



ACF UPDATE



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Editorial

EU – IN OR OUT?

Perhaps I should begin by saying that I write as one of those who has been told that they are unlikely to receive their BPS payment before the end of January 2016! However, since I have no idea whether the reasons for this are to be found in Brussels or London I do not think I will let it influence what follows!

This is a mixture of the practical, the narrowly political and the moral: a difficult mix for Christian discernment. As the NFU has pointed out in its paper 'UK Farming's relationship with the EU' the EU was founded to keep the peace in Europe. It was never conceived as being purely about markets and trade. More recently, it has played a major part in helping the countries of Eastern Europe, newly released from the Soviet empire, to return to orderly and democratic government re-integrated into Europe. Clearly in judging Britain's relationship these wider issues need to be remembered.

However, even at a purely farming level the issues are major. At present, all financial support to UK farming is derived from Europe. This touches us all as individuals very practically! But it is also a wider issue. Broadly speaking total EU support and total UK net farm income are similar, or the same. An end to farm income raises questions of hardship and food supply with

issues of wisdom or folly. Those advocating UK exit from the EU need to be pressed very hard on what they intend for farming. Even if reassuring answers are forthcoming we need to consider what would actually happen. If there were to be a new system of support would there be an interim period of chaos. Historically the record is not encouraging. BSE began here, Foot and Mouth disease ran riot in 2001, in 2005 the CAP Reform was messed up in the UK, a Government facility caused Foot & Mouth outbreak in 2007 and Bovine TB is not under control. Would the introduction of a new farm support system work any better? It also has to be asked whether the UK political establishment really minds whether food is produced here, or merely imported.

These are serious issues with major implications both for farming and food supply and for our relations with our neighbours.

Contents

Page 1	Editorial
Page 2	Prince Charles at Cirencester Modern Gleaners
Page 3	Modern Gleaners continued Food Poverty & Farmers Poverty
Page 4	ACF Bulletin – 25 years ago Introduction to Dai Gwatkin Return visit to Wurtemberg Local Discussion Meetings Thought of the day

PRINCE CHARLES PUTS EMPHASIS ON NATURE AS ROYAL AGRICULTURAL UNIVERSITY STUDENTS GRADUATE

Prince Charles said the agricultural sector would need to take on a different approach.

Farmers must put the protection of natural ecosystems back at the heart of agriculture in order to see dramatic improvement in soil health, organic matter and to ensure genuine food security and long-term human health.

“It will also require the very best of human ingenuity, dedication and resourcefulness. And that, to me, is why farming and land management can never be ‘just another industry,” Prince Charles told students.

“When we talk about agriculture and food production, we are talking about a complex and interrelated system and it is simply not possible to single out just one objective, such as maximizing production, without also ensuring that the system which delivers those increased yields meets society’s other needs.

“These must surely include the maintenance of public health, the safeguarding of rural employment and small holder farming, the protection of the environment and vital natural ecosystems.”

The prince, who has been president of the institution for 30 years, said in managing rural assets, the students would be playing important roles in rural communities.

He added: “I do hope you will also think hard about this human dimension, because the health of the agricultural sector and the health of what is left of the rural community are directly connected in so many fundamental ways.

“I expect this is something you all understand very well, but the wider population certainly doesn’t.”

Speaking after the graduation ceremony, Emma Glenister, who graduated in food production and supply management, agreed it was important to ‘take nature into the heart of what we do to ensure we leave something for our children and grandchildren’.

Anna Bowden, who completed a masters in sustainable agriculture and food security, said she believed there was a place for a mixture of large and small farming systems as long as they did not have ‘detrimental environmental effects’.

MODERN GLEANERS – from the Editors emails

A farmer is standing in a field of perfectly edible but unsaleable sprouts. He has been eating them himself all week as they only need to be washed by hand, but "we can't sell them to the supermarkets because of the way they look with pest damage".

There has been a lot of attention on food wasted by supermarkets and consumers, but it is estimated that 20 to 40 per cent of fruit and vegetables grown in the UK are rejected on cosmetic grounds before they even get to the shops.

To create more awareness of food wasted at farm level and "to put something back into the community", he invited a team from the Gleaning Network UK to the farm last Thursday to glean the sprouts along with a trial crop of kale, kohlrabi and cabbages. Gleaning is the practice of gathering any remaining crop left in the fields after harvest and has been carried out in Europe since the Middle Ages. But it is now growing in popularity again, thanks to the work of the network. It organises gleans around the country and gives the fruit and vegetables to charities such as Fareshare, which redistributes them to school breakfast clubs, women's refuges and luncheon clubs for the elderly.

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"It's undeniable that we need a shift in consumer attitudes to wonky fruit and veg, but also retailers have played a huge part in shaping that expectation," he said and put more emphasis "on the cosmetic rather than the nutritional value of the produce".

