

The imminent arrival of the 'Perfect Storm' is one of DEFRA's favourite topics at the moment. When it will arrive is not clear but it is very definitely coming during the next forty years and I believe we can already see it brewing on the horizon.

Riders on the perfect storm – ready?

The components of this storm are Population Growth – predicted to increase to nine billion or by 30% by 2050, Water – recognised as an increasingly scarce resource, Energy – oil and gas being finite and already increasing in cost at a terrifying rate. Finally these components will combine with the resulting pressure on Food Security and Scarcity. Separately each component has a significant impact on UK agriculture and food production. Together they create the Perfect Storm. Secretary of state for DEFRA Caroline Spelman MP thinks we are the generation that will be the Riders On The Storm. Exciting.

The problem with sailing a ship in a storm is that you need to be able to react to heavy gusts and swells in an instant. A moment's hesitation will result in disaster or at the very least a dunking. The Riders On The Storm will need a business environment that allows quick thinking, and innovation at speed. Do you reduce the main sail or change it altogether? Do it quick or you'll capsize in the storm!

Richard MacDonald is on our side. His excellent farming regulation task force reported to the Government on ways of reducing regulatory burdens on farmers and food processors. It has recommended more than 200 ways of reducing unnecessary 'red tape'. A glimpse of blue in the cloudy sky which is sadly about to be obscured by DEFRA's hesitation and lack of application to the sensible and essential recommendations. Like a scene from Yes Minister our Jim, (Paice) MP can be seen about to grasp the tiller to make the necessary changes only to be



thwarted by the circling Humphries.

As the storm gathers and to assist her Riders, Caroline Spelman MP helpfully acknowledges the need to simplify CAP. To quote her directly "Easy to say, difficult to do!" Europe is in danger of being caught unprepared in the storm if the wrong decisions are made and those decisions are all the harder with the CAP becoming a social rather than economic policy. Greece will not smooth the passage and if DEFRA manage to make simple complicated as spectacularly as they did with the introduction of the Single Farm Payment scheme in England we will all be looking for the lifeboats.



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Being an optimist I see The Perfect Storm as an opportunity for the UK food and farming industry. The market place is about to get much tougher, the

buffer from the Single Farm Payment will get lower, all inputs will rise in cost and a green input tax will be applied. Against this backdrop food will become an increasingly scarce resource and I remember

enough of Professor Allan Buckwells economics lectures at Wye to know that a scarce resource is what the producer of that resource needs. It will not be an easy passage and the majority of the industry will remain price takers not makers but it will be exhilarating and rewarding for those that can handle it.

The overall mental agility of our industry needs to improve. The unsupported sectors have been agile for decades, those businesses already have a different attitude and each time I have the privilege to work with one I am impressed by their resolute approach to challenging markets. Tightening every nut and bolt is the mantra of one such business for 2011. Simple but effective. Tightening the sails for the Ride On The Storm.

Finally, and on a completely different tack, The Riders On The Storm was the last song on the last Doors album with Morrison. It ends with the storm fading slowly to silence. As it should be, only the fittest Riders will survive.

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