



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: Gordon Reynolds

Age: 64

Location: Forest Farm, Cranbrook, Tenterden

Size: 700 acres

Type: Arable/Cattle breeding

Interviewed by: Katy Sharpe

Filmed by: Joe Spence

Date: 21 August 2015

Katy: Would you be able to tell me about the farm?

Gordon: Yes, we're a family farm, my father started here after the war, he'd been in the RAF for the six years of the war, and he and my mother bought 70 acres of forest farm in 1945, and from there they set about farming, improving the land. I've got two other brothers and we're all farming. So there's three brothers farming, all in Kent, and then our grandchildren also farming, my youngest brother's son farms over at east Kent, and Lucy, my youngest daughter [in the interview] is here carrying on the farm, and then I've got two daughters in New Zealand. The oldest manages a very large dairy herd, on the south of, south island and my middle daughter, her partner has an organic vineyard in the Otago Valley. So, there's a lot of farming in the family, and my mother actually was the real farmer...

...

Gordon: So, my mother was the real farmer, her family farmed under what is now Heathrow Airport. And they farmed really all through the Depression, and so farming was in her blood, and also in my father really because he, he is, his father's a dentist but he was a very good engineer, so between my mother who did the livestock side of the farm, and father was a great engineer so he was very familiar with machinery, and they developed the 70 acres and in fact educated the three of us privately from 70 acres which you certainly couldn't do now, and then I came back to join the business in 1970 after I'd been to college and then my younger brother came and joined the business in 1974, and we farmed till 1996, together, and we built up to about 500 acres. And then my father retired and we then, split the farm into sort of, we, we still farm together but we have separate businesses. So I, in



those days we had about 150 cows which we were milking. We used to grow corn, and also retailed well over half the milk we produced. We had 5 milk rounds, employed about 7 people, and we sold milk onto people's doorsteps and into shops and schools, and about 70 retail outlets. We did that, we started that in 1981, and we did that until 2001. So, we sold the business and we actually sold one herd, we had a terrible foot and mouth outbreak here in 2001, we sold one herd but by that time we'd expanded, we were milking 300 cows and on two sites. Once we split up in '90, '96, we then expanded ourselves, we bought some more land, and we rented our farm. My eldest daughter was going to come back and join me in the business but at that time milk prices were extremely low, like they are now. That was seven years ago. And so she decided to go and migrate. I think and set about producing a family and developing an industry in, the dairy industry in New Zealand, and I'm delighted that Lucy's now joined me four years ago in this business here, and so we are now developing the business further, and we're looking at alternative enterprises, producing energy, we're looking at we've put a planning application in for an anaerobic digester, to produce energy from our farmyard manure, and some crops. And so, we also have a cattery, we have a 40 place cattery in the grounds and that is expanding really well. At least 6 weeks this year have been completely full and so that's, I'm delighted that that's been, under Lucy's stewardship, very successful.

Katy: So Lucy, have you – obviously you joined the farm four years ago, did you always want to sort of be involved in the farming business?

Lucy: no I actually never intended to become a farmer [laughs], and if you ask my school friends they'll say it's something I never wanted to do but I, when I left school I trained to be a chef, worked as a chef for a few years, and decided that I didn't want to be inside all the time. So I went back to college, I went to Plumpton Agricultural College, and actually studied Animal Management, not Agriculture. When I finished that I went out to New Zealand to stay with my sister, initially for a year, and worked on the farm with her, stayed for three years, loved the cows and working on the farm, so, made the decision to come back here and work with Dad.

Katy: Ahh. And so, [to Mr Reynolds] up until Lucy joined you was it yourself and...?

Gordon: I had a herdsman, well I had two, two herdsmen, but I was, so I was milking over three hundred cows on 2 units so I had a herdsman at each farm, I had a tenancy on a farm in the neighbouring parish, and then we were back, yeah we got up to about five hundred head of cattle. But that's when the milk price was, was reasonably good. Since then sadly, the milk prices have really gone down in fact below now the price of production. I'm glad we're not milking cows but what we do now, we rear pedigree heifers to sell to other people so that's our, main thrust is rearing, rearing pedigree heifers. And going, they go into other people's herds..



