains, so going organic has given our products added value,' says Mauro Figone, a member of the meat cooperative *Carni San Pietro Vara*, with the sort of simple practicality typical of the region. 'This is the future for places like this.'

But why, I ask Caranza, has an innately conservative community with simple agricultural roots accepted such far-reaching and radical policies?

The main reason is simple: economic survival. Add to that a quality the region is well-known, even infamous, for: thriftiness. 'We Ligurians are exceptional at saving,' Caranza chuckles. The roofs of the council building and the secondary school are fitted with photovoltaic panels providing them with almost 100 per cent of their energy needs cost-free. In the same way the two wind turbines installed on a wind-swept promontory about an hour's drive from Varese Ligure produce 4 million kilowatts of energy a year, enough for 8,000 people: more than three times the population of the municipality. Thanks to an agreement with the public company that runs the wind farm, the public administration receives 30,000 euro a year for the excess energy produced. Later this year the administration will install another two turbines, bringing more money into

the administration's coffers and providing clean, carbon-dioxide-free energy to even more people.

'Some people say wind turbines are ugly,' says Caranza, 'but that's only a problem if you put 40 of them up together.' As we stand at the evocatively named Centocroci ('Hundred Crosses') mountain pass in the hamlet of La Cappelletta ('the Little Chapel') and gaze upwards at the two white whirring giants, I am awed both by their size and by how naturally they seem to fit with their environment. Caranza later tells me how another rural municipality in Italy once decided to paint all its electricity pylons shades of green so that they would blend in with the landscape, and how this well-meaning move had made them stand out even more.

Another reason Caranza has succeeded where others have failed is simply that his administration knew it was possible to obtain the same sort of certification for a municipality that you can get for a business. In the name of 'absolute transparency' the inland Ligurian community became in October 1999 the first Italian municipality to be certified ISO 14001 (the international benchmark for environmental management), and in November 1999 the first European municipality registered under the EU's Eco-Management and Audit Scheme. 'Many public administrations don't even know that these schemes exist,' Caranza says. 'I think there is an interest in not letting people know about them.'

And unlike most politicians, who are typically ambitious



People say of Mayor Caranza (on the right): 'He could talk to a stone'.

and career-minded, Caranza and Marcone seem to be made of different stuff. 'If you want to carve out a career for yourself,' says Marcone with a hint of self-deprecating sarcasm, 'you don't do it by becoming mayor of Varese Ligure.' Whereas Caranza seems driven by a desire to keep his birthplace alive, Marcone is spurred on by what she calls a 'strong civic sense'. 'It is not about going back to a golden age that never existed,' she insists. 'It's about integrating man and the environment.'

Importantly, the pair are in total agreement about the significance of education and communication. 'Nowadays the only thing that counts are the numbers,' says Marcone. 'The amount of people that will use something, how much it will cost...' She pauses. 'I don't think it is useful to fit oneself to that kind of logic.' Given the option to build either a new football pitch (as the nearby municipality of Sesta Godano did not long ago to much fanfare), or to put in a wastewater purification plant, most administrations will opt for the crowd-pleasing first scenario, she says. The Varese Ligure administration, in contrast, decided to opt for a different tack: two water purification plants were installed and the whole community was informed about the environmental benefits they would bring. 'Of course, a purification plant is expensive,' says Marcone, 'but this is politics to my mind. If you want to please the overwhelming majority but not give a damn about their health...' She shrugs. Later, when talking about the pressure the council came under not long ago to eliminate the first year of one of the secondary institutes, she says: 'If you don't maintain services in marginal areas it's obvious that there will be a gradual decline. But it doesn't seem to interest anyone. Most politicians know they'll be long gone before the consequences are felt.'

Recently, growing media and tour-operator interest has led to inevitable demand in the area from out-of-town and foreign home-buyers. So far at least, prices have remained contained. In the old borgo a small house with its own garden is going for 50,000 euro, a much bigger house for 130,000 euro. 'There's a lot of demand for buildings that could be turned into B&Bs, or used for second homes,' says local estate agent Cristina Vair. 'Many houses have been bought by Genoa- or Milan-based residents, and also by English people,' she says.

London-based journalist Mandy Bentley is one of those English people. She decided to buy, in her words, a 'slice of Italian rural life'. She first bought a flat with friends two years ago, and has now bought her own property in the same building. She comes to stay about once a month. 'The municipality's commitment to the environment was an important factor in my choosing to buy in the area,' she says, admitting she feels increasingly frustrated by her life in London. 'Long commuting distances, unsafe and unreliable

public transport, the disappearance of local shopping facilities in favour of out-of-town centres' all contributed to her decision to 'find a home with a more naturally sustainable lifestyle'. She believes that there are places in England that could learn a lot from the Varese experience, but is worried that it may be too late. 'The UK seems more influenced by the American way of life, which is inimical to environmentalism,' she comments sadly.

There may be time, however, for other European countries to adopt such innovative measures to safeguard their rural communities. As Bentley points out, the new EU member states 'still have an agricultural structure dominated by smallholdings'. Nor is it too late for other Italian rural communities vulnerable to potential depopulation, degeneration and decline. Indeed, one of Caranza's *other* full-time activities is presiding over the umbrella association *Qualitambiente*, which brings together 40 Italian provinces and municipalities that in the wake of the 'Varese Ligure effect' have obtained European certifications for environmental management. Yet these marginal and often marginalised communities remain fragile. Caranza once likened Varese Ligure to 'a transplant patient who you worry about at the slightest cough'. It would take very little for the fine balance to be overturned: organic food going out of fashion, for instance, or the tourist influx waning.

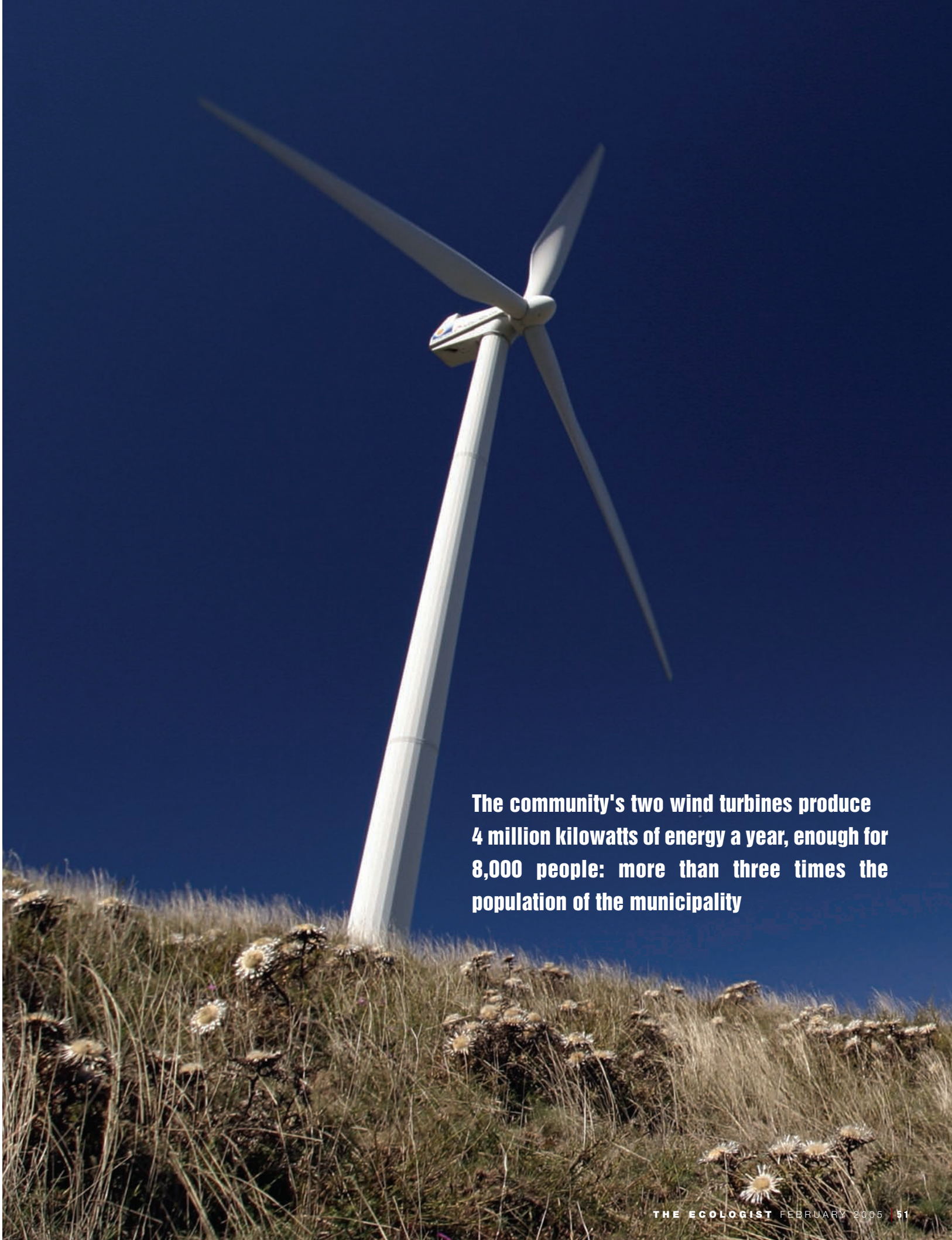
Another even greater concern is the alarming lack of farmers. For example, an organic yoghurt factory which has just opened in the municipality can't get enough milk locally so has to buy it in from Tuscany. Yet this makes little sense in the context of sustainability. As Marcone sadly points out, the problem is that 'farmers' children are embarrassed about what their parents do', and worryingly few want to follow in their footsteps. And the few young farmers there are can't seem to find wives. Ever pragmatic, Caranza suggests the solution could come from abroad through immigrant men and women wishing to become farmers or marry locally.

In the meantime, new resident Bentley sums up the current state of affairs: 'I think there will always be a tension between maintaining the environmental quality of life, which has been a major achievement of Caranza and Marcone, and the inevitable modern-life demands for employment, housing, transport facilities and other services. For me this might be a golden age. I hope it will be sustainable, for others to enjoy in the future.' This is what Caranza and Marcone are working so hard to achieve. 'Going organic has allowed local companies to stay in the area,' says Caranza. 'What we need now are more reasons to stay, or reasons to come back,' he continues, his eyes alight. 'That's the only possibility for the future.'

Giovanna Dunmall is a freelance journalist living in Rome.



'It's not about going back to a golden age that never existed. It's about integrating man and environment.'

A large white wind turbine stands on a grassy hill. The turbine has three blades and a nacelle. The sky is a clear, deep blue. The foreground is filled with tall, dry grass and several white daisy-like flowers. The text is positioned in the lower right quadrant of the image.

**The community's two wind turbines produce
4 million kilowatts of energy a year, enough for
8,000 people: more than three times the
population of the municipality**

Dying for Tibet?

'When it comes to serving the needs of Tibetan people and protecting the local environment I am ready to give up even my life.'

Tibetan monk Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche

By the time you read this Rinpoche may well have had to make that ultimate sacrifice. On 2 December 2002 the Tibetan environmental advocate and religious leader was sentenced to death. According to the Chinese government, he and his co-accused, Lobsang Dhondrup, had been involved in a number of explosions and so-called 'splittist' activities (Chinese parlance for supporting the Dalai Lama).

The only evidence against Rinpoche was a confession extracted under torture from Dhondrup. Neither man received a fair trial by international standards, with both being denied access to independent lawyers and no evidence being made public. Their appeals were then heard in secret in a provincial court on 26 January 2003, despite assurances they would be heard in the Chinese Supreme Court. Both sentences were upheld, and while Rinpoche's was suspended for two years Dhondrup was executed within minutes of the appeal verdict.

Since then Rinpoche has been tortured and denied contact with the outside world.

An ongoing international campaign calls for the suspended sentence to be dismissed, evidence to be made public and a retrial to be convened with independent observers under international judicial standards. Both the UK Parliament and the US Senate have condemned this politically motivated trial and backed demands for a new, fair hearing or the release of Rinpoche. Time, however, is not on his side. The suspension of his death sentence expires on 23 January this year.

In 1950, only one year after its foundation, the People's Republic of China (PRC) invaded Tibet, which until then had been a sovereign nation for more than 2,000 years. That same year, in the eastern Tibetan region of Kham, known to the Chinese as Sichuan province, Tenzin Deleg *Rinpoche* was born.

Following the invasion, China drew up the boundaries for what it called the 'Tibetan Autonomous Region'. Yet only part

of what had historically been Tibet fell within these new boundaries: the rest of the country was subsumed within various Chinese provinces (see map, page 38).

After a widespread Tibetan revolt was crushed in March 1959, an event that led to the exodus of the Dalai Lama and many of his followers, China began to establish a rigid pattern of control and power in Tibet that persists to this day. As a young man, Rinpoche fell victim to this oppression and endured hard labour during the Cultural Revolution of 1965-1976: a period of devastating destruction and repression during which religious expression was banned. Despite this he managed to study Buddhism and began working to reinvigorate Tibetan Buddhism in the Orthok region near Lighthang in eastern Kham.

In 1982 Rinpoche went to India to study, and in 1983 was recognised by the Dalai Lama in as a tulku (reincarnate lama; the name 'Rinpoche' is actually an honorific title bestowed on reincarnate lamas and esteemed Buddhist scholars and teachers). This recognition enhanced his position and influence within Tibet, and in 1987 he returned to his homeland after being advised by the Dalai Lama that 'the true duty of a lama is to serve the common people'.

On his return Rinpoche began to practise the environmental, social and religious principles he had developed in India. He established new monasteries, schools, medical clinics, orphanages and old people's homes. The establishment of Orthok monastery in 1993 was his largest single project: housing 700 monks, it served as the hub of his community efforts.

As Rinpoche rose to prominence in the area through his humanitarian works, local government officials began to monitor his activities and views. As many of them were not in line with Chinese government policies they may well have been interpreted as challenges to the authority of the PRC. In particular, the Chinese resented Rinpoche's work as an environmentalist.

An outspoken advocate for environmental protection, Rinpoche highlighted gold and metallic ore mining practices that resulted in river pollution and soil damage. He also drew attention to biodiversity loss caused by indiscriminate hunting, particularly of musk deer and the endangered Tibetan antelope or chiru. The chiru is hunted by poachers for its underbelly fur known as shahtoosh, one of the world's most prized animal fibres. The illegal shahtoosh trade has led to

20,000 Tibetan antelope being killed each year. In attempting to stop the poaching not only did Rinpoche coordinate groups of followers to go into the mountains and prevent the setting of cruel metal traps; he also provided livestock to poachers in order to negate their need to hunt rare species.

However, it was the issue of deforestation that first led to conflict between Rinpoche and local officials: conflict that would ultimately lead to his unjust death sentence. In 1987 he had begun campaigning against the clear-cutting of mature forests. The clear-cutting, which provided timber to central China, was devastating the local landscape and watersheds through soil erosion and flooding. (The implications of clear-cutting for biodiversity are severe: scientific models and ecological surveys suggest that when an area loses 90 per cent of its native forest, at least 50 per cent of its species are wiped out as a result.)

In 1987, forestry land in Lighthang county was divided into three categories: land for government use; land for township officials' personal use; and public land. However, township, county and local officials were eager to open up new areas for logging in a region where government land was practically exhausted. To achieve this, higher-ranking officials were bribed to move the boundaries so that public land was reassigned for government use.

Protesting against this corruption, Rinpoche led a group of petitioners first to provincial officials in Kham and then over their heads to officials in Beijing. Thanks to Rinpoche's efforts, a campaign to prevent the reassignment of public land as government property was ultimately successful, but at great personal cost to himself. Though it boosted his standing with the local people, his exposure of corrupt practices and duplicity by Chinese officials won Rinpoche new enemies; these grudges were nursed as the officials concerned moved up the government hierarchy.

