

Education for organic farming

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The chemical system of farming has failed on many fronts.

It has failed to provide food that is safe and nutritious. It has failed to solve the problem of crop loss to pests and diseases. It has failed to prevent soil degradation and soil carbon loss. It requires more and more inputs to keep going. It contaminates the environment around the world, even in areas where chemicals have never been used.

It is a temporary phase in food production that is passing, and needs to pass quickly to secure the future for humanity and the world we live in.

Pesticides lose their effectiveness as pests, diseases and weeds develop immunity. World phosphorus reserves are running out. Nitrate fertilisers pollute water supplies and add greenhouse gases to the atmosphere. Eventually, farmers will have no alternative but organics. The sooner we move there, the better.

Natural ecosystems do not need external inputs because everything is recycled. A balance is achieved between pests and pest controlling organisms. Soils are renewed by the action of microbes that release minerals from rock. Successful organic farming learns from these natural systems and tries to replicate them as far as possible.

Organic agriculture is not as simple as the chemical system. Organic farmers need the skills to prevent problems from developing, rather than reacting to them after they have occurred. Organic farmers need knowledge of ecology, biology and soil science as well as crop growing methods.

There is now a huge literature and knowledge bank in the world about organic farming. This has been built from a combination of traditional practices, new scientific discoveries and the experience of farmers.

It can be difficult to access this knowledge. It may be in a different language. It might not be available in agriculture courses. It is rarely held by extension agents who have been trained in the chemical system.

Knowledge provides confidence. You might be told that organic farming is an unachievable dream, that it will not feed the world, that it will send farmers bankrupt. The millions of successful organic farmers in the world, producing every type of crop in every environment, know this is untrue.

Mekong Organics is just one of thousands of other organisations in the world promoting organic farming. We use the historical knowledge of farmers, the new understanding of ecology and soil biology, and experiences from around the world.

There is no prescription for organics, as methods have to suit the particular environment and culture. This course aims to provide options and confidence so that farmers can choose, trial and develop the systems that work best for them. It also covers organic certification, marketing systems and world trade opportunities for organic products. As part of the course, many successful organic farmers in Vietnam and Australia share their experiences.

I would like to welcome people to take this course.