ResULTS project: Area A interview 29

Face to face interview with upland farmer at the farm, conducted 5th November 2018

Two interviewers: I1 is the main interviewer, I2 present in supervisory capacity

Two respondents: R1 and R2

[Transcription started]

I1: So the first question is, can you tell me a bit about your farming business and what other kind of diversification of sources of income you have, different activities?

R1: Okay, so our main farming activity is, we’ve got 550 ewes, they’re made up of commercial and pedigree flocks. We have 100 Swaledale ewes which they all go the Bluefaced Leicester tup. Up until this year, we generally sell our mule females. The males, the singles they go to fat straightaway. The twins, they generally get sold as stores. This year we’ve actually kept some of them because previous years we’ve been hitting the £100 mark for the females but this year we’re looking at sort of £50, £55 and that animal to us is probably going to be worth more to keep her and she’ll have a fat lamb which is going to be around £50, than it is to sell her because, well, she’s just not worth anything. So that’s the Swaledales.

We then have Suffolk and Texel cross type ewes which they provide our fat lambs, all their lambs. Perhaps one or two of the three-quarter bred Texel females will be retained as replacements. And then the rest of the flock is made up with pedigree and Bluefaced Leicesters and Valais Blacknose from Switzerland. [section deleted to maintain anonymity].The sole reason we have those is, they are a massive attraction and when we opened this place in the spring, we had people come from miles and miles. We’ve had people come from America just to visit the Valais Blacknose.

They were about extinct in Switzerland and over the past four years they’ve been that well publicised through media that they’re now deemed the cutest sheep in the world, which they are so, so pretty and, yes, to be fair they are maintaining a really high price. Not so much with farmers but with private collectors, people who are really affluent businessmen who have a £2 million house and five acres wanting a pretty lawnmower and that is pretty much…

I1: [Inaudible]. I didn’t expect that.

R1: Yes, and they’re quite happy to pay ridiculously high prices for a sheep. Whereas if you were trying to sell them to other farmers, they’d be, uh-hmm, no, definitely not, because they can’t see a commercial gain in them. Whereas the market we’re aiming at, they’re not looking at them as a commercial enterprise. They’re just a toy and that is the wrong way to look at an animal, in my opinion, but you’ve got to do what you’ve got to do, haven’t you?

So that’s the sheep and then cattle we have 50 head of cattle. There are three pedigree Aberdeen Angus and then there are two, four, eight pedigree British Blues. The rest are commercial. The commercial cattle either get put to the Limousin bull or the Belgian Blue bull or British Blue bull or they are embryo recipients for the pedigree cattle. They all come from the same farm so the commercial cattle are British Blues out of dairy cows, mostly Holstein based and the reason we use them is because they’re so easy to handle. We bottle rear them so they’re really quiet to handle. You can do anything with them. They’re used to a lot of public so again they’re quiet when they’re visiting the public and they’re just fantastic mums when it comes to rearing a calf.

We have a few pigs, again, they’re pedigrees and then all sorts of other stuff but the other animals such as the alpacas and the reindeers, they’re used on the mobile side and the petting farm. Nine years ago we were really, really struggling. Lambs were even worse than they are now. Sheep, Swaledales they were like 50p in the auction mart which you cannot live on 50p for a sheep when it’s cost you God knows how many. If it’s cost you sort of £50 a head to keep throughout the year that’s including like vets’ visits, wormers, vaccines, winter forage et cetera, the price of a replacement ram to serve them all and then you get 50p for it in market, it’s like a massive, massive loss.

So we introduced four reindeer to our farm and we started going round schools and universities, all sorts, different…Christmas markets and we bought the four and halfway through November we couldn’t keep up with the amount of people that wanted us so we bought another two. The six reindeer in six weeks earned double what we’d earned the whole rest of the year with 500 sheep and 50 cows so hence why we went down the reindeer route. Then two years ago we bought this place and it was our…this is our base and it’s enabled us to sort of open up to the public rather than us trailing all over the country. At one point it got to we would have 14 teams of reindeer out every weekend and that just became so hard to control and I was worried that the more we were out, the more likely we were to encounter problems…[section deleted to maintain anonymity].

R1: So we wanted to open up to the public so they could come to us and hopefully reduce our risks. We also do a mobile educational farm. It’s going to sound like we’re a proper…

I1: No, no, it sounds really good, don’t worry.

R1: …what’s the word…

R2: You can have that.

R1: …Jack of all trades and master of none. I hope it doesn’t come across like that because it’s not what we want to portray ourselves as but after we got the reindeer, we got asked if we did anything else and we started doing a mobile farm. At first it was solely to subsidise our livelihood because we were making nothing but after about two years and after going into school, after school and sort of eight to ten-year olds telling you that milk comes from the shop and they genuinely have no clue where it does come from. They cannot make that sort of link between a cow and then it ending up on your cornflakes. I think for both of us it became very much, do you know what, kids and parents genuinely have no clue or a lot of them, where their food is coming from. They think that everything is processed so now it’s very much more about actually educating the children…

I1: The public, yes, and the children, yes.

R1: …yes, about where stuff comes from. So there you go, that’s us.

I1: I wonder for the sheep and the cows, so obviously the markets for you is either the auction mart or the…which particular auction mart are you going to?

R1: We either send…so fat lambs, they will often go direct.

I1: To the slaughterhouse.

R1: Yes, through a…

I1: Which slaughterhouse?

R1: [section deleted to maintain anonymity]

R2: It’s a collection centre.

R1: Yes.

R2: We take them to the local mart, they pick them all up on a certain day and take them to the…

R1: So it’s sort of the dead weight scheme.

I1: [section deleted to maintain anonymity]

I2: So we’re trying to understand sort of the resilience of the upland hill and beef systems.

R2: I’m trying to understand it too.

I2: Yes, well, we’re relying on you to tell us so part of it is about understanding your business and why you do the things that you do and then we’re trying to look at…

R2: When you find out why we do what we do, will you let us know because…?

I2: I will. Then trying to understand are there sort of pinch points downstream, you know, so, for example, we’re doing some things in Scotland where the auction marts, sometimes other marts are kind of on the edge so they might collapse and if they collapse, then what happens to the whole, does the whole system go? How far can people take their livestock? Does other things…? So it’s that sort of…trying to understand the whole system.

R2: Well the whole agriculture job is about to fall in a hole at the moment, isn’t it?

I2: Why is that, because of…?

R1: The crisis.

R2: Because nobody’s making no money.

R1: Well, that is one of the reasons why we use [Mart1] mostly. We use []Mart1. We do use [Mart2]. We occasionally use [Mart3] and [Mart4] and [Mart5] but that’s mostly for sort of replacement pedigree stock so like new tups for the Swaledales. [Mart2], again, we use them for, it’s mostly tup purchases because [Mart6], we tend to find that a lot of the…when we sell our Bluefaced Leicester rams a lot of them go through [Mart6] to local farmers so really, we’re not bettering ourselves. Sorry, I’m looking…I’m trying to look at you both equally.

I2: No, no, it’s alright. Look at this one, I’m not really supposed to be interfering.

R1: We’re trying to…

R2: [Inaudible].

R1: We’re trying to sort of better our bloodlines so that we can better the bloodlines that we sell to other farmers. So it would be of no advantage of us buying a Bluefaced Leicester ram out of []Mart6 because the likelihood is that either his dad or his grandad is our bloodline so that’s why we use the other markets. [Mart6] has been there for hundreds of years and not just us, but if we stop using it, then the likelihood is that the auction mart site is just going to be made into houses and I just feel that it’s got… is a market town and if that goes, then the whole heritage of [Town P] and the surrounding area has kind of gone so, yes, that’s why we use them.

I1: Okay, well we will have the chance to talk about all of these things and how they are interrelated. I have a kind of general questions. What are the special features particularly to this upland area you would like to be maintained?

R1: All of it really. I know I mentioned like the history, I think it’s important that we do maintain the history so like the stone walls, the stone buildings. It’s a massive…if we start trying to grow crops up here then you’re going to take away all its history. You can’t grow crops up here or not very well. It’s sheep and cow country so that’s what I would like to see maintained. I certainly would like my children to carry on.

I1: With farming, yes.

R1: With what we’ve done.

R2: I’d just like our children to work.

R1: Well, there is that.

