



INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT

Farmer's Name: William Riccini
Age: 52
Location: Oast House Farm, Canterbury
Size: 140 acres
Type: Fruit

Interviewed by: Joe Spence
Filmed by: Joe Spence
Date: 25th November 2015

Joe: Please can you introduce yourself, and just tell us a little bit about the farm and its history...

Riccini: Right, well my name is William Riccini. I farm in partnership with my brother David. We're currently farming 140 acres of top fruit, consisting of apples, pears and cherries. We are third generation farmers, my maternal grandfather started the farm just after the war in 1949 and, as in so many cases, it goes from clogs to clogs in three generations as they say. My parents contrived, god bless them, to lose a lot of the farm that my grandfather had built up, which was up to 250 acres and in excess of 14 cottages and farmhouses. It went down to 40 acres by the time they had finished with it, and David and I have contrived to slowly try and rebuild that, we're back up to 140 acres as I said, but as far as property goes, we're never going to get 14 properties back – we have 2. But our prime concern, or our prime business, is farming and not property. So that's where we are at this present day.

Joe: So part of the farm has been about property as well?

Riccini: Well it used to be, I mean my grandfather's generation, all of them, and probably still some of the bigger farms actually own farm cottages which is one of the main attractions for working on a farm as a farm worker because farm wages were OK, but they weren't brilliant, but the biggest attraction was to have a farm cottage which was always rent free. Those days have gone now and many of the farms have sold off their farm cottages, sometimes in order to keep farming and sometimes because it wasn't in their interest. So a modern farm nowadays is for production. And that's where we are today, so originally the houses were a by-product. If you can go back to the 1940's and 1950's, nobody moved house as much as they do today, people see their homes as investments, well in those days a home was a home. And therefore the properties were



just way of attracting labour. Nowadays farms can't afford to have ten farm cottages on their books paying just nominal rent, it doesn't work like that anymore, I'm afraid. So we are purely farmers – nothing wrong with that!

Joe: So the cottages were sold off?

Riccini: The cottages were sold off by my parents in the main. My grandfather had two daughters and no sons, not that it makes any difference. My mother carried on farming her half that she was left with as inheritance and the seven cottages, let's say, and my aunt sold off all of her land and all of her cottages straight away. My mother farmed for a further twenty five years, but periodically sold off farm cottages to keep farming. Because times were bad in 70's and 80's, there's no doubt about that, they were very difficult. But you know, people don't change quickly enough, or adapt quick enough to changing environments, with the greatest respect to my mother. But to that generation actually, they didn't recognise the changes quick enough. With the advent of supermarkets, the dominance of supermarkets, the advent of the common market - they didn't react quickly enough and as a result, in my opinion, this is only my opinion, had to sell off capital assets, i.e. houses, in order to keep farming. Which actually something tells you you're doing something wrong; if you're having to sell off capital, you're doing something wrong. This is only my opinion, I have to stress that. And as a result, you lose your capital assets and that is in effect what happened. So in actuality, my mother went from her half of 250 acres, down to 40 acres, and owned 2 cottages, from quite a high base. So, David and I have spent our lifetime farming getting some of it back. But the reality is we will never get the property back because the house prices are so high now, so that's by the by, so we just focus of farming. So we started with the 40 acres that we bought from my mother for let's say "mates rates", it was less than market price what we paid for it, and subsequently built it up to just under 140 acres now. And that's where we are today – and we make a living out of it, there's no doubt about it. We've adapted and changed and seen the mistakes that our parent's generation has made, as have many other farmers' sons, those that haven't have gone under or sold up. 'Gone under' is probably too strong a word, but 'sold up' because they can't make money out of it. What's quite interesting about top fruit, I went to a conference about ten years ago held by English Apples and Pears Limited and the CEO put up a slide of the amount of hectares farmed in England and how many growers there were in 1985, and there were something like 1400 registered fruit growers in England, farming 10,000 hectares. Then he put up the same figures ten years later, there were 380 growers, but still farming 10,000 hectares. So the reality is the area of fruit grown is exactly the same, but it is owned by fewer people, so obviously by default farms have got bigger in order to survive and the uncommercial farms have been swallowed up. It's as simple as that.

Joe: Interestingly, one the things we are producing as part of this project are a number of Geographic Information Surveys, maps showing how farming has changed is spatial terms, the retraction of hops, the expansion of...



Riccini: Cherries? Something like that? 'Cos cherries is having a real renaissance period right now. I mean, it's absolutely amazing, quite an amazing turnaround in the last 10 or 15 years. And we're got on the back of that to a degree. And that's all about having different root stocks if you want to get really technical about it. The cherry industry was getting smaller and smaller and smaller, but they only had one, or maybe two, types of root stock that weren't very good at producing regular crops of cherries and you can only make money if you produce regular crops, they're quite a fickle root stock. Then with the advent of a root stock called 'Gisela', which was developed in Germany, the trees became much more dwarfing, so much easier to manage. I mean you don't see cherry trees 30 or 40 feet high anymore, they're 10 feet high at the most because of this dwarfing rootstock that prevents the tree from getting too big and also gives you regular crops. So the whole world has changed in cherry growing, because of this development of a root stock, and to a degree that happened with top fruit as well, with apples. East Morling Research Station produced something that was called 'Emla 9 Root Stock', which is a dwarfing root stock, and this has enabled growers to change the way they're growing top fruit, beyond recognition. Most people's traditional view of an English apple orchard is probably 40 trees an acre, these great trees hanging over with sheep underneath, well maybe 50 years ago that was the case, well probably 80 years ago to be honest. Things develop and things change, and now you have much much higher density of tree planting. We're cropping at probably up to 2400 trees per hectare now. So instead of 120 or 400 or 500 you're at 2400 - so the investment is absolutely huge, the cost of planting an orchard now is immense. But you have to do that in order to get quicker returns 'cos what you're trying to do is... don't think about a tree, imagine the area, and you're trying to fill in the that cropping space as quickly as possible. So if you plant a tree every twenty feet, there's twenty feet not cropping, and you're spending twenty years growing that tree and getting it big enough to fill your cropping space. But if you plant a tree three feet apart or a meter apart in new money as we are now, you've already filled your cropping space so you don't have to grow wood in order to fill that space you can start growing apples on that tree instead. And of a sudden you're getting a crop in year two of maybe five or six tonnes a hectare, whereas in the old days you wouldn't get anything because you would take the fruit off in order to make the trees grow quicker, in order for the cropping space. And that's how the world has changed as far as fruit growing has gone.

Joe: Normally in these interviews we start talking about the future towards the end of the interview, but I'd be quite interested to hear your thoughts on it now. So we've been talking about how we maximise yields from the smallest areas possible, but where does that process stop? Surely it can't go on forever?

