

FIFTEEN YEARS OF INNOVATION MANAGEMENT

Since I started Innovation Management, in 1993, both the world and the markets we work in have changed. I don't claim to have been involved in all of the changes but hopefully I have helped in a small way with some.

Bruce Knight February 2008

In 1993, John Major was Prime Minister in Britain, Bill Clinton had just been elected as US President. Charles and Lady Di were still married.

The Spice Girls were formed that summer and David Beckham signed professional for Manchester United.

No one had heard of google, e-bay, amazon or sat-nav. Nor did a carbon footprint mean anything to anyone.

In agriculture, the term set-aside was new to Europe. Since then it has been and, effectively, gone. In Britain DEFRA was unheard of and has survived despite mad cow disease, foot and mouth and payment scandals on single farm payments.

Ciba-Geigy, Sandoz, Rhone-Poulenc, Schering, Hoechst, Shell, American Cyanamid were all significant international players in the agrochemical industry. ICI Plant Protection had just become Zeneca. Today not one remains.

Terra (now GrowHow) in the UK was ICI Fertilisers, Yara was Norsk Hydro, GrowHow was Kemira. Agco was Massey-Ferguson and Case and New Holland were competitors.

For the most part the seed industry was entirely separate from the multinational agrochemical companies. Today only KWS and Limagrain have survived as independents.

In 1993 the price of wheat was about \$150/tonne. In February 2008 it touched \$330/tonne. But that does not tell the true story. For most of the time over the last fifteen years it has been less than \$100/tonne.

The potential of GPS technology in recording, variably, crop yields was just emerging. Precision Agriculture had not really been born. Nor were auto-track tractors.

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones were not invented.

Genetically modified crops were still three years off commercial introduction in the USA, with Europe expected to follow. By 2007 global plantings had reached 114 million hectares, about 8% of the world's cropped area. Europe is still thinking about it.

Investment in biodiesel plants were starting in much of the EU, except Britain. Bioethanol production was limited to the USA and Brazil. We now all know about biofuels and seem to have a love-hate relationship with them. The big hope for the EU was to be energy from biomass crops. Apart from small areas in Sweden they are still to come.

The supermarkets were all powerful in controlling the food chain, and they still are.

Organic produce devotees were claiming that their systems could feed the world, as they still do.

In 1993 grain mountains were the issue. Now we are facing the challenges of meeting global food supplies, satisfying increasing demands for energy and water, while preserving biodiversity. On top of this there is the impact of climate change.

Investment in Research and Development and well directed Marketing and Communication is the only choice.
