

Food security and the environment

We need strong British agriculture, says **Terry Jones**

Dear Editor,

In the June 2010 issue of *People & Science* there was a debate entitled, 'Should we eat less meat to increase food security?'

The drive to eat less meat has attracted a host of celebrities over the past year. From Sir Paul McCartney to Gwyneth Paltrow, green-minded pop stars and actors have been urging us to save the planet by reducing the amounts of beef, chicken and lamb we consume. But even if a world without roast beef was one in which we all wanted to live, we need to think a little harder about our future food security and what will really work to arrest global warming.

Surely the best way to safeguard our food security in the 21st century is through strong, productive and sustainable British agriculture, while at

the same time impacting less on the environment - a key message at the heart of the National Farmers Union's *Why Farming Matters* report.¹

We know the challenges faced by the world in securing food supplies in the future are vast. Available land is limited; natural resources such as water and soils are being depleted in many parts of the world and climate change will place a strain on attempts to increase productivity. But we should also remember that meat and poultry should form part of a healthy balanced diet - as the old adage goes 'everything in moderation'. Indeed for some, reducing or cutting out meat from their diet could have an adverse affect on their health particularly for those at risk of having a poor iron intake.

New management practices and technologies will emerge that enable agriculture around the world to satisfy the very real growing global demand for food while reducing its environmental impact. In livestock production genetic improvements, changing feeding regimes, increasing feed conversion ratios and reducing the impact of disease will help to lower emissions. Given our world-class science base, surely this is where the UK can really excel and demonstrate to everyone why farming truly matters.

¹ Available at <http://www.whyfarmingmatters.co.uk/>

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Photoshopping climate change

Bob Ward sounds a warning

Dear Editor,

I was surprised to discover that the March 2010 edition of *People and Science* illustrated an opinion piece by Professor Judith Curry about the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change with a picture of a polar bear apparently stranded on an isolated ice floe. This image was obtained from a photo agency, istockphoto. It notes that the image, described on the agency's website as 'the last polar bear', is 'a photoshop design. Polarbear [sic], ice floe, ocean and sky are real, they were just not together in the way they are now' (<http://www.istockphoto.com/stock-photo-4095333-the-last-polar-bear.php>).

The same image was used in the 7 May edition of the journal *Science* to accompany a letter by 255 members of the United States National Academy of Sciences who were protesting at 'the recent escalation of political assaults on scientists in general and on climate scientists in particular'. A number of so-called climate change 'sceptics' seized upon the image, which had been used without the knowledge of the authors of the letter, as an example of exaggeration by climate scientists. The journal soon admitted that the use of the image was 'a mistake' and replaced it in the online version of the journal.

Of course, Professor Curry may not mind that her article was accompanied by this image, but given the recent controversy surrounding it, *People & Science* may find itself subject to the same criticisms as *Science*.

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