Lucy: predominantly down in the West Country or up North.

Katy: Ok. Do you also...arable as well?

Gordon: We also, yes, we, we, grow [?] crops for seed, we grow seed-wheat, seed-oats, and triticale, and then we grow maize, some of which we sell to other people and so

[Lucy, to the dog: Oscar get down]

yeah, so we grow maize which we sell to other dairy farms, and then eventually you know we, maize we grow, grow for the anaerobic digester plant.

Katy: So quite a lot of what you do then, is selling to other farms...

Gordon, Lucy: Yes.

Katy: Selling cows... Do you prefer that? Or is it something you've had to....

...

Gordon: Yes, so we, currently, we, we sell seed- seed-crops, heifers going into other peoples herds and we produce a lot of hay for horses and quality hay and also grass-seed. Which actually [hard to hear] is a hybrid [wind]...down for two years and we sell the seed again to other people as mixtures. So that's the sort of enterprises, plus the cattery that we've become. But the farms gone through lots of different enterprises. We used to have chickens, pigs, then I had...we'd always done a certain amount of contract work, and contracting machinery out, and [wind, hard to hear].. and so I've always kept to, more of the livestock side, and so gradually we sold the chickens [wind hard to hear], pigs used to eat, we used to have pigs in this building here [points to the converted building behind us], and calves, and, so we've rationalised what we do, over the years, and as various commodities have become profitable, yeah.

Katy: So, what sorts of [other] changes have you experienced, apart from the obvious?

Gordon: Well, obviously machinery, we, it, has changed hugely. I, when I first started driving a tractor, they were little, what we call grey fleas, Ferg, little Fergie tractors, that were about 50 horsepower and had no cabs, it was quite frugal, but, but great fun. Now of course, we have air-conditioned cabs, very sophisticated tractors, all computerised, and it's very different driving a tractor to what it was when I first started driving a tractor [laughs], when I was about 11. And, and all the other machinery, has changed hugely. We used to have to



[Mrs Reynolds, answering phone: Cameron, hello!]

Gordon: Handle small bales, and fertiliser in 50kg bags, we used to lift, now that's all done mechanically, we have a rough train JCB, does all our material handling, which makes life hugely...

Katy: Easier

Gordon: Easier. Easier on the back, Lucy just loves driving a JCB, she gets very excited doing it, she's very precise and so it's a joy to see her achieving so much more than we could, per hour. That's, that's the great thing...

Lucy: Yeah

Katy: More efficient

Lucy: Yeah

Gordon: We're so much more efficient. Yes, I think that's, that's the huge change. I mean it's quite interesting, people that just came. Her father we employed on the farm, we probably only had about 120 acres when he would have joined us, when he was 18 when he left school which would have been about 1960, and we employed about 4 people on the farm for 120 acres and now we employ 2 people with 700 acres. So, you can see how, how it's changed. bar sort of...

Katy: I imagine the roles that you've had to... I mean whereas before you had a lot of members of staff for different roles you must have had to take on quite a few jobs.

Gordon: Yes,

Katy: Is that part of the reason you changed to selling?

Gordon: Partly, yes, when we started producing producer- retailing milk, the milk price wasn't good then in '81, and we were getting people coming to us wanting milk, from the farm, straight from the farm, because they were finding that the quality of their milk, they were getting from the wasn't very good so we started producing, bottling milk on the farm, pasteurising it, and we built up a very successful business, delivering milk to, to the doorstep. And at the time, it was, it was very good wasn't it?

Lucy: Yeah, that was how we earnt our pocket money was working in the dairy, and

Katy: Yeah. Did you enjoy it?



Lucy: Yeah, I did used to enjoy doing that,

Gordon: Weekends...

Lucy: weekends, used to go out and do the milk round with Dad,

Katy: How long was that for? Was that for most of your... childhood?

Lucy: Yeah.

