

“Don’t get me started on that.” The phrase is used all the time at our meetings and I realised that it is because South Cheshire FoE members are passionate about environmental matters. My personal hobby horse is food sustainability, land being built on which may be needed for growing food.

What is your “Don’t get me started on that.” issue? Why not let your editors know and we’ll give it an airing.

We had intended to have this newsletter issue given over to a welcome to spring with growing and nature subjects but not enough landed on your editor’s computer, so thank you Caroline for your contribution which appears later.

Time to fix the Food Chain



The Group has decided to get involved with the Food Chain Campaign and here’s what it’s all about....

Few people realise that the meat and dairy industry causes more climate-changing emissions than all planes, cars and lorries on the planet. A hidden chain stretches from UK factory farms to the rainforests of South America - where huge soy plantations are wiping out wildlife and making climate change worse.

Soy crops, grown to feed chickens, cows and pigs in Europe, now cover an area larger than the UK. The expansion of soy farming has already destroyed much of the wildlife-rich Atlantic Rainforest, leaving many species under threat. If current trends continue, 40 per cent of the Amazon will be lost to soy farming and cattle ranching by 2050.

People in the UK are unwittingly caught up in this damaging chain, but with this campaign we can break it. We’re calling on MPs to back a new vision of farming that feeds the world without ripping up the rainforest. This will require some big changes, but we’ll take it step by step.

One issue that will resonate with MPs and public alike is the use of billions of pounds of taxpayers' money to prop up factory farming through EU subsidies. Public money is also spent on food in schools, prisons, hospitals and care homes with little thought given to how it is produced.

Our new research traces the money in the food chain. Our taxes often end up propping up a system that is trashing rainforests, wiping out wildlife and making climate change worse. The new legislation would ensure the Government stops spending taxpayers' money on factory farmed meat and dairy, and changes the system.

Each year 20 MPs are selected in a ballot and given a chance to propose a new law - called a Private Member's Bill. We'll be pushing for one of the chosen MPs to introduce a Bill requiring Government to:

- Switch subsidies away from intensive livestock production towards planet-friendly farming.
- Change the menus in schools, hospitals and care homes.
- Give farmers help to develop home grown animal feeds.

To make this happen we need you to raise public awareness of the impact of the meat and dairy industry and increase the pressure on MPs to do something about it. We've tabled an [Early Day Motion \(EDM 845\)](#) to gather support from as many MPs as possible throughout 2009.

There'll be an element of luck when the ballot is drawn in late 2009, but with a Summer of Action coming up we can stack the odds in our favour. This campaign will be launched at the Northern Gathering hopefully lots of us will be able to attend and get the campaign off to a great start. The Gathering is at Manchester Youth Hostel on Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th May. Tania

On a similar subject Caroline has given us some additional things to think about in respect of meat production. Over grazing has caused serious soil degradation, threatening biodiversity and livelihoods. Deforestation occurs as arable farming

encroaches for animal foodstock production. As the land becomes less productive, more is taken from forests. Water use is heavy in animal husbandry and much of the world's population is desperately short of water.

Following Tania's article above, members might be interested in what Ghent is doing in exactly this area, but for a slightly different reason. Ghent has declared one day a week as veggie day. "There is nothing compulsory. We just want to promote healthy eating". They hope to make every Thursday a day free of meat and fish. Their aims are to reduce obesity, global warming, and cruelty to animals and to show that vegetarian food can be delicious. Every school and restaurant will have vegetarian options.

The organisers say "if everyone in Flanders does not eat meat one day a week, we will save as much CO2 in a year as taking half a million cars off the road".

The scheme started with a foodie festival at the vegetable market. Goodie bags were given away, recipes and food samples were distributedand fair trade wine. The best eateries for vegetarian food were named. If they can do it why can't we!

