



## INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Stewart Hukins  
Age: 73  
Location: Church Farm, High Halden, Ashford  
Size: 100 acres  
Type: Mixed

Interviewed by: Baely Saunders, Joe Spence  
Filmed by: Joe Spence  
Date: 23 November 2015

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*Baely: Ok, well maybe if we just start, if you introduce yourself and the farm and just give us a brief history of...*

Hukins: Ok, Right-o, Well I'm Stewart Hukins, 73 years old, I have been living here for 46 years on this, in this house, but I also lived in this house when I was about 10 years old, for a couple of years, my parents lived here for a couple of years. This farm is a small farm, here, which is about 100 acres and it was owned by my, well it's been in the family over 100 years, it came down through to my father who then, it came onto me, but I was also farming another farm about 3 miles away, towards Biddenden, which is where I had the dairy herd. So, yea, I have a brother and sister so we lived here, I suppose it was about 1954, something like that we were living here, and then we moved to where my parents' main farm, when my fathers' mother died, they moved to that farm and this farm was let out to a cousin of my fathers. So that, when I got married, it was, the cousin was ready to move on, they were getting quite old, so they moved on and so I lived in this house for 46 years, I suppose. And initially I went to Wye college for 3 years to do agriculture and after that I went to New Zealand, and, well Australia and then New Zealand, working my way round for a couple of years just because the thought of coming back onto the farm straight away rather appalled me really, and so I thought ' Well, I'll see a bit of the world first' and then came back and worked for my father doing fairly mundane sort of tasks, not very interesting, so I don't suppose I enjoyed it that much until... I suppose, so I came back in 1966 I think it was, and once I got [back] my father said 'Well you look after the dairy herd' - things became for interesting. And it's



the management side which is pretty interesting, although the scientific training you get at college comes in very useful, for people that haven't been to and done a, well a scientific background, it must be quite hard knowing about fertilizers and sprays, that sort of thing. So anyhow, in 1972 my brother had come back onto the farm about a year or 2 earlier, on to the farm which, the total acreage is on 3 farms really, was about 500 acres I suppose, and I think it was about 1971 when I said to my father 'Look, it's very, very difficult working with my brother, I think it would be a good idea to split the farm' and he was a bit appalled at the idea I think initially, but that's what we did and in 1972 we formed 2 partnerships. So my brother was in partnership with my father, and I was in partnership with my father. And I farmed this farm and the farm that was about 3 miles away towards Biddenden, where there were hops and the cows were. So I used to commute from here to there because that was the main centre of the business really. This farm, 100 acres, quite small, was mainly arable, the other farm had the hops, about 20 acres of hops, which is quite intensive, and the dairy herd, which is semi intensive I suppose, and some arable over there. Right, so where do we go? In the first year or 2 of my farming life in partnerships was pretty disastrous, I think it was in 1974, the price of livestock went right... hit the ground, I mean calves, you know, there was always the danger if you went to the Ashford market, when you came away you'd find that somebody had left a calf inside your vehicle because they wanted to get rid of it, there was no sale for them. And so, when you had a sick animal at that time, you just almost couldn't afford to get the vet because it was more than the animal was worth. So 74 was quite a bad year from that point of view, and then 75 was a very dry year, it wasn't the drought year of 76, but it was a pretty dry year, and that affected fodder production for the cows and the growth, you know, the yields of the hops in 1975. And that, then followed after that, 1976 which was the drought year, and we didn't have a drop of rain fall on the farm from about mid-april until about the end of September, not one drop of rain. That meant that the winter fodder we make for the cows, by the end of June it had all been eaten, and we had to feed the cows straw and sugar beet nuts because there [was] nothing on the pasture, so it was pretty terrible. And the hops, well the hops didn't really grow right to the top wires, they were dying before they got there. So it was a pretty bad year, so after those 3 years I'd notched up quite a big overdraft and, I suppose about 1979 I think that, you know, we had to go to the bank each year and say how much we wanted to borrow and the bank said 'I think you'll have to sell some land to knock down the overdraft' Well luckily I had a pair of farm cottages which were not needed, and we sold those, which brought the overdraft down. And that brought it down enough that we could get on alright, exist alright. But then, I forget which year it



was now, but it was around that time, there was huge inflation and interest rates went right up with a bang and so, if I'd been a saver at that time, that would have been fantastic, I'd have been getting, you know, 17% on my earnings, but as I was borrowing at 2% above base rate, and base rate was 17% or something, I was paying 19% on my overdraft. Well, you can't go on like that for long, but you get in a spiral where the overdraft gets bigger and bigger because the interest payments are so high. So it was difficult times but we survived it and the dairy herd, I wonder, the dairy herd at time would be probably about 60 or 70 cows I think, and obviously we realised we had to step up production and so increase the dairy herd. And the hops at that time were fairly good, and we were growing good crops of hops, but then in the 1980s, around about 1984, the prices really hit rock bottom there. Is this something you've heard before? I don't know....

*Joe: We met Mr Redsell, who spoke about this*

Hukins: Yes, well I think the Hops marketing board, which had been there came to an end because it contravened EEC regulations, and until that happened, hop growers had a good living really, because the price you got was basically the cost of growing the hops, plus a percentage so it meant that everyone got, you know, was doing alright. Once the hops marketing board was disposed of things started going bad really - brewers were buying their hops from abroad, whereas they had been buying them from English hop growers, if they were cheaper abroad, they bought them abroad. And so, the world price for hops was quite low, so the price we got for our hops, starting about 1984, was pretty bad, and a lot of people at that time they decided, for 1 year, to idle their hops which meant you didn't put strings up for the hops to grow up, you just let them on the ground so you could grow them next year if prices came back. Well the next year prices didn't come back and I, I didn't quite, I don't know about bravely, I'm very pleased I did it, but I decided to get out of hops at that stage, which was quite a big decision because of all the capital tied up with hops. You have all the wirework in the gardens, which is very expensive to put up, we had a hop picking machine, and an oast house, so we had all the right things for hop growing but I decided if we didn't get out it would pull us down and it was a very good decision because hop growers kept going out of business for, probably the next 15 to 20 years because the price was never good enough to make a decent profit. I think the price right now is quite good for English hop growers because of the microbreweries, people, brewers wanting English hops, and so the demand for English hops has come up, so the prices have gone up. So people still in hops, and there aren't very many of them, are probably doing ok with their hops.



