



The Link



(Acts as an Intermediary Only and not as a Principal)

Christmas Edition

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Peter Day

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Exactly 12 years ago today (December 10th) the Registrar of Friendly Societies in London affixed his seal to the Rules of Ridings Machinery Ring Ltd and RMR officially became a legal entity with the objects of "Acting as an intermediary on behalf of its members to facilitate, encourage and promote the efficient and rational use of machinery and labour and in doing so contribute to the reduction of fixed costs of participating members business and to develop complementary services which improve the efficiency of members production"

Earlier this month the Board met for an afternoon to take a critical strategic look at the business and defined the key objective of the Ring to be "to increase members profitability." So, perhaps we have been working on the right lines after all.

One of the driving forces behind the formation of the Ring in 1992 was the perceived detrimental implication to the farming community of the "McSharry CAP reforms". As events turned out neither these nor those that followed under Commissioner Fischler will have the same impact as the current Mid Term Review.

I will not make any further reference to the MTR but leave it to Joe Barrowman in his Chairman's Report and to the numerous experts who are filling meeting rooms up and down the country, other than to observe that an enquiry to the internet search engine *Google* on the topics shown resulted in the following from which you can draw your own conclusions: -

"McSharry Agricultural Reform"
566 hits

"Fischler Agricultural Reform"
40,300 hits

"Mid Term Review Agricultural Reform"
591,000 hits

As the Ring trading year draws to a close I am delighted to report that as far as turnover is concerned we have already exceeded last years final figures and look set to achieve the budget. Although we

have not been able to meet every request especially where labour is concerned the core services of machinery and labour look as if they will end up 25% higher than last year.

This lack of staff and especially relief milkers is a cause for concern and if we cannot fill the need from local sources we, and the industry, will have to look elsewhere, which in all probability means Eastern Europe. The RMR RS new website www.ukfarmwork.com is attracting hits but there remains the twin questions of assessing competence and finding accommodation to be resolved.

The theme for our stand at Harrogate this year was also labour or more explicitly, the lack of it. The New Holland tractor kindly provided by Russells of Kirbymoorside with a large yellow revolving polystyrene question mark in the driving seat was sufficiently unusual to cause visitors to pause for thought and take on board the message "who will drive your tractor in the future"

The construction of this masterpiece of engineering was a tribute to the latent engineering talent to be found in most farmers and an overdose of Blue Peter when young, utilising as it did a windscreen wiper motor, a length of welding rod, a plastic ruler, the case of a bic biro and plenty of gaffer tape. (see back page)

Finally I would like to thank all the members for their co-operation in contributing to this success, especially the demanders for their forbearance and those suppliers "who went the extra mile" during the difficult times that we had this year.

May you all have a happy and peaceful Christmas and return to the fray invigorated in both spirit and mind, ready to face the challenges and opportunities that are just waiting to be identified.



Supported Under the England Rural Development Programme by DEFRA and the European Agricultural Guidance and Guarantee Fund



Ring Needs Assessments – A Survey of Farming Trends in Yorkshire



John Rooney
Field Manager

As many members will know, for the past two and a half years, as part of our Rural Enterprise Scheme funding, we have been undertaking the completion of Ring Needs Assessment questionnaires from farming and agriculture based businesses in Yorkshire.

Our target is to complete a total of 1000 RNA forms by the end of June 2005, and so far with the help of Ring members and others, we have completed over 750 questionnaires from a wide cross-section of enterprises throughout the county.

The information gathered gives a fascinating insight into the changing face of farming businesses in this region. A high proportion of the businesses surveyed have changed considerably over the past five years, in terms of the number of people employed, the size of individual enterprises and in the level of diversification in the businesses. We are only too aware that all enterprises need to adapt to

changing markets and trading conditions, and perhaps it is no surprise therefore to see anything from a dating agency to a pop group listed under the 'non-agricultural business interests' section of our form.

Of course, the main purpose of the survey is to assess the changing needs of rural businesses in the region, and to attract new members to the Ring where a need for Ring services is evident, and to this end, we recently organised a farmers evening at Grange Moor, Wakefield.

Our local members were invited, together with a number of farmers and contractors in the area who had completed a Ring Needs Assessment form. After an introduction by Joe Barrowman, Peter gave a presentation on the Ring and our services, and we finished off the evening with questions from the floor and a buffet supper for our guests. A number of people were interested in the services we offer, and this will hopefully lead to new members joining.

John Rooney

Welcome to New Members...

Sorry, not available on online version



Joe Barrowman

Chairman's Report

In the early spring we held a conference entitled "Aye to the Future" at which the speakers were Lord Haskins, Sir Ben Gill and Andrew Black of Savills. They gave us a view of where we were then and what might lie ahead. It was an excellent day. We wished as a group to give a positive slant to our industry in that we were saying "yes" to the future.