Following disastrous flooding throughout China in 1998, a new forestry conservation policy was announced. Then Chinese president Jiang Zemin directly linked the Yangtze flood of that year, which killed thousands and caused economic loss of \$37 billion, with deforestation in Tibet. However, this about-turn came too late for Rinpoche, who by then was firmly in the sights of the authorities.

Because of his continued devotion to the teachings of the Dalai Lama (who is seen by Beijing as the biggest threat to its complete control over Tibet), and the respect with which he was regarded locally as a community leader, the Chinese



Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche, before his arrest



viewed Rinpoche as a threat to their authority. He became subject to persistent harassment by the authorities, which culminated in his arrest in April 2002 on fabricated charges and his subsequent suspended death sentence.

Geshe Lobsang Tenpa, a former student of Rinpoche, remembers his tutor's defending his work before his arrest with the following words: 'I see no reason to abandon my people and flee to freedom... I started schools, monasteries and health clinics for the good of the common people. If the Chinese government considers that is a crime then I am helpless. But I have not done anything politically seditious, so I have no reason to suspect the government will arrest me... I have taken a vow to stay in Tibet and serve the people, and I will perform my promise.'

By continuing to persecute Tibetans like Rinpoche who recognise and strive to protect the delicate ecological lattice that binds us all together, China not only threatens the future of the Tibetan environment: it threatens us all. China has taken advantage of the post-9/11 political climate to prosecute cases such as Rinpoche's, cases that seriously abuse the human rights of Tibetans and pose a grave threat to the environmental security of each and every one of us. Future generations will not judge us kindly if we stand by and watch leaders of courage and integrity such as Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche be unjustly executed or imprisoned, while at the same time a unique habitat is destroyed and an ancient culture smothered.

What you can do

For further information on the campaign to save Tenzin Deleg Rinpoche's life and on Tibet's environment, please contact the Free Tibet Campaign: 28 Charles Square, London N1 6HT; 020 7324 4605; www.freetibet.org; mail@freetibet.org.

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THE PLUNDER OF TIBET Rinpoche's profound concerns about exploitation and mismanagement of the Tibetan environment under China's occupation are fully vindicated by the following issues:

The Tibetan plateau is a unique environment of 2.5 million square kilometres, most of which is situated at an altitude of more than 4,000 metres. Nomadic pastoralism and subsistence arable farming were the region's economic mainstays for centuries. It is the highest and largest plateau on earth, and, as the source of many of Asia's principal rivers, provides water for a quarter of the world's population. These rivers include the Brahmaputra, Indus, Sutlej, Karnali, Mekong, Yangtze and Irrawaddy, which flow into China, India, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia.

Water management

China is implementing massive water management projects on the Tibetan plateau, with significant social and environmental consequences resulting from population relocation, construction and flooding. Water shortages in China's densely populated northeastern region have led to a series of large dams and hydroelectric power projects exporting electricity from Tibet to Chinese cities. The hydroelectric plant on Yamdrok-Tso lake has been particularly controversial, with the fragile ecosystem of the lake, one of the most sacred in Tibet and the largest freshwater lake in the northern Himalayas, being severely disrupted by the project.

Agriculture, grasslands and desertification

Since the 1960s China has sought to change what it perceives as inefficient livestock rearing methods among Tibetan nomads. In the 1960s and 1970s many nomads were forced to become settled farmers, and much of their grazing lands were converted for arable usage. The resulting yields were largely disastrously, as non-indigenous crops were selected without reference to local knowledge. This began a process of declining agricultural productivity, grassland degradation, desertification and even famine.

The current grassland laws for Tibet (set in the late 1990s) aim to settle nomads by enclosing pastures so as to intensify livestock production. The laws have been necessitated by the growing market needs resulting from the massive influx of Han Chinese into Tibet. The migration of the Han is part of a huge population transfer programme.

The new farming practices have led to overgrazing as exploited lands are not left fallow, herd mix is disrupted and livestock is not shifted between seasonal pastures as nomadic practice would normally dictate. The overstocking resulting from the new market values is exacerbating the overgrazing: it is a vicious circle leading to ever-increasing desertification in a fragile habitat.

This imposition of alien values and power also threatens traditional social structures. Tibet's nomads are no longer self-sufficient and their value systems have become distorted. In 1999, for instance, they engaged in lethal armed clashes resulting from a dispute over the ownership of pasture that had previously been considered communal land.

It is worth noting that criticism of China's policies is not limited to Tibetans and activists. In 2001 a World Bank report stated that 'there is little doubt that [Beijing's] natural-resource-management policies have been an important contributing factor' to desertification in Tibet.

Tibet's first railway

In 2001 China began a six-year, \$3.2 billion construction programme to build Tibet's first railway, which will eventually link the Tibetan capital Lhasa to Gormo in northwest China and the vast Chinese national rail network. As part of China's Western Development Strategy, this 1,118-kilometre railway is intended to bring 'stability' and 'unity' to Tibet: the words are euphemisms used by the Chinese government for 'repression' and 'control' of the Tibetan people.

The railway will inevitably lead to greater population transfer of Han Chinese into Tibet, and will thus exacerbate the existing economic disparities between Tibetans and Chinese in Tibet. The increased population will also put further pressure on the environment. In addition, the railway will make it easier for China to extract resources from Tibet and to further militarise the Tibetan plateau. As for the construction project itself, even China has admitted it will cause damage 'to a delicate ecological environment that will be very difficult to recover'.

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The Rainforest saver

After more than 20 years work, Mike Hands, a British tropical ecologist has come up with a groundbreaking way to stop vast areas of rainforest from being destroyed.

But will his pioneering technique be given a chance?

Report by Daniel Elkan



Mike Hands could hardly bear to look. Only a few years ago it had been thick rainforest. Now it was just grass and weeds. Slash-and-burn farmers had cut down and burnt the forest to grow crops to feed their families. After only a year or two the land had become infertile, forcing the farmers to move on.

Working for the Honduran government as a surveyor of river-flood control, Hands was constantly seeing forests destroyed by slash-and-burn farming. Each time, the same questions plagued him. Why did the soil become infertile so quickly, compelling farmers to leave? Wasn't there another method of cultivation that would keep the land fertile, so that the farmers could stay on the same land?

As a keen organic gardener he was convinced there had to be a simple, non-industrial solution to the problem. Night after night he pored over books and journals on soil husbandry, organic gardening and farming. While they were full of techniques for keeping soil fertile, they shed very little light on why tropical soils can sustain crops for one to two years but then no more.

A few hours reading after work just wasn't enough. Hands realised he was going to have to study the problem full time. But at 39, with a wife and four young children to support, he wasn't sure he was up to it. And with no savings of any note, the only way to finance his studies would be to get a loan using his Cornish home as security. But he felt compelled. So in April 1984 he returned to the UK, and persuaded Cambridge University to let him start a one-year MSc on slash-and-burn.

Today there are estimated to be more than 300 million slash-and-burn farmers worldwide, each one clearing about a hectare of forest a year. 'El Salvador has been completely deforested, as have the virgin forests in the lowlands of Costa Rica, Peru, Honduras, Venezuela, Columbia and vast areas of Brazil,' says Hands. With as much as 40 per cent of the planet's carbon being stored in forest vegetation, slash-and-burn is an increasingly significant factor in climate change.

For the slash-and-burn farmers themselves, the situation only gets worse. With the land around their villages long since exhausted, they typically have to trek two or three hours into the hills to work. As this prevents other family members from helping with cultivation, the farmers are left with a backbreaking workload. All around, available land is running

out fast. Often farmers slash-and-burn their way up to the top of a hill, only to meet other farmers who have slashed and burnt their way up the other side.

Increasingly with no fresh forest to slash-and-burn, farmers are going back, too soon, to previously farmed areas. With the land not yet recovered and the soil still infertile, the returns are meagre. Facing starvation, the farmers try their luck on any remaining patches of forest that were missed the first time round, usually on steep slopes unsuited to cultivation. Tragically, this destroys the last remaining forest seed sources in the area, and makes natural forest regeneration impossible.

In desperation, some farmers move to cities. There, they mostly end up begging or trying to live off rubbish dumps. Their only other option is try to get temporary work on a plantation: hazardous toil for a pittance, in slave-labour conditions.

Meanwhile, the slash-and-burn problem rarely makes news. 'It's partly because, unlike damage from hurricanes, the destruction is gradual,' says Hands. 'But it is also because people feel so helpless. They think: "Don't show me a forest burning. What the hell can I do?"'



Mike Hands inspecting first growth *inga* trees

In Cambridge Hands attended as many as 30 lectures a week, on subjects ranging from soil ecology, plant ecology and soil chemistry to the geography and climate of Central America. As the undergraduates partied and enjoyed their newfound freedom, Hands was running from lecture to lecture like a man possessed. Meanwhile, his weekends were spent in the library digging up obscure papers, hoping to unravel the mysteries of crop failure on tropical soils.

Despite exhaustive research, however, it remained a frustrating puzzle. Nobody could say for sure whether the cause was insect pests, crop disease, nutrient-depletion in the soil, or weed growth. Two leading studies suggested that soil on slash-and-burn sites might be losing phosphorus, an important element in plant growth, but went no further.

When the year was over, Hands still hadn't found the answer. And although he stayed on for a second year, by the time his second term was halfway through he had had enough of theory. He wanted to hear from the farmers themselves about the kind of problems they faced.

The best place to go, he reasoned, was where fertility was failing fastest: the acid soils of the Costa Rican rainforest. In March 1986 Hands arrived in Costa Rica and headed for the 'agricultural frontier', where farmers were hacking into virgin

forest. He stayed in an old crumbling farm and befriended a forest guard, who introduced him to the farmers. Once they were assured that Hands was not from the government, they were happy to talk.

'I asked the farmers about the cropping sequence and yields,' says Hands. 'They were tremendously patient. They showed me the different textures of fertile and infertile soil; how, as soon as they cleared the land, rampant weeds and grass would invade. One of them had spent 160 days a year hacking at grass with his machete just to be able to get a crop to eat. I said to them: 'Suppose you had a system that simply let you stay in one place, cropping maize...' They replied: "Ah, yes - that is a dream!"'

From everything the farmers had said, it seemed likely that the problem was nutrient levels in the soil. Hands suspected phosphorus might be being depleted. Was there a crucial difference between soil from slash-and-burn sites and soil from virgin rainforest? Although comparisons had been made some years before, Hands wanted to do the tests himself to see if something important had been missed. So he returned once again to his laboratory at Cambridge, this time with 50 kilogrammes of Costa Rican soil.

It took many months of seemingly fruitless experiments, many consultations with different chemistry experts, before Hands found what he had been looking for. Contrary to what previous research had claimed, but as Hands had thought for some time, the soils cleared by slash and burn had lost masses of 'total' phosphorus. Even though he did not yet have the data to show when, or how quickly, the loss had taken place, one thing was certain: only a fraction of the phosphorus would have been used up by the crops; the rest of it was being wasted - washed out of the soil by rain.

Having proved his theory, he turned his attention to finding a way of combating the problem. He knew that alley-cropping, a method of farming pioneered in Nigeria and in which crops are grown between rows of trees, allowed nutrients to be retrieved from the soil and recycled by the crops. But Hands also knew that for alley-cropping to work on rainforest soils, it would not only have to stop phosphorus and other elements getting leached out of the soil; it would also have to fix nitrogen, control weed growth, and be practical for some of the world's poorest farmers.

Up till then alley-cropping systems had used fast-mulching, small-leaf trees, but in these Latin American tropical conditions the trees would need to be adaptable to very shallow acid soil. Furthermore, when the leaves fell they would have to provide a thick blanket of mulch to protect the soil from the heat of the sun so as to allow the roots to raise to the surface and into the mulch itself. In effect, the alley-cropping would have to mimic the conditions found in the virgin tropical forests.

Could this be achieved? Hands was confident that with the right type of tree the system could be made to simulate what rainforests do naturally: first, stop weed growth by a combination of shading and smothering; and secondly, recycle nutrients through slow leaf decomposition.

His plan was to plant seedlings of fast-growing, thick-leaved trees in long rows a few metres apart. When the trees



[A] CURLA site. *Inga edulis* alleys prior to first pruning. The grasses completely suppressed by shading, the soil covered by natural leaf-fall. [B] CURLA site. *Inga edulis* alleys shortly after first pruning. Maize seedlings just appearing through the mulch which has completely suppressed the germination of weeds. [C] The San Juan site; June 1992. Young maize emerging through the mulch of *Inga marginata* following first pruning. The trees received a further, light pruning 2-3 weeks later. The resulting crop was heavy and completely weed-free. Both maize and bean seeds possess enough reserves to push through the mulch, whereas the seeds of weed species cannot do so. No chemicals were used on any *Inga* plot during the whole of the project's duration.



This is Reuben Mendoza; a member of the Pech Maya tribal community in Olancho, Honduras. Reuben is standing among mature maize plants between rows of recovering *Inga* trees. He states that it is many years since this site could produce any crop. The trees required over 2 years since planting as seedlings to 'capture' the site from the invasive grass and other weed species that had dominated it. There are no weeds within the maize itself; their growth was smothered by the deep mulch. The soil had become very degraded following a slash-and-burn operation many years before. This plot produced a large maize crop; its second in consecutive years. The site is close to Reuben's house... a very

important factor. Shifting agriculturalists will commonly walk for 2-3 hours daily to a temporarily-available swidden site; often high in hilly country. The ability to achieve food-security close to the dwelling is of supreme importance in their lives. This factor also opens the possibility of producing cash-crops close to where they can be nurtured, guarded and cropped. This in turn opens the farm economy to other members of his family.

Reuben, a descendant of one of the ancient corn cultures of Central America, gave Mike Hands one of the best and most humbling presents of his working life... 3 huge maize heads that he saved from this crop.

had grown, the leaf canopy formed would shade the alleys between the rows of trees. In the dark alleys, the light-hungry weeds and grass would not survive. Once the ground was weed-free, the trees would be pruned and the leaves put on the ground to form a decomposing leaf layer several inches thick. This leaf layer would smother any further weed growth, and at the same time stop the sun from drying out the ground. Finally, holes would be poked in the leaf layer, and crops planted in the holes. The crops would get nutrients from the decaying leaves, while excess nutrients would be absorbed by the trees' roots and returned to the ground in subsequent prunings.

The theory seemed sound; what wasn't was the financial backing to carry out a pilot study. Since 1986 Hands had been applying to several UK governmental and European organisations for funds to carry out a seven-year research project in Costa Rica. After 18 months, though, all he had was a pile of rejections. Even the Overseas Development Agency, on which he had pinned much hope, had written him a curt reply that didn't give any clue as to why his application had been unsuccessful. It seemed nobody was interested in what he was doing.

Then, in March 1988, Hands received the letter he'd never fully believed would come. He had to read it three times before he could believe it. The European Economic Council was offering him £2m to fund his project.

By March 1989 Hands was back in Costa Rica. With the help of a botanist friend from Kew, he had selected an Amazonian tree *Inga Edulus*, which had the qualities required: thick, tough leaves, fast growth, and the ability to fix nitrogen in the soil. But most importantly it was intensely mycorrhizal, symbiotically using fungi to absorb phosphorus into its roots. He was ready. Across his two-acre site he set up a range of study plots. Areas of slash-and-burn stood side by side with virgin forest and alley-cropping test plots sown with thousands of *Inga* seeds.

Researchers he talked to in Costa Rica were not convinced. They said the *Inga* leaves would decompose far too slowly to feed the crops: the system was bound to fail. Hands remained convinced. He knew about organic decomposition in rainforest soils. He was sure that instead of the crops feeding on the most recent deposit of leaves, they would feed on the decaying leaves laid down one or two years previously.

It was to be another four years before Hands would have the evidence that *Inga* alley-cropping really worked. The maize crop was in its second year, weeds were being stopped, and the *Inga* was recycling nutrients, including phosphorus. More

importantly though, Hands was able to find out just how crucial phosphorus was to the plants.

