

Uttermost care

A recent communication to local farmers compliments them on taking the 'uttermost care' with the Cleaning & Disinfection work. It seems that people have been careful to switch off electricity before using power hoses and personal contact has been avoided with asbestos.

It is seen as a good thing that the uttermost care of people is now coming to the forefront of FMD. These are difficult times. As the disease pendulum swings new cases are causing alarm at the same time as restocking is rumoured to be taking place. Stories of articulated lorries delivering two thousand sheep and one hundred cattle are circulating. Tales are whispered of farmers, with inadequate fodder for the winter, accepting the only available offers for store cattle from cash rich FMD compensated traders.

The traders use their own and other peoples land so it is a complicated scenario to understand how restocking is commencing. For the farmers who had other peoples stock on their land, culled out last February and March, they have been unable to negotiate grass keep sales for this year. Their income is nil. Their compensation is nil. They saw their former customers benefiting from the culling without the trauma and now investing the cash in new stock at bargain prices. They are peeved in the uttermost at the perceived injustice.

In a different world to the traders the family farms are making the best of the ongoing difficulties. There is no doubt that an extended family structure has helped raise spirits. As one farming grandmother put it 'we couldn't be downhearted for long with three grandchildren watching over us'. Without the activity and the financial payments for doing their own cleansing work they doubt if the farm could be expected to survive. They are not yet approaching receipt of the FM7 certificate but they do have a completion budget for the cleansing.

Another farmer, with a farming brother who lives alone, has expressed his fears for his brothers health and wellbeing. His brother is one of many who suffers all the restrictions and would probably have been better placed if his animals had been taken. As it is, income is negligible, movement of animals has been restricted and life has held little joyous prospect. For several weeks one brother was quarantined and could not visit the other. The telephone was the only contact which is not the same as face to face dialogue.

Within the same village four dairy herds were culled out. Two of those have said that they do not intend to restock with milking cows. The alternatives have not yet been identified and it is unlikely that final decisions will be taken this year. It is assumed that those that return will be making a long term commitment to themselves. Some farmers are unhappy about the idea of restocking while the disease is 'still about'. They cannot contemplate the future if they restocked and then were culled out again. As we approach the autumn some of the family farms will look to next spring for commercial production in the hope that the disease will be gone from the whole country.

As well as looking forward many are reviewing the details of what took place. Few will actually make contact with the various inquiries but it has stimulated conversation. The stories will one day be classified officially but difficult, ridiculous and amusing is a start.

On one farm the lambs were injected, the ewes shot and the cattle injected and then shot. All of the cattle were put through a crush in the farmyard close to the house. Some of the sheep were despatched in the fields others in the farm buildings. Sixteen days later the sheep were collected and two days after that the cattle removed. The stench was difficult. A cloud of black birds covered the carcasses and two buzzards were found dead in the same field, assumed to have been affected by the injection.

The same day that the last carcasses were driven off a policewoman collected the no passage signs from the lane and gave them to the farmer indicating that it was now all over. Five months later the replaced signs are still active. The post is still left at the end of the lane and few visitors approach the farm. During the intervening period permission was given to sow a field of barley and then subsequent instructions came that they were unable to harvest it. When permission was sorted out the licence for the combine arrived but not one for the combine driver.

The need to complete time sheets for each hour of the clean up has introduced a new discipline. This has applied to the administrator, as well as the farmer, when early starts and late finishes for seven days overran the structure of the monitoring database. It took much longer than anticipated for the earth floors in the lambing sheds to be dug out and burnt, with crushed chalk brought in and packed down as replacement.

In the corner of the orchard, like many properties dated back several centuries, was the household dump from times before rubbish collection. Sheep had grazed the orchard and so the dump was excavated and the contents burnt. Unfortunately the various ancient bottles and artefacts were lost in the immediacy of the job. Time Team eat your heart out.

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