

OPINION

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Reporter's Notebook

Issues are familiar on both sides of the Atlantic

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Globalization, the good and bad of it, is in full force in Great Britain and Paris.

While dot-com crises and stock market problems seemed far away driving through the once-pastoral English countryside, global issues unite us.

The same policies that mean Tampa Bay area supermarkets often offer more fruits and vegetables from Mexico and Peru than they do from nearby Ruskin has affected British farming, say the people who shear sheep and till the land.

British farming families, once themselves entrepreneurs and investors, are watching their livelihood fade away.

Globalization, including mandated imports by the European Community, have dealt a major blow, said a tour bus driver, also a farmer in the English Lakes district.

Unscrupulous farmers who bought animal products from Zimbabwe are among sources being blamed for what could be the knock-out punch, foot-and-mouth disease, he said.

Nobody wants to touch even healthy British livestock, said Linda, who works as a paralegal and spends her nights and weekends running a dairy farm. She has provided foster housing for more than 300 sheep during the crisis.

However, the healthy sheep may still face slaughter. They can't return home to quarantined areas, and there's no market for them, she said.

The British tourism industry also has suffered.

The yellow tape may be down and there is no obvious burning of livestock carcasses, but tire disinfection sites are still in operation on both the M-40 motorway and narrow remote roads. Signs warn hikers to stay on designated paths.

International foot-and-mouth publicity is blamed by the British for tourism being off in London and rural areas.

"The Americans are afraid they are going to fall down and die in the streets," said a doorman at a London tourist hotel.

And historic, out-of-the-way bed-and-breakfast inns often are empty.

To earn money on market days, women in Wales villages are selling homemade meat pies and lemon tarts in the same space their menfolk used to trade livestock.

The British government shoulders blame for the tourism glut, said the tour bus operator. Government officials told Brits and tourists not to go to the countryside, he said.

However, at a wedding in the tiny northern England village of Silverdale, locals remain hopeful.

Glenda and her husband, both zoology majors, recently bought a cattle ranch in Aberdeen, Scotland.

Glenda, a teacher by day at one of the country's many residential special needs schools for children termed "beyond parental control," said she and her family hoped to "make a go" because they loved the land.

In the same village, a bed-and-breakfast proprietor said he was developing an Internet site and was excited by the "Wild Web."

Another wedding guest offered that she loved to vacation in Florida, naming Indian Rocks Beach as a favorite locale. Orlando also was high on her family's list and not only for its theme parks. Her husband and son enjoy spending time at Orlando shooting galleries, firing off machine guns, she said.

Natural resource issues also unite us.

Across the English Channel, "Oil & Gas in the Gulf of Guinea" was the theme of a July 9-10 conference at the Hotel Inter-Continental Paris.

Speakers included HE Gabriel Nguema Lima, secretary of state for mines and hydrocarbons for the Republic of Equatorial Guinea; Jean-Jacques Koum, exploration manager for the Socit Nationale des Hydrocarbures, Cameroon; and Nicolas Bonnefoy, in charge of oil practice for Ernst & Young LLP.

Conference topics included development of new onshore and offshore oil reserves and strategic alliances between governments and international/private investing companies. Sound familiar?

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