Food miles and historic designed landscapes environmental sciences essay

ASSIGN BUSTER

Introduction

As our current food debates focus on rising levels of obesity among children, on carbon footprints, ethical husbandry, sustainability and the celebration of regional distinctiveness, growing your own in an allotment or window box makes perfect sense. It also means a reduction in food waste and a welcome reconnection with the kitchen (Colquhoun, 2009; McEwan, 2009; Gammack, 2010). There are also issues of climate change and an expanding global population to contend with. Food production has become unsustainable, using too much water, adverse effects on soil quality and biodiversity (RHS, 2009; Defra, 2012). This country imports most its food. 90% of the fruit we eat and 40% of the vegetables are currently imported (to the value of £6. 4 billion in 2007). That fact alone, should encourage the nation to grow more of its own food (Colquhoun, 2009; RHS, 2009). In theory, the world currently produces enough food for everyone, however there are many social, economic, political and environmental factors that cause problems with access to and distribution of food and thereby lead to continued hunger. A recent report from the Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) estimated that if current patterns of food consumption persist, 60% more food will need to be produced globally by 2050 (compared with 2005-07) (Defra, 2012). According to the National Trust (2008) this country wastes about 30% of the food it buys. According to McEwan (2009) some people believe that organic and locally produced food or growing your own is for the affluent and middle classes and that the masses deserve cheap food. There is no such thing as cheap food. There is always a price to pay. There is however a high demand for local food, keeping money in the community; connecting farmers with

consumers and strengthening our awareness and connection with the land and the food it produces (Montgomery, 2008). Local food be it from farmer's markets, farm shops or box schemes also means that people would eat seasonal produce which is more sustainable and adds more variety and change to a diet (National Trust, 2008).

Farming issues

Since the end of World War Two British farming has gradually been intensified, particularly under the Common Agricultural Policy of the European Union. While farm, flocks and herds grow, the amount of farms has diminished inescapably as technology replaces manpower. This pattern is replicated across the western world of industrialised countries (Holden, 2009; Beat, 2012). Developing counties have been forced to follow this example and intensify their agriculture in order to feed its growing population. Despite this argument being supported by vested interests and politicians, it is increasing challenged by independent scientists, whose studies have consistently found that small-scale organic farming is actually the best way forward (Mundler and Rumpus, 2012; Beat, 2012). This industrialisation of food has led to a standardising of taste and the disappearance of thousands of food varieties and flavours (National Trust, 2008). A report by the International Assessment of Agriculture Knowledge, Science and Technology for Development (IAASTD, 2008) concluded that if the world is to cope with a growing population and climate change while avoiding environmental collapse and social breakdown, it will have to change the it produces food. IAASTD (2008) also found that genetically modified (GM) crops would have little benefit in feeding the poor as well as stating that persisting in current

trends would deplete the world resources and put future generations in peril. The United Nations (UN) (2008) found that compared to most other production systems in Africa, organic agriculture was more advantageous and more sustainable in the long term. There is a need to redirect agriculture fundamentally to modes of production that are increasingly environmentally sustainable and socially just (Schutter, 2010; Defra, 2012). Agroecological practices scaled up can concurrently increase food security and farm productivity, improve incomes and rural livelihoods, and combat species loss and genetic erosion (Schutter, 2010). Ho (2011) indicates that there is a scientific consensus that a move to small-scale sustainable agriculture and localised food systems will address the primary reasons of declining agricultural productivity as well as the conservation of natural soil and water resources while saving the climate. The National Ecosystem Assessment showed that in the past, increases in the productivity of farmed land have resulted in declines in other ecosystem services. A healthy, properly functioning environment and the maintenance of essential ecosystem functions are however the foundation for sustaining food production (UK National Ecosystem Assessment, 2011; Defra, 2012). The view that neither large-scale chemical farming nor GM crops can possibly feed the growing world population, whereas organic smallholding is the only way that can, is strongly supported by scientific evidence (Beat, 2012). An organic walled kitchen garden and allotments could form part of this as it is small scale, significantly more biodivers, and the knowledge and skill to be organic and sustainable is already there. They are adaptable and flexible and do not depend on one crop or harvest (McEwan, 2009). A lot of farmland is under threat. Every year, thousands of acres of fertile soil and hundreds of family

