

# Cam Corridor Strategy

The Importance of Water to UK Agriculture –  
making every drop count

By Richard Pemberton

# 1 Introduction



- ▶ Soil and water are the key assets of any farming business, particularly in irrigation based farming enterprises
- ▶ Careful management of water resources will help farmers reduce their environmental footprint, drive business opportunities and save money.

- ▶ The chemical and biological quality of water that farms use affects the types of crops that can be grown and ultimately the productive and financial capacity of the holding.
- ▶ In 2008 the UK was 60% self sufficient in indigenous vegetables and 38% self sufficient in fruit. It is critical that Government water policy recognises that fresh produce production is classified as a reasonable, justifiable and essential use.
- ▶ A wide range of industries rely on abstracted water, particularly the chemical, metals, paper, food and drinks industries, with the main process being cooling.
- ▶ 20% of electricity generation depends on abstracted fresh water to ensure the availability and affordability of electricity

# 2 Climate Change

- ▶ Climate change may lead to higher temperatures, but will also lead to more extremes of flood and drought
- ▶ Climate change could lead to improved yield potential and a wider diversity of crops being grown, but it will only transpire if there is adequate water available for irrigation
- ▶ Environment Agency have no more than 24 hours storage, putting pressure on water supply in times of drought.
- ▶ More storage for farmers and possibly the EA is essential and could help mitigate the effects of flooding.



# Trumpington Estate reservoirs at Cantelupe Farm



- ▶ The largest changes in rainfall patterns and higher temperatures are forecast for East Anglia, where competition for water supply will also increase due to a rising population.
- ▶ Sustainable abstraction and sustainable water storage is critical and the Government must ensure this happens.

# 3 Water Licensing – Current Position

- ▶ Current system dates from 1960s. 20,000 licences in place in England and Wales
- ▶ Allows abstractors to take a fixed volume of water regardless of availability.
- ▶ Since 2001, new licences have a 12 year life and may not be renewed if abstractor has no need for the water.
- ▶ Water trading under the current system is difficult and slow, so rare.
- ▶ Abstraction charges vary according to the season and consumption

## 4 What are the main aims of Government reform of the water abstraction management system?

- ▶ Maximise the amount of water available to all abstractors
- ▶ Promote efficient use through charging mechanisms
- ▶ Facilitate trade, allowing new entrants to access water
- ▶ Provide reasonable certainty for abstractors for planning their businesses



- ▶ Protect water ecosystems in line with legal requirements, ensuring that reform does not lead to environmental deterioration



Bourne Brook a tributary of the River Cam

- ▶ Ensure the new system is able to respond to longer-term changes in water availability
  - ▶ Water storage reservoirs in times of high water flow
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- ▶ More efficient household and new build house design criteria

# 5. Proposals for Review

## i) Current System Plus

- ▶ Licences reviewed to leave enough water in rivers or ground water for the environment when levels are low
- ▶ Strengthen link between water availability and permitted abstraction
- ▶ Regulator would make water trading easier
- ▶ Abstractors would have annual and daily limits like now
- ▶ Ground water abstraction could be varied over the long term in response to changes in availability

# 5. Proposals for Review

## ii) Water shares

- ▶ Abstractors would have a share in the available water resource, rather than an absolute amount
- ▶ Abstractors would receive a water allocation for a fixed period based on the available resource at the time and the reliability and size of their share
- ▶ Allows for pre-approval of shorter term trading between abstractors and a wide range of trades

## 6. A personal view

- ▶ A fair allocation of water for the land-based business sector is essential
- ▶ Water entitlements should be allocated to land owners and then recognise other 'users interests'
- ▶ If water rights are sold there is a real danger of land being devalued, which would be critical where mortgages are in place. Compensation should be paid by the Government if this happens.
- ▶ If a trading market develops it is critical that agricultural businesses are not priced out of the market by other sectors. Consider the establishment of water abstractor groups

- ▶ Essential to make planning permission easier for development of on-farm reservoirs. If abstraction licenses are to be time limited, they must be sufficiently long to allow investment in reservoirs to be written off over say 25 years
- ▶ Consider incentives for construction of reservoirs e.g. joint community ventures using public and private funding
- ▶ Investment in R&D to develop new irrigation technologies and crops resistant to weather extremes
- ▶ Food security is vital. Consider 'ring fencing' a minimum volume of water that growers will have access to
- ▶ Food production must be reflected in the Government's review of water policy



# Conclusions



- ▶ The River Cam corridor and the tributaries provide a vital corridor through the city and surrounding countryside, which must be protected for the use and enjoyment of all.
- ▶ The quality and volume of water within this river system must be monitored and regulated to ensure that the resource is available for the use and enjoyment of all sectors, including agriculture, the wider business community, the wider public, but most importantly the environment.

Thank you