CATTLE & CLIMATE within the Devon context: Message for DCRF during COP26[[1]](#footnote-1)

As members of DCRF, as in our Devon FCN team, we need to be very sensitive to the importance of cattle within the culture, agriculture, biodiversity conservation, and rural economy of Devon. The few points below are offered for discussion at this time.

I have earlier written a requested paper on global climate change and agriculture which may be of interest to some – though it needs updating![[2]](#footnote-2) I have written one on *Cattle & Climate in Africa* to be delivered later this month in Nairobi which I can send to any who are interested.

* ‘Cattle’ in the Bible can sometimes indicate both cows and sheep, and cattle are the first-mentioned kind of animal in creation (Gen.1:24)
* God’s appreciation of cattle - both intrinsically and recognising their importance to rural livelihoods - is indicated by such verses as in Psalms 50:10; 104:14; 107:38; Deut.11:15; Jonah 4:11; Hab.3:17-18.
* Yes, cattle contribute GHGs - Greenhouse Gases :- methane (CH₄) which is 21 times stronger than CO₂, and the Global Warming Power of nitrous oxide (N₂O) is 310 times that of CO₂. BUT CATTLE IN GRAZED & MIXED FARM SITUATIONS ARE BY FAR NET CAPTURERS OF ‘CO₂-equivalent’ to x 2.5 to x 3.4 at least…
* Agriculture, uniquely, is able not only to reduce its emissions by better management but also renewably to capture and counter carbon release. This is the natural organic cycle. Sustainable Farming Systems rely on approaches that centre on **agro-ecology**.
* **Soil biology is key**. Carbon and nitrogen stored in soils via humus derived from the continual turnover of living soil organisms and within their bodies - from earthworms to bacteria and soil fungi – are keys to soil fertility and thus to biodiversity both below and above ground in our pastures and moorlands. Two-thirds of Britain is upland and much lowland is also suited to grassland. All of this is non-edible except via cattle.
* Grazing livestock are the key and approved God-given instruments for management to deliver not only meat and milk but also biodiversity of the natural pasture habitat and its plants, insects, birds and other creatures.
* Let us counter the gross misinformation that suggests that the ‘silver bullets’ of climate responsibility are to “plant trees everywhere and go Vegan”. It is true that more trees integrated within farming systems are desirable[[3]](#footnote-3) and have a vital role globally. To go vegan is a choice for some which is to be respected but equally to be respected is the majority choice not to do so (1 Cor.8:8). It is true that many people are - or would be - healthier with a higher *proportion* of vegetables in diets, hence the ‘5-a-day’ fruit and veg aim. Making the meat component in our typical diets more of a luxury and paying accordingly makes sense for both consumers and producers.

1. Glasgow, Nov.2021. Dr John Wibberley is Chairman of FCN in Devon, and Professor of Comparative Agriculture & Rural Extension, University of Reading , and at the Royal Agricultural University, Cirencester where he was previously Head of Agriculture. (**ejwibberley@btinternet.com**) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. **Wibberley, E.J. (2008)** Global climate change: agricultural implications & theological reflections. *Journal of Rural Theology* **6**(**2**), 75-89. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. **Wibberley, E.J. (2014)** Treasuring Trees for Agricultural Management Transformation. *International Journal of Agricultural Management* **3**(3) 127-134. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)