

Green Challenge conference

<p style="text-align: center;">Horticulture 2018 Dr Alan Knight Sustainable Development Commission and Single Planet Living</p>
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Much of the thinking in this document is work in progress, please check with the author before using - alanpknight@mac.com"

Lets start at the most exiting place possible. If I was tasked by the Prime Minister to create a sustainable economy I would invent gardens and I would invent horticulture. Of course, I would soon discover that both did not need inventing and then I would wonder why todays sustainability gurus and policy makers are not making more of the remarkable asset we have in our long quest for sustainability. This paper explains why...

Introduction

About a year ago I wrote a piece for Wyevale Garden Centre's sustainable development consultation document which was headed 'If I gaze into my organic, fair-trade, low carbon crystal ball' and the year in question was 2017, so it is relevant to revisit that article for this one on horticulture in 2018.

In the article I pointed out the difficulty of predicting something that may or may not happen 10 years hence. For example, who would have thought 10 years ago that smoking would be outlawed in public places? Who would have thought that supermarkets would be fighting about who was greener? Who would have thought that creosote would be banned and that patio heaters would be public enemy number one?

I think more likely is that over the next 10 years, three main audiences will interact with each other and be responsible for what the situation will be like in 2018. And the three of them – government, business and the general population will also be informed by and sensitive to the media.

Some general thoughts – we may have personal carbon credits which would mean that we all have our own carbon budget, being charged if we exceed them and being able to sell the carbon credit if we have some to spare. I think that retailers and manufacturers will have to know in detail about their environmental and social impacts, positive and negative, and this will involve making that information available to the public. There could be some lessons here for commercial growers.

With government interventions of encouragement or regulation, with customer and media pressures, businesses will only be working with suppliers who understand and are committed to positively influencing environmental and social issues. From my current experience, I see committed suppliers as ones with a competitive advantage but by 2018, I predict that this kind of commitment will be the minimum standard.

But **back to today and today's audience**. Even since writing that piece for Wyevale, we're living in a totally different economic climate which has changed the situation again. I'm not naïve enough to think that the credit crunch hasn't affected everyone. Whether you're a business, a consumer, a mortgagee, a student, a pensioner, it's very tough out there.

But what I have seen and am still seeing is a growth of interest in food. And in the general context of 'food', it's fruit and vegetables that get the lion's share of media coverage and general discussion. In the speeches I do, I talk about the **global challenges and one of them is the decline of wellbeing**. Even though – credit crunch aside – we're meant to be richer and happier in the western world, actually we're not. Studies show that we're more miserable – part of the reason is stress but also obesity is a major problem.

It's not a tremendous leap to see how fruit and veg can benefit from concerns around obesity – healthy diets, five-a-day and all that. But from a broader perspective, what's happening is that many people are also concerned about the provenance of their food. The boom in farmers' markets proves that people want to know where their food comes from. They want to know if it's organic or whether chemicals are used. To a lesser extent, they are concerned about GMOs.

The current economic climate might have caused a slight hiccup in the growth of locally sourced, organic food sales in that people are having to be more careful about how they spend the money in their wallet, but if this paper is entitled 'Horticulture 2018', then I strongly believe that you cannot ignore these provenance type trends. Obesity is not going to go away anytime soon and nor will the concern about what people are feeding their families.

As commercial growers you will be aware that many people are taking up 'grow your own' for provenance and financial reasons. And as an environmentalist I have to applaud this while you might have slight concerns of this trend affecting your business. But 'grow your own' is likely to contribute only a small proportion of overall fruit and vegetable sales and more positively, a potential market is opening up as the garden centres are widening their ranges to include fruit, veg and salad starter products – hopefully from your sites. More than, it makes people interested in fruit and veg again, once again they understand quality and variety, all good news for growers.

I mentioned that one of the **global challenges** is the decline of wellbeing, but perhaps the biggest one affecting us all is **climate change**. There may be some cynics who believe that it doesn't exist but with the mass of evidence, most are taking the precautionary principle – that it does exist and that the link between climate change and human activity is incontrovertible.