Gordon, Lucy: Yeah, yes, all the time we were growing up

Gordon: Yes, yes, all the time...three girls, I've got, three daughters as I say, all the time they were growing up we were retailing so they used to come and help and

Lucy: Yeah, I was probably...I was about 18 or 19 I think when we stopped doing the retail rounds, so yeah...

Gordon: So, other things that have changed dramatically is, genetics,

Lucy: ...close the door?

Gordon: yes

[Lucy shuts door]

Gordon: ... is genetics of livestock, has changed hugely,

Lucy: Yeah

Gordon: we, we used to have British Frisians when I first came back here, [inaudible, wind] Hoffstein bloodlines, and so the production of each animal went up, dramatically, and all the time I've been farming, obv, doubled actually

Lucy: and the technology within that, well it's still changing today. We still use, well we predominantly use AI, and we use a certain amount of sex semen so we get the heifer replacement that we need and you know exactly what the genetic background of each animal is, which, yeah probably when dad started didn't necessarily [laughs]

Gordon: They, they were pedigree, but the information we have on each pedigree animal now is vastly superior because so and that's a huge change, so the genetic ability of the animals has improved. Likewise with beef cattle the growth we achieve now with cattle to get quality beef is far superior to what was 40, 50 years ago. So, we, we're able to produce better forage by producing maize, enables animals to



grow at a steady rate throughout their lives, and produce absolutely prime beef, and the same with sheep, people are able to ensure the lambs [wind, gets hard to hear] that and the beef cattle, with...[inaudible]...never used to, which makes a far better product. For the public to buy, so they get a consistent, quality product, and I think that's really very important. And the other thing is, traceability, has changed hugely. We have to, everything we do, so we know exactly where the animals come from. All the animals have ear-tags, a passport, so the, legislation has, it's got a lot worse from our point of view, but it's right that people, the public have absolute confidence in the food that we produce as long as what ends up on the plate, the public know exactly where that food's come from, and so has full traceability. That's really important, we, we try and produce the very best products we can, and so the consumers have confidence in, in what we produce, and how it's produced.

Katy: So...do you still sell beef to the supermarkets? I know you said earlier – the heifers - you sell them [to the west country]... is that separate?

Gordon: We, we, we do some beef, yeah and they go, but we, we tend to sell those as sort of what we call store-cattle, so we don't fatten anything here.

Lucy: so we don't sell directly to supermarkets, we sell to market.

Gordon: But we, we, sell those to the market and then they will go into a, a fattening unit, so we, we rear them until they're about 18 months old. And then they fatten, go on to other people. But we, principally rear pedigree heifers, that's our main, main thrust.

Katy: Do you then sell them on markets, like you said, in the West Country?

Lucy: Yeah

Katy: Up north

Gordon: Yes, they, they, go they go to auction, at pedigree sales, either down in Sedgmore Market, in Somerset, or to Leek, in Staffordshire, with I suppose, dairying and so on. Around here, sadly, Kent, when we were milking, about 150 herds in Kent, and we're now down to about 40.

Katy: Yeah.. seems to be dropping...

Gordon: So it's huge, yeah. Currently there's 10 dairy farms going out of production every week, yeah which is, very drastic.

Katy: Yeah we, we, interviewed one...it does tend to....yeah...



Gordon: So, it, it's yeah there's many changes happening right now, commodity prices round the world are going down dramatically, which is impacting on every sector of agriculture. So...

Katy: Cause you're no longer competing just against every other farmer in the country, you're competing against the world now, aren't you?

Lucy: yeah

Gordon: We're, we're very lucky... even wider than the European market, we're competing against world markets and what's affected us quite considerably is the embargo on food going to Russia, has impacted on all world markets. And certainly on our market, it's having quite a, devastating effect on commodity prices. And then obviously with the slow-down in China, that's having quite a marked impact on commodity prices, especially for my daughter in New Zealand because all their food, all their produce goes to China. And so that's, their prices halved actually in the last 18 months, our price has gone down by a third. And so we're very much in a world commodity market affecting our prices. And I'm quietly confident of the future because obviously we've got 64 million people in the country, and they need feeding. And the, the land that food is produced from is diminishing, as they build more and more houses, especially in the UK, but that's happening throughout Europe too. Whilst we're able to get more efficient and produce more food, per acre or per hectare, even so the population of the world is growing fast, and people need, need to eat. And so I'm quietly confident for future generations, that farming will become profitable again, because at the moment it is not...Hardly any sector is very profitable at the moment...

