

Effects of Climate Change on Plants: Implications for Agriculture

An international group of scientists gathered at Rothamsted Conference Centre in November to consider the 'Effects of Climate Change on Plants: Implications for Agriculture'. There was little evidence of 'Climate Change' in the days preceding the conference: the weather was unrelentingly wet and gloomy. However, the skies cleared in time for the delegates' arrival and we enjoyed, for the most part, two sunny days.

Inside the conference room it was serious stuff. The AAB held a conference in April 1996 on 'Implications of Global Environmental Change for Crops in Europe', back when 'Climate Change' was something that might be going to happen but surely could not be as bad as some people were predicting. Now 'Climate Change' is generally considered to be underway already, and it is no exaggeration to say that how mankind emerges from the coming century or more of predicted major shifts in climate will depend on how well agricultural production can be maintained. As one speaker put it, we are having

to breed crops for environmental conditions that do not exist yet, something that has never been done before. At the same time, agriculture, as one of the major producers of greenhouse gases, has a big part to play in ensuring that the severity of climate change is kept to a minimum by reducing its emissions. Both of these aspects of the problem were presented and debated in great detail.

As someone who has not hitherto been involved in this aspect of plant and agricultural science I was greatly impressed by the quality of the presentations and the commitment of the science community that was represented by the speakers and delegates to making a difference. Past generations have all had to face threats and challenges of one sort or another and 'Climate Change' is our great challenge. Agriculture is part of the problem and the solution, and plant and agricultural scientists are going to play a big part in meeting that challenge. I have no doubt that this will not be the last AAB conference on this topic.

Thanks to my co-organisers, Huw Jones and David Lawlor, and to the AAB staff who helped to make the conference such a success. *Nigel Halford, PPCI Group*