



# 50 Farmers' Tales

An Archive of Interviews with Kent Farmers



## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Sean Finlayson and Steve Fox  
Age: Finlayson 50s; Fox 63  
Location: Highland Court Farm, Patricxbourne, Canterbury  
Size: 700 acres  
Type: Fruit

Interviewed by: Joe Spence and Baely Saunders  
Filmed by: Joe Spence  
Date: 17 December 2015

\*\*\*\*\*

*Baely: So, if you'd like to introduce yourself and what you do here...*

Finlayson: Right, well I'm Sean Finlayson, I'm the manager of Highland Court Farm now. I've been here for five years, when Farm Care took over the lease of Highland Court Farm from the family. Originally we were a Cooperative farm - part of the Cooperative Farming Group. Last year that was sold to the Wellcome Trust - the Wellcome Trust now own all the farms...they've got about 50,000 acres across England, and two fruit farms, so this is one of them, the other fruit farm is in Hereford. So they bought this farm originally to supply Coop supermarkets, and it's planted mainly in Gala and Braeburn to supply those supermarkets. And then due to various internal things happening in the Coop they decided to sell off some of their assets so they sold off the farm to the Wellcome Trust. And so a year ago we changed ownership but the company didn't change as such, it was just the whole shooting box went over to the Wellcome Trust. The Wellcome Trust is charity trust fund set up by Mr Bill Wellcome so they've got assets of about £17 billion and all the profits go into medical research, of which about £700 million of year goes into medical research, around the world, animal and human health. So they're an investment company with profits going into medical research - and quite a successful investment company, they've got huge growth over the last twenty or thirty years. So they've invested in the farms, obviously for the capital investment of the land, and opportunities they think in the long term future as well. So when we started the farm, we came here the farm was a bit run down, not much investment in the last ten or twenty years. So the Co-op at the time put in about 3 or 4 million pounds and basically over the last 4 or 5 years we've replanted the whole farm with new, modern orchards, and machinery and everything. So it takes a few years to get production up, so we are now just starting to see the benefit of production going up



from 3000 or 4000 bins to 15,000 bins this year. It will keep going up, so we're quite a highly productive farm at the moment – mainly because we have got very intensive sort of modern orchards, irrigation, and good clones and the best sort of orchards that we could set up. So at the moment we've nearly filled the farm up, so at the moment we've sort of finished our planting programme, so we're now just trying to streamline it and sort of get the profits up, and get the quality and the yields and everything up. So yeah, we've got 14 permanent staff, most of those we took on five years ago, some of them have been, some of the staff, one of them has been here for 43 years. The rest of them have been here for on average maybe ten years. And then we've got 3 or 4 new starters. We have about 80 to 90 casuals that come in the summer, and they live in a caravan site that we've built two years ago. That's just a temporary site, that just houses farm workers, and they nearly all come from Eastern Europe – Bulgaria or Romania. And then they... few English people, not so many - my sons, a couple of sons... a few others. Which has been different because even though I'm not from here, I was around here about 25 years ago and you know, my wife's family and all that... the local housewives and the students used to work on this farm...even I worked on this farm when I was just out of University. And so it's changed a lot because even 25 years ago it was all local employees really. And now it's virtually zero, and maybe a handful of local pickers. Obviously the permanents are nearly all... well they are all locals. So yeah, that's our plan at the moment, just to bolster up. We're probably a medium to large sized farm in the scale of farming and probably one of the most technically advanced in the country, mainly because we've started five years ago from almost zero and build everything brand new to top spec. So we had to start again, so everything is sort of new and modern and intensive, whereas normally you'd build up quite slowly. And Because our whole farm is like that - we've got about 700 hectares...700 acres of orchards, about 250 acres of apples - we had to learn quite quickly how to manage those systems and use those systems which means we've sped along a bit on the technology path, because that was our own focus. On this farm we also do a lot of blackcurrants for Ribena, and we also do cherries, plums, apricots... we do some pears, and we also have a 'pick your own site' at Sandwich, that's pick your own cherries and strawberries. So even though it makes a little bit of profit and money, it's more of a community engagement area. It's just a really nice area. We don't get too excited, the kids eat all the strawberries and cherries and things, so yeah we use it as a launch platform for various open days and... and we will develop it one day, give a little bit of money to some more of our community, wildlife sort of thing. Yeah, so that's the farm in a nutshell.

