

## ***Good Riddance to the Good Old Days***

***(but beware, they may return.)***

by Viv Forbes, June 2009

### ***Be careful what you wish for.***

Deep in their hearts, a large and growing number of people all around the world are coming to the conclusion that runaway global warming is very unlikely. However a disturbing number seem to think “OK, but even if all of this proposed legislation has no climate benefits, it may curb our extravagant consumption, reduce pollution and bring us a more sustainable lifestyle.”

Read on:

My family owned a dairy farm. From the time I could walk and talk (about 1941) I helped on the farm. At first I would have been a net nuisance, but I saw and remembered everything that went on.

It was a very green farm, powered entirely by bio-fuels and solar energy.

### ***Sustainable Farming is nothing new.***

Our farm was almost sustainable – that is, nothing much came onto the farm, and nothing much left.

We bought essentials like tea, sugar, flour, dried fruit, salt, beef, tobacco, cheese, matches, kerosene, rolled oats and Cockies joy. (We small farmers were called Cockies by the grazing gentry and others, and syrup was the only condiment we could afford, so syrup became known as “Cockies joy”.) Unfortunately Mum also bought items of child torture like Castor oil and Epsom salts. And we sold milk, old cows, calves and occasional pigs.

There was no “organic waste” – there is no such thing as waste on a sustainable farm. Food scraps were fed to dogs, chooks or pigs. Manure and any waste vegetation went onto the vegie garden or onto the poor quality hill paddocks. It was not quite sustainable as we shipped minerals like calcium and phosphorus off in the milk and meat, and we did not put it back into the soil.

The main grain crop we harvested in the early days was corn. We used bio-energy and pulled it by hand. That was fun for 10 minutes. In about half an hour, handling the dry rough corn cobs first makes blisters, and then removes soft skin from kid’s hands.

As we pulled the corn, we threw the cobs into heaps along the rows. Then we hitched a quiet one horse-power Clydesdale horse to an old dray, and as he wandered along the rows, we threw the cobs into the dray. When the dray was full we went to an old shed and shovelled the corn into the shed. The corn cobs were shelled later as we needed it with a hand operated corn sheller (which was probably an antique even then).

If we were slow in using up the corn, the mice found it. One year the mouse plague was so bad we shovelled corn remnants and as many mice as we could kill with the shovel, back into the dray and recycled them by burying the lot in a ploughed furrow.

All very green and sustainable.

Our 40 or so cows were milked by hand, so Dad had a crushing handshake if he chose to show it. As I grew up, my job was to bail up the cows, wash their teats and start the fire under the copper to heat water for the wash-up at the end. All energy in the dairy was supplied by bio-fuel picked up on the farm and cut into blocks with a cross-cut saw (which I grew to dislike).

We also had a cousin who was an engine driver on the “Thallon Mail”, a steam train that passed our place. Every now and then a big lump of coal would happen to fall off the coal tender just as it passed our place. Every bit of that shiny black gold was picked up in a bucket by us coal gleaners. Dad called it “getting a bit of our own back”. The bucket stood beside the open fire for the frosty nights.

### ***We had Real Horse Power in those Days***

Dad had six huge Clydesdale draught horses used for ploughing, harrowing, planting, hauling wood home and dragging cows out of bogs. They were hay burners and the hay was grown on the alluvial flats along the Condamine River (on the Darling Downs of Queensland, Australia).

When we made hay, two Clydesdales pulled the mower to cut the hay. Then the relief crew of two Clydesdales were hitched to the hay rake to rake the hay into rows. A couple of days later all hands including Mum, my older sister and I took up pitchforks to make the hay into fork sized heaps ready for pickup. I had a special short handled pitch fork so I could earn my keep. I did not feel “exploited” – I felt very grown up and important, and I learned the joy of achieving things.

Then came the loading onto the 2 horsepower hay wagon. We kids helped throw stooks onto the wagon at the start, but as the load got higher, we dropped out, and then Mum dropped out until only the tall men armed with long pitchforks could throw the stooks to the top. Our neighbour came to help at that stage because it needed another man on the top of the wagon to stack the hay properly so the load did not fall off on the trip to the hayshed. As the neighbours had a son a bit older than my sister, hay making was a big social occasion for all of us. (That bloke next door later became my brother-in-law: even in matrimonial matters, we practiced self-sufficiency.)

