INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Andrew Brealy (with Christopher Brealy)
Age: 60
Location: Strode Farm/Hollamby Estates, Herne Bay
Size: 1250 acres
Type: Arable; plus Narcissi/Solar Farm Lease/Housing Development

Interviewed by: Anna Durdant-Hollamby
Date: 30 April 2015

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Anna: Can I get some vital stats about the farm?

Andrew: You might be interested in speaking to my father as well, who's now 86. So I go back to only 1985, because I worked for Gist after I left university, not having done agriculture, I did bio-chemistry. My godmother had a nursery, a plant nursery, and I found that more interesting as a youngster, because of the diverse crops that they grew. Lettuce, tomatoes, cucumbers, runner beans, you name it, there was always something different to do. And so I was interested in that side of things, and so they actually showed me an advert in the Grower Magazine and I went to work in Spalding for Gist for ten years, having had an interview for that in 1976.

Andrew: It was my brother who did the agricultural degree and he's 8 years younger than I am. It is coincidental that 72 of us were made redundant at Gist in 1985, and to get my redundancy payment, I had to stay on another 6 months as the department I was involved with downsized until we all left, so it coincided with my brother joining the farm having done an agricultural degree. Me having phoned up Dad up asking if he had a job for me, explaining that I'd lost mine, and he said as long as you bring another enterprise, to diversify, to help the farm. So I introduced narcissi and also, covered, forced cropping.

Anna: What does that mean, could you explain that in more detail?

Andrew: Forced cropping is where a plant of any type is made to produce its crop outside of its normal window of natural production. So with narcissi, you can force them through cold storage treatment and pre-heat treatment, a combination of the two, into flowering earlier, so I could get first narcissi flowers. And I would say that everyone thinks that's a daffodil, but a daffodil is a common name for the yellow

trumpet narcissus, so there all Narcissus, but when you say daffodil to someone, they think of a big yellow trumpet but that's still a narcissus. That's a common mistake, people make.

Okay, so by forcing, you can get them to flower in November. And traditionally those flowers are picked with leaves, because you get a higher value then. And then with the outdoor ones are picked, because they are picked for their bulbs, not for the flower, the flower is a bonus. We want the goodness to go back into the bulb to produce the bulb. So you just pick the flower stem, okay? The technical term is spiked with leaves and unspiked. So if you were to phone up Covent Garden Market and say could I have some narcissi please, if it were on that stage where outdoor were available, they would say 'Do you want unspiked or spiked?'

That caught my father out once. Because I was on holiday and he was phoning them up to say he would be sending them some narcissi so the chap said 'unspiked or spiked?' And my dad said 'what do you mean!?' And the chap at the other end said 'well you're growing them, surely you know?' And dad said 'No, I'm just covering for my son, if I asked you about the growth stages of wheat, you wouldn't know,' so he said 'alright, fine...'

A: Fair enough. So it's been narcissi, forced cropping…

Andrew: The farm was about 1250 acres, okay so, one was in partnership with my father. When I joined, we made a three way partnership, myself, my brother, who's called Peter and as I say, he's 8 years younger than I am. I'm now coming up to my 60th birthday.

A: Thanks for that, I now don't have to ask you your age, which is always a bit awkward.

Andrew: No problem, my father is 86 this year, but I will come onto that. Sorry I've lost my train of thought.

A: Ah, no it's fine, you were saying about the size of the farm, being 1250...

Andrew: 1250 acres. Okay, so half of it was with a family tenancy. So the building you're sitting in belongs to Hollamby Estates, which was set up by my grandfather back in the early 50s, because the family were originally builders in northwest London around Eastcote, Dulles Hill, that area. So my father didn't have any agricultural qualifications, but one of my uncles did, and my grandfather bought land and steadily bought up more land to build up the land ownership.

