

## **A policeman's lot**

*Published 16<sup>th</sup> July 2001*

“ Good morning. May I borrow a carving knife please.” This was my first meeting with our local officer of the law some twenty years ago. It was just after six am and I had switched on the light to visit the loo. “ I saw your light so I knew you were up” he continued. Imagining some urgent criminal investigation I fetched the sharpest available. He explained later, over a cup of tea, that his Panda became stuck in a recently harvested field with grass wrapped around the drive shaft. He had been spotting hares in the headlights.

This introduction to the boredom of local policing has been brought home by the current incumbent of the post who has been attending farms with FMD. His role was to keep people away from the stock. His abiding memory is of the stench while he waited, for days, for the bodies to be attended to. No one attempted to molest the animals so he became an impartial observer of the comings and goings of contractors, slaughterers, vets and others.

He doesn't have a view on the role of a possible vaccination policy or the endemic nature of the disease in Saudi Arabia or the problems of detecting the disease in sheep or the statistics of epidemiological forecasting and how the contiguous cull is allocated. He is saddened however by the impact on local people and the sheer waste of resources. He saw builders brought in as contractors to build roads through the springtime mud so that pyres could be built. References are made to organising an imbibing gathering in a brewery. Generators, pumps, lorries, diggers, boots and shovels were all hired in, which is good, but not necessarily in the order they were needed, which is bad. Men arrived to transport dead stock over roads that were not built to pyres that were not constructed. Having arrived on the farm there was confusion about whether the men can leave again.

There is no doubt in his mind that the army was needed long before they arrived but they lacked local knowledge. Somehow the information was distorted with officers believing that people would be obstructive when they wanted to help. The observer recalls that the deep uncertainty felt by neighbours was not allowed for. It is this social dimension that needs support, should there be a repeat of a culling policy for any disease.

The local press is producing a glut of post election hype about hopes for the future with the change of ministry. Next to the profile of the various ministers and duties is an advertisement from a solicitors, touting for business, should you wish to take action against the government for their culling policy. This is going to run and run and whole legal careers are likely to be developed from the slaughter.

On the practical front the Wool Board is to store fleeces for at least two months to 'ensure eradication of the virus'. Health certificates are required to export greasy wool and the costs of the Board are expected to rise with delays in payment to farmers.

On the levels and low moors the cutting of water weed is delayed, within the infected area, which may lead to disruption of the complex management of low moorland water. This is expected to provide shortages of drinking water for stock and irrigation in some areas and flooding in others. With the inter-ownership and use of grazing on the low moors it will be

difficult to disinfect machinery moving from one ownership to another. Farmers are unsure and confused where land ownership, rather than stock, is expected to somehow be related to presence of the virus?

The financial folk are pressing to assist farmers looking to develop the 'green shoots of recovery'. It seems that there are many 'new initiatives' to assist farmers to 'plan and realise their business needs' with references to 'seeing light' at the end of tunnels. Four stages are indicated with initially assessing liabilities, finance and labour, preparing an interim cash flow, planning land use and reviewing alternative income options, moving on to future business planning, setting objectives, a three year plan and a one year cashflow, agreeing action points and setting milestones. This is all leading to regeneration, benchmarks, monitoring, reviewing and more planning.

All terribly good stuff but this week, just at this time, on the farms next door and the ones next to them the only business plan is to try and breath out a little more. These farmers have been holding their breath for five months. Maybe, slowly they will begin to relax as the disease drifts further away. Managers writing schemes from the comfort of a non infected area shouldn't be too disappointed if their packages are slow to take off.

My daughter and her family are having five days away from the farm next week. Father in law will be doing the milking and the sunny weather has allowed grass gathering to progress. Hopefully they will find the infected area reduced still further on their return and that they are outside the boundary.

Richard can be contacted on 01363 866353 or E-mail: [rga@agmed.freeserve.co.uk](mailto:rga@agmed.freeserve.co.uk)

Richard Gard  
28<sup>th</sup> June 2001