

Is Devon's agriculture fit for purpose in an era of climate change

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Background

- Jury-type approaches increasingly common in academic & policy work
- Jury of key stakeholders
- Witnesses drawn from Devon's land management, environmental & research communities

Witnesses and evidence

- **Dr Dave Chadwick** – overview with focus on methane & nitrous oxide. Identified sources & quantified emissions. Identified range of ‘best practices’ e.g. improved nutrient management, biomass production

Witnesses and evidence

- **Paul Gompertz** – a profound believer in climate change. A ‘doom-sayer’. Believes climate change much more threatening than generally accepted. Does not think Devon’s Ag. fit for purpose given kind of climate change he expects to occur

Witnesses and evidence

- **Mel Hall** – SWOT analysis: more positive opportunities than threats. Key issues is about preparedness and knowing what to do to respond to challenges

Witnesses and evidence

- **Mark Howard** – food industry converts fossil fuels into food. Not currently fit for purpose. Small window of opportunity to avoid catastrophic climate change.

Witnesses and evidence

- **Mark Robins** – difficult to answer yes or no but tended towards no. Cultural & symbolic strength of farming in Devon means that farming at heart of finding solutions to climate change challenge

The verdict

“We believe that Devon’s farming is fit for purpose today. In terms of the future, the jury is out”.

Recommendations of the jury

- Need for strategic overview & improved understanding in terms of land use planning in order to fully understand the asset base & its characteristics.
- Need to develop likely scenarios of future change & build strategy around these.
- Need for more active market place experiments. The only way to find out if farming is fit for purpose is to put some experiments in place and learn from them.
- Jury have real concerns about science and R&D. The jury recognises that it is a national issue not a county issue but are concerned to ensure that the county and the farming industry are linked in to sound research and science to help inform the industry to make the changes that are necessary.

Conclusions

- Novel & engaging approach to tackling particularly complex question.
- Ideally, jury would have spanned two days with additional witnesses & more time for reflection.
- May have been helpful to have specified more precisely terms contained within question.
- Not surprising that verdict, **endorsed by all members of the jury**, was qualified by number of recommendations.
- Verdict & recommendations can help provide guide for action as the county prepares to meet the challenge of climate change.

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