



Legally Speaking



Davos and Bust

Given the inevitable tumult surrounding the resignation of Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, pundits will be quick to assess the success and failures of the Labour government under her leadership.

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Coupled with this development, the World Economic Forum convened once again this month in Davos for their annual “think fest” – politicians, the global elite, power brokers, financial luminaries and uber rich all eager to share their intellectual heft with fawning media on a vast array of matters affecting the globe, not least of which were debates concerning carbon emissions, global warming and climate change. The rhetoric has become inflammatory and in many instances, borderline deranged (see Al Gores’ explosive monologue as a case in point).

The question is, what do these developments have to do with the agricultural sector in North Canterbury. Depending on which side of the political spectrum you sit, not a whole lot or, maybe everything.

For many what really matters is the ever increasing cost of living, inflation, energy costs etc. The cost and availability of eggs, exorbitant cost of meat, the lack of strawberries available for the Christmas pavlova, have all littered conversations in the past few months.

Central to these issues, the plight of farmers in the agricultural sector, not unlike the conditions of nurses in the medical field, teachers in education, goes largely unnoticed.

Farmers have been placed under immense regulatory and compliance pressure by this Labour government and are having to carry significant associated costs to keep their enterprises sustainable, let alone profitable and the effects are now slowly trickling through to the consumer – very soon it will be an avalanche when household mortgages come off their fixed placement in the latter part of this year.

Much of what New Zealand has achieved in the fields of excellence, can be traced back to the vibrant and robust agricultural sector that has underpinned our economy for decades and yet it is not fashionable to acknowledge the roles that farmers have played in this history.

Commentary on the farming sector is often condescending, ill-informed and completely one sided. Like any industry there will always be some bad or reckless farmers, just like there are bad dentists or dubious accountants but at this crucial juncture, it is high tide that the farming community receives the support and encouragement that it richly deserves.

Consider the havoc caused by the war in Ukraine to the world’s food supply chain, remember that during our Covid lockdowns (and the climate of fear that pervaded at the time) and it was the farmers that kept our shelves and fridges full and replenished.

Forget the fancy Davos rhetoric, remove politicians who don’t understand this one “truism” of New Zealand – this country was built on agriculture, we are essentially a national farm with pockets of excellence in sport, technology, film and entertainment etc, and we should be incredibly proud of this

heritage. Trends and fads will come and go, cryptocurrencies will burn bright one day and crash spectacularly the next, but hard working, innovative and largely responsible custodians of the land – our farmers, keep us afloat.

To brandish their “woke” credentials our leaders (and often unelected representatives), are so keen to share the spotlight in the international arena, they are falling over themselves to commit to global trends, goals and targets re climate change, but have little comprehension of the hurt that they are inflicting on our regional economies. If we are not careful, we will quickly erode in the next few generations, the very sector that has kept New Zealand going.

To borrow from the tired tag lines of gender debate “I am a lawyer but I identify, as a farmer!”. Maybe more of us need to do so, before we complain about the cost of free range eggs on the shelf.*

