

Quality Food from the Earth up

Message on Organic Shop Window, Kyneton. Victoria

Adapting Farming to Climate Change

Submission to House of Representatives Standing Committee New Inquiry.

As a citizen in this country, a life-long (77 years) consumer of farming products, experienced Biodynamic compost maker for over 30 years, an economic historian and philosopher, I welcome this inquiry and request that my comments are read and understood from the perspectives from which they are written.

Current and prospective adaptations...

Before roads, bridges, railways, pipelines etc **topsoil** is the most primary infra-structure for which our country is responsible. If a foreign country was taking away 6.8 tonnes topsoil per hectare per year (our current loss of topsoil), there would be a war! Similarly, if an anonymous agency dumped 4billion dollars worth of chemicals on our land per year, (causing or aggravating erosion) it would be treated as a terrorist plot.

The more living topsoil farmers can (re-)generate, the more water can be retained and carbon be absorbed in their soil and the less salination will occur. This means that current farming practices like **perma-culture, natural sequence farming, organic and biodynamic** farming need to be identified and recognised as pioneers in adapting farming to climate change.

Some impact on downstream processing will be:

1. **healthier, more nutritious food**, less suffering allergies, obesity and other negative side-effects of chemical and industrial farming methods.
2. **less need for pipelines and desalination plants**, as the loss of water and the salination of the land are prevented at the source of the problem, not 'fixed' somewhere after the damage has been done.
3. **greater scope for work-opportunities**, in rural areas. Rather than having to commute to cities for work, the labour intensive farming methods required to responsibly care for our land, provide plenty of scope for job-creation in meaningful and healthy work-environments
4. **liveable landscapes**: organic and biodynamic and other living topsoil enhancing farming practices create landscapes on a more natural scale with 'inbuilt' biodiversity, which will not only be environmentally more sustainable, but also humanly more liveable, for rural communities as well as urban visitors or tourists.

The role of government in augmenting the shift etc...

This role might be seen as threefold:

1. **negative:** the government should **refrain** from any business interest on the one hand and from any scientific bias on the other.

Examples of the mix-up of these two:

- An agricultural scientist working for an NSW Govt Department stated that it took him 10 years to fit what he **observed** on Peter Andrew's farm with what he **knew** as his scientific framework. Scientific frame-works not based on - and not constantly modified on the basis of - observation are abstract theories and tend to become dogmas. Adaptation of farming is too urgent to wait another 10 years!
- At a public forum on pro- and - cons of GM, organised by the Hepburn Shire Council, I asked how funding for GM research compared to funding for research into alternatives like Organic and BD Farming. The answer from an expert on the panel was: GM research gets millions of dollars, organic and BD some thousands...
- A group of mothers, concerned with the safety of food for their children, started last year to investigate thoroughly themselves, as GM is not labelled and Government agencies could not inform them: they discovered that most of the information on which governments in Australia base their policies, are research-results produced by the same corporations that produce the GM seeds. See: MADGE.newsletter@madge.org.au
- Statement of Mr Dick Adams, quoted in the committees call for submissions: 'We must get this right if we are to maintain an internationally competitive Australian agricultural sector.'

With due respect, I would have thought that we must get this right, because of our duty of care, to ensure that given the changing farming conditions through climate change, our people are going to be properly fed in such a way, that they, too, can healthily adapt to climate change. Especially those institutionalised consumers, who in one way or other are in Governments direct care.

And when it comes to competitiveness: junk-food will compete with junk-food, high quality food will compete with high quality food. I don't assume that indiscriminate competitiveness is a concern of the inquiry.

2. **internal:** the government should make the shift from thinking in terms of '**control**' to thinking in terms of '**enabling**', i.e. no longer 'outcome driven' research projects, no longer 'interest-group-driven' subsidies.
3. **positive:** The enabling role of Government as suggested under the next heading:

Government role in Promoting research etc

First of all, as a matter of simple distributive justice: correct the current imbalance in funding to enable **effective comparison** of effects and side-effects of current living topsoil enhancing farming methods with industrial and GM farming effects and side-effects;

Second: make funds available for **independent research** and refrain from using corporate research-result as a basis for Government decisions.

Third: extend subsidy regime to cover the **specific costs** of topsoil enhancing farming practises at least as long as market conditions are still skewed in favour of products of conventional/industrialised farming products.

In conjunction with the above, **fourth:** encourage, educate - and enable financially - hospitals, nursing homes, other caring institutions to purchase products of topsoil (re)-generating farms, preferably from local growers, to enhance freshness, nutritious value and to decrease 'food-miles' required.

Fifth: support, stimulate and where needed initiate a whole raft of training programs in those living topsoil enhancing farming methods at TAFE and university levels, in local community centres as well as apprentice programs for prospective farmers who want to work with these methods. Farmers and researchers experienced in these methods will need community and financial support, to enable them to train the trainers.

The role of rural research etc:

The first point of reference for rural research and development are the farmers who practise and develop the methods: **for them farming IS research and development.** Agricultural science needs to be based on agricultural experience if it wants to avoid theoretical bias or dogmatic certainty.

Summary:

- Our forest, wetlands, deserts and farmland are our **primary infra-structure:** organic topsoil retains water, absorbs carbon, prevents salination.
- All methods of current farming that (re-)generate **organic topsoil** and their positive down-stream effects need to be identified and recognised as pioneering 'Adapting Farming to Climate Change'.
- Role of Government re 'augmenting etc'
 1. **refrain** from business interest and scientific bias;
 2. **shift thinking** from control to enabling;
- Role of Government re 'promoting etc':

1. correct imbalance in research funding to enable **effective comparison**;
 2. fund research and don't base decisions on corporate research-results
 3. correct imbalance in subsidy to cover **specific costs** of pioneering topsoil enhancing farming methods.
 4. stimulate **caring institutions** to purchase farming products from local, topsoil (re-)generating growers.
 5. support, initiate extensive and intensive training programs, including **apprenticeships and training-the-trainers** programs.
- Rural research and development: **Farming IS research and development**. Any science or project ignoring this becomes abstract theory or fundamentalist dogma and a waste of effort and resources.

Thank you for the invitation to submit.

Adaptation to climate change is best achieved by bringing the soil and the crops, the farmers and the markets in the most healthy conditions. In this way all of us at the receiving end of farming product will also in the best condition to cope with climate change. *'Quality Food from the Earth up'!*

Best wishes with your inquiry and further work,

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