

BETH DICKINSON (2022)



**Agriculture is currently at a critical time, where farmers need to make important decisions to aid them in the upcoming agricultural transition and the reduction of subsidy payments (BPS).**

Therefore, it was a massive opportunity to be able to obtain an invitation to the farmers' voice leading 'NFU' conference 2022.

'British farming: a blueprint for the future', the theme for this year's conference, set the scene for the imperative discussions which were going to be held in the International Conference Centre, Birmingham over the two days.

NFU President Minette Batters, from the get-go, illustrated the importance of British Agriculture and the industry's place within the economy. However, following a momentous presentation from Defra Minister George Eustice, it was clear British Agriculture faces challenges from lack of government support and stringent regulations.

It was inspiring to hear how NFU members have evolved their farming businesses by developing 'out of the box' ideas. This proved that taking risks and moving away from predominately 'agriculture' has developed business resilience. This confirms that we should be encouraging farmers to look at the wider business and review all their opportunities rather than just craving a BPS substitute.

From a personal perspective the NFU conference was an unforgettable experience, providing an insight into the NFU's approach and empathy to the challenges the agricultural industry faces. Professionally, the knowledge and information I learnt was valuable and will aid all of my clients who require advice on how to 'tackle' the agriculture transition.

Everyone I met at the conference was forward-thinking and ambitious with their relationship to agriculture, which provided though-provoking conversations.

Overall, my conclusion from the two days is firstly: what a fantastic organisation the National Farmers' Union is. Not only does the NFU support farmers, but they also boost the agriculture industry. As confirmed by Minette, the attendance and people in the conference room proved what a fantastic industry we have that just require the government bodies to work with us, to ensure Britain's food supply.

A massive thank you to the Yorkshire Agricultural Society and the Future Farmers of Yorkshire for making my visit possible.



CHARLOTTE WHITE (2021)



**I'd like to thank Future Farmers of Yorkshire and NFU North East for the opportunity to attend the NFU 2021 conference.**

It got off to a gratifying start, reflecting on the coronavirus pandemic and how it had made for an unprecedented year for the industry. The industry had to

overcome adversities which brought food security into focus, this was a triumph for the industry as it opened an opportunity for future expansion of food production in the UK.

Minette Batters and Boris Johnson's opening addresses demonstrated we have witnessed the successes and accomplishments as an industry, but we shouldn't become complacent.

A wider appreciation is needed for a new modern age of agriculture, opening our eyes to our farming destiny. As an industry we should strive to be leaders in diversification, environmental progression and be forward thinking, applying positive change – regenerative agriculture, producing more for less, maximising land output aiming to increase self-sufficiency for the future, securing rural economies and creating global market opportunities.

I recognised investment was a significant topic, capitalizing in people, infrastructure and innovation. This begins with people, investing in education attracting new talent from varying backgrounds. Aiming to expand expertise, encouraging individuals to develop life-long career skills. New entrants will be encouraged to promote regenerative agriculture to recover the industry, which was made a priority during the pandemic.

Overall, the conference was promising, offering an optimistic outlook for securing a prosperous future for agriculture. The pandemic has publicised British agriculture, outlining its importance to feed a nation in an unprecedented time and I feel incredibly proud to be beginning my career in such a prosperous time for modern agriculture.



JOE WESTON (2021)



**Throughout the coronavirus pandemic, webinars haven't held the same appeal as 'in person' events. They tend to lack the peer-to-peer knowledge exchange where the science and the theory is**

**deciphered into real world interpretations of problems or opportunities.**

However, the opportunity to attend the NFU virtual conference, thanks to the Future Farmers of Yorkshire and the NFU North East office, was an opportunity not to be missed. Not many industry events can boast a recorded address from the prime-minister and attract the attendance of two cabinet ministers and the leader of the opposition.

Sustainability was at the heart of many of the messages being conveyed, refreshingly though this went beyond just considering the environment and it was re-iterated that for an agricultural business to be sustainable it must also be profitable. It seems that the

government want to encourage what they term 'green growth', by improving profit, reducing costs and improving natural assets along the way.

The Sustainable Farming Incentive looks like the first major step in this direction following our departure from the EU. The pilot scheme will open later this year and I'm sure we all hope that this will be successful as it is promised to be.

Payment for the scheme is set to take a Natural Capital approach and will reward farmers for outcomes and improvements, it should prove to be more flexible than previous schemes and many previously ineligible features will now be recognised and rewarded if they have a positive impact.