He was buying it speculatively for the potential of building to happen on it because green field land, which can be built on, is worth a hell of a lot more to the family, in dividends, etcetera, than anything I could produce at a profit from farming the land, because we farm heavy London clay here and it's not the easiest of land to farm. So, going back to the 1250 acres, it was almost 50/50 split between the family tenancy and, also from our side of the family, the rental from what used to be Mid-Kent Water, where they were planning to build a reservoir at Broad Oak. So that butts right up towards the university, where you our now at Tyler Hill, and spreads all the way back, just over 600, about 625 acres back to the Canterbury road, at the bottom of Calais hill, so that has gone through various changes.

About ten years ago, it was all on, because we had a few dry years and the water demand had gone up the agenda. So, they started to do investigations through pits in the field to look at the substrata, because they worked out that the valley will not naturally hold water. So as I understand it, they have to line it with clay so although there is clay underneath, it's the wrong type of clay. But then that all died a death, the recession hit, and so that put it on the back burner again now. And I'm just coming to the end of my final three year farm business tenancy, so after harvest this year, I shall be giving that up.

But there are reasons for that, because the family company have got development potential on Strode Farm, which is my base and I can show you that on a map so you can see that. So, the farm base closed last November, so it meant my base of operations, my grain storage, where I can keep all my machinery, has gone. So that really was the writing on the wall for me. I shall be retiring slightly earlier than I'd planned, but having said that, the land that's left that's not going to be developed has still got to be looked after, so we're contracting in the work.

A: Okay, yeah, well early retirement and farming, yeah, it's not exactly you're going to be at a loss for things to do if you still have land and now, these solar panels? Is this to do with you?

Andrew: Yes that's another reason that would have precipitated the closure of the farm as well. You really need 800-900 acres of land to farm to justify buying your own machinery. It's been worked out that it wouldn't be worthwhile and you contract in the machinery and the labour to do the work for you in that area, so the British Solar Renewables have leased the land, which is just over 200 acres for 25 years.

And they obtained their planning permission on 9th January 2015, so they managed to build it and feed into the tariff, which finished at the end of March with 2 days to spare, because they had a terrible time in January with the wet weather, and were trying to make a start with putting in the panels, but they managed it. So they got a

connection on 29th March I think it was so yeah, and the amount that a solar farm can pay back is roughly six times the profit per acre than I could obtain from farming it! So it's a no-brainer!

A: It's such a brilliant thing - was there much opposition with it?

Andrew: Only from the immediate local people, it's quite a sparsely populated area, just there, so there was worry about noise from the inverters, but that's very low noise. You'd have to walk up quite close to hear a hum, from them when they're working. And also about flooding, because it was perceived that the panels would deflect the rain, but because they're just on steel poles pushed into the ground, there's no concrete underneath them, the steel posts which they stand on are 8 or 9 metres deep into the soil, so they don't move within their 25 year life, so any rain that falls on the panels, naturally falls off them and onto the ground, just as it would do. They're going to reinstate that was underneath and then they'll have sheep grazing underneath to keep the weeds down. The idea being that sheep underneath to keep the vegetation down so it doesn't grow above and shade the panels.

A: That's so interesting, I was wondering about livestock and whether there can be a relationship between the two. That's really nice, and it's okay for the sheep to be under the panels?

Andrew: Yup, it's common practice. The downside in a sense is that DEFRA have taken the view that the land is ineligible for the EU farming payment.

A: Right, okay, is that the subsidy?

Andrew: Yeah that's right, we try to get away from the word subsidy in farming. It is an indirect farming subsidy in a way, but to get this payment, we've got to jump through a lot of hoops: farming not within a metre of the top of a ditch, 2 metres from the centre of a hedge, you're not allowed to cut hedges at a certain time. So to get this payment, we have to comply with a lot of rules and regulations as to what we can do on the land.

A: Oh it should be, to me, not that I know a huge amount about this stuff but when you're doing something like solar panels, it would sort of be an automatic EU supported initiative, because it's so important. So it's really cool that you're doing that. Actually I saw, I'm from East Sussex originally and when I go back on the train to Tonbridge, I've seen 2 or 3 fields full of solar panels. So exciting to see that renewable energy is increasing.

