

**Fri, Jun 01, 2001**

## **Soldiers move in as disease puts the Ribble Valley under siege**



SOLDIERS and now a war room – the Ribble Valley is officially under siege from foot and mouth disease.

Among the casualties so far are seven farms, stretching from Pay-thorne to Sawley, where the infection has been diagnosed by MAFF vets at a cost of thousands of animal lives.

Gisburn's once-thriving auction mart is now battle zone operational headquarters. A 50-strong "war cabinet" of MAFF officials and support staff, vets, police and officers from the North-East-based 33rd Signals Regiment are holed up in temporary shelters, plotting a culling policy.

Out on the roads and at farms where foot and mouth has been confirmed or is suspected are the regiment's soldiers – up to 200 of them between here and Settle, tasked with the logistics of co-ordinating the transportation of sheep and cattle carcasses.

Says one eye witness: "It really is like wartime.

Wagon after wagon is rolling through the Ribble Valley. It's quite frightening, disturbing and very upsetting. On the road through Bolton-by-Bowland, I had to wait 20 minutes while sheep were transported. One minute they are grazing in a field. The next they are on their way to being culled in front of your very eyes."

Yet the culling policy is still defended by MAFF, whose spokesman explains: "Swift slaughter of infected animals and those deemed to have been in 'dangerous contact' with them is the most effective means of eradicating foot and mouth disease.

"It is important we react as quickly as possible, which is why we have opened up an operational centre in Gisburn. MAFF has no advance information on where the next outbreak, if there is to be another, may occur".

- As we went to press, MAFF announced that the outbreaks in Settle and Paythorne were epidemiologically linked.

**Fri, Jun 01, 2001**

## **Mum and daughter go on the web to tell the world of their anguish**

A MOTHER and her daughter are telling the world what it is like living in a Ribble Valley village under the shadow of the foot and mouth crisis.

Their anguished personal stories have gone out on the World Wide Web.

Farmer's wife Mrs Sue Asquith and Emily (14), one of her two children, have written heart-rending accounts of how they are coping with the isolation of having to stay on the

farm now that their 243 cattle and 750 sheep have been slaughtered.

Mrs Asquith refers to missing the intelligent repartee of her colleagues at the school where she would normally work and being "cooped up" in a house with two anguished teenagers who wanted to go out at the weekend, but couldn't.

"I am slowly growing to hate the smell of disinfectant. The whole countryside smells so different now," she wrote, asking: "Who is to blame for this shambles?"

Daughter Emily wrote: "It feels like I have been given a prison sentence that's never going to end. It is my birthday in three days' time and it is not possible to have a party."

Mrs Asquith, of England's Head Farm, Paythorne, is also anxious about what is going to happen on Monday when son Adam (15) is due to take his GCSE exams.

Would they restock and continue farming when the crisis is over?

"Well, yes, because we don't know what else to do. We are not qualified for anything else," she said.

There are more immediate problems like silage cutting and also the more distant problems of where they obtain the animals to re-stock their farm.

"People forget the scale of this. When they read about a single case of foot and mouth, they forget that means six or seven surrounding farms have all had their stock culled," she added.

Meanwhile, the tiny hamlet of Paythorne has been all but wiped out by the disease. Sheep and cattle at all but one of the six farms have been slaughtered.

Mr Keith Redmayne and his wife, Alison, at Carholme Farm – the only farm not yet affected – are under siege.

"It's like being in prison," said Mrs Redmayne.

"We can't go out or do anything." Mrs Redmayne works full time to supplement the family income, but has been unable to go to work since the outbreak.

The family have not heard from the Ministry of Agriculture since Friday. With 170 cattle and 400 sheep, the Redmanyne's are living on a knife edge and are among many farmers complaining of the lack of information from the ministry.

**Mon, Jun 11, 2001**

**Swift action is promised in the foot and mouth battle**



THE Government's new foot and mouth disease operations centre in Gisburn could be in situ for six months.

It will "enable us to move quickly and effectively", MAFF officials told the press at a briefing on Friday.

The Forward Allocations Centre (FAC), as it is termed, has a staff of about 150, including 120 vets plus army and RAF personnel.

This mixed agency staff is expected to work from the centre for six months, continuing MAFF's strategy for tackling the disease. This remains focused on ensuring:

- The slaughter of animals on infected premises within 24 hours;
- The slaughter of all susceptible animals on contiguous premises and identified through dangerous contacts within 48 hours;
- Regular patrols within 3km of each infected premises;
- Surveillance and blood sampling undertaken systematically and quickly.

Dr Stephen Hunter, MAFF director of operations, Yorkshire, told reporters and film crews that the resources at the FAC would enable staff to identify newly-affected premises and then the contiguous areas around them.

He said that these resources had been increased significantly since the start of the Settle outbreak so that MAFF could keep on top of the disease through swift and effective reaction to a case.

An important function of the FAC and its large number of vets, many of them foreign, would be to engage in active patrols in linked areas to pick up early traces of the disease and respond quickly.

Mr David Duff, MAFF director of operations, Preston, then took over the briefing. He also stressed the speed of reaction that the new centre would facilitate, to keep ahead of "an altering scenario." He said that the initial source was not known for the Ribble Valley cluster, though 14 of the Yorkshire cases have now been linked and the investigation continues. He said: "It is possible a connection may never be made."

However, since the briefing, a link has now been confirmed through animal movements.

He said that a vital part of the FAC's activities would be the longer-term cleansing and blood sampling operations to ensure the area was clear of the disease after the identification of infected premises and once all infected and close contact animals were killed.

He added that he realised the farming community was concerned that the location of the centre was behind the auction mart, which he called "a commercial slaughter centre". He said that it was necessary to ensure full bio-security measures were inbuilt, so that all vehicles and equipment were cleaned and disinfected so they could not transmit the disease.

The FAC consists of 18 Portakabins inside a secure, fenced compound with self-contained power, fuel, and cleansing facilities. Administration and operations offices are computer supported.

In the operations room maps of the currently affected area showed infected farms ringed with interlinking circles representing the 3km contiguous zone. This has previously been a cull zone, but is now called a "3 km Protection Area."

Lt Colonel Huw Lawford, representing the Ministry of Defence, said: "People will be clearly aware of the increasing temper of the operation" as he described how more resources could be mobilised if necessary. "There is no shortage of men and materials," he said.

His troops are from 22 Regiment, Royal Artillery, plus a contingent of Royal Air Force personnel, and are tasked with co-ordinating and assisting with logistics. There is a major in charge of the Army cell in the FAC, as Lt Colonel Lawford is based in Leeds to run the operation supporting MAFF in Yorkshire and further north. He in turn comes under the command of Brigadier Andrew Farquhar in York, who visited the centre to talk to film crews.

There is no doubt the operations facility has proved capable: its staff has been busy identifying and killing diseased and contact animals all week. However, its presence has not prevented or even slowed the relentless spread of the disease along the Ribble Valley and it has not impressed local people.