I1: Okay, so because of the project, I use the term upland food system and we felt that this kind of term means different things to different people so that’s why we have referred to this kind of…this is the first card and we try to say here pretty much that the blue arrows, it starts with input providers and then you have upland farm and lowland farm and then you have processing, primary processor, secondary processor so this is the supply chain. Then you have the, all in circles, which is all the type of organisations or businesses that they are around in order to help the supply chain to add value. So you have banks, you have colleges, extension services, developmental agencies like the local council or there might be other developmental agencies. Unfortunately the examples I have here are from Scotland so it doesn’t make any sense for you but this one is certification bodies so you have Red Tractor here. What else do you have?

R1: Actually, we’re not because we, up until moving here, we haven’t had a need to do it but now that we are…we’ve got the home…I call it a homestead, like our base, we’re finding that we’re going to have to…

I1: To go through the route of…

R1: …go through the Red Tractor.

I1: Yes.

R1: Yes.

I1: Is it only the Red Tractor or is there another certification board here?

R1: No, we’ve only got Red Tractor. There are different boards, like there are different universities that you can study at there are different people you can go with but essentially, you’re getting that Red Tractor certificate.

I1: Okay, that’s fine.

R1: Ironically, actually on the petting farm side, we’ve got the Red Tractor equivalent for that side.

I1: Which is, the name?

R1: Oh, is it KIWA? I can show you the certificate.

I1: Okay, yes, just the name. I don’t want the certificate, just the name.

R1: I think it’s KIWA; K-I-W-A.

I1: Okay, the problem is that you are the first person I interview for the area so I don’t know all the, you know, the details, for example, Red Tractor I guess I knew that but about the other one I don’t know. So I keep learning about this one. So you have insurance companies, you have research centres in there, yes. All the type of consultant services, these are vets, accountants, land agents, all the type of…

R1: Professionals.

I1: Yes, the professionals that come to help you with the farm. Then you have them…here you have the industry associations or lobbies so it can be NFU, it can be NSA or any other organisation. I didn’t mention this one which is inspecting agencies so FSA probably it doesn’t affect you so much but SEPA is the one from Scotland but it’s for part of the water quality. It keeps all the…

R1: Like the environment agencies.

I1: Yes.

I2: They do it with the environment agency.

R1: Yes, I know what you mean.

I1: Then pretty much the blue arrows with orange circles, together they create the livestock and value chain but then you have the green boxes which is all the stakeholders that are affected from the actions of those and then you have obviously…some of them they affect also, so government and funding bodies like the ones where they fund this research, pharmaceutical market, energy market, either renewable or conventional one and then you have all the type of NGOs that might be active in this area that might be related to either environmental or social issues. You have the local upland community and the tourists come here and the general public and in a few ways this is pretty much the human side but also in the system we consider part of the system is the animals, the plants, the microbia themselves, the biological organisms. So the first reaction, does this kind of picture make sense, you would like to add something, to remove something? What is your first reaction to that?

R1: The input provider, I’m not quite sure who you mean.

I1: Input providers might be either the fertilisers or…

R1: Ah, right, yes.

I1: Any kind of tangible input you need.

I2: Feed suppliers, suppliers of quad bikes.

R1: Yes, I get what you mean now. No, I think there’s everyone on there that is…

I1: Some people they have told me that probably here between the farmers and the slaughterhouses you need to have the auction mart for their marketing needs.

R1: Collection, yes, definitely.

I1: So is it all the auction mart but also is there any kind of other marketing group that you can work instead…you can go through that route instead of auction marts in the area?

R1: It’s probably because I’m more aware of it but social media is starting to play quite an important role in marketing of livestock, not perhaps for the meat side but from like breeding side. I certainly see a lot more of that.

I1: So you have been approached by customers through the social media.

R1: Yes, I think it’s becoming more popular and I know sort of the average age of farmers in the UK is about 60 or something like that but the younger generation that are coming in, I think that is probably going to be a route that people will…

I1: Direct, pretty much marketing through their, you know, the social media.

R1: Yes.

I1: Okay, that’s greatly interesting. Let’s put that to one side for now and then I have a general question which is, what does resilience mean for you? So when you hear resilience, what it brings to your mind.

R1: For me, I think it means how stable we are to changes, either government or disease and my answer to it at the moment is I don’t think we’re very resilient to any of it. One, because like the government side, we’ve got like we’re predominantly sheep and I don’t think people are going to…I think sheep farming will go out. I think as soon as Brexit hits, [non-verbal], sheep are just going to be worth nothing at all. So as far as being resilient to what might happen financially we’re not…because I don’t think…I think the only thing that we could do to sort of save it is to cut our losses now while the female sheep that I said earlier off the Swaledales, we should probably just get rid of them now at £50 a life instead of waiting for them to become maybe £5 a life. Yes, which is…

I1: That is your prediction what is going to happen after Brexit.

R1: That’s what I think, yes. By what’s been in the media and I know there is a lot hearsay at the minute but there is no…no-one’s giving it any sort of reassurance.

I1: So don’t worry about Brexit, we’re going to discuss, obviously later on. Okay, you mentioned what you think resilience and what it means for you. Now, I’m going to present this one which is pretty much…it’s kind of definition from the literature again about resiliencies, the capacity for business or a whole system to either as your buffer against internal or external disturbances, or learning and adapt to incremental changes. For example, a farmer might be increasing or decreasing their stocking rights, for example, or even transform through radical changes. So, for example, the fact that you have this investment, it’s a kind of radical change the fact that you added deer, farming, it’s kind of radical if you’re converting organic or…these kind of big changes so that kind of definition makes any sense to you?

R1: Yes, I think from this sheet showing I think perhaps we’re more resilient than we thought or than I thought and I think by doing what we’ve done, although it was financial for us and not just…yes, I think in the beginning it was financial and I think the older that I’ve got, you get harder to things but you also get softer emotionally. I think I don’t want to get rid of the sheep or the cattle at all and I think by adding the reindeer and having the Valais sheep and now opening the sort of education side, that’s been a way of us being able to still do what we love and what we want to continue to do but still be able to survive. It sounds daft but this now, this place for us to be able to have our pedigree sheep, it enables us to buy more expensive males and females to better ourselves, whereas we wouldn’t have been able to do it. If we had just solely carried on farming we would never, ever have been able to do it.

I1: So you tried diversification in other activities, farming activities or non-farming activities like the education side, it’s pretty much your main type of solution in order to subsidise what you love, which is farming.

R1: Yes, and the sort of irony of it is, if we were to take a sheep to market, a fat lamb and get £50 for it, if we invite the public to come to us and then most people will buy out of the café, if we process that animal ourselves it costs us about £25 to have it slaughtered and butchered into usable joints or mince or whatever, we can sell it back to the customer, the customer feels happy to support us in our farming activity. We don’t charge a premium for it but we’re still making…we can turn that life into about £120. So by cutting out the supermarket, which I feel sort of are the root of our problems, we’re able to make the animals make a profit. Does that make sense?

I1: So you add value pretty much to the product if you have...

R1: Yes, by adding this, we can then make the livestock viable and, yes, not have to get rid of them. Is that what you mean?

I1: It seems that through the education side, you have also kind of retailing small farm kind of shop. You process a bit there.

R1: Yes, because I don’t want to get too far off your lines…

I1: No, no, it’s fine. It’s part of the whole thing.

R1: …so at the moment the shop that you went into is purely a gift shop but by this time next year, I hope to be able to have in there, even if it’s just a small refrigerated area where people, if they’ve been and…at the moment we only sell our own pork through the shop so by selling sausage sandwiches, bacon sandwiches we’re making our pigs make a profit and nothing else has changed. So the cost of feeding them to get them fat to send off to market and the cost of feeding them to get them fat to go through our own shop is exactly the same, the only thing is we’ve cut out the supermarket so that the supermarkets aren’t essentially robbing us and I know that sounds wrong. We can charge what we need to charge through the shop and not charge the consumer.

I1: Extra.

R1: Yes, but I would like to have a fridge in there so that if people have enjoyed one of our bacon sandwiches or sausages they can buy a pack and take them home and then, yes, we’re getting…

I1: Which is pretty much that you created a shorter direct channel into the consumer.

R1: Yes.

I1: So they’re not going to need to go to buy your stuff from either the other retailer shops or the supermarkets.

R1: Yes.

I1: Okay, great, don’t worry, I’m just moving…I’m in a hurry here because all of those we’re going to discuss later on.

R1: That’s fine.