Andrew: The interesting thing is that now that Cornwall, Devon, Somerset and Dorset are at grid capacity so that no one anymore can build green, renewable

energy down there. Until they can put some more, what they call, grid capacity in it, which is the ability of the electricity to be absorbed into the grid to be distributed. It's their capacity down there, which is surprising that it's been reached so quickly. Apparently that is going to happen over the next few years over the whole country, until more investment is made into the grid distribution

A: Yeah definitely, aw that's all really interesting. So glad that's all changing. Could I ask you about the EU, you just mentioned their impact with the payment. Are there other EU restrictions that have been really challenging to deal with?

Andrew: If I was still growing oilseed rape, I would be seriously concerned because of the withdrawal of neonicotinoids. I don't know whether you've heard of that? It was a seed dressing which combatted fleabeetle, and when you've got a very young plant, I don't know if you're a gardener, but oilseed rape comes out of the ground about the size of a radish, looks very similar to a radish, and when the plant is young like that and it's very vulnerable to insect damage, and neonics was a no-brainer - everyone treated their seed with neonicotinoids. Just recently, funnily enough, I was reading some figures, about 5% was lost, so that's many 1000s of acres was lost in the UK this last autumn. 1.5% of that was re-drilled with spring rape and the rest was cropped with something else, or they just gave up, because they realised that the chemical armoury they had…so we had to revert to a contact spray, which is not as environmentally friendly.

A: Oh really?

Andrew: Because there was resistance to those chemicals, to some of the insects that they were trying to control, so you may have to go back a couple of times to control them. Whereas with the seed dressing, which restricts the contact of the insect we're trying to control, and works very well. And then I know there's the worry about bees, but scientifically nobody really knows the influence of everything that affects bees, like the varroa mite. Which is a mite, a pest which attaches itself to the bee, which just sucks the life out of the bee, which is not very nice. And unfortunately, although beekeepers can treat for varroa mite, there is resistance to the chemicals they use, which is safe to the bees, so they can't get complete control over varroa mite. So, the studies which the European Union have used to ban neo-nics is questionable, because they've artificially used, we think, higher doses than bees would be subjected to in a field.

A: That must be so frustrating, more than that when it affects your crop.

Andrew: I'm not a scientific expert, but it's a sort of knee-jerk reaction. We see lobbying potential from the environmentalists being much stronger than the farming lobby at the moment. Europe doesn't go hungry - if we were somewhere in

Africa, they'd perhaps look at it a bit differently from a political point of view, but the political green input is stronger, because we can afford to be in Europe.

A: Yeah, definitely, I think that's such a good point, I think yeah that the green brigade at the moment have quite a stronghold don't they, more than the farmers, who are in more of a marginalised situation.

Andrew: …and then there's the view on GM foods, which are restrictive in Europe, at the moment. People don't realise we are all eating GM foods simply because the tolerance level is set up to 1% of contamination, whether it's maize coming in as an import from South America or the Americas as a whole, into Europe, for animal feed or for ourselves, we're indirectly eating it. At the moment, there's no scientifically proven downside to eating GM foods, but I have concerns personally as a farmer. I would love to sow, for instance, GM wheat.

Break - Christopher, Andrew's cousin comes in. Introductions etc. He had brought a local history book about the town and farms in the area.

Andrew: Because I made the point earlier about the fact that it's been worked out that a farm has to be 800-900 acres to be able to afford its own machinery - otherwise it's cheaper to get contractors in.

A: And you're Strode Farm, right?

Andrew: Yes. What happened in 2005 is that Hollamby Estates, the family company which all the shareholders are still family members—there are 48 of us now—because it's gone down and spread out through the generations, from my grandfather down to great grandchildren level, hasn't it Chris?

Christopher: Yeah!

