ResULTS project: case study A, interview 59

Telephone interview with farmer, conducted 7th March 2019

Interviewer: I

Respondent: R

I: So this was introduction. Is there any questions you have for me?

R: No, not really. We were breeding sheep, we’re now sheep and cheese. We’ve replaced our beef cattle with dual purpose native breed cattle. But I think you need to understand why that is and that’s important in the survey.

I: Yes. Don’t worry, we will have the opportunity. Just before we start answering the questions I need to ask your permission to record the interview for me because it’s quite long and I need to accurately make…

R: Yeah, it’s fine. I totally understand, and yes you can.

I: Okay. Just a moment to arrange that. Okay. So, let’s start with the first question. Can you tell me a bit about your business and also your involvement with other beef or sheep sector?

R: Okay. So I’ll give you some background. I’m a first generation tenant farmer in the [area A]. I am 49 years old. I’m married and have two children. My wife works as a professional in the National Health Service. We have been farming here on this upland farm for ten years as tenants. My background prior to that which I think is probably relevant is that my parents were teachers. I have no direct farming family. I was brought up in rural North Yorkshire, went to Edinburgh University to do a degree in agriculture. When I graduated I worked for the Co-Operative Wholesale Society as a farm manager for six years. Then I went back to university to do a PhD, and went back to Reading University. I ended up [inaudible] and managed their high yielding diary herd. And then when I finished at Reading University I went to work for a firm of chartered surveyors as a farm management consultant. Then we were fortunate enough to be able to start farming as tenants up in the farm that we’ve got here.

I: And your farm where exactly is located?

R: My farm is in the [area A]. It’s at the top of [area 3], so it’s 20 miles North West of [city 2]. It runs from about 200 metres above sea level to about 400 metres above sea level. No, sorry, that’s not right. It runs from… Oh, it’s probably right. Yes, sorry. From about 250 metres above sea level at the bottom part of the farm to about 400 metres above sea level at the top. It’s peat land. It’s a very wet climate. Poor land. Marginal land, and very reliant on government subsidy at present.

Just a bit more about my background. I have always wanted to farm in my own right from an early age, and I achieved that by the age of 38. We took on the farm in 2007 from the previous tenant. The farm was rundown. The landlord has been extremely helpful to us, and very supportive. We have engaged with Natural England and re-established drystone walls. We’re re-establishing traditional hay meadows. We’re planning a lot of trees where I can. And we’ve put fencing up as well. When we took the farm on we took on 160 ewes. We built those numbers up to approximately 450 ewes, and we took on 20 Galloway cattle. We continued with that for five or six years and then decided to change for various reasons.

I: And when that happen?

R: So the change took place, and I need to tell you why the change took place. So we started off with traditional hill breeds which were Swaledale and dales reds, and then we moved over to recording [inaudible] because I realised that recording lactation offered me a better opportunity of actually controlling the quality of the animals that I produce. We went down that route. Then probably five years ago I began to realise… So we were getting through the programme of works to rebuild our drystone walls and restore our hay meadows and plant trees, and could see that actually two things were happening. One, that programme of works was going to slow down, and also I was beginning to see that despite any of the genetic improvement in the livestock that I was facilitating, it was making absolutely no financial benefit whatsoever. So I was losing interest in the farming side of things because the job satisfaction was not there because the money was not there either.

So myself and my wife realised perhaps five years ago, maybe six years ago, that we had to change what… If we were going to survive, if I wasn’t going to get bored and fed up then we were going to have to change. We were also coming to the end of a first generation countryside stewardship scheme on the farm and we had the opportunity in 2014 to go into the final tranche of the higher level environmental stewardship scheme which would bring us a significantly better income for ten years. So at that point we realised that we had to use that significantly better income and invest it in something that was going to create us a sustainable business, because at the same time, five, six years ago we realised that this level of government support was not sustainable in the long run.

I: I understand.

R: Just a couple of other things about our farm situation. Our farm is three miles long, a very difficult stone track. We are at the head of a valley, and it takes us 20 minutes to get to a proper road. We are at least 30 minutes from any significant town or village. Probably an hour from anywhere significant actually. We’re 30 minutes away from the local town, village with shops. And that has implications for bringing in bulk feed and concentrated to this farm. We can get hay and straw here, but we cannot get lorries with concentrated feed here. The other thing that happened was that whilst our original stewardship scheme stated that we needed to keep Galloways or Belted Galloways on an area of ground that was ahead of all the restoration and the Galloways [inaudible] and also help to restart this heather on there.

The Galloways had been great, but unfortunately they were so slow growing, and the problem is our ground is so peaty, that if we out wintered them, they destroyed the sward, the grass. So keeping Galloways rather defeated the object. Then if you bring them inside to feed them on hay and straw, that’s expensive and it creates extra work. So I was spending a lot of the winter feeding and mucking out these animals, and the summer producing food for them, and actually at the end of the year the calf value barely covered the cost of feeding [inaudible].

So equally, in terms of job satisfaction, that was not providing either…well it was providing neither job satisfaction nor a sustainable business. Coupled to that, if we were going to add value to a beef herd by taking those cattle through to slaughter then because they were so slow growing and because raising beef animals to produce [inaudible] is so biologically inefficient, it would mean that instead of having 20 cows here, we’d probably have to carry 80 cattle [inaudible], right the way through to slaughter, and this farm cannot carry that number of cattle.

I: So you have to go for store animals option.

R: And store animals don’t pay. Because the Galloways, it’s a specialist market and really the only way to make money in a Galloway slow growing native breed is actually to add the value and sell them as a finished product on the plate. As a high quality premium marbled grass fed beef animal direct to the consumer, and we can’t do that. We can’t carry 80 cattle here in total to do that. So the store animals are a complete waste of time.

I: Okay. For the option if you would like to fatten them then do you have the marketing chance to do that if you would like to do it?

R: Well, I can come onto that later because things have changed slightly. Probably the answer initially was no, but the fact that we couldn’t keep them to fatten them ruled out any idea at the time. But yes, those channels are there. They weren’t there at the time, but they have come now because we’ve done something else that has enabled that.

I: What is the something else?

R: Well, I’ll come onto that. That’s because we’ve changed direction and we’re making cheese, and on the back of making cheese we’ve made contact with premium cheesemongers in London and on the back of those premium cheese makers in London we’re in contact with premium butchers in London. It’s as simple as that. So we had to sell beef animals as stores which was a waste of time and effort and money, and we had to sell cheaper stores because we can’t finish them either, and we have to find land elsewhere to finish those sheep. Because I live so far away getting animals in and out from here is so difficult, that makes that very difficult for a one man operation. So we were selling animals as store sheep at a loss, and five years ago the only thing keeping us going at present is government subsidy.

I: I understand. I have a few questions, because you raised a lot of issues. But obviously we will have a chance to discuss a few more later on. First of all you mentioned that the cost of production, when you were trying to sell your animals, the beef I mean, then you just almost covered the expenses of feed…not feed, but…

R: Yeah.

I: I wonder, do you include also the cost of labour of yours?

R: No, I didn’t. I could sell a calf at best in October for about £300, and I knew that to feed one of my cows over winter would cost me at least £150 if not £200, and that’s excluding labour. I know that [inaudible], so there was not even any point in doing the calculation.

I: I understand. If you would like to do the calculations, because of your qualifications you know how to do the calculations, is it easy to do it? If an upland farmer wants…

R: I mean, I could do it, but if I looked at some of my neighbours I think that… I go to farmer meetings and one of the things that struck me last year, we’ve just done a farm meeting on soil sampling because of the new legislation. Under the new legislation we are now required to do soil sampling regularly to assess the nutrient status of our soil. What was a shock to me was the ability of farmers to undertake simple mathematical calculations looking at levels of nutrients in either farmyard manure or slurry or levels of nutrients within the soil. The simple addition and multiplication and division was difficult for them. They didn’t understand the relationship between the maths and the concept.

I: I understand.

R: So, what I’m saying is, I could certainly have a stab at calculating the cost of production, but I would suggest that maybe 50 per cent of my neighbours wouldn’t be able to.

I: Okay. But still you don’t want to do it.

R: Well, there’s no point. Because in that scenario I know that I’m not producing any beef, there’s absolutely no point because I know that we’re making a loss. So at that point we decided to change what we do. So there was no point spending the time doing the calculation, you could see it, it was plainly obvious.

I: Yes. The other thing I would like to ask you, you mentioned you did a PhD. Can you tell me a bit more about that?

R: Yeah. When I was working as a farm manager for the Co-op my experience was based on large scale dairy and arable farming in England, and then I moved to Scotland and it was farming large scale, fruit, veg, arable, dairy. And then I moved to Ayrshire and managed a farm on my own, and that was 200 dairy cows and arable and a pick your own enterprise as well. Whilst I was managing those cows in Ayrshire, I realised that I didn’t…I had an interest in livestock, I didn’t have enough knowledge about what we were doing with the dairy cows in terms of managing them and feeding them. So an opportunity came up at Reading University to do a PhD. It was actually [inaudible] in high yielding dairy cows. So that’s what it was. We were looking at energy balance, and the energy fluxes involved in high yielding dairy cows from calving to about 30 weeks of lactation. And a lot of that data fed into the current breeding system for cattle. I believe it’s called feeding for milk. So yeah, some of our data fell into that.

I: I have a question here, because obviously you have experienced different farming systems from arable, soft fruit you mentioned, livestock, and obviously different names, lowlands, uplands, and through the experience you’ve had also from [inaudible] the exposure to those data and the analysis. I wonder overall what are the lessons you get from upland farming?

R: I think probably from upland farming the short growing season is significant. It just curtails your ability to compete on a… You’re forced into a situation really of producing store animals, and in order to finish those you either have to sell at a loss or you have to import expensive feed to complete the process.

I: And this is because of the short season you said.

R: Short growing season, yeah.

I: Ah, yeah, okay.

R: Your grass doesn’t start growing here probably until late April, and it finishes growing in mid-October maybe, at the best. Whereas there are people elsewhere, even 20 miles from here, grass is now growing nearly all year round, and that just doesn’t happen here. And also the ground is so wet that you can’t [inaudible] cows onto it. And I think that the intensifying of agriculture in the uplands is very difficult and not necessarily appropriate.

I: We’ll have the chance to discuss a lot about that later on.

R: Yeah, okay.

I: One last question regarding the background you gave me…

R: Sorry, one other thing about the uplands, the difference between the uplands, I would say the level of education and approach to farming is very conservative in the uplands.

I: Can you speak a bit more about that?

R: And I think that’s a reflection on education.

I: Okay. You mean that some people might lack education they might become more conservative.

R: They’re resistant to change.

I: Ah, resistant to change, okay.