[bird scolds something]

Katy: Do you think the fact that you're able to... you know, because technology's increasing, you're able to produce more efficiently on smaller, in numbers of land, that, that'll be...helpful...You know, if more land's being sold for housing, is the fact that you're able to be more efficient with technology...is that a benefit?

Gordon: I think it is, yeah, I'm, I'm confident that, and we could actually produce more than we do now, the industry is treading water because commodity prices are low, we are, we could produce a lot more food, than, we....we are currently. I actually hope we come out of the EC, I think it would be.... In my view, farming would be better off, out of the EU, and [sighs], it, it's obviously a debate that's going to be had in the next 18 months. Very widely, and we will still trade with Europe, whether we're in the EU or not, and not only agriculture as an industry but all other industries will still trade with Europe. They, they, trade with the rest of the world



now, take, take JCB as a great example, as a sort of like, industrial operation, and, and they trade fairly well now, obviously within Europe, but they'll still do that whether they're in, whether we're in the EU or not. And, I think we would be better off....

Katy: Any particular reason, that you think we'd be better off?

Gordon: I, I think we'll have more stable food prices. And, I and, and, really legislation. I, I think we, we are plagued with red tape and European legislation which we're having to, have to adhere to, and Lucy spends a lot of her time, doing paperwork, and some of it really is...it's not productive time, And what we produce is no better for a lot of the red tape, we have to adhere to. So, I hope that we do come out, I think...hopefully government will put in place systems where food is absolutely...that we know where it's coming from, so the traceability's there without the red tape. It can be done.

Katy: Yeah?

Gordon: Yeah

Katy: So you know...I think at the moment you get subsidies from the EU, do you think that, that would be something you'd be willing to...lose for...

Gordon: Yes, I...see, I take New Zealand as an example. About 12 years ago, they took off all subsidies in New Zealand, and farming has benefited from it and I think that would be the case here. There will be still some subsidies, but they'll be in a different form. So, and I, I believe that once subsidies come off, commodity prices will be, be more stable. And that would be good for the industry. And, and good for the public, so I mean, we, the situation..... [wind]

Katy: So, do you see your farm developing much in the future, or do you think you'll stay as you are?

Lucy: I think we have to change to be able to continue. We, there's demand for things always shifts and changes, and we've got to be able to keep up with that, to be able to compete, so, we will continue to change as we have over Dad's lifetime. Yeah. And that's partly why we're hoping to be able to go ahead with the anaerobic digester, that will give us a bit more stability, we know we'll get a constant, we'll be able to constantly supply electricity and we'll get a constant price for that, which will hopefully give us a bit more flexibility throughout the rest of the business. and...yeah...



Gordon: So what that enables us to do, we will be able to produce electricity, from, our waste, which is slurry and farmyard manure which goes back to the land, currently. We will be putting that through the anaerobic digester, and then it'll go back to the land, and all the nutrients of that material will remain, and will benefit the soil, and so we see it fitting into our existing farming enterprise very, very well, and as Lucy says, will produce a steady income of electricity which will supplement the income on the rest of the farm, and it'll enable us to go on producing seed crops, because the digestate – the anaerobic digester produces – the plant produces is weed free because the process kills any viable seeds. And so, we will be able to go on farming at a high, at a better level, improving our soil structure, improving our crops, and so we feel it fits in extremely well with the existing enterprises, yes.

Katy: So will that - does the electricity from that – does that go to the national grid? Or is that...?

Gordon: That goes to the National Grid, yeah. Some, we'd hope to sell, to some local houses, businesses and, but most of it goes to the National Grid, yes, and obviously we shall use it around the farm

Katy: Because [pause].....so.....when did you decide to change....well....you sell seed crops at the moment, was that something you'd....when did that change?

