

FROM GRAHAM ELLIS STANFORDS

As operators of the only weekly Livestock Market in East Anglia covering the three counties of Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk we have seen since the major Foot and Mouth outbreak in 2001 a substantial reduction in livestock numbers in the area. The large arable farms concentrated on growing combinable crops with less and less cattle kept in yards on the mainly arable farms which had been traditional in the past.

We are however very fortunate in East Anglia having well established wholesale and retail abattoirs providing good competition for quality stock and thereby providing a choice to arable farmers who are still willing to invest in the Livestock industry.

Personally being a third generation auctioneer, I have seen dramatic changes in Colchester which used to be a major pig market and now due to the severe reduction in the number of pig units in East Anglia, no live pigs are sold through the market.

I am a committed supporter of the live market system giving true competition and thereby maximising returns to farmers and in Colchester Market we are pleased to provide that outlet for local beef and sheep farmers and are supported by many from the Eastern counties.

The current beef trade is buoyant for the best with numbers totally insufficient for the demand being the bright spot in the Livestock Industry. Major concerns have hit beef feeding units with TB being the greatest one and due to the collapse of the dairy industry in the Eastern counties with the number of dairy farms reduced by well over 50% over the last 10 years, the number of available store cattle has also been reduced.

There is little likelihood of any improvement in the situation of numbers through the market. However, the outlet is vital for both the abattoirs, butchers and of course the farmers, they are all part of the system and need each other.

The sheep market in 2015 has been extremely difficult, the end of the hogget season saw a collapse in trade unexpected by many and that has continued right through the new season lamb trade.

This has resulted in many producers questioning whether they will this season feed hoggets although it is pleasing to note that the area of stubble turnip being drilled is still in line with last year and thereby hopefully numbers will not be reduced.

The sheep market of course affected dramatically by the euro which has resulted in prices lower than we had hoped but again in Colchester all sheep are easily sold to local wholesalers and butchers who are willing to pay a premium for quality stock. As with any lives markets we see all breeds and classes of sheep and we have a market for all.

Most our clients are saying they will reinvest in breeding stock but looking to buy at some £20 per head less than last year and store sheep prices have started on a similar percentage reduction.

With the extreme wet weather from mid to the end of August, harvest has been drawn out but the yields have been good but price low, surely corn looks worth feeding when returns for the best cattle and sheep are competitive turning corn to meat for profit.

The reduction in wheat and barley prices together with soya has also helped the pig farmers where the trade has been somewhat disappointing but net margin has been maintained due to the reduction in feed prices.

We at Colchester Market are pleased to support the livestock industry by providing an out let for all cattle and sheep whether it be finished or store stock.