*Joe: Just to clarify, you've been managing this farm for five years*

Finlayson: Yes, when the Coop took over they brought in a new management team, myself and the assistant manager, and they kept all the staff. And so my bosses as such are all based in Manchester at the moment, so they have various sort of 'ops'



managers that look after various farms, and so I look after this farm and so, I am the general manager sort of type based down here.

*Baely: Who looked after it before the coop?*

Finlayson: It was the Highland Investment, the owners were running it themselves. They had a manager... there was also a pack house here which we shut down in 2013, so we took over a running pack house... but really the volumes we were doing weren't enough to justify it and it was too run down and needed another sort of 3 or 4 million pounds investment to get it up to spec. And the site being old, and old buildings, it was never ever going to be a top spec bespoke production unit. And also ...the um yeh ...we're not strong in the expertise of packing and everything, we've decide that we'd send all our fruit to Hereford, to a cooperative there, which our other farm is part of as well, so we've lumped our production together and it's done through a cooperative out there and then most of it goes to Tesco, and some to Cooperative, and a little bit goes to Waitrose as well. And so it does... most of the fruit in Kent goes north anyway at some stage, because obviously nearly all of its grown here so it goes up that way, and so it seems like a long way to go and pack your fruit, but actually in the end it goes up north anyway so, we're quite happy with that arrangement. Well I'm quite happy 'cos I don't like pack houses so it was very good for me (laughs)! Unfortunately, you know we had some redundancies and things, but we found them all jobs - a lot of them are working on the farm as well, so it wasn't too bad.

*Joe: To before you...you've managed other farms previously. Prior to this. Your whole career has been managing, farm managing?*

Finlayson: Yes

*Joe: Shall we have a think about some of the major changes that you've encountered?*

Finlayson: Well I'm a bit different, 'cos obviously I'm from new Zealand. So I came over here about 30 years ago, mucked around on some farms and I've been farming all over, in Kenya and Senegal, Gambia and Tanzania and Portugal... and then I came back here about 7 years ago, no more than that now, 8 or 9 years ago, and worked on some big strawberry farms, asparagus farms, so yeah, wide ranging types of farming from all over the world really. It just happens that my wife lives next door, in the village next door. We've got quite a few kids, so we just came back here to sort the family out, get some family time, and it's a nice farm, nice job, and it just fits in with our family life here at the moment.

*Joe: Would you say that in Kent this is quite a recurring theme - farms handing over control of the farms to third parties?*



Finlayson: Yes, I think in general, because farming now is so intensive and also...how do you say it? Not 'skilful' but you need, you know, the right sort of skills and sort of passion to do it, that they... you can't just rely on family, or you know, somebody coming up just to take over. And unfortunately for Highland Investment, they didn't have someone to take over like a lot of these farming families. 'Cos you almost need professional management, and you know it's not just me, we've got assistant managers, we've got directors and we've got commercial directors, HR and ... you know, the whole package that comes with a company. So for small family businesses, they almost get overwhelmed now. Unless they're absolutely committed or they've got family members or someone in the family that's committed to go that way, it's very difficult for them. You know, Highland Investment had, you know a very nice farm and then there was no one really coming through looking after that farm, and you know, not having the skills as well, you know things can go wrong. Not necessarily it always goes wrong, but it can do, and you need the big professional support network of HR and Health and Safety and Legal and... which most farms... you'll find the smaller farms are closing down and bigger farms are starting because you need all this other stuff that comes with farming these days. So you've got two parts of farming, you've got the actual growing - the trees and growing production style - but then you've got the business of farming: almost two different things. It's just like any other business so you need to have all the training, the Health and Safety, the Legal - employment law, payrolls... in the old days they used to pay daily, with cash out of the back window and all of that but now it's all email and all sorts of stuff. And so it's a business now, and a family run business is difficult because everything's got to be absolutely professional. And there are family run businesses around, but they are professional businesses, you know, with key people in the right places and total commitment to the business. So yeah, in general farm are getting bigger and small farms are going out of business. And that way it's quite different from Europe because the farms are a lot smaller but they're family farms, but they're totally dedicated, the son and the father and the whole family are working hands on, on the farm. Whereas in England its sort of bigger farms, its more 'standoffish' management and you know, you've got, you need, professional managers which are quite expensive and a lot of support, so they will struggle after a while. And there's a lot of capital that's needed as well, and this type of farming it's long term capital. Because the average orchard costs around £25,000 a hectare to set up, and you've got that for about 20 years as well - if you make a mistake or get the wrong variety or whatever... you know, you've got to be really on the ball. And so it's high investment, and returns... returns you won't get returns, there are normally a 7 or 8 year return. So it's quite tricky.

