

Happy New Year!

This note provides an International, Regional and UK update on some current events and challenges for food, farming and environment policy in 2008. But it starts with links to a delightful pair of programmes on Radio 4 about agricultural biodiversity and ends with a link to Tim Lang's Rachel Carson lecture in December in which he charted the current challenges for food policy. This document can also be downloaded at www.ukfg.org.uk/docs/UKFGchairNewYear2008.pdf.

At 5:45am on 1 January the year started on BBC Radio 4's **Farming Today** with a surprising but delightful programme about the importance of agricultural biodiversity for our future food. Geoff Tansey's interviews with farmers and scientists in Ethiopia, including the wonderful Melaku Worede – father of the Ethiopian genebank and participatory plant breeding, formed the basis of this and the previous day's programme. I contributed a small part with comments at the end of the New Year's Eve programme and the start of the New Year's Day programme about the importance of diversity in Europe.

Farming Today 31 Dec 07: Seeds of change?

downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/farming/farming_20071231-0530.mp3;

Farming Today 01 Jan 08: Feed the world

downloads.bbc.co.uk/podcasts/radio4/farming/farming_20080101-0530.mp3

This start to 2008 presages an important year for food policy, including its provision, consumption, trade, technology and biodiversity, in rapidly changing socio-political, economic and environmental contexts.

Internationally, the first international assessment on agricultural science and technology for development (**IAASTD**) will be published (www.agassessment.org) after lengthy negotiations on its disputed contents. The final Plenary is scheduled for mid January in Nairobi although this has yet to be confirmed in the wake of the recent election disturbances.

In February, for the first time in nearly a decade, the UN will debate the interactions of agriculture and the environment, especially agricultural biodiversity, Terminator technology and GMOs, at meetings of the Convention on Biological Diversity (**CBD**) (www.cbd.int/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=SBSTTA-13) and also in May (www.cbd.int/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=MOP-04 and www.cbd.int/doc/meeting.aspx?mtg=COP-09).

Also in May, the Commission on Sustainable Development (**CSD**) will debate agriculture for the first time since the 1990s (www.un.org/esa/sustdev/documents/docs_csd16.htm).

All these processes will be influenced by the World Bank's World Development Report 2008 (**WDR2008**) "Agriculture for Development" (www.ukfg.org.uk/docs/wdr2008.pdf)

Regionally, the potential negative impacts on national food systems of the interim and final Economic Partnership Agreements between Europe and ACP regions and countries will be hotly debated, especially since their rejection by African Heads of State at the EU's Lisbon Summit in December. *Abdoulaye Wade, Senegal's president, said at the closing of the Africa-Europe Summit: "It was said several times during the plenary session and it was said again this morning: African states reject the EPAs."* (bilaterals.org/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=17&var_recherche=epa#articles).

The UK Food Group is involved in two European projects to raise awareness about the impacts of European trade and production/consumption policies on African farmers.

In the UK, DFID will review the implementation of its 2005 Agriculture Policy. UK Food Group comments on the consultation for this policy can be found at www.ukabc.org/ukfg_comments_dfid_ag_guidelines30sept2005.pdf.

At the launch event for this policy document, we highlighted among other things, in terms of an indicator of DFID's renewed commitment to supporting agriculture in developing countries, Para 137 of this policy document, which states:

Creating a supportive policy framework

137. We will support developing country governments to:

- create a long-term vision for agriculture and to reflect this within their poverty reduction strategies;
- ensure the participation of representatives of the rural poor in shaping agricultural policies;
- strengthen and, if appropriate, reform public sector institutions so they can deliver important functions which support agricultural development;
- ensure that agricultural development strategies provide incentives for the sustainable use of natural resources and environmental services; and
- meet internationally agreed labour standards.

It remains to be seen if DFID has been able to make any significant changes in this direction or intends to change course to do so.

It is also 5 years since the government provided its response to the report of the DFID-led **Commission on Intellectual Property Rights** (www.iprcommission.org/graphic/uk_government_response.htm). The welcome publication of "The Future Control of Food" edited by Geoff Tansey and Tasmin Rajotte, will bring readers up to date with the way IPRs have decisive impacts on our food system (www.idrc.ca/en/ev-118094-201-1-DO_TOPIC.html). A planned launch of this book in London, at a UK Food Group meeting, is scheduled for 11 February.

In March the **Cabinet Office** will publish its paper resulting from its project looking at "trends shaping food consumption and production in the UK and their implications for society, the economy and the environment". The Guardian report in November (www.guardian.co.uk/business/2007/nov/11/fooddrinks.businessandmedia) warned that this paper may infer that "genetically modified high-yield crops *will have to be introduced* to satisfy growing demand" (my emphasis).

The preliminary paper published today (3 Jan), which invites comments (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/upload/assets/www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/strategy/food/food_analysis.pdf), highlights the importance of food to human health and wellbeing in the UK. But it makes no reference to the need to reshape agricultural production methods within healthy ecosystems using organic and agroecological methods. Rather, it makes reference (pages 61 and 62) both to genetic modification and nanotechnology ("*The UK has a world-class reputation for nanotechnology research with nanotech projects underway in over 35 UK universities*") as ways forward to improve sustainability – not sound biologically-based production methods – and consigns organic production to a lifestyle choice (page 83).

A policy framework that “joins the dots” of the complex issues surrounding food production and consumption is **‘food sovereignty’**, which seeks to increase democracy in localised food systems. The six principles of food sovereignty derived from Nyéléni 2007: forum for food sovereignty and an article I wrote for the Food Ethics Council Bulletin about this forum is at www.ukfg.org.uk/docs/FoodSov17Dec2007.pdf. This note was circulated at the last of the **ODI ‘Future Agricultures’** lunchtime seminars on 17 December at which I referred to food sovereignty in the context of the need for a new agenda (www.odi.org.uk/audiovisual/podcasts/071217-agriculture-debate.mp3).

At the European Social Forum in Malmö, Sweden, 18-21 September, the social movements’ debate on food sovereignty will continue.

In preparation for this momentous year for food policy, 2007 was rounded off by a masterly overview of the current challenges in the food system by Prof Tim Lang. Speaking at the **Rachel Carson annual lecture** organised by PAN-UK, Tim highlighted four principles for the food policy agenda – health of people and the planet; a new direction for food culture; ‘choice’ within limits; and increased democracy in food policy. The slides presented at this lecture are at (https://secure.virtuality.net/panukcom/PDFs/RCML_Tim_Lang_Slides.pdf). All the policy issues that have been worked on relentlessly by him and others over many decades are now coming up high on the 2008 policy agenda.

Sorry about the length of this note but if anyone wants further information about any of the items above, or related issues that we are working on, please contact me. A summary of our work in 2007 will be posted on the UKFG website.

A further note confirming the next meetings of the UK Food Group will be sent later by Geraldine Galvaing, the UKFG Coordinator.

Meanwhile I hope you all have a very purposeful and fruitful 2008.

Best wishes

Patrick

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