

can we have a  
**FOOD ENERGY WATER**  
education please

u start with food

a *University of Food* project

**FEATURING**

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BIRTHI  
NG**

Also:  
GANDHI TODAY

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In a sense we do not know what peace is. Peace may be no more than a token and Gandhi and many other figures past and present may represent a longing for something we wish to bring into existence. An illustration is provided by the context within which Mahatma Gandhi lived and worked. In general, the issues of nonviolence, civil disobedience and passive resistance to foreign rule are still current today having morphed into peace demonstrations, human rights declarations, near revolutions, opposition to land grabbing, and movements that knowing that violence can take many forms find their distinct ways of dealing with the same issues. The latter movements could be identified broadly with the ecological movement.

It would be fair to say that Gandhi is a distant figure. It is very difficult, if not impossible, to learn from the past. Today, the same telltale signs show a humanity at war with itself and, if true, this is something that haunts us. Not only are we at war with one another using the cruellest of means and techniques but we are also at war with the planet. It is the same thing. Violence and conflict can erupt at any time and especially when access to the land is denied. We should rather put the land to its intended uses as a prerequisite for a better today. Given the context of a British occupation and the threats posed by World War II Gandhi was no doubt wise and steadfast in his beliefs of nonviolence. He paid with his life. He knew, however, that the issues were land issues. Lest we lose sight of his teachings, as we may see them, we need to put land, or in my view 'food', on a different plane. To 'do food' and to 'study food' capture the essence of living.

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# u start with food

Pledges Principles & Social Contract

## 5 Food Pledges – One Agenda

- 1) Do Food
- 2) Study Food
- 3) Make Food the Entry Point for Joyful & Compassionate Living
- 4) Let Food Inform the Social & Economic Function of the Family Group
- 5) Privilege Food and realise the Beautiful Worlds of Work Affections & Relationships

*only food raises hopes for a better today*

### Guiding Principles

- 1) All Peoples have the same basic food requirements, and
- 2) All Households have the same basic energy requirements

The Guiding Principles tell us how to satisfy these requirements.



### Social Contract

- Society is the issue of its resource-based education & economy
  - Resources include Food Energy Water (FEW)
  - They would create work and well-being
  - It is in our interest - that of individuals and civil society at large - to renew and value these resources
  - Depleting them would go counter our interest
- For economies proper, we, the collective we, must act
  - responsibly (resources etc) and
  - in a supportive role to one another
- For civil society proper, we, the collective we, must
  - be the State
  - act like the State
  - represent the State
  - embody the State

a state too big to care a state too

A University of Food Project

## FIGURE 1: OVERVIEW

## PREFACE

Whether we look at people first or animals or plants we know by the way we treat one how we behave towards the other.

It should be noted that throughout this document food is used as a short form for all life essentials. Food is in good company and other essentials include water, light and energy. No list can ever be complete, and is oxygen not another essential together with that other need-essential, i.e. a place where to live and keep warm? Could art and cooperation also be added, if this were not to stretch the point too far? In reality, however, even if the link between food and everything else is not immediately apparent, as for instance the one with art, food can still be seen as the glue holding everything together and art is a food associate providing nourishment to our whole being. What links food to water, soil and shelter is obviously more evident. It should be said that these are not the only 'essentials' for the term suffers from abuse and overuse as seen in advertising or as evidenced by the search engine Google that gives out as many as 75,100,000 results for the term. That cannot simply be true. Food is different. We can be categorical about it and state that food availability or unavailability determines all aspects of living.

This would give food a new aura or status allowing us to look at it as establishing an important principle. Not just any principle but a first principle. A first principle as used in philosophical, biological or scientific enquiries means any proposition or statement that speaks for itself. To elaborate, this would be a statement that does not need further explanation (of the type that would lead to endless discussion or waffle) or is not open to doubt or controversy. That I am alive should satisfy any further enquiry in the same way that the sun rising to the east should. Sometimes the expression 'first thing first' is used with more immediacy to indicate some crucial element that has priority over others, and indeed what needs to be done in order to progress to a necessary second stage. In Figure 1, the first of the Guiding Principles is incontrovertible, which is another way of saying that it is a first principle: All peoples have the same basic food requirements. The same applies to the second guiding principle: All households have the same basic energy requirements. As we have seen for food read everything else and, equally, for households read any dwelling, shed, lodging, the workplace or any other place of assembly or recreation. In all instances their requirements are still the same. Any first principle has second and third principles indicating a system of principles; say first principle, and what you are in fact saying is akin to taking your first step. There may be many essentials and possibly many principles but food and a roof over our heads override them all.

Starting with food is a great way of starting anything, and is in itself a first principle. As such it cannot be derived from any other statement or proposition. We

cannot stand still, and the actions involved in procuring our food and building our homes amount to a necessity and an obligation, for all of us. In common parlance, we could say that there are no ifs and buts with food, and no pussyfooting about either.

It would however be impossible for us to satisfy this need directly if we do not have a piece of land and if we find we cannot afford (too expensive to own or rent, or too onerous) to grow the stuff and build our living space (remembering that there are bills to pay as well). To grow and to build go hand in hand, and apply across the board. Unfortunately, in extreme but far from infrequent cases, people are starving and malnourished or are homeless and lie in squalor. The opposite is true of some others who live ostentatiously whilst holding in total contempt those they have oppressed. True or false, control food and you control people... all the rest is a footnote. Lest we lose sight of the purpose of this document, starting with food would indeed lick many of our self-inflicted wounds and sores. It would be indicative of a healing process and this is premised on the assumption that our full participation in all human affairs – food, use of materials and resources, planning, organising, arranging our space, the development of appropriate technology and science, education and health – is a guarantee and a precondition for successful outcomes. It is difficult in the present circumstances to talk about equality or justice in any meaningful way. This is idle talk. There is no equality and there is no justice. We should rather assert the first principle of participation, which really means to be part of the whole. Is this not what it is all about?

Mario Molinari  
10 October 2013

## **THE FOOD DIMENSION**

### **Food Jobs & Wars**

‘Victoria reveals how tea united east and west, triggered wars and helped us win them.’ Victoria Wood’s Nice Cup of Tea.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Introduction**

The focus on food responds to a need to reach out. We need a new start, and starting with food raises hopes for a better today. Not only ‘food’, of course, but also all the activities that go with it including water, energy and land activities. The scope of these activities is further enhanced by the five Food Pledges of the Overview (Figure 1). In general, it could be said that thanks to food we could achieve the twin goals of a fair and equitable world. Backing up this claim is the one pledge to make food the entry point for joyful and compassionate living.

Food is our first port of call enabling us thereafter to establish all other life connections. Our capacity to do so however is impaired by an adverse social and economic system.

#### **Economies of War**

Tea is not unique in getting us into trouble. Biscuits too can unleash wars. The planet is in the grip of ever-tighter deadlines. The production costs involved in the atomised operation of biscuits as described below, which include mining, energy and transportation costs, are immense. That biscuits are made or should be made by a consortium of many countries spread over five continents verges on the insane. Any glitch in the assembly line – land disputes, crop failure, quantities and specifications – can all too easily give rise to strife, conflict and war.

Take a typical biscuit-containing chocolate bar from a British shop, manufactured in a British factory. It contains sugar, cocoa, milk, whey, wheat, yeast, salt, palm oil and calcium sulphate (a nutritional additive) which are sourced from all the world. For instance, the salt may come from China; calcium sulphate from India; palm oil from Southeast Asia; whey from New Zealand; milk and wheat from the EU; sugar from the Caribbean; and, of course, cocoa for the actual chocolate from South America.<sup>2</sup>

Paraphrasing from a Quaker publication, violence is with us whenever we drink

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<sup>1</sup> [http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01rx1xc/Victoria\\_Woods\\_Nice\\_Cup\\_of\\_Tea\\_Episode\\_1/](http://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episode/b01rx1xc/Victoria_Woods_Nice_Cup_of_Tea_Episode_1/)

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.foodsecurity.ac.uk/food/food-global.html>

from a plastic cup or beer can. Drilling and mineral extraction intensify worldwide. Land, deserts and seas are grabbed and exploited every day. Human and physical resources are incidental and expendable.

Land matters caused German President Horst Koehler to resign from his position in 2010 and this because of remarks he made during a visit to Afghanistan.

A country of our size, with its focus on exports and thus reliance on foreign trade, must be aware that military deployments are necessary in an emergency to protect our interests, for example, when it comes to trade routes, for example, when it comes to preventing regional instabilities that could negatively influence our trade, jobs and incomes.<sup>3</sup>

Is promotion or demotion the outcome for daring to speak out? Is the guy a hero or a villain? One has always to rely on the luck of the draw for these things. Ultimately, your job and mine are on the line for they depend on the vagaries of a totally estranged world out there that has you worried sick about how to pay bills and a mortgage. And you really need 'that' job! Still, even if we give the then German President the benefit of doubt how extraordinary that he should talk of a 'country of our size'! Is there an optimum size for a country like Germany that would appease everyone? Is what you gain at the expense of another country real gain? Is the state of 'emergency' permanent?

It is not even a question of history repeating itself; it is a continuum. "We cannot make war without trade, nor trade without war." (Jan Pieterszoon Coen, Dutch colonialist, seventeenth century.)<sup>4</sup> Now more than ever, the economy as we know it is characterised by 'growth' meaning not just that a country is going through a period of expansion but that growth itself is the sole condition of trade and commerce. That is, plain profit is boring; the much sought-after new standard is now a whopping maximisation of profit. The race is on.

What exactly grows is perhaps plain to see, and provisionally the conclusion can be drawn that a growth economy, an endless expansion, is the same as a war economy. Wars wipe the desk clean in preparation for the next redrawing of maps. 'Military deployments' and the use of force are not the weapons of last resort; rather they are interwoven in the economic fabric.

### *Wars as a Fixture*

Here we touch a raw nerve. Trade, industry, science and technology, the balance sheet, logistics, media reporting, military and civilian deployments, the combat zone... it is impossible to separate them. **Our jobs depend on the rollercoaster of**

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<sup>3</sup> <http://recentissuetoday.com/headline/2792/german-president-horst-koehler-resigns-from-position/>

<sup>4</sup> Cited in *The Ascent of Money*, Fergusson, Niall, London, Penguin Books, 2009, p. 135.

**wars.** We end up supporting them out of choice or necessity.

Who do you work for? Who are you dealing with on a day-to-day basis? Which central bank doles out the cash? And talking of which, what are you being paid for, what do you spend your pocket money on, who benefits from your spending habits and so on? Connect a few dots and you can easily establish that each job is linked to wars and war-like activities (mining, drilling, communications, services) at home and abroad. All dots will take you to the riches and resources of the land. Wars are a fixture and a thorn on our side.

**In plain English, no wars no jobs.** If we identify this as a problem to grapple with then what it is suggested we do is to renew, value and make good use of the resources of the land. That is why they are called resources.

### *Gauging our War Support*

In light of the above, to have a ‘proper’ job acquires a rather different meaning. The case could be made that to campaign against wars (‘when bombs are dropping’) or to give them the extra oxygen of publicity by mounting campaigns all year round misses the point altogether. **Here too, in plain English, we cannot campaign against what we support every day.**

Can campaigners do better than that? It is an all-consuming fulltime job, to say the least, to campaign, object and agitate, and then, in effect, pay our dues to the upkeep of wars. Simply put: **1)** everything is to be paid for and/or funded nowadays; **2)** campaigns do not come cheap; and **3)** campaigns fall into that category of consumption of resources that gives war its justification. So, what are we left with? One possibility is to follow the money trail all the way, leaving no stone unturned, to see how money is sourced at one end and shed at the other.

A campaigner is a good consumer, for consume you must, and consumption simply means that what you do, plan, purchase, procure, print or parade<sup>5</sup> in pursuit of your aim has a price tag, a material cost, attached to it. A small or large budget, a donation or windfall, deep or shallow pockets, the



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<sup>5</sup> Photo opportunity of Greenpeace protesters as they prepare to ascend the Shard in London. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-23266281>. At a glance and from top to toe, the climbers are sporting gear and harnesses well worth some £400 apiece. All equipment will no doubt carry multiple ‘country of origin’ labels with their additional or external costs.

money you spend powers the economy, prevalently a war economy, that will in turn reward you handsomely with what you spend your money on.