These villagers are now faced with a constant cycle of movements of vehicles from the site to neighbouring farms, then back again, often several times a day because, as one said, the planned timings have gone awry. The farmers, having lost their livelihoods, now share the cafes and pubs of Gisburn with the ministry vets and the soldiers.

Many villagers remain unconvinced of the effectiveness of the culling operation and some have been vocal in their opposition to the Government's policy. However, most have been wary of giving their names, as they, like many farmers, fear the power of

this totally alien intrusion into their lives.

Some are now convinced by strings of apparent coincidences that the disease, the cull policy and its link to EU edicts is being used by the Government to destroy the small farmer and place food production in the hands of agribusinesses and corporations.

A popular expression in Gisburn and nearby villages is: "The whole thing stinks."

THE area takes on a battleground feel as Brigadier Andrew Farquhar briefs the media on action points.

**Mon, Jun 11, 2001**

**Post-election huge cull is denied by MAFF chief**



**Special foot and mouth crisis reports by Vivien Meath, Robbie Robinson, John Turner and Tim Procter**

QUESTIONS posed at the press briefing held at the new MAFF operations centre at Gisburn reflect the worries of people in the Ribble Valley about the spread of foot and mouth disease.

When asked if a huge cull of farm animals from Preston to Harrogate will start after election day, Dr Stephen Hunter, MAFF Director of Operations, Yorkshire, said: "That's nonsense, really nonsense. I want to scotch that, it really isn't true." This assertion is not believed by some local people, who are very uneasy about the whole operation, both locally and nationally.

Dr Hunter also said that there were no plans to cull wild animals particularly deer, as the disease was rarely transmitted so the risk was low. He added that although deer can catch the disease it was rare and that attempting a cull would drive them from their regular areas, increasing that risk. He said that vets failed to find a sick deer reported in the valley. The spread of the disease by other animals is also considered a low risk and any form of cull is considered impracticable.

It was not foreseen "at this stage" that milk supplies will be affected by the culling of dairy cattle. It is clear, though, that the spread of the disease and associated culling could change this situation.

The use of burial sites and landfill sites in the local areas have been ruled out by MAFF, though it has been admitted that the rendering facilities can no longer cope with the amount of carcasses and burial sites have been reopened in Cumbria. This is causing some opposition from rural communities around these sites.

Specific questions related to the disease and posed by readers have also been answered by MAFF.

The incubation period for the disease varies between animals. The interval between exposure to the disease and the appearance of symptoms varies between 24 hours and 10 days, or even longer. The average time is three to six days.

Vets are visiting every farm where disease appears as it is reported, then they attend every farm in a 3km zone around the infected premises. A modification to this is the use of vets to patrol areas within a recognised area to check and test animals.

Where farmers are working to clean up premises after infection and culling, they are being employed by contractors, not directly by MAFF.

Payment is also by contractor, at £16 per hour for supervisors, £10 for labourers with a reducing scale from there. There are no directives to concrete over breeze-block type walling or other such schemes. However, many farmers are now taking the opportunity to repair cracked and damaged walls as the structures have now been thoroughly cleaned.

People wanting information regarding payments of benefits to those losing their stock and other losses through FMD should contact the benefits agency on 0207 238 0751 or 0752 or 0756. This is necessary as payments and support depends on circumstances.

Gisburn residents and many farmers concerned about the lack of information being given to them about the operation can use the following contacts.

Websites in particular contain much detailed information about the clinical aspects of the disease and list the national valuations of animals.

**Fri, Jun 15, 2001**

### **Claim that foot and mouth is deliberate**



#### **‘Does a lunatic want to see back of farming?’**

AS the foot and mouth culling was stepped up this week, more and more people are asking: “Is the slaughter of our farm animals really necessary?”

But the new Government department heading up the battle against the disease is determined to continue with the slaughter policy, a spokesman confirmed yesterday.

Meanwhile, piles of dead animals stood testimony this week to the greatest tragedy ever to hit British farming.

On Tuesday, a Lancashire county councillor demanded an end to the culling policy and the introduction of vaccination instead.

And, as people were questioning whether the mass slaughter of stock and the consequent decimation of farmers' lives was the correct policy, one Ribble Valley farmer suggested the disease was being introduced into the countryside deliberately.

The Bristol family farm at West Bradford lost its 55-strong milking herd of pedigree Friesians, its 100 young stock and 100 sheep and lambs when MAFF vets found evidence of foot and mouth and ordered a cull on Sunday. All the animals on six neighbouring farms were also slaughtered.

Mr Andrew Bristol, who farms Whittaker's Farm with his father, Mr Bryan Bristol, said: "I can't understand how this disease 'jumped' nearly three kilometres and hit me. We are out of the way here.

We are hidden a mile off the main road. There are not a lot of comings and goings. All I can think of is that it is being deliberately introduced.

"Of course I can't prove it, but more and more farmers are wondering whether some lunatic wants to see the back of British farming.

"Nobody has a clue where it is coming from. My neighbour, nearly three kilometres away was just as baffled as I am. His animals were all inside, but they still caught it. The experts tell us this disease can only travel 200 yards or so in the air.

"Everything that has come on or off our farm has been disinfected. We couldn't have done anything more. I was almost paranoid about it. I have tried my level best for 12 weeks – then it has got me.

"Some people have suggested it is being spread by wildlife, but I can't help thinking it might be wildlife on two legs. I am not ruling anything out. I mean, how did it jump from here over to Barnoldswick?

"On Friday night I was milking my cows and they were all fit and healthy. The next day they had foot and mouth.

"There was 80 years of sheep breeding started by my great-grandfather gone in just 25 minutes.

"I have lost my livelihood and so have six of my neighbours. We are all distraught.

"This whole devastating thing is totally unnecessary and MAFF don't seem to be of any help.

We ask them what we do next and they can't tell us. They are running round like

headless chickens." he added.

Father-of-two Mr Bristol (42) said: "I have been a busy man all my life. Now I have got nothing to get up for."

He and other farmers are also worried about what is happening to their land – the British countryside – in the meantime.

"In just three days it is already beginning to look like a wilderness. There is all this grass growing and not a living thing to eat it."

Coun. David Whipp, county councillor for Barnoldswick, the latest foot and mouth "hot spot" called for vaccination to replace culling.

Stating that "this crazy culling" just is not working and labelling it "heartless and inhumane", he is calling for newly-appointed farms minister Margaret Beckett and Prime Minister Tony Blair to introduce an immediate vaccination programme.

The Government and DEFRA – the new title for MAFF introduced this week – is holding fast to its continued pursuit of slaughter as a cure for the disease.

Dr Stephen Hunter, DEFRA director of operations, Yorkshire, repeated that the Government's operation is based on advice from its chief vet and chief scientist, and EU policy.

He said: "We'll get over this outbreak."

**Fri, Jun 15, 2001**

**Farmers fear vehicle movements could be spreading the disease**



**Special foot and mouth crisis reports by Vivien Meath, Robbie Robinson, John Turner and Tim Procter**

THE large amounts of vehicle movements associated with foot and mouth disease, particularly the transportation of slaughtered animals, is not considered to be spreading the infection, the public was told on Tuesday.

