

Letter from the President A Perfect Storm

In my first Newsletter, I expressed the belief that integration not isolation was the best way to face the challenges of a turbulent world. Writing just after the momentous decision made by 51.8% of the votes cast to leave the European Union and, amidst the political turmoil, seething frustration and raw division the result has exposed, the need to come together seems more acute than ever. Never has a week in politics felt quite so long, nor has 'news' been quite so challenging to offer, such is the pace of developments.

What does seem clear is that while the long run effects of the decision to Brexit will remain uncertain until the myriad of deals are eventually struck, the uncertainty itself seems set to spook markets, deter investment and defer all-manner of decision-making until we get there, making economic recession and the break-up of the UK seem more likely than not. The intended and unintended consequences of the decision in all the different spheres on which the EU has influence in Britain are daunting to say the least. While there is a hope that the UK's new relationship with our European neighbours is one in which the UK feels content to pay the price of greater independence and the EU is freed from the carping and dragging of heels that the UK has been guilty of in the past, other scenarios are available.

But storms pass. And it is also true that from change springs opportunity. Agricultural and fisheries policy are cases in point. While one is right to be sceptical that efficiency, environmental and food safety arguments will determine decision-making, the referendum result does present a chance for bespoke reform. Also, despite the disdain for 'experts' voiced by the Leave Campaign, opportunities for the profession to help shape things seem inevitable. What is paramount is that the research community in the UK is vociferous in its demands for a mechanism that guarantees the pan European collaboration that has brought so many economic and societal benefits to us all. Access to the EU's funding, networks and top researchers, all of which have benefitted the UK so unequivocally, are in jeopardy. Those of us fortunate enough to have collaborated on EU projects and those whose presence in other countries has enriched the knowledge economy are testament to its success. To be outside the European single market of knowledge would be grave mistake. We are all crew. And we need all hands on deck.

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The President's Letter has raised some key issues that the agricultural economics profession in the UK and beyond will need to address following the outcome of the referendum. Although it is early days, it seems highly likely that the AES-Defra One-Day Conference in December will explore the implications for Brexit on the UK agri-food industry. The annual AES Conference in Dublin next April will certainly include reflections on the Irish and European-wide implications. The triennial EAAE Congress in Parma in August 2017 will be a time for further analysis and reflection, including through panel discussions and symposia. The special set of articles in the latest edition of *EuroChoices* on the *Implications of Brexit for Agri-Food*, guest edited by Alan Swinbank makes for essential reading, [and is](#) likely to be followed up by other articles in the future.

The President notes the uncertainties and implications for collaborative European funded research projects, which is of relevance not only to the profession itself, but also for policy developments in the UK and EU, and for the wider public good aspects of research. So much is still unknown as to the future links between the UK and the EU and while the challenges will be formidable, we will also need

to explore opportunities.

Wilfrid Legg, Editor, AES Newsletter