

Farming during the pandemic

The necessity to stay well has added to the anxiety and isolation caused by Covid-19. As harvest approaches, Daphne and Peter report from their farm in Narberth

There we were, hoping for a holiday this year and Covid-19 hit the world. Worrying and distressing reports in the media. We watched from the comfort of our farmhouse home with increasing trepidation and disbelief as people were attending large crowd events just when we were battenning down the hatches. Hoping for a holiday together is all we ever do; the farmer has not left the farm overnight for many years. We are used to isolation but this was to prove to be on another level.



Lockdown for us meant a normal day's work in abnormal circumstances, with added anxieties about the welfare of our workforce. Would they be able to come to work? Would they be stopped by the police? (they were) Would they be safe? The difficulties of social distancing when handling stock. TB testing, usually completed in a week, took a month to finish, with added measures to contend with. Ordering medications in advance and depending on deliveries and goodwill of so many agricultural companies and their workforce. Constant worries and, not least, would the milk tanker arrive each day to collect the milk? We were lucky with our milk buyer but many farms were less so with payments hit badly creating huge anxiety for many, impacting businesses and causing financial strain.

“Stay calm and carry on”. We didn’t always. The anxieties over the welfare of distant family and friends, some shielding, others working as keyworkers, not being able to physically go and help them, trying to stay healthy ourselves, all had an effect.

Contingency plans were written to enable the farm to function should the farmer fall too ill to work, a frightening scenario at the best of times.

Gratitude, unfelt before, for the internet and technology and the option to communicate by it, even teaching our grandchildren by video calling.

Coronavirus hasn’t directly impacted our harvest, the work continues and the weather has been kind in 2020 with good silage yields. There have been greater worries for those harvesting food crops, not least the lack of available workforce to pick, for several reasons.

We noticed the footpaths becoming visibly overgrown with fewer walkers, possibly restricted by the five-mile travel limit. The little church beyond our kitchen door stands sadly closed although the grounds have been maintained. The occasional visitor can be seen trying the door despite the notice of closure hanging on the handle. We have been told there is unlikely to be a Harvest Service this year. We wonder if one could be held outside in full view of the fields around and embracing the weather on which we are so dependent for our crops.

A time to sow and a time to reap, and not just that planted in the field maybe.

Whatever is happening in the pandemic, the grass still grows and hope springs eternal. The work goes on to feed the people.

We felt blessed in comparison to many during lockdown and thank God for his protection. We feel for those who have lost loved ones. God willing, please let there be better times for all ahead.

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