The network's first glean took place on a Surrey apple orchard in 2011 and is spreading around the country, with hubs of volunteers in Manchester, Bristol, Brighton, Cambridge, London and Kent. To date, the project has gleaned approximately 110 tons of produce, equivalent to one million portions, with more than 500 volunteers across 55 gleaning days. Although Thursday's glean was on a gloomy day, the weather did little to dampen the enthusiasm of the 10 volunteers who had travelled from London, Suffolk and Cambridge to take part.

Whoever wrote this seemed to be unaware of the Biblical origins of gleaming. Does anybody know more about this organisation?

FOOD POVERTY AND FARMER POVERTY

A new problem has burst onto the scene in recent years – food poverty – people are simply unable to find the money to buy food. There has been a widespread response from Churches in the shape of food banks, nationally co-ordinated by a Christian body – Trussell Trust. At the same time low farm incomes and the related problems have also attracted Christian responses. There has been increasing focus on local food supply. Delays in the payment of financial entitlement by government agencies are an issue in both food poverty and farming problems, but are there any other connections. At first sight there is a conflict. If food is cheaper, food poverty will be less and farmer poverty will increase. Conversely the more farmers are paid, the more food poverty will increase. However, it may not be that simple.

Is this a question ACF should explore?

FROM THE ACF BULLETIN 25 YEARS AGO

The Winter Bulletin was all about an ACF Conference looking at the stresses and strains of farming. By hindsight one can see that this was the beginning of the process that led to the formation of Farm Crisis Network (FCN) as it then was. The keynote address was by Gordon Gatward, who later became one of the five people to put FCN together. Below is a flavour of how his involvement began.

One of the main areas of my work over the last three or four years has been that of counselling farmers under stress. It is one of those things where God really opens up the door to an area of ministry. I did not particularly want to go into it but he booted me through anyway! I first got involved in this ministry through caring for some local farmers and getting very concerned about some of the problems they were facing.

It was because of this that I got involved in organising some conferences for farmers, looking at the whole problem of stress and how we as Christians could respond to it. One of them was at Riseholme College. I found that I was the subject of media attention. As a result of this publicity, I found that I was being asked to go on to radio and television. Some of these interviews were a great help to my ministry, although others were a hindrance.

Some time ago some of you may have watched Countryfile. I was involved in making this programme about farming depression and I found that through this the Lord very firmly put me back into this area of ministry, which I believe is a very important part of my work as an Agricultural Chaplain. I have found I have had people ringing me up at all hours. They have heard my name through the paper, radio and the television. One woman actually rang me up during the course of the programme, and she was crying. I could go on and express a number of situations like this.

INTRODUCTION TO DAI GWATKIN – ACF COMMITTEE’S NEW MEMBER



Dai farms with his Father on 180 acre of grassland in Herefordshire near to the Welsh border. They had to give up milking some years ago, and they now rear dairy heifers on contract for a large dairy farm nearby. This is run on a low impact, lower output system with Jersey cross cows. Dai says this also means low stress.

At the same time he has an almost full time role with the Methodist and Anglican Churches as an Agricultural Chaplain – having trained as a potential Baptist Minister! During that period in South Wales he had experience of a large city church and hospital chaplaincy. He confesses to having once been ‘young and arrogant’. He strikes his fellow committee members as still being young!

RETURN VISIT TO WURTEMBERG CHRISTIAN FARMERS

Those of you in the South West will remember that a bus load of members of the Protestant Farmers’ Association in Wurtemberg, Southern Germany visited us recently. It is this organisation which gave

us much help in establishing FCN 29 years ago. Some years ago they visited Derbyshire and the Midlands.

They are now pressing us to make a return visit. This would provide an opportunity to understand more about their farmer support network, and some of the other work they do for farmers in their area, including running short courses and provided recreational and craftwork opportunities. It will also be possible to visit farms and to learn about their relationships with for example, EU Policy.

We are currently discussing dates, possibly around May. We are also working out the cost. This is a good opportunity. If you are interested please let us know and we will keep you posted as we work it out. The duration would be four or five days, including travel.

LOCAL MEETINGS

In May, we wrote about a local meeting planned for John Plumb’s farm in 2016, and we also canvassed ideas for other local meetings, including some based around ‘Honey & Thistles’. We are now discussing possibilities in Devon, Somerset, the East Midlands, and Suffolk. As soon as we know more we will be in contact.

THOUGHT OF THE DAY – A Lesson from Noah

In the story of Noah, who and what went into the Ark? Noah was told ‘From all living creatures, from all flesh you must take each kind aboard the Ark to save their lives with yours. Of every kind of bird, of every kind of animal and every kind of reptile on the ground.’ Not you notice just the creatures of use to Noah and his family.

Afterwards he was told ‘I now establish my covenant with you and with your descendants after you, also with every living creature to be found with you, birds, cattle and every wild beast, everything that lives on the earth.’

So the story tells us that the natural world is not to be valued just in terms of its use to us, but for its own sake, for its God given value.