

Good Morning.

We have farmed at Oxton organics since 1986, a small holding at the bottom of Broadway lane. It is a mixed farm, I keep a few sheep and we have a market garden where we grow vegetables which we sell through our local box scheme.

Being an organic grower soil health has always been important, but it was not until 7 or 8 years ago that I really started to understand what truly healthy soil could look like and how amazing plants are. The world we live in is more wondrous than we imagine and as we damage our soils we damage the climate cycles, the environment, and human health.

The central ethos of our farming practices is to nurture and regenerate soil health. Without functioning soil, full of life we cannot grow healthy abundant nutrient dense foods.

The connective-ness between all beings leaves me in awe, plants need soil microbes to mine the sand and stones and make micronutrients available, which in turn they feed us.

The mindset of working with nature has changed some of our farming practices, we now use no till or minimum tillage, encourage diversity, and look to feed life when we have problems, so much better than the feeling we are battling against nature.

We do not need pesticides and fungicides as these kill or harm so much more than the pathogen they target. Instead we should look to improving the health of the plants, as plants are capable with their microbial and insect allies to fend off pest and disease.

We modern humans lost so much knowledge and connection with nature when tractors, fertilisers and poisons were introduced.

We didn't know then the damage these new inventions could do, but as the years go by we are increasingly damaging our soils and the planet.

Now as science is showing us how incredible creation is, we need to take notice of the old ways along with what the scientists are discovering, and farm and garden in a regenerative way, the rewards will be abundance for all.

For natural cycles produce abundance, one only has to look at the hedgerow growing alongside a field of crops which need fertilisers and maybe

pesticides and herbicides, and yet the plants below the hedge are green and healthy without any of those things. Nature has the answers and diversity is the key.

Although organic we were lacking in diversity (mind we always had plenty of weeds). So in an attempt to encourage diversity we have living pathways between the vegetable beds, under-sow many of our crops and ensure there is a cover crop over all the market garden throughout winter.

As our soil starts to thrive we see many more tiny beings in the soil, worm numbers are incredible, insects thrive, there are so many pollinators and predators, and bird population has risen because of the increased insect population. I think our vegetables last longer taste better and have become more resilient to extreme wet, drought and heat.

What a win win situation

As a steward of the land it brings such joy to see life flourishing and the soil smells so good, like a woodland after rain. This is the smell of healthy soil full of life.

We have a long way to go but the aim of growing nutrient dense food for the community whilst looking to nature and following her teachings is a joyful one.

Climate change is starting to feel so real. We live in one of the driest areas of the country and Fladbury is unfortunate to be in a rain shadow within that area. I remember local farmers telling me this when we first bought the land. So, although this is not a new problem the climatologists are telling us drought could become a bigger problem. Along with excessive rain at other times.

Us farmers and gardeners are at the mercy of the weather and the past three years have been amongst the most difficult and incredibly stressful at times. This year we have not seen significant rain since the end of January.

According to my rain gauge since the end of January we have only had 5 inches/120mm, our usual average for this time is 400mm.

One only has to look at the trees dropping their leaves this summer to see how stressful this is for plants.

Managing the stress, I've felt during this prolonged drought has been very difficult to cope with at times. I have come to realise that whilst working hard

to make the soil and crops more resilient I may of left myself out. The drought has gone on so long, the autumn equinox has passed and there is little time for plants to catch up, farmers throughout dry regions in the country will be struggling with the stress of this knowledge.

For graziers this has been an extremely challenging year, our pasture showed to me I had not been managing it as well as I hoped, I really need to increase the number of deep-rooted plants growing there so it stays green in droughts like these.

One area that has deep rooted plants has done well, the sheep have grazed it four times to once in the other pasture, so you see we can have abundance even in extreme conditions when we treat the soil right.

We are on second river terrace which means that when the avon floods badly so do we. We flooded the summer of 2007 which was our worst growing year. Much of climate change could be reduced if we change our farming and gardening practices. Nature is resilient and abundant.

Healthy soils and a green planet will help us through the challenges to come, because a greener planet is a cooler planet.

One only has to walk over a field of bare soil then a green field to feel the difference in heat.

In wet conditions healthy soil with plenty of organic matter acts like a sponge soaking up water and holding on to it. Air pockets are resilient and can keep soil inhabitants alive for days during extreme conditions, and most importantly the soil stays put. The amount of soil run off into our rivers is not normal healthy soils do not wash away out to sea, polluting rivers and causing huge dead zones in the oceans.

Even if one does not have a farm or garden, we all eat and by supporting local farms, buying organic, or regenerative food we can all be part of the answer.

And so as we have come together to give thanks for the harvest, I hope I have instilled a little more awe and wonder at creation, the incredible cycles of life and our responsibility as custodians.

We are truly blessed to live on this amazing planet.