

Climate Crisis part 2 - The power in our hands ...

In the first part of this article, I focused on the legislative and regulatory landscape around responding to climate change. Business doesn't need to wait for regulation to fully reflect the magnitude of the threat to global society and the natural world on which it depends. There are obvious actions which can be taken in the manufacturing part of the food chain, alluded to part 1, supported by ESOS audits and incentivised by the risk of 'name-and-shame' or the opportunity of 'name-and-fame' represented by SECR. In agriculture, some of the obvious actions also help elsewhere.

Cover crops leading to improved soil organic matter, fertility and crop yield also play a part in improving water infiltration and retention and reducing erosion through run-off. After the heatwave of the summer of 2018, this must be taken seriously as a risk to agriculture across the northern hemisphere. Increased soil organic matter also equates to carbon sequestration, an obvious public good, and the potential for a new income stream for farmers and growers as those sectors which cannot reduce their own emissions soon enough might look to buy carbon credits from those that can. That would alter the position of sequestration as a public good in the eyes of the current Secretary of State, at least, as there have been clear signals that there will only be intervention with public funds where market forces cannot provide the desired outcome.

The issue is too critical to wait for the market, however, so it is to be hoped that public money will be used to kick-start a new carbon market in the same way that it was used to prime solar PV and wind generation to great effect. The carbon intensity of the UK's electricity grid dropped 39% from 2015 to 2018. Agroforestry is another area of interest, but the benefits are relatively slow to deliver, and time is short.



Food waste, globally and nationally, is another area for attention. Around 1/3rd of all food produced for human consumption doesn't get eaten, and much of it will end up releasing methane as it decomposes. Despite having a shorter atmospheric residence time, methane is a far more potent greenhouse gas than carbon dioxide. The UK food industry is coalescing around WRAP's food waste roadmap, and consumer sentiment has been responsive to wasted food for some time now, as much for social as for environmental reasons. Along with the established consumer mega-trends of health, convenience and indulgence, since the financial crash of

2008 there has been a strong strand of responsibility. This is often tied into the other trends so reduced meat intake, for instance, is both about personal health and responsible consumption, whether that be related to emissions or animal welfare.

The continued success of the 'Impossible Burger' - Beyond Meat's share price having jumped over 150% on the first day of trading - and other meat alternatives points towards commercial opportunities and many businesses which are long-established in meat products are adjusting their portfolios accordingly.



Sir David Attenborough, as close to a secular saint as we have had in our lifetimes, has fronted an excellent programme on the clear and present danger, and has taken the message to the world's politicians at the UN's COP24 meeting in Poland. Greta Thunberg has unflinchingly addressed audiences of regulators and told it as it is. If she ends up receiving a Nobel Peace Prize for her work, which has been mooted, it will be well-deserved. There are many other voices that have taken up the challenge, in a range of ways and this is our best opportunity collectively to get an institutional response of the same scale as has been the case with plastics, for which Sir David also deserves much credit. As citizens we can all do our bit.

Changing our own habits is an obvious first step - eat less meat and dairy, seek out deforestation-free products, travel less often (especially by plane) and switch off things that aren't being used. We can also seek to influence family, friends and people we meet, and we can make ourselves heard by our local, national and European (for as long as we have them) political representatives. The local council elections this week were inevitably focused on Brexit but encouraging politicians of all parties to respond to the climate emergency is a must. Politicising climate change will only make progress slower and it has to become politically pre-competitive for the best chance of successful action.

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