As far as the cows go, cows became my main enterprise then. In 1980, I think it was about 1981 I was able to buy 30 acres of land from [interruption to check audio] Alright? I was able to buy 30 acres of land from a neighbouring farmer. He was growing grapes on his farm and he had 30 acres that faced north rather than south, so they were no good to him really. They came up for sale, I heard it was coming up for sale, so before it went on the open market, I went to see him, so it didn't get onto the open market, and did a deal with him which was, you know, good news. So I had another 30 acres which was excellent for producing extra fodder for the cows, and we were soon growing maize for silage production which was a great feed for the dairy cows for winter time. So that worked well. When we split the farm in 1972, I mean, it's very difficult to split a farm in two, you can't, you do your best but... I had quite a small amount of animals, my brother had a large acreage of hops. Incidentally, my brother is still farming hops, he stuck it and he's coming through alright now and his son has just come onto the farm, so they're doing ok.

*Baely: Is that Ross Hukins Hops?*

Hukins: Yes, do you know him?

*Baely: No, but when we knew we were coming to do an interview here, we were doing some research into High Halden and the farming families around and Hukins, again as an unusual name, it pops up.*

Hukins: Yes, well my brother who I split up from, his son is Ross. And Ross, having been training as a chartered surveyor in London, about 2 years ago decided he wanted to come back and farm, which was a bit of a shock to my brother who I think was getting close to retiring. So Ross came back on the farm and, you know, I think he'll do a good job but it'll be tough - Hops is his main, his only enterprise really, apart from grass for, hay to sell for horses. But he's got one or two other things that he's thinking about I think, so I think.. He'll do well I think. So yes, that's Ross. How did we get onto Ross?

*Baely: You were talking about splitting the farm in 2...*

Hukins: Yes, yes, so yea, my brother kept his hop acreage and he gradually got out of sheep, and then gradually got out of corn 'cos they weren't, he wasn't doing terribly well with them. I started investigating other crops, so I thought I might go into essential oil production. I actually went into dried flower production because there was time, I suppose it was probably in the 90s, when dried flowers were quite a thing, you know, and florist shops had dried flowers. A lot were coming over from Holland but I thought



'well, perhaps we can dry hops ourselves' 'dry flowers ourselves' so I started, you know, about 5 acres of dried flowers and it was ok, we did alright. My wife was the salesman, and we found quite a lot of shops in London that took them, but I realised actually that going into something like that which, you know, I had about 20 different varieties of dried flowers and they all needed looking after in different ways, which is horticulture really, and horticulture and agriculture almost don't mix I don't think. And I could see that if I didn't look out, I'd take my eye off the ball and I wouldn't be giving all my attention to the dairy herd. And the other thing which we used to do was turkeys, for Christmas. So I think that began in about 1972, we started, my father had had turkeys, which my brother then took over, and then when I formed my partnership with my father I started doing turkeys. So every year from, I don't know what year, it was about 1973 or 74 we did turkeys, and gradually built it up, at my height of turkey we did about 6000 turkeys, which were all for Christmas market, all hand plucked, all sold to butchers. So it was a fairly profitable crop, but it was jolly hard work and I didn't really enjoy it, you know, when Christmas came you were a nervous wreck almost. But it actually paid good money and so I suppose having turkeys probably got us through some of the lean years really. But it is quite a, it is more difficult these days in a way, because there isn't local labour, these days to pluck the turkeys, etc., you rely on Eastern Europeans these days, but then it was all local people that came to pluck the turkeys. I probably had about 40 to 50 turkey pluckers working for about 2 weeks in December and that was a nightmare in itself because some pluckers didn't do a very good job and you had to keep having a go at them. Producing the right number of turkeys at the right weights for the butchers was a nightmare in itself, and so it was quite a stressful time. But we kept doing it because it paid the money. I was one of the founder members of something called the traditional farm fresh turkey association, which is still going and it was trying to put a gloss on our market really, make our product different from supermarket turkeys, and we, sort of, had our own logo and we had press days where we invited butchers and journalists to come and see our product, which was based on, in a way, looking after an animal kindly, on straw yards, which then came onto free-range, and treating them well, and once they'd been killed, hanging them for a period of about 2 weeks which improved the flavour and the tenderness of the turkey. And then, so we made ourselves different from the supermarkets, where basic supermarket turkeys where [inaudible] frozen, and they were on the shelves, people were buying frozen turkeys. Latterly of course supermarkets do sell fresh turkeys but at the time that wasn't available so much.



As well as the cows and the hops I also grew arable, making up the area that we didn't need for the dairy herd, you know, that was in arable and not a big acreage of arable. When I first started farming there in 19... well when I was looking after the dairy herd in sort of 1970 and soon after, fodder production was hay and I didn't get onto silage, producing grass silage, until I suppose about 1977, 78. And silage, grass silage, actually is a much better product than hay because you cut it at an earlier stage of growth of the grass, so it's got a higher digestible value for the cows, and it's not so influenced by the weather. If you're hay making you need 3 days of fine weather, which isn't always easy to get and we had 2 or 3 years when either we, hay was just about ready to bale and then it rained, and we turned it again the next day, and it was just about ready to bale and it rained again, and that, there was 1 year where that went on for about 10 days and by the end of it, what we had left was just useless and we just raked it into a pile and burned it, which is pretty awful. The other thing about hay making is, the forecast says it's going to rain, so you bale it, just a bit before it should be baled and then it goes a bit mouldy in the bales. So to make good hay you've got to get the timing about right, and silage production is much more reliable, it's a better product.

