

Farming Updates prepared by Joanne Jones and Andy Jerrard for the DCRF meeting 29th October 2018

Thoughts from Joanne Jones of Farming Community Network on current farming news

- The dairy sector is benefiting from a shortage of milk so prices are rising. The benefit of this is however offset by increased feed costs.
- There is some concern amongst consultants of a glut next year & prices will fall again. Many would like a period of stability rather than volatility experienced over recent years
- All farmers are struggling with feed stocks following the harsh winter & dry summer.
- There are some concerns especially for those farmers who usually just about manage of animal welfare issues this winter.
- Brexit continues to be a major cause for concern as it is not yet known if there will be trade tariffs & what effect this will have on exports
- TB continues to be a concern in Devon, hopefully with an extended cull area, numbers affected will soon start to reduce. Many are facing intimidation for being part of this.
- FCN are about to embark on a project with Devon YFC to visit every club in Devon in the next 12 months to talk about mental health (see item 9)

Thoughts from Andy Jerrard, Rural Support Worker

It is often the case (as you would be well aware) in any pastoral work that a factor in what is happening for an individual or family somewhere along the line involves finances. Working in the knowledge that in general terms agricultural incomes have dramatically failed to keep pace with inflation and at the same time most inputs have exceeded normal inflation provides an underlying recipe for difficulties. This may seem a familiar story but it is many years since the position was other than this. For those suffering the vagaries of bTB this is often exacerbated due to the financial costs incurred (and each change in the rules makes the situation worse). Although it is of some encouragement to many that action is belatedly being taken to deal with the main suspect in this problem it comes at a cost and is of little immediate comfort to those who find themselves caught up in a bTB breakdown.

Exmoor Hill Farm Network (amongst others) have done considerable work in demonstrating the unprofitable nature of hill farming- what some of these farmers were surprised by at a recent presentation was that many arable farmers find themselves in the same situation .

The prospects for future trade lead to a variety of opinions - most of which seem to be surprisingly upbeat for the long term (in stark contrast to the 'experts' - whose track record on the referendum itself provides for some hilarity!) as the feeling is we are not self-sufficient in food and others will still want/need to trade with us. It may be a different picture when the Basic Payment ceases to arrive although obviously a lot could happen in the rest of the world to alter that before then.

It is interesting having just returned from Southern Ireland (which may sound like showing off!) that the politicians on the ground and many of the local people are concerned about the effect that us leaving the European Union will have on their economy (which suggests the possibility that the bargaining cards are not all stacked one way as some would like us to think!).The other thing being

there illustrated was what happens if you rely too heavily on one food stuff (i.e. Spuds), the rest of the world suffers from the same disease in the year that you do and there is nothing available on the open market to buy in to replace it (this probably comes under the topic of ensuring food security!) . It also shows how valuable some of our modern chemistry (and plant breeding) is in preventing such happenings and the folly of some recent decisions taken by some governments (and the EU) with regard to this subject - which in itself is causing some anxiety for those who can see the difficulties arising in crop production for the world without all the weapons in the armoury being available.

Incidentally , even my first sentence illustrates a huge divide between those of us who benefit from cheap food and 'normal working practices' and the working hours, days and weeks put in by farmers and their workers in order to provide it (which is not to negate the upsides of farming when things go reasonably well).

Some news on the progress of the new Agriculture Bill can be found here

<https://www.nfuonline.com/news/bulletin/agriculture-bill-mps-push-to-put-the-food-back-i/>