

# NewStatesman

*A New Statesman fringe event in partnership with*



***Is food security in danger unless we change  
our attitudes to technology and  
innovation?***

***Tuesday 23rd September 2014, 12:00-13:00***

***Bridgewater Suite, Jurys Inn, 56 Great Bridgewater St, Manchester, Lancashire***

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## About the New Statesman

The New Statesman is Britain's leading, best written and most authoritative weekly political, cultural and current affairs magazine. For 100 years its mission has been to provide readers with a rigorous examination of political culture as well as to amuse and entertain. Our provocative and acclaimed reports, columns and essays explore the issues that lead national conversation and are an essential source of information and analysis by senior politicians, civil servants, national and local newspaper editors, business decision makers, heads of local authorities, trade unions, trade associations and almost every opinion former in the UK.

## About Crop Protection Association

### ***"Safeguarding our Food Supply and Quality of Life"***

The Crop Protection Association (CPA) is a key voice of the UK Plant Science Industry. We promote the role of modern plant science in safeguarding our food supply from seed to shelf.

Our members are involved in the development and manufacture of a wide range of plant science technologies which are of crucial importance to the cultivation and protection of food crops, protecting our gardens, woodlands, infrastructure and public places.

These include the formulation and manufacture of synthetic and bio pesticides, seed and plant breeding, agricultural biotechnology and the breeding of bees.

Our strength comes from our ability to combine the industry's expertise and skills to analyse and address key issues.

We are committed to explaining the role of the Crop Protection industry and the benefits of its products to the community. This includes engaging in constructive and intensive dialogue with relevant stakeholders to ensure that these benefits are fully recognised and accepted.

## Background

*New Statesman and the CPA are proud to present this panel event at the Labour party conference on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of September. Broadly, this event will explore whether attitudes to technology and innovation are helping or hindering our long-term food security. The discussion will be facilitated by b of the New Statesman.*

The world's population is expected to exceed nine billion by 2050 – a rise that creates a number of challenges, not least that of how to feed everyone. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation has warned that food production must be increased by 70 per cent if it is to meet this demand. While other factors such as reducing waste and changing diets can also contribute, they do not provide the solution alone. If we are to take the food security challenge of the coming century seriously, it is vital we ensure we establish the productive capacity that can ensure we keep pace with demand.

However, there are concerns at the extent of this challenge. For instance, it is widely acknowledged that in much of the developed world, including the UK and Europe, increases in average crop yields are not being maintained. Coupled with changes in our climate, limited availability of land, disease and increasing fuel prices, this creates significant threats that need to be addressed. One only need reflect on the civil unrest caused in 2008 after the spike in oil and commodity prices to see what impact these threats could have on food prices and consequently wider society.

In response, from the farm to the shop shelves, technological innovations must continue to play a key part in ensuring a plentiful supply of safe and affordable food.

Modern crop protection products, techniques and technologies all have a central role to play in safeguarding our food supply. Innovation in plant science is essential not only to protect the supply of safe, high quality, affordable food, but to maintain the health and well-being of the nation. Pesticides, for example, keep weed, pest and disease pressures in check. Without them crop yields would fall by a third. Meanwhile, genetics and synthetic biology are supporting the development of higher-yielding, disease- and drought-resistant crops, such as the Blight-resistant potato and Aphid-resistant wheat.

Advances in engineering mean it is now possible to use sophisticated sensory tools and real-time image analysis to control machinery remotely, supporting developments in health and safety. They are also contributing to enhanced

animal welfare – some farms, for example, use robotic systems and sensors that enable dairy cows to milk themselves, enabling them to live more comfortably. And businesses further down the food supply chain, including manufacturers and retailers, are harnessing technology and research in the way they deploy highly sophisticated logistical systems, innovations in packaging and delivery, and introducing advances in formulation that benefit consumers.

All of this provides ample opportunity for the UK's science and engineering sectors to work with food producers and the food industry to strengthen our position as a world-leading research base, and to contribute to the future security and sustainability of our food supply.

However, the reality is somewhat different.

There appears to be an aversion amongst the public and sometimes outright hostility, towards the role of technology and innovation in food production, particularly in the UK and Europe. While adherents promote the benefits of new technologies – from the introduction of GMOs in producing new beneficial traits in seeds, through modern intensive livestock units that employ advanced systems and machinery promoting greater efficiency and environmental performance, to the use of increasingly targeted pesticides that enhance crop yields with minimal environmental or health impact – the public are sometimes reluctant to accept their arguments and instead are more easily convinced by the concept of a “natural” food system that harks back to a bygone (if not indeed mythical) era.

Pesticides provide a case in point. There remains heated debate about their use by farmers to tackle pests and diseases and protect yields. Despite an extremely rigorous regulatory system, there is still a poor level of understanding amongst the public about the safety of these products and how they are used. While it is a complex and sometimes technical subject, much of the public debate around the use of pesticides (for instance the recent controversy with bee health and neonicotinoids) is conducted in misleadingly simple terms, and rarely with reference to their utility to farmers and food production. Arguments over the comparative benefits of intensive and extensive livestock production suffer similar abuses, for example with intensive dairy units disparagingly referred to as factory farms, with little acknowledgement of their potential benefits.

A huge number of actors in the food sector, from farmers and researchers to retailers and manufacturers, are developing technological innovations that can have a positive impact on our food system and allow us to increase productivity sustainably. However, at the same time, negative attitudes to some of those

innovations seem to be leading to a policy and regulatory environment that prevents proper assessment and uptake of those technologies, ultimately putting domestic food security at risk, and through increased reliance on imports from developing countries, global food security too.

