



DAVE'S DAIRY

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Looking after yourself is silly

I don't know what things are like in your district, but here we seem to be hovering on the edge of a nasty drought. So when Clarkson turned up this week we made some pretty forthright comments about the matter.

"You are always very quick to claim the credit, Clarkson, if the season is good," one of the group complained, "but we notice if the weather turns nasty it suddenly becomes a State responsibility or the Almighty has to carry the can. We think it is time you did something about it. After all, you are well enough paid, you ought to be glad to do a bit extra."

There was a time when Clarkson, if attacked in this manner, would have been silly enough to bite back and then we would have been able to cheerfully snap at his heels for an hour or two. But long and painful experience has taught Clarkson to keep his mouth shut at times like these.

Of course when he is opening shows in spring, when there is plenty of feed about, he mouths a lot of platitudes about the wisdom of us conserving fodder in order to "combat the inevitable drought which moves towards us with an inexorable and measured tread" and similar verbose nonsense.

But now he has enough sense to shut up if a drought is really on.

It is easy to castigate farmers for not having enough fodder to meet and beat a drought, but doing this isn't so simple, really.

For instance, baling, carting and storing enough hay to feed cattle through a long drought in farming country is so expensive that generally it would be far better to sell your cattle at the beginning of the drought and then sell the little bit of hay that you had.

If your breeding herd is of exceptional quality this comment may not apply, but it does usually if the drought is going to be a long one.

But the trouble is that you only know if it is going to be a long drought when it is too late. In dry times the country fairly bristles with weather prophets of all kinds, all recounting their many correct prophecies, but never remind us of their failures which occur as often as their successes.

So we have to make the decision on our own judgement and probably your banker or stock agent will leave you on your own so that when you are wrong he can claim he knew you were wrong all the time and you should have asked him!

It's not quite so hard with sheep because we have learnt that we can reap, store and then feed out grain much more cheaply than hay and grain will keep sheep alive for a long time.

It's true that after you have fed a sheep over \$3 worth of oats it may be worth \$3 less than when you started the process, but it is no good getting in a sweat about this.

You should take some comfort from the fact that whatever you decide to do will almost certainly be wrong.

Of course the city slickers get very anguished when they see on TV the drought stricken cows being shot and buried in a pit. I admit it wasn't a pretty picture but, after all, I guess to a cow, being shot and pushed into a pit is much the same as being killed in the abattoirs and having her skin pulled off.

City people are funny about things being killed. They burst into tears if they see a big whale being killed but quite cheerfully tuck into their mutton and lamb.

Yet I suppose a sheep's death is just as poignant to the sheep as the whale's death is to the whale.

It is hard to know what policies governments should follow for drought relief. For instance, in some droughts there is considerable amounts of money spent on helping drought-stricken farmers and when you see the television pictures of the rescue operations for starving stock your bowels of compassion are moved.

But when the suggestion is made that we ought to help the farmer who has, with infinite effort and expense, helped himself by conserving a lot of fodder in the good years, there is a howl of rage. "Why should we help him? He's a lucky sod. Certainly we will help his poor improvident neighbours but not him!"

Seeing this, the provident person may well decide that looking after yourself is a silly way to behave. But I guess that attitude is in line with almost everything in the Welfare State.