

Workshop: Re-skilling
Session: Afternoon Session 19th November

Chair: Jim Twine

Speakers:	Will Best	Manor Farm
	Rebecca Stevenson	SA apprentice
	Edward Acland	Woof
	Gyles Morris	Magdalen Project
	Vanessa Glasgow	WEA
	Mike Ward	

Main points

1. Information

There is a knowledge deficit in society in the practical skills required for a career in farming and growing. This may be attributed to a number of factors; people do not learn practical skills like they used to in the past, attitudes to the role of children in work have changed and this problem is compounded by the detachment of children from nature. An aging workforce is not sustainable.

There is a need to disseminate information throughout society aiming to increase the appeal of farming. This can be achieved through making people aware of what farming has to offer, through the official accreditation of skills that can be learnt on the farm, and making apparent the 'alternative' opportunities that farming can provide outside of the conventional education system.

2. Connectivity

Demand for farm workers is high; people are struggling to employ skilled workers on their farms. At the same time there are people who want to learn skills and are looking for a place to do this. Mentoring services and apprenticeships provide invaluable ways to learn practical skills and in the long term often provide a valuable service to the farmer – it is a mutually beneficial process.

Connections need to be made between those who need workers, and those who want to learn. This can be achieved through provision of an information service about what courses/schemes/qualifications are available – in effort to match up farmers and potential trainees more efficiently.

3. Enabling

Taking on an apprentice or worker is often a risk to the farmer. Farmers need encouragement to take on unskilled workers, be rewarded for their commitment and time or be made more aware of the benefits that their investment might result in.

The accreditation of the skills learnt through apprenticeships or other schemes may facilitate funding streams that could be used to encourage farmer participation. Similarly this can also be achieved through promoting the educational potential of the skills and experiences that are promoted on a farm.

4. Network building

A certain amount of joined up thinking needs to occur in order to facilitate successful reskilling efforts. A network needs to be established that:

- Brings together, encourages and trains potential trainers/mentors
- Sets out the skills that are needed within the farming sector and the skills that may be learnt through the various schemes available
- Unite the multiple organisations that already exist, and make apparent the different models of learning that are available
- Links the 're-skilled' to the jobs and opportunities available in the farming sector

Actions

The Soil Association will aim to co-ordinate the production of a database that brings together all the different modes of training currently available. Help will be needed to bring together a list of all schemes, particularly small courses and local on-farm opportunities. We therefore need input regarding any schemes that you are carrying out or know about.

Martin Steer offered his time to talk to school groups/teachers to help promote organic farming as a career. There must be more farmers and growers like Martin that may be able to spare a couple of days a year to make progress in this area. The Soil Association will work on a template/pack that will enable them to do this.

WEA highlighted some of the current opportunities for funding that are available for on-farm training. There are a number of funding streams that could support this form of training and the Soil Association will aim to create a database of these funding opportunities to enable trainers and farmers better access to funding.

After the workshop Simon Joshua from Radford Mill approached us with some very interesting ideas around creating a network of training centres and providers. We will be pursuing this in the New Year. If anyone would like more information on this or is keen to be involved please contact Ben Raskin (braskin@soilassociation.org).