



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Alan Reeves

Age: 62

Location: Winterwood Farms, Sutton Valence, Maidstone

Size: 30 ha.

Type: Soft fruit

Interviewed by: Katy Sharpe

Date: 14 July 2015

Katy: Ok, so, if you could just tell me about the farm pack house first that would be great

Alan: Erm, well the farm started – this farm started, as I say, back in the 70s when it, one person who just had a, a little plot of ground – 2 acres and a tin shed
[Both laugh]

...and was growing, growing raspberries [inaudible, recorder moved], in tubs erm because he had a very small piece of ground. That was not here, it just...along the road. He...managed to get, buy this, this ground....it was still not very large but it had- was growing principally raspberries for a few years...er....the raspberries then, we had a soil disease, Phytophthora in those days, very difficult.

Katy: What was the name of the disease, sorry?

Alan: Phytophthora soil borne disease. Which...very difficult in those days to control. So it was a case of changing, changing the ways we did things and the idea was to look at things obviously on the small farm, you're looking for things that other people aren't doing or don't want to do. So we....decided that we'd go into what we call the minor crops, in those days there were a lot of minor crops we, we grew Tayberries, loganberries, boysenberries, [laughs]

Katy: Do you still grow them now?

Alan: No, a lot of them are now gone, out because they're just not wanted anymore, the sales are so low that it's not worth doing. But we're still packing, we're still packing a lot of...growing a lot of gooseberries, handpicked blackcurrants, and up till last year we were, we were growing redcurrants, we still have supplies in the



redcurrants from a farm we deal with in Scotland. And that type of crop...because, transport is the biggest problem, cost to transport to the supermarkets was the biggest problem, no one wanted to do 5 trays to 1, 5 trays to another, it was too expensive, for a not a very high priced commodity. So that's the reason we decided to grow them all, therefore we could make up, if we could get the orders, 5 loganberries, 10 boysenberries, 20... we could actually make up a pallet of fruit, which then became viable on the transport side. And that, that worked very well. And we started to expand because of the packing size as well, people wanted what we'd got, and they wanted it for longer in the year we were also...still growing a few raspberries, and blackberries, so we started to get supplies from, from other farms who wanted to sell to supermarkets but were too small to do it on their own. And therefore you're buying from local people...a lot of the smallholders now that are no longer around to be honest, and we started to look further afield, for, for.... For projects, to fill gaps in, where we were – we were still only packing during the summer months and then we, we started to look abroad as well, for some crops so that we could extend seasons, things like pink currants.

Katy: Pinkcurrants, I've not heard of that

[Both laugh]

Alan: we found that there were parts of farms which were slightly later or slightly earlier than us so we could match that in with what we were doing.

Katy: So how long ago was that? Was that...?

Alan: This would be late 70s, early 80s

Katy: Oh ok, so it changed quite...well soon after starting, it sort of changed to become, become a pack house

Yeah, yeah yeah, a few years, yeah I mean, we'd been going a few years but it's erm, it...probably the 80s I suppose...er we then, we took on blueberries as a minor crop

Katy: (Laughing) not so minor anymore!

Alan: (Laughs) No! It was, to us then we were selling 2 or 3 boxes here there and everywhere.

Katy: Really? Ok

Alan: No one had ever heard really of blueberries. So it fitted in to the category that we were doing quite nicely. Obviously the... didn't...things improved before



[inaudible/too quiet]...so we, a French farmer we dealt with quite a while, late 80s he, he said that he was buying blueberries, and would we be interested in blueberries. So we had a look with him and said yes we thought that we could help him, we had to try and expand what we were doing including as, it was obvious obvious to, to certainly, because, around the time was it was obvious that these things were gonna be...at some point were going to be liked and wanted. That's how I started to gradually...gradually....we kept on with the other fields as well but the blueberry one was the one that we couldn't go anywhere else but up really, it was nobody...and nobody else [inaudible]...as soon as they started to see it in shops people got curious. And then, then...to expand...by this time we were doing all year round... we were packing for other suppliers as well as our own fruit. And it was the next place we looked really was the French farmer had a Polish wife, and she told us about farms in Poland that were doing blueberries...

Katy: Oh, so you were getting the connections there?

Alan: So we looked there as well. Our name began to get sort of more widely known...there was a, a company in South Africa...asked if we'd be interested in selling their blueberries because it would be their summer our winter, so it made it viable to...we could then pack blueberries somewhere in the world all year round. Then of course the Daily Mail put in a half page spread about the how good blueberries were for superfoods. And the very next day our orders went up by 4 fold!

Katy: Really?

Alan: Yeah, we haven't stopped(*both laugh*) Till now, yeah, blueberries are our main main concern, and although we've not grown many blueberries up till now, here in the UK...most of our growings from Poland, South Africa, we're actually...this farm is now, actually most of it will be transferred over to growing blueberries.

Katy: Oh really?

Alan: We'll sort of continue with the other crops, especially gooseberries which we've always collected, when we go outside you'll see.

Katy: So you think....you'll sort of phase out raspberries and strawberries will you?

Alan: we've never done strawberries

Katy: Oh you haven't? Oh, oh right ok.



