

## Cambridge Vision 2030

### Today's Subject.

#### **"Agriculture and Green Space in the wider Cambridgeshire Area over the next 20 years."**

What a fascinating subject – I think this is my 6<sup>th</sup> attempt at writing this paper, the world changes hourly

What is the scenario?

Magnificent University city surrounded by farm land of all types, mostly large farms growing Cereals & Sugar Beet to South & West, plus lots of Vegetables to the East & North.

Immediately North an area of small land holders who's way of life is highlighted by massive change in the way food is marketed in the last 40 years, they produced Flowers & Vegetables, Chickens & Eggs nearly all passed through the whole market system which was in place in all large towns eg Covent Garden in London.

This type of marketing still supplies the small shops business and will continue until it is finally wiped out by the Supermarkets. But there is a window that has opened, the farm shop and a will to keep open the weekly markets in local towns.

The Politician's will once again control the future of that type of farming.

I think I can safely say Cambridge was in the past surrounded by small farmers producing Pigs, Cattle & Milk.

They have reduced enormously, their market outlet having virtually disappeared.

The law and ridiculous fees imposed on abattoirs has closed 80% of these small businesses.

Livestock are now handled by the bigger operators; how things have changed.

Due to public pressure, insisting quite rightly that livestock should be fairly treated, many pigs and chickens are going outside.

You see vast outside pig units, we ourselves have 3000 sows outside, as long as we can keep on top of the Urban Fox dumped in the countryside these will persist.

Also lets prevent some unwise body introducing the White Tailed Eagle, they just love small pigs and small dogs.

One small Piglet out of 10 is our profit. I might add Buzzards, which have only arrived in large numbers in the last five years have been seen after small piglets.

How long do you go on protecting raptors till you only have raptors left.

Just imagine a BAN on SHOOTING FOXES, it would be the end of "Outside Pigs"

Shall we project things that have happened in the last 40 years and see where they end up in another 20 years.

Over 40 years – farming has always been helped financially with grants and subsidies.

Why?

Without help, farming would have either ceased or prices would have gone up.

I think most people agree that cheaper food was the "raison d'être".

Of course it was badly thought out and mountains of food which nobody wanted, built up. Financial stupidity at its worst.

That has changed a lot, money is now diverted to the Environment land projects and I think that will continue on a much smaller financial scale, with Europe capping the maximum payment to the large farmers.

This will put a ceiling on size, but the majority of farming enterprises in Great Britain have a long way to go to achieve that maximum size.

Farming will survive, they will grow what it pays to grow. On land where a profit can be made.

Hand outs will decrease.

Foods costs will go up.

As a result there will be less land which can be farmed profitably and what is left will be farmed more intensely.

At last there is definite political pressure to produce more food in Great Britain.

Why.

There will be economic wars and even worse a physical war. Ethnic cleansing takes place all the time.

We nearly starved in 1941 and food rationing did not cease until 1953.

We are an island and food will still be brought in by boat, yes faster boats, aeroplanes will not cope - the Berlin Air lift only just kept the inhabitants from starvation. 1948/1949.

Maybe the "BALANCE OF PAYMENTS" will once again be talked about and farmers given credit rather than permanently blamed for everything.

We are fed up for being accused of destroying the small bird population when all the predators including Cats & Grey Squirrels and Raptors are just running riot.

Yes I feel farming will become a respected industry once again. Let's be given where credit is due, we are like a child goes best with encouragement.

But farming will still be borderline financially. We are not united enough to tell the supermarkets what they should pay. Rather than they telling us what they will pay co-operative buying & selling will increase.

40 years ago did the Supermarket exist? In 20 years' time will the small shop return? I fear not.

Politically, supermarkets will financially wipe out the small shop in town; maybe Cambridge will support farm shops, Post Offices attached and selling other food.

But will the small farm be there to supply them? I fear there is little doubt all farms will get bigger – why? The small farm cannot afford to employ labour; in fact some say labour is now a liability and not an asset.

The car makers certainly feel this way. In farming there is an enormous window for skilled engineers.

We in farming still feel those that work on the farm are still an enormous asset. The modern farm wants a highly intelligent, educated person; still ready to get his hands dirty.

We must change the attitude of local schools who think that Agricultural work is lowly and still has straw behind the ear.

Agriculture is very high in league of working capital employed per man in industry.

I don't think it will be driven by a drone from a command post, but we can now steer them automatically. But we will still need the Men/Women about the place, like your concrete track bus from Cambridge to Huntingdon. It scared the daylight of me sitting behind the driver travelling at 60mph who had his hands on his knees!

