

## Quakers and Business Group – 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Business Conference 2014

### FOOD –There's a story behind everything we eat

It's great that you are going to join us for this one-day conference about food. It's a big topic to cover in only seven hours so to encourage you to get in the mood here is some background to the issues and the speakers, some website links and short videos that introduce them.

Most of the time we take food for granted. It arrives at the table two to three times a day. At best we thank the person who placed it in front of us. At very best we thank the Almighty through saying grace.

But behind everything we eat there is a story – a field, a farm, an animal, a farmer, a skilled worker, a corporation, a bank, a wholesaler, a transporter and a retailer. Each of these is a business. If we include the small farmers who produce 70% of the world's food, then the food industry (from farm to fork) must be the world's biggest employer. The soil is the biggest single store of fresh water. Many of the world's crops are dependent upon pollination by bees and other insects. Nature detoxifies much of our pollution at no cost – providing we do not overload the system. With such friends in nature, you would think that we would work with them and support them. But increasingly, in the search for “efficiency” and higher profits, we do not.

There are many examples of what is going wrong. Half of the world's antibiotics are fed to livestock - a major cause of resistance. In the UK, milk is now cheaper than bottled water. A third of all the world's food is wasted. A third of all the world's grain is fed inefficiently to livestock. A recent Cambridge study reports that a “healthy” calorie costs three times that of an “unhealthy” one (<http://bit.ly/1o1Hzu7>). Small farmers produce 70% of the world's food but industrial agriculture gets 80% of the subsidies and 90% of research funds. In conventional, commercial farming it requires 7-10 calories of energy to produce one calorie of food on our plates. The “Horsegate” scandal is fresh in our minds. Industrial farming is resulting in unacceptable pressures on animals and in pollution through their waste.

We could go on. It would be easy to spend the day listing more of these concerns and becoming utterly depressed. But there are also many good things happening and at the conference you will have the opportunity to listen to people who are involved at the front line, who can open our eyes to the good things that are happening and to what we can do to encourage and support them through our buying habits or through pressing for change. We will also have the opportunity to learn about how we can become a citizen journalist and use this new skill to spread the word to others – and books by authors present will also be on sale.

**John Turner** is a Quaker farmer from Lincolnshire, running a mixed family farm, producing Wheat, Barley and Oats from the arable land and beef cattle from the rotational grassland and permanent pastures. He combines practical experience with a deep interest in the issues that affect farming and is one of only two farmers featured in the recent Square Meal report (<http://bit.ly/1rpFjYx>). Nearly 5 years ago, John and I and a couple of other farmers started a discussion group looking at how we could give a voice to farmers who raise their ruminant animals (cattle and sheep) purely on pasture – feeding no grain. Today this has evolved into the Pasture-fed Livestock Association (PFLA – [www.pasturefed.org](http://www.pasturefed.org)) with a registered brand, production standards, a transparent tracking system, nearly 140 members

and 40 approved producers. This growing organisation offers a viable alternative to farmers who want to raise ruminants in their natural environment and on their natural diet. To learn something about this, and the principles on which John's approach to farming is based, take a look at <http://bit.ly/1pwYXSD>

He will give a brief overview of his farm and the degree to which markets shape today's farming. He will consider where farming currently finds itself, where many would like to see it develop and the practical steps for making that transition. Using the experience gained from the Pasture-Fed initiative, it will be possible to look at both the challenges and the opportunities, shedding some light on who needs to be involved in bringing about meaningful change.

**Philip Lymbery** started his career working alongside Peter and Anna Roberts, the founders of Compassion in World Farming (CIWF – [www.ciwf.org.uk](http://www.ciwf.org.uk)), and has been its Chief Executive since 2005. His vision is to end factory farming by the year 2050. He is passionate about animal welfare and is focused on strengthening the organisation, engaging with food industry companies, influencing global policy makers and driving the agenda for legislative reform. In speaking out against factory farming, he has frequently experienced the ire of farmers. In agreeing to work with the corporate food sector he has experienced the ire of those who wish to destroy it. But, as Alastair McIntosh noted in *Soil and Soul* (p 149) when he and others were engaging with the cement giant Lafarge on the Isle of Eigg: "It seemed to us that as we all used corporate products, we all had a duty to help corporations engage responsibly".

Over the last three years, Philip has travelled the globe with Isabel Oakeshott (until recently the political editor of the *Sunday Times*), documenting the realities of industrial farming and resulting in the publication of the well-reviewed book - *FARMAGEDDON*. For much of the book it is a disheartening read, demonstrating the damage of industrial farming on livestock, on the environment and on communities. But the last quarter of the book focuses positively on the opportunities for change and what we can do as individuals - and this will be his underlying theme. To get a taste of what he found take a look at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hYsPDWVaZrA> .