R: They’ve never done anything else, they’ve never been exposed to anything else, and they’ve never travelled, they don’t know many people outside their local community and they see what their neighbours are doing and they all do the same. So, together with other reasons, the industry tends towards stagnation.

I: Okay. I understand. We’re going to talk about that resistance to change later. My final question related to the background you gave, you mentioned about something involving cooperative.

R: Mentioned something about what, sorry?

I: You were [voices overlap].

R: Yeah. The organisation I worked for after graduating from Edinburgh University was called the Cooperative Wholesale Society, or the Co-op, and they were at the time Britain’s biggest farmer and they farmed 50,000 acres in the UK. They weren’t a cooperative organisation as such, not like the farmer co-op. CWS Agriculture, as it was known, was the farming department of the cooperative movement. So you’ll have a Co-op store in Edinburgh or in the Borders, or throughout the UK and we were the farming side of that.

I: Okay. And that wasn’t related with livestock was it?

R: Yeah, sorry, that was farming. It was a farming business. So they had 5,000 dairy cows at the time and they farmed, as I say, 50,000 acres, and that includes fruit and vegetables and arable and…

I: Okay. I understand. It was a kind of mixture. But I wonder overall what was your impression from that experience?

R: I learned a huge amount. The managers, my colleagues were highly educated, very motivated, very driven, very hard working, very professional. I think that the business was extremely top heavy with administration and was totally reliant on subsidy at the end of the day. It received about £1 million subsidy and it made £1 million profit. The overheads structure, due mainly to management and administration at the top end, also cost £1 million, so our overhead cost was huge. The other thing, again looking back, with hindsight, the whole of the industry is infiltrated. It’s completely driven by subsidy, and then was unwilling to…or lateral thought, entrepreneurialism was perhaps stifled and not necessarily supported.

I: I understand. The reason I ask was to understand whether from your experience you believe that any competitive type of scheme could help upland areas.

R: Well, the Co-op did have upland farms before I joined, but they got rid of them because they didn’t make any money.

I: Okay. Let’s leave that aside for now. I have another question for you which is quite general as well. What are the special features of particular upland areas that should be maintained in your view? This is quite general. It can be any type of feature of farmland areas.

R: Before we go on, in terms of my farming experience here we’ve only really got to about 2009, and we’ve changed significantly from 2009 to today’s date. So if you want to come back to that or do you want to…?

I: Okay, yes, you’re right, it’s better if we explore that now. Let’s do it now.

R: Okay. So, to summarise, we got to the point where we had realised that we were working very hard, we were trying to improve the quality of our livestock but we were unable to take advantage of that quality because of the limitations of the climate here meant that we couldn’t take our livestock to a finished state and we couldn’t therefore add value by selling to premium markets, and we’re forced with selling animals as store animals at low pricing. This coincided with the end of our current agri-environment scheme…

I: Two thousand and fourteen.

R: At the end of 2013. We could see what was coming. It had taken a year to work these schemes up. So in 2010 we decided the direction we needed to head into. So according to the new agri-environment scheme that we were going into we still needed to keep cattle, so I decided that we can’t keep beef cattle, it’s too…we can’t keep the numbers of cattle on the farm that we need [inaudible], and the reason behind that is partially because they grow so slowly, but also because the beef production is so biologically inefficient that there’s no hope of making it pay. So whilst this isn’t a dairy farm, I have a dairy background. What we looked at was the possibility of utilising the fact that there are native dual purpose cattle that are native to the [area A] that we could use. They’re called Northern Dairy Shorthorns. They’re a very rare breed. They’re on the critical list of [inaudible] by the Trust, but they’re native to the [area A]. Could we keep those cattle? Could we milk those cattle? And could we turn that milk into a product that we could sell in a premium market?

So what we did was we spoke to people in that premium market and asked the question, and we had a favourable response. So we started to change our herd from Galloway to Northern Dairy Shorthorns. We went onto training courses to learn how to produce cheese. We’ve got a recipe that is a very old style Wensleydale cheese, and Wensleydale cheese is local to the [area A]. It will be raw milk cheese. It will be a low input milk yield from our cattle. We were able to access leader funding to build some facilities, and last year we began to make cheese on a small scale.

I: How was the reaction of the market?

R: The market was absolutely fantastic, and we are producing something that there is a growing market for. We are more or less unique in the UK that we are following a path that is looking at provenance and [inaudible] of our farm and minimising bought-in inputs and trying to express the forage and the microbiome that is in existence in our farming structure. So we’re selling to Neal's Yard Dairy in London who are the top cheesemongers in London, and they are absolutely 100 per cent behind us. They wish that many other people would do what we’re doing. So we’re taking a recipe from an extinct cheese, we’re using nearly extinct cattle that are from the [area A], that are bred to survive in our conditions. We’re going to milk these cows from the beginning of May to the middle of October at the latest, and then drive it off. Very seasonal production, but we’re going to sell that cheese at a very high premium into London and other wealthy cities.

I: I have a few questions there. Your customer again, what is the name?

R: Neil’s Yard Dairy.

I: Okay. And you spoke to the people in the market, obviously, that customer you mentioned, or other people…

R: There’s another local one called the Courtyard Dairy, and he’s based at in [area X], and he is the equivalent of Neil’s Yard Dairy but he’s in the North of England. They were both extremely supportive, knew what we were trying to do and just bent over backwards to help us to do it.

I: So, firstly, you spoke to the local rather than the one in London.

R: Yes, spoke to the local one and he was so interested in what we were doing he put us in touch with the London one because he knew that they would be able to help us too and they would be interested, and they would be able to help us in terms of ideas and research and development and marketing and cheese development. So that network within the cheese making industry is there.

I: That’s really good, but I wonder how easy was it for your business to approach the local customer? Because obviously it was a completely new concept.

R: We just drove past him. He has a retail outlet on the A65 on the way to the Lake District, and we were going to the Lake District and we called in and we just got talking to him and we asked him. It’s as simple as that. And then we kept going back and saying if we want to make cheese which cheese course should we be going on, which cheese makers should we be speaking to? So he said speak to these people, go on this course and read these books.

I: Oh, great. The reason I’m asking is to understand how easy is it for an upland farmer to think out of the box and also make those kind of links?

R: Very difficult. Because they can’t, and they don’t, and they won’t. So I am unique in my valley. I am the only one doing an added value product. They don’t have the confidence, they don’t have the education, they don’t have the contacts, they don’t know how to approach people, and they like farming, they like doing what they do. I like change. If I don’t have change I get bored, and I look at my neighbours and I do not understand how they can continue to do the same thing day in, day out, year in, year out, and not get bored to tears. But they do.

I: I understand.

R: And they also think that the government owes them a living, and they have a divine right to receive government subsidies to keep them in the manner to which they are accustomed, and it’s the government’s obligation to keep their business solvent. I look at some of my neighbours, they’d far sooner take their sheep to the local agricultural show and win money or win a prize at the agricultural show than actually look at their business and delve deeper and say actually are we making any money here or are we just surviving on subsidy. When you push them, or in meetings I’ve been to…I’m now getting to the point where I’m fed up of going to farmer meetings, because when farmers are pressurised, they deflect criticism in every direction.

So they will point the finger at every other part of society and say us farmers are always getting blamed, and there’s a victim culture within upland farming. They think they’re always being blamed and everybody’s pointing the finger at farmers, and they are insecure. I put it down really to, as much as anything, lack of education and lack of continuing education and exposure to other cultures and innovation. That’s why I say I think it’s stagnated, and I think the subsidy… Don’t get me wrong, I don’t think we could survive without subsidy, but I think subsidy as it has been delivered today has enabled the UK farming industry to stagnate.

I: It’s good that you opened that discussion. I wonder right now to make the questions, how subsidy should be delivered to avoid that stagnation? Because you mentioned we need the subsidy but we need to be delivered in a different way. That was my understanding.

R: Yeah. It’s very difficult. There’s lots of issues. I think one thing that without a shadow of a doubt…two things about the subsidy system going forward. One, my wife is a dentist. She can’t practice her dentistry without doing annual continuous professional development, and that is obligatory for her to practice. So whilst I’m not solely advocating CPD for farmers to be able to farm, I am advocating that farmers should undertake annual CPD that should be verifiable before they’re able to receive subsidy.

I: Okay. That’s one. Other?

R: So that’s one. The other is that farmers should not be able to receive subsidy beyond retirement age unless they have a documented, written, agreed succession plan in place.

I: I understand. So those are two ways we can make subsidies be delivered in an effective way.

R: Yeah. I don’t know, those are two examples. Yes, subsidy needs to be removed from production, it needs to be delivered through environmental objectives.

I: Okay. Obviously there’s a lot of talk about that shift, I wonder, should be totally removed from food production or what do you think?

R: Should subsidy be totally removed from food production? Why should it continue with food production?

I: Don’t expect answers from me.

R: I know, but I’m asking the question. So you’re asking me why should it continue in food production, and I say, well, why should it continue in food production, because that is merely underpinning inefficient businesses. And the environment is being drastically damaged at the moment by subsidised food production. Unless there is any particular special reason, which might be to do with food security or a food shortage, then I don’t see why food production should be supported.

I: I understand. Okay. Don’t worry, we will have the chance to… Let’s go back to the questions because we…

R: Sorry, I haven’t finished about the farm. So basically we’re now in a position that come May this year we will be producing cheese to sell in London and in high end retail outlets. Coupled at the same time we have reduced our sheep from 400 or 450 ewes down to 150.

I: Okay. The reason?

R: That was partly to release capital but partly to release time as well. The other thing that I’ve done, is that we’ve changed from our horned sheep, our Black Face, our Swaledales and our Dales Reds and we’ve changed over to wool shedding, easy care sheep. So I am not spending time clipping sheep and removing their wool in summer.

I: I understand.

R: Again, I recorded tups every time, and I’ve recorded tups every time because I know that the progeny of those tups will be an improvement in the direction that I want the cheese farm to go. And by reducing the sheep numbers, our losses have reduced disproportionately, and our use of [inaudible ] has reduced, and my time, effort, involved in the sheep farming has reduced drastically.

I: I understand. If you opened the information cards.

R: Hang on. I need to get on my computer now. Can I just put you down for a minute and send a text? I’m on a mobile phone.

I: Yes, you can do.

R: It’ll only be a minute. Hang on. I’ll just put you on speaker phone. Sorry about this. I got a tractor stuck yesterday and it’s still stuck…

I: I need to go to the toilet, so don’t worry. Take your time.

R: Yeah.

[Pause]

I: Hello?

R: Hello.

I: Here I am. I’m really sorry. I needed to go.

R: That’s fine. I need to go back again on the computer. A different computer this time. Right, information card one, definition of food systems.

