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Thought others might find the attached article by Jules Pretty
interesting...

Cheers,

Nancy

- > Seeds of revolution
- > Jules Pretty
- > The Guardian
- >
- > Ever since its beginning, agriculture has passed through
- > periods of stability punctuated by bursts of rapid change.
- > Once again, the time for change is upon us. We need nothing
- > less than a wholesale reconstruction, based on radical
- > thinking.
- >
- > Throughout the history of agriculture, commentators and
- > farmers have contributed to such thinking in classic texts
- > that define a moment - from Marcus Cato's Di Agri Cultura
- > 2,200 years ago to Andrew O'Hagan's recent The End of
- > British Farming, in which he asks: "How did we come to
- > this?"
- >
- > O'Hagan's narrative ends as hired killers swagger in to
- > destroy a Lockerbie farmer's prize sheep herd. Foot and
- > mouth is this year's crisis, but it spells the end for herds
- > built up over generations.
- >
- > The real costs of industrialised farming are severe - some

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- > [pounds]1bn to 2bn each year for environmental and health
- > damage. These are costs paid by society, not by the
- > polluters. It is wrong to think that we have a "cheap food"
- > policy. Food only appears to be cheap when we look at the
- > prices in shops. Each of us pays in three ways for our food.
- > First, at the till. Second, via taxes for subsidies - a
- > progressive way to keep down food prices, as the wealthy pay
- > more tax, and the poorest spend proportionally more of their
- > income on food. And third, to clean up the environmental and
- > health problems of modern agriculture. In truth, food is
- > expensive - and the sooner we appreciate this fact the
- > better.
- >
- > The question we must ask is: what is farming for? To produce
- > food, yes; but also to produce many other goods. It is the
- > positive side-effects of farming that offer a way forward.
- > More sustainable farming is very good at producing public
- > goods - things we can all enjoy and that are good for the
- > economy. Farming produces landscapes we want to visit. It
- > absorbs carbon in soils and trees, mitigating climate
- > change. It can hold water in wetlands to provide flood
- > control. Many of these could end up being significant new
- > sources of money for farmers. To move toward sustainable
- > agriculture, I propose a five-point plan for reconstruction:
- >
- > 1 Switch subsidies to the side-effects of farming.
- >
- > This means switching subsidies from being production-based
- > to providing incentives for sustainable agriculture. This
- > can be done by offering direct subsidies for adopting
- > sustainable methods - what is called the "provider gets
- > principle". Farmers who produce public goods - whether
- > landscapes, carbon, clean water or flood protection -
- > deserve public support.
- >
- > 2. Develop a greener food standard.
- >
- > Not all farmers feel able to make the jump in practices and
- > thinking to organic farming. There is a strong case for a
- > new intermediate food standard - what might be called a
- > greener food standard - which would push the market towards
- > more sustainable practices.
- >
- > 3. Use the tax system to encourage sustainability.
- >
- > Environmental taxes internalise the environmental costs of
- > production, requiring polluters to pay for the damage they
- > cause. Green taxes offer a "double dividend" by cutting
- > environmental damage while promoting welfare. Revenues can
- > be recycled into subsidies for environmentally improved

- > practices.
- >
- > 4. Develop new markets for positive side-effects of farming.
- >
- > The Kyoto protocol and Bonn agreement established a new
- > context for the reduction of carbon emissions. Agriculture
- > sequesters carbon when organic matter is accumulated in the
- > soil, and when trees act as a "sink" or are used as an
- > energy source that substitutes for fossil fuels. Carbon
- > trading systems need actively to be developed to provide new
- > opportunities for additional farm income, "joining up" the
- > government's climate change and farming policies.
- >
- > 5. Establish a royal commission on sustainable farming.
- >
- > Moving our food and farming systems towards sustainability
- > will not be easy. The government has announced its intention
- > to set up a short-term inquiry. But there should be a new
- > royal commission to address how sustainable food and farming
- > can be achieved.
- >
- > It is not all crisis. There are good things happening in
- > farming. But there can be little doubt now that a
- > fundamental shift in policy must be made. Marcus Cato said
- > this on the first page of his book: "And when our ancestors
- > would praise a worthy person, their praise took this form:
- > good husbandman, good farmer; one so praised was thought to
- > have received the greatest commendation." It is time to
- > re-establish the trust and the praise. It will not be easy.
- > But that time has come. It requires nothing less than
- > another agricultural revolution.
- >
- > Jules Pretty is professor of environment and society at the
- > University of Essex, Colchester. This article is drawn from
- > a paper published by the Fabian Society:
- > <<<http://www.fabian-society.org.uk>>>
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