Riccini: Oh God! Well we started replanting our farm 12 or 14 years ago, and we went to 1.5 metres planting apart in the rows. Subsequently we've gone down to 1.25 metres, and then some of the planting we've done we've gone down to 60 centimetres which is incredibly close to plant to a tree and it's almost like a hedge, we call it 'the fruit wall' system. Where it stops? I don't know the answer to that, you obviously can't plant them



much tighter than that, but we've started going up as well. So, when we were picking trees the rationale was, ok, never use a ladder because you're spending too much money, you're paying somebody too much time to go up and pick the trees at the top, so therefore everybody brought their trees down in height because you could pick them from the ground and that was quicker. But what's happened now is we've gone closer in the row, we've brought them down to a metre or 1.25. But now we've started to go up again, because now the rationale is 'right, we've gone as close as we can', we're cropping from 1 metre off the ground up to 2.5 metres off the ground and we're cropping as close as we can in the row – where else can we crop? Oh we can go up! Because the rationale is it costs you, let's say £4.20 for a tree, so whether you make tree 2.5 metres tall or 3.5 metres tall, you don't have to pay any more for that extra metre. You'll have to put up some extra stake which will cost you an extra 30p or something like that. But actually, there is an argument that says well that fruit is almost free that you're cropping at the top, it's not, there are obviously extra costs, you have to pay extra annual pruning costs, that sort of thing, and might have to pay an extra £1 a bin or £3 a tonne to pick the stuff at the top. But actually, you don't have to pay anymore for the ground because you've already got the ground, and you don't have to pay anymore for the tree 'cos you've already bought the tree, so the rationale is to go high.

Joe: And you don't have to pay for the irrigation or...

Riccini: It's all already in place! So you're fixed overheads, or all your establishment costs are all virtually the same, except for maybe a taller stake. So that's the rationale there.

Joe: So potentially in another 50 years we might be seeing very close together, but also very tall, fruit trees?

Riccini: Well I think the maximum height...because then you start talking about light levels, and I don't know how technical you want to me to get but, you start talking about light levels and light is key to producing good fruit. It's not just about making the apple red, although that is obviously a factor because it has to be marketed in that way, but good light levels into the tree actually produce really good fruit buds and it's the fruit bud that makes the apple. If you have weak fruit bud because it hasn't got strong light then you get weak, small apples basically, and they don't even set maybe. So there's going to be a finite height that we can get to before you start losing light or you start getting light interception from one row to the next, because one row will be shading too much of the next row, ok, so there will be a finite height. ... the best thing about fruit growing, well it's a long term business anyway because fruit orchards have been lasting up to 20 years and they're going to go to 15 years now because of the way we're growing fruit, probably be even 12 years soon. But it is changing and everybody keeps on trying different systems, it's probably the same in every industry isn't really to be honest. But it is quite interesting to see how things have changed so quickly. In our lifetime – and I find that in itself is exciting. The frustrating thing is that within the last ten years things have



probably changed exponentially quicker than at any time in the last 30 or 40 years. And it's really frustrating, planting an orchard, and then thinking...you always think you're planting the concept orchard, the best orchard, and then in four years' time you're already thinking 'oh my god – it's already out of date!' And that's frustrating but also exciting at the same time because you can't wait for something to be old enough to grub and be able to replant again. And I have to say we pay far more attention to the maths, or to the finances of an orchard than my parent's generation ever did, maybe because of the fact that in those days it was so easy for them to make money, and it was. Certainly pre common market, maybe up until 1980 it was probably fairly easy. It's quite interesting because I've have friends who were of that generation, and they quite freely admitted they would plant something, or a variety of something, because they liked it, or it grew well, or it was easy to crop or prune or something like that, and then they'd say to the supermarkets "there it is – you've got to sell it!". And what they couldn't get their heads around was the fact that the supermarkets could turn around and say "well actually, we don't need this, and if we don't want to buy that variety 'cos we don't like it then we'll go somewhere else thank you very much". And that's what I'm saying about the 1970's and 1980's, my parent's generation couldn't grasp the idea that, 'hang on a minute, we've got to be market led' - and they weren't market led. They were so used to just putting something in the ground, producing it and selling it. Because, yunno, there wasn't 'too much' fruit around. There wasn't the imports that there are now. There wasn't the option for the supermarkets to go anywhere else. And then all of a sudden transport or freight became so much cheaper, everything became so much cheaper, and the supermarkets turned round and said "right, we'll get French thank you very much" and we thought "why? We're English, you've got to buy *our* stuff!" and they said "well actually I don't have to buy it at all, I'll go wherever I want". So we had to react, or my father's generation had to react, and some of them reacted quickly enough, some of them didn't react at all, some of them were a bit too slow to say to the supermarkets "what do you want from us? And then we'll grow it". And it not that black and white, of course its not, but that is the essence of the 70's, 80's and 90's if you like and the changes that have occurred, and I'll always put a caveat – in my opinion! That's from my angle, from where I see it. And as a result, you know, Cox's is a classic. We used to grow, and we're talking bins now which is a third of a tonne, we used to grow two and half thousand bins of Cox's right up until probably 1995, '99, something like that. But all the time we were drastically reducing our reliance on Cox, and everytime we could afford to grub a Cox orchard and replant it with Gala or Braeburn we would do that, simply because Cox is really hard to grow, its highly specialised, you don't get the yields, you don't get the tonnage per hectare, the storage is always a problem, it doesn't colour well, the supermarkets don't particularly want that variety anymore, not as much as they used to. So, where we were struggling to get 40 tonnes a hectare of Cox's, we can easily get 50 tonnes a hectare of Gala, with a superb grade out, and probably 70 or 80 tonnes of Braeburn, again with a superb grade out – and the supermarkets want it! That's the difference – we're not sitting there going 'we're growing Cox because we've always grown Cox'. Well I don't care, Why does the supermarket care? Why should it? You know, everyone slams the supermarkets. Everybody, whether it's the consumer the



supplier, or whatever. The reality is, we've chosen to live in a market driven society. So the consumer has only got themselves to blame if they don't have choice and variety available on the supermarket shelf. They are the ones that are picking up Gala and Braeburn, they're not picking up Cox's or Cameo or Discovery or something like that, they are not doing it. So we have to react to what the supermarket wants, which in turn actually reacts to what the consumer wants. You could argue that the supermarket dictates what the consumer wants by only putting that on the shelf – I don't know enough about marketing at all, but I would certainly question that. Why would a supermarket sell something that, or put on their shelves something that somebody didn't want? They're only going to sell more of something that people do want, surely. So that's my basic opinion on supermarkets, but we're digressing aren't we!

Joe: Well no, not at all, I mean supermarkets are perhaps the most significant thing really...

Riccini: Change! Well, absolutely, it's absolute change. Its something like, they sell 87%, or something ridiculous, of every piece of fruit that's sold. The greengrocers, bless their hearts, they're not in the game anymore. There's a lot of niche...you look at the green grocers that are on the high street and they're very highly specialised, very good at what they do and they've chosen a target audience whoever that may be, and they'll survive. But the reality is that 87%, or something ridiculous, is sold in supermarkets, so we as growers have to react to that and do what they want.

Joe: From my experience so far doing this project, a sort of theme I see emerging is one of these tiny smallholdings cutting out middle men, and selling direct to the consumer...