Andrew: So, that's one of the restrictions about the shareholdings in Hollamby Estates is that any shares that are given has to be approved by the board, so when they're given to family members there's no restrictions and that includes partners as well, who marry into the family. So, yea, going back to the GM debate, I'd love to be able to plant GM wheat at the moment, which would perhaps give me the option to spray glyphosate, to control black grass, because on heavy land where we have a lot of winter crops, we've got a real resistance issue with black-grass, so from that point of view, that would make growing wheat economically viable and solve the problem going forward. BUT, we'd have to control it carefully, because I know that resistance issues have built up in the States. Some of the GM crops over there have now got glyphosate-resistant weeds…

A: Wow.

Andrew: …so, there would have to be a protocol to vary the weed control; but that's what I see would be the main benefit. As when they first came out, before the Frankenstein food articles appeared, they could manipulate plants to increase vitamin A content in rice, or whatever, and make the plants more sustainable for growing in adverse climates, where there's drought resistance or growing in wetter climes. So, it is part of the argument for feeding the world, that's potentially going to increase to 9 billion people by 2050. And because we're not making any more land, the land is slowly disappearing as we develop more and more of it.

A: Yes, more and more people, we need to come up with things that are gonna, yeah, feed the world, as you say, very important. That's all really interesting, thank you.

Break, while Christopher shows me local history book that he's brought with him. Andrew also answers my personal question about the name Hollamby Estates and suggests we arrange an interview with his father Vincent about the years before he became involved.

Christopher: The other thing that happened was that after the Second World War there was a Kent agricultural committee, which took over the running of the land.

Andrew: That's right, yep, and oversaw the farming that was taking place, as you're probably aware, grassland was ploughed up, probably against some farmers wishes, because it was seen to be more productive if the land was ploughed up and a crop put in, rather than have livestock, which potentially was low intensity farming in those days.

Christopher: So that came to an end in 1956, which is when grandfather bought most of our land, in 1956.

A: Can I ask you about your views on organic farming as you were talking about GM?

Andrew: It wouldn't be practical to consider it on our soil type because you'd need a big selection of livestock because the manure would have to be supplied from the animals. And so for a really integrated organic farm, you'd need a mixture. And because we're on heavy London clay, ….poaches—poaching is when you leave animals on land when the ground turns wet— its as though they start digging it up with their hoof prints, and that became evident to me, because when we had the big foot and mouth outbreak, what 20 years ago now, we actually had some sheep—a flock of about 120 from Thanet—and because we didn't have any livestock, it was seen as a safe area to put the livestock on. But, because it was in the autumn, and although the ground it went on was permanent pasture, for hay production, they

quickly poached that ground, going into the winter, so there was no feed value for them, and they then had to move back quickly, I think they moved off before Christmas. because there were issues about moving fodder around at that time because of getting it from a farm that might be infected and cross-infect, so yeah...

[pause] The organic lifestyle means that we'd only be able to feed, right, if everybody said "no more chemicals, no more fertiliser apart from natural fertiliser", you would feed about a third of the world's population, as it stands at the moment!

A: Yeah? That's really interesting.

Andrew: And you'd have to have a whole different mindset, because we'd have to involve a lot more people on the land who are prepared to go out in all weathers, to weed and harvest, etcetera, compared to what we do now...

A: A lot more people/labour intensive isn't it, as well as everything else?

Christopher: That's a good point to know, isn't it? Most farmers have one manager and employ maybe one other person, don't they?

Andrew: Or take on a student, because roughly put it's about one person per 1000 acres now and the manager. Then you take on a student at harvest time and also at re-seeding time in the autumn. My farm had, including me, four staff before it closed down, which was, in a sense, way over the requirement for the land we farmed. But because it was difficult clay land, you have a much shorter window in which to seed and put the crops back in and cultivate the ground in the autumn.

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A: And I've got, just looking at my list, you're covering so much, it's brilliant, thank you. I'm thinking about your narcissi and supermarket guidelines and stuff like it, has that impacted?

