

## **Food, food, glorious food - we will become what we eat**

**An introduction to the impact of food and drink at festivals – and some suggestions for environmentally friendly practices**

*By Hannah Claxton*

*You're lying in a field. Next to you is a lake where ducks and geese are swimming and behind that some woodland, a beautiful backdrop as you lie on your picnic blanket listening to gorgeous music coming from a stage in front of you. People down the front are dancing, around you people look happy. Taking in the festival ambience, you feel so relieved and pleased to be out of the city and connect with the countryside in this way. Beyond there is farmland and hedgerows and you can see in the distance a farmer out on his tractor. You sip your Czech Bud and share your picnic - a New Zealand lamb kebab, French brie and some apples from California to finish. Festival food is such an eclectic and exciting part of your summer weekend ... and you can't wait to try the pie stand.... and then you feel a sense of wonder as a butterfly lands on your leg. And carefully, you place your unfinished meal waste in a bin before heading down the front for a dance...*

*....REWIND.....What would happen.... what would happen if.....you lie in that field and sip your locally made organic cider, whilst eating a lamb kebab from a lamb reared just a mile down the road whilst gorging on local cheeses, strawberries and raspberries too. This time there are butterflies, bees and thousands of insects dancing around you, and just a few eyarsd away a local the farmer is delivering his produce to the pie stand....and when you finish, you take your waste to a compost bin, knowing it will break down naturally and then go back to feed the ground beneath you, keeping your dance floor green and healthy for another year. What would be the impact on that lake, that woodland, that farmer, that field you are sitting on, the air which you are breathing and the atmosphere beyond.....what would be the impact on your one weekend of the year out of the city and into the countryside....?*

The Croissant Neuf Summer Party's recent Environmental Audit, showed that by attending the 2,000 capacity festival, the audience emits 50% less CO<sub>2</sub> than if they stayed home. This year, Croissant Neuf have stated that their priority for the 2012 festival is to increase its commitment to reducing its environmental impact by using more local suppliers and reducing food miles .<sup>1</sup> The context for such a move is that the UK imports 38% of its food needs and that a staggering 50% of this is not only indigenous to the UK, but shipped in during the UK growing season.<sup>2</sup> Food it is, glorious it isn't!

What we eat has a direct impact on us, we all know the adage 'you are what you eat' - but more than ever what we eat is wrapped up in the future of what we will become. The food we eat is heavily implicated in climate change and has a huge impact on the ecology and biodiversity that sustains life on this planet.

Whilst there is currently no direct research into the environmental impact of food and drink practices at music festivals and venues, what we do know is that internationally the food industry generates 1/3 of all global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, as well as significant levels of the greenhouse gases

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<sup>1</sup> <http://partyneuf.co.uk/about-us/green-ethics/>

<sup>2</sup> The Validity of Food Miles as an Indicator of Sustainable Development, DEFRA, July 2007, pgs 6 & 7

nitrogen oxide and methane. One study from the USA suggests that the American public are currently eating the equivalent of a gallon of oil a day from the production, processing, packaging and distribution of the food they eat.<sup>3</sup> As music festivals and venues take inspiring steps to reduce their impact on the environment, there is an increasing urgency to add food and drink to the list of responsibilities that any sustainable policy should address.

Some festivals, vendors and producers are already taking steps to try and figure out how to go local, thereby reducing their food miles. The Green Man festival proudly stocks local Welsh beers and ciders, and every year the demand grows, as festival-goers engage with these environmentally friendly (and tasty options). But there is even better news – and its down to simple planning and economies of scale (which can apply to green business just as they apply to big industries). With the distance food travels traveled and a reduction of CO2 emissions key significant factors, local suppliers are now working together to share delivery infrastructure<sup>4</sup> and by working together, these local producers are also reducing their costs and building reliable relationships for future festivals whilst contributing to local jobs and economy.

That said, the distribution models for local and sustainable food choices in the UK are still very weak, but there are signs that making positive food choices could start to get easier. At a national level new organisations such as **Sustaination** ([www.sustaination.co.uk](http://www.sustaination.co.uk)) and **Local Food Advisor** ([www.localfoodadvisor.com](http://www.localfoodadvisor.com)) are creating online networks which are helping the hospitality industry, consumers, farmers and food producers to make connections. At a local level, groups like **Manchester Veg People** are literally buying small vans and creating new local, organic distribution networks<sup>5</sup>.

