

At 11.59pm on December 31 2009, I poked two fingers at the passing of a dog of a year.

I can live with pain in business as long as it's my fault. But when the hurt is because a bunch of blinkered, expenses fiddling MPs, who mostly haven't got the brains to hold down a proper job, and who invest tax-payers' money in a mob of over-paid city slickers who manufacture nothing but spend their days gambling with yours' and my pension funds, I get angry.

These same MPs are shortly up for re-election and they seriously believe they'll keep their jobs and both homes by tossing us a sack-full of promises of a better life after they're re-elected. How gullible are we?

Cameron's Conservatives will take a fresh look at the Competition Commission's findings and appoint a supermarket ombudsman to curb Tesco and Walmart's march towards world domination. Nick Herbert, Shadow Environment Secretary, promises to "rein in large retailers guilty of squeezing farmers' and food producers' profits". That's all of them.

Brown's flagging administration promises another commission to decide how farmers can feed two billion more mouths over the next decade while climate change shuts down planet Earth.

At election time, politicians notice what's been staring us in the face for over four years, so to help them secure my vote, here are a few clues.

Read Graham Harvey's recent article in *The Times* explaining how the quest for cheap meat has moved animals out of fields and into barns where they are fed high-energy, high protein food for faster growth.

To help MPs understand why this is not good, I'll explain.

Seven per cent of our greenhouse gases come from agriculture, of which one third is methane emissions from grazing animals. Their pastures foster plants, soil-based bacteria and photosynthesis that neutralise up to 40% of these emissions, while grass-fed beef or lamb is higher in omega-3 fatty acids, antioxidants and a compound known as CLA, a proven preventative against cancer and heart disease. That's good.

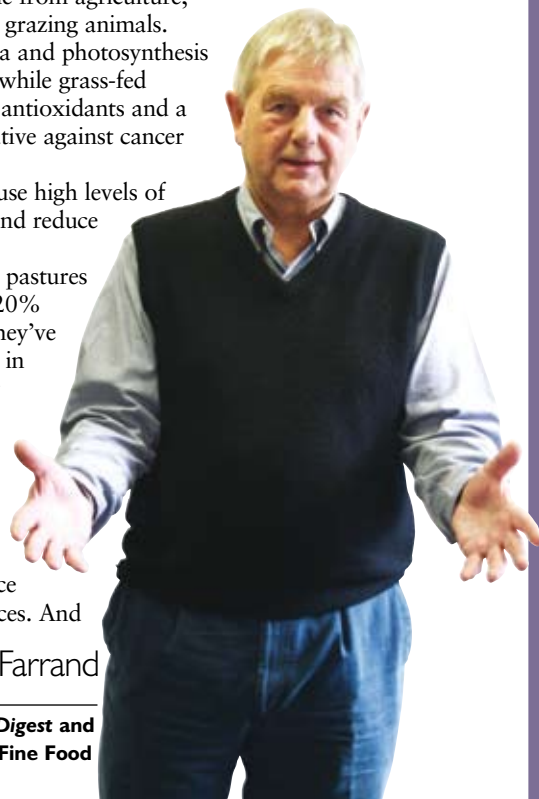
Crops grown to feed animals reared inside use high levels of chemical fertilisers, pesticides and diesel fuel and reduce photosynthesis. That's bad.

Farmers in Mississippi have discovered that pastures grazed by herds of bison contain as much as 20% carbon-rich, emission-neutralising residues. They've succeeded in cultivating similar characteristics in their own soil by strip, or 'mob', grazing their herds. In this country, we average just 2% of these residues but a few enlightened British farmers are adopting similar techniques with encouraging results. That's very good.

So any MP wanting my vote must promise me a renaissance in traditional husbandry and heavy penalties for supermarkets that force down food prices regardless of the consequences. And this time, the promises must be kept.

Bob Farrand

Bob Farrand is publisher of *Fine Food Digest* and national director of the Guild of Fine Food



“At election time, politicians notice what's been staring us in the face for over four years”

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What they're saying

“It doesn't help us if we're selling chutneys here at £2.95 and people see them in Waitrose at £2.65. I spoke to one rep who said 'But we're only selling five lines to Waitrose'. Shoppers don't notice that – they just notice the price.”

Damian Caldwell, Deli of the Month – p14

