

AGROFORESTRY AND THE KINDLING TRUST based on a talk by Chris Walsh to MESS on zoom Feb 8th 2021

Agroforestry is a system of land use in which productive trees are grown in combination with agricultural products on the same land. This offers the best of both worlds. By providing more margins, it is less intensive and more sustainable.

In UK it can mean large trees dotted around fields with grazing around. Or it can be rows of fruit trees with food crops grown between the tree rows.

Wakelyns in Suffolk <http://wakelyns.co.uk/>



Wakelyns is as an oasis within the Suffolk countryside, surrounded by huge fields growing monoculture crops, mostly for animal feed and overwhelmingly dependent on agricultural chemicals.

Martin Wolfe: *Wakelyns is distinguished by the system of alleys and hedges that have been established over the past 25 years making it one of the oldest and most diverse organic agroforestry sites in the UK.*

Our 56 acres are divided into cropping alleys which are 12, 14 or 18 metres wide, and in which we are this year planning on growing YQ and Q wheat, lentils, chia, oats, peas, and camelina. We have been busy working on our planting plan for 2020-2022. The tree rows are home to over 50 varieties of apples as well as pears, quinces, cherries, plums, damsons, apricots, peaches, figs, walnuts, hazelnuts, along with trees for timber and coppiced willow and hazel for thatching, fencing, art and biomass fuel.

Stephen Briggs Cambridgeshire

ARABLE (ORGANIC), CAMBRIDGESHIRE: Stephen is a first generation farmer and has been farming organically for 18 years, building up from 22 acres (9 hectares) to 576 acres (233 hectares). He grows organic cereals - wheat, barley and oats - for seed. He also grows between 10 (4 hectares) and 100 acres (40 hectares), depending on the season, of organic vegetables, including broccoli, cauliflower, beetroot and leeks. In 2009 he planted 2,400 apple trees within his cropland to create the largest commercial agroforestry system in the UK. He makes and sells organic apple juice and, in 2017, converted a farm building into a shop, cafe and education centre
<https://www.justfarmers.org/profiles/b976613061a20e492dcd97e2b1e6ffae>

Agroforestry has several advantages:

1. The trees help to reduce the windspeed and soil erosion.
 - They reduce the need for irrigation which helps prevent nitrogen run off
 - They hold the existing soil and increase organic matter
2. There is an increase in Biodiversity
 - This means more birds and more different bird species
 - The natural planting provides a wild life corridor encouraging more small field and wood mammals and also more insects providing natural insect pest control.
 - This attracts larger predators which helps to rebalance the eco system.
3. There is help in tackling Climate change.
 - Trees provide carbon sequestration and storage both above and below ground.
 - Healthier soil means healthier crops leads to increased productivity without the use of chemicals.

THE KINDLING TRUST <https://kindling.org.uk> We are lucky in the Manchester area to have an example of this way of growing crops. The Trust was established in 2007. Since then it has been working with communities, farmers, health providers, activists and policymakers to challenge and subvert the present industrial food system which fuels the crises of climate change, biodiversity loss, and economic inequity.

The Trust is part of the global movement for Food Sovereignty, a call to action that began with small farmers in the Global South rejecting corporate dominance of farming and asserting the rights of all people to define and control their own ecological food systems.

As one of its projects the Trust runs a COMMUNITY GARDEN at Woodbank Park in Stockport on the ground of the former Council Plant Nursery <https://kindling.org.uk/CommunityGrowing>

THE TRUST'S LATEST PROJECT – KINDLING FARM <https://kindling.org.uk/Farm>

Part 1 The start of this project is the Kindling Heritage Fruit Tree Nursery

<https://kindling.org.uk/news/pioneering-agro-forestry-project-offers-green-recovery-farming>

In December 2020 the Trust was awarded nearly £1/4 million of funding from DEFRA's Green Recovery Challenge Fund, and is working with Unicorn Grocery, on whose farmland the nursery will be sited. The 22 acre nursery, a few miles west of Manchester, will produce and nurture twelve thousand heritage apple, pear, plum, damson and hazelnut trees over the next fifteen months.

The Trust hopes to train up a new generation in the age-old art of grafting and budding to create apple, pear and plum trees. It is the largest training and empowerment project the Trust has undertaken to date, seeking to connect people with nature as well as addressing the climate crisis and securing the future of endangered and climate-resilient fruit varieties. Despite the challenges of covid Trust members are confident they can tap into the surge of concern for environmental issues and a desire to build back better after the challenges of 2020. The organic root stock for the project is difficult to get so they have to go to Europe but the scions for grafting onto the root stock are being collected from various places around the North West

Part 2 KINDLING FARM

A farmer approached the Trust with an offer of land close to the nursery at a very reasonable price. The Trust is hoping to buy this land and develop it into a farming blue print for the future. The hope is that the Farm will be a place where, together, Trust members can support a new generation of farmers, increase access to organic veg for all, pioneer the most ecological farming methods and support others to create social change in their own communities.

BUY A SHARE IN THE FARM

Between 3rd April and 3rd July 2021 you can buy a share in the Farm by investing in the community share offer. Whether you are new to community shares or a seasoned investor, this community share offer is a unique opportunity to invest in the future of food and farming.

You can invest from £200. You can request up to 3% return p.a. on your investment.

You must invest before Saturday 3rd July 2021. <https://kindling.org.uk/InvestFarm>

THINKING ABOUT AGROFORESTRY WORLDWIDE

There are row upon row of trees or bushes in large mono-culture plantations worldwide, in particular the coffee plantations, tea plantations, banana plantations, all monocultures that provide for our needs at the expense of the environment. Small farmers have been pushed off their land and work as wage labourers often in poor conditions. In Madagascar vast fields are planted with the single crop, sisal as means of providing sustainable packaging instead of plastic. But this has pushed the lemurs despite their ecological importance, into a small protected area . In Malaysia vast palm oil plantations offer no home for native mammals, the orangutangs.

But also there are projects similar to the Kindling Trust here. Trees for the Future is working closely with farmers and local community leaders across Sub-Saharan Africa to establish Forest Gardens – planting 50+ species of trees, dozens of shrubs, fruit trees, and 12+ vegetables on a typical farm. Combining trees and food crops improves the quality of the land and offers a better more sustainable life with more income and food for those who take part.

The Fairtrade Foundation offers a route away from the big plantations for those workers who can be involved with their projects. They help achieve decent working conditions, local sustainability, and fair terms of trade for farmers and workers in the developing world. For instance on Honduras the coffee crop often failed, attacked by rust fungus, irregular rains and prolonged dry periods, all directly related to climate change. But cocoa is more resistant to the changes in the climate so one Fairtrade supported Co-operative has diversified planting cocoa bushes and also vegetables.

Such projects here and abroad maybe only small in terms of the world food production but they are pioneers and prophets of the way forward for the future and deserve our support.