Andrew: I've never dealt directly with a supermarket. And with the narcissi, with the flowers, I tried to get away from using Covent Garden Market as much as possible, because you'd never know what price you're going to receive, until you put stuff on the market and it is sold. So one of the big issues I found, with narcissi is that it's a relatively cheap flower for people to buy and you have a very busy period, Valentine's Day, Mothering Sunday, also perhaps in the run-up to Christmas. And then everybody would have flowers so the next week, no one would want any, to buy any. So, you can manipulate a little bit but you can't turn off the production, because they naturally just keep on flowering. Even if you turn the temperature down, they will keep on turning over.

So, I tried to sell locally to local retailing shops, the flowers, but that's always an issue because unless they've got a very good turnover…and I learnt the shops that had a good turnover, funnily enough, tended to be green grocers, rather than florists because of the high footfall. People go in to buy their veg and something like a cheap bunch of narcissi, they would pick up that as well. So those shops were useful. And then I've dealt with secondary wholesalers. And they would be useful to take the undersized flowers and sell off cheaply, which would be a waste of my time, trying to send them up to Covent Garden, because you'd hardly recover your costs, well you wouldn't. It would be an absolute waste of time. And the other thing about using Covent Garden, in the years I produced flowers, I had two panels go bankrupt on me and when the administrator comes into those and they see what is in the bank balance, and when they're winding up the company, they spend up to the money that's available. And if you get a penny of the pound that you're owed back, you're lucky.

A: You're lucky!

Andrew: So, I lost, personally, the first time it happened, about £1600, which really wiped out in the 90s when that happened, any profit from that crop. And then when Hollamby Estates bought out my tenancy, which they did in 2005, to form a trading company, we had another panellist go bust and that was about £1200, but I'd become aware of recognising the signs and stopped selling them material. Because they may know they're going under, but [laughs] they keep it very quiet, you just sort of notice the payments slipping and you have to chase them more and more. But it was quite surprising to me, some of the big companies up in Lincolnshire who sell to Covent Garden, how much money they were owed, and I'm talking about hundreds of thousands of pounds to, you know, an auction.

A: Wow, yeah.

Andrew: Not an auction site, you know, a commission seller, probably Covent Garden. It would just depend how long they kept on persevering with them, before they pulled the plug.

A: Wow as big losses go...

Andrew: Yup

A: Kind of on that note, have there been other challenges and threats to the farm?

Andrew: The biggest challenge that we have no control over is weather. 2000-2001 winter was depressing because we managed to seed and get most of the crops in and then it rained and rained and rained. And the crops rotted in the ground.

A: Oh God, how awful.

Andrew: and the nature of the farm is that we can very rarely get on in spring early enough to get the crop up and growing, before it becomes uneconomic. Because although we can put a spring crop in but it's normally so late on, on the London clay that, for instance with Barley, you have what we call Cuckoo Barley, and you put it in so late that the cuckoo is already doing its music. And so you have a very short window for the crop to grow. Weather and....

Christopher: …the biggest thing is we had the new Thanet Way go through in 1996…

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Christopher: Yes, I would say the New Thanet Way was a big thing, in1996, that came through the farm, you see, we lost 40 acres.

Andrew: And the compensation you received was agricultural value, so we received £1250 per acre. Now when you think of the development value is in the hundreds of thousands per acre for housing development, you only get under the compulsory purchasing scheme, you only get agricultural value, despite the fact that the local population are getting the benefit from a new road and all the infrastructure that goes around it.

A: It's nothing, is it?

Andrew: It meant that fields were cut off, such that instead of driving, just in the practical sense, with a combine harvester, the head sits on the front which is quite wide these days, instead of being able to drive from one field to the next, we'd have to de-couple and escort it round to the field to harvest in that area.

[pause while they point out on map what was divided by the road]

A: Okay, I see

Christopher: That's Strode Farm there you see [pointing on map], that field was cut into two and so was this one.

A: Wow, that must have had a huge impact

Andrew: So in practical terms, you get used to it and you adapt to it. But initially it's a real nuisance.

