

ACF Update: Spring 2017

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Editorial

As I compile this Update it feels quite serious, but it is becoming clearer that we are probably approaching serious times for which we need to prepare ourselves and seek God's guidance as to our individual responses and ACFs collective response. We believe that Donald Curry's talk in January 2017 is the clearest summary of all the uncertainties and possibilities, this is reason enough for publishing it, but as he is one of our members it would be inexcusable not to. He has played a significant role in farm policy issues for most of this century and is a member of the House of Lords and one of their Select Committees which deals with a range of farm related issues. Towards the end of his talk he urged farm groups to try to raise the profile of the situation of farming after Brexit. Following this urging we made a submission to the House of Commons Select Committee on Trade which is also in this edition.

Last time we printed a statement that we and FCN set out soon after the Referendum and with it we commented with relief about the Government's announcement of continuing with BPS until 2019. The relief remains of

course together with the realization that because we are still in the EU until the departure agreement is concluded it's not the British Government's money and it had no choice in the matter.

However there is another article *Behold the Lamb* in which there is good news and humour together with profound insights. We do beseech you dear readers to consider making your own contributions so this becomes more varied in the future.

Christopher Jones
 ACF Coordinator

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What shall we do about Brexit? A talk by Lord Curry

Notes of the Sustain Annual Gathering and Debate, held 17 January 2017 at St Ethelburga's Peace and Reconciliation Centre, London

Lord Curry of Kirkharle addressed the question: What shall we do about Brexit? Opportunities to achieve healthy, fair, humane and sustainable food, farming and fishing – for the benefit of everyone.

The session was chaired by Shaun Spiers, chief executive of the Campaign to Protect Rural England, who is also vice-chair of Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming and attended by 90 members of the Sustain alliance and other guests. Lord Curry started by summarising what we know about Brexit:

- There is enormous uncertainty, which is likely to continue
- The exit process will be complicated
- The UK is set to trigger Article 50 by the end of March, after which a two-year negotiating period will ensue
- New trade agreements cannot be signed until after the exit process is complete
- There will be a Great Repeal Bill to transpose EU law (as much as it can) into domestic law.
- Around 30% of law for which Defra has responsibility will not be covered by the Great Repeal Bill, for example the EU Habitats Directive
- As announced by Theresa May PM that very day, the UK will not be part of the European Single Market
- Defra will be consulting in 2017 on two 25-Year Plans, on 'food and farming', and later in the year on 'environment'

We should be rightly concerned about the lack of prominence of food, fishing and agriculture in public debate and the policy agenda – other issues are currently dominating government thinking.

Lord Curry structured his response to the question 'What shall we do about Brexit?' around four themes:

1. Financial consequences
2. Regulation
3. Migration
4. Trade

1. Financial consequences

This is an area of enormous concern: What will happen to replace (if at all) the current £3 billion in public support for agriculture and rural development? He deliberately avoided the term 'subsidy', saying 'support' needs to be agreed, explained, acceptable to the public and explicitly payable for 'public goods' that need to be explained and accepted too.

Improvements made since the Policy Commission on the Future of Food and Farming, 2002 (which he chaired) may be lost. In fact, those gains are already being lost. Until recently, 70% of farm land was in some sort of agri-environment scheme, which felt like good progress. We should be especially worried about the uplands. How can continued public support be justified? What function do we want them to perform? Grazing? Water retention? Carbon retention? Energy generation? Argument needs to be made to both the Treasury and the public.

Another worry is that we could lose the cross-compliance requirements that tie farm payments to environmental protection measures: without this, the lever for change will be lost.

2. Regulation

Lord Curry headed up the Better Regulation Taskforce. Around 70% of the regulations that Defra oversee are EU based. Reviewing, evaluating and replacing these is a mammoth task. Perceived over-regulation was presumably a motivation for many farmers to vote to leave the EU. But it is not just the EU that demands regulation: markets all over the world, and consumers, also require regulation on – for example – food safety

What shall we do about Brexit? Continued

and traceability. Crises have arisen in the recent past because of lack of such regulation, such as E.coli and horse meat. The last thing the farming industry needs is to lose the confidence of the public through the wholesale dismantling of regulation. There is some that could be trimmed away – but this has to a large extent already happened. The low-hanging fruit has already been picked. The assumption that there is a burden of surplus regulation waiting to be dismantled is not realistic.

3. Migration

The issue of migration is very important. The UK needs access to seasonal labour, especially for fruit and vegetable production. Lord Curry did not dwell on this theme, but flagged it as of great importance.

