

Friday August 19th 2022

Dear George,

Your book, *Regenesiis*, and subsequent articles demonising organic pasture-fed meat, are unhelpful, polarising and alienating.

The suspicion it casts on organic farming as a whole threatens to undermine the agroecology movement, which has fought for years against agrottoxins- in defence of our biodiversity and soil - and provides the most compelling future narrative I have found in 30 years of campaigning.

I've spent time working the fields alongside you, followed your rallying cry into the field to uproot GM crops, crawled with you and my girls under large landowners' fences to catch crayfish and shared ideas for the revolution over beautiful homegrown meat around the fire at Tinker's Bubble.

You've been a true comrade, providing inspiration over our parallel campaigning lives through the struggle for land rights, against corporate capture, and I can truly say that you are one of our movements' most powerful voices in the ultimate fight against our race to extinction. But now, your voice risks harm. It threatens the livelihoods of millions.

I feel duty bound to intervene.

The problem is that you've conflated all organic, pasture-fed livestock, in unlimited numbers, with the agroecology movement, and point our fellow travellers in the green movement in a misleading direction by putting a positive spin on cloned, gene-edited "cultured" meat. Corporate investors are, no doubt, delighted they've won you over, as they are forever trying to find ways to greenwash their sneaky shiny takeover of the narratives that guide our food system.

Your arguments against agroecological livestock are based on prominent UK and USA spokespersons for regenerative agriculture (often shortened to "regenag"). These spokespersons are not representative of how livestock fits into the solutions put forward

by the global movement for agroecology, La Via Campesina, which represents the production methods and livelihoods of peasant farmers across the world at the frontline of the global fight against the industrial food chain. We are the living alternative to corporate controlled global supply chains who are currently destroying the soils, water and biodiversity essential to the food sovereignty of future generations.

Your critique of the concept of food sovereignty is that it doesn't accept the right NOT to farm - though our critiques of industrialised agriculture do precisely that. We stand firmly against farms which work against the "common good" though definitions of what this means will be hotly debated as all farms follow a mixture of practices, some good, some bad, and each contains the potential to improve practice.

When we think globally, the concept of Food Sovereignty deeply embodies equity and "fair share". That means that in order for all to have the right to food, fuel and fibre, we have to balance between land for livestock and other uses, aiming for equitable distribution.

Therefore, when we defend our livestock farmers (myself included), we also defend the livelihoods of forestry workers, horticulture growers, arable farmers, and conservation land workers. All of these sectors provide employment and contribute to our basic human needs. The goal is for no one to take up too much space, by encouraging cooperation, collaboration and multipurpose use of this wonderful earth we all share.

In our movement, it's widely accepted that current levels of production and consumption of animal products must be reduced, but there is no need to present an alternative that eliminates it completely. Livestock is important to nutrition security, fertility rotations, conservation grazing of wildflower meadows not to mention the livelihoods of small farmers and pastoralists across the globe. Agroecological, pasture-fed beef and lamb *can* be raised, without imported grains and soya, on land that must be grazed to maintain grassland biodiversity and contribute nutritionally rich food.

You are utterly off the mark in singling out land-use as the most important criteria for environmental impact - the use of agrottoxins, large machinery, intensive stocking numbers and excessive effluent also contribute to biodiversity loss. These are all the impacts of industrial livestock production.

The agroecological movement seeks to end industrial, corporate controlled, input driven, vertically integrated factory farming, leaving room for a sensible and sustainable amount of low input livestock.

Surely, the solution is to limit the size and density of our livestock herds by not allowing holdings over a certain size (including big ranches) to receive subsidies, and banning mega dairies, battery chicken factories and concentrated pig farm operations. We should also cease the export of meat to bring production more in line with consumption. Policies such as these would take livestock numbers down, but allow for small, low output holdings, that share the land with nature, and which gain a higher price through direct sales.

I urge you to be more nuanced, as I simultaneously urge organisations defending organic farming to take responsibility for examining our production methods and land-use so we take no more than our fair share.

More research needs to be done to give a clearer definition of where, and when, and to what level, livestock plays an important role based on scientific accuracy. For the last couple of years, we've been working on a land-use modelling report and it is true that we need more forests and wetlands and that pasture-fed beef and lamb use a lot of land, but there is room for livestock on leys and meadows.

The type of livestock production we want is small-scale and integrated into mixed farms as an essential part of fertility building for arable production and recycling waste or raised on biodiverse, mixed meadows. And it must be local, so that people are connected to its production and understand better the limits or seasonality and respect how precious animal products are.

On the carbon sequestration question, as in the question of land take, we can't look at the figures in isolation from other factors. Forests sequester more carbon than grassland, but, grassland also sequesters carbon and the balance between these two land uses should be made with the context of rapidly divesting from fossil fuels. The most essential psychological element of achieving this shift is replacing what we gain from consumerism with a greater connection to the source of our basic needs - the land.

Statistics from the ETC group prove that 70-80% of global nutrition security is provided by small-scale producers. According to the FAO, Livestock plays a crucial

economic role for around 60 percent of rural households in developing countries – including smallholder farmers, agro-pastoralists and pastoralists. It contributes to the livelihoods of about 1.7 billion people living in poverty and 70 percent of those employed in the sector are women. For example, in India 95 million people earn their living from herds of 2-4 hand-milked cows. Yet, each day the systems supporting this production are dismantled because they are deemed to be “inefficient”.

Your narrative is dangerous because the narratives of our food system hold tremendous power to leverage resources, research and development funding, subsidies, grants and regulations. For decades, the resources have flowed to the big guys, while agroecological production has been starved of investment. A food system woven together from small, mixed agroecological farms, especially in the industrialised world, may feel like a hopelessly romantic vision, but it's a damn site closer to reality than expecting techno fixes to feed us.

I was recently invited to a meeting of cultured meat scientists and was shocked at how far away from reality their ideas were. The top investors were large corporations and there was little analysis of how the production would be scaled up without relying on large industrial monoculture production. I was also struck by the fact that the primary source materials for the meat were cloned and genetically modified, but the promoters were keen that the public be kept in the dark about this. For this reason, the proponents of cultured meat lobbied hard against the labelling of new gene-edited foods so the public wouldn't be put off and they could apply for public R&D funding to develop their product.

It was clear that there is a limited amount of funding available to research agricultural systems and that popular narratives guide governments' choices. If you feed the narrative that organic is bad and cultured meat is good this undermines our ability to evolve by gaining the resources we need to become more scientific in our approaches and thereby, more efficient in the truest sense of the word.

More importantly, your polemic against organic farming spreads division into the movement when the most important thing we should be doing now is pulling together behind a consistent and positive vision.

I am worried that you've lost faith in humanity's ability to rapidly reconnect. That the 2,000 pages of abstract reports you've read have panicked you. It's understandable, I

felt that same panic sitting through days of IPCC reports at COP26, wondering how on earth we will change in time. The panic makes the glossy, well-financed solutions of the corporations seem like viable shortcuts, though our gut instinct knows better.

Don't lose faith in the agroecological movement, help us get the support we need! There are millions of us chipping away everyday, with our hands in the soil, sowing deep roots of resistance, and with these roots, of both grass and tree, we will weather the storm.

With love and rage,
Jyoti