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The Independent **(UK) Feb. 9, 2004 ~**

"Wasteland To Garden Of Eden - With Volcanic Rock Dust"

Couple Called 'Cranks' Wins Funding For Fertiliser Trial

by

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A Scottish couple who believe volcanic rock dust can revitalise barren soil and reverse climate change have won research funding from the Scottish Executive.

Over a 20-year period, Cameron and Moira Thomson, both former teachers, have converted six acres of exposed, infertile land in the foothills of the Grampian mountains near Pitlochry into a modern Garden of Eden, using little more than the unwanted by-product from a nearby quarry. The application of rock dust mixed with municipal compost has created rich, deep soils capable of producing cabbages the size of footballs, onions bigger than coconuts and gooseberries as large as plums.

Before the pair began their experiment, erosion and leaching were so severe that nothing had been grown in the glen for almost 50 years.

The basis of the Thomsons' theory is simple -- adding the dust mimics glacial cycles which naturally fertilise the land. Since the last ice age three million years ago the earth has gone through 25 similar glaciations, each lasting about 90,000 years. We are currently 10,000 years into an interglacial -- a hiatus between ice ages -- meaning modern soils are relatively barren and artificial fertilisers are needed.

"We've been dismissed as cranks and loonies, and now it looks as though people are starting to listen," said Mrs Thomson, 42. "Farmers and scientists have seen what we have achieved and are willing to look into how it can be used for everything from growing crops to turf for golf-courses." The couple established the Seer Centre charitable trust in 1997 to test their ideas and have been granted more than £95,000 by the Scottish Executive to conduct Britain's first rock dust trials.

The Thomsons' technique may also play a significant role in the fight against climate change, as the calcium and magnesium in the dust they use converts atmospheric carbon into carbonates. "We are walking into another ice age unless we do something now," said Mr Thomson, 56. "If we burn fossil fuels at today's rates, atmospheric carbon could be kept stable if we covered the earth soils with between 0.8 and 3.2 tons of rock dust per acre."