By the time the hay was placed in the hayshed, not one scrap of fossil carbon fuel had been used – all energy came from grass, hay, bacon, eggs, bread, butter, milk, syrup, dried fruit and Uncle Toby's rolled oats. Hay making was 100% green, but we never sold hay – it was all used by our own horses or cows by the time the next hay making season came around. "Green" farms fed the farm families but produced little surplus.

But even in this "Pre-carboniferous" era of my life, we still needed metal tools – for ploughs, planters and mowers, for mattocks and hoes, for crow bars and shovels, for pliers and the brace and bits, for nails and wire, for mauls and wedges, for axes and adzes, for wagon wheels and trace chains, for shot guns and rifles, and for the hated cross cut saw.

Every bit of metal needed coke made from coal to smelt the metal, carbon to produce the steel and coke for our backyard forge. We also needed cement (which cannot be produced without liberating carbon dioxide) for cow bails and pig sties.

To fully eliminate man-made production of carbon dioxide would require us to return, not to the technology of the pioneers, but to the technology of the Stone Age – bows, arrows, stone axes and wooden digging sticks.

### ***The Days of Wind Power and Biofuels***

At home, Mum had all the truly green appliances.

For cooling we used wind energy and evaporative cooling. A Coolgardie safe stood under the awning at the back steps. It looked like a small box-shaped fridge, but had sugar-bag sides and a water reservoir on top. Wicks that looked suspiciously like worn-out bath washers were draped over the four sides and allowed the water to be sucked from the reservoir onto the bag sides. Evaporative cooling, exactly like that which provides an automatic stabiliser of ocean temperatures, cooled the sides and the cool breezes then went through the safe. Butter, milk, bacon, corned meat and vegetables were stored here. The safe worked well in dry windy weather, but became quite ineffective in the hot humid still days around New Year.

Cool water was available at the back steps from a water bag. I loved the baggy taste of the water, especially when we had a new bag.

Our cooking and heating during freezing winter mornings was also provided from bio-fuels, and it was my job to keep the wood box and the chips bucket full of bio-fuel.

Stock water was pumped by wind power (when the wind blew). Solar power and carbon dioxide grew the crops and the lucerne which fed the cows, pigs and chooks.

## ***Our Green Failures***

We failed the green test on lighting. There was no genuine green whale oil around so we were forced into the use of dastardly kerosene for lights in the kitchen and bedrooms and in the Hurricane lantern for outside work at night. (Had kerosene not been developed, whales would have disappeared 100 years ago.)

We also failed the green test on transport when Dad bought a second hand utility and the sulky was stored in the hayshed. As we had not been educated as to the godliness of green transport options, we thought the utility was wonderful. It allowed us to go to town occasionally for luxuries like fresh bread from a baker's shop, lollies for the lolly jar and fresh fruit. I was allowed to sit on the back to experience the wind in my hair as we travelled at Superman speed.

That utility was the start of our "green" decline.

The next green backsliding was the purchase of a diesel powered milking machine, which allowed me and Dad to do the milking without labour from Mum (big sister was married to the guy next door by then).

Then Dad heard from a progressive neighbour that the diesel engine could also drive a generator to charge batteries while we milked. Soon we had a 32 volt DC electric system with 16 huge batteries under the awning at the house. At last we experienced the magic of light at the flick of a switch, providing no one stayed up too late and flattened the batteries.

Then Mum demanded a kerosene fridge, which in our ignorance of green rules we thought was wonderful as we could then have ice cream on Sundays. Then she threw away her perfectly good bio-fuelled mother pots irons for a diesel fuelled electric model. The one disadvantage of the electric iron was that someone had to start the diesel engine every time Mum wanted to do some ironing.

## ***We got Top Marks for Recycling.***

We were right into re-cycling too, especially bath water, toilet paper and string.

Saturday night was bath night. Being the youngest, I got to have the first bath in very shallow but clean warm water. When I was finished, a kettle of hot water was added, and my sister bathed. This procedure was repeated for Mum. Finally Dad came in after dark, all dirty and dusty, and had his bath. Lastly, the well mineralised and fertilised bath water was caught in a bucket and later poured onto the mandarin tree.

Washing the clothes was a green dream too. Monday morning was wash day, and we "men" tried to make sure we were nowhere around or we would get a job. Bio-fuel was used to boil water in a big copper standing outside the laundry. Once all the bugs and dirt were dislodged by boiling, clothes were rinsed and clean green muscle power turned the hand ringer. Then solar and wind power dried the clothes on the line.

