

Farming Updates prepared for the Devon Churches Rural Forum June 2019

From Joanne Jones

Dairy prices have generally held this spring which is the traditional time of year they drop - probably due to European shortage.

The recent rain has been very welcomed in June as there was concern about forage shortages again this summer following a difficult dry summer last year.

The overall concern still remains Brexit & uncertainty over the future - hopefully decisions will be made soon & our industry won't be sacrificed in any future trade deals.

From Andy Jerrard

I have just come in from looking across the fields in front of our house. What I see is a patchwork of fields; some green with grass for the dairy cows which live not far away, some with oilseed rape which may well find its way into many useful household products, others with wheat which may be used for animal feed but may also find its way into biscuits or bread. Still other fields have maize, which will feed the dairy cows in winter to help provide liquid milk all year round. All of these crops present a wonderful mixed landscape that delights the eye and many different forms of wildlife.

The folks who shape this landscape work hours well in excess of those which I am required to do and days that I am allowed to take as days of rest. In addition, many of them would be breaking the law if they paid their workmen the same meagre wages as they 'pay' themselves.

The oilseed rape has recently been sprayed with a sprayer that is built in Devon (providing local employment), using agrochemicals developed by scientists using the brains and talents that God has given them (and supplied by a local merchant thus creating more employment), and will be harvested using a combine which shows to perfection the skills of the modern breed of engineers and designers. The lorry that takes away the crop will probably provide another local driver with employment and all these machines will help to keep mechanics and machinery dealers in jobs.

The milk from the cows fed with the grass and maize crops will be processed locally providing yet more jobs, and as some of the products are exported will bring much needed money into the country.

What has all this to do with the state of farming in Devon in June 2019? It has not escaped my notice and certainly that of most farmers, that the pressure groups, media, various celebrities and, sadly, even groups within the church, are having a 'pop' at their agricultural practices, their place in the economy, and (most insultingly) their animal welfare standards. However good you are at your job and however self-confident you may be, continually being undervalued and insulted takes its toll and, in an industry notorious for its suicide rates and mental health problems, this is a real pastoral concern.

Therefore the message for this time is; if you have eaten today be thankful to God, but don't forget to be thankful for and supportive to those who have made this possible - hug a farmer today.

From Colin Smallacombe

Beef & Sheep prices are well below last year but the concern especially with beef at the moment is a 3-4 week waiting time to get cattle to abattoir. This is owing to a decline in consumption & imported meat coming in from abroad.

On a positive note [ADHB](#) (Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board) say that the breeding herd (both dairy and beef) has declined slightly (2%) so long term there may be a tightening of supply.

For lamb depending on Brexit there seems to be a tightening of supply globally. New Zealand & Australia are predicting a massive shortage in lamb as Chinese demand continues to surge.

From other sources ...

Cash flow continues to be a major problem for many and some contractors and other suppliers are needing to wait longer for bills to be paid. Expenditure in terms of fuel and wages is not keeping up with income in many cases. Perusal of Farmers Weekly is still showing dispersal sales for around 3 dairy herds a week in the country as a whole.

Picking up on some of Andy's points above, farming seems to be suffering in the public perception because of greenhouse gas emissions – but there is also concern about feeding the nation. As a country we are already only 60% self-sufficient in food production.

Some of the agricultural markets seem to be behaving oddly – perhaps in advance of Brexit. It seems that the EU is already changing buying habits, with especially lower imports from Northern Ireland which is having an effect on prices in the UK. Some farmers have not planted all their arable fields not knowing where the market for the resulting grain will be. The value of UK dairy cows has gone up as exports of cows from the EU appear to have significantly reduced.

Markets and tariffs post Brexit are still unknown for our farmers, which is adding to financial concerns and increasing nervousness in the industry.. For example – much of our lamb is exported – but if tariffs make this less likely and the price of lamb drop too far some of our sheep farmers, especially those whose livelihoods are marginal already, may need to leave the business.

The dry spell in April gave excellent sowing conditions and the spring wheat has got off to a very good start. Recent rain has given an abundance of grass and a very good quality silage crop.

FCN

If you know any farmers who are struggling and may benefit from someone in the Farming Community Network coming alongside to listen and support – please signpost them to the website and help line <http://www.fcn.org.uk/>