

Chaddesley cares about Planet Earth

Buying local produce – part 1

I have written in the past about the importance of buying fruit and veg. grown locally, or at least in the UK – cuts down on distribution pollution and supports local enterprise. In the spring of this year a very similar message was being promulgated by the Director of the Soil Association, but for a different reason.

He was asking “What would happen to the food chain if there was an interruption to fuel supplies?” Imagine the effect on fuel supplies after a tornado, conflict in the Middle East or a lorry drivers strike. The national grid could fail as there would be little or no fuel. How soon would supermarket shelves empty – and then what?

Another thought – we are seeing a steady, if sometimes slow, increase in the price of fuel. If distribution costs rise at the same time, then supermarket food may also increase eventually. At what point might we say “wait a minute, I’m not paying that for a cabbage”?

Virtually everything that we buy is oil dependent at some point. Much of the food that is offered by the supermarkets is not only oil dependent, but comes from overseas and needs a massive distribution chain, opening up the possibility of yet more disruption. So what, you might ask? So, because we all seem to want cheap (supermarket) food, there is relatively little “local” produce available. Many farms have gone out of business or changed product.

“Market forces” you might say. Perhaps, but is it a sensible market force if it means eventually that we cannot get the product at all – i.e. supply is disrupted and there is no longer a local producer? Perhaps we need to rethink. Perhaps we, the purchasers, need to commit to growing more of our own fruit and vegetables. Perhaps we need to commit to loyalty to local growers, to buy their produce regularly year round. Perhaps then the growers will commit to growing what we want in their turn, so that we can purchase their output.

Where might we start? – buying local, fresh, good tasting fruit and vegetables!

Here’s a taster of next month’s article – In 2002 40% of the banana crop in the West Indies was wasted because they were “wrong”. The EU rules for bananas state that “the thickness of a transverse section of fruit between the lateral faces and the middle, perpendicular to the longitudinal axis, must be a minimum of 27mm”. Does it taste any better? – does it hell!!!

Oh, and this year my wife and I are going to save a few trees by not sending cards to all our friends in Chaddesley – so this is Happy Christmas to all of you!!

Martin J. Kenrick

For the Working Group set up by the Parish Council