

## OPINION

# Climate Action

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## Challenges facing district's farmers

**D**o you ever wonder about the 'District' part of Market Harborough, and especially what life is like for our farmers? Recently I had the privilege of speaking with one of our local farmers to find out more.

David (not his real name) talked about the challenges he faced over the years, but also the positives.

Like many areas of Leicestershire, David's soil is very heavy clay and growing cereal crops on it like wheat and oats is a yearly gamble. Years ago, David sold off his animals and created space for some local businesses to provide a regular income and be able to carry on farming. Many farmers have had to set up secondary businesses to survive.

In the past couple of years, the annual gamble became even greater once the ugly war started being waged by Russia against Ukraine, causing all sorts of shortages and increased prices. David had prepared a sheet of figures to demonstrate what he meant. The figures showed how prices being paid for crops had varied greatly, yet costs of fuel, machinery, paying contractors, buying new sprays and fertiliser for example, had risen massively and generally stayed high. The huge fluctuation in both sales and input prices has hugely increased the financial risk of farming along with the changes in weather patterns.

November and December were the wettest months David has ever known. Harvesting the



maize proved very difficult and planting the next crop was impossible. Now he needs a good spring, hoping there's enough seed available. He's also hoping for better conditions and prices this year.

David mentioned his concern for livestock farmers, especially dairy. Increased and excessive rainfall means that as the farmers are only allowed to spread slurry in the drier

spring and summer months to prevent leaching into our water courses, they are faced with the considerable cost of building bigger slurry stores and covering open concrete areas where cattle walk and feed.

A big positive for David is that over more recent years, he has been able to pursue his first love of farming, namely conservation. Thanks to government grants and schemes, he has planted tree copses that are approaching maturity, grass to provide fodder for animals to enjoy, with trees planted in those areas too, and lots of quick growing hedges like hawthorn. He and his family have enjoyed seeing many more birds and other wildlife in these areas. It's the great joy of David's life.

David is also excited about the future of farming as farmers try regenerative farming methods such as not ploughing the soil to stop it being compacted and destroying the amazing life going on there. Another change is planting cover crops like clover that enriches the soil naturally. Finally, businesses need to offset their unavoidable carbon emissions and farming sustainably is much cheaper and more certain than building unproven and very expensive, ugly carbon capture storage facilities.

What does the future hold for our farmers and our locally produced food? We need our government to have a consistent long-term policy that takes food security seriously, David said.

For our part, if we the readers, use our LOAF <https://greenchristian.org.uk/gc-campaigns/loaf-2/why-use-your-loaf/the-future-is-more-hopeful>, says Julie