



WITH MARTIN LINES

Nature NATTERS

Different backgrounds, shared purpose

“As I write amidst the heatwave, the merry-go-round of life and

government is spinning ever-faster, and we await to see what comes next as Stephen Morgan steps into the role of Minister of State in Defra.

Constant churn and changing of roles in any workplace makes delivering long-term goals difficult. When someone is recruited for a new role or given new responsibilities, many would say a thorough understanding and knowledge of the industry is essential. But if someone has excellent leadership skills, dedication to the role, and an understanding of the challenges in front of them, I believe they can be a powerful actor.

There are many good examples where people have taken on roles with little industry-specific background but the ability to pick it up and make a difference. Think Andy Cato and George Lamb of Wildfarmed: a DJ and a TV star. But to be able to do this, people require time. To stay in roles long enough to get a good understanding of the bigger picture, the wider state of the industry and how it fits into our society and economy long term.

When recruiting to fill vacancies in our farms and businesses, sometimes we often hope to find someone very experienced to come in and hit the ground running. Yet sometimes it's the best option to bring in somebody with a different, complementary

Something picturesque from our farm to ponder.



skillset, and develop them in the role; someone without preconceived ideas or an outdated or jaded mindset. This provides a clean slate, an opportunity to educate them in the way we want them to deliver their work and the skills they'll require for it.

In my work, I speak to a lot of different farmers, and it's not uncommon for a grower to experience resistance when training an experienced farm hand, if they're teaching new approaches or using technology that the worker isn't used to. The somewhat familiar, 'that's not how I've always done it...' But without an attitude of openness and enthusiasm to learn, experience can limit one's mindset and complacency can set in.

In saying this, I'm not denying the fundamental importance of older generations' wisdom – we'd benefit from listening to our forebears more than we do. But in this agricultural transition we find ourselves in, there's a responsibility on the younger generations to

support older generations to adapt to the innovative new farming machinery and practices that'll help us to transition and build resilience during the coming years.

With so many changes in agriculture at the moment, with pressures being felt from extreme weather events, the bank balance and new government policies, the need to share alternative ways of working and pick up new skills quickly is becoming increasingly important. And yet we're an industry with an ageing workforce and little capacity to support apprenticeships and new entrants.

We have to continue to find ways of bringing new blood into farming, whether that's from apprenticeships, college and university courses, or from career changers who want to adapt their life skills and experience to new ways of farming. Some of the most innovative thinkers and farm business leaders haven't come from multiple generations of farming families, they're coming into the industry

from a different path and have a fresh perspective on where the future lies.

So whether we're welcoming people into our farm businesses from unconventional or non-farming backgrounds, or welcoming a new minister to Defra with little or no farming experience, it's worth remembering that there's more than one path into agriculture, and more than one kind of person who can succeed in it. ●

YOUR CORRESPONDENT

Martin Lines is an arable farmer and contractor in South Cambridgeshire with more than 500ha of arable land in his care. His special interest is in farm conservation management and demonstrating that farmers can profitably produce food in harmony with nature and the environment. He's also chair of the Nature Friendly Farming Network UK. @LinesMartin martin.lines@nffn.org.uk.