

## **Harvest Thoughts 2008.**

At a time of life when most people would be considering the merits of buying a new car or even carrying on driving, local Northallerton Farmer Joe aged 88 took delivery of a new combine. This was after a lot of research and visits to see various second-hand combines across the north of England. Joe will drive the combine on some of his own harvest and that of his son in law. He will then go on to help his son in law and grandson on their combined acreage across the Northallerton/ Thirsk area. Joe sums up that old adage " Farm as though you are going to live for ever". Joe is one of farming's true gentlemen and his farming is to the highest standards as are his in-depth farming diaries which he produces to tell you the prices and yields for the past 70 years. He is a source of inspiration to us all.

At the time of writing these notes last year Foot and Mouth was casting a huge black cloud over the farming scene and continued on in to the autumn disrupting the autumn sales and movement of livestock especially in the hills. This led to very poor returns for many upland farmers especially sheep farmers who in many case had to sell their livestock at half to two thirds of their cost of production leaving huge holes in the farmer's cash flows, the effects of which are still being felt now. Many of these farmers were helped in the short term by the very generous grants given by both A R C Addington and RABI. Although a lot of farmers through a mixture of pride and uncertainty felt unable to apply and have carried on tightening there belt's and in some cases have left the industry.

While the industry was still reeling from the Foot and Mouth outbreak came confirmation that Blue Tongue had arrived and the countryside was again put under a new set of movement restrictions for livestock. As this article is being written the news that the whole of the England has been declared a protection zone will help livestock movement get back to normal in time for the autumn breeding sales as farmers get on with the task of injecting their stock.

TB and badgers is a very hot topic with the Government deciding to support a Vaccination program rather than the cull of infected badgers the industry was asking for. This coupled with the recent decisions to adopt a different stance on set aside to the rest of Europe has angered the farming industry who feel as though wildlife and conservation is being put in front of food production. In this time of world population growth and famine in many parts of the world to restrain the full potential of the best group of farmers in the world to produce food is nothing short of criminal.

Our growers and Nurseryman must not be forgotten in these harvest thoughts as well, as their costs are linked to the oil price. As the retailers look round for more and more price crunching, price saving deals, 2 for 1 etc, it has to be remembered that most of these deals are financed not by the retailers but the producers. Their margins are getting squeezed and quite a few growers are seeking help from the industry charity Perennial.

Currently arable prices are doing the opposite of last year with £115 a ton being quoted for wheat off the combine, the current spell of very wet weather will; if it continues, lead to wheat having to go on to the animal feed market .Farmers are experiencing very wet conditions with a lot of winter barley still to harvest here in North Yorkshire and as we get to the 12<sup>th</sup> of August

no wheat has been harvested here at all. This drop in price is being fuelled by a good Harvest in the Black Sea Region and the release of large tonnage onto the world market. Lower cereal prices are of course linked with a drop in the quality of the milling wheat, with some samples being rejected, and not all bad news for UK farming the livestock sector especially the pig and poultry sectors welcome the reduction in the price of cereals.

The price of oil and derivatives is having a serious affect on all farming operations. With the price of fertilizer going up dramatically since last year and prices of £375 to £400 a ton being quoted for 34.5%: this time last year prices were £140 to £160. An oft quoted rule of thumb was that if the price of fertilizer and the price of wheat where the same, it is profitable to grow wheat. Currently the crop which will be planted this autumn at current input prices will have to be in excess of £130 a ton next year to break even. With the cost of filling the modern tractor with fuel for a days work being over £150 a day farmers will feel the pinch on the long days ahead spent planting our next years food.

Cattle and sheep prices are continuing to be a reasonable trade although when the increased cost of production are taken into account the bottom line might not be so good.

Once again Farming borrowing figures have gone to the highest figure eve. Most of this money is being used to accommodate cash flow requirements. Some farmers are still awaiting payment from not only 2007 but some for the 2006 single farm payment in part or full. Hill farmers are awaiting further development on the new scheme to replace Hill farming allowance, which looks as though it will be more environmentally friendly rather than farmer friendly

The local show season is in full swing and despite difficulties at some because of movement as result of blue tongue there has been a fantastic turnout of stock, and good attendance of Farmers and the Public, Once again the Yorkshire Show was outstanding. People from other parts of the country are now realising, what those of us in Yorkshire have known for sometime that the Yorkshire Show is the best Agricultural show in the Country.

Thank you for your continued support and for taking the time to read these thoughts. I would like to especially thank all the members of the clergy who read these reports for all their help and ongoing support. I can be contacted by email or phone. I will endeavour to keep you in touch with any of the forms of help mentioned and can give you advice on any farming related questions.

Kate Dale has decide to leave our project after 16 months of outstanding contribution, Kate has been a inspirational person to work with and has left her unique stamp on the project. It has been a privilege to work with Kate and I will miss her efficiency, commitment and enthusiasm, and wish her all the best in the future. While speaking of the future the project is having a slight change of direction as Funding from Yorkshire Forward comes to an end. This funding should have ceased at the end of March but was extended to the end of September. While we explored other avenues of funding from the 1<sup>st</sup> of October we will be funded by LANTRA and will be doing more work in identifying areas of training to support farming and rural business. We are also exploring funding from LEADER.

Once again Farming has need of the prayers and support of the public as a whole. This support can be given by the collections at Harvest festivals, if it can be spared, going to the 3 farming Charities.

Yours Bob Baker

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