For some reason, the term 'organic' in the UK, seems to have become mixed up with a stereotype of over-priced food for over privileged people. Yet at its core, good organic or 'agro-ecological' farming practice can make major differences in the areas concerning the environment, recognised by certification standards from respected bodies like the Soil Association, Organic Growers and Biodynamic Demeter. Not only do organic and agro-ecological farmers have much lower CO2 emissions (because they aren't burdened with the oil based foot print of agro-chemicals) but they also spend a lot of time working on the fertility of their soils. In the UK, 45% of our soils are on a EU watch list as in a 'dangerous' condition. Globally, intensification of farming and over use of agro-chemicals is leading to a crisis in fertility, with yields flatlining and 38% of the world's agricultural land currently at risk of irreversible desertification.<sup>6</sup>

Soil that is rich in organic matter and high in natural biological and bacterial fertility increases water retention, an important consideration as we face increased extreme weather scenarios and regular droughts. Well managed, fertile soil also enhances the soil's ability to store carbon from the atmosphere. Some researchers think our soils could, if properly managed, sequest 5-15% of all annual global CO2 emissions,<sup>7</sup> mitigating and reducing the CO2 in our atmosphere by a significant amount. Agro-ecological practices also reduce water pollution, a significant problem that costs UK companies £120 billion a year in the removal of pesticides and other toxic chemicals from our water supplies.<sup>8</sup>

Taking a lead on food impact and events, **Sustain** (an alliance for better practice in food and farming) have introduced a food pledge for caterers, hospitality and food buyers as part of the **2012 Olympic Food Legacy Programme**. It is a good resource for anyone wondering where to begin with a food impact policy for their festival, event or venue:

[http://www.sustainweb.org/foodlegacy/food\\_legacy\\_pledge/](http://www.sustainweb.org/foodlegacy/food_legacy_pledge/). The pledge encourages vendors,

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<sup>3</sup> Food, Land, Population and the US Economy. Pimentel, David and Giampietro, Mario. Carrying Capacity Network, 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Michael Havard, Fai Watu Ltd, Green Man Bars

<sup>5</sup> <http://vegpeople.org.uk/>

<sup>6</sup> Life Cycle Assessment, 2009 (<http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2010/02/100209183133.htm>)

<sup>7</sup> Lal, R. (2004): Soil carbon sequestration impacts on global climate change and food security. *Science* 304, 1623- 1627.

<sup>8</sup> JN Pretty, C Brett, D Gee, RE Hine, CF Mason, JIL Morison, H Raven, MD Rayment, G Van der Bijl, An assessment of the total external costs of UK agriculture, *Agricultural Systems*, 65 (2), 113-136, 2000.

caterers and hospitality towards the purchasing of local, seasonal food from food producers practicing good to high levels of environmental standards whilst taking into account the importance of animal welfare, sustainable fishing practices, healthy eating and waste management.<sup>9</sup>

Reducing food waste is also an important consideration. In the UK it is estimated that we are binning 30% of all food purchases, which is equivalent to 17 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.<sup>10</sup> In the US, the food waste figure is closer to 50% of all edible food, from farm to processing, to supermarket to household fridge, at a cost of \$75 billion dollars, binned, mostly to landfill.<sup>11</sup> Along with the positive effect on the environment for reducing food waste, WRAP (Waste and Resource Action Programme) estimates that the UK hospitality sector could save £724 million per year by tackling this issue.<sup>12</sup>

Glastonbury Festival is leading the way on what to do with food waste, with an integrated food composting initiative for all vendors launched in 2004. The first festival saw 110 tonnes of food waste composted that would otherwise have gone to landfill. Food waste in landfill is not 'biodegradable' in the sense many people assume. Once in landfill, food waste releases methane, a highly damaging greenhouse gas and leaches a highly toxic and contaminated liquid capable of considerable groundwater pollution.<sup>13</sup> On 24<sup>th</sup> August 2004, Michael Eavis proudly spread Glastonbury Festival compost back onto his land, to feed the soil, which feeds the grass, which feeds the cows, which makes the milk, to make the cheese, which feeds the people at the next Glastonbury festival. A truly closed loop, low impact, sustainable system – true recycling with soil fertility thrown in to boot. And the Festival has now invested in a new anaerobic bio-digester with a neighbouring farm to increase recycling and reuse of farm waste and festival waste to turn it into a green energy source – widely publicized in the UK press as 'poo power'!