(Maggie has visited Ghent. It is highly recommended for ambience, museums, bars, restaurants and cycle lanes, trams and a good cheap hostel in the city centre). They also hold a highly recommended arts/music festival every July with lots of open air street theatre.

Ghent isn't the only place with an environmental agenda:

In Fife several hundred people only buy local food.....Cities around the world from Reykjavik to Bogota have introduced car free days.....In Norway, from September, some areas will be using biomethane from raw sewage to run city buses

Local Groups Meeting A meeting of representatives from local groups was held recently at a hostelry near Crewe station. Incidentally the first thing it revealed was that South Cheshire members eat less chocolate than members of other groups. That's as may be, but the topics we covered that evening were membership and how to increase it and skills which each group needed. It was apparent that different groups had very different set ups and needs. We identified our need as TIME Every one of us is very busy.

Secondly, membership. We discussed ways in which we could try to get more members, though I personally feel that getting the message across is more important than a large membership, and several ideas were suggested, Our membership has been dropping somewhat of late so this is an area we should work on. We have ideas. Watch out for them.

Future meetings will be held, but probably not very frequently as everyone is so busy. Bidi

At last London is catching up with SCFoE. Rooftops and open areas in London are to be used to grow crops of vegetables. **We've been growing vegetables for years!** This is part of a larger group of measures, such as the National Trusts Grow Your Own campaign, encouraging landowners to lend land to growers. It hopes to have 1,000 plots available, and British Waterways and Network Rail have also promised to co-operate. A study is being carried out to see if the roof of the Hayward Gallery would be suitable for allotments. These would have a view of Westminster and St Pauls. Very posh. It certainly beats my view of the Shrewsbury train line, which actually I'm very fond of. Further ideas include fruit trees on the moat at The Tower of London, orchards in cemeteries, land beside canals, retired working boats as floating gardens. The Capital Growth Initiative was started in November 2008 and hopes to provide 2,012 plots by the time the Olympics arrive here. It all sounds a good and logical set of ideas as does the hope of mini-farms in the suburbs. (Think of the success Cuba has had with its city farms. They have fed the population for years.) I'll keep my eye on this and let you know how it fares.

It is intended to have a Big Lunch on July 19 to share home-grown food. Should we have one too?

Why is the letter A like a flower?

A bee (B) comes after it!

Someone commented the other day that in the supermarket she was visiting, many people were still taking plastic bags. This reminded me that a “This shop supports the Carry a Bag campaign” flyer had been given to me with a purchase I had made. This campaign supported by FoE aims to make Chester plastic bag free. www.greenchester.co.uk gives more details.

There are many problems about *Climate Change*, not the least being that it is happening at all, but your editors find all the statistics confusing. However I recently read one in the *Guardian* that even I could understand. The world has already burned **half** the fossil fuels necessary to bring about a 2C rise in average global temperature. I have the article if you wish to read it.
Bidi

UNCLEAR ABOUT NUCLEAR?

The arguments for and against nuclear power stations are not clear-cut. They do have the big advantage of being far cleaner than coal- or oil-fired stations: they not churn out CO₂. The amount of power they can generate is in principle unlimited; in practice it is limited by their design. They do not rely on finite fossil fuels, so in that sense they can be seen as a renewable. As the French are quick to point out, they also give security of supply. They do not require pipelines, which are often vulnerable to terrorism. France produces around 77% of its electricity from nuclear power (59 reactors), citing considerations of energy security and their lack of indigenous coal/gas/oil (in fact France does have coal, though not all that much). The comparable figure for the UK is around 15% (19 reactors). No-one gainsays the desirability of secure energy sources.

Unfortunately, nuclear power has a long list of drawbacks, actual or potential. Accidents can and have happened (Chernobyl 1986, Three Mile Island 1979.) They could themselves be a target for terrorists. When a plant is due for decommissioning after its working life, a whole new set of problems has to be confronted. Many of these are well known. The plant itself has to be made permanently safe, for example by being entombed in reinforced concrete; the toxic nuclear waste has to be disposed of somehow, yet no-one has so far come up with a satisfactory way of doing this.

