



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Frederick Husk
Age: 60s
Location: Great Pineham Farm, Dover
Size: 150 acres
Type: Beef

Interviewed by: Anca Mamaiche
Date: 20 July 2015

Anca: Right, so first I would like to know a bit about your farm at the present moment. For example what type of farm do you have and how big it is?

Frederick: Yeah, it's 150 acres, it's now sort of running down because of my age, 'cause I farm on my own. Changing from a mixed arable and stock farm to just beef, cattle and grass.

Anca: So you've changed from mixed to arable?

Frederick: Yeah. Mixed arable and stock, to now being just beef cattle and grass.

A: Right. We'll come back to this and maybe you can tell me why you think that these change occurred. What would be a typical working day on the farm for you?

F: Well, any stock that is still housed will be fed early in the morning, and then checking all the ones that are outside. Looking...walking, some are in walking distance some by vehicle, to go and see that everything is well and safe. And then depending on what work is being done, hay making, mucking out yards, those sort of things, depending on the time of the day and time of the year.

A: Do you have any employees?

F: No.

A: Are there any other uses, other than growing on the land? Like a caravan park, anything like that?

F: No. No other industry at all. No.



A: Ok. Not even in the past?

F: No.

A: Ok. So what happens to your produce? Who do you sell to and how?

F: The cattle are marketed live in the local market, which is Ashford.

A: And about the arable? Or you don't...?

F: Well, there is none now, but arable would have been partly fed to the cattle and partly sold to a merchant.

A: Have you always worked with local markets?

F: Yeah

A: Never with supermarkets?

F: No, no.

A: May I ask why?

F: Not big enough.

A: OK.

F: They wouldn't be interested.

A: Right. So they want farmers that can....

F: They want a regular supply.

A: Right.

F: And I couldn't do that.

A: You sell your cattle in Ashford. Do they stay local to Kent or do they go to export as well?



F: Well, nowadays, they generally go up into East Anglia to cutting yards. There's loads of by-products in that area that they can feed them on, cheaper than we can get. Or perhaps they don't even pay at all.

A: About the Russian embargo. Did it affect you personally in any way?

F: No. Because I am not an exporter so gather not really. But it may have affected the prices we got, in the long outlook, but not directly.

A: OK. One last question here. What is your general view on organic and whether the products that you are, well cattle that you grow, whether they are organic?

F: They pretty much are, but I don't belong to an organisation because I don't like to being told what to do.

A: Ok. Do you find that, I don't know, their rules are just strict or...?

F: Yeah, not only strict, but they're petty.

A: Ok. Now that I know a few things about your farm at the present moment. I would like to know also about your background in farming. When did you start to do farming? About what age? What were your reasons for doing so?

F: I was born to it. I have never been, never moved anywhere else, never done anything else.

A: And for how many generations did you...?

F: Three. My grandfather purchased the land.

A: So now going back to the changes. You said that you changed from mixed to just cattle. Why is that?

F: The cost of machinery and also storage of grain became more specific and because I don't have a very big farm. It was uneconomic to spend the money on the machinery and the grain drying facilities so we stopped producing it.

A: Have you ever thought about extending the business and...?

F: No. It wouldn't be very easy around here. They're too many already big farmers that would snap up any land that's available and so, you know, since they've introduced the single farm payment and the subsidies before that, it's made the bigger farmers bigger and the smaller farmers not so big. Because they can't



compete. The amount of handouts that have been given to the 2000 acres farms, they can buy land every year, not even notice a difference.

A: So how do you feel about all these changes and about the fact that...?

F: Oh. The whole thing is about producing cheap food for the public and that's how it works.

A: Do you think that's how it should be? About producing cheap food....?

F: No, No. I think we should get a fair price for the product, but that's never going to happen nowadays because we don't have a strong enough lobby in the UK to do it.

A: So you're saying that it is about, I don't know, politics as well?

F: Oh yeah.

