

A baker's dozen

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The baker is giving up from next week. His twice a week round, for over twelve years calling on villages and farms, is simply not viable any more. He relied on the farmers wives having their regular order of bread but also buying a few extra cakes, biscuits, vegetables, tins, videos and bits and pieces. For five months he has left orders in boxes at the end of farm lanes but it isn't enough without face to face selling. FMD has been the final factor. He feels sorry for many of the elderly people who he meets and talks to and from time to time has had to contact their relations or the doctor. Raffle ticket sales for the carnival club will be severely hit.

For local businesses, that have taken a beating from FMD, some sort of help is at hand. One of the criteria applied is if a business has seen a fall of 60% of their turnover for two months since February, compared to last year. The queue is lengthening. There are hoops to jump through but basically a business recovery plan is developed and up to £15,000 of support available. At least the accountants, banks and consultants will make a shilling or two. One farmer is selling frozen organic beef by post at up to £33 per kilo. A complimentary box of goodies was well received by an immobilised veterinary recipient as a thank you for past friendship. Who said farmers are weak at marketing their produce?

Before FMD many farmers took advantage of a national business advice programme with an emphasis on diversification. A version of this is now offered to the 7500 holdings with culled stock. One priority is to remodel the environmental impact of the farm. Seminars and five days of consultancy are available. It will be interesting to see how this is received by the family farms.

One local farmer has had his flock culled due to positive sero-surveillance. He is confused because he is unable to clarify the identity of the animal involved but he is suspicious because he believes that an infected beast fell off a lorry outside his field gate in transit to a pyre. He is not sure whether he counts as an infected premise, a non contiguous premise or a slaughter on suspicion. He isn't really bothered. The sheep are gone and things must move on, but he finds it amusing that the same agencies that possibly infected his sheep and caused them to be slaughtered are now due to tell him how to run his business.

The updated statistics show that three quarters of the sheep culled in Devon and two thirds of the cattle were not at infected premises. The national picture is somewhat different with over half of the cattle taken from infected premises. Local rumourmongers are saying that cases were seen before Christmas and the infected animals slaughtered and buried. Who knows? The truth is out there somewhere.

It is interesting to hear about the debates taking place in the USA. Talk is of 'when' rather than 'if' FMD arrives. It appears that the scale and density of livestock would prohibit both a herd culling programme or a vaccination policy, on practical grounds, as well as a public opposition expectancy to burning pyres. A possible scenario is to cull only infected animals, lose the FMD free status and live with the commercial consequences. Farmers here are

hoping that all the anxiety and upset will allow our own FMD free status to be reclaimed so that our farmers are in the very best trading position.

Even within the infected area disinfected straw mats have all but disappeared. Individual vehicle disinfection is being heavily promoted by the agencies as part of the bio-security procedures. The infected zone has shrunk to allow visitors onto most of Dartmoor. Locally many people are still reluctant to walk past farms and visits are simply not taking place. As one vet commented 'it's all taking too long, we're just getting worn out by it all'.

Details are available about restocking procedures and given time these will no doubt become familiar. Not only has the infected farm to have been passed as clean but also any farms within 3 km must have completed their clean up and there are no positives from sero-surveillance. Within 8 km there cannot be any suspected or confirmed disease. The individual farmer is therefore dependent on others. Maybe there will be restocking zones established.

There is concern whether sero-surveillance of stock will be available before the animals come onto the farm as well as after 28 days. This point is unclear at present. It may be that rather than have intensive visits and animal inspections farmers will take the other option of waiting four months after full cleansing or twelve months after partial cleansing. By waiting it is hoped that the infected area will be removed and then supplies of stock will be available from local known sources.

One dairy farmer, within the infected area, was pleased to confirm pregnancy in nine out of twelve heifers using a syringe for AI. Since then he has achieved a 30% success rate with twenty one cows. At £25 per syringe it's an expensive failure rate. Proposals for return of a technician service are eagerly awaited. His wife commented 'he says he's lost the knack but I'm not sure he ever had it'.

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