



Summer 2008 Newsletter

Going Hungry

The need for increased food production to feed a growing world, high fuel prices and pressure to reduce carbon emissions are a few more vegetables to add to the boiling water.

When visiting a farmer last week he asked me if I realised that prior to the First World War in the UK we were farming more than four times the amount of dairy and beef animals, pigs and sheep than we do in the UK now. The farmers at that point were only feeding one third of the UK population. Now in 2008 we have far less animals, a substantially larger population and maybe approaching a huge food crisis.

We rely on imports of food and out of season fruit and vegetables. The UK production of food continues to demise due to increasing costs in production and lack of payment being made to the farmer. Supermarkets become richer and more powerful; farmers become poorer and stop farming. Where will this all end? Will the public still afford to purchase organic produce over conventional?

News reports in May are showing that Organic and free range production might not be as environmentally friendly as first thought. DEFRA, who are keen supporters of Organic farming, have conceded that while there has been no direct comparisons between organic and conventional farming, the different types of fodder used in animal diets generates different amounts of methane. Larger amounts of methane are released from diets that are high in roughage related to diets that are high in starch. This will amount to organic farmers producing larger volumes of methane emissions, as organic diets tend to be high in roughage and low in concentrates.

A report by Cranfield University suggests egg production in traditional cages produces 10% less greenhouse gas than free range units of the same production capacity.

With the UK facing a food shortage, will intensive farming once more be the way forward for Britain's farmers? Producing vast volumes of food, smaller production costs and a lower carbon footprint?

Report by Clare Tucker



Hot new danger - Fuel oil theft!

The theft of fuel oil is one of the fastest growing crimes this year. With the price of oil nearly doubling in 12 months, thieves are cashing in. Farmers and homeowners in isolated areas are most hit - sometimes twice after replacing their stolen oil. Some thieves are openly driving tankers into farms; others are using large vans with tanks on the back.

Check the level of your fuel regularly. Many victims don't know the crime has happened until they have 'run out'. Consider buying a close shackle padlock for your tank. Most tanks can be locked at the inspection cover. Lockable filler caps can also be retro-fitted to oil tanks. The installation of security lights that activate when there is movement in the area is a great deterrent. Also consider an oil tank alarm. It will alert you when you're losing oil at a faster rate than normal - either through a leak or the oil being siphoned.



Young Drivers and Tractors

As we are approaching the summer season it may be useful to clarify the licensing restrictions relating to young drivers and agricultural machines.

All motor insurance policies have a general exception excluding claims when a vehicle is being driven by anyone who does not hold a license to drive the vehicle. However it would appear that not everyone is aware of the specific licensing requirements relating to agricultural machines.

If an agricultural machine is used on the public highway or in any other place where the Road Traffic Act applies, the minimum age entitled to drive is 16 years and DVLA License category F is necessary.

However the age limit is increased to 17 years for tractors greater than 2.45m wide. It is important to note that any implements attached to the tractor need to be included when assessing the overall width of the vehicle. The driver must also be a minimum age of 17 if the tractor is towing a trailer/wheeled implement greater than 2.45m wide and/or has more than two wheels, or four wheels close-coupled.

Children under 13 years old must not drive or operate tractors or other farm machinery. It is also illegal for children under 13 years old to ride as a passenger on tractors, ATV's or other farm machinery, unless in a tractor where a passenger seat and seat belt has been fitted and is worn. The legal age for a child to operate a quad bike is 16 years.

Are round bales a costly option?

The recent price increase in silage film wrap will not be helping the overall cost of producing a round silage bale, with the film now accounting for nearly 35% of the total cost of the bale.

If you are producing a large volume of round bale silage you will know the cost of producing a round bale is becoming very expensive, especially if you have to dispose of the film afterwards. At an average production cost of £7.00 a bale, the film alone equates to £2.35, with a 750mm roll of silage film now costing around £47 and only covering 20 bales if using 6 layers.

The battle between clamped silage and round bales is ever changing.

North Somerset Show Success

A great day out was had by customers and staff at North Somerset Agricultural Show in May.

A record attendance of visitors entered the show ground on May bank holiday, to which BKG had a stand to greet clients, talk regarding insurance matters and farming issues. It looks to be a permanent feature in the calendar for BKG to attend for future years. The Whiskey draw was won by farmer, Robert Cole from Kingston Seymour.



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