

Kim Musgrove, permaculture, Lardner

A visit to YouTube, will lead you to “In Grave Danger of Falling Food.” It is well worth a look. For me, the penny dropped when I saw this. I’d heard of Permaculture, but when I saw this it all made sense.

“Permaculture is the conscious design of sustainable systems.”¹ This can be applied to a backyard, a farm or an entire community.

By observing natural ecosystems we can devise ways of mimicking those systems. And to quote Bill Mollison, (Permaculture guru) “You don’t have a snail problem, you have a duck deficiency.”

I have fallen in love with Permaculture; it is shaping Earthshack, our 25 acre farmlet in Lardner. We will open our gates and welcome visitors to see sustainable farming, building and living. We hope our story can inspire others to follow their dreams and design their own sustainable systems. We have had the chance to be WOOFERS (Willing Workers on Organic GFarms) and learnt from others success and failures. We want others to have the same opportunity.

I have a teaching background and my husband is a park ranger for Parks Victoria.

We have spent the last six years researching natural farming techniques and had a lot of fun trialling a rotating four field system on our previous property.

Our freezer was full of free-range pork, straight from the backyard and from there we wanted to learn more about Permaculture.

I completed my Permaculture Design Course in 2009 and relished in the opportunity to be surrounded by like-minded people. The skills and knowledge will assist with our whole farm planning and house design.

One unexpected benefit is also being able to apply the principles of Permaculture to my work with Transition Baw Baw.

Transition Towns

I see Transition Towns as permaculture for an entire community. Transition towns start with a group of people who get together and look peak oil and climate change squarely in the eye- and do something about it. Rather than waiting for politicians to put sustainable systems in place, Transition Towns unleash the collective genius of the community and come up with their own ways of creating a local future that is sustainable and resilient.

Climate change

We have all heard of climate change and most people accept that humans are the main cause. All of the science aside, it just makes sense that if you over populate the planet, destroy most of the world’s forests and indulge in unrenewable natural resources....something just has to give. Peak oil is a different situation. Many people have never heard of it and are unaware of the looming consequences.

What is peak oil?

Every oil-well peaks in production then declines. Every country peaks in oil production then declines. And consequently world wide production will peak and decline. Of the 65 largest oil producing countries in the world, up to 54 have passed their peak of production and are now in decline, including the USA in 1970, Indonesia in 1997, Australia in 2000, the UK in 1999, Norway in 2001, and Mexico in 2004.² Once the oil in a well gets too difficult to extract, it is no longer viable to continue doing so. Many countries are also reaching their peak in gas production too.

¹ Naomi Coleman, Southern Cross Permaculture Institute

² <http://www.energybulletin.net/primer>

Why does this matter?

Our society has been built on cheap oil. Our food producing systems particularly, which rely heavily on oil hungry machinery, fertilisers and transportation. In fact, it can be really hard to find something in your home, school or workplace that in fact hasn't used oil in its production. Cosmetics, plastics, tyres, synthetic materials ... even the pen you may be chewing on right now. As we know, when demand outstrips supply, prices go up. **Transition Towns** acknowledge that our days of cheap oil are limited, so let's plan for a future that copes with that. In fact, let's go one step further and design local communities that are thriving, connected and resilient. Every Transition Town looks different as the needs of every community are different. But every Transition Town designs a future knowing that:

Climate Change makes carbon reduction essential. Peak Oil makes it inevitable.

Transition Baw Baw

Just this year, Transition Baw Baw has emerged. Over the next 12 months we are busy raising awareness of the issues surrounding peak oil and climate change. From here we hope enough locals have the basic knowledge and desire to want to come on board and help us design resilient communities.

Every facet of community life needs to be considered and planned for, including food, energy, transport, health, heart and soul, economics & livelihoods. Importantly, local jobs, local money and local products help to build communities that can cope well with the global issues such as peak oil. Parallel currencies such as LETs (Local Energy Trading Schemes) and even a local dollar (maybe the Baw Baw Buck??) can help to raise awareness of living local, but also offer alternatives that can run alongside the Aussie dollar.

Permaculture thinking has helped to progress Transition Baw Baw.

We are working with the local shire to amend the local law prohibiting chooks on quarter-acre blocks. We can see the benefits in using chooks to: reduce food waste to landfill, grow backyard fruit and vegetables and provide hours of pleasure for residents who choose to have the quirky feathered friends in their yard.

Seeing the links between chooks and health, chooks and waste and chooks and pleasure helps to think holistically and with an open mind, to come up with the creative solutions we need to re-design our local communities.

We have also proposed a fruit and nut grove as part of the Two Towns Beautification Plan. With the idea that walkers and cyclists we be able to help themselves to a snack along the track. Beyond this, it will also provide an opportunity for school children and other community groups to learn about growing fruit and nut trees, companion planting, healthy eating...and so on.

Most importantly, Transition Baw Baw is all about inspiring the local community to come up with their own local solutions to peak oil and climate change. Examples of 'seeds you may have seen sprout' include:

- Produce swaps in Rokeby, Yarragon, Poowong.
- The idea of trialling Permablitzs in our area: backyard makeovers, Permaculture style.
- Free skills revival workshops are also being offered, to ensure the necessary skills of yesterday are passed onto the next generation. (Visit: www.bbsn.org.au)

There are millions of little things we can all do to transition towards resilient communities:

- Hire a bus to take your group, instead of driving separate cars
- Jump on the train or bus
- Walk and ride
- Shop local
- Request locally grown, sustainable food
- Generate your own power:solar, micro hydro, wind
- Get to know your neighbour "we all villagers at heart."

Transition Baw Baw is still in its early days, but keep your eyes open for the “Great Unleashing” in 2011 followed by each community writing their own “Energy Descent Action Plan.” To do this, you will be asked to close your eyes and dream of your ideal sustainable community, then together we work out the steps to get there.

Further information:

Transition Baw Baw

www.transitionbawbaw.net.au

www.transitionnetwork.org

Transition Town Film: In Transition 1.0 (local library or download off the internet)

Peak Oil: <http://www.energybulletin.net/primer>

Permaculture

www.holmgren.com.au

Short Film: In Grave Danger of Falling Food (You Tube)

Book: Earth User's Guide to Permaculture, Rosemary Morrow

Book: Introduction to Permaculture, Bill Mollison & Reny Mia Slay

Earthshack

www.earthshack.com.au

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