Rural Report – *from the farm*

2021, yet another topsy turvey year for farmers here in Suffolk, an incredibly wet winter, a cold very dry spring, followed by a wet summer, has, as usual, led to very many weather-related challenges for arable and livestock farmers alike. These challenges are, of course, what makes farming such an interesting and varied occupation, thankfully most have managed to make the most of the conditions and despite the relatively late cereal harvest it was generally completed by the end of August, although yields have been incredibly variable, even on the same farm there have been some of the best and some of the worse results, depending on soil type and how well crops were established in autumn 2020.

Very thankfully, and no doubt a result of a global tight supply cereal prices have remained very buoyant, with feed wheat trading at the unusually high price of £180 per tonne for harvest movement. Other crops, particularly roots, have faired very well in the cooler moist summer, with sugar beet looking especially well as we move towards the 21/22 harvest campaign.

Grassland too, has been an interesting crop to get right, firstly livestock had to have the meagre spring supplies supplemented, resulting in many barns being completely empty by the end of April, then, within a two week period in May, the famine turned into plenty, livestock couldn’t keep on top off the phenomenal growth and the mowers were soon called into action to conserve this valuable crop and fill the barns and silage pits once again.

Besides the pandemic, one of the other main challenges of 2021 has undoubtably been the raft of new agricultural acronyms to discover and attempt to understand what they are all about. The ELMS (Environmental Land Management Scheme) has, even before its inception, evolved and we now have to understand the SFI, (sustainable farming incentive), Local Nature Recovery and Landscape Recovery schemes, all supposedly going to make a significant contribution to the six main goals of the 25 Year Environment Plan - clean air, clean and plentiful water, thriving plants and wildlife, reduced risk of harm from environmental hazards such as flooding and drought, enhanced beauty, heritage and engagement with the natural environment, mitigating and adapting to climate change, all also contributing to our carbon net zero targets!! All laudable aspirations, but with so little detail while these are being “trailed” it is difficult to know just how to integrate them into our farming businesses to ensure that we can continue to remain profitable as direct support payments are reduced.

As farmers we do hope that demand for UK produced food actually factors in our nation’s thoughts, so that we can incorporate all of these factors into the future, rather than export our food production requirements to others around the world, who may not just have the ability to protect the environment and animal welfare in the same ways that we do here.

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