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Speech of CLA President Tim Breitmeyer

It gives me great pleasure to open the conference today, as many of you will know only 3 weeks into my Presidency.

The issues we have come together today to discuss are critical to my business, but even more so for this great industry. And so I am particularly honoured to take on the Presidency, at this critical time.

By way of background my family own 650 hectares and farm a further 1400 hectare of arable land in Cambridgeshire.

Landownership and farming is in my DNA.

I strongly feel that we are in a defining era for the future of British farming. Over my years of CLA involvement, I have benefited enormously from the perspective it has given me.

I have had the chance to compare and contrast what I do, with so many other farms and estates all around the country. To learn from others and to share ideas, and to view one undeniable constant.....

The really successful businesses have inter-generational involvement, with the younger cohort driving change and inspiration.

But the exposure to this CLA Community has also helped me to study my business through new eyes, and to ask more fundamental questions about what I want to achieve from my land and my business in the next ten years.

That is what I ask **you all to do today** as we challenge traditional thinking, and I would suggest that is what British farming needs to do as we go forward.

A Changing World

We are in a period of uncertainty and change.

Brexit grabs the headlines, but it is only one of the major changes that are reshaping the landscape in which we live and work.

Climate change... a population explosion... radical advances in technology... a reshaped global market place..... and changing public expectations of what our land and landscapes might be used for.

These are all long-term trends that are changing our role, and they will determine where future business opportunities lie.

So what does this mean.

It means big choices for landowners on future land use. The assumption can no longer be made, that our livelihoods can be derived from the use of land for food production alone.

The decisions we make will define the future of our businesses and have consequences for the landscape and the fabric of the communities we serve.Decisions that we have to embrace and not shy away from.Because it is the proactive and the forward thinking businesses that will succeed.

We operate now in a globalised world, where most of what we produce can be grown cheaper and easier elsewhere. So, we can no longer rely on that obvious and traditional market for what we currently grow or rear.

Indeed, for some of us the choice might be to use our land differently, to cease farming on all or part of our land. Particularly as on a small island with a growing population and growing economy, there are competing pressures on land use.

But, whilst this challenges the default presumption of food production, it creates income opportunities for us – from housing and infrastructure – to leisure and tourism and energy generation.

But, if like me, you and your family choose to run a farming business, **your focus** will be on finding ways to make that business profitable. It should be the conversation regularly held in every board room, and round every farmhouse kitchen table.

Throughout today's conference we will hear from some of the best innovators in our industry and we can take inspiration and practical advice from them, to rise to that challenge.

Redefining Farming Themes

So, to set the scene, I want to provide some context for the sessions we have planned ahead.

I will focus on **five** themes we believe will define the future success of farming in our country.

Firstly, our approach to **business planning and skills**.

For too many years, too many businesses in our industry have got by without effective business planning, concentrating instead on **production** and **output**, as the sole measure of success.

But these can no longer be the key drivers for success, when faced with the changes ahead. Profitability must be key.

It's not about size and scale. These attitudes and behaviours exist as much among larger estates as they do in small farms. And, so do the innovators across all sizes and sectors who will find the solutions.

Shortly you will hear from Roger Mercer and later from Hylton Murray-Philipson outlining how planning is one key ingredient for success.

Secondly, we must understand our **customers**.

Few among us will be in the fortunate position to build a long-term business plan, based **solely** on competing in a global commodity market place. Loading up trucks with produce and livestock, never to hear again, about where it went and how it was used.

Tomorrow's British farmers will need to be more engaged than ever further up the supply chain, tailoring products for their market and creating unique brands like British Quinoa, who you will hear from this afternoon.

Establishing partnerships with retailers and producers will be critical for the future, and we will hear from **Matt and Caroline** about how that can work effectively.

Thirdly is **investment** - as I travel around this country visiting fellow members, one thing that stands out so clearly to me is the chronic underinvestment there has been in our farming infrastructure for several decades now.

Not so much the shiny tractors, there are too many of those, but the buildings, the irrigation, drainage, and the wider infrastructure. We will not succeed unless we find the confidence and the means to invest in these things.

We can all take inspiration from the forward thinking on show from Ed Barnston and Evan Jones, on how they have moved past a standard landlord tenant relationship, to establish a genuine business partnership to achieve this necessary step.

The fourth theme is **technology**. We are on the cusp of a new exciting industrial revolution that is transforming farming across the world.

Today's tractor driver is a computer engineer, my latest recruit has just finished four years of agricultural engineering at Edinburgh.

