

Crossing the divide: the potential for consensus between four worldviews of agriculture's future

December 2023



Supporting evidence

This evidence pack contains quotes from opinion pieces, articles and speeches that illustrate the stances taken on various issues by members of the worldviews we characterise.

We have provided commentary to illustrate how these link to the claims we made in our report. All sources can be accessed publicly.

Traditionalists' worldview

Traditionalists think farmers' primary role is food production:

"Keeping the country fed is what farming is for"

Mark Spencer, minister of state at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, in a [speech](#) at the National Farmers Union (NFU) Conference, 2023

"British farmers need to be recognised and valued, first and foremost, as food producers [...] we should never take our food security for granted"

Minette Batters, president of the NFU, in a [speech](#) at the NFU Conference 2023

Traditionalists think farming also plays an important cultural role:

"British farmers not only produce our food, but they play a vital role maintaining, protecting and enhancing the landscape that has helped all of our mental health."

Stuart Roberts, then NFU deputy president, quoted in [Farmer's Guide](#)

"Sheep farming in the UK is very much land-based and extensive, it's considered good in terms of animal welfare and it's got a very close relationship with the landscape and the countryside." **Phil Stocker, chief executive of the National Sheep Association, quoted in [Country Life](#)**

Traditionalists tend to overlook the environmental impact of conventional agriculture, especially meat production:

“One of the greenest things government can do is to keep farmers farming.”
Tim Farron, MP, speaking at the 2021 Northern Farming Conference (quoted in [News and Star](#))

“Largely speaking, our system of beef and sheep production are based on grass and not causing that level of damage seen elsewhere” **Phil Stocker, National Sheep Association, quoted in [Country Life](#)**

“If people choose to eat meat, they can be assured that British farmers produce some of the most climate-friendly food in the world, working with mainly grass-fed systems.” **Tom Bradshaw, NFU, in an [open](#) letter to *The Times***

Traditionalists tend to see meat as central to a healthy diet, but believe that the public should not be told what to eat:

“Protein is an essential part of the human diet, helping to build, repair and maintain your body’s structures [...] Lamb and beef are naturally rich in protein, low in sodium and provides vitamins and minerals that are vital for good health – Zinc, Selenium, Taurine, CLA, Phosphorus, Iron and Creatine.” **Farmer and columnist Charlie Beaty, writing in [Countryside](#) on why we should back British farming**

“We would never dream of telling anyone what they can and cannot eat. But if you want to eat quality, nutritious red meat as part of a healthy, balanced diet and be confident that it’s been sustainably produced, buying British is a great place to start.” **Stuart Roberts, then NFU deputy president, quoted in [The Guardian](#)**

Traditionalists believe in free trade for exports, but that imports should be restricted to protect local industry:

“In a purely economic driven world [proposed trade deals with Australia and New Zealand] make sense – we keep food inflation down by importing cheaper products and creating competition... As a result we will see less of a ‘sheep industry’ and more land managed as a park for access and carbon and biodiversity... All we will do is export our environmental footprint – push it out of sight. It will do nothing for our food security or resilience and we will ... be in a precarious position in times of food supply unrest.” **Phil Stocker, National Sheep Association (NSA), quoted on the [NSA website](#)**

“The bottom line is that poorer standards are cheaper. If you give countries with lower standards a competitive advantage – as we have done with the

trade deals – it will damage not only animal welfare and the environment it will also damage our farmers.” **Tim Farron, MP, quoted in the [Westmorland Gazette](#) on proposed international trade deals**

Traditionalists tend to resist change at the pace and scale proposed by other worldviews:

“Land management and farming are not easy career choices. There is just as strong a vocational commitment as with the caring professions, often with similarly poor rewards. It is normal to cling on to the here-and-now, however unattractive or unsustainable, for fear of something worse. Even advantageous change will be resisted if it is delivered by coercion... The very identity of being ‘a farmer’ seems threatened.” **Professor Tony Hockley, director of public policy at the Policy Analysis Centre, in a [blog](#) for the London School of Economics**

Agroecologists’ worldview

Agroecology is a whole systems approach:

