



MEDIA RELEASE

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Speakers at sustainable food and farming conference call for greater diversity for more resilient farming

Greater diversity in crops, livestock, biodiversity, our markets and diets was the key message and subject of debate at the annual LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) President's Event on Tuesday 11th November.

Dr Gordon Jamieson - Knowledge Exchange and Commercialisation Director, John Innes Centre, focused on the increasing global dependence on wheat, and the challenges which lie ahead due to growing demand and changing weather. Dr Jamieson highlighted the importance of diversifying the varieties of wheat grown and proposed we evaluate both risk and reward when it comes to the use of technology.

From crops to livestock, Dr Grant Walling - Director of Science and Technology, JSR Ltd, discussed the changing demands in livestock breeding to ensure prolific dam-lines, robust sire-lines, good health and consistent quality. Unlike for wheat, where the message was to explore new varieties, Dr Walling stressed that now that we know the genomics, the loss of a breed is not necessarily a loss to diversity as we can always bring back breeds if we need to.

Kantar Worldpanel's Fraser McKeivitt, Head of Retail and Consumer Insight then covered market diversity and wider consumer trends. His key message for the industry was to exploit market trends and he highlighted that health is a growing area of importance that the food and farming industry can tap into. He also outlined the UK's most frequently prepared dishes, with the sandwich topping the list, followed by a roast dinner and pizza, and explained that farmers should keep this in mind when thinking of uses and markets for their products.

LEAF demonstration farmers, Patrick Barker – EJ Barker & Sons and Andrew Francis – Senior Farms Manager of the Elveden Estate, explained the role of Integrated Farm Management in creating diversity on farm and in increasing biodiversity. Patrick Barker said that when he was looking at what benefit biodiversity made to his business, he came to the conclusion that biodiversity is his business. Andrew Francis covered how being more sustainable helps make his business more efficient.

Covering the area of diversity in the diet was Caroline Drummond, LEAF Chief Executive, who shared the findings of her Nuffield Scholarship looking at ‘what farmers can learn from science to improve the nutrition of food’. Caroline’s research demonstrated that as a nation we will need to change what we eat and how we grow our food in order to feed a growing population while managing natural resources. She pointed out that 60 per cent of our diet comes from just three plant species - corn, wheat and rice - and five animal species, yet there are many more plants and animals that are edible that we can explore, as well as looking at improving the nutritional profile of the foods we do grow through breeding and technology.

The event was concluded with a lively debate chaired by Countryfile presenter Tom Heap. The morning’s speakers discussed the issue of diversity in more detail and took questions from the floor. The issue of whether the world will need to stop eating meat, or eating less, meat, in order to feed the world was hotly debated. The role livestock plays in managing the landscape and the fact that some land cannot be ploughed for arable farming, along with the consumer desire to eat meat, were all points covered by the panel. Another topic which caused wide spread agreement was the need for plant breeders and animal breeders to work more closely together due to a large proportion of crops being used for animal feed.

Caroline Drummond, Chief Executive of LEAF concluded: “The food and farming industry has already made incredible advances over the years, producing a greater diversity of foods – from crops to livestock breeds – through to increasing biodiversity on farm and driving greater choice in the market and our diets. Together we need to continue this work to ensure a resilient future for the sector and looking at all aspects of diversity will ensure a sustainable, long term food supply chain that can feed the growing population and effectively maximise and manage our natural resources. With a growing population to feed and obesity and malnutrition both key health issues, we need to produce more food, but we also need to produce more of the right food. Integrated Farm Management is critical to this as it combines the best of traditional farming methods with modern technology, to produce food on a commercial scale which also enriches the environment.”

LEAF also launched a new resource for its members ‘*Integrated Farm Management: A Guide*’. The Guide is a practical resource for farmers explaining the principles of IFM, detailing key practices for each of the nine IFM sections with suggestions on how farmers can implement specific practices on-farm. The IFM Guide is available to LEAF members.

The conference was hosted by LEAF President, Baroness Hazel Byford, DBE DL and kindly sponsored by HSBC.

Please visit www.leafuk.org for copies of speakers' presentations and photos of the event.

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LEAF Editors' Notes:

- LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) is a leading organisation delivering more sustainable food and farming. LEAF works with farmers, the food industry, scientists and consumers to inspire and enable sustainable farming that is prosperous, enriches the environment and engages local communities.
- LEAF promotes Integrated Farm Management (IFM), a whole farm business approach that delivers sustainable farming.
- The LEAF Marque is an assurance system recognising sustainably farmed products. It is based on LEAF's Integrated Farm Management (IFM) principles. Farms in 40 countries worldwide are producing to the LEAF Marque standard.
- All LEAF Marque certified farms are independently inspected to ensure they meet stringent criteria to demonstrate that food is being produced to high environmental standards. These criteria include soil management and fertility, crop health and protection, pollution control and by-products, energy and efficiency, wildlife and landscape management and animal husbandry and the environment.
- For more information about LEAF please visit: www.leafuk.org, email: enquiries@leafuk.org tel: 02476 413911. (Registered charity no: 1045781)