Now December is upon us and the subsidies as we know them stop. Over the years we have become dependant upon these subsidies, so when they disappear it will concentrate our minds on what to do next. People I speak to, as yet do not have a clear idea of how they wish to progress, and nor do I. We are all trying to get to grips with the new rules and subsequent clarifications and assess how they will affect us as individuals.

To paraphrase, "there are rules that we know, there are some rules we don't know, and there are some rules we don't know we don't know," but despite this, we will have to sort all of this out for our own circumstances in the very near future, and we shall discover that the worth of a thing is what it will bring.

The strength of the Ring is that it will allow us to consider our options without committing ourselves to major expenses or necessarily disposing of assets until we see how we wish to develop our future strategy. The Ring will be of great benefit to members in both the long and the short term – especially in these times of total rethink. Peter has a good knowledge of what is going on, so for someone planning to expand he will know of someone who wishes to contract and this is where the Ring comes into its own.

The Ring helps even out the peaks and troughs of demand by different members in the farming calendar. On different farms the peaks and troughs occur at different times – so that our members can access resources at the time they most need them – when others may have spare capacity, which is what the Ring has always been about.

The Ring has gone well this year with both turnover and recruitment increasing at a satisfactory level. The foot & mouth outbreak had a far greater impact upon the business than we had anticipated and although its after effects are still being felt, we feel that we are now getting out of the situation and can look forward to the future with optimism.

I would like to thank you all for supporting the Ring and I appreciate all the effort put in by John, Frances, Jane and Peter together with my fellow Board members who all do a lot of work in their own way to make the Ring successful.

I trust that you will have a happy Christmas and that next year and the future is a positive one for all of us.

Joe Barrowman

Conveyors & Elevators

Through one of my contacts we now have access to one of the largest suppliers of new and used spares and replacements of imperial measurement Carrier conveyors and elevators. They also have the facility to supply new belting for all makes of conveyors which can be pre-punched with holes for grain buckets or flights to your exact specification using computer driven hardware.

In fact if you are in the market for any new or second hand grain handling equipment from gravity tables to fans and grain walling give me a call.

Services & Equipment update

In the Chairman's Comments Joe has written that we try to have a good knowledge of what is going on, which is perfectly true, and one of the ways of doing this is to ensure that we have an up to date list of the equipment and services that you have available for other members. Every year we send a printout with the end of year newsletter of what we have recorded against you on the database and hope that you will update it in an idle moment over the holiday period and return it in the prepaid envelope. Some of you even notify us at the time of changing equipment and even better still when you have finished a seasonal task and are available to work for someone else. This is particularly useful to us in respect of labour.

I also appreciate the feedback we get from telephone conversations with members in the normal course of managing the Ring. In an ideal world John and I would like to be able to visit you on the farm on a regular basis but this is expensive and time consuming. However if anyone would like a visit please let me know and it will of course be arranged.

We know from experience that you like and expect to speak to a person rather than an answerphone when you phone the office, and if it is not manned the service suffers. In a short survey I ran last week less than 1 in 3 callers left a message. I do have caller display and endeavour to call back anyone who is too shy or frustrated to leave a message. Don't forget that both John and I work from home and you can also try us in the evenings (numbers on the front cover) From my point of view up to 10pm is ok, but after that I would expect it to be an emergency!

“Think outside the box”

From the “Ring Need Assessment” questionnaires that John has been organising the completion of as part of our DEFRA grant aid (they are designed to give us some pointers to trends and future plans for the business particularly in respect of forward planning, labour and machinery) there are a lot of entrepreneurs out there doing something different. If you think your enterprise would benefit another member please put it on the list. If you have holiday cottages or facilities include those as well. The networking between Rings is good and we have arranged several short breaks for members of other Rings this year. If you have a promotional web site include the address.

Even better, **if you have not got a web site have you considered having one?** This is just one of the services available from RMR Rural Services. For an example look at www.templefarmhouse.co.uk

I have also thought that it would be a good idea for us to have a **list of all members who are involved in the production and sale of produce** either through farmers markets or a farm shop. Let me have the details and I could include it as a page on the ring website with a link to your own if appropriate.

Email addresses are also welcome – if you have not had one of our e updates recently it is either because you have never given us your address, you have changed your ISP or in I suspect the odd case you have forgotten your password and not downloaded your messages and your email post box is full.

To get your address added to our list just send an email to pday@ridingsmachineryring.co.uk Incidentally, in case you are wondering, your printout does not have facility to record e mail addresses.



"who will drive your tractor in the future?"