

# Farming Today

By Kevin Prince



## Additive may be a methane solution

THE “Summer of 22” will be remembered for many reasons just as we spent much of this year’s heatwave – at least those of us who were old enough – reminiscing about the “Summer of 76”, when rivers also ran dry and reservoirs became severely depleted.

It was a real scorcher this July and again to a lesser degree, if you’ll forgive the pun, in August. Farmers rushed ahead with harvest and although grain quality was down there were no problems getting it into store apart from some field fires that saw combines destroyed.

Climate change has been the big driver behind weather events. Here, farmers recognise that there’s work to do to reduce the industry’s contribution to emissions but if livestock farmers across the world kept their dairy cattle to our production standards the global herd could be reduced by 70 per cent.

A natural part of a cow’s day is digesting what it’s eaten and chewing the cud, as its popularly known, meaning the cow regurgitates balls of grass to be masticated a second time and in doing so also hiccups a quantity of methane.

Work is going on to reduce this by introducing an additive to feedstuffs. The Dutch manufacturer of one product reckons that less than a teaspoonful of



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additive per cow per day can bring about a massive reduction in methane. Production facilities will be built at the company’s plant in Scotland – yet another example of how science is

helping us meet emissions reduction targets.

But of possibly greater concern for many livestock farmers will be the immediate reduction in feedstuffs

because the dry summer meant silage and hay stored for winter had to become summer feed. The diminished stocks were unlikely to be replenished with a third cut unless the grass has made a

spectacular recovery. As I write this it’s too soon to know.

Already, farming charities such as Forage Aid, set up in 2013 to help farmers in Wales and Cumbria with stock trapped in snow drifts, are planning for this winter. It involves farmers with surplus feed stock donating it to the charity, or others like it, and then hauliers moving it free-of-charge across country to where it’s needed. With the ample rain that fell in Cumbria this summer, it may be that the lorries will be bringing feed south.

The change in weather patterns will inevitably lead to a change in farming practices. The hot, dry weather conditions which made this year’s harvest easy for arable farmers will make the autumn and winter difficult for livestock farmers. If this is to become the norm then more land will be used to grow forage crops in order to meet that demand and equilibrium would return. The difficulty is that meteorologists are predicting more erratic and extreme weather conditions ahead.

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