farms are being lost to development and the intensification of agriculture. The knowledge and stewardship that has maintained the delicate balance between man and nature for generations is disappearing and the social fabric of our rural landscape is unravelling (Curtis, 2010). A new charity, The Soil Association Land Trust (the Land Trust), is challenging us to re-see the way we view our farmed landscape and our place in it. The trust was set up in 2008 with the aim of safeguarding land in perpetuity for sustainable farming and growing and reconnecting people with the land and the concept of stewardship. The new land coming into the trust will provide public access to farms and the countryside-to reconnect people with the land (Curtis, 2010).

Food miles and going local

As the environmental impacts of global agro-food systems have been exposed, the concepts of ‘ local food’ and ‘ food miles’ have become powerful political tools in policy discourses built around sustainable agriculture and alternative food systems (Coley, et al, 2009; Mundler and Rumpus, 2012). There has been a tendency to assume that local food is a solution to the problem of food miles. However more recently, food miles have been linked much more explicitly to carbon accounting. For example tomatoes grown in Spain require less energy than Britain because climate but this is set against the extra energy used in the transport to Britain (Coley, et al, 2009). Another example is roses grown in heated Dutch greenhouses that have a much bigger carbon footprint than those airfreighted from Kenya (Woodward, 2013). Over the last decade there has been a rapid growth in home delivery for grocery and other items: however,

travel for food and household items still represents 40% of all shopping trips by car, and 5%£ of all car use, equating to over 16 billion vehicle km per annum. A study found that if a customer drives a round-trip distance of more than 7. 4km in order to purchase their organic vegetables, their carbon emissions are likely to be greater than the emissions from the system of cold storage, packing, transport to a regional hub and final transport to customer's doorstep used by large-scale vegetable box suppliers (Coley, et al, 2009; Mundler and Rumpus, 2012).

Food production in the past

Driven by a combination of necessity and fashion, growing your own has been a strong theme throughout our history-and today it has come full circle. Many of the features you see within the parks and gardens of the National Trust today give clues to the diet and lifestyles of the past, providing us not just with a view of history, but a source of reference for producing an individual's food at home today (Gammack, 2010). Until the 18th century there was little distinction between the productive and aesthetic ' gardens' of the country gentleman. Most of the components of self-sufficiency were equally important as ornaments in the landscape, symbolising status and wealth, such as a deer-park (Gammack, 2010). By the mid-18th century most food for the estate was produced in walled kitchen gardens, and in some cases the home farm, both separate from the ornamental gardens, although still a prestigious part of the estate (Gammack, 2010). In the late nineteenth century, the provision of a plot of land for the working classes to grow vegetables was advocated as the answer to a range of social ills including heavy drinking, poor health and low life expectancy. In 1908, the Allotment

Act was the first in the UK to grant the legal right to a productive garden. During the Second World War we ‘ Dug for Victory’ and emerged from it in more robust health than this country had enjoyed since the start of industrialisation (Colquhoun, 2009). This may suggest that allotment are the way forward.

Allotment provision

Allotment provision has been going from bad to worse since the Second World War and at best the decline is just halting (McEwan, 2009). The UK currently has around 330, 000 allotments, down from its heyday of 1. 5 million during World War One. The National Society of Allotment & Leisure Gardeners (NSALG) estimates that a further 100, 000-150, 000 people are on local authorities’ waiting lists. It based this figure on a recent survey of 50 councils, which showed that waiting lists had increased tenfold on the same survey in 1997 (Horticulture Week, 2009). With the exception of inner London, English local authorities are obliged to make " adequate provision" of allotments for residents thanks to a law that reached its 100th birthday in 2008. Councils fear that if they buy or lease land then, when demand falls off again five years down the line, they will be stuck with the sites. But the revised Act from 1925 does allow for change of use (Horticulture Week, 2009). Leach (2009 cited in Horticulture Week, 2009) explained that while many new housing sites already include food-growing areas, parks managers should consider finding room for such areas in their parks. It is not possible to annex part of a park for allotments as it would constitute change of use. It is likely that allotments will be mainstreamed back into green space. Often they are not part of the parks department as thus do not figure in green-