Dr Stephen Hunter, DEFRA director of operations, Yorkshire, said that transportation of animals in and between farms, and the human and vehicular contact with livestock made as part of farming procedures has been proved to have spread the disease.

However, DEFRA operations were not thought to be doing so. Regarding the huge



numbers of lorry movements, he said: "These are highly unlikely to be a source of disease transmission."

Speaking at the first foot and mouth disease briefing since the formation of DEFRA, he described the latest situation in the "Settle/Clitheroe rectangle." He gave figures for farms affected by the operations and detailed numbers of animals culled. This week's list of farms with confirmed cases is printed below.

He said they were achieving the objective of slaughtering infected animals within 24 hours and contiguous culling within 48 hours. He added that they had been fairly successful in removing carcasses for disposal quickly and that rendering and burial sites still had good capacity.

However, Lt Col Huw Lawford, covering army assistance, said that animals were being removed as soon as possible, but he could not be responsible for delays. Referring to the material at his disposal, he said: "We are having to draw on a national asset, so cannot promise anything.

They are finite resources."

This could reflect the increased activity in the Valley, as two weeks ago he reported that there was no shortage of men and materials.

To improve logistics, a holding area for 60 lorries has been built near Hellifield, which can be used as an allocation area for disposal vehicles. It also has a water testing unit and potential for decontamination facilities, both of which are part of the overall biosecurity measures.

Mr Hunter said that extensive blood sampling by vets 3km around infected premises has found old traces of the disease in sheep. He said: "These show infection was present four weeks, possibly six to eight weeks, before 10th May. It has been in sheep for some considerable time."

Responding to a question about the possible movement of FMD along the Valley by the River Ribble, Mr Hunter said that this particular variant of FMD was spread by human and vehicular contact with stock and by air movement. He said: "The disease can only move a shortish distance by air; about 100 to 200 metres, but can be facilitated by local conditions, so it could be that the river is spreading it through these."

He said that air movement along and across water, and temperature inversions might permit the virus to move across water, but that it was not a major source of transmission of the disease, though difficult to rule out.

He stressed that the spread of the disease was not predictable and that he expects more cases, though hopes very few. He said that although epidemiologists were investigating how remote outbreaks have occurred and how infection continues to spread, nothing is

predictable, not even how long his team would be in the area.

"There are no absolutes," he said.

*Fri, Jun 29, 2001*

### **Son's good turn brings loss of stock at two local farms**

He became a dangerous contact after visit to help free a cow trapped in scaffolding

A BLUNDER by a DEFRA official was the last straw for a farmer who has suffered an amazing and catastrophic farming tragedy.

A good turn one morning by his son, who helped farmer Mr David Coupland free a cow entangled in scaffolding, resulted in the stock on two farms being wiped out.

For that afternoon, cows on Mr Coupland's farm at Grindleton were confirmed as having foot and mouth disease.

This turned his son into a "dangerous contact", which meant the son's stock had to be culled.

And because, on the way home, his son had called at the Dunsop Bridge farm belonging to his father-in-law, all the father-in-law's stock had to go, too.

And after all the 229 cattle on Mr Coupland's farm had been slaughtered and removed and the initial shock had worn off, a DEFRA official, who gave his name as Woody Butler, made a telephone call to Mr Coupland on the animal-free farm, asking if he could come and inspect the stock.

"I have never known anything so inefficient and insensitive," said Mr Coupland.

"He explained that he had only been doing the job for a few days. But somebody must have given him this information. What sort of an organisation have they got running?"

"It is scandalous the way this job has been handled."

And Mr Coupland is also voicing concerns that have been voiced by some of his neighbouring farmers about how the disease is being transmitted.

"I am told it can take up to three weeks for this disease to incubate. My cattle were confirmed positive three weeks to the day from when a Ministry vet came here to inspect them," he said.

*Fri, Jun 29, 2001*

### **Slaughter is best option – Minister**

Special foot and mouth crisis reports by Vivien Meath, Robbie Robinson and John Turner

THE Government's ongoing slaughter strategy to eradicate foot and mouth disease has nothing to do with EU policy, claimed Mrs Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State at DEFRA, writes Robbie Robinson.

She was answering questions during a visit to Gisburn on Monday, where she met farmers and representatives of rural businesses.

She was told that people were increasingly aware that scientists working in the USA were advocating the effectiveness of vaccination to control FMD, particularly the situation in Britain. She said that if a better method than slaughter could be used to control the disease then it would be attempted.

She then made one technical reference to the fact that several injections would have to be made and that there was no guarantee that they would work.

Mrs Beckett said that all the options had been examined and added that it was the British Government which had helped put in place within Europe the policy that foot and mouth was to be controlled by slaughter.

However, responding to a complex question regarding the immediate cessation of a slaughter based on EU edicts and the commencement of vaccination, she said that vaccination as an option was always under consideration, but denied that EU laws had anything to do with the situation.

An activist who attended the "stop the cull" demonstration at Gisburn said: "We heard her say that vaccination is still a government option, but five months on and six million animals dead, most of them healthy, this is just a blind to prevent a judicial review, which could, if supported, stop the killing now. Vaccination would have stopped the disease months ago and the countryside would not be in this mess."

When asked about the many claims of incidents involving cruelty to animals and intimidation of farmers, Mrs Beckett said that they must be reported to the appropriate authorities for action to be taken.

She told farmers that compensation was being paid and that the delays they were experiencing would be investigated. She said: "We cannot undo the disease. We have to re-establish and move on."

Businessmen, many of whom have lost trade through the restrictions imposed by the DEFRA operations, will receive government support. Several are setting up recovery groups and charitable trusts to form a solid backing to their attempts to recover from the continuing effects of the crisis in the north of England.

Mrs Beckett told them that their concerns had been taken on board and that short-term help would be forthcoming, while planning for the future and prosperity in the long term.

A small group of vociferous and determined protesters met the Minister. Barnoldwick resident Mrs Jennifer Purcell presented the case for blood testing on contiguous farms and an end to the killing and destruction of people's livelihoods.

Mrs Purcell told the Minister, "We want blood testing like farmers had in the Forest of Dean, which saved animals and the businesses." She claimed that the people of the country were appalled at the barbaric slaughter that was destroying farms and country jobs.

"We have had enough of this killing," she continued. "But we are not yet going to blame the Government as we are asking the Prime Minister to do a U-turn and start blood tests and vaccination.

"The people will not rest until you listen to us. We have talked and written letters and that has now come to an end. We want action. We will not stop as we are joining with other groups and getting more support."

The severed leg from a pet lamb was presented to Mrs Beckett by tearful Mrs Rosemary Greenwood. It was, she said, hacked off and left behind in a field by slaughtermen after a cull on the Greenwood's uninfected farm at Marton Scar.

