

IS BREXIT REALLY THAT IMPORTANT?

Bill and Ben are at their local. "The boss is still talking about going to 300 milkers. An extra 50 cows won't make much difference to the workload but what happens if there is no one to buy the milk?" They chat about Brexit and conclude they know far too little about WTO or international trade agreements to form a meaningful opinion. "We were suspicious when the boss started converting those old calf buildings to offices but he was right. The income helps cushion the blow when the milk price drops!" They reassure each other that everything will be all right.

Politicians and journalists like to quote superlatives. The worst recession ever, the biggest political upheaval since the war, unprecedented disruption; all have been heard in recent weeks. There will be winners and losers, opportunities and threats, survivors and failures. Some suggest the rural sector will suffer more than others, of course much of the produce is perishable and cross border hold ups could be catastrophic. At this point it would be easy to talk the industry into an early grave but, since the dawn of man, there has been a need for farmers to produce food to feed those that do other things. Is anyone suggesting this is going to change?

Bill and Ben are distracted by the boss's daughter standing at the bar. "Has Caroline been on the

farm recently" Ben asks. "You're kidding, she is 18, has the use of her Dad's Range Rover and he pays the credit card bill. I wish my Tracey's future looked as bright as hers! She'll marry into one of those rich families and have a very comfortable lifestyle for the next 50 years. I don't suppose she even thinks about it!"

But Bill and Ben are both wrong. Caroline comes from the generation where climate change has been discussed since year one. The science behind rising temperatures and the predicted outcomes have been discussed thoroughly.

Bill and Ben are amazed when Caroline and her boyfriend Jack join them. Bill turns to Caroline: "I suppose you are not really bothered about Brexit, life must look pretty rosy?" After a few seconds she turns to them and says: "Why on earth do you think life is going to be rosy for us? Dad is worried about Brexit and his decision to go to 300 cows but in my opinion that is a detail. The politicians will eventually wake up, agree trade deals and farming will continue. The population will be fed." Jack then adds: "We are just starting our careers, I want to go to university, get a good job and then marry Caroline and start a family." Some of this is news to her!

Jack continues: "but we can't take anything for granted. We both like the idea of

having a family but don't want to bring children into a world where life for the next generation is likely to be more difficult than it was for the one before it." Bill and Ben are humbled, they hadn't understood the challenges the following generation faces.

"Dad's nearly 60. In 10 years I think he expects me to be ready to take on the farm but with daily comment from vegans, and others, who now focus on the impact intensive livestock farming is having on the environment, farming is not necessarily for me. We may not even be allowed to have a dairy unit in 10 years time. Cows produce enormous quantities of greenhouse gases, we spread tonnes of ammonium nitrate to keep the grass growing and, although we try hard, it seems there is a pollution incident every year."

Ben is beginning to get irritated. "So you are one of those people who think we should stop eating meat and re-wild half the country?" "No," she says, "but it is difficult to square the circle. If it is true that the farming industry is an unintentional polluter it must make sense to adopt techniques which reduce greenhouse gas omissions and other pollutants."

After they have gone Bill and Ben sit in silence but eventually Bill says: "perhaps it's not a case of I'm alright Jack!" As the evening draws to a close they both agree there are far greater challenges ahead than the side show called Brexit!

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MATTHEW BERRYMAN

Partner, CLM

T: 07710 765323

E: matthew@c-l-m.co.uk

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