Alan: it's not, but we, we because we've done the other crops, strawberries these days is a commodity, and unless you're growing a lot, it's really, you can't do it on the small scale anymore because the machinery other things needed makes it not viable, you need to...size of the farm to make it work

Katy: So you'll just grow blueberries?

Alan: So we'll, no that's what I'm saying, although we're going to grow a lot more blueberries, we will probably still keep, because we're still growing...we set it out...I know we have another supplier in Kent who's still growing blackcurrants and gooseberries for us. The person in Scotland who's growing gooseberries, redcurrants, blackcurrants, and blueberries for us in Scotland, so it's we're all, we'll hopefully we'll always keep growing the other minor crops - or the ones that we've got left.

Katy: Oh ok. with the pack house then, would you mind just sort of... if you could, maybe summing up, so it comes in from ...

Alan: So, yeah we have our own we have our own fruit coming in and we have fruit from our UK suppliers and from our, our farms we deal with in Poland and South Africa and other countries, then, as we're part of Berryworld, they're also farming fruit in various countries so that arrives here. And then we....it comes into the packhouse, we're told what's going to arrive, we check that everything's ok, we look at all the backgrounds of the farms and fruit, we do our due diligence testing and all that. And then we, we check the fruit which was ok for sales to supermarkets. Once the fruit arrives, we do physical checks, on fruit, and decide what customer that fruit will go to....and so other places...into a cold store, or... which we use later, or straight onto a line to be packed and then to go out.

Katy: Ok, and erm, could you tell me about your own background in farming?

Alan: My own background? Yeah. I was, I was an apprentice to the next door farm.

Katy: Oh ok, what, Ed, is that Edmeds?

Alan: Edmeds, yeah, when I was 16, when I left school at Maidstone Grammar School, and was there for a few years, and then went to Hadlow College for three years. My day release, middle of the year, was spent in Sittingbourne, with cherry and fruit farms. On leaving college I went to work for the... I was fruit supervisor for the Hertfordshire College of Agriculture, in er, in St Albans...I wasn't there that long, but I'm not sure I liked working for the council.

Katy: [laughs] Yeah, no, I can attest...



Alan: Wasn't commercial enough. I then went to, move to Chichester, I was assistant manager of Stanley Orchards which was part of Faversham's nurseries, 400 acre apple farm. I moved back to Maidstone, West Farleigh, it was soft fruit - strawberries mostly... and then decided to go self employed, and was a contractor in apple picking for quite a few years. At that time, Mr Rowan Steven who owned this farm was also working in Edmeds when I was there, so we knew each other. And, when he bought this particular farm and needed a bit of help, he rang up and said, you know, I mean, he knew I was self employed, he said would you be able to come over for a few days and help out [laughs].

Katy: Lovely, so how, how, when, when was that?

Alan: I lose track of these...to be fairly truthful, but it wasn't that long after... so in the 70s. So I kept, I then sort of helped out when he wanted me to, and it did, and then I also started to, the contract work finished mostly in the winters so I took...after the picking sort of that time would help with the packhouse [coughs]. It gradually became that I was spending more time here [laughs], then I was at my other job. My other job was...things had taken a turn for the worse in the apple industry. I couldn't earn as much money as I used to.[laughs] So, yeah I came, I came more or less full time to work here. And ran it, when there's only a few of us that's easy. Changed jobs as things expanded. So....

Katy: Do you prefer it here than being...you know obviously you've done a lot of stuff in the past, do you prefer being here...?

Alan: Well I, I've been here sort of 25/30 years

Katy: [Laughs] So, I'd say it's a yes then!

Alan: [Laughs] Whether that's enjoyed it or not, I don't know! *[both laugh]* but yes...and I've, I've, sort of, have now, I've expanded my jobs, as the farm's expanded, and the business, so... yeah, I suppose I... I grew up as a farmer...and now I'm more or less office bound, so I try to get outside as much as I can. But I suppose when you get to my age, it's not quite such a bad thing...not have to go out in all this weather

Katy: [laughs] in all the weather!

[Go out and walk around the farm]

Alan: So the farm itself is only very small here, erm but we still....use it for experiments as well...we have er fairly sophisticated irrigation systems (*arrive at*



the building where the irrigation systems are housed, very noisy, not easy to pick up the audio) The valves for each field are opened by wireless...set it up in the morning....run all day...

Katy: Yeah, wow.

Alan: It might be muddy up here

Katy: That's alright. I'm just trying to think where this extends back to, so does this go back up to Sutton Valence?

Alan: It's not quite as far, you'll see, in the corner...So these are fields waiting to be planted

Katy: And what are they going to be planted?

Alan: They will, that will be blueberries....So that's the extent.

Katy: Oh I see

Alan: So it doesn't go quite as far,

Katy: Yeah, no it's not it's, quite small

Alan: They're the houses down the back of Chartway Street. There's a grass field the other side,

Katy: Yeah, one of my friends lives somewhere down there

Alan: So we now, things changing, type of crop we're growing and also the way we're growing them, so trying to rely less on chemicals, so the use of Mipex, as we call it, probably a trade name, but it's a woven fabric, which will stop the weeds growing, but actually is...rainwater will go the other way

Katy: Oh that's quite clever

Alan: It's just a woven fabric....

