

Donald Thomas Younger Curry DCL

Mr Chancellor,

In the words of one of his close colleagues, Sir Donald Curry is the perfect example of a “man made good”, whose insight, vision and industry has reshaped British farming during exceptionally difficult times. He has steered the United Kingdom towards sustainable farming, and in doing so, his actions will preserve this green and pleasant land for generations to come.

Originally the tenant on a small farm in Northumberland, Sir Donald is now regarded by his farming peers and Government as “The Expert” on farming. He is currently the chairman of the Delivery Group for Sustainable Farming and Food, which advises the British Government on sustainable Farming and Food policy. In his role, he has survived successive ministers (and prime ministers). He has a remarkable ability to find solutions to complex problems to seek compromise and ensure progress. I am sure that you would agree, Mr Chancellor, that this is an essential attribute for one who has had to negotiate with several government departments, which are known, on occasion, to have interests that conflict with each other not to say with the country at large.

But his energy is not just focussed on “balancing the books”. Sir Donald is chairman of the National Farmers Union Mutual Insurance Society, having been vice-chair and non-executive director since 1997.

In this way he continues to secure the welfare of his fellow farmers, something that he began with the NFU in the 1980s. I know his farming colleagues hold him in high regard.

Amongst his major achievements, he became Chair of the Meat and Livestock Commission at an exceptionally young age, occupying what is widely regarded as being the most challenging public office in the food industry between 1993 and 2001. He was therefore the natural choice for Prime Minister Tony Blair, who invited him to review future Farming and Food policy as Chair of the Policy Commission on the Future of Farming and Food. Within five months Sir Donald produced the definitive paper – something of a miracle for a Government document.

Despite being widely referred to as the “Curry report”, this was not an article for the Good Food Guide describing the growth of high-quality Asian cuisine in Britain, but a visionary statement which laid the foundations for Food and Farming in the future.

Sir Donald has ensured that the Curry Report was not consigned to the slurry heap. By persuading the Treasury to commit £500 million to deliver its recommendations, he chaired the implementation group, interacting with Secretaries of State across several government departments. In this way, Sir Donald’s exceptional communication skills came into their own.

Perhaps the most difficult challenge we face as a nation is to change our cultural attitudes towards farming, the provision of food, and how this relates to our environment without it biting too hard into our pocket. Sir Donald's vision of sustainable, environmentally-friendly – and yet economically viable food provision has been endorsed by many, including Prince Charles and Gordon Brown. But convincing the consumer and the wily Farmer presents a particular challenge, especially in his own back yard of Northumberland.

But this is precisely why Sir Donald has been so effective. He is no Whitehall bureaucrat. First and foremost he continues to be a local Farmer, and he has not forgotten his Northumberland roots. Despite his position and influence, his colleagues describe him as a man of great humility, who has, through his actions, secured the trust of the whole industry, inspiring loyalty in friends and colleagues. What better person could have chaired the Meat and Livestock Commission through the B.S.E. crisis? Managing the media furore whilst planning the future in a way that protected the interests of the farming community, and yet shaping farming strategy to ensure that such a catastrophe would not happen again.

Given these achievements, I doubt whether there would have been any dissent in professional circles about his elevation to the Knighthood in 2001 but I understand that one of his elderly aunts had her concerns. Now why could this be? Someone close to home, who watched Donald Thomas Younger Curry take his first steps across the

farm yard, and grasp the tractor wheel for the first time, raising doubts about an honour bestowed by Her Majesty The Queen?

Of course, the aunt did not doubt that Donald should receive the knighthood – but her question was “why not for At Home in the Community?” This question gives us a little insight into another facet of Sir Donald’s life – the charitable work he continues to develop with equal conviction and vigour.

By using the same incisive mind and principles that have served the Food and Farming Industry, Sir Donald has been equally active in the voluntary sector. “At Home in the Community” is one example, providing care and support for adults with learning difficulties. Over the last two decades, social provision has become increasingly cash-strapped, particularly for the more vulnerable members of our society, but “At Home in the Community” currently employs over 80 staff to provide homes for over 40 adults from Gateshead to Haltwhistle.

Against all the odds, Sir Donald was instrumental in establishing “At Home in the Community”. His close colleagues tell me that this was only possible because he holds his local charitable work on equal footing with his work at a National level – frequently hopping off the flight from Heathrow straight into a meeting in the voluntary sector. His conviction is underpinned by a deep personal faith, which he shares with others as a Methodist lay speaker.

In recognition of his outstanding contribution to British farming, and his equally important charitable work in Northumberland, Mr Chancellor, I now ask that you bestow upon him the degree of Doctor of Civil Law, *honoris causa*.

Citation by Professor Patrick Chinnery