

Europe's Green Deal and Disruptive Rethinking of Food and Agriculture – who is ready?

In December 2019 the EU published the Green Deal as a platform strategy for achieving climate neutral subsistence across Europe by 2050. In 2020 Henry Dimbleby will publish a review of the UK food system which will lead on to a new National Food Strategy. These, along with other initiatives will lead to rapid reforms in many areas of agriculture. There will be reductions in fertilisers, antibiotics and pesticides as well as more efficient food production systems. There is a chance that as policy initiatives transform into Bills and new practices that fair and just transitions will deliver food and meet environmental ambitions. However, there are also well-considered viewpoints which suggest that the transition will be far more vicious with the lead coming from the price of food and economics, not farming policies. The RethinkX Team state that “We are on the cusp of the deepest, fastest, most consequential disruption in food and agricultural production since the first domestication of plants and animals ten thousand years ago” and this is because the price of manufactured protein will soon be cheaper than farmed protein. Consequently, meat and dairy sectors will collapse. Some direct benefits for the environment are evident, such as reduced emissions, changes of land use especially the reduced need to grow for crops for animal feed, biodiversity gains etc. Governments like the concepts because food prices will come down, nations will have the opportunity of managing their own supplies, employment in high-tech bio-farma industries will grow and green credentials will accrue. Such disruptive ideas are both frightening and thrilling and can be readily accommodated into elements of e.g. the Green Deal. Both routes are right, we must forge forward with change. Horticulture as a sector could do well as other food sectors fold. It will be interesting to discuss who is ready.