Katy: Oh right. And do you plant from...

Alan: We'll make a hole and then plant into it. You see the irrigation lines going, going through.



Katy: That's clever

Alan: So we can, we can grow without using herbicides. So there's a great...maligning of farmers for thinking that we all just want to go out and spray.

Katy: Yeah, no actually everyone that..well most people I've spoken to have said that yeah there's a lot of..is there a lot of regulation on what you can and can't?

Alan: Terrific amount, exceptional amount, it's not only that, it's very expensive. If I've got to spend 20,000 on a sprayer, 20,000 on a tractor, and pay an experienced person 30,000 a year, why would I do that?

Katy: Yeah when you could just pop down [points to the woven fabric]

Alan: If I didn't need to?

Katy: Is that, is that quite cheap, how much is it?

Alan: Well it is quite..it's not so cheap, but yeah over the years it will... but, in general, not just talking this, in general, it's, we don't want to be out spraying, it doesn't do us any good, you know it costs us a lot of money, so if I can get away without doing it I will [laughs]

Katy: (laughing), Yeah, you want to make it, not lose it!

Alan: But people think "Oh yeah they just chuck...[inaudible due to wind]"

Katy: Yeah I know, I think that's quite a...yeah very outdated view... yeah

Alan: It's probably the newspapers that...They find one little thing where something, someone's got it wrong and they blow it up, so every single farmer is doing the same

Katy: So these, what are these?

Alan: So these are gooseberries

Katy: Oh! [surprised] I didn't know they were pink before they turned green!

Alan: No these are, these are a specifically red dessert variety, if you can find them they're very sweet. So just coming to the end of picking and they've probably got one more picking.



Katy: Yeah, so these erm, is it a certain type of supermarket that wants these then? Because I have to say, I haven't seen them, so...

Alan: Yeah, I think everybody wants them, but it's that they're not, I mean a fair amount was particularly picked up by Waitrose so...

Katy: Yeah, I can imagine they'd be the type to want something like this

Alan: Yeah I think well, the other supermarkets seen them, and want them.

Katy: yeah, they want in on the action! [laughs] So how big are, like so how big is this field?

Alan: I didn't say, this is....trouble is everything's in hectares these days, trying to convert it back from one to the other.

Katy: What did it used to be?

Alan: I still work in acres [laughing]

Katy: Oh, [laughs] you can tell me in acres if you want

Alan: Well, it's about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an acre here... on this piece, on this particular gooseberry patch, as I say it's a very small farm by a lot of people's standards.

Katy: So the blueberry bit we were just at, was that similar...sort 3/4 of an acre as well?

Alan: Yeah, that'll be about probably about well it's probably a bit more than that out there, if you go take your...cause that will also be [pointing] blueberries on the corner there so if you go all the way across there's, there's easily three acres there I should think

...

Alan: Yeah, another piece of gooseberries, these are cooking gooseberries just taken out, they come to the end of their life,

Katy: Ok, and then do you re...?

Alan: We'll be getting it ready to plant again either this autumn or next spring

Katy: So do you plant... obviously I know you pack it all year round, but do you plant, when do you plant the plants?



Alan: In the autumn if we can, yeah we can plant in the spring but it's er the autumn if the weather's ok for doing it

Katy: Does the win- yeah, I was going to say does the winter not affect their growing at all then?

Alan: No, they tend to sit over winter but they're ready they're grounded if you like, they're set already to start growing in the spring. When you start planting in the spring, they take a little bit of a knock back. And this is the red gooseberries again, er for planting

Katy: So do you grow everything with the erm...the black webbing?

Alan: We will yes. Not everything is at the moment, but it, it will be as we change things over.

Katy: Is that one way it's kind of changed over the last few years cause you've had to...

Alan: Yeah, yeah I think so, but with this type of crop you know you can... rather perennial crops so you know this field will last 7, 8 years.

Katy: Oh really? Before you have to

Alan: Take it out. So, possibly up to 10. With blueberries it can be 20, 25 years.

Katy: So they're quite... you know there's an initial expense but then you don't have to keep paying out to make it, you know to replant every year.

Alan: To replant, no. As I say everything is radio controlled, all the irrigation system

Katy: Oh, I wondered what that was. So what's, Oh I see oh is this all the how, so that's how it plumbs into the ground?

Alan: It comes from the tank, just here through the valves. Turn the valves, and if the wireless tells it to open that valve and shut that valve then that's what we do.

Katy: Oh that's clever! Does someone have to check it to make sure it's working?

Alan: No, only on the screen will know...it shows an alarm, sets it off, it can be altered, the farm manager can go in and do it on his office or he can do it on his phone at home or,



Katy: Really? Wow. So it must be quite a lot of man power to, you know, get all the pipes installed under the ground into the rows...

Alan: Yeah.... But it's one of those things you're only doing once really I mean we will have to replace these cause we could, we may end up with different row widths when we're replanting we may have to do the [inaudible]

Katy: So what would you do in that case, would you have to take all the turf up, completely?

Alan: Yep, just dig a trench through.

Katy: So do you think you'll, obviously I know it's changed to become more of a pack-house type of farm, do you think that will, I dunno, do you see it sort of developing in the future to be anything different, or do you...?