I: Okay. Leave that aside. Go to the next one which is [inaudible].

R: Upland food system [Inaudible].

I: Yes. So in that one, because the project is talking about food system and we thought this term would mean completely different things to different people, that’s why we’re trying to draw this diagram. The blue arrows is the supply chain, so you have input providers, upland farmer, lowland farmer, [inaudible], wholesaler, retailer, consumer.

R: Yeah.

I: And then you have all the orange circles which is organisations or businesses that help the supply chain to add value.

R: Yeah.

I: And you have banks, colleges, certification bodies, inspecting agencies, consultancy services like vets, like accountants or…

R: All the support agencies.

I: Yes, exactly. And also industry association lobbies, like NFU or Federation of…

R: I wouldn’t say the NFU is helpful or supportive at all.

I: Don’t worry.

R: I’ve just got the idea in the uplands the NFU barely existed. They are resistant to change more than anybody else and they are the drivers of stagnation. Sorry, I’m being a bit political here.

I: No, no. I want to hear these comments, but let’s finish the bit about the description of them and then we ask your comments.

R: Yes.

I: Then there are the green boxes which is other stakeholders affected from what this value chain is doing, but also affected by the chain. So you have the government and the funding bodies, the pharmaceutical market, the energy market, convenience and renewable. All the charities. And then local upland community and tourism, the general public. This is the human side. We consider part of the system, the biological organisms themselves, so the plants, the bacteria, the animals. So I need a kind of feedback that it makes sense, there is something missing, the comments you make for NFU or any other player.

R: Yes. Can I base this really on our experience?

I: Yeah.

R: So we found the leader funding process marginally beneficially. It was marginally beneficial because of the level of bureaucracy that was involved. We applied for a grant of £10,000 and it was extremely bureaucratic. Some things in the process were beneficial, in that it made you question what you were doing and think what you were doing. But the process itself was so slow and cumbersome that it almost delayed the project going ahead. The application for funding, it takes so long that actually when you’re needing funding to capitalise on a project you need it perhaps within the next four or five months, but actually to get through a leader might take you a year. So, whilst it was beneficial it was torturous.

I: I understand.

R: When it comes to the support network, so the diversifying in cheese, what we found was that Neil’s Yard Dairy and the Courtyard Dairy, the two main people that we will be supplying this year, were extremely helpful. They have their own experts who were very supportive in terms of what we wanted to do. When we wanted to look at infrastructure we used a dairy engineer who put us in touch with people who had conceptualised and built infrastructure that was appropriate to us, and the dairy engineer is a super guy and has also acted as a consultant. The other thing that we did was visit lots of cheese makers who had recently started up in production, which meant travelling the length and breadth of certainly England, and they were a good source of help. Then the other person that was helpful was [person 1], who I believe that you have emailed.

I: Yes, we have an interview, but it’s I think a couple of weeks.

R: Yeah. [person 1] is unique. I’ve worked as an agricultural consultant, and I know several, and [person 1] is like no other. He works in a very logical way and he’s very questioning and doesn’t conform to standard agricultural consultant practice at all. He’s also had expertise in the food industry as well. In any part of my journey into farming the NFU has been of no use whatsoever. In my view the NFU is chained to its membership who are aged farmers in their late 50s or through to their 80s who don’t want to change. It is unable to question its members’ approach to business or activities, I think, without fear of a catastrophic loss of membership.

I: And how practically they contribute to the stagnation, NFU?

R: Because they want to see the continuation of the status quo, and when you look at all the documents that they brought out about Brexit and everything, they are unquestioning. For instance, when you look at the NFU’s recent document on the uplands, it states that aren’t farmers doing a good job in the uplands, we’re providing [inaudible], we’re slowing the flow of water, we’re providing water storage and slowing the slowdown, we’re providing habitats for uplands wading birds, et cetera. Actually, the reason that environmental stewardship was brought in was because farmers were doing exactly the opposite of that. Heather was being overgrazed, because we have a huge sheep population then woodland and scrub is unable to flourish.

The NFU is unable to look at itself or its members in a critical manner and come up with appropriate either questions or discussion in amongst itself. And that’s the same if I go to a farmers’ meeting and you say to farmers well you shouldn’t really be…you know, look at the analysis of what we do, look at the increased runoff from [inaudible] sheep grazed pasture, look at the problems that we’re doing by feeding sheep out in a field, we’re feeding corvids, crows and jackdaws. Look what those jackdaws do to ground nesting birds, et cetera. We’re feeding sheep, we’ve got an explosion in the rat population. They are unable to look at the big picture, and they’re unable to question their own activity. That’s because their membership are elderly and resistant to change.

I: Okay. So you mentioned about the NFU in that diagram and also you mentioned the positive role of particular consultants…

R: Sorry, I haven’t finished yet, sorry.

I: Please, continue.

R: Yeah. So the reason I single out [person 1] is because he was able to help us, and in a way that I can’t really explain, but I know people within Andersons, who are a farming consultancy, I know people within ADAS, and they are unable to offer the level of support and the type of support that we found necessary.

I: Can you please elaborate a bit more? I want to understand how a good consultant looks like and what is on offer right now.

R: So a good consultant will question you right down to your primary personal objectives, and that is very difficult. A consultant from ADAS, or whatever the consultancy company is, is less likely to do so. A consultant from one of those companies is quite likely to want to provide you with a standard template for a report, and is guided and has been brought up within the subsidised agricultural system, and will perpetuate more of the same because they know that their jobs are reliant on subsidised farming. That’s not conscious, that’s subconscious, but they will want to do more of the same. For instance, in order to increase revenue you have two options, you either increase volume or you increase price.

I: Yes.

R: So what we do in agriculture generally is increase volume, and that is what we do. We have more milk, more sheep, more beef, more cereal, higher yields of everything, when actually it might not be appropriate. When that commodity is being produced at a loss what’s the point of producing any more, and should we be taking a sideways look at this and saying actually, we need to produce less and add value to it or look for a different market for it. So these consultants have grown up, they’ve been through the same agricultural system that I’ve been through, we’re all inculcated in this subsidised agricultural system which is a production based system, which is a post war agricultural system designed to feed the population of Europe.

I: I wonder if there is a third route, because also minimising the cost might be another way.

R: Yes, but you get to a point where minimising the cost, you come up against legislation, and you only have to look at Brexit and the fact that we could minimise cost of production further here by reducing our welfare standards and using hormone implants for our beef animals, but we’re not allowed to do that.

I: For now.

R: Yeah.

I: Who knows?

R: And minimise cost by…we externalise costs. So we look at the environmental degradation that’s taking place, and we’re already externalising costs already, and that might mean methane emissions, it might mean CO2 emissions, it might mean nitrogen oxide emissions, it might mean what is water pollution, it’s degradation of habitats for wading birds. I’ve tried to reduce my cost production by increasing my sheep numbers. We went from 160 ewes to 400 ewes…

I: The reason I ask that…

R: Sorry, my wife’s just going, I just need to say bubye.

I: Yes.

R: I’m just saying to my wife this conversation I’m having with you is very cathartic.

I: Oh, thank you.

R: I hope you don’t mind, and I hope you don’t mind that I sound as if I’m getting on my high horse.

I: No. It's okay.

R: But, sorry, I’ve forgotten where I got to. So I looked at that with our sheep. So we went from 160 to 400 ewes, and I thought yes, this is going to reduce my overhead costs per ewe and we’re going to produce [inaudible]… And I’ve done the sums and actually because of the losses, because of the poorer performance of the animals, because of the volatility of the market, because of the additional overheads for more animals, like a quadbike, and because of my time, I did this calculation probably in October that I am actually better off with 150 sheep, my margin is greater with 150 sheep than it is with 400. So increasing numbers with the same amount of land in the upland did not increase my farm margin. And [person 1] will talk to you about this in great detail when you speak to him next week.

I: Actually, when I was suggesting about the [inaudible] or reducing the cost I was pretty much having what [person 1] suggested. But you already explained it a lot. I wondered, in the diagram, you mentioned about the importance of having good consultants and what a huge difference it makes.

R: Sorry. I worked with this consultant, and I worked [inaudible] and I found that the culture within that firm was very much about using your time efficiently and being able to charge for every hour that you spend. The consultancy firms have partners and partners want a margin. So very often the consultancies that I came across, either it was on the back of a government scheme which said you have to produce a report... Post foot and mouth there were a load of farm reports done that were government funded and it was basically get a consultant out on the farm, charge £400 for the service, and produce a report, which was very superficial which really didn’t look at the business in huge depth, didn’t look at the personal circumstances in great depth, and really produced a report that was what the client wanted to hear.

I: I understand.

R: And then get that [inaudible] down quickly so you can claim your money from the government. And then when it came to the other level of consultancy is about holding a farmer’s hand and seeing them through the complexities of the current subsidy schemes and what you can and can’t do. So very much a lot of the consultancy is limited by the boundaries set by the subsidy teams and some of the parameters set by those subsidy teams. And very often these consultants have come straight out of agricultural college or from a farming background and they’ve had little experience of diversified or added value or agriculture with any form of entrepreneurial activity or lateral thought.

So the thing that sets [person 1] apart from any others is he has done it. He has farmed. He has been through a very dire economic period in farming. He has survived that. He developed a diversified business that added value and sold into the food chain. Then he retrained in business management and marketing, and that sets him apart. He has experience of all those things which a lot of modern day agricultural consultants do not have. They don’t have any of that entrepreneurial experience or lateral thought and open mindedness. I think certainly the consultants I know indeed are not open minded.

So I’ve had an agricultural consultant here from ADAS who said oh yes, I can see you…this was a long time ago, and he was a senior ADAS consultant, he came here to give us some free advice, and we looked at the sheep and we were producing sheep at a loss there but he didn’t tell me that we were producing sheep at a loss. He then said, well, if you’re going to diversify you want to open a tea room. There was no concept… The fact is you’re an upland farm, you’ve got to beef and sheep and that’s it. You can’t do anything else with your farm because it’s not possible.

Then actually, we had one of the senior people from the Country Land and Business Association, [person 2]. Very senior in the North of England, who came and sat at our table and said, of course, [farmer’s name], you can’t do anything else other than farm beef and sheep here. So within the industry there is an acceptance that on a hill farm you can’t do anything else other than farm beef or sheep, and that sets the limit for consultants. That’s the vision. There is no vision. And that’s what [person 1] will tell you as well. Very few farmers within the uplands of Britain have a vision about where they want to take their business. And that’s the same for the consultants as well. Does that help?

I: It helps a lot because actually it covers questions that I have later on, but I allow you to speak a lot about that because you pull a lot of things nicely together, so it doesn’t make sense for me to interrupt you.

