

## Farming Interests Working Group

It was good to hear that a Brexit Deal was done with the EU, but we await the small print and what changes will come the rural and agricultural way. There was immediately more confidence in the sheep trade and lamb prices jumped over night, but that was due mostly to a shortage, as many lambs had been slaughtered in the late autumn and early winter on the assumption that once we left the EU with a deal or no deal, the prices would drop by 30% as had been the forecast. Also the wet weather conditions do make a tremendous difference to the sheep, as in wet weather they need so much more energy just to walk around and do not flourish as in drier conditions. Milk prices are stable although there again we had been warned that the buyer could not give a price for January milk due to Brexit talks and are still waiting for confirmation. Beef prices have dropped a little in December but abattoirs will take all that is produced. The price of straw has rocketed this winter due to a shortage of cereal crops last year and the wet harvest.

The ongoing problems of TB restrictions on farms in the Vale who have had inconclusive results is proving very expensive and worrying for the farms involved and animal movements on and off the farms are not allowed, until two negative TB test results 6-8 weeks apart are received for all animals. It is extremely sad when animals are taken by Animal Health and biopsies are negative on death and no TB is found. The compensation is about 75% of the value of the animal.

Countryside Stewardship Agreements for those farmers wishing to take part have been finalized by RPA in late December as they start on January 1<sup>st</sup> 2021. With more acres planted to wild bird seed and environmental crops it does bother me that we are exporting the food shortage problems in this country to third world countries where the rain forests are being destroyed to grow food crops for other nations to import and with all the haulage problems that will increase global warming.

The lack of visitors this year on rural holiday businesses due to Covid has been catastrophic and although there have been some grants from Government that has been mostly returned to guests or used for regular payments.

There is a lot of low spirits amongst the rural, agricultural population due to COVID, steady removal of the BPS payments, ELM rules yet to be finalized, TB restrictions, worries over Brexit, continued wet weather, but a lot of that is the winter SAD complaint and come spring they all bounce back with more optimism !!!!