

Farming Interests Working Party September report.

It has been a very difficult summer for harvesting and silageing with many dull damp days and often rain which although made the grass grow quickly, kept the grain moisture too high and would need drying. The maize crops have had a hard year and are well below the amount of crop compared to last year. There are many bare spots where the seed rotted and some fields were patched later to fill in, but it needed hot sun in July and August which was in short supply, so will make harvesting the maize crop later in the year. September sun and dry weather has helped, but we hope for a dry autumn to harvest and re drill the fields with wheat or grass seed. As part of Countryside Stewardship rules a lot of maize has to be off the fields and they need to be replanted by October 15th. The use of special Horsch drills that do everything from working the top few inches of soil to planting the seed in one pass over the ground is now being used evermore. Ploughing the land in the autumn is now not recommended due to the possible run off of soil and water and the impaction of the soil when the weather is wet.

Prices for beef and sheep have kept up to the higher level due to shortages with breeding stock and the finished product. Milk prices have crept up a little but the inputs like feed, fertilizer, seed, fuel and straw have jumped up in the last few months. The shortage of lorry drivers and abattoir workers is now being felt with supplies often arriving later than expected, but farmers are resourceful and can often borrow from friends and neighbors to keep going. The ABP chain of abattoirs is short of 600 workers in the country and at Yetminster 16 packers short. In time this will filter down the chain to farms and shops. With 5 dairy farms given up in the last 4 years in the Marshwood Vale and parts of several farms now into Environmental Schemes there is less food eg milk being produced in the area.

The holiday bookings have been good all around the area for campers, caravans and self catering businesses; let's hope it continues well into the autumn. It has made the Vale roads busy but with very few problems or traffic jams. The local main roads have been extremely busy this year with passing through traffic.

There is still a high level of government rhetoric and public support for tree planting and high targets but a shortage of land area, financially beneficial schemes labour and trees themselves constrain the market. Other serious factors including squirrel, deer and the emergence of new pests and diseases make successful tree planting very difficult. Meanwhile timber prices are up 40% for construction and furniture grade timber with a reduction in imports driving even higher market prices and local demand. The new firewood surety scheme comes into place in early April which can drive better quality firewood with lower moisture but does place new burdens with costs of over £1000 pounds for producers to register with Hetas - again favouring large scale production cheap imports and putting high costs on local producers.