And then when, in about the beginning of the 1980s, capital grants started being given to farmers for quite a lot of things, one of them which was the equipment to make silage, the silage clamps which we used to store the silage in, we got I think it was 40% grants for that. We did quite a lot of land drainage at that time, there was 60% grant on land drainage. We were given grants for pulling out hedges, as strange as that may seem, but we had a lot of small fields and that was a good thing done really. So, it was in the 80s when, I suppose is a good time in farming, we were getting grants in, for helping to modernise that farm and we were putting on, banging on lots of fertilizer, nitrogen, much more than they do these days, but the grass really grew well, you know, we got fantastic yields of grass. Probably what was happening is some of it was seeping into the streams, some of the nitrogen was probably finding its way into the streams, but at that time, that was the way farming was at that time, you know, people weren't that aware of pollution as, you know but, gradually, pollution became much more of an issue.

So, the hops I gave up in 1984 or 5, so the dairy herd I increased the size of that and, I really can't remember the year that quotas came in, you probably know when quotas came in more than I do, I forget, but when milk quotas came in, they came in just like that. We were given no warning that milk quotas were coming in. So the milk quota you got was based on the milk quota you'd been producing for the last 3 years or so. I was in the stage, just starting to build up my herd, increase the herd, so the dairy quota I got





was not sufficient for the way I was going, which was unfortunate. I mean some people were fine, other people were not fine. There was a system where you could appeal on the quota you got, which I did and the adjudication was done by another county, not Kent and I got given a trivial amount more, it was pathetic. I know other farmers in Surrey and Sussex who appealed on theirs and they were given quite a lot of extra quota, so it depended on the tribunal and the county who judged it whether you got the extra quota or not. So, it meant that I had to lease in quota every year, or buy quota in. In the first year or 2 of quotas, it was, the system - we'd been given quotas, no one knew whether it was a saleable product or not, it had never been tested whether you were able to sell the quota you'd been given or not, and the same with leasing it, no one knew whether that was allowable or not. It was never challenged and by, so after about 3 or 4 years, so many deals had been done with milk quotas, either people selling it, people buying it, people leasing it in, that it would have been too difficult to unravel so it became, if you like, a recognized system of increasing your milk quota if you needed to. And people getting out of cows could then sell their quota. And quota began to acquire quite a value, so when we were given it, we were given it for nothing, it was given to us - within about 3 years, if you sold your quota, it was worth about 13 pence a liter and gradually, over the years, the price crept up and up, and I suppose in 1996, was about the... when it got to its maximum value and it got up to about 65 pence a liter. So, I had a good dairy farming friend who got out of cows in 1996 and he got 64 pence a liter for his quota, and that was something which had been given him. So, quite a lot of capital gains tax to be paid on that, but it was a very useful thing to have.

I actually got out of cows, well I came to the end of my farming career in 1998, and I was able to sell my quota, but the price by then had come down to 35 pence a liter and within another 2 or 3 years the price had come down to about 5 pence a liter and, until about 2 years ago the price was nothing again, back to zero, because there wasn't enough milk being produced, so people didn't need milk quota to cover the milk they sold. So the price had come back to almost zero, almost back to zero. So, but I gave up in 1998 for a very, various reasons really, I suppose the main reason was my dairy herd was then about 110 milking cows, I produced a dairy, a pedigree Holstein herd, dairy cattle breeding was, I suppose, what I was most interested in of all really, selecting the right animals, the right bulls for your cows, which was AI, it wasn't natural service. And that was the most interesting part of dairy farming, it's the sort of science side coming out and the genetics, and I, when I came to sell them, I did have what I regard as a lovely herd, they were beautiful animals and, the reason for it, it was because we had management consultants coming in to see us once or twice a year and they said you



know 'very soon, you're not big enough, you're going to be making a loss, you haven't got enough cows. You need to be maybe 150 cows or 200 cows.' Well, to do that I would have had to, first of all get more cows, which costs money, and at that time buy the quota to service the extra milk, which was about 35 p a litre, I'd have had to put a new milking parlour in, and new building to house the extra cows. So the cost of doing that in 88, 1998 would have been huge. Now, if I'd had a son who was interested in farming I might have done that, I might have gone to the bank and said 'look we need to borrow some money'. But both my daughters are doctors, there was no way they were going to come onto the farm, so what was the point in injecting a whole lot of capital into the business if I only had, you know, I don't know how many more years farming I had, maybe another 10 maximum probably, I couldn't see the point in doing that. And there wasn't a lot of point in carrying on dairy farming if I was going to be losing money at it, so for that reason partly, another reason was, at that stage, if you made a capital gain, which milk quota was a capital gain when we sold it, there was something called retirement relief which we were able to get and that was, almost meant that I didn't have to pay any capital gains tax on my milk quota. But that retirement relief system was coming to an end so it was sensible in a way to cash in, or to make use of that while that retirement relief was still available.

*Joe: Would you like a glass of water?*

Hukins: Yea, there's one up there actually Joe, that'll be fine thank you. Do you want a glass of water?

*Joe: I'm alright thanks...*

Hukins: You alright?

*Baely: I'm good, yea.*

*Joe: You just keep talking as normal [checking the audio]*

Hukins: Yea, I think that was the big reason for it, there were 1 or 2 other reasons for it as well but the prime reason was just that, that I've got no one coming onto the farm but it needed a lot of capital to carry on. So I had the business of going to see my father, who's still around, and tell him that I decided to sell the herd, and that I was going to sell the farm as well. That was the farm 3 miles away, which he was a bit shocked about, and I explained the reasons, and I have to say within, probably within a few months, he came to see that what I'd done was the right thing to have done. Luckily, before,