Alan: We'll end up, we, we're growers basically. The pack-house came along if you like, and we started out as growers and we'll always be growers, so...

Katy: Do you think you'll take on, any, cause I know you said you've got a lot of suppliers, Kent's got a lot of...do you think you'll carry on taking on...do you think you'll take on anymore suppliers or have you got enough?

Alan: it depends on what sales, and what people are available and those people who want to grow what we want, so its, it changes from year to year, what actually, because we're based on supermarkets trends mostly.

Katy: And you said, Berryworld sort of do your marketing, do they have any kind of say in what you should be growing or packing or is it just?

Alan: Not really, no.

Katy: No. So they just sort of do the admin.

Alan: No, I mean, yes they will help us to identify those market trends. But, they don't actually say you know we want you to grow this, we want you to grow that. It's always better to do what you've done and do well.

Katy: [laughs] yeah. If it's working, don't stop!

Alan: These are some trial pots, blackcurrants

Katy: Oh ok, so you keep them in the pots do you?



Alan: We've kept those ones in the pots because I'm actually doing that trial for somebody else, a university in Poland, but the other ones we have our own breeding programme going on, at Hutton Institute in Dundee, and these are some bits and pieces that we've brought down here to trial.

Katy: So it's getting quite...I mean is that another way it's changed too, I mean if it's, if it's you know, you have all these breeding programmes now, did you- you probably wouldn't used to have had that would you?

Alan: No, no we wouldn't. We would've relied on people like East Malling who, were government led at that time and now everyone's independent and has to make their way. [laughs] And it's changed, another few things changed is, is with varieties that people have...selling varieties to supermarkets so that they're they'll only want that particular variety, and it's also then it's exclusive to certain people. Other people can't grow it.

Katy: So I suppose it quite limits you in a way, would you say?

Alan: It can limit you in that way yes, unless you're part of it, so you have to... [laugh]

Katy: [laughs] I mean are there any...I do you have any sort frustrations with.... I don't know job, or how, how you know all these regulations...do you ever sort of wish?

Alan: I've got used to it now. To, to, it's just the amount of auditing has vastly increased, creditors.

Katy: Cause yeah you've got all the, so all the office staff will that, will they deal with that side of things? You know the office staff that you showed me earlier, the...

Alan: Well, yeah, but as the technical manager that's, I'm the person who deals with them.

Katy: Oh you deal with them [laughs]

Alan: [laughs] that's a major part of my job, but it's every supermarket, but a lot of ethical auditing now

Katy: Oh ok, how so?

Alan: a lot of our auditing is external so some people come in, it's now got to...changing so that we, a lot of our audits are now unannounced whereas so we



used to have someone from external book a day for them to come. Now it's a case of they just turn up at the door, and they say we've come to audit you.

Katy: Right, ok, and what kind of things do they audit?

Alan: They're auditing quality, legality, how we run the pack-house, how we run the farms, checking that we've only sprayed legal chemicals, and that we've done everything with due diligence to make sure that we've, we have procedures, risk assessments, all these things in place to...well to make sure that the customers and the staff are safe, and what we're selling is safe, legal and a good quality.

Katy: So is it, who is it that comes and audits? Is it someone from, is there like a managing government of farming?

Alan: No, no, no, we pay for it.

Katy: Oh ok [laughs]

Alan: Yeah, we end up having to pay for it, it's just that it's, there are several schemes which if we want to sell our fruit to supermarkets we're expected to be, to have that qualification. So you've probably heard of the one which is assured produce, which is the red tractor mark? And then there is, unfortunately with auditing, we all thought at the beginning when we did that audit that that would be the only audit we need. But no, every supermarket then they would want some extra audit. So for Tesco's, we have to do what we call Tesco Nurture.

Katy: Oh, I've seen their little label, yeah

Alan: So we have to do that one as well, and for Waitrose we do one called Leaf, which is linking the environment, farming which is more based around environmental matters and that type of. So that's the farming. And then, say ethical, Also the packhouse we have to do, our main....there is the British retail consortium, BRC, again this is independent, and then we have certain, Tesco's themselves have their own audit, auditor again, that's on an unannounced basis again, so they just turn up. Had Waitrose here last week doing audit...Asda will just turn up, and do an audit. So, it keeps us on our toes [laughs].

[Noise of men digging up the field we're walking by]

Katy: Yeah, [laughs] So that's probably quite, yeah, quite a big change then...



Alan: Again, this is another part of the blackcurrant farm. These will be going soon because they've had their day now, there's nothing left there in there...

Katy: You know with, obviously with all the pesticides and restrictions, do you think at some point they'll completely ban every pesticide so there won't be any legal ones?

Alan: I think it would be very difficult to do that, I mean it would be nice for everyone if they could, but they wouldn't be able...so the...the customers have now got used to a certain quality and if that, if you go back to having marks on apples and a bit of russet on one side, I'm not sure the customers are going to accept that.