Regarding the national situation, Mrs Beckett said that she was confident that the reduction in cases was showing that the operations were working. She also said that there had been no increase in the culling. Commenting on the people working for her, she said that she had received nothing but praise for her staff. She said: "The people in charge and on the ground have been heroic."

Notification of the visit was received by the press on Monday morning, just hours before her arrival. Many of the protesters present said that the short notice had probably prevented a much larger demonstration.

And, although Mrs Beckett was left in no doubt about the feelings of the angry crowd, the protest was peaceful.

After visiting the auction mart, Mrs Beckett visited a farm at Hellifield, where livestock had to be slaughtered because they were on premises adjacent to those where an outbreak of the disease had been confirmed.

She went on to the farm after putting on the protective clothing and going through the disinfection procedures in order to comply with the precautions needed to prevent any further spread of the disease in the area.

During the day's meetings, she emphasised that there were no easy or immediate solutions to the problems of reducing and eliminating foot and mouth disease. She made clear that the Government was resolute in ensuring that the outbreak was dealt with as quickly as possible, but that the recovery wanted by local businesses, farmers, hoteliers, shopkeepers and others may yet take some time.

*Fri, Jun 29, 2001*

### **MP takes Valley's plight to Minister and colleagues in Westminster**

The following text is taken from Hansard – the official report of proceedings in Parliament – for last Thursday.

MP Nigel Evans' reply following statement to the House by Margaret Beckett, Secretary of State Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs.

Mr Evans: "The impact of foot and mouth on the Ribble Valley has been enormous. The Minister has spoken of the national impact, but in the villages that have been directly affected, such as West Bradford, Gisburn, Paythorne, Sawley, Rimington and Downham and other areas near Clitheroe, the impact has been devastating and total. Farmers still speak about the 1967 outbreak and remember it as though it occurred yesterday.

"The present outbreak has affected not just those directly involved in farming, but the wider community. There is a sense of grieving for the communities throughout my area and, I am sure, in neighbouring areas.

"Will the Secretary of State ensure that the culling operation is carried out as humanely as possible? Stories have been spread about the inhumane culling of animals. We heard about that before and thought that it had been corrected. It must not be allowed to continue.

"With regard to the welfare package and the compensation that has been made available to farmers whether or not they have been directly affected by foot and mouth, will the Secretary of State ensure that it gets through as quickly as possible?

I understand that some farmers have been waiting 10 to 12 weeks for money, which cannot be allowed.

"We have heard stories that the vehicles used to transport carcasses are not properly disinfected and that stops are made for tea and coffee on the way to the areas where the carcasses are to be laid. That must not be allowed. Transportation must be direct from the farms to the pits.

"The Secretary of State said that she would visit the north of England. As she knows, in Gisburn I have the Army operations depot, and the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has a base there. Will she come and see the operation first-hand, speak

with those who are directly affected by the outbreak and listen to the ideas and practical suggestions of farmers and those in associated industries to ameliorate the position in the short term? Will she then produce practical suggestions for the long-term recovery of farming in our area?"

Mrs Beckett: "I shall respond briefly. I understand the comments of the Hon. Member for Ribble Valley (Mr Evans) about the feelings and concerns of his constituents. He made a number of observations about people waiting for compensation, and suggestions for dealing with problems in the handling of transport.

"It would be very helpful to my department if people who have detailed evidence, whether of delays in payment or, indeed, of incidents of the kind to which he referred, made it available. He will know that one such anecdote repeated 10 times gives the impression of 10 such events. We shall of course look at any concerns that are expressed, but evidence would help."

Fri, Jul 06, 2001

### Farmers are angry over delays in secondary clean-up after culls

FARMERS in the Ribble Valley are becoming increasingly angry at the amount of time they are having to wait to have their premises cleaned.

Chairman of the NFU Craven branch Mr Henry Rowntree, of Gisburn, has described the Government operation as "under resourced and mismanaged."

He lost his herd a month ago, is still waiting for the secondary clean-up operation to start and is dealing with his fifth case officer.

A DEFRA spokesman said the delays in the cleansing of farms after slaughter operations were being caused by overstretched resources.

After hearing of complaints that a 10 week wait might be necessary, the department has written: "Farms are cleansed and disinfected immediately after culling. DEFRA then aims to start second stage cleansing and disinfection as soon as practicable after this.

"Resources are stretched and unfortunately delays can occur – there is no 'average' timescale. Where the farmer undertakes to do his own cleansing and disinfection the process can be completed very quickly.

"DEFRA continues to emphasise that biosecurity after disposal is of the highest importance."

Another worry expressed by farmers is the apparent lack of continuity in their relationship with case officers. On this the department states: "DEFRA aims for continuity but inevitably, with a large number of temporary and seconded staff helping out during the current crisis, there are more staff changes than usual. While farmers may

find this disconcerting, there should still be a consistency of approach. Case officers, temporary or otherwise, are still working for the same supervisors and to the same professional standards."

DEFRA has also said that the identification of contiguously culled premises cannot be achieved without a large commitment of resources. Although all infected premises are listed by address on the DEFRA website, contiguous premises are not placed in such a list. Their details are added to the associated infected premises file and to recover them all in list form for publication would stretch resources even more, it is claimed.

The Advertiser and Times estimates that some 200 farms could now have seen their stock culled in the Ribble Valley.

Although there have been no premises declared infected since Thursday, culling operations have continued in the Ribble Valley on contiguous premises and those considered dangerous contacts. The DEFRA spokesman said: "It is still a crisis situation".

- The Craven Trust DALES Recovery Appeal has received a large donation in its first week of fundraising.

Dr Brian Fisher, a trustee of the appeal, said that £100,000 had been given by a "substantial landowner from the north Dales", who hopes that it will encourage people to make donations.

Fri, Jul 06, 2001

## Silent vigil to end slaughter of healthy animals

PROTESTERS demanding an end to the Government's slaughter of healthy animals to control foot and mouth disease held a silent vigil at Gisburn on Saturday.

After releasing black balloons carrying "stop the slaughter" petition cards addressed to the Prime Minister, they gathered along the mesh fence surrounding the DEFRA base on the auction mart car park. They then tied hundreds of black ribbons to the fence and stood quietly facing the vets, labourers and ministry operatives working on the other side.

After the vigil, they drove slowly in a column of 50 vehicles to Clitheroe, via Whalley, where, to blaring horns, drivers and passengers distributed petition forms.

Mrs Jennifer Purcell said: "The Government has to realise that people will not put up with this any longer, when there is an alternative which will protect healthy animals and countryside businesses."

Mr Dave Robinson, a Clitheroe man who has been actively supporting farmers who wish to resist the culling policy, said: "We are not a bunch of nutters. Also, we are not just animal welfare protesters, which is what the BBC called us.

"Our aim is to stop the slaughter of healthy animals and to see a policy of vaccination introduced which will lead to the whole countryside getting back to normal in the shortest possible time. The cull is barbaric and it isn't working. Vaccination does work. It's been proven throughout the world."