Colin Tudge is a biologist by education and a writer by trade. He has written for many publications and for a time was on the staff of *Farmers' Weekly*, then *New Scientist* then BBC Radio 3. But mainly he writes books—on natural history, evolution, food and farming and, lately, on the philosophy of science and metaphysics. His latest book is "Why genes are not selfish and people are nice"! In the early 2000s he coined the expression "Enlightened Agriculture", sometimes abbreviated to "Real Farming" - defined as "Agriculture that is expressly designed to provide everyone, everywhere, with food of the highest standard, nutritionally and gastronomically, without wrecking the rest of the world". The essential component ideas are those of Agroecology, Food Sovereignty and Economic Democracy.

In 2008 Colin, and his wife Ruth, established the Campaign for Real Farming ([www.campaignforrealfarming.org](http://www.campaignforrealfarming.org)); and in 2010, together with Graham Harvey, they launched the Oxford Real Farming Conference as the antidote to the established Oxford Farming Conference - this year to be held in Oxford Town Hall ([www.orfc.org.uk](http://www.orfc.org.uk)). They also launched Funding Enlightened Agriculture (FEA - [www.feanetwork.org](http://www.feanetwork.org)) which seeks to arrange finance and business advice for farms and related enterprises that are contributing to the grand cause of enlightened agriculture. You can get a taste of his thinking at the first video on this site - <http://orfc.org.uk> Colin will speak about how we can feed the world, now and in the future, without wrecking it.

Sally Bagenal, and her husband Henry, were for many years dairy farmers in the Southwest of England. Their awareness of the environmental and health problems associated with some modern farming practices led them to farm organically for 20 years. To strengthen the market for organic milk, she was co founder and, for over ten years, CEO of the Organic Milk Suppliers Cooperative (OMSCo – [www.omasco.co.uk](http://www.omasco.co.uk)), which she led to become the largest organic milk cooperative in the UK. Organic milk became a household name in the UK, with market growth of 30%. The co-operative broke new ground in its trading relationships with farmers, processors and supermarkets, which gave rise to one major UK supermarket winning the Ethical Supermarket of the Year award. She has since been involved in the development of organic farming in East Africa.

Sally will share her experience, ranging from practical farming through to engaging with the supermarkets. She will focus on the realities of getting perishable material from its raw state on the farm through a complex chain to arrive as portions on our plates. Larger stores/supermarkets have their upside as well as their downside - <http://bit.ly/1DvGI8I> If we boycott supermarkets, what is the alternative? Community supported farms and farmers' markets are great – but how relevant to people on low incomes living in an inner city tower block – where price and convenience are particularly important? If healthy food is so much more expensive, how can we make it affordable?

There will also be a number of people present with specific interests that impact on the future of how we produce and access our food. Those known to us at the time of writing include:

- Quaker Concern for Animals - <http://quaker-animals.co.uk>
- The Sustainable Food Trust - <http://sustainablefoodtrust.org>
- The Sustainable Restaurant Association - <http://www.thesra.org>
- The Permaculture Association - <https://www.permaculture.org.uk>
- Wholefood Action - <http://www.wholefoodaction.org.uk>
- Raw food - booklet can be found at <http://amzn.to/ZChA0z>
- Slow Food - <http://www.slowfood.org.uk>
- Sustain – [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)

Time will not permit each of these interests to have a slot in the plenary sessions – but they will be identified at the start, will be able to present themselves in the discussion groups and to share their literature.

By the end of the day you should have a much better idea of how you can influence the food industry by what you purchase and where. But you can also influence what happens through applying pressure – whether through lobbying or the use of social media – and we will have an opportunity to learn about this from Patrick Chalmers and Judy Kirby.

Patrick Chalmers is a former Reuters reporter. Getting into and out of conventional journalism opened his eyes to the realities of his chosen career. He found how mainstream media, including his former employer, were far from being the public watchdogs of power that they like to pretend. Quite the opposite – he found that the bulk of their work blinds people to their powerlessness in the face of modern politics, at every layer of government. In his book – *Fraudcast News* - he gives an insider's account of our media's complicity with power. Yet this is a hopeful story, including a plan for how people can make their own media and lay claim to their political voices. In the conference Patrick will share some ideas about how we can become citizen journalists. This video gives some background to his

experience - <http://bit.ly/1DwlLdt> If you are pressed for time take a look at the first three minutes and the last five. Patrick will be supported by Judy Kirby, until recently the editor of The Friend and currently co-editor of The Fox Report (its investigative arm).

At this conference you will hear about food and farming as it is – with a focus on the positive and on the future. We will be asking where the opportunities for real change lie and what influence we can have upon the way our food is produced? How can we bring about change and become part of the change that is needed?

By the time you leave we hope that you will have a greater understanding of:

- The realities of farming
- The role of animals in farming systems and how their interests can best be served
- Options for feeding the world - the big picture
- The food distribution chain
- How best to purchase your food responsibly and apply pressure for change

A minute at the end of the day will seek to capture the key lessons learned that can guide our attitude to food as well as our attitude to the people and to the resources that produce and distribute it.