*Joe: What changed in the world to transform farming from, as you were talking about, the family orientated thing to this really corporate...*



Finlayson: The main thing that's happened for farming, and like I've been involved maybe 25 years... the farmer, what they produce whether it's strawberries or meat and wheat or whatever, basically over the 20 years the money for your product is the same, virtually the same, you get the same per tonne or kilo or whatever, right the way through, and it never really goes up. And so the only way to beat that is by getting higher productivity, and... higher quality and things like that. And the only way of getting higher productivity is to...by more technical advances. So if you look at strawberries; they're all grown in the ground, they're probably yielding ten tonnes per hectare. You know that will sort of... then they started growing hydroponics on the ground - that went up, then on table tops then in glass houses and now they're all sort of like 50 tonnes a hectare. And the same with apples at the moment. In the old days you'd be quite happy with say, ten tonnes a hectare, big trees, one there one there one there, get the locals in, pick them chuck them in, sell them - there wasn't much foreign stuff around. You've got the same money now as we're getting now but productivity is a lot less, so now we're hitting about 40 or 50 tonnes a hectare ... Hi Steve! [Steve Fox]

Fox: Hello Sean!

Finlayson: Steve, you want to come and? Do you want to stop there and speak to Steve?

*Joe: Yeah Ok!*

*Baely : Please will you introduce yourself and what you do here*

Fox: My name's Steve and I'm a fruit man, I do pruning and I have done supervising, but now it's all changed and don't do supervising, I spend most of my time pruning, all the way through the summertime now.

*Baely: And how long have you worked here?*

Fox: I came here in 1969, straight from school

*Baely: wow*

Fox: And so I've seen everything, I've seen changes.. seen how the fruits been picked. When I first come here this farm had two fields of blackcurrants which they needed 300 women to pick them, in a period of time. And once that had finished they went on to the early apples which started in May and went right through to October - different varieties. They were put in 30 pound boxes - there was no bolt bins in those days, they come in 1970. And so everything was put in 30 pound boxes, brought up to the stores, or weighed and lidded, and then sent out...except for the



Cox which stayed in the cold stores from when they were picked in September till probably March time.

*Baely: Ok, goodness you've got so many memories and such a good memory as well!*

Fox: When I here, first come here there used to be 18 men working here. And now its dwindled right down, Shaun knows [referring to Shaun Finlayson the Farm Manager], when I had my last manager there was only 4 of us which looked after all this farm, Highland Court and Alton (sic?) Farm as well. So yeah...

*Baely: In your many years here what would you say...what are some of the biggest changes? So maybe the staff is...*

Fox: Well the staff has dwindled away. Obviously the big trees have gone, er, went, which produced probably 12 to 13 boxes per tree in those days. And I think it was in 1980, we had two advisors come through and said right 'to sell Cox they must be coloured', so we put the chainsaws in them and just...they went from 11/12 boxes a tree to 4. But then the disease set in, so we had to grow all of them out and then they had "central leader trees", so all of the branches come off the "central leaders", and instead of them being 20 foot by 20 foot in those days they went down to 15 foot by 10 foot. So instead of having 109 trees to the acre, we was getting 290 trees to the acre, in that area. And most of them was probably producing 4/5 trays a tree in their early years, plus they had plenty of colour. We had er... we always grew Cox here, 'cos this farm could produce good quality Cox and a lot of Cox providing that we didn't have frosts when they were in full bloom. So we had them, but we've also had strawberries up until I think, if I remember rightly Shaun, the cherries that are down the bottom were planted in 1999?

Finlayson: Yeah something like that

Fox: But we done em...because the supermarkets got so funny about the quality that they wanted, that my old manager said 'that's it!' and we only picked for one week, because they were coming out daily, testing them. He couldn't put the women to clear the field up as he wanted to go, so he said 'right that's it! Finished! we're never growing strawberries here again!'... on the ground

...

