

Vibrating Machine Operatives

The big change has come to the home farm. For the past few winters it has been discussed but finally the younger members of the partnership have moved to the main farmhouse and the aged ones to the bungalow. These are at extreme ends of the farm and for many years have been two separate units with a fifty acre parcel of land in between. Now the land has been bought in a bold expansionist move, which the senior farmer describes as the 'most agonising decision we have had to make but we must believe in the future'.

The physical part of the move, by Land Rover and sheep trailer supported by pick up and open trailer, was a prime example of rural good humour and organisation. As one load of furniture was removed from the farmhouse similar items were inserted from the bungalow. Everyone helped with uncles, friends, cousins, grandparents, parents and children carrying something. The whole crew descended on a sister for lunch to consume the largest shepherd's pie produced by the family before. Home bred lamb of course. With all that has been going on this year, it is heartening to know, that despite the worry and concern of FMD, major plans were able to be developed.

The positive side of rural living has been promoted with 15,000 posters promoting National New Members Week for the National Federation of Young Farmers Clubs. Next year their president will be the Prince of Wales and it is hoped that their various activities and fund raising will get back on track after the abandonment of meetings due to FMD. The 730 local clubs cater for all ten to twenty six year olds, whether they are farmers or not, and in amongst the more serious activities one group has organised Salsa Dancing, Go Karting, Ice Hockey and a Traffic Light Disco. And that is just within one month! Expect to be tapped up for a sponsored bed push near you.

The skittle leagues are starting again and there is more interest than ever as farmers are determined to get out and about. Most local pubs have a farmers team although this is often stretched to include anyone who has loosely anything to do with the land. In the heat of 'the move' special instructions were issued not to drop the box of skittle trophies collected over the years. Also getting back into action are meetings of the Women's Food and Farming Union. Anyone who has experienced these rural dwellers en masse will have anticipated their rapid return to activity. Never mind non attendance by a ministry man at the local FMD Inquiry, the most daunting prospect will be the invitation to come along and explain yourself to the WFU.

At a recent social gathering to discuss the success of the event telling the history of the village and church in light, music and voice, the following conversation took place between a dog walker and a farmer. 'How do you feel about us using the footpath over the top?' 'Well it is open and has been for sometime' said the farmer. 'Yes I know that but are you happy about it? We won't use it yet if it troubles you'. 'All the blood testing in the county has proved negative so far despite a couple of scares', explained the farmer 'so I don't feel that there is a problem'.

This concern for the feelings of neighbours has been a part of local life this year. Another farmer at the gathering was pointing out that they were having to get used to traffic passing their door again. People from the village had been using an alternative route to go to work rather than pass the farm. It wasn't that they had to, or had been asked to, they just didn't want to be a cause for concern or give 'any trouble'.

Deep discussions also took place about the EU Physical Agents (Whole Body Vibration) Directive. No one of course called it that. It was rather referred to in the same way as people talked about the scheme to only allow straight bananas into the EEC. The notion that farmers could only drive tractors for a couple of hours at a time lead to considerable speculation as to how the matter could be policed and who might do it. If teams of people are needed to satisfy the requirements the whole village could be placed on the farmers books as 'vibrating machine operatives'. Suggestions followed as to the possibilities of a funded training programme and whether meetings in the church would qualify for support and therefore help the church tower repair fund.

After any disease outbreak there is a period for healing and return to health. Although the animals had the disease the rural communities suffered along with them and the healing process appears to have begun in earnest.

Richard can be contacted on 01363 866353 or E mail: rgard@agmed.freeserve.co.uk or www.agmed.org.uk.