

## **Before and After**

It is very easy to assume that the anguish and personal concerns about the Foot & Mouth 2001 outbreak can now be forgotten. The impact on some of the people involved has been brought home again recently.

Two local psychiatric nurses related the activities that they carried out during the culling and their workload now. They drove farmers in their cars to stand and view burning pyres. These were people who needed to grieve for their livestock and to overcome their feelings of despondency and depression about the future. Some of them were put on medication. It seems important to be aware that these were not necessarily introverted wizened old men with little in their lives except a pet cow, two ewes and a cockerel. Some of the individuals were candidates for herd health programmes and would be represented in the top quartile of practice clients.

For a few farmers the anger and frustration was a temporary consideration and they threw themselves into the recovery process with cleaning, planning and thoughts for the future. For quite a lot more however the process is not yet over. The nurses continue to be needed and they are in fact seeing more people from farming families now than they did at the height of the slaughtering. Word has circulated that realistic rural help is available from knowledgeable considerate people. One of the nurses is married to a farmer and she shares her awareness with her colleague. Both are slow to alarm and have advanced listening skills.

The problems, caused by lack of fodder initially and lack of income for much longer, have been addressed from the national support fund. It seems incredible that donations are still pouring in to the fund although the original brief was to set up emergency short term relief. Many, many millions of pounds have been distributed. It is also a fact that some recipients have now overcome their difficulties and have in turn donated to the fund. It is becoming clearer now what percentage of the ten thousand culled out premises will be returning to production because they are recorded and documented.

Much of the financial support was actually required by farmers who had their premises placed under restriction but not culled out. Possibly ten times the culled number with direct restriction beyond general movements. Theirs is the longer term financial difficulty. Many have yet to make the decision to restock, or at least to announce the issue to anyone beyond the family.

The photographs show the before and after on the same farm with beef and sheep. The bright winter sunshine shows the state of affairs seven months after culling day. The chalk base to the sheep shed has been replaced but the gaps in the galvanised iron remain. The telegraph poles are still in evidence although they have been extensively cleaned. The yard has been re-laid with fresh concrete and the fences, gates, walls, windows and doors scrubbed and repainted. Although everything is spick and span there is no fundamental alteration to what was there. The buildings will not have any additional functions and in a few months time everything will look almost the same as it did before. They have taken the decision to restock and the process has, by now, already begun.

There is however, a real sense of a new beginning. All the former blood lines have gone. The stock that was bought from market, farm sale and neighbour is no more. The history will not impinge on the present. All that happens with the new stock, its origin, how it arrives, the first lamb or calf, the first vets visit etc will each form part of the new beginning. All the implements, ranging from hand tools to tractors and trailers, have been extensively cleaned, oiled and serviced. Everything should work and all the old rusting pieces that grandfather used to use to fit strange devices to outdated machines have gone. Maybe, at some date in the distant future, these will be dug up and fortunes made from antiquities. Not very likely.

The buildings, the yards, the fences, the animals and the general farm structures have been regenerated. Vets are being asked to advise on the quality of stock to be purchased and plans are made to keep out disease. Work is ongoing to support the farms as businesses and the farming families as people under threat. In the next few weeks, as spring approaches, the new structure of the local farming scene will be revealed. Whatever it is we cannot go back to where we were before. Being part of the after is all we have.

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