

Disinfectant for breakfast.

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Three hours after loading the lambs in the trailer, driven to the abattoir and called into the agricultural merchants on the way home, my neighbour was still looking forward to his breakfast. Before FMD he would have been back in about an hour.

Having sorted out the movement license he arrived at the gates to be unloaded and cleansed. The paperwork is scrutinised and an overseer watched the spraying and scrubbing. The farmer is not expected to get out of his pick up but he thought he would lend a hand with the sprayer. Consequently his footwear had to be disinfected along with the mat under the pedals. As he was wearing shoes he now has damp socks to add to his discomfort. He doesn't mind. He was meant to be getting back to meet the contractor for silage wrapping, but the weather has turned.

The notion that contiguous culls should be negative for the virus is an important concept which will need to be discussed with farmers in depth. For the specialist less detected virus indicates a more successful policy. For others less virus means more waste of animals.

It has been indicated that the virus is expected to spread up to 1.5 kilometres from infected animals. So why have a contiguous cull and not a 1.5 kilometre cull? And if the science indicates 1.5 kilometres why has 3 kilometres been used in some locations? As the circle grows the number of farms involved increases by some factor probably related to Archimedes and his principles.

Most farmers have accepted that a cull of infected animals is necessary for the greater good of Farming UK. They accept that it is too late if clinical signs are apparent in that the virus will have had time to spread. But the notion of deliberately slaughtering healthy stock to make a fire break raises more and more issues of concern. As the circle size is dictated by the speed of action some farmers can be forgiven for becoming impatient. At the same time others have deliberately looked to delay the control measures.

The vet in the field has difficulty in engaging with clients looking for answers. Clients and vets will share the results of the many enquiries that are being set up. In the meantime many vets will hope to discuss other matters if the disease has passed by and hope that the authorities will bear the worst of any criticism if the virus strikes.

Although the virus has been controlled locally the effects are escalating. For the county there have been 173 infected premises and 1500 farms culled out. There are now over 43,000 businesses that have had payment of income tax deferred. The Forum of Private Business, while calling for an 'urgent' public inquiry into the role of the Government', has said that 'businesses are still struggling to cope after the many indignities and problems heaped upon them, all through no fault of their own'.

The Rural Development Agency has re-opened the Redundant Building Grant in the South West. You need to be quick because the fund closes at the end of November. This allows for renovation of buildings in order to create a 'fresh source of income' but not residential. It

is interesting to consider the word 'fresh'. A building that has not generated income for six months perhaps. Someone will interpret no doubt.

The plight of the Young Farmers Clubs has been identified in cash terms. Over £450,000 has been lost. The 23,000 members have been unable to party which is merely the outward appearance of their money raising efforts for charity. Without activity the clubs have lost their own funding. The approach is that for years the YFC has helped others, now it is time to help themselves. Charity is said to begin at home.

The role of the young is seen as essential to the regeneration of the countryside. Pump priming is needed and farmers and companies are being asked to dig deep and contact the head office at Stoneleigh. For any youngster contemplating taking over from father the impact of 2001 will not easily be managed. Many pundits believe that the coming months will shape the future for livestock as the recovery process begins.

The alternative view of the future is that the old and feeble step aside and let the strong rule. The strong rule anyway but there should be room for traditional ways. The Family Farmers Association is considering how to influence the new order. It will be interesting to know the sort of farms that will join the movement 'Farmers against Junk Food'.

There will only be the best from the land at a dinner being arranged for all those troubled by FMD. A two night stay in London over Remembrance Sunday weekend with a black tie dinner to 'take people out of themselves'. I hope it works.

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