

Museum farming

When Owen Paterson set out how we can use our new freedoms out of the EU to have a better environment and a stronger farming industry, he majored his remarks on the need for innovation.

He characterised the Common Agricultural Policy as one based on protectionism to keep us in a museum of out of date farming practices. He drew attention to how the ban on neo nics had led to a fall in rape seed production in the EU, making us more dependent on imports from the Ukraine which uses neo nics. He made the case for selective gene editing , and argued that gm progress is necessary. It is after all a version of selective breeding which has characterised past agricultural progress inside the EU, done with more precision, understanding and speed.

He reminded us of the damage done to our landscape by EU inspired policies of abandoning pumps and refusing to dredge ditches and water courses, leading to extensive flooding. Owen himself made an effective case when in government to revert to proven water management techniques with modern high capacity pumps and dredgers to free the Somerset levels of excessive water. He studied how the Fens were still well drained and usually kept out of flooding despite being very low lying, and how the EU/Environmental Agency system abandoned this approach elsewhere to the detriment of residents and farmers.

Agriculture offers great scope for improvement as we leave the EU. We have a huge food deficit running at more than £20bn a year. We are made to put high tariffs on important food items from outside the EU. Setting our own policy should produce more home grown food and lower overall prices for consumers. we will impose lower tariffs than the EU but will impose them on the whole world once we have left.