From money falling out of a money tree to a heartily spending spree. Should Greenpeace not be a bit more cautious on all money matters? The lesson to learn here is that the greater our addition to resources and funding the louder the bang of wars. This alone should sound off an alarm not so much to have you desist from your overall aim but to make you rethink strategy. Or, if 99.99% of the population campaigns and of this 99.99% campaigns against, then the time may have come for a think twice moment.

Campaigning cannot be justified. It is humdrum and creates a false impression of them and us. Under campaigning, we can enlist various forms of protest, lobbying and demonstrations. How do the groups and organisations involved perform individually and collectively? Have the horrors of war abated? Is demilitarisation on our to-do list?

One characterisation of the peace groups is that they partake of the spoils of war. They position themselves according to their chosen share of the action. They qualify themselves as pressure groups. They resist and oppose. They all cover one hotspot or warzone each given their a priori piecemeal approach to conflict. You may campaign, yes, but where are the signs that 'peace' is gaining ground?

Moreover, in the 80's and 90's it was highly fashionable to boycott the individual country and product. Things always move on and we now face a new reality. As we have established, thanks to teas, biscuits, mountaineering hats, honey and even a humble lasagne everything is the produce of at least half a dozen countries. Pity we miss out on boycotting them all! Certain things never change. Today the trend is to stop, end, ban, curb and rehash anything under the sun, and still the penny has not dropped. Nothing of that will ever work. As things stand, what you do as a young or seasoned campaigner can only work in favour of the very system you purport to hold culpable. The inescapable fact is that wars are accidents waiting to happen, and we elect to hasten them. One thing to bear in mind is that we are always part of the system we happen to describe.

### *The Peace Dividend*

Here are some basic questions. Do you want a proper job? Would you like one? What are your plans for the future? Do you want to stand tall and proud? Are you resolute in your determination to expose how this wretched system works? In your determination to seek justice? Fine, you can do all that and more, and the only way to do it is to run a different agenda not the one laid down by the powers that be. What sort of agenda would that be? It is always good to keep an eye on the economy (of which more below). We could campaign for real and roll out a programme of work creation designed to replace what the warfare economy has to offer in terms of jobs and services.

**It used to be called ‘peace dividend’.** Suffice to say, what qualifies a different agenda is the value we put on human and physical resources accompanied, lest we lose sight of them, by the ensuing social and economic activities that translate into the flows of goods and services both within and between countries.

### *Things to Remember*

No country ever would go to war without brutalising its citizens first into believing that wars are necessary. The process of demolition begins at home and in the workplace. People are restrained to submission. What is at stake here is your resolve. The core strategy must change if the problems as described affect us at such deep level as to neutralise us. We experience violence, conflict and war in our veins and arteries, right now. It is that close. The trade routes and spaghetti junctions show a trail of fear, carnage and despair. Wars or else... Mandatory campaigning is not the answer. In a sense we do not know what peace is. That is why we need a fresh start.

## **U Start with Food** **– A *University of Food* Project**

‘U Start with Food’ is an all-inclusive proposal to institute a virtual University of Food. Inclusiveness relates to all matters food. No aspect of living is left untouched by *it!* Pledges and principles underpin the proposal and these in turn lead to the formulation of a new social contract. (Figure 1: Overview)

The model for the food university is or will be that of the University of the Third Age (<http://www.u3a.org.uk/>) “... self-help, self-managed lifelong learning co-operatives for older people no longer in full time work, providing opportunities for their members to share learning experiences in a wide range of interest groups and to pursue learning not for qualifications, but for fun.” Equally, the proposed food university will pursue - for fun and for real – matters relating to food and resources. (See Figure 4) Food starts it all. Conversely and arguably, all the rest is a false start. Food is the real socio-economical driver and prime mover thanks to which we can:

- create communities
- shape the economy
- promote learning

This would not be possible without further reference to the Pledges of the Overview, a total of five, which are highlighted here:

### 1) Do Food

- 2) Study Food
- 3) Make Food the Entry Point for Joyful and Compassionate Living
- 4) Let Food Inform the Social and Economic Function of the Family Group
- 5) Privilege Food and Realise the Beautiful Worlds of Work Affections and Relationships

If food is implied, then what the five ‘Do’, ‘Study’, ‘Make’, ‘Let’ and ‘Privilege’ actions of the pledges amount to is a powerful set of instructions that can form the backbone to social cohesion and responsibility. In other words, the pledges stand for *the* different agenda.

Within food, there is little call for innovation and foresight (for ‘innovation’ see Figure 4). There is no zeitgeist in food. Rather food is the synthesis and the means to achieving a learned community served by an attendant economy. With the spotlight on trade and the economy, the peace dividend can inform the type of economy that we deem is best for us and for this, in all likelihood, we do not even have to reinvent the wheel. The wheel of fortune is on our doorstep. Every country, region and locality needs farming, construction, engineering and manufacturing. In that order.

Work and employment will make all this possible. As for the scale, this is neither big nor small. We can just take ‘small’ to mean that we have to make a start aimed at linking all forms of production at the local, regional and national level. Putting the land to its intended uses provides the baseline. Food and farming will lead the way given their capacity to shape our living and working environments. Food leads, making it easier for the others to follow. Having established the principle of the baseline, we can then concurrently oversee the other stages – the construction, the engineering, and an educational system to boot. Food is the baseline, or it may even be a bit more than that. **Food is the *fons et origo* of all human knowledge, of our culture and traditions, of trade, ecology and science.**

### *Food ‘Security’*

Food ‘security’ is the fear of food shortages, of lights going out, and of water taps running dry. The lack of a food education and knowledge is a condemnation of our modes of living. Food, Energy and Water (or FEW) will be amongst the foundation subjects taught at the proposed Food University. Given that every country, or conceivably every country, had in the past faced, is facing now and will be likely to face soon problems associated with food or energy or water shortages, or FEW shortages, is a FEW education not the answer to our self-inflicted woes? Should a FEW education of the essentials of life not be part of our upbringing (family structures) and broader education (social structures)? Is FEW the way forward? And is it not the case that More is FEW? **The answer to the question of**

More is  
FEW !!

**whether we can and should have a food, energy and water education will determine the outcome of the wellbeing of nations.**

### *Give Food a Chance*

Is this small change? A frivolity? Compare this (for compare we must) to what we have to face up to most of the times. The shopping list reads:

- the horrors we are capable of
- food and water wars
- a fearsome economy
- fragile social structures
- hungry cities

So is food as in food-for-good and as a socio-economical transformer still such a trivial matter? There is nothing trivial about food if in her book, *A Taste of War*, Lizzie Collingham rightly sets out to explore the ‘often overlooked dimension’ of food to our understanding of WW2. For the author, war is almost an acquired taste; resources and food are something to do ‘battles’ with; food itself is elevated to the ranks of no less than ‘an engine of war’, ‘an instrument of war’.

But not the only instrument. Wars need a trigger and mundane pretext such as provided by food and resources, and they need too a moral, high ground justification. There is a further warning in Collingham’s depiction of our propensity to come to blows at every twist and turn, **“All the major combatants fought the Second World War in the name of a better future”**. (Emphasis added.) It is a terrifying thought but the ‘future’ often turns out to be a more powerful war cry than the past and present. Beware of such a future! Maybe, all the combatants wanted was no more than the prospect of a beautiful day ahead. Maybe.

(Back to the lower plane of existence, and parenthetically, we are reminded again by the author that the shortages of fertilizers resulting from the competing demands of both agriculture and the factory production of explosives posed the dilemma of either feeding hungry mouths or hungry conveyor belts.)

In *Food Wars*, Tim Lang and Michael Heasman are unequivocal about their views whilst inviting caution about possible outcomes, “There is some way to go in the Food Wars before there is Food Peace.”<sup>6</sup> The desire for peace will never be realised for so long as we contrast it with the horrors of war. Break away from war and peace and set out an agenda that would give food a chance.

### *In Balance*

There is a recognisable balance in the natural world and we continue to disrupt it.

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<sup>6</sup> Lang, Tim and Heasman, Michael. *Food Wars*, Earthscan, London, Sterling (VA), 2004, p. 10.

Disruption amounts again to an act of war. In *Your Planet Needs You* Jon Symes reminds us of how loose are the connections that link us all, and this only because we turn our back to positive ties and connections.

In the early 50's, the Dayak people of Borneo suffered a malarial outbreak. The World Health Organisation (WHO) sprayed large amounts of DDT to kill the mosquitoes that carried the malaria. The mosquitoes died, the malaria declined, but there were unexpected side effects. The first was that the rooves of the people's houses began to fall on their heads: the DDT had also killed a parasitic wasp that had previously controlled thatch-eating caterpillars. Worse, the DDT-poisoned insects were eaten by geckoes, which were eaten by cats. The cats started to die, the rats flourished, and the people were threatened by outbreaks of typhus and plague. To cope with these problems, which it had itself created, the WHO was obliged to parachute 14,000 live cats into Borneo. Operation Cat Drop, now almost forgotten at the WHO, is a graphic illustration of the interconnectedness of life, and how little we seem to understand of this.<sup>7</sup>

Understanding is paramount but, no, we do not seem to care. There can be no doubt that we need to turn our attention to the overall dimensions of food and of the entire food chain. All in all, food is big in all senses of the word. In particular, the food proposal as submitted provides the necessary term of reference aimed at bringing individuals and groups together. It suggests looking at food, water, plants, well-being, climate and rocks as one. One conveys the idea of belonging and, the same thing, stands for the environment of which we are part.

There is vitality in food. The aim of the proposed Food University is to establish a core food strategy – the new agenda or strategy – channelling the goodwill of many as we anchor ourselves to the ground we stand on and to the life force represented by food. Lest we forget the 'often overlooked dimension' of food to our understanding of how we live and work. Lest we forget any imbalance.

Food is the driver, the pointer, the code name, the backdrop and the capstone. Get the ecosystem on a spin. Get the big locomotive going and all the rest will follow in its wake.

### *A Simple Proposition*

**Food of course is also nutrition and dinner parties but someone must grow that food, harvest that water and generate that energy in the first place.** Done. It must be said, you would need to strain the sinews of your imagination to the limit to call all *this* (i.e. getting things done, getting all on board, leading from the front)

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<sup>7</sup> Symes, Jon. *Your Planet Needs You*, Your Planet Needs You, Chester, Cheshire, 2006, p. 12.

much of a challenge. Of course, we all want a challenge but this is a doddle! That is the point, it is our job! The fact is that food is a simple proposition and the baseline for human understanding.

To do and to learn capture the essence of living. To do is to bring into existence and to learn is to order, arrange and juggle in the mind. Then start again. This is what it is meant by 'Do Food' and 'Study Food' in the Pledges and throughout as you may have the opportunity to appreciate.

Food opens up a world of possibilities. This is the beautiful world, rising just above the ordinary world, of work, affections and relationships. Looking for volunteers, interns? Is this something up your street? With 'U Start with Food' we can hope to address many of our social and economic ills.

Any one for tea and biscuits?



## FOOD BIRTHING

Hope Takes Roots  
(A notice seen in rundown Detroit)

A point in space is space itself.

### Foreword

That food is born, hence ‘food birthing’, may be a novel way of looking at food. The topic merits this dedicated Foreword. Birthing precedes growth and we should be looking at the act of birthing with renewed intent. The idea that the economy grows is pernicious; if it grows it is only at the expense of something else. It is far better to see and learn that food grows in a favourable medium. The fact is that food and plants grow, **unaided**. An example of non-human meddling is provided by rivers and oceans teeming with fish, foodstuff and many creatures. Should this not be something to be grateful for? Food grows, literally. We see that happening, and equally we should see that our task, duty and responsibility is to maintain the overall fertility of the land and rivers. Fertility is a sign of a resilient system. It is not a question of more or improved fertility; rather, as in any balancing act, we should ensure that we do not stress the fertility level necessary for living.