Our toilet would score 100% on the green meter. It comprised a 4 gallon drum under the seat of the thunder box. It was also very environmentally friendly and many little critters lived there, the most noteworthy being the red-back spiders under the seat. One day dad got bitten on the end of a very private part and had a rush visit to hospital (no one told me what they did there, but I had visions of a tourniquet.)

No water was wasted flushing our toilet. We were very sparing of water in all things – level 6 water restrictions would have seemed like luxury to us.

Toilet paper was recycled paper of any sort, preferably something strong and soft. Newspaper tended to tear at inconvenient places, and brown paper was not very absorbent. Best of all was the tissue paper which wrapped the bread bought from the town baker. Mum carefully unwrapped this, tore it into squares, punched a hole in the corner, and the lot was hung near the seat in the toilet. Once a week the contents of the drum were buried in the paddock by Dad, thus earning even more green points.

All dairy by-products were recycled. We sent milk to the butter/cheese factory and got whey back in our own milk cans. This was fed to pigs.

## ***Green Schooling***

School was an air-conditioned torture cell, but totally green.

The school house comprised one small square room with opposing doors on two sides, opposing windows on the other sides and verandas on either end. In summer, the hot dry wind blew across Seymour's wheat paddock straight through the school, making summer afternoons a purgatory. But on cold winter mornings we froze. If it was still frosty when school started the teacher would occasionally light the bio-fuel stove in the corner of the schoolhouse (if someone had donated some bio-fuel).

There were no parking problems for kids at school as all transport was totally green. I walked to school, other kids from further away rode horses. Later, when I was a big kid, I got a bike for Christmas. Like most green machines, its utility was intermittent. It was great for going downhill to school, but a real trial for coming home back up the hill.

The bike seemed to mark the accelerated phase of the degeneration of our green status for one day a truck arrived with a bright yellow brand new Twin City tractor on the back. This machine ran on kerosene. Dad loved that tractor, and our bio-fuelled Clydesdales were soon pensioned off.

And, for the first time ever, we had surplus hay for cash sale.

## *The War comes to Wheatvale*

The war years left a few indelible images in my mind.

First was the big American bomber which for some reason landed in our neighbour's wheat paddock. Then a huge American convoy of troops decide to stop at our place for smoko and a fag. I was fascinated by their jeeps, their accent and their chewing gum. We were so happy to see the Americans here.

Then I remember playing in the trenches which our Dads dug at the Wheatvale School. I don't really think the Wheatvale School was a prime Japanese bombing target, but that was probably an order from on high, making us feel part of the war effort.

But the most enduring war-time memory was of Dad discussing when we would abandon the farm and head south. He must have heard about "The Brisbane Line", where the government was prepared to cede the North to the Japanese, and retreat to the south east triangle. We discussed how we would cut all the fences to allow the animals to escape and hopefully survive.

The war was triggered by Japanese hunger for resources, particularly oil in Indonesia. They feared, with some justification, that they would be denied access to resources and energy by the powerful British and American navies. So they struck the American navy at Pearl Harbour, and crippled the local British navy at Singapore.

Then their army headed south. Singapore fell, bombs rained down on Darwin and soon Japanese soldiers were on top of the Owen Stanley Range looking across the narrow Torres Strait at Australia.

But luckily for us, the American navy stopped the Japanese advance in the Coral Sea and our own troops blocked them in Papua.

That war holds one stark lesson for Australia today:

***"If goods don't cross boundaries, armies will."***

Australia is a sparsely settled cornucopia of riches with many undeveloped resources which are a magnet for the teeming millions of Asia. Our prize resources include uranium at Coronation Hill and Jabiluka, bauxite on Cape York and the Mitchell Plateau, offshore oil and gas, vast heritage areas of timber, undeveloped water resources in the tropics, massive coal and iron deposits, well publicised but undeveloped sites for large dams and ports, oceans of unexploited sea food, and unknown but probably huge mineral riches in unexplored northern reservations.

We have only three options if we wish to retain our country: develop these resources, build a powerful defence force, or become a close ally of tomorrow's Pacific power. There are no easy options.

Using global warming hysteria to justify lock-up of our vast carbon energy resources is far more dangerous to future generations of Australians than any amount of man-made carbon dioxide in our atmosphere. Our American friends may not be here next time.

### ***Everything changed after the War ended.***

As the world emerged from the fifteen dreary years of world depression and world war, everything took on an optimistic hue. Unaware of all the green laws they were transgressing, cars replaced utilities on many farms and the relative merits of Wolseley, Morris, Ford and Oldsmobile were debated endlessly. Dad really let his head go and bought a V8 Ford Pilot and he and Mum went for their first real holiday. (Sadly, this was also their last holiday together as Dad was killed soon after in a farm accident.)

