

http://fora.tv/2009/07/22/Food_Security_and_Climate_Change#fullprogram

This movie on Food Security and Climate Change is well worth watching. An interview with two people about the inter-connectedness of food, agriculture, climate change that has not sufficiently been brought forward in the debate on global warming, manifesting as climate change.

Both speakers assume that the process of global warming cannot be affected much at all by human efforts. The kind of scientific meddling we have known for years has always made things worse. So, the task now is how best to adapt to a planet that is going to change. We can guess, measure, what areas of the planet will get hotter or cooler, dryer or wetter.

Scientists project that by the middle of this century the population of this planet will be nine billion (at present just short of seven billion). Personally I am not at all sure that it is useful to project to 2050. It seems from current news that enormous changes, disasters, may happen much earlier.

Our response to whatever changes in the atmosphere must of course be adaptation, not dangerous experimentation.

In the movie, Dr. Sara Scherr, world expert on scientific facts and figures talks about world wide food and agriculture availability and needs today, and in a warming future. She makes the point that in most serious discussions about the danger of too much CO₂ in the atmosphere not enough emphasis has been given to the extremely important role of agriculture — living green — in absorbing CO₂ out of the atmosphere. After all, plants and trees require CO₂ in order to be able to provide us with the oxygen we need. Green absorbs CO₂!

The other speaker, Mark Hertsgaard, reporter and writer, talks about a recent visit to western Africa, to Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali. On a map, those three land-locked countries are at the southern edge of the Sahara desert. He tells a fascinating story about a new kind of agriculture that is spreading in those three countries. We think of agriculture as cleared land, planted in neat rows of wheat or corn (almost everywhere called maize). In that part of Africa people grow millet and vegetables. At one time the tribal chief, or perhaps the ruler of the country, claimed ownership of trees that grew in those desert countries— people cut trees before they could grow. According to Hertsgaard it was president Reagan who convinced leaders of the importance of “private property.” In any case, a few farmers began to leave the trees grow where they happened to sprout. That meant planting millet and other crops around and in the shade of a tree, maybe two trees, three. Magically he now produced twice as much millet as before.

His neighbor saw that, allowed trees to grow, planted around and under his trees, and also saw his crops thrive. Over the last twenty, thirty years, the

practice of growing around and under trees spread to other farmers, and farmer to farmer into neighboring countries.

This new kind of growing things under and around trees flourishes, producing two, three times as much as before. Not only that, the water table has raised as much as 15 meters in some areas (45 feet) so that, in what used to be desert, now people have water for their crops and, what's more, for themselves. In the Sahara it does not rain much, but it does rain. Sand does not hold water but the root system of trees aerates the soil and makes it possible for moisture to stay nearer the surface. The leaves of the trees make mulch.

Hertsgaard ends his enthusiastic report with saying that from a satellite the border between Niger and Nigeria, a straight line, is clearly marked: Nigeria (which has oil, and perhaps because of that pays no attention to agriculture) looks yellow from space; on the other side of that straight line Niger is green.

Trees and plants absorb CO₂.

Burning oil, and drilling for it, spews huge amounts of CO₂ into the atmosphere.

Hertsgaard casually adds that allowing trees to grow in that part of the world turns out to be a very ancient custom. Of course. The city of Timbuktu (many spellings) in what is now the country of Mali, once was the center of not only trade but culture and sophistication in 14th and 15th century Africa. Timbuktu is where the north-south road crosses the east-west road across Africa. It still has two famous mosques, now damaged by the desert. Timbuktu must have had trees many centuries ago.

The most important lesson from that story, however, is that this change came from the farmers. Trees were not planted, but whatever tree grows there was allowed to mature. No western experts, no scientists from outside were involved. No money grants from the International Monetary Fund, or from the USA. Not even national policies, support, management. This was truly a change from what I call "the bottom."