To put things in perspective where there is growth there is decay and where there is life there is death. In Dr George McGavin’s words ‘Life relies on death’. (BBC documentary *After Life: The Strange Science of Decay*.) The economy itself is subject to the same life and death cycles (also known as peak and trough or boom and bust cycles) but, really, since it believes it can grow forever, it is dangerously trapped in a delusional self-image of eternal and immortal youth. And with immortality comes an aura of invincibility.

By all means, let us celebrate life in full together with all life renewal cycles, and let us celebrate food. There are happy moments and memories to be had. We talk of babies and puppies that are born, of us being born equal and of animals free, of new stars showing in the sky for the first time, and of new dawns and hopes, and even of the birth and the making of a nation.

#### *From inanimate to animate*

Everything seems to point in that direction of birthing, of rising from a condition of inanimate state. Does food not rise from the ground and grow? And prior to that if it grows, is it not the case that food is also born? Does food have parents? What is likely to happen then is that food is born, then it grows, then it causes to eat, then it feeds... Each time, for each food and for each element, what we are witnessing is a single act of foodbirth. Let us take full advantage of the opportunities life has in store for us to pause, reflect and celebrate.

## Introduction

We need to reveal food to the world. What makes this very word special is the central position food occupies in our vast universe. Discover what this particular word is made of, where it comes from, whether it is related to other words, what it can teach us. Look for connections all the time by attaching words to what they purport to signify and also dissect them into their single bits or letters that come together to form the whole. We must revive words and salute them. The recommendation here is to read and study them for they reveal inner worlds. For best results turn into an undercover word detective!

## A Special Word

To the untrained eye, words seem to be all over the place – miles away from each other, not clear what they mean, esoteric, too long, too short, true/false, trouble-makers and downright dangerous. The meaning of words is concealed. You may stumble on them and discover that some you can say, others you are not allowed to. It is a matter of knowing what we say and how we say it; say words and you say minefield; not so much a war of words but we may even go to war for words, and logos and brand names.

But not all words are the same. Fortunately for us, some are better than others and a good word (always) goes a long way. Words have several magical properties and many secrets. They are connected to all other words, sometimes in mysterious ways, in the same way that our actions are. Words make words all the time as typified by a conversation – just another magic word, ‘hello’, is enough to break the ice and open the floodgates to more words and greetings. The title of a book, poem or song, say ‘Pandora’, is meant to be illustrative of the full contents of the artistic composition. Similarly, here a single enchanting word ‘food’ stands out in our arrangement of words. It dominates the page in ‘The Language of Food’ illustration, Figure 2, sitting in the middle like a queen bee or a blob or headword signifying its importance. All the other words – soil, flowers, health, art, maths – are satellite words explaining the central word.

The sense relation existing between the headword and the explanation words can be visualised in different ways. A few examples will suffice here.

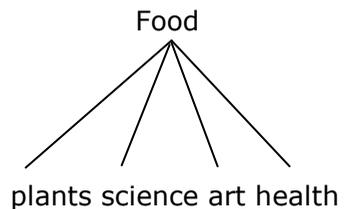
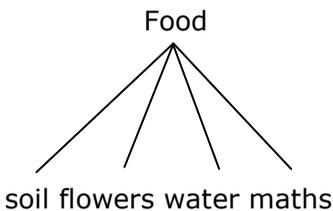


Figure 2 equips food with 36 definitions ranging from food being water, soil and plants to food being the staging of the seasons. That food is art, as we have seen, and also ‘maths’ can be explained in terms of wanting to establish the ever-present link between food and our physical world. There is more to it, but in simple terms we need math to measure our plot and allotment and measure our strengths too! The total number of food definitions in this booklet approaches one hundred. Far too many, and are they necessary? The definitions are necessary because food is reviled and besmirched, and the whole operation here is to rescue food from its discredit.

With this operation still underway, what is really special about food, what can such a word tell us, where does it come from? Can we pinpoint its birthplace? Is food an act of creation with a small or big ‘c’? This is what we set out to explore next and along the way, we will also establish what connects food to other cryptic words and much more.

### *Definitions*

According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) food is, ‘What is taken into the system to maintain life and growth, and to supply the waste of tissue;’. The definition is wanting on two counts. First, when it comes to maintaining life and growth (no less!) food is in good company – air, water and carbon also maintain and support life. Food is not unique in this respect.

Second, the OED does not say, for instance, that food is the produce of the soil which would arguably account for the actual definition. Does any ready-meal fit this soil description? Do supplements, additives and colorants? Does any substance nourish us in the same way? Would it have not been better to say ‘The produce of the soil that is taken into the system...’? Of course not all types of soil are suitable, but here we have to draw a line. Definitions are always slippery and the OED one bears witness to that. The omission, however, is significant.

From the same dictionary, words that are associated with food are ‘aliment, nourishment, provisions, victuals.’ We can satisfy ourselves by saying that food is the seed and offspring of life. In particular, a word like food is like a password or simple mechanism that gives you access to the secrets of many other words. And one ought to remember too that words have ‘roots’. Interesting. Do these words really long to ‘put down’ roots? Could it be that deep down these roots are holding hands? Can we postulate a rootstock of words? All this will be revealed next in ‘Food and Pasta’ and ‘Aliment and Old’!

### *Food and Pasta*

So the bombshell! The revelation! Food and pasta are the same word! You did not know that, of course. They look and feel different anyway but this is only because over time most words undergo several changes and transformations. Of course, one is an English word the other Italian (but this only to confuse us, truth is that words

do not really ‘belong’ to a particular language or country<sup>8</sup>) but they stem from the same root word as shown below. Also their meaning is different; pasta is only one type of food whereas food is the headword and the collective noun for all provisions. Words are playful. They simply evolve.

The proof is in the eating. The root is simply shared among many other Indo-European languages as shown here in the Douglas Harper’s Online Etymology Dictionary (OE):

food (n.) 

Old English foda “food, nourishment; fuel,” also figurative, from Proto-Germanic \*fodon (cf. Gothic fodeins), from Germanic root \*fod-, equivalent of PIE \*pa- “to tend, keep, pasture, to protect, to guard, to feed” (cf. Greek pateisthai “to feed;” Latin pabulum “food, fodder,” panis “bread,” pasci “to feed,” pascare “to graze, pasture, feed,” pastor “shepherd,” literally “feeder;” Avestan pitu- “food;” Old Church Slavonic pasti “feed cattle, pasture;” Russian pishcha “food”).<sup>9</sup>

Do take a peep at all the action verbs above whose importance will be further highlighted. Also, pastor is literally what or he who feeds, or the feeder. This is quite amazing in view of the word’s current meaning. We are mostly familiar with the specialised meaning of pastor as ‘shepherd of souls’ and nowadays of street pastor as well. Let us follow briefly the development of this other word and then draw some general conclusions.

pastor (n.) 

late 14c. (mid-13c. as a surname), “shepherd,” also “spiritual guide, shepherd of souls,” from Old French pastor, pastur “herdsman, shepherd” (12c.), from Latin pastorem (nominative pastor) “shepherd,” from pastus, past participle of pascere “to lead to pasture, set to grazing, cause to eat,” from PIE root \*pa- “to tend, keep, pasture, feed, guard, protect” (see food). The spiritual sense was in Church Latin (cf. Gregory’s “Cura Pastoralis”). The verb in the Christian sense is from 1872.

What we have here is a cluster of words that say the same thing using food as the lead word. A need arises to express something and this need is met by a new or an existing and modified word. And food expresses something special. **What happens is that food is born then it grows then it causes to eat then it feeds... Each time,**

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<sup>8</sup> Words enter or leave language almost at will. They may have all started as ‘foreign’ words at one point.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed\\_in\\_frame=0&search=food&searchmode=none](http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?allowed_in_frame=0&search=food&searchmode=none).

### for each food, what we are witnessing is an act of foodbirth.

To return to the dictionary entries, PIE refers to the early or Proto Indo-European languages giving us the root of known words that have come down to us. Sometimes the origin is assumed and we put a star (\*) in front of the word as in \*fodon, \*fod- and \*pa-. On the one hand, food and fodder, and on the other ‘pasci’, ‘pascare’, ‘pasti’ the latter having also entered the English language as pastor, pasture and, why not, pastiche too.

It does not stop at food and pasta. Food and bread or ‘panis’ provide a further example of distant cousins in the lineage of words. ‘Panis’ can first be recognised in panettone and then pastry, or store room for bread and general food provisions, in pannier – original meaning bread basket but now bags that sit across the back of a bike – and furthermore in ‘panini’, the latest addition to English, corresponding to a small Italian-style bread roll or baguette.

Other pasta words include ‘paste’ a mixture of flour (or clay) and water directly from pasta. One more to go, and ‘pasta’ is ‘meal’ in Italian and the word is also recognisable via the French ‘repas’ in the English ‘repast’ denoting here a ‘light’ meal between meals. Hmm.

### Food and Nature

There is earthiness in words. They have real grit and roots running deep and across the living ground, a ground seen as the provider and feeder. Forage for roots and learn history, geology and mineralogy. Bump into them and see what you can make of another root and batch of words: ‘native’, ‘nativity’, ‘innate’, ‘nature’, ‘nation’... Do these words share the same root? Including nature and nation? It must be a coincidence! How is that possible? What else is ‘growing’ from these common ancestral roots? From this ancestral rootstock? Can we establish a link, a connection, between food and nature? Let us dig deeper down for roots.

‘Nature’ has come down to us from *nāt*, past participle stem of *nascī* to be born (Source: OED). The second part of the term (‘nāt’ plus ‘ure’) is the future form *urus-a* of the same verb giving us ‘what will be’ or in the definition of Etimo Online, ‘that which is to be born’ or the ‘force that generates’ (as translated from Italian).<sup>10</sup> It is indeed the life force, the seed and produce, all that which grows and has inherent power which is the meaning we attribute to the carrying capacity of the soil, its fertility and fecundity. It is the ‘that’ which is being born.

The secrets of one word: past, present and future. Fused. **There is a sense of a future, a becoming, that belongs to us all.** We should jump up and down with joy at the news. We should sing-along. If neither of that then, let it be known that food and nature are the act of birthing of the living soil. Could it be that all words are linked? Our investigation continues.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.etimo.it/?term=natura&find=Cerca>

*Aliment and Old*

So the bombshell! The revelation! Aliment and Old are the same word! And you did not know this one either. Bye the bye, this is not the same ‘old’ as in not new or original but old in the sense of growing old, ageing.

As we have seen, aliment is another word for food (OED) but the term is not commonly used in English. The exceptions are alimentary, alimentation and, a more obscure one, alimony (‘allowance to a wife from a husband’s estate’). Expect a word like food to have many different source-words or roots<sup>11</sup> and the root ‘al-’ in aliment (words ending in ‘ment’ – document, monument – express a condition of the verb) is from ‘alere’.

The floodgates open again. Let us consult the Online Etymology Dictionary. We can move from aliment to old in three easy steps.

aliment (n.) 

“food,” late 15c., from Latin alimentum “nourishment,” in plural, “food, provisions,” from alere “to nourish” (see alimentary).

alimentary (adj.) 

1610s, from Medieval Latin alimentarius “pertaining to food,” from Latin alimentum “nourishment,” from alere “to nourish, rear, support, maintain,” from PIE root \*al- “to grow, nourish” (see old).

old (adj.) 

Old English ald (Anglian), eald (West Saxon) “aged, antique, primeval; elder, experienced,” from West Germanic \*althas “grown up, adult” (cf. Old Frisian ald, Gothic alpeis, Dutch oud, German alt), originally a past participle stem of a verb meaning “grow, nourish” (cf. Gothic alan “to grow up,” Old Norse ala “to nourish”), from PIE root \*al- “to grow, nourish” (cf. Greek aldaino “make grow, strengthen,” althein, althainein “to get well;” Latin alere “to feed, nourish, bring up, increase,” altus “high,” literally “grown tall,” almus “nurturing, nourishing,” alumnus “fosterling, step-child;” Old Irish alim “I nourish”).