*Joe: you got rid of the strawberries...*

Fox: yea, we got rid of the strawberries and we put the cherries in down there, and, well we're still growing them now aren't we Shaun?

Finlayson: We are yeah



Fox: Erm, yeah they decided they wanted to try cherries and they was slow to get going and that, because I don't think we really understood the pruning and the planting of it, but then once they got going they kept fruiting. And the only trouble was that 'cos they wasn't under covers we were losing a percentage to the birds and also when it rained they was splitting, but we got over that. You know, for what percentage we was losing, they wasn't bothered about it.

*Baely: Could you just...you were talking a second ago [before the tape started recording] about how it used to be, how there used to be 70 women and a 100 or so children*

Fox: Yes

*Baely: And how has that changed?*

Fox: Well it changed, er we first noticed it probably in 1980, when we stopped putting vans down into the villages. We used to have vans with drivers that would go and pick the women up from Bishopsbourne, from Bridge, from Aylesham, and also the army barracks at Whitfield, 'cos I done that run a few times, going down to pick them up. And then it got complicated, if I remember rightly my old manager saying that in those days the women could work three weeks strawberry picking and come back from three weeks apple picking before they would pay taxes. But then the DHSS [Department of Health and Social Security] got involved, and I had one or two and Shaun knows one or two of them where their names wasn't right 'cos I knew 'em personally! So they'd give me their names and I thought 'no that isn't right' and the addresses didn't add up either, and when you get a person saying 'well my name is Robin Hood and I live at 1 Sherwood Forest, Aylesham – it doesn't work like that! So with the DHS getting involved we gradually lost people because they wasn't prepared to, I suppose, give up their dole money and everything, the social for three...for.. just that amount of time. Because, we got rid of varieties and we concentrated on Cox, so you didn't have long periods, you only had three weeks to a month to get the Cox off, because we'd lost all of the early varieties and one or two of the later ones after the Cox. So it wasn't worthwhile us having a lot of people in then. We did have pickers and that, but it got difficult, as I say, with the social and that. Whereas once upon a time we used to have miners that used to work nights and used to come straight out here, once they'd finished their night shift and started picking during the day. And their wives, and everything. So...

*Joe: When did they sleep!?*

Fox: Pardon?



*Joe: How did they ever sleep?*

Fox: Well, I mean, they wanted the money. Because when you talk to people... when you had then back in the late 1970's/80's, the money that they earned apple picking was Christmas money for their children, to buy all their presents and that....So...but as I say, the 80's we noticed...because people was coming in their own transport, and then it got to the stage where, when I had to run a gang, they'd come up to me : "Oh Steve, we've got to leave" - and this is that quarter to three. "We've got to go and pick the children up". And then they wouldn't get in till ten past, quarter past nine. And then they used to moan because they wasn't earning money, but as I used to say to them, they're getting paid good money 'cos they're only here five hours...five or six...well no five hours if you took their breaks out, their half hour breaks and their morning break. So and I mean ...I'd like to have been earning £50-60 just for that, that period of time. But then you had good pickers that earned more, I mean I had pickers, one couple earning £120 a day 'cos they were paying £10 a bin. And then there was this one guy, Steve Cook (sic?) his name was, a brilliant picker, but I couldn't put his with anybody because he would get here just after 8, go at 3:15 cos I'd close the field up by then, and he would do 12 bins on his own. Because he'd want to earn the money while he was here 'cos he was only here three weeks, a month, and then he would go looking for other work and that. But, yeah, funny how things have changed. But a lot of my time was spraying and that, I used to enjoy spraying. I mean my season back in the 80s..70's/80's was, started spraying in March, finishing September, having a gang of pickers and then pruning again. So I was only doing three things over a period of a year...which I enjoyed anyway.

