Farming Working Party report for May

The weather was glorious for planting spring barley a few weeks ago, with germination good apart from patches where the rooks had their breakfast, dinner and tea, so leaving some crops patchy, but unless there is significant rain soon the crops will not grow further. The forage maize is being planted now and in the next week if dry conditions continue, but will need rain to help the seeds germinate. Some silage crops have been taken and clamped ready to feed cows and cattle next winter. The rooks are a real pain, as there are so many of them, thousands just drop into ploughed and planted fields as they cannot get much food from grass ground as it is too hard to peck into and the worms etc have moved underground further for moisture. The thousands of rooks must eat an awful lot of insects, worms and bugs from the ground and they pitch into silage pits and eat the grains and maize from in the actual silage pit face and leave their poo. They also pick holes in the sheets covering the crops.

The weather has been extremely kind to outdoor lambing flocks during March/April. The costs per lamb born are significantly less than if lambing takes place indoors, although you still need to feed the ewes, there is less problems with scours, infection and staffing costs.

Prices of bought commodities are still rising with red diesel being one, as tractors will not run an anything else and the spring work has to be done. Fertilizer is still about 2.5 times more expensive than 2019/20 if you can get it, so slurry has now become a valuable source to feed the grass plants or to be ploughed in for forage maize. Cattle and cow bought in feed has gone up 50% and up 100% more for certain feeds and forward contracts in some instances are being broken or addition travel costs added and some protein feed is not available. Our electric is now going up approximately 150% as there is no cap on business electric rates.

Almost all farms in the Marshwood Vale have some sort of holiday accommodation, either camping, caravans, shepherd’s huts or self catering barn conversions or cottages. Bookings this year have been good again with people opting to stay in Great Britain and with the Ukraine/Russia war the uncertainty is bound to help rural tourism. We are all encouraged to offer some sort of other option for incomes on farms as it is a very precarious business to be in.

We have to rely on what our customer eg the milk companies or abattoirs are willing to pay for our products. The price of lamb is a little cheaper than last year but both milk, (which is in short supply this year due to staff shortages for milking and price increases), and beef are up on last year.

Countryside Stewardship grants are available but you have to sign up, pay all the bills associated, advisor fees, planting seed eg wild bird cover crops and wait a year before you see any money from RPA, but once into the second year it speeds up.