

Shropshire-based producer and award-winning columnist Roger Evans runs through his wish list for 2018 and explains why maintaining a level of optimism is so important for all of us.

Keep the faith

I've always been fascinated by how other businesses work. I don't mean other farms – I can make a fair guess at how they work. It seems that most farmers can make a better effort at making their farm work than I do myself, but I've learnt to live with that.

What I mean is other businesses that I have little knowledge of. Did you know, for example, that there should be a sort of 50:50 split between the space given to advertising in a magazine and the space given to contributors and articles? In other words, the advertisers pay for all the rest of it. But it's not quite as easy as that because there is a huge onus on editors to keep their input interesting. If it's not interesting and attractive to read then the target audience don't even open it. And if they don't open it then they don't read the adverts and the critical balance is soon lost. I can't remember who told me all this, but I think it was the editor of this magazine. I must have caught her on one of her sensible days!

As a result, we get a magazine like this. Half of it is advertising services and products that we could find useful and half of it is given to other people's suggestions, ideas and experiences. You cannot over emphasise the importance of this. It's a bit like being on a farm walk – you are just as likely to learn something useful from another farmer standing next to you, as you are from the people who have organised the farm walk.

But in this mix there is also an important ingredient that's missing and it's one that you have to provide yourself. Without it there would be no market for any of the advertising. And, as we know, without advertising there would be no magazine. The simple ingredient is hope or, if you prefer, optimism.

At the start of a new year we need plenty of both. If you don't have hope there's little point starting the journey. Don't waste time hoping for a good outcome for farmers from Brexit. That's a story that is a couple of years away from its finale. Your views won't affect its outcome, so why waste time thinking about it?

It's OK to hope that your herd won't be closed down by TB. The effect on your business can be devastating and there is very little else, apart from hope, that you can do.

Next on my wish list is a decent milk price. I hope that milk buyers will pay as much as they can and not as little as they think they can get away with. I'm not convinced that milk buyers appreciate just how much damage was done during the milk-price crash, to the balance sheets of those of us who did not have the protection of retailer-aligned milk contracts. Even worse than that, if they know, I'm yet to be convinced that they care.

To have a good year we must hope for good weather and that means, for most of us, plenty of grass at the right time. That will also mean that we should only need to buy in the feeds that we plan to buy and not be forced to buy in more to make up any short fall.

That's a pretty comprehensive wish list. I'll add another really long shot. I hope my lawn mower will start in the spring.