starting about 1990 I suppose, I started to help another dairy farmer run his farm, on a part time basis, used to give management advice. And by the time I gave up my dairy herd I was doing it for another farmer as well, so I had 2 farms I was going to see, probably a day at each farm every week. So that was good really, I was using my expertise, keeping my interest in, and I used to, for both those farmers, I used to go and buy their dairy young stocks so, you know, if they weren't breeding enough heifers of their own, to replace the cows that were leaving the herd every year for natural reasons, they needed to buy in dairy heifers, and they would buy what they call down calving heifers which were heifers about 2 and 1/4 years old that were about to calve, or had just calved. So one of my jobs in that was going off to buy animals for these farmers, which again I enjoyed very much but it was quite a responsibility. I mean I had to buy, I forget how many it was now, I had to buy 50 heifers valued at about £800 each, so I was spending a lot of money, somebody else's money, so it was important I got the job right really, for them. And I think I did, I mean I think, I don't think I ever bought bad animals for people. I did my homework, I wouldn't buy animals latterly in the West country because of TB. So, I was sourcing animals from the eastern counties or further, you know maybe Surrey and Sussex, but when you got much further west then TB was a potential problem. So, doing that was a good step down from ceasing farming in 1998 until, I think it was when I was 65 which was another sort of 7 or 8 years, I gave up doing those, looking after the dairy herds. And it was a good step between working full time, because farming is hard work really, working full time, to being retired. So I was very pleased to have had that and I enjoyed doing that.

So I gave up in 1998 and, at that stage my dairy herd was, I pretty, I thought it was a pretty good herd, and I was gonna sell it to, they were gonna go up to Cumbria to be sold because that's where Norton Brooks Bank, the sort of prime Holstein auctioneers were, that's where they had their sale yard, so I had them booked in to go up there to be sold and, as luck would have it, I had entered the herd competition that summer and so a judge was coming from another part of the country to judge my herd, which I did every year. And when somebody came from another part of the country there was always a local farmer that came round with him to show him from farm to farm. And I said to this farmer, Gordon, "this will be the last time you see my cows Gordon", he said "What do you mean?" I said, "Well I'm going to be selling them I'm afraid". Anyway, about 2 nights later I had a phone call from him, he said "I've been thinking, I'd like to buy half your herd" I said "I'm sorry I'm not interested in selling half my herd, I'm afraid, because I mean, if you buy half my herd, you'd want the best half, so I'm not interested" So, about a week later he rang up again and said "I've been thinking, and I'd like to buy



your whole herd" So that was fantastic, so he only lived about 5 miles away and he bought, I suppose of the 110 cows, he probably bought 90. You always get some cows of a herd which, you know, are not in calf anymore or, various reasons, they're going to be leaving the herd anyway. So he bought 90 of 110 cows and they went to his farm 5 miles away, so, quite often I would go over there to see my cows in his herd which was great really. Of course cows do have a limited life so after about 4 or 5 years the cows which I had sold him probably, although they would have produced cows, calves, and they would have been coming into the dairy herd, my cows would have gradually left his dairy herd because of old age really. So I was very lucky with selling the herd. I was very lucky with selling the farm really. There was a neighbouring farmer who a land agent knew of, and so I sold to him without going on the market. With hindsight I should have kept the farm, because land values in 1998 were round about £2000 an acre. Land values today, and they'd been that sort of figure for 10 or 15 years, you know, they hadn't really moved, hardly anyway. Land values today are around about 9 or £10,000 an acre, so land values in that time have gone up about 3 or 4 times, so with hindsight I should have held onto the farm but, you know, you can't live life like that - You make a decision at the time, I was happy at the time to do what I did, one of the great things it did was made me no longer beholden to the bank. You know, all my farming career I'd had an overdraft, so every year, or twice a year I had to go to see the bank manager and tell him what our borrowing was like, what it would be for the next year, and you had to do cash flows to show where you were gonna be, and one of the nice things about giving up farming and, ok selling my farm and selling the milk quota, I had cash, I was able to pay off the overdraft and no longer beholden to the bank manager, which was one of the lovely things about it really. So, yea.... And since, so I carried on doing the management for quite a few years and, since I gave that up, I've been fully retired which I'm enjoying thoroughly, I have to say. Right, you've probably got some questions. I've probably left out lots of blanks....

*Joe: I'd like to know a bit more about quotas...*

Hukins: What, milk quotas or hop quotas?

*Joe: The quotas you were talking about in relation to the dairy*

Hukins: Yes, well with Hops Market Board, when the Hops Market Board was there, Hops Market Board was founded in 1932 and it came to an end, I suppose, I don't know what year it was it came to an end, in the 70s I think, we had to disband the Hops Market Board. That was a quota system as well, hop farmers had quotas, so if you



wanted to increase your acreage, you had to buy milk [hop] quota from another farmer. And gradually the value of, as people started getting out of hop, the value of quotas came right down, for hop quota. With milk quota, well it was based on, as I say, when they came in, I can't... you'd be able to look it up on google or whatever, but when they came in, they came in overnight, we were told what quota we had and that allowed us to produce that amount of milk in a calendar year.

*Joe: No more...?*

Hukins: I think it was something like, if you produced more... if the country was over quota as a whole, so if the country had produced up to quota, you got a fine for producing a liter of milk, and the fine was almost as much as the value of the milk itself. So we were probably getting, I don't know, probably about 18 to 19 pence a liter for the milk itself at that time, but the penalty for going over quota was something like, a very similar figure. So if you knew you were going to be going over quota that's when you needed to lease in quota from another farmer, and the availability of that determined what price it was going at really. But it was something I had to do every year because the initial quota I'd been given was not enough. And then, obviously, it obviously meant that it was, you know, it was not such a profitable thing for me because I was having to lease in quota, if I'd had enough quota to start with then I'd have been in a better position really. So, quotas have now, in the last year or so, I think it's in the last year or so, have come to an end, in Europe. Which I question whether they, if that, what is going to happen, because the reason they were brought in in the first place is because we had a milk mountain in Europe - just too much milk and butter was being produced, so prices were obviously low, for that reason, there was a whole stack of butter in cold store. And that's why they bought in quota, and when they bought in the quota, everyone was probably cut back on the milk they'd been, you know - if you'd been producing 100,000 liters, they probably gave you a quota for 90,000 liters. In my case, I was aiming to produce 130,000 liters in the future, so being cut back to 90,000 meant I had a long way to make up in leasing in quota. But over those years, well over the last, since 1998 when I gave up, dairy farmers have been going out of business, as you probably gathered. You know, every year, and the reason they're going out of business is not because they don't like it, it's because it's not profitable, they're making a loss, and so there're really not many dairy herds left in Kent, which is very sad really. And the tendency now of course is for dairy herds to get bigger and bigger, and so probably most dairy herds that are going are probably 200 cows, but there are some 500 cow units, even 1000 cow units. The problems you get with that size unit is that, if you've got 500