After three years of cropping, the soil on the slash-and-burn patch was infertile, the plants on it struggling. Hands divided the area into smaller plots, and to each plot he had added a different soil nutrient. Three weeks later he returned to find that no plot had changed - except the one to which he had added phosphorus. On that plot, every kind of plant had suddenly flourished. So desperate were the plants for phosphorus that they neglected every other element.

To uncover the reason for phosphorus loss, Hands analysed hundreds of soil samples taken at every stage in the slash-and-burn simulation. The data revealed a total surprise: the level of phosphorus in the soil only a few weeks after the forest was burnt was exactly the same as the level before the burn. Rainforest naturally contains too little readily available phosphorus to provide for the needs of crops, but the ash left over after burning the forest contains a massive amount. It

had been thought that the ash provided the crops with the phosphorus they needed. But Hands' data showed the phosphorus in the ash was being washed out before the crops could absorb it.

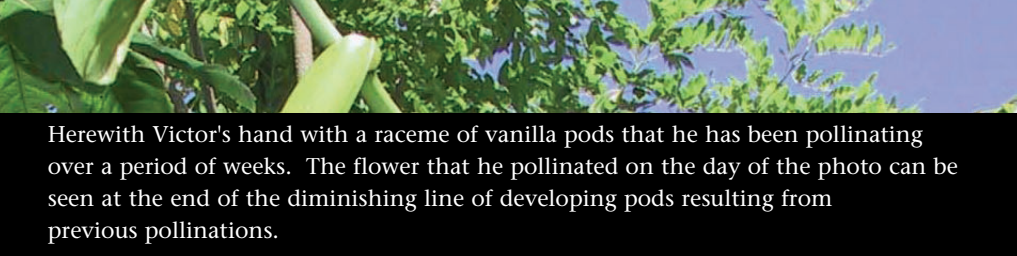
This created a puzzle. The farmers were getting decent crop yields for the first year or two, so the extra phosphorus needed must be coming from somewhere. If not from the ash, then where? Hands realised what was happening. Ash on the soil has the same effect as liming a compost heap: it speeds up the process by which soil microbes decompose organic matter, such as dead leaves and branches. It was this process which was releasing the phosphorus.

However, new data revealed this extra phosphorus release was only lasting two years. Then,

coinciding with the crop failures, there was a dramatic drop in phosphorus levels. Again, Hands had an explanation. Phosphorus is released as a result of microbes in the soil feeding on fallen organic matter. When the farmers clear and burn the forest, this supply of organic matter is cut off. For the following two years, the microbes feed on the organic matter that has already fallen. But when this runs out, they die. In turn, phosphorus-release ceases. With no phosphorus-retrieving trees there to take it up, any remaining phosphorus is washed out of the soil by rainfall.

This also explained the success that Hands was getting with the *Inga* alley-cropping: the continuous supply of leaves was feeding the microbes, while the *Inga* trees absorbed and recycled the phosphorus before it could be leached out of the soil.

With as much as 40 per cent of the planet's carbon being stored in forest vegetation, slash-and-burn farming is an increasingly significant factor in climate change



Herewith Victor's hand with a raceme of vanilla pods that he has been pollinating over a period of weeks. The flower that he pollinated on the day of the photo can be seen at the end of the diminishing line of developing pods resulting from previous pollinations.



By 1996, despite the success of his experiment, Hands wanted a further series of trials. He knew that farmers had been let down too many times by much-hyped 'magic solutions'. A conversation with a Honduran NGO called Pico Bonito soon changed his mind.

'They told me the destruction of rainforest out in Honduras was so awful that I should stop pussy-footing around and let farmers try my system immediately,' remembers Hands. Just three weeks later, with Pico Bonito's help, he began approaching Honduran slash-and-burn farmers.

Victor Coronado from Atlantida in northern Honduras was one of the first. His initial response was sceptical. 'The first thing I thought was that it doesn't make sense to plant corn or beans under the trees,' Coronado recalls. However, as Hands was only asking him to give up a small part of his land, not large enough to risk his livelihood, he agreed to give it a try.

Six years on, Coronado stands surrounded by proof that Hands' technique works. Where there used to be grass and weeds, tall, leafy maize plants now rise above his head. In a field nearby, alley-cropped pepper plants are flourishing, while in Coronado's kitchen there is plenty of the vanilla that he grew last year.

More than 30 farmers have adopted the scheme, each with a plot of *Inga* alley-cropping located only metres from their home. With the crops so close by, they can be more easily guarded from wild animals, and the rest of the family members are more easily able to help in the field. 'When I go out it does not worry me now, because my wife, my daughter or a neighbour can look after the crops,' says Coronado. In fact, Coronado's wife took over the running of the pepper crop completely. After harvesting and grinding, she mixed it with cumin and sold it in the town square. 'She has made \$900 for the family selling pepper,' Coronado beams. 'All of us can produce crops that are 100 per cent organic. If more farmers get involved, between us we could even sell some of the crops abroad.'

Once it is set up, say the farmers, *Inga* alley-cropping requires less time



Part of the firewood harvest stacked outside the plot. The farmer stated that total firewood production from this 1/10th hectare plot was the equivalent of three months' fuel for the kitchen stove.

and effort than slash-and-burn. From the second year of harvesting onwards, they save at least 40 days work a year, because there are no more weeds to deal with. On top of that, the trees produce a copious supply of firewood, which the farmers would otherwise have to spend many days gathering from the forest.

Moving over to the system costs the farmers almost nothing. For each hectare of alley-cropping, farmers need to plant 5,000 *Inga* trees. Once these are grown and the system is up and running, farmers can replace the phosphorus the crops use up by adding rock phosphate to the soil. This organic supplement is cheap: an \$8 sack is sufficient for an entire hectare of land for a year. 'The low cost makes it sustainable,' says Hands. 'They need to invest their time at the start, but they don't get into debt.'

Sadly, only a few of the many farmers wishing to do so have been able to try the scheme. The problem is a shortage of *Inga* seed. Although they produce 2,000 seeds each, the *Inga* trees used in alley-cropping are pruned before they produce fruit. Some trees need to be left deliberately unpruned to act as a seed source. Initially, farmers like Coronado did not do that: a problem Hands had not foreseen. 'In hindsight, we should have told the farmers to keep some trees aside for seed production,' Hands says. 'But at the time we just wanted them to try the system in the first place.'

Hands and Pico Bonito have recently set up seed orchards, which within a couple of years should be providing

some of the seeds needed to cope with demand. For the time being, however, farmers wanting to adopt the system are having to wait. And there are lots of them. So far, 4,000 farmers have been shown plots of *Inga* alley-cropping at demonstration farms in Honduras. 'The response was overwhelming. The farmers were all clamouring for seeds and technical assistance,' says Hands.

To the farmers of the Costa Rican rainforest, Hands said: 'Suppose you had a system that simply let you stay in one place, cropping maize...' They replied: 'Ah, yes - that is a dream!'

'Unfortunately, we could only give out handfuls of seeds.'

To make matters worse, at exactly the time when investment in *Inga* seed orchards and demonstration farms is most needed, funding from the EU has dried up. So Hands is once again back in his native Cornwall applying for funds. Meanwhile, Pico Bonito has to rely on donations to carry on the work.

With money from an individual donor, Pico Bonito has set up seed nurseries in the Honduran province of Olancho. 'We have 8,000 seedlings there,' says the organisation's Gerado Vasques. 'But we desperately need more money to expand. The eagerness of the

indigenous people is encouraging. They want to try *Inga* alley-cropping not just on small plots but on big plots of over a hectare, to produce large crops of maize and beans. We hope we can fulfil Mike Hands' dream.'

With no response from the EU, Hands is hoping that charitable and philanthropic organisations might recognise the value of alley-cropping. Demonstration farms and seed orchards have the potential to save vast areas of rainforest for minimal outlay. A farm visited annually by 4,000 slash-and-burn farmers would cost only \$12,000 a year to run. If those 4,000 farmers then converted to *Inga* alley-cropping, 4,000 hectares of rainforest would be saved - each year. Seed orchards cost next to nothing to set up and run, and a one-hectare seed orchard provides enough seed for 1,000 hectares of *Inga* alley-cropping. At a time of growing alarm over the worldwide loss of rainforest, it seems absurd that money is not being made available.

Unfortunately, too few people even know that this proven alternative to slash-and-burn exists. Hands admits he is not good at publicising his work. Yet all across South and Central America, seed orchards are desperately needed. 'Even without these, *Inga* alley-cropping will spread from neighbour to neighbour,' says Hands. 'But that would be painfully slow. If we just sit and wait, we will lose this chance to save the rainforests for ever.'

Daniel Elkan is a freelance journalist. Mike Hands can be contacted on mikehands@uk2.net

LATEST RELEASES

Collapse: how societies choose to fail or survive

Jared Diamond

Allen Lane, 2005, £20

The Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *Guns, Germs and Steel* examines the determining factors in a society's survival, taking examples from ancient Maya to modern Australia.



Pathologies of Power: health, human rights, and the new war on the poor

Paul Farmer

University of California Press, 2005, £10.50

One of the world's leading physician-anthropologists presents a passionate argument against the inequalities of healthcare.



Hooked on growth: economic addictions and the environment

Douglas E Booth



Rowman & Littlefield, 2004, £17.95

Booth argues that, given the finite resources at our disposal, economic growth is not a birthright and necessity for social peace and progress.

A Land of Ghosts: the braided lives of people and the forest in far western Amazonia

By David G Campbell

Jonathan Cape, 2004, £18.99

The result of 30 years of ecological studies in the Amazon. Campbell writes about the 2,000 species of trees in the region with the same passion as he does the native Indians.



The Record of the Paper: how the New York Times misreports US foreign policy

Howard Friel and Richard A Falk

Verso, 2004, £16

The assault on the credibility of *The New York Times* continues with this damning study of the paper's unreliable sources for stories



ranging from the bombing of North Vietnam to WMD.

Ghost Wars:

the secret history of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet invasion to September 10, 2001

Steve Coll

Penguin, 2004, £20

The managing editor of *The Washington Post* looks at how covert operations by the CIA in Afghanistan gave rise to 9/11.



Empty Cages: facing the challenge of animal rights

Tom Regan

Rowman and Littlefield, 2004, £15

Regan, a leading philosophical spokesperson for animal rights, updates Jeremy Bentham's saying 'the question is not "can they reason?" nor "can they talk?" but "can they suffer?"'



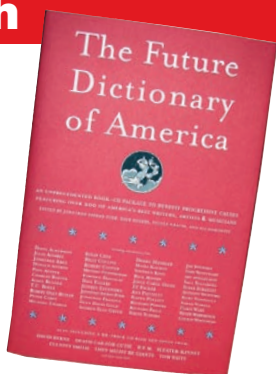
Book of the month

The Future Dictionary of America

Edited by Dave Eggers et al
Hamish Hamilton/ St George's Press, 2004, £14.99

In 1983 Douglas Adams and John Lloyd created the pseudo-dictionary *The Meaning of Liff*, which swiftly became a classic of loo lit. The book aligned the world's 'spare' words with definitions for experiences, feelings, situations and objects that we all know and recognise, but for which no words exist.

This idea has now been adopted by some of the US's best writers, presided over by Dave Eggers. They collaborated in the run-up to last year's presidential election to find definitions for a dictionary for a future utopia in which 'all or most of [the US's] problems are solved and the [George W Bush] administration is a



distant memory'.

As with *The Meaning of Liff*, the definitions are often whimsical; the difference lies in the words themselves, many of which are neologisms. For example, 'bellitoast' is defined as an adjective meaning 'inclined or eager to make toast (sliced bread that has been browned by heat) instead of war; aggressively hungry for toast'.

As for the definition of 'environment', TC Boyle nails it as 'a confused mass of biota, rocky places, open plains and ditches filled variously with water, muck and blood, with the potential of being converted into strip mines, strip malls and strip clubs to the everlasting benefit of mankind and the Halliburton Corporation.'

The book culminates in Kurt Vonnegut's searing essay 'Cold Turkey', in which he warns that our political leaders are addicts of fossil fuels, 'committing violent crimes to get what little is left of what we're hooked on'.

Reading the book with Bush re-elected is a faintly depressing experience. For all its humour and humanity, you know that these

'At one time democracy – at least to us – meant collective decision-making on issues that affect us all. Now the only acceptable meaning seems to be competition in the electoral market.'

The Fire Ant Wars: nature, science and public policy in 20th century America



Joshua Blu Buhhs
University of Chicago, 2004, £16

'Fire ants' were introduced from South America to the US south at the beginning of the 20th Century and spread out across the region with alarming ease. A preference for open habitats meant the ants benefited from the existence of large expanses of monoculture farms connected by man-made avenues. A menacing pest was created. The US Department of Agriculture (USDA) responded to the invasion with a plan for the complete eradication of the ant: harmful insecticides were dumped on more than 57 million acres, devastating wildlife and enraging environmentalists. In *The Fire Ant Wars* author Joshua Blu Buhhs argues that the extremity of the campaign had less to do with good science than the USDA's desperate determination to raise its status following previous eradication programme failures. An excellent and insightful read. Reviewed by Christine Carter

The Burning Season: the murder of Chico Mendes and the fight for the Amazon rain forest



Andrew Revkin
Island Press, 2004, £10

The murder of Chico Mendes in 1989 led to a sea change in global environmentalism. As a pioneer of environmental and social justice, Mendes insisted that humans should be considered as integral components of nature: a principle he carried into the battles he fought alongside his fellow rubber tappers against ranchers in the Amazonian rainforest. Although Mendes was the fifth rural union president to be murdered in Brazil that year, his fame was elevated due to his prescient understanding of the global reach and influence of his local struggles: the scorching summer of 1988 heralded the beginning of the mass media's interest in a new concept called 'global warming', and a growing realisation that international trade was implicated in it. Revkin's essential book shows how Mendes understood humanity as an endangered species fighting to survive within a fragile and interconnected ecosystem. Reviewed by Alex Humes

WEBSITE OF THE MONTH

www.thematrix.com

TheyRule.net provides a glimpse of some of the relationships of the US ruling class. With a click of the mouse, TheyRule provides a 'map' showing the connections between the country's most powerful companies and institutions,

often run by people who sit on 5 or 6 different boards at the same time, creating an interlocking web of power. A very useful research tool and an eye-opening demonstration of the structure of US society - and for whose benefit it is run.

READER OFFER

Readers can order a copy of Joel Bakan's book *The Corporation: the pathological pursuit of profit and power* (see last month's *Ecologist*) for the special price of £7.99, including p&p (RRP: £9.99), by telephoning 01205 255800 and quoting ECO.

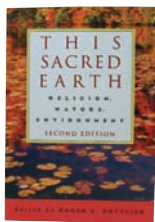
10 FAVOURITE NOVELS ON ...GENETIC MODIFICATION



A rally and mass lobby of Parliament against GM takes place on Wednesday 23 February 2005, with a similar event occurring on the same day at the Welsh Assembly. To find out more, visit: www.gmfreesecarecrows.org. To help readers understand the issues behind GM, Jonathan Matthews, the director of the campaign group GM Watch, recommends his top reads on the subject.

