

KEYS TO THE FUTURE



Who we are

Founded in 1998, **Feasta** is an Irish-based think-tank devoted to exploring how we can create the best possible future for society and the planet without diminishing the resources of either. To do this successfully it draws on an international, trans-disciplinary network committed to deepening our understanding of the key systems that support our world (food, energy, environment, economy) and of the complex, interdependent relationships between them. We believe that weaknesses in those systems threaten humankind and the planet, so we work hard to identify and analyse them and to use our expertise to find viable, long-term solutions.

Feasta is about the big picture. We recognise that these systems are continually changing both themselves and in relationship to one another—and that understanding and managing these dynamics is the key to the future. This is the world that members of **Feasta** think about, and it's an exciting one to explore.

What we do

The **Feasta** network brings together experts and innovators in fields as diverse as food and energy security, economics, law, human geography and environmental policy. What they all share, however, is a belief in the fundamental interconnectedness of systems. A 'bird's-eye view' is therefore a key feature of our work. By getting analysts out of the silos in which they so often find themselves, we create synergies that result in new ways of seeing the future and of helping that future to materialise.

Our global perspective makes us a natural home for cutting-edge thinking about issues like human welfare, environmental constraints and, of course, the economic and monetary instability that currently clouds our world. **Feasta** succeeds in this role because we take great care to find the right balance between the autonomy needed for creative thinking and the discipline required for the organisation to be effective.

The lack of any real global consensus about how humankind can turn things around makes our work essential at a time of great uncertainty and instability. The kind of rich, independent thinking that **Feasta** hosts is needed now more than ever.

Feasta's Record

Feasta works at the forefront of new thinking to anticipate emerging challenges and devise ways and means to respond. Our publications are widely quoted in scientific papers and in NGO, activist, government and military reports. Our members are invited as lecturers and advisors across the world. Through our conferences, lectures, website and publications, we have helped educate and inform a generation about

the dangers our complex societies face, and how we might respond wisely and with foresight—and most importantly, before the worst damage is done.

Analysis of current dysfunctional systems has enabled Feasta to anticipate problems, issue warnings and recommend appropriate and timely action.



The Global Credit Crisis

We pointed out that the creation of money via interest-bearing debt required unending growth if debts were to be repaid, and that the resulting competitive search for growth would cause environmental and social damage. We called for new, diverse forms of money to be issued by non-banks and gave platforms to monetary reformers such as *Sensible Money and Modern Monetary Theorists*. We host an online forum for 100+ currency activists and moderate their conversations.



High Oil and Food Prices

We warned that high oil and food prices, market volatility and even the collapse of energy prices would increasingly constrain economic growth and the affordability of basic human needs. And we were right: 2012 saw record highs in average oil prices, while food prices reached near-record levels. We believe that food security is important even for the most developed countries. Our work in this area has been widely referenced, with one example being the German military (*PEAK OIL Security policy implications of scarce resources. Bundeswehr Transformation Centre, 2010*).



Food Security

We are pioneering the concept of Nutritional Resilience, which takes into account the importance of the mineral balancing of soils and biomass if the food we produce is to provide the essential nutrients the human body needs. We highlighted the importance of the concept of biomass peak as it relates to oil peak. We saw the need for a method comparing different production systems and began developing the "Good Food Index": *what should we be measuring if we want to get healthy food with minimal resource use and limited pollution?* We have also explored methods of planning radical transformations of food systems through a Food Security Framework, as well as emergency food planning and preparedness.



Localised Resilience

More broadly we have argued that urgent attention must be paid to more localised resilience to inevitable shocks and stresses. We have been helping communities (as one of the inspirations behind the *Transition Town Movement*), civil society, public policy-makers and critical infrastructure providers to explore the implications and possible responses to a prolonged period without global economic growth, or even of major contraction.