cows within a unit, they haven't got enough area around the buildings to go and graze, because they would have to travel too far to go and get the grass. So, in those situations, the grass is harvested by machines in the field, and brought back to the cows, and they're kept in most of the year, they're kept in buildings. I mean, you know, in kindly ways but they don't get to go outside as they used to go outside. That's in the very big herds. So one does wonder with no quotas there, what is going to happen. I'm pretty sure I'm right in saying there are no quotas now. One does wonder whether people are going to start expanding again and get to a situation where there's too much milk. The reason is, I mean as you probably gather, that dairy farmers have been protesting for the past year or so because the price that they're getting for their milk is so poor, and most farmers are receiving less per liter than the cost of producing it. So most are in a loss making position. And so that's why dairy farmers are still going out, which is really sad, and you know, this country won't be self-sufficient in milk production presumably if it carries on like this. I don't know if that answers your question on milk quotas, or....

*Joe: Yea, the only gap I think is just who set the quotas, is that a government thing, was that an EU thing?*

Hukins: It was an EU thing, it was up to each national state to implement them, but the EU brought them in and so it was a cross-Europe thing, but we all knew damn well that the Italians were paying no attention to it at all, and maybe other countries as well, but certainly the Italians paid no attention to the quota system. And we knew that over here but I think our government were very, you know, made sure it was strictly enforced, if you know what I mean, so we had to abide by it, whereas, certainly in one or two European countries they probably got away with producing much more milk than they should have done. One of the interesting things about dairy farming in those days, I used to belong to a dairy group, which was made up of dairy farmers in Kent, and we had a system of once a month going round somebody's farm, in the group, or maybe somebody else's farm, a good farmer outside the group. So we would go round, farm by farm, once a month, looking at farms, and if it was a member of the group whose farm we were going on, we would probably be critical, helpful, helpfully critical, or just question him why he was doing things, to make him question it really. And it was a jolly useful thing to be doing, and we occasionally would arrange foreign trips. As we went to Italy once, we've been, went, to France to see various ways of farming. But that was a jolly useful thing, because, as I said right at the beginning, farming is a solitary occupation, and people are marooned on their farms, and don't necessarily see many



people from outside. So, if you have a problem, if a problem's brewing or if you've got hard times, you know, it gets you down, and you really need the company of other farmers to come and talk about things with. So these dairy groups were really good news from that point of view.

*Joe: We met with Bridgit Boty at her house, her farm, and she spoke a lot about she couldn't travel abroad with dairy groups visiting dairy farms overseas and gleaning knowledge.*

Hukins: Yes, and their still farming are they? Are they still got a dairy herd?

*Joe: Bridgit Boty, a couple of days before we visited her, had decided they were actually gonna get out of cows*

Hukins: Cos their, her, daughter's running the farm wasn't it?

*Joe: Yea, so her knees, she's getting problems with her knees at the moment so*

Hukins: Who, her daughter is it, or?

*Joe: Yea, Bridgit's 76,*

Hukins: I was going to say, Bridgit's getting on....Yea. But they're going to get out. Yea. But you see, I dare say it's because they were not making money at it, I would imagine. There maybe underlying reasons as well, like health reasons, but, if you've got health reasons, and you're not making money at it, why carry on with it really. The trouble with a lot of dairy farmers is, you get dairy farms where they're there because the land is not very good for arable, so if you're driving through parts of England and you see a big arable area you know that the land is pretty good, probably grade 2 land. Grade 1 is the highest, where orchards and fruit trees will be growing, grade 2 is pretty good land where you get arable and maybe root crops, maybe sugar beet perhaps. When you get to grade 3 land which is, this land is grade 3 land, this is heavy clay on this farm, you can grow arable, but it's more suited to grassland really. So when you go through areas where there's mainly grassland you know it's partly because, or mainly because the land is not good enough to grow arable crops, so it's growing grassland. And, in the past, the best use for grassland was a dairy herd. That's where you got the most income from but, sadly dairy farms are making a loss so they're going out. But the land won't get any better, I mean people might have beef instead, but there's not much money in beef generally. Sheep, I don't know about sheep. Sheep go up and down, sometimes they're



good, sometimes they're not so good. But if you've got not terribly good land, then grassland is the best use for it.

*Joe: Can I turn the light on [interruption while the light switch is found]*

*Baely: So, after you - the dairy herd was on the farm 3 miles away and here was arable?*

