

## **Notes from the PACE Supporters' Meeting, Tuesday 5<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

### **Unpacking the food system**

#### **Food!**

#### **We all eat it, . . . .**

... so we all depend on the systems which produce it and make it available to us, and we all need to understand more about the positive changes that are required to face the current challenges:- changing climate; biodiversity loss; nutrition; health; food security; resilience. . . . all hot topics these days.

The PACE Food Group, Jim Sumberg, Andrew Whitefield and Chris Bowden, are ready for more involvement from the community in their exploration of 'the food system', and the November PACE Supporters' meeting was an excellent starting point. Thirty people attended this meeting, the youngest being about 6 weeks old. (I wouldn't dream of hazarding a guess at the oldest!!). Conversation amongst the attendees was a key part of the evening, with three periods of open discussion, each preceded by a presentation from members of the food group.

We were reminded how infinitely complex a 'system' can be, depending on how deeply you delve into all the interconnected elements, and consequently very difficult to change. The 'food system' has evolved into what it is now over millennia, with no overall plan or control. It is basically a market-led system, and a global one. Whilst fundamental systemic changes are necessary, they are beyond the reach of PACE, but grass roots community-based actions are vital too. It is important for us to ask ourselves the right questions, in order to get a view which suits our purposes here in the Manningtree area. After all, we are all part of the 'food system' too.

Below is a compilation of most of the points raised during the lively and stimulating discussion sessions:-

- We should make a local map of the existing elements (producers, retailers, etc.)
- Consumers can exert a strong influence by means of their purchasing behaviour.
- Our values are a significant factor, but some compromises may be unavoidable.
- Politics is another significant factor.
- We are talking about a system, but the system itself is facing collapse.
- We need to consider resilience at a community level. Decentralisation.
- Lead by example. Others will imitate.
- PACE can have a wider influence than the immediate area.
- Most people only think about the cost of their food, or only think about where their food comes from when it doesn't!!
- Convenience is an over-riding factor these days.
- Education is very important – lots of points raised:- where your food comes from, how it is produced, seasonality, cooking, food waste, etc.
- There is a strong psychological dimension. Beware of judging others.
- Eating with other people has mental, physical, social and educational benefits.
- We need to be very aware of food poverty.
- The Manningtree Earth Festival 2025 – FOOD should be one of the main topics.

A few people have expressed an interest in joining the food group. One focus for the next few months will be planning and hosting a series of talks where we unpack some of the terms used to describe food or parts of the food system. Terms such as 'seasonal', 'organic' and "regenerative farming". The group will be meeting on Monday 18<sup>th</sup> November from 7pm to get to know each other, collate thoughts on this series and to share progress on the other projects they've been working on over the past year . For venue details please contact Chris via [bowdenc1975@gmail.com](mailto:bowdenc1975@gmail.com).

**Many thanks to Jim, Chris and Andrew for leading the food project.** *(More details from the presentations about the food system are available).*

**Other business** John Hall gave a quick update, as follows.

The previous PACE Supporters' meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> October had discussed 7 PACE projects:-

1. **Manningtree Earth Festival.** The PACE organising team has met and this will be the main subject of our PACE Supporters' meeting on 3<sup>rd</sup> December.
2. **The Food Project.** Taken forward at current meeting as described in these notes.
3. **Community Solar Energy Scheme.** The PACE team on this project are still waiting for the funding which will support the 'funded option'.
4. **Wildlife-friendly Open Gardens.** This PACE team has decided to hold the next open day in 2026, perhaps in Manningtree or Mistley instead of Lawford.
5. **Water Quality of the River Stour.** We have 15 trained volunteers and continue to sample at 4 or 5 locations each month.
6. **Reduce Reuse Recycle (formerly Plastic Free Manningtree).** The Team has met and will again in the Red Lion on 12<sup>th</sup> November 7.30 to plan a campaign.
7. **Tendring Show.** This PACE team has met and will meet with the Show Committee to discuss sustainability initiatives for the next Show on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2025:- travel to the show; recycling; overall sustainability plan.

**To volunteer to help with any of the projects, email [manningtreepace@gmail.com](mailto:manningtreepace@gmail.com)**

The PACE Trustees will discuss 3 proposed larger initiatives on 14<sup>th</sup> November:-

- A. Community environment hub
- B. Community green space
- C. Environmental advice service

or D. A combination of these three.

**Climate Fresk.** This is a type of workshop which helps people to understand the science behind the changing climate and why we need to take notice and act. The PACE Trustees are attending a course to find out more about this.

**Regular PACE Newsletter.** Halford Hewitt is working on the design of a newsletter which will give a clear and engaging structure to PACE communications.

**Safeguarding.** Trustees are following an NSPCC training course to ensure that we care for children and vulnerable adults in all our activities.

**NEXT PACE MEETING – Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> December 7.30pm.** The main topic will be the next Manningtree Earth Festival.