

Students Who Make a Difference

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We live in a world with finite (= limited) resources and a growing global population. How can we make sure that, even in the future, we will have enough food, energy and water to meet our needs? Fortunately, many people realise this problem and are trying to do something about it. We spoke with three British students working on environmental projects to change the world.

Tegan Pringle

WHAT AM I STUDYING?

I am looking at leather recycling, including footwear, fashion, automobile and furniture products.



WHY? 4.5 million pairs of leather shoes are produced every year and no recycling is currently possible. This leads to more waste and the reduction of space available in landfill (= large hole for rubbish). Resources are also wasted by sending them to landfills instead of reusing these materials. I feel that it is important to make as much use as possible out of the natural resources that we have. By recycling leather we can extend the useful life of the material.

Michael Barwood

WHAT AM I STUDYING?

At the moment, my focus is on automation within the recycling industry (= how to use robots to improve recycling systems).



WHY? The recycling industry typically only uses very basic levels of technology compared to manufacturing, which uses many advanced technologies including automated robots. This is a problem because the automotive and electronics industries generate more waste than recycling industries can handle effectively. Therefore, each year significant amounts of money and important resources disappear. I believe that in order for recycling to really make a difference in the world, recycling processes need to start using a level of technology comparative to manufacturers.

Jamie Stone

WHAT AM I STUDYING?

I am researching how the flow (= movement) of food from farm, to factory, to supermarket, and eventually to someone's fridge can be less affected by disruption. Disruptions could be anything from flooded farms to high petrol costs, and these can result in people having to suddenly pay a lot more in shops. In the worst cases, food may become unavailable. I am also interested in how we can keep food flowing without damaging the environment, and at the same time provide plenty of fair jobs for people.



WHY? In Europe at present, food in shops is generally varied and affordable. However, many of the foods that we eat are quite damaging to the environment, and they are not always fair to those who produce them. Furthermore, we are still not perfect at sharing out food around the globe – millions go hungry each year whilst so much of the food we produce is wasted. This is a big problem on its own. However, by 2050 there will be 9 billion people on the planet and climate change may limit what we can grow and where. It may also cause increasing disruptions, for example, extreme weather. We need to act now to solve these potential problems so that we can continue to enjoy a good variety of affordable food.