



IT'S YOUR FUTURE

Summer 2005



Welcome

Dear Supporter,
Welcome to Action for Sustainable Living's first Newsletter, our quarterly digest of news, views and gossip on the sustainability front.

It's now just over a year since Anna O'Sullivan (the 'Green Guru' much beloved by the South Manchester Reporter!!) hit the streets of Chorlton. To give you just a flavour of what she has been involved in during that time –

- Assisted in getting Chorlton Fair Trade status – see below,
- Supported over 250 individuals to lead more sustainable lifestyles through home visits,
- Organised group activities attended by 350 people,
- Helped set up a recycling centre in Chorlton Water Park,
- Worked with two schools and involved 700 pupils in litter and Fair Trade exercises , and
- Regularly appeared in local papers and contributed a column to one of them

That kind of track record is one reason why AfSL was awarded a Defra grant of £150,000 over three years, which has allowed us to appoint two new Sustainability Consultants –

- Hulme – Josh Steiner
- Old Trafford – Claire Wheeler

and begin the task of assisting two very different communities to live more sustainably. We look forward to bringing you their good news stories over the coming months.

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Did You Know?

- Up to **85%** of power used by a VCR is consumed when on standby: appliances on standby pump **one million tonnes** of carbon into the atmosphere (Standby Britain – The Independent, 23rd June 2005)?
- Britain's farmers throw away as much as **a third** of their fruit and vegetables because supermarkets are imposing ever-tougher rules on cosmetic appearance (News – The Sunday Times, 17th July 2005)?
- Britain is **at the bottom** of the European heap when it comes to recycling and are only belatedly responding to the problem because of pressure from our European partners (from *Rubbish: Dirt on Our Hands and Crisis Ahead* by Richard Girling – Eden project Books)?

Working with Manchester Universities

Manchester University and Manchester Metropolitan University are partly situated in the Hulme area of Manchester. Sustainability Consultant for Hulme, Josh Steiner, and AfSL director Alan Boyd, have been in discussion with Environment Officers from the two universities about working in partnership to support students and staff to live more sustainably. One outcome has been a joint funding bid to set up a "Save Energy in Education" project, which would improve the energy efficiency of university buildings and halls of residence by raising awareness and supporting action among staff and students. If the bid is successful then AfSL will recruit two "Energiser" workers, 1 based in each university, to provide information, advice, training and support, building on AfSL's model of working in the community. Staff or students interested in sustainability issues other than energy efficiency will be passed on to AfSL's community-based workers for support.

We will find out by the end of October whether our bid has been shortlisted, and will then submit a more detailed application. A copy of the bid can be downloaded from www.afsl.org.uk

Whether or not the bid is successful, Josh intends to work with the universities to enable staff and students to make a contribution to, and be involved in, the local community in Hulme. Areas in which action groups might be set up include energy efficiency, recycling, organics and Fair Trade, transport and green spaces. The universities are keen in principle, and we expect to agree a specific project in time for the next term in September.

For further information about AfSL's work with universities, email josh.steiner@afsl.org.uk

Fair Trade Feast!

On 20th June around 150 people gathered at Trafford Athletics Club to celebrate an evening of Fair Trade. The event was organised by the FairTrade Chorlton Steering Group, Friends of the Earth and AfSL. A string quartet was playing as people arrived to hear speeches from –

- Jessica Symons, Director of Krata - a sustainability consultancy - and Chair of FairTrade Chorlton
- Emily Diamond, National Friends of the Earth, based in Leeds



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- Chris Wright, founding member of AfSL (his talk is reproduced below)
- Simeon Greene MBE, farmer and General manager of St Vincent's Banana Growers Association

during which guests enjoyed a wonderful Organic/Fairtrade buffet provided by The Bean Counter (based in Chorlton) and Nectar Café (an organic café in Hale specialising in local produce). The evening was rounded off with a raffle of amazing Fair Trade prizes generously donated by local people and businesses.

Chorlton was awarded Fair Trade status on 23rd July

Fairtrade Chorlton aims to:

- Raise awareness of Fair Trade in the local community
- Persuade *retailers* and *eateries* in Chorlton to sell Fair Trade products to customers
- Persuade all businesses to provide Fair Trade products to staff

You can play your part by signing the Fairtrade Chorlton pledge form at www.afsl.org.uk

More information on Chorlton Fairtrade is available at www.fairtradechorlton.krata.co.uk

Fair Do's For All – by Chris Wright

We've heard a lot about Fair Trade recently and the importance of giving farmers in the developing world a Fair Deal by shielding them from the chill winds of Free Trade. But what do those words 'Fair' and 'Free' mean, particularly in relation to food?