Climate Change

We warned that there would be little chance of nation-state governments reaching agreement under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. We strongly critiqued the nascent European Emissions Trading System as unfair, ineffective and prone to permit price collapse (as has happened). We argued for the importance of accounting for agricultural greenhouse gas emissions. We developed *Cap & Share (C&S)* as an equitable mechanism to control greenhouse gas emissions from the use of fossil fuels; and

a Carbon Maintenance Fee to control emissions from deforestation. We proposed a Global Climate Commons Authority to administer schemes such as these. We described our proposals in *Sharing for Survival (2012, Brian Davey, editor)*, – "a great book" according to US innovator Peter Barnes. We engaged in research funded by the Irish Department of Environment, Community and Local Government to look at ways of managing agricultural emissions that also built soil and nutrient resilience while furthering local economic development.



Smart Taxes

We warned that badly designed taxation systems were leading to property bubbles and massive environmental externalities, as well as escalating inequality and increasing systemic vulnerability. At the same time we argued that smart taxes would support employment, dampen bubbles and help build socio-economic resilience.



Commons

We argued that the idea of 'the Commons' provided a new framework through which societies could responsibly manage resources and sinks whose viability was critical for the welfare of all. With funding from the Irish Department of Environment, Community and Local Government for The Smart Taxes Network, Feasta led a small group of well-known economists, architects and others to explore Site Value Taxation, resulting in the well-received 2012 publication *The Fair Tax (Emer O'Siochru, editor)*.



Systemic Shocks

We have warned that the increasing complexity (speed, interconnectedness, interdependence and concentration) of the globalised economy is adding socio-economic vulnerability to systemic shocks – at precisely the time that the risk of these shocks is rising.

We argue for the urgent need for large-scale shock and transition planning. We have outlined some of the steps needed to enhance resilience and, if resilience is lost, to prepare for forced transitions. As a result of this, for example, the US Department of Health and USAID asked us to contribute to high-level pandemic preparedness planning for the ASEAN region.



The New Emergency Conference and Fleeing Vesuvius

In 2009 Feasta held a three-day conference that analysed the nature and effects of the "development" path the world has followed for the past 300 years and how it has led us relentlessly to the current crisis (the 'emergency' of the title). We followed this with a book to which 27 authors contributed. According to Richard Heinberg of the Post Carbon Institute, "Fleeing Vesuvius is the first book to explore the profound historic implications of the crisis".

The Global Crisis

There is widespread recognition today that the situation is extremely serious, that things are getting worse, not better, and that the scale of the crisis is now more than individual governments can manage, or even comprehend fully. People fear for the future.

We consider these fears to be well founded. They reflect the facts and the science behind them:

Earth-system scientists have identified several planetary boundaries we cross at our peril: some, like climate change and biodiversity loss, have been crossed already, and we're approaching others, including freshwater use and ocean acidification.

Levels of inequality throughout the world, both within and between countries, are unacceptable, as are other not-unrelated factors such as the use of violence.

We appear to be entering a new age of risk, in which sustained economic and financial instability is coming up against more profound ecological constraints, whilst at the same time our vulnerability to shocks and stresses is increasing.

Feasta is one of the few organisations in the world tackling these problems at their roots. We believe the problems are systemic—the natural consequences of the systems that currently dominate the world—and that tweaking these systems individually is a waste of time. What is needed are radical systems' changes. And if we are to avoid a disastrous future, they must be devised and implemented soon.

FEASTA'S POTENTIAL: GIVEN ITS RECORD, WHAT MIGHT FEASTA CONTRIBUTE?



Risk and Resilience

We argue that there are growing risks to human welfare and to the operation and stability of our socio-economic systems and societies. Even if there is only a chance that these risks will materialise, surely it is wise to understand them and their implications and to be pro-active in finding ways and means to address them?



Action on Climate Change

Many will no doubt continue to hope that nation-state governments will agree measures to reduce emissions from fossil fuels and deforestation before climate change becomes irreversible, a tipping point likely to be passed in about 2020 according to many climate scientists. In our view, there are systemic reasons why this is wishful thinking. We advocate bringing other pressures to bear on the fossil-fuel industry. Some of our proposals are described in *Sharing for Survival*. We are now developing others including the use of legal action.



The Global Community

In difficult times people in local communities look after each other. Now that people all over the world are experiencing the stresses of having come up against global limits, Feasta members have launched a Global Community group to study and develop ways for humanity as a whole to operate as a big global community. The Internet has made possible global co-operation as well as global competition. Can we build a co-operative global order or global Commons regime? With our understanding of both the systemic flaws in the current mainstream system and economic and ownership systems that work well locally, Feasta has a useful contribution to make in this regard.



