

SUSTAINABILITY

The system must change to secure the future of food, is the key message at the Extinction or Regeneration conference



17-05-23 / 7 min read

AUTHOR: STEF BOTTINELLI



Organised by Compassion in World Farming in partnership with a number of organisations, including IPES Food and BirdLife International, the Extinction or Regeneration conference took place at the QEII Centre in London this May.

The two-day event saw several world-renowned academics, food experts, ecologists, activists and farmers discuss topics ranging from soil health and regenerative agriculture to the role of

The need for change

From Professor Tim Benton, Compassion in World Farming Global CEO Philip Lymbery, former food tsar Henry Dimbleby, IPES Food Co-Chair and UN Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights Olivier De Schutter, and Dr Vandana Shiva, activist founder of Navdanya, to Primatologist Jane Goodall, Dr Susan Chomba, Director of Viable Landscapes for Africa at the World Resources Institute, Seth Watkins, Pinhook Farms farmer and Ruud Zanders, Founding Partner at Kipster Revolutionary Farmers, all speakers shared one opinion: the current food system doesn't work.

Record high food prices, agribusiness oligopoly, growing global hunger and debt crisis, food poverty, declining living standards and health issues such as obesity in low income households in wealthy countries, centralisation of production of certain foods, export-led agriculture in continents like Africa to satisfy the need of richer countries for produce such as coffee and cocoa, and poor relations between government and farmers, are just some of the issues hindering the food system and creating disparities across the globe, according to Olivier De Schutter. The IPES Food Co-Chair stressed the importance of finding durable solutions to food poverty, moving away from the concept of charity. He also highlighted the importance of listening to farmers, identifying solutions and challenging the power of big agri-food corporations. Debt relief, justice and support for Global South countries in the face of climate change is also of the utmost importance to tackle poverty and inequality, he added.



Waste is a crime against nature."

Rattan Lal, Distinguished University Professor of Soil Science, The Ohio State University

Professor Tim Benton spoke about the need to rethink how we grow food from a sustainability point of view, rather than a quantity perspective. He said that the concept of continuously growing more and more produce to meet consumer demand, using high tech to offset the lack of enough land, is an ideology which is not based on science. He added that demand can be changed by restructuring the market and agro-ecological approaches can feed the world if we change our diet. Whilst this approach can be accused of being ideological, Benton is a firm believer that the market can be restructured and the onus should not be put on consumers. Less agricultural efficiency but more system efficiency, cutting down waste, structural market change, eating less meat and consuming more varied diets are just some of the changes needed to reshape the food system, he said in his speech.

Stefanos Fotiou, Head of the UN Food Systems Coordination Hub, echoed Benton's beliefs, advocating for sustainability at action and scale, providing evidence that sustainable food systems are beneficial for people, planet and prosperity.

at least 30-50%, producing more from less land, using less water, pesticides, fertilisers and energy, increasing the consumption of pulses, eating more plant-based foods, improving access to food, bettering distribution, addressing poverty, inequality, political instability, and wars. He was unequivocal when he spoke about famines, saying they were "man-made" and "unthinkable, morally toxic." Professor Lal was passionate when talking about the importance of soil health, pointing out that all life depends on it and that *"the rhizosphere is the only place where death is resurrected into life."*

Out with the old: the need for regenerative agriculture

Far from being left out from the conversation, since they are the ones who most closely work with the land, farmers took to the stage at Extinction or Regeneration, sharing their experiences of regenerative agriculture.

For Ruud Zanders, Founding Partner, of poultry company Kipster Revolutionary Farmers, animal welfare is top priority. His chickens live in wooden coops, and enjoy roaming around outside. The land is fenced and netted to keep predators out, and when the birds get hungry from all that time spent outside, they are fed food that would otherwise go to waste, such as leftover bakery items. Kipster's farms are as sustainable as possible and run on solar energy. Zanders and his partners are great believers that animals are sentient, and respect for their chickens' lives and feelings forms the basis of the organisation. Despite selling eggs and meat, Kipster believe that a plant-based diet, rather than slaughtering animals, is ultimately the preferable choice.

Reginaldo Haslett-Marroquin, co-founder and CEO of US-based Tree Range Farms, also shares Zanders's beliefs that his poultry must live a good, healthy life before slaughter. The chickens on his regenerative farm are raised in forested pastures, where they forage on plants and insects and aren't fed antibiotics. Haslett-Marroquin believes that his methods are not just sustainable, but produce better meat, because his birds are cared for and live healthy lives before they meet their maker.



Decent, nutritious food is a human right. "

Philip Lymbery, Global CEO, Compassion in World Farming

The need to shift from traditional agriculture and looking at methods utilised by other cultures, as well as understanding the food and farming needs of different regions of the world, was also a hot topic. Dr Susan Chomba, Director, of Viable Landscapes for Africa at the World Resources Institute highlighted the 'reductionist model' that she said has been promoted by the

to help Africa, but few truly understand its needs.

Dr. Lyla June Johnston, scholar, activist and artist, spoke of her Indigenous American culture's way of farming and the concept of 'kincentricity' – managing land in kinship with other species and treating them as equal as opposed to beings put on earth to be exploited by humans.

The importance of respecting the land and its inhabitants, animals and plants included, was also key to Dr Vandana Shiva's speech, who added that farmers must be treated as physicians – and paid accordingly – because they take care of the land, and know it inside out. For her there's no doubt that farming has to be local, biodiverse, organic and regenerative.

As Philip Lymbery said in his opening speech: *"If we continue as we are, we face a perpetual winter. We have to focus where we can have the most impact. What is the biggest land user on the planet? Food. Food needs a big shake up."*

"We need a solution: regeneration, rewilding, rethinking protein – reducing our reliance on animal protein – bringing animals back to the countryside, farm animals out of the factory farms and given the opportunity to experience the joy of life. It requires all of us, the UN, governments, to come together and move away from industrial agriculture and factory farming. It requires us to understand big changes are needed. We can't afford not to change."

"Decent, nutritious food is a human right. How can we continue to allow people in poverty to consume poor quality, factory farming food?"

The feeling at the conference was that everyone present is hopeful for solutions that promote regeneration, but will those with the power to change our food system listen?

Sustainability is essential to the future of food worldwide. Discover the latest innovations leading the way at the Food Matters Live Sustainable Food Forum:

[Get involved](#)

Download Food Matters Live's free Sustainability Digest

[Get it now](#)

[Food and nutrition policy](#)

[Food waste](#)

[News](#)

[Sustainability](#)



RELATED CONTENT

13-04-23 10 min read

Time's up: reaching 'peak meat' and shifting to plant-based is no longer an option, but a need

11-05-23 9 min read

"It's sickening, it's unbelievable" – Jonathon Porritt fires shots

27-08-21 6 min read

Dining Table Tales with...Tim Lang

Stef Bottinelli

Digital Editor

[Visit profile](#)

AUTHOR OF:

**Saudi Arabia to build
110,000 square meters
horticulture area to ensure
food security in the
country**

Related content



24 - 04 - 23 / Inside Food science

The rhizosphere – the mysterious world crucial to the future of food

Sustainable

Mapping the food system: the race to revolutionise the sector using data

Sustainable

21-11-22 / 6 min read

10 must-read food books about sustainability, culture, and history

Sustainable

09-09-22 / 31 min read

Cultured meat: the future of food is slaughter-free

Sustainable

15-12-22 / 10 min read

The commodities connection: how sustainability could be the answer to the energy and raw materials crisis

Read

› The system must change to secure the future of food, is the key message at the Extinction or Regeneration conference

Discover



Community





Get our best content directly in your inbox

Sign up to our newsletters