

# Fertile minds at work as farms COP it again

DID COP26 in Glasgow pass in something of a blur for you – or maybe a cloud of blah if you are of a younger age group.

Farmers in the UK were among the first to take a hit when the EU and US agreed a deal to cut methane emissions by 30 per cent by 2030. Atmospheric methane has been largely overlooked as the world has concentrated on carbon dioxide but it's claimed methane caused about 1 degree C of the warming since the Industrial Revolution.

It can't all have come from the digestive systems of ruminants such as cattle and sheep. In fact data analysts suggest only 18.4 per cent of world greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions come from agriculture, forestry, and land use and of that roughly 5.8 per cent is attributed to livestock and manure. The latest official Defra government data for 2019 shows that UK agriculture is responsible for around 10 per cent of UK GHG emissions – and just 6 per cent if only considering livestock farming. By contrast, Transport (27 per cent) was the largest emitting sector, followed by Energy Supply (21 per cent), Business (17 per cent) and Residential (15 per cent). Despite this there will be no



Farmers were among those to 'take a hit' in UK-EU deals, says Kevin.

escape for farming.

The initial call was for a reduction in national cattle and sheep numbers but this will be hard to achieve now supermarkets are insisting that male calves on supplying farms, which are of no use to dairy farmers, are no longer euthanased but instead grown on for beef.

After that disastrous BBC documentary on feed lot beef production

in America gave entirely the wrong focus on beef producers in the UK there was an outcry and calls for people to stop eating meat. But if we eat all the vegetable matter instead, the results will be the same - just a change of species from which methane is literally the end product!

Far from cutting the national herd, experts are suggesting that major changes in animal diet and

health should produce the 30 per cent cut in methane. Alterations to diet can reduce livestock methane output dramatically; feed additives are being developed that do the same. Eliminating endemic gut ailments such as Bovine Viral Diarrhoea (BVD) will also help.

Meanwhile, supermarket Morrisons, which uses only British farms to source fresh meats, is researching the use of seaweed from the Irish and North seas as a feed additive for cattle.

Food security for the Nation seems to very easily get forgotten in the rush to play our part in attempting to solve the global problem of emissions. However, if ever a reminder was needed, surely the recent fuel crisis and the hike in wholesale energy prices show how, as an island, we are still vulnerable if we cannot sustain ourselves. To anyone who remembers World War II or post-war rationing, the thought of decimating our livestock industry must be the stuff of nightmares.

What we must avoid is doing deals that merely move our climate-changing output to other countries, as has happened through outsourcing industrial production to China and India, which then need their coal to meet the resultant power



Kevin Prince

demands. Shipping lamb and beef from the Antipodes is not the brightest idea, either. Cheap food has a hidden but increasingly evident cost!

■ *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.*