Katy: No, no. It's a shame

Alan: But, the list of chemicals has dropped dramatically, and it really has, but its also becoming more specific when I first started a lot of the chemicals were, you know, an insecticide will kill everything, whereas now it's selected insecticides which will kill the pest that you're actually...without killing all the beneficial insects, so that's one good change where it's We, we can actually...it has meant more monitoring and knowing what you're looking for, and that means you have to be a little bit more on the ball, but it has, it has made things, you know, you're looking at specific...if you need to, it's the last thing you actually go for, to be honest, if you can do it another way...

Katy: Yeah. So do you use...what other ways do you...

Alan: Well it could be biological control, which will mean placing another pest that eats that pest, into the crop obviously that's that would be a natural predator of the insect..the pest, perhaps even just good hygiene, pruning, makes it...all these things we'd consider first, but there are times when you can't avoid.

Katy: Because I had, it's not really related to the interview, but is it true that you can kill blackfly with just washing up liquid and water mixed together?

Alan: There is, there is, yeah and there are several products on market which are a little bit more sophisticated, but will do the same thing. But it might be say with biological control, there's a parasitic wasp? That, that... wild... now buy that wasp in tubes [?].... Put it into the crop...

Katy: [Jokingly] And can anyone buy that, or is it just...? [laughs]



Alan: I don't, I don't know [laughs] but those are the sorts of things or that's the way it's going, And, yes as you say, things that will actually....again you have to be careful, washing up liquid's very good, it's not a pesticide, but then you're back to one that will, it doesn't differentiate..

Katy: No, it'll kill them all [laughing]

Alan: It'll kill the beneficial one as well

(Arrive at a greenhouse with lots of young plants in - very noisy with spraying)

Katy: So is this where you begin, begin to propagate is that?

Alan: Yeah, we won't go too far cause the irrigation's on. These are the plants, you know we've looked at the plots where we're gonna plant blueberries, these are the plants that'll go in in the autumn.

Katy: Oh, I see. So when do you start growing these, in the pots in here is that...

Alan: Yeah, they will be, be here for the summer and then, and then in the autumn we'll plant them out.

Katy: Oh... There's a lot...do you know how many plants are in here?

Alan: I don't [laughs]

Katy: No! There's a lot [laughs]

Alan: The farm manager's just disappearing, [laughs] he'll know exactly how many there are. But yeah he will have, he will have made sure he's got enough to plant the areas that will...that we are planning to... as I say we're not going out of growing yet, anytime soon.

(Leave greenhouse.)

Alan: So we go as far as the, the lane, Tower house...

Katy: Which lane? Oh that lane, yeah.



Alan: Some er, gooseberries here, these are the young piece, again the red ones, we have been planting quite a few of the red ones recently.

(Continue walking)

Katy: So the, what was it you called it...the.....I can't remember the name, was it mini..can't remember the name, type of crop that wasn't popular, was it... it wasn't called mini...what was it called. I can't remember the name...there's loganberries...

Alan: Oh tayberries, loganberries, yeah the minor crops

Katy: Minor crops, that was it, yeah. So they're not really around here....are they?

Alan: Well, gooseberries is a minor crop, because it's very, very few of them sold... grown or sold. And blackcurrants again is something that is very expensive to pick by hand, by machine rather, which is why our breeding work's going on, to find, find a variety a breed of variety that will make, will be cheaper to pick basically, so that we can increase the amount that we sell. That's the idea.

Katy: So, ok, so how are these picked at the moment then if they're not picked by hand?

Alan: No they are, they are all done by hand

Katy: Oh they are all done by hand. Right

Alan: which means that we do...

Katy: Do you sell these to supermarkets?

Alan: Yeah this goes to supermarkets, we do sell them to some markets but it's virtually everything we do is supermarkets, but they have to have the strig, and it's very difficult, it's time consuming as it were and we're looking for, and you get a few squashed ones where you, they're tight to the bush, so we're looking for say the longer strig with a bit of a gap, so it's easier to pick off. But this variety is the first one out of our trials in Scotland. It's actually Winterwood's own variety... Big Ben. Ben unfortunately...the Scottish research institute...everything they breed has to have a prefix or a suffix of Ben. So whatever we call it, it has to have Ben in there somewhere

Katy: Ben blueberry...

Alan: So there's Big Ben, and the one at the other end is called Ben Mayer.



Points to another row

Alan: They're gooseberries again which, when I first...I, I'd seen the variety many years ago in Holland, never been able to find it again. Our manager managed to...couple of years ago managed to find a nurseryman who sourced me 500 plants...no idea where he got them from, but he found me them, that was the first 500 plants that we grew here.

Katy: Oh wow, that's grown.

Alan: Again, some cooking gooseberries, we've taken out... blueberries [inaudible?] We have a little farm just down the road, I don't know if you know Haven Farm Shop? Halfway down Sutton Valence hill on the right hand side?

Katy: Oh yeah, yeah

Alan: Behind there, we grow raspberries

Katy: And...do you grow that for the farm shop?

Alan: No that's grown for here, and we're planting gooseberries. The ground's a little bit tired here, for growing gooseberries again, so that's one reason for changing, where Haven Farm hasn't had any gooseberries, so we're putting some, some down.

Katy: S-Do you.. I know you obviously, you said you worked at Edmed's...back in the past, do you have any sort of connection with them now, or...

