



The importance of not taking our food for granted

by Chris Jackson, Export Manager UK TAG



Back here in the UK our Christmas festivities are about to start and we look forward to another New Year.

As the seasons and years march

on, in this ever changing and adapting world, farming and food production remain a constant necessity, something that whenever I can, I remind politicians of. I think at times they lose sight of mankind's need for food, as they mostly are so very far divorced from the realities of food production. In our modern, urban, developed world, food is taken for granted; not so much in our less developed countries where wars and natural disasters cause mass famine and starvation. This should be unacceptable in today's world.

Natural disasters fire, flood and drought we can do little about, but the continual warring is totally man made and therefore avoidable.

Farming and food production should be a concern of all thinking political leaders. Within our global industry, we are becoming more and more efficient at producing an increasing amount of food - in very innovative ways using high technology and science to aid us. Quantity of production is paramount, and unless you can find very lucrative high return niche markets, then yield is the key driver to farmer's profitability.

As most of the world's consumers want food as cheaply as possible this adds even more pressure to the farmers, who now in the western world are driven to production systems that for livestock are welfare friendly, this means added cost to production and in some instances lower outputs. In addition, all farmers' crops, vegetables and stock, have to look at production methods that do not have damaging effects on our environment. Most small scale farmers have been doing this over decades as they know that their land is the most precious asset that they have, and they need it to be productive not

only for themselves but for their families who will follow them. This is not always the case for the industrial conglomerates who see farming as a short-term income stream.

For livestock production we hear much about the routine use of antibiotics and growth promoters to aid in production. Here of course in the UK these artificial aids have been banned for many years, so we lead the world, however this enlightened approach has not been adopted worldwide, so that we now hear more and more about antimicrobial resistance.

Genetics and better management with different feed formulation are playing an important part in maintaining farm production. For crop production the ever increasing use of chemicals to control disease and weeds that have residual consequences both in the soil and in crops are now very much scrutinised and rightly so. The use of technology that people of my era would not have dreamed possible are all helping, for instance field sprayers that only put chemical on the weeds instead of the whole field are now in use.

Highly sensitive irrigation controls saving water are now being widely used, so all of this technology means that the few farmers that there are to produce our food need to be very well trained and educated to a very high standard. Farming is now a high-tech industry and needs to be recognised as such to encourage our young people to either stay on the farms, or join an industry that is needed and must be appreciated.

Let us hope that as we move to another year, our world's farmers can continue to meet the challenges and that when their crops are ready then the infrastructure is in place to effectively distribute for them to the points of consumption. I am looking forward to the challenges of a new year with enthusiasm.

May I take this opportunity to wish readers the very best of Seasons Greetings and I look forward to seeing some of you at our forthcoming exhibitions.