“Agroecology combines regenerative farming practices with a system-wide transition where nutritious food is sustainably produced and affordable for all, nature is thriving across the whole landscape, and resilient businesses and communities help to mitigate climate and geopolitical shocks.” **Dr Jim Scown, PhD researcher and previous programme co-lead: farming transition at the Food, Farming and Countryside Commission (FFCC) writing for the [FFCC blog](#)**

“The real task before us is not to devise forms of agriculture that conform to present economic norms but to acknowledge that agriculture is indeed the most significant thing that human beings do — and then devise an economy to fit the agriculture.” **Colin Tudge, biologist, science writer and researcher, writing for his [blog](#)**

“Agroecology is not a set of rules, it’s a frame of mind and a way of thinking.” **Lucy Bates, co-lead: farming transition at FFCC, [quoted](#) on the FFCC website**

Agroecologists take a low tech, traditional approach to farming which aims to minimise chemical inputs:

“These are not new ideas, a lot of these are really old fashioned ideas, old fashioned mixed farming. There’s no such thing as a new idea... and there’s a

reason why it worked this way for so long because you have a closed nutrient cycle on your farm, you are not constantly exporting organic matter and nutrients from your soil, you are replenishing it with what you take off...”

Ben Andrews, Broadward Hall Farm manager, [quoted on the FFCC website](#)

Agroecologists promote reducing meat consumption through a return to traditional diets:

“we don’t need ersatz meat at all. We just need to raise farm animals kindly and in wildlife-friendly ways, and only in kindly and wildlife- friendly ways, and then use the meat and offals (and feet and tripes and bones and all the rest) astutely, as people the world over have been doing for thousands of years. The idea that we need high-tech ersatz springs from the belief that most people crave a high-meat diet, or something that at least looks like a high-meat diet” **Colin Tudge, writing for his [blog](#)**

“It’s easy to target all meat with the same brush, but it’s important to recognise that there is a big difference between meat produced to ethical standards and the cheap and nasty stuff that comes from very intensive livestock systems. We urge that people should eat less meat, but eat high-welfare, sustainably produced meat when they do.” **Helen Browning, chief executive of the Soil Association, quoted in [The Guardian](#)**

Agroecologists take a cautious attitude towards tech-driven solutions:

“We should not assume as people in high places so often do these days that high-tech will always provide the best solutions.” **Colin Tudge, writing for his [blog](#)**

“A food system woven together from small, mixed agroecological farms, especially in the industrialised world, may feel like a hopelessly romantic vision, but it’s a damn site closer to reality than expecting techno fixes to feed us... I was recently invited to a meeting of cultured meat scientists and was shocked at how far away from reality their ideas were.” **Jyoti Fernandes, Landworkers Alliance in an [open letter](#) responding to George Monbiot’s book *Regenesis***

Vision of a world where agroecology is the dominant land use:

“It would be much more diverse with much greater structure – more trees, hedges, ponds, wet areas, agricultural diversity, more wildflowers etc. It would have a lot more people working in it – more jobs on farms, conservation sites, more rural businesses etc. There would be a much greater

abundance of wildlife and biodiversity in general. It would be connected, dynamic, thriving and a living landscape. It would help to provide a lot more food for its local population.” **Anonymous, FFCC [website](#)**

Technovegans’ worldview

Technovegans believe reducing meat consumption is necessary to solve the climate and biodiversity crises:

“The most important scientific question in the world right now is why does meat taste delicious. If we can answer that question successfully, we can eliminate and reverse the environmental threat.” **Patrick Brown, former CEO and founder, Impossible Foods in a [podcast](#) for the American Society of Microbiology**

“Livestock farming attacks every Earth system. It’s the primary agent of habitat destruction and wildlife loss. It’s causing riverside and dead zones at sea. It generates more greenhouse gas emissions than all the world’s transport. It sprawls across vast tracts of the planet, inflicting massive carbon and ecological opportunity costs...” **George Monbiot, author, in an op-ed for [The Guardian](#)**

Technovegans think alternative proteins will play a central role in reducing meat consumption:

