

## OFC 2010 to tackle feeding 9 billion while minimising environmental impact

3rd October 2009

Bookings are now being taken for the 2010 Oxford Farming Conference (OFC) which will be held at the Oxford University Examinations Halls on 4-6th January 2010. The Conference theme, Rising to the Challenge, will explore how British farmers can respond to the immense agricultural challenge of feeding a world population of 9 billion by 2050 with minimal environmental impact.

“Agriculture faces a huge challenge which affects every country and race - feeding 9 billion with less land, less water, less oil and greater climatic extremes,” explains Heather Peck, the 2010 Chairman.

The opening morning will set a hard-hitting tone for the rest of the conference; Hilary Benn MP will be joined by his shadow counterpart Nick Herbert MP and Phil Bloomer of Oxfam GB.

“Inviting an NGO to the stage is a response to delegate feedback last year and Oxfam’s messages will make a very pertinent and valuable addition to this huge area of debate,” she adds.

Oxford has an established reputation for probing content and attracting high-calibre speakers; 2010 is no exception.

Political analysis will continue on the first day with Dr. Cees Veerman, the highly respected former Dutch Minister for Agriculture discussing the European perspective for agriculture. He will be followed by John Parker, The Economist’s Globalisation Editor who will update delegates on the economic climate 18 months into the global recession.

The Conference will also debate how businesses manage risk in the context of increased production, consumer and environmental demands. Three speakers will pick up this session: Stan McCarthy the Chief Executive of Kerry Foods in the context of managing a world-class food business built from strong cooperative roots; David Brownhill a dynamic arable farmer from Australia managing his business in harsh antipodean climes and Professor Patrick Wall who will discuss the food safety and supply challenges facing the food and farming sector today and in the future.

Following the success for the “Farmer Perceptions” research commissioned by the OFC for the 2009 conference, further work has been commissioned for 2010. “BBSRC and Volac have kindly sponsored two pieces of research to determine where agricultural scientific research should be focused for the future,” explains Cedric Porter, an OFC Council member.

“We have commissioned the IGD to find out what research the food chain would like to see in the future and have primed Precision Prospecting to survey farmers to understand where they would like to see research funding to support their businesses,” he adds.

The science-focused session includes a paper from Professor John Beddington, the Government’s Chief Scientific Advisor and Dr Andrew West, CEO of the innovative New Zealand research business, AgResearch.

“We also have two excellent farmer speakers who will describe how science is at the core of their businesses, Adrian Ivory is a young beef farmer from the Borders and Fiona Lamotte is Managing Director of Scotherbs, the biggest supplier of herbs to retailers and restaurants in the UK,” Mr Porter adds.

The final session on the 6th January will probe the thorny subject of succession planning and passing the business baton to farming’s next generation. Speakers include Grant Gordon, Director General of the Institute of Family Business, Dr Matt Lobley from Exeter University and the Mercer family, farmers who have successfully managed integrating and inspiring the next generation into their business.

In a similar vein, the Oxford Union Debate will be run on the 5th January and it is likely to be very controversial, proposing the motion: “This House believes that all farmers should retire at 60”. Two lawyers will partner two young farmers to tackle this.

“The social and networking dimension is a core part of the Oxford experience and I’d encourage those who are coming to the Conference for the first part to take part in the whole event,” suggests Heather Peck. “Delegates include farmers, food chain and the farming trade and range from the age of 18 through to those of more mature years!

“The Pre-Conference Dinner on the evening of the 4th of January is a great occasion to kick off the two days; we

start with a champagne reception followed by a four-course dinner in the grand Oxford University Examination Schools with what should be a rousing after-dinner speech from Vince Cable MP. The dinner on the second evening is the Christ Church College dining hall – famously used as Hogwarts Hall in the Harry Potter films.