Reassuringly, all three Conservative MPs assured us that the government would not compromise on environmental, welfare or food safety standards in any trade talks.

Working as a fieldsman for RS Cockerill, who are both a grower and a processor of potatoes, I was particularly interested in George Eustice discussing his desire to increase transparency between suppliers and processors.



JESSICA MACKINTOSH (2020)



**H**aving only recently joined Future Farmers of Yorkshire I was somewhat reluctant to apply for a sponsored place at this year's NFU Conference.

However, after a few wise words from a fellow Future Farmers member about the chance to hear well respected speakers from within the industry and the opportunity to meet likeminded

people, I filled out my application.

I grew up on our family farm East of Doncaster before heading to Harper Adams University to study Agri Business. A few years on, I now work for Cranswick Foods as their Agriculture Supply Chain Manager and maintain a keen interest in farming and rural matters.

Throughout both days of the conference there were debates, discussions and commodity breakout sessions covering a wide range of topics from animal health to combatting rural crime.

The session 'How we are inspiring our nation's schoolchildren' was a personal highlight for me. It was fantastic to see the work being done with the younger generation, putting children back in touch with where food comes from and conveying important messages through project-based approaches focusing on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, showing them opportunities that our industry has to offer.

Attending the conference has given me the chance to broaden my knowledge within the industry. It allowed me to further understand the challenges we face, whilst also hearing about the success coming from the hard work already put in by many.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the NFU and Future Farmers of Yorkshire, for not only for my place at the conference but also for the events they organise throughout the year. The events are informative and a great way to meet other forward-thinking members eager to expand their knowledge and excel in their careers.



ALICE LIDDLE (2019)



**My highlight of the conference was when NFU President Minette Batters spoke with Defra's Michael Gove.**

Minette clearly explained the importance of our domestic food supply and managed to get Gove to confirm (in writing) that tariffs would remain as they are. This is vital to safeguard UK agriculture from high tariffs on food produced to much lower food standards outside the UK and protect consumer's food safety.

The facts, figures and references to scientific reports were also a highlight throughout the conference and from each speaker.

In particular, when it came to waste, if we reduce waste by 50%, we would feed the growing population with the resources we are using now. This stuck with me because the emphasis is always to produce more from less resources, however, I think more should be done to reduce waste at later stages in the supply chain.

The conference really did exceed all my expectations. I really enjoyed meeting new people who have inspired me to get more involved in the NFU and Future Farmers of Yorkshire. It was also great to listen to many different people's views on the future of UK agriculture which helped to reform my views.

The implications of Brexit and other issues were made clearer by industry experts, instead of the many posts we see on social media which are often inaccurate/misleading.

Despite feeling a sense of fear and uncertainty among delegates from every stage of the supply chain, I felt inspired by everyone's commitment to our industry and a slight sense of excitement at the opportunities these changes could create.

I would recommend going to the NFU Conference to anyone. I would advise them to throw themselves into it, speak to new people and share experiences. Go armed with questions and ask them in the Q&A time.

It is a great opportunity where representatives from every stage of the food supply chain are present, which brings the common goal of serving the consumer into the limelight.



JAMES JOHNSON (2019)



**There were many highlights for me during the two-day conference, but three parts stood out to me most in particular.**

The first was listening to NFU President Minette Batters, her opening speech was extremely engaging and informative, with a real insight into what the NFU have been trying to accomplish over the last 12 months. I personally had never heard Mrs Batters speak before, but she really filled you with confidence in the agricultural sector.

The second, was hearing Michael Gove MP speak about how his work at the head of Defra. The point that stood out for me was how a no deal Brexit would affect the farming community.

I didn't realise in the event of 'no deal' and the possibility of doing a deal with Europe after this point could easily come on a 0% tariff for imports, that we would have to offer this to other countries around the world, leaving us very open to cheap imports coming in from abroad, putting a lot of strain on the British food market.

Also, during his Q&A discussion with Mrs Batters, Mr Gove did say that this government will not reduce their high food standards, protecting British farmers against the likes of America and South America exporting low standard food.

During the livestock commodity session, it was fantastic to hear the growth in the world market for high standard red meat. From a beef producer this was very reassuring to hear.

Japan opening its doors to UK red meat for first time since BSE and China's indulgence in the western diet gives the red meat sector confidence that their produce will be wanted. This is all extra to an ever-growing population.