A: policy and... So, if you would have the chance to try and change.... Sorry, did you wanted to say?

F: Well, I was going to say, every other industry produces a product for sale, manufacturing or whatever, they put down their costs and the margin, and that's the price they sell it at. Farmers don't. They have to accept whatever [price] is offered and it's not the cost of production. Whether it's milk, whether it's vegetables, whether its beef or lamb.

A: Has it always been like this?

F: Yeah.

A: Right. So how about the subsidies that the government...do they help?

F: Yep. We get a sort of acreage, hectarage, payments now...which, we have to take it because, to compete with the rest of the farming community. If we didn't, we wouldn't be able to keep the land.

A: How about the new, well they're not that new, but the policies that... well I am referring to set asides and environmental schemes and....

F: Yeah. Well if farmers haven't looked after the land as it is now, why do they need to be paid to do it now? When there is nothing wrong with, especially the UK, there's nothing wrong with the countryside. And that's because the farmers have always cared for it, and to pay them now to do it, and not grow crops, seems a ludicrous



system, but it's because there are powers that be that are not involved in producing foods. And of course there's an excess of food at the moment in the....regions.

A: Right. So how do you think that this entire international market fits into this? Do you think that consuming local would, would be better, and national food rather than...?

F: It would, it, it would be better, cause you get less movement of products if you bought locally, but because of the supermarkets, they will buy a penny cheaper from Spain, because they will fill the shelves...or from any other country in the world...so it no longer matters where it comes from, it's all, it's just the price, whether it's milk, potatoes or any other foodstuffs.

A: Mmm...

F: But there are products like potatoes that are grown here, sold to Europe and then brought back by the supermarkets to, to be sold in the shops. It's just a ridiculous system.

A: So you said that you don't have a...strong lobbying...?

F: No.

A: ...group...are you talking about the National Farmers Union or...?

F: All of those organizations don't have any political clout in the UK.

A: So would that mean that they intentionally want to create an advantage for big farmers and don't care about small farmers...or it's...?

F: It, it works that way.

A: It works that way.

F: There are niches.

A: Ok.

F: Where a local...whatever, green grocer or butcher will buy locally and pay extra for it and that is, that helps the local farmer, but then that doesn't happen everywhere.

A: Yeah...So do you own your land entirely?



F: Yes.

A: So how did this change through time?

F: I inherited it.

A: You inherited it...

F: Yeah.

A: So was it ever less or more than you have at the moment...did you reduce the business in terms of size as well?

F: Only, only because of the motorway going through the middle of it. That was a compulsory purchase by the Kent County Council, no options to sell it.

A: Ok, so this, this is a rather personal question – what does farming mean to you, how do you see farming?

F: More of a way of life than a business. I don't have to answer to anybody else, and I enjoy it.

A: And umm, I think this is the last section. About how you see your farm developing in the future and how you see farming in the UK developing in the future. So for, let's start with your farm.

F: Umm... I think by the next generation it'll be swallowed up into part of a larger farm.

A: Right.

F: Because there won't be enough income from small farms to sustain even one man.

A: So can I ask you, do you have any sons or daughters that would...?

F: Yeah.

A: Are they interested in...?

F: They, they all have, make their own income, they're not here.

A: They're not... I noticed that many of the farmers that I interviewed [interrupted]



F: Yeah.

A: ...so far have umm this, I don't know, maybe I should call it regret that their sons and daughters are not that keen on farming anymore..

F: No. All of my family are keen on the industry,

A: Right.

F: But they have to make a living elsewhere...work for a real farmer, one works for the auction at Ashford, another one is farming in his own right...and me daughter she is also connected to farming as well, in her job.

A: Right, Right, so, now about...well I think you already answered this question, how you see farming in general being...developing in the future, but you already told me...

F: Well, there'll be bigger units, because the small family farm will...there won't be enough income to sustain it.

