



MEDIA RELEASE

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Research, planning, productivity and sustainability key to a healthy future for food and farming

Last week, the farming industry came together at LEAF's Annual Conference to discuss what is required to address the challenges of climate change, population growth and growing health issues, and the vital role LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) has to play. Speakers and delegates, including representatives from agriculture, industry and academia, were united in the belief that science, research and innovation will be key to driving forward change.

The theme of the conference was '*Setting the Agenda: Healthy Food and Farming Fit for the Future.*' In her keynote speech **Dame Professor Anne Glover CBE, FRSE**, Vice Principal for External Affairs and Dean for Europe, University of Aberdeen spoke about how food was the world's most precious resource. She outlined how, by 2050, there will be a 70% increase in food demand and that our planet is increasingly under pressure. In order to meet this demand, we need to farm more sustainably. Dame Glover called for more funding for research to ensure that future policy decisions are based firmly on credible, scientifically robust evidence. She stated that, as a country, we are well positioned to deliver such evidence commenting: "Innovation in agriculture is key. Science and technology are part of our culture."

Sara Eppel, Head, Innovative and Sustainable Farming at Defra outlined plans for Defra's Food and Farming plan, and while she stopped short of saying the plan would encourage farmers to join LEAF, she said that LEAF's Integrated Farm Management (IFM) was exactly the type of farming that the plan would promote. She also acknowledged the work of LEAF Demonstration Farmers stating: "They focus on production, respond to supply chain needs and set the standard for environmental performance."

Meanwhile, conference chair **Tom Heap** described LEAF as a pragmatic organisation that was based on "ideas not ideologies". **Caroline Drummond LEAF Chief Executive** said: "Our role at LEAF is to ensure that we take the science that is available to us and communicate this to farmers in a way that is practical and clear. We strongly believe that setting the agenda for meeting the needs of the future – healthy food, healthy farming and a healthy economy - will hinge on innovation, cross industry collaboration, scientific advancements and strengthening public engagement. We want to inspire farmers to produce more sustainably by practising IFM, equally, we want to reach out to the public and get them out onto farms to see how their food is produced. Joined up thinking and 'doing' with the

farming, science and health sectors will bring about real change towards a more resilient farming economy, a better environment and a healthier society.”

During the conference’s debate session, **LEAF Chairman Stephen Fell** reiterated the importance of credible evidence when making decisions on important, and potentially, controversial, issues. Stephen, who had earlier outlined LEAF’s vision of a world that is farming, eating and living sustainably said: “If we’ve got justification and it is based on good science - then LEAF will make a stand.”

Fittingly, for the International Year of Soil, soil was another hot topic for discussion. **Jake Freestone, LEAF Demonstration Farmer** explained how he was already using IFM to ensure the health of his farm, particularly on soil: “Through IFM we have more nutrient availability in soil.” Jake, who stressed how efficiency was key, called on farmers to harness the biology of soil, describing it as “the building block of sustainable farming.” **Judith Batchelar OBE, Director of Sainsbury’s Brand** highlighted the importance of understanding the end value chain, noting how soil health, animal health, plant health and human health are inextricably linked: “You can’t have one without the other.” Judith said LEAF was well placed to meet the challenges ahead.

Meurig Raymond, President of the NFU spoke about the importance of communicating with consumers through initiatives like LEAF’s Open Farm Sunday and highlighted the future potential for British farmers. After the conference, Meurig said: “British farming is the bedrock of the country’s food industry providing around 60% of the food we eat. It’s central to the rural economy and ultimately it’s farmers who are front line when it comes to protecting the nation’s countryside and wildlife. I want to see a future where we can unlock our potential and be more productive, not just because it’s good for business but because I firmly believe that increasing our productivity is not the enemy of the environment and can actually help us deliver on more efficient use of land and inputs.”

Speaker presentations, photos and a full commentary from the day is available now on www.leafuk.org

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For more information, an interview or images, please contact:

Raman Sahota/ David Gough

LEAF Press Office

Ceres

T: 01189 475 956

E: Raman.sahota@ceres-pr.co.uk / david.gough@ceres-pr.co.uk

LEAF Editors' Notes:

- LEAF (Linking Environment And Farming) is the 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 more sustainable farming. IFM uses the best of modern technology and traditional methods to deliver prosperous farming that enriches the environment and engages local communities.