

## **Blaming the children!**

The seasonal gathering of family and other visitors to Devon has taken place. This has been, for many, their first visitation since last February and first hand accounts of the outbreak were sought as a topic for social intercourse. Some of the views and opinions proffered were probably influenced by a heady mixture of myth, magic and red wine but revealed a worrying level of conclusions lacking evidence.

In this part of the county there is a complex use of coaches to ferry children to school. The local school has over fifty buses collecting kids from each village and various pick up points. As the children grow and move on, the bus routes change to offer the maximum convenience to the majority of families. For farm children they are usually collected at the end of the farm lane. Therefore children from one farm mix with their neighbours along route twenty three and then mix with their subject class that could come from anywhere within the area. The strong view was overheard that it was the children that spread the virus.

The basis for this statement was that two farms that were culled out, but not contiguous, each had children who often sat together on the bus. Once the disease is identified of course restrictions applied but in the pre-disease and distant disease periods the children continued to attend school.

The notion that a child is the vector for slaughter and burning is not something that should be encouraged. Surely the risk of child transfer is insignificant. If it isn't then as a matter of urgency we need to think through this topic very carefully and come up with a workable, reassuring, cunning plan for the future. If children spread FMD then what about any other animal borne infection and zoonoses? Surely there are enough other issues of bio-security without blaming the children. Tail gating for multiple pick-ups being a recent addition to the armoury.

A further opinion is the view that contiguous culling should work from the outside in and not the inside out. This apparently is how continental outbreaks have been controlled. For this outbreak there has been a lack of easy identification of farms, owners, land and locations. Hopefully, now, a point on the map can be taken and the necessary details of stock holdings within a given area rapidly identified. For the future it should be possible to work disease control from the outside of the circle, or is this simply wishful thinking?

The impact of FMD has been on individual families and in some circumstances whole communities. The peak of publicity, about the widespread slaughter of a village area, has attracted the attention of the various supporting agencies. It was relatively easy to make a case for rural rejuvenation and funds and resources have continued to pile up. The media have been attracted to one such community. which has a local resident well known to peak time viewers and farming representatives who are not camera shy.

The village relies on agriculture and has two pubs, a primary school and a mayor, who delivers post in the mornings, serves up fish and chips in the evenings and dons a suit and chain for civic duties. The population is less than fifteen hundred souls and before FMD was

one of many similar rural communities. Now many of the long standing residents are getting more than a little concerned.

A project officer arrived first, to help overcome the bad times and the village is in line for an improved community centre, support for the school, the toddlers, Brownies, town band, drama group, church and goodness only knows what else. That is the upside. The downside is the county plan.

The county plan is looking forward to 2016. Consultation is underway to identify facilities where you live that need to be improved and those that are working well. In addition, each area close to a large town is reviewed to see where expansion can take place. Many thousands of new homes are demanded to be located within the plan. Some people see it as unfortunate that the village will soon boast updated facilities, and will be seen to be able to accommodate an enlarged industrial estate, to match all the rural diversification and accommodate the houses for the families who will be needed to use the facilities to the full. This is one community who will view 2001 as a point for pivotal change. Will the new estate be named after the man who transported the infected sheep into the county?

The Government seasonal newsletter wishes all livestock farmers a more prosperous and trouble free 2002. Recognition is offered that many have 'experienced great difficulties' and states that 'we have tried our best to alleviate these' and goes on to say 'but given the necessities of disease control and the constraints imposed by centralised policy this has not always been possible'.

At least they are not blaming the children.

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