- 1** *Seeds of Deception* by Jeffrey M Smith (Green Books, 2004)
An account of the GM foods scam that's as riveting as a thriller without compromising on the science.
- 2** *Genetic Engineering, Food and Our Environment: a brief guide* by Luke Anderson (Green Books, 1999)
The activist's handbook that's stood the test of time: comprehensive, concise and affordable.
- 3** *The true story of GM food, BSE and foot and mouth* by Andrew Rowell (Earthscan, 2003)
Definitive accounts of the Pusztai and Chapela affairs from the journalist who broke the news of the dirty tricks campaigns designed to destroy these whistleblowers.
- 4** *Genetically Modified Crops and Sustainable Poverty Alleviation in Sub-Saharan Africa: an assessment of current evidence* by Aaron deGrassi (Third World Network, Africa, 2003)
Damning report exposing the biotech industry's PR use of flagship projects in Africa.
- 5** *Living with the Fluid Genome* by Mae-Wan Ho (Institute of Science in Society, 2003)
A geneticist explains why genetic engineering cannot work, and tells of her own struggle against a corrupt scientific establishment.
- 6** *Captive State: the corporate takeover of Britain* by George Monbiot (Macmillan, 2000)
How corporations are now consolidating control of the food chain through GM.
- 7** *Hungry Corporations: transnational biotech companies colonise the food chain* by Helena Paul et al (Zed Books, 2003)
A very well documented account of how a handful of multinational companies are using genetic engineering as a tool to control the world's food supply.
- 8** *GM Food and Hunger: a view from the South* by Devinder Sharma (Forum for Biotechnology and Food Security, 2004)
A collection of essays exposing the 'gene revolution'.
- 9** *Green Backlash: global subversion of the environment movement* by Andrew Rowell (Routledge, 1996)
Exposes how the multinationals, their PR assistants and right-wing supporters work to nullify their critics.

This Sacred Earth:
religion, nature, environment
(second edition)



Edited by Roger S Gottlieb
Routledge, 2004, £26.99
This collection of essays brings together religious thinkers, academics, environmentalists and activists from across history to tackle what is broadly considered 'eco-theology'. There is an extraordinary list of contributors, who include the English essayist William Hazlitt, the US anarchist and environmentalist Henry Thoreau, the ancient Chinese philosopher Lao-Tzu, indigenous activists and the staggeringly monickered Lea Bill-Rippling Water Woman. A must for anyone who has ever thought about the origins of mankind and the fate of the earth.

Reviewed by Patrick Wilson

One World:
the ethics of globalisation
(second edition)



Peter Singer
Yale University Press, 2004, £8.99
Peter Singer's incisive critique of globalisation is a fascinating document. The majority of the book was written in the 'tranquil and secure days' of the first eight months of 2001, and is based on a series of lectures Singer gave at Yale. Nine/11 forced Singer to hastily update his thesis to accommodate the fearful new world in which terrorism

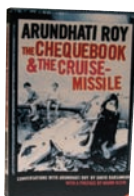
forced us to consider not merely the activities of our neighbours, but those also of valley-dwellers on the other side of the earth. It is a world in which traditional value systems, developed when the atmosphere seemed an unlimited resource, no longer hold; in which you can spray deodorant in a New York apartment and contribute to skin cancer deaths years later in Punta Arenas. The Iraq invasion represents the final paradigm shift in Singer's thinking. His foreword chastises Bush's unilateralism, as per Kyoto, as a departure from the ethics the US president espouses. It is a depressing vision of one world on the brink of division.

Reviewed by Benjamin Davis

The Chequebook and the Cruise Missile:

conversations with Arundhati Roy

David Barsamian, with a preface by Naomi Klein
Perennial, 2004, £8.99



In *The Chequebook and the Cruise Missile* the Keralan novelist Arundhati Roy delivers sublime homespun rants against US imperialism, the Indian caste system, the subjugation of women, dams, the digital revolution, the perennial threat of nuclear war between India and Pakistan, and much, much more. The real joy with the book comes from the humanity and scope of Roy's reference: just as her Booker-winning novel *The God of*

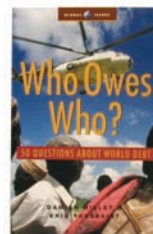
Small Things connected the smallest things to the biggest, these conversations weave political grandstanding with gorgeous artistic observation. The conversational aspect allows for a relaxed, informal style that breathes eloquence, humour and charm into a remarkable series of polemics. 'How,' Roy asks, 'are you going to persuade a Naga sadhu [a Hindu ascetic], whose life mission has been to stand naked on one leg for 20 years or to tow a car with his penis, that he can't live without Coca-Cola?'

Reviewed by Benjamin Davis

Who Owes Who?

50 questions about world debt

Damien Millet and Eric Toussaint
Zed Books, 2004, £9.99



Millet and Toussaint, respectively the general secretary and president of the international activist network the Committee for the Abolition of Third World Debt, have written a comprehensive guide to the developing world's debt crisis. Millet is also a maths teacher in France, which no doubt came in handy for the production of the book's maps, graphs and charts. The roles of all the major organisations are subjected to rigorous analysis, as are the various arguments for and against the wholesale removal of one of the developing world's biggest single burdens.

Reviewed by Barbara Stone

Trespass Against Us:
Dow Chemical and the toxic century

Jack Doyle
Common Courage Press, 2004, \$24.95



It invented the US military's favourite defoliant Agent Orange. It bought Union Carbide but refuses to take on its responsibility for what happened at Bhopal. It is one of the main producers of the deadly group of carcinogens dioxins. And not only did its 'new and improved' silicone breast implants leak, but internal documents show the company knew about this before it began to market them. Investigative journalist Jack Doyle exposes what he calls the 'toxic trespass' of Dow's products into our bodies and the environment. For Doyle, Dow is the epitome of the corporation operating in accordance with the 'invent first, ask questions later' mantra. This much-needed and exhaustively researched book answers many of the questions Dow would rather we didn't ask.

Reviewed by Sarah

Is The Ecologist in your local shop?
Whether you're a shop owner or a customer, tell us the name, phone number and contact name for the shop where you'd like to see **The Ecologist** sold and we'll arrange it.
Email stockist@theecologist.org or call Kim on 020 7351 3578

FRUIT & VEG

This month box schemes and farmers' markets are filled with winter vegetables. Whether you're looking for fresh ideas for the vegetables you know and love or an introduction to that unknown object lurking at the bottom of your box, The Ecologist has some tips for February's in-season produce.

February in-season vegetables

- Beetroot
- Brussels sprouts
- Cabbage
- Carrots
- Cauliflower
- Celeriac
- Celery
- Chard
- Chicory
- Jerusalem artichoke
- Kale
- Leeks
- Parsnip
- Potatoes
- Shallots
- Spinach
- Swede
- Turnips

WINTER RATIONS: a week's worth of hearty, seasonal soups. Root vegetables are at their best in February, this means lots of vegetable soups.

Monday: Leek and potato soup

INGREDIENTS: Two tablespoons of olive oil, one chopped garlic clove, four or five washed and chopped leeks, four diced potatoes, one pint of chicken stock, salt, pepper, and a half cup of milk.

HOW TO MAKE: Sauté the leeks and garlic in olive oil for around 10 minutes. Add everything else except the milk and bring to a boil, then lower the heat. Cover and simmer for 20 minutes. Cool slightly then add the milk.

Tuesday: Carrot and spinach soup



INGREDIENTS: One pound of carrots, one peeled and chopped parsnip, one peeled and quartered onion, one and a quarter pints of vegetable stock, 1/4 teaspoon of nutmeg, four ounces of spinach leaves.

HOW TO MAKE: Add the first four ingredients to a saucepan, cover and bring to a boil. Lower the heat and simmer for 1/2 hour. Purée the vegetables (with a bit of the cooking liquid) and the spinach in a blender. Add nutmeg, salt and pepper to taste.

Wednesday: Cabbage soup

INGREDIENTS: One Savoy cabbage, two tablespoons of olive oil, two chopped garlic cloves, one tablespoon of chopped parsley, 200 grams of tinned plum tomatoes, one litre of chicken stock, salt and pepper.

HOW TO MAKE: Cut the cabbage in half, remove the core and cut into fine slices. In a saucepan, heat the oil, then add the garlic and parsley and cook until soft. Add the tomatoes, season with salt and pepper and cook for five minutes. Add the cabbage and cook for another five minutes. Add the chicken stock, bring to a boil and then simmer for about 20 minutes.



Thursday: Cream of cauliflower soup



INGREDIENTS: One cauliflower, one pint of chicken stock, 1/2 pint of milk, 1/4 pint of cream, two leeks, one onion, two garlic cloves, an ounce of butter, 1/2 ounce of thyme, nutmeg, parsley.

HOW TO MAKE: Chop the leeks, onion and garlic and sauté for a few minutes. Cut up the cauliflower and add to the pan with the stock, milk and thyme and cook until the cauliflower is soft. Put half in a blender or food processor and purée, then return to pan. Add the cream and chopped parsley.

Friday: Winter broth

INGREDIENTS: Two tablespoons of olive oil, 1/4 peeled and diced swede, six peeled and chopped carrots, one diced fennel bulb, one pint of vegetable stock, chopped parsley, salt and pepper.

HOW TO MAKE: Sauté the vegetables with the olive oil. Add the stock, bring to the boil, then simmer for about eight minutes. Season with parsley, salt and pepper.

Saturday: Brussels sprouts soup

INGREDIENTS: Two tablespoons of olive oil, one chopped onion, one chopped clove of garlic, one large diced potato, 11 ounces of chopped Brussels sprouts, two pints of vegetable stock, nutmeg, salt and pepper.



HOW TO MAKE: Sauté the onion, garlic and potato in olive oil in a saucepan for five minutes. Add the sprouts and sauté for two more minutes. Add the stock and bring to the boil, then simmer for between 15 to 20 minutes. Purée all in a blender. Add nutmeg, salt and pepper to taste.

Sunday: Root vegetable soup with greens (pancotto)

INGREDIENTS (serves six for Sunday supper): Three tablespoons of olive oil, three chopped onions, two cloves of crushed garlic, two peeled and diced potatoes, one pound and two ounces of peeled and diced root vegetables (turnips, parsnips, leeks, celeriac and fennel), four ounces of stale bread with the crusts removed, two cups of greens such as chopped cabbage or Brussels sprout tops, salt, pepper and grated Parmesan cheese.



HOW TO MAKE: Sauté the onions and garlic in olive oil for five minutes in a saucepan. Add the potatoes, root vegetables and half a cup of water. Cover the pan and simmer for about 20 minutes. Add the bread and enough water for the consistency that you want. Simmer for a few minutes. Add the greens and simmer for five more minutes. Add salt, pepper, olive oil and Parmesan to taste.



FRUIT & VEGETABLES (BOX SCHEMES)

'I can't sign up to a box scheme because I'm never in to receive it'... have you considered:

- 1 Calling them - many can manage late deliveries
- 2 Getting it delivered to a neighbour
- 3 Having it delivered to your local newsagent / chip shop etc
- 4 Arranging for them to hide it somewhere

BEDFORDSHIRE	St Austell
Bedford	Cotna Organics.....01726 844 827
David Catlin.....01525 861 452	St Martins-by-Looe
BERKSHIRE	Kevalar Farmers.....01503 250 135
Reading	Truro
Ellis Organics.....0118 9722826	Hendra Farm Organics.....01872 572 301
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE	CUMBRIA
Wendover	Brampton
Fieldfare Organic and Natural0845 601 3240	Eva Botanicals.....01697 741 906
CAMBRIDGESHIRE	Lady Jane's Tea Room07941 731 255
Cambridge	Grange over Sands
Waterland Organics01223 812 912	Howbarrow Organic Farm.....01539 536330
Royston	DERBYSHIRE
Gullden Gate Smallholding01763 243 960	Ashborne
Wisbech	Meynell Langley Organic Food01332 824 815
Organic Connections International.01945 773 374	New House Organic Farm01335 342 429
CHESHIRE	Adams, Nick.....01335 360 996
Chester	Chester
Organicfair01244 400 158	Organic Stores, the.....01244 881 209
Lymm	Derby
Cheshire Organics01925 758 575	Organic Pumpkin.....01332 370 254
Malpas	Matlock
Oakcroft Organic Gardens01948 860 213	Beano's Wholefoods01629 57130
Northwich	New Mills
Stockley Farm Organics.....01565 777 492	Organic Shop, the.....01663 747 550
Sale	DEVON
O Zone, The.....0161 291 8862	Barnstaple
Warrington	Lugg Smallholding01598 710 558
Northern Harvest.....0845 602 3309	Beaworthy
CORNWALL	Earthstar, Little East Lake Farm.....01409 221 417
Penzance	Holsworthy Organics01409 221 417
Nice Organics01736 810 033	Bideford
Saltash	Marshford Organic Produce.....01271 322 855
A & N Health Foods01752 844 926	Bovey Tracey
St Agnes	Yarner01364 661 503
Tree Of Life Organics01872 552 661	Buckfastleigh
	Riverford Organic Vegetables0845 600 2311
	Crediton
	Linscombe Farm.....01363 84291

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Rare veggies to try in February

They may not be top of your shopping list, but February's lesser known vegetables are flavourful and easy to prepare.



Chicory

Chicory is a relative of the dandelion and is high in fibre, iron and potassium. ‘Mad chicory’ (*cicoria pazza*).

TO MAKE: Boil one kilo of chicory for about 45 minutes. Drain, squeeze it and cut into quarters. Sauté two cloves garlic, one hot chilli pepper and the chicory for 15 minutes. Add salt.

Jerusalem artichokes

'Jerusalem' is thought to be a corruption of *girasole*, the Italian for sunflower. They have a nutty flavour and taste like a cross between a potato and an artichoke heart.

For a simple, tasty side dish: peel and boil them for about 45 mins (or until soft), then add salt, pepper and lemon juice.

Parsnip chips

An excellent alternative to potato chips.
TO MAKE: Pre-heat the oven to 210°centigrade. Peel and cut some parsnips into three-inch slices, and then simply roast them in the oven for 45 minutes with olive oil, salt and pepper.

Exeter	
Shillingford Organics.....	01392 832 729
RodandBens.....	01392 833 833
Elder, D.....	01392 860 856
Great Cummins Farm.....	01647 61278
Ifracombe	
West Hill Farm.....	01271 815 477
Kingsbridge	
Alan's Apple.....	01548 852 308
Newton Abbot	
Dartmoor Direct Co-Operative.....	01364 631 528
Woodland Organics.....	01803 813 760
Nature's Round.....	07810 127 376
Pyworthy	
Ceridwen Herbs.....	01409 254 450
Tavistock	
Tamar Organics.....	01822 834 887
Tiverton	
Ms Kate Palmer.....	01884 861 269

DORSET

Bournemouth	
Bourne Organic.....	01202 778 516
Blandford Forum	
Gold Hill Organic Farm.....	01258 861 413
Bridport	
Bothen Hill Produce.....	01308 424 271
Dorchester	
Longmeadow Organic Vegetables..	01300 341 779
Ferndown	
Sturts Farm Community.....	01202 870 572
Pulham	
Cannings Court Organic Farm.....	01258 818 035
Wimborne	
Long Crichel Organic Walled Garden.....	01258 830 295

DURHAM

Darlington	
Acorn Dairy.....	01325 466 999

ESSEX

Brentwood	
Legg, RG.....	01277 211 883
Halstead	
Organic Choice.....	01787 478 471
Ongar	
Ashlyns Organic Farm.....	01277 890 788
Fair Organics.....	01277 890188



GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Cheltenham	
Slipstream Organics.....	01242 227 273
Dursley	
Better For Organics.....	01453 545 090
Lydney	
La Bodega.....	01594 844 841
Newnham on Severn	
Camphill Village Trust.....	01594 516 344
Tetbury	
Bowldown Farms Ltd.....	01666 890 224
Thornbury	
Thornbury Organic Co-op.....	01454 415 345
Wotton Under Edge	
Whitfield Farm Organics.....	0845 283 0232

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Chorlton Wholefoods.....	0161 881 6399
Mossley	
Mossley Organic And Fine Foods..	01457 837 743
Stockport	
Limited Resources.....	0161 477 2040
Whalley Range	
Glebelands Market Garden Ltd.....	0161 718 5328

