

Letter from Scotland

They may have their moans and groans about the European Common Agricultural Policy but Scotland's farmers are more than wary about Brexit. A survey published by the National Farmers Union to coincide with this weekend's Royal Highland Show found that only 11 per cent of farmers and crofters feel positive about life after Brexit...whatever form it takes and whenever it actually happens.

Already nearly half of farms have felt the effects of Brexit and its uncertainties – higher costs, lack of investment and difficulty recruiting seasonal workers. There is a lot at stake because agriculture is still one of Scotland's biggest industries – one in every ten jobs depend upon it.



When will Brexit end ? When the cows come home.

A visit to this weekend's show at Ingliston in Edinburgh will give you a feel for the size of this industry. There are over a thousand exhibitors, 6,500 animals on parade, a crowd of 200,000 people over the four days. The show itself is estimated to generate £65m for the Scottish economy. It's the showcase for our entire food industry, now attracting more of our attention with our national diet under discussion, exports and imports of food a growing concern and the industry's role in combating climate change a subject of much controversy.



The Secretary of State for Scotland David Mundell arriving at the UK Government tent at the Royal Highland Show 20 June 2019
PHOTO ©2019 The Edinburgh Reporter

The Scottish Government has a “Good Food Nation” bill on the stocks at Holyrood. Everyone is waiting to see the results of the public consultation and whether the legislation that will follow will be anything more than fine words. Words about food standards, methods of production, food miles, labelling, waste, school and hospital meals, diet, obesity, food poverty and of course the effects of Brexit on our current GM free status.

Did I mention climate change ? Hardly a week goes by without another protest. As the Greenpeace “occupation” of an oil rig in the Cromarty Firth came to an end, more protestors lay down in Lothian Road in Edinburgh to try to block the flow of carbon-burning traffic. And a tented village of climate change activists has sprung up in the grounds of the Scottish Parliament.



Climate camp at Holyrood

But MSPs inside voted down an attempt by the Green Party to move the target date for net zero carbon emissions from 2045 to 2042. That's still much later than the activists would like but it is five years ahead of the target set by Westminster. And all the targets are but aspirations with, as yet, little immediate consequences for drivers, air passengers, home owners or consumers.

“Aspirations”, it turns out, are all we can expect from the next prime minister at Westminster. In the glare of TV debates and interviews, the candidates for the Conservative Party leadership gradually watered down their impossible promises, like squaring the circle of Brexit, cutting taxes at the same time as increasing government spending, and “bringing the party and the

country together.” Nicola Sturgeon said whoever is chosen will cause as much damage to Scotland in 18 weeks as the Tories did under Mrs Thatcher and John Major in 18 years.

The “English Tories” even came in for criticism this week from the leader of the Scottish Tories, Ruth Davidson. She was commenting on an opinion poll among English Conservative Party members which found that 63 per cent wanted Britain to leave the European Union, even if it meant Scotland going independent. Ms Davidson said English Tories should take a long hard look at themselves.

And so to polluted blue water of a different kind. Teachers at a school in Lanarkshire are on strike in protest at the way complaints about “blue water” are being handled. They fear that the water supply at their school, Buchanan High in Coatbridge, has been contaminated by an old dump site for industrial waste underneath the new building and has caused cancer among four of their colleagues. Parents and pupils have also complained of illness and a local petition of 16,000 names has called on the school to be closed.

The local council says there is no evidence that the “blue water” caused any illness and, in any case, the pipes have been replaced. But at FMQs Nicola Sturgeon promised a review would be carried out by independent experts.

Finally, we have all been reviewing Scotland’s 3-3 “defeat” at the Women’s Football World Cup in France. Shelley Kerr’s team

had to win against Argentina to stay in the competition and, until 16 minutes before the end, they were enjoying a 3-0 lead and breathing pure oxygen at the Parc des Princes.

Then it all went wrong. The Scots “took their eyes off the ball” and allowed Argentina to score two goals. They became nervous and caused a penalty. It was saved by the goal keeper Lee Alexander but a second penalty was awarded because she had inadvertently moved before the ball was struck. Of course the wicked VAR (video assisted referee) was blamed for the whole fiasco. But the hard truth is that once again Scotland managed to draw defeat from the jaws of victory.

I’m sure my brother, who was there, felt like throwing himself in the River Seine.