Quite a lot to take in. To simplify, food is a blob and a bee. Food is an aggregate of activities and components that continuously shape and reshape life. Food makes a clean sweep. It is formative and transformative. Let us all harvest this rich crop of ‘food’ and ‘aliment’ words and let the occasion be a convivial one. This bonanza and rich crop includes nature, birthing, grow, make grow, feed, fuel, tend, guard, rear, support, maintain, set to grazing, lead to pasture, cause to eat, protect, make bread, nourish, strengthen, get well, bring up, increase, foster, high in the literal

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<sup>11</sup> The PIE \*ed- is the root of ‘edible’, or what is fit to be eaten, and of the verb ‘to eat’.

sense of growing tall, elder, adult, nurturing...

All the ingredients of life are there. To 'do food' is the first step and the first pledge of Figure 1: Overview, and **'do' is the verb of action that includes all the meanings of the verbs above.** To do food is not a fad nor is it something you could easily make light of or brush aside. Rather the *prima facie* evidence is that food is the springboard of life.

### *Assisted Food Birthing*

This is not what we normally tell ourselves about the virtues of food. Rather we are told the virtues of rubbish. Instead we need to up the stakes. We need to assert the roundness of food in order to assert the fullness of life. Down to earth *and* from the earth. The Bible, unlike the Oxford English Dictionary, is more factual about food, '... plants for people to use (or cultivate), to bring forth food from the earth...' (Psalm 104.14; NRSV).

There appears to be plenty of the stuff in the Bible. That might have been the case but in those biblical times meals had only to be eaten and drinks drunk for this to presage that something dreadful was going to hit you. Dealing with the Psalm in question, here there are plants to be made use of for they can 'bring forth food from the earth.' Food comes from plants and the soil, a point worth reiterating, and not in modern parlance from the fridge or the belly of a home delivery van.

Of further interest is the word 'cultivate', which in NRSV is given as an alternative to the verb 'use' (footnote only). Cultivation marks a shift in food sourcing. In days gone by, hunters and gatherers could afford, with some toil, to pick what was available in a world of relative abundance. Rivers and forests were their habitats. Farming and cultivation changed this pattern for the two practices implied a degree of planning and organisation. People started thinking in terms of tomorrow and indeed of long winters and droughts. Provisions were stored. Settlements grew in size as a result of the development of many forms of exchange, barter and trade. Hunting, gathering and/or farming the remit was still the same – it was to bring forth something from the soil and from the gushing forth waters.

Clearly, food is our job but any reference to food procurement is rare in the Bible. That is odd since it may well account for our 'sin' or fall from grace, a point missed by biblical scholars and commentators alike. Can this negligence, if this is what it is, ever be justified? Do we ignore food at our peril? Does everything in the Bible not rest heavily on creation, beginnings and the buzz of the earth yielding up its fruits? The tree of life seems to indicate a forest economy, an economy that was probably under threat. More generally, even a cursory reading of the Bible shows that everything associated with food, or almost everything, ends in tears. That last supper seems to have upset many.

Indeed, food spells trouble. Yet the first impression is that everything is okay. We learn that food is there for the taking (fine); we should show gratitude towards it

(agreed); and remember God the Creator made all that possible (and here is the first salvo – it is not very helpful if we attribute everything to him). The Genesis tells the story.

God said, “See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.” (Genesis: 30, 31; NRSV)

That settles it then. Dinner served! Well, not quite, and we need to find out why. But first, why was God the Creator so keen to pose as a munificent Giver as well and, second, what had befallen people that they could not feed themselves? Were good trees now producing only thorny fruits? Had rivers run dry? Even if this was not the case, does it necessarily follow that you have to raise starvation to the status of religion?

So according to Genesis, the plants, beasts and birds were there for the taking (thank God) but, alas, in a sense they were **not** there (thank God not). How could we explain this apparent paradox? We could explain it by saying that, in the real world, there is no ‘given-given’ and there is no such thing as a free takeaway. To be a Creator is one thing, one can see the point, but where does that leave us unless we step in and become co-Creators ourselves? Would we want one Creator to do everything for us? How can we ever grasp the act of giving if we do not play ourselves a prominent role in the exchange of gifts?

Feeding hungry mouths when sorely gaping is not the way forward (might one day food banks make a dramatic appearance?) whether in the form of manna from the sky or in answer to the petition ‘Give us this day our daily bread’. Where did that bread come from? And those fishes and that wine? Those poor sods must have been chronically deprived of food to require to be provided for on a daily basis. Even a few small crumbs seem like jumbo loaves when you have been kept waiting that long. Were miracles needed seven days a week?

The confusion seems to arise from mixing up miracles with mirages, and this is not helpful. Can we sensibly decouple the act of creating from that of using and consuming? Is the biblical account really a false beginning, not quite what you would expect from a proper genesis? Will some people end up being more deserving than others? Poor or not poor and the many food or land issues hanging over our heads today what can we effectively do to rise up to the challenge? It will have to be something special, something we do *ourselves*, if what we want is to ‘support’ and ‘maintain’ life and ‘the breath of life’.

Can we settle the matter amicably and call this ‘something’ our wit and input? Our tending and guarding? Can we begin from the beginning and assist that birthing

of plants, birds and creepy crawlers? Each and every one? Is the goal we set for ourselves to plant and nurse? To feed and bring up? From whence do we derive strength and vigour? Would our presence and co-presence ensure the renewal of life? Can we create and co-create? Is renewal symbolised by the ‘bread of life’? What is our job? What is our remit? Can we build on observation and experience to see how the world changes with us? Is our word our bond?

Unfortunately, for most people food technologies are lethal. Big and dominant, they create – no doubt the wrong creation – instability and insecurity. For most people a growth or war economy is life threatening. Again, this is the wrong growth in the hands of the wrong people. It may be that, ultimately, we have but ourselves to blame for this state of affairs. There is a compelling case here for creating an image of food evoking an alternative method of ‘food birthing’. The image we want to create is a delightful one of a food to be born and to be grown. A different birthing is therefore possible, a renaissance, and with it a different growth too.

**Let it be that the nature of people is to grow in confidence and stature.  
Growing tall.**

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The world is flat. We live in the two dimensional world of the flat page (reading, writing), flat screen (workplace, media) and flat packs (home, office). It is a sterile world. Nothing germinates there. Rather we need to lift things off the page and add the third, pop-up dimension of our full participation in all matters human.

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One word ‘culture’ applies to both the cultivation of the land (agriculture, viticulture) and the cultivation of the mind (a literary culture, a learned or cultivated person) - how inconsiderate to forsake one for the other.

## FOOD LINKS - COMMUNITIES

In an ideal world, we can identify the interests of the family group with those of society, the community or the state. The fortunes of one with the fortunes of the other.

Two, three or four family members living at first under one roof, later leading separate lives in as many separate postcodes.

### Introduction

You start with food for three main reasons. Thanks to food you can help **1)** create communities, **2)** shape the economy and **3)** foster learning. Things to bear in mind are: look in these pages and other sources at how food connects (illustrations like the ‘Gardening Project’, harvesting, festivals, climate, wellbeing, vigour) and at how society is geared to cut you off the land (think if you can of ever expanding conurbations) barring access to knowledge, skills, tactile experience, smell, flow, movement, and empathy. There could be no simpler way than say that starting with food pays off. Not so, and society makes its views known by enclosing the land and erecting barricades that deny access to the very means of sustenance.

Food equates to life. Is this food for thought, food for the soul or is it our daily bread? All of them. The fact is that food is inclusive and is culture. Culture is what we pick, garner and observe as we journey through life. A food culture is a telltale sign of a society at peace with itself. It would stand to reason that if we say ‘food’, well that is all there is to be said about *it*. It would be like saying, in a child-like manner, that food is food is food... A working definition is always useful but in the case of food, we may just be tempted to make an exception and go for a food definition that holds true at all times. Food is true to itself.

- food is the mainstay of communities
- food is the backbone of the economy, and
- food is the powerhouse of learning

The beauty of it is that working with one definition is a sure way of getting the others done as well. The definition is one; the applications are many.

### Families and Communities

Families and communities are chapter and verse of the same story. We can identify a community with people having a roof over their head, a piece of land under their feet, an extended family with parents, grandparents, children and grandchildren, a retinue of friends, workmates...

[continued page 27]

# THE LANGUAGE OF FOOD

One for sowing. One for harvesting. One for preparing. One for composting. Food is... an activity for one and many. Food is... language, or the profusion of true 'is' statements.

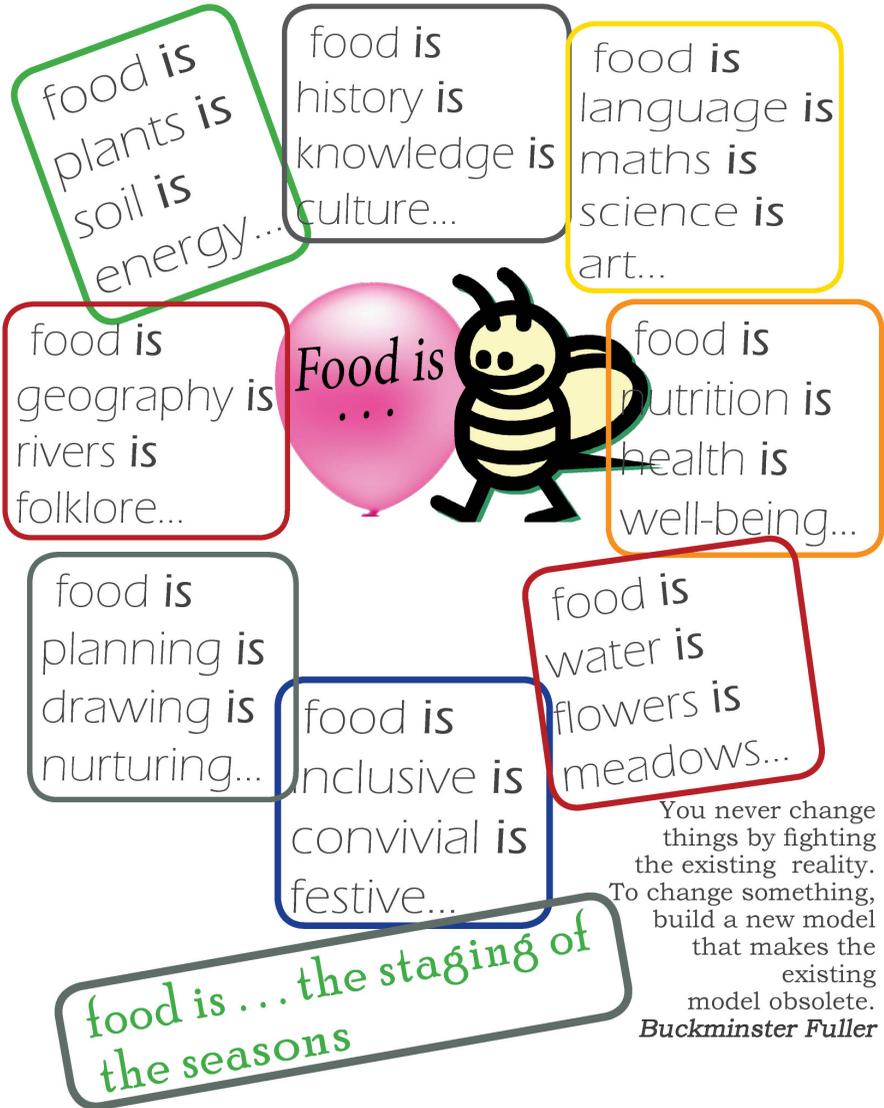


FIGURE 2: THE LANGUAGE OF FOOD

# GARDENING PROJECT

Connect & Learn  
Localise Learning  
Localise Resources

Any subject taken in depth at once relates to other subjects.

M McLuhan



*Children's Gardening is a delightful publication that illustrates learning beautifully.*

Written by Peter A Please, the publication centres on a gardening project shown as a core project whence seven other projects or subjects radiate like spokes of a wheel. Each subject is a 'branch' of knowledge with many offshoots.

Can one be proficient in all branches?

Can we afford not to?

Can we all be or aspire to be a Leonardo da Vinci?