HAMPSHIRE & ISLE OF

Thurmaston	
Corner Plot Vegetables.....	0116 2697 920

LINCOLNSHIRE

Barrow on Humber	
Wheelbarrow Foods.....	01469 530 721
Grantham	
Goodacre, JM & A.....	01476 860 228
Spalding	
Sadd, BM.....	01945 440 388
Southampton	
Sunnyfields Organic.....	023 80871408
Whitchurch	
Laverstoke Park Produce.....	01256 890 900
Harroway Organic Gardens.....	01256 895 346

LONDON

EC2	
Organic Delivery Company, the.....	020 7739 8181
E5	
UK5 Organics.....	020 8806 0721
N4	
Just Organic.....	020 7704 2566
N7	
Bumblebee.....	020 7607 1936
SE10	
Greenwich Organics.....	020 8488 6764
SE2	
Abel & Cole.....	020 7737 3648
SE6	
Capricorn Organics.....	020 8306 2786
SW3	
Here.....	020 7351 4321
SW8	
Food Ferry Company, the.....	020 7498 0827
W12	
Fresh Food Co, the.....	020 8749 8778

MERSEYSIDE

Thurstaston	
Church Farm Organics.....	0151 648 7838
Liverpool	
Organic Direct.....	0151 7076 949
Windmill Wholefood Co-op.....	0151 7341 919

MIDLANDS, WEST

Birmingham	
Organic Roots.....	01564 822 294
Coventry	
Down to Earth.....	02476 677 500
Solihull	
Hopwood Organic Farm.....	0121 711 1187

NORFOLK

Attleborough	
Arthur's Organic Deliveries.....	01953 887 582
King's Lynn	
Abbey Farm Organics.....	01485 609 094
Norwich	
Stable Organics.....	01263 577 468
Barker Organics.....	01263 768 966
Paradise Organics.....	01508 494 260
The Greenhouse.....	01603 631 007
Salle Moor Hall Farm.....	01603 879 046
Eostre.....	01953 789 000

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE

Daventry	
Goodness Direct.....	08718 716 611
Kettering	
Arcadia Organics.....	01536 525 298
Milton Keynes	
Organic Trail.....	01908 568 952
Northampton	
Leafcycles.....	01604 628 956

NORTHUMBERLAND

Alnwick	
Rock Midstead Organic Farm.....	01665 579 225
Bedlington	
North East Organic Growers.....	01670 821 070
Berwick Upon Tweed	
Green Shop, The.....	01289 305566
Corbridge	
Cropped Up.....	07947 856 641

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

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Farmshop Home Delivery.....	0800 169 7009
Cossall	
Trinity Farm.....	0115 944 2545
Nottingham	0115 960 9014
Roots Natural Foods.....	0115 960 9014

OXFORDSHIRE

North Aston	
North Aston Organics.....	01869 347 702
Chipping Norton	
Chipping Norton Organics.....	01608 642 973
Sarsden Organics.....	01608 659 670

Reading	
Organico.....	0118 951 0518
Toihurst Organic Produce.....	0118 9843 428

SHROPSHIRE

Craven Arms	
Organic By Order.....	01588 660 747
Dawley	
Food For Thought.....	01952 630 145
Oswestry	
Doggart, A.....	01691 652 166



Shrewsbury	
Boxfresh Organics Direct.....	01952 770 006

SOMERSET

Bath	
Norwood Farm.....	01373 834 856
Truuuly Scumtious Organic Baby Food Ltd.....	01761 239 300
Bridgwater	
IVB Partnership.....	01278 733 080
Bristol	
Barleywood Walled Garden.....	01179 351 725
Leigh Court Farm.....	01275 375 756
Langport	
Park Lane.....	01458 252 901
Lower Claverham	
Arcadia Organics.....	01934 838 634
Milverton	
Spring Grove Market Garden.....	07956 429 531
South Petherton	
Flaxdrayton Farm.....	01460 241 427
Somerset Organic Link.....	01460 241 427
Taunton	
Prockters Farm Shop.....	01823 413 427

STAFFORDSHIRE

Stafford	
Bella Herbs.....	01785 663 868
Stoke-On-Trent	
Real Food Company, The.....	01270 873 322

SUFFOLK

Beccles	
Jim Cooper Vegetables.....	07866 960 706
Bury St.Edmunds	
Longwood Farm.....	01638 717 120
Eye	
Daganya Farm.....	01379 668 060
Ipswich	
Hillside Nurseries.....	01473 652 682
Newmarket	
DJ Produce Ltd.....	01638 552 709
Saxmundham	
Swallow Organics.....	01728 668 201

SURREY

Cranleigh	
Sunshine Organics.....	01483 268 014
Worplesdon	
Horti. Halcyon.....	01483 232 095

SUSSEX

Barnham	
Willow Nursery.....	01243 552 852
Brighton	
Real Food Direct.....	01273 621 222

Chichester	
Wayside Organics.....	01243 779 716
The Whole Food Shop.....	01243 790 901
Hartfield	
Beans and Things.....	01273 477 774
Harvest Supplies.....	01342 823 392

Lewes

Barcombe Nurseries.....	01273 400 011
Landsgdown Health Foods.....	01273 474 681

Farm-A-Round.....	020 7627 8066
Bluebell Organics.....	07759 832 234
Tadcaster	
Organic Pantry, The.....	01937 531 693

Whitby	
First Season.....	01947 601608
Pasture Cottage Organics.....	01947 840 075
York	
Yo Aspin Organics.....	01439 771 848

YORKSHIRE, SOUTH

Sheffield	
Beansies.....	0114 2681 662
Down To Earth.....	0114 2685 220

YORKSHIRE,WEST

Hebden Bridge	
Valley Garden Organics.....	01422 846 651
Huddersfield	
Half Moon Healthfoods.....	01484 456 392
Natural Choice.....	01484 513 162
Leeds	
Love Organic!.....	01132 663 030
Pontefract	
Brickyard Organics.....	01977 617 327
Shipley	
Bradford Wholefoods.....	01422 202 648

SCOTLAND

Aberdeen	
Lembas.....	01569 731746
Ardrossan	
Wildly Organic.....	01294 472075
Armadale Pier	
Rubha Phoil Forest Garden.....	01471 844700
Birkhill	
Bee-Organic.....	01382 581186
Cupar	
Bellfield Organic Nursery.....	01337 860764
Dumbarton	
Epo Growers.....	01389 875337
Edinburgh	
Grow Wild.....	0131 443 7661
Damhead Organic Foods.....	0131 448 2091
Glasgow	
Roots & Fruits, Wholefoods & Organics.....	0141 3393097
Glendale	
Glendale Salads.....	01470 511349
Inverness	
Tio Ltd.....	01667 462189
Macleod Organics.....	01668 462555
Inverurie	
Croft Organics.....	01467 981717
Kirriemuir	
Angus Organics Ltd.....	01575 540294
Kyle of Lochalsh	
Raasay Walled Garden.....	01378 660345
Newmacher	
Ward, Colin, J.....	01651 862041
Pencaitland	
East Coast Organic Boxes.....	01875 340227
Stonehaven	
Fraser, J & M.....	01569 730195
Tarbolton	
Stair Organic Growers.....	01292 541369
Tarskavaig	
Achnaclioich.....	01471 855315
Turriff	
Greeness Organics.....	01888 544877

WALES

Anglesey	
Foreman, Helen.....	01407 742293
Bangor	
Dimensions Health Store.....	01248 351562
Brecon	
The Ciliau.....	01874 711224
Builth Wells	
The Ciliau.....	07887 656887
Caerphilly	
Source, the.....	029 2088 3236
Cardiff	
Pulse Wholefoods.....	029 2022 5873
Spice of Life.....	029 20487146
Green Cuisine.....	029 2049 8721
Clunderwen	
Flynnon Farm.....	01437 532 570
Deeside	
Organic Stores.....	01244 881 209
Haverford West	
Sarra, Mr & T.....	01437 762 323
Monmouth	
Imma Fingal-Rock.....	01600 712 372
Carrob Growers.....	01600 714 529
Pwllheli	
Ty'n Lon Uchaf.....	01766 810 915
Llangybi Organics.....	01766 819 109
Swansea	
Jade Gate Organic Produce.....	01792 232 643

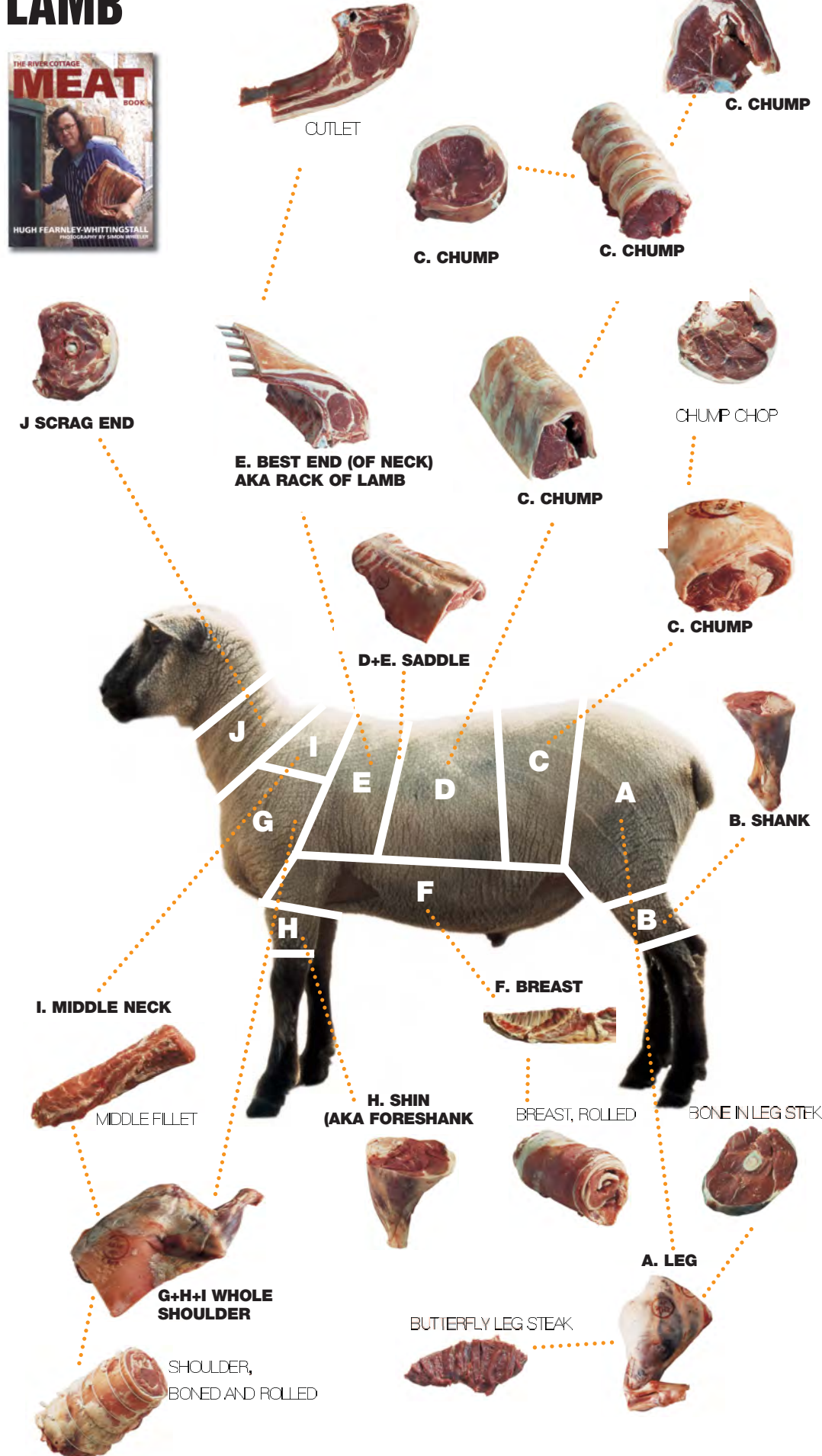
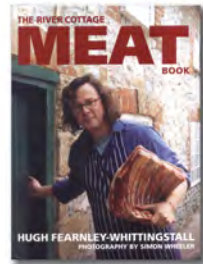
Abundant vegetable of the month: the spud

Can't bear another baked potato with cheese? Potatoes are one of the most versatile vegetables, and your box scheme this month will be full of them. Take advantage of the 25 ideas below before you run out of steam and grow sprouts. Typing any one into Google will provide you with heaps of potato recipes.

Potato salad
Potato pancakes
Potato bread
Potatoes and cabbage (bubble 'n'squeak)
Potato curry
Potato stew with chicken
Shepherd's pie
Potato pie with bacon
Sweet potato pie
Potato mash with garlic
Potato gratin
Potato hash browns
Potato puffs
Lyonnaise potatoes
Twice-baked potato casserole
Potato mash Cajun style
Potato mash with horseradish
Leek and potato bake
Potato vichyssoise
Steamed potatoes
Potato cakes with cheese
Spicy potatoes and cauliflower
Potato casserole with parsnips
Scalloped potatoes
Potato dumplings

And if you've really had enough of eating potatoes, cut them in half, get some paints and give them to the kids for potato printing.

THIS MONTH: LAMB



The following is an abridged version of Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall's Meat Manifesto, taken from his latest cookery book, 'The River Cottage MEAT book'. Think about the meat you eat. Is it good enough? Good enough to bring you pleasure every time you eat it? Could it, should it, be better? Are you among the millions of consumers putting pressure on farmers to produce mountains of cheap meat of dubious quality, by dubious means? Perhaps it would make sense to spend a little more on it, a little less often. Or to buy cheaper cuts of meat.

Think about the animals from which the meat you eat comes. Are you at all concerned about how they have been treated? Have they lived well? Have they been fed on safe, appropriate foods? Have they been cared for by someone who respects them and enjoys contact with them? Are you sure? Perhaps it's time to find out a bit more about where your meat comes from.

Are you adventurous with meat? Do you explore the different tastes and textures of the various cuts, particularly the cheaper cuts, and of offal? Could you save money and eat better by doing so? There may be all kinds of recipes, not complicated, not expensive, that could breathe new life into your meat cooking and bring more excitement and satisfaction at mealtimes to you, your family and the friends you like to entertain.

MEAT

Where do you get your meat? Might there be a different way of buying meat that works well for you, that could guarantee better quality and give you a cleaner conscience? Could you buy locally, buying direct from the people who actually farm the animals that produce the meat? Or could you use a butcher who can tell you where all his or her meat comes from, and get special things for you when you want them?