Riccini: Yes. Yes, farmers markets, farm shops, absolutely. But there's no scope for growth! If you are happy with, let's call it £25,000 a year or whatever they generate as a net profit, if you're happy with that and you have no ambition to get bigger, then that's absolutely great. It's a lifestyle, providing you a nice way of life. Good for you. And I've got no problem with that. And I think what you're going to see in the next 20 years is farms my size, 140 acres, disappearing. I'll tell you that for nothing – we won't be here! If I get to retirement age I will be a very happy man without selling up, and I'm a profitable business. The reality is, you either become a 20 acre farmers' market farm, or you become 5,6,700 hundred acres, where your overheads are just spread, and spread, and spread, and you have your own pack house, your own cold stores, you do everything yourself from start to finish. Now I'm not saying that's going to happen in my generation, I hope it's not, but I'll count myself lucky if I can still be here in 20 years' time.

Joe: So you'd consider a big farm to be what, upwards of 500 or 600 acres these days.

Riccini: Yeah, yeah. But it's not just about the size of the farm that's crucial, it's the other costs, if they can absorb those other costs which are storage, packing, packaging and marketing, if they can bring that into, into within their own business as well, and it's



not done third party, then you have a chance to survive. And for that you need critical mass. Now if you think that...take a bin of fruit, I like to refer to a bin of fruit, you're aware of what a bin of fruit looks like I guess, its 350 kilos give or take 10 kilos. If you think that probably in excess of 65% of the costs of getting that apple or that bin of fruit onto the supermarket shelf are 'ex farm'. In other words, 35% of the productions costs are irrigation, pruning, picking, spraying 'blah blah blah' – all on farm costs. After that, what I call 'off farm costs' which are storage, transport, packing, packaging, marketing- all of that is an off farm costs. I don't have any of those cause I don't have a cold store, I don't have a pack house, and therefore I don't have any transport 'blah blah blah', so I'm paying for all of that third party. Somebody is making money out of me out of that, of course they are, I don't expect them not to, and I don't expect anyone to do it at cost. So if you could bring those in house and do it yourself, that's another profit centre, OK, but you have to have critical mass in order to be able to do that. Critical mass has go to be in excess, I would suggest now, of 30,000 bins, 10,000 tonnes of fruit, in order to have a pack house that is viable and cold stores and so on and so forth. If you can't get to 30,000 bins or 10,000 tonnes then you are not going to be in the game in 20 years' time, that's my belief. We're in the game now, we're very very fortunate, we're a member of a cooperative that shares cold storage and uses pack houses that other members of the cooperative have built themselves. Now we're sort of hanging on the coat tails of those guys, they're making money out of us by packing our fruit, but one day they'll have enough fruit of their own to say 'well, actually I don't need your fruit, or actually I'm going to charge you more for packing your fruit, because you've got nowhere else to go so I can charge you what I want really'. I'm not saying that's going to happen tomorrow, but actually, that could conceivably happen. So what happens is, oh no, my margins are tighter and tighter and tighter, I can't control the 65% of costs for producing an apple because I'm not in control of them, I don't owe any of those costs, I can't do anything about it.

Joe: It sounds quite cut throat really...

Riccini: Well it is, but that's capitalism, that's economics, that's reality. Unless you become a socialist state or communist state, you are subject to free market. And everybody, although god knows why, (it makes me so cross) wants cheaper and cheaper food, when if they actually looked at themselves, and looked at what percentage of their income actually goes onto food, they'd be embarrassed, they would be ashamed of themselves. They've probably got their plasma flatscreen TV's hanging up there – I don't think they ask the cost of that! I mean, you'll probably know this much better than I can, but what percentage of our expenditure from a weekly shop goes on food? 15%? 17%? I bet it's not much more than that.

Joe: I believe in the 1940's we'd spend something like 60%...

Riccini: 60%, so actually farmers should be congratulated, *actually*. Because we're still in business, **we've actually cut your food bill by a third, or by two thirds, since the war,**



and you're still moaning about how much you're paying for food! It's a bloody disgrace, actually. Farmers should be upheld as heroes if you like, for doing a really good job of producing food, because you can't live without it. Just imagine, putting another penny on a litre of milk for example, that would change farmers' lives. Those poor buggers that have got dairy herds are going out of business left right and centre – what's a penny a litre of milk going to do to your life? Absolutely nothing. What's it going to do to his life? It'd change it irrevocably. And the same with me. Now I'm not complaining, because I've never complained about, I've always believed in a free market, but dear Lord, but sometimes... And then you can get all romantic about it, and emotional about it, and say 'hang on, you love your countryside don't you England? You love it, don't you like seeing cows in the field, don't you like seeing pasture? Don't you like seeing beautiful orchards? Well if you do then you've got to pay a little bit more for it'. Yunno, that's not holding anybody to ransom, that's just a reality. Gosh I'm talking a lot aren't I!

Joe: I suppose this is wrapped up in the reality that consumers themselves have become increasingly alienated, detached, from a sense of where their food comes from and who it affects?

Riccini: Exactly. Detached. And quite frankly Joe I don't think they care to be honest, as long as they can get cheap food, I don't think they care at all. I don't think there is enough people that care enough about where their food come from. And I haven't got a problem going up against foreign imports, I've got no problem with that whatsoever. Foreign imports have actually modernised our industry, our food industry, there's no doubt about that, we're as good as anybody in Holland and France and they're perceived to be some of the best in the world, were as good as them at production. Absolutely no problem at all. I've got no problem with competing, I just want people to understand that one day, your world is going to change unless you see what's happening.... I sound like King Canute, trying to push back the tide now, and I'm really not. I'm not bitter, I'm not angry about the way the industry has changed, because I know that things can't ever stay the same. I get that. But if people want to see pretty little farms, with one cow, a milking cow and a pig... it just doesn't work like that anymore. But that's people's *perception*, it still is. Nothing's changed. People still think there are sheep under orchards, under trees, yunno under apple trees, it's ridiculous, absolutely ridiculous. But that's all about farms, yunno, I think we employ 1% or some ridiculous figure of the population, it's probably not even 1% of people who are employed in agriculture in some way or another, maybe it's as high as 2%. The reality is that just after the war, what was it, probably 40% were involved in agriculture? ...

I think, its quite interesting to see how things have changed...oh yea, we were talking about populations, and people employed on farms, and that's obviously a result of trying to drive economies into the business, and wages, people cost money. You become more and more machinery reliant and as a result you do get the population increasingly detached from farming. That's the way the world is, we can't do much about that.



Joe: A number of farmer we have spoken to during the course of this project have spoken about the, and I don't know if it's the fault of the farmers, or the fault of the consumers, or both – but there's no way for them to speak with each other.

Riccini: What, consumers and farmers?

Joe: Yeah there seems to be no dialogue...

