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# THE FUTURE OF UK AGRICULTURE: PLANT SCIENCE, SOIL SCIENCE AND REGENERATIVE FARMING

How can science help us to farm wisely?

12:00 Thursday 21 March – 13:30 Friday 22 March 2024



## AGENDA

**Down tools for a day**

**Imagining a future**

**Farming with nature**

The conference will take place at St Paul's Church and the Sainsbury Laboratory. The conference dinner and overnight accommodation is at Downing College.

## **DAY 1 - THURSDAY 21 MARCH 2024 AT ST PAUL'S CHURCH, CAMBRIDGE**

14 St Paul's Road, Cambridge, CB1 2EZ

### **12.00** Arrival and Lunch

On arrival, we'll give you a name badge.

During lunch, please speak with someone you don't know – we'll give you a question to help get the conversation started!

### **12.50** Welcome from Mark Sainsbury

### **13.00** Introductory thoughts: Rethinking farming - a farmer's perspective on trying to figure what it means to farm regeneratively?

Martin Lines, Farmer and Chief Executive Officer of the Nature Friendly Farming Network.

### **13.10** I will go with my father a ploughing, sung by Dr. Guy Hayward

**13.15 – 14.45** Getting to a wise 21<sup>st</sup> century farming system in the UK - Constellation by Jill Purce, assisted by Dr. Guy Hayward

**Move from our furrows,  
Up to the wily crow's nest  
For a clearer view**

### **14.45 – 15.10** Coffee break

### **15.15 – 15.45** Research on Regenerative Farming - the story so far in the UK

The Organic Research Centre (Dr. Julia Cooper), NIAB (Dr. Elizabeth Stockdale) and Agri-TechE (Dr. Belinda Clarke) have done a rapid evidence assessment to understand what research on regenerative farming has been done or is underway.

Short talk on key findings and discussion

### **15.45 – 16.30** A taste of current farming, crop and soil research

Nine attendees will briefly outline their current activities and how it relates to advancing regenerative farming.

- Prof. Louise Manning, University of Lincoln – *If you can't measure it, it doesn't matter*
- Johnnie Balfour, Balbirnie Home Farms and the Pasture For Life - *How I make decisions about how to farm*
- Anna Jones, Just Farmers – *What's a herbal ley? Communicating regenerative agriculture inside AND outside the farming bubble*
- Dr. Eleanor Reed, Natural England - *Building partnerships for positive Soil Health outcomes*

- Dr. Jeongmin Choi, Crop Science Centre, Cambridge - *Breeding crops for beneficial fungal symbiosis*
- Dr. Julia Aglionby, University of Cumbria – *Transition in the Hills? Placing Farmer Identity and Cultural Landscapes at the heart of climate and nature friendly farming.*
- Kate Smith, ADAS – *Crowd Control: mob and cover crop grazing in the UK*
- Dr. Lydia Smith, NIAB – *Alternative crops for regenerative farming*
- Vicki Hird, Wildlife Trusts – *The Double Dividend*

**16.30 – 16.55 Break and time to talk with Presenters**

**17.00 – 17.50 How plant science can support regenerative farming practice?**

“Since new developments are the products of a creative mind, we must therefore stimulate and encourage that type of mind in every way possible.” [George Washington Carver](#)

Chair: Prof. Giles Oldroyd, University of Cambridge

- Prof. Malcom Bennett, University of Nottingham - *Regenerative farming, hard soil and crop roots?*
- Dr. Stéphanie Swarbreck, NIAB - *From lab to field - developing research methods to test crops for regenerative farming?*
- Prof. Jonathan Jones, The Sainsbury Laboratory - *the role of genetics to reduce the environmental impact of agriculture*

**17.50 What’s the life of a man any more than a leaf**, sung by Dr Guy Hayward

**18.00** Walk/taxi to Downing College; overnight room check-in at the Porters’ Lodge.

**From 19.00** Drinks reception at Grace Howard Room, Howard Theatre, Downing College

**19.45 – 19.55 Reflections on the day from Sue Pritchard**

**20.00 – 22.30** Dinner in the Main room, West Range Hall

**Connecting it all - food, health, nature and climate change**, speech Henry Dimbleby

## DAY 2 - FRIDAY 22 MARCH 2024 AT THE SAINSBURY LABORATORY

47 Bateman Street, Cambridge, CB2 1LR

**7.30 – 8.30** Breakfast at Downing College for those staying over; check-out (overnight bag storage available at Sainsbury Lab).

**From 8.30** Arrivals and coffee at the Sainsbury Lab

**08.55 Welcome by Sarah Butler-Sloss**

**9.00 – 9.50 Managing soils wisely**

“The maintenance of the fertility of the soil is the first condition of any permanent system of agriculture.” [Albert Howard](#)

Chair: Prof. Andy Neal (to speak on *What do we know and what do we need to discover about soil systems to support Regenerative Agriculture*)

- Prof. Sacha Mooney, University of Nottingham – *Future soils for future crops*
- Prof. Karen Johnson, Durham University - *A nation that rebuilds its soils rebuilds itself*
- Dr. Ruth Wade, University of Leeds - *FixOurFood: the impact of regenerative farming in Yorkshire*

**9.50 – 10.40 Emerging practice in regenerative farming – learning by doing?**

“You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.” [Buckminster Fuller](#)

Chair: William Kendall

- Bronagh O’Kane, Farmer in Northern Ireland - *The more I learn, the more certain I am I don’t know enough!*
- Andy Cato, Farmer and founder of Wildframed – *Learning to make more of nature’s holistic systems*
- Tom Fairfax, Mindrum Estate - *Using the correct tool correctly!*

**10.40 – 11.20 Coffee Break**

**11.20 – 11.30 What and how do we need to learn to farm regeneratively?** A reflection by Prof. Tom MacMillan

**11.30 – 12.15 Open discussion**

**12.15 – 13.00 Reflections from farmers and growers (after everything you’ve heard at the conference, what should be the next steps?)**

**13.00 – 13.15 Next steps** – Gary Wilson

**Final thoughts** by Dr. Rupert Sheldrake

**The Farmer** sung by Dr. Guy Hayward

**13.30** End of conference; optional Lunch and tour or walk of the Botanic Garden