**Big Debate 1: Food security versus environmental responsibility:**

**which should take precedence?**

Chaired by food writer and campaigner **Geoff Tansey**

10.50-11.50 hrs

*Should the demands of food security overtake concerns about the environment, particularly in an era of environmental change?*

**Speaking for “Food security should take precedence”:**

**Mark Tinsley,** PC Tinsley Ltd

**Eric Audsley,** Cranfield University

**Speaking for “Environmental responsibility should take precedence”:**

**Joe Morris**, Cranfield University

**Chloe Palmer**, FWAG

**Mark Tinsley**

It’s not a question of either/or, they are equally important and interdependent. Competitiveness to make us more secure is more important: the last government reduced spending on competition.

There are a plethora of environmental NGOs painting a black and inaccurate picture of farming.

There has been a reduction in self-sufficiency in food, and the UK is less competitive. We need sustainable competitiveness, reduced carbon footprint and less dependence on subsidy. We need to promote healthy soils and beneficial insects, and create common cause between producers and conservationists.

**Joe Morris**

Sustainability relies on environmental responsibility.... due regard to the whole system, terrestrial and aquatic. Working within the environmental limits and capacity of the natural world.

There has been a significant improvement in the quality of soils and waters since the 1980s when everything was more polluted.

Environmental responsibility is high. There is a key role for science and technology in agriculture.

Relaxing environmental standards to increase capacity is ineffective in the long term.

Man does not live by bread alone, but may inherit the grapes of wrath.

**Eric Audsley**

With diminishing resources, food is the last thing you would give up on (after heat, light etc).

We need to satisfy minimum levels to proceed. In a period of plenty, the need for food security is less obvious. In 2050 there is likely to be a serious problem – too many people. Food will always be the most important thing.

**Chloe Palmer**

The farming industry must rise to the challenge to grow more food. A short term goal to increase production now with insufficient care for the environment will cause problems in the future. In Australia, overproduction ruined the soil to such an extent that food is now effectively grown hydroponically.

One former intensive farmer has returned with success to the soil management techniques of 10 year crop cycles. The challenge is to produce more, impact less and eat more healthily.

**COMMENTS**

* It’s the wrong question. Both are equally important. We should look for the best outcomes for both, collaboratively.
* What about the part retailers play?
* (Voters in the debate who think both sides are equally important should actively abstain in the vote).
* What about the question of food waste and inappropriate over-consumption.
* A recent WHO report says there is no shortage of food in the world for 2050 – half of it never gets to the market. Even the best systems waste 20%.
* We should help the third world.
* The balance has gone too far from security to environmental responsibility – in the 1960s there was too much security, now too much emphasis on the environmental.
* We need sustainable intensification. Units of production would be a better measure of efficiency.
* Security = human arrogance.
* It’s interesting that an interdisciplinary organisation (RELU) has taken such a traditional confrontational debate approach.
* 2050 isn’t the only date: we need to think about all the dates in between. We have to address the question of how many people we allow to happen (*ie population management*).
* My crop is paid for in sterling, but the price is agreed globally.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

**Mark Tinsley**

Historically, farmers have shaped the landscape.

We need to subsidise famers less. They need to become more profitable. We need to put resource into finding out how best to do this.

**Joe Morris**

Don’t have the confidence in agriculture of itself to sustain the environment. Distribution and entitlement issues exist, though currently there is enough food worldwide.

**Eric Audsley**

The biggest future problem is global population. Food security becomes more important as we have less land to provide food for the growing population.

**Chloe Palmer**

Europe is leading the way in environmental responsibility. We must encourage environmental innovators in agriculture. There’s not a lot more that legislation can achieve. I’m a fan of voluntary contribution.