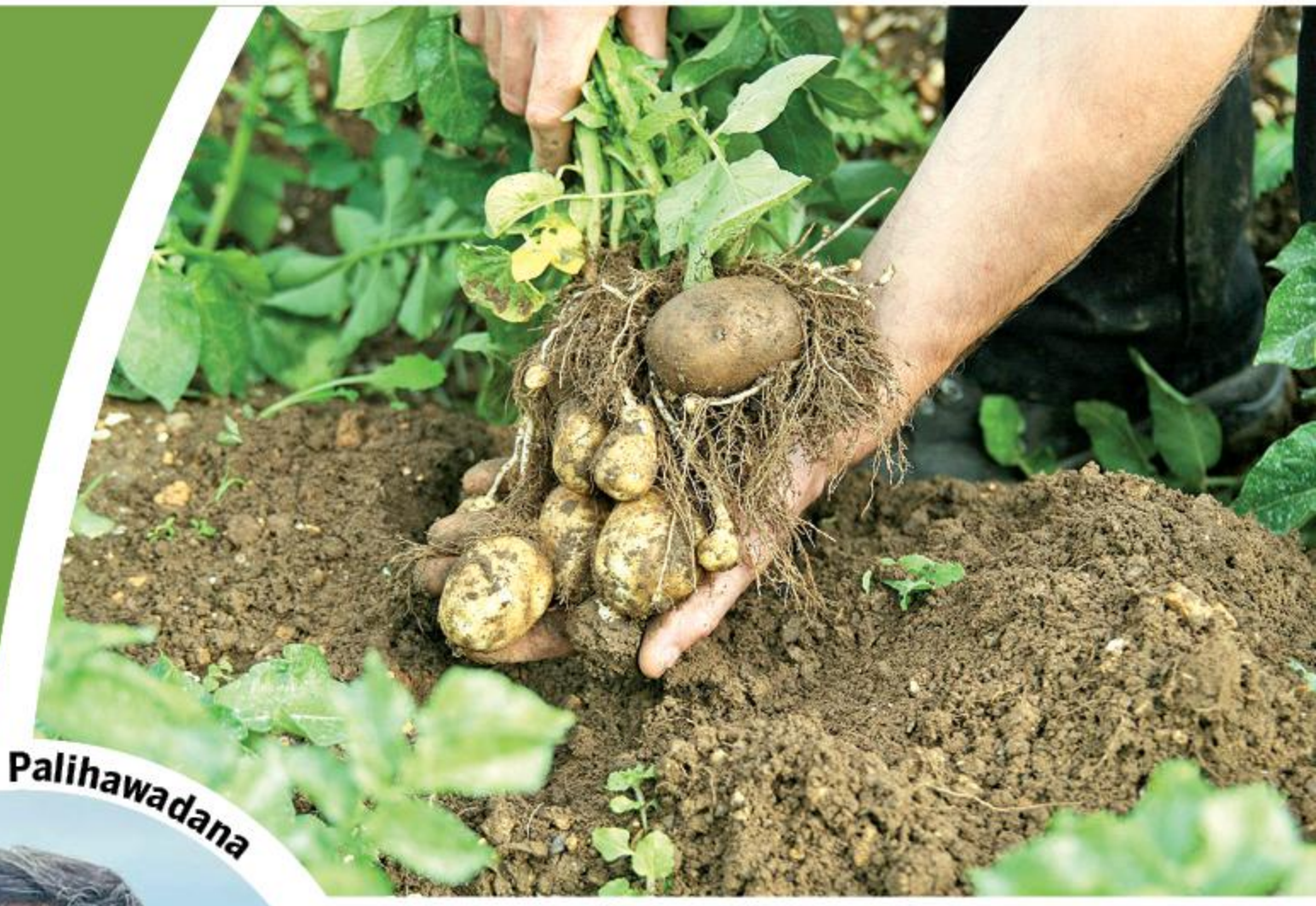


GROWING OUR OWN FOOD TO OVERCOME CRISIS



Ajantha Palihawadana



Organic farming. Source – Soil Association



Organic farming. Source – 24 mantra

Care: Organic agriculture should be managed in a precautionary and responsible manner to protect the health and well-being of current and future generations and the environment.

“The majority of our population is directly or indirectly dependent on home gardens. Agriculture in its various forms has the most significant effect on land use. Industrial agriculture is responsible for most of the *environmental degradation, forest destruction, toxic chemicals in our food and environment and a significant contributor, up to 50 percent, to the climate crisis.*”

The degenerative forms of agriculture are an existential threat to us and most other species on our planet. We have to regenerate agriculture for social, environmental, economic and cultural reasons. Home gardening can provide some solutions for the current crisis in Sri Lanka, especially for low-income marginalized communities in Sri Lanka,” explained Palihawadana.

ally the fruit trees. Timber trees are present in the *medium canopy layer*. At the *bottom canopy layer* are vegetables and other crops (*root and tuber crops, leafy vegetables*). *Gliricidia sepium* is used as a shade tree, its sticks used for fencing and as a support for vine crops. So these species also occupy different layers of the canopy, contributing to the diversity of home gardens,” pointed out Palihawadana.

