ALAN SCHOFIELD

ORGANIC VEGETABLE GROWER, GROWING WITH NATURE, PILLING

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I have been an organic vegetable grower since 1982, and for the first ten years I was working for and with another organic vegetable grower here in the village of Pilling who was called Douglas Blair. At the end of my work with Douglas, me and Debra [my wife] left when we purchased Bradshaw Lane nursery, which is where we are now. We started Growing With Nature in 1992.

99.9% of our food these days is produced with some form of chemical assistance or another. We use completely different approaches. We are a vegan, organic holding here which means we don't use any animal products, or any animal manures in our growing system. And I started this in the late 1990s, when BSE was first heard about. So we withdrew all animal manures and moved on to a system of green manures and making our own compost, and a walk around the holding to see the vitality and the greenness of the crops shows that we are not lacking in any of the key major nutrients necessary for crop growth.

We started using volunteers about five years ago. As the recession really bit we saw our business basically fall off a cliff. Even though we were managing to keep on top of the crop production, there are a lot of ancillary jobs that farmers do: looking after the environment, coppicing trees, etc. So a lot of the work that we do with the volunteers is keeping that side of it under control. And what [the volunteers] are looking to get out of the deal is to increase their knowledge of how to produce vegetables. And I don't think there is anything better than working alongside somebody like myself, because I have the confines that the amateur gardener doesn't have which is the commercial world.

One of the things that has changed in my lifetime is people's appreciation of where their food comes from and the importance that we as a society place upon that. And therefore I feel that the value that people place upon local production has gone down over my lifetime. Technology has increased phenomenally over the last 35 years. This has revolutionised the marketing arena and has led to much bigger farms. And the thing that frightens me about that is that, in an era that we are living through at the moment where climate change is becoming more and more real as every year turns that on a small scale if I am flooded, then we lose quite a small amount of production. I know of 1000 and 2000 acre vegetable farms that over the last five years have more or less lost all of their production, and that is not only financially damaging for the farm, it completely and utterly wipes them out. Whereas we can survive because we can adapt and change what it is that we are doing. And I just think that seeing as food is one of *the key* important ingredients to human existence, how *little* emphasis we place upon its wellbeing and food production.