THE FARM OF GREEN PASTURES AND CONTENTED COWS

Court Lodge farm comprises 90 acres sloping down from the Etchingham-Burwash road in East Sussex to the banks of the River Rother. Ray and Sheila Barber have farmed there keeping livestock, for nearly 30 years. They live in a small bungalow on the farm, which also includes some simple buildings that serve for housing of the animals in winter and shelter as necessary during the summer. The river is weakly tidal and floods the lower meadows in winter, which helps to keep them in good heart for summer grazing.

Trees and bushes flourish on the boundaries and separating the fields. Wild animals visit or have habitats on the farm, notably foxes and deer; the farm's livestock comprises 60 cattle and sheep, three donkeys, three ponies, and four horses. They have been spared from rearing for "production" or profit, and the whole now comprises 90 acres of pastures set aside, with no grants nor subsidies from the government (which would be available if the farm were adding meat and milk to the subsidised overproduction and storage in the EC of these commodities and their derivatives); nor have applications to the Countryside Stewardship scheme of the Department of the Environment been of avail, although Ray and Sheila Barber's custody fits such a description.

The Barbers exclude hunts from their land.

REVERSING MALIGN FARMING TRENDS

Use of artificial insemination (AI) in cattle after WW2 and development of dual-purpose dairy/beef animals led to intensification and increasing cruelty and stress on cow and calf. Aspects of this pressure and its corollaries are now being exposed by problems with the exports of veal calves. The Barbers decided over 25 years ago to quit the business. They were prompted by the anguish in separating calves a few days old from their dams to be pitched into the auction-rings at livestock markets and by the wear-and-tear and early breakdown and culling, for "manufacturing" beef (as in burgers), of cast or prematurely barren cows succumbing to production diseases. They rescued calves, cows, and other animals in distress at local markets and slaughterhouses, looked after them in a simple fashion, and left them unmolested to populate the pastures. Ray Barber combined this stewardship with work as a lorry-driver, which sufficed to support the venture financially.

The Barbers kept a few horses and entered them in shows. Earnings from trophies did not meet expenses, so the horses have been retained uncompetitively.

The going become much harder after Ray had an accident; he had to retire two years ago from paid employment (the couple are now 67 years old).

DO-GOODERS MUSCLE IN - BUT STILL NOT STRONGLY ENOUGH

The history of the farm-turned-sanctuary includes another factor entering five or six years ago. In 1976 the Vegetarian Society's Research Section issued a long-term Green Plan for farming, food, health, and the land, in which reversion to low-input systems

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and a reducing toll extorted by the live/deadstock industry were objectively assessed. The Plan anticipated an increase of a niche market into the trend now running strongly and foresaw both the need to curtail the forced breeding of livestock and the duty of retaining a population of animals reverting, with appropriate attention, to a feral state to enjoy and enrich the countryside. This concept of farm animals seemed at first sight ridiculous but on contemplation became a reasonable responsibility for a nation happily keeping 15 million "unproductive" dogs and cats, many pampered to the point of cruelty. The Barbers and vegetarians were therefore thinking and acting along the same lines. Cattle, sheep, pigs, and poultry are more than meat, milk, eggs, and manure on legs.

As the Barbers' financial problems deepened, they turned for help and participation from vegetarians. The Vegetarian Society disbanded its Research Section and appropriated its funds; however, the Section arose as a new body called Vegetarian Economy and Green Agriculture (VEGA), some of whose members continued to contribute donations to the farm. Young Indian Vegetarians who, being inspired by Hindu tenets of ahimsa, applauded the connotations in welfare and environment that the Barbers were demonstrating. The Barbers would have had to fold up some time ago but for the generosity of YIVs, but these and other contributions, augmenting allocations from the Barbers' pensions, are now not enough. This Christmas the mangers in the stables are full and the animals are bedded with adequate straw, but it has been touch-and-go; it may be the last for the sanctuary at Court Lodge Farm, for the Barbers may be forced to sell up. By a quirk of fate the land has appreciated for activities the Barbers abhor: BSE (mad cow disease) has never struck on Court Lodge farm, so it would appeal to a producer setting up an intensive dairy/beef enterprise.