Riccini: I'm actually...I think farmers are actually, have become quite introvert. I certainly have, I used to be...well no I suppose I've not become introverted, I don't think I could, but I've certainly noticed how there's an 'us and them' mentality. This is especially true in the villages where the people living in the villages have no interest in the farms whatsoever, and always complain about mud on the road, about tractors slowing them down, they think they have a right to walk anywhere they want whether there is a footpath or not. And what I call the 'horsey set', people who have five acres of pasture, they have three horses on it and they walk their horses wherever they want to. I tend to think people don't have a lot of respect for farms or farmers, because they are always confrontational. They think they own the countryside if you like, or they have a right to do whatever they want, whenever they want, and there's nothing positive to come out of it. When I was boy and lived in the village, in this village, we employed half the school children, in their summer holidays would be spent picking early apples or strawberries or whatever. And so there was that affinity, you are absolutely right, and there was that understanding. There was that symbiotic relationship, we'd provide jobs and we'd get a service done in getting our fruit picked. That certainly doesn't happen anymore, and as much as I've tried, so hard and I really have, to employ English people for fruit picking – they don't want to know! Nobody wants to know, and this is why the countryside is full of Eastern Europeans, bless them – they are *lovely people*. They are intelligent, they're well educated by and by, most of them speak English and if they're not they're teaching themselves while they're here, and they want to work and God how they want to work. They realise the value of money. And it's not because they are cheaper, it's because they are here every day wanting to work. We used to grow strawberries, until about 12 years ago, and we started out just by having English workers. And we'd have 50 English workers as a minimum on our books, in order to get 25 to turn up every day. And it would never be the same 25, it really wouldn't. We only needed 25 and we employed 50. They would always have some sort of excuse, yunno... or they were hungover, or their car had broken down, or their little Jonny was off school today so they couldn't get into work, or they just couldn't be bothered, or they earned enough money the day before that they didn't need any money for that day, because they'd earned enough money for their beer! It actually was like that. **These guys, they're here every single day because they live here for a start. They want to be here. They earn exactly the same amount of money as if they were English, so in excess of £400 a week when we're picking apples without any problem at all. And they take that back to their own countries and OK, it's worth three times that in their own countries. But £400 a week, that's the equivalent to £20,000 a year – I cannot find an English person to do that.**



And that, absolutely disgusts me and I don't know how to solve that problem. Nobody in this country is prepared to do manual labour, and it's absolutely despicable. I don't know how to get around the problem, there's almost shame in doing manual labour, in working hard, and I don't understand that at all. And I'm fed up of trying to get round it, I'd much rather have a really nice gang of Eastern Europeans. And I hate labelling them as 'Eastern Europeans' – as 'people who happen to come from Eastern Europe' 'cos that what they are. They are really nice, hardworking people, trying to make their way in life. And I love them for that, and I have the upmost respect for them. And the common misconception from a lot of people, especially working class people, when I talk to them, or meet them in the pub or in the street or wherever is, they'll say to me "well you only employ them 'cos their cheaper" - no they're not! They're not cheaper at all. They're the same price as everybody else; there are laws about how you pay people in this country. It's nothing to do with them being cheaper, it all about them actually wanting to bloody work, and I can't fault them for that. Shall I get off my soap box now?

Joe: No not all! I mean it might be interesting to reflect on what social and political processes have taken place, which have turned British workers off the idea of manual labour...

Riccini: Oh can I have an opinion? It's only my opinion again

Joe: Of course, go for it!

Riccini: Well my opinion is, and it's probably a common opinion, but... I sound like a Daily Mail reader but I'm not. I think benefits are too easy – and I really really mean that. There was this chap, it must have been around 15 years ago when I lived in Stourmouth, which is where I grew up. There must have been just about 4 council houses up in Stourmouth and in one of the council houses there was a chap I knew, 'Trevor' – a really nice bloke. And he had five children, and he said 'I'm looking for a job but I need... let's say... £10 an hour for the sake of it'. How on earth can you expect to get £10 an hour Trevor, you've got no qualifications, you're a manual labourer, which is fine. But I dunno what the going rate was back then, probably £5 an hour or something. I said 'I can't afford to pay to £10 an hour'. He said 'well I've worked out my benefits and if I get a job I will lose most of my benefits'. 'Cos he'd found out that he was on the equivalent of £17,000 a year because he had five children. And one was a baby so the social carer, worker, or whatever, came round and said 'well you haven't got a carpet in your living room and you've got a baby that crawls around so we'll have to give you a carpet cos' otherwise it's too cold for the baby...or you need a washing machine 'cos you've got much washing to do'. And why on earth? Where was the incentive for that man to go and work? I don't blame him, I really don't blame him. So actually, I don't blame English people in a way, for not working 'cos their benefits are so high. Now I know that's Carte Blanche and a very broad brushed statement, I do understand that. And this is where working tax credits are supposed to offset...I guess... top things up with the working tax credits. But nobody really wants, they won't get out of bed for £300 a week. I can't find



anybody. The minimum wage is £6.90 or something now, call it £7, its £280 a week. Nobody's going to come to work for that. 'Cos the works too hard. It is hard work. But I haven't got a problem with hard work. If you've got a problem with hard work then don't come. Therefore they don't come. The piece work rate is different. We were talking about £400 a week earlier. We pay by the bin of fruit, it gives you the opportunity to earn a lot of money. Some of my workers when we had to do a seven day week, were earning over £600 a week, yunno, £650. Well that's a lot of money, in anybody's language and I can't get English people to do that. I'll tell you a funny story, can I just? It was it Kent University student and he was a really lovely bloke. He phoned up my agency, which is called Concordia, which is a charity run agency, which issues all the visas for workers, and sources all the workers for me, Government approved and all that. And he rang up and said 'I'm looking to work on a farm in Kent... I'm at Kent University, I'm surrounded by orchards and I live in Whitstable'. He said 'I really want to get to know my county', he was quite a romantic yunno 'and I really want to get in it, and feel it, and experience life on a Kentish farm, and I want to work really really hard'. So Concordia rang me up and say 'well what about it William?' I said 'yes absolutely no problem. He's obviously articulate, he's intelligent, he says he wants to work hard, fantastic. I took him on in the middle of June, and I already had 12 workers with me at the time from Eastern Europe, I can't remember which countries. And we were doing a job which is called 'thinning apples' which involves taking apples off a tree when they're probably only 15-20mm in size. You literally just pull 50% of them off because otherwise the rest of the apples won't grow big enough. So that's their job. I'd worked out the price, it was 40 pence a tree. Most of my... I think they were Bulgarian workers were earning, this was about three years ago, I think £8 an hour, this was at piece work rate. They were doing 30 trees, whatever it is, per hour. And they were working hard, and they were tired at the end of the day, but they were earning £8 an hour. Erm, and this poor lad, he tried really really hard but he just couldn't get it and he said 'William, I'm really really sorry but I'm going to have to stop work'. He said 'I'll see the week out' – but he didn't even do a week, I think he only did 4 days. This was after the second day, he turned round and he said 'I just can't do it, it's costing me money'. I said 'what do you mean it's costing you money?'. He said 'well it's really hot isn't it?' I said 'well yeah it's fairly warm, its 22 degrees or whatever, but have you got water?' He said 'yes, that's the problem'. He said 'I do 3 trees and then I drink a whole bottle of Evian!' (laughs). The whole bottle of Evian is costing me £1.40 and I've just made £1.20. I said 'well why are you drinking Evian, why don't you drink tap water? He said 'Oh well I couldn't possibly do that'. So it was actually costing him money to work for me. I said 'look, I'll pay you hourly rates. See the week out and I'll pay you hourly rates and just do your best'. So I tried to get an English worker – and that's what happened! Their perception of what work was, and what bardhip was, it had to be Evian, it couldn't be tap water, and 'oh no, this is too hard for me actually, I can only do 3 trees an hour or whatever it was. He was earning the equivalent of about £5 an hour, the other guys were doing £8. Ridiculous.