We in the so-called developed world have grown up with the idea of a free market economy. It keeps prices low and offers consumers maximum choice. New goods arrive in the market place: initially, they're expensive, but then competition kicks in and prices drop. Our whole culture is saturated with the ethic of consumption and, as individuals, we instinctively try to get the best deal we can. The cheaper we can get stuff the more we can have – of everything. The only limit is what we can afford – and, increasingly even that is no limit at all.

I would like to suggest that, in applying this approach to food, we are losing sight of something important. Put simply, by treating food as a commodity like any other we no longer value it. For a start, we need food to stay alive, we don't need iPods and DVDs. More fundamentally, food is also one of the main connections between the world out there and the world within - we literally take a bit of the world out there into ourselves and make it part of ourselves. Without wishing to get too mystical here, that's a pretty amazing concept and one that should make us want to be absolutely sure about the quality of what we take in.

It should also make us want to cherish and nurture the people and the processes that provide us with good quality food. Taking the long-term view, farming should be the ultimate sustainable product. If a piece of land is looked after properly, it will go on producing forever. The deserts of North Africa, once the granaries of ancient Rome, show what happens if we over, or misuse the land.

So, from these perspectives – quality and sustainability - how are we doing? Well, here's a couple of statistics that should worry us. The average age of small farmers – and I'm not talking stature here, I'm talking about the traditional, mixed economy English farm – is 58. More leave farming each year



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than take it up and that's reflected in the dramatic reduction in the overall number of farmers (from 82 thousand in 2001 to just 68 thousand last year - 2004).

So what's going on? Well, a lot of our food now comes from abroad – including 70% of all organic food sold in the UK (a direct reflection of the small farmer problem). But that's only part of the answer. Although the number of farms is going down, the average size is going up (14% of farms are now over 100 hectares – the average is 50 - and they account for 65% of agricultural land). In other words, we're talking about the advance of agribusiness, and agribusiness is above all about pushing prices down, obeying the basic laws of the global free market. It is competitive and cut throat, a business that produces things that just happen to be food. And like any other factory process, it's the bottom line that matters. Accountants pour over inputs, outputs and investment ratios and pronounce on ways to improve productivity. As a consequence horizons tend to be short term and there is an emphasis on technology and innovation (satellites can now scan fields and programme fertilizer spreaders so they put more on some parts than others to produce a uniform crop).

So what's the problem? We have to move with the times after all and technology has transformed our lives, mainly for the better. Well, yes, it is a problem because it is simply unsustainable. Big farms no longer produce for their immediate localities, they aim for national and even global markets and that means trucking – even flying - stuff around. They are the creatures of the supermarkets - themselves the logical outcome of treating food as a commodity like any other – and it has been estimated that every item on a supermarket shelf has traveled an average of 2000 miles to get there. But oil – the single thing that keeps the whole show literally on the road - is running out. Some commentators suggest that reserves have already peaked – most give it 20 – 30 years at most - and yet worldwide demand, fueled by the burgeoning economies of China and India, continues to soar. It simply can't continue.

Agribusiness is also unsustainable because it uses increasing amounts of artificial fertilizer and pesticides, which also depend on the oil industry. Because large scale tends towards monoculture, it lacks the diversity and hardiness of traditional mixed farming - which is a small-scale, self-sustaining, natural system - and thus depends on an array of chemical defences. There are now signs that the bacteria that exist in topsoil and are essential to growing food are disappearing on fields that have become heavily dependent on artificial fertilizers – the soil itself is becoming sterile.

And just in case you think supermarkets are good because they offer more choice as well as cheaper prices, think again. They may be constantly adding new items and services to their range (you can now get married in Tesco's!), but within each category choice is severely limited. In the 1950s there were 50 well-known brands of UK apple and some 30 different varieties of potato, today just four varieties of apple and three of potato claim 90% of the UK market. There used to be 20 different types of regionally distinct cattle, now just one, the Friesian Holstein, dominates the market. "Lousy milk, lousy meat ... but lots of it", is one farmer's view. Supermarkets also source their foods from the same basic supply chains, which is why food scares like Sudan A can turn up all over the place at the same time. Buying food from supermarkets is inherently dangerous as well as being unsustainable.

