

Here we are again, better late than never. The fact that this is late is not an indication that nothing is going on, quite the reverse. The battle is continuing, not just unabated but increasing, and there are signs that we are actually scoring some victories.

Farmers' Wives Visit

Not least of these victories was the visit of our courageous farmers' wives, led by Mrs William Pugh from Powys in Wales, to see Mr Nicholas Soames at MAFF headquarters in London on 26 June. The MP who arranged the meeting and accompanied them was Alex Carlile (Lib/Dem). He said afterwards that he was amazed at their knowledge and congratulated them on shaking Mr Soames. Mr Carlile said "I was proud of you". This is an important development, as this is the first time that the wives of sufferers have spoken out and presented a Minister with solid medical information to back their complaints. The effect of this visit was that the Welsh Farmers Union delegation which went to MAFF the next day, to ask for the reintroduction of compulsory dipping, was turned down! Well done ladies! Since then Farming Today (BBC Radio 4) has broadcast an excellent interview with Mrs Jane Rees of South Glamorgan and her husband Tom, and their daughter Polly. Both Tom and Polly have been badly affected by OPs

MPs see Mrs Shephard again

Paul Tyler with his all-party group of MPs went to see Gillian Shephard just before she was moved to a new job. She appeared less confident than he has ever seen her. She asked why there are no Irish farmers complaining, and in fact she is wrong, we hear a lot from Irish farmers with problems, but they do not trust British bureaucrats, and so do not report to the VMD, do you blame them? There is a great concern in the European Commission about OPs in Ireland, and in particular residues in water.

Paul Tyler also reported the conversation his delegation had with Mrs Shephard about certification. He told her that question and answer forms do not constitute training, and will not safeguard the health of one farmer. The Countess of Mar has also reported that some farmers are forming syndicates to buy OP dips in bulk through the one member who has got his certificate, so that the whole scheme is a farce. Mrs Shephard asked the delegates' opinion of the reintroduction of compulsory dipping, and they told her that that would be entirely wrong, and that curing outbreaks of scab with injectables would be the way forward. They also emphasised that notification must be reintroduced, and asked why it had ever been rescinded.

Since William Waldegrave was given the post at MAFF he has had a long detailed letter from SWEPA asking him to institute epidemiological surveys of all sheep farmers, so that we can know the true numbers of sufferers, followed by detailed clinical investigations into the claims of ill-health. No reply has as yet been received.

Benefits Agency

SWEPA is conducting a long battle with the Benefits Agency in Leeds about Industrial Injury and Disability Benefits. We have sent them a full analysis of the situation that UK sheep farmers find themselves in, in the areas of medicine, science, law and politics, plus benefits problems, etc. (If anyone wants a copy

please send a stamped self-addressed envelope to E. Sigmund, address at the end of this letter). The centre of our problem is that the civil servants in the Agency admit that they know nothing about OP poisoning, the doctors they appoint to examine sufferers know nothing, and they will not refer you to those who are experts, such as Dr Jamal and Professor Peter Blain.

Why has the government set up a specialist panel of doctors to look into chronic ill-health from OP exposure, but will not give that committee the funding or facilities to actually examine and test any of you? You are the evidence that everyone keeps asking for, but when we ask "why not carry out the research on those who have become unwilling guinea-pigs?" there is a deafening silence. This is not honest, it is not rational and it is not good science. Despite that refusal the chairman of the medical panel (Dr Bateman) wrote to SWEPA to say that they want to carry out epidemiological surveys. After Christopher Booker's latest onslaught in the Sunday Telegraph Dr Bateman wrote saying that they would look at individual cases. If you wish to write to him laying out your case his address is: Dr N. Bateman, Wolfson Unit, Claremont Place, Newcastle on Tyne NE1 4LP. I hope that you will do this, because he will not look at the 260 plus cases on our database; perhaps if you all write individually he will not be able to ignore the evidence any more.

Legal Conference

SWEPA's Legal/Medical/Scientific Conference is going on in September, at King's College in the Strand in London. We are very pleased at the interest shown by the legal profession, the scientific and medical community, and in particular the press, TV and radio. This should again raise the subject of the difficulty of proving environmental poisoning in law.

The toxicologist, Professor Bridges, from the University of Surrey has entitled his speech "Whose side are you on - God or Mammon? The dilemma of the scientific expert". That is telling the government the truth, and Professor Bridges is on the VPC! How will Mr Waldegrave get around that?

Media Interest

The Sunday Independent review section is considering very seriously the possibility of doing a substantial piece about sheep dip poisoning, and if they do it will be very thorough and accurate journalism. The farming press also is becoming more sympathetic week by week. Christopher Booker is writing a piece on the struggle that we are having with the Benefits Agency.

Appeal to Politicians

I have written to the two Labour Shadow Spokesmen on Occupational Health (Ian McCartney) and Social Security (Michael Meacher) raising the subject of sheep dip poisoning and how appallingly it is being handled by this government, and I am also in touch with the Director of DG V at the European Commission (Ronald Haigh). DG V looks after Health & Safety. We are being sent a copy of their scientific report on this subject in September.