

INTERVIEW - Organic Farming Seen Here to Stay

CARDIFF, Wales - Climate change and declining oil supplies should favour organic farming, Jonathan Dimbleby, journalist and president of the UK Soil Association, told Reuters.

"There won't be the fossil fuels available to provide carbon fertilisers at a price which will make it (industrial farming) sustainable," Dimbleby, who heads Britain's largest organic certification body, said. "I think everything militates in favour of organic agriculture."

Dimbleby grew up on a small farm with livestock and attended agriculture college before opting for a career in journalism.

"It was farmed effectively without any chemical fertilisers and it was a very wonderful environment. I wanted to be a farmer," he said, adding he eventually bought a farm in 1992 which he owned until last year.

"My interest in agriculture led me to think that organic agriculture was a natural, proper way of treating the soil."

He acknowledged that it would be a challenge for organic farming, if adopted widely across the world, to feed a rising global population.

"I think it is the big question. Can organic farming feed the world? There is as yet no definitive evidence available but my suspicion is that it is possible," he said.

"I think our food consumption patterns are going to have to radically change. I think we are going to eat less meat and that frees up a lot of land for growing crops," he said, noting that much of the world's crop were currently used to feed livestock.

Genetically modified crops had proved ineffective at reducing inputs such as fertiliser and did not offer a solution except in the production of medicines.

Dimbleby also expressed reservations about biofuels, particularly the rapid expansion of the use of maize in the United States for ethanol production.

"I think it is quite disturbing in the US that a huge proportion of the land is given out to biofuels. I think it is an avoidance of the problem (caused by diminishing oil supplies)," he said.

Dimbleby said biofuels might have a role to play in some parts of the world, adding: "I just don't think we should be carried away."

He noted continued significant growth in demand for organic food, which he linked to recent health scares such as mad cow diseases and worries about pesticides.

"There is also quite a strong feeling that somehow industrial agriculture has had its day. There is something intrinsically attractive about a less exploitative form of agriculture."

Story by Nigel Hunt

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