This means more good news for commercial fruit and vegetable growers. The targets for carbon emissions reductions has led to a wide range of discussions and initiatives around energy generation and efficiency, transport, the protection of forests, cereal production – and cows' farts.

Meat, particularly red meat, contributes significantly to carbon emissions. Producing 1kg of beef results in more CO₂ emissions than going for a three-hour drive while leaving all the lights on at home. This was proved by scientists in Japan who measured the data on calf raising, animal management and the effects of producing and transporting feed – as well as the emissions emitted in the form of methane from cattle. Just for interest, the emissions from 1kg of beef are equivalent to the amount

of CO₂ released by an average car every 160 miles and the energy consumption is equal to a 100W bulb being left on for 20 days. How's that for a real dinner party conversation show-stopper!

But what does this mean for commercial growers? It does not mean the UK will become vegetarians, but it may mean people may eat less meat.

Keeping with the climate change and carbon emissions topic, consumers are also aware about food miles. Should we be eating asparagus from Peru and Braeburn apples from New Zealand? Certainly not, well, certainly not if they are in season here. This is part of the 'local' argument which we looked at from a provenance point of view earlier but it's part of all our responsibilities to communicate to consumers the all-round benefits of buying local food.

The last **global challenge** I'm going to mention is **using up our finite resources**. You may have heard the fact that it would take the resources of three planets for everyone living in the world today to have the same lifestyle as people in western Europe. Across the world we're struggling to feed ourselves and there is a concern amongst scientific and academic circles about how dependent we are on food being imported from other nations. Food security is a real concern and the success of commercial growers in individual nations is of huge importance if we are going to achieve a secure food supply.

The intention is to balance some of the gloom around the big global challenges with the potential growth areas that these present for commercial growers. Overall I am very optimistic and if the trends are followed and the challenges are met, then I predict success.

Sustainability is a huge challenge for many companies, for horticulture it should be good news, of course horticulture has its impacts, chemicals, carbon and water but your core product is 100% on message.

Down with patio heaters and up with vegetables!

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Biography – Dr Alan Knight, OBE

Alan Knight has nearly 20 years' experience of working on the interface between everyday products and global environmental and social issues.

In 2005 Alan founded Single Planet Living since when he has worked with global and national organisations advising them at board level on global sustainable development issues which affect businesses, society and individuals. He supports senior teams in understanding how their organisations and their products can help people live more sustainable lifestyles, in the long-term ensuring that they have a business which meets future needs.

Horticulture 2018 by Dr Alan Knight

Since 2005 he has worked with the Virgin Group, Prudential, Barclays, Coca-Cola, Wyevale Garden Centres and Fortnum & Mason.

Before founding Single Planet Living, Alan's roles included:

Head of Corporate Accountability at SABMiller, the world's second largest brewer, where he developed a group-wide framework for sustainable development, covering issues as diverse as water and climate change to HIV/AIDS.

Head of Social Responsibility for the Kingfisher Group where he co-ordinated social and environmental policies for over 590 stores in 12 countries and worked with supply chains across Asia.

Head of Sustainability at B&Q plc, the UK's DIY market leader in DIY. There he was best known for his work on sourcing sustainable timber and developing new techniques for supply chain management.

He was a founding Director of the Forest Steward Council which now covers over 70 million hectares.

Alan co-chaired the UK Government's Roundtable on Sustainable Consumption, serves on the UK Sustainable Development Commission and is chair of the Ethical Trading Champions Group of the UK Government's Food Industry Sustainability Strategy. He was for six years chair of the Government's Advisory Committee on Consumer Products and the Environment (ACCPE). This committee led to consumer products becoming a central element of DEFRA's policy. The committee's advice directly led to the energy label on cars and in the Homeseller's information pack.

He is also a visiting professor at the School of Management at Southampton University, an Ambassador to WWF and a former director of both the Tropical Forest Trust and the Forest Stewardship Council.

He was awarded the OBE in June 1998 for Services to the Environment and in 2005 the US-based Rainforest Alliance gave him a lifelong award for his contribution to finding solutions to rainforest destruction caused by the timber industry.