*Joe: How have you coped with this sudden introduction of new technologies? Have you found it easy to adapt?*

Fox: Not really. I like the old fashioned ways! But it's modernisation...you can't alter it. I mean I spent from 1977 to 1993 on a tractor spraying with no cab, well I had a cab tractor which was good, and sprayers were obviously better that when I first started, but now...I look, and I see orchards that are on wires and they go X amount of high and you think...ooh you know, your picking costs. But obviously Shaun, you know, you know what your costs are, whereas I think, if you had two pickers, that picked the same together - went up a double row, they would pick it through and I don't know if the costs could be cheaper? I imagine it would, 'cos they've got no ladders to use and stuff like that, but I don't know. And, you know, farming has obviously come a long long way from when I first started. I mean you had your tractor, off you went and that, you had your apple trees, you picked them and stuff like that, and plums, I forgot we got plums as well. And it's probably better today, all round...for....the new people (laughs). I mean Shaun's seen a lot more, I mean I only see what goes on on this farm, and there's probably other farms got their own ways of working but might be better or might not be better, I don't know. [pause to think]





We worked harder in the early days, that I will definitely say, because once we picked the fruit we had to weigh and lid them, and then they went out to market, all the early stuff, and it was 1980 when we had the first lot of bins come into this farm. And at first the women was moaning 'cos they didn't think they was going to get paid the right money for what they was getting for picking in boxes, but it did work out well for them.

*Joe: You were just touching on the topic of women working on the farm, are there less women working today as farm workers?*

Fox: Yeah, I don't know of anybody Shaun...Would you now? They've turned all to students now, foreign students. Like, on this farm....Shaun knows where they come from, I don't. I know we had some from Poland one time, and Romania and that. And it was difficult for me when I first started with them, because they're not understanding what you're saying, and you can't understand what they're saying. They're probably calling you every name under the sun after you've walked away, given them a rollicking sort of thing. But now, obviously now I'm not involved with supervising all the gangs so I don't know, I mean Sean will tell you more about that side of it now, than ever I can.

*Joe: It certainly seems like one of the biggest changes, in every interview we've done...this is the 50<sup>th</sup> interview I think that we've done...and in every single interview this has been spoken about as being a major change. Migrant labour...*

Fox: Yes. Yes... And I think it works but ... they've got to understand what you're telling them and that. And if they're not doing it right then I think action has got to be taken. Because you cannot have damage to tractors or fruit and that.

...

Especially after you've explained what you wanted. And that.

*Joe: I suppose that would be the same in any place where people don't speak the same languages*

Fox: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. I mean I don't know any other industries that has foreign labour, that's put it over to them. I don't know. But that certainly is a big change in this kind of farming - foreign students. I would not knock them, I would treat them the same as I would English people. I wouldn't go 'Oh I don't like you, I'm going to sack you, go". But they've got to do the job right, if you can understand what I mean. We put the apples on the tree from pruning, and then the chaps look after it, spraying and everything, and it can be damaged - from class one to juice in five minutes. And I've seen it, we had three Polish guys - I'm going back before the Co-op



had it – I mean I sent them back to the caravans. I mean they were chucking apples in the bins. Because the two supervisors had told them and by the time I got there I said “right go back to your caravans and you don’t get paid, you’re not getting paid for that”. Oh dear oh dear they went and saw Gary [the farm owner], and my name was mud and he let them come back the next day!

Well I mean I would have said “right, you don’t pick and you lose a couple of days’ money”, to make them understand the damage that they’ve caused. But then, perhaps that’s me! I mean in my days, from the first gang in 1980 to 2001, I only ever sacked a mother and son, and another couple – I didn’t actually sack them but they shouldn’t have been here – they was too old! I mean I showed them everything what to do... fill the bins up, put them in the... I actually picked some apples, put them in the picking bags, emptied it in the bin.... left them... course when you’ve got another 22 pickers to keep an eye on - when you walked back there was apples all on the floor, under the trees. I thought “Oh dear” and then I explained to them again. And then a little later I saw apples going up in the air, and they were picking the ones off the floor and trying to knock off the ones they couldn’t reach, ‘cos they didn’t want to put the ladder in! So they didn’t come back either. But I mean they were too old, they were an old couple and they shouldn’t have been here. I don’t know why Chris had sort of said “yes you can pick”, but yeah they didn’t last that long. But the mother and son I did say to leave because they were doing too much damage with the fruit in the bin bruising and everything. But no, I’ve never really ever had a lot of problems with pickers and that. It’s how to handle them. I always used to say “you’re employed by Highland Investment Company, but you work for me”. And it all seemed to go well after that. [laughs]

*Joe: Do you live on the farm? Or in the past have you been a resident?*

Fox: I live in the farm cottage...on the farm, yes.

*Joe: And you’ve remained there for your whole career?*

Fox: Well I lived down on the farm at first, but then I moved up in there in 1980...1990 sorry.

