

Thoughts from a Northern Mart October 2010

The Royal Agricultural Benevolent Institution 150 year celebrations role on, and came to Ripon Cathedral on the 10th of October. Where they held their Harvest of the ages service, 500 Guests, staff, beneficiaries and supporters attended. What was a magnificent service with soaring organ music, fantastic choral singing by the Cathedral choir and the service led by the very Reverend Keith Jukes and Cannon Leslie Morley. Howard Petch gave the address and as always was very informative and inspirational in his address. I would like to pass on some of his thoughts 150 years ago when RABI was founded a farm worker earned around £30 a year and it took 3 ton of wheat at £10 a ton to pay him, now a farm worker earns around £25000 and it takes 160 ton to pay him. Interestingly we are 60% self sufficient in food at present same as we were 150 years ago. Then 26% of the population worked in farming now it is about 1.5% food for thought. Also Howard spoke about commitment and how a farmer commits to do something like ploughing you cant plough straight if you keep looking back.

The price of cereals and oil seed rape seems to be volatile at the moment with movement up and down but settling a little higher as speculators, analyse harvest results. Fertilizer prices have already jumped by £50 a ton for next year as the manufacturers see a market a little more buoyant than last year for it's product.

Milk prices have had a few slighter price increases from some of the buyers but prices still remain stubbornly near the cost of production, not giving much room for improvement repairs and expansion. Both the price of beef and lamb has slipped in the last few weeks, with store cattle easing back slightly. Store lambs are still a reasonable price, the good trade for breeding sheep continues with the latter lambs selling just as well as the earlier ones. Good prices are been paid for breeding rams with the trade very buoyant.

The speed of harvesting and sowing seems to get faster with whole fields of potatoes being harvested in a day, along way removed from the days of potato picking holidays when gangs of School children descend on the countryside and 1-2 acres a day was a good day. Now a lot of the harvesters have nobody on or at most 2 people picking off the odd bits of debris and unsuitable potatoes everything been done mechanically, at acres an hour instead of acres a day. Maize harvesting is in full swing at the time of writing and vast acreages again disappear in a day. The shortage of fodder as been addressed by great grass growth in August, September and October one farmer showed me some fantastic hay baled in mid September as good as any June hay with that rich fragrant smell of Sunshine.

Farming seems as previously mentioned in these thoughts to be a source of longevity with lots of farmers still farming in their 70-80's some unfortunately because they cant afford to retire. Others because they want to carry on and do the job they have been learning for years as one man said to me, in his 70's he was getting to grips with driving his new tractor with satellite navigation, as he said it was a bit ironic as when he started driving there was no road signs because of war time regulations. At the Harvest festival in Ripon Cathedral yesterday the longevity and commitment was again shown by presence and participation in the service By lord Plumb who despite not seen me for 25 years remembered not only me but my wife's name from our days on YFC council.

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