



August 2007 newsletter

Harvest 2007 - hedge-to-hedge wheat

Harvest 2007 has seen the largest percentage rise in prices for over a decade. Rises from £90 to £180 had to come at some point and will lead to a reversal of many policies which in the past have been designed to keep supply down to match demand. Grain mountains now are a generation back and world stocks currently barely cover a month of demand. The fact there is usually a harvest somewhere in the world just about to start or finish (the advantage of two hemispheres) is good news but may not help us this time for six months or so. Lee Moor has been alternate set-aside and wheat since 2003 and with set-aside likely to be phased out this year we will see a more balanced rotation. The Farm Bakery of course is at the other end of this price rise and flour prices have risen very suddenly as well.

Remember in all of this that food costs are now less than 10% of disposable income compared to 30% a few decades ago. The days of politics and big business creating cheap food may have evaporated - even if only briefly.

Holidays in Newcastle!!

The Brown family did get away this year - even if only to Stranraer. Uncle George and Mary Bell joined us so that the hunting lodge was nicely full. We dodged the showers and took the opportunity to cross the water to Northern Ireland on two occasions. A visit to Newcastle, Northern Ireland gave me the idea that in the spirit of carbon neutrality the Browns would always holiday in Newcastle - there are 38 around the world and so the world is indeed our oyster.

I was struck by the parallels between Northumberland, Dumfries and Galloway and Northern Ireland. There are as many differences as similarities but they are all rural economies that need an economic engine for sure. Renewable energy and local food will certainly be part of the complex solution on the visit across the Irish Sea. It was also good to catch up with friends John Martin from my days with Young Farmers - yes I was once both of those things - and John Gilliland from my days at the East of Scotland College of Agriculture. Twenty years ago since we left, no sign of a reunion yet. Do get in touch if you want one?



Scarecrow spectacle



The phrase 'men of straw' has rarely been so appropriate than over the August Bank Holiday Weekend in the nearby hamlet of Rennington. Our local paper, the Northumberland Gazette, has once again carried a full album of the scarecrows in Rennington and this year even an audio cast; technology moves onwards! This year's festival was again very successful and with the new Barlow Homes coming to completion and South Farm in Rennington about to be converted I suspect the appetite for this event is still there. Certainly thousands of locals and tourists loved looking around and doing the quiz. The sense of community felt in our tranquil village is even more real when the news is full of stories of gangs and gun crime in urban areas. Visitors left very little litter and the hall, church and several charities benefited from various fundraising activities. In particular the Great North Air Ambulance gained from people's loose change over the three days.

Also on the Bank Holiday weekend was the Glendale Show. The Browns won a family membership for this, so scarecrows were left behind for the day! I have to say what a fantastic job the committee makes of the event and even with the repeated trauma of foot and mouth the show went on - without livestock, but even so with 15,000 people through the gates they certainly pulled off a fantastic event yet again.

Ian E Brown



Foghorn Brown has a message for you...