So, what can we do? Well, cities used to be dependent on their hinterlands. There was a daily exchange between town and country. Today, Lancashire and Cheshire might just as well be on the other side of the world. And, even if supermarkets do stock products from our own back yard, they have probably traveled around the country to reach us! The direct relationship between town and country has been broken and we need to re-establish it if we are, once again, to enjoy and value food.

And that brings us back to Fair Trade. Free Trade has produced the situation I've just described and it just isn't sustainable. To encourage local farmers to produce the food we want in ways that can continue into the future, we are going to have to recognize that it isn't just another commodity to get the best deal we can on. That means putting our normal and habitual consumerist hats to one side and really asking questions about where food comes from and how it is produced.



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Shopping at somewhere like Unicorn in Chorlton makes that task easy because a lot of what they sell is grown very locally indeed. Buying from Farmers' Markets, Farm Shops and Box Schemes are other ways in which the trends can be reversed – although even here it is worth checking where food has actually come from – you may be surprised.

But just as the Chorlton Fair trade group is actively promoting Fair Trade with producers in developing countries, so a similar group might develop links with local farmers, encouraging local shops to access food from them or, if necessary, setting up your own distribution system (charity shops provide one model, where a lot of the work is done by volunteers, thus keeping down the costs). It is even possible to conceive of local people going to work on their linked farms at times when the farmer needs additional help – another way of keeping the cost of food down.

It's a virtuous circle. We get good food whose provenance we know and value, and farmers are guaranteed a fair income. And, by re-establishing the direct link between producer and consumer, we are saying that food cannot be left to the vagaries of Free Trade and that all food, wherever it is produced, should be bought at a Fair Price.

The Fair Trade movement has shown us the way forward. We need to extend that principle to our own back yard. It may just change the world.

Find Your Local Producers – log on to www.bigbarn.co.uk and type in your postcode

The Alliance for Better Food and Farming can be found at www.sustainweb.org

Building an Organic Future with the Soil Association – www.soilassociation.org

Real Nappy Reality!

3 billion disposable nappies are used in Britain every year – that's 8 million nappies each day, most finding their way to landfill sites¹. Landfill sites are filling up rapidly and we need to think seriously about reducing the amount of waste we produce. One way of doing this is by switching to Real Nappies.

Real Nappies are becoming increasingly popular as people realise their benefit to the environment and the wallet!

Friday the 22nd July saw the first appearance of Action for Sustainable Living's new Real Nappy kit at a Women's Health event in Old Trafford. The Nappy kit was purchased with Community Chest funds and will help Sustainability Consultants make real the idea of Real Nappies at consultations and events.

The event was organised by BLOOM; a network of different centres, groups and services, all working together to help people in Hulme, Moss Side, Old Trafford & Whalley Range get what they want out of life. The event aimed to provide Asian women in the area with free impartial health and well being advice. At the AfSL stall women were encouraged to explore real nappies as a viable alternative to disposables. Most women had not heard of real nappies before and were impressed at how modern and comfortable the real nappies looked.

Real nappies have come on in leaps and bounds in recent years, they now come in a variety of shapes, sizes and patterns suiting even the fussiest baby! Most real nappies are made from natural materials including cotton and hemp.

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In comparison disposable nappies are made up of 65% wood pulp and 35% petroleum derived synthetic materials such as acrylics, rayon and polypropylene, these synthetics are produced from oil – another non-renewable source. As well as depleting natural resources, disposable nappies take hundreds of years to biodegrade and can contain viruses and even live vaccine which pose health risks.²

As well as benefiting the environment some people believe real nappies can have some health benefits for babies as they are made from natural fabrics - unlike disposables. Chemical-free reusable nappies mean that you are putting natural material next to your babies' skin, rather than man-made material.³

Money savings are possible too! Calculations made by a number of campaign groups realise the cost of using real nappies and home laundering them to be on average £500 less than using disposables! The average spend on disposable nappies is £791.701 over 2.5 years.⁴ These calculations include the cost of running a washing machine (depreciation), washing powder and electricity as well as the cost of the real nappies, liners and a carry bag.

You may well have heard recently that the Environment Agency has produced a report contrary to these findings. The Women's Environmental Network; a campaigning organisation representing women and campaigns on issues, which link women, environment and health, say the report is 'Seriously flawed'. The lifecycle analysis (LCA) for the Environment Agency has taken four years and cost more than £200,000 and concludes there is "no significant difference between any of the environmental impacts". But the conclusion is based on poor quality data and misses the point of its own findings.⁵



Photo supplied by Women's Environmental Network

WEN's full media statement can be found by accessing the internet site: www.wen.org.uk/general_pages/Newsitems/ms_LCA19.5.05.htm, alternatively if you do not have access to the internet, please contact WEN direct. Contact details are listed below.

