Working in harmony

One of the world's largest chemical producers, BASF is leading the way with its harmonious solutions to sustainability in the agricultural sector

When The King, as the then Prince of Wales, wrote a book about sustainability and agriculture in 2010, he titled it *Harmony: A New Way of Looking at Our World*. The word "harmony" has become important in contemporary farming, as experts seek to find the ideal balance between the health of the land, the wealth of the farmer and the food needs of society – which is why BASF describes farming as the "biggest job on earth".

"The Biggest Job on Earth platform opens a space for our community and the entire industry," says Neil Kay, Vice President of Western Europe for BASF Agricultural Solutions. "We need to show governments and policymakers what can be done with the right guidance and appropriate incentives – together we can really drive positive change if you invest in the right place.

"We have worked with some farms for 20 years to support biodiversity, showing that it is possible to have a sustainable and profitable farm that supports the soil and the environment around it. It can be done harmoniously."

BASF's roots are in chemicals. The company was founded in Ludwigshafen, Germany, in 1865, to make dyes but has since expanded into a huge global business, supplying raw materials to the automotive, pharmaceutical and construction industries, among others. An important early breakthrough was synthetic fertiliser, an innovation that would become a key driver in the development of industrialised society, supporting the nutrition of billions of people. Agriculture is still a core sector, and the company produces a portfolio of products to help farmers increase yields and the quality of their crops in a sustainable way.

The production of more food to satisfy the demands of an expanding population is one of the challenges that UK farmers face today, alongside logistical issues and the unpredictable, more extreme weather brought about by climate change.

"Our work is about giving farmers a platform to explain farming procedures and the challenges they are having to overcome to get food on our table," says Kay. "We live on an island. We can't acquire more land, but we do need to increase productivity and protect the industry to ensure food security."

It will take a variety of solutions to solve this problem, involving genetics, seeds and chemistry. BASF is predominantly a research and development company, and has created a range of digital innovations to this end. In 2020, it committed to helping farmers reduce CO_2 emissions per tonne of crop by 30 per cent within a decade. "We set out very clear targets about what we want to do around R&D and climate change, and we are looking at ways to reduce emissions per crop and increase our sales of accelerator products," explains Kay.

"Accelerators are solutions that make a substantial sustainability contribution in the value chain." They include projects such as farms that focus on biodiversity, or digital applications that allow barley growers to generate accredited carbon certificates. "We are supporting growers to do the right thing, as well as create new revenue streams where they can trade the carbon they have eliminated."

BASF uses a phrase, adds Kay, about "finding the right balance for success". In other words, solutions need to be sustainable in terms of the environment, profit and the planet. "Every innovation must have the appropriate balance, not just for today but for the future."

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