

# Blue Sky Thinking

## Chapter Six

### September 04

We finally finished harvest, although things did get a little fraught. On the Monday, we had been stuck for days in a field of flat triticale and still had 250 acres to combine. The weather forecast informed us that rain was due on Friday morning. Michael called in the contractors and phoned every farming colleague we knew, who had finished combining. By Wednesday morning we had four combines rolling and the last bit of spring barley was in the barn by 7.30 on the Thursday evening. The rain duly arrived on Friday. We were immensely grateful to our friends, who turned out to help us in spite of the fact that they must have needed another combining job like a hole in the head! I don't think that Michael realises just how much affection and respect he commands in the local farming community.

During the wet period, the meat room was finished and I was able to collect the beef from the abattoir as arranged. The bullock filled twenty 12kg boxes, which in turn, filled my brand new freezers. Since then, I have been kept busy distributing advertising flyers and newsletters around the district and I have already sold ten boxes, with lots of promises of more orders when people have space in their freezers. I have just sent out the first Bradford's Farm newsletter to our database of existing contacts, which surprisingly turned out to number over one hundred people. Storing fortytwo caravans can have unexpected plus points! Hopefully the newsletter will generate more orders and I will be soon be able to book the next animal in for slaughter. Meanwhile, I have been on a 'Meat Marketing' course run by the Soil Association in partnership with the Netherfield Centre. This was a useful day which reassured me that we are on the right track and also that our pricing structure is broadly in line with our competitors. I did suffer a bit of ribbing from fellow farmers, because our marketing flyer promotes our Aberdeen Angus beef, but a rogue Simmental is visible in the picture! I guess I will have to remove her when I reprint.

I am a Director and a trustee of Action in rural Sussex, our local rural Community Council. We recently organised a 'question time' debate billed as 'Sussex Countryside - Loved to Death?' which was held at Glyndebourne. The panel was made up of Sussex celebrities, politicians, landowners and representatives of regional government. It was an interesting afternoon, but at times, panel members displayed a startling level of ignorance about rural issues. One questioner sought the views of the panel regarding the lack of services available to people in the countryside and was told (by a resident of Brighton & Hove), "Is it reasonable for people who live in the countryside to expect an urban level of services? You choose to live there; you can't have your bun and your penny." If only life was that simple...

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The Laughton & District Agricultural Society recently held its annual ploughing match at a lovely farm on the Downs above the port of Newhaven. The site certainly added an extra dimension to the usual downland view: beautiful, undulating countryside and the opportunity to watch the boats and ferries bustling in and out of the river. The horses provided the visual icing on the cake and the edible variety at the tea stand in the marquee was excellent too! We were back at Glyndebourne in the evening for the celebratory dinner and for the giving of cups. The menu is usually fairly traditional, but this year the dinner committee were more adventurous and instead of the usual roast beef, we had an excellent meal of guinea fowl. The speeches were mostly light-hearted and entertaining, although I was somewhat disheartened by the words of the elderly President, who was looking forward to a day when we would 'stop this diversification nonsense and get back to proper farming'. I hope that most farmers will see the benefits of diversification and change, both for themselves and for the community as a whole.

A couple of months ago I described our limited involvement with a reality TV programme, which planned to offer a farming experience to a group of celebrities. The end result, formally known as 'The Farm', or informally as 'Pig Brother', has just appeared on Channel 5. I'm very glad that we did not end up hosting the programme, as all my fears about lack of reality and stereotyping have been realised. It is just like the 'Britains' model farm with which we all played as children, with Stan Collymore hand milking the well trained, professionally groomed cow. Paul Daniels has walked out in protest, saying that it isn't a true representation of British farming. I never thought I would agree with Paul Daniels, but there's a first time for everything!