A: Of course, it divides everything up doesn't it, completely.

Andrew: …but from the family company point of view, that division then traps some bits of land potentially, which improves development potential, going forward.

Christopher: Historically, when the motorway went round Reading, the M4, there was land that had to be developed.

Andrew: So to the Hollamby Shareholders, so little of the profit goes into the dividend, if any, it's the bricks and mortar, the development that happens on the land, which pays the dividend for the family shareholders.

A: And you guys are in housing on the land, this is what Hollamby Estates are doing?

Andrew: This is what is proposed. The Canterbury City Council has zoned some land. The reason why Strode Farm has closed is that there's an 80 acre block between Canterbury Road and Bullockstone Road which is being zoned for housing and a bit of retail and it will also give a relief road for Herne. Because I used to be on the Herne and Broomfield Parish Council, and for a number of years we tried to get the A road that goes between Herne Bay and Canterbury downgraded going through Herne so that we could restrict or advise HGVs that they can find an alternative route. But, that, we've been told, cannot happen, but now within this development, we can provide a relief road, not a bypass because it won't be as wide as a bypass requires. So it'll be a thirty mile per hour route, through this development, coming off Canterbury Road at the Eddington Junction and rejoining the Canterbury Road further up where Bullockstone road rejoins. So, that's the benefit and of course, there's a lot of resistance locally, because unfortunately Herne and Broomfield Parish is going to have three developments surrounding it. Ours, the old Herne Bay Golf Course, which closed, and also Altira, which goes up towards Hillborough on the north side. And so, if all the houses get built, that are proposed, it will roughly double the size, potentially of what Herne and Broomfield is. So, it became awkward for me to stay on the parish as a parish councillor, because the insinuation was that I was manipulating the parish's views, although every time, any discussion about development in the area came up, I would have to declare my interest and have to leave the meeting. And then the chairman would invite me back in, but all the stories that came out in the local press, that insinuation was always there in the background. So the directors at Hollamby said to me that I ought to resign from the parish council, which I did, in the spring last year 2014, which was disappointing to me, because I was giving something back into my community, not to do with the development, but the farm was ideal for storing things for the parish. Whether it be

the Christmas float or the that caravan they use, or salt bins as they arrived, or play equipment. "Oh Andrew can store that," - so it came to me by default, and of course the locals don't realise what goes on in the background with that.

A: I guess they just gossip don't they?

Andrew: Yup, but it was interesting that the reaction against the development was slightly less than a pub which had closed in the village being taken over by a Tesco Direct, or a small one, and the reaction to that was 100% no thank you very much!

A: Right, but they got that through?

Andrew: No, they didn't. Tesco walked away from that, but then there were two other local ones, one in Sea Street, just over the road here, and one near the Queens' roundabout as you go on the Canterbury Road to Herne Bay. So, those two were built out of the three that were proposed, within a mile and a half of each other. So it did get through. So, the local opposition, Tesco recognised that. It's a shame that a parish comes together with a negative viewpoint; the positive stories we don't seem to come together as well. Like when a new community centre was proposed in the parish. There was quite a lot of negativity about that, because it had to be built on a site where there were some small allotments. But to build it to fit the purpose, because of the expanding community, it had to be bigger than the Lovell church hall we'd bought as a parish. So, getting away from that sort of Nimbyism is difficult...But then when you say to these people, "where are your children going to live?" You've got to have the housing in place to make it affordable and make land available.

Christopher: Do you know anything about the local plan?

A: No not really, only from what you've said?

Christopher: Because there lots of houses proposed for this area, and at Chesfield, there's a development proposed by Eton College at Bodkin Farm, so they're not on the local plan, but they're got lots of people wanting to build houses, 300 houses. They're going to appeal in August to get permission to build 300 houses there. So yeah, there's a lot of pressure for housing.

A: Well yeah, exactly, country wide isn't it? It's so necessary.