A police spokesman said the protest had been very peaceful. "We had no major problems. There was some traffic congestion, but they kept moving at a reasonable speed. It was very well behaved."

The previous evening, people crowded into a church hall in Barnoldswick to hear leading clinical virologist Dr Ruth Watkins talk about the FMD virus and the effectiveness of control by vaccine.

She said that the introduction of a vaccination policy would not have closed down the countryside with its associated losses, as restrictions could have been lifted in a very short time, perhaps as quickly as five days.

Other speakers illustrated how pressure to blood test animals has led to the saving of farms and businesses in the Forest of Dean and Wales, and how vaccination can be used to save hill flocks, rare breeds and pets. The audience then put questions to Mr Gordon Prentice, the Pendle MP.

He said: "We have listened to these experts, but the Government has to take all the information and form a consensus, including the advice from its own scientists."

One angry response claimed that the information has been available for the six months of the FMD crisis and that a well-informed scientific consensus should have been reached a long time ago.

Despite stating that vaccination is still considered as an option in the FMD crisis, Mrs Margaret Beckett, minister at DEFRA, has refused a meeting with Dr Watkins.

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### **Claim that disease is being spread more by DEFRA than by farmers**

by Robbie Robinson

FOOT and mouth disease is being spread more by DEFRA operatives than by the farming community, claimed local farmers, rural businessmen and members of the public at a special meeting in Clitheroe this week.



At the meeting, in the Ribble Valley Borough Council chambers, they also agreed that the reopening of the footpaths systems was not only an error, but was in clear opposition to DEFRA's demands for stringent biosecurity measures, continued farm access restrictions and movement controls which include signs keeping people off side-roads.

They were meeting informally to air their views about the personal effects of foot and mouth disease and to discuss a way ahead for local rural people. Mr John Barber of Lancashire Rural Stress Network chaired the meeting and fielded the emotional and sometimes angry debate.

The difficult position of the rural inns, cafes and restaurants was highlighted by Mr Peter Hey, of the Hark to Bounty, Slaidburn, who said he was losing £1,500 a week. He told the meeting: "I have explored most avenues of help, but most are a blind alley. I can have a deferment of VAT payment, so what little we do get means we will have to pay our VAT bill once the Government says the crisis is over. If our customers can't get here we suffer and as DEFRA is not controlling the disease, it's not going to go away.

"DEFRA is employing people at £240 a day sitting at home on standby," he claimed. "These people don't care. They are getting thousands and we are getting nothing."

He said that his inn employed people from eight village families, so reductions in staff meant less income for them, less spent in the village shop and so on. The effects, he said, went well beyond his own business.

The farmers there were generally opposed to vaccination. Most did not know the latest information on virology and were still bound by the marketing arguments put forward by the NFU and the Government that slaughter is still the only solution. Mr Andrew Bristol asked: "How can we change EU policy?"

However, after some discussion there was a more relaxed atmosphere as the information regarding a forthcoming EU debate on vaccination was put forward and some handouts on virology were distributed.

Mr Bristol said that he was sure that birds and wildlife were spreading the disease, but that had not been examined by the Government and DEFRA. He said: "There was no-one more careful than us about biosecurity." He seemed surprised when informed that the Government dare not, it was claimed, consider a slaughter of wildlife as there would be a public outcry. He said: "They don't give a damn about the killing of our animals, though, do they."

He was also incensed about the use of the word compensation. "It's not compensation," he said, "it's compulsory purchase. We would rather have our animals than the money."

Mr Barber said that he feared ordinary people would be forced out of the countryside and it would be filled with a rich elite who had access to the best of everything and sent their children to private schools.

He wanted to know how people felt about the way ahead for small businesses, farmers markets and other ways of keeping country people employed. Mr David Coupland said: "They are pushing the small man out. Small is a dirty word. Small shops, small farms, small works, just being pushed out."

There was agreement that farmers markets and the purchase of local products was a way to support all local businesses. Mr Bristol said: "Everyone needs to look for the Red Tractor on what they buy, not the Union Flag."

He said: "All this is political. All these Eastern European countries will take over our farming because they are cheap. Then when they put up their prices, everyone will come back to us, but we will be finished and we won't be able to feed ourselves."

The conclusion drawn was that a formal public meeting with speakers on virology, government policy and the presence of NFU representatives and the MP for the Ribble Valley, Mr Nigel Evans, be planned as soon as possible.

It is intended to use the meeting rooms at Clitheroe Auction Mart. Notice of the meeting will be given once it is has been arranged.

*Published: Friday, 20 July 2001, 10:16 AM*

### **Help us put a local cost to the foot and mouth crisis**

DESPITE the £2.2 billion cost of foot and mouth to the nation, resources can not be found to estimate the cost to the Ribble Valley.

The Government's response to our request for a breakdown of costs and figures in our own area was disappointing.

In a written question to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Valley's MP Nigel Evans asked how many animals, on infected and contiguous premises, have been culled in the Ribble Valley as a result of the foot and mouth outbreak.

The response was: "The information is not available in the format requested. The Settle associated cluster includes the Ribble Valley and an additional area to the east currently extending as far as Ilkley. To sub-divide the area as requested would incur disproportionate cost."

As a result of the reply, we assume that our question relating to the cost of the operation in the Ribble Valley alone (compensation to farmers, DEFRA's forward allocation centre

Our question regarding the cost of the foot and mouth outbreak to-date, received the following reply. "Our current estimate (as at July 9th) of the direct cost of the outbreak to the Exchequer is around £2.2 billion. Among other things, this includes cost of disinfection and cleansing, as well as compensation for compulsory slaughter of affected livestock.

Throughout the outbreak in the Ribble Valley, many of our readers have asked why we have been unable to break the figures down to reveal just how many infected and contiguous premises have been affected in the Ribble Valley alone, along with the numbers of animals culled.

We believe that any information we give must be as factual as possible and it was our hope that it would be possible for DEFRA to release the figures apertaining only to our area.

Now in order for us to try and paint as accurate a picture as possible of the losses to the Ribble Valley alone, we are asking farmers to contact news editor Vivien Meath at our Clitheroe office (01200 422324) with the answers to the following questions.

Name and address of their farm.

Infected or contiguous cull.

Number of cattle.

Number of sheep.

Number of pigs.

Number of goats.

Number of exotics.

Sadly, it seems, that this is the only way a correct record of the losses to our own farming community will be recorded in the Valley's history.

And, for the record, as a comparison, the continuing cost to the nation of the now empty Millennium Dome is £635m., £628m. of which was funded from the Lottery, and £7m. being the cost of upkeep since its closure.

*Published: Friday, 20 July 2001, 10:17 AM*

**Midnight tomorrow signals opening of many footpaths**

FROM midnight tomorrow, many footpaths across Lancashire are to be reopened, although a vast section of the Ribble Valley will remain closed to walkers.

The news has upset the National Farmers' Union. It expressed concern that many of the paths to be opened were within part of the area currently defined by DEFRA as being subject to special animal movement controls.