R: Okay. That’s fine. Sorry if I’m talking too much.

I: No, that’s fine, don’t worry.

R: Do we want to go round the orange ovals in this arrow and do you want me to comment on them?

I: Yes, please. Some of them, not all of them.

R: So bank wise, we changed banks. We were with HSBC, we’ve been with HSBC since more or less birth, and we found that they couldn’t… I’d just got to know my local agricultural banking manager with HSBC and then she was made redundant, and at that point we were just starting to look at the funding process for our diversification and they were absolutely… So I had to speak to somebody in Birmingham who had no knowledge of farming at all. So at that point we changed to Nat West bank, and Nat West bank were brilliant because their banking manager, [person 3], was so open minded and supportive and could see what we were trying to do and could see why we were trying to do it, and he was fabulous and really supportive.

And we’re tenants. We’ve got no collateral at all, and he could see on the basis of the business plan and the enquiries that they’ve made and the people who were supporting us in terms of the cheesemongers in London that we weren’t talking nonsense. So we were able to get ourselves a really significant loan and get the thing up and running. So banking wise Nat West have been great. And that’s very much dependent on the personality of the personal banking manager we have. [person 3] has since left Nat West and retired, and we’ve got another Nat West banking manager and he’s pretty mundane and ordinary and boring, and really we would look to try and find a different bank manager within Nat West if we can. So that’s that.

Education and training services, I worry greatly about education of the next generation of farmers in the uplands, both university and college. I have no evidence other than speaking to sons and daughters of my neighbours and the approach that they take, and I worry greatly that we are still stuck in 1970s and ‘80s agriculture when we are teaching these students, and we’re turning out clones of their fathers and grandfathers in terms of wanting bigger, better, more, and environment comes last on the list. And I think the environment thing is superficial, and I think that the level of farm business management expertise is dire.

I can speak with some degree of objectivity on this because at one point, probably 2006/2007, which is a while ago now I admit, but I did teach 18 year olds from Askam Bryant College, I was trying to teach them agricultural business management on a Monday morning. And they were 18/19 year olds and they had absolutely no interest whatsoever in the business management side of things, and they were more interested in tractors, showing sheep, showing cows, and the gory details of the weekend’s social calendar. So I worry about just what is going on in our…how questioning our colleges are of the experiences that their students are having either on the farm at home or on work experience. I also worry that we train our farmers and then we stop educating. As I said before, my wife has to continue to do her CPD throughout her working career to keep her up to date with current legislation, current science, current developments which are beneficial for them for what she does and the service she provides.

I: You mentioned at some point that environment is quite superficial. I wonder what you mean by that.

R: So if I listen to my neighbours they all can see that things have changed. Okay, I’ll tell you what keeps me awake at night. It’s the fact that I have in the past used macrosychic lactones, which are ivermectin, abamectin, and moxidectin, which are [inaudible] for sheep. What keeps me awake at night is actually just how deleterious are those to the invertebrate organisms on the grassland that I farm. What impact is that having on the food chain? What impact is that having on breeding wading birds and their food supply? Another example is within the agricultural press there’s a lot of suggestion that livestock grazing grassland sequestrates carbon. Now, I know for a fact that the scientific evidence to support that is equivocal. There is as much information that shows that grassland sequestrates carbon or doesn’t sequestrate carbon as there is evidence that grassland does sequestrate carbon. And if you look at some of the pressure groups, if you read the agricultural press, if you look on Facebook then the overriding message is that grassland sequestrates carbon. And that’s not true. And that’s why I’m saying it’s not deep enough.

One of my neighbour’s daughters has just finished at Harper Adams, and she posted on Facebook [inaudible] an example of a soil carbon cycle, and that’s exactly what it is, it’s a soil carbon cycle. It means the carbon is cycling. Not necessarily being sequestrated. She posted that to say look, here, farmers are good for the environment, we’re sequestrating carbon. As I say, the scientific evidence on that point is equivocal. I’m saying that it’s very superficial. We don’t have that depth of understanding to know what we’re applying to the land, what we’re doing with our animals has implications.

Again, I can talk about methane emissions. None of my neighbours are aware of the fact that in ten years’ time we have to reduce our CO2 emissions or equivalent emissions by 40 per cent, or in 20 years’ time by 50 per cent, or 30 years’ time by 80 per cent. They have no idea. They only know that…some of them won’t even know that cows emit methane. Sorry, I digressed there. But I just think that I’m not certain there’s enough emphasis on proper environmental education in depth within the agricultural farming…

I: Do you have any links about the research you mentioned?

R: Yes, I do. I can send you a paper on it. That’s the other thing, [person 1] and his wife, me and my wife, and two other farmers and their wives and our local AONB, which is area of outstanding natural beauty manager, have a dialogue with [person 4] who is a climate change scientist and has the government climate change tsar and food security tsar. We have sought him out and we have a dialogue with him because we are so concerned about what is happening.

I: And what was the reaction?

R: What, from [person 4]?

I: Yes.

R: He’s all for it, and he wants to have more meetings, and he wants us to take it further and further and further. [Person 4] blew our brains out with what he said. We had a meeting just after Christmas for two hours and he talked about climate change and he took us through everything. As farmers we’re worried about what place do we have in society in the future, because [inaudible name] wants to [inaudible] trees everywhere and is that appropriate for these places as well. So we’re questioning our existence. That’s what the NFU doesn’t do. That’s what the colleges don’t do. They don’t question their existence, they don’t have an appreciation of the [inaudible] of the agricultural systems.

I’m saying as a whole. I’m sure there is [inaudible]. I can only speak from my experience. So we are taking this further, we’re going to get the [area A] National Park involved with [person 4] to try and break those…and how do we get these messages that [person 4] has about the climate change, about economics, the message [inaudible]. How do you break those barriers down and say to farmers, guys, wake up, the climate’s on its knees, the environment’s on its knees, and your business is on its knees, and the government isn’t going to bail you out anymore.

I: Just, please, if you have any links with research that has been done, the one you were talking with [person 4] and you supplied to him or he gave back to you, just please send those links to me, because I’m looking also to find scientific evidence from all the sites.

R: There’s another guy who we caught up to do a paper who’s working in Estonia at the moment. He’s called [person 5]. He’s looking at abandoned land in Estonia and whether you can have a carbon neutral beef system on that abandoned land. Unfortunately that’s because I have an academic background and I seek out interesting things and things that help me to compartmentalise my worries about my… As a farmer, it’s all I’ve ever wanted to do, and I’m so grateful…

I: So about the [person 5], if you can send me that link as well.

R: Yeah, I will do. What I was saying is I’m so grateful for the opportunities but I’m also extremely worried about my part in climate change as well. So that’s my driver. Sorry, I haven’t got round the… Research centre, consultants services, I’ve talked about those. Industry associations, lobbyists, I don’t have a great deal to do with them.

I: What about the NSA?

R: The what?

I: The National Sheep Association.

R: I have nothing to do with them. They’re just another lobby group.

I: Okay.

R: No, I count them along with the NFU and the National Beef Association and all those. I don’t read agricultural press because it depresses me and it winds me up.

I: Okay.

R: I’m not involved in any certification body. The jury’s out as far as that is concerned. Might do if we have to. But my standard certification body is the person I sell my sheep to.

I: But about the certification, because it’s a kind of popular movement.

R: Yes. And it’s fine if you’re producing a commodity. Sorry, this is one really important thing now I’ve said commodity. What farmers don’t understand in the uplands and probably in most of Britain and most of Europe is that we are producing a commodity livestock on a small scale. That is a paradox. Commodity and small scale shouldn’t be in the same sentence. And there is no realisation within these agricultural communities that that business model doesn’t stack up. What did you ask me last? Standard certification bodies. So the standard and certification bodies thing, it doesn’t do anything for me in terms of making my business unique or having a unique selling point.

So in the uplands, I can’t produce commodities efficiently in the uplands, so I want to produce premium products. So those premium products I will sell on the back of their existing qualities to the people that want to buy them, and by and large if they meet me and they see my production system, which they want to do, then their Q and S or red tractor means nothing to Neil’s Yard Dairy, and I don’t think it will mean anything to the butcher in London either. Now, that applies to me. I’m not saying that the certification standards are inappropriate, and it’s something that we may consider in the future. But for me in my position, they’re just another level of bureaucracy.

I: I understand. What about inspection agencies? The equivalent in England, it’s environmental.

R: So the Environment Agency, my neighbours hate them. I think they’re okay. Obviously you can have a dialogue with them, they’re willing to work with you. I don’t have any experience of SEPA, but the Environment Agency, from my perspective, have actually been relatively helpful and approachable. The Rural Payments Agency are a disaster are not fit for purpose.

I: Why is it a disaster?

R: The Environment Agency, I think my experience of them has been relatively good. Natural England in its old form was very good too. But they’re barely in existence any longer. Extension services are more or less non-existent. I was brought up in [inaudible] agricultural system which was great. They educated you, they did the research, and they held your hand while you were farming. Fantastic system, state run system. And you had contact with the same guy throughout your career. That doesn’t happen in England. There’s nothing in terms of agricultural extension. The AHDB is again inculcated in that system. I’m sick to death of getting the same rubbish on my email from AHDB talking to me about reducing costs of production when actually what we need to do is look at margin and actually probably, if anything, increase price rather than reduce cost of production. Because we’re up against the buffers in terms of legislation and input costs when we try to make things more efficient.

I: Anything about the charities or NGOs?

R: What was that, sorry?

I: Anything about the activity of charities or NGOs?

R: Well, I think the charities in support of farmer difficulty are very worthy organisations and probably necessary at the moment because farming will be more necessary going forward. I’ve not had any experience of the farming charities, other than the Rare Breeds Survival Trust, and that’s not one that’s necessarily appropriate for support of farmers.

I: What’s your experience with this particular charity?

R: They’ve been supportive in what we’re doing as a farm in terms of using nearly extinct native breeds to create a business opportunity.

I: Okay. So you had enough support, but you could have something more from them.

R: I don’t think that I would necessarily… The only comment I have about the Rare Breeds Survival Trust is that it hasn’t necessarily got a fully scientific approach to what it’s trying to do, and it’s board membership is made up…and this is second hand. This is the experience I’m relaying to you from a close associate of mine who was involved in the Rare Breeds Society Trust. Their approach to breed preservation is not necessarily wholly consistent or wholly scientific, and is a little bit backward in some respects. So that organisation could perhaps be run slightly better, but that’s a minor detail really.

I: I want to ask you something. From previous interviews I got a lot of suggestions from other interviewees that farmers especially in upland areas need to see themselves as land managers rather than food producers, which pretty much means every piece of land they have they need to make the best choice utilising different options. So in a piece of land they might need to concentrate on forestry, another piece, farming, another piece, peat management or whatever. So what do you think about that idea? Makes sense?