Alan: Yeah, I mean we're always good friends at the, supplier we have at Horsmonden is the younger son of...So we've been friends since we were, we're the same age so we just, we've been friends since we were 17, and we went to college together

Katy: Yeah, Hadlow?

Alan: Yeah, Hadlow. So of course, I know all the sons that are running it now, I either grew up with them as friends and because I was the only other, there was three sons, and me basically working on the farm shop, I was treated by the father just like another son really, very lucky, but...

(Arrive at a field, where what looks like sowing is being done)



Katy: So what are they doing here?

Alan: These are just preparing the ground, putting some wood chips down, etc ready to put, what we do is put wood chip in, they need a lot of organic matter, and then they'll be that'll be incorporated into the soil, and then we make up the beds as you saw and then put the Miplex in position.

Katy: Ahh. So is the woodchip be...does that help with what, drainage?

Alan: No it helps with the, the blueberries like very acid soil, and so the wood helps to, when it breaks down, helps to lower the pH of the soil. And also they need low pH, high organic matter, so you're adding organic matter in to this.

Alan: [Calls to farm manager] Rob? May I introduce Katy?

Rob: What?

Alan: May I introduce Katy?

Rob: I was waiting for the next part of the ... spreader to fill it up again

Alan: ahh right.

Rob: Hi

Katy: Hi

Alan: Katy lives in Kingswood, I think, but - is it? But she's from the er...Kent University?

Rob: Oh right?

Alan: And they're doing a little project, I'm just showing her round the farm. On how things have changed over the last 50 years.

Rob: Good luck with that!

Alan: I was just gonna say [?] you're the only one who'd know.



Rob: Er, yeah. So, yeah, that's a...that's something different

Alan: Probably most of the major changes, Rob will have seen as well, pesticides and that type of thing

Rob: – I think it's becoming a much more....science based..thing, I mean perfect example *(goes over to the car and gets a leaf in a bag)*. Leaf analysis, water analysis.

Katy: Blimey ok, and what's that for?

Rob: that's nutrient...

Alan: That's part of deciding how much fertiliser we use, we check to see what's in the water when we put it on and what's in the leaves already so working out what the plant needs.

Katy: How often is that done, is that?

Alan: Summer months, when they're growing, but obviously we are taking soil samples as well during the early spring. So it's all to do with...part of our audits as well is how we use fertilizers, without applying too much. So, apart from the fact, again like the chemicals they're very expensive, and we don't want to use too much anyway, we obviously want to make sure the balance of the plant is right, as Rob says it's getting very scientific now, you work these things out

Katy: Yeah, I was getting that impression, very much yeah. So is that something the auditors want to know as well then?

Alan: Well they want to see that, they want to see what we're doing, they want to... things like justification for using something. But not only that, but a mass balance, to, they'll ask what we've bought in, see the invoices and where we've used it, and how much we've got left, so they want a complete....

Rob: they're a bit paranoid as well in case we try and blow up Westminster.

Alan: Yeah, I was going to say as well, because we...not that we stock any of that but there are certain fertilisers that can be used in bomb making, so they have to be secured. But we do, we do a stock check every month to make sure no one's taking...

Katy: No rogue... [laughs]

Rob: So yeah, it's... I dunno, I'm trying to think of...it's becoming more scientific, it's becoming more paper chased. Paper based.



Alan: Certainly from my day, you know, I would go out and look and decide well I think they're looking a bit yellow so we'll put on couple of hundred acres of nitrogen, now to Rob taking samples to make sure that might only be an acre, you know, 10 and a half. And again, when I first started even when we were packing for supermarkets you know we've got that whole team so you see when I started, a supplier would arrive, would jump up onto the back of the lorry, have a look at it, and then decide whether we took it or not [laughs] I mean there was no traceability

Katy: Yeah, no computers. It's amazing how it's got very technical, very very....

Rob: Oh yeah, I was going to say, I mean if you've gone up and seen the QC department, then you'll probably understand that we can trace the fruit back to...field, date picked, we can then take that from how much fertiliser was used on that field to grow that crop, how much water we used to grow that crop... how much chemicals was used to grow, you know, produce that crop type thing. And, it's literally these days it's a spreadsheet.

Alan: And on the justification, we talking about things like auditing, and something like leaf...using this for...we actually have to upload onto their website, the number of litres of water it's taken us to grow each ton of fruit, so yeah we do have to work those things out...when I started...just expertise in a way that you know...how you grew something.

Katy: And is that the same with, I think was it Rob, was coming...were you coming out of the tunnel where you're growing the blueberries?

Rob: Yep

Katy: Yeah. So is that, do you have to do a certain amount of water, certain amount of....?

Rob: We've done it a couple of times this year, but it's more for our own interests in this one, because we're into uncharted territory really. Rob continues – I'm speaking to some guys in South Africa at the minute, on our, on our other sites who are much more scientifically...I'm slightly scientifically challenged, I don't know if you... but you know, they want to know what we're doing so they can tailor the certification programmes for us, as we go along.

Alan: obviously we can't be exact because obviously temperature,

Rob :Yeah I mean we've taken...



Alan: the climate, so we still have to keep an eye on what our plants are looking like. There's still an element there of actually you know growing not just, let somebody else do it...the computer grow it.