space strategies (Horticulture Week, 2009). The National Society for Allotment Gardeners (NSALG) usually receives about one call a month over threats to allotment land. Councils are tempted by the development of housing and supermarkets. Allotments established in the 1800s are often sited centrally, in prime spots. Allotments are not a hobby that can be picked up and dropped. It is a long term investment, taking years to get good crops of rhubarb and asparagus. An established allotment is manageable for older people but starting again is soul-destroying (Leendertz, 2013). One of the most high-profile recent allotment site losses was Manor Farm Allotments in east London, which was bulldozed to make way for the Olympic Park. It seems a shame that this most British of features was not worked into the park itself, and presented as an example of something precious and important (Horticulture Week, 2009; Leendertz, 2013). But developers will always prefer a clean slate. It is always the " more viable" option. If councils and developers cannot be trusted upon to work around allotments with imagination, then they need stronger protection. An imposing bombardment of change-of-status applications would almost be understandable: councils are facing massive government cuts, and government is encouraging housing development to help stimulate the economy (Leendertz, 2013).

What’s happening now

What has been said so far, forms part of the reason why organisations and key individuals are promoting ‘ grow your own’, local and organic produced food. The National Trust is the largest non-governmental landowner in Britain and in 2009 already provided allotment land at around 50 of its properties. The benefits to the Trust are that the land is looked after to a good

environmental standard and this contributes to the conservation of its sites (Colquhoun, 2009). Monty Don and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall supported a National Trust project to create 1, 000 community allotments at its historic gardens in 2009. The National Trust advertises the new 1000 allotments on the www. landshare. net website. Fearnley-Whittingstall set up the website, which matches growers with available land online in 2008 (Appleby, 2009). Gibside in Northumberland, Minnowburn in Belfast, Wembury in Deven and Osterley Park in London are among the National Trust sites where allotments are available. Allotments were created in parkland and derelict walled gardens. As many historic Victorian kitchen gardens have fallen into disrepair, this provides a way to revive them. Rather than being car parks or left to grow scrub this gives them value again (Appleby, 2009). This also provides an opportunity to grow heritage varieties in a historic setting (Schrieber, 20100. EU rules state that if a variety is not on a national list, it cannot be sold. Seeds cost around £1, 500 to register at present. However the Food & Environment Research Agency (FERA) plans to relax regulations on selling thousands of heritage varieties of plant seeds, giving gardeners a whole new range of varieties in the marketplace (Appleby, 2010). The original purpose of many of the National Trust estates is being reinstated. These estates were once self-supporting with rolling parkland and vast tracts of agricultural land. They had important out buildings-cow sheds, dairies, mills, breweries, pigsties, pigeon lofts, kitchen gardens and glasshouses (NT, 2009). This is made possible under the guise of the Fine Farm Produce Awards. It recognises and encourages quality food, ‘ properly’ raised with a true sense of place (provenance). An award is given to a specific product rather than to an individual. The ingredients must come from National Trust