Joe: On that topic, we now almost certainly have referendum coming up about leaving the EU. What might it bring?



Riccini: I would like us to stay in the EU. For marketing reasons we've adapted to the situation. But also, quite bluntly, we get a grant for capital investment from the EU, of 4% of our turnover if we match it with 4%. I don't know if you've heard this from other growers? So therefore the EU has helped me grow my business far quicker than I ever would have been able to without it. You could argue that I've got less money for my product because we are in the EU, but actually we'll never know the answer to that, to be honest. If we're out of the EU, but still in the common market, I don't know the politics of that, I don't get that at all. The reality is I get 4% of my gross turnover to reinvest in capital. As a result of that, over the last 8 years I've probably spent a quarter of a million pounds in creating a cherry business, which I never had before. So therefore that's got to be a good thing. So I'd quite happily stay in the EU. I think we've adapted to the market place anyway. I can't see supermarkets, if we got out of the EU, paying us anymore for our fruit because it would be more expensive from Europe. I don't, I don't believe that to be the case. And the other thing with the EU of course is labour, what would happen with the labour? It's basically a free open market, open borders as we know it at the moment, for EU members, if we leave the EU with got to go through the whole rigmarole again of visas...blah blah blah...it would probably kill our business to be honest. Without doubt.

Joe: Yes that's what we've been hearing from most of the farmers I spoken to him, certainly on the arable side...

Riccini: Wants to stay in? Yes. Yes. We've built a business on the back of the EU, or being member of the EU, whether its the grant money or the labour. Yunno, soft fruit growers would go out of business tomorrow if they didn't, 'cos, 45% of their costs, of their costs are labour. Can you imagine just not having any labour all of a sudden and having to pay English...I don't even want to think about it! Yes, it would be horrendous. What I'd like to emphasise at this point, we were talking about labour generally, an Eastern Europeans or Europeans, whatever you want to call them, I have to emphasise that they are not exploited in any way, shape or form. They are there because they are good workers, and they earn good money. And the bottom line is, its manual labour. You're not going to earn £20 an hour. You're not going to be on a salary. You're on a minimum wage, plus whatever you can pick at piecework rate. And that's life. And it's not a bad, it's not a bad living.

Joe: I think what you're saying is very important, and it's perhaps something that we've not heard enough of throughout this project. It's this recognition that farming has changed, not just because of, yunno, regulations to do with farming specifically, but due to much wider social processes, political processes...

Riccini: Absolutely

Joe: The welfare state, and the evolution of the welfare state, the decline of British manufacturing...



Riccini: Well in a way we're classed as primary producers...no that's coal and stuff like that. In a way we are...a friend of mine always describes a farm as a factory without a roof on it. And that's exactly what it is to be honest. It's a factory without a roof. And, yunno, if you look at England, we employ god knows how many people in the service industry. But the service industry by definition doesn't produce anything. In my simple mind there is no production. I don't know how we have lived as long as we have in this country without a manufacturing base, whether its factories or farming, or coal mining, or whatever you want to call it, primary production or whatever. I don't know how we can keep supplying a service industry living on the world of finance alone. ...

I'm actually totally ignorant when it comes to the English economy, I've never fully understood it, all I know is that I a way, and it's probably not a very nice thing to say, but in a way, 2008 – austerity - was probably one of the best things that ever happened to this country and probably not before time. I know this is very simplistic, but then, I'm just a farmer, I think we we're all living on credit cards and the value of our house increases. Well the bubble burst didn't it. It's as simple as that. It's such a reality check. It's just a shame that that reality check, and the realisation that you can't live on credit forever, and you can't live on the value of your house forever, it's a shame that that didn't transfer into people's mind set, in that, yunno, 'I actually have got to work for a living'. I just wish that we could find a way to make people realise that you actually have got to produce something. This nation has actually got to produce something in order to be able to survive and to flourish. It's all very well, yunno, having the Nissan factory in Sunderland producing cars for Nissan. Ok we get jobs from that, of course we do, but the profit doesn't come to England does it, the profit goes to Nissan. So I understand why we do those things, but I actually think that we can't live on the square mile of London forever, yunno, with its finance industry, forever. And the normal working people, of which I count myself as one whether you like it or not, you know I'm just a normal working bloke who owns land, have got to get off their backsides and work. God, I'm sounding just like my Dad now! I'm so sorry. I wish he'd done that more. Sorry, can we move on 'cos I'm getting lost now, remind me why are we here?

Joe: We were talking quite broadly about the wider processes that have impacted on farming. I mean when we talk about change, do you think there is something that I've not really raised yet, something that you would like to talk about?

Riccini. Yes. Well, bureaucracy. I can remember when if somebody fell of a picking ladder in the 1970's or 1980's you'd go in and say 'well that's your own stupid fault for falling off the ladder', and today there's this litigation or suing culture that comes from America, obviously. And now we have to train - a half day course - on how to use a three step ladder. For all my workers, to which they duly have to sign a document to say that they have been trained fully in how to use a step ladder in order to pick fruit. Well how ridiculous is that? I had a farm walk with some fellow growers and I hosted it here, about five years ago, and somebody asked me about my health and safety policy and training



and that sort of thing. They actually said ‘what’s your health and safety policy on this farm’ and I said ‘well actually our health and safety policy is common sense, that’s our first line in our policy, is use your common sense’. But you’re actually not allowed to use common sense anymore, you’re really not. I mean I know it’s in every industry whether it’s the building site, or the factory or probably the shop floor, yunno, how many dresses you can hang on a coat hanger or something ridiculous like that. But the amount of paperwork that we have to go through because we’re so scared of being sued by somebody because we’re not allowed to use common sense anymore. People are not allowed to use common sense anymore, I find it really really sad. And it’s just homogenising everybody, there’s no differentiation between people anymore, characters, anything, it’s all gone. And I find it really frustrating, and I almost say things now, when we go out or we have farm walks, just to be controversial to make people stand up and think ‘You’re not towing to party line – god what a refreshing thing to do’. And I find it really frustrating and I’m going to get really angry now, my two kids went to the local village school. They’re 18 now. They went to the primary school in Preston, and got on well with the teachers there, I think there was 118 students there. And I offered to show the top class how raspberries and strawberries were grown, and to show them apples as well if they wanted to. Cos’ we used to grow those but we don’t anymore. And the teachers said ‘yeah that’s fine’. And I’m going back 10 years now, so even 10 years ago it wasn’t that bad. And I went in the farm minibus, I picked them up, I hadn’t done a CPC course which is something you have to do now, if you know you have to drive a minibus, that came in last year, I hadn’t had a police check for child molesting or whatever that ones’ called. I picked them up, two teachers, two trips cos it was a mile away, 16 on a minibus, got thirty people back to the farm. Fantastic. I had these kids in the palm of my hand, now that’s not easy when you don’t have animals on the farm, ‘cos kids love animals, you can stroke them it, pet it, feed it, whatever. I had these kids picking strawberries, I showed them how to pick them correctly, I showed them how to pick them badly, I showed them everything. And the same with raspberries. And I gave them all a punnet each and we’d written their name underneath on a bit of paper, and we gave them a competition, I made it fun! And my supervisor, it was their job to pick the best picked punnet of strawberries, and the same for the raspberries. The kids absolutely loved it. I put them all on a tractor and trailer and we drove down to the raspberry field and we did exactly that same thing again. I couldn’t do that today. There’s no way in a million years, I could do that. ‘A’ the teachers wouldn’t let me and ‘B’ I would be so frightened of one of them falling over and hurting themselves and their parents suing me that I’m not going to do it. Now you talk about disconnect between the public and the farmers, that’s a brilliant example of how farmers will say ‘sod you, I’m going to stick my head in the ground and I don’t want anything to do with you, because I can’t afford it, it’s just not worth the agro’. And that, health and safety and litigation or whatever you want to call it, is one of the prime reasons you don’t have public on the farm. When have people aren’t on footpaths, we’ve got two footpaths running through this farm for instance, and when they’re not on the footpath I go mad. I tell them off. And they can’t understand why I’m cross with them. If you fall over a tree stump, or trip over something, or you get sprayed by a pesticide by mistake, you’ll sue the arse off me...If you’re on a footpath I know