My advice for anyone else attending the conference is: don't be afraid to ask questions when you're able to. There is no better way to get information than from this top team. You also have a great opportunity to network with likeminded individuals. I managed to meet a couple of members of the NFU Livestock team that I very much enjoyed speaking to.

The main reason I'm very thankful to get the opportunity to go to the conference is that I've come away full of confidence that farming has a bright future even after this bumpy road we have ahead.

There are going to be some great opportunities for future world trade deals especially for our high standard produce as well as government backing during the possibility of a no deal Brexit.



NATALIE MOORE (2019)



**I would like to start by saying thank you to the Future Farmers of Yorkshire and NFU Northeast for giving me the opportunity to attend the NFU Conference in Birmingham in February.**

The NFU is an organisation I have known about since a young age but never completely understood and so the conference was an excellent chance to find out.

It is fantastic to see how much work they put into lobbying for farmers; in getting the government to understand the true needs of the industry, in helping to produce legislation that is fit for purpose and to opening up new markets for the products and bi-products of UK agriculture.

Being a member of both Yorkshire and Northern Area Young Farmers for many years as well as being a grain rep in Yorkshire and the North East for four years there were many familiar faces in the North East delegates seating area in the Main Conference Hall when we arrived and it was good to catch up with old friends again.

The highlight of the conference for me was the dinner in the evening for both the food and the social. I've never tasted such succulent rump steak and it was a credit to the chefs at the conference centre who turned out nearly a thousand of these in a short space of time.

The evening also provided an excellent chance to get to know the other future farmers and the free table wine helped the conversation flow. The other Future Farmers were all very interesting and inspiring to talk to, they were driven, ambitious and passionate about agriculture.

I love attending things like the NFU Conference because of the people you meet there; some very intelligent, forward-thinking people. I love chatting to them about what they do and what their ambitions are for the future.

I heard somebody recently say that you need to surround yourself by people you aspire to be like, and I always come away from these events with a new-found enthusiasm; it always puts the fire back in my belly.

To anyone else who gets the chance to attend, it is a great place to meet people, make sure you take the opportunity to chat to as many people as possible.

You will learn a lot, and despite some of the debates being fairly lengthy, there is plenty of time to relax and have fun.

NICK GRAYSON (2019)



**T**ravelling into central Birmingham on the train during rush hour on a weekday morning, wearing a shirt and tie was the first culture shock for me – it gave me time to become a little apprehensive about what I was about to be faced with. Who would I talk to? Would I stick out like a sore thumb? Were my chinos the right colour?

The train pulled into Birmingham New Street and I eagerly exited the station and began following Google maps towards the ICC. Within 5 minutes of walking I soon began seeing men adorned in tweed jackets heading in the same direction as myself and as the destination became closer and the number of tweed jackets around me grew, I knew I was heading in the right direction!

After arriving at the ICC and completing the formalities of registration and bag drop I grabbed myself a coffee and began to have a little wander to see if I could bump into any familiar faces. Before too much time had passed, I met up with a guy who I regularly speak to on Twitter, fantastic! I knew someone! It was now time to take our seats, where you are then seated within your own NFU region delegates. This was my first chance to say a quick hello to the other Future Farmers of Yorkshire delegates.

Possibly one of the most inspiring speeches at the conference for me was the opening speech by Minette Batters, with her confirming to me that with her and her team at the helm of the NFU ship at such a turbulent time for British agriculture we could not be in safer hands.

Following on from the political sessions in the programme was a session entitled: “The Future of Food, Where are we Going?” In this session there was one stand out speaker for me and possibly the entire conference that was Jack Bobo, Vice President, Global Policy and Government Affairs, Interaxon Corporation. Jack gave some incredible insights into world food production over the coming years, and also consumer perceptions of agriculture.

He made several points which stuck with me, the most hard-hitting being “the next 30 years are not just the most important there has ever been in the history of agriculture, but they are the most important there will ever be in the history of agriculture”. This led us into lunch and I couldn’t have been more inspired!

For anyone attending for the first time I would say go with an open mind, don’t expect to agree with every word every speaker says, but try to filter through and pick out the sound bites of excellence and inspiration that are there. You will meet some fantastic people, everyone was so friendly and chatted to me as though we had been friends for years, and finally expect minimal amounts of sleep, it turns out Walkabout doesn’t close until 4am, and the first session of Day 2 begins at 8am!