R: Yes, makes sense. But the problem is that farmers are reluctant to change. As I say, they like farming sheep, my neighbour likes selling his tups at the auction mart for £50,000, and people like buying his sheep, so why should he change? He wants to produce more, he wants to get bigger, he wants to be seen within the community as being a successful farmer. That means selling at high prices at the local auction mart and buying new tractors, and buying more land when it becomes available.

This is what I’m meaning about the shallow nature of agricultural education in that we have no [inaudible]. My understanding at the moment is it’s really we’re concentrating on more of the same, more sheep, more beef, let’s carry on as we are at the moment. And if you look at the demography of the farming community the average age of farmers in the [area A] is probably something like 50. Those guys are not going to change, full stop, until they’re carried out of their farm in a wooden box. Then there’s no opportunity for the next generation to come into that business, because the barriers to entry for people like myself are so great that we have a stagnation.

You’re not going to get change to land management because 50 year olds are not going to change. And if you’re a tenant and you haven’t got a house to move to and to retire to then you’re going to continue to live in your farm, under your tenancy agreement until you die, and then there will be change. Then what will happen is that the farm infrastructure will have decayed and will cost an arm and a leg to restore and renovate. I can speak with some authority on that because our farm was run down when we took it over. My predecessors in this farm were 75 and 65 respectively. The walls had come down, the pastures were full of rushes, and the fences were down, no woodland.

To put things back together and start to reinvigorate the farming system it’s cost the tax payer something in the region of £100,000 to put our 460 acre farm back into some form of order. So I think it’s very laudable to try and look at land management. It’s exactly what I’m doing. So my gill woodland I’m trying to replant. When I say gill, gills are the steep sided watercourses that run through the [area A] and are very characteristic of that landscape. Basically the woodland has been grazed down by sheep and I want to plant woodland back into that. I want to restore my meadows. So all those things you’ve talked about, managing different parcels of land in an appropriate way I would love to do. So I am doing some of that, but there are various barriers to that. Do you want me to carry on?

I: Yes. Because I want two questions related to that. Which one…?

R: So I’m a tenant on an estate of about 83,000 acres, and my landlord’s brother is a shooting tenant. So there is a shooting interest on that estate. And I want to plant more trees, but the gamekeepers don’t want me to plant any more trees because they view trees as vermin corridors. So there are issues trying to persuade my landlord and my landlord’s brother that I’m doing this to stop water erosion and to slow water flow down, but they see me planting trees as, A, using up valuable agricultural land, which it isn’t, because it’s in the uplands, and, B, creating vermin corridors. And the shooting interest in the uplands is significant, and I will be representative… Well, A, I’m not representative because not many farmers particularly wanted to plant trees, and, B, I will be representative because my land owner doesn’t necessarily want me to plant trees.

And I’m currently looking at wanting to plant more trees now, actually trying to get to speak to somebody about the government grants that are available to plant those trees is extremely difficult. If I get through that barrier and get to the point where I can plant trees then I have to remap my farm, because we’ve compartmentalised it, changed land use, and then what happens is that that triggers a response in the Rural Payments Agency and it’s like throwing a spanner into the works of the Rural Payments Agency. The knock on effect of that is that it delays my [inaudible] payment scheme money.

So I haven’t received any money from last year because we did some tree planting and remapping, and now I’m being delayed. My money is three months late. That has a significant impact on my cash flow at the moment. When we start producing cheese then that will be different. So there are lots of obstructions in the way of land use change, and you must not underestimate the level of inertia that comes from the shooting fraternity in terms of land use change, which is outside the agricultural sphere, but because they’re generally the wealthy land owners or if not the land owners own the shooting rights, then that can have implications on land use change. Is that clear?

I: It is a very good example, and it’s nice the way you describe things because you pull a lot of things together which I have found evidence from other interviews but it’s nicely that it has been said fluently in one argument rather than different pieces of that. You mentioned about entry barriers, especially for young people or for tenants, and I would like to know a bit more about that.

R: Okay. So, for us, ten years ago, as I’ve always wanted a farm we looked at buying a small farm in the [X] Moors. We had an offer accepted and then we were gazumped, the sale didn’t go through. So we didn’t get an opportunity. In my roles, various jobs we saved up money, we had about £80,000. We didn’t have a great deal of money. So therefore I knew really that we had to look at renting perhaps in the uplands purely in terms of the rental barrier, the hurdle was very low. So, if I can give you my example, so my rent for this 160 acres is about £7,500 a year, which is the same as I would be paying rent for a house in a local town. So my conclusion was that I could afford to pay that, I could afford for my farm to go wrong, I could afford for prices to collapse and I could still live in this house.

If I went out and got a job, I could still afford to pay the rent on this house. So from that point of view it was sustainable to come into the uplands and rent. I pay a low rent on an isolated hill farm. What I couldn’t do was pay a high rent of, say, £20,000 plus on a farm of, I don’t know, 200 acres in the lowlands, because if the farming situation went pear shaped and prices collapsed, then I would still have to find £20,000 from somewhere. And it’s far easier to…and that…and if I went out to seek a job, we would struggle to…all my salary would be utilised in paying that rent. So can you see my rationale for coming to a hill farm?

I: Yes, I can see that.

R: So that was one thing. So then we were very fortunate in that the opportunity to farm here, this farm came up through networking and contacts, not through applying for a tender process. I still put a business plan in. My landlord realised that he needed new blood on the estate, a breath of fresh air. So having contacted him he very kindly took a risk with us because we didn’t have necessarily a farming track record to come and farm. So the critical thing was that whilst the barrier to entry was pretty big in terms of capital requirements, we could afford an upland farm, which made it easier, but the biggest barrier is having the opportunity.

I: I understand.

R: I set up a forum with a former colleague, because along my journey towards farming I came across perhaps a couple of dozen young people like myself who desperately wanted to farm and couldn’t get the opportunity. These guys were very capable, not afraid of hard work, but just simply did not have the opportunity to make that happen. And at the time the presumption in the agricultural press was that there weren’t any individuals out there wanting to farm. That was wrong. That was a total misrepresentation of the situation. So actually having the opportunity is the key barrier, not the capital. And it’s also that opportunity might not necessarily be a tenancy, it could be another form of farming arrangement. One of the other issues is that…

I: For example?

R: For example, contract farming agreements, for example, share farming agreement. The problem with those is that they are not well known and so people are wary of them. So land owners are wary of them and frightened of the risk, and land agents are wary of them and frightened of the risk.

I: What are the risks for them?

R: That it goes wrong. That it’s taking somebody on who’s an unknown, that circumstances change and they don’t know what the circumstances might be. I think it’s fear of the unknown, basically.

I: Okay. I understand.

R: But some of this succession is intrinsically linked with taxation legislation, tax planning and safeguarding assets from the tax man.

I: Can you tell me a bit more about that?

R: Well, actually safeguarding assets from the tax man is a good thing because farmers could continue to live in their property and be part of the farming arrangement if they were to look at contract farming agreement or a shared farming agreement, because they would still be taking a financial risk. And actually, it’s better for the land owner than perhaps a tenancy [inaudible]. But it’s fear of the unknown. The land agent is scared still of taking on a tenant or a farming partner who hasn’t got a track record, who they don’t know will do a good job or not. In an estate situation it’s far easier to go to one of the existing tenants and say actually, we want to split this farm up and give you some more land to make your farm more sustainable.

I: But then in Scotland right now there is land reform which pretty much makes stronger the right to buy for tenants, which has an implication…

R: I can’t speak about that because that’s not my experience in England.

I: Okay.

R: So when a let farm comes up land owners generally these days are less willing to… What they can do is do the house up and let it for a really good rent, and then let the land to existing tenants to make their businesses bigger and therefore, the perception is, more sustainable.

I: Okay. The conversation is really good. My only concern is I think they have booked the same room for another meeting later on. So I suggest, if you agree with that, to have a break, leave me about 30 minutes to sort out in which room, and probably having something very little to eat, and then come back and phone you back in probably half an hour. Is it okay?

R: Yeah. I’ve got to go and dig my tractor and trailer out at probably about half past two, so that’s my absolute time limit.

I: What time is it now?

R: It’s one o’clock.

I: Okay. And your limit is half past two.

R: Yeah. I’m quite happy to stop for another day or for you to come back later on, but I can carry on until half past two and then I could start again probably at five o’clock, but you may have finished work by then.

I: Okay. Give me 20 minutes to sort out what is going to happen with the room, because I definitely need to move out from this room, and then I will call you back.

R: Yeah. I’m sorry if I’ve spoken far too much.

I: No, no, believe me, it’s exactly what I needed from this type of… I will explain you later.

R: Okay.

I: Okay. Thank you for now.

R: Cheers, yeah. Bye.

[pause]

I: Okay. I have to say that I really enjoyed the conversation we have, because I might not show many questions but it’s because you are describing very well and you synthesise all the arguments together. I listen to the answers and I can figure out which answers go to which questions, so I don’t need to…

R: Yeah, I understand.

I: …follow the exact order as I’m doing with the other interviews, which is good. It’s much more natural way to do the interview.

R: I think probably because of the conversations and experience and interactions I’ve had with people like [person 1] I think probably some of what I say is very well rehearsed and it’s therefore probably, hopefully, coherent and relatively joined up I suppose. As I said earlier, it’s very cathartic for me because I find agriculture very frustrating at the moment I suppose is the best way to say it.

I: It’s one of the many frustrating things right now. It’s not the only one unfortunately.

R: No, I understand. No, that’s fine. Anyway, go ahead.

I: Okay. So I was thinking about what resilience means for you, that word, what it means for you.

R: Okay. Yeah, I’ve thought about this a lot actually. I think in its basic form resilience means being able to bounce back after shocks, after a shock to the system or a period of bad luck or negativity you can bounce back and survive and sustain your business. So resilience to me…and this is where I got very frustrated with the spreadsheet survey that was done, which I was very much looking much more at the technical side of things. Resilience means to me can your business survive in the long term and can it survive uncertainty and shocks to the system?

Obviously, part of resilience in a capitalist society means that you can utilise that capital to see you through the bad times. We don’t have a lot of capital because we’re tenants. But what I do have is perhaps human capital, in that myself and my wife are relatively well educated and my view is that we use that human capital to be able to change our business. My view is that as well as having a capital base, which might mean money or it might mean education or ability, it means that you can change your business to suit circumstances. My biggest concern for upland farming is that that does not exist in large quantities, that people are not willing to change and therefore they will not be as resilient as they can be.

