

Thoughts from a Northern Mart August 2009

The sun is shining in the north at the time these notes are started but with the chance of showers forecast for today the next few things could change, combines are gathering up the harvest which so far is of a good quality and reasonable yields of grain but not huge amounts of straw, with prices as high as £40/acre for straw in the swath being quoted. However not everywhere is experiencing good weather one farmer today told me at the mart that he was hoping to bale the hay he has had cut for 6 weeks.

Harvest is progressing reasonably well, one farmer told me that his new combine cut more Barley in 2 days than his first combine cut in an entire season, this sort of increase in capacity does not come cheap, also the infrastructure needed to keep these monsters running at full capacity takes some managing. If one of these mega machines are running at full capacity it holds 11 tons of grain and while emptying into the corn trailer, it will have cut another 3 ton of corn, and is capable of cutting in excess of 60 ton/hour. All the harvesting is not done by these mega machines, and many tons of corn will be cut by older and smaller machines many over 20 years old and are kept going by hours of careful maintenance over the winter months. This machinery plus the ability of farmers to work extremely long hours at this time of year as one farmer said to me his worker had worked more hours overtime than his standard working week, as he said goodness knows how many hours he had worked himself. Last years disastrous harvest is still fresh in many minds, and this is driving the farmers on to get this harvest in, what was described as going to be a barbecue summer.

The first breeding sheep and store lamb sales of the season are now under way with good prices for both breeding sheep and store lambs. Breeding sheep are meeting a very strong trade. The easing of the proposed Electronic Sheep Tagging regulations is helping to put a little more confidence back into the industry coupled with the generally good prices. Pigs are continuing to be a good trade with those farmers who were able to stay in the industry are at last making a good return. Milk however is a different matter with some prices being cut by 3p a litre in the past few weeks and many of the other contracts at best only at break even , the exodus of farmers from milk is showing no sign of abating . Beef has had the usual seasonal dip in price but is still better than last year. Despite the good quality of the harvest the spot price is disastrous with barley trading at £75-£80 a ton off the combine this is not looking good for the wheat trade.

At this busy time of year farmers are having new maps issued by the RPA and have a month to rectify any discrepancies in the physical and mapping. This leads to more and more pressure on the farmers with the change from hill farming allowance to the new Upper Level Entry Scheme for supporting the hill farmer they need these maps to be correct, many discrepancies are showing up which need correcting before claims can be submitted.

The show season goes on with many shows experiencing record levels of attendance, especially at Driffild. The gems of the Show season that are Reeth, Muker, Kilnsey, Pateley are still to come so the chance to see the countryside at its best is still there.

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