Most people however seem to be cottoning on! Local Authorities across the UK are trying to reduce the amount of household waste produced in their area. Both Manchester and Trafford council are advocating the use of real nappies and even teaming up with a local laundering service: Cotton Tails, to provide **free trials to local residents (details below)**. Manchester council agrees Real nappies are a great alternative and give parents the chance to stop disposable nappies going into our waste stream and protecting our environment.⁶

If you would like any more information on Real Nappies why not follow some of the links below, alternatively you could book a home consultation with one of our sustainability consultants who would be happy help you make an informed decision.

Notes and References

- 1: www.manchester.gov.uk/environment/recycling/realnappy
- 2: Cotton Tails Nappy Laundry Service, Tel: 01244 374521
- 3: www.manchester.gov.uk/environment/recycling/realnappy
- 4: www.wen.org.uk/nappies/cost_comparison
- 5: www.wen.org.uk/nappies
- 6: www.manchester.gov.uk/environment/recycling/realnappy

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Free Trial

To take part in the new trial you need to fill in an application form which can either be downloaded at www.manchester.gov.uk/environment/campaigns/nappy.htm, or alternatively you can contact Fiona Maddocks - Waste Minimisation Officer for an application and further information Tel: 0161 953 2421, email the Recycling Team at recycling.team@manchester.gov.uk. If you live in Trafford please contact Cotton Tails direct on 01244 374521.

Assumptions for Cost Comparison

- WEN has assumed an average of six changes a day as suggested by paediatricians Miriam Stoppard and Dr Christopher Green
- The average price per disposable nappy is 14.5p.
- This is based on WEN research (March 2005) of both branded and own brand nappies. The same research found the average price of branded nappies to be 17.8p per nappy (branded nappies hold 92% of the market³), and an average of 13p per nappy for own-brand. TNS superpanel found the average price of nappies to be 17p per nappy in 2003.
- At an average six changes per day over 2.5 years at 14.5p per nappy this equates to an average cost of £6.09p per week, and an overall spend of £791.70 rounded to £792.
- Whatprice.co.uk calculate the cost of keeping a baby in nappies over a 24 month period at: £793.32 and calculate 14.8p as the average price of a nappy. www.whatprice.co.uk/health/parent/nappies.html
- Pregnancy and Birth Magazine found the cost of keeping a baby in nappies over three years to be £1,126.

Useful Contacts

Nappy agents, Cloth nappy enthusiasts selling and promoting cloth nappies in their area. They may use one supplier or several for purchasing nappies. This is an excellent way to see a range of cloth nappies in the agent's home or in your home. Most agents are very flexible and are happy to do demonstrations for groups.

Lollipop, Tel: 0161 860 4193, email: claire@redrobe.freeseve.co.uk
Stocks most leading brands of shaped nappies and covers, plus Lollipop's own products.

Daisy & Tom, 0161 835 5000, 118 - 124 Deansgate, Manchester M32, stocks Bambino Mio products.

Manchester Real Nappy Network, provides excellent impartial advice on choosing, using and buying cloth nappies.

Kim; Tel: 0161 282 6357 or Gwyneth; Tel: 0161 928 1549. Also has a list of websites for buying real nappies on the web.

Extra-Large Real Nappy Network, Provides information about real nappies suited for older children and adults.

Tim Brown, 2 Park Road, Blockley, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos GL56 9BZ; Tel: 01386 700 293 or call 01386 701 428 Email: XLnappy@aol.com.

Nappy Laundries, Do the washing for you! You will be given a week's worth of nappies to use, and once a week they will be picked up to be washed. You will then be provided with a new load for the following week. If you're dazed and confused, call 01983 401959 to speak to someone personally about finding a contact in your area.

Cottontails, Jenny Baker, Tel & Fax: 01244 374521, email: nappies@cottontails.co.uk, website: www.cottontails.co.uk, covers Cheshire, Wirral, South Manchester, Merseyside, Wigan, Warrington & North East Wales. The nappies are 100% natural cotton and chemical free. If you haven't had your baby yet, they will be happy to provide you with a starter pack 2 weeks ahead of your due date.

Real Nappy Helpline



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Details of local cloth nappy contacts, whether you want to buy them, wash your own or use a nappy laundry service. Tel: 0845 850 0606

Women's Environmental Network, P O Box 30626 London E1 1TZ; Tel: 020 7481 9004 Email: nappies@wen.org.uk, www.wen.org.uk - online cloth nappy information and supplier contacts.