Andrew: So yes, the government inspector at the moment is looking at Canterbury City plans for development in the area, so the problem is if the inspector rejects the local plan, it leaves it open for anybody to put forward a piece of their land into the mix, because they can argue that the city council is not meeting the local needs of what it's been advised by central government that it's got to build.

Christopher: If the council has their plan rejected you see, then there's no plan, there's no structure to it or anything…

Andrew: …becomes a free for all then.

Christopher: I think the other change worth mentioning are the solar farms, they're quite a few solar farms in the area.

A: Yeah, definitely. We talked a bit about the solar panels here, which is amazing to see. Andrew was telling me about the fact that you can have sheep underneath as well, which I hadn't realised before.

Christopher: But, there's another one, a 70 acre one on our neighbours' farm. And there's one at the top of Calcott Hill.

Andrew: Yes, the other side of the Canterbury Road. So, there's quite a few locally, which has made people wake up in the area to whether they perhaps want any more solar farms, because they've said "Oh there's several in the area, why do we need any more?" But from my point of view, I think about, with my agricultural hat on, ours has gone on grade three, grade four land, so that's the worst agricultural value. Where, they've gone on grade one land, because in the planning criteria at the moment they don't really consider grade one or grade two land, they don't give enough weighting in the planning criteria. Because I'm always aware that going forward, you want to retain your easiest working land and your most viable for growing a good crop, which can be grown on grade one or grade two land, and not to lose it. The upside is that it would be easy for a solar farm in 25 years' time to just pull the posts out of the ground and it could revert to agriculture again if it was needed. But bricks and mortar, a little more difficult.

A: Yeah, still it's the kind of thing that ought to be really stringently considered. And with the solar farming and stuff, do you mainly deal with DEFRA or Department of Energy and Climate Change?

Andrew: We deal with a developer in the sense that British Solar Renewables own various companies round the country, so they approach us and say "We're prepared to pay you a rental figure per year for the next 25 years" and so they got planning permission and we just made the land available. So it's more to do with the local planning authority than it is with DEFRA.

A: Okay, sure.

Christopher: But that's just the way we did it, but apparently there are various ways of doing it. I mean I think the one next to us, that was sold to the solar company.

Andrew: Yep, so they owned the land outright, going forward, but that's to do with the individual farmers' circumstances. Are there family members not involved with the farming side of things? And they wanted capital out of the farm, that's one way for that individual to provide it.

Christopher: But there's been a bit of a change because at the end of March, the tariff changed, so they were all rushing to get the solar farms built by the first of April. So the tariff has changed now, so the incentive's not there so much, there won't be any more big solar farms, people don't think there'll be any more for a long time.

A: So yeah, you were saying about just getting in there, in that window

Andrew: Because in the future, whether it's a wind farm or a solar farm, there's a bidding process in the future, so people will have to bid a price they're prepared to pay to feed into the national grid, for the electricity that they generate. And so that's going to force the price down because of the bidding process, it makes sense in a way that that's going to happen, from a consumer's point of view, because it's been worked out that roughly 8% of everybody's electricity bill is from the subsidy that wind farms and solar farms received, to generate enough incentive to build wind and solar farms.

Christopher: So it's called the contract for difference.

A: Okay, that's good to know.

Christopher: So potentially the solar farm is competing with the wind farm off Herne Bay, you know it?

A: What, the one out to sea, opposite...?

Andrew: Opposite Whitstable and Herne Bay

A: Yeah I've seen it, I know, yeah.

Christopher: That also comes to the substation, which is just down here, which the solar farm connects to as well, so yeah that's the situation.

A: Yeah that's really interesting, it's so good to kind get a practical understanding of how it's actually working in reality. Because obviously, in the press, you get such

different stories about you know, wind farms here or solar stuff there, it's really good to hear what's actually happening on the ground.

