

Building a Profitable Permaculture Farm with Richard Perkins of Ridgedale Permaculture

Voices of Change Episode 225

EPISODE HIGHLIGHTS

- **A great team has been major part of success.**
 - Encourage people to take that on as their own.
 - Major part of my work is managing farming people.
 - Everyone contributing with their unique skills, gifts and talents.
 - Having a bigger team than the requirement of the job.
 - We created a culture where everyone is stepping up.
 - Opportunities are present for creative decision making all the time.

- **Richard on teaching on the site:**
 - Young people coming to this stuck and don't know where to start.
 - We teach people how to do permaculture by giving people opportunity to be in charge to let them learn.
 - We do long term education because, these terms are process based. It takes a while to get to know things.
 - Level of information that can be transferred in the few days or weeks is very minimal.
 - It takes six weeks to find that bearings.
 - The core team that comes for six months learns far more.
 - Over and over repetition of the same cycle let them learn and know.

- There is a place for short courses but they don't produce actionable results.
- Young folks want to do a bit of everything now and mashup the landscape in some way.
- People will have responsibilities and they will shift every X amount of weeks.
- Everyone moves around and gets to experience managing different parts in the farm.
- A group of interns normally consists of 15 people.
- After learning, interns take over and core team gets some holidays.
- When interns come they take upon targeted field learning.
- Core team is looking after the running of daily enterprises.

- **Richard on planning:**

- *"Six months long winter gives a lot of time for planning."*
- Massive amount of work goes into the quiet times of the year doing planning.
- All the planning, all the business sheets and all the back end of it makes it work.

- *"Waking up to small problems of farm life is a joy to daily life."*
- *"Market gardens are very complex when a man has never done that before."*

- Richard on farm economics:

- Goal is to step up and show what can be done economically.
- There are very little permaculture farms that demonstrate a viable living.
- Farming is still the hardest, highest risk occupation. It's doable but it's not easy.

- Most of the financial data is not shared by permaculture farms already working.
 - *"Investing in enterprises that bring in their cost their first year, instead of investing in elaborate things right away."*
 - Start with enterprises that are known - where you can easily get advice on them when starting out.
 - We are feeding all of us before making profit.
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- **Richard on Holistic Management:**
 - The basics of Holistic Management is that, you sit on the stool with three legs, one is ecological, one is social, one is economic.
 - Holistic Management is a whole thing in itself.
 - People usually don't have the full picture of holistic management. Extra time is needed to learn how that process works.
 - Planning and accounting are two different things, depending on how you do the accounting.
 - *"Holistic Management is the next step for permaculture world."*
 - *"Until you don't do it, you don't know it."*
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- **Richard on pastured poultry:**
 - Layers and Broilers are very different chickens.
 - Broilers bring massive nutrient input via grain.
 - Layers impact on the land is far greater than the broilers.
 - Layers do scratching service to the ground.
 - Dung beetles take manure down to the ground.
 - Fly larva and maggots are lovely chicken food.
 - Layers scratch manure and search for maggots, broilers just eat manure.
 - Both are good for the land but layer is better.

- Broilers are much better financially.
- Broilers take 10% of their diet from pasture, layers take 40%.
- Putting broilers with layers, they would probably get attacked.
 - Layers are a little bit edgy and they will beat the broilers to the feed.
- **Richard on marketing farm product:**
 - Start by selling customers what they want to eat, even if that isn't your ideal. Use that to start building a customer base, educating them, and using the cash flow to move towards higher ideals.
 - It's good for small farms to work on getting loyal customers.
- **Richard on soil:**
 - Organic matter always leads the soil back in the right direction.
 - Things like crop rotations and pests and diseases become less of a problem when such an investment is going into the soil.
 - An indicator for good soil is that, you don't need to fork out the carrot, you just pull it out.
 - It is much more profitable in long term to not to till the soil.
- **Richard on permaculture aesthetics:**
 - A big part for us is to keep the farm aesthetic. Things need to be look aesthetically pleasing.
 - "*We take good care of our lawn, not because we care about our lawn, but because our neighbors care about their lawns.*"

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