Rob: if you look there.... Even with things like watering these days it's all done automatically from a dozen [?] rig in the main pumpers, and this, this control box here is solar paneled it receives a signal there, switches a solenoid on here, opens your water tap, closes your water tap. The other one you see in the field there, there's air temperature, humidity, soil moisture and a water meter on that as well, so we can draw a lot of information from what we're doing.

Alan: We were talking about spraying earlier with these chemicals using that information we can decide when the disease levels are likely to be at their highest so that we only spray when we actually know that there's gonna be a problem.

[Rob's phone goes]

Rob: So yeah, it's becoming more and more, in the old days, even when I started, you'd walk along the field, you'd give it a kick

Alan: see if it's dry or not

[all laugh]

Rob: think ok, let's try a bit in there and see where we're at. Even, even down to temperature, you know, it's

Katy: What, soil temperature?

Rob: Soil temperature, and things like that

Alan: air temperatures, so you're matching up the two and there are probes in the soil which are giving us what the water level is at three different stages. So we can minimise the amount of water that we don't, we can give them just enough that they need rather than just irrigating the field and thinking "Ooh well it looks a bit dry we'll give it some water".

Rob: and even down to the temperature in the tunnels that you've just walked past, you know it's all there, real time. From there we can set up alarms, for too high a temperature, it'll email you, it'll let you know it's time to think about ventilating, or letting some air out, time to close the tunnels.

Alan: close the polythene tunnels up let some heat out



Rob: or, keep some heat in, and humidity and things like that so it's becoming more and more...

Alan: sophisticated

Rob: sophisticated to a certain extent

Alan: probably leaving me a bit behind [laughs]

Rob: like, like everything with technology comes its problems, [laughs]

Alan: there's still a place for someone going round...you did that bit wrong

Rob: that's not! it's a bit like the dead parrot [*Rob and Alan laugh*]. Everything says it's good, yeah but it's dead. So, there's a lot to be said for still being able to walk a field and just take a judgment, take a judgment call on it. Even though things, even with the things...

Alan: Especially as we obviously have to anyway.

Katy: Yeah, so that, so that side will never change, you wouldn't ever become fully...automated?

Alan: I...I can't see that

Rob: I don't think so

Alan: Unless you put drones out there

Katy: Yeah, I mean that's something they do in big farms in America, isn't it... maybe.. I mean they must do, they're so huge...

Alan: I mean there are... you can use satellite images, and you can use scanning, This field was scanned.

Rob: yes, yeah well if you want to see the paperwork on it, that's not a problem

Alan: they actually did a...a

Rob: quadbike



Alan: quadbike, on it they have a special scanner and then they can say well that part of the field is low in something or it's high in something else and a lot of, you'll find a lot of the big farms, the big farms they'll use satellite mapping, and that's actually programmed into the computer on his tractor so if you're putting things on like fertiliser if it's in a poor area, it will actually up the rate in that area, and it'll bring it down again when it comes to a bit that doesn't need it. So again it's focused on all about not using more than you need to.

Rob: GPS fixing as well, is another important part of it, when it gets to a certain part of the field, as Alan says if it's.... if the sampling is showing that it's low then it will automatically up the rate and then increase the rate as soon as it hits. It's a bit like the sat nav in your car.

Alan: but again, when I started, it you know, you calibrated the sprayer by hit or miss, and now our sprayer here has GPS unit on it, and it calculates that some of them actually if the wheels start spinning it adjusts the pressure on the thing so it's all to make things that much more precise.

Rob: so, er, yeah

Alan: So it is surprising, I don't think people realise the technology. And, and I think perhaps we would find some younger people more interested if they realised just how sophisticated it is now, because it's not, it's not, the days of the old....

Rob: well it comes down to everything isn't it, I mean, even being able to write a bit of code these days on farming is a very important thing,

Alan: Yeah you can't work without a computer now

Rob: so your kiddies that are you know computer literate on code writing and software development and stuff like that, you'd be surprised how much is used on farms. [To Alan] I mean Richard's your ideal man to speak to about something like that isn't he?

Alan: and that's the, and that's the biggest change from my day really, is the amount of technology involved.

Katy: Yeah, I suppose it'll only get more..really...

Alan: Oh yeah, it gets more every day, increases every day, the things you can do, even the systems you've got they tend to be improved on all the time

Rob: which is happening all the time as well isn't it. It's, it's an ongoing...



Alan: ongoing... thing

Rob: ongoing thing you know for us, in all fairness

Alan: but at the end of the day, we still rely on the weather! Cause if the weather's wrong [laughing], there isn't a lot we can do about it!

*Katy: No.
[All laugh]*

Rob: ok?

Alan: Ok, thank you Rob

Rob: I'll leave you to it!

Katy: Thank you.

Rob: Cheers, bye!

Alan: Yeah, that's the one thing we won't change

Katy: Yeah the weather (laughs)

Alan: the weather, and that governs so many of the things we do. So this is blueberries

Katy: And are these, obviously they're not ripe, how long does it take for them to ripen?

Alan: probably about three weeks more or less.

(Notices people working in the field)

Katy: So are they picking...blueberries up there?

