

Dorset CAN
Climate Action Network

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DorsetCAN Land Use Meeting, 9 July 2021:

Food Systems & Forest Gardens: how to make change happen in your community

On 9th July we were treated to the inspiration of two guest speakers who gave presentations and answered questions:

Forest Gardens: 'Working with nature to achieve healthy and abundant yields'

Rakesh Rootsman Rak who runs Roots n Permaculture: <https://www.rootsnpermaculture.com>

Rakesh gave us an insight into the idea of Forest Gardening which uses the proximity of grown or growing trees to nurse horticulture by their capacity to reach into the soil for water and nutrients, nurture the soil with leaf fall, provide shelter and help water the crops. The crop plants are encouraged to be part of the natural cycle by being allowed to complete their flowering and seeding. He also hinted that the nutrient content of crops grown this way was richer so we needed to eat less of them to be fed, be healthier and have more energy. Big claims. Rakesh's passion and belief have persuaded DorsetCAN to organise a visit to a Forest Garden in the county..

Food Systems: How Bridport has developed as a 'Local Food System'.

Candida Blaker from 'Bridport Food Matters'. <https://www.bridportfoodmatters.net/>

Candida gave an overview of how Bridport has grown a 'Local Food System' linking producers, consumers, committed volunteers and seeding into the community a verve for expanding this to involve more and larger local producers. Inspiration and direction has been drawn from the 'Seeding Our Future' organisation: <https://www.seedingourfuture.org.uk> but has built on the history of Bridport as a home of independent retailers, progressive ideas and many committed people.

Her presentation was full of interest and detail – my pen melted in the effort to keep up with notes! However some important future considerations were based on making the locality and the UK more resilient to future climate change. At present we only produce 60% of our food and much of the 40% is fresh fruit and vegetables from mainland Europe. The UK only produces 55% of our fresh veg and only 17% of fresh fruit. With climate change producing water shortages and transport producing GHG this is not a sustainable position. Therefore we should consider likely changes:

- Warmer, wetter winters with more storms producing soil erosion, food storage loss and an increase in insect pests.
- Hotter drier summers: crop selection (from brassicas and apples to sunflowers and apricots?), better water management: improved irrigation, intercropping, reducing soil disturbance (no-dig and permaculture) greater use of mulching to prevent evaporation.
- Reorientation of land use to grow human food rather than animal food. (at present horticulture uses less than 5% of agricultural land in Dorset most is used for grass and crops to feed livestock).
- We need to strengthen links between local producers and consumers, and support local producers to effect the changes needed.

A very inspiring talk with lots of 'solutions' suggested. DorsetCAN is resolved to organise a visit to Bridport to see more clearly what can be learned and transferred to other parts of the county. So as we head out of 'Covid restrictions' we have at least 2 DorsetCAN outings on the horizon.

The Land Use team plan to arrange further talks, hopefully as inspiring, in future months and open the DCAN members and those yet to join.

Ian Duckworth – Land Use Team