

OGP Policy Working Group: Background to Food and Farming

What is happening in Oxfordshire now

Despite over 50% of food in the City coming from the UK, rather than further afield in the EU or overseas, a mere 1% of the food consumed is locally sourced – mainly from sources such as farmers' markets, box schemes, allotments, and direct sale to restaurant. If only vegetables are considered, then the proportion jumps up to 3.5% sourced locally.

On top of this, Oxford's food system is responsible for about 20% of the city's greenhouse gas emissions, twice the annual emissions from all of Oxford's cars.

(<https://goodfoodoxford.org/foodprinting-oxford-how-to-feed-a-city/>)

Farmland accounts for 74% of Oxfordshire's land cover, of which 56% is under cereals farming and 30% under livestock grazing.

“Over recent years there has been a restructuring of farm size in the county. There has been an 11% reduction in the number of small farms (20 ha to 50 ha) and a 5% increase in the number of holdings greater than 100 ha in size over the same period (Defra, 2015). This could be due to increasing land values making it difficult for new entrants to the sector to purchase land, resulting in a switch to contract farming.”

(<https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2013/08/Farmland-%E2%80%93-93-from-the-State-of-Oxfordshire%E2%80%9399s-Nature-2017-full-report.pdf>)

What the Green Party needs to do

Policies are needed to make land available for small-scale agroecological farming, community-supported agriculture, etc. - to grow good food efficiently and locally, cut food miles and fuel usage, sequester carbon, improve soil fertility and water storage, produce healthy food without pesticides and artificial fertilisers, and foster biodiversity and wildlife habitats.

Encourage tree planting to shelter and feed livestock, store water and encourage biodiversity. However, tree planting in the past has often been carried out in gung-ho, thoughtless way. Tree planting on a farm or county (or national) basis needs a well-planned strategy, rooted in ecological principles. It is essential to plant:

- the right trees (usually native trees)
- in the right places (bearing in mind that trees/ woodland is not the only habitat that matters); e.g. trees have often been planted at the expense of wetland (and heath).

Emphasize *agroforestry*! Martin Wolfe's adage that “all agriculture should be seen as an exercise in agroforestry” is well taken! This would transform the landscape – nearly all for the good!

Teach about growing and cooking healthy food in schools (there is still one school farm in the county, at the Warriner School near Banbury).

Note that there is a near-perfect, one-to-one correspondence between good farming (based on the principles of agroecology), sound nutrition, and great cooking. All are

variations on a theme of “plenty of plants, not much meat, and maximum variety”. All the world’s greatest cuisines on an axis from Italy to China use meat sparingly – as garnish, stock, and for only occasional feasts. Quality and provenance matter far more than quantity. But we don’t need to be vegan, or to eat ersatz (as George Monbiot anomalously recommends). Really we just need to re-learn how to cook! Nothing is more important! It should be valued accordingly!

We recognise the twin problems of food waste and food poverty in Oxfordshire. We will support the network of food banks and hubs working to pass on waste from the supply chain to those who cannot afford it, and also the work of organisations like "waste to taste" who are working in the community teaching people how to cook cheap nutritious meals and reduce their personal food waste.

Note: the antidote to food poverty is not to make food even cheaper (with all the damage that that does – to livestock, people, and the biosphere) or to seek in a general way simply to increase GDP and so raise the general level of wealth (which in fact always serves primarily or exclusively to make the rich richer). The long-term cure can come only from acknowledging that food ought to be expensive (because that is the real cost) combined with – the sine qua non – a far more egalitarian economy (“Green Economic Democracy”). In particular, food seems too dear largely because of runaway house prices – the greatest scam of all time. Food banks etc at best are an Elastoplast and in truth a serious indictment of the status quo. That they are apparently necessary is a disgrace. We need to dig deep to change things round and the Green Party is the one most likely to do this.

Similarly: the prime cause of waste globally is not people’s profligacy (though that is egregious) but (a) gratuitous “value adding” (e.g. throwing out all the fruit and veggies that don’t meet the supermarket’s arbitrary standards) and (b) – biggest of all! – the overproduction of meat! E.g. most home-grown cereal in Britain including wheat is for animal feed! If we raised livestock properly only a small proportion would be for feed.

The world needs to re-think agricultural strategy from first principles *and again, of all the political parties, the Greens are best equipped to do this. They have the will and are not lumbered with historical ideology as the big parties are.*

Environmental organisations in Oxfordshire involved with food & farming:

Good Food Oxford: <https://goodfoodoxford.org/> Greens support its *Good Food Charter*

Trust for Oxfordshire’s Environment: <https://www.trustforoxfordshire.org.uk/> which has links with farmers.

Wild Oxfordshire: Wildlife and Farming: <https://www.wildoxfordshire.org.uk/education/>