

Asa Briggs (A2) Lecture Theatre

Plenary Lecture – **Professor Jules Pretty** – Sustainability in agricultural and rural systems: recent history and future challenges

Chair: Professor Alun Howkins (President, British Agricultural History Society)

On the subject of ‘Sustainable Intensification of Agriculture’, Professor Pretty has written:

‘All commentators agree that food production will have to increase substantially. But there are very different views about how this should best be achieved. Some still say agriculture will have to expand into new lands. Others say food production growth must come through redoubled efforts to repeat the approaches of the Green Revolution; or that agricultural systems should become organic. Traditionally agricultural intensification has been defined in three ways: increasing yields per hectare, increasing cropping intensity (i.e. two or more crops) per unit of land or other inputs (water), and changing land-use from low-value crops or commodities to those that receive higher market prices ...

Agronomy refers to the management of crops and livestock in their specific circumstances, and matches with the emergence of the term agro-ecology to indicate that there is a need to invest in science and practice that gives farmers a combination of the best possible seeds and breeds and their management in local ecological contexts.

This suggests that sustainable intensification will very often involve more complex mixes of domesticated plant and animal species and associated management techniques, requiring greater skills and knowledge by farmers ... Too many successful efforts in raising production yields have ended in failure when farmers were unable to market the increased outputs. Understanding how to access rural credit, or how to develop warehouse receipt systems and especially, how to sell any increased output, becomes as important as learning how to maximise input efficiencies or build fertile soils.’



Professor Jules Pretty OBE is Pro-Vice-Chancellor at the University of Essex, and Professor of Environment and Society. His 18 books include *This Luminous Coast* (in press, 2011), *Nature and Culture* (2010), *The Earth Only Endures* (2007), and *Agri-Culture* (2002). He is a Fellow of the Society of Biology and the Royal Society of Arts, former Deputy-Chair of the government’s Advisory Committee on Releases to the Environment (ACRE), and has served on advisory committees for a number of government departments. He is a regular speaker, contributor to media, and presenter of the 1999 BBC Radio 4 series *Ploughing Eden*, a contributor and writer for the 2001 BBC TV Correspondent programme *The Magic Bean*, and a panellist in 2007

for Radio 4’s *The Moral Maze*. He received a 1997 international award from the Indian Ecological Society, was appointed A D White Professor-at-Large by Cornell University from 2001, and is Chief Editor of the *International Journal of Agricultural Sustainability*. He received an OBE in 2006 for services to sustainable agriculture, and an honorary degree from Ohio State University in 2009.

More details can be found at:

www.essex.ac.uk/pvc/sustainability and www.julespretty.com.