I: I understand. If you look at the information cards, the last card, it’s called information card two with definition of resilience…

R: Hang on, let me just get back to the computer. I haven’t looked at it so…

I: It’s better not if you haven’t.

R: Okay, hang on. Information card…

I: Two. Right at the end.

R: Oh, right at the end, okay. Definition of resilience. The capacity of a business or system as a whole to either absorb, buffer against internal and external disturbances. Yes. Learn and adapt to incremental changes in order to be less exposed. Yes. Even transform through radical changes so shocks and long term stresses are no longer effective. All of those.

I: So it makes sense for you. Do you have any examples you have seen it works like that?

R: Well, I can only quote to you what [person 1] has done, and he will tell you about that. He left college, he set up on an outdoor pig unit as a young man with a young family, and they were borrowing money to buy pigs, they were borrowing money to buy feed, and then interest rates went up and pig prices went down and feed prices went up, and they were in a dreadful position. This was in the 1980s. What they did was take some radical advice and they sold half their pigs to clear their debts and they took their business along a completely different line and added value to their pig meat with half the quantity of livestock, and they ended up selling that meat into Harrods at a premium and made a very good business.

And the fact is they were tenants, they didn’t have any capital really, but what they did have was human capital, was themselves, and they used their skills, knowledge and ability to make that business resilient and change that business. And we’re not in as an extreme position, but we are doing the same. We are using our interest in food and the environment and our skills in terms of our education and our faming skills and our scientific skills which allow us to look at things like cheese production and our understanding of microbiology to be comfortable with producing a raw milk cheese. So hopefully you’re talking to someone where resilience is in progress. That’s what I’m hoping.

I: Okay.

R: So because agriculture hasn’t had to change but it’s faced with change then there are probably very few examples of change having taken place because we’ve not been forced into that situation.

I: The radical change can be either giving up, for example, cattle beef and concentrating only on sheep, or, like you did, you shifted to milk production. But also it can be things like agritourism, renewable energy, organic farming, pasture fed or whatever, any kind of radical change.

R: Yeah. Tourism, agroforestry, convert your buildings into holiday lets, downsize and go out and get a job and farm part time, look at doing camping, caravanning, and fundamentally that resilience is down to the individual having a vision, and what we don’t have in the rural community is vision. My neighbour’s vision is simply to continue to sell tups at high prices in the market and watch his neighbours look at him in awe as he drives round in his new Range Rover. He doesn’t have a vision for his business. And I would go so far as to say the majority of farms in upland Britain are not businesses, we are simply employees of the state.

I: I understand.

R: They don’t look at their farms as businesses. They’re not businessmen. They don’t know the cost of production. Five per cent of farmers maybe do cash flow, that sort of thing. None of them have a marketing budget or a marketing plan. None of them have a vision. And so without that vision you have nothing to drive or strive for.

I: Okay. I want to ask you something else now. If you get to information card three, which talks about resilience, functions, rules, goals of food…

R: Hang on, number three.

I: Yes.

R: Okay.

I: So these things are some of those I found in the literature and I tried to group them. First is related to the business owners’ private interests, the next one is related to the multiplier effect, recycling money to the local industries by buying services or feed or whatever, and then the third one is related to public goods services. So yourself, as an upland farmer…and you can speak about yourself but also you can speak for the upland farming community in [area A]. I’m asking if you go through the whole list is there any type of function, goal or whatever you would like to call but it’s pretty much the same thing, which is important, that is missing from that list?

R: So relating to business owners’ private interests…

I: No, for the whole list, not only the first.

R: Is there anything missing, so you want me to go through those now.

I: Yes. Just read them through and then we can start discussing. If there’s something missing then also we’re going to discuss other aspects.

R: I think the thing that’s missing if you’re asking for things that are missing from that information card three, I would say it’s… Functions, roles, goals of food system agents.

I: Yourself think only about upland farmers in [area A]. So for upland farmers what is the important functions or roles? What do they see for themselves? What matters more? What are the motivations behind them?

R: Food production. They are farmers, they’re producing food, full stop.

I: Number seven, okay.

R: They’re producing food and they want to continue to live as they are living because they know nothing else and they can’t see anything else. And that’s it.

I: So this is what is happening now, but personally for yourself and also what should be the case, what would be then the answer?

R: Sorry, could you say that again?

I: You answered the questions from what is happening about the upland community right now in general, but I wondered what is your personal answer, your personal view for yourself, your businesses, and also what should be the functions from the upland community?

R: So, for me, the role here, for my role, I think, would be to preserve, conserve as many species and habitats as we should be whilst trying to balance that with a sustainable premium added value food business, a holistic business that incorporates the environment with marketing and embraces change.

I: So pretty much number one and number 20 together.

R: Number one and number 20, yeah. What else? Flood prevention, yes. Moderation of climate change, yes. Biodiversity enhancement, [inaudible] all of those, absolutely all of those.

I: Okay.

R: It incorporates all of those. This is a difficult one for me. It’s got to be holistic, that’s what I mean, it’s got to have all of those in. Personal objectives have got to be in there.

I: Okay.

R: Personal objectives and personal vision is critical.

I: So personal objectives, you mean number ten which is personal and family [inaudible].

R: Probably, yes, that as well. And ability to change and monitor.

I: Okay. I understand.

R: This was a little bit difficult because I just think that all of those should be in it.

I: Okay, I understand. No worries. As I said, there are no right or wrong answers and it’s pretty flexible. If you want them all inside that’s fine. The other thing I wanted to ask you, is the full potential of adding value to beef and lamb products currently produced in upland areas reached?

R: Is the full value reached?

I: The full potential of adding value to those products in upland areas is reached or not.

R: I think it is in individual circumstances. {person 1] will talk to you about this. Given the explosion of the premium ready meal market then I would say it probably isn’t. That potential hasn’t been reached. I think certainly there are individual circumstances where that is perhaps being approached and is evolving, but as the uplands as a whole I think it’s nowhere near, and I think one of the issues behind that goes back to my very first statement which is that climate has an impact on productive ability of the land up here, and it also has an impact on your aspiration as a farmer, and that’s happened to us, in that it makes you think it’s difficult to produce finished livestock.

I: Can you elaborate a bit more what type of effect climate change has on the farmers?

R: So the climate means that I’ve got a short growing season. The short growing season means that I can’t take lambs to slaughter weight or finish, and that means that I have to sell my lambs as store lambs and I can’t complete the added value process with the land resource that I have.

I: Okay, I understand. Before we get to the next part, which includes also the climate change, is there anything else you would like to discuss about the functions, the roles, the goals for the upland farmers or we should move on?

R: Sorry, can you say that again, the phone went dead for a minute? Hello?

I: Yes.

R: Sorry, can you repeat that last question?

I: Yes. I wondered before we move on is there anything else you would like to mention around functions, roles or goals of upland farming community? If you don’t want to mention anything else on information card three then we can move on.

R: I think that to make the uplands more sustainable we need to have a huge influx of new thinking and new blood.

I: I understand. Okay.

R: Because I don’t think…without…something needs to make [inaudible] change because the barriers, the demographics will work against change forever, and something radical needs to happen to make the uplands more sustainable. I can even speak about the communities, in that we’re involved in the charge, we’re involved in the village hall committee, and I’m a school governor, and the same issues arise within those organisations as within the farming community. There is a huge resistance to change. There is a social prejudice against incomers and new ideas, which means that the village hall and the church stagnate, and the school will die. We only have 25 children at our school. We’ve had to federate with the neighbouring school, and there is resistance to that federation from the local community. Federation is the only means of survival and there is this resistance, the community does not want to change. So it’s not just the farming community, it’s the rural community as a whole that does not like change.

I: When you say newcomers, they’re people with obviously no agricultural background do you mean?

R: Yes, some of that. But my wife has no agricultural background, so she’s been involved in the church committee and the village hall committee, and she’s about to resign from those two. The reason is, and this is a prime example, the church does not have a toilet. The church has money to build a toilet. The toilet means that during church services people are completely compromised and have to walk quarter of a mile to the village toilet, and we can’t offer anything more through the church. The resistance to having a simple thing as a toilet means that that is one example of why that institution, the church, will die, because it has no value to the community.

The same as the village hall. The village hall committee does not want change. We have two village halls in two villages which are 100 yards apart and neither is used fully. Actually, what needs to be done is that those two village halls need to be sold and we need to build a new one that can cater for the school and the local community, but the resistance to change is there and it will never happen. Those village hall committees will die and close and become redundant. There are people who have moved into the district who are very well educated, quite wealthy, have young families and are put off by the inertia of the local community.

I: I understand. So if we move to the information card four which describes the resilience, disturbances long term pressures, shocks and drivers of change…

R: Hang on.

I: …there you can see a lot of different drivers, so please read those and let me know if there is any important driver which is missing.

R: So, sorry, these are factors that can affect resilience.

I: Yes. It’s pretty much what affects the businesses. Any possible disturbance or pressure or shock or driver of change. So is anything important which is missing from there?

R: I would say that what’s missing from there is educated, open minded, relatively young, entrepreneurial, driven people with a vision.

I: Okay. So that could be added to the social drivers I suspect.

R: Yes. I would say that you’ve actually got all the inverse of that up there. The reducing pool of upland farming skills and knowledge is absolute rubbish. That’s not a comment on you at all, but that is exactly what I was saying about inculcated statements. Because everybody perceives that in an upland farm you need to have been brought up in the hills to run an upland farm because it’s so difficult and because you need to know where the sheep shelter when it’s snowing and dar, dar, dar, and it’s all piling on the pressure to stop change happening.

That statement comes from within the industry. I have not had experience of upland farming… No, that’s not true, I have experience of upland farming, but it’s not rocket science. Anybody who’s physically active and got a brain can take on upland farming, and actually the less they have in terms of upland skills, to a point, probably the more beneficial it is to their business because they’re not influenced by that tradition. Does that make sense?

I: Yes. So most of those drivers of change sound like a threat, and I wonder if there is anything that can be seen as an opportunity.

R: In this list of drivers?

I: Yes.

R: Well, changed weather patterns is an opportunity. Our growing season I think is getting longer. There is scientific evidence to support that.

I: So number one you mean.

R: Number one, yeah. There may be positives to the negatives. The other positives might be that we may be paid for carbon sequestration and/or maintenance and preservation of peat status. Opportunities. Uneven power dynamics in the supply chain, yes. So farmers could set up, given the appropriate support, added value food chains whereby the additional value goes to the farmer and not to the food chain.

I: Which means pretty much by passing the existing market channels.

R: Yes, it does. Alternative land uses are opportunities. So get somebody with a different mind-set to come and take on a tenant farm and you’ll get a different outcome. So it might be somebody who runs a tenant farm who’s from London and knows how London works and advertises in London and invites people to come out for farming holidays, and people will pay to do that. But local people here would look in horror at doing…would find that horrific to invite people to come and experience farming in [area A]. So yes, change of land uses opportunity. Brexit might very well bring opportunities.

