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What is Land For? The Food, Fuel and Climate Change Debate. Edited by M. Winter and M. Lobley. London and Sterling VA: Earthscan (2009), pp. 340, £49.95. ISBN: 978-1-84407-720-5.

With such a promising and topical title, this book will disappoint those seeking an authoritative international perspective. The introduction refers to the central role of the Rural Economy and Land Use programme of the UK Research Councils in funding the workshop that underpinned the book, and emphasises policy relevance and application. The title should have referred to its UK-centric policy focus.

Unsurprisingly, given the fact that the introduction, the 12 chapters, and conclusion involved 51 contributors, the reader will encounter repetition, topic discontinuity and diverse writing styles. Over 120 acronyms and abbreviations are used. At least, the introduction, chapters and conclusion all have a references sub-section, and there is an index. Most of the 25 illustrations and all of the 14 tables are, boringly, in black and white. Half the chapters are presented in a section entitled Part 1; New Uses of Land: Technologies, Policies, Tools and Capacities, the remainder in Part 2; Emerging Issues and New Perspectives.

For the most part, the general approach reflects an authorship operating in and dependent on the public sector. Nearly all the topics covered have relevance beyond the UK, and include ecosystem services, energy crops, carbon sequestration, anaerobic digestion, floodplains, competition for land use, biodiversity, public engagement, future landscapes, land stewardship, governmental involvement in regulating land-use technologies and ethical approaches. The introduction and conclusion and some of the chapters express thought-provoking socio-political viewpoints.

The food, fuel, and climate-change debate now has to cope with new global market and constrained public-funding realities.

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