

permaculture

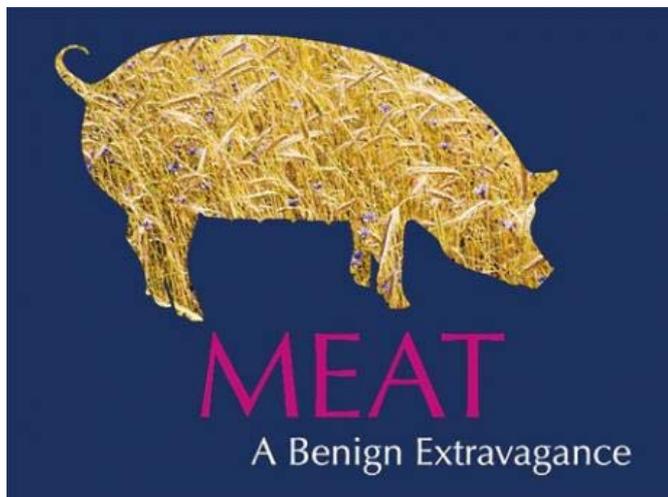
practical solutions for self-reliance

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Meat eating vs vegetarian or vegan diets

Simon Fairlie

Simon Fairlie's explosive new book, *Meat: A Benign Extravagance*, argues that a more subtle approach to the environmental impact of eating meat is needed, taking full account of how livestock can be constructively integrated into agricultural systems



Meat - A Benign Extravagance?

For about 10 years I lived in a community which (since the comments I make here can apply to other similar permaculture settlements) I don't need to name and will call Happy Valley. There were many things I liked about the place, but one of the aspects that I found difficult was the collective diet. There was no prohibition on eating meat; but since communal meals had to provide for the common denominator of collective acceptability, a vegetarian ethos prevailed. If you were on kitchen duty, it was more convenient to cook without using any animal products, because then you didn't have to prepare anything special for vegans.

Food Miles & Self-Sufficiency

Initially I agreed with this policy, because meat is environmentally extravagant, but over time I found this approach problematic, both at consumption level and at production level. On the one hand, Happy Valley, although it aspired towards self-sufficiency, was spending about £200 per fortnight on pallet-loads of food imported from the four corners of the world, notably China, Turkey, India, Brazil and the USA. Most of this food was either high fat or high protein: olive oil, sunflower oil, margarine, peanut butter, tahini, soya milk and yoghurt, nuts, chick peas, beans, lentils, molasses, dried fruit, rice, quinoa etc.

On the other hand the production of animal products on site was marginalised, a matter that I was sensitive to since I was the main stockman. Certainly the milk, cheese and yoghurt produced were eaten, and we also sold cheese. But whereas the vegetable garden was a collective responsibility, towards which every-one

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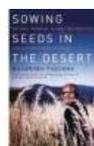
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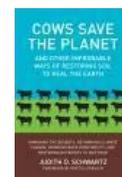
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