I1: So if I ask you how is your farming business doing in terms of resilience now, struggling, surviving, making a reasonable living, booming, where do you think you are right now?

R1: The farm is struggling. The actual livestock.

I1: The farm is struggling but the business…

R1: …livestock is struggling, yes.

I1: Yes, but the whole business you think it’s more surviving or…?

R1: Yes, we’ve invested over the last two years, £1.8 million into making the farm make a living. Before we moved here, we lived in a rented house, we had a yard that was away from the house so everything, our travelling and everything costs were a lot more but having introduced the deer and the Valais Blacknose sheep that enabled us to be able to buy here and then do…or in the bank’s eyes, they’ve seen us as a…

I1: Owners of the land.

R1: Yes, so they’ve been able…we’ve been able to borrow off the bank to be able to fund the rest of this which if we hadn’t have introduced those, the sheep alone and the cattle, we would never, ever, ever have been able to buy a base altogether. So, yes, the sheep…the farm side is struggling, this side even though we’re still young is…it’s making money.

I1: Okay, so very briefly, let’s discuss how has the resilience of your business changed during the last five years? You have told me a bit about that. What is your prediction about the next three years and the next 15 years?

R1: Right, well, if you’d have come yesterday…

I1: Yesterday, actually, I missed...

R1: …I probably would have said, I won’t be here in 15 years because we were just having a really bad day, lambs have dropped again and you just think, why the hell do you bother? There’s no point in being here. By doing what we’ve done, which I’m assuming that’s our resilience…

I1: Yes.

R1: …in the next three years I hope to have nearly have paid my mortgage off and if things continue as they are now, then we will have done. We will have nearly paid our mortgage. In the next 15 years, I don’t know. I’m hoping that we will be doing a lot more with different groups so obviously we do the education side now, we go into schools, we have schools come out to us but I would like to be able to let those schools that don’t have very much area to go outside, I would like to let them come to us on a regular, so maybe set up a year’s plan so that the children…the children and students that I work with, I would like to give them the knowledge to be able to just say, we had a war, a major…that those children could grow their own food, that those children would know that like if they went out catching rabbits that they could provide for their families. I know that sounds really, really old-fashioned but…

I1: But it’s educational, yes.

R1: …most of the children and a massive majority of the adults in Britain would starve if something major went on because they don’t have a clue at all. I know I keep coming back to that but I would just love to be able to give this generation that we work with the skills, we’re by no means, experts but I know that if something went wrong I could provide for my family and I would just like to pass it on to the next generation so that it’s there and it’s not lost because we are losing that as a nation. We’re a nation of fiddlers.

I2: Fiddling with your thumbs, yes.

R1: Yes, we’re not a nation of doers anymore and I think, without getting political, that’s probably one of the reasons why we’re in a mass depression or that’s what I feel. So that’s my next…I don’t know about 15-year goal but certainly the next ten-year goal, who knows?

I1: I assume you will find very interesting to discuss this card. This card pretty much tries to summarise functions, the roles, the goals, if you wish, whatever you call them, pretty much they’re the same things but, for example, for your farming business, I would like you to read the whole list. As you can see here, here we have something which is probably relating to owner’s private interest, then we have something which is related to the multiplier effect so the money that your business is recycling back to the local community and then we have related to the public goods or services. So I will kindly ask you to read the whole list, identify if there is any important function, role, goal that is important for your farming business and you don’t find it here so anything which is missing. Then just to let you know that some of those they might be interrelated because…it’s fine if you start recognising some of those interrelations.

R1: Okay, and if there’s something that I don’t see there, you just want to know.

I1: Yes, if you see something which is completely irrelevant with your business or the area or whatever, just let me know as well.

R1: I think the only one, like you said the repetition but I would put preservation of the area into this for me as well, for private interests.

I1: Don’t worry because the next question is can you please rank the five most important for you? So from all of those, in any possible combination, as I said, might be interrelated, you select five important, which are the five most important? So you can have the one you selected from here, 21.

R1: Yes, I think definitely 21 is important for me.

I1: I assume we can extend a bit because here it says, preservation of historical and cultural value of landscape in local cuisine, but also it’s preservation of the skills to not exactly grow your food but survive in case of…

R1: Yes, I probably don’t put it across quite right but I just think that a lot of the next generation aren’t going to know how to grow things and, yes, they think, oh, yes, you just put a seed in and it grows, but it doesn’t because they need to know a little bit more about, like you’ve got to weed round it just, for example, otherwise it’s just going to suffocate it and you’re not going to get a good crop. You’re going to grow a weak crop which…

I1: So preservation of those kind of skills, we can add it as 23 because it’s not very clear there.

R1: Yes.

I2: Maybe you can also mention the stone walls and the barns and…

R1: Yes, it’s our heritage, isn’t it? That’s what our grandfathers and their grandfathers have essentially killed themselves doing. Like people look at a stone wall and think, oh, yes, that’s…yes, and some people look at a stone wall and think, well, yes, what’s the art in that? It is an art in itself and if people could even just half grasp how much work and effort has gone into making these walls and the reason why they’ve made these walls, I just think, it’s a good thing to know.

I1: They can appreciate, yes.

R1: Yes, they appreciate it better so definitely that one. For me, the only reason I need to succeed is like I want to leave something for my children to be able to carry on and be able to look back and think, oh, do you know what, my mum and dad did this and it’s enabled us to do that. Obviously, we need to survive.

I1: So number two is also important for you, okay.

R1: Yes, I think number four’s important because I think if we can create local employment, it’s keeping money in the local area and there’s a lot of people that were born round here have to move away because there aren’t enough jobs so I think that’s important, so number four. These don’t have to be in order, do they, of relevance?

I1: Yes, the five most important, critical.

R1: Oh, God…

I1: Okay, don’t make it too complicated. Just let me know five important ones. It’s not necessarily one, first, second.

R1: That’s fine, okay. Seven.

I1: Number seven, food security, okay.

R1: Yes, I think we need to…that’s very important and, well, ten, I suppose.

I1: Personal and family satisfaction and wellbeing.

R1: Yes, 21 and ten are…

I1: Yes.

R1: So, yes, they’re probably my five most important.

I1: I assume when you said that, I need to succeed, you mean, number one or not.

R1: No, succession for me is being able to leave my family something that they can…give them a head start, that’s my…if I can do that, then I’ve done my goal. That’s what I want to be able to do.

I1: I understand. Okay, so those are the ones that are quite important for your business. If we talk about the downstream markets a bit, about, for example, slaughterhouses or retailers, what do you think in your opinion would be the five most important for them, the functions or the goals or the roles they have to play?

R1: So like slaughterhouses and the retail side.

I1: Yes.

R1: Profit.

I1: Number one.

R1: Yes.

I1: Okay.

R1: Probably, well, obviously a reasonable workload.

I1: Number three.

R1: I think probably one, two and three are very important to them.

I1: Okay.

R1: Yes, I think they are probably the only three.

I1: The only three, okay, that’s fine.

I2: But you sell pure bred animals or do you sell pure bred animals apart from the French sheep?

R1: Yes.

I2: What do you think would be important to people who buy those, breeding stock?

R1: Oh, right, well, they’re going to want…they’re always wanting to better their livestock so adding value and increasing customer satisfaction.

I1: That’s probably number 17 which is genetic diversity.

R1: Ah, yes, them two.

I1: So it was number nine and number 17.

R1: Yes, nine and 17.

I1: Okay, so the next question is…it’s quite a general question again, do you think that the full potential of adding value to the beef and lamb products coming from upland areas has currently reached…?

R1: So…

I2: I think you should re-read that.

R1: Yes, sorry.

I1: Is the full potential of adding value to beef and lamb products coming from upland areas, those products, currently reached?

R1: No, there’s always room for improvement, isn’t there, with everything.

I1: Especially beef and sheep.

R1: Yes, sorry, I meant, livestock. Is it currently reached? No, there are always…I think everyone is always improving everything. So just like, for example’s sake, here this year we’ve got a really nice crop of Limousin calves out of our cattle but…so like we need to change our bull this year. If we change it to a British Blue, are we going to get even better calves? So I think everyone’s always like toying with genetics and seeing if you can create something better every…I think everyone would be doing that.

I1: The question I had in my mind when I was asking that, it was pretty much looking at downstream in the supply chain, do you think these products they get…we manage to add the maximum of the value to them and get back…?

I2: This is the meat you’re thinking about?

I1: Yes, the meat one.