Hukins: Well, yes, I hadn't really mentioned that. Yes, it was arable, part of it. But it also, the other part was grassland, which was in rotation with the arable, so there was a rotation going so maybe 4 years arable and then it went back into grass. And the grass was used partly for producing silage for the dairy herd. So we would cut the grass here and take it by a tractor and trailer to the other farm to 'tramp it' (sp) make it into silage over there. Or, this is where the dairy young stock came in the summer time. So, once the cows, the animals, were turned out in the springtime to go to grass, all the young ones would come onto this farm, and be grazing 1 or 2 fields on this farm. So this farm had young stock on 1 or 2 fields, grass for silage production for the dairy herd for the winter, and what we didn't need for the dairy herd was in arable, growing wheat. And that was another thing which happened around about the 1980s I suppose.... I was actually a founding member of something called the Mid Kent Training Group. Training groups were beginning to crop up in other parts of the country and 1 or 2 of us in Kent decided to set up a training group, which is where farmers join the training group and you get people, specialists in certain subjects to come and talk, or specialists in, maybe chainsaws, so something, come to teach the farmers, or farm workers how to use a chainsaw, or equipment like that, or sprayers, the correct way to use sprayers and, you know, the training group really expanded and we got quite big and I honestly don't know if it's still going but I imagine it is because, you know, people come onto the farms all the time and you do need training. Although of course, with less and less people on farms, the need for training groups has probably gone down, when I think about it. I mean that's one of the things which has happened obviously. When I was a boy here, 8 years old, in that building over there, that was a stable and there were cart horses. That was in the 50s and there were cart horses on this farm, and there were about 3 people working on this farm of 100 acres. Well, you know, you don't really need any men working on a farm of 100 acres these days. Maybe half a man. So that was the day, in the 50s, yes cart horses were still around but tractors were coming in quite strongly, I suppose, but you still quite a lot of men on the farm and my father had probably half a dozen, or 8 men working for him on his farm, on the main farm. But over the years they were gradually replaced by machinery and, so nowadays of course you have probably 1000 acres being managed by probably 1 or 2 men, with very big tractors and very big





machines. Just interesting, the way things have gone. I don't know where they go from here quite but I mean, cos you can't get a much bigger than that, one would think, but you know, progress is always coming, so one can't always foresee what's going to happen next. But you've probably seen, some of your younger farmers have probably got big tractors and big machinery, have they? And where do they see that going?

*Joe: It just seems to, everybody says 'it just gets bigger and bigger'*

Hukins: Keeps getting bigger and bigger but, you know, there comes some stage it's got to come to a limit, I would think. Yea. But that's the same with, obviously when I took over the dairy herd from my father in about 1967, 68, they were milked in a cow shed, and so the people that milked the cows, they had machines which they took from cow to cow, they plugged the rubber tubes into a vacuum line up there, and when that cow finished milking, they picked up the bucket and moved to the next cow down the line. And then I installed what we called a milking parlour in, gosh I don't know, early 1970s, we put in a milking parlour which was what was called a 5/10 herringbone, which meant you had 5 cows standing either side of where the operator was, they were standing at an angle, so as like a herringbone, and the man was down in a pit so the cows were probably, the udders were about chest high so it was easy to put the units onto the cows. And that's why I would of had to have modernised, if I'd carried on dairying, my milking parlour would have been much too small, so we'd have had to rip that out and put in a brand new milking parlour, if we carried on. But there were things, aids that came in, automatic cluster removal came in, so when the cow'd finished milking the machine would come off automatically. It was all down to milk flow coming through the equipment, and when the milk flow from the cow got down to a very low level, the machine would be taken off the cow. There are things like robotic milkers as well, which I have seen working very satisfactorily. A robotic milker will milk about 80 cows, something like that, so if you've got 160 cows you need 2 robotic milkers. And the cows, when they feel like being milked they just wander in, they're given a bit of cake, they give them a bit of food, to make it worth their while going in, they're milked, the milk is recorded, the teats are disinfected before they're let out and off they go again. So that's just another part of automation in farming really which has occurred.

*Joe: It has been a kind of recurring theme I would say, especially amongst livestock farmers... Sorry, it has been a recurring theme amongst livestock farmers in particular - the cost of mechanising, especially like large acreages, it's just been so great that they haven't been able... they've had to get out. One of the interesting, we met one or two, yeah, with dairy farming, it's farmers' that have made a lot of money, outside of*



*farming, perhaps in the city through stocks and shares, or whatever it might be, have then come into dairy farming and used the capital [....]*

Hukins: Yes, well quite, that's what it needs, that's almost what it needs. They've got to know what they're doing of course, because otherwise they very soon lose a lot of that money, but if they've got any sense they'd employ somebody who does know what they're doing I suppose. But it's certainly, as far as... when I first went to work on the farm, yes, probably before I went to agricultural collage actually, my father had a combine harvester and you had, you used to stand, somebody driving the combine and then the other person was standing at the back, and you, it was put into bags, sort of hundredweight bags or hundred weight and a half bags, which are pretty heavy sacks. So you had a chute where the grain was coming down, then you had a leaver, so you either went that way, so you're filling up that bag, and when that bag was full, you pressed the leaver and it started filling up that bag, and in that time you had to take the bag off, tie it up and put it down a chute down onto the ground, and then another job was, for other people would come along and pick up the bags of corn and load them onto a trailer, I mean it's all very heavy work.

The worst thing about it was though, I mean I know when I was working for my father, and I was working on the back of a combine, the dust, from off the back of a comb, was awful, really awful. And after the first night I'd been doing it, I almost, at night, I almost completely seized up, we had to get the doctor out, I almost couldn't breathe at all, because of all the dust that had gotten into my lungs from the grain, and ever since that time I've had asthma. Ever since then, until then I hadn't had anything, I mean it's, I don't, most of the time I'm fine but, you know, there are certain things which set it off and it all stems back, I think, to working on the back of the combine without wearing masks or anything, I mean, masks, there weren't such things as masks or anything then to put on.

Of course spraying is another thing where things have improved dramatically because you know, when people that used to spray for me, the precautions they took were probably not overly great, I mean probably didn't wear masks, probably wore rubber gloves and aprons but, you know, things have... you know, people to be able to spray these days have to pass quite high level courses so, yeah. There've been great improvements really, I mean, maybe the romance of farming is gone a little bit but there've actually been great improvements in the way things are done, and a much healthier lifestyle for the people working on the farms as well. I mean bad backs was quite a common thing, from lifting up these heavy sacks of corn.



Yeah, another question, what else?

