

In the Pursuit of Rural Happiness

I recently read a book called 'The Practice of Happiness' by a John Kehoe, a book kindly given to me by my secretary.

Farming, with all its complexities, can bring a lot of stress and unhappiness. A culture of hard work, long hours and monotony, seems to go with the territory. Put on top of that, difficult times and a recession. With the falling payout, a shortage of cash, 'rural happiness' seems to fly out the window. I have seen a number of farmers in tears recently. This shows the pressure that they are under.

If we look at some Eastern cultures, like Vietnam, China, and Thailand for example, they are mainly of Buddhist background. That belief is about kindness, happiness and contentment with life and what they have. I well remember, being in a large barn where Vietnamese girls, were sitting on bales of tee shirts and selling them to the public. They worked for 364 days of the year. They earned one American dollar a day. You would think that they would be miserable, but no, they were some of the happiest people I have ever met. They remembered us when we returned the next day, they were just amazing. We were invited back to meet their families and it was a graphic example of how happy Eastern cultures can be, with so little and how unhappy Western culture can be, with so much.

Western societies and particularly farmers, have a belief in life, in agriculture, but most have never discussed or been taught, the belief of happiness. The Western world pumps out millions of anti depressant drugs for our unhappy people. More than that I know there are many more farmers who are now finding themselves on 'happy pills'. Pressure, long hours, no breaks and monotony may cause depression and the need for anti depressants.

However, back to 'the pursuit of rural happiness'. Happiness is defined in the dictionary as

1. the quality of being happy;

2. The state of pleasurable contentment of mind;

Happiness is one of our most basic human desires and yet so little is known or understood about happiness. What exactly is this feeling of happiness, what causes it, what makes it come, what makes it go away and could it be permanent? Is happiness, about achieving our goals (more land) for example, is it health, wealth and personal fulfilment or is it a lot more? From reading the book and my own understanding of agriculture, of life and life's complexities some of the issues might be:

LIFE IS A JOURNEY - and it is happening now

Life is not an event. Many farmers (but not only farmers) long for a time when there is enough money, enough time, enough stock feed, enough love. Well there is, right now, enough. Yesterday has gone and tomorrow is yet to arrive. Do we as humans all live in the past, not in the future and not in the now?. Life is not about reaching a station, it is about the journey. There is a wonderful Zen proverb "Where ever you go, there you are"

TRUSTING LIFE – this is it.

Many people do not trust. They won't trust their luck, their partner, their boss, the weather, the cows, the grass etc. Farmers may need to change their views on trusting life and the universe. It will just take the strain out of everything. I am personally very trusting of everything and everybody, by and large I get along brilliantly and the odd thing will cross me but I deal with it when it happens. I do not fear in anticipation, nor do I ever try to get even on passed wrongs. There is no point in trying to get even, you need to get over it and move on. I see farmers who have been wronged and they spend the next five years fighting it through the courts, looking backwards over their shoulder, only to waste a big portion of their lives.

GOOD LUCK- BAD LUCK

There are no such things. Events, some good and some bad, happen. Farmers need to learn from these events. See the bad ones as an opportunity and see the good ones as learning.

My accountant says that if you lose one of your key staff members instead of seeing it as terrible and horrible you should see it as an opportunity. This could be an opportunity to find someone different, maybe even better, more interesting or someone whom you can learn from and they in turn can learn from you.

Every period in life has something new to teach us.

“The harvest of youth, is achievement: the harvest of middle age, is perspective: the harvest of age, is wisdom” – Joan Chittister.

GRATITUDE

Being truly grateful for life, is as good as it is important. Being thankful that you have a good family, a nice farm or property is important. We need to be grateful that our health is as good as it is. Say thanks to the people who are kind and helpful. Show some gratitude, rather than being grumpy all the time. Let people into the traffic, but don't expect them to be grateful.

Here's a little story of mine. If you pick a bird up off the side of the road and nurse it back to life, would you expect gratitude from the bird when you let it go? No. So don't expect gratitude from people when you show them kindness either.

I have found that being grateful to people and sending them letters and notes and small gifts always gives a very good response.

GIVEAWAY

The Western world is so into 'self' and 'what's in it for me' that they forget to give and to share. Some of the richest people I know are those who give to others. You can choose to give away the practice of worrying, the practice of criticising other people, or the unrealistic goals that you have set for yourself. Give away your expectations, and you will find that life will smooth out, and be a lot easier.

It is a choice, to give away and not to hang onto stuff.

CREATIVE CHOICES AND ACTION

“To change one’s life, start immediately. No exceptions (no excuses)” – William James.

We need to become, what we choose.

Maybe we don’t want to milk cows. Make the changes.

Maybe you want to go into farming. Do it.

Choose carefully and don’t let fear stand in the way. We all admire those who ‘have had the courage of their convictions’. Maybe we could emulate them. Maybe we could copy these people, that we see, who have no fear of change and are able to move forward.

LOVE AND KINDNESS

“These are necessities, not luxuries. Without them, humanity cannot survive”. – The Dalai Lama.

Love and kindness, are both qualities that we search for. Many do find them and many do not. I often say love is elusive and if you find it, go after it. It’s about being open and responsive to others. Small actions, a few kind words and even sometimes just a smile will make you and others feel happy.

In farming, that can be just showing kindness, to the suppliers, to your banker, to anybody who is around you, because the response will be amazing.

FUN, JOY AND NONSENSE

I am a master at this. We can create fun and joy and nonsense everywhere. Practical jokes, short-sheeting beds, water fights at the cowshed. Who says you shouldn’t throw food around! We need to have fun, every day. I have set up a laughing lunch, with two of my mad mates. We go to lunch nearly every week, at a different venue, ‘some mad place’. We have all agreed not to take it seriously. We have a lot of laughs, a lot of fun and it is such a relief. We all look forward to it.

I have grown a beard (never had one before, but it is causing fun and nonsense everywhere, and I love it).

CHOOSE HAPPINESS

Life, feelings and relationships are all choices. We can choose to be happy or we can choose to be sad. We can choose to be friendly or to be revolting. We can choose to be frigid or choose to be fun.

Life is an endless journey of choices. This ability to realise that you can choose how you feel, is very basic in our human nature and survival. If you realise you can choose, then you can make the changes that you need.

“If you want happiness... then be happy”.

“The greatest masterpiece of all... is a life well lived”.

SUMMARY

So when they put the lid on your coffin, will you be able to say you have lived life to the full. Loved and lost and loved again. Laughed, played tricks, trusted people, been happy and been sad. Have you taken life by the scruff of the neck and given it a good go? Or will you be unhappy because, you worked rigidly, had a lack of love and laughter, ill health that have kept you from being the person you want to be?

These are some of the ideas in the pursuit of rural happiness. You have the choice, are you making the right choices?

These are the opinions of Don Fraser of Fraser Farm Finance. Any decisions made should not be based on this article alone and appropriate professional assistance should be sought.

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