LIFE DOWN ON THE FARM

The 90 acres at Court Lodge have become a sanctuary of granny pastures. Some of the animals have lived there as long as the Barbers. Unmolested, the animals live out normal spans: cattle to their mid-20's, a ram is approaching his 20th birthday, and others are enjoying, literally, donkeys' years of life. The animals congregate in their own groups and the species mix equably. They manifest every sign of attachment to the farm and their fellows and of trust in the Barbers. Present numbers overstretch resources; more animals could be saved and supported on the land, but such introductions would demand extra labour and costs beyond our means. Millions of commercial animals are slain (massacred would be an apt word) before they reach puberty: a veal calf or lamb would be killed a few months old, a bullock would "go down the road" aged no more than a year or two, a breeding ewe or ram is unlikely to see its sixth birthday, and an average dairy cow, weary and exhausted after three years of hectic production of calves and milk - lactation and gestation being forced simultaneously for over half the year - would be burgered before she could enter her fourth lactation aged five or six years old.

Geriatric farm animals - like old people and pets - require extra attention. Tender loving care at Court Lodge by Ray and Sheila Barber, with all their experience, has to be supplemented by consultations with vets and visits, which cost a lot. These

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expenses are not stinted - for the animals' sake and to the vets' benefit, one of whom has brought acupuncture to the relief of a ram coping with the arthritis of old age. Treatment requires more than Herriot-worship when the patient weighs over ten times more than the human carer. One stampede in the free range occupants of Court Lodge farm started by low-flying aircraft or a hot air balloon can run up hefty vets' bills for animals left hobbling with strains and aches.

The pastures are managed and rotated according to good farming practice. The swards yield hay and silage for winter keep. The farm has little capital equipment, so the Barbers have to call in contractors for help with some of these tasks and with muck-spreading. The Barbers do much of the work in feeding and bedding the animals and cleaning out the housing and yards. At their age these jobs are becoming especially arduous. Straw (for bedding) is expensive in the area because competition is fierce from prosperous local horsey culture enterprises, and East Sussex and Kent do not grow cereal crops on the scale of, say, East Anglia, from which supplies could be brought in, but at high cost. Moreover, intensive cereal growing concentrates on short-strawed varieties with reduced value as comfortable bedding for livestock. Some owners can afford wood-shavings for this purpose, but the Barbers have so far managed to avoid this cost by shopping around keenly for suitable straw.

THE COSTS

These practices are reflected in the average annual expenditure and income on which the Barbers work now. The figures omit any reward for their labour and management; they also exclude contributions from their pensions and ad hoc donations we manage to attract. We have allowed little for contingencies and acts of God (such as the gales of the late 1980's, which took off roofs and wrought other damage). We have also excluded the perennial cost of running an overdraft.

AVERAGED ANNUAL BUDGET

	Expenses	£	Income	£
1.	Straw	4,000	Donations from YIVs	8,000
2.	Hay	2,000	Lettings d	1,800
3.	Oats, barley, bran	2,400		
4.	Fertiliser	1,800		9,800
5.	Contractors:			
	Haymaking	1,400		
	Silage a	1,000		
6.	Labour b	6,000		
7.	Maintenance	500		
8.	Insurance	350		
9.	Services c	500		
10.	Fuel	50		
11.	Fencing materials	200		
12.	Farriers, foot trimming	800		
13.	Vets	5,000		
		£26,000		

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a. This figure includes the cost of sheeting and tires.

b. Costed at £5 per hr., 4 hr. a day in winter, 3 hr. in summer. This is hypothetical at the moment, as the Barbers cannot afford to pay for labouring assistance.

c. Water, electricity, etc.

d. A building is let as a workshop for a local carpenter.

PROSPECTS

Court Lodge farm's pioneers are tackling a challenge implicit in the aspirations of green-mined people for a kinder approach to the land and to animals, which means reversal of untoward intensification and revision of farming policies, some of which are tardily recognising the factors but offer rewards and inducements to recently-reforming transgressors rather than to custodians of the land and resources who have far-sightedly taken initiatives in putting into practice instructive changes.

The Barbers would not forgo all modern developments; indeed, they would like to invest in some light equipment to lessen the back-breaking toil. They are at an age when they must prepare urgently for their own retirement and when they regard possibilities of diversification and expansion as tests for the successors we seek with suitable experience and commitment. True to the project's intent we would like to complement the sanctuary with developments on the land of horticulture. The area is a centre of viniculture but, more relevantly, of a revival of the traditional cultivation of cobnuts (hazels and filberts). This would be a nice development and earner if Court Lodge farm and its inhabitants can be kept going through immediate crises.