exactly where you are so I know exactly how to behave on that footpath. But if I'm not expecting you, I could run you over with a tractor. And that's reality. That is absolute reality. And so therefore, yeah, that's disconnect. But the society has brought it upon themselves. It's not the farmers' fault. No way. You know we still have to stand here...yunno I do farm walks for fruit growers, every now and again somebody will ring me up and say 'this is East Kent Fruit Society can we have a farm walk? What have you got going on this year? Have you planted anything differently?' I stand there, in the yard, talking to farmers my age, and there's not many younger than me now I'm afraid and people older than me, and I have to stand there, and I have to point out to the exit they've just come in, and I have to say 'in case of a fire go out of that gate'. And they look at me as if I'm stupid, but they all know because they've all got to do it. And it's embarrassing, it's ridiculous, it's demeaning. I'm supposed to give them, in theory, all a high visibility vest, well how stupid! Where's your common sense gone? I have to point out if there's hole in the ground – don't break your ankle. Oh god, yunno, it's just so frustrating. And it's depressing.

Joe: So health and safety is one. What are the other major shifts in the bureaucracy of farming?

Riccini: Oh erm, food traceability. That's a good one, food traceability. I mean I get that now, there's so many food scare stories that the media generate, and some of them are justified and some of them aren't. So we have food traceability and I don't have an issue with that, recording the day the fruits picked, where it was picked, who it was picked by... erm ... how long it was stored for, where it got stored, at what temperature it was stored at, all that sort of thing. Continuous residue testing for pesticides, we have ongoing residue testing - I haven't got a problem with that either. And all of that stuff makes sense, it's the 21st century after all, I get that, I understand that. I think some of it is unnecessary but, you know, where do you draw the line? So I understand that completely, and that's one of the changes that's happened. We are much more accountable for everything we produce. Yeah, fine. Fair enough. So... health and safety, traceability... data recording, of course, we have to record everything we do, whether its water use, the spraying of pesticides, whether it's the use of foliar feeds, nutrients for feeding the crop. That all has to be recorded. Fair enough, not a problem, we can do it. We spend more time in the office now than we ever used to. That's life. The biggest one is always going to be the labour, recording all of their training and getting them to sign it off that they've been trained, and this is all about protecting yourself again from not being sued. I get that...well actually I don't get that...I don't get the training side of it at all, you've got a picking bucket and a ladder. None of them have got moving parts. Oh and then health and safety on the farm as far as accommodation goes, that's quite a good one, because accommodation has come back to farming, but in a different way. You don't have these nice little Victorian farm cottages everywhere, you have mobile homes for the Eastern Europeans to stay in. So we obviously have to comply with all the fire standards, side of things, smoke detectors, carbon monoxide, gas, electricity – that's all done every year. So that's another week of my life spent getting all of that ready for before they arrive on the



1st June. That's got to be done. But that is one of the nice things, I have to say, one of the nice things is having people on the farm again. Because it's very quiet and lonely in the Winter if you like. When they go in October, its brilliant because you've had them for five months or whatever, and you think 'thank god they've gone now – I don't have to take them shopping one a week in the mini bus to Canterbury, I don't have to check off their forms, I don't have to generate payslips, I don't have to do any of that, I don't have to do anything. And then after Christmas you start getting a bit twitchy, a bit eager again, you start thinking 'ah yunno, the seasons going to be upon us soon, before you know it'. So you start looking forward to the first of June and I have to go to a road show, it's called Concordia Road Show', Concordia are the agents that get us our workers, so the update us on any law changes for employment, blah blah blah. And that sort of clicks you into gear again and you're quite looking forward to having people on the farm, because you know things are going to happen. Things are starting to happen. Things happen all through the winter, yunno were pruning, we've got 180,000 trees to prune or something ridiculous, so we have contractors doing that, or we're planting, or whatever, you know there's always two or three people around, definitely. But when they arrive you down tools yourself, and this is us, on our side of the farm, you know we do still drive tractors and plant trees, you know, that's us doing that. But when they turn up I spend all my time supervising them, moving them around, giving them one job or another, making sure their caravans are clean. This sort of thing. And it becomes... I always say to them we have an induction day, I have to show them a health and safety DVD, what a surprise, I set them all up with bank accounts. I tell them when I'm going to take them shopping, we take them every Monday night, that's sort of thing. I tell them if they've got a problem to come and see me, the spare gas bottles for their caravan are over there, this is how you change them. All that sort of thing, I do all that sort of thing for them. And then at the end of I tell them they're expected to work hard, you know, 'we work hard' I say 'but we play hard as well'. So after a month of them working we have a big party or something, we have a barbeque and we buy loads of beer and vodka 'cos they like vodka, and I get very drunk, make a fool of myself. They think it's hilarious, and they know that I'm a human being. And if I haven't broken the ice by then, which I normally have anyway, then that certainly does it. And then if there's slack time, and it's a hot day in August I'll say 'who wants to go to the beach?' So we all pile into the mini bus, we take them down to the beach. It's great. And there are Romanians, Lithuanians, Latvians, Bulgarians...they don't speak each other's language, especially Romanians because that's a Latin based language, the rest are Germanic or something, I don't know. So some of them can interact quite a bit and some of them, especially the Romanians really can't. But they all try really hard and we all try and speak English together, but they'll all pile in together, they'll all throw each other in the sea or whatever and they'll all get drunk together in the kitchen area. And I love it. You know I've almost lost faith with the English, I've almost given up that... it will never be like that again, we'll never have English again. But you just embrace ... this is the new way and that's it. So you have to take all the good things from what you've got now, all the new things that are good, and embrace them, and nurture them, and it's great. And I love some of the returnees, those that come back year on year, normally three years is probably enough. And I say 'what did you do with your



