

Stainmore Hill farming

Newcastle Journal, 21 Sept. 1991, p.17 –

‘Shadow over hill farmers’

- Depressed prices rising costs and further uncertainty caused by debate over reform of CAP [is casting a] shadow over northern England – Mr Jim Akrigg of Westwood Brough Sowerby, Kirkby Stephen put his farming enterprise on show to the CLA’s national presidentMr Akrigg’s farm is in 3 distinct parts – Westwood, Brough Sowerby with 44 acres in ownership and 56 rented. Woodside, North Stainmore with 130 acres in ownership and Tarn House and Seavy Rigg North Stainmore¹ comprising around 1,800 acres rented rough grazing.

Mr Akrigg concentrates on sheep and beef cattle, keeps 90 bull cows and followers. The sheep enterprise has over 1000 ewes around 700 Swaledales are pure breed, the remainder crossed with Bluefaced Leicesters for male lambs. He was bought Woodside by his father in 1951 and Tarn House and Seavy Rigg have been rented since 1990 We know our income is lower than it was ten years ago. Yet some of our costs have gone up 93 per cent in the same period. We have trimmed our variable costs, but fixed costs continue rising ... [we need] a system of payments tailored to the needs of the environment rather than to the social needs of the production of food ... [he added] We have invested £10,000 in a hill land improvement scheme, regenerating former hill pastures which have reverted to moorland and easing the grazing pressure on the high fell.

I hope the CLA leadership will study the efforts we have made over all these years and convince the policy makers that farmers in the uplands are facing their biggest ever challenge - the challenge for survival.

¹ Tarn House and Seavy Rigg are in Hillbeck township though it may not be unusual for a Stainmore farmer to regard it as Stainmore.