When I heard Hertsgaard say he was going to tell this story in December at the big meeting of governments in Copenhagen, my first thought was—actually I yelled at the computer—NO! I had a vision of those three African countries suddenly being invaded by thousands of experts, scientists of all kinds, scouts for well-meaning foundations giving away money, all of them wanting to study, measure, manage, and export that new model of agriculture. It cannot be exported, of course. It is a unique response to a unique place and time. What works in an African desert cannot work in, say, Bangla Desh, where large part of land are regularly flooded with salt ocean water.

I am convinced that we, western Man, with all our science and technology, our limitless power, must step back. Leave local communities, every unique area of

the world, work out their own adaptation to whatever climate change will bring to that unique place.

We are the ones who caused global warming. It is we, Westerners, who are destroying wildlife habitats. It is we who want to control Nature, manage everything—and it is our mismanaging that has caused a disaster that is only just beginning to show its effects.

Today we expect our best brains to find answers, create techniques, spend money, send teams of experts, to manage adaptation(s). The answers cannot be in more left brain thinking, nor in the Monsanto labs, or in the think tanks of famous universities.

Answers, plural, must come from the creative right brain thinking of simple, uneducated natives: they know their own environment best. The answers can only be in Nature, within the context of the planetary ecology which we have almost entirely forgotten to consider in our mad rush to... To what? Riches unknown in history? Yes, but at what price. A few of the most powerful, ruthless people owning the planet? In the end that is an illusion. The planet cannot be owned, cannot be managed, cannot be forced. Ants build structures that in relative size compare to our most daring skyscrapers. But ant hills as well as skyscrapers belong to the planet, and in time crumble into dust,

I grew up with a sort of mantra: IN CASE OF DOUBT DO NOTHING. I don't know where it comes from, who said it first. It is a good phrase, good advice. In an emergency, in a disaster, don't run around in a panic, don't call the trained emergency team. Sit back, stop thinking altogether. Give your intuition finally free rein. Listen to that precious gift, our intuition, that remnant of right brain awareness. You will get your answer — not "the" answer, but the answer that refers to you and your unique circumstances and capabilities.

Sadly, we westerners are conditioned to distrust our intuition. We cannot accept that native people, indigenous people, might teach us something about surviving in their unique part of the planet (and all parts of this earth are unique). We cannot accept that uneducated people might know what science cannot even see. We think we cannot learn from animals; all desert people know and accept that some animals are better at finding water than humans; they gladly learn from animals. We are conditioned to distrust lessons from the past and so we must learn them again and again and again. Americans are lost in an Amazonian jungle; our response is to destroy the jungle so that we can see straight lines again. We cannot consider the immeasurable loss of a wealth we so callously destroyed: hitherto unknown plant and animal species, medicinal plants and useful animals (a new kind of honey bee, for instance).

We are educated to focus on designing and managing a manmade world, on top of the earth. The earth as property, to be bought and sold, to be leveled, denuded, destroyed to get at what we call resources. It took millions of years for the planet to make the oil we have almost all pumped out in a century. We

cut the top off mountains to get at the coal that we burn in a week, coal that is the end product of millions of years of compost, dead plants compressed and aged to something we burn to make heat.

We are obsessed with control. We think we must manage everything from governments to corporations to the media to people, with complete disregard for the reality of the planet that gives us life. We are not managing, we are plundering.

We, 20th and now 21st century humans have triggered the planet to respond to our polluting, our wasting, our wanton eradicating forests, mountains and rivers.

And still we think we must manage.

Probably it takes a knockout blow to the head to reclaim our senses.

Hopefully those who survive can listen and learn. Listen to their heart, their intuition. Listen to their neighbor, their child, a frog. Remember long forgotten ancient ways of surviving in a wilderness. Remember the things we did wrong, so that now we can do better. Survival is not a fight, it's not force. It is working and thinking together. Life eats life, but survival means eating only what we need; and honoring the life that feeds us.

IN CASE OF DOUBT DO NOTHING

Modern Man's refusal to doubt his superiority is radically changing the planet we share with all Life. We have forgotten how to do nothing, trust What Is.