He also added that fire wood crops are very important, because at present the gas companies are increasing the price. Fire wood from the home gardens can contribute as an alternative.

ORGANIC AGRICULTURE

“If you take an organic home garden (without the use of chemicals) it has contributed to a continuous supply of fresh foods and vegetables and food security. It also is a source of medicines.

I would also like to say that the governments’ decision to shift to total organic overnight has created a lot of confusion. It is important to understand organic agriculture in the proper way. So organic home gardens need to continue as their value is time proven and time tested.”

Palihawadana points out that in order to have a flourishing home garden there are lessons we can learn by following certain organic principles. Consequently, the four principles of organic agriculture are seen as applicable to home gardens:

Health: Organic agriculture should sustain and enhance the health of soil, plant, animal, human and planet as one and indivisible.

Ecology: Organic agriculture should be based on living ecological systems and cycles, work with them, emulate them and help sustain them.

Fairness: Organic agriculture should build on relationships that ensure fairness with regard to the common environment and life opportunities.

bon-based molecules that all life on earth depends on. Organic matter is fundamental to all life and soil organic matter is fundamental to life in the soil.

Farming practices that increase Soil Organic Matter (SOM), *increase fertility, water holding capacity, pest and disease resilience and, thus, the productivity of agricultural systems.* Because SOM comes from carbon dioxide fixed through photosynthesis, increasing SOM can have a significant impact in reversing the climate crisis. The fact is our health and wealth comes from the soil. Regenerative agriculture is the best option to use in our home gardens that can increase SOM. SOM is an important proxy for soil health.

HOME GARDENING

Palihawadana points out that home gardening has been a long-standing practice in Sri Lanka. More than 35 percent of the population is engaged directly or indirectly in the agricultural sectors. “Home gardens cover 14 percent of the total land use in the country and over 80 percent of the *organically certified products* comes from the home garden. As such, home gardens contribute to a significant amount of foreign currency earnings. In the Sri Lankan traditional Sustainable Agro Ecosystem there are three components - *Chena cultivation, home garden and the paddy field.* Home gardens provide stable foods, cash crops, fruit, vegetables, medicines fire woods and timber while conserving bio diversity, soil and water and helping eco-systems survive,” said Palihawadana.

When talking about canopies in home gardens, we need to understand that there are two - *Vertical and Horizontal.* The composition and size of these home gardens are vary,

“In the typical home garden, if you take the *top canopy layer*, it is usu-

and vegetables skyrocketing today. Of course we may not be able to hold out indefinitely (*being dependent on our home gardens*) but it may buy us some time. Green Thumbs speaks to Manager SriCart (Organic Certification Sri Lanka), Project Director LOAM (Lanka Organic Agriculture Movement), Ajantha Palihawadana, who speaks of this two pronged approach.

When thinking of *Sustainability*, Regenerative agriculture and Home gardening should go hand in hand. Regenerative Organic Agriculture Systems are those that improve the resources they use, rather than destroying or depleting them. It is a holistic approach to farming that encourages continual innovation for *environmental, social, economic and spiritual well-being.*

“The destruction of biodiversity, the greenhouse gases, pesticides, endocrine disrupters, plastics, poverty, hunger and poor nutrition are directly caused by the acts of multinational cooperation. More importantly, we need to build a new regenerative system that will replace the current degenerate system,” added Palihawadana.

We know that the soil is fundamental to all terrestrial life on this planet. Our food and biodiversity start with the soil. The soil is not dirt. It is living, breathing and teeming with life. The soil microbiome is the most complex and richest area of biodiversity on our planet. The area with the greatest biodiversity is the rhizosphere, the region around roots of plants. Plants feed the soil microbiome with the molecules of life that they create through photosynthesis. These molecules are the basis of organic matter — car-

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The approach to sustainability is two pronged. Both *Regenerative Agriculture* and *Organic Home Gardening* need to be promoted. Here, when we are talking about sustainability we are talking about the ecology. Today as individuals and families we have very little control over the events that are taking place in our country due to the economic crisis. So there is an economic aspect to this as well. To survive we need to eat. And to eat we need to buy our food from the market or *grow our own food.* In hindsight growing our own food would have been the better way with the prices of fruits



Home Gardening Increasing biodiversity. Source – Science Alcove



Soil Affected by Industrial Agriculture. Source – Food Print