Gordon: We've, we, we've done that for a number of years, in fact my father used to produce grass-seed many years ago, and then when we became more intensive with the livestock, and we, we, we then didn't do a lot of seed production because all that grew for the, all the grain we could use went through the dairy herd to produce milk, so since we've, we sold the dairy herd, it's enabled us, we've freed up more land, and because we've always farmed to a, to a high standard, with seed crops you have to have land that hasn't produced the same crop for the last three years, and so we're able to do that, by rotating our crops, growing maize, we're able to have clean ground to produce seed crops, and we've developed that, and the grass-seed we've done for two years now, and we shall develop that more....

Katy:help the business to grow?

Gordon: Yes it happens, yeah, yeah. We like to think we, you know produce quality crops in a sustainable way. And I, I well, both interested in it is because, is the environment and producing crops which is sustainable

Katy: Yeah

Gordon: yeah, and I think that's, what we're very much about is, the future of agriculture is hugely important to us, in a sustainable way.



Katy: Also, because, quality in particular is definitely increasing at the moment, it's something that...at least from farms I've seen that the consumer demand for quality crops and quality products is only going to increase...

Lucy: Yes

Katy: Yeah

Gordon: I mean, sadly, I think the supermarkets don't do the public, in some respects, especially with fruit, they want the perfect apple, and what rather annoys me is that a lot of very good apples don't come onto the market because they're not perfect and they get thrown away. Now that is a huge waste. And I think, the industry needs to address that. They could go onto the market at a slightly lower price, the, the taste of them is excellent, it just, they're not perfect. And this is where, supermarkets need to work with the industry, to make sure that waste doesn't happen. Because, there is a huge amount of waste throughout the food process that we, we have a responsibility for the environment to reduce that waste, and I, I think in time to come, supermarkets will realise that, and they're, we're, so there's less waste, more goes to consumers. Even if the...it needs to...the customer would have a choice, yes they can have the prime apple, or pear, in perfect condition, they've got to pay a little bit more for it. But then they should have a choice of being able to have one with blemishes, that tastes just as good...

Lucy: tastes exactly the same...

Goordon: ...that'll save us waste. And I think some common sense has got to come into it. And I believe in time it will happen.

Katy: [to Lucy] So, could you tell me more about your cattery business, is that something that you run...is that kind of linked in... to the farm..I know it's sort of..

Lucy: Yeah I mean Dad actually set that up, six years ago now?

Gordon: yes

Lucy : as a form of diversification

Katy: Yeah

Lucy: I took it over, three years ago? and it's just, it's grown, year on year it's grown, we have 32 pens, all of which can take up to two cats, some of which can take up to 4 cats from one family. It's very seasonal, school holidays are our busy periods, but



year on year, again out of season it's grown, we're not full out of season, but we have enough to be able to keep the business going. This summer we've been the fullest for the longest period, and hopefully that will continue to grow...yeah.

Katy: So I was just thinking that rather than.... Yeah you are diversifying quite a lot, you're putting your hands in all these different...is that something you feel that you need to do to survive? Having all these different things going in order to...

Gordon: Yes, I think that....the, the anaerobic digester plant, will make a huge, huge difference to the business. And will make a very good balance. Lucy's husband currently works for my brother, and he, he will hopefully come back, and run the anaerobic digester plant. And so it'll be very much a family, we're a family business now, so yes, my brother farms just down the road, he does mostly arable farming, and he, he has a beef herd in south, beef herd, and we work together, and then my eldest brother, he contract farms over in East Kent, and has quite a lot of very precise machinery, he comes and drills our maize, harvests our maize and our and he, his manager is actually my youngest brother's eldest son. So, we're, we're very much work as a family, and we feel that gives us great strength. And....

