

The Need to Grow



Discussion notes from Monday 15th February 2021

It was wonderful to see so many people at this meeting. It is obvious from the feedback that most of you got a lot from it.

Our guest speakers were excellent and their contributions were very much appreciated by all. Unfortunately it was always going to be impossible to do more than scratch the surface of this incredibly complex subject in just 90 minutes.

That said we came away with a greater understanding of the need for regenerative farming, to return our agricultural soil to health and restore its ability to store carbon. The role of livestock in this process was more significant than I had realized and the need for a return to mixed farming came over loud and clear, as an insurance policy against losing an entire monocrop in a badly timed extreme weather event.

Do keep an eye on the [Broughton Water Buffalo Farm](#) and [Farm-Ed](#) web sites for details of their open days and events once the covid restrictions are lifted. We might consider hiring a minibus for a group visit later in the year.

One of the questions posed near the end of the evening was “what can we do here in Alton to support the transition to regenerative farming?”

Suggestions that came out of that were (or should have been, in the case of ALFI’s directory):

1. Check out ALFI’s (Alton Local Food Initiative) [Local Food Directory](#) which is available from their web site. This is a list of 40 vegetable box schemes, shops, market stalls and farm shops in and around Alton, all of which sell some locally produced food or drink.
2. Support our local farmers such as [Mill Farm Organic](#) in Isington (near Bentley), they rear their own cattle, sheep and pigs and you can follow their farm trails to see how they live. They have the Pasture for Life accreditation (see below). They also have a well-stocked farm shop with a wide range of mostly organic produce.
3. Our farmers market and Tuesday market may be depleted at the moment but they will be back and we can support them too.
4. Make a point of asking about the provenance of food when out shopping and also at restaurants (remember those?).
5. Get familiar with food labels – see below:
6. Lobby the government to insist that menus in restaurants must include the source of their main ingredients as they do in North America.
7. Try to buy organic produce from supermarkets when we cannot source what we need more locally.
8. Promote the importance of changing to a much more plant-based diet with less but better meat.

Food labelling is a complicated business:

[Which article](#) This Which article explains what 11 marks mean including Fair Trade, Rainforest Alliance and Leaf, amongst others – see below for more details of the most common ones and click on their logos to go to their web sites.



The Red Tractor is only found on food and drinks that are sourced from UK farms and have been checked from farm to pack. It is traceable, safe and farmed with care to current government standards.



Products carrying the LEAF Marque logo operate to sustainable farming standards, for example by managing soil quality, using water and energy efficiently and controlling pollution. 39% of UK fruit and veg is LEAF Marque certified.



Products bearing Fairtrade marks meet the internationally agreed social, environmental and economic Fairtrade Standards. There are lots of variations on these marks so take a look at the web site for the detail.



The Rainforest Alliance seal promotes collective action for people and nature. It amplifies and reinforces the beneficial impacts of responsible choices, from farms and forests all the way to the supermarket check-out.



The Pasture-Fed Livestock Association has published its latest certification standards. Notably, the Pasture for Life rosette guarantees the animals were 100% pasture-fed and kept in a way that is beneficial for soil and wildlife while producing meat and dairy.



When you see fish or seafood products with the blue MSC (Marine Stewardship Council) label, you can be sure they come from a sustainable fishery that has met the MSC Fisheries Standard. Businesses trading in these products have met our Chain of Custody Standard for traceability.

Organic labelling is quite complicated and undergoing review, post Brexit. The following web sites are a good source of information.



Other organisations mentioned during the discussion that you might want to explore further include:



Our nearest member of the Incredible Edible Network is in [Winchester](#)



The [Farm Carbon Toolkit](#) is a vehicle for farmers to connect with other farmers to reduce their greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions.