

Culling the Combine

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This afternoon the first of the regional seminars, for farmers who have had their animals culled, will take place. The town hall has been booked and 1500 farmers invited to one of two such gatherings. Yesterday farmers were trying to reserve a place and being turned away. Over two hundred seats are filled.

It is highly relevant that one aim of the meeting is to promote five days of 'free business advice' when 'cleansing and disinfection has been completed'. This, when yesterday, all secondary cleansing operations have been stopped. Not just new cleansing as widely reported but all cleansing. It is likely to be a warm meeting.

For many farmers cleansing has not been an easy process. The small teams involving the farmer himself have often been unable to work with sufficient efficiency to satisfy the man with his feather duster, white cloth, matchstick or penknife. The level of cleanliness demanded is very high. As one farmer put it 'it's like cleaning seagull mess off the Forth bridge with a toothbrush'. The whole farm needs to be clean. Farmers have found that sheds attended to some weeks ago are rejected, because of fresh dirt and dust. Some farmers have had to give up and call for professional help. These 'professionals' use the same tools but they throw more resources at it with ten, twenty or, as reported on the radio, sixty people involved.

As usual there is humour between farmers and my neighbours relation has been told that he has to bury his combine. It's old, rusty and apparently not able to become virus free. He may burn it first.

Also stopped by decree is re-instatement of buildings and fittings that were removed as uncleanable. So, some farms are ready to be signed off as clean but are not refitted and unable practically to restock. As an example it has taken four months from slaughter to sign off on one farm and refitting was due to start now but cannot proceed until the review of expenditure takes place. No date for completion of this review is currently known. This farmer is unhappy about the arrangements for sentinel cattle and is planning to wait the four months laid down before restocking. This brings him to November and that means that probably he will wait until next Spring. At least before commencing milking.

One of the concerns, expressed by a local farm consultant, is that many farmers like to work with a firm structure to their day. Cleaning the farm after culling has continued to provide a daily structure. With cleaning suspended there will be an increasing amount of time to think and worry. This is why the meetings are so well attended. It's better than twiddling the thumbs.

For farmers whose stock has not been touched the second cut of silage and some combining is going ahead. Making use of the good weather. One farmers wife commented that she wasn't sure any more whether they were in or out of the infected area. Her bed and breakfast trade is non existent, she doesn't go to other farms and other wives do not visit

her. 'If you followed the news', she said, 'you would think this disease is about money. It isn't it's about people'.

The harvesting of grain, on restricted farms, including cereals, oilseeds, peas and beans has different requirements to straw, silage, hay and haylage. The farm information sheet advises that for details visit the website. The role of the web in the control of FMD will no doubt be the subject of intensive academic study in years to come.

Cleansing and disinfection of vehicles together with handling and storage areas for grain has emphasis. With disinfection likely to be needed at field entrances, away from the farm, it is disappointing to read the reports from farm insurers. Theft of knapsack sprayers is not uncommon and one farmer blocked passage to a sensitive area with his Landrover only to find that someone had stolen the wheels.

Over five hundred local farms have been released from form D restrictions this week. Movement licences for livestock from these farms is now handled by Trading Standards. Other movement licence offices have themselves moved. Let us hope that the right farm is able to get the right licence. If in doubt call the vet, he'll know!

The home farm is now outside the infected area. Wool has been sold and the beasts that are eating fodder that will be needed next winter will be moved on as soon as possible.

I received a 'phone call this week from a reader in practice in Yorkshire. A typical example of a vet trying to do his very best for a troubled client. I wish him and his client well. A comment he made encompassed the suffering of his client and his own experiences on the front line. 'Nothing', he said 'can prepare you for Foot & Mouth'.

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