

Foodscaping the path to progress in a post-pandemic world

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By Nate Smelle

By exposing the fragility of the local and provincial food supply, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the critical role each individual can play in shaping a sustainable future by growing their own food. In turn, this heightened awareness of food insecurity has also revealed the power of the people to endure during times of crisis.

As the founder of Ecostructure Canada, a sustainable design consulting firm, and co-founder of Archers Organics in the Barbados, Fraser Young has been working to create buildings and communities that foster both a healthy environment and a vibrant economy. According to Young, one of the most effective ways to promote both ecological and economic health is by growing food locally and organically. Having witnessed the devastating impact pesticides used to grow food conventionally in the Barbados have had on the water, soil, biodiversity, and the coral reef over the 30+ years he has spent there, he has learned that it is better to work with nature than against it. From his observations in the field, he said he has also learned that growing organically and locally is not only healthier for people and the planet, it is also more productive, and therefore more profitable over the long-term.

“One thing we promote at Ecostructure Canada is food, energy and water independence,” explained Young. “The average family of four in Canada spends around \$18,000 on these items every year. We can reduce that to about \$4,000 a year keeping \$14,000 in your pocket every year. When discussing economic growth we only purchase local and nothing is more local than what you can create on site at home. We have created a wealth retention strategy that will reduce financial stress, increase quality of food, decrease costs of living and allow individuals a connection with the beautiful pristine nature that surrounds us.”

Since founding Ecostructure in 2007, Young said he has been working with a group of 50 others in the Barbados to develop “systematic improvements,” through the use of organic, biodynamic, and permaculture farming practices. Speaking to the many levels of benefits these eco-effective agricultural practices produce, he said “By growing our food we take the logistical unknowns out of the equation. We can produce for both seasonal eating as well as canning and preserving through winter. This doesn't just help with the supply but also the economics of losing employment and retaining the ability to feed you and your family high quality, low cost organic diets which help keep and build a healthy immune system and a healthy wallet.”

Through his more than a decade of experience working with businesses, Young said Ecostructure has been able to help business owners create local sustainable supply chains that build and support local wealth retention and the ecosystem in which they are located. Providing an example of the type of work Ecostructure does, he explained how they have been transforming the ecologically-damaged 600-acre site of a former quarry in the Barbados into an abundant organic agricultural asset for the community. Standing as a testament to the beneficial impact of Ecostructure's work, Young said, is the fact they have earned the attention of the Ministry of Agriculture in the Barbados.

“We now have the ear of the government,” Young said. “The Ministry of Agriculture is now thinking about changing their philosophy. They see the benefits of building a tourist product which down there is already a billion dollar industry around sustainability, organic produce, local production and keeping money in the local economy.”

Recognizing that more and more people are catching on to the ecological and economic advantages of growing their own food since the pandemic, Young said he is hoping to see communities throughout North Hastings and beyond incorporate elements of organic agriculture and sustainable design as they recover and restructure from the impact of COVID-19. An easy and effective way to do this, he said, is through foodscaping. Noting the untapped potential of sustainable tourism in North Hastings, and the economic stimulus growing locally and organically could provide, Young said “I would love to see us be the organic capital of Ontario. I think if we did that, we would attract so much wealth from Toronto and Ottawa. And, we would retain so much wealth, because everyone would be producing their own energy and food. The clean water up here is also a real gift.”

Young and his wife are currently in the process of working with the the ecosystem on the land where they reside in L'Amable to secure their personal sustenance, and enhance their quality of life. As part of their efforts to become more self-reliant and in harmony with the natural world, they are producing their own energy using solar panels, taking shelter beneath a living roof that provides habitat for a rich abundance of biodiversity, and growing/foraging their own food from the land where they live. Indicating that they rarely need to go to the grocery store for anything, Young said they will eventually be able to grow and forage enough food in their backyard to sustain themselves year-round. Although some might think the cooler climate in North Hastings may not be accommodating for food growers, he said by employing many of the lessons learned from their work in the Barbados they have found great success harvesting the north.

?It's is so much easier to grow up here than the tropics,? said Young.?The winter kills back weeds and pests so we get a fresh start every spring. The long days, pristine soils, water and crazy long days during summer are a gift that make growing a diverse organic offering easy, affordable and rewarding in many ways. We grow 100+ varieties of organic heirloom veggies and 150+ varieties of fruits trees, nut trees and berry bushes all of which have cold hardy rootstocks to thrive up in our area.?

By sharing the lessons he has learned about the benefits of sustainable design, Young hopes others will follow in his footsteps. If people follow this template for change, work together as a community and avoid damaging nature's balance, he said society has the potential to heal the planet, address climate change, and design a future that is healthier and sustainable. To find out more about Ecostructure Canada visit their website at: www.ecostructurebb.com.