

## **Action and Reaction**

*Published Sept 2001*

It should have come as no surprise to the scientifically minded that Foot & Mouth Disease has followed the laws of physics. To every action there is an equal and opposite reaction.

In the early days of diagnosis, slaughter and contiguous culling, the farmers were handled quite abruptly and told to comply with the instructions. Their observations and comments were often seen as unwelcome. Consequently many simply said 'Ok if you know so much you get on with it'. It is therefore of little surprise that tractors were hired out at premium prices, roads were built to accommodate articulated lorries when alternatives were available, knapsack sprayers were hired from farmers at a weekly rate that approached the purchase price and valuations were taken to the limit. The authorities pushed and the farmers pushed back.

Now the forensic accountants have been called in. Hourly charges are to go and replaced with a clean up project cost. The alternative is not to restock for 12 months. The difficulties with buildings that were 'dirty' before the crisis seems to be causing alarm. Of additional anxiety are buildings that may never be able to be cleaned satisfactorily. In this locale there are a number of buildings made from mud, straw and horse pee. These have survived since the 1700's but may be non cleanable. What happens to the farm with some modern buildings and some listed Cob. Can they go ahead with restocking in cleansed byres and close up the others for a year?

Not included in all the fuss about the 'millionaire farmers' and the £916 million paid out in slaughter compensation is the charitable support given to people suffering the financial distress of FMD. One charity alone has taken over 450 'phone calls a day and they are still coming in at 150 per day. Over 16,000 people have received financial support at a cost of nearly £8 million. Of deep concern is their feeling that 'the worst is yet to come'. The government matched funding for charities has been extended for another three months.

A neighbour has been counting the cost of the whole scene as plans for the winter are in hand. He is agitated about the low price available for his beef. Below his cost of production and he is not impressed by comments from supermarket leaders in the days leading up to the county show. His simple observation is that no longer can his dairy farm survive on milk alone. He also is being offered land to purchase. These are not sales through agents advertised in the weekend property supplement. These are over the hedge conversations because local farmers cannot see a way forward and are looking for short term fixes.

The local farmers, who watched the approach of FMD, suffered the restrictions and then the disease drifted away, have possibly the worst of all worlds. They now apply to their vet for short distance movements. They apply to the ministry for longer distances or if the beasts are being sold to another farmer, and to Trading Standards if the animals are going for slaughter. Of course if the cattle are over thirty months old the license is issued by the county council, unless there is a TB restriction when animal health offices have a role. Transport still needs to be disinfected and these arrangements have to be made with the local authority. If movement is to one of the ten collection centres in the county the relevant one has to be

contacted for arrangements to receive cattle and sheep. Over thirty month cattle are penned separately. Before animals are moved to a collection centre they must be pre-purchased by a slaughterhouse served by that centre.

The lines must be overheating with arrangements. At least BT will be earning a shilling or two. Gone are the days when a farmer would try his luck at the market hoping that an overseas buyer was on hand.

It appears that people enquiring about payment dates and details for slaughter compensation have been calling the line that deals with grants and subsidies. Of course answers to questions about VAT are dealt with by the Customs and Excise National Advice Service and for Inland Revenue matters call the tax office. No doubt agents are busy sorting out details on behalf of clients. Whatever happened to the One Stop Shop?

The final stages of the blood testing programme is in hand from flocks within three to ten kilometres of what was an infected premise. This is expected to last until October. If these tests prove negative the authorities believe that they can say 'with confidence' that the county is free of FMD. For some people this confidence is yet to be accepted. There are still many queries about the start and spread of the virus and there is an expectancy with some people that the disease will return next winter when the animals are housed.

One of the bio-security measures is to keep sheep and cattle separated. Looking over the hedge at animals grazing, trying to spot where hedges have broken down, is a local pastime.

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9<sup>th</sup> August 2001