4. Trade

This is enormously important, and we lack understanding of the implications of leaving the EU and Single Market. Tariff arrangements will be critical. There are some eye-watering examples of high tariff rates that could be imposed on UK exports to the EU: over 40% on dairy, 6.8% on oil seeds, 17.7 % on lamb. These would represent huge barriers to farmers looking to export. Then there is the question of the import, then re-export, of traded goods within the EU: what will happen to these? For example, a large proportion of animal feed imported into the EU comes via Rotterdam, and what we need is then shipped to the UK. What will happen to livestock farming if farmers need to pay an import tariff on animal feed?

All options carry risks, and the number of separate negotiations involved is enormous. There is a strong argument that food and farming deserves the same special treatment – the same policy concern and special deals – that are being promised to the financial sector.

The timescales are challenging. There is likely to be a ‘significant period of disruption’ after the initial two-year period for completing the UK’s exit from the EU. New trade arrangements are unlikely to be in place immediately for a smooth transition. Even if farm support payments are extended to cover this period, markets will be disrupted.

How can we influence government and policy?

If we are to see this as an opportunity, the government needs to recognise that food, farming, rural economies and land management require a holistic approach. Policy ‘ownership’ straddles different government departments, and the experience of the 2002 Policy Commission for Food and Farming was that this creates a lot of difficulties.

We need to persuade government of the ‘bigger picture and bigger prize’ of health, sustainability and secure farm livelihoods, setting ‘a sustainable course for the next 20 years’. There is not much evidence so far that the government has got this message. Now that the government’s approach has been laid out [in Theresa May’s speech of 17th January 2017], Defra needs to start talking about all this, and civil-society organisations and farm groups need to start applying pressure to ministers and policy-makers.

Lord Curry concluded by commenting that this is the most important time since 1947 in terms of the implications for farmers, rural economies and the countryside. We need to talk to influencers, we need to communicate the importance of this agenda to the public, and we also have to make the case for retaining high British food standards and environmental protection.

A note from the editor of this update who was present: In the subsequent discussion it was generally agreed that in respect of trade we also need to bear in mind that being outside the Single Market, and outside its protective tariffs, not only makes it hard to export into the EU but also may expose the UK to much cheaper imports from outside.

Behold the Lamb

“But ask the animals, and they will teach you, or the birds in the sky, and they will tell you; or speak to the earth, and it will teach you, or let the fish in the sea inform you. Which of all these does not know that the hand of the LORD has done this? In his hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind. (Job12:7-10)

Recently a group of people arrived at the farm for an impromptu visit. They had come from what is well known as a deprived area of the city. The barn was the usual scene of ewes and lambs characteristic of this time of year. One



of our visitors caught sight of a recently born rather feeble triplet under a heat lamp and asked if she could pick it up. Now holding the lamb snugly in her pullover she announced that she wanted to take it home. Explaining that my reluctance was based on not wishing disappointment if it died, rather than not wanting to part with it, she asked me where it was more likely to survive - in our pen or with her. There could only be one answer to that, so off it went to the city in the minibus. Regular facebook entries now evidence a precious and pampered lamb whose growth rate has surpassed his siblings in the field.

The lives of some of these folk has not been easy. Christian friends of ours who work in the area have noted how farm visits and contact with animals have bridged cultural and social gaps and crossed religious and ethnic barriers. And disciples of Jesus are being made as a result.

God's creation declares His glory, proclaiming the work of His hands. And God uses His creation to heal the hurting, to bind up the broken hearted, and above all to lead us back into right relationship with the Creator.

Paul says to the Romans:

For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities – his eternal power and divine nature – have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that men are without excuse.

We can clearly recognise God from his handiwork. When we know that we are custodians and stewards of this amazing creation we have to accept both privilege and responsibility; not only to farm sustainably but also to make our living green space available to others who need it. In no other industry could the 'factory floor' be considered both a place of production and at the same time therapy.

*The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.*

Creation itself is God's way of drawing us to himself. Through Christ, who is the image of the invisible God, all things were created and all things hold together. And through Christ we have reconciliation and peace through his blood shed on the cross. (Colossians 1). I often wonder at the awesome greatness of Creator God, but also that he made himself a human servant, placing himself within his own creation, becoming one of us in order to rescue us.



*John Plumb
ACF Chairman*

Farming and Trade with the United States:

ACF Submission to the House of Commons Select Committee on Trade

In February we were alerted to a UK-US trade relations inquiry and invited to submit some written evidence to the International Trade Committee. The Agricultural Christian Fellowship is as its name implies an association of Christians engaged in or associated with farming. One of its activities is reflection and advocacy around ethical and policy issues in Agriculture. It was co-founder of a network of some 400 volunteers who work to support farming people who are in any kind of difficulty in England and Wales. This provides a unique insight into the state of farming. The author of this submission, Christopher Jones M.B.E. has also been a part of the UK delegation to the World Food Summit in 1996 and familiar with all the WTO negotiations around bananas some years ago. We are commenting on those of the committee's particular interests, which involve food and farming.