A potent mix of factors driving energy demand upwards is at work. Britain's population has risen rapidly in recent years. People own and use more electric widgets than ever. We live longer. We treat centrally-heated homes as a God-given right. Hospitals operate batteries of hi-tec medical equipment. Industries have continuous processes that require continuous energy use. Many electrical appliances are habitually left on standby, thereby consuming power even when not in use. We have become a car-loving and car-dependent nation – more's the pity. For millions of motorists, car use is emphatically not the first thing to go when times get tough. And so on.

What about the supply side?

We have a pool of aging nuclear power stations, many of which are due for imminent decommissioning. And this against a background of rising demand, even in recession.

Something Must Be Done.

Since 2003 there has been a *volte-face* on nuclear power. Whereas in 2003 it was described as “not an attractive option”, in 2008 we were told it was essential in order to ensure continuity of electricity supply into the future.

Is this change of mind necessary or even possible? In 2009 the evidence that we live in a rapidly-changing world could hardly be clearer!

The core argument is that we must have the right mix of energy sources in order to safeguard supplies. We must not become over-dependent on any one source.

But substantial new source(s) of electricity will be required very soon indeed. How does nuclear fit into the mix?

Our water-cooled nuclear reactors, built in the 1950s/60s, are certainly becoming life-expired; they used designs that have long since been superseded.

Can't we bring energy demand down?

Wouldn't it be nice! The need to avoid wasting energy should be obvious to all during hard economic times, and should help prod us into changing entrenched habits and making savings that we should already have been making anyway.

Turning off appliances when not in use, insulating our buildings properly, and not requiring that air-conditioning units function all year round, are all desirable things that ought to have become engrained habit long since. Contrary to popular belief, Britain has a temperate, moderate climate, and air-conditioning is seldom an absolute necessity. English notions of extreme weather look extremely silly when set against the conditions expected year in, year out in other parts of the world.

To believe that demand for energy can actually be reduced against a background of growing use is rather akin to asking Niagara Falls to flow uphill. **We have to assume increasing demand in the future.**

In Britain we are very lucky. Nature has been bountiful when it comes to energy sources - including renewables. We have vast reserves of coal. We have gas and oil from the North Sea. The Scottish Highlands provide hydro-electric power. We inhabit a windy part of Europe. We're surrounded by seas with some of the world's most powerful tides. We're not ideally placed for solar power, but it has its part to play. Many European countries get by with no nuclear power stations at all. Sweden recently decided to do away with nuclear, having decided that the alternatives were less problematic.

We are currently being reminded very forcibly that fossil fuels are finite: supplies of North Sea oil and gas are on the wane. The shortfall will have to be made up either by importing – or by turning to alternative energy sources.

So where are our wave and solar power stations? The sunshine may not be too reliable in this corner of Europe, but there's usually wind, and there are always tides. There is potential for increased use of hydroelectric power in the more mountainous parts of the UK. We have certainly seen increased use of wind-power, with windmills sprouting up both on land and at sea. Denmark has gone for wind power in a big way, but I suspect it has only a limited role to play in countries that are far more densely populated than is Denmark.

A potent and depressing recent sign: a Scottish-based company specialising in wave power recently decided to relocate to Portugal, where the government has inaugurated what is believed to be the world's largest wave-power station thus far, at Aguçadoura on Portugal's Atlantic coast.

Cost considerations. It was once believed – or at any rate claimed – that nuclear energy would be too cheap to be worth metering (yes, really). Yet, in the 1980s, it was found impossible to sell off the nuclear plants because there were no takers. They were not an economically-viable proposition then, and are not now. If we build new nuclear stations, we can expect them to be a financial burden for a long time.