A: Yeah. I think this is pretty much it. Is there anything that you'd like to add, anything that maybe I just didn't cover, any other?

F: Well, the change from 50 years ago...labour was necessary then because we didn't have modern machinery. Whereas, one man now with a teleporter or a tractor can do work that 5 men used to do. Even feeding cattle in the winter, I can do it on me own, whereas it was necessary to.. men with forks and you know such.. years ago we had to have labour.

A: Yeah.

F: But now the labour is not, not sustainable and not necessary.

A: So did you used to hire...?

F: Well it was mostly family.

A: Family. Ok.

F: Yeah...but yes...but 50 years ago there were other men working on...yeah.

A: Anything else that we didn't cover?



F: Prices have multiplied. We were getting a living 50 years ago, but now that the... especially in the beef industry, the livestock has changed, we had no continental breeds 50 years ago...but now the type of meat that is demanded by the supermarkets, we have to change from the native breeds to continental breeds. Umm...

A: So I suppose that in this process numerous breeds are being lost maybe?

F: Well become, not extinct, but yeah...specialized.

A: Specialized.

F: So that's where, that's where the niche markets come in, if you have a butcher that needs a traditional native animal, then he'll pay extra for it because they're not available everywhere anymore.

A: So, if you would compare the traditional native animal with the continental breeds, how do they compare in terms of quality?

F: Well they're smaller in stature, they're most probably better quality meat because you have more fat cover and marbling in the meat, that's a mixture of meat and fat, whereas the continental is a faster growing leaner beef, which is ideal for supermarket shelves...and so that's the difference. Conversion of food to meat is higher with the continentals. The end product is younger and heavier.

A: Alright, I think this is pretty much it. I'll ask you a third time, is there anything we didn't cover that you'd like to add?

F: Well, you're only talking about this farm, aren't you really, because there's more involved, but...

A: If you want to discuss about farming in general, please do.

F: Well, the whole thing has changed...whereas we had a choice of markets 50 years ago, now there's only one. You had more butchers attending the markets whereas you don't now. You have wholesale buyers and the butchers buy it off a wagon. And so, you don't get the comparison in...and the bidders for it... and that, that's what's changed.. whereas each butcher would go and buy his own meat for the week, and uh...nowadays they're not here, they're just a shopkeeper now.

A: Yeah. Yeah. Do you see things going back to how they used to be? Do you see small businesses...?



F: They can't. They can't because the more farms that they put together to make a bigger unit, the cottages are sold off, the fences disappear and it'll never be able to go back. Hedgerows are gone to make bigger fields and so, you know, there's no way it could change back again.

A: *It's, it's a bit sad really [laughing].*

F: Well it...[laughing] it is...it's a bit, sort of, knowing it, growing up with it..

A: *Yeah.*

F: Because there was much more community in, socially I mean, you had more people that...if you went to the pub it was all farmers everywhere, whereas now they're not there anymore.

A: *Do you think the public knows about it, or do you think that it should know about it, and do you think the public has any...?*

F: I don't think the public are that interested in how their food is produced. I really don't. As long as it's on the shelf and it's cheap, that's all that matters.

A: *That's true, yeah.*

F: Whether it comes from Australia or Britain, it doesn't seem to matter 'cause well you know that cause they buy New Zealand lambs and such. If it's a penny cheaper in the butcher shop they'll buy it.

A: *Yeah, but we all notice all these movements umm organic, free-range, locally produced, and what else?*

F: Mmm.. yeah.. you see they have to put a premium on it to be able to produce it.

A: *So it's not the public starting to realize that things.. or maybe..*

F: It...the normal housewife will buy on price, but if, if they've got a bigger income then they can afford to do that and will do, but whether it's any better I wouldn't like to say. Even free range eggs, I mean it's got the shell on, how do you tell the difference?

A: *Yeah.*

F: *[laughs]*



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A: Alright, thank you so much for your time, I think this is pretty much it, we've covered all of it.