

The Revd Richard Teal

President of the Methodist Conference 2020/2021

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PASTORAL LETTER to the Agricultural Community

Dear Friends

We are contacting you at this crucial time for British Agriculture.

At this time of writing we do not know whether there will be a no deal Brexit or not. The Agricultural Bill is making its way through the House of Commons and again we do not know the repercussions of that and COVID 19 has the country indeed the world in its grip.

As President of the Methodist Conference during this year I am having many excellent zoom conversations with Farmers and members of the National Farmers Union. The conversations tend at the moment to centre around topics such as Brexit, the Agricultural Bill, Environmental issues, mental health issues, isolation, diversification, tenancy agreements, education about where food comes from, climate change, agricultural theft, the basic farming challenges of weather, resilience and mis-information, alongside the joys of farming such as new birth, working with nature, the life cycle of everything and being custodians of the land.

I have greatly appreciated these conversations and I trust there are many more to come as my year progresses until next summer.

Farming has played a key role in shaping the countryside we all enjoy today. I live in rural East Yorkshire, among the beautiful rolling Wolds and spent 11 years living surrounded by the outstanding natural beauty of Cumbria. The agricultural community is to be thanked. Every sector, livestock, arable, horticulture, upland, lowland, organic, conventional and tenanted and every type of farm continues to carry out a huge amount of work to protect and enhance the landscape, encourage wildlife, benefit soil and water and reduce the impact on the climate. With agriculture occupying over 70% of the UK



landmass, farm businesses play an irreplaceable role in looking after our cherished natural environment. Farmers are custodians of the countryside and are well practiced in the words of Minette Batters, the National Farmers Union President, 'at balancing its needs while producing safe, affordable, traceable food'.

We believe we now need a new dialogue, realism, trust and changing behaviour for both farmer and consumer, and a willingness to pay the real price of food and good farming to make things as good as they should be. In the words of James Redbank's in his recent book 'English Pastoral,' Some of the solutions are small and individual, but others require big political and structural changes. We have to flex our political muscles in our millions to create a politics that sees the land and what happens on it as being at the heart of building a more just and decent country.'

We wish to express our appreciation of all that you do, and all that you are.

Please be assured of our thoughts and prayers for you.

With very good wishes

With every blessing,



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