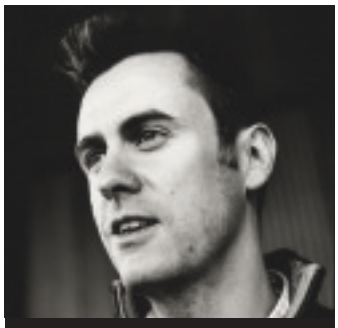

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Meetings, briefings and seminars – it's all jargon

Sometime in late 2005 I, along with many farmers and rural professionals, succumbed to "seminaritus".

With the advent of SPS and the introduction of Environmental Stewardship, CLM and indeed other professional firms in the rural sector were led to devise various seminars, breakfast meetings and evening briefings. We made a concerted effort to bring current and future clients up to speed on the changes afoot, their importance and what they meant in a practical sense. At the same time we also did quite a lot of crystal ball gazing to consider what might happen after 2013. What I perhaps failed to anticipate was the forest of jargon that would spring up to describe the various elements of rural policy that would be implemented.

Let's start at the top with the EU Common Agricultural Policy which is divided into two PILLARS and looks set to remain so. Pillar 2 relates to the Rural Development PROGRAMME. This Pillar has four AXIS. Axis 1, 3 & 4 have various MEASURES of support. Axis 2 primarily relates to the Environmental Stewardship SCHEME. Environmental Stewardship has two LEVELS. The Higher Level has various THEMES and will in fact soon be split into three TIERS. Both ELS and HLS are comprised of many OPTIONS. Axis 2 also funds INIATIVES like the England Catchment Sensitive Farming Delivery.

This only describes one funding stream, entangled in a bureaucratic web of pillars, programmes, axis, measures, schemes and initiatives. You get the gist. Regular readers however will appreciate that I have something of an obsession with rural regulation and compliance, but most of all with opportunities for drawing in funding.

Understanding the Commission's proposal for CAP reform is important to me because it affects my clients. In attempting to pass on information about these changes I apologise in advance if I and my colleagues in other firms infect your calendar with a new epidemic of "seminaritus". But right now this month, when we are faced with getting on for 150 SP5s to complete, I am not so concerned about crystal ball gazing; I am concerned about the here and now. I am thinking about what price entitlements are trading at, and the fact it will be irrelevant for this year by the time you read this; I am wondering how many people know that the Catchment Sensitive Farming Project officers have £10,000 per farm available for those in priority areas, but that applications must be submitted by the end of April. A great many Countryside Stewardship Agreements expire this October but I worry that neither the agreement holders or indeed Natural England know what will happen to them.

All of these issues are in the here and now and we have and will continue to tackle them; to devise appropriate solutions for our clients.

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