R1: I think, yes, I think we put…this sounds really bad but I think we put everything into them to try and produce a…every year the market fluctuates and they want to know something. They want something different. So once upon a time like the mule lambs they were the in thing. They were a big carcass, there was a lot of meat on them but then all of a sudden fat’s bad, no-one likes fat, we don’t need any fat. So then we went to big lean carcasses and then all of a sudden, we don’t each as much so they don’t want big carcasses, they want a smaller carcass, no fat. Then the farmer’s thinking, oh, well, if I need to get as much out of this smaller carcass as I can so I’m going to put a lot more meat into it so we start using the Beltex and the Dutch Texels et cetera and then all of a sudden, the butchers or the buyers don’t want that. So it’s…

I1: It’s because of the [inaudible].

R1: Yes, so you try your best every year. It’s an absolute guessing game because you do not know, and at the end of the day if the suppliers think, well, hang on a minute, I can get all these lambs from New Zealand for £35, why the hell am I going to pay you £70 for that lamb when I can buy two for one? So I think that the supermarkets sort of have a fairly good grip on livestock producers and sort of everything else. No matter what you try and produce, you’re sort of making your judgment on what they wanted last year and trying to think, well, do they still want that? Do they want a bit more backside? Do they want a bigger lamb? Do they want a bigger beast?

I1: It’s interesting that you said it’s a guessing game…

R1: It is.

I1: …rather than…so you don’t get any kind of feedback that would be useful for you to…

R1: No.

I1: …know which direction you need to go.

R1: It’s worse than Russian Roulette. You just don’t know. They’ll tell you…like last year after Christmas, lambs rocketed, absolutely went sky high. Like a lamb was worth like £130 and you’re thinking, God, that is like winning the lottery because you’ve been taking £50 for it all last autumn. So this year a lot of…I’m kind of getting off the mark a little bit, but a lot of lowland men who buy the lambs from the hills have been paying a premium. So like a fat lamb’s been worth say £55 but a store lamb that they’re going to put another £20 into…

I1: [Inaudible].

R1: …yes, to get that £135 after Christmas, they’re buying them at £70. So for the hill men, it’s been more economical to sell and quite a lot of females have gone that would have been kept for breeding, they’ve been sold at £70 just to get rid of them to these lowland men who…well, I should imagine they’ve got their fingers crossed that those lambs are going to rocket again after Christmas and they’re going to make a lot of money on them lambs. I mean, if you can double your money on a lamb, again, it’s a bit like winning the lottery. I really hope that they do but it can just…like we’re massively affected by what happens to Australia and New Zealand. Like they’re shipping their lambs in at anything, just [non-verbal] go because the drought, they either send them in and get a little bit for them or they shoot them or they die. The supermarkets and the slaughterhouses or let’s call them buyers, they’re not loyal to British suppliers.

I1: Produce, yes, okay. So we’re going to discuss some of them here which is this card tries to summarise the disturbances and long-term pressures, shocks or drivers of change, whatever you would like to call them, but pretty much when you go through this list you’re going to read them and most of them they sound like threats. So the first question for me is if there is any important driver of change here that’s missing and second, if any of those can be seen as an opportunity for your farming business?

R1: Overall.

I1: Yes, from the whole list and then we discuss other things later on. You don’t need right now to take one by one and explain it to me. You just have a…

R1: If there’s anything missing that I can think of.

I1: Yes.

R1: No, I think you’ve…

I1: Don’t worry, if something comes to your mind later we can add it.

R1: Are these in order of like relevance or just…?

I1: No, the only reason I have used the numbers is it’s easier later on in the next exercise.

R1: Yes, fair enough.

I1: Also for the recording, it will be much easier if you say number one instead of…

R1: Fair enough, yes, that’s fine. No, I think…

I1: The other thing is…so if any of those can be seen as an opportunity?

R1: For us.

I1: Yes.

R1: In a roundabout way, 21 and 22 because my long term goal, obviously I’d like to be able to get people a bit more back to, not…I don’t want to make them Neanderthals but just have an understanding so that if something did go wrong or even it’s just something nice to be able to do with their family, just grow something, just be able to…even if it’s just a bag of…a potato plant, they’ve grown one potato plant and they just all sit down together and think, do you know what, those tatties are really nice. We grew them. Just to be able to give people that, get back to the land bit, just a little bit. I don’t want to make them all…

I1: Skills to survive, pretty much.

R1: Yes, and I’m not saying it will.

I1: So for you it’s the kind of opportunity because through the educational side you help with that.

R1: Yes.

I1: Anything else as an opportunity. It’s not necessarily to be seen as an opportunity just I’m wondering if there is anything there.

R1: I just saw something. There was something somewhere. We have actually teamed up with [organisation R] and we actually teach…we’re not teaching but we’re providing the centre and the animals for [organisation R] to run courses for other farmers. So not using us as an example but just using our centre as a…

I1: A meeting point.

R1: Yes, and our livestock so that’s an opportunity for us.

I1: For you, okay.

R1: Yes.

I1: Okay, so now my question is, again you can combine in any possible way some of this might be interrelated but my question is, can you rank the five most important threats for your businesses from there?

R1: Number seven.

I1: Can you say a bit more because before we started recording you said that there is…?

R1: Yes, with our deer, we’ve just had a…well, we’ve lost about half of our herd of reindeer due to an unknown disease. We’re trying to work with the vet, well, we are working with the vets and laboratories trying to find out what it is or what could have caused it. So that to us, disease is massive because it could shut everything, not just the animal side but if the animal side is shut, pretty much all the rest of it is shut. If it’s something that turns out to be something that could go through all the different species and you never know, fingers crossed it’s not. So that to us is number one.

I1: Have the beef and sheep side been affected in the past from disease?

R1: Have we been?

I1: Yes.

R1: No, nothing…no. No, we…touch wood.

I1: But you were worried. Yes…

R1: Yes.

I1: …touch wood, okay. So number seven definitely is quite important for you.

R1: Number 14, production standards.

I1: What would you like to say for that?

R1: I think if we lose…if we don’t strike a trade deal then like Britain’s probably got some of the best sort of welfare standards of any of the EU countries and I think that if we’re not…I just think it will become unfair. Like we have to adhere to all these different standards which quite right, so we should but it comes at a cost to us and when we leave Brexit, like our subsidies will drop, not that we should be relying on subsidies but then that just gives…what we don’t take out that will be distributed across the rest of the…

I1: UK.

R1: …not UK, the EU so that’s giving them a boost to…I can’t really explain.

I1: You mean the share of the markets, they’re going to be redistributed between the farmers in the European Union rather than…

R1: Yes, from what I can work out, we pay the price for having these high standards. Across the rest of the EU standards perhaps aren’t as high and they’re going to be…so their production costs are less, they’re going to be given more for not having to improve their standards and I think that just leaves it as an uneven…

I1: Because of the short of the suppliers since the UK go out of the EU, you mean.

R1: Yes.

I1: Okay, now I understand.

R1: So sort of you can group 12, 13, 14 as they’re probably the second most.

I1: So you mentioned before about the subsidies and I would like to ask you obviously we don’t know which direction we are going, there is an indication that probably we are going towards more environmental public goods, what is your comment here? Is it a good to road to take or the wrong road?

R1: In one respect I think it’s good because I personally think we do need to look after our environment a lot better. On the other hand, I think it leaves an unfair playing field because such as, how do I explain it, just say you have a 4,000 acre estate in Aberdeenshire and if you’re going to get paid on environmental, you’ve got 4,000 acres of area to regenerate heather growth, plant trees so what I’m getting at is it’s not fair…I personally don’t like subsidies. I think subsidies are wrong and I think if we were all paid a fair price through market, through collection centre or however you market your produce, then there would be no need for subsidies. We shouldn’t have to rely on it. It’s wrong and up until moving here we actually claimed no subsidies whatsoever and the only reason we claim it now is because we own the land that we have, whereas before it was rented so our landlords get it.

Like I say, I think when these environmental subsidies come in I think it will just make it worse. I think a lot of the hill men, they’ll get killed off because they’ll just think, why am I farming sheep when I can draw half a million pounds for planting trees and getting the…I don’t know, lynx introducing the European Lynx, why should I farm sheep? So I think it will wipe a lot of hill men out. I think they’ll just think, look, do you know what, I’m 55, my son’s not bothered, he’s off in London doing whatever he does with computers or whatever, my daughter’s not bothered, she’s married off to whoever, why bother?