“I think that the centrality of meat to our culture, at least here in the West, is so powerful that I’d rather attack this through technology than through philosophy. I think I’d rather just create something that’s indistinguishable.” **Ethan Brown, CEO of Beyond Meat, in [an interview](#) for the Verge**

Asking people to eat less meat without offering like-for-like alternatives is “...as if we were urging people to burn less fossil fuel without offering a replacement: no solar, wind, geothermal or nuclear power.” **George Monbiot, writing in an op-ed for [The Guardian](#)**

Technovegans take an extreme land sparing approach to food production:

“By replacing animals in the food system with delicious, nutritious meats made from plants, vast swathes of the Earth’s entire land surface could be spared for biodiversity and wildlife. As natural ecosystems are restored and recovered land converted to plant biomass, photosynthesis (the most

reliable and proven carbon capture method, optimised by billions of years of evolution), could stabilise and even reduce global atmospheric CO₂.” **Patrick Brown, Impossible Foods, writing in [Medium](#)**

Technovegans think alternative proteins will soon outcompete meat in price and taste:

“We can continue to improve [alternative proteins] now until forever, [but] the cow is not going to get any better at being meat.” **Patrick Brown, Impossible Foods, [quoted in an interview for Vox](#)**

Sustainable intensifiers’ worldview

Sustainable intensifiers promote a high tech approach to farming:

“Farming is not a cottage-industry, or something quaint and nostalgic; efficient, high-technology agriculture holds many of the keys to our future. Sustainable food production and food security are vital to the nation’s health and the nation’s economy...” **Dyson Farm [website](#)**

“Appropriate and efficient use of inputs, smarter approaches to business planning, and the adoption of innovations and new technologies, increase productivity whilst protecting valuable resources.” **Sustainable Intensification [Platform](#)**

Sustainable intensifiers tend to agree with traditionalists that farmers’ primary role to feed the world:

“The most damaging neglect in Government policy in recent years has been to ignore food production. All ministers and their advisers have done is conjure up ever-changing environmental schemes, without any thought as to how our farmers are to fulfil their essential purpose – to feed the nation.” **James Dyson, founder of Dyson Farming, [writing in the Farmer’s Forum](#)**

“In meeting our Net Zero commitments by 2050 ... the United Kingdom also has a global responsibility to optimise its own food production capabilities, and reduce our dependence on food imports, so minimising our food system footprint in parts of the world where farmers may be more vulnerable to the effects of climate change” **[Julian Sturdy, MP, head of the APPG on science and technology in agriculture](#)**

Sustainable intensifiers are cautious about approaches which promote the extensification of farming:

“The problem is, if we simply extensify farming, we will reduce production, and we’ve a rapidly growing global population that is not a serious option. True, we can help slow the growth in demand for food by reducing waste, by changing our diet, by eating less meat, but this is unlikely to happen fast enough to halt the growing demand for food. [...] Ideally, we should be reducing the global area used by agriculture in order to allow for habitat recreation and species recovery.” **Michael Winter, Professor of land, economy and society at Exeter University, quoted in an explainer [video](#) on sustainable intensification**

Sustainable intensifiers and technovegans both want to make farming more efficient, but have different approaches to achieving this:

“Their [sustainable intensifiers] business plan is to take ‘under-utilised’ land and to introduce ‘modern’ technology and inputs – in the form of seeds, fertilisers, agro-chemicals, machines or irrigation – to produce a small number of commodities. Scale, specialisation, simplification and standardisation are the mantras. Mechanisation and chemicalisation the tools. Or, they talk excitedly about ‘AgTech’. [...] Many of these new technologies support or intensify the high-input, industrial model of farming. For example, precision agriculture and ‘Big Data’ tools make the application of chemicals and fertilisers more efficient, but they lock farmers into the use of these inputs. Other companies seek to take food production off the land altogether, putting it in a warehouse under artificial lighting or keeping it in the laboratory (as in the case of lab-grown meat).” **Paul McMahon, co-founding partner of SLM Partners, quoted in the FFCC’s [report: Farming smarter, the case for agroecological enterprise](#)**