

# over the gate

by Claire Eckley



## The next generation

**We've had a summer of exams — our younger has had GCSEs and older has had A-levels. Revision all seemed rather laid back to me, but a friend said keeping things calm was the best bet. We await our results.**

A year ago, neither had much idea what they might do after school. Younger has always been interested in the farm, as evidenced by TikTok videos of tractors, and what I have been told is a "straight pipe" on one of the New Hollands!

Older, partly due to having attended school in a more urban location, is not so interested but is always happy to sit on a tractor in the summer and cart some grain. Now they are about to start new chapters in their education.

Younger, with his passion for machinery, has always risked getting bored at agricultural college. One of the agricultural colleges was so concerned that after we visited for an open day, they thoughtfully took the time to scroll through all the details of open day attendees, work out who he was, and phone to discuss this.

But we have found a solution to possible boredom — cows! He will live with his aunt and her family, and help milk their

360 cows, while attending their local land-based college. A bonus for him is that his chosen agriculture course specialises in farm mechanisation — so less animals, more machinery. University is still an option afterwards, or he can start ticking things off his to-do list, like that trip to NZ, a season foraging in the southwest, a long summer driving a combine from Texas to Canada...

Older is confident that product design engineering is for him, and I can see why. He's happy to problem solve and to work in a large team, but not sure what particular field yet. That comes later, but there obviously may be some exciting opportunities for him to use his knowledge of farming in his engineering career. Tractor cabs, robots, handheld instruments, packhouse lines — the agricultural world could be his oyster. Or maybe sport products will be his passion and we will lose him from the industry, for a while at least.

I'm a leader in our Young Farmers Club, and it's interesting to see the routes members are taking or considering. Those with a strong work ethic are a great example to their club mates, and the club provides a useful network, not just through parents but also via the wider agricultural community. We're lucky our members studying degrees have remained active in the club and we see them often. Certainly one older member has been inspired to return to education.

One thing about leading a Young Farmers Club is that this year, at least, we're not short of grain cart drivers, and both sons are able to take a week off to go on holiday with friends. Hopefully older will not bring back COVID from the Reading

Festival like he did last year!

Engaging young people as they choose their careers has always been difficult for land-based industry. Guy once took part in a careers evening at a grammar school. He was put in the 'environmental' subjects room, which was kind of OK. At least he had a fancy video on show, and he parked a nice tractor in the playground. But did those bright young people choose land-based industry? Probably not, but they might now be engineers, scientists, or financial managers in businesses that have food in their product ranges. Do they think they work in land-based industry? Again, probably not.

Harvest has begun here, and the combine is happily chewing through wheat on some of our better ground. I must mention the possible drought on the horizon, as that will almost

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certainly make it rain between the writing and the reading of this article! We are loath to plant oilseed rape, or cover crops. Our land is heavy, and our tillage is minimal, but it's still hard to keep hold of water. We've had only around two thirds of the usual rainfall so far this year, since January. So it's a watching brief at the moment.

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*Kent has only had only around two thirds of the usual rainfall so far this year, as evidenced by the cracks in the ground in this crop of oats. Rain will be needed before cover crops or OSR are planted at Eckley Farms.*