With the spread of motor vehicles, suppliers started to call on farms regularly with things like fresh fruit, fish and Rawleigh's patent medicines. Farm people even got to drive to the pictures (cinema) on special occasions.

Kitchen appliances appeared. With better machinery and cheaper energy, farmers could generate surpluses which reduced food costs for the cities.

Life became easier, more interesting and more prosperous. Bush kids could even aspire to better education and different jobs.

Three things provided the greatest improvements in our lives – the utility for going to town, the Southern Cross diesel engine that milked the cows and ran the electric generator, and the Twin City Tractor that used kerosene power for the heavy farm work. Unlike the Clydesdales, the Twin City never bolted or baulked, obeyed instructions, only ate if it was working and never needed hooves trimmed or shoes repaired. At the heart of all three was a combustion engine depending on petroleum products.

Carbon fuels created real farm surpluses and liberated farm families from much drudgery.

### ***Weather Forecasting before Computer Models***

Weather is a subject of vital interest to every farmer, and farmers observe and read more about the weather than most people.

But we never feared or talked about global warming – we all looked forward to the spring warmth and the summer rains. What we feared were droughts and killing frosts. Animals seldom died in warm summers – they were far more likely to die in a cold, hungry winter.

And then as now, no one believed the official weather forecasts from the weather bureau.

What every farmer listened to was Inigo Jones, an eccentric individual weather forecaster and scientist who believed that the sun rules our weather cycles, and sun spots could be used to give some idea of what the future weather may be.

Farmers knew that cycles of seasons, tides, sun, moon and the solar system had a dominating influence on their weather. Many farmers were well informed on such matters.

The alarmists scoff that only ignorant farmers and old buffers are climate sceptics. Farmers and old buffers know that extreme weather events are nothing new. We had our hail storms and heat waves, floods and droughts, killing frosts and dust storms. Mum even talked about a tornado when she was young. And every farmer had his stories of the Great Federation Drought, 1900-1902.

But no one blamed humans or carbon dioxide for weather disasters – we just grumbled, cleaned up, and got on with life.

Modern research is now showing that in climate matters as in many other things, farmers and old buffers have more common sense than those who build computer models of the climate. Inigo Jones was closer to the truth than is the IPCC.

### ***Trucks and Tractors Fed the growing Cities.***

The effect of trucks, tractors and cars on the amount surplus food Australia produced was dramatic but seldom appreciated.

In 1940 each small farm probably had 6 Clydesdale horses, plus four ponies and stock horses – ten hungry horses to be fed every day. On bigger properties there were mobs of horses – about 4 horses per stockman, plus all the breeding stock and young animals.

Before he went farming, my father had a bullock team that hauled logs from Mt Lindsay to the local saw mills. An old photo on my office wall today shows there were 20 bullocks in such a team. Teams of heavy horses or bullocks pulled the wool bales to market and fast horses were harnessed to the Cobb and Co coaches that carried the mails and the passengers. In its heyday, Cobb and Co owned 30,000 horses. Even the army was green, and large numbers of Australian Waler horses provided mounts for the Indian army, towed the artillery and gave mobility to the Light Horse.

### ***The Teams***

*“A cloud of dust on the long white road,  
And the teams go creeping on  
Inch by inch with the weary load;  
And by the power of the green-hide goad  
The distant goal is won.”*

***Henry Lawson (1867 – 1922)***



All of these working horses and bullocks had to be bred and fed. An enormous amount of land, hay and grain went to provide transport and traction. Pioneering Australia ran on bio-fuel.



**"On the long White Road".**

All of these horses and bullocks were progressively replaced by motor vehicles in the first half of the twentieth century. The last Cobb and Co horse-drawn coach ran in Queensland in 1924. There were no protests about the jobs lost at Cobb and Co – many more were created elsewhere.

By replacing hungry horses and bullocks, motor vehicles liberated a huge amount of land for food for the cities. Instead of hay burners we started to use petroleum fuels in our Whippets, Chevs, Oldsmobiles, International Trucks, Fordson Tractors, Twin City tractors, and the Ford Model T

Tractors also increased food production by doing more farm work, more quickly.

Our Clydesdales pulled one small plough, very slowly, needed regular rests, and had no headlights for working at night. Originally, an acre of land was a measure of the amount of land an ox could plough in one day. One tractor today would plough hundreds of acres in a day. And planting (and harvesting) can be done quickly, at exactly the right time when temperature and moisture are optimised.

