

New study identifies that developing countries are winning the sustainable Intensification race

A major new global assessment published in the prestigious journal *Nature Sustainability* shows that more than 163 million farms world-wide (29% of all worldwide), have crossed a redesign threshold and are incorporating some forms of sustainable intensification on 453 million hectares of agricultural land.

This important new research paper titled **Global Assessment of Agricultural System Redesign for Sustainable Intensification*, involved leading authors from 17 universities and research institutions in the UK, including the Organic Research Centre, as well as researchers in the USA, Sweden, Ethiopia and New Zealand.

Significantly, the study shows that developing countries such as West Africa, India and Bangladesh are more willing to redesign their systems and adopt sustainable agriculture practices to boost food production and biodiversity.

A worldwide example of redesign is organic agriculture, which is showing a rapid increase globally with the largest number of organic farmers in India, Ethiopia, Mexico and Uganda; while the largest organically farmed areas are in Australia and Argentina. Encouragingly, the UK too has seen a 6% growth in the organic market with dairy products and meat taking the lead.

Professor Nic Lampkin, Chief Executive of the Organic Research Centre and one of the authors of the report said, "We have reached a tipping point in agricultural production and it is evident that we need urgent change to protect our environment as well as providing healthy, nutritious food but Government needs to give farmers the right tools to implement change.

"Our research identified that the organic sector is showing positive global growth and now occupies 58 Million ha worldwide representing a 55% increase in the number of organic producers, to 2.7 million, and a doubling of organic area in the last decade. Although many UK farmers are now investing in some form of sustainable intensification to improve their soil, protect precious water resources, boost biodiversity and improve production, this study highlights that the UK needs to catch up with developing countries in terms of introducing more sustainable agricultural practices. If we are to remain competitive with the rest of the world, we need urgent action from Government to give farmers the courage to innovate and feel confident that policies are in place to train, support and fund the redesign of agricultural systems."

The research assessed global progress towards sustainable intensification in areas such as integrated pest management, conservation agriculture, integrated crop and biodiversity, pasture and forage systems, trees and agroforestry, irrigation management and small patch systems such as allotments.

However, as Professor Lampkin said, “The global agricultural challenge is significant: world population will continue to grow from 7.6 billion (2018) to 10 billion by 2050. Consumption patterns are converging on those typical in affluent countries for some sections of populations, yet still leaving some 800 million people hungry worldwide. The big question centres on scale and whether agriculture can still provide sufficient nutritious food whilst improving natural capital without compromising other aspects of well-being; but can this occur at a scale to benefit millions of lives, reverse biodiversity loss and environmental contamination, and limit greenhouse gas emissions?”

He concludes, “Key challenges include investing to integrate more agroecological and redesign forms of Sustainable Intensification in farming systems, creating agricultural knowledge economies, and establishing policy measures to scale sustainable intensification further. The conclusion of our study is that sustainable intensification may be approaching a tipping point where it could be transformative. From this study our major hope is that system redesign can begin, although we recognise that this will need supportive national and international policies to succeed.”

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Notes to editors:

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The Organic Research Centre (ORC): established in 1980, is the UK’s leading independent organic research charity. It works both nationally and internationally, to:

- Research and develop practical, sustainable land management and food production systems based on organic and agro-ecological principles
- Foster knowledge exchange with and between current and future producers, food businesses and related professionals
- Influence policy and public debates on the future of food and farming based on sound evidence.

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***Global Assessment of Agricultural System Redesign for Sustainable Intensification** is published in the latest edition of the prestigious journal *Nature Sustainability*. The paper’s authors are Jules Pretty, Tim G. Benton, Zareen Pervez Bharucha, Lynn V. Dicks, Cornelia Butler Flora, H. Charles J. Godfray, Dave Goulson, Sue Hartley, Nic Lampkin, Carol Morris, Gary Pierzynski, P. V. Vara Prasad, John Reganold, Johan Rockström, Pete Smith, Peter Thorne, Steve Wratten.



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