Harper Adams University has just brought in its first, **hands free harvest**.

Our knowledge of genetics is opening up a world of possibilities for breeding in livestock and arable production.....Data-led precision farming techniques, are reducing our reliance on, and use of, blanket chemical applications, saving cost and increasing sustainable practice.

All of these tools are making it possible to use land and resources more efficiently than ever before. **Both government and The Industry**, have to find ways to embrace them, to make them affordable, accessible and above all else, mainstream for all.

We discussed these issues in detail when we met for our Innovation Day in in September, and Charles Cowap will tell you more later.

The fifth theme is the closest to my heart – **Collaboration**. We have to learn to work better together. As a soldier in my previous career, working together saved lives, and it will save businesses in farming.

If we cast our eyes into Europe and we ask ourselves why those businesses are so much more productive than us.

Invariably the answer is they work better together....How their farmers come together to bargain and exert their power in the supply chain... in how they share risk and investment in infrastructureand in how they learn from each other about what works and doesn't in making their business successful.

Collaboration is a running theme through the presentations and stories you will hear today, from the Flagleaf farming partnership of which William Claycroft-Ely is one part, to the retailer supplier relationship that Matt Naylor has with The Co-operative.

And as all military tacticians will tell you, a strategy is nothing without a five-point plan, and so here is mine

- a commitment to business planning,
- a focus on truly understanding and engaging with our customers,
- a confidence to make investments,
- an open mind to innovation and new technology and
- above all a new-found enthusiasm for collaboration. Standing together as we find the solutions to our common problems.

Making a Success of Brexit

Now today is first and foremost about how we **take control of our own destiny**....

BUT OF COURSE, we are also here to talk about the **policy**, **political** and **fiscal** environment we operate in, and how the CLA might influence this.

We are in an era-defining period of change.Brexit is the catalyst.40 years of relative certainty and consistency, are coming to an end.And with it the single farm acreage payment, I would venture to suggest.

For all its many frustrations, the EU has provided a backdrop to the choices businesses have made and how they have evolved across an entire generation.

We have an opportunity now to set the framework for the next 40 years.

But the stakes are high.

Not just because the outcome of the negotiations on our future trading relationship with the EU, will heavily influence our future marketplace.

But because we must extract ourselves from the Common Agricultural Policy, and move carefully to a new framework that is built to last.

So, over the last year the CLA have set out a clear vision for a change in our farming policy....

That is the right thing to do..... The CAP is history and with it blanket income support as we currently know it....

If we are to attract large investment from the public purse in the future, the need for which we are very clear about, then the justification has to change.

So just as our challenge is to redefine the successful farmer of tomorrow, and invest in the challenges I have outlined.

So we must also redefine **their** relationship with society, so that we establish trust and understanding that is arguably lacking.

The bargain we strike for managing the land and the landscape, and how we meet ever more demanding expectations in standards of animal welfare, food and environmental delivery,..... must all be recast in a way that benefits all.

The CLA vision is for a new contract – clear, transparent and open – a business-like agreement where government sets out what it wants, and we set out how we can deliver that service.

Agreements tailored according to location and circumstances. Allowing farmers and landowners to make choices about how extensively they want to build their business around securing and servicing this income..... founded on a bond of trust and partnership, **not bureaucracy**,practical but audited,and paid for on time.

Our vision is a radical one. It is not something we can just make happen overnight.It will require careful planning and design, detailed testing and once settled, a long-term transition.

It is a vision for farming that sees the farmer put back in charge of their own land and business.

- Allowing them to make choices about how to drive sustainable profitability, to improve production.... but also how to derive sufficient income for the services provided.
- One, that challenges farmers to think differently about what their land is for and how best to maximise the efficiency and profitability of their land.
- All of which is likely to mean farmers producing more, better quality food, from less land, whilst providing careful stewardship of our nation's natural resources.

I started these remarks talking about the farming choice.

We don't often think in these terms,.....we re-run the cropping plan, and the breeding cycle, to produce food, with a tinker here or there...It's mostly an unthinking choice, a natural common-sense decision that is part of our tradition and our identity.

Moving forward it must be a **rational choice**. If the next generation is going to continue farming we must have confidence that this can be a profitable future.**A future driven by a smarter, better, use of our land and resources.**

Big challenges lie ahead, but massive opportunities also. Those willing to embrace them, to question the established way of thinking and doing things, are the ones that will succeed.

A selection of those who have made that choice are here today, and I hope you will be as inspired by them, as I am.

Thank you.