

# Farming Today

By Kevin Prince



## Late night walks diminish four years' turmoil

**Kevin Prince has wide experience of farming and rural business in Hampshire, where he lives near Andover, and across southern England as a director in the Adkin consultancy. His family also run a diversified farm with commercial lets, holiday cottages and 800 arable acres.**

READING the coverage of the US elections in the newspapers and then waiting the soon-to-arrive installation of Joe Biden as president made me suddenly declare in an almost Victor Meldrew way – “I can’t believe how quickly four years have gone!”

It really does seem only a few weeks ago that we were all in shell shock about Leicester having won the Premier League, Britain voting Leave, and Mr Trump being handed the most powerful job in the western world.

It hasn’t been an easy four years and there seems to be a general mood of gloominess about everyone at this time of year – and this year, for many justified reasons, it does seem worse than ever: My preferred method of escaping all of this gloominess is a tramp through the

woods (often at night and in the rain) with our three Labradors. I realise how incredibly lucky I am to have the ability to simply go for a walk and not have to worry about bumping into people on a narrow pavement or park track.

It was late in the season before the autumn rain finally made its mark on the heavier soils, thus closing off some land to vehicles for the next few months. The softer ground encouraged us to maintain some fencing and as I gently encouraged my son in the use of a hammer, post banger, and wire puller I had a flashback to my 11 year old self being shown exactly the same things by my father, who was probably more patient than I.

My father is still going strong and can still fence more metres in a day than me – but it did make me reflect upon the way that, just as autumn has given way to winter, for several generations in the country fathers have been showing sons very similar techniques. As a teenager I was taught how to lay a hedge or hand shear a sheep in the same way that my great-great-great grandfather would have done. But as I stood in front of my rather bored looking 13 year-old explaining for the fifth time why it was



important that the wire netting was tensioned I could not help but think that the last 20 years have seen the greatest changes in the way we live since the industrial revolution.

My father wants my son to learn to drive a tractor but in reality (apart from his lack of desire!) by the time he enters the workplace how many workers with that skill

will actually be needed? The size of modern tractors and the fact that the driver is already pretty much superfluous in many routine field operations will inevitably have the same impact upon the required number of tractor drivers as the tractor did on the number of men who were required to use a scythe. Despite the increased criminality

**Kevin Prince's dogs out for a walk on the farm**

of this time of year, the wall to wall coverage of the US election’s drawn-out aftermath and the continuing Covid crisis, it is re-assuring to spend half an hour in the dark miserable rain in the company of three dogs who are only interested in the scents of the countryside and do not care less about who is running the western world!