FIGURE 3: GARDENING PROJECT

It is often the single home set among a cluster of other homes – a street, cottages, households and neighbourhoods, a hamlet or village. It is like placing each home/household at the centre of its home/household system. Each homestead at the centre of its homestead system. The social, educational and economic function of the family, community or society at large is or should be one and the same. For this, as with communities, we need to anchor families firmly to their place, their locality and their land.

### *The Land*

The land never fails to surprise us with its rich pickings. It is the topsoil where most of the growing takes place; the air above it; the plants and trees that cover it; it is dew, meadows, insects, moulds and fungi. The land is also the flow of its energy and the vigour of its life-giving waters. Said Professor Brian Cox, “I’ve heard it saying that we don’t truly understand biology until we understand water”.<sup>12</sup> Biology, or the science of life! These words repeat themselves and, at one level, it is just like saying that we are all part of this great water pool of life. Water and food! Food and water! You would be hard put to tell them apart.

And on energy, another great life essential, the co-founder of permaculture Bill Mollison had this to say, “The characteristic that typifies all permanent agricultures [hence the term ‘permaculture’] is that the needs of the system for energy, are provided by that system.” (Mollison, II: 3) This means that the needs of a system for ‘resources’ of which energy is one – so again water, topsoil, food, fodder, herbs, leaves, wind, carbon, fuel, minerals, time, tending, labour, all natural and human resources – are provided for by that system. A system is an organised whole containing all the elements attributed to that system.

This is quite illustrative because what is needed in any given system is not an external source or resource, quite the opposite, but an inner one as if mirroring one’s inner resource and strength. What are the alleged benefits of these external resources that cannot be matched by internal ones? Are the latter known and have they been adequately brought to the fore? Be that as it may, in reality, internal and external coexist and could and should be seen as being in flux as each system borders with the other.

We do not truly understand the workings of life until we understand a land-based community. All food-related activities are human activities and they both provide us with that unique opportunity of experiencing wholeness. What this means in practice is that even if the best physical conditions of a fertile land and bountiful rivers were satisfied (i.e. food is born, food grows unaided) it would still take people to play their part. Add the human resources to the physical ones, and you have a measure of the full potential of the system under consideration. In all

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<sup>12</sup> *Wonders of Life*, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/b01r1znn>

instances, it would take people to help that food grow in the same way as it would take people to harvest water and people again to generate energy, and generate goodwill. **People to grow. People to harvest. People to generate.**

The antiquated word for it is participation or, as the jargon has it, mucking in. So again here is another definition of ‘community’ that amounts to people taking part in the affairs governing the conduct of its folks. You can spot one when folks can actually get their heads around looking after each other. What is certain is that food plays a pivotal role in all we do bonding everything together.

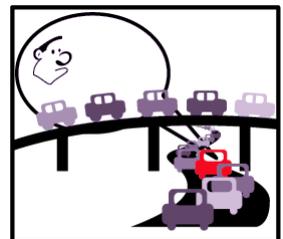
### *The Barricades: Breaking up Communities*

The term ‘communities’ is used loosely by some to indicate many varied forms of associations – the global community, the scientific one, the virtual one. Do not take anybody’s word for it but, again, Google produces 1,350,000,000 returns for the term! It would be naïve to assume that we are blessed with communities everywhere. The reality is different.

We cannot avoid economics, and the doubt over what communities are today is legitimate given the nature of the job market. Globalisation is the operative word. The whole market is highly competitive with companies being constantly in the firing line. Some are even the victims of their own success as they first innovate soon, for it is the name of the game, to be overtaken by fierce competition. The others, however, will simply struggle from the beginning in the tough IT, pharmaceutical or retail business environment in which they operate. They cease trading or go bust at a moment’s notice – anything between a few months to five or six years. Eyes are fixed on a bottom line. You are made redundant. After that you rush to train and retrain, and next set out to get another job even if that entails, for instance, getting on your bike or leaving the country. The cost of living and personal circumstances may also be a factor in your decision to leave employment as you seek better conditions for yourself.

Whilst all this is happening, in the background as it were, it is the amount of travelling in general and therefore of driving and commuting in particular that takes place on a daily basis that is exacting its heavy toll on you and on would-be communities.

Is this amount negligible, excessive? What amount are we talking about? Overall distances travelled that include land, sea and air transport may have gone up by a factor of 10, say, in the past fifty years. Having increased in the past, what do we know of future trends? Are further hikes in the pipeline? And what does that tell us about communities? In short, what with increased road traffic and chronic gridlock (ideal for fast cars), these are more likely to resemble grumpy communities on wheels and not much else.



Whether you rely on faster and faster cars or high speed trains these can never be the answer as any short-term gain is in reality offset by the frequency of commute and the lengthening of distances. Moreover, who do you say goodbye to when you set off on these long journeys? You do you leave behind? A ‘community’ that perhaps never was? ‘Enough with communities, where is the time to do anything these days!’, you might say. Fair point. Time constraints and commuting are contrary to social cohesion. More and more people are tossed back and forth all going to their workplace and back for a good part of the day unable, even if they wanted to, to coalesce or indeed form communities. People are denied the opportunity to do so.

The power of the state or the big state rests upon the dispersing and displacing of the social group. The former is hell bent on dismantling the latter piece by piece. Are all would-be communities or social groups under threat? We can possibly talk of confinement. Cast a look around, and if you live in mega cities, urban sprawls or sink estates could you actually say, hand on heart, that these are places suggestive of communal living?

Similarly, are urban settings that account for an estimated 80% to 90% of the total population of a country thriving centres of learning and production? How transient is the aforesaid urban population – who comes, who goes over any given period? How has the population changed in the past five, ten or 20 years? Are villages (rural communities?) faring any better as they struggle to retain a vestige of their former selves? Too sparse and isolated, can they really survive?

For the sake of the argument, the individual household or family unit may just present us with an instance of community, but does the instanced model not reflect the wider picture of communities on the wane? In fact, of broken communities and broken families? Where do you place your family unit or household in this picture? Is this a picture you recognise? Let us turn our attention to families at any rate to put them into the frame as well.

In an ideal world, we can identify the interests of the family group with those of society, the community or the state. The fortunes of one with the fortunes of the other. The ideal or perfect world is the starting point of social and political enquiry. In the real world, however, a widening rift exists between the state group and the family group. There are instruments and forces at play that keep the two groups apart, entrenched in opposite camps.

### *Upbringing*

With its pledges and principles (Figure 1: Overview) the whole thrust of ‘U Start with Food’ is to heal the state-family rift. The vicissitudes of the family group are described in a separate document and fairytale,



'*Upbringing!*'. Is a fairytale best suited to reveal the full extent of this rift? Is a vengeful big state out to dismantle family and community structures alike? Can we talk of near extinction of these structures, and is the state posed to launch a full-scale attack on them? The description reads:

The Story so far. It is distressing to see families disintegrating. The State cannot fix what it destroys every day. The Tale as is being told. *Upbringing!* depicts the daily interactions developing within an Idyllic Household. Three Easy Steps take you on a guided tour sightseeing this development. Obstacles, however, bar the way. **Family groups that should signpost a society in reasonable good shape are, in fact, a shadow of themselves in favour of an upbeat but brutish Big State.** An epic battle between unequals has ensued. Casualties are heavy.

### *The Essence of a Community*

The tale is available online <http://www.newliteracy.co.uk/mm-on-upbringing.html>. We know no obvious cure to our afflictions and woes. Maybe so, and yet there is no harm in having a go at fashioning families and communities where none exist. To fashion them, look no further than people's involvement in the full range of land activities. Well qualified in these matters Wendell Berry, an American farmer, novelist, poet, environmental activist, and cultural critic, might as well have said that life is a community! Not his words, of course, but in *Life is a Miracle* he wrote:

I am in the middle of a long procession, five generations: before me my grandfather and my father live in my memory, after me my son and my grandson live in my sight.<sup>13</sup>

We know where the secret lies; the secret lies in assisted food birthing. The activities associated with it include preparing the soil and planting. This would be followed by watering or irrigation. Food will grow and before long, it would be time for harvesting, trading, distribution and preparation. All year round. Our first physical attachment is with the soil and with using this work pattern and work cycle as a template for all other instances of human endeavour.

Broken communities are ghost communities. If they exist wholly and unmarked, this is only the result of an ailing imagination that projects communities devoid of any earthly form. Could we ever bring them to life to resemble something tangible? Could we revive them from their inanimate state? Here too, what unique features would best characterise them?

What we could do is to come up with a definition of an 'ideal' community, one that does not exist yet in any suggested form, and say, "**My ideal community is**

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<sup>13</sup> Berry, Wendell. *Life is a Miracle*, Washington D. C.: Counterpoint, 2001, p. 152.

**one in which people gather, make decisions and share time and experiences”.**  
The plan is laid down before us. Change occurs all the time but it is also true to say that there is a strong element of sameness in all we do. Can we really change the 'essence' of what a community is?

## **FOOD LINKS - ECONOMY**

But, beyond doubt, wealth is the relentless enemy of understanding.

J K Galbraith

For all the absence of any big economic or financial shocks for the best part of two years, substantial accidents can still happen, in a global economy that remains structurally flawed in a serious and substantive way.

Robert Peston

The extreme atomisation of work creates infinite externalities and therefore problems.

### **Introduction**

We need a proper economy and do not even have to reinvent the wheel for that. Rather every country, region and locality needs farming, construction, engineering and manufacturing.

The scale is appropriate to the task at hand, with appropriate being taken as a baseline for all forms of production that linked in a daisy-chain fashion would then go on to create the local, regional and national forms of the economy. Each form will exist and subsist by virtue of the other. On the human side of the equation, this would, by definition, be an economy cut out for the local 'locals', everywhere.

### **A Balanced Economy**

The question is mainly one of balance where at any given time individuals, traders and enterprises are producers, buyers and sellers of goods and services on a revolving basis. We know what we produce. We know what we buy. We know what we sell.

### **PRODUCERS ↔ BUYERS ↔ SELLERS**

The movement is circular. Balance is the main feature of a serviceable economy. However, this is not the case with the current economic model. Here the individual (which always means all of us, people of all ages and backgrounds) is by and large excluded from the production process. We do not know who produces what, nor are ourselves producers. Instead, mass production has taken over. Everything or almost everything is produced in large quantities and in some foreign outpost out there. Not that we can really tell but the world is flat, or at least flat packs are. Any damage or malfunction often puts these particular home or office items and many

others beyond repair and beyond recycling. We buy new again. This is a waste-producing economy.

Sidelined by production we become surplus to requirement. The price we pay for this, at all personal and social levels, is extremely high. Millions will struggle. Under classes will be formed. A big chunk of the job market is awash with jobs that tend to be unskilled, stressful, highly repetitive or short term. No one can endure them for long. They move on. The outcome is a transient workforce. Wages are depressed thanks to the maintenance of a floating pool of cheap labour – the future cauliflower pickers and toilet cleaners – from countries poorer than our own. Whole economies tend to rely on the working poor.

Prices do not stand still. ‘We may also have reached a point,’ says John Gamlin, ‘where it is no longer possible for salary and wage increases to match rising prices, let alone be in advance of them’<sup>14</sup>. Other segments of the job market may perform better but not for long. Reflecting on Gamlin’s insight, the scenarios we are presented with are damning:

- 1) Wages match price rises. Ideal but for one thing – you have entered the rat race.
- 2) Wages outpace price rises, but as night follows day just wait for the bubble to burst.
- 3) Wages lag behind. You are sucked in in a downward spiral.

Supply will always outstrip demand. This is etched on the system as can be shown by reference to some personal accounts. Your story or mine is that you are probably working your socks off having to meet a string of stringent deadlines (the ‘race’ or career path). Given that, it is more than understandable if you stock up on food and buy this and buy that when you actually have the time to do so. Your lifestyle, or perhaps to coin a more appropriate phrase your ‘workstyle’, explains what and how you buy. The invisible hand of price guides you over the array of shelves. On that visit alone, to the shop or designer outlet, you will have probably splashed out on things a bit more than you had planned for. Just in case.

