**The Times: Thunderer**

**Farming as environmental activism**

There seems to be growing consensus amongst environmental activists that the only way a livestock farmer can contribute positively to the environment is to simply not exist. Recently a high profile campaigner described a tweet of mine as “greenwash at its worst”. It’s a curious reversal of how I’m perceived by the wider agriculture industry.

I am both a farmer and an environmental activist; each identity defines and enables the other.

My climate anxiety kicked in 30 years ago. I remember stopping work in the evening to gaze out across the beautiful countryside, almost in tears at the thought our society was in the process of throwing this all away.

My determination to do everything I could to prevent such needless waste became the main driver in converting our farm to more sustainable practices; firstly through organic production, and then agroecological methods that prioritised animal welfare and biodiversity. Like all major changes it was tougher than it looked.

Up till this point, all my working life, I had followed the teachings of a system that confidently asserted that industrial farming was based on sound science and hard evidence. Yet that science has led us to the edge of an ecological crisis. As the benefits of farming with nature started to emerge on our farm, my confidence in agroecology grew.

I saw the proliferation of green dock beetles naturally controlling the spread of docks; the amazing ecology of the dung pat, with its orchestra of beetles and larvae, cycling nutrients and incorporating carbon into our soils. All this wildlife that we had disrupted with the technologies of industrial farming returned, and they improved the productivity of the land.

We found that this method of farming wasn’t just profitable, it was more profitable than ever before. After ten years we were farming as much stock as we had been pre-organic but we had cut out tens of thousands of pounds of costs.

My old belief system had been totally blown apart.

After 25 years of experiencing the practical consequences of following a nature-based approach in our own macro and micro-biome in south west Scotland, I am convinced that it’s not too late for us to bring the crises facing humanity under some degree of control through re-balancing natural systems and a determined policy of planetary re-greening.

So the question that arises in my mind isn’t whether the identities of farmer and environmental activist are irreconcilable; it’s why isn’t every farmer a campaigner in addressing this environmental catastrophe? Farming can be part of the climate solution, but only if we act regeneratively now.

David Finlay is the farmer at Rainton Farm near Gatehouse of Fleet, a recent winner of an Outstanding Achievement Award at VIBES, Scotland’s Environment Business Awards.

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