Food Security

It has become broadly accepted that our food systems need to be radically transformed if the effects of climate change, energy depletion and environmental degradation are to be mitigated. Localising food production is also seen as an essential part of transitioning to a resilient society. Within this context, Feasta is exploring how best to measure and compare the benefits of different food systems and how to plan for food security within diverse social contexts and localised resource bases. Given the broad depletion of the nutritional content of soils it is essential to understand the effects this can have on the resilience of the food production systems within a localised context and, crucially, on the health of the dependent populations. We are actively researching the nature of the link between the mineral balance of soils, the availability of fertility and the productivity of ecosystems, as well as how they may be altered in order to increase the quality and quantity



Cap and Share

of the biomass and food produced within different regions. We must ensure that everyone has access to sufficient food and to the nutrients essential for human health.

Action on climate change has huge potential to mitigate global poverty in the long term, but still more work needs to be done if this potential is to be fully explored. There is much scope for collaboration between C&S and organisations involved in cash-transfer programmes in the Global South to research how the techniques these programmes use could be applied to C&S. The effects of gold rushes and per-capita allocations in cash-poor parts of the world must also be studied. If cash allocations deriving from C&S are to make use of the world's mobile phone network, as envisaged in *Sharing for Survival*, ways of improving the network's resilience must also be explored.



Carbon Cycles and Sinks

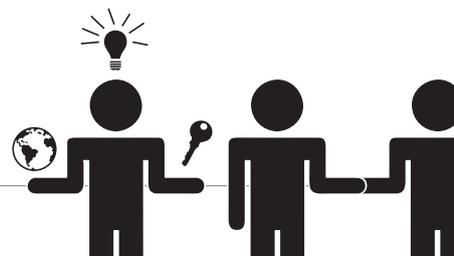
We want to research the carbon balance of Irish grasslands and follow this with trials of award-winning researcher Allan Savory's methods of cattle husbandry in different regions of Ireland. The aim would be to enable optimal uptake of CO₂ by Irish grazing land and to explore the possibility of Ireland becoming a carbon sink.



The Liquidity Network & Designer Currencies

We want to encourage an understanding of money systems as not simply being 'neutral facilitators of exchange'. They (explicitly or implicitly) carry value-sets and have environmental and social consequences. The view that currencies can be designed, and that the profession of currency designer should be seen as honourable and influential, was put forward in our paper to the International Social Transformation Conference in Split in 2012 (*The Lot of the Currency Designer: Graham Barnes, Ciaran Mulloy*).

Responses to monetary dysfunction are concerned either with reforming the money monopoly or with designing and creating 'restricted-scope' solutions, such as Feasta's Liquidity Network, inspired by the late economist (and Feasta co-founder) Richard Douthwaite. Feasta plans to play an active role in the development and introduction of sustainable methods for exchanging goods and services and storing value over time. The established view that there is no alternative to interest-based money issued as debt must be undermined and exposed.





How Feasta Works

Feasta is a collective thinking process—a home for people who want to think, speak and write independently, and to connect with others who want to do the same. It is also a charity and a company limited by guarantee. The scale of our activities means we have clear management structures and processes that ensure that co-ordination is the guiding principle underpinning our work. People can take on a project and run with it, but the right support (and accountability) is always there.

Project Funding

Feasta is structured in a way that specifically encourages project work (such as desk studies, policy research and alternative currency design) but these activities must be funded separately. A portion of all funding raised for projects goes to Feasta as a contribution to fixed running costs and administrative overheads.

Core Funding

Core funding is critical for basic operations and administration; the website; network and membership support; annual lecture; project oversight; publications and event support.

Over the years, core funding has enabled Feasta to support individual researchers and project developers, allowing our committed volunteers to contribute a huge amount of self-funded research for less than the cost of one academic economist. Feasta has leveraged these scant resources to secure significant global impact and influence given its size. And it plans to keep doing so.

For more information

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Cad a dhéanfimid feasta gan adhmaid? Tá deireadh ne gcoillte ar lár.

What will we do in the future without wood? The end of the forests has come.
