**On the farm...**

Some certainty for the future has helped to encourage farmers to start and set the direction for their businesses. The knowledge that we have a trade deal with our nearest market and development of the agricultural transition plan on the back of the 2020 Agriculture Bill, have given us some set targets to work to, all we need now is for the UK market to demonstrate its determination not to buy the cheapest food from around the world and to stick with us British farmers.

The weather at the end of February has certainly given us hope that here in Suffolk we may get an early spring for a change, but that can all change very quickly! Drier conditions here at Euston have allowed for early carrots, under the cover of plastic, and onions to be sown into good soil conditions and - as tractors work well into the dark - land is presently being prepared for sugar beet and forage maize to be sown later in the spring.

Those with heavier, clay-based land are having to continue to be patient and wait for the soils to dry before their tractors can roll. Autumn sown cereals are mostly a two-part crop, those sown in September, before the autumn deluge, look fantastic and have come through the winter well. Then there are those crops that were sown in difficult, sticky, wet, miserable conditions in October, and even later, some of which have endured saturated soils most of the winter, resulting in shallow root systems making them very vulnerable to a spring drought. Similar conditions in spring 2020 led to devastating cereal yields and significantly reduced arable farm incomes, the extent of which depends on just how much of the crop has been sold forward. With feed wheat presently trading at almost £200 per tonne, a ten-year high, it was a brave or more likely a lucky soul that held onto all their crop to sell at these inflated values.

Those feeding this expensive grain to their livestock, are, obviously, not at all happy, all of which emphasises just how the volatility of volume and price can have a significant effect on all farming businesses, so now, without the security of a base payment, we are going to have to find other ways of coping with fluctuating levels of income. Never mind all of that though, isn’t spring in the countryside just fantastic? The delight of new life and new hope bursting forward wherever you look.

**A I Blenkiron 28th February 2021**

***Andrew Blenkiron is estate manager, Euston Estate, vice-chair of Suffolk NFU and has an active role with Assured Food Standards, the organisation that operates the Red Tractor scheme.***

**andrewblenkiron@euston-estate.co.uk**