"We are deeply worried that the reopening comes at a time when the farmers within that area are subject to some of the strictest controls in the UK," said NFU policy advisor Mr Rodney Bacon. "The reopening of the footpaths within the area will be seen by farmers as contradicting the advice on bio-security issued since the beginning of the foot and mouth crisis and recently reinforced in a video sent to every livestock farmer."

The Government is revoking the order that closed all rural footpaths in the county on March 1st this year. Lancashire County Council's Countryside Service staff started removing the "path closed" signs this week in time for the weekend.

Mr Bacon paid tribute to the patience shown by members of the public. "It is truly appreciated and we believe that they would have been willing to wait a little while longer until we were at a stage when special controls could be lifted," added Mr Bacon.

Rights of way in the following area (see shaded part of map) will remain closed due to the high number of confirmed cases of foot and mouth.

All the land in Lancashire that lies to the north of the M65/A6068 and east of the following boundary; the western boundary running from Burnley junction 10 on the M65 and following northwest along the A671 through Padiham to meet the B6246 at Whalley, continuing along the B6243 through Whalley and Great Mitton to the T junction with the B6243; east along the B6243 to the first road left of it which passes through Bashall Eaves, Cow Ark and Whitewell and in to Dunsop Bridge; at Dunsop Bridge left on to the Trough Road to Marshaw and continue on Rakehouse Brow and Quernmore Road to Quernmore; continue north-westwards out of Quernmore on Wyresdale Road/Langthwaite Road until the road reaches M6; continue northwards up the M6 until it reaches the Cumbrian border.

A summary of the current situation is available on the county council's website [www.lancsenvironment.com](http://www.lancsenvironment.com)

Published: Thursday, 26 July 2001, 01:14 PM

### **We revealed true cost of farm clean-up**

TWO weeks ago the Advertiser and Times exclusively revealed the cost of cleaning the area's farms after culling.

This week, Prime Minister Tony Blair ordered a spending clampdown on disinfecting farms affected by foot and mouth disease amid fears that the total bill may top £800m.

Now, scores of Ribble Valley farmers are left with no stock, no money and wondering when they are going to be able to return to work. In many cases, a month after they lost their stock, farmers are still awaiting primary disinfection of their farms.

Referring to the decision on Tuesday, NFU chairman Mr Ben Gill said: "We thought the situation was bad enough yesterday when we understood all new work was being suspended, but this is quite shambolic.

"Thousands of farmers who are halfway through the clean-up process will not be able to believe their ears when they are told it will all have to stop. To halt work in mid-flow does not seem to make any financial sense either."

He added that, although it was right to review costs paid to contractors, it made no sense to halt all operations while work was taking place.

Earlier this month, we were told in an interview with the Minister for the Food Chain, Lord Whitty, that £50,000 to £100,000 was a basic estimate, but unavoidable if farms were to be restocked and brought back to use.

Talking about farm cleaning during a visit to the Ribble Valley to meet farmers and promote the Government's £75,000 video campaign, he said that it was necessary to pay cleansing and disinfectant operatives well as they did "a difficult job".

In a government memo, the contents of which were revealed this week, it now seems that farms in Europe are being cleaned at a fraction of the cost of their English counterparts.

On Monday, DEFRA said it was only the start of secondary cleansing and disinfection which was being halted in order for a review of costs to be carried out.

Published: Thursday, 26 July 2001, 02:19 PM

### **Halt to cleansing of farms could destroy many small operations**

by Robbie Robinson

THE Government's decision to halt the cleansing of farms, including those in the Ribble Valley, could ruin many small farmers, it was claimed this week.

Farmers and local representatives of the NFU and the Countryside Alliance are angry at the Government's decision to stop clean-up operations on farms affected by the foot and mouth disease (FMD) cull.

The Prime Minister has ordered a halt to the cleaning, which is costing an estimated £2 million a day and could have reached a total of £800 million.

Farmers have accused DEFRA of incompetence as it was discovered the cost of cleaning

and disinfecting a farm in England is averaging £104,000, compared with £30,000 in Scotland.

Mr Thomas Binns, vice-chairman of the NFU in Lancashire said that the news was a huge blow to crisis-hit farmers. He said that it had taken a month from his stock being culled at his farm in Downham to seeing a case officer from DEFRA about cleansing. Mr Binns said: "On Friday he told my wife that things were on hold until later this week.

"I want to disinfect my equipment so that I can get on with making silage."

Mr David Coupland at Rodhill Gate said: "Its absolutely stupid. There have been no buildings disinfected here since the cull. They've got all these men on the ground running around like headless chickens. We have had so many people here – case officers, a New Zealand man, women vets, labourers. I reckon they have had 30 different people here and nothing's been done. It's no wonder it's costing them an arm and a leg.

Countryside Alliance Chief Executive Mr Richard Burge said: "The Government is well aware that prompt restocking will make the difference between survival and failure for many small livestock farmers hit by FMD."

He warned that any significant delay in the clean-up of farms could be disastrous for many small livestock farmers already, as he put it, on the edge.

MP Mr Nigel Evans has written to Mrs Margaret Beckett highlighting his concern that the Prime Minister has halted the cleansing operations.

He said: "This is another clear indication that the Government and Mr Blair lack control on this issue."

He said that the high cost was the fault of the Government and not the farmers, and that a more efficient method of cleaning must be found. He added: "The cleaning process must carry on and reassurance must be given to the farming community."

Mr Evans said that with another seven confirmed cases over the weekend cases, the disease was certainly not under control and the Government can not afford to be complacent.

Last week, farmer Mr David Coupland was quoted as saying small farmers, shops and businesses were being pushed out. He has asked us to point out that, although he was at the meeting, he did not make that particular comment.

Published: Thursday, 2 August 2001, 04:28 PM

A distraught farmer asks: 'Did my animals really need to die?'

by Robbie Robinson

THE owners of pet animals culled during foot and mouth slaughter operations in Bolton-by-Bowland have been notified that their animals might not have had the disease.

Mrs Alison Grimshaw and her husband, Angus, of Hungrill Farm, Holden, received a letter from DEFRA two months after their seven sheep, three of them rare breeds, and two goats were killed by lethal injection. The vet found a blister in the mouth of their ewe and after a long discussion with Mrs Grimshaw convinced her that that the animal was infected and that all their pets would have to be killed.

However, the letter states that the animals were slaughtered "on the suspicion that they were infected with foot and mouth disease".

Mrs Grimshaw, who was impressed by the vet's efficiency and caring approach to her task, said: "The lady vet told us that in her opinion we had foot and mouth disease. I wasn't convinced by the marks she found on the goats' feet. We treated foot-rot regularly, but she said she had seen FMD before and was sure the blister in the ewe's mouth was the disease.

"I was happy about the goats' feet, but had to accept what the vet said about the ewe's mouth. She was very specific with us. If she had not been I wouldn't have let her take them."

The vet issued an A notice, confirming the presence of FMD on the premises, but shortly afterwards a B notice was received in the mail.

