***Editorial Views***

*By Dr. Rob Crassweller*

**“The View Across ‘The Pond’**

I recently returned from a vacation to the UK and the Netherlands. Let me begin by stating there is no really good time for me to take a vacation; but fortunately, I have Don Smith working for me. His experience and organizational skills really make our orchards and data collection run

efficiently and make taking time off easier. The first part of the trip was a tour of Wales and Yorkshire with the second part a visit to my son and his wife in the Netherlands. Besides enjoying the scenery and the visit, it was interesting and educational to listen to the news and see their lifestyle.

First was the cost of things; in the UK, gas after conversions was priced at $8.00 per gallon (£1.29/liter). Accordingly, there were a lot fewer SUV vehicles on the road but there were still a lot of cars in the UK. Contrast that to the Netherlands where bicycles dominated the local travel scene. Bicycle paths were everywhere and in many cases were wider than the sidewalks.

In Amsterdam, next to the central train station was a public bicycle parking garage, similar in size to one of our municipal garages that was three stories tall. My son does not have an automobile and instead commutes to work everyday on the train. Their train system is all electric and high speed. Fares are paid by scanning in a rail pass, which is similar to our E-Z Pass on the turnpike, by adding money to your account as you need it.

In both countries the costs of goods and food had similar ‘numbers’ as we might see on a menu. A sandwich might be listed at 5.90 but it was in either pounds, sterling or Euros. The exchange rate for each was £1.00 = $1.69 and €1.00 = $1.29; making our actual cost for that sandwich $9.97 and $7.61, respectively. The cost of things drove a situation that is almost identical to what is happening in the U.S. – hourly labor rates. The UK was in the midst of battling for £15.00/hour wage rate. Their reasons are similar to what the proponents in the

U.S. use.

As part of our trip in the UK, we had a professor from a local college outline some of the citizen’s concerns about their country. Their first concern was about immigration. The

entire European Union is being inundated from foreigners arriving from Africa, non EU and Asian countries. The nightly news showed videos of people jumping over fences in the port of Marseilles. Like the U.S., once they have entered the EU they are virtually free to move within

the entire region without being checked.

The pension and the health care systems were also under pressure in the UK. Similar to the U.S. and Pennsylvania, the citizens were worried that the systems would go bankrupt with people living longer. Our guest lecturer also indicated that Parliament in the UK cannot seem to

agree on a solution for either problem. Historical buildings and sites abound in both countries

and respect for them can affect current everyday life. In an area of the world that has been inhabited for over 2,500 years, it is nearly impossible to be able to find a building site that was not previously inhabited. Recently when excavating for a new public parking garage, they found

the grave of a Richard III, a former king of England. That put the construction project on hold while the site was excavated. One of the hotels we stayed at in Harrogate, UK has been in existence since 1775 when it started as an addition to a farmer’s home and has been added to

ever since. The result was a mixture of building structural configurations as rooms were added over the years. The result was a strange combination of room styles and floor

levels. One room had a double staircase winding up to it.

As you can see from these few observations, life outside of the U.S. is not that dissimilar elsewhere, with many commonalities. While we enjoy our travels, it is always good to return to the U.S. and we are fortunate to live in this country.