

**Nuffield Report: 2012 Associate Scholar Merlijn Albering Grou (The Netherlands)**

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## Study:

*"What is the future of local and small-scale agriculture? Will the small-scale farmer survive? What is the role of local food production on our society and environment?"*

## Summary:

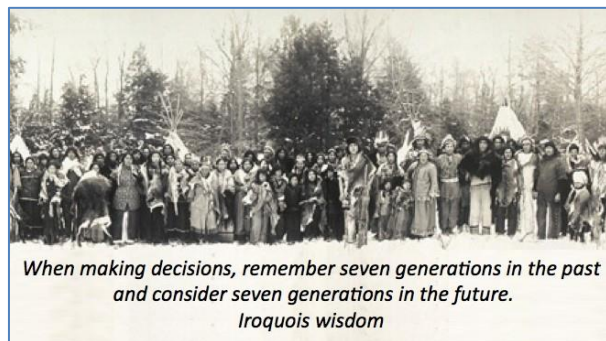
- Food is only food, when it is where it is needed as food
- Local food production becomes increasingly important for customers. And is increasingly favoured over anonymous global industry-grade food.
- Local will be the new organic.
- Companies decide what we eat but people want to make that decision themselves.
- Local food production is better for the direct environment, it is greener, economic healthier, limits the growth of cities, delivers more diversity, more social cohesion, and more people can make their own living.
- Global food production is indifferent to the local environment, minimizes diversity and maximizes uniformity, does not stimulation social cohesion, doesn't provide stable economic growth to the neighbourhood, and makes people dependent on economic forces beyond their control. Typically few people make most money, but those are not working in or particularly interested in globally sustainable agricultural businesses.

## Report:

2012: A special year as Nuffield scholar. Nuffield is a journey, a journey that takes years. An exploration of your vision and the world around you.

### The start

The news features stories about food scandals and numerous books address the origins of our food. There are discussions about how we can feed the world in the next years. The Internet is filled with ideas about an ideal world in which everything and everyone is respected without hunger and with healthy food. There are camps that discuss GMOs versus traditional, diversification versus monoculture, large versus small, and old versus new technology. As a new kid on the farm it is all interesting and confusing but also inspiring and challenging. I ask myself: "What is the future of local and small-scale agriculture? Will the small-scale farmer survive? What is the role of local food production on our society and environment?"



### The core

During my travels, farm visits, conversations, discussions, conferences, and literature research, I saw the opposition between the glorification of large-scale industrial agriculture and the wish for reliable, traditional, and locally grown food. In Canada I witnessed on the one hand, the cultivation of soybean and Ginseng for Asian markets and, on the other hand, a wish for lettuce from one's own neighbourhood. When I tried to explain this dichotomy for myself, the main thing I concluded is:

## Food is only food if it is there where it is needed as food.

Soybean fields in Canada do not produce food. The beans are an investment and not at all interesting for the region where it is grown. There is abundant rich farmland but nothing is grown that the residents themselves eat or need. Apart as investment the produce is used as a means of power. A truck with rice for the border at a refugee camp is not rice: it is a source of negotiation and power struggles. Only in the hands of the refugees it will be food.

With that in mind, local food makes more sense. Local food production ensures:

- the stimulation and stabilization of the local economy,
- a caring instead of exploitative interaction with the local environment,
- the production for what we need instead of what we produce for profit,
- a brake on the migration from the countryside to the city,
- more control over your own situation,
- a higher yield per m<sup>2</sup> because less harvest is lost,
- a larger diversity in the supply of fruit and vegetables,
- a better protection against large-scale outbreaks of disease in plants and livestock,
- a stronger bond with local consumer and local farmers,
- that consumers have the choice for producers and farming approaches,
- a fair wage to the farmer, and
- a more diverse agricultural environment, where large uniform plains are replaced by a patchwork of unique farms.

### The result

After this year, I am more convinced than ever that local food production has a future precisely because small-scale activities have such a positive impact on our environment and society. More than ever I believe it is the small-scale farmer that will survive, because he builds and maintains contact with its customers and is more in control than his large-scale neighbour. I am herein supported by the reactions of my customers.

A diverse and growing group of people is looking for changes in current agricultural policy. Because of this all, I am invigorated to think about more than just my own familiar patch of land and I dare to question what is normal, but not necessarily good.

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