

Advent is coming – Winter 2019 Farming Update from Andy Jerrard

For the church in general the season of advent, the time of waiting and preparation, is passed. For most farmers we are still in that season - waiting, waiting to see how early the spring arrives for starters. An early spring will be an answer to many prayers as it will mean animals can be turned out and preparation for early silage cuts can start in earnest. These things will help to alleviate the high costs of feed and straw, which for some came on top of high feed costs during last year's (otherwise gratefully received summer). A kind October has helped, a dryish January has done no harm in that regard, therefore all that is needed for the three card trick is a warm early to mid-march onwards. However (there is always a word of caution when it comes to farming and the weather) if there wasn't to be a reasonable amount of rain in February then a dry summer would be bad news indeed as depleted forage stocks would not be replenished for next winter – farming is always a long-term business!!

The other bit of waiting (apart from for lambing and calving in particular) is to see what the outcome of leaving the European Union will be. Sadly, the hoped for (possibly slightly naively but nevertheless optimistically) reduction in bureaucracy is not likely to happen. The prospects for increased exports hang on a knife-edge and the general outlook for agriculture as a whole is considerably uncertain - reflecting the whole process of exiting the EU. Whatever the outcome there is no indication currently that the rather important public good of producing food is going to be recognised in the immediate future, which is another dampener on optimism, along with the sustained and possibly coordinated continual public attacks on that which farmers do and do well on behalf of us all.

It is often said that opinions expressed when food is readily available may change more than somewhat if (when?) foodstuffs are not as readily available. It is possible that a very disorderly leaving of the European Union might produce some of these changed views temporarily, as last years' very short spell of snow highlighted. There are a considerable number of farmers who (although that period of weather was particularly trying) also appreciate that a few days longer of enduring the snow may have done the world of good for their standing and prospects.

It would also be true therefore, to say that although they would of course rather it didn't happen, a considerable number of farmers ponder on the fact that if a natural or man-made disaster of some type happened that threatened our supply of food, then attitudes towards farmers would become immeasurably more supportive.