****

**Press Release**

11 February 2021

**OFC makes history with new Co-Chairs**

A diverse, female team has been announced to jointly chair the Oxford Farming Conference (OFC) – the first time in the event’s 76-year history.

Agri-food industry experts Barbara Bray and Sarah Mukherjee were appointed to the voluntary position at the end of the annual conference in January 2021, and will lead the OFC’s charitable and industry work including the delivery of the 2022 conference.

Both Barbara, who is Black British, and Sarah, who is British Asian, said they want to bring their combined experience to help shape the focus of the next conference, which will be a hybrid digital and physical event following the success of the online event last month.

“We are delighted that the Directors of the OFC are unanimous - we must do more to ensure that food and farming better reflects the modern communities of the UK. Organisations that are more diverse are more resilient, a quality that everyone in business will need in the coming years to survive these very turbulent times.

“As Co-Chairs, our plan is to continue to draw on the conference’s rich history for debating the agri-food sector’s biggest challenges and opportunities. We are proud that the entire Council of Directors is determined to encourage diversity and inclusion in UK agriculture and the food sector.”

Based in Manchester, **Barbara Bray, MBE** is a food safety consultant and registered nutritionist driving and delivering food safety in food supply chains and developing nutrition strategy for businesses.

With a passion for educating people about food and nutrition, Barbara became an OFC Director in 2020 and is a trustee for International Affairs with the Nutrition Society and sits on the food and nutrition committee for the Institute of Food Science and Technology.

“I was initially drawn to the role by the excitement of being able to create events that bring people together to network, hear from a range of thought leaders, and provide an opportunity to set the scene for the year ahead.

“During my time as Director, the UK Agricultural industry has undergone unprecedented upheaval with the dual disruptions of the coronavirus pandemic and Brexit. But the OFC continues to inspire farmers to think differently and meet challenges head-on, something I’m keen to champion during my time as Co-Chair,” says Barbara Bray.

**Sarah Mukherjee**, based in Hertfordshire, is Chief Executive of IEMA, the membership organisation for environment and sustainability professionals.

Sarah read law at Oxford University and worked in PR and consultancy at the House of Commons before becoming a BBC Environment correspondent for BBC TV, radio and online. More recently she was Director of Environment at Water UK and Chief Executive of the Crop Protection Association, joining the OFC as a Director in 2020.

“I’ve been attending the OFC since 1995 and, over that time, I’ve witnessed the evolution of the event, and was proud to be a part of the first-ever digital conference held this year.

“By utilising digital tools, we were able to provide a rich experience bringing together old friends, international speakers and, most importantly, some new faces by making Oxford more accessible, fulfilling our charitable mission to inform, challenge and inspire.

“We know how important networking is to the experience of Oxford and I am very much looking forward to returning to the exam halls in January 2022. The event sells-out every year so, by offering a hybrid event with some online sessions live streamed, we will be able to reach even more people than before,” said Sarah Mukherjee.

Find out more about the conference and watch the sessions from January 2021, at www.ofc.org.uk

**-Ends-**

**Issued by Jane Craigie Marketing. For further details or interviews, please contact** [**marketing@ofc.org.uk**](mailto:marketing@ofc.org.uk) **or Rebecca on 07792 467730**

**Notes to Editors:**

For more information on the Oxford Farming Conference (OFC):

**Website:** [www.ofc.org.uk](http://www.ofc.org.uk)

**Twitter:** [@oxfordfarming](http://www.twitter.com/oxfordfarming)

**YouTube:** [OxfordFarmingConference](https://www.youtube.com/oxfordfarmingconference)

* The next Oxford Farming Conference will take place in Oxford from 5th to 7th January 2022.
* The OFC Bitesize, a series of online one-hour webinars, will return in autumn 2021.
* The [Council](https://www.ofc.org.uk/council) is made up of 10 voluntary directors.
* OFC is held annually in January and includes a vibrant programme of speakers, panel sessions and politics sessions.
* 2022 will be the 76th conference.
* OFC has established a reputation for strong debate and exceptional speakers.
* OFC is a charity that invests in the agricultural education and knowledge-sharing. It attracts over 600 delegates every year, including many people from the wider food chain, retail, NGOs, scientific organisations, media, policy-making bodies and governments from around the world.
* With HRH Princess Royal as its patron, OFC is a charity with a remit to educate and transfer knowledge in the agricultural sector. As part of its charitable undertakings, the OFC sponsors young people to attend the conference, to travel overseas and it seeks to develop emerging lea