

## **Faith: Reconnecting Britain's faith communities with their food**

Environmental stewardship is an important tenet of all faiths. How does sustainable food link in with this and what relationship do faith communities have with their food and where it comes from? Representatives from the Muslim, Hindu and Christian communities examine the ways communities can deepen their connection with food and the environment, and how faith communities can be mobilised around their food.

Chair - Revd Dr Mike Rayner, Director, British Heart Foundation Health Promotion Research Group; Vice Chair, Sustain and Assistant Curate, St Matthew's, Oxford

Speakers:

Elena Renier, Islamic Foundation for Ecology and Environmental Sciences and Medical Herbalist

Roger Pauli, Industrialist, Treasurer of the Anthroposophical Society in Great Britain and Bio-Dynamic farmer

Ranchor Prime, Author of 'Hinduism and Ecology', Consultant to the Alliance of Religion and Conservation and "Friends of Vrindavan", an international charity dedicated to conserving the sacred forests of Krishna in India.

Dr Elizabeth Perry, Christian Aid on behalf of Fairtrade Foundation

### **Key arguments:**

The statement, 'Man cannot live by bread alone', can be interpreted to mean that mineral matter cannot sustain us in the absence of the spiritual. In Bio-Dynamic agriculture, many see the earth as a living spiritual body inhabited by Christ and interconnected with the entire cosmos. Believers are therefore obliged to behave towards the Earth not as a purely mineral substance, but as a sensate being.

Bio-Dynamic farmers, therefore, treat animals with compassion and land is cropped within its carrying capacity to retain natural balance. An ability to farm this way is dependent on freedom from external constraints. Therefore, to restore sustainable methods of farming, living the Christian ideal of agriculture, a new model of accounting and economics is required, moving away from the current model of 'agri-business'.

At the Bhakdivedanta Manor, the Krishna temple in Hertfordshire, a dairy herd has been managed for 35 years within cruelty-free principles. Cows live out their full lives, they are milked by hand and bulls are trained as oxen to take on meaningful work rather than be killed. The temple community value the bulls as engines of the community. 'Cruelty-free' milk sweets are offered to Krishna.

The Karma principle is relevant to all religions. Food should be an exchange of give and take. The Bhakdivedanta treatment of cows is not only a Hindu tradition, it demonstrates good practice in animal husbandry and is rewarded by increased milk yields.

The biblical concept of stewardship is one in which humans are partners with God in caring for his world, originating in the creation narratives of Genesis. Underlying this is a basic belief that the earth is the Lord's not ours (Psalm 24). The laws of the Hebrew Bible forbade exploitation of neighbours, animals or the soil, and enshrined the Sabbath concept, providing a weekly rhythm of rest for people, livestock and the earth.

In the Judaeo-Christian tradition the major Hebrew festivals were based around food.

In the New Testament, Jesus draws his parables from nature and agriculture and emphasises that God is in intimate relationship with creation.

When thinking about food, justice is also an important consideration for Christians, with concern for people being at the heart of Christianity. This aspect of faith motivates many Christians in the Fairtrade movement.

Rooted in Christianity is the understanding food is not just a commodity. It is where physical and spiritual realities meet. Whilst this is the case, more work is necessary to mobilise Christians around environmentally sustainable food in the same way they are inspired by Fairtrade.

The Islamic faith requires Muslims to take care of their health, live in harmony and be moderate in their lifestyle and food consumption. Food should exclude intoxicants of every kind and be pure and wholesome.

The word **Islam** means being in a state of complete wellbeing; the word is derived from the Arabic root word **slm**, which also means in harmony, at one with the Creator. The idea of Islam is to submit to the Oneness of the Creator (**Tawhid**).

Human beings receive Divine blessings a living energy from fruit, vegetables and animals. When human beings view themselves merely as consumers, there is a loss of appreciation of the spiritual and energetic nature of food. Today, the loss of traditional holistic nutrition has brought about heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

A return to traditional holism, including nutrition, may be the missing link to reconnect communities to their food; establishing a direct rapport with nature and the Divine would also influence cultivation and healthcare in a spiritual manner. For more information, see [www.ifees.org.uk](http://www.ifees.org.uk)

There may be a link between the decline in spirituality in the UK and unsustainable food production and consumption. Both can be addressed by faith communities, leaders of which can make a big difference by putting sustainable food on the agenda.