Ironically, there are foolish people who are demanding we return to using bio-fuels for transport. This is causing the reversion of "land for food" back into "land for transport". This takes us back to the horse and sulky days. It may be worse than that as horses and bullocks are probably far more efficient at extracting energy from grass than is the current process for growing, harvesting, processing, refining, distributing and using ethanol fuel in motor vehicles. In the US today, about 30% of crop land is devoted to producing ethanol – even though our big Clydesdales "ate like horses" they never consumed 30% of the farm production.

No one has any feasible option for replacing hydro-carbon fuels in our trucks, tractors, aeroplanes and cars. Nor is there any feasible way of catching the exhaust fumes and burying them (even if this made any sense, which it does not). Therefore the only way to achieve cuts in carbon dioxide emissions in the food and fibre industry is to **produce less**, using inferior technology.

Farm families could return to bio-fuels, and some may even enjoy the rustic self-sufficient lifestyle again, but the cities would starve.

### ***Ration Cards are Nothing New.***

Penny Wong's mis-named Carbon Pollution Reduction Scheme is not that at all. It is the carbon dioxide Ration-N-Tax scheme (or the Rats Scheme for short).

Ration cards (called carbon emission permits) are the essence of the scheme.

This is just a return to the bad old days of my boyhood.

We knew all about ration cards during the war – you needed a ration card for petrol, tobacco, sugar, tea, butter, clothing and probably other things that I was unaware of. There must have been meat rationing too as we were very surreptitious when we killed a pig for our own consumption.

But war time ration cards were free. This time, some people will pay, but other people with better lobbyists will get them for free.

There is another perverse difference with the proposed carbon ration cards. Rationing of the 1940's was designed to "fairly allocate" a perceived shortage of goods (and to allow governments to grab a bigger share of community goods without paying full price). There was no limit on production.

However, the ration cards of the RATS scheme aim to limit production – "if you produce more than your carbon ration card allows, we will fine you". This makes a mockery of the Rudd promise "to increase productivity".

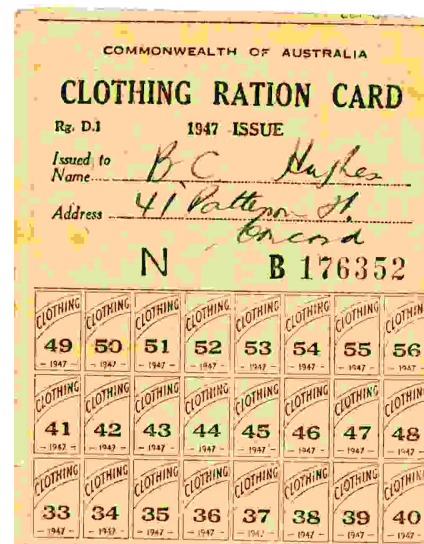
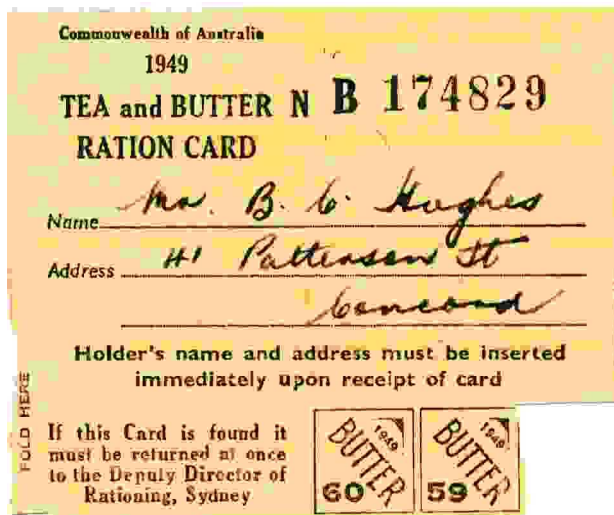


Notice that list of rationed items – everything on it is a carbon product. This reflects the reality of the world - the struggle for carbon-based food, fibre and energy is always with us, and shortages are kept at bay only by productive economies that produce surpluses, supported by smoothly running delivery systems that get it to the cities every day without fail.

One foolish dictator (or many foolish bureaucrats) can cause a shortage in a very short time.