There is such a thing as overproduction (see below) and there is such a thing as overspend. If you can afford it, well we all do it! (See also ‘Home Economics’ and ‘Bus Passes’ below.) What is being argued here is that we should move away from a consumers-based economy and inch our way towards a producers-based economy. A consumers’ model harms us. A never-ending growth forces our hand. According to a Deloitte report,

Consumer engagement is only one piece of the puzzle, *and it needs to move*

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<sup>14</sup> Gamlin, John. *Living Green*, newsletter of the Life Style Movement, February 2013. Chatham, Kent.

*beyond the belief that society can consume its way to sustainability.* [Emphasis added.]<sup>15</sup>

It is impossible to be sustainable if we do not participate in full in the production cycle. Full participation means forming communities, creating meaningful work for ourselves (it must be said, if not ourselves, who else?), exercising judgment and taking responsibility for our actions with regard to one another, our resources and the environment.

The dominant belief however is one of eternal, youthful ‘growth’. The wrong growth. Production is put under one roof firmly and securely being tasked with manufacturing all the things we apparently need, want and more besides. The outcome is one of inbuilt overproduction whose dubious claim to fame is a reduction of the unit cost of the goods and products we buy (for buy we must) whilst unwittingly or otherwise creating downstream a wasteland. Overproduction is synonymous with waste and a growth economy – it is, but only apparently, cheaper to buy new than to do, fix or reuse things.

The virus is spreading. A point is reached when we have no choice but buy, buy in larger quantities, buy on the spur of the moment, and buy again evermore at super and hyper markets in reverent response to the stern demands of the production and assembly lines. It consumes us. It destroys us. It reduces us to pulp, wrecks and automata. It is a war of attrition against the individual, a campaign against group identity. We could try to turn this round and, with an eye to what should be ‘our’ overall aims, say that we should crank up goodwill and cooperation on a large scale. There is little reward in feeding and being fed by a throwaway, spend-spend economy that makes us poorer and poorer.

We do not have ‘goods’, we have many ‘bads’. We do not have ‘plastic friends’, we have several ‘plastic foes’. We do not have a growth economy, we have a lesser, miserable economy.

### *The Money Inhibitor*

Money is the inhibitor and killjoy. It kills work creation and goodwill. The dream of putting farming and food-plus-energy-plus-water first seeing them as the real engine and the real mainstay of the economy can never be realised. The scale is epic for it will involve a new approach to learning and working in all sectors of human activity – farming, manufacturing, engineering, technology and science. It is in this sense that food, but not food alone, can shape the economy. Nor should we forget that it is always about us too, about our commitment, participation and resolve.

The objective is and remains that of a balanced economy – diverse, serviceable

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<sup>15</sup> Report prepared in 2010 by Deloitte Touche Tohmatsu and the World Economic Forum, *Redesigning Business Value: A Roadmap for Sustainable Consumption*.

and resilient – in which we are summoned to play a key role. In a balanced economy, the decision-making process rests upon the people involved (i.e. the ‘ideal’ community as it acts like the state, and embodies and represents it, Figure 1: Overview.) A balanced economy is on our side. An adverse economy, on the other hand, militates against us.

The pressures on time and money are immense. Targets, profit and fear prevail. This is a punitive, remorseless economy waging wars at the drop of a hat. Money is the insidious weapon of destruction. Money has the power to colour our views of the world. It has the extra power to leave many desolate, destitute and dead.<sup>16</sup> The bottom line is money or the cost of everything, and this will be discussed next in relation to both energy and water.

## **The Cost of Everything**

### Energy

No one can ever withstand the relentless sharp rise in food, energy and water prices. Everything must be paid for. The battering is severe. We have little or no say and are swept aside. It would be unrealistic to think that energy prices are going to subside in the near future, or tariffs, given their complexity, to be simplified as if to soften the blow. Shopping around is no use. The fact that our governments cannot ‘control’ energy prices is serious enough but, it must be said, this is only half of the story. They are not alone. The energy companies cannot either!

[EDF Energy] blamed the cost of wholesale energy and government charges including mandatory energy efficiency and social schemes.<sup>17</sup>

Our governments are actively complicit then, or so it appears. Energy efficiency opens up a completely different can of worms. It is ominous and ‘mandatory’ as we have seen. The truth is that energy efficiency is a big seller. As consumers, we have had hardly the time to use and enjoy our latest craze when another product comes on the market tempting us with the familiar promises of something that is cheaper, faster and over specced. Until the next one clamours for attention again. John Naish author of *Enough* hits the nail on the head.

Moves to make appliances more energy-efficient are merely a fig-leaf, because we keep buying more and more of them. And they are getting more powerful: plasma screens, for example, can use up to four times as much

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<sup>16</sup> As reported, “Pope Francis has called on world leaders to end the ‘cult of money’ and to do more for the poor, [...] Free market economics had created a tyranny, in which people were valued only by their ability to consume, [...] ‘Money has to serve, not to rule.’” <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-22551125>. Pope Francis will be wise now to set the example.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-20093259>

energy as a normal television. Sony's PlayStation 3 consumes the same amount of power as an average PC and nearly three times more than the original Xbox game system.<sup>18</sup>

A big fig-leaf indeed covering a multitude of sins. All our best efforts to be energy efficient go up in smoke. We pay upfront, pay midcourse and again handsomely later as we replace, out of choice or necessity, 'old' with new. Where is the choice? Can we withstand the onslaught? Is the holy grail of efficiency, synonymous with that of competition, the road to nowhere? We are adept at letting certain things 'grow' at the expense of harmony and goodwill. We should add to the mix that we also struggle endlessly on account of many other financial pressures known as 'bills' but for the name – insurance premiums, business rates, rents, transportation, season tickets, 'childcare' and more besides.

You feel powerless being at the complete mercy of the cruellest and most ruthless of systems. **The rise of a single penny in the cost of living is for some felt like the last straw that broke the camel's back.** It is a roller coaster from wrack to ruin. **All our best efforts are torpedoed.** Without the backing of cooperation (or balance or harmony) we can only experience massive failure.

You work harder, longer and longer hours... and still cannot get on top of things, and fall and slip back. Thus, to put the record straight, there is nothing to be proud of if all free market economics can do is to create tyranny (see footnote 16). The major global energy suppliers control energy prices. Period. We are at the receiving end of this process and for us the major culprits are oil, gas and electricity – put the price of one up and bills, wages and manufacturing costs will follow suit, albeit each to their own accord. It is only reasonable to ask and hope for a different mode of production and working environment.

### Water

Fresh water accounts for less than 3 per cent of all available water on planet earth. Will there be enough for future use? How big are regional differences and will they impact on our region? Our current levels of water consumption are extravagant. As consumers we do not have the inclination or time or desire to know where things come from. We may not care, or feel we are powerless at times of lack of rain or parched land. We have no reason for wanting to know. Water is always on tap, until such a time that it is not.

Fresh water is what we use for drinking and cooking and other domestic uses but there is a 'hidden' type of water. This is called virtual or embedded water because it can be found in all the products we handle as explained below. The following three specific water consumption areas highlight the problems associated with water.

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<sup>18</sup> Naish, John. *Enough*. Hodder & Stoughton, London, 2008, p. 108.

1) Industrial farming – Industrial farming is highly water intensive. ‘It takes between 2,000 and 5,000 litres of water to grow one kilo of rice... For just a bag of rice... It takes 1,000 litres to grow a kilo of wheat, and 500 litres for a kilo of potatoes... It takes 11,000 litres to grow the feed for enough cow to make a quarter-pound hamburger...’<sup>19</sup> 70% of all fresh water is used for irrigation. A case of water down the drain!



2) Manufacturing – Everything we touch, handle or shift has an embedded water content. This refers to water that is used in the life cycle of any product, brown goods, household, school or office products, paints, cars, power tools, machinery and lots and lots of carrier bags and packaging and widgets.

‘SAVE WATER DRINK BEER’ is cool but not when it is printed on a T-shirt. Fred Pearce again, “[Whatever you do] don’t buy one of those jokey T-shirts advertised on the Internet with slogans like ‘Save water, bath with a friend’. Good message, but you could fill roughly twenty-five bath tubs with the water needed to grow the 250 grams of cotton needed to make the shirt. It gives a whole new meaning to the wet T-shirt contest.” (Pearce, p.22)

3) Households – We use 150 litres of fresh water a day. Of this, a third is flushed down the loo. This however does not take into account the water content that goes into producing the food (say 30%) and goods (say 65%) we import (see industrial and manufacturing above). If we did, we would see our effective daily water consumption soaring to a staggering height of three thousand (3 000) litres per person/day (Defra).

This had led Gavin Neath, Senior Vice President at Unilever, to say, ‘For far too long, businesses like ours have been effectively shipping water around the globe.’ In other words, by not producing locally we nick water from other countries.

### **The Barricades: Direct, Indirect & Invisible Costs**

The real problem with food and energy security, as it is called, is that everything is done to tear you away forcibly from food and the essentials of life. You cannot form a family group or a social group or a community group (same thing) nor can you give rise to the attendant forms of the economy. The outcome is a significant shift in how and in what we produce and buy. Truth is that we no longer buy, we shop. Let us see what has changed in how and what we buy and for this we can now adjourn to the supermarket shop floor.

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<sup>19</sup> Pearce, Fred. *When the Rivers Run Dry*. London: Eden Project Books, 2006, p.21.

### *Victims of Waste*

Assuming that we can buy supermarket foods at a reasonable price this is only because we transfer the cost to a number of external services, e.g. the health and social services. “Sadly”, says Jamie Oliver, “in the next 18 minutes when I do our chat, four Americans that are alive will be dead, for the food they eat”.<sup>20</sup> The victims of factory-made foods are legions. Who is footing the bill? Also, food wastage has reached soaring heights.

Today, food is wasted at source (crop failures as in monocultures, post harvest loss), during processing or distribution (sizing, colour, appearance) and at the point of consumption (food that ‘never reaches a human stomach’) – up to 50 per cent.<sup>21</sup> A shocking figure, and the more so given that this news item (like most headlines) has now been consigned to the dustbin of news. This level of wastage is the direct result of large-scale and industrialised food production that can easily afford to factor in these record levels of wastefulness.

### Home Economics

So what happens when you reach for your wallet? The sales pitch is the same everywhere – food is cheap and is getting even cheaper. If true this is only because we have not added all of our bills together. Not only the food waste bill, of course, but since this has not been touched upon before, we should also consider the health, human and social costs associated, for instance, with drinking, poor dieting or intestinal disorders. Seen in the round these are not ‘external’ costs at all but real ones, and they can easily dwarf any food bill. In conclusion, and provisionally, far from being cheap and cheerful food costs us a fortune. Let us deal then with a handful of standard bills we use everyday and, to get the ball rolling, let us assume that you are driving to your shopping mall. Two legitimate questions arise, how much is it costing you, and why are you driving in the first place?

The chances are that with the demise of local production and local shops of many kinds (yes, the same point again) you have no choice but drive. Driving is almost the norm and this highlights the ever-changing pattern of the distribution and purchase of goods. Nipping down the road on foot is no longer an option and familiar as we may have become with food miles, according to the Future Foundation, “Shopping miles’ are increasing as an overall total of ‘Food Miles’”<sup>22</sup>

The cost of driving and parking is given at approximately £1000 per annum. A

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<sup>20</sup> Jamie Oliver’s TED Award Speech. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J6kInh6yDnY>

<sup>21</sup> “... due to poor practices in harvesting, storage and transportation, as well as market and consumer wastage, it is estimated that 30–50% (or 1.2–2 billion tonnes) of all food produced never reaches a human stomach.” Source: Institute of Mechanical Engineers

<http://www.imeche.org/knowledge/themes/environment/global-food>

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.fcrn.org.uk/sites/default/files/Somerfield%20-%20Shopping%20Miles%20%28Chapter%204%29.pdf>.

hefty bill. A quick mental calculation will tell you where you stand either side of the given figure. What is also relevant here is that the cost of motoring impacts on what and how you buy. Instinctively, you want to make up for the upfront costs by targeting specifically the big offers (no shortage of that for sure!) and heavily discounted items. Having satisfied yourself with that, you may find that you buy a bit more than you had budgeted for because, oh well, there are savings to be had and you cannot put it out of your mind that you have already splashed out at the petrol station!