1. What should the UK's priorities and objectives be in negotiating any such agreement?

The enhancement of the common good on both sides of the Atlantic, rather than an increase in the wealth and power over food and environment of a handful of huge companies. The Prime Minister is not alone in thinking that many have felt little benefit from increasing world trade.

2. The possible impact on specific sectors.

Agriculture, practiced by large numbers of comparatively small businesses, is peculiarly vulnerable to trade deals if they are not negotiated with food and farming in mind. Statistically it may look like a small percentage of UK consumption, but it is a percentage that is peculiarly difficult to manage without. World-wide climate change makes the future of supplies on global markets uncertain, so it is important to nurture UK farming. We also need to be mindful of the other functions of farming in care of landscape, watersheds, biodiversity, wildlife, and support of tourism. These are areas in which we are improving, but which are likely to suffer if food production becomes a bargain basement affair.

3. The extent to which any agreement could and should open up markets in public procurement.

As far as food is concerned the answer is "no". Local public procurement of food is emerging as a way of improving school and hospital meals as well as steering farming into sustainable directions. It can also be used to provide education about the natural world. During the recent TTIP negotiations, it was said that legislation in the U.S. protected the right of local authorities to source food locally. That should remain the case; the common good is for both sides of the Atlantic.

4. Regulatory harmonization.

With food and agriculture this is a hot potato! Standards and practices are very different. It would be better to forget harmonization and to establish a principle of mutual respect for each others rules, combined with clear labeling. These rules have evolved over years and reflect the concerns, tastes and cultures of populations, as well as the thinking of experts on what is safe and wise in local circumstances. The U.S. leads the way in obesity and our pursuit of their example needs checking rather than accelerating.

5. Dispute resolution

This requires some thing transparent and capable of taking account of all the implications. The ability of governments to take action in the interest of health or food security should be protected.

Our concluding comment is that new systems and policies will have to be devised for UK agriculture, and it would be better if that were able to be done before a new trade agreement imposed constraints on the process.

Other responses can be found on this website:

<https://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committee-s-a-z/commons-select/international-trade-committee/inquiries/parliament-2015/uk-us-trade-16-17/publications/>

ACF Noticeboard

ACF Conference

There will be a national ACF Day Conference on Tuesday 14th November 2017 at the Arthur Rank Centre at Stoneleigh in Warwickshire. The main speakers will be The Bishop of Lewes: The Right Reverend Richard Jackson, formerly an agronomist, and Lord Donald Curry who will be well known to many of you and is currently a member of a House of Lords Select Committee - the work of which touches many farming issues. The theme will be about how we face uncertain and difficult times as individuals and as a fellowship. More information will be sent out shortly.

Derbyshire ACF forthcoming Events

- Saturday 1st July, 7:30pm **FARM WALK & BBQ** at Thorpe Farm, Hathersage (the home of "Hope Valley Ice Cream"). The Marsden family will be hosting this and the Rev Richard Towle will share a gospel challenge.
- Friday 13th October, 7:30pm **HARVEST SUPPER**. At Millennium Hall, Hulland Ward.
- Saturday 9th December, 7:45pm **CAROL SERVICE** at Dale Road Methodist Church

For further details of any of these events please contact Graham Hinds

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ACF SUBSCRIPTIONS

We will be increasing the annual subscription rates from June 2017. The new rates are:

Individual Membership £20

Joint Membership: £30

Student, unwaged, retired: £16

THOUGHT FOR THE SEASON

God Spot – The problem of the Sabbath

Throughout Jesus' life there is constant friction arising from his activity on the Sabbath day, but he never dismissed it as unimportant. So what lies behind it?

With the 10 Commandments there are a variety of reasons for the Sabbath. There should be a restraint and moderation in work, especially in the way those in subservient positions are made to work, and in the treatment of animals. God rested on the 7th day of Creation and this is a model for our relationship with the natural world. It is God that can sanctify us, not ourselves.

These principles spread into rules about the treatment of servants, debtors, the poor and even the land itself.

Jesus reminds us that Sabbath was made for man, not man made for Sabbath.

WEBSITES

At present we have two websites: <http://agriculturalchristianfellowship.uk> and <http://honeyandthistles.uk>. We are trying to integrate these into one better whole and need someone to give extra help to our current webmaster. *When the Chairman was asking a friend for advice he said it needed somebody good at websites who understood about farming. The reply was that people who were good at websites do not get outside very often! We do need help with this.*

AND FINALLY

Do get in touch with us if there is anything you would like to see in future copies of the ACF Update.

Or perhaps, as Christopher says in his editorial, you may like to contribute something yourself.

All our contact details are on the front page.