Andrew: The first part of the process of considering a solar farm or a wind farm is the capacity within the grid to connect up locally, because where the solar farm is down towards Sandwich, that is at grid capacity. So they've built an anaerobic digester on the farm there for digesting maize, so whole crop maize and whole crop rye and they also use other little bits or waste vegetables, waste fruit, which goes into the melting pot if you like to produce methane. They weren't able to build another one to feed in electricity, so they've still built one, but they feed in the methane gas into the grid, after it's cleaned up, so there are ways round at the moment, but it is becoming more difficult. So on the arable land that's left now, instead of perhaps growing wheat and oilseed rape, the majority of our winter crop, we'll have whole crop maize grown by a contractor, and that'll go to feed in the substrate to the digester at St Nicholas Court, down towards Birchington. So that is an artificial influence on the rental value of the land. If you have an anaerobic digester, they want land to grow that crop on, quite close, so it artificially raises the local level and makes it uncompetitive. It's good for the landowners in a sense, because they can get more from renting the land out, but my neighbour, if they wanted to grow wheat or oilseed rape, they can't afford to rent the land at that value to compete with the anaerobic digester that's part of the subsidy system. Because, to encourage this green energy, there's got to be artificial incentives, which works against the market, in the sense that other farmers, who might have rented that land, they can't afford to do it anymore. But, having said that, the rules from the European Union now say that over thirty hectares, we have to grow three crops on a farm.

A: Yes, Alan mentioned that the other day.

Andrew: Yes, so it does mean that we're still growing some oilseed rape on the land, because of the three crop rule.

A: So, oilseed rape, wheat and maize, was it?

Andrew: So on the farm this year, there'll be maize, oilseed rape and the third crop will be fallow, okay? Which, because of the solar farm, all the fencing hasn't been put up yet, so, rather than say that there's a hope value added to the bits that have been cut off big farm this year, we're just going fallow until it's settled down, the activity's reduced and then it can potentially be cropped the following year. So that's the easiest option for us at the moment.

A: That makes sense.

Christopher: And the government are trying to digitise the application forms.

A: So it's online as opposed to?

Christopher: Yeah it was online, unfortunately it fell behind. So this year, we applied by May 15th, but they extended it until June 15th, because there was a problem.

Andrew: Government IT systems haven't got a good reputation for success.

Christopher: So we're in the process of doing that.

A: Ah man, what a headache!

Andrew: And one of the changes this year is that the entitlements that are attached to each farm or farmer have to be used this year, if you can't or haven't got land to use your entitlements on, they're lost, unless they're sold for another farmer to use. So we're in negotiation at the moment to sell the entitlements which were attached to the land, where the solar farm is, because as I explained earlier, the entitlement will be lost there, because it's not eligible, even though there will be sheep underneath, that's being discontinued. It used to be allowed, but they've decided going forward, that that's not going to be allowed anymore.

Christopher: In October last year, that was

Andrew: The other thing I will mention is that the land which is owned by South East Water—because Mid-Kent Water's no more, it's now South East Water and I think Southern Water, I can't remember the exact percentage—but that land only became available to farm because the threat of compulsory purchase against the three farms in the valley at Broad Oak to encourage them to sell. So that was in the early 70s that that happened, but my father was able to farm that. Originally, it was on a license agreement, 1 or 2 year, and then that was extended to five year intervals, and fortunately when I joined my father on the farm in '86, the house attached there was part of the license, so it came with the land. And then, when one of the agents changed, because Savill's used to be the agents for Mid-Kent Water and that then changed to Angela Hurst. Her idea was that she'd separate it under a farm business tenancy, and so the farmhouse was separated from the land. And I was required to rent it and at that stage, I thought I might as well as buy my own, rather than rent it, as a mortgage wasn't much more than the rental value. And I was conscious of the fact that my parents, they'd lived in a property which was attached to the farm, but not theirs, so my mother was always conscious of not having her own, and that potentially she could be forced out if someone else was required to look after the land and needed that house. Fortunately, within the family, that didn't happen, because we got enough properties in the company that we can

accommodate family members who have retired, so from that point of view, it's been good.

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