We were all too smart for the ration police. Everyone traded ration cards they did not want for something they did want. Mum recalled years later how Dad's consumption of tobacco increased markedly during the period of rationing. He cadged or traded ration cards from non-smoking friends and relatives and made sure he never went short of a fag. There were no bankers making a sub-prime market in ration cards - the black market was much more efficient anyway.

Even though ration cards were “free”, everyone hated them, especially the small retailers who had to keep records. But the controllers were reluctant to let them go. Rationing continued under the Chifley Labor government until 1949, four long years after the war ended.



A warning for Mr Rudd.

Menzies promised to abolish rationing, and won the 1949 election. Petrol rationing was abolished in February 1950 and butter ration cards disappeared in June 1950.

Labor spent the next 23 years in opposition.

## ***Taxes in the Old Days***

I can never remember my Dad complaining about taxes, and I never saw him spending a day cursing and doing his GST or his stock return. Prior to 1942, there was no federal income tax. We had no accountant that I ever heard of.

He did complain once about the buffalo fly tax. Every farm receipt had to bear a buffalo fly tax stamp, which you bought from the government. But after decades of tax, we still have buffalo flies. The flies outlived the tax.

But income tax was a non issue for the pioneers. Judging from an old tax return from 1933, the tax rate was 3.3%, so no wonder it was not a topic of general discussion. But, as usual, war brought many bad things. In 1942 the Commonwealth took over all State Income taxes “as a temporary war time measure”. Naturally the tax rate increased, and complexity grew.

The tax act went from about 130 pages in 1930 to well over 10,000 pages now. Shredding that would have provided kindling for lighting the stove for a month.

Imagine what it will all look like when the carbon taxes and subsidies are added to the current tax mess.

## ***Climate Change in the 1950's caused us to lose the Farm and Everything else.***

I fully expected to inherit our farm and looked forward to that.

But “destructive climate change” took a hand, and changed my life (for the better as it turned out).

It happened this way.

We seemed to have quite a few floods in the 1950's. As we had a stretch of lovely creek flats, the river flooded these, causing a bit of short term chaos with things like fences, crops and machinery foolishly left in flood reach.

Like many people, we had not learned that “flood plains are for floods”. We also had not learned that we should welcome floods for the rejuvenation they bring – fertile silt, a beautiful soaking of the subsoil, and flushing of bad things like accumulating salt.

We had just “recovered” from one flood when another came, washing out fences, burying the plough in silt, destroying a beautiful corn crop and generally leaving a mess. No national disaster was declared, we just got to work fixing things up.

Dad was on the road fixing yet another fence when a bloke came along, stopped and started chatting. Dad moaned about the flood. The stranger then said casually “Would you sell the farm?”

Eagerly Dad said “I would sell the damn thing tomorrow if I could”.

“What would you sell it for?” said the stranger casually.

Suddenly wary, Dad quoted what he believed was a ridiculous price.

“I’ll buy it” said the stranger. And he did.

I was devastated – I thought my father had disinherited me. (My mother told me the real story years later.) I became a landless peasant kid in the big city of Warwick.

My mother then lost all the money from the farm in the 1961 credit squeeze. On the advice of her bank manager, she invested all the money in new-fangled but “entirely safe” “debentures”. She prudently spread the risk among three companies whose names were seared in her memory and mine for ever more – Reid Murray, H G Palmer and Latec. All three went broke at about the same time and the debentures proved to be as safe as sub-prime.

But I engrossed myself in studies and won a scholarship to University.

So, I was just one of the many victims of “extreme weather” and a global financial crisis. Neither made world headlines, but they are headlines in our family story.

But, being gluttons for punishment, years later Judy and I eventually bought a new farm and are family farmers once again.

### ***Finally, are we going back to the Good old Days?***

Targets for the reduction of man’s production of carbon dioxide vary from 5% to 50% or more depending on the spokesman and the temperature that afternoon. (Of course, all planned cuts are “dictated by the science”, not by political expedience.)

If the carbon cops have their way, we are headed back to the low carbon life I saw my father and mother living – a life of monotony, repetition, discomfort, hard work and poverty. Our family could survive and even enjoy a return to what green computer modellers see as “Green Nirvana” providing we had enough land, but we would produce little surplus. 80% of our greatly increased urban population could not survive.

Only Pol Pot has achieved anything like the revolution in life styles proposed by today’s green coercive utopians.

Someone’s grandmother from those times had the most sensible comment about “The Good Old Green Days. She told an earnest young reporter:

***“Thank God the good old days are over.”***

***Viv Forbes June 2009.***

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