I1: Okay, so far, what type of subsidies, obviously there is the land based because you own the land but have you done anything about environmental schemes or getting anything about infrastructure grants in the past or calf subsidies?

R1: No, we never claimed any of that.

I1: So the only experience you have is with land-based subsidies.

R1: Yes, the only thing that we have actually looked at, we’ve looked at the mid-tier scheme to restore all the like the drystone walls and that kind of thing so it’s more restoration.

I1: Yes, it’s infrastructure kind of grant.

R1: Yes, so that’s the only thing. We haven’t joined up…we haven’t signed up, I know was it September you had to have it in by, I can’t just remember but we didn’t…we were just looking. We do have a guy that comes out and helps us. He’s helped us do our like forecasts for banking and stuff and on the flipside of it, he does actually do all that kind of thing so he’s been looking into it for us to see what would be available on sort of…

I1: For that.

R1: Yes.

I1: Okay, so based on the experience you had with land-based subsidies, what are the type of side-effects you saw here? I mean, what other kind of negative things that happen because of the land subsidies not only for your farm, in general talking?

R1: Well, like I said, I used that example of an estate in Scotland but there are bigger estates round here but where I was born there’s a 4,000 acre of moorland, old lead mines and that sort of thing and that will, if you’re going to get paid say £4 a tree, say it costs £2 a tree to have someone to provide the tree, plant it and do whatever and then it’s leaving you £2 profit per tree, a lot of landowners are going to think, do you know what, that £2 a tree is worth more to me than that lamb that I’m going to make £2 profit out? He’s not going to…well, if it dies he’s not lost anything because he’s been paid for it and then when he’s grown his trees there will be some, in my head, you probably think I’m dingy…

I1: No, no, no, I’m not thinking such things, don’t worry.

R1: You’re sat there thinking, [swear word].

I2: I’m really impressed with what you’re doing.

I1: We have heard similar type of arguments, believe me, because it…

R1: Thank God.

I1: …makes sense, it makes really sense. I mean, it’s practical. If you put down all the different options you have there are some routes that are more incentivised to some extent than others.

R1: I mean, don’t get me wrong, we’ve all to make money, absolutely and that's what makes us all…

I1: Which makes sense.

R1: …go around but that guy who has got rid of…alright, say he rented that 4,000 acre out to four different farmers, so that’s four different hill farmers that are either going to sell up or…they’ll either all sell up or it might get split between two or he might just think, do you know what, I own your four farms as well, I’m going to plant all the land with trees, I’m going to put your rent up and like not being funny but like houses like this they would easily be, certainly in this area with such as Menwith Hill, this house would be £1,200 a month rent. Well, I’m getting £12,000 a year rent from having a farmer in it with all the land because it’s…ours isn’t less favoured land but the moorland is less favoured.

So I’ve got rid of four farmers, I’ve got rid of maybe 4,000 sheep, now I’ve got, what, 24,000 trees planted so I get paid for 24,000 tress and then in five years’ time when they’ve planted these non-native fast growing trees, they’ll come up with some other scheme and think, shit, do you know what, we’ve just covered Britain in trees. We can’t sort of provide for ourselves anymore. So then the energy companies will think, do you know what, we’re going to pay you £5 a tree to chop it all down but when they’ve chopped all them trees down, it’s not going to be usable land anymore.

I1: Yes, so pretty much you lose the heart that you have.

R1: Yes, and, yes, don’t get me wrong you’ll have created some fabulous habitats for wild deer, badgers, probably even like the European lynx that I know they’re going to reintroduce and different…like numerous birds, they’ll thrive but then they only think about them now so that's going to be their selling point. Do you know what? You’re doing all this for nature. The general public are going to think, oh, yes, awesome but then when they think, shit, do you know what, by having them sheep up on that mountain, we were actually…we were feeding Britain. We were still maintaining the habitat, all we’ve done now is we’ve made it go back a hundred, 200 years. We’re going to go backwards, in my head.

I1: Yes, I fully understand what you’re trying to say because obviously there are a lot of people saying to keep the landscape you need a number of sheep grazing livestock there because otherwise you don’t get the same kind of benefit so it’s not only, you know, let’s plant trees everywhere. It’s not the only solution.

R1: No, I was just using that as an example.

I1: So I would like to ask you, which is related to what you have said, what would be the impact of obviously for your family but in general what will be the impact if upland sheep and beef cattle farming is dramatically reduced or ceased altogether? It’s pretty much you have already answered but I wonder if…

R1: For me directly, I’d like to say I will never get rid of them sheep and cows. Hopefully, for me, by doing the other bits of diversification that we’ve done, it will enable me to always be able to have what is true to my heart, hopefully, but if it got so ridiculous that to have those 50 cows was going to cost me 50 grand a year, they would have to go and, yes, they would have to go. We would have to rely on the smaller animals, maybe like the Valais Blacknose sheep, we’d keep those because the general public love those and they would still happily pay to come into the farm and see those animals but the actual animals that have made us what we are, we wouldn’t be able to keep them.

I1: Okay, so from that place, I wonder, you mentioned before about the retailers and I assume you were trying to explain what is here under nine which is uneven power dynamics in the supply chain so any more comments the way that the supply chain is tracked right now, it affects your resilience?

R1: I think if there was a policy where, it’s a bit like your free trade agreement, isn’t it, I think the government needs to step in more and say like, surely from you ladies sat here and me telling you that a fat lamb is worth £50 to us in market, it’s probably cost us £35 to get there and losses et cetera, it’s bringing what you have left from that lamb down, let’s say £10 just for a roundabout figure. Then it costs the supermarket, well, they’ll probably have some mass trade if they have so many thousand lambs go through their slaughterhouse, it’s probably only going to cost them £5 an animal to be slaughtered, then it goes to the supermarket. From buying that lamb at £50 to selling it to you, if you went and bought that whole lamb in bits, it’s probably going to cost you about £220, £250 but – you’re alright, you can have your dinner, Joe – what am I getting at?

So what I’m saying is the supermarkets are causing a barrier between the general public and farmers and I think if they brought their prices into line and I understand that they’re a business, I think there would be less, I think, animosity between the general public and farmers because if you ask any general public now, they’ll probably say, oh, bloody farmers, they’re riding round in their new Land Rover. That’s their tool. They can’t do their job without their tool but that’s what they see and I think if you go to the supermarket and buy a lump of lamb and you think, that, you look at it and it’s £15, you’re thinking, oh, my God, how many pizzas can you buy for £15. They’re causing a massive split between…

I1: So pretty much you’re trying to say to me that the supply chain, there’s a kind of broken link somewhere.

R1: Yes, very much.

I1: Okay, so that is between you and the slaughterhouse.

R1: No.

I1: It’s between also…

R1: It’s the buyers, so the…the supermarket buyers. The slaughterhouses are only doing what they’ve been told to do. We can’t do without the slaughterhouses because the animal has to be humanely killed. It’s the end supply and…

I1: The producer.

R1: Yes.

I1: Pretty much there is a broken link, yes.

R1: It’s the…

I1: How practically this kind of broken link is maintained.

R1: It’s not.

I1: No, I mean, how do they keep having that kind of broken link in place? How do they create that type of distance between you and them?

I2: You mean the buyer and the producer.

I1: Yes, the buyer and the producer because there is a broken link right now.

R1: Absolutely.

I1: I wonder how you maintain that.

R1: Do you mean, how we fix it?

I1: Yes. No, but I was thinking what are they doing…how we fix it is important thing I would like to discuss but the other thing is how now do they keep it in place that breaking…?

I2: Why does it stay the same way?

I1: Yes, why it stays. Sorry, I’ve lost the word. It’s not maintained the word.

R1: I often ask ourselves that question, how can it…? It seems to be that we have to adhere to so many rules and regulations, high welfare standards, we have to have certificates for this to be able to sell to those buyers. It’s almost like we’re signing ourselves up to a contract where they…

I1: Without a contract at the same time.

R1: Yes, basically we’re paying…so the Red Tractor, like what are we paying…? I know we don’t at the moment but we’re going to have to do because the supermarkets are going to turn around and say, well, if you don’t pay your £250 a year, we’re not buying your lambs, they’re not as good as anyone else’s. My lambs might be better than everyone else’s – I’m not saying they are, just for the record – but just because I don’t have that piece of paper to say they are, how do they know? Just because someone hasn’t walked round and looked at your medicine book and said, oh, yes, you’re doing a really good job, they might go into the field and say, oh, Christ, do you know what, all their sheep were lame but they’ve got that piece of paper to say that they’re really good so we’re going to buy them off them. Just because I don’t have that piece of paper, but what…getting back to your point rather, I don’t know how it can happen. I don’t think no farmer does.