*Joe: How long have we been speaking for? [Interrupted while time and audio is checked]  
If you're happy to talk maybe a little bit about the future, you know we can sort of  
speculate about...*

*Baely: Yeah, I just wanted to know, what, so what, the farm down the road, that's been  
sold, and the two farm cottages there are rented out did you say? Or sold?*

Hukins: Well, yeah, I mean when I sold the farm I retained, I did retain a farm bungalow. It was, I think it was put up in the war, I think, it was a timber framed bungalow which the person who came today to see me, who was, you know, an excellent turkey rearer. She did great service to me, so she lives there for reduced rent, let's put it that way. And when I sold the farm, there was a another pair of cottages on the farm, one was, one side I sold at the same time as the farm, the other side, the farmer who bought the farm took it over, so he had it for a farm worker on the farm. And then, and previous to that I'd sold a set of farm cottages, about 1980 when I bought the extra land. They were not, they were not needed for the farm because the number of workers had gone down so we didn't need so many cottages. So yea, I still retain that one little wooden bungalow which is, yea, all the time she wants to live there, she'll live there and when she moves on, I'll probably sell it.

*Baely: And the land here, on this farm, that's still yours?*

Hukins: Yeah, I still own that, it's let out to another farmer who rents land from other farmers as well. So other farmers who've given up because maybe they haven't got a big enough acreage, they let their land out and then the farmer I let mine out to, he farms himself, but he needs extra land from other farmers to make it worthwhile his farming. But he's getting to an age now, I think he's I don't know 64, 65, pretty soon he'll be saying 'I'm gonna give up' so I'll then have to find somebody else to rent this farm. I mean it's not an acreage you could contemplate farming because it just would not be viable to do it, 100 acres on its own. But it will pass to my daughters one day and then they can do what they like with it. I mean, farm land, if it's let out on a business tenancy is free of inheritance tax. I think I'm right, yeah I'm right in saying that really, so it's quite a good way to pass on the asset to the farm to my daughters and they can then choose to let it out or they may choose to sell it but, when I pass on, there shouldn't be any inheritance tax to pay on that land. And, you know, 100 acres at £10,000 an acre comes to about a million pounds, it's amazing really. I mean I think the value of farm land is



partly due to the inheritance tax benefit it has. It's certainly not related to the profit you can make out of farmland at the moment cos nearly every part of farming at the moment whether it's arable, or dairy, or sheep, or beef, they're all in the doldrums, I mean farming is going through a very bad time at the moment. So yeah, so the farmer who's renting my farm, he probably is having quite a tough time really. And we negotiate the rent after 3 years, so when he comes to negotiate the rent, he may say, he may say 'I don't want to pay so much' I don't know, we'll wait and see. But there will be other farmers I think, who will be interested in renting the land if he doesn't want to.

So yeah, this farm has been in the family over 100 years, which is why, another reason why I wouldn't want to sell it, I wouldn't want to be the one that cashes in on it, that's what I feel, you know, my ancestors have, sort of walked behind ploughs with sweat pouring down their face, I don't feel it's up to me to sell it and cash in on that. My daughters won't have the same feeling because, although they grew up in this house and they loved being in the countryside, they didn't ever work on the farm so they won't have that same, quite that same pull to the land that I suppose I've got really.

*Joe: It's really interesting, it would be nice just to talk about this a little bit more because, as I understand it, farming traditionally is the farms that the father has passed on to the son, who becomes a farmer, who passes on to his son, who becomes a farmer and farming remains in that family, actually practically working on the land. It seems we're at a slight tipping point now where this next generation are maybe moving out of farming and, like you say, they're turning into land owners, or land leasers.*

Hukins: Yeah, and when you say this you mean the young, younger farmers are not wanting to carry on farming you mean? Yeah, it is happening, I mean you think, you know, they can earn much better money in London doing a job than sweating away on the farm probably, I think that is probably happening. Yeah, so maybe we are at a tipping point, to some extent.

Yes, it made me think of something else when you were saying that, about farmers passing on. One of the problems there is in farming, with passing farms on, it's very, and whether a family is involved, it is incredibly difficult, well I think probably the biggest problem in a way, incredibly difficult, if a farmer is passing on his farm, which is actually worth a lot of money, the land has got a big capital value to it, but the son may have 2 sisters, or 3 sisters, or maybe a brother who doesn't want to farm. How can you be equitable to everyone, and the answer is you can't, I don't think. Because the person doing the farming needs the land to do the farming, but he can't afford to buy the land,



you know, so he probably, in some way, inherits the land. But the people who are not inheriting the land themselves will be saying 'this is not fair, you know, the land's worth that, you know, I should be getting a slice of that' So, I mean, different families cope with it in different ways, I'm sure, and there are probably trusts set up etcetera, but it is a big problem, when you have, you know, farms where some of the family carry on farming and some of them don't. How do you deal with it? And it can, yeah it can lead to bitterness sometimes, or bad feelings because some people will feel they're not really getting just measures. But in a way it's the way it's got to be, and I suppose that's why, going back 200 years, or 300 years, the eldest inherited the land, and the second one, I think, went into the army and the third one went into the church. That sort of thing. But, you know, rather than splitting the farm up, and splitting the farm up, and splitting the farm up, so it got smaller and smaller and smaller, it kept the land in one piece which, actually was a sensible thing to do. So if you were a second son, you may have felt a bit aggrieved you didn't have the farm but you went into the army and probably had quite a good life there, probably, I don't know. But that system doesn't really work anymore, I think, not really, it's.. It's very hard [audio adjustments]

You can't keep splitting a farm in two, or whatever, so it just means the rest of the family have got to go elsewhere and do something else, or be a farm manager if they want to be in farming. Yeah, so, but as you say, I think you're right in that the young today don't necessarily want to farm because it's not that attractive to them and so they're going off to do other things, so I suppose at that stage then the farm is sold probably, or let out. Yeah.