National Association of Nappy Services, Tel: (0121) 6934949; Email: info@changeanappy.co.uk; Web: www.changeanappy.co.uk
Find out where your nearest laundry service is.

Friends of the Earth's resources for parents of young children,
www.foe.co.uk/campaigns/safer_chemicals/resource/parents.html

Unicorn Grocery, 89 Albany Road, Chorlton, Manchester, M21 0BN (0161) 861 0010. Unicorn is a worker's co-operative that stocks a small range of real nappies.

It's a great time to become a volunteer

As a volunteer your time, skills and experience will extend AFSL's capacity to support local people to live more sustainable lives. Volunteers are an important part of the organisation and its' future. We have received money from Manchester Community Chest to fund a **volunteer training programme**.

The programme is optional, although we would encourage volunteers to take advantage of this opportunity. Volunteers can opt to take part in one area of training or they can opt to take part in it all. The training opportunities are:

- **AFSL In house training**
This short training course has been designed to give you a basic understanding of AFSL as an organisation and its' future. Based in Manchester. Volunteer "open days" are coming up in Chorlton (12-5, Saturday 27th August, Chorlton Library) and also in Whalley Range (date to be confirmed).
- **Centre For Alternative Technology short courses.**
Educating For Sustainability, 7-9 Oct 2005 (residential course.). This course uses games, discussions, practical activities etc to explore our understanding of sustainability (ideal for work with younger people). Basic accommodation and food is provided.
Educating with the Eco-footprint, 24-26 Oct 2005 (residential course). The eco footprint is a powerful educational tool which can help promote sustainability in a fun way. You will also get the opportunity to measure your own footprint! Basic accommodation and food is provided.
- **Hockerton housing project tour**
The project is the UK's first self sufficient, ecological housing development. The day long tour provides a unique "real life" experience of living sustainably. Minibus transport will be provided.

All places are limited. Contact us to book your place.



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Future Events and Opportunities

October signals the start of our **local and organic theme** in Chorlton and Whalley Range. AfSL will be taking part in the **Chorlton fringe festival** - complete with the now infamous giant banana! Taste testing, quizzes and support to take action will be top of the bill. **Could be the start of a local food group in Chorlton or Whalley Range? If you are interested please call Anna on 0845 456 4468.**

We also have some **fantastic training for volunteers in October** (see above)

An exciting new topic area is being developed by Anna (Chorlton Sustainability Consultant) to help people in Chorlton find out more about **green ways of getting around**. Transport has become one of the biggest influences on the stability of the world's climate. The burning of fossil fuels in our vehicles produces greenhouse gases, which has been linked to global warming. We hope the development of this new area will help people to take action and find cleaner greener ways around Manchester. If you would like to help develop this area let AfSL know. **For more information call Anna on 0845 456 4468**

AfSL Online

Although AfSL is a Manchester based initiative, what we are doing has national applicability. Our online "community" is one of the ways in which we are bringing people together to enhance sustainability. People who don't live in the areas we currently serve can still support our work by giving donations (thank you, William Lana of **Greenfibres** – www.greenfibres.com - for your particularly generous gift recently), becoming members, pledging to take action, or volunteering with us – all through our website. Besides showing that the technology works, it's a great boost to everyone here to receive such support. And even if you live locally, electronic communication can be a good way of staying in touch. The website now has a range of facilities - take a look at www.afsl.org.uk:

- **Give a donation** using your credit or debit card
- **Join AfSL** online, or download our membership form and join by post - you will be supporting our work and gaining access to a range of information and benefits
- Make a **pledge to take action** - currently only on Fair Trade or Recycling, but soon the website will also contain information and action ideas for the full range of sustainability issues that AfSL covers
- Become a **volunteer** - we have a range of volunteering opportunities, and for many you don't have to live locally (anyone want to help develop our website further!?)
- **Join our mailing list** for this newsletter.

And Finally!

- Please feel free to **forward this Newsletter** to anyone you think might be interested in its contents.
- Action for Sustainable Living is currently a Manchester based initiative (although we would like to see similar initiatives established in other areas), so we give priority to people living there. If you are from **outside the Manchester area** and want more information about our activities, please do not phone us. **Visit our website, or contact us by email, post or fax.**
- If you **do not wish to receive future editions** of the Action For Sustainable Living Newsletter please **email unsubscribe@afsl.org.uk**



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