Lucy: but I think yeah, I mean the cattery, and any diversification probably on any farm, has to work, has to be able to work alongside the farm, but it's a balance and it has to complement what we already do, but at the same time it gives us an income stream, it, the cattery takes up a very small proportion of the land on the farm, it's unobtrusive, ok it takes up quite a lot of my time at this time of year when we're busy, but I can manage that. I'm not working as much as I have been because I've got a son who's just 8 months so I'm not working on the farm as much so it's just a, it's a, I balance it, with what I do on the farm. yeah, it has to...yeah..[laughs]

Gordon: it's very much a, a, people say farming's a lifestyle, but I mean, it, it, it's an industry, it's a business, we need to make a profit, and it's getting that balance. Balance of life, is very, very important and balance of work-life, income, getting that, lifestyle balance is hugely important. Yeah. I like to think we, we have some of it here.

Katy: Yeah, it is a lovely, lovely area.

Gordon: We're very lucky, this is the high weald, it's an extremely attractive part of the country, there's not too many people in the area, but just enough...Farming, but we are lucky to live where we live. And, we know that, and it, we, yeah. So...

[pause]



Katy: Will we be able to walk round the farm at some point after? I think Joe would like to film...

Gordon: Yeah, yeah, yeah, very much so. There's cattle there you can film.

Lucy: actually it's quite good timing.

Gordon: so yes..

Katy: Is there anymore you'd like to tell me? You mentioned pigs and chickens was that when you were starting out?

Gordon: That's when I was young, growing up yeah we used to do, Capon chickens, fattening chickens for, we used to have geese, at Christmas, we had pigs, some grass-seed contracting, so yes they were sort of enterprises that my father had. And my interest has always been in dairy, really, I mean, I, I, when I actually came back here, in 1970, we were only milking about 11 cows, I soon got that up to 100 cows, and, it, 250 cows here, which we're pedigree herd, and then this other herd I took on, they were also pedigree, so yes, milk, milking cows has been my, my passion if you like, and breeding, we used to be showing cattle, we've still got some progeny from our original herd, which we, decided to develop, so yeah, animal genetics were my main, main interest. And quality milk production, has been my, I suppose my time. But I, I personally wouldn't want to go back to milking cows now, I, I did it for probably 50 years, and I, yeah I certainly wouldn't want to, but I remember when I first started in cows I was a... [sighs] I was very young, we used to milk into buckets, I was not able to lift them up. I used to do milking and my older brother who was much stronger, would be able to lift the churns and tip them into the cooler, so I've milked from a very young age, and and used to love it, yes I used to get up and half past 5 every morning but it didn't worry me, and I still get up quite early. And, so... only time I milk cows now is when occasionally I go over to my daughter in New Zealand. And she gets me on some, and I do pretty much...
But that's my limit of milking these days...

Katy: So milking seems to be what got you both into farming really, isn't it?

Gordon and Lucy: Yeah, yes, yeah [laughs]

Lucy: yeah, no I mean I guess, Harvey and I, my husband, he, he quite likes cows as well, and I guess, ideally we would quite like to be able to milk cows here again one day, but depends what the milk price does, it's it would need a lot of investment to be able to milk here again.

Katy: Is Harvey into farming as well?



Lucy: Yeah, he works for my uncle, who runs the contracting business, so he's, yeah. Hopefully, when Dad retires - if Dad retires - [laughs] then we will, do more together.

Gordon: No, I mean, Lucy's doing more and more, you know when Harvey comes back here, and that works out, I shall take a back seat. But, yeah and it, I, I'd just love to get milking here again, but with the milk price where it is, in the relationship of, of profitability with milking cows it's just not

Katy: Worth getting in at the moment

Lucy: No, no.

Gordon: but..

Lucy: things need to stabilise a lot before....

Gordon: yeah, I think it will. Farming commodities always go in troughs and peaks, and it'll, it'll come back.

Lucy: things always go in waves, and there's a growing trend towards people wanting locally produced and British food, which can only be a good thing for the British farming industry. Yeah. [laughs]

Katy: Anything else, you wanted to tell me about?

Gordon: Yeah, covers most really.

Katy: Is the erm...[wind].... If that's ok?

Gordon: Ok.

Lucy: shall we go for a wander?

Katy: Yeah that would be lovely

Lucy: do you want another drink?

Gordon: was that all you were expecting or?

Katy: Yeah, no, what the interview? Yeah that's pretty much what we were expecting.