Alan: No they're just weeding up there, because this hasn't actually, this is the first field we planted and it hasn't been fixed...you can see some bark as well, some mulch here at the top to, to try and keep the weeds down, but it's obviously not 100%. In fact the labour profile is such that we haven't got a lot of picking at the moment...



Katy: Yeah I mean, I haven't seen a lot of people actually around on the field, so are you not picking much at the moment or..?

Alan: No we're coming to the end now, we're still flat, we've picked today, we'll pick up until every...[inaudible]. We planted 4 or 5 years ago, it's all one variety... the field next to the tunnels we planted a lots of different varieties just to see which ones grew best in our soil.

Katy: And the one you which is best...

Alan: And the one which is

Katy: So, I suppose that then restricts, like what you were saying earlier, you can only provide this variety to...

Alan: Yeah, I mean, there are... because we serve different supermarkets it's not so much of a problem because one of them will probably take them. This is a good variety, everyone will take this one, but again it's no point you know growing something, that, there's no point growing something that nobody wants, on the other hand there's no point growing a variety that doesn't make any money...

Katy: Yeah, no [laughs]

Alan: [laughing] at the end of the day there's only one reason for us being here. So these are growing very very well, these... considering the soil, everything else, so that's why we're able to expand on blueberries,

(continue walking)

Alan: These are cooking gooseberries, which have been picked now, but they're two or three years old, so they'll be replacing the bushes that we've just taken out. [Coughs] and next year they should be in full crop.

(continue walking)

Katy: Yeah, the scientific side of it, it does kind of...it's surprising, and I yeah, the quality control in the packhouse, and that, it's not really something I was expecting.

Alan: No? [laughs]

Katy: No, yeah, it's amazing[laughs] So do they have, are they quite sensitive to water, is that why you've got the tunnels over them? Like, will the rain ruin them?



Alan: It will ruin them, but with all cane fruit now and with all strawberries they've all come from covered, when really that's, there's two reasons. One it, it supermarkets prefer it. I say two reasons there must be three really, but one supermarkets prefer it because of the other two reasons, and they do stipulate mostly that we cover them. These are what we call rain chairs rather than full tunnels, and we're not trying to change the time by vast amount on when we get the fruit, we're not trying to get it early by heating it up, it's simply to keep the water off the fruit during flowering it lowers the diseases that we get so we do less spraying, and it also means that we can pick at the right time because obviously we can go in and pick even if it's a rainy day rather than just waiting for the sun to come out. But, you reduce the amount of detritus if you can keep the flowers dry when they're being pollenated. And, lowers our spray bill

Katy: So are blackberries, I dunno, are they one of the harder fruits that you grow? I dunno...

Alan: Not specifically, again with, although they're not, how we've found with blackberries we don't like to... [inaudible], actually weed the plant rather than use herbicides [inaudible]

Katy: Would you yeah, not be able to use, I forgot the name, the black mesh?

Alan: It's not quite so easy but you can, you can do it. But we didn't particularly when we planted this piece. It's easier with the crops like gooseberries where they've just got one leg and it stays whereas what you do with the blackberries is where you see the fruit now, those canes will all be cut out and they'll grow new canes during the summer this year, which then produce fruit for next year

Katy: Oh, so it gets quite wide, and quite...

Alan: So you'll so you'll need space for the new shoots to come up from the bottom,

Katy: Right, yeah

Alan: Again, more gooseberries [laughs]

Katy: (joking), so the grass doesn't count as a weed, I can see a lot of grass [laughs] So is the, is this quite a traditional way of gro, I mean aside from the mesh, is it quite a traditional way of growing them with the wooden...?

Alan: No they would have traditionally been grown just as a bush, the open without any wires but we saw quite a few years ago a system of growing redcurrants on wires, and we thought we'd try it with gooseberries, it means we can plant them



closer together down the row, which traditionally you would (pointing), one bush there and one bush there, so we've doubled up, and trying to keep the...you only keep two branches which means that you'll hopefully, should be able to grow the same amount of fruit with two plants instead of one, but higher quality because they're growing on the younger wood.

Katy: So you trim away kind of ...any stuff that's sticking out?

Alan: Yeah, so the stuff that you see here but obviously we've got to get tractors down here, but as the branches get older they will take them out and weed proof that

Katy: So the idea is to keep them as flat to the wire as possible. Ahh ok, that's interesting. So they, ok, so they can grow taller, I suppose, or can they?

Alan: Yeah, well that's about as tall as they can get. But you see they, they branch...so each one of those, where this is first day, they, they fruit on two year wood, so that's grown this year, And that there, the buds here will turn into fruit buds and will produce fruit next year.

Katy: So it only fruits on the young,

Alan: Well not on the first year, only on the second and subsequent years. So as you can see we're pruning back to make the new shoots grow as replacements.

Katy: Ahh. Oh. Didn't know that. Is that the same with the blackberries then, because I noticed they were on wires as well, is that to keep them?

Alan: No, really because they are much more...

Katy: Hedgerow like aren't they

Alan: Yeah, more of a woodland plant, and so you need to support. These you can grow without supporting them if you wanted to, it's just the way we grow them.... So that's the extent really, of the farm.

Katy: Yeah, yeah, it's been really interesting.