money?' You know, especially if its couples, if you get couples that are living together, whether they're married or just boyfriend and girlfriend, they have common aim. They want to make as much money as they can for their family or for buying a house or something like that. And between them, in five months they'll probably net £12,000 after all their expenses of living here. They'll probably go home with £12,000, well imagine what £12,000 looks like in Bulgaria – a phenomenal amount of money. And they say 'well we bought half a house and next year we're going to finish paying for it', this sort of thing. And I love to know what's going on and I find it really nice that we're actually making a contribution to their economy. We don't get so many Polish anymore that we used to, I mean we still get a few Polish, its almost...they were the first to come, you know, fifteen years ago, and they really worked hard you know. I don't want to generalise and go 'oh Polish are better than Bulgarian', I'll never do that, they're all just people. But the Polish were so focussed on doing a really good job and working really hard. And then taking their money home and almost building their country again. I know they've had a lot of EU money but you can see... I've got friends in Poland now that have worked here, and they've shown me what they've done with their money and it's not wasted, and I love that, I just think that's a beautiful thing, that in some pathetic philanthropic way we've managed to help people who have helped us, and I love that. And I'm going to be all romantic now...I was at college in York for three years, and you've got the Rowntree building, the Cadbury building, Cadbury row or something like that, and all these people, all these Victorian philanthropists who made millions from the working class people but then built them a hospital, and then built them proper terraced houses, not these slums. And you know, left the Joseph Rowntree Foundation and that sort of thing. I think that's beautiful – Ok they made money out of them, but they gave them jobs, they paid them, they housed them, they built them schools you know. And I think ...in a way its benevolent dictatorship isn't it, because you weren't elected to do that, you were rich because maybe your parents were rich, or you're landed gentry or whatever, but you've actually given something back, and I really like that. And I'm sure people like Branson do that all the time, I'm sure they do, and I think that's a good thing. But its benevolent dictatorship in a way, isn't it, I'm telling you what's good for you, you need a house there or a school there or whatever. And it's also in my interests to keep you healthy so you keep working. I get all of that. But that's the way society was, and in some funny little way all these fruit farms around Kent and East Anglia and Sussex or whatever, they're doing the same thing to Eastern European countries, in a very small way, because the English don't want it. They've already got it. Maybe that's the problem.

Joe: One thing I'd like to talk about, one thing that's seems quite interesting, is taking over farms, generations taking over farms. Children inheriting from parents. You've taken over from your parents, but it does seem quite common that this current generation is deciding that maybe they'll sell the farm

Riccini: It's the saddest thing. It's really sad. My son has absolutely no interest in the farm. He's 19 and he's studying to be a merchant navy officer, an officer in the merchant navy. My daughter whose 16 and has just started taking her A-Levels thinks she might



be, but she knows she's only saying that to make me happy, bless her heart. My brother's daughter, no interest. And I find it really really sad. But on the other hand, what right have they got to be good farmers? 'Cos I suppose... what right did I have? I think a lot of family farms... when things got tight they went bust, 'cos by what reason does that fact that I'm the son of a farmer, make me a good farmer? I'm going to say fruit grower now, not farmer 'cos that's specifically what we are. And it just lucky that David and I are half decent at it, to be honest. On the other hand, if you are born a shopkeeper's son and wanted to go into farming, you've got absolutely no chance of getting into the farming industry, none whatsoever. Because the capital value of my farm, and I'm sure other farmers and fruit growers have told you this, we're all cash poor but asset rich. My farm, the last piece of land I bought, was three years ago, it cost me £9000 an acre. Today it's valued at £12000 and that was only three years ago. Prior to that, I bought some 8 years ago, and that cost me £5500 an acre. So it's more than doubled, it's almost trebled in price in seven years. So there is absolutely no chance of someone coming in, buying a hundred acres or buying forty acres to make a sustainable living out of it. They've got to be a retired bank manager who's taken a big pay out or something like that.

Joe: Its funny you should say that because we have interviewed farmers who have made their money in the city and then got into farming

Riccini: And then come out and done it. Yes. But that's the only way you can do it. No normal person is ever going to start farming. And I think that's one of the sad things you know... I can't remember which government started selling it off, it might have been Thatcher, I don't know, but there used to be council holding farms. I'm sure you're aware of this in your field. But the majority of those have been sold off now. But that was a great way for somebody who wasn't born into farming to start farming. And those opportunities have now gone, absolutely gone. And I think that's a real shame, I really do. 'Cos you could be missing out on talent there and you'll never know. And that's a shame.

Joe: Yes we met a pig farmer a couple of weeks ago who did a degree in agriculture, got a council holding and eventually they gave him the option to buy.

Riccini: Option to buy, yes. Which is great. Although I don't think they should necessarily give everyone the option to buy because then, where does the next generation go? It doesn't. He was fine. But on our farm, my grandfather started when in all honesty he happened to be a good fruit grower, but he also happened to be in the industry after the war when you couldn't not make money out of farming because everyone was hungry, simplistically speaking. So yes, he made a lot of money but he started... actually I can't remember what he trained as originally trained in but he started with... I think he originally bought 20 acres and get got it up to 250 acres by the time he died in 1971, and it was 250 acres plus all the property. And then he handed it to his two daughters, my Mother and my Aunt as I've told you. And then farming got hard, it got difficult, you had to be viable...there was no automatic 'I'll produce this and I want this for it'...stopped



happening, and that's when farming got difficult. Dave and I, we like to think we've bucked the trend a little bit and got in just in time before my mother lost everything... actually that's not fair 'cos she hasn't lost... I've over exaggerated that a little bit but it's, you know, it's fairly true.

Joe: so when did you say the farms were really struggling, in the 80's?

Riccini: in the 80's yeah. Then... they weren't actually used to doing things themselves. My mother on a two hundred and... well she only had half of it, 160 acres, actually had a farm manager... my parents in divorced in 1970 so that's why I talk about my mother mainly. She had a farm manager on 160 acres, she had 4 farm workers, god knows how many regular casuals, and never did a stroke of work herself. Well that wasn't reality, that was her parent's generation, and she was just living the same way that her father lived, my grandfather lived. You couldn't live like that then, it wasn't sustainable, hence why she kept selling off the farm cottages to keep going. The reality is that David and I, we farm 140 acres now, which is only 20 acres less than what she had on our own. There's nobody else doing it. We have no regular full time staff, there's just me and David. We use contractors in the winter to do the pruning, we do prune 40 acres between ourselves in the winter, and we do the majority of our planting ourselves. You have to get your hands dirty, when you're this big, you have to get your hands dirty, you can't not and that's reality. And that's why to keep trying to get bigger, so that one day you don't have to get your hands dirty. I know one guy, he's the second biggest fruit grower in England now, can I name names or not?

