

THE UPPER ROTHER AND DUDWELL FARM CLUSTER

THURSDAY JANUARY 31st 2019

Real opportunities for Farmer Led Cluster Groups

COLIN HEDLEY – CJH AGRI-ENVIRONMENT CONSULTANTS LTD

Colin Hedley – Who?

- Son of a first generation farmer on Langstone harbour
- Farmed cattle until 2018
- Joined Sussex FWAG in 1991
- CLA conservation adviser from 2002 to 2005 dealing with agri-environment review, uplands and cross compliance
- Became self-employed in 2005
- Am involved with three farmer led farm cluster projects
- For over 10 years was director of Three Harbours Beef Ltd
- Member of FWAG South-East
- Expert on suburban fringe pressures !!!!
- Last resident farmer going back 5000 years

THEN AND NOW / WHAT IS A FARMER?

- Up until the early 20th century half the land was growing energy crops and not food
- In the 1960's half the average wage went on food
- Feeding a population that knew poverty, famine and war
- Farming seemed to be generally well respected
- The proportion of the average wage spent on temperate foodstuffs is under 25%
- No food shortages
- In addition farming manages a generally diverse and stunning countryside which brings economic benefits nationally and locally

YET PRESSURE ON FARMING ACUTE:



- Huge problems, particularly highly visited areas (the reverse of a capitalist economy)
- A seemingly complete lack of respect and gratitude
- Mis-match between customer aspirations and reality
- The better off society has become the worse farmers have been treated
- Society has chosen to replace half the monthly income spent on those managing the countryside to half the income spent on housing going to those who don't manage the countryside
- Little societal concept of vocation or the reality of hard work in all weathers
- This is partly our fault – diversification, lack of co-operation, working harder and longer


WHAT'S THE SOLUTION?

- Local food? Possibly but meat very difficult (high value, perishable, bulky, stealable)
- Increasing production?
- An ever-decreasing spiral which will not be good for the countryside or the farming structure as we know it
- Ultimately not good for society either
- Farming is the foundation of civilisation
- (so can we judge how civilised we are by how we treat our farmers?)



WE ARE APPROACHING OUR WATERLOO MOMENT SO LET'S CHANGE THE RHETORIC

- Subsidies are not environmental payments
- Subsidies to farmers ended in 2005
- Farming is subsidising society – low returns, stress, accident rate, etc vs free access, enhanced house values, underpinning rural businesses, etc
- Farming can deliver a wide range of vital life support benefits for society including food – if society chooses. We cannot deliver / subsidise environmental benefits through food production.
- To deliver this we need well rewarded people who know and understand their land and have the resource to manage it accordingly

- 
- *Farming is the answer, but we need to review our current definition of farming*
 - *If we don't, some land will become unfit for food production*
 - *& will we be able to feed society in the longer-term ?*
 - *People will not and cannot pay more for food that will achieve the level of prosperity that farming deserves, and interest rates will surely only increase.*
 - *For food production I am convinced the economics will come from reducing costs, at least in the short term*
 - **O plus grade and Mr Richard Russell**

TIME FOR CHANGE – FARMER LED CLUSTER GROUPS WILL BE PART OF THAT CHANGE


YOU ARE NOW PART OF A NETWORK OF NEARLY 100 GOVERNMENT FUNDED GROUPS

& THERE ARE OTHERS PRIVATELY FUNDED

ECHOES OF PARTNERSHIP WORKING AND TRAINING DURING THE WAR – HANTS GROWMORE

BUT WHAT ARE THE REAL BENEFITS?



- 
- Focus on environment and your targets will help demonstrate delivery – future will be more focussed on results
 - Training will help you deliver better agreements
 - Partnership working – excellent support including delivery, training, social media, promotion, etc
 - Engagement with the local community- they need you
 - Opportunity for sharing of information, machinery, livestock
 - Opportunity to share and engage with other clusters and advisers
 - Your farming community

AND THERE'S MORE:

- Let's dedicate our focus more on our soils as they are the key to sustainable agriculture
- This should reduce costs, give healthier livestock, happier farmers
- Also allows us to build soil carbon, reduce flood risk, increase water supply, and produce cleaner water
- Private funding – not just water companies
- Soil monitoring trial – will increase knowledge of soil health under different regimes could help reduce housing costs, fertilisers, vet costs, machinery and increase yields
- Huge interest in the concept of farm cluster groups
- Most exciting opportunity for farmers in at least a generation - lets take it!

