Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon

SUSTAINABLE FOOD AND DRINK GROUP (SFADG)

Update – June 2026

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1. **Next SFADG meeting Monday 8th June.**
   'Weeds: the problem in perspective'
   Speaker: Richard Cripps – retired lecturer in horticulture at Lackham College
   Bring weeds for identification and discussion.
   Some of you will remember Richard's very engaging talk on fruit tree pruning at the Swan in 2021.
   We'll also be discussing how to progress our Action Plan, with a focus on project 2 and an update on project 3 (see here).
   Venue: Quaker Meeting House
   Time: 7.30-9.30pm (We'll aim to start promptly at 7.30pm)
   All welcome.

2. **Community Farming Festival Day at Avonleigh Orchards**





Read Kate Nottage's report, elsewhere in newsletter, on this successful day which drew in plenty of people with young families.

3. The Facts of Life

I continue to be concerned at how disconnected many people are, including academics, climate change think tanks, policy advisors and "influencers", from the realities of farming and food production.

The carbon footprinting industry continues to use inadequate metrics, which point people in the direction of vegetarian and vegan diets. This was advocated at the April CFB monthly meeting by Sam Hampton, in a talk about "Building Carbon Capability for everyday life" and discovering how everyday choices can drive climate action. However, this is completely delinked from biological and food production reality.

Dairy cows produce a calf on an annual basis, and then produce milk for 10 months following the birth of the calf. The first calf is born when the cow is about 2 years old and during the life span, of about 6.5 years, 4 calves will be produced (in high welfare systems, such as organic, the life span and number of calves may be considerably increased). Only one of the offspring will be needed for replacement of the cow in the dairy herd, the rest of the calves will be reared for beef (often having been sired by a bull more suitable for beef production). When the dairy cows are culled at the end of their productive life, they also go into the food chain. Dairy and meat production are inseparable.

Out of 800 respondents to a recent Farmers Weekly survey of beef farmers across the UK and Ireland, 72% said cattle were out at grass for 26 weeks or more in a year; 7% were fully housed. Most beef cattle in the UK are reared mainly on grass, or grass products (such as hay or silage). More concentrates are fed to dairy cattle and to some beef cattle during the finishing few months. Dung is important for soil health and biodiversity. In winter, cattle are often housed; farmyard manure (FYM) from the dung and straw bedding is eventually spread on the land and creates an on-farm fertility loop.

Cropland needs less fossil fuel-based fertiliser when FYM has been applied. Specialist croplands have become seriously depleted in soil organic matter, resulting in ever increasing dependence on agrichemicals since around the middle of the 20th century. Cover crops and green manures help restore organic matter, no-till or minimal tillage promote good soil structure and soil life,

although ploughing is sometimes necessary for weed control. There are regular accounts in the farming press as to how grazing and/or FYM applied to arable land helps restore biological life to the soil, improves crop health and enables pesticide applications to be markedly reduced. Well managed grazing and application of FYM also improves soil structure and function, through improved soil biology, thereby improving uptake of nutrients, and resilience to drought and flooding, through improved hydrological function. The reintroduction of grazing livestock to arable land is a key component of regenerative farming. Farmyard manure is a source of natural fertility, widely used in the production of our plant foods, including fruit and vegetables.

Every farm is different and ways of managing both crops and livestock varies from farm to farm. There is no 'one-way suits all'.

4. **The Trouble with Numbers**

"Carbon footprints, feed conversion ratios, greenhouse gas emissions – these topics dominate sustainability debates, and rightly so. But when they become the only numbers that matter, we create a dangerous blind spot."

This is from an article by Justine Pearce, a welfare improvement manager at farm standards body, **RSPCA Assured**, in this week's *Farmers Weekly*. She had recently taken part in a Defra roundtable on **animal welfare, climate resilience and food systems**.

Pearce continues: "Measuring these numbers alone risks rewarding highly intensive, lower welfare systems that look efficient on paper, but are ecologically destructive in practice. A low carbon-per-kg metric is a narrow lens that fails to take account of negative side effects. It ignores the nitrogen run-off polluting our waterways, the loss of biodiversity as meadows are converted to monoculture feed crops, and the erosion of soil health."

She talks about mass mortality during climate events, such as heatwaves, when thousands of birds can die in a single shed. Apart from the harm to the animals, the carbon cost of rearing them is wasted and the food produced is lost. She says "The statistic that 40% of food produced is wasted tells us we do not need to produce more food through increasingly intensive systems – we simply need to waste less of what we already produce. The research behind food waste also has

a significant gap – it does not fully capture losses across the entire food chain. It is unlikely to account for the vast quantities of feed, water and land effectively wasted when animals die in mass mortality events… And even when waste is recorded at retail or consumer level, it is simply counted as a single product rather than reflecting the full volume of resources required to produce it: in this context, the push for 'efficiency' looks misplaced. We are optimising for efficiency within a system that does not fully account for what is being lost."

She goes on to explain that higher welfare and more resilient farming needs investment and is central to achieving sustainability goals. "The 4,000+ RSPCA Assured members are proof that farmers want to do the right thing… Better housing, slower growing breeds, appropriate stocking densities, natural cover such as trees on any outside area provided, and better litter management – these all play a role in mitigating heat stress in animals, but they have real financial implications. The government often leaves farmers to bear these costs alone."

"The good news from the roundtable" Pearce concludes "is that the appetite exists to interlink farmed animal welfare, climate resilience and food waste. It just remains to be seen whether it will translate into policy. Welfare resilience is climate resilience and we need to start investing in it." She strongly believes that "without good animal welfare practice, there is no climate resilience in farming"

6. **Let's support better food labelling**

   The concerns expressed above by Justine Pearce about the inadequacy of the current metrics to assess or guide sustainable food production, and dietary choices, align with the concerns we have documented in 'Environmental Impacts of our food and Drink: The Misleading Metrics", see Misleading Metrics – Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon.

   At the SFADG meeting on Monday, 8th June, we will discuss whether Climate Friendly Bradford on Avon should sign up to support CLEAR, the campaign for better food labelling – see https://www.clearfoodlabeluk.org/the-consortium

ENJOY GOOD FOOD AND DRINK

If you wish to be on the SFADG circulation list, please contact Ros Edwards at climatechampions@gmail.com