BOX DELIVERY

- BERKSHIRE**
Lambourn
 Sheepdrove Organic Farm01488 71659
- CAMBRIDGESHIRE**
Ely
 Naturally Yours01353 778 723
- CORNWALL**
Cusgame
 Cusgame Organics01872 865 922
Penzance
 Vivian Olds Ltd01736 788 520
Truro
 Carleys of Cornwall01872 277 686
 Mewton PG01872 540 343
 Nuncarrow organic farm01872 540 343
Tywardreath
 Stoneybridge Organics01726 813 858
- CUMBRIA**
Carlisle
 Whiteholme Farm01697 748 058
Grange-over-sands
 Howbarrow Organic Farm01539 536 330
- DERBYSHIRE**
Ashbourne
 Nix Organix01335 360 996
- DEVON**
Exeter
 Organic Farmers Market, The01392 875 678
Holsworthy
 Providence Farm meats01409 254 421
Kingswear
 Fountain Violet Farm01803 752 363
Okehampton
 Fishleigh Estate01837 810 124
Umberleigh
 Higher Hacknell Meat01769 560 909
- DORSET**
Beaminster
 Childhay Manor Organics01308 868 709
- GLOUCESTERSHIRE**
Berkeley
 Adeys Farm Meats01453 511 218
- LONDON**
Ealing
 Thorogoods of Ealing020 8567 0339
Notting Hill
 Lidgate020 7727 8243
- MIDLANDS, WEST**
Birmingham
 Rossiter, S & A0121 4581 598
- NORFOLK**
Norwich
 Harveys Puremeat01603 621 930
- NORTHUMBERLAND**
Hexham
 Northumbrian Quality Meats01434 270 184
- OXFORDSHIRE**
Wantage
 Real Farm Foods Ltd.01235 762 641

- SOMERSET**
Exmoor
 Brown Cow Organics01749 890 298
Shepton Mallet
 Hindon Organic Farm01643 705 244
Bath
 Radford Mill Farm01761 479 572
Taunton
 Stoneage Organics01823 432 488
- SUFFOLK**
Woodbridge
 Red Poll Meats01728 748 444
- SURREY**
Shere
 Drydown Farm07941 277 545
Wintney
 Organically Speaking01483 531 319
Bramley
 Wintershall Partnership01483 892167
- SUSSEX, WEST**
Billingshurst
 Steepwood Farm01403 785 434
- WARWICKSHIRE**
Rugby
 Browning, GNF & GA01926 632 246
- WILTSHIRE**
Swindon
 Purton House01793 770 219
- YORKSHIRE, EAST**
Driffield
 Barnston Organics01262 468 128
- SCOTLAND**
Perth
 Hugh Grierson01738 730201
- WALES**
Clyro
 Clyro Hill Farm01497 820520

MAIL ORDER

- Graig Farm Organics0159 785 1655
 Higher Hacknell Farm0176 956 0909
 Meatshop0122 857 7329
 Save the Bacon0160 469 6859
 Sheepdrove Organic Farm0148 871 659
 Swaddles0845 456 1768
 The May Highland Beef0157 042 3080
 The Organic Beef Company0148 866 8429
 The Real Meat Company0198 584 0562
 Traditional Norfolk Poultry0195 349 8434

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 Sheepdrove Organic Farm, Lambourn, Berkshire RG17 7JH. Email: sales@sheepdrove.com

IS THE ECOLOGIST IN YOUR LOCAL SHOP?
 Whether you're a shop owner or a customer, tell us the name, phone number and contact name for the shop where you'd like to see The Ecologist sold and we'll arrange it. Email kim@theecologist.org

Organic General Supplies - Going 100% Organic

What about your cupboards? Are they full of jars of mass-produced, over-processed and unfairly traded goods? Do you think that replacing all these staples with organic versions would be frankly impossible?

It's time to think again. Eating organically doesn't mean eating with less variety. There are plenty of organic and fairly traded suppliers who offer alternatives for all kinds of groceries from salad dressing to hazelnut spread. And if you're worried about organic food costing more, think how much longer good quality produce lasts, and eat less!

Why not...

- Contact producers for an idea of their range, and how to get hold of their products.
- If your local shop doesn't stock an item you want, then just ask them to order it in from the producers listed in these pages - the more demand there is for these products, the more readily available they will become.
- Search organic mail order companies' websites - many stock a wide variety of grocery items.
- Form your own co-operative group to buy bulk organic products straight from the wholesaler at greatly reduced rates.

See next month's issue for a guide to forming your own co-op.

The Ecologist's Top Ten

Each month we'll bring you 10 of our favourite 'Cupboard Fillers' to demonstrate the fantastic variety available. This month...

Top Ten Organic jams, preserves and spreads



Duchy Originals Lemon Curd

Made to a traditional recipe with organic eggs, butter and Sicilian lemons, this smooth rich curd has a sharp lemon zest. Duchy is dedicated to producing high quality organic products, and the profits help fund The Princes Trust. www.duchyoriginals.com



Clearspring Strawberry Fruit Spread

A rich, thick jam from a leading organic wholesaler. www.clearspring.co.uk

Cotswold Honey Fairtrade Set Honey

Cotswold specialises in processing and packing high quality organic fairtrade honeys from around the world. This honey from Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula is strong and richly flavoured. www.cotswoldhoney.co.uk



Essential Trading Yeast Extract Spread

A reduced-salt yeast extract from the Essential Trading Company, an employee-owned co-operative that allows trading ethics to govern business decisions. www.essential-trading.co.uk



Duchy Originals English Damson Jam

Another classic from Duchy, made with organically grown English damsons from a family farm in Worcestershire. The jam is made with whole fruit, and has a sharp-sweet aromatic flavour.



Green and Black's Chocolate and Hazelnut Spread

A family favourite from a company committed to Fairtrade organic chocolate - they trade directly with the growers paying them a premium for their organic cocoa. www.greenandblacks.com



Tea Together Organic Marmalade with Fresh Ginger

Traditional breakfast spread with a twist, cooked with a balance of 60 per cent whole organic fruit and 40 per cent organic sugar, from a small family firm based in Northern France. +33 (0)321 861940

Whole Earth Crunchy Peanut Butter

With no added sugar, this organic and vegan friendly peanut butter from a company set up by the Soil Association's chairman is as full flavoured and crunchy as it gets. www.wholeearthfoods.com



Meridian Blackcurrant Spread

A pure fruit spread sweetened with only natural fruit juices. From a Welsh Company dedicated to producing healthy, convenient foods by traditional small-scale methods. www.meridianfoods.co.uk

Equal Exchange Fairtrade Clear Honey

A light wildflower honey suitable for everything from toast to sweetening tea, from a company that ensures small-scale farmers in the developing world get a fair price. www.equalexchange.co.uk



Make your own: Rhubarb Jam

INGREDIENTS...

1.2 kg rhubarb
800g sugar
the juice of a lemon

1. After washing the rhubarb, trim the ends and halve the stalks lengthwise. Chop into small cubes.

2. Mix the chopped rhubarb, sugar and the lemon juice together in a in dish, cover with parchment paper, and leave overnight.

3. The next day, you will find that the sugar will have drained the juice out of the rhubarb. Put a saucer in the freezer and then strain the rhubarb juice into a saucepan through a sieve.

4. Put the saucepan on the hob, bring to the boil and then cover and boil five to ten minutes. If you have a cooking thermometer try to keep the mixture at around 110°C (230°F).

5. Now return the chopped rhubarb to the saucepan, bring back to a boil and simmer for a further five to ten more minutes, stirring occasionally.

6. Remove the saucer from the freezer, and put a small amount of jam on it. Tilt it to see if the jam is set. If the jam has not set, continue boiling and testing every minute until ready.

7. Tip the jam into some leftover jars and turn the lids as tight as you can. Store in a cool dark place for three or so months before eating.



Plus...

If you've got a garden and are feeling keen, grow your own forced rhubarb too. All you need is a container such as a dustbin or bucket that you can use to keep the light away from your rhubarb. As soon as the rhubarb begins to show signs of growth, cover it with the upturned container. The darkness combined with the heating effect of the container will quickly bring on the rhubarb and in a matter of four weeks or so.

DAIRY



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PRODUCER

Yeo Valley01278 652 243
Rachel's Organic Dairy.....01970 625805

CHEESE

MAIL ORDER (ORGANIC)

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Birdwood Farmhouse
Cheesemakers.....01452 750248
Caws Cenarth Cheese.....0123 971 0432
Godminster Vintage Cheese.....0174 981 3733
H.S. Bourne01948 770214
Llanboidy Cheesemakers.....01994 448303
Llangloffan Farmhouse Cheese.....01348 891241
Loch Arthur Creamery.....01387 760296
Staffordshire Organic Cheese.....01782 880366

PRODUCERS (ORGANIC)

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ORGANIC

PRODUCER

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ORGANIC

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MAIL ORDER

Too busy to make it to the shops? Then let them come to you. As well as the fruit and vegetable box schemes listed on page 71, there is a wealth of companies who deliver all your weekly needs right to your door.

NATIONWIDE

Barleywood Walled Garden.....0117 935 1725
Duchy Originals.....020 8831 6800
Eostre Organics Ltd.....0195 378 9639
Equal Exchange.....0131 220 3484
Essential Trading Cooperative.....0117 958 3550
Everybody Organic.....0170 765 1243
Goodness Direct.....0871 871 6611
Graig Farm Organics.....0159 785 1655
Infinity Foods Cooperative Food.....0127 342 4060
Mother Hemp.....0126 242 1100
Natural Good Foods.....01455 5587
Oil in the Raw.....0157 935 1178
Suma.....0845 458 2290
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ECOLOGIST STOCKISTS

These are the UK's real SUPER-markets. As well as all stocking The Ecologist, they offer such a wide range of healthy, mainly organic products that you need never darken a Tesco's or Sainsbury's door again. If you know of a similar shop in your area that's not listed tell us its name and we'll get in touch, get it stocking The Ecologist, and promote it in these pages.

BRISTOL

Fresh & Wild
85 Queens Road, The Triangle0117 910 5930
Harvest Natural Foods
11 Gloucester Road0117 942 5997
The Better Food Company
Sevier Street.....0117 935 1725
Wild Oats
9-11 Lower Redland Road.....0117 973 1967

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Aylesbury
Healthright
48C Friars Square.....01296 397 022
Chesham
Healthright
27 High Street01494 771 267

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

Cambridge
Arjana Wholefood
Unit 7 Dales Brewery,
Gwydir Street.....01223 364 845

CHESHIRE

Chester
Rainforest
51 Watergate Row.....01244 340 200

CUMBRIA

Keswick
Sundance Wholefoods
33 Main Street01768 774 712

DERBYSHIRE

Ashbourne
Natural Choice
24 St John Street.....01335 346 096

DEVON

Chumleigh
The Dairy
Fore Street.....01769 580 598
Plymouth
In Other Words
64 Mutley Plain01752 663 889

GLOUCESTERSHIRE

Bisley
Green Shop
Cheltenham Road01452 770 629
Cirencester
The Organic Farm Shop
Abbey Home Farm,
Burford Road.....01285 640 441
Cheltenham
Rendezvous
16 Portland Street.....01242 577 893

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Manchester
On The 8th Day Co-Op
111 Oxford Rd.....0161 273 4878

HAMPSHIRE & ISLE OF WIGHT

Ringwood
Scollocks Health Foods
1 Market Place.....01425 473 787

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Field Fayre
18-19 Broad Street.....01989 566 683

HERTFORDSHIRE

Berkhamsted
Cook's Delight
360-364 High Street.....01442 863 584
Radlett
Destiny
Batters Green Farm, New Road01923 852 522

LANCASHIRE

Lancaster
Single Step Co-op
78a Penny Street.....01524 63 021

LINCOLNSHIRE

Stamford
Silverlane Foods
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LONDON

Brixton
Brixton Wholefoods
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Camden
Fresh & Wild
49 Parkway Camden, NW1 7PN.....020 7428 7575

Heartstone
106 Parkway, NW1 7AN020 7485 7744

Clapham Junction
Fresh & Wild
305-311 Lavender Hill,
SW11 1LN020 7585 1488

Crouch End
Haelan Clinic
41 The Broadway, N8 8OT.....020 8340 4258

Just Natural...Organic Solutions
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Ealing
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19 The Green, W5 5DA.....020 8566 1965

Hammersmith
Bushwacker
132 King Street, W6 0QU.....020 8748 2061

Kensington

Luscious Organic
240-242 Kensington High Street,
W8 6NE.....020 7371 6987

Kew Gardens
Oliver's Wholefood Store
5 Station Approach, TW9 3QB.....020 8948 3990

Maida Vale
Organic Grocer
17 Clifton Road, W9020 7286 1400

North Finchley
Alternatives Health Store
339 Ballards Lane, N12 8LJ.....020 8445 4397

Notting Hill
Fresh & Wild
210 Westbourne Grove,
W11 2RH020 7229 1063

Planet Organic
42 Westbourne Grove, W2 5SH020 7221 7171

Old Street
Fresh & Wild
196 Old Street, EC1V 9FR020 7250 1708

Primrose Hill
Sesame
128 Regents Park Road,
NW1 8XL020 7586 3779

Shoreditch
Spitalfields Organics
103a Commercial Street,
E1 6PG020 7377 8909

Soho
Fresh & Wild
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Stoke Newington
Fresh & Wild
38-40 Stoke Newington Church St,
N16 0NY020 7254 2332

Mother Earth
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Baldwins Health Food Centre.....020 7701 4892
171 Walworth Road, SE17.....020 7275 9099

West Hampstead
Peppercorns Natural Foods
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NW6 2LJ.....020 7328 6874

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Newcastle Upon Tyne
Out Of This World
Gosforth Shopping Centre.....0191 213 0 421

NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Nottingham
Out Of This World
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OXFORDSHIRE

Charlbury
One Village
Charlbury01608 811 811

Oxford
Uhuru
48 Cowley Road.....01865 248 249

SHROPSHIRE

Ludlow
Myriad Organic Foods
22 Corve Street.....01584 872 665

Shrewsbury
Wild Thyme
1-2 Castlegates.....01743 364 559

SOMERSET

Glastonbury
The Wholefood Store
29 High Street.....01458 831 004

SURREY

Cranleigh
Natural Life
190 High Street.....01483 272 742

SUSSEX

Forest Row
Seasons
10-11 Hartfield Road01342 824 973

Brighton
Sunny Health Foods
76, Beaconsfield Road.....01273 507 879

WARWICKSHIRE

Coventry
Organic Enterprises
Ryton Organic Garden,
Ryton On Dunsmore.....024 7630 3517

NORTH YORKSHIRE

Sheffield
In A Nutshell
31 Chesterfield Road0114 250 8555

New Roots
347 Glossop Road.....0114 272 1971

WEST YORKSHIRE

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Helen Kemp
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SCOTLAND

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Grassroots
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Charing Cross.....0141 3533278

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St. John's Church,
Princes' Street.....0131 229 4541

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MONTY WALDIN'S BIODYNAMIC AND ORGANIC WINE FEBRUARY SELECTION



Monty Waldin, author of the world's first biodynamic wine guide, has spent years understanding the complexities and vagaries of organic/biodynamic wine production. Here are his suggested 10 to try for February, from a Valentines Day Cava, to a winter warming bottle of port.

WHITE WINE

Biblia Chora Estate
2002 White

Generously flavoured, explosive organic blend of France's Semillon and the Greek Assyrtico.

PRICE: £10

Stockist:
Harvey Nichols
(Tel 020 7235 5000)



Bianco Veronese 'Liber',
Fasoli Gino

Oak aged, Soave-style dry white from Garganega grapes with a touch of oak from one of Italy's best value organic wineries.

PRICE £7.99

Stockist: Vintage Roots.



Planet Organic
Chardonnay, 2003

Dry organic Mediterranean Chardonnay, made in an not-too-oaky or buttery style for early drinking.

PRICE: £6.95

Stockist: Planet Organic
(Tel: 020 7221 7171)



Davenport Vineyards
Horsmonden Dry 2002/3

Forget what this organic white is made from - unpronounceable grapes like Ortega, Bacchus, Faber, Huxelrebe and Siegerrebe enjoy its chalky crispness and floral/honeyed fruit.

PRICE: £6.80

Stockist:
Davenport Vineyards,
(Tel: 01892 852 380 www.davenportvineyards.co.uk)

RED WINE

I Masieri 2003,
La Biancara

This richly flavoured red table wine from near Venice combines Biodynamically-farmed Bordeaux grapes Cabernet Sauvignon and Merlot with local speciality Lagrein. Winemaker Angiolino Maule is experimenting with aging his wine in clay pots buried underground, like the ancient Greeks did.

PRICE: £7.80

Stockist:
Bat & Bottle, Oakham, Rutland
(www.batwine.co.uk or Tel: 08451 084 407)



Côtes du Rhône Rouge,
'Nature', Perrin 2001

Good value, rich, winter-warming southern Rhone organic red from the Perrin family (see next)

PRICE: £8.20

Stockist: Bibendum,
Tel: 0207 449 4120
or www.bibendum-wine.co.uk)

Coudelet de Beaucastel, Côtes du Rhône, 2001/2002

This is the second wine (junior partner) to the famous Châteauneuf-du-Pape; Château de Beaucastel which is owned by the Perrin family Rich, smoky, organic red that needs decanting before serving.

