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Ever since our ancient ancestors gave up hunting and gathering and began growing crops and herding animals, farming and agriculture has developed far beyond a means with which we can feed and clothe ourselves.

Farming and agriculture is now big global business. It is about commodities, futures, efficiencies, factories, markets, profits, plant breeders rights and IP, GMOs, competition, machinery, adaption and a whole host of other aspects that have taken it far from its original intention of clothing and feeding the nearby community.

We only have to take a close up look at farming and agriculture to see that all is not roses in that large and diverse sector. Land (the foundation and backbone of farming and agriculture) is being degraded, demineralised, denuded and destroyed. The negative effects of farming and agriculture are spread far and wide. Our own Great Barrier Reef is slowly being poisoned and silted up because of farming and agriculture. Our once great rivers are now just mere stinking drains (if sufficient water is allowed to remain in the river after the demands of irrigation and other agriculture activities). In a desperate attempt at battling 'pests and weeds' toxic chemicals are widely used on the soil, on the crops, on the trees and on the animals that are farmed. We then ingest these chemicals and the negative health implications are only just being acknowledged, but not appropriately enacted upon.

Farming and agriculture has no qualms at all about displacing any other form of life that might stand in the way of the 'right to farm and to commit agriculture'. Forests, wetlands, communities of critters, and intact bio-diverse environments are bulldozed aside, burnt or neutralised so that the modern farmer can get on with business.

Fortunes are sometimes made by large agribusiness companies and their shareholders. And sometimes fortunes are lost. The gamble with weather and markets pales into insignificance when it is measured against the gamble of futures trading, stockmarkets, regulations, global markets, tariffs and quotas. The recent debacle in the Australian dairy industry highlights the risks that industry players are prepared to take with other people's money, hard work, lives and livelihoods.

Wool, wine and wheat are just a few products of farming and agriculture to have felt the vicious, sharp scythe of the ever present 'boom-bust' phenomenon that besets this sector. Why this happens is more to do with the concept of 'making a fortune' than of feeding and clothing ourselves and also making a modest living. Boom and bust has been around for a long time – and it seems as though an opportunity to learn from mistakes is missed every time foreclosures, bankruptcies and mortgagee auctions sully the rural landscape.

Food was not meant to be grown in a factory. Food was meant to be grown in healthy soil and eaten while it is still fresh. A good farmer does not abuse the soil in which he or she grows crops, trees or grass – but many farmers do. Good farmers do not mistreat their animals – yet many farmers do. A good farmer ensures that their livestock are treated humanely – and yet sadly many farmers are inhumane with their animals, or

allow them to go into production, processing and transporting systems that are inhumane. We as a society condone the abuse of soil, plants and animals – to our detriment. We even encourage the manipulation and modification of plants and animals and the splicing of genes to alter those plants and animals. We as a community are rarely informed that manipulated plants and animals are sold for us to eat.

Stripping one area of soil health and fertility to feed a million hungry mouths in an area that has already been denuded by human greed, ignorance and overpopulation just is not a smart or a sustainable thing to do. So much modern farming and agriculture is like mining; it's just that the process is slower. Nutrients, minerals and the soil itself is removed from the rural landscape by much farming and agriculture today. This does not bode well for future generations.

Humans have been living off Nature for thousands of years. In the past couple of hundred years we have become very used to abusing the bounty provided to us by Nature. We must very quickly re-learn to live *with* Nature – and within its finite limits. If we do not do this then we will have to learn how to survive with polluted and limited water, poisoned oceans, unhealthy air to breathe, deserted soils and landscapes and food that is not fit to eat – and these things are already occurring. Nature has to provide us with food, clothing and shelter as nothing else on earth has the capacity to do this.

Our current practices are not what farming and agriculture was meant to be. Farming and agriculture was really just so we could feed and clothe ourselves and to some extent our local community with a better degree of security than that which could be had by hunting and gathering.

Are you a smart and truly sustainable farmer; one who can actually say that your soil, your farm and your environment is truly better now than it was, or are you a 'farmer' who is out for what you can take as quickly as you can take it, without a real and genuine care for the future generations?

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