



A Harvest of Enough

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Harvest Time

With the late start to the growing season, most of the typical Mediterranean vegetables performed poorly. There was no harvest of peppers, aubergines and chilis.

Similarly the early fruiting trees were badly affected by the late cold and wind. This meant that the cherry harvest was minimal and there were no plums or pears.

By contrast we had the best chestnut harvest in over

eight years. Similarly the summer squash and cabbage produced enough for us to store.

The presence of our grazing animals also stimulated a bumper crop of mushrooms, with enough surplus to dry for winter use.

Experiences such as these show the pivotal importance of poly rather than



mono cultures. By working towards increased diversity, we ensure that what we 'lose on the swings we will gain on the roundabouts'.

Saffron Crocus



Crocus sativus has been in cultivation for over 3000 years. At Semilla Besada we have been increasing our stock slowly over 7 years, as

well as exploring the most sustainable way in which to grow them.

The saffron crocus remains dormant during the summer, but in the autumn green leaves appear, followed by purple flowers. It is the deep orange/red stigmas that are collected and dried to provide a yellow dye.

Each bulb only produces three stigma, and these must be collected by hand, which accounts for the high price saffron, currently \$1000 per kilo. Our crop from about 200 bulbs was 2 gms!

As the ground is bare during the summer heat, we have experimented with companion planting, which does not compromise the

performance of the saffron.

This year, annual wild legumes, such as vetch and medicado, carpeted the ground in spring. The top leaf was harvested to feed the rabbits. The stalks were left to provide a mulch during the heat of the summer. The roots were left to provide soil humus as they break down during the autumn and winter rain.

Finding companion plants to provide living mulches, is a very effective way in which to work in a brittle landscape.

It is this principle that worked so effectively for Masanobu Fukuoka.

Special points of interest:

- Saffron Cultivation
- Solar Oven
- Networking in Spain
- Family Farming

Bee Subsidy



David moving a new swarm that settled in spare hives in the shed

This year the European Union has offered a subsidy to beekeepers for 150 or more hives.

The result has been a significant increase in the number of hives on the mountain during the spring.

However, there are insufficient flowering plants and shrubs to sustain this increased population. The result has been a loss of up to 50% of colonies.

Actions such as these are clearly

unsustainable, and do nothing to address the environmental degradation that is resulting in loss of bee food.

By contrast our resident three hives, ended the season in good health.

Interestingly, last year and this, there was no evidence of Varoa Mite in any of the hives. We use no chemical intervention to address this problem.

Each year we extend our diversity

of flowering plants in order to provide our bees with food on a year-round basis.



Visitors from New York State

This year we offered the opportunity for Holistic Management colleagues to farm-sit while we spent some time networking in southern Spain.

Karl and Jane North, sheep farmers in New Your State took us up on our offer. They both have a lifetime's experience in raising sheep for meat and wool, as well as making artisan sheep's cheese.

They also had experience of subsistence farming in the Pyrenees, so were well aware of the

challenges that we face at Semilla Besada.

Karl's knowledge of holistic pasture management, gave us valuable insights into how we could now move forward in our efforts to regenerate perennial grasses.

Jane introduced us to the use of Cardoon flowers as a rennet substitute, and provided us with valuable information on beneficial moulds in the cheese making process.

<http://www.geocities.com/northsheep/>



A lifetime's experience in raising sheep for meat , wool and artisan cheese

Another Step in the Right Direction

With our commitment to sustainability, we are always looking for new ways in which we can reduce our dependency on fossil fuels.

This year, we built a solar oven. We wanted to be able to use sunshine whenever possible to cook such things as soups, stews, pot roasts and grains, as well as be able to pasteurize bottled

fruits, jams, chutneys and pickles.

The galvanized metal used in our original design did not provide sufficient reflection to produce the temperatures necessary to pasteurize. However, we were still able to cook soups, stews and grains successfully.

The installation of mirrored glass as a back reflector generated

temperatures of 80C, and so we plan to replace all the reflectors with recycled glass.

Much of our inspiration and help has come from Solar Cooker International, who have been developing simple models for use in third world countries.



More than Organic

This year we applied for organic registration with Spanish organisation CAAE.