PRICE: £12-13

Stockist: Mistral Wines,
(Tel: 0207 402 7957)



Coteaux de Tricastin,
Chapoutier 2003

Biodynamic red from the Provence/Rhone area with the wild smells of the Mediterranean garrigue. Chapoutier is France's largest producer of biodynamic wine.

PRICE: £6.57

Stockist: Bibendum,



SPARKLING WINE

DO Cava Brut Rosat, Albet i Noya

Rich, Pinot Noir, pink organic Spanish sparkler ideal for Valentine's Day.

PRICE: £8.95

Stockist: Vintage Roots (Tel: 01189 761 999 or www.vintageroots.co.uk)



PORT

Casal dos Jordões Tawny
Port NV

Notably pure, very concentrated hard-farmed organic Port aged in large wooden ovals for several years so the fruit flavours turn from over-ripe plum to soft walnut.

PRICE: £12.50

Stockist: Daylesford Organic
Farm Shop
(Tel: 01608 731 746)



Tea

Clipper Teas, based in Dorset, have been selling organic and fair-trade teas from South India, Sri Lanka and Tanzania since the early 1990s. One of their teas, in particular, has been a trial of labour and love. Based in the highlands of Sri Lanka, the Greenfield Estate is so covered with boulders it was deemed useless and given away free by the government. Undeterred, they planted between the boulders, and the enormous roots had to grow deep into the soil to get moisture. They flourished and thrived, producing tea with a brisk, rarefied flavour and a bright golden colour, one of Sri Lanka's most distinct.



Coffee

In 2003, Lorna Suttie and John Bruce opened The Bean Shop, a coffee mail-order business in Perth that sells organic coffee beans from small-scale South American producers. They buy only unroasted, green coffee beans and roast them to their dark colour themselves in a small, gas-fired roaster in their shop just before they mail them out. They recommend the 'clean tasting, lush and smoky' organic Cuban coffee beans at £4.20 for 250 grams.

Beer and Cider

Until the 1970s, beer, Britain's most popular drink, was essentially a local product. Today, 8 out of every 10 pints brewed are made by the 'big four' breweries. Many of the features that made local beers distinct are being kept alive by small-scale breweries throughout the country. Black Isle beer, based in the Scottish Highlands, makes 6 organic beers, all of which are unpasteurised, giving them more flavour but a shorter shelf-life (about 3 months). David Gladwin founded Black Isle beer 6 years ago, aiming to make a high quality organic beer with distinct local flavours. Staying true to his area, the Black Isle Scotch Ale is produced with bog myrtle, or 'sweet gale', a heavily scented shrub that forms on the heather moorlands, and was used to bitter beer in the Middle Ages, before hops became widespread.



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Home insulation

Insulation saves energy, saves money and reduces the impact of domestic energy use on climate. In a typical British home about a third of domestic heating is rapidly lost through the roof, ceiling and walls, yet simple insulation steps can eliminate this almost completely.

1. ROOF

Is your roof properly insulated?

How thick is your current insulation? It should be 270mm for glass wool, 250mm for rock wool, and 220mm for cellulose. Is there insulation between the ceiling joists (beams that support the roof) and the rafters (wooden slats on the floor of the attic)?

Is the roof lined with aluminium-backed plasterboard? Has the loft hatch been insulated?

Are there sufficient gaps around the eaves to avoid condensation. Condensation lowers the temperature, causing the thermostat to trigger more heat.

If you have a water tank and pipes in the roof space are they insulated? If not, they should be insulated to help prevent them from freezing. If you have a jacket fitted to your hot-water cylinder already, check that it's at least

75mm (three inches) thick. A good jacket will cut heat loss by around 75 per cent.

Caution

Don't completely seal your home.

Omit sealing from kitchen and bathroom windows or steam will be trapped indoors; room temperature falls as steam condenses; seal inner doors to these rooms. Instead, do not interfere with air vents for fires and heating appliances.

2. WINDOWS AND DOORS

Are your doors properly draught proofed?

To eliminate draughts and wasted heat, use a brush or PVC seal on your exterior doors. Don't forget the letterbox and cat-flap. For advice, contact: the Draught Proofing Advisory Association Limited, PO Box 12, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 3AH; tel: 01428 654011; fax: 01428 651401.

Do your external doors have enclosed porches? A small porch creates an airlock, which prevents heat loss.

Do you have double glazing?

Double glazing is the UK's most popular energy-saving measure, but is actually less energy-efficient than putting in much cheaper cavity-wall insulation. If you haven't got it, spend your money on other, more productive measures.

Are your windows properly draught proofed?

Only a quarter of the UK's 22 million homes are adequately draught-proofed, yet draught proofing is one of the most inexpensive and effective measures to improve the efficiency of domestic heating. Only durable draught proofing should be fitted, as a poor-quality product may only last a year.

3. WALLS

Are your walls properly insulated?

If your house was built after 1930, it is likely to have cavity walls. To find out what kind of wall insulation you have or need, visit the Energy Saving Trust website at www.est.org.uk/myhome/insulation/cwi/doineed/

Why is cavity-wall insulation so important?

It acts in the same way that radiators do, by storing heat between inner and outer walls, and bouncing it back into rooms.

Is it difficult to install?

No. The insulation material can normally be applied through small holes drilled in the outside wall in less than three hours.

Where can I find a local registered installer?

Contact the Energy Efficiency Advice Centre. Telephone: 0800 512 012; www.energy-advice.co.uk

If you have solid walls...

they can be insulated either internally with insulated thermal linings or externally with insulated render and cladding. Lining is quick and easy to apply, and can be decorated with virtually any finish.

4. FLOORS

Fill gaps between floorboards and skirting boards with newspaper, beading or sealant. Don't block any under-floor air-bricks in your outside walls: without adequate ventilation floorboards will rot. Line insulating blankets beneath suspended floors. Lay boards over concrete floors.

How much will insulating my home properly cost, and how much can I save?

It's likely to cost less than one year of your heating bill. Yet it will result in you using 48 per cent less fuel every year, and will pay for itself within four years. Insulation also adds value to your property.

Subsidies for energy efficiency work

Government grants are available to those most vulnerable to ill health: the elderly, families on low incomes, the chronically sick and the disabled. These apply to both home owners and private tenants, and pay for cavity-wall insulation, loft insulation and draught proofing. There are different schemes depending on where you live: Warm Front in England; the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme in Wales; Warm Homes in Northern Ireland; and Warm Deal in Scotland. Visit www.est.org.uk/myhome/gid/ to find out more.

Finding an installer

Contact the National Insulation Association: PO Box 12, Haslemere, Surrey, GU27 3AH; tel: 01428 654011; email: insulationassoc@aol.com; www.insulationassociation.org.uk.

RENEWABLE INSULATION MATERIALS

Why choose renewable insulation?

To reduce the environmental impact of your home. Alongside cost, thermal properties and efficacy, consideration should be given to the following:

- embodied energy (energy consumed during the processing and transport of materials);
- raw material extraction;
- high toxicity levels;
- related health issues in manufacture, installation and for occupants;
- use of ozone-depleting chemicals;
- and whether materials can be recycled.

What types are there?

Cellulose: The most common. Made from waste or unused paper. Available in boards of various thickness or loose-filled in bags for loft applications.

Wool: New or recycled, in many different sizes and thicknesses, requiring no special tools in its application and can be cut with scissors. Has low embodied energy and is completely biodegradable.

Flax: Can be used in pitched roofs between and over ceiling joists, in suspended floors and in timber- or steel-framed walls.

Hemp: Thought to have great potential.

Cork: Still not widely available, cork insulation comes in boards of varying thickness, which are generally used as insulation on the rafters, not the joists.

Cotton: There is currently only one organisation manufactures insulation from waste cotton in the UK.

HOME

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URBAN COMPOSTING

Imagine you could turn 30 per cent of your household waste, at no cost, into high-quality compost for your plants, while at the same time helping to save the British taxpayer millions a year in landfill costs. You'd also be reducing toxic emissions from incinerator plants and saving peat bogs from destruction

To start URBAN composting all you need is ...

1 A 'compost' bucket with a lid

Keep the bucket in your kitchen and simply put your food scraps in it rather than your bin. Then just take it to your composter in your garden as and when is convenient or full.

2 Ingredients

Every time you are tempted to throw any of the items listed opposite in your main kitchen bin, **STOP**. Chuck them into the 'compost' bucket instead.

3 A composter

This can be the difficult part for people who live in cities. Composters need to be kept outside, preferably (for convenience's sake) close to the building you live in, usually in a back garden. If you have a garden, consider starting your own compost heap. If you don't have a garden, consider the following ideas:

Do your flats have communal bins?

Convince your neighbours to add a compost bin or, if there isn't sufficient room, to replace one existing bin with a composter. If enough of you use the compost bin, you won't need an extra bin.

Do any of your neighbours have space in their garden for a composter?

Perhaps one of them is already composting.

If it is impossible to site a composter where you live, then find out if there is a community composting scheme in your neighbourhood. The community composting sector is very diverse: it ranges from individuals and small groups working on allotments to social enterprises with local authority contracts providing kerbside collection services. To find out if there is a scheme near where you live, contact the Community Composting Network on 0114 258 0483, or go to www.communitycompost.org

Composters:

A brief introduction

With time, all organic material will decompose. Compost can be made in six to eight weeks, or it can take a year or more. The speed at which it decomposes will depend on the type of composter you own and the mix of materials you put into it.

There are four main types of composter:

1. Open air bin

The standard compost heap found in gardens across the UK. If you or your neighbour has the space these are fine, but slow.

You can buy all sorts of wooden or plastic bins. Or you can make your own:

- Cut the bottom off a plastic dustbin, and bury the bin a few inches below the surface of the soil.
- Build a bin from wooden pallets.
- Stack four or five old tyres on top of each other and cover the top with a piece of wood.
- Use wire fencing to create a cylinder.

2. Closed air composter

They retain heat much better than open compost heaps, and so speed the process of decomposition. These are the most popular type of bought bin, and are mostly made from recycled plastics.

3. Rotating composter

Rather than turning the materials with a fork, you turn the whole bin. Compost can be made very quickly (in less than a month). The weekly contents of your kitchen bucket can simply be added through a hatch in the side of the bin.

4. Worm composter

Really worm farming rather than worm composting. Your worms are your livestock, and you feed them. They eat the rotting matter: anything from food waste to paper and cardboard. Their droppings are called worm casts and make any compost in which they are contained very rich. Compost from wormeries is the best you can produce, and can be used sparingly, more like a fertiliser than as straight soil.

NOTE: Many local councils offer compost bins to residents at reduced prices; before you buy one, check whether your council does so; if it doesn't, ask why not.

Do **Not** add to your bucket

The foodstuffs to the right will decompose, but they will smell and attract vermin as they do so. Certain composters can cope with this, but unless you have such a system they are best avoided. All the rest of these items either don't decompose at all or give off some fairly unpleasant or toxic residues.



- Meat
- Fish
- Cooked food
- Coal and coke ash
- Cat litter and dog faeces
- Disposable nappies
- Glossy magazines

Do add these to your bucket

- Fruit and vegetable scraps, including banana and onion skins, potato peelings and apple cores
- Eggshells
- Tea bags
- Coffee grounds
- Old flowers
- Any plant remains
- Gerbil, hamster and rabbit bedding or faeces
- Wood ash or sawdust
- Cardboard
- Paper towels and bags
- Cardboard tubes
- Egg boxes
- Hair (yours or your pets')
- Old spices and herbs
- Pine needles
- Matches
- Birdcage cleanings
- Stale bread
- Old pasta
- Milk
- Melted ice cream
- Stale crisps
- Tobacco wastes (but not cigarette filters)
- Nutshells
- Moldy cheese
- Razor trimmings
- Outdated yogurt
- Nail clippings
- Shrimp, crab or lobster shells
- Bread and pie crusts
- Cooked rice
- Bad wine
- Toothpicks
- Pencil shavings
- Woolen socks
- Burnt toast
- Feathers
- Vacuum cleaner bag contents
- Dead bees and flies

The right ingredients

Some materials, such as soft, young weeds and grass mowings, rot quickly. They work as 'activators', known in the world of composting as 'hotter rotters', and get the composting process started. On their own, however, they will decay to a smelly mess.

Older and tougher plant material is slower to rot but gives body to the finished compost - and usually makes up the bulk of a compost heap. Meat and fish scraps are best avoided so as not to encourage rats.

The speed at which a compost bin's contents decomposes will depend on you getting the following right:

1. The balance of carbon and nitrogen

It's a lot easier than it sounds. The bacteria and fungi in compost get their energy from carbon and their protein by synthesising nitrogen. Your compost

should be primarily carbon-based materials, with just enough nitrogen to aid the process along: roughly a ratio of 30 parts carbon to one part nitrogen. As a rough guide to which of your compostible materials are which, the activators (hotter rotters) are the nitrogen-rich materials; most of the rest contains carbon in varying degrees; and if it was once a tree then there will be a lot of carbon in it.

2. The amount of surface area exposed.

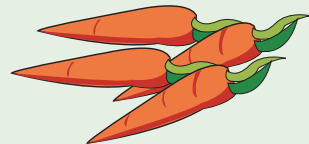
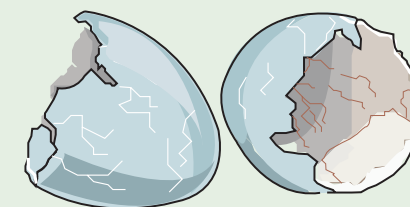
Decomposition occurs when the particles in your compost come into contact with air. If you increase the surface area, it will speed up the process. Simply chop, shred or break up material more before you put it in your composter. If you don't do this, the insects and earthworms will do it for you anyway.

3. Aeration, or oxygen, in the compost heap.

During the process of decomposition all available oxygen in the compost is taken up. You need to aerate your compost, simply by stirring it with a garden fork.

4. Moisture.

You need to keep your compost moist, but not too moist. To get the balance right, squeeze a handful of the composting materials: it should have the moisture content of a well-wrung sponge. If the pile is too wet, add some dry matter such as cardboard. If it is too dry, pour some water on it.



WHY SHOULD I COMPOST?

1. It reduces the amount of rubbish sent to landfill sites and incinerators. A third of the average domestic dustbin is filled with materials that could be composted. Currently, only 2 per cent of UK waste is composted. Even that represents 400,000 tonnes per year of compostible rubbish not going to landfill or incineration sites.

2. You can reuse the compost in your garden, on your balcony or indoors on your pot plants, and reduce demand for peat, thereby preserving internationally important peatland natural habitats.

3. You are recycling the nutrients that your food, etc, took from the soil and helping them grow back into the soil. According to the Washington-based research organisation the Worldwatch Institute, in 1990 alone the earth lost 480 billion tonnes of valuable topsoil, which was washed into rivers and oceans or blown away as a result of intensive farming practices or deforestation.

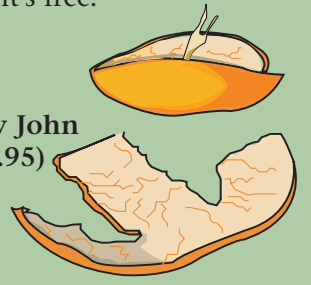
4. You are restoring the environment both by improving the soil and by encouraging the growth of plants. Compost improves the structure of the soil and increases its water-holding capacity. Your plants will grow better, and will be more resistant to disease and pests.

5. Compost is a good fertiliser, and reduces the demand for chemical alternatives.

6. It will save you money. If the majority of people in the US composted, they would save £60m worth of rubbish-collection fees.

7. A standard 220-litre capacity composter will produce the equivalent of more than seven grow bags of compost in a year, and it's free.

For more information
Backyard Composting by John Roulac (Green Books, £4.95)
Composting For All by Nicky Scott (Green books, £1.95)



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Reusable nappies

Do you want the best for your baby, but don't want to harm the environment? Then use reusable nappies. Contrary to popular belief, modern reusables are cheaper and more hygienic than disposables, and you won't have to spend hours cleaning them.

