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Centre for Agricultural Strategy

Investing in rural harmony: a critique

Edited by A Korbey

CAS Paper 16 May 1984

Address of Welcome

G England

It is a straightforward task to welcome the participants to this Seminar and it can be done quite briefly. I commend the Centre for Agricultural Strategy for its initiative and also the four sponsors who have helped to make it possible.

It seems that CAS was correct in its choice of timing for the seminar. Some here feel that the issues at the heart of its topic have been debated for a very long time, but for a number of reasons it is particularly valuable at this moment. The correspondence columns of *The Times* and inspired Government leaks through the 'usual channels' indicate that many people consider that all is not right.

I notice important voices making the point that the compensation provisions of the Wildlife and Countryside Act, however useful at present, are not likely to be long-lasting. Also noticed is the increasing awareness of an apparent incongruity between the effects of both the agricultural pricing policy and support grants and the objectives of other aspects of countryside policy.

In this last connection there is an added sense of timeliness in that the Commission of the European Communities has made a proposal for 'improving the efficiency of agricultural structures' — a Community phrase we have all learnt to use. And, of course the House of Lords Sub-Committee on Agriculture and the Environment has been taking evidence on the draft proposal. Some of those who have given evidence will be speaking in this Seminar.

I commend the approach adopted by CAS. Firstly, valuable work has been done in the Clive Potter report and it has been made available well in advance to give a well-directed basis for discussion. Secondly, speakers have been invited who can give a wide variety of view but, collectively we are not, necessarily, seeking a consensus.

All this is consistent with the function of the Centre which is defined in the invitation as 'the identification of important issues in agriculture — world wide — to ensure they are subjected to informed debate and to publish its findings in reports designed to influence decision makers and opinion formers', I understand that the intention is to publish these proceedings.

With these few words of welcome I hand over to Professor Colin Spedding, Dean of the Faculty of Agriculture and Food as well as Director of the Centre for Agricultural Strategy at the University of Reading, who will chair the seminar.