Perrine & Charles HERVÉ-GRUYER

VIVRE AVEC LA TERRE

MANUEL DES JARDINIERS-MARAÎCHERS
PERMACULTURE - ÉCOCULTURE - MICROFERMES

ACTES SUD | FERME DU BEC HELLOUIN
How are we to feed the generations of tomorrow? The world’s population is increasing and our resources in arable land, soft water and natural fertilizers have diminished alarmingly. Oil will inevitably rarify and become more expensive. Climate change is intensifying and extreme weather events are becoming more frequent. According to some studies, the number of climate refugees could reach 2 billion people by the year 2100. It is clear that our current fossil fuel-dependent, greenhouse-gas emitting agricultural model not only destroys land and the biodiversity but will also be incapable of feeding generations to come.

The Ferme du Bec Hellouin farm has been experimenting with new forms of agriculture that are radically different to current models, based on the imitation of natural ecosystems. This ecoculture is life-enhancing rather than annihilating. The farm seeks to create a complex agro-ecosystem, with a high diversity of terrains and plant and animal species in order to encourage the best performance from their different ecosystems. Ecoculture is highly adapted for food-production and raising animals. Small surfaces undergo intense cultivation essentially by hand. Its methods draw on age-old farming techniques of the South and North as well as on the latest contemporary scientific discoveries. The approach fosters farmers’ autonomy and the food security of local communities. Microfarms can be created with low capital investment and are not dependent on sophisticated technologies. They are hence highly adapted to the needs of billions of farmers around the globe with limited land resources and without machinery. It is worth remembering that 80% of farms around the world cover less than 2 hectares.
AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH VALIDATED BY SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH

Scientific studies carried out at our farm by the INRA, AgroParisTech, the University of Gembloux (Belgium) and other organizations have validated the exceptional and sustainable productivity of the farm. In 2015, 1,000 square meters of farm land at the Bec Hellouin yielded products with a market value of €55,000 (the average in production in France is €30,000 per hectare).

This exceptional productivity has been accompanied by a remarkable improvement in the quality of the soil, the organic carbon contents of which have increased up to 10% per year on some plots. The impact of biodiversity has also been very positive: the farm is home to more birds, including rare species, insects and earthworms than neighboring farms.

A microfarm designed in such a way can thus produce an abundance of quality food for human consumption while also forming a valuable source of carbon and an oasis of biodiversity.

SWARMING THE WORLD

The “miniaturization” of agricultural scales advocated by the Bec Hellouin method means that microfarms can be created anywhere, even in urban environments, encouraging job creation and more resilient soils.

Bec Hellouin’s research has already inspired farmers around the globe as well as politicians, heads of regional authorities, agricultural teaching and national education ministries.

Our previous work Permaculture – guérir la Terre, nourrir les hommes, (“Permaculture, healing the land to feed people”) has become a bestseller in France, and has already been translated into eight languages, including English, Chinese, Spanish, Italian, and Greek.

A MANUAL FOR AMATEURS AND PROFESSIONALS ALIKE

The fruit of six years work, Vivre avec la Terre (“Living with the Earth”) is an exceptional literary and scientific project which gives readers the resources needed to commit to an organically-inspired approach. By learning to understand how natural environments work, readers will discover a number of simple and effective applications enabling them to create their own high-performance, ecological garden, allotment or farm. The manual recounts Bec Hellouin’s unique experience but also offers a whole host of recent information about nature and food-growing provided by the permanent scientific and technical monitoring of the farm in the last 15 years. It offers readers a simple and structured synthesis of our most recent data, as well as relatively inaccessible data only available in international science reviews.

The manual is targeted at everyone who wants to “live with the Earth”: the 19 million French people with their own garden, but also agriculture professionals, researchers and everybody who dreams of starting their own microfarm. In France in 2017, 80% of creation projects for organic food-producing farm professed to follow the permacultural microfarm model developed at Bec Hellouin.

Vivre avec la Terre has a wider-reaching scope than simple technological and scientific knowledge: it features inspirational quotations from a wide variety of sources, expressing a quest for harmony and a poetic tribute to the beauty of the world.

THE ECOLOGICAL EXAMPLE

We are eager to reduce the carbon footprint of this unusual manual: paper and its manufacturing processes are today readily sustainable. So for each book purchased, we undertake to plant a tree.
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FOOD PRODUCING CULTURES AND FOREST GARDENS

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VI. DENSIFICATION AND ASSOCIATING CULTURES

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Since we started work on his manual, we have seen the world undergo deep transformation. Climatic change is accelerating and becoming more evident with each year that passes; we ourselves at the farm have noted its effects. Humankind however is not taking the ecologically urgent measures required. The imminent cataclysm offers a unique opportunity to build a better world in new unprecedented ways. Transition can be a choice not a sufferance; it can be desirable and festive. Instead of waiting until it is too late, let us reconnect to the infinitely varied and generous wonder of nature and adopt simple, sustainable lifestyles. We may not have as many gadgets but we will be rich in everything that makes life calm and beautiful.