Welcome to International Innovation

AT THE CORE of food and agriculture debates worldwide are fair trade, food sovereignty and sustainable practices. Understanding the intricacies of the food system, and the production cycle from farm to fork is vital to ensuring that trade agreements are appropriate and enabling land workers to suitably benefit from the profits made. Access to nutritious food is another contentious issue, especially as many producers do not earn enough to purchase the very same food they grow.

Directly related to many of these challenges is the worrying trend of soil degradation. In sub-Saharan Africa, for instance, 83 per cent of the population depends on the land for its livelihood, and yet 40 per cent of the continent’s soils are uncultivable. Not only are fertile soils required for income and healthy food production, they support and host a quarter of the planet’s total biodiversity and play a key role in the carbon cycle, helping to mitigate climate change. As 2015 is the International Year of Soils, the spotlight has turned on many of the world’s unsustainable soil management practices. As a result, scientists around the globe are providing evidence-based recommendations to address human and environmental pressures on agriculture.

United in the goal of providing a sustainable future, researchers in this issue of International Innovation present a diverse range of studies extending from wheat genome sequencing and chemical-free pesticides to assessments of international agri-food supply chains. On the policy and practice levels, we highlight the work of influential organisations working towards efficient ecological and sustainable strategies. Dr David Songstad, President of the Council for Agricultural Science and Technology, outlines the organisation’s position as a global leader in the dissemination of factual, unbiased scientific information on all aspects of agriculture; while President and CEO of the National Geographic Society, Gary Knell, discusses the scientific and educational endeavours undertaken by its members aimed at environmental conservation and exploration. With an emphasis on the relationship between agriculture and food justice, we also talk to Food First’s Executive Director, Dr Eric Holt-Giménez, who comments on issues surrounding racism, nutrition and sovereignty.

In many cases, there are no immediate solutions to the challenges faced across the food and agriculture landscape, but the steps being taken now will lay the foundations for greener and fairer practices hereafter.

We are working hard to build a dynamic community, bringing together a diverse range of researchers, funders, policy makers and commercial partners to showcase the very best from across the research spectrum. As ever, do not hesitate to contact us with any feedback or proposals for our next edition. Finally, if you are not already receiving our newsletter, register for free at www.internationalinnovation.com/join-us/registration

For now... enjoy the issue!

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