By Matilda Lee

'I don't use renewable nappies because...'

'...They aren't as comfortable as disposables'

If anything, they are more comfortable. Natural cotton and wool allow your baby's skin to breathe, preventing irritation. And because there are many different types and combinations of reusable nappies, you are more likely to find one best suited to your own baby's individual body shape and preference.

Disposable nappy manufacturers promote the fact that their nappies absorb more moisture. But a baby is not uncomfortable in a moist nappy.

It is only when the nappy is left on too long that it will make the skin sore. In fact, there are two significant benefits to this feeling of moistness. First of all, the baby learns the basic sensations that will help it to potty train. Second, the carer knows whether the baby is drinking enough, which is incredibly important if your baby has a fever and is in danger of becoming dehydrated.

And finally, it's a myth that reusable nappies leak. If they fit properly, a reusable nappy is no more likely to leak than an average disposable. In fact, a well-fitting reusable will give even better protection than a disposable nappy.

Most nappies, wraps and liners can be machine-washed at just 60° centigrade and tumble-dried. If you don't have a tumble dryer, nappies, liners and wraps can be line-dried. If it's raining, a clothes horse, airing cupboard or radiator will do.

In essence, there are two types of reusable nappy: two-part nappies that consist of a nappy and a waterproof

wrap to go over it; and all-in-ones consisting of a cloth nappy with a waterproof wrap attached. The latter look similar to disposable nappies, are easier to put on than two-part nappies, but take longer to dry after washing as they are more bulky. Inside each of the two types of real nappy a reusable nappy liner is inserted; these are made from fleece or silk (for sensitive skin).

or you can send them away to be washed...

If you're not up to the extra washing, you can use a nappy laundry service. At an average cost of £8.50 a week, this is a door-to-door service that will pick up dirty nappies and deliver clean, fresh substitutes. For your nearest reusable nappy laundering service, see www.nappyline.org.uk

every second or third day, depending on how many you buy.

The only extra time involved is the few moments each week it takes you to load your washing machine, and just a few more to hang nappies out or put them in the dryer or on the line. And you actually save time by not having to go to the shops all the time to buy more nappies.



'...They need changing more often'

Regardless of whether you are using washables or disposables young babies need to be changed frequently as their skin is very sensitive to prolonged contact with faeces, urine, creams and powders. Paediatricians recommend new babies be changed 10-12 times a day and older babies six times.

A good-quality cotton nappy should only need changing every four hours during the day and 10 to 12 hours at night if your baby sleeps through.

'...I can't afford them'

The expense is in the initial purchase. Once bought, reusables will save you money in the long run. On average, disposable nappies cost between £650 and £1,000 over a baby's 'nappy life'. The cheapest reusables cost £79.70 for all you need, while a top quality organic option costs around £250. If you have more than one child, they become even cheaper as you can use the nappies again later.

'So they are cheaper and easy to use. But why else should I use them?'

1. To protect your baby's health

Disposable nappies contain super-absorbent gel, the effects of which on baby's skin and genitalia have yet to be researched.

Disposable nappies contain up to 200 chemicals. It is still unknown how many are absorbed through a baby's skin.

A study in 2000 found that disposable nappies keep babies' testicles at higher than normal temperatures, which may affect future fertility.

Disposable nappy manufacturers claim that a dry nappy means a healthy bottom, but harmful bacteria multiply in these dry conditions, and bacteria is the main cause of nappy rash. If you change the nappy at regular intervals throughout the day, and immediately when soiled, and keep the nappy area clean, then there shouldn't be any concerns about nappy rash. An independent study at Bristol University on infants with 'very bad' and 'quite bad' nappy rash, found that the type of nappy worn did not emerge as a significant factor.

2. To protect the environment your baby will grow up to live in

The average baby will go through 5,000 nappies. As 85 per cent of people are using disposables, they now form 4 per cent of all household waste, costing the taxpayer £40m each year to dispose of them.

Of the approximately 8 million disposable nappies used in the UK every day, around 7.5 million end up in landfill sites.

Disposable nappies use three and a half times more energy than real nappies to produce, eight times more non-renewable materials and 90 times more renewable resources.

The 3 billion disposable nappies thrown away each year add 1 million tonnes of nappy waste to our already overfull landfill sites. They then take up to 500 years to decompose, and produce the potent greenhouse gas methane and leachate,

a toxic liquid that can leak into soil and local water supplies. The 10 per cent that aren't landfilled get incinerated, a process that results in the release of carcinogenic dioxins into the atmosphere and creates ash (which does need to be landfilled) containing heavy metals and other toxins.

Some people choose to use 'eco-disposable' nappies believing them to be better for the environment. Eco-disposables are a viable alternative to conventional disposables when you are travelling and at other times when reusables really aren't practical. They are unbleached, use less plastics and chemicals, and therefore expose babies to fewer synthetic materials. And, theoretically, they are biodegradable. However, as Elizabeth Hartigan from the Women's Environment Network points out, 'eco-disposable nappies *do* go to landfill just like any other nappies, and in landfill they don't break down'. They are better for the environment than traditional disposables, but they still contribute to the waste problem.



'...They are difficult to use'

You can now buy renewable nappies that are shaped so you don't have to fold them.

Nappy pins have been replaced with Velcro, poppers and elasticated claw-like grips.

'...I haven't got time for all the washing'

Once soiled, nappies should be stored in an air-tight nappy bin (costing just a few pounds). This also keeps your house from smelling of used nappies.

You can then wash the nappies

'OK, I want to use reusable nappies. What are the practicalities?'

Where to get them

Reusable nappies are sold in more than 1,250 shops nationwide. To find your nearest reusable nappy agent, laundering service and retailer call the UK Nappy Line on 01983 401 959, or visit its website at www.nappyline.org.uk.

The amount you need

How many nappies you need in total will depend on how often you do the laundry. At least purchase enough nappies and liners for a minimum two days' use.

Getting the right type for your baby

Hartigan says: 'One size doesn't fit all. Parents should consider the shape of the baby.' The easiest way to start is by ordering a nappy trial pack, available through most reusable nappy companies, so you can check the size, fit and style that suit you and your baby best. [See the list of producers on the opposite page.]

Useful extras

For night-time or babies that are heavy wetters you can add booster pads for extra absorbency. Most nappies require a separate waterproof nappy pant or 'wrap'. These are elasticated, often laminated and are designed to ensure no leaks. Wraps don't have to be washed at every nappy change, only when soiled. You should allow for four or five nappy pants for each growth stage. And most parents choose additional one-way liners that are inserted in the nappy and allow wetness to pass away from their baby's skin. Liners also collect solids for separate disposal, making washing nappies easier. Liners are available as biodegradable flush-aways or polyester sheets. You can either use washable or disposable wipes. Finally, you will need a nappy bucket or bin with a tightly fitting lid. For any questions or advice on reusable nappies, the cloth-nappy vendor the Nappy Lady (www.thenappylady.co.uk; 0845 456 2441) will provide you with a free guide tailored specifically to your preferences, and a personal nappy advisor for further queries.

Washing reusable nappies

It is advisable to use non-biological powders, as they are less likely to cause a skin reaction. A brand like Ecover is both kind to the environment and to your colours.

Unless you live in a soft water area, or have a water softener, you'll find your nappies will tend to go hard. However, you should not use fabric conditioners as these will coat the fibres of your nappies and significantly reduce their absorbency and thus cause leaks. Tumble-drying will leave your nappies soft and fluffy: even just a 10-minute burst will do. If you don't have a tumble dryer, a tablespoonful of white vinegar in the conditioner compartment of your washing machine will help remove lime-scale and detergent residues and make nappies softer. Giving laundered nappies a good shake and rub together when they are almost dry is also good for softness.

How much do reusables cost?

A basic reusable nappy kit costs:

- 1) 20 terry nappies, costing £38.00
 - 2) 'Baby Pants' (plastic wraps) at £2.60 for a pack of six x 2 packs = £5.20
 - 3) A pack of six nappy pins, costing £1.10
 - 4) 20 reusable fleece nappy liners, costing £20
- Total cost = £64.30

Enough disposable nappies for one baby will cost between £650 and £1,000.

The Ecologist's Green Heroes option costs:

- 1) 20 Popolino organic cotton* shaped nappies at £8.25 each, costing £165
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 - 3) 20 reusable fleece nappy liners, costing £20
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Community Nappy Schemes

There is an ever growing variety of schemes making life easier for people using reusable nappies.

- The Women's Environmental Network runs a second-hand nappy and wrap exchange. You can contact it on 020 7481 9004, or at nappies@wen.org.uk.
- More and more councils are offering cash incentives to reusable nappy users. For example, North London Waste Authority and Camden Council provide a £35 discount for parents in the north London borough who sign up with an approved nappy laundry service. Give your council a call to see if it offers a similar discount. If it doesn't, ask it why not.
- Density for Sustainability, a scheme launched in north London by community-based not-for-profit nappy delivery service Nappy Ever After, enables parents on low incomes to use reusable nappies. An innovative social enterprise in a densely populated urban area, the scheme lends itself very well to replication elsewhere and

already has plans to set up a new local laundry service. Visit: www.nappyeverafter.co.uk

- Notts Nappy Project is a very innovative and imaginative trial scheme with good links to other programmes. Parents return nappies when they don't need them anymore; these are donated to a Romanian charity. Notts Nappy Project also provides parents with an opportunity to sell on unwanted nappies, and hopes in the future to get real nappy info into training hospitals and universities. Visit: www.nottsnappyproject.org.uk

To find out more about any of the above schemes, or about similar programmes in your area, call the Women's Environmental Network on 020 7481 9004 (email: nappies@wen.org.uk). There is a list of links to local groups on the network's website at www.wen.org.uk/nappypartnerships.

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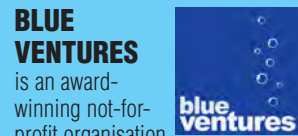
is an exchange network through which bed and board are given in return for help on organic farms. WWOOF provides excellent opportunities for organic training, cultural exchange and people wanting to change to a rural life or join the organic movement.

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I'm the Reverend Billy

The Indian Ocean tsunami gives the US government something that 9/11 also gave it, but something that Aids never did: the photo-op to fly US helicopters towards HOLY NOBILITY. Boys in desert cammies (sewn for Iraq) are posing with bottles of water in the morning paper. The Christian images of patiently dispensed miracles out-gun the photo placement of the nearly identical DEMOCRACY DEVIL in Baghdad. Oh, children. The Big Wave and the Christian Gunmen. This movie, set at empire's edge, using horror as sentimental media content... It's something the British and Roman empires didn't even have to deal with. Then again, they didn't kill in the age of advertising.

Nothing in the biblical best-seller *Revelations*, with the goats flying over our heads with candelabras on their backs, is nearly as weird as the current bouquet of apocalypses, but the Bushies are on their knees in the White House, praying their God forward. Can I say politely, with all due respect, that their God is a case of MISTAKEN IDENTITY? Unfortunately, this tragedy is perfect for them, casting the earth in the act of judgment, so they can in turn mimic their God and act out ongoing horror with their Hummering Pentagon.

How fascinating, when nature anthropomorphises itself. It is as if the earth insists with its unforgettable wave on being the star. THE EARTH WINS THE OSCAR FOR LEAD IN A DRAMATIC ROLE. The fact is that this one, the tsunami, is easily converted into a media story. But however you characterise the sender of the message - despite the proud ownership of the narrative by all available public figures, celebrities, talking heads and astrologists - this is still a message from the earth.

If you will join me in rolling the SACRED WHEEL OF WHY?, it is probably likely that the earth is preparing several messages simultaneously, and we ignore the ones that cannot be distributed as HORROR at our peril. Follow that? For instance, the magazine you are holding presents scores of apocalypses in an average issue, and they are presented by the writers and graphic artists in all sorts of persuasive ways, but some apocalypses, let's face it, never make *Top of the Pops*. The earth IS speaking to us each time, though, whether the disaster is GM milk in rural Britain or damming in China or SUVs in Michigan: the communicating is trying to come through.

The Flaming Stone From the Sky or the Perfect Wave or the enormous Great White Shark: these nightmares that fit the movie poster are usually chosen instead of a million dead salamanders, the narrative of tectonic plates, the infinitesimal PCPs in the mud or other expressions from our world. But ultimately, regardless of hype, there is a common storyline to all this.

Ultimately, the earth lets us live for a while, gives us a responsibility to listen to it and co-exist with it, and then it has designed a way for us to die, and in such a way that it gives a future for those dying behind us. This is the earth's common sense, and its most important storyline; but it's a hell of a sell, in the face of RAPTURE PULP FICTION. If we as a species have decided we will not just suffer the slings and arrows of dying the tragic death of a child, but wish to collaborate with the earth further up into our lives, then we are fools if we don't listen to the less media-genic messages like Aids.

Aids must be re-presented without a gunman profiling against the sunset. It should come to people WITHOUT THE REQUIREMENT OF KINKIFIED FEAR, as in the consumer angst that a horror-a-week maintains. We keep buying when we are afraid of death. They know that.

In our church we believe fervently that if you practise less consumption, than fear won't be a psychological state occasionally relieved by products, but a useful

and ultimately sensible emotion. If fear is more complex, more like life, it is a 'sustainable Fear'. God knows that if we insist, despite the earth's advice, that our human fears must be the top religion, than we kill ourselves with Aids and other unphoto-genic waves.

And so, we come to the END of our worship. Earth's expressiveness will end our expression, then, if we insist. Until that moment, we will cure the wave within by letting the wave

without really wash through us. By a mysterious and non-commercial media, the WILD ANIMALS SEEMED TO SHARE THE RIGHT STORY, the one not in the commercial media, and having a

feeling for what the Earth

had to say, they quietly moved to higher ground. Let's go up there! Amen!

we will cure the wave within by letting the wave without really wash through us.

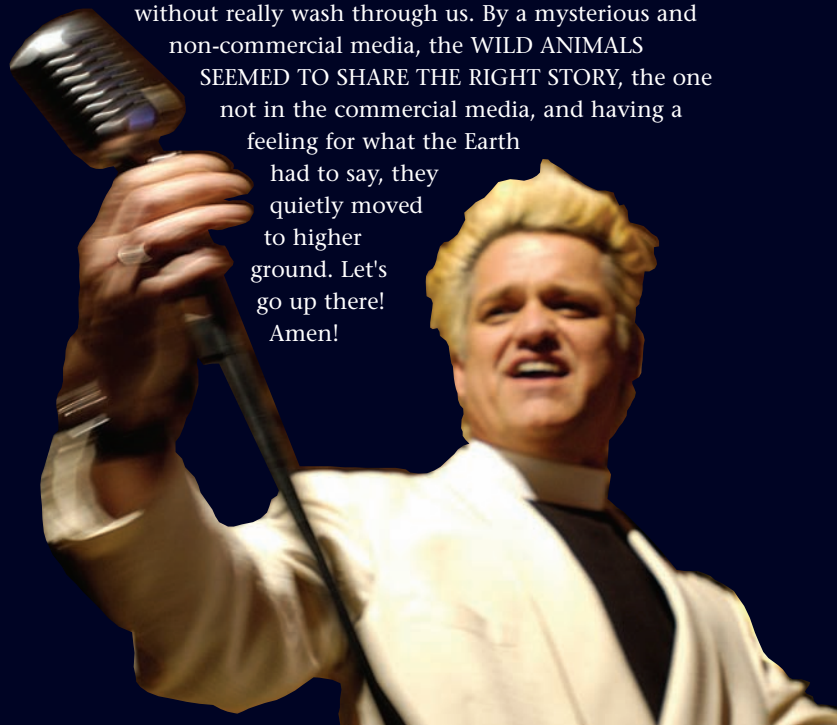


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