Our government is correct in saying we must not allow ourselves to become over-dependent on any one energy source. By achieving a mix of sources we are able to adapt to changing demand, technological advances, climate change, maybe natural disasters. We're also better insulated from the possible effects of political ructions elsewhere in the world.

Possibly other less naturally well-endowed countries can put together a plausible case for needing nuclear. For a windswept nation like the UK to make this claim borders on the absurd.

If projected future growth in UK energy demand is even roughly accurate, new nuclear facilities could not come on-line in time to fill our energy gap by the time they are needed, even if work started today.

Here are a few suggestions how it could be done.

1. Conservation. Much current energy consumption is simply wasted. Turn off lights/appliances when they're not needed. Car-share. Much travel simply isn't necessary: time and fuel is wasted sitting in traffic jams. By avoiding unnecessary journeys, roads are that bit less congested for those who really do need to use their cars and trucks. Insulate buildings. Work and shop from home. A courageous local

- council in Wales recently decided to turn off the street lights in the small hours of the morning.
2. The UK should be investing in wave power in a big way. Here is a renewable that's sitting untapped and unexploited all around our lengthy coastline. Estuary barrages have tremendous potential.
 3. Of course solar power is not on its own a magic bullet for a country with a climate like ours – but it can play a part. Solar technology is well-proven.
 4. Our oil reserves are in decline, but new sources of natural gas are still available off our coasts.
 5. Although coal was historically a diabolically dirty fuel, this is starting to change. Once carbon-capture is perfected technically and is economically viable, we will still have our enormous reserves of coal to draw on. This is for the medium-to-long term.
 6. By general consent, wind-farms are not a particularly cost-effective energy source – not at the current state of technology, at any rate. They can play their part, even so. The technology is simple; they can be installed and up-and-running quickly.
 7. Road vehicles can in principle be made to run on many fuels other than oil-based products. There are many who advocate the use of hydrogen to power vehicles, while hybrid-power vehicles are taking to the roads, using alternative power sources depending on the type of journey and roadside infrastructure available. Use of multiple fuel types requires well-planned infrastructure and clever vehicle design, and is tricky to implement. Still, Brazil has shown us that it can be done.
 8. Technological advances → efficiency savings. Nothing new here, of course, but the savings achieved through improved technology are real enough, and are certain to continue into the future. Our government has rightly made a start on taxing motor vehicles by engine capacity (fuel consumption).
 9. Biofuels: currently a hot topic. Some types of biofuels have received a very bad press, as they often compete with agricultural land needed to produce food for a rapidly-increasing population, with some very unwanted results (slash-and-burn agriculture, deforestation, rising food prices). This energy source is still in its infancy and is not likely to play a large role any time soon. Still, recent developments relating to the use of algae, jatropha seeds and other non-nutritious bio-sources hold out much promise for the future.

If optimal use were made of all these possibilities, there would be no need to replace nuclear power stations that fall due for decommissioning over the next decade. Dave

As a post script to Dave's article, I read in the Guardian recently that nearly 370 farms in Britain are still restricted in the way they use land and rear sheep because of nuclear fallout from the Chernobyl accident.

And now something to make you think seriously .It is a quote from Caroline Lucas, MEP and leader of the Green Party**"We've got to get better at painting a positive vision of a post-carbon world. This is not about sitting around a candle in a cave."**

And still in thinking mode..... Leo Hickman asks "How do I tell my children that the planet is doomed." This really shocked me because I have always told my grandchildren to be as green as possible, with the implication, always unstated, that they were assuring themselves a better future. They have never known a world without recycling, reusing and home grown food and a biking granny. I have never told them what the fearful consequences might be if we fail to control climate change. Have any members any thoughts on this?

What season is it when you are on a trampoline?
Spring-time!

If two is company
And three is a crowd
What is four and five?