land or from appropriate, preferably local, breeds and varieties. The producers/tenants must reveal all details on their production processes and techniques. They are then assessed for authenticity and use of ‘ proper’ or craft techniques (NT, 2009; Schrieber, 2010). Local Food is a £59. 8 million funding programme that distributes money from the Big Lottery Fund (BIG) to a variety of food-related projects to help make locally grown food accessible and affordable to communities (Kirwan, et al, 2012). An a evaluation of the project found that the Local Food program is bringing small, often neglected pieces of land into production, developing local infrastructure, and contributing to an increased in the physical quantity of food produced at a local level. In addition, it is also clear that Local Food is a vehicle for a number of social benefits, including community cohesion, regeneration, healthy eating, educational enhancement, integrating disadvantaged groups into mainstream society, and developing people’s skills so that they are better able to get into paid employment (Kirwan et al, 2012). Across the UK today communities are working with local producers to take ownership of the food they eat. Known as ‘ community supported agriculture’ (or CSA), the aim is to share the responsibility and rewards of farming between producer and consumer (Schrieber, 2012). These schemes work on a membership basis, with customers paying a fee entitling them to a discount on, or a share of, the produce. For farmers this brings a secure income, a chance to forge relationships with customers and a reduction in distribution costs. For consumers it means competitively priced local food and the chance to get involved with food production (Schrieber, 2012). These schemes mean fewer food miles and less waste. They boost local economies

and reconnect people with farming and the outdoors. An example of a CSA on a National Trust site is Buckland Growers in Devon (Schrieber, 2012).

Sissinghurst

The landscape surrounding the garden at Sissinghurst was central to Vita Sackville-West's love of the place as ' a garden in a ruin in a farm'. Back in 2009 Adam Nicolson (2009) had the idea of reinstating the farm to produce fresh organic produce for the restaurant, in view of the 115, 000 people a year who eat something in the Trust's restaurant. Nicolson believes along with Ho (2011) that a small farm of 259acres can be viable if at its heart, it is supplying a restaurant with food that is local, organic and fresh. This is what people want to buy. Along with the farm is a 3. 5 acre vegetable garden and a new orchard to replace the old one, which was removed due to the grants given to do so at the time. This produces an array of produce for the restaurant.

The Vyne

At The Vyne, the National Trust's Tudor manor house near Basingstoke, the walled garden was in production for more than 200 years, there is little written evidence about what crops and varieties were grown. So while historic authenticity may not be uppermost, the estate can focus on what will best meet its aims of visitor engagement. If information was available about what was grown in the Victorian era, then it would be recreated (Horticulture Week, 2010). The Vyne was given a £500, 000 grant from Defra's Greener Living Fund to enable the walled garden to become a show case for local, sustainable food production. This will help get people back in touch with the origins and seasonality of their food (Horticulture Week, 2010).

Education: The break between producers and consumers

Due to urbanisation many people have lost the link to the production of food. If someone has a packet of crisps, they often have no concept of where that food has come from or how it has been produced. A gardener or a farmer on the other hand has a direct link to the production of food. When people grow their own food, the standard of food tends to be better as opposed to cultures where cities can't feed themselves and have to be fed by someone else, where food suffers (McEwan, 2009; Horticulture Week. 2010). Children have no chance if their parents or grandparents never show them that carrots grow in the ground. Growing food has the added advantage of interesting children in fruit and vegetables. It also teaches them useful skills such as being able to feed themselves without going to the shops. Additional they lean about seasons, life cycles, plant reproduction, insects and insects, weather and soil structure. If they are persaded to eat there produce, they will also learn about preparing, cooking and eating vegetables (Beat, 2009). Conversely this brings children and older people together, promoting community cohesion (Appleby, 2009, Horticulture Week, 2009).

Conclusion

Organisations such as the National Trust have the opportunity to exploit their various resources including their farms and gardens. At the same time as preserving historic artefacts, they can preserve heritage techniques, old breeds and varieties (Hunt, 2006). They can provide high quality, organic food on a local scale that is sustainable. Not only does the creation of allotments on National Trust properties enable sites to be cared for and used for their original purpose, it helps satisfy the demand for allotments, teaches

people where their food comes from and seasonality. Research has proven that small farms that are organic are also the most productive and sustainable (Beat, 2012). Food puts places on the map; examples include Cornish pasty, Kendal Mint Cake or Cheddar cheese. The richness of the British landscape is reflected in regional, seasonal produce and this biodiversity needs protecting (Schrieber, 2010).