The reasons behind this decision were:

- To support the development of organic farms in this region.
- Access the store of information that this organisation had about farming in Andalucía.

- To make contact with other organic farmers in the area.

Although we are encouraged by the movement away from chemical dependent farming, we still feel that it is only a beginning to the return to sustainable stewardship of our planet's natural resources.

Ultimately, everything hinges on the ongoing health of the ecosystem processes.

What advances that health depends on whether the landscape involved is brittle or non-brittle.

Unfortunately, there is minimal appreciation in Europe of the implications of the Savory Brittleness Scale.

To obtain a Nutsell on the Savory Brittleness Scale [click here](#).



Networking in Spain



While Semilla Besada was in the good hands of our visitors from New York State, we travelled to the province of Almería.

Here we met Prof. Juan Tomas Puigdefábregas, the Project Coordinator of De-Survey-IP, a surveillance system for assessing and monitoring desertification. This project is being carried out at the

[Estación Experimental de Zonas Áridas](#), which has been researching desertification for over 30 years.

By complete contrast, we also visited [Sunseed Desert Technology](#), a charitable trust. They have been providing research and development facilities for over 20 years in the areas of:

- simple, cheap technology for arid areas,
- drought-tolerant plants and trees,
- and mycorrhizal inoculum to address low fertility in dry landscapes

Research and development facilities for over 20 years

Chinese Persimmon



Seven years ago we planted three Diospyros kaki, Chinese Persimmon trees

This year we had fruit for the first time. The fruit is smaller and flatter, has deeper red flesh and a fuller taste than the local variety.

As the fruit stay on the tree long after the leaves have fallen,

they are an attractive feature in a dormant garden.

We also collected neighbours' surplus fruit in the valley for drying.

The fruit is picked when under-ripe and inedible raw, then peeled, sliced and placed on drying frames for several days. The dried fruit can then be stored in jars for at least a year.



Semilla Besada Companions *shaping the future*

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News Flash

Buying books for Christmas?

We have made a selection of books relevant to this landscape as well as sustainable stewardship from the Amazon site. If you cannot find what you want, simply key in your search word and you will be directed to the Amazon site. We get 5% for every book purchase, without any cost to you.

www.holisticdecisions.com/bookshop.html

Semilla Besada is a 16 hectare research conservation farm set in the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains in southern Spain.

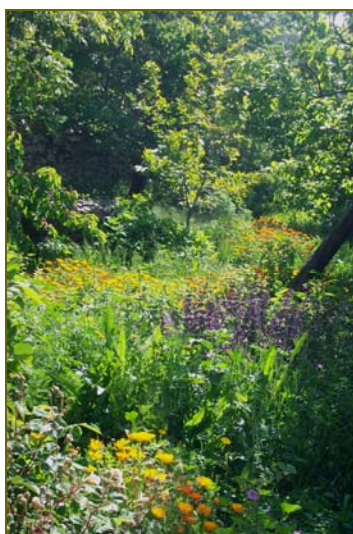


The focus of the farm is the improvement of this ecosystem's capacity to cycle water and nutrients, support complex and stable biodiversity and provide year-round cover for bare soil. Attendant to this is the development of sustainable land and livelihood practices for small-scale farmers.

Every decision we make is :

- *Tested for environmental, social and economic sustainability.*
- *Carefully monitored to ensure that we can take remedial action as soon as we detect a deviation from long-term sustainability.*

Family Farming



Family farms all over the world are going bankrupt, and yet they are crucial to maintaining the health of our planet. The reasons for this are many:

- The maximum hourly wage is below the national poverty line.
- Unsustainable factory farming, prices the family farm out of the market.
- Food prices do not reflect the real value of the product.
- Government regula-

tions concerning food production are punitive for family farms

- No value is placed on farming's land stewardship role

Are you surprised that we sell out to developers?

As a result of the bio-fuel craze, animal feed rose this year from €9.50 to €17.50. Our goat farmer neighbour's net profit is currently €30 a week.

The power to change this is with the consumer. It is of

pivotal importance that their understanding of sustainable stewardship, and food production changes.

Semilla Besada is committed to working towards facilitating that change, not only for our own survival's sake, but for that of our local community and the natural resources upon which we all depend.

For full details of our educational programmes and publications see www.holisticdecisions.com