*Joe: I was just asking because some farm workers I’ve spoken to have said that’s one of the things that has changed – that they used to live on the farm but then as time went on they started getting houses elsewhere – I just wondered if that was something that you...*

Fox: Yes

*Baely: And you said your wife worked on the farm?*



Fox: Yes she did at one time, yes.

*Baely: And your children?*

Fox: No, they were all too little, at the time. But no they don't work on the farm. None of them had any interest! And I think it's sad really, you see it today that that actual people that own the farm, their family doesn't want it.

*Baely: That has been something that has come up in a lot of interviews, whether it's with farm workers or, like you say, the farm owners. It used to be that if your Dad was a farmer then you became a farmer, if your Dad was a farm worker then you became a farm worker, and that's not the case now.*

Fox: But I think that the trouble is, it's the attitude of the youngsters today because, down in the Plough two or three years back they used to have a 'Young Farmers' meeting once a month. An this particular Thursday we was down there, and it was amazing, when you scanned back and listened to them and that, and they were more interested in this girl bringing a baby in! You should have seen them, they should have started at 8 o'clock when they hadn't started going 'oh...look a little baby – lovely!' and this. And then one of the guys said "what you been doing today then John?" "Well" he said "the old man had a day off so I took the day off and I went swimming". And I thought "Blimey 0 and you're the boss's son!" I mean, it's the attitude. And they seem to like this sherbet too much! That's what they were more interested in, than actually what goes on on the farm.

*Joe: So that's one of major changes? Peoples' attitudes to work or to being a labourer*

Fox: Yes. But, I've enjoyed it. I mean, from the time I left school and come here, I always wanted to work on a farm. In those days when I was leaving school you either went down the pit, the mines. Or you went to work in Fords in Dagenham where you had to stay...find digs somewhere, but that wasn't for me. I think my Dad wanted me to follow in his footsteps and I wasn't no good at woodwork! He used to moan like heck and me, and I said "that's it, I'm going on the farm!" and I come here from school and stayed here ever since! But I've enjoyed it and I still enjoy it, I still...whatever I've got to do I still enjoy it to this day. I don't know if that sounds weird or something, I still get the same enjoyment as what I did ten year ago, fifteen, twenty year ago. 'Cos if I go out there and slaughter a load of trees, then Shaun is going to be on my back going "what you done to our apples, or plums or all that... we haven't got any...so you get in the office I'm going to sack you!" But every cut I make, if somebody come out and said "why have you made that cut?" In the olden days we used to say "because we didn't like it" and then the manager would give us a rollicking! But if somebody come out and say "why did you make that cut" well I would say "well I've made it for certain reasons" blah blah blah and that would be it,



knowing full well that there would be half a dozen apples, pears, plums...the only thing I'll always say is that I can't beat mother nature...if all the flowers are in out in full bloom and there's a frost, well I can't alter that.

*Joe: With all of these changes, are there things that you are sad to see go?*

Fox: It's not sad, 'cos I think, 'cos I've spent my whole time on this farm...it's a case of seeing people retire... that I've worked with, and they've always helped me and that, and they're not there anymore. That's the only thing I would say. As I say, the picking side of it is total different to how I was always used to, I'd sort of have a gang of 24 pickers, 12 bins on the go or 14 bins on the go, and sort of say "right there's your row, up you go, off you go". But now- I mean Shaun knows more about it - they're picking one side of wires and that... so its half...yeh both sides will go into the bin. And then they need plucker (sic?) trucks to pick your tops and everything

Finlayson: machines

Fox: Machines. It seems machines have done away with people like me! [laughs] The old fashioned people!

Finlayson: Not totally...

Fox: No no! But as I say, I used to enjoy having a gang of pickers, roaring off up the road, picking a bin up, chalk marking it off, putting it out for the transport to come along, they'd take them off... and that...They're on trains now...and I think... "Oh... the day drags". But no, it doesn't for me because I go off pruning and that, so I'm happy.