Mrs Grimshaw said: "I was very worried about this as a B notice is only issued after premises are cleaned up and checked and we hadn't been. I was worried about spread and reinfesting neighbouring farms."

She described how she had bumped into the DEFRA case officer for neighbouring Wycongill farm who told her that the premises were being cleansed by the farmer and his family, and that they were arranging sentinel animals to test the farm was clear of FMD. This would, he told her, lift the A notice at Wycongill and replace it with a form B.

She said: "I asked him if I could restock and he said it would be months. He said: 'Don't even think about it.' Yet we are supposed to be clear of the disease. They must have known we weren't infected or they wouldn't have issued a B notice. None of it makes sense."

The letter also informed the Grimshaws that the blood tests are not necessarily accurate. It read: "The fact that the laboratory results are negative does not, however, mean that foot and mouth disease was not present in the stock on your premises. There are a

Mrs Grimshaw said: "There are a lot of issues in what that letter says, about animals, money and people. The blood tests are a con if what it says is true. It doesn't answer anything for me. If it wasn't so laughable we would just sit down and weep.

"Think of all those farmers waiting for results, lives and livelihoods dependent on these tests. Then they get a letter like that. The agony, waiting for a letter that means nothing. It's terrible."

She said she had talked a lot about her situation and that of her neighbours. She said: "I think they chose the vet to send to us. I wonder about the tactics. If we'd had a big bossy person it would have been different. Even the delays and waiting, is that a tactic too?"

"When I lost my pets I thought that if it helps to stop the disease, then that's got to be, but it isn't working. It's made no difference. It's going on and on, for more and more people and the sacrifice is no use, it's meaningless."

Published: Thursday, 2 August 2001, 04:37 PM

### **Standard compensation scheme scrapped as bill heads for £1billion**

AMID growing claims regarding "generous" payments made to farmers, the Government has scrapped its standardised compensation scheme for livestock culled in the foot and mouth epidemic.

On Monday, it was announced that, with immediate effect, all valuations of animals slaughtered because of foot and mouth disease will be made by an independent valuer appointed by DEFRA.

Owners will retain the right to notify DEFRA in writing within 14 days if that valuation is disputed. Should the owner dispute the valuation within this period, their case may proceed to arbitration.

The option of valuation at standards rates was set at the height of the outbreak to speed up the culling.

Animal Health Minister Elliot Morley said: "The rates were set generously at a time when new cases were being reported at an average of 40 a day to encourage farmers to come forward and speed up the cull which was vital to bear down on the disease.

"In the event, less than 10% of farmers used this facility and the rate had the effect of putting in place minimum prices, which is not normal practice in the livestock sector."

The scheme has already cost the taxpayer nearly £1billion in four months, but new outbreaks of the disease are still occurring. On Monday, the national total reached 1,907.



To avoid arguments over animal values, standard rates of £1,100 were set for a breeding cow, £90 for a ewe and £130 for a breeding sow. Farmers with more valuable pedigree animals could ask for a specific valuation.

This week, the National Farmers' Union attacked the abandonment of the scheme and was said to be seeking an urgent meeting with Mrs Margaret Beckett, the Secretary of State for the Environment.

The union is to fight for standard payments to be paid to farmers whose herds and flocks were culled before the scheme was introduced.

Last week, the Government halted cleansing and disinfection work on farms following allegations of overcharging.

Meanwhile, police are investigating claims that an anonymous caller offered an infected sheep to a stud farmer in Newport, Pembrokeshire, for £2,000 to pass the infection to animals there.

Published: Thursday, 2 August 2001, 04:39 PM

### **Farmers' fury at deliberate disease spread rumours**

AN application to erect modular buildings at Gisburn auction mart for accommodation by DEFRA is a retrospective proposal, a DEFRA spokesman confirmed this week.

The Crown Property Development application for the single-storey units covers the formal requirements necessary to ensure normal development procedures are followed.

It involves those buildings forming the current DEFRA base known as the Gisburn Forward Allocations Centre and is not a proposal to enlarge the base.

The DEFRA FAC was built in May when it was realised that foot and mouth disease operations in the Settle/Clitheroe "rectangle" would be extended for several months, possibly into 2002.

Dr Stephen Hunter, DEFRA's director of operations for Yorkshire, said in June that the centre would allow the ministry to keep on top of the disease, and that a vital part of activities based there would be the longer-term blood sampling and cleaning operations to ensure all areas were clear of the disease. Also, 120 vets were based there to patrol areas to check and test animals.

DEFRA also commented on the allegations made in the national press and television that FMD was being deliberately spread by farmers to claim compensation, which is said to be far in excess of the current market price.

Local farmers have angrily denied the rumours. Mrs Alison Redmayne, of Carholme

Farm, Paythorne, said: "I cannot imagine any farmer would actually pay to buy infected meat to spread it to their own animals. Farmers I know would never contemplate such an act."

A spokesman said that DEFRA will investigate any claim of deliberate spread of the disease and of any other irregularities which could be substantiated. DEFRA has recognised that a number of rumours and allegations exist, but states that, without evidence, an investigation cannot be made.

Published: Thursday, 2 August 2001, 04:38 PM

### **While Valley's footpaths remain closed moves begin to aid rights to access**

WHILE the majority of the Ribble Valley's footpaths are still closed, the Government has announced new moves to bring the rights of access closer.

Local access forums are to be established to provide advice on improving public access for open-air recreation and enjoyment of the countryside.

On Tuesday, Rural Affairs Minister Alun Michael announced the start of consultation on the forums. The Government is seeking to introduce the new right of access under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 by the end of 2005.

By law, membership of the forums will have to strike a fair balance between the interest of different groups, including land owners, managers of land and those benefiting from the new public right of access to open country and users of local rights of way, such as walkers, horse riders, cyclists and carriage drivers.

Mr Michael said: "The Government is committed to giving people greater freedom to the country's open countryside. Today I am announcing a process of consultation which will help us strike the right balance between the needs of recreational users of the countryside on the one hand, and the needs of landowners and those who work on the land."

Views on the consultation paper are invited from local authorities, national park authorities, interested organisations and the public on proposals for regulations governing the establishment, functions and administration of local access forums.

Local authorities and countryside bodies will have a duty to consult the forums on draft maps of open country and registered common land, appointment of wardens by access authorities, by-laws affecting access land, long-term restrictions on and exclusions from access, and rights of way improvement plans.

Clitheroe Advertiser 18/9/01

### **Gisburn culling leads to criticism of biosecurity at DEFRA centre by Robbie Robinson**

A CULL of sheep at Gisburn has led to renewed criticism of biosecurity standards at the DEFRA operations centre in the village.

A flock of 57 sheep and lambs were slaughtered after one of them was found to be foot and mouth disease seropositive following routine blood testing. A retest found two animals positive and they were all killed as a precaution.

DEFRA has explained that the presence of antibodies does not in itself indicate the presence of live and therefore infectious virus.

However, local farmers and Ribble Valley residents have expressed alarm that animals kept close to the DEFRA Forward Allocations Centre have been exposed to the disease.

