

FOOD JUSTICE FOR ALL! HOW OUR YOUTH ARE PIONEERING A BETTER FED WORLD

By Kerri Waters and Dan Graham

The children are our future, so the song goes, but what kind of future? Pandemic and climate crisis would suggest a dystopian nightmare!

In the summer 2021 Dan Graham and Robert Ngawoofah accompanied a group young people from Manchester to represent VON at the Food for Youth Festival and join other inspirational young people fighting for food system change.

The Youth4 Food Festival took place at ValleyFest in Bristol in August to bring together around 100 young food advocates for a weekend of growth, learning and creativity. Led by The Food Foundation, the young delegates discussed issues of food poverty, nutrition and sustainability with their peers and business leaders, campaigners, politicians and policy makers. It gave them a chance to connect with projects fighting for food justice. The jam-packed schedule also gave young people a platform to express their hopes, dreams, desires and artistic talents.

We went along to discover what a sustainable food system looks like and the role veganism has to play in it. First up, we listened to young activists, like Dev Sharma, discuss what it means to be a campaigner. Dev has been a Young Food Ambassador for the Children's Right2Food Campaign for three years where he visited Downing Street to meet party leaders and cabinet ministers. As a Member of Youth Parliament for Leicestershire and a Diana Award winner, he has been a passionate advocate against food poverty and the recent school meals scandal... and all this at the tender age of sixteen!

"More kids are going into long-term poverty and experiencing hunger and food insecurity, and that was especially clear when the schools were off during the pandemic", said Dev's colleague and fellow Youth Member of Parliament for Scotland, Ryan McShane. "I am incredibly angry with the system and I want to know how reform and policy is being scrutinised and enacted on the ground".

Government policy was indeed the focus of our next discussion where a panel of politicians and experts answered questions about the National Food Strategy. The strategy is based on feedback from a national consultation - including the views of over 426 young people - to produce a series of recommendations to the government. One of which was a possible meat tax and a 30% reduction in meat consumption.

Grain farmer, scientist and cook Abi Aspen Glencross agrees that this vital if we want to produce good, healthy food, "I

was cycling through East Anglia from one farm after another and all I saw was feed wheat. That is all going to feed animals but just think how many people could grow veg there? What makes me sick is that these animals are not meant to eat grain. How are we using that much land area to feed animals a diet to produce food that is making us ill?"

Now that we have a food strategy, the question is will the government act on it?

"I'm disappointed there isn't a much stronger statement on meat and animal-sourced foods as it is abundantly clear we are totally addicted to these foods in the UK and that is having a devastating effect on the planet and our health", explained Professor Alan Dangour who is the Director of the Centre on Climate Change and Planetary Health at the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine.

Despite this, Professor Dangour was very positive about a shift to a plant-based food system, "The meat and dair industries are under an enormous amount of pressure and

I can see some pretty major structural changes happening, especially with the incredibly exciting alternative protein sources that have the potential to transform what we eat".

So what will we eat in the future? We met young entrepreneurs, farmers and engineers attempting to answer that very question. These pioneers are putting new technology and innovative thinking to work for the health of our bodies and the planet.

On the platform was an inspiring young veganic farmer Sinead Fenton who runs Awwside Farm; growing edible flowers, vegetables and herbs on a 4.5 acre smallholding in Arlington, East Sussex. Sinead said: "For us, growing is all about celebrating the amazing diversity of our natural and living world. Growing has taught us not



Youth4food





only about the amazing world of plants, but sparked a love for wildlife and the need to regenerate our landscapes to create thriving and nurturing environments for all living beings.”

And that’s what Aweside Farm is all about for us, putting wildlife and people first, and growing beautiful organic

produce that nurtures us and celebrates our incredible and vibrant living world. It’s a celebration of life!

Many of the young people at the festival had experienced food insecurity themselves and understand the inequalities that exist in our global food system, especially how our consumption impacts on the Global South. That’s why the festival included live video links from young food activists from across the globe. Many of them are ambassadors for ‘Act4Food Act4Change’, a list of systems demands for world leaders and decision-makers.

We’ll leave the last word to one of the very impressive young members of the Vegan Organic Network, Izaak Graham. “Young people today understand the global causality of buying meat and dairy. It has a big environmental impact and sets off a chain of degradation.”

The next generation gives us hope that a just and sustainable food system good for people, planet and animals is no pipedream.

the garden of equal delights by anni kelsey

Reviewed By Verona Barnes

This is a very personal book, where the author combines her passion and reverence for the earth and nature itself with a desire to share what she has learned about the dynamics of forest gardening. This is not a handbook for creating a forest garden, but more of a companion book to find out how to be the gardener.

Anni has developed 12 principles of forest gardening which are very much tied in with her view of how forest gardening sits within the environment. She cares very deeply for the planet and sees the ecosystem being created with nature, rather than despite it; for so long, gardening has been fighting nature.

The principles include ideas recognised within forest gardening such as doing less work to achieve more abundance, but her emphasis is different. For Anni less work is more important for the ecosystem, rather than being less work for the gardener. Indeed the gardener has much work to do changing their perception of what needs to be done in every aspect of forest gardening. She describes watching and waiting, not to learn, but learning to watch; to ultimately learn. This part of the book demonstrates just how hard it can be to watch what happens within the garden and wait to see what effect waiting has. For example she does not deal with slugs, but sees what happens to them; they are eaten by birds and the frogs from her pond. The damage they cause has lessened over time as her ecosystem has matured. Sharing experiences like this can help the budding forest gardener who is reading this alongside their chosen handbook.

The first principle she discusses is fertility, health and abundance, where her knowledge on soil, nutrition, biodiversity, carbon storing and feeding the garden what it has grown is the foundation on which the garden is developed.

This is not just gardening in a different way, but being a different gardener. The gardener is regarded as being of less importance than pollinating insects, after all the garden will survive if it is not tended, however if it is not pollinated it will die. Anni shares with the reader her own transformation into a different gardener, and her deep appreciation for the work that nature does within the ecosystem. It’s not just how much she has achieved, but the vital help she has received from the different components of the garden.

The three appendices are interesting in their own right. The first is a table of trees and plants which have all grown in the garden of equal delights. They are listed by category and include their benefit to the garden, and where they grew. The second is a discussion of David Holmgren’s principles of permaculture, where she compares David’s principles with the work she has done. The third is her thoughts on food growing on a larger scale.

As I mentioned at the start, this book is quite deliberately not a handbook of how to plan your forest garden, but as the author states it is ‘about the role of the forest gardener in the actual gardening of the forest garden – what to do or what not to do.’