*Baely: A little bit earlier, you said something which was really lovely about, you feel a connection to this farm that, you know, your ancestors have been here for hundreds of years, sweat pouring down their faces, and you can really relate to that and that means that you, like you said, you don't want to be the one to sell it. Now you also earlier said that, in a strange contradiction, the land, if you were to sell the land that is worth way more than you would ever make in profit were you to farm it. And so, what is about farming that means that despite the fact...*

Hukins: Well I think, I mean there is no doubt it is a way of life and people, if they've grown up on a farm and they're used to being out in the outside air, driving tractors, looking after animals, it's a very special way of life really and, it's very hard work at times, I mean for dairy farming it's hard work most of the time, for arable farmers, not so much so but they have a busy time in the Autumn getting the crops in, busy time at harvest time, harvesting, through the growing season, yes they have to spray, but it's



not flat out so they have more time but yeah, things, that's the way that things are at the moment, I mean maybe things will change again, I mean prices are very bad at the moment but actually, you know, if milk price suddenly went up a lot again and arable prices came up, as long as you can make a profit on the land, that's good enough in a way. As long as you're making a reasonable living, even though if you sold the land and you did something else with the money, course if you invested the money from the land at the moment you wouldn't make much money on it, but even though the land is worth quite a lot of money, as long as you're making a good profit on it you don't think of selling the land, you need the land there as the asset to be able to farm. But of course, when it comes to the situation where we're in at the moment where people are not making good returns on farming and they've got an asset such as the farm, then they would be tempted to sell the land I think.

I did sell the farm, having said I haven't got, having said that I wouldn't really want to sell this farm, I did sell the other farm, but the other farm hadn't got great family connections. We bought the farm, my father bought that farm in 1964, it was, we bought it on the 1st of October 1964. And I know that because on the 2nd October 1964 was the date I set sail for Australia. In those days, you didn't go by plane, or you could have done but it would have been very, very expensive, so you went by boat to Australia. So we bought that farm, joining my father's farm, it was next door to it, on the 1st October 1964, on the 2nd October 1964 I set sail for Australia, and when I came back again in, it was in the summer in 1966, I was put in charge of running that farm. And, so, and the reason my father bought that farm was because he thought he had 2 sons coming into the business, the land he had was not big enough for himself and 2 sons so he bought this farm, I went to the auction with him, it went for auction. It's amazing how values change. It was about 160 acres, it had a Kent farm house, you know, a farm house like this, 3 sets of cottages and it came to, it was sold for £32,000, the whole lot. £32,000. But my father couldn't afford £32,000 so he immediately sold off the farm house, the lovely farm house. He got £16,000 for that, so he paid a NET £16,000 for 160 acres plus farm cottages. Well it's almost laughable now and, of course, if you knew then what you know now you would have bought a whole lot of other farms up in the area and waited for the time you could cash in on it. But you know, you just don't know what's going to happen, and just as well you don't know what's going to happen really. When I sold my farm in 98, I was very happy with what I got for it at the time but, yeah, with hindsight, if I'd kept it, I'd be a lot better off but, that's alright, I mean, I've done alright, you know, I'm happy with what I did and so that's good enough for me really.





Yeah, I'd say this farms been in the family probably about 140 years I suppose, something like that. But that's several generations of Hukins owning the farm.

*Baely: We were doing a little bit of research, looking, cos obviously we were trying to find how we got here and things, so we were looking up High Halden, and Church Hill and Church Farm and there's actually a Hukins family tree. Have you seen it? It goes back to 1701. And it's, the first, John Hukins, High Halden*

Hukins: I may have seen it, yea, have you... you have access, you could print it off and?

*Baely: Yeah, you can access it on online but it's being researched by a woman who's actually in Australia and she's managed to trace. Yeah, Diane, she's not a Hukins I don't think, I don't think it's Diane Hukins.*

Hukins: So are you going to print it off for me or are you going to tell me how to get to it?

*Baely: We can print it off for you, or we... Yea you can find it on google. If you type in Hukins, High Halden, you'll find it.*

*Joe: It's a big blue screen, with a big family tree. It's got a big blue, it's just one page, big blue but it's got the whole family tree.*

*Baely: It's really interesting, the Hukins family emigrated to Australia, so they were farmers, John Hukins was a farmer in High Halden and then, I can't remember if it was his son, or his grandson, went over to Australia as a farm worker and a convict overseer.*

Hukins: Oh, a convict overseer, he wasn't a convict, that's good. Oh right, that's interesting, I didn't know that. I know one ended up in South Africa because I had a knock on the door one day and it was somebody who'd come over here to research his background, and I think we shared the same great grandfather, George Richard Hukins, and he came and knocked on my door and said 'I believe you, we, share a great grandfather' or something and he came in here and we had a good chat. And he was a doctor in Johannesburg. But he had come from, he originated from here.

*Joe: It did mention something about South Africa on the site, but it also said Japan and China, there is Hukins there as well.*

Hukins: Well no wonder there's none left in Kent anymore if they're going that far. Yeah, that'll be interesting, so that's all on that family tree is it?



*Joe: We'll write it down before we go...*

Hukins: Yeah, I'll have a look, I'll have a look. I suppose, I know one or two of my relations have done, sort of tried to do family trees, it is interesting. I suppose I don't get over interested in it really, I don't know why not. I suppose if you did a programme like 'who do you think you are?' you know that programme? That would be really quite interesting if they went back, followed the family back somewhere. But yeah, it is interesting, I've never given enough time to it really to research it.

*Baely: I think it's something that's quite specific to families who are very connected to the land, like farming families, that people are still in the same place for so many generations, cos I certainly know that none of my family are anywhere near where...*

Hukins: Where did they start off?

*Baely: I mean my parents now live back in Mid-Wales and I know that, certainly 3 generations back, my great, great, great grandparents, great, great grandparents, were miners in South Wales. But my parents are the first ones to go back anywhere near Wales, everyone else went as far away from it as possible...and I certainly don't know of anybody in the same village.*

Hukins: No, they've all left. Yeah, yeah, yeah. Well of course when you're on a farm, of course, it ties you to that area, that's the thing. You know, of all occupations I suppose, farming's the one that ties you to the land and ties you to that locality. Whereas any other occupation you can move around and get jobs elsewhere. But farming you tend to stay put. Yeah, which is, which is nice really I suppose, as long as where you're living is a nice area.