

Introduction to Permaculture

It can be safely said that modern, industrial farming is one of the most destructive practices on the planet today both for the health of the people and the planet. Genetically modified organisms (GMOs), factory farming, the use of pesticides and excessive nitrogen-based fertilizers, agricultural subsidies – all of these practices are unsustainable. GMOs upset the natural practice of saving seeds by creating genetically-modified crops that do not reproduce so that farmers must buy new seed every year. This is incredibly risky behavior as we lose the natural variability in organic seed. What if Monsanto for whatever reason were to stop producing the seed?

The factory farming of animal meat is one of the most inhumane practices ever developed by human beings. It is a major contributor to climate change and ocean and river “dead zones”. Plus it is immoral. The cruelty that is shown to these living animals is something very few people could tolerate, yet it is pervasive. Future generations will not look kindly on us.

Pesticides are sprayed on crops by men wearing chemical suits yet they are somehow declared safe to eat. And agriculture subsidies cause havoc to world food markets undercutting local farmers around the world and putting many out of business.

All of these practices are declared necessary in order to feed the world. They are said to be far more efficient. Efficient at what though? It is true that modern industrial farming is more efficient in terms of production per unit of labor. Like most other industries, efficiency is measured in terms of cost in dollars. Modern industrial farming produces enormous yield with relatively few people working on the farm. Aided by massive machinery, modern industrial farming uses huge fossil fuel inputs in production.

Permaculture represents an entirely new way of looking at food production, seeing it instead as a byproduct of ecosystem conservation. It utilizes a wide variety of plants and crops intermixed on a small piece of land. Some plants provide shade for other plants that need less sun. Permaculture produces healthy food, as much as three times the food produced with industrial farming per unit of land. Permaculture is based on a different kind of efficiency, production per unit of land. It requires more people to work the land than industrial farming but yields can be up to 3 times greater per unit of land. It is also a much more resilient farming practice. Where monocultures of corn or wheat or soy can fall victim to pest invasions, drought, or disease, the variety of species of plants on permaculture farms reduces the chances for entire crops to be wiped out.

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