

Blue Sky Thinking

Chapter Two

May 04

May has been rather a mixed month. We had a couple of wet weeks, which put my husband Michael into 'moaning farmer' mode. I pointed out that the crops needed watering after the dry spell and that we needed some time for business planning and financial projections, but my words fell on deaf ears. He continued to chunter until the land dried out, the spraying was up-to-date and the final fifty acres of oil seed rape was drilled and rolled in. Now he is in an agitated state because he has grass seed and wild flower mix to drill in our Countryside Stewardship areas, but he is too busy picking up silage bales. Comments about prioritisation and time management are not well received!

In spite of his mood, we did manage some discussion about future plans for the business. As I mentioned last month, reform of the subsidy system means that we can do things differently and strange though it seems, we may be better off if we give up some of the land which we currently rent. We raised this during a discussion with our bank manager. He seemed broadly supportive of our business proposals, but asked us to do a three year financial projection of the implications of giving up land. This proved to be a valuable exercise which clearly demonstrated that 'less is more'. It seems that now in the farming world, *'It is **what** you do, not how much you do it'*, that gets results, but time will tell.

I have continued to work on developing our diversification plans, but unfortunately, recently I caught a nasty bug and found myself laid up ill for a week. Whilst working for the NHS, I was paid for time off sick. Regrettably, when you are self employed, no-one does your work or generates any income while you are draped across the sofa with only Richard and Judy for company! However, even if you are an employee, in farming you can find yourself in a different world. The other day, Michael was reminiscing about childhood Saturday mornings, when he accompanied his father to the butcher, the green grocer and down to the fields to give the hired hands their wage packets. He could not fathom my shrieks of outrage and my insistence that pay day should be Friday! Farmers have no understanding of that wonderful, 'Thank Crunchie it's Friday!' feeling which is experienced by the rest of the working world.

Elsewhere in Little Horsted, the working world is making an impact. Apparently one of the former farmhouses that is regularly rented out has become a *'discreet country location with ample parking for the discerning gentleman'*. The pub talk is full of this juicy news - reports of short skirts and large cleavage abound and the fee of £80 for half an hour would certainly pay the rent! Some of our farming neighbours are having difficulty seeing the funny side of it. They were not helped by Michael ambling into their farm vegetable shop early one morning, solemnly enquiring whether he was in the right place for sex tips or asparagus tips! It is never dull in the country.