FARMING REPORT – Summer 2017

Due to lack of space in the magazine, my last report had to be edited and for those of you that thought it didn’t make a lot of sense the full version can be seen on the website. Writing this at the beginning of May we are desperately in need of some rain and the cold northerly winds are unseasonal.

On a positive side, spring sowing was completed without too many problems and the cooler weather has kept disease levels low. Retaining moisture has been vital to get seeds to germinate and unlike your garden where you can turn on the hosepipe, we have no means of irrigation, so we are in big trouble if we do not get rain.

Even those of you who are not farming must have noticed that the rapeseed flowered very early this year and has continued to flower longer than normal. I hope this means that we will get a good crop. The spring barley sown on the thin chalk soil is not at all happy, we rolled some of it a second time to retain moisture and will give it a spray of nutrients to try and revive it.

Many livestock farmers are experiencing problems with starlings eating cattle feed and contaminating it with their droppings. Losses of about £1 per cow per day are not uncommon and on a 300 cow herd it is a significant amount of money. Trials are being carried out by adding garlic to the feed as a deterrent and results so far are encouraging. The same thing occurs locally with outdoor pigs where their food is very attractive to the ever increasing population of rooks and gulls!

70% of the total land in this country is managed by farmers and they are responsible for 373,000 kms of hedges and 900,000 hectares of woodland. The total value to the UK economy in 2015 was £46 billion. Also in the same year 936,000 cases of fly tipping on farmland were reported and in most of these cases the farmers had to pay to have it cleared up. The worst case was in Essex where one farmer was landed with a bill of over £100,000.

Our electricity has now been upgraded from single to three phase. I must say that Scottish and Southern Energy have been most helpful at all stages ( once you get through to the right department – only to be beaten by BT for time spent on the phone! ) Having said that we did all of the excavations, bought the sand to line the trenches, paid for the moling under the drive in 4 places and bought the ducting for the cables. SSE then came along and laid the cable in the trench and connected it and charged us a fairly hefty sum so that we can enjoy the privilege of buying their electricity.

We have planted a lot more hedging again this year and I am pleased to say that it growing well. The ever increasing population of deer do find it rather tasty which is annoying to say the least. We now have Fallow deer as well as Roe deer on some of our land, they are magnificent looking animals but by their size and numbers are able to do considerable damage to crops.

The Brinkman family have been our farming neighbours since the 1930s . Mr Brinkman senior was a Dutchman who started with just one acre which he dug by hand and grew roses. He moved to Bosham in the depression and found a niche market for more roses and then famously fruit trees and became one of the largest growers in Northern Europe. They gave employment to many local people in and around Bosham until his son Eric sold the business and retired in 1996. It was the end of an era when Eric died a couple of years ago and it was sad to hear that Mrs Brinkman died last weekend, both of them living well into their 90s.

With margins for growing arable crops becoming tighter most farms are looking for other forms of income. Holiday lets, bed and breakfast, buildings let for storage, clay pigeon shooting, camp sites and wedding venues to mention a few. We are joining the bandwagon and have a field suitable to hire for weddings. We have a family wedding of our own this summer and it will be good to get family and friends together to celebrate. It`s also a great incentive to get the farm tidy!