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OXFORD UNIVERSITY NEWS RELEASE: Food security in face of climate change

Oxford University News Release: Embargoed until Wednesday 2 April 2008

International experts discuss food security in the face of climate change

International scientists are to discuss ways of tackling the threat of climate change to food security, both nationally and globally, at a three-day conference at Oxford University starting on Wednesday 2 April. The conference 'Food security and environmental change: linking science and policy for development' is organised by 'Global Environmental Change and Food Systems' (GECAPS), a research project in the University's Environmental Change Institute.

More than 200 scientists and rural development experts will be examining the effect of global warming on food security – focusing on the environmental, economic and social impacts. Among the issues raised will be the future of biofuel production; the impact of increasing pressure on land and water supplies; food miles and the environmental impact of the food we eat; and how to maintain food production in developing countries.

Of the 150 papers to be delivered, research highlights include:

Fair trade: Dr Polly Ericksen, the GECAPS Science Officer at Oxford University, will talk about inequalities in the patterns of food consumption and trade agreements between the North and South. She will stress that technical fixes alone will not create long-term adaptation strategies for ensuring food security in the face of climate change. She argues that as policies and institutions drive food systems, there is a need for better regional trade agreements.

Biofuels: Mandy Ewing from the International Food Policy Research Institute will explain how we can grow biofuel without endangering food supplies for the poor. She will argue that technological improvements to biofuel production play a crucial role in ensuring that the poorer countries still have food on the table.

Malnutrition: Dr Uwe Schneider of Hamburg University and colleagues will show the impacts of increasing land and water scarcity on global food production, meat consumption and malnutrition in developing countries.



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Food miles: Professor Gareth Edwards-Jones of Bangor University will present his research from Africa and Spain, which shows the complexity of applying carbon labels to food sold in the UK. He will argue that food miles are not always a good indicator of a carbon footprint and also raise the ethical consideration of possible discrimination against poor countries because they are far away.

Cheap-food culture: Dr David Barling from City University, London, will suggest that the 'cheap food era' is under stress because of consumer concerns about health, diet, animal welfare and the environment. He investigates how concerns around the UK's national food security can marry with better governance and policy goals for a more sustainable food supply.

On Thursday 3 April, Dr Prabhu Pingali, Head of the Agricultural Policy and Statistics Division of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, will give a public lecture entitled 'Global change and rural communities: Is sustainable development still possible?'. The lecture will take place at the Sheldonian Theatre in Broad Street at 6pm.

John Ingram, Co-ordinator of GECAFS, said: 'We live in a complex world where we demand more and more of our environment but in return we are increasingly compromising its ability to satisfy our food needs. This conference will highlight new strategies to enhance food security for all communities across the world in the face of a changing climate.'

For more information or to arrange interviews or see abstracts of research, please contact the University of Oxford Press Office on 01865 280534 or press.office@admin.ox.ac.uk

Notes for Editors:

* To find out more about the conference, go to www.eci.ox.ac.uk/news/events/gecafs-0408.php

* The Global Environmental Change and Food Systems (GECAFS) research project is hosted by the Environmental Change Institute at Oxford University. GECAFS is an international, interdisciplinary research project focused on understanding the links between food security and global environmental change. For more information, go to www.gecafs.org



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* The aims of GECAFS are to investigate how global environmental change affects food security at a regional scale; determine options to adapt regional food systems to cope with both global environmental change and changing demands for food; assess how potential adaptation options will affect the environment, societies and economies; and engage the international global environmental change and development communities in policy discussions to improve food security.

*Conference administration is provided by Elsevier, publishers of Environmental Science and Policy.

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