Personally, I think it’s an absolute disaster, and I wish it would never happen. I think it’s horrific, to be quite frank, and we’ll leave it at that. Yeah, may well reduce access to foreign labour, I don’t know. In terms of opportunities, again if you’ve got the statutory wherewithal within the land owning community to change the method of land tenure then that needs to happen to get more opportunities within farming. Yes, war and conflict will produce shocks. That will produce change. That may well produce opportunities.

I: When you mentioned about the change in the land, sorry, I didn’t catch the whole phrase, but I suspect you suggested something like land reform, do you?

R: Yes, probably land reform, yes. That’s what I mean, yes.

I: Okay. What exactly do you mean by that? What type of reforms you would like to see here?

R: Well, for instance, under the legislation currently we have two forms of tenancy, we have the farm business tenancy, which is the 1995 act, which is a limited period tenancy, which really in a lot of circumstances promotes short termism. So I was very fortunate that my landlord knows that a tenancy for anything less than 20 years is not sufficient for anybody to establish themselves and create a farming business that is sustainable in the long term. Whereas if you go to lots of places FBTs are for five or ten years. That is not going to bring you new blood into the industry to give them a chance to establish a business.

I: So that kind of new tenants work as a barrier you mean.

R: Yes, that will work as a barrier. It’s very much market driven. So it’s short term, the environment therefore doesn’t come into it. it’s taken on by neighbouring farmers as a marginal piece of land rather than by a young couple who can see an opportunity to do something different, to change direction. But if it’s a short term, if it’s for only five years then that doesn’t give you the opportunity to become established. And of course the rents are driven by the market, so big neighbouring farmers can afford to pay more rent than people who are starting a business.

The other agricultural holding act is the 1986 act which in England gives three consecutive generations succession. That means that people who are not up to running that business well can continue to farm. It also stipulates that the next generation should be earning their income from that farm, and perhaps discriminates against farming families who have diversified using that farm as a base and created another business, but because they’re not earning that business from the primary agriculture then sometimes the inheritance of that tenancy can be jeopardised.

So you’ve actually got two extremes. You’ve got one that isn’t secure enough in the 1995 act, and in the AHA you’ve got something that on the one hand can be too secure and allows families to continue the same type of farming activity, whether that be good or bad, and works against change, and then you’ve got this next generation has to be earning their living from that farm, which again discriminates against change within the tenancy sector. Do you understand what I’m saying?

I: Yes, I understand. To me, the way you describe it, it’s both of them. They don’t really create true incentives for the type of innovative farm, the radical changes.

R: Yeah, absolutely.

I: Okay. I understand. So from information card four is there anything else you can see as an opportunity?

R: I could do. If I sat down for two hours and looked at it and thought about it I could probably come up with some more, but I can’t at the moment.

I: That’s fine.

R: Changes in consumer lifestyle, societal concerns about meat production damaging ecosystems. There’s opportunities there in terms of developing holistic systems.

I: I understand. So if you marketed a product in the right terms you mean you can find the right niches.

R: Yes, perhaps.

I: I understand. I have a couple of things that…

R: Sorry, one more.

I: Yeah.

R: Brexit. So for me Brexit may give me an opportunity in that it might be so damaging for some of my neighbours that they stop farming and will release land so that I can take that land over.

I: I understand. When you mentioned Brexit probably might have more negative impact, which aspects particularly of Brexit? Because I tried to cut it in different aspects, so that’s why you have subsides, access to…yeah.

R: So, immediately, tariffs may well be applied, and we may lose access to European markets which are our biggest market. I’m looking at purely the negative things. And it means for me exporting cheese to Europe may well become more difficult. Tariff supply may well mean that food prices go up. That means that lamb and beef, which are already expensive, will become less popular and therefore prices will become depressed internally.

Agricultural support will change, and because of the structure of European agriculture and the power certainly of French farmers, we benefit from that power of the French farmers in terms of agricultural subsidies, and if we’re going to leave Europe then our subsidy system will change and those subsidies will probably decline. I’m not saying whether that’s a good thing or a bad thing, I’m just saying that’s what will happen. And that will be a shock to a lot of farmers now in the uplands where in fact profit is less than subsidy received. There will also be fewer opportunities in terms of labour supply. We will lose that stream of labour perhaps. Again, I mentioned this earlier, we may well struggle to retain our status in terms of animal welfare and food quality if we are perceived to be importing food from the USA which is of perceived lower quality in terms of chlorine washed chicken and hormone treated beef.

I: So in that case we will continue having the same standards or we lower the standards?

R: Well, we can’t. How can we possibly do that? Because that will bring in a whole host of cheap food and that will undermine the production of our poultry and our beef and our sheep. Basically UK farmers will be being undermined in terms of price and they won’t be able to compete with that.

I: But the thing was got a lot of comments on that argument that actually if the regulations allow lower standards to come in in the UK pretty much the British farmers have only the option to produce high standards in order to differentiate their products, because they cannot compete on price.

R: No, they can’t. We can’t compete on price because we are small scale commodity producers. But if we compromise our standards how do we know that beef that’s sitting in an abattoir is from South America or from USA or from the UK, and traceability becomes an issue, and when traceability becomes an issue then Europe gets suspicious and then Europe will stop buying meat from us. I can see all these barriers coming up. And red meat is expensive and we’re producing it in commodity quantities, and farmers are going to have to change and downsize and change to native breeds, slower growing, and there’s inertia there that will not readily be accepting of the changes required, and that will take time and that will be a shock to the system.

I: What do you mean they are not ready to accept the changes?

R: So, for instance, my neighbour who sells his sheep for a lot of money also has a Belgian Blue herd. He is an upland farmer. They’re double muscled Belgian Blue cattle. They grow quickly, they’re finished on a cereal diet that produces a meat that is very lean and course but lacks flavour. How can that be sold into a premium market?

I: Okay. So what do you think of the native breeds? Do they have any advantage, market advantage or resilience advantage compared to European type of breeds?

R: For what we’re doing the offshoot is that we do have male calves. Male Northern Dairy Shorthorn cows. They are slow growing. Their beef is delicious. We’ve just eaten some last week. It’s marbled. The flavour is intense. And we’re selling that. They are slow growing so they don’t require cereal input. They’ve been outside all winter nearly. I’ve only just brought my cows in, and my young stock. They’re hardier. They don’t require the same veterinary inputs. They live off poor forage. They produce a product at the end of their time that has measurable differences in taste, texture and smell. That has a premium in the market if it is marketed appropriately.

I: What I don’t understand is that it seems to me from what you said that native breeds seems to have a kind of advantage in terms of either resilience or market differentiation.

R: Native breeds are smaller. That means that when the ground conditions are steep and when the ground is wet they don’t sink into the ground. They’re active, they can climb hills. They can graze where other cattle can’t. They have thick, woolly coats which means they are more resilient to outdoor weather. In Scotland, look at the highland cattle, look at the Galloways. Our Northern Dairies have a similar coat as well. So they require less management, less time, less feeding input. As a commodity they’re worth less than commodity continental grown beef, because their carcass doesn’t weigh as much, the margin is less because they don’t grow as quickly.

The native breed’s advantage is really in terms of taste and texture and smell, and eating experience. And the environmental story that can come with it to help market it. For example, because we are in our higher level environmental stewardship scheme here, we’re turning that on its head and using it as part of our marketing for our cheese and our beef that we are trying our level best to produce this cheese and this beef in an holistic fashion that has as small an impact on the environment as we can possibly make.

I: So, in other words you are saying that native breeds also offer some benefits on the side of environmental…mitigating the emissions or any other environmental benefit.

R: Well, from a technical point of view you could argue that native breeds grow slowly and are of lower weight at slaughter. On paper that looks bad because their methane emissions per unit of light weight produced will be far in excess of the cereal fed, fast growing Belgian Blues that they have next door. However, my cows can help to restore heather moorland by controlling Malinia and grazing that Malinia, whereas the Belgian Blues will lose condition if they do that and not meet the target. It’s also consistent with the story that we should be eating far less red meat, and I advocate that. We should be eating far less meat, much more vegetable matter. But that meat should be produced in a much more holistic manner and should not be reliant on significant cereal inputs, which could be fed directly to the human population or to more efficient converters of that food, such as pigs and poultry, instead of livestock. So it’s not a direct story, but it is part of a comprehensive holistic marketing story.

I: I understand. I wonder when you mentioned about number nine, uneven power dynamics…and I’m not talking about the marketing channels that you have established about the cheese, I’m talking now about the typical market channels available to an upland farmer. So, for example, the auction marts, the available slaughter houses. What are the power dynamics there and how they affect the farmer?

R: Well, for us, our nearest slaughter house is 35 miles away, and it doesn’t do a very good job. It’s a small one. It was set up on the back of government money, a grant. It’s still operational, but it’s still trying to do a commodity job when perhaps it should be looking elsewhere. The other thing that happens within the slaughter industry is that the slaughter houses buy the livestock, and they put themselves in great peril, and they are forced to go big because they’re at the mercy of the volatility of the market. A lot of abattoirs go bust because they buy when prices are high because they have to keep throughput high, and then they sell when commodity prices are lower, and so it very often mucks up their cash flow, and the margins are so tight because they’re reliant on throughput.

My view is, I can’t understand why the abattoir isn’t being paid for doing a service rather than actually owning the commodity itself. The other problem is that once an animal loses its head we lose all its ear tags and we can potentially lose identification, and traceability is always a question mark in slaughter houses I feel. I’m not an expert on it. [person 1] is far and away a better one to probably give you answers on that one.

But the added value lies with the butcher. In conjunction with my neighbour we’ve just had one of our beef offspring slaughtered and butchered and the added value certainly comes in the retail side. It’s about gaining that for the farmer. The other problem is that very often a lot of the schemes that have been set up to look at added value within the production industry have been set up very badly, and they’ve been set up with an initial overhead that’s unsustainable to administer what might be a cooperative added value system. So the initiative has died on its feet because its overheads are not consistent with its initial throughput.

I: Do you have examples of those kind…?

R: Yes. [organisation 2], which set up on the back of the abattoir at [town 4], probably 20 years ago. Big fanfare announcement. Lots of money pumped in. Huge administrative management structure, and it just wasn’t sustainable.

I: What is the name again?

R: It was called [organisation 2], and it was based…

I: And now it doesn’t exist.

R: No, it doesn’t exist now, no. And it was based at the abattoir at [town 4] in [County 1].