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A Typical Day On The Farm

Would you like to work on a farm?

Below is a typical day in the life of Ray and Sheila Barber who have exhausted their life and their life savings running a farm for retired animals. It is only through Ray and Sheila's compassion that these abused and discarded animals have been saved to live out the rest of their days in peace.

05-30 The start of another day at Court Lodge Farm. The first job is to put the kettle on for a cup of tea and get shaved. Sheila is now up and gets ready for her early start. We listen to the shipping forecast, hoping it won't be too wet or windy.

06-00 Go out with Prince, our Alsation and check to see if everything is OK with our animals.
Sheila gets warm water to make up the feed for the three Shire Horses, which are then cleared out and given the first hay feed of the day.

7-30 Three lots of cattle in their separate pens are fed. Sheila now gives warm feed to three old sheep, aged about 18 years old. They have arthritis, so they are kept in a deep clean straw to keep them warm and dry. Ray feeds six cattle and five ponies in their loose boxes.

8-00 Ray and Sheila go in to the house for breakfast and then out again onto the farm.

8-30 Ray cleans out the main area of the covered yard whilst Sheila cleans out and feeds two old Donkeys and two old Cows in their loose boxes. Sheila helps Ray to finish cleaning out the covered yard, by hand with fork, shovel and wheelbarrow.

10-00 The next job is to use one wheelbarrow each to feed 10 loads of silage to the main group of cattle in the covered yard. The cattle feeders are filled to last the cattle all day. Sleeping area for cattle now bedded up with bales of straw.

12-30 Shire Horses cleaned out again and given fresh hay.

13-15 Time for a quick cuppa and sandwich.

13-45 Out again onto the farm to clean out and then feed the animals again (repeating the morning's work except for the covered yard).

16-30 Back into the house for a cup of tea.

16-45 Out again onto the farm to clean out, feed and give fresh bedding to the Shire Horses.

18-00 Sheila now cooks dinner and the highlight of the day is to listen to the Archers on Radio 4. It is bliss to be able to sit down for a couple of hours.

21-00 Out again onto the farm to clean and put the Shire Horses to bed with titbits of carrot. Check the rest of our animals to make sure that they are all OK for the rest of the night.

22-00 And so to bed.

As our society is still based on co-operation where the consequences of helping people enables everyone to go forward in their lives, we all need to apply this to the Barber's situation and many others like it.

One way to help these animals is through donations, since a Vet's bill can come to hundreds of pounds for time and medicines. If a sick animal has to be moved, the roof of the stall may have to be taken off when the total bill could reach a thousand pounds. The annual running cost of the farm reaches ten thousand pounds for feed and Vets.
The farm's daily timetable is put back when a vet has to attend a sick animal and so the day finishes much later in the evening. Ray and Sheila have no choice, they have to continue, without money, without help if one of them becomes ill:
Would you want to step into their shoes?

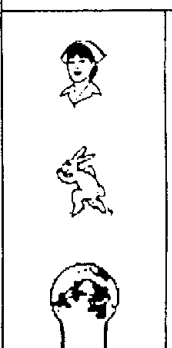
Please contact BAAG and we will forward your donations (however small in terms of amount/time, covenants and good wishes to the Barbers.

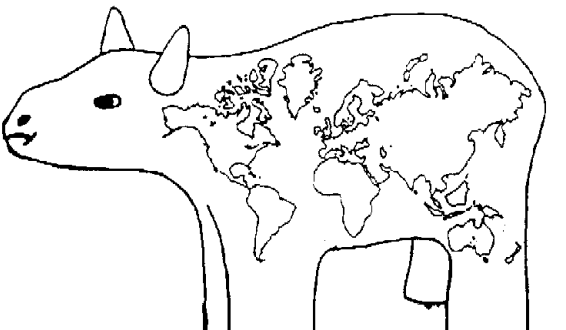
How do I Join BAAG? By giving us a call, your support and your views...

For BAAG *Veggie /Vegan Individual and Community Action:*

Phone (0256) **64498**

Vegetarian/Vegan Support/Campaigns for Health/Non Animal Foods/Reducing Pollution/Reducing Starvation





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