So you bulk buy. You buy more and probably eat more. Moreover, it can also be assumed that you are likely not to consume it all (whilst still having a go at it anyway) for whatever reason not least, and understandably, because food is perishable. The likely destination of uneaten food is the food waste caddy (see food wastage above). What do you buy that fits in with your shopping routine or, more generally, with your 'workstyle'? Since you do your shopping once a week and your trolley is already brimming over the chances are that you are 'not' going to buy anything that involves any food preparation like using seasonal vegetables and beetroots or, less likely, skinning a rabbit.

There is no room for flair and side dishes. Cooking other than microwaving is also uncommon. Writing for BBC News Magazine, Denise Winterman states candidly, "It's safe to say ready meals are an essential ingredient in what the British eat."<sup>23</sup> You would rather play safe on all counts having only one overriding preoccupation in mind – your freezer is half-empty and this is not a sensible use of your appliance. And, of course, there is always a fascinating story surrounding any freezer that the whole world wants to hear. Did you by any chance start with a smaller freezer which you then traded in for a larger one? Did you buy a second one in the course of time? What had prompted your decisions? Design? Christmas sales? Energy efficiency? Its cubic capacity?

### Bus Passes

Councillors and politicians rank among the worst enemies in our midst. Tongue in cheek they want our sympathy, '[Politicians] too have dreams and nightmares'<sup>24</sup>, but still manage to put on a smile and trample on people's own dreams and manufacture their nightmares. Councillors and politicians are duplicitous. They pride themselves with presiding over the culling of local shops and trade as a prelude to both 'thriving' and 'vibrant' regeneration projects and 'vanguard' shopping malls. With that done, they would then do terrible things like dispensing

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-21443166> The language used here is a peevish exercise in normalisation. Something is 'safe' and meals are an 'essential ingredient' that all (perhaps?) 'British' eat. To conclude, 'ready meals' are fine.

<sup>24</sup> Fox, Liam. *Rising Tides. Facing the Challenges of a New Era*. Heron Books, London, 2013, p. 6. Dr Liam Fox is a Member of Parliament.

concessionary bus passes to their residents.

And how would then councillors and politicians call this latest expression of their generosity and dishonesty? They would come up with some imaginative platitudes: to maintain people ‘active’, ‘mobility’, a freedom to go anywhere (at certain times of the day), folkscare and indeed the provision of a much-needed service to the selfsame community they have jointly concurred to destroy. They deprive with one hand and concede with the other wrecking people’s lives. The brutalisation process continues. Residents might as well starve to death without those bus passes.<sup>25</sup> Brave would be that politician (possibly not a Dr Liam Fox) tabling any early day motion to have those passes withdrawn. Deception is now staring us in the face.

Beggars cannot be choosers and with no access to local facilities pensioners and disabled persons, who mainly qualify for the concession, have no choice but being bussed to and from, where else?, the new gateways, the shopping precincts and glittering malls. Local shops and trade are predicated on local production, and this point has been made many times before. The benefits of a producers-led economy are ignored and so are the resulting synergies of people trading with one another from nearby sheds, stalls and shops that will also provide the expected opportunities for renewed business, decision-making, gossip and friendship.

This dovetails with that breath of life represented by the very family group or extended family group entrusted with the upkeep of its patch. Bundling all this up, the social group doubles up as the economic group and by extension as the trustee and custodian of its locality. There are however policies designed to break all this up. The state is the relentless enemy of the community. The result is increasing isolation, misery, depression, parasitic work, joblessness, ‘home care’ and ‘care homes’ where no one can possibly care, busybodies, and the threats posed by a gigantic, unsympathetic and creaky nanny state.

Nobody seems to mind. Meanwhile costs are escalating and they include council taxes and welfare bills, the price we pay for broken communities, the depletion of resources, all of which is ultimately reflected in the price of milk and cheese we may buy. It is a rising tide with no benefits.

### Duty on Food

Call it a duty on food. Add it all up – health concerns, an unsteady welfare system, fuel costs and car tax, landfills, the drip-drip of rising prices, the humiliation of shopping around – and the sum total is that we pay dearly for neglecting food. The real hidden costs are none other than human costs. It is the cost of families, social groups and communities ‘in meltdown’ and therefore of sink estates and of a wafer-

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<sup>25</sup> The big picture always looms large. The FAO (Food Agriculture Organisation) have classified the current time as a ‘new era of rising food prices and spreading hunger.’

thin social fabric that counts. Add this to the liability column of the ledger and what emerges, it appears, is a dismal picture. Food must be too expensive if the poor cannot afford it. Food poverty just adds another sad twist to another sad story.

### Food Poverty

So tantalisingly near yet so far. The scandal of food banks provides incontrovertible evidence of the dire state we are in. Food that is abundantly available, food that is born, is however out of reach of many. There is more than a biblical overtone over this. The scale is global with some countries more affected than others are. Local and regional differences can be explained on an ad hoc basis but, broadly, the food industry and our governments are to be held to account for the suffering caused by food deprivation. It is, in fact, more than that. Our whole attitude to food must change. The irony is that according to a website <http://www.trickleup.org/> '1.4 billion people live in poverty' and according to another website WHO, the World Health Organization, '1.4 billion adults' are obese or overweight.

- Worldwide obesity has nearly doubled since 1980.
- In 2008, more than 1.4 billion adults, 20 and older, were overweight. Of these over 200 million men and nearly 300 million women were obese.<sup>26</sup>

The solution is in numbers. Given that the ratio is exactly of one poor for each obese person the trick here would be to pair them up and monitor whether they would be sharing at all. Has this ever been tried out before, and, if not, could indeed such a pilot be rolled out? Perhaps it is difficult to arrange these things, and perhaps it will never work because it is a barmy idea. You do not create upstream a triple scorched earth policy of poverty, obesity and wars that you glibly say can then be resolved downstream.

Turning to the UK, the queues are getting longer and longer.<sup>27</sup> The numbers have gone up threefold in 2012. The estimated figure is 350,000. Not content with that half a million are expected to be using food banks



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<sup>26</sup> <http://www.who.int/mediacentre/factsheets/fs311/en/>

<sup>27</sup> "Food being handed out in Bradford city centre last night". February 27, 2013. [http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/10253316.Foodbank\\_demand\\_in\\_Bradford\\_doubles\\_in\\_a\\_year/](http://www.thetelegraphandargus.co.uk/news/10253316.Foodbank_demand_in_Bradford_doubles_in_a_year/)

by 2015. All the signs are there again of a sales pitch, a forecast and prediction, all in one. And what do we do about it? ‘Charity [The Trussell Trust] says up to 650 more food banks are needed across UK to cope with surging demand’.<sup>28</sup>

Summing up: demand is surging, hunger is spreading, food prices are poised to deliver the killer blow... and still waiting for a wake up call? Charities, religious leaders, councillors, politicians, food barons and sundry philanthropists they all know it is coming and they all see people scavenging for food, and what do they do? Twiddle their thumbs? Cashing in? Provide the same manna and tin food?

Yes, they do. They act irresponsibly, and we collectively do as well. They never learn, nor do we. The hungry should not be fed. The homeless should not be offered a bed. If we do not know where things come from (even one thing would be fine) why would we ever bother to find out what comes next after that? Is ‘Creation’ not utterly meaningless if we do not enter the loop ourselves? Why do we say that we care if the tools to learn to care are not available to us? And who are the other miscreants besides the implausible carers, the tin food banks and the aseptic food bankers? In what category would you slot in takeaways, school meals, soup kitchens and the poundlands of this world? We already have food banks aplenty, thank you very much! Is the present state of affairs satisfactory? The levels of suffering are appalling matching, as they do, the levels of profit of the multinationals and buccaneers of food. Is it imaginable to ponder on any virtue or value in the presence of people who are begging? Is it possible to endure the realities of our desperation? We have got it wrong somehow, as we often do. The realities are that food is used to round up and silence people. Rather we should turn food into a force for good.

A virtual University of Food can be a clear indication of our willingness to change direction.

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<sup>28</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/society/2013/apr/24/number-people-food-banks-triples>

## FOOD LINKS - LEARNING

The story I know cannot (almost) be told.

Wendell Berry

Learning is learning the workings of the food cycle. Should we enter this cycle first we would then be in a very fortunate and privileged position to enter all life cycles.

### Introduction

Not only do schools ‘kill creativity’ (Sir Ken Robinson) they also kill learning. That is, if you do not go to schools really what chances do you have to get on in life? Will you get any work? Will anyone marry you? Is going or not going to schools really a question of learning or not learning, of life or death? Could skills and wisdom be acquired by other means? Instances of learning should extend well beyond any formal education.

Existing schools owe their powers to a centralising state. These powers are in excess of what presumably is expected of them, i.e. teach, motivate, and help prepare every child and adult to a fulfilling life. Predictably, they also extend to the minutia of ‘how’ and ‘what’ to teach. Schools are said to prepare the young to the world of work, for a job that probably will never materialise. All schools beat a well-trodden path: they instruct and train, stream, set targets for each age group, specify each subject in detail, inspect and examine, hand out certifications and qualifications, reward and discipline, select and cream off. After all, and incidentally, not everyone is destined for higher places. The levels of inspection and scrutiny are severe. Schools hold sway.

### *Gated Schools*

A more appropriate term for schools (the physical building) might be that of ‘gated schools’ which by analogy with gated communities<sup>29</sup> tend to exclude stray pedestrians and visitors. Gated schools would not allow their methods and practices ever to be questioned. They are jealously guarding their exclusiveness.

There have been stories, variously told and reported, of a Canossa-like figure by the name of



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<sup>29</sup> “In its modern form, a gated community is a form of residential community or housing estate containing strictly controlled entrances for pedestrians, bicycles, and automobiles, and often characterized by a closed perimeter of walls and fences.”  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gated\\_community](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gated_community)

'Learner' who having called repeatedly at the school's gate on many a wintry day had never been let in. The chain of command had always denied the veracity of these stories.

A penitent Henry IV at the gate of Canossa, 1077.

## **A Different Learning is Possible**

The contention here is that a whole raft of subjects is kept out there standing in the bitter cold. The most important things in life – food, energy, plants, pond and sea life, microbes and creepy crawlers – and these are *not* part of our upbringing (family structures) and education (social structures). A case of 'no food, no drinks allowed in these premises', but starved of the essentials of life how long before a country claims its pound of flesh?

Any learning must be from the ground up otherwise do not call it learning. Which is the reason why we need upbringing as a matter of hey presto. Upbringing comes before education itself (how and what we learn) in the same way that understanding comes before knowledge (or facts or data or blogs). Should the family group not be the friendly face of a society at ease with itself? Is a chain not as strong as its weakest link? As a social group amongst many, for this is what they are, do family groups perform a fully integrated social, educational and economic role? Are they firmly anchored to their place, their locality and their land? Are they fully interdependent? And with interdependence, do they also enjoy any degree of autonomy?

With upbringing we are back to family groups, households or communities but, alas, these structures are sick and frail. If true, how could then schools, gated schools or any other social institution ever succeed where other basic structures have reportedly failed? Are schools indeed a cut above the ordinary and mundane, a special breed, or are they failing us badly too? Are these gated schools highly competitive within a strictly controlled learning environment? How could our horizon ever expand if we do not head for the horizon line?

### *The Web of Life*

The web of life describes what is all around us. Nothing can possibly exist in a vacuum. Our first impact with reality is visual and tactile, and is one of a number of different things and images cobbled together: toys and bells, prams, a rail, a bus full of people, an alleyway or a sand beach. We are happy with that and tend to see things as a whole, i.e. a sign is a sign of something else and we learn to know that what we observe in a busy street can only be the tip of something bigger that we may then analyse and break down – bus, wheels, billboards, people, bags, other vehicles, lights, road accidents etc.

Our horizon, however, is unfamiliar to us, and we break down things in isolation

and in terms of single items of information, of reckless bus drivers (if any) and, more generally, of ‘bad apples’ here and of ‘deviant’ or ‘dysfunctional’ social groups there. The big picture is dispensed in smaller and smaller doses consisting of some teachers and schools that are said to be underperforming; of scroungers that are a national disgrace; and of the sickening behaviour of nursing staff in some care homes that must be exposed to our contempt. In short, if possible, we fail to realise that the big picture is the same as the small picture.

