

The need for a collaborative approach to the UK Farming and Food Security Problem



Watching the stories unfold around UK Farming and Food Security is as frustrating as it is concerning for these following significant reasons:

1. The Government isn't going to change course on its overall relationship with UK Farms and Farming. Even if some media friendly concessions are made. *Much like two of the UK Supermarket chains this week making public announcements that they support our Farmers over the Inheritance Tax issue, whilst at the same time taking no action to create genuinely change that would help Farmers to receive an income that reflects the role that they have as a Key player in the Food Chain.*
2. Farmers are committed to 'changing unchangeable minds'. *Because of the way that the Agricultural Marketplace and the systems feeding in and out of it have been deliberately manipulated over a period exceeding 50 years.*
3. There is an industry-wide dependency upon subsidies and contract production/trading arrangements that effectively surrendered the control of UK Farms and Farming to the establishment (primarily EU 'modelling') and big business, which has resulted in a cultural deprogramming of some of the most creative and entrepreneurial mindsets to exist within the SME, operational business world.

4. A situational bias exists within the UK Farming community, UK agricultural academia, UK Farming advocacy organisations and the industry media and commentariat, where the solutions to the problems that many freely elucidate and the outcomes that they desire are only considered within or relating to the structure of the existing economic paradigm and cultural deference that the general UK population has to the Public Sector, NGOs, Government, Politicians and public figures, or those in 'a position of responsibility' or influence.
5. The reluctance or objection to 'going a different way' that adheres to UK legal requirements, *but is itself not led or reliant upon government, the public sector or any industry bodies that are heavily influenced by them*, is based purely upon the idea that Farmers themselves taking responsibility for investing in either the diversification of their own enterprises or collectively with other local or like businesses, will offer unacceptable levels of financial risk. Whereas waiting for the government, public sector, industry bodies and those businesses like Supermarkets to 'wake up' and 'invest to save UK Farming' will not.
6. The latent pool of knowledge, experience and understanding that exists within the Farming community, throughout agricultural academia and the supporting sectors, has the ability to offer industry changing outcomes that would quickly return Farming and Food Production to the central role within UK Communities that it traditionally had, and still should. Based on the reality that Food is as essential as Air to breathe and Water to drink for every person, each and every day.
7. Those members of the wider Farming community with platforms and voices to be heard remain focused on promoting the issues, solutions and outcomes as their own view and experience enables them to see them. Too often overlooking the reality that there are profound threads of commonality between every one of them which are all too often being overlooked, as the default position is for everyone to focus on what is 'right', *only for them*.
8. This was the situation a year ago. A year before that and so on. IHT has just focused the imagination of more people than before. [But could prove counterproductive.](#)

It doesn't stop there. But going into further reams of detail will not help anyone who is not open to the collaborative, community approach that has now become necessary for UK Farming to evolve and regenerate itself into a model of working and operation that will not just allow it to survive. But actually thrive.

As an experienced business leader who spent 12 years in frontline politics after being a local government officer and senior charity manager, then embarking on a research and thought journey that took me to complete a PGCert in Sustainable Ag and Food Security at the RAU, I have a perspective on what is happening that doesn't conform to stereotype to say the very least.

Whilst I have written extensively about the Food Security situation, attempted to broaden others perspectives on [how the Food Chain really works](#), suggested a way to use the issues with Red Tractor to launch [a new Food Quality and Provenance Assurance Scheme to begin a revolution in UK Farming](#) and focused on [the role of Local Food Chains with the Community in the Future](#), I have been doing so purely with the intent of opening a door.

The door I am referring to opens to the room of collaboration and discourse where using everything as we are doing it and know it, is left behind. Because this all represents the past, and what whoever or whatever is really driving all the problems that UK Farming faces wants to happen and intends to be in place.

Although [I made my misgivings clear about the aims and approach of No Farmers No Food from the start](#) and have seen nothing yet to suggest that they are anything other than a problem awareness raising vehicle, I keep a close eye. Hoping that something will change and a touchpaper or catalyst might appear that will at least begin to bring the different ideas, views and suggested solutions together in a way that opens every mind to learning from each other's views and most importantly, leaves the egos behind.

In [a tweet yesterday](#), No Farmers No Food, talked up the value of marketing boards as many will remember them with the inference or suggestion that they could be of great help to UK Farming, if they were to exist now.

It was [one of the rare occasions when I felt that I wanted to respond](#), seeing that there are principles that could be highly beneficial in the fight to save UK Farms and Food Security today, depending upon the approach taken and what the model of such organisations would be and how they would operate today.

I haven't focused on 'marketing boards' in anything like the historic sense. In no small part as their demise arguably led and fed into many of the problems that the industry faces today. Because the platform they offered was not protected as it should have been by government and the public sector, and was in no small way exploited by a range of different profit driven organisations for the levels of financial gain which have led to the crippling financial straightjacket that UK Farming now finds itself in.

However, [Hector Wetherell McNeill from the George Boole Foundation Limited replied](#) and linked a paper to my tweet that they have recently published titled 'Agricultural Commodity Marketing Boards', which you will find if you [follow this link HERE](#).

I'm grateful that Hector responded as he has done. As whilst I would suggest there is broader a broader picture to consider that I have touched upon in the points above, and I don't believe that marketing boards are in and of themselves a solution to the mess that UK Farming is now in, there are a number of very valuable points and suggestions made that could be massively helpful within a cooperative operational business or some kind that has a

system of governance that runs locally and outside the influence of any of the usual suspects that quickly come to mind.

I would certainly be supportive of the discussion group idea that the proposal discusses and feel sure that the communication technology that is now readily available could be used to create a discussion and ideas sharing platform that could prove to be game-changing indeed.

I will end here by saying only that there are no politicians and no political party that exists today that can or will be able to make the changes to the UK Farming industry that only Farmers and the businesses that are aligned with the sector can and have the power to do so themselves.

The only thing that is really stopping UK Farming from making the changes that are now needed is the recognition that the power to make those changes rests only with UK Farmers themselves.

Many thanks again to Hector and best wishes to you all.

Adam

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