Joe: Of course

Riccini: Mr Clive Goatham. And I knew him fifteen years ago. And fifteen years ago he had 200 acres, 250 acres maybe, and he was driving a fork lift, he was running his pack house, he was the pack house manager, he was the fork lift driver, he was the tractor driver in the Spring. He was doing everything. And he grew and grew and grew, he now got I think 1700 acres of top fruit, one of the most advanced... he's got his own pack house, his own cold storage, own distribution, and really going for it. And every now and then, we sell him some of our fruit and I see him... and he's a really nice down to earth bloke... and he says 'I don't half miss not driving a fork lift'. And yet, he owns probably 60 fork lifts now, yunno, but he misses not driving a fork lift. So it works both ways, he literally sits at his desk, his phone is always in his ear and he's running a big company, a multimillion pound company, a forty-fifty million pound turnover company. Within the space of 15 years he's done that, through planning permission for land he's sold for outward investment, let's put it that way. But every now and again he says 'I don't half miss driving a tractor'. And here's David and I doing our best to get big enough so that we can employ somebody to drive a tractor for us! Yunno it's really weird isn't it, you always want what you can't have don't you. So to a degree, it is lifestyle for David and myself now... that's not fair actually, that's not doing ourselves justice, we are a very viable business, we make a nice living, a good living, what I consider to be a good living



and we have a big asset base. I think a lot of my parent's generation, they loved the lifestyle. And they didn't see it as a business, it was a lifestyle for them. It was the tweed, the hunting, the shooting 'oh and we're farmers'. But actually you have to be a businessman first. Farming isn't a lifestyle, it's actually business. There's no doubt about that. It's a business, and it just happens that you like the lifestyle. And it's all about getting that priority right, and that concept. Once you've got that in your head, that 'I've got to run a business, it's got to be viable... shit... I've got to work hard... oh and by the way it's quite nice getting dirty, it's quite nice having my own tractor, or going shooting on my own land'. If that's the lifestyle you want, great. But, that's the priority, it's business first, lifestyle second.

Joe: And are you saying that that mind set, that outlook... that is something that has changed?

Riccini: Absolutely, 100%. Almost in one generation. I can see, I look round now and I see people my age still farming from when their fathers farmed in order to hang on and build it back up again... and I look at it and... they're either dead in the ground now bless them or got an old tweed jacket on somewhere with their terriers you know. That generation, if our generation hadn't changed, and some of them hadn't changed, we would not be in business now. And it was our generation that went through the pain if you like, I really really believe that. I can't speak for the rest of the industry, but I know for the apple and pear industry, it was our generation that went through the pain and the biggest change. My fathers' generation were going through the change if you like, but didn't realise it! They were too slow, a lot of them. Does that make sense? So yeah, so that's how I see it.

Joe: And this asset... do you think your kids...

Riccini: I went to a dinner, I was invited to a dinner by Lloyds and they had Adam... who presents Country File, whoever it was, anyway. He's this chap, a celebrity, he was the after dinner speaker. And he stood up and he wanted to talk about succession. And he told this really interesting story about this dairy farmer up in the Midlands somewhere who had a two hundred dairy herd, two children, a couple of hundred acres, nice farmhouse, farm buildings. He'd get up every morning, 4 o'clock, feed and milk his cows, come in for breakfast knackered. His kids would get up 'cos they'd be going to school, so he'd have breakfast with them, they saw their Dad knackered, and they'd go to school, come home, and then saw their Dad mucking out the sheds or something. And all they did was see him work. And the fact that he loved it was irrelevant. And he asked his children when they were in their twenties at University, 'do you want this farm or not?' And they both said no, 'no don't want it, we don't want to work like you work'. And he said to them 'are you sure you don't want it' and they said 'no we don't want it'. He said 'right I'm selling it then, I'm going to start enjoying my life'. And he sold it for £5 million, so that was his, he lived off it, that's his £5 million, that's what I'm talking about – assets. And his children went back to him in their thirties and said 'actually Dad, money



isn't everything'. One had been off being financier and the other something else yunno. And they said 'money isn't everything, careers aren't everything – your lifestyle was fantastic...you had to work, but it was a nice life. You had a good life. You were your own boss. It was viable business and it was good lifestyle'. So they came back to their father and they said 'we really wish you hadn't sold the farm because we realise now that money isn't everything and you made 50 grand a year anyway, and you had your own farm'. And they couldn't have that now. It had gone. So what Adam Henson, that was his name, so what Adam Henson was saying to the dinner was that, even if your children say no when they're at University and you're thinking about retiring, and even if their just finishing University and they're saying they don't want to farm, just hang on as long as you can. Because they'll get to their thirties and they'll turn around and say 'no actually we might want it after all!' And by that time, if you've sold it it's too late, they'll never get it back. And that's what I was saying – you can never get in to farming. So my first idea was actually to get to 65, sell the whole bloody lot and live off it, but having heard that, I'm not so sure that... I actually love what I do and that's the other pull. I can't wait for Monday morning ... my partner doesn't get me at all ... I get twitchy, Sunday afternoon I'm thinking 'I want to go to work, I want to come to work'. And I don't even live on the farm. I haven't got a farmhouse, we don't have a farmhouse. I can't wait to get to work, and I consider that one of the luckiest things that I could ever hope for. And I'm determined to be good at what I do because I want respect from my peers. But I'm determined to be good at it because I want to actually do it, I want it to be viable, 'cos I want to do it. So I love getting up in the morning, I love coming to work. I'd work seven days a week if I could but I think that would make me a very boring person because I would have nothing else to talk about. And I should probably do it as long as I can. The trouble is, I think one of the problems there is on a farm this size, is that what makes it viable and what gives us a good return for my brother and myself ... my brothers a year younger than me or 18 months younger than me ... is that we actually don't employ anybody so we save ... doing all the work ourselves, we save £20,000 a year each, by not employing somebody. So simplistically speaking that goes into our pocket, plus the profit. As soon as we start employing somebody the margins start getting very tight, so we're still starting to get to the stage where we're big enough, or we have a big enough turnover that we can employ somebody. Because we know at 60, we can't do the amount of work that we do now. We just physically can't. And that's another sad thing, you know. I count my ability by...an easy way to do it...yunno I've been planting trees, we've been planting since...I can't remember...but from the age of about 35 we've been planting say three thousand trees a year or something like that, sometimes twenty thousand and sometimes none but we've been planting...and I love planting because you're creating something, you're making something, and you look back and think 'oh I've made an orchard'. I love that. But simplistically speaking, I could easily plant 300 trees a day without breaking sweat, and I have got up to 400 trees by really giving it some welly. When I planted last year, for example, I was 51 [years old] last year, I couldn't get past 200. And I thought I was working just as hard as I did ten years ago! I physically couldn't plant more than 200 trees in a day and I was going 'what the hell is wrong with me!?' And it was just a brilliant way of measuring your inability to carry on at the same



level, and you can work out why athletes retire when they do and sportsmen and things. Shit! I can't plant as fast as I used to. So by the time I'm 60 I might be doing 50 trees a day instead of 200. So you know, we've got to employ somebody eventually or we'll sell up. But we have to make the business viable, which we're doing. You know, we bought another 16 acres three years ago, we've planted it up with cherries. That will give us a big enough turnover in three years' time to employ somebody, we know that. To take the weight off our backs. It's quite funny isn't it, I can think three years ahead, and I can think twenty years ahead, but I haven't got a clue what this farm is going to look like in ten years...

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