Festivals and venues hold huge and important spending power that could drive real changes in the food industry and influence consumer behavior. The top 200 UK festivals alone contributed £450 million to the UK economy.<sup>14</sup> There is a real opportunity for this area of the hospitality sector to commit their enthusiasm, expertise and entrepreneurial energies to find practical solutions and build relationships from farm to fork and back again. Such a commitment would also allow knowledge and expertise in growing, creating and distributing new sustainable, low-carbon food and drink based economies to develop and flourish.

Importantly, festivals and music venues are inspirational places, which are able to tell stories and build exciting worlds of possibility. By adding food and drink impact to any EFP (Environmentally Friendly Practice), there is a very wonderful opportunity to encourage audiences to think differently about what we eat and drink, and why. Such changes could pave the way for a sea-change in the food culture of this country. And through eating our way to a more sustainable future, could create connections with the countryside that are no longer just a visit or a day out, but are intimately a part of us.

**Hannah Claxton** is a farmer in training whose recent move back to London follows an interest in future models for feeding our cities. She is currently working with the Urbivore Foundation, helping to put commercial and sustainable agriculture back at the heart of communities. Her passion for food that is good for people, communities and the environment has taken her to the Indian Garhwal Himalayas to work on research for Vandana Shiva's Navdanya organisation and to New York to research urban agriculture and food activism – getting stuck into the growing of food

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.sustainweb.org/foodlegacy/food\\_legacy\\_pledge/](http://www.sustainweb.org/foodlegacy/food_legacy_pledge/)

<sup>10</sup> New estimates for household food and drink waste in the UK, WRAP, Nov 2011 ([www.wrap.org.uk/retail\\_supply\\_chain/research\\_tools/research/report\\_new.html](http://www.wrap.org.uk/retail_supply_chain/research_tools/research/report_new.html))

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Jones, 2004, University of Arizona, Bureau of Applied Research Anthropology ([www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Business/US-wastes-half-its-food](http://www.foodnavigator-usa.com/Business/US-wastes-half-its-food))

<sup>12</sup> The Composition of Waste Disposed of by the UK Hospitality Industry, WRAP, July 2011 ([www.wrap.org.uk/hospitality](http://www.wrap.org.uk/hospitality))

<sup>13</sup> Waste Strategy for England, DEFRA, 2007, pg 20.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/business/2010/aug/27/music-festivals-record-industry>

*where ever possible. She has recently finished working for Fern Verron, a 30 acre biodynamic farm in Herefordshire that specialises in high quality, super tasty, agro-ecologically produced vegetables and meats. Her 20s were spent in the music industry managing successful international artists and project managing strange and wonderful, unique events and happenings. Now, she can mostly be found with soil under her nails or cooking for friends and seeking out farmers markets.*

### **Further Recommended Reading:**

Eating Oil, Food in a Changing Climate - Report, Sustain  
[www.sustainweb.org/pdf/eatoil\\_summary.PDF](http://www.sustainweb.org/pdf/eatoil_summary.PDF)

Bottled Water and Energy - A Fact Sheet, Pacific Institute, 2006  
[http://www.pacinst.org/topics/water\\_and\\_sustainability/bottled\\_water/bottled\\_water\\_and\\_energy.html](http://www.pacinst.org/topics/water_and_sustainability/bottled_water/bottled_water_and_energy.html)

Waste and Resource Action Programme (WRAP), reports on Food Waste  
[http://www.wrap.org.uk/local\\_authorities/research\\_guidance/food\\_waste/](http://www.wrap.org.uk/local_authorities/research_guidance/food_waste/)

Food Futures, Strategies for a Resilient Future – Report, Soil Association, 2009  
<http://www.soilassociation.org/aboutus/whatwedo/ourreports#climatefriendlyfoodandfarming>

Soil Carbon and Organic Farming – Report, Soil Association, 2009  
<http://www.soilassociation.org/aboutus/whatwedo/ourreports#climatefriendlyfoodandfarming>

Growing a Better Future: Food justice in a resource-constrained world, Oxfam 2011  
<http://policy-practice.oxfam.org.uk/publications/growing-a-better-future-food-justice-in-a-resource-constrained-world-132373>