There certainly won't be so many to look after and police the land. A very worrying thought. There are only about 150 growing days in a year. We can't afford loss of machines and vandalization to our land.

These large machines cover the hectare at a great speed.

Perfect timing of farming has increased enormously, even avoiding travelling on the land when you should not, e.g. too wet, you can wait for the perfect day, this has reduced the

labour footprint and increased yields, the norm in a single pass of cultivation where before you did possibly 3 or 4.

Sadly these larger machines need larger field sizes and the smaller field goes out of farming possibly into Environment Schemes or even worse, or better, whichever way you look at it politically, into houses, green space and factories.

An uneconomic farmer will always look for the financial outlet.

So only the Politician decides if Cambridge remains a lovely city surrounded by green lands, much of it farmed intensively or becomes part of Huntingdon.

I was in Los Angeles on a Farm Conference and we met a dairy farmer who had bought and sold his farm 6 times in 40 years, moving 3 miles from one suburb to what would be the next suburb in 7 - 8 years - 18 miles of suburbs in 40 years and that was in one direction only!

What other factors will change the direction of farming in our area?

Water and climate change.

I think the weather is changing. Rain seems to arrive in enormous deluges followed by none at all. Farmers will do all they can to harness these downfalls.

The heavy land to the south to get rid of it.

The sands and fens to the north and east to conserve it.

We must build reservoirs, transfer to the Aquifer, hold up the rivers, and maybe transfer water from the North via existing canals and rivers.

Irrigation is a major player in this area and is essential for the extensive vegetable growing that occurs there:

Politician's choice again, an onion from New Zealand or a local onion from a cool store.

The weather does seem to be getting warmer, more cropping land in Scotland could come into production which will help our Home Grown Food equation.

East Anglia, the only extra land which could come into food production is the enormous area of forestry around Thetford and the North East corner of Suffolk.

These trees were planted on very light land where major production was a rabbit which were so thin you could not eat it, but you could make a HAT from it's fur. At the moment to reclaim that area is totally impractical. Introduced crops would only grow with water and East Anglia is already slightly over licenced to the Water Companies & Farming.

Once again a Political decision to transfer water from the abundant North to the HAVE NOT'S in the South.

### **Other Limited Factors.**

#### **1. Power.**

In the next 20 years, man will never replace that machine. The massively improved diesel engine will continue to improve, maybe supported by the battery Tractor, charged at night and run by day and Tractors that run on gas. Maybe the fuel of the future. Farming is not dependant on electrical power as in industry, so will be less effected when the lights go out, which with the present rate of progress is a possibility.

#### **2. Fertilizer Intensive Farming.**

Trace & Basic elements, Potash & Phosphates will not run out in 20 years, but will be getting scarcer, another ceiling to feeding the WORLD.

#### **3. Growability & Yield.**

I have talked about keeping ourselves and the World from staving by 2050. Maybe the plant & animal breeders can speed up the amazing progress they have already made over 40 years (Cereal yields up by 40%) Use less water, use more Basic Elements more efficiently. Use light and Co2 more efficiently. Genetic modification.

The Science is there as Prof Balcome I know will tell us all about it. As farmers we need it and the WORLD needs it. But we need it in a safe form. Just imagine more efficient photosynthesis improving wheat yields by 30%.

Politicians will make us use less sprays in our control of Bugs, Weeds and Diseases, wouldn't it be wonderful if the plant didn't need spraying in the first place.

Even grew so fast it smothered opposing weeds. You never know in these coming 20 years. It could be done.

The world is praying for it.

#### **A SUMMARY.**

1. How far do you wish Cambridge to grow?
2. Do you wish the land surrounding this lovely city to be highly productive or one large Nature Reserve and would you have any conscience about importing food from miles away or even failing to help feed the WORLD.
3. Would you encourage food processing nearer to point of production and use.
4. Would you like farming to survive.
5. Acknowledge that food production has got to increase to feed the WORLD and Cambridge has the knowledge & science to achieve it and help them to direct it along totally safe lines.
6. Would you like an Agriculture Degree to return to Cambridge University, combining Science & Farming. Maybe East Anglian land the Agriculture Laboratory of Europe. In fact maybe help save the World.

Farming will proceed in a framework decided by the Politicians and consumer, but is limited by availability of Power, vital Elements, eg: Phosphate & Potash, Light, Heat & Water.