We just seem to be ruled by the supermarket, yes, the supermarket because it’s not your local butcher because your local butcher will go to a local market, buy what he wants and pay a fair price. Whereas now the supermarkets will inform their buyers, right, lambs are £50 buy as many as you can, every lamb you can at £50 because we’ll just freeze them and then when lamb starts getting a bit short supply, we can unfreeze them. Do you know what I mean? I can’t explain. I’m useless at explaining but that’s what they’re doing. Yes, it’s a bit like…

I1: So the fact that you don’t have any kind of contracts and at the same time the fact you don’t have any kind of feedback you mentioned before so these type of things pretty much put you in that place of having to gather all the costs like prepare yourselves to enter those markets, you don’t have any control over the price. You have to take the price.

R1: Yes, you either have to take it or be prepared to bring them home and sit and wait and keep everything crossed that they might go up to £130 but there’s no inclination or anything. All people are going on is what happened last year. It would be a bit like entering a war, wouldn’t it, like oh, well, when we had World War I it was a bit like this so World War III might be a bit like…

I1: Yes.

R1: Honestly, it’s like just walking round blindfolded. You’re doing all these things. Something else might come up like every year.

I1: I wonder because some kind of interviews we’ve had are organisations from around the supply chain and they started talking about comments like, well, a lot of the farmers in the UK they’re not looking at how to minimise costs. They are looking at what they have done previous years and they look backwards while they should think forwards, you know, comments like that.

I2: Are we interrupting your lunchtime?

[section deleted as not relevant to interview]

R2: Sorry about that.

I1: So you get that kind of comment and then I’m coming to you and you tell me the other…

R1: And we say the same.

I1: …from the other side. I’m not exactly confused but I see that it’s not a fair comment what they said.

R1: Farmers are very fickle and it seems that the only way that they can make money is to rob another farmer, okay. Now I personally think the downfall is us because if we all got together and said, do you know what, none of us are going to sell you any of our produce at all until you lot start offering us a fair price. I know everyone else…like different farmers have different costs. Like one farmer might have land 50 mile away so instantly his costs have gone up because he’s travelling, so his travelling costs have gone up but feed, who knows what feed is going to do. There are buyers groups but still like with the fluctuation of wheat and barley prices no feed company will commit to basically we’re in an every man for himself, situation so the feed companies, they’ll buy it off the farmer at £70 a tonne but then they’ll bring it back to the mill and say, well, we’ve got to dry it, we’ve got to treat it, then we’ve got to add minerals, then we’ve got to make it into a pellet so we’ve put our costs into it and then this is what we’re selling it at - I’m sorry, my stomach’s going ten to the dozen - so we’re going to sell it at this

Then you might get ten farmers together and they might say, right, well, we want so many hundred tonnes of lamb fattening pellets, but what they take off…so just say they’re going to charge that group of ten farmers £120 a tonne for their lamb fattening ration, what they’re not charging them ten farmers, the next ten farmers, they’re going to put it on to them.

I1: [Voices overlapping], yes.

R1: Yes, so that’s all…it’s just a vicious circle and that’s all they do is…

I1: And I assume that this pretty much the result for most of the farmers, are they quite alone. I mean, [inaudible] while both of the input providers or the slaughterhouses, they have much bigger banking power of the buyer.

R1: Yes, and not only that, such as here we are…there’s only two beef and sheep farmers in the five mile radius but there’s one, two, three, four, five…there’s five dairy farms so it’s not like we can all group together and say, right, I’ve got 200 lambs that I want to fatten, I’ve got 200, I’ve got 100, there’s too much…

I1: Variability.

R1: Yes, so it’s a bit pointless, until it comes to a common ground like fertiliser it’s a bit pointless having a buyers’ group because you’re not all buying the same thing. You’re all producing something different so kind of your buyers’ groups only work where you’re in an area where there’s ten or a dozen hill sheep men or hill beef men. Does that make sense?

I1: That do the same thing. I understand but this is pretty much from the side of the input providers but I wonder from the side with the slaughterhouse before you mentioned something if all of our farmers we could stop and say we don’t sell to you, if…yes, obviously it’s…

R1: In an ideal world…

I1: …kind of in an ideal world.

R1: …that would be brilliant.

I1: …but I wonder, what stop the farmers here to try to create either kind of corporative marketing group or whatever?

R1: Because they wouldn’t all stick together. This is what I mean about the only way a farmer can make money is to rob another farmer because just say the ten local farmers or just say the whole beef and sheep industry got together and said, do you know what, we’re not selling you nothing. Here…

I1: The retailer.

R1: …yes, and here…

I1: [Voices overlapping].

R1: …would turn round and say, well, don’t then, we’ll just buy it all from New Zealand and we’ll buy all our beef from Brazil, you just struggle on. So then we’re left with all these sheep and cattle, what do we do with them? We’ve got to still feed them while they’re alive. What do we do?

I1: So that’s why it creates that whole thing.

R1: Yes, because they would. They have no morals at all. I think I read somewhere once that we’re almost sufficient in beef, pork and lamb to keep Britain going. We don’t have to buy any in but we just…we don’t…because we can buy two for one from New Zealand, these boys here, that just makes their profits [non-verbal speech].

I1: [Inaudible] might be an issue with the UK production that comes to the market certain months while they leave other months with low supply because not many animals are produced in those months.

R1: I know what you mean but all they do they freeze it. They can…if you imagine 100 sheep, they need, well, 100 sheep need what, 50 acres, whereas 100 dead sheep they need 40 feet by 20 feet. Does that make sense?

I1: Yes.

R1: And when they’re hung up, when they’re on a hook, they’re not eating, they’re not costing you nothing, other than electric, whereas an animal that’s eating, it’s costing you every day.

I1: Also some of the comments I had that the problem also is caused by the capacity of slaughterhouses to pretty much get all this throughput in those busy months so sometimes they cannot really accept all the…

R1: See what they did there was there used to be a slaughterhouse at [town P] where all these little slaughterhouses used to - I know this sounds really one sided - but all these little slaughterhouses they used to do their own animals. Like [town P] there are two butchers shops so all the animals that would be sold through the butchers at [town P] would go to that one slaughterhouse which would then have left capacity…

I1: From the bigger…

R1: …from the big supplies to go to [town R], you see. Now the closest slaughterhouse to here is [abattoir 7] which is 20 miles away, ish. Now everything goes through there now so all [processor 1] meat, all [processor 2] meat, all [processor 3] meat in [town I], that all goes to [abattoir 7] so they maybe have a quarter more animals going through those…. Does that make sense? They’re busier because the government…

I1: There’s not the smaller slaughterhouses.

R1: They’ve had to mop up all the…what would have gone to the smaller…and like all the…the government’s made it harder for…well, basically that’s why all the small slaughterhouses have shut is because of all the different rules and regulations they have to abide by. They can’t afford to do it because they weren’t getting the volume of animals going through it.

I1: To justify, yes.

R1: It’s exactly the same as they’re doing with farming. You either get big or go out. That’s the only way you can survive and this is why the whole factory farming thing is coming into play because if they’ve got…like there was going to be a dairy farm down country somewhere, they were going to be able to employ, I think it was three full-time vets and all these…basically a factory and…

I1: But this is a kind of intensive system that can be applied probably in the lowland area. I cannot understand how such a thing can be linked with uplands and extensive systems having the animals in the fields, how you can have a factory element there.

R1: Well, you can’t up here because there isn’t the space. I suppose you could pigs but again that’s still…no, you can’t but you see like sheep, you’d…what they’re trying to do, they’re trying to get just the big producers to produce…to me at the end of the day it’s these guys…

I1: Retailers.

R1: …that are monopolising everything because these ones here, the consumers, they will buy what…or…these here, are so good at marketing, that’s their job.

I1: Retailers, yes.

R1: So like there was a supermarket not long ago, all our fresh beef and lamb is sourced from local farmers, right. So what does that make you guys think? What do you think when you think that?

I1: I think it’s kind of in the field, very friendly for the animal, for the environment.