Some have criticised the department's biosecurity arrangements and procedures, claiming that they are not adequate for the purposes of such a mobile operation, criticism which has been voiced throughout the crisis.

DEFRA has repeated that its biosecurity arrangements are appropriate, particularly as officials are instructed to cleanse thoroughly before returning to the centre.

The animals culled at Gisburn belonged to Mr Darryll Capstick, foreman for Richard Turner and Son at the auction mart there. The sheep had been on pasture across the road from the auction mart car park on which the DEFRA centre is situated.

Cattle kept with them have returned negative blood tests so have not been culled. These animals, two cows and a calf, are not owned by Mr Capstick.

The cull followed rumours 10 days ago that animals at Gisburn were to be slaughtered. At the time, a DEFRA spokesman told the Clitheroe Advertiser and Times that there were no plans to slaughter any animals at Gisburn.

One farming family which has criticised the biosecurity at the centre is so convinced that DEFRA operations have helped spread the disease that it has made every attempt to prevent ministry personnel from entering the farm.

The family has employed its own vets to take blood samples of sheep, with DEFRA officials present as witnesses only, so that the procedure conforms to departmental regulations.

Members of the family said: "We've done everything by the book regarding licensing and biosecurity, yet we are still being treated arrogantly by DEFRA in Leeds.

"We had to accept one DEFRA official, but we didn't allow him to touch any animals. We've got this far and we're not going to risk it now."

The family said that DEFRA had told them their cattle would be slaughtered if blood tests of the sheep proved positive for FMD antibodies. They claim that owing to that comment the wait for test results was very difficult for them, adding: "Those three weeks were horrendous."

Since then the blood test results have been returned and have proved negative.

In common with the current procedures regarding a cull after routine serological testing, tissue sampling was taken from the sheep at Gisburn for further examination. A DEFRA spokesman said that hopefully they will confirm that antibodies only present and not live disease.

However, should live virus be found the occurrence will be classed as a confirmed case and the full range of restrictions and contiguous cull rules will be applied.

Clitheroe Advertiser 17/01/02

Farming does have a future - but it will be very different



A Farmer's Report by David Graveston

David Graveston, of Park House Farm, Gisburn, begins by recapping the traumatic events of 2001 - a year he and hundreds of other Ribblesdale Valley farmers will never forget.

THERE is a future for farming. It will, however, be different. Throughout this year, we aim to follow one farmer and his family as they restock and restart post foot and mouth disease.

FEBRUARY 23rd, 2001, and the entire livestock sector of the United Kingdom is on red alert. The first case of foot and mouth disease for quite some time has been diagnosed and, unknown to us all, is the start of one of the worst outbreaks ever.

My first knowledge of this was a text message on my mobile phone from a fellow farmer which read: "FMD no livestock movements - no auction, ring u later."  
My first thought: FMD, what's that? We all know these initials now and a whole lot more for things that have taken place.

The outbreaks in Cumbria attracted everyone's attention and fear. As a farmer in the

Ribble Valley, it seemed far enough away, but there were huge reasons for my concern.

Fearful of the disease, I never went out to any farmer gatherings. Movement of , animals at home, throughout March/April, with pre-visits of vets and paperwork a mile long, made life very hard. Movements through May were nearly impossible as the disease became closer.

### **Too close for comfort**

That month, the disease came to Settle. It was too close for comfort and now within 15 miles of our farm. FMD had become personal. It was affecting friends and colleagues with whom we did business and hope to do so again in the future.

The disease moved into Paythorne. It was now only two miles east, as the crow flies, from me. This meant a neighbour of ours lost part of his herd. It appeared to come no closer, then it arrived in Sawley, two miles west. For a time we thought we had escaped. The disease appeared to have gone past us, but to no avail.

On May 31st, at 10-30 p.m., I received a phone call from my neighbour to the west. "I'm sorry David, my cattle have got foot and mouth and are to be slaughtered in the morning."

It was the worst nightcap I have ever had. After talking to my neighbour, I went for what I thought could be the last unspoilt viewing of the cattle. MAFF would want my cattle as contiguous stock to the infected premises. My worst day, however, was the day after !

On June 1st, 2001, at 4-50 a.m. (I could not sleep knowing my neighbour's cows were going and our cows could be next), I went to look at the dry cows first. The cows did not acknowledge me as they usually do when I walk round. Then I saw one animal was slavering at the mouth. My heart dropped. FMD - we have the dreaded foot and mouth disease. How do I tell my parents this? They have put all their lives into these cows.

They took the news badly, as you can imagine. We all did. Once the cattle are infected they suffer greatly. After seeing the cows in pain it became easier to accept their slaughter. If you are ever unfortunate enough to see animals infected, then you will agree that it is kinder to have the animals put down to relieve pain and suffering.

All our animals were put down within the day and removed the day after. The cattle were killed by bolt guns in the feeding passage. One moment they were eating, the next they were dead. The operation was well run considering the pressure this disease brings.

Cleaning a farm to hospital standard was the next task. Every speck of dirt and grime had to be removed as organic material could harbour the disease for the future. It was all hands on deck as the farm was washed and scrubbed clean.

The job is now done. The buildings have been detoxed twice, as required. We waited for

time to elapse before we could restock. DEFRA said we could restock, with certain restrictions, on December 22nd, but I chose to leave the restocking until after Christmas, so that we could spend time with the family.

### **Many stories to tell**

We all have bad memories of last year, some of which I don't want to put on paper. I know that many people will have many stories to tell. Let's hope the knowledge and experience will help with any future outbreak.

Now we are turning our thoughts to restocking. Like many more, we have asked ourselves whether we should, when, with what, how many and where they should come from? As for the future, what does it hold?

All these questions have to be addressed and heaven forbid that foot and mouth disease raises its head again in this country.

At present, following DEFRA guidelines, we have bought 60 "Sentinel" cattle, bulling and in-calf heifers, from a well known Holstein breeder. They have to be moved around the farm buildings over a four-week period. Each week, they are visually checked for foot and mouth. Once we reach the end of the four-week period, we should be declared clean, free of FMD and we can restock at will. Our fields also have "Sentinel" stock on. Sheep are being moved around and are also inspected weekly and blood tested after four weeks for foot and mouth antibodies.

Prior to foot and mouth, we had sheep, beef and pedigree dairy cattle. Now our plans are purely to farm with dairy cattle. We will be concentrating solely on milk production. Prior to FMD, our herd averaged 8,600 litres 2,500 litres more than the national average.

We will be looking to increase production per cow with the new herd . We are trying to source some suitable milking stock for future production, a difficult task without the auctions open. The sooner they do open, the better for all concerned. We will not be keeping as many cows in the first instance, and we estimate it will take three years to return to where we were pre FMD.

The year 2001 saw my parents retire from farming. Foot and mouth has had major implications for farming. Farming policy in nearly every case will change. Things certainly won't happen overnight. Farming has a future, but it will be very different.