

# THE ALCHEMY OF AGROECOLOGY: VIDEO

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## *DIGGING IN: FACILITATING DIALOGUE AND ACTION*

### KEY THEMES AND TERMS

Weeds; agrochemicals; cost, use, impact; agroecology; food sovereignty; functional biodiversity; simple technology, organic agriculture.

### CATALYZING CONNECTIONS

#### DECODING QUESTIONS

- *Description:* What do you see/hear/feel when watching the video?
- *Personal Connection:* How can you connect Fulvio's story to your personal experience or stories in your family?
- *Common Themes:* What social issues/themes emerge from our personal stories? Is there a common issue that we share?
- *Social Analysis:* How did this situation/issue come to be? What are the historical and social processes that created this situation?
- *Planning for Action:* What can be done? How does this inspire me to change my actions?

#### SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

- When you hear the word "weeds", what do you think of?
- What would the word be in your cultural context or in a language other than English?
- For example, Fulvio indicated that the Spanish word for weed is *malesa* which has a negative connotation (*mal* means "bad"). He suggested a new word, *bonesa* which would be a way of recognizing the positive use of weeds (*bon* means "good")
- Name some of the weeds that you know. How many of the weeds around your home can you identify?
- Do you ever think about weeds as food or medicine? If so, name them.
- What are the roots of the bad reputation of weeds?
- How does Fulvio understand "agroecology"?
- Agroecology is farming that "centers on food production that makes the best use of nature's goods and services while not damaging these resources." It applies ecology to the design of farming systems; uses a whole-systems approach to farming and food systems; and links ecology, culture, economics and society to create healthy environments, food production and communities.
- What are the key benefits of agroecology?

- How do these **10 elements of agroecology** relate to your own understanding of agroecology?
- What are the advantages of making your own fertilizers, herbicides, pesticides?
- What are the challenges of or obstacles to doing that?
- What is functional biodiversity?
- What is the relationship between forests and fields in agroecology?

## **HANDS-ON ACTIVITIES**

In this **Foraging Guide**, there are a number of medicines that are considered sacred by First Nations local to Ontario. Please familiarize yourself with these **sacred medicines** before harvesting and using these medicines, to respect their gifts and full medicinal properties. Make a salad or a tea with edible local weeds. What did you discover? How does it taste? How does it make you feel? What can you find out about the weeds' medicinal properties?

Investigate the medicinal properties of sacred medicines that are around us each day, like cedar, birch, and sage. Take a walk to identify the sacred medicinal properties in your community. There are many teachings available to us on these sacred medicines from Elders, such as the online series of Elder Bertha Skye who shares her teachings on the **sacred cedar, birch trees, and labrador tea**.

Try an experiment similar to the one you see Fulvio demonstrating in the video. Make a hole in a container, as he did. Pick a common weed from your area, like comfrey. Put it inside the container with a rock to hold it down. Wait for a few weeks, to see if it turns to liquid.

You can also do research on the main ingredients in organic fertilizers, herbicides and pesticides. Get advice on what is needed in your garden soil and for the plants you want to grow. See if you can find the appropriate weeds needed.

## **INTERGENERATIONAL AND INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE**

Migrant labour: Fulvio moves back and forth to work in Mexico and in Canada, and acts as a consultant to organic farmers in other Central American countries. When we visited Fulvio at Plan B Organic Farm Canada in 2016, he told us: "We are trying to connect farmers with Indigenous people, and build the connection between Ontario and Mexico." Since 2014, his son-in-law Miguel (appearing in the video gathering weeds in the forest) has also worked on this farm in the summer, through the Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program. Migrant labour is a central feature of agriculture in the neoliberal era.

Why do Mexicans like Miguel have to consider leaving home to support their families? (View the video "**Who Will Feed Us?**" that further explores these questions with Miguel and Fulvio)

Back home in Nurio, Michoacán, Fulvio is teaching his two sons, Bryan and Jorge, along with two other Purépecha youth, Santiago and Isidro, to farm organically and produce natural inputs. He describes his deep commitment to youth: “I started working with youth like Santiago, on the one hand, so that they would value traditional knowledge and not lose it; and secondly, because there is a lot of racism against Indigenous people.”

What are the pressures on rural youth, and Indigenous youth in particular, to leave the countryside and move to the city? How can today’s farmers keep young people farming?

Fulvio and Maria involve their extended family in the production of these natural inputs. The women and youth help gather the raw material, cook, and store the liquid produce in containers. These productions support about 30 members of their extended family. Maria is the business manager, and women play a key role in the gathering and processing of the product.

## **CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN LEGACIES COLLABORATORS**

There have been some interesting debates between Legacies partners about the use of organic inputs. Organic farmer Dianne Kretschmar experimented with one of Fulvio and Maria’s herbicides. This was her response:

“I’m basically disinclined to use herbicide, whether it’s organic or local plants or anything. Because I don’t think the issues we have in farming are to kill things. I think it’s more to understand the interconnectedness, and something that we’re doing wrong. It comes back more to management practices of the farmer than a potion to kill things. I did talk to Fulvio about that herbicide. He said, yeah, it’s a contact herbicide. If you get any on the beets, it will kill the beets, too. It’s too potent, what does it do to the micro-organisms?”

## **INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE ACTION**

Why would a big company be interested in buying the formula for the herbicides that Fulvio and his family produce? Why do they resist selling their formulae to big companies?

At the end of the video, Fulvio concludes “Food sovereignty is healthy food for everybody.” What personal changes and systemic changes are needed to make food sovereignty a reality?

# *DIGGING DEEPER: RESOURCES FOR FURTHER RESEARCH AND ACTION*

## **VIDEO**

ETC Group. (2019, February 18). [Video: Who will feed us? The Peasant Food Web vs the Industrial Food Chain](#). ETC Group.

Pacor, Antonio, Bettina Gozzano, and Focuspuller. (2011, August 9). [La Via Campesina in movement...Food Sovereignty now!](#) [Vimeo Video].

CIDSE - Together for Global Justice. (2021, September 3). [EN - Financing Agroecology](#) [YouTube Video].

## **BOOKS & ARTICLES**

Altieri, Miguel. (2002). [Agroecology: The science of natural resource management for poor farmers in marginal environments](#). *Agriculture, Ecosystems, and Environment*, 93(1-3), 1-24.

Bein, Sierra. (2020, September 5). [Is it time to decolonize your lawn?](#) *The Globe and Mail*.

de Shutter, O. (2014, January 24) [Report of the special rapporteur on the right to food](#). *United Nations General Assembly*.

Laureto, L.M.O., Cianciaruso, M.V. & Menezes Samia, D.S. (2015). [Functional diversity: An overview of its history and applicability](#). *Natureza & Conservação*, 13(2), 112-116.

Matties, Zoe. (2016). [Unsettling settler food movements: Food sovereignty and decolonization in Canada](#). *Cuizine*, 7(2).

Novic, Baza. (2013, April 24). [Organic gardening your way: 5 home-made fertilizer recipes](#). *Organic Authority*.

Penniman, Leah. (2018). *Farming while black: Soul fire farm's practical guide to liberation on the land*. Chelsea Green Publishing Company.

Yuan, LinYee. (2020, November 25). [A message from Indigenous Leaders: Why regenerative agriculture is not enough](#). *MOLD*.

## **ORGANIZATIONS & WEBSITES**

- **National Farmers Union Campaign on Agroecology**
- **Organic Authority**
- **The Principles of Agroecology**
- **Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations - Agroecology Knowledge**
- **La Via Campesina**