*Joe: You talked about people who have looked after you retiring, I'd like to touch on the topic of community and farming communities*

Fox: That's a difficult one because I think...when I first came here...yeah, if you fitted in with them - like I was an old boy they didn't know me from Adam or how I was going to react - but once they could see that I was interested then they would help me - "do this, do that". Especially when Walter Wigham was boss, I wasn't allowed to drive a tractor. That was it, full stop - "no he's not allowed to drive one". And when the other two managers were about and I had to put the boxes on pallets and walk behind tractors and that. But then a couple of them used to say "go on have a little drive Steve". But I used to say "no, if Mr Wigham comes out or Mack (sic?) and Malcolm comes out I'm going to get into trouble!" ...."No you won't...". And once they could see that you could do things... "go on, have another go, have another go" and stuff like that. And then within two years - I was tractor driving for one of the old boys and we had 40 odd pickers. It was a Cox period. And yeah I enjoyed it and he



could that I was getting on and he leave me and he would say "if you want a full bin and I'm not about, just put chalk on it, the orchard, and just take the ticket out and put it in your pocket and give it to me later". And so we had that trust in one another, even though I was an old boy. And then it went on from there... I done that, then I got mowing, they trusted me with the mower on my own. And then from there I went spraying and they trusted me to spray. And I was shown the right ropes. And I sit back - and I know it's all health and safety - and I've been on those Agravista...

Finlayson: Training...

Fox: Training thing! But nobody's ever told me when I've got there... Years ago when my old manager said to me he said "would you like to have a go at spraying?" and I said "Yeah I would love to have a go with it". So right "we'll sort you out a tractor with a sprayer and John will show you" - the sort of number one er... sprayer man. And it was a wet day and he said "right" he said "there's your tractor Steve and there's your sprayer Foxy..." he said "right", afterwards... and he showed me everything...all the grease points, where the oils went and everything... and he said "right we'll go up to the spray shed now" and I said "yeah OK John". He'd got a big bag of flour that he'd brought up, ... a big bag of flour that he brought up and he pulled up and he said "right I'm going to tell you one thing". I said "what's that John?" He said "if I catch you mucking around with this chemical, I'll give you the biggest box..larrup round the ears!". And he had friggin' great big hands and I thought - "I don't want them round my neck and that". He said "you treat that with respect and that will look after you". And he showed me what to do and everything and I'll always remember those words: 'treat it with respect'. And I never had any accidents, just carried on. And I started spraying in 1977 and finished in, well, 2010. I don't do any tractor driving now, or anything. But I still enjoy it!

*Joe: (To Baely) Is there anything?*

*Baely: (To Joe) ...no*

*Joe: I'd quite like to think about the future. What will the future bring for you? What will the future bring for farming? For this farm?*

Fox: Well I'd like to think that it can make money...still a lot of money. And I think the worrying - from my point of view - what I would say, the worrying thing from what I can see...because farms are going on wires they're getting closer and closer, obviously the tonnage is going to be a lot higher. And I think, because we deal with supermarkets, they can turn round and say "sorry, that don't look right, that don't look right". They can be so choosy because like you say there's Mansfields, there's Newmafruits, there's others...all the same position. And there's only a certain amount of supermarkets who can take so much fruit. And then you've got the



foreign imports still in. And I think, if they're not careful, that's where I think a problem could lie. I don't know. 'Cos there's so much fruit grown worldwide whether it be apples, pears, anything – you could have a glut of fruit where supermarkets in my opinion could say “sorry we can only take so much” and then they'll start saying “we don't want it”. Again that's only me. And I think, another thing when you say about this, housewives or women with a family that's only got so much money, and to me, a loaf of bread and a tin of beans makes a meal rather than a pound of apples. And I know they say you should have your five, whether it be apples, pears, anything ... but to me with money that a meal to a woman is more important than fruit. I hope I'm wrong and I mean I think to certain degree I think I could be wrong but I just see with all this intense planting, whether it be here or on the continent, that there's so much fruit and the supermarkets are dictating it. Because you haven't got enough supermarkets to take all the fruit.

*Joe: when did you really start feeling the effects of the supermarkets?*

Fox: I think it stems back into the 80's to be honest. I remember David MacKewan (sic?) saying to me one year “I'm going to supermarkets, I'm going to get five pence a pound more”. And we was up the sprayset and I said “yeah that's alright Mack, but they can turn round and say...”. No I'll tell you what I said to him: ‘If I was the manager of a supermarket and I wanted ten pallets on a Monday but I hadn't sold them, I wouldn't go back on a Tuesday and say I want another ten pallets!’ And this is where I think farms back in those days neglected the open markets – er the market boys – because they would take them, they would take class two and that, they would take the lot. But the supermarkets... And I remember Mack when he was in charge, he had one store out the back here, of class two in thirty pound boxes, ‘cos the supermarkets wouldn't take them, and we ended up going chucking the lot, putting them in a three tonne trailer and spreading them along a field. ‘Cos he'd sold all the class ones to the supermarkets. And I think that was one of the stumbling blocks.