R1: But you see what you’ve not listened to is fresh. All our fresh beef and lamb. The percentage of fresh beef and lamb that the supermarkets actually sell, it’s probably about ten per cent. All the rest of it has been frozen because they know that you’re going to buy it, take it home and cook it straightaway so all they’ve done is thawed it out for you. So they’re not supporting the local farmers very much. They only might buy a hundred cows a week. They might sell 10,000 cattle…

I1: Through the…

R1: … does that make sense?

I2: It does, very much so, yes.

R1: So that is it. They are in effect brainwashing the British nation into buying what, oh…yes.

I1: I wonder about the effects…

I2: I’m just wondering, how are you doing for time?

R1: Knock yourself out. I’m not bothered, yes.

I2: Alright, okay, yes.

I1: Fixing, how we can fix this problem.

R1: How we can fix it?

I1: Yes.

R1: I think we need to, well, level things out so see I…it’s like a massive combination of things. I think the consumer needs to be more aware of just how much you are being charged for your food and like perhaps if you went, if the consumer went to more local…

I1: Markets.

R1: …yes, then they’d realise that, do you know what, it’s actually not any dearer buying it from your local butcher than it is going to…

I1: The supermarket.

R1: Yes, and by buying it from your local shop, you’re helping these. So if you go to your…

I1: The slaughterhouse or the producers.

R1: …your abattoirs, you might see your local abattoirs back up which then going back to wherever it was, local employment, you’d start bringing more money into the local areas.

I1: Yes, so that’s the kind of multiplier I think we discussed before but I wondered because I have forgot about that, asking what are the drivers, anything about the change in the weather has an impact on your businesses in any possible way?

R1: Yes, massively.

I1: How?

R1: Such as last year the snow, we haven’t had snow like that for…

I1: So is that called extreme weather events, like snow, drought or…

R1: Drought, yes.

I1: …whatever, number six.

R1: Which…yes, number six, by lambing last year. Like once upon a time people used to lamb in April because it was spring, the weather was starting to get better. Now spring is often quite cold and wet so a lot of people have started lambing in February because February tends to be drier, better weather and then by the time it gets to April, the lambs are two months old, they’re strong, they’ve been outside, they’ve got some resilience. Whereas last year, we lambed in February and the shed it was nearly level with snow. It just came overnight. It killed a lot of lambs inside and then, of course, it makes everywhere wet and then when it starts thawing it’s muddy so then it’s the disease.

I1: So spread of the disease also because of the weather.

R1: Yes, because of the weather.

I1: But this is kind of extreme event which obviously with climate change we’re going to have a few more of those but there are also gradual small changes. It’s either the temperature, higher temperatures, small changes over the years or in the rainfall so it might be, have you noticed any more wet weather than usual?

R1: No, last year it was a lot drier, like even now, like what are we, 5 November today, this time last year the cows had been inside six weeks because it was so wet. This year, they’re out and if they can stop out until Christmas that’s fantastic for us because that’s lowering our feed costs because we’re feeding outside. It’s lowering our bedding costs.

I1: So pretty much those kind of gradual weather changes, it’s for your benefit so far because…

R1: This year has been but that’s what I mean, as far as like most people lamb in February now because the weather’s changed so much it’s almost done a flip. Whereas February used to be cold, icy, snowy so people used to lamb in March, April because it was spring, the weather was warming up, it was drier, blah, blah, blah.

I1: So you’re lambing earlier.

R1: We’re lambing earlier to try and avoid the bad weather.

I1: And also you keep the cows outside in the field for longer.

R1: Only this year.

I1: Only this year, yes.

R1: Yes, because it’s been so dry. We maybe had two days of rain over what…?

I1: So it’s a kind of mixed effect so far.

R1: Very, very mixed but the adverse weather, when we said earlier, oh, yes, the extreme…

I1: Number six, yes.

R1: …last year we scanned our sheep and we were predicted 1052 lambs. After the weather. we got…our lamb crop this year was 500. That’s how many lambs it killed, either with disease after-effects or the snow inside. New born lambs, we just, oh, it was carnage. That’s [non-verbal noise], yes.

I1: I understand. So from here obviously it seems number one and number six are also quite important.

R1: Very.

I1: Yes, and about the change of the pattern of diseases, have you seen any…you mentioned before that probably you have more disease issues because of the weather, I mean, if they are related to the weather.

R1: When I was a little girl, we very rarely had very many…like the cows because they’re inside longer usually, obviously an exception this year, they’d get lame because we bring them inside. They were maybe inside for five months so they start getting things like foul, like obviously you clean them out every day but some are deep littered so you just bed up and bed up and bed up and then they start getting infections with their feet. Whereas when I was a little girl I can remember on really good frosty days the cows used to go out so they were getting some hard standing, that their feet weren’t getting hot and sore because we had the frosty days where they could go out and clean up, save some bedding because it was dry to lie down whereas now because it’s so wet and you’re trying to save the fields for when they go out in spring, there’s a disease build up there.

I1: I understand. From that list, also the one you mention, where is it, the social concerns, no, the changes in the consumer’s lifestyle and consumption patterns is what you mentioned before that one year they want a lean…

R1: Yes, fat carcass, lean, long…

I1: …yes, carcasses, yes, they wanted something else.

R1: Yes.

I1: So that also pretty much affects you, from what you said, I try to understand. Okay, so let’s leave that aside now and I wonder if we can discuss, if I can find it [voices overlapping].

R1: I’ll be back in one second.

I1: What time is it?

I2: It’s twenty to two.

I1: Twenty to two.

I2: Yes.

I1: Okay, so it means half past which is two hours and ten minutes, isn’t it?

I2: Yes.

I1: Okay, [inaudible]. So we have already talked a lot and I don’t want to get…

R1: Yes, no, no, it’s fine, go for it.

I1: Well, we go very quickly about that so pretty much it’s about summarising the different type of solutions in order to meet all these types of problems, okay.

R1: Yes.

I1: So very quickly we go through this and you let me know if you apply any of those in order to deal with the problems.

R1: One.

I1: Number one, okay.

R1: Two.

I1: So the efficiency over what resources, how you try to improve?

R1: So sort of labour, just me and my husband. We don’t have anybody else help us so that’s trying to improve our efficiency.

I1: Okay, and then about the operation or way of working the farm, have you done any kind of changes in the way to face all these types of disturbances?

R1: Little bits but nothing can prepare you for what happened last year because it was almost like a freak weather pattern. Again, you keep your fingers crossed that it doesn’t happen again this year.

I1: What type of innovation, technological innovation do you use?

R1: Such as recording volumes and…because everything now you have to record everything for traceability, again rightly so, so we have a, we call it a zapper but it’s a handheld device that reads the information off…

I1: The tag.

R1: Yes, and you can put in against each tag what it is, bad lambing, had triplets, every year, blah, blah, blah, so that’s how we…that's what we do. We haven’t got the cows on that yet be we are looking to.

I1: Do you use the EBV values? No.

R1: Yes, and no.

I1: Okay.

R1: We do for the consumer because the consumer, I’m not talking meat now, I’m talking pedigree livestock, because there has been a lot of publicity about it, people are becoming more aware about it. A lot of people don’t understand it and a lot of people are unaware that sometimes people are really naughty and can make these EBVs look amazing, when they’re not.

I1: So they don’t trust, pretty much, people they don’t [inaudible].

R1: Not all people and some people are quite bad at sugar coating, so I think those have to be taken with a pinch of salt.

I1: So you mentioned how you have [inaudible] agriculture because obviously [inaudible] and then normal farm which is the educational. And then I wonder do you, what is the next one, try to use shorter market channels because you try to sell through…?

R1: Through, yes.

I1: Okay, and then any changes in the diseases control measures over…to face any problems?

R1: Just being more vigilant, making sure everything’s done on a time so like clostridial vaccines, making sure we’re doing it pretty much to the day to not leave too much of a lapse so that we’re always covered. I think that’s probably more…

I1: Then anything about sharing resources with other farmers or other businesses?

R1: Machinery, yes. Yes, I think you’ve got to try and sort of help each other. Labour…

I1: And you do that through the business ring, no?

R1: No, just…

I1: No, you do it farmer by farmer.

R1: Yes.

I1: Okay, and usually it’s related with what type of activities in the farm?

R1: So like grassland, sort of hay making, sileaging, straw, [inaudible].

I1: And number nine is modify the degree of reliance on the subsidies. You mentioned before you don’t like subsidies and you tried to lower by obviously diversifying in other profitable activities that subsidise your farm instead of waiting for the subsidies from the government.