## **Discussion points**

Taking all of this into account, panellists will discuss issues such as:

- Is food security in danger unless we change our attitudes to technology and innovation?
- What should the next UK government do to ensure a science-based, rational and balanced approach is used that generates investment in, and take-up of, the products and techniques we need to secure our food supply?
- Can the UK government actually do anything to boost agricultural production or is it a matter for Europe or indeed global bodies?
- What impact does Europe's obstructive approach to modern farming methods have on investment in agri-science and agri-technology?
- How can we influence Europe's policies to ensure our food security is protected?
- How can we ensure that the public is provided with correct information to counter scaremongering by campaigners?
- How should we ensure journalists and broadcasters are properly equipped to deal with sometimes complex scientific issues, and to report them fairly and objectively?

## Speakers

- Huw Irranca-Davies MP - Shadow Minister for Food and Farming
- Nick von Westenholz - Chief Executive, Crop Protection Association
- Vicki Hird - Senior Campaigner, Land Use, Food and Water Security Programme - Friends of the Earth
- Melanie Leech - Director General, Food and Drink Federation
- Richard Reeves – Chair of the Northwest Crop Board, National Farmers Union
- Jon Bernstein – Chair, New Statesman

## Running order

<b>11.45</b>	Guests arrive and seated. Tea and coffee served.
<b>11.50</b>	Speakers and hosts arrive.
<b>12.00</b>	Jon Bernstein introduces event, and speakers.
<b>12.05</b>	Speakers make introductory remarks of no more than 5 minutes each.
<b>12.30</b>	The event is opened up to questions from the floor/between the panel
<b>13.00</b>	Jon Bernstein wraps up discussion, thanks participants, and closes.

## Biographies

**Jon Bernstein**

**Chairperson**

**Former Deputy Editor of the New Statesman**



Jon Bernstein is an award-winning journalist, editor and digital strategist. He was deputy editor, then digital director, at the New Statesman; multimedia editor at Channel 4 News; ran the Channel 4 FactCheck website during the 2005 general election; editor-in-chief of Directgov, working in the Cabinet Office's eGovernment Unit; and editor-in-chief of dot com start up and technology website silicon.com.

In 2011 he was named Website Editor of the Year by the British Society of Magazine Editors for Newstatesman.com.

**Vicki Hird MSc FRES FRSA**

**Senior Campaigner - Land Use, Food and Water Security Programme**

**Friends of the Earth**



Vicki Hird, award winning author, expert, strategist and senior manager has been working on environment, food and farming issues for over 20 years. She is an expert consultant for NGOs and institutions (including for RSPB, WSPA, The Sustainable Development Commission, Greenpeace, The Plunkett Foundation and HEAL) and is the Senior Campaigner heading up the Land use, Food and Water Programme for Friends of the Earth.

Previously she was Policy Director of Sustain. She has launched many major food and environment campaigns, from local to global in scope, has published numerous reports and articles on the sustainability of food systems and published *Perfectly Safe to Eat?* (Women's Press 2000).

She has an academic background in pest management and is a Fellow of the Royal Entomological Society and the RSA. Vicki is on the board of Pesticides Action Network, and the Keo Foundation, is chair of the Eating Better alliance and has sat on numerous government advisory groups over the years. Current areas of work include sustainable diets, food security scenarios and promoting the Square Meal debate on food, farming and the environment as part of a key grouping of UK NGOs.



## **Huw Irranca-Davies MP** **Shadow Minister for Food and Farming**



Huw Irranca-Davies MP, Shadow Minister for Rural Affairs, Food and Farming.

Huw has been the Member of Parliament for Ogmore since the 2002 by-election. He has been Labour's Shadow Rural Affairs, Food and Farming Minister since 2011, having previously served as a Defra Minister in the last government.

In 2010, Mr. Irranca-Davies was appointed as Shadow Energy and Climate Change Minister and given the Marine and Natural Environment brief, shadowing Charles Hendry.

After he left University, Mr. Irranca-Davies worked in leisure management, but returned to education as a lecturer at the Swansea Institute of Higher Education.

## **Melanie Leech** **Director General** **Food and Drink Federation**



Melanie has been Director General of the Food and Drink Federation, the largest trade association representing food and drink manufacturers, since August 2005.

Melanie began her working life as a Police Constable in the Metropolitan Police Service. She joined the civil service (HM Customs and Excise) in 1988 and subsequently held senior roles in a number of departments including the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Office of the Rail Regulator and the

Cabinet Office as well as a secondment as Executive Director of the Association of Police Authorities.

Melanie is Vice Chair of the Carnegie UK Trust, a Fellow of the RSA and a Member of the Institute of Directors.



**Richard Reeves**  
**Chairman of the Northwest Crop Board**  
**NFU**



Richard farms 700 acres of combinable crops in North Cheshire on a number of farm tenancies.

As a first generation farmer, having graduated from Leeds University, Richard enjoyed spells working for ICI and the Duke of Westminster, before helping establish a small grain co-op in the North West.

**Nick von Westenholz**  
**Chief Executive**  
**Crop Protection Association**



Nick von Westenholz is CEO of the Crop Protection Association (CPA), a post he has held since January 2013.

Prior to joining the CPA Nick worked for the National Farmers Union (NFU), where he was Head of Government Affairs, responsible for managing the organisation's political relations and heading up its London office.

Nick has enjoyed a varied career both within and outside agriculture. He worked for a London-based public affairs agency for many years, advising companies and organisations across a wide range of sectors on media and political relations. He also trained as a lawyer, being called to the Bar in 2007, and managed a family-owned arable farming business in East Hertfordshire before joining the NFU in 2009.

## Location

Bridgewater Suite, Jurys Inn, 56 Great Bridgewater St, Manchester, Lancashire, M1 5LE  
You will be met by a New Statesman representative who will direct you to the room.

If you have any questions or queries between now and the event contact:

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