*Joe: Did that make life more difficult for a farm worker or just different?*

Fox: Erm...not really knowing Mack's side of that... he thought he could sell apples to a blind man who couldn't see what they was. But I mean we grew a lot of Worcester Pearmain, lovely apple, and he said to me..beginning of one week, he said “I don't know what we're going to do with our Worcesters”. I said “what's happened Mack?” He said “I can't sell them, nobody wants them”. I thought “crikey!” And then, on the Friday he said ‘you've got a gang Monday’ I said “what doing?” He said “picking the Worcesters!” I said “I thought you couldn't sell them?” He said “I've sold them all to Heinz, they're going into baby food!” But I personally think that, because, the market boys, they neglected, because Mack was interested in five or ten pence more. But then I think that as the season went on, and then as there as more fruit coming in



and that, and we stored ours into March and that, and that's where I think he got cold, because they would find a little fault with them and say "well we don't want them" and that. [pauses to think, turns to Sean Finlayson]. We'll have to export!!

Finlayson: Well we are. We might do soon!

Fox: Well I hope you have better success than Mack did one year, because there was a group of farms, I don't know whose, they was five farms. And this American company, they wanted some Cox, so he was telling us, we had a little mate, he was all excited "we're going to export to America!" They got as far as Liverpool docks and some representative from America come over to have a look at them. 'Cos they found a couple of little things [gestures with hand] in a pallet, in one box.... they all stayed at Liverpool docks and got dumped. The whole lot. So I hope you all have better success than Mack!

*Joe: You've got maybe a 'traditional' outlook to farming, you said you like the traditional ways of farming...*

Fox: The old ways, yeah but it's no good me ... that's only memories. That's gone. And the future lies with Sean and how we transform this farm today. And I wish him good luck and I think he'll be a success with it. But as I say, my main worry would be supermarkets, because all the farms are growing a big volume of fruit and there's only a certain amount of fruit that supermarkets can take. Unless Sean knows better than what I do!

Finlayson: No you've got it right

*Joe: What parts of traditional farming would you like to see remain into the future?*

Fox: You couldn't do it. You couldn't bring the past to today. Because the trees, the orchards are planted different. You just couldn't do it. It's not good me saying you could bring back 20 years ago and put it in today's, because no it wouldn't work. It just wouldn't work.

*Joe: So do you think that that traditional knowledge will just get lost?*

Fox: The old tradition of how I learned farming to a certain degree has gone because we, instead of going to Belgium and Holland buying trees, we used to do a lot of grafting and Sean would know this. And I enjoyed grafting but now, for the price of it, it's cheaper to have tree, than trying to graft it anymore. 'Cos you want skilled people, it's not a case of giving a knife to somebody and them cutting their thumb off of something, 'cos that's what could happen. And putting grafts in, waxing them up...it wouldn't be profitable Sean would it?



Finlanyson: No it takes too long

Fox: Yes and you're only given a certain amount of time. In the Spring.. 'X' amount of weeks, well I should think three weeks Sean wouldn't it be?

Finlayson: Yes

Fox: And then you've got to stop. So now I should think it's cheaper to have a tree. So I could say that no, you can't put ... you can only look back and they "they were the good times, at that time" and you couldn't bring that back to the present day. It wouldn't work.

*Baely: That was lovely!*

*Joe: Yes. Thank you for that interview. Is there anything else you would like to talk about? Is there something that you think we should ask you?*

Fox: No, no not really. As I say, I've enjoyed talking to you and giving you my views. As I say I've enjoyed it, and I wouldn't alter...if I could sort of say "would I do that again?" Yes I would leave school and come into farming, again.

*Joe: Lovely, I'll stop the camera. Thank you ever so much.*

Finlayson: Your very relaxed, I think you should be a news caster!

Fox: Oh no! [laughs]

Finlayson: They should have you on BBC one!

Fox: Well it's something I've enjoyed...

**END**