I: Okay. I’m trying to have some interviews with people from the slaughter houses. I will try to have an interview with them, because obviously it seems quite an interesting story.

R: The abattoir at [town 4] is called [organisation 3].

I: Okay. Do you know them?

R: Not very well, no.

I: Okay. That’s fine. I wonder, is there any issue about how many available, in terms of infrastructure of slaughter houses, how many abattoirs there are available and where they are located?

R: Yeah. It’s catastrophic. It’s hopeless. For me to take animals to the abattoir it’s three quarters of a day out of my time, and it’s a long way, and it’s not local and it adds to food miles, and it means that it’s another barrier to getting food processed locally and that added value being retained within the system locally.

I: So I wonder for someone, obviously not for yourself, but for someone else who would like to do something like local, say, cider in the farmers’ market or [inaudible] or whatever, is it possible?

R: Yes, it is. We’ve just done one. My neighbour took one of our cattle I’d grown to store, he finished because [inaudible]. He took that. Our nearest abattoir is 40 miles away in [city 2]. He took that to [town 5], and then it was brought back to a small cutting plant, a local butcher who’s very good and has specialised in boxed meat production. He is only 15 miles down the valley. So there are individuals who do do this sort of thing locally, but the abattoir is the real spanner in the works. The fact that we have to take that animal so far away to get it processed. That is a big effort. I think that is a barrier to making things happen locally.

I: But also I suspect once you got the nice product of yours through the butcher to the final consumer then it might be quite difficult to have supply quite extended over a period of time rather than one off. So what I’m trying to say is that when the final consumer really likes your product and go back to the local butcher and is looking for more, and if they don’t find that because the producer has no more animals…

R: Yeah, but if I’m supplying a premium product, which my native breed will be, I don’t want to go through the butcher because I want to have that direct dialogue with the final consumer, and I want the final consumer to understand that what I produce is produced seasonally off grass. So my beef, my cheese is made with cattle grazing grass, and it’s not finished of expensive, unsustainable cereal brought into the country on farm. So I would like – it’s part of my marketing strategy – that consumer to understand the cycle of production on my farm. Do you see what I mean?

I: I understand. I wonder if that type of seasonality restriction, obviously you cannot remove it, but I wonder if you can stretch a bit, make bigger the period of supply if more than one farmers having the same mind-set could work together. It makes sense or not?

R: Yeah, totally. Absolutely. But it’s finding those individuals with the same mind-set. So the only individuals I know with the same mind-set are me, one farmer in [area A] that I’ve just come across, [person 1], and two others, and that is in probably a 30 mile radius. So farmers don’t like working with each other to that extent. The other thing is, and [person 1] will tell you this, farmers are hopeless businessmen when it comes to marketing meat, and it requires a very special person to facilitate, organise and run that sort of cooperative selling process. And [organisation 2] was yet another example of where things have gone wrong.

I: Okay. So, I wonder, is there any room for learning for those examples and building something?

R: It needs leadership in the local community, and it needs someone to who’s a respected farmer to break the mould and go down that route, and we haven’t got that at the moment because… I’m not viewed by my peers as a good enough farmer to show leadership. The only way I can show leadership is through the success of my business. And the same goes for [person 1], because [person 1] is a radical. He says things that farmers don’t like to hear, so they will dismiss him. [person 5] is another successful farmer who’s selling his beef into London. Again, his neighbours see him as being nonconformist and reactionary and therefore to be shunned. What he’s doing is not traditional, it’s out of the ordinary, so it’s different, so they’re afraid of it and they don’t want to be involved.

I: I understand. So it seems most of those farmers that have the right mind-set are seen unfavourably from the local community.

R: Yeah. My view is that the only thing that will make the farming community change is economic shock.

I: Yes, I understand.

R: They will be forced into a situation where they will run out of money and they will have to do something quickly.

I: Just a clarification, all these people with the same mind-set, are all of them newcomers?

R: I am, [person 1] is, [inaudible] is. Of the five of us that I know of three of us are newcomers within the last 40 years, and two of them are from existing farming families. But those that are from existing farming families have been educated to quite a high level.

I: I understand.

R: The other thing that will instigate change which [person 1] has been involved in in his project, and he will say it, is the farming spouses. Wives and partners are very often at the sharp end of it when the money dries up, and they are the people who can take a relatively distant view, a view with perspective on the farming business, and are the ones who are in a lot of situations driving change. The very interesting thing that [person 1] has come across is that the ones who are most willing to implement change are the wives and spouses of farmers, those partners, those spouses, those wives are from a non-farming background.

I: Yeah, because a similar type of evidence I have seen from other interviews. It’s very interesting. I wonder, do you think if you try a new…the idea about the meat that we were discussing before.

R: Yes.

I: If you would try with the five of yours, on a smaller scale, and pretty much prove it on concept, do you think it can attract through the success?

R: Our next meeting with [person 2] in May we will probably start to discuss that and see what opportunities and whether we can work together to make that happen. That is something that’s on our agenda. But it is extremely difficult. And because of the geography of the [area A] it takes a long time for us to meet up. We’re all busy. To draw us together is extremely difficult. It takes me an hour and a half to drive to [person 1]. What has helped is Facetime and email. Superfast broadband has helped break down those communication barriers. But physical communication in terms of actually meeting together is very difficult. We’re all a long way away from each other. We’re also trying to encourage the national parks and the [name of area] area of outstanding natural beauty, these protected landscapes, to try and put their weight behind initiatives such as that. But again they put their weight behind initiatives like [organisation 1] and it failed.

So there’s this track record of failures of added value within the food chain, and farmers see that failure and think oh, it’s another one that’s going to fall flat on its face. NGOs see that as a failure and say well, this is not going to work. So there is a huge amount of inertia that’s running against initiatives such as that. The other thing is that very much within the [area A] National Park there is that same resistance to change that I’ve talked about earlier on. So the [area A] National Park farming advisors are also very reluctant to push farmers to change or to try and get farmers to change, anything that’s terribly radical.

I: Can you explain why the national parks have this type of attitude?

R: Why the national parks have what, sorry?

I: Have this type of inertia you mentioned, or are they…

R: It’s because [voices overlap] a very strong lobbying body, and when you get into a meeting with farmers… So if you have a farmer on a one to one basis it’s very much easier to put a constructive strong argument for him to change. But if you go to a meeting with a group of farmers, farmers exhibit the same instinct that their livestock exhibit, and that is a herd instinct. They will then close off and shun you and shun your ideas and shun the ability of change, and they have mutual support in numbers.

Any criticism of their farming ability or farming operation or farming philosophy is deflected by them blaming some other part of society or deflecting the argument, and you never get an in depth… So it’s very difficult for the national parks to challenge the status quo. Those guys have to engage with farmers to implement national park policy, so they’re unlikely to want to challenge farmers on mass because they have to maintain that communication channel. And very much in these areas, because I feel about the level of education, if you disagree with somebody then you fall out with them.

I: I understand.

R: They’re very defensive and they are very insecure. I’m afraid it’s 25 past two. I’m going to have to go.

I: Yes.

R: I’m happy for you to phone me up again if you want to continue this conversation.

I: Would it be fine if we do that next week at some point?

R: Yes.

I: Okay.

R: Can you email me with a suggestion and then I’ll confirm.

I: Okay.

R: Sorry to have to break off. I’m sorry if I’ve waffled on for far too long.

I: No, no, it’s my turn to apologise because we extended a lot of the time you are offering to us, but obviously this conversation is really amazing. It pictures everything very nicely together.

R: Well, unfortunately it’s only my view. Some of it’s based on evidence, some of it’s based on personal evidence, and some of it’s based on my feelings, and so it’s not wholly objective I’m afraid.

I: I understand. But I have already conducted about 60 interviews with different stakeholders in different places, and a lot of the comments individually they have come across, but it’s nice that you bound them all together in some way.

R: Okay. Right. Well, I’ll have to go. I’ll have to leave it at that, but please email me with a… I’m happy to spend more time. This is extremely cathartic for me because it enables me to share my frustrations with somebody who will actually document them in some way or will form part of something that might have an influence somewhere. That’s why I’m prepared to give you my time.

I: Thank you very much about that. So I will send you the email. In the meantime please send me those links with scientific evidence.

R: Yes.

I: Also related the work of [person 2] and [person 3] you mentioned.

R: Yes.

I: And anything else you think is relevant. And if you would like to have a look on the cards that’s fine, but it’s not necessary. We will discuss it through the conversation.

R: Okay. That’s fine. Well, it’s lovely to talk to you. I’m sorry if I’ve gone on so long.

I: Have a lovely weekend.

R: Thank you.

I: And we’ll see each other next week.

R: Yes. Very good. Okay.

I: Thank you. Bye.

R: Cheers. Bye.

[interview continued]

R: …education, another one he says. I went to Edinburgh University to do agriculture. It no longer does an agriculture course.

I: Was it SRUC or called SAC?

R: Yeah, it was the university… And that’s part of my worry is that we have specialised into agricultural colleges and agricultural universities and we no longer expect our agricultural students to go and integrate with other members of society in university institutions. If my children want to go into agriculture I would very much encourage them to look outside agriculture first before they come back to it. Because my concern is that in agricultural colleges our children and our students only mix with likeminded individuals of their own ilk, and we end up with agriculturalists with a very narrow outlook who are not exposed to other opinions and other methods of working and other disciplines, and hence it reinforces the inertia, the inward looking nature of our agricultural communities, and I think it contributes towards limiting their horizons in terms of what they can do. Does that make sense?

I: I understand. I now [inaudible] agricultural college and it’s quite independent, semi-independent, and even if it’s located in the campus of the wider university, it doesn’t really have any – I mean, what is the word - connections, as you described.

R: Yeah, integration. But the same things goes…you see, Harper Adams is now an agricultural university. If you go to Harper Adams, you’re only going to meet land agents and agriculturalists. And the same with Cirencester. Cirencester is now the same. All our agriculture…so Aberdeen used to do agriculture, Edinburgh used to do agriculture. I think Nottingham still does. I think Newcastle still does and Reading still does. But that’s it. Wye college has gone, and a whole host of these places are no longer integrating agriculture with other disciplines, and I think it’s a mistake.

I: I understand.

R: Okay. Sorry, I needed to get that one off my chest.

I: Okay. Brilliant. If you have any other things you have on your mind just let me know.

R: Okay. It usually happens when I’m on my tractor spreading muck or something, so I have to try and remember them.

I: Yeah. The most innovative ideas come when you do a kind of repetitive work that you know exactly what you’re doing. So your brain really relaxes that time.

R: Yeah. When you’re in autopilot. I don’t like going away on holiday particularly but it’s essential to both myself and my wife, my family. We do go on holiday because it gives you time to relax and you can look at your business and your