

On the farm...

After a cereal harvest to forget, Suffolk farmers are all set to get going again. Arable farmers have another season to plant for with anticipation and optimism, and we only hope that our efforts are rewarded by better results when we get to next year's harvest, certainly something more akin to 'normal' would be appreciated.

I know that farmers are, supposedly, always moaning about the weather. There is, of course, a simple reason for that – weather is fundamental to how successful our efforts are, how much profit, or loss we make in that year. Even now in the 21st century we are still beholden to what Nature delivers.

A double whammy is the best description of the last year, far too wet, too early in the autumn of 2019 resulted in limited opportunities to plant winter cereals, then an exceptionally dry spring and early summer this year, limited the moisture available to the majority of crops. Here at Euston winter sown cereals have yielded 65% of our average, grass has been similarly affected, fortunately those crops that we were able to irrigate have responded to ideal growing conditions and have yielded well, all be it at a significant cost.

Our markets are, of course, only affected to a very limited extent by UK supply. We operate in a global marketplace with currency fluctuations and world supply tending to dictate the price. Thankfully, for cereals at least, a weak sterling and reasonable world price have assisted in easing some of the pain of low yields – wheat has for the first time in many years hit the heady heights of £200 per tonne, 25% up on the year.

With so many unknowns in the world I do think that it is really down to us farmers to attempt to provide some certainty and security, reassure people that no matter what, we will provide the food and some of the fuel that the nation needs – and while we are about it we will continue to protect our natural assets for future generations.

Good productive farming working alongside the environment has to be the solution. Surely, if nothing else, over the last six months we have had a clear demonstration that Nature is, without doubt, very capable of taking control. We must take care that we work with, rather than against this incredible power, rightly harnessing new techniques and science to assist in our quest.

A I Blenkiron 30th September 2020

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