R1: Yes.

I2: You were going to say something about the labour, sharing labour.

R1: It’s hard because when…I know I keep going back to when I was younger but my family farm supported one, two, three, four, five, six…six people. My grandad had 1,000 Swaledale ewes and 100 suckler cows. That had been his life’s ambition and it supported a family of six. Now, my uncle, there’s only him left and he has 2,000 ewes and 50 cows and he struggles to make a living. So from six of us working at home, well, say four of us working at home to one, and well certainly doubling the sheep, I know he’s lessened the cows but how does that make sense? Any other business would, say producing computers, if you’d doubled the amount of output, you’d be expecting to double the workforce but it’s lessened.

I1: Is that because he doesn’t find any labour to help him?

R1: People don’t want the labour. People don’t like standing, not standing but being out, like lambing time, you might go three days and not sleep. I know that sounds extreme but it does happen and nobody wants to do that. People want to go to work at 8:30, come home at 5:30 [non-verbal], that’s theirs then.

I1: So it’s a kind of hardness of the type of work that it’s not attractive to people anymore.

R1: Yes, people laugh and say that farmers are a breed but they genuinely are. You have to want…you have to have that passion, even if you’re not from a farming background, if you go into farming you have to really have that passion and it’s not all the time, don’t get me wrong. It’s not like that every single day but it’s for intense bursts, so maybe lambing six weeks, it’s long hours, maybe 22 hours a day and catching a bit of sleep in the lambing shed and no-one wants that. I don’t blame them but for the people that do do it, I do think they do love what they do.

I2: Do neighbours help each other so if you were sick, would some of your neighbours come and say, can we lend a hand?

R1: You try but because you’ve sort of stretched yourself so much you tend to find that you can’t.

I2: You haven’t got the space to help anyone.

R1: Yes…

I2: Yes, I can understand that.

R1: …which is sad because once upon a time like hay time you’d all sort of cut your fields and you’d help each other but now you’re just…you don’t, you all…if it’s a sunny day, because you might only…I mean, this summer has been a freak because if people haven’t got good hay this year then they need to give up but you’d do it in…so say we’d cut ours and then the two neighbours would help and then the neighbour would cut his and we’d help with the other neighbour and you’d do it like that but now, if it’s a sunny day, you can guarantee everyone’s out with the mower cutting, hoping that tomorrow’s going to be good to pick up or shake it out. It’s just not there anymore.

I1: Okay, and anything here, the local and short market channels is what you are trying to do.

R1: Yes.

I1: Okay, do you try to reserve any production capacity from the land or the animals or whatever or try to create inventories of stock of materials that you use? I wonder how you prepare yourself to be resilient from the shock that you know is coming to you, any type of shock that we discussed before.

R1: Such as winter which I know is not a shock but you try and stock up on like your hay, your straw because you don’t know when you might need…if it starts raining now, we need to bring those cows in so we need to have supplies ready to get the barns ready to bring them straight in. If it stays like this…

I1: But this is pretty much what always you are doing. You haven’t change that.

R1: No, that’s always….

I1: No, there is no change.

R1: No.

I1: Because I’m looking more for the changes you are doing in order to face this kind of problems rather than….

R1: No, there’s not really a lot of change.

I1: …what you are doing. Okay, do you try to learn more about your consumers, what other farmers they do? Where at the market what are other trends there?

R1: You try.

I1: Do you get anything…

R1: No.

I1: …which is useful for, you know, as information?

R1: There are different sort of information points like the beef and lamb, I’ve forgotten what it’s called now, it’s got some initials, they sort of try and help you predict what’s wanted but at the end of the day it all comes down to money and if you’ve produced those big fat lambs or big cattle if they’re cheap they buyers will buy it because they will have a market for it. They will dress it up so that the consumer wants it. At the end of the day, it’s price. That is all it is down to unfortunately and so there is no, answering your question, there is no real way to prepare.

I1: To prepare for that.

R1: No.

I1: So this kind of feedback you mean, are you referring to the dead sale, dead weight feedback that you’re giving because I assume from marts you don’t get any type of feedback?

R1: You do.

I1: You do, so they do some kind of predictions.

R1: Has your thing done something?

I1: As I told you, it does whatever. That’s why thank God the other thing it works.

I2: Do you need to set it on again?

I1: No, I think it’s battery, this time. Anyway, continue. We have the other thing.

R1: So like if you send your lambs to market through the collection centre you get a print out back saying, ear tag, blah, blah, blah, E3, which all carcases are graded on the Europe scheme and it kind of gives you an idea of what lamb and sometimes you might hit those E grades and ultimately that’s what you’re aiming for because that’s where the premium is but the premium might only be a couple of pence but they have you working towards that couple of pence because that couple of pence means so much. That’s what you do.

We are being a bit like robots, to be honest. The retail, the supermarkets have so much power. They can sort of influence both sides because we’re so desperate to make a living, the consumer is so desperate to get value. Back in sort of 50, 60 years ago, 80 per cent of a household’s income was spent on food, 20 per cent was spent on luxury items. Now, 20 per cent of a household’s income is spent on food. The rest of it is spent on holidays and…

I1: And even less, I think, it’s even less.

R1: Well, yes, so I think if there was some rain on this group here, then it would benefit both sides, both the producer and the consumers.

I1: But then I’m really surprised that the only signal that farmers have to do that kind of guessing game is the price. How many things they can allow you to learn especially that volatile kind of environment and I wonder is there any other kind of feedback that could make any difference except for the price?

R1: Any other feedback, as in like what the supermarkets want?

I1: Yes, or what other specification or…?

R1: But this is what I’m saying. They do; they regularly have meetings saying, oh, this is where the market’s trending because the modern-day housewife she doesn’t want a leg of lamb to last all week. She just wants her Sunday roast for a family of four. So they’ll tell you that they want smaller carcasses but with bigger bums but then at the end of the day, if they have to pay £100 for that lamb that they want and £50 for that lamb that weighs twice as much, they’re going to get twice as much meat, they’re going to buy that £50 lamb.

I1: Okay.

R1: And making all them £100 lambs come back down to £50, do you know what I mean?

I1: Yes, [voices overlapping].

R1: I know, it’s sad, it is really sad but it is price. It’s solely price.

I1: Yes, okay. I understand.

R1: I know you’re getting the other side as well so they’re probably sat their preaching like I am that farmers are so urrgh.

I1: But that shows exactly that the whole supply has a lot of broken links that need to be fixed and [inaudible]. That’s what it proves pretty much. So okay, those…we discussed that. Any insurance or how you try to make yourself financially ready or anything you do with renewables?

R1: No, we don’t have any renewables, again, like diversification, we’ve diversified to try and help it. Insurance; the trouble is with insurance it costs so much, say for instance, foot and mouth, to insure yourself against foot and mouth, you’re insuring against the what if and no insurance company wants to say, oh, well, yes, actually we’ll give you this price for every animal if. It’s that whole black area no-one wants to dare step foot in.

I1: Okay, so those are pretty much all our questions, I wonder if from your side you haven’t the chance to talk about something, about this topic and you would like to tell us, any type of changes you would like to see that would make your farm more resilient. So we discussed a lot of things but I wonder if there is anything that you had in your mind and you didn’t have the chance to talk about.

R1: No, I think you’ve allowed us to talk about a lot. Yes, for me, I would just like to see a fairer playing field, where it’s fair right the way along, from the very beginning right to the consumer. I don’t want to rob the consumer. I mean, at the end of the day they contribute to our wages so it’s only right that if we can produce something that’s affordable for everyone, then, yes, that’s what I would like to see anyway.

I1: And before, at some point you were working as a tenant.

R1: As a tenant.

I1: Yes.

R1: Yes, well…

I1: Because I wondered what the difference it has made to your resilience, the fact that now you are the landowner.

R1: Not a lot really, you just see…you see every bit so we still have rent. So in essence we still are tenant farmers as well because a lot of our sheep are on rented ground so we still are tenants.

I1: So the only difference is you have some land which makes the difference for the bank to allow you to borrow more money, pretty much.

R1: Yes, you’ve got assets, basically.

I1: Yes.

R1: Yes, that’s it.

I1: So that’s only the kind of difference you saw.

R1: Yes.

I1: Good. Thank you very much for your time. I think we exhausted you enough.

R1: It’s alright.

**End of transcript**