Coming to the first point, individuals only (or the small picture) are answerable for their actions. Their particular behaviour should be seen as deviating from the norm. Therefore, isolate! The truth is rather different. And now the second point; all is designed in such a way that we Joe and Jane Public and we the Big Guys are spared the blushes. Nothing to do with us apparently. That may indeed be the case, but can we really afford to live in a make-believe world? Are we not all responsible in some way? Is it not the case that a domino effect can be seen at play in all human actions? Are the consequences of these actions fully understood?

The contagion simply spreads and if we want to stop the rot, we should try to see connections everywhere and raise them to the status of formal learning in schools and elsewhere in the same way that we learn astrophysics, as some do, and knitting. Typically, politicians do not own up to their responsibilities and would rather bend over backwards to leave things as they are. They are the Establishment and are therefore beyond reproach. The status quo, however, means running the risk of insulating the cause from the effect of the entire package of social and economic policies. As always, it is a confused picture. We need to make learning accessible by embracing connectedness. The least we can do is to try and to try hard. With a bit of goodwill we could actually realise that everything is connected. Connectedness itself should be seen as part of a broader approach to learning.

## *Learning*

### The Process

You learn when you open your eyes, observe, participate, muck in and accomplish. Take ‘you open your eyes’ to mean that you open them for the first time ever, that you wake up in the morning and then again that you wake up to the reality represented by your ‘first’ single act or batch of learning. The first act is your first encounter with the web of life. Hello Life! Your first act is self-contained for it has given you all you need to build your second act and the subsequent ones. Each act is linked to the next by your newly acquired confidence and self-confidence.

What you are likely to get at the end of each act is a nod and a mumble or a pat on the back – you have done what you had set out to do, well done – and that fires you up eager as ever to get started with another one. Jobs may simply range from your first steps as a toddler to you having to tidy up your room (and you know how long this may take!) or to going up a ladder. You can only start from where you

have left, one step at the time. Having learned one process, you are turbo-charged to learn all the others.

The Romans got there first and wrote, '*Ab uno, disce omnes*', literally 'from one, learn all'. Rather neat. In longhand, this means that from one action or experience (good, bad etc.) you then learn all the other actions and experiences. (Again, it definitely sounds far better in Latin, doesn't it?) The quotation has a special quality. 'All' almost reveals an infinite capacity of the human intellect to acquire, store and transform knowledge. The opportunities are all around us. 'Disce' stands for learning and has given us words like 'disciple', a follower and learner of the teachings of a master, and 'discipline', a subject or set of instructions imparted to learners. Discipline is also a code of conduct that you have chosen for yourself in order, for instance, to manage your time and affairs. (Sort out your life might be another way of putting it!) Otherwise, discipline also applies to the exercise of authority.

To conclude, the learning process provides the time coordinate of your actions. Everything is a cycle and a discipline. Learning is the process of going through these beginning-middle-end cycles over and over again. It still does not tell you 'what' to learn though but as argued throughout food is unique in providing us with the set of instructions we will ever need. With food firmly on our side who needs experts, meddlers and masters? Hands off food then! No doubt, it is far too early to get excited about anything given the issues surrounding food as outlined in these pages. A person, household, community or country that cannot feed itself is a terrible stain in our hands. The job to clean up our act has not begun yet, not really.

### Connectedness

To learn is to connect. To learn is to access. We never tire of asking questions, and what we mostly crave for as humans is to belong and show up, and to know how everything is connected to much else. How your thought processes are connected to your actions, how water flows, how herons fly, how political decisions affect you, how DNA works, how microbes reproduce, how colours are perceived, how your driving, buying or shopping habits impact on you, and be in no doubt on others as well. We only need to connect the dots to find out! These are the same dots that have variously been described as actions and steps.

And indeed, was connection not what Professor Brian Cox had really in mind when he said, "... we don't truly understand biology until we understand water?" And in her book *A Taste of War*, was Lizzie Collingham not right when she set out to explore the 'often overlooked dimension' of food to our understanding of WWII? And why not, to our understanding (that word again repeatedly, a word that, obviously, has many sworn enemies) of much else? Finally, writing in the sixties, Marshall McLuhan commented that:

In education the conventional division of the curriculum into subjects is already as outdated as the medieval trivium and quadrivium after the Renaissance. Any subject taken in depth at once relates to other subjects.<sup>30</sup>

We yearn for a wholesome renaissance but, unfortunately, the evidence shows that we are plagued by divisions. The division of producing and consuming countries, the division of urban and rural settings, the daily confrontations, the dogmas, barriers and barricades, the blurred picture, and the fragmenting of learning into unrecognisable bits. We cannot afford words. They are well beyond our means and we struggle endlessly.

### Learning What?

Food connects and we can therefore ask food to do the teaching. Examples in this document abound and they are in particular supplied by Figure 2: The Language of Food and Figure 3: Gardening Project. Looking at Figure 2 again, you may decide that what you have there is all you could ever imagine of wanting to know about food. **The illustration is overflowing, replete and littered with definitions!** Thirty-six in all, and a veritable sin of indulgence! The excitement is justified because only food can be all these things as depicted.

You may have yourself some cherished food definitions of your own. Carolyn Steel amongst others, the author of *Hungry City*, had hers – food is the ‘envoy of the countryside’. The more the merrier really. Food is playful and is embedded in rocks, rivers, things, flowers, sticks, materials, insects, bacteria, in our bones and guts, in everything that swims, crawls and flies. If it heaves and falls, if it blooms and decays, then this is food. Similarly, in *Gardening Project* beautifully written and illustrated by Peter A Please, learning takes place at once. Turning our attention to the author’s core subjects, these are:

- MATHS
- ART
- NUTRITION
- PHYSICAL EDUCATION
- SCIENCE
- LANGUAGE
- SOCIAL STUDIES

They certainly stand out and comprise pretty much everything. Art is there too. There is depth and breadth in all these subjects and, even more critically, a gardening project is unique in showing that you cannot slice up any subject. This

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<sup>30</sup> McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media*, Routledge Classics, London 2001, p. 379.

would be more suitable for a pizza parlour or a talking shop. Rather to understand one subject is to understand all the others as in *ab uno, disce omnes*. The subjects glide over the soft fabric of life effortlessly. They converge and depart.

Learning as well as teaching happens at once – maths and art and design overlap, bending, sifting and lifting are part of the curriculum (unconventional, may require different school frocks), nutrition and science and language are contiguous etc. Learning as a vocation. Formative and lasting. All subjects rub shoulders with each other. With this in mind, we can take a closer look at these activities. The publication itself is ‘a month by month guide advancing educational gardening activities in schools.’ Starting out with September, it says,

Creating a SENSORY CURRICULUM is the groundwork for healthy, cognitive development. Try these ideas: tearing, breaking, snapping – lettuce, pea pods; peeling – carrots, potatoes; grating – lemon, carrot; cracking – nuts; smelling – everything, especially contrasts, eg roses and rotting cabbage; stirring and pouring – peat, sand and water; sifting – sand and soil; tasting – for contrast, eg lemon and honey, turnip and apple; listening – for different sounds, bird-songs, noises in the open, wind blowing, children laughing; touching – (nearly) everything.

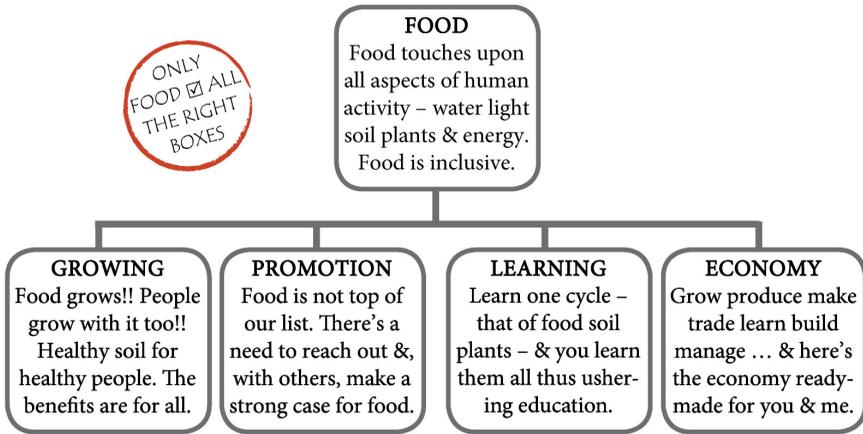
And through to August and thus completing the twelve month cycle, it says, “Ending Hunger Starts at Home”. “It is not just learning about food growing, but also encompasses maths, environmental science, geography, science, organic principles. (Ruth Hirsch)”<sup>31</sup> **A gardening project breaks away with territorial teaching.**

What is at stake here is learning. The continuous food cycles act like a sure and unflinching reinforcement of our actions, a corrective guidance to our learning and an indication of our rightful or wrongful ways of doing things. We do not know for sure what is right or wrong but food, i.e. committing ourselves to wellbeing, to doing and to retaining the fertility of the land and of the seas, is the way to approach things. This is our fertility as well. Language and our modes of expression will flourish in this environment. We should rejoice at the opportunities for learning. They are all around us if we care to look. Radially.



<sup>31</sup> Please, Peter A. *Gardening Project*. Horticultural Therapy September 1991. Reprinted April 1993. Design Alan Peacock and Julia Warin. Printed by Wincanton Print Company.

# FOOD, or the Innovation with No Name



The land allows us to enter the key food cycles. These cycles are the same as the water and energy cycles.

In particular, a food cycle has a beginning (food is born), middle (eating, recipes) and end (disposal, composting). Not the real end though, and composting says it all. Composting is to return to the soil what came from the soil. To return to the sea what came from the sea.

What's being described here is the feedback loop or, simply, the food cycle. Which is the same as the learning cycle.

The *University of Food*, UFood, looks at:  
Food Energy Water Plants Gases Animals Bacteria Spores  
Fungi Living Organisms Rocks Minerals as:

### FOUNDATION SUBJECTS

The *University of Food* is the answer to our testing times.

UFood is or will be modelled on the University of the Third Age,  
... self-help, self-managed lifelong learning co-operatives for older people no longer in full time work, providing opportunities for their members to share learning experiences in a wide range of interest groups and to pursue learning not for qualifications, but for fun.

Equally, UFood will pursue - for fun and for real – matters relating to food and our resources. Activities are mainly home-centred, a focus for social change.

**FIGURE 4: FOOD, or the INNOVATION WITH NO NAME**

The booklet is a reflection on the ‘often overlooked dimension [of food] to our understanding of the Second World War’ (Lizzie Collingham, *A Taste of War*). Today, uncertainties over the entire food supply are a cause of tension, conflict and wars. Any reference to ‘food security’ shows that countries are unwilling or even opposed to put food centre stage and make it a rightful instrument of policy. Peace or political activists and campaigners have largely ignored this food dimension. A different style of campaigning is called for.

No aspect of living is left untouched by food and **U Start with Food** tells part of the story. *Food Dimension* looks at the impact of a war economy on food, jobs and our muted responses. Here the idea to institute a virtual University of Food is mooted in part response to that. The beautiful ‘language of food’ is first evoked in one of the illustrations (Figure 2) and then specifically in *Food Birthing*. That food is born, hence ‘food birthing’, may be a novel way of looking at food. This section explores the ‘birth’ of food seen as an enduring metaphor for renewal. Finally, under *Food Links* the interplay between food, families, communities, the economy, and learning is further explored.

### About the Author

Mario Molinari is a food writer and tutor with a background in navigation and business. He believes that our attitude towards food must change if we want to raise hopes for a better today. Food, water, energy and, indeed, all life essentials should be part of our upbringing (family structures) and education (social structures). He invites participation in the setting up of community gardens and of a virtual University of Food.

He is the author of *Divided by Words* a book that highlights the pitfalls of the way we communicate. We cannot go past words and fail to match good intentions with useful action. His affiliations are with permaculture and a small number of other groups. He has tried a number of things but these things have a habit of not getting quite off the ground. For him, what would work is a shared belief in our commitment to a joyful and compassionate living.