

Cast your mind back twenty years to the dawn of the new millennium. The world was gripped with excitement and a sense of optimism marred only by predictions of planes falling from the skies, trains grinding to a halt and banks in meltdown as a result of a Y2K software bug. But when the day came all the hype amounted to absolutely nothing!

But now, and as the 2020's loom, we face seismic changes perhaps worthy of the hysteria experienced two decades ago. Even the most robust sceptics now accept that action being taken to address global warming will impact our lives to an ever-increasing extent and it seems inevitable that those born since the millennium will experience more change in the next decade or so than previous generations did in the second half of the twentieth century.

With such uncertainty ahead at least we now know that future agricultural policy will be designed and implemented by British bureaucrats and politicians. We can only speculate on the direction it will take but it is almost certain that financial support will only be provided if wider benefits to the environment are clearly identifiable.

The position presented by the farming industry will be critical. Those representing the sector have the biggest challenge that either they, or their predecessors, have ever faced. The NFU, CLA and

# CAN WE IGNORE CLIMATE CHANGE?

others must present to government a joined-up plan which simultaneously balances the needs of farmers and food consumers but also demonstrates that the protection of the environment is core to the future of the industry.

The farming sector must be ready to adopt changes to production methods and land management practices designed to counter climate change and protect the environment. Opposition will alienate government and consumers alike.

The challenges ahead must be treated as an opportunity to persuade the buying public that British food is good for them and good for the future of the planet. If this message fails to get through consumers will not differentiate between food produced in the UK and imported food from countries not taking action to protect the environment.

We can't ignore that climate change campaigners

have farming, and particularly livestock production, firmly in their sights. The often-repeated accusations that greenhouse gases from livestock are accelerating global warming and also the questionable claims that it takes 7kg of grain to produce 1kg beef are not going to go away.

So, should the industry wait for new policy or grasp the nettle and implement change now? Of course plenty has been done already. Many have stewardship schemes and an increasing number work with authorities to protect water quality. Technology like GPS guidance is widely deployed to reduce chemical use and fuel consumption and cultivation techniques to protect soil are evolving constantly. Contract farming agreements, whilst not new, result in consolidation and significant efficiency improvements.

Whatever your point of view change is inevitable. The future well being of the farming industry is dependent on all stakeholders facing in the same direction. Government must listen to the industry and implement policy which encourages production of food for the nation whilst simultaneously helping farmers to protect the environment. And the farming industry must hear the concerns and fears of environmental campaigners. Their voice will get louder and consumers will listen. Ignoring them will be at our peril.

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