Nine. Joke by Ted

ANAEROBIC DIGESTER

I was given very interesting article the other day, from The Farmer's Guardian about an anaerobic digester. This is on an organic dairy farm near Wrexham. 25 anaerobic digesters are in use at present in the UK, and the aim is to have 1,000 units by 2020. This unit will use 25 tonnes of slurry a day from a 600 cow herd and can also use other waste farm products to produce methane. A second digester to be built at a later date will boost output to 500kW and will provide enough electricity to power the nearby village of Holt. I have the article if you wish to read it. Bidi

It had to happen one day..... **NETTLE SOUP** (Next issue, **Weave** Your Own Sandals. Joke!!)

Get out your rubber gloves!!!!

This is not very precise recipe.

Very large bunch of young, fresh nettles (unsprayed)
A little butter, marge or oil.
1 or 2 two onions, cloves of garlic, carrots, leeks or celery sticks, all prepared and chopped.
Veg or chicken stock
Pinch of nutmeg
A few tablespoons of yoghourt, cream or crème fraiche.



Remove any hard nettle stalks. Wash the nettles well.
Very gently fry the vegetables in the fat until soft, then add the stock and nettles and simmer for 10 minutes until the nettles are soft. Add nutmeg, salt and pepper. Cool and liquidise. Serve with the yoghourt or cream and preferably homemade wholemeal bread.

And don't forget you can dry nettles for nettle tea in the winter.

A couple of interesting updates have appeared in the papers.

In the Guardian of 16th April, it was suggested that the Environment Agency report on biomass crops, which had said that biomass crops might not offer benefits over fossil fuels, was mistaken. It believes that properly grown, harvested and transported biomass crops have real benefits for wild life, and that the land that they would use will not release substantial amounts of carbon from the soil. Using former sheep pastures to grow miscanthus and willow coppice will produce less gases than livestock and fertilised animal pasture. **I have the article if you wish to read it.**

It also looks as if things are going better for the London Array Windfarm which could create enough energy to power a quarter of the houses in Greater London.

When do monkeys fall from the sky?

During Ape-ril showers

Greening of the walls of Cities

A new trend, vertical gardens on the walls of cities, has great advantages both environmentally and architecturally. "The vertical garden acts as a phonic and thermic isolation system. It is also an air purification device." Says Patrick Blanc, the creator of what he calls "les murs vegetal". Your editors prefer this to concrete.

Soil is not needed, the gardens are created with a frame and polyamide felt. Watering and fertilisation are done automatically through pipe networks. Examples can be seen at The Athenaeum Hotel in Piccadilly, The Driver pub in King's Cross and Museum of Ethnographics Art at Paris's Quai Branley and many other places throughout the world, even at London's Westfield shopping centre.

JOIN SOUTH CHESHIRE FRIENDS OF THE EARTH

Local Meetings and Information

We meet the 1st Monday of every month at the Bowling Green Pub in the centre of Nantwich.

We make plans for days of actions and campaigns and where appropriate, invite speakers.

Social events and visits are also organized during the year and there is a local groups' magazine to update you on National Campaigns.

How do I join?

SCFoE is affiliated to National Friends of the Earth. However we have a small annual subscription to cover local administration, communication costs and local campaigning.

Rates are Family £10

Individual £6

Concessions £3

If you would like to join, and I do hope you will, simply complete the attached form and return the whole form to myself at South Cheshire FoE, c/o J.Perry, 29 Freshfields, Crewe, CW2 6QD

Contact us

We can be contacted by mail, see previous column

By phone on 01270 569 737

By e-mail on janet@foesouthcheshire.org.uk

Or visit our website at www.foesouthcheshire.org.uk

Hope to hear from you soon

Janet Perry, Membership Co-ordinator

Yes, I'd like to join my local group

Name _____

Address _____

_____ Postcode _____

e-mail _____

I enclose a cheque /postal order for £____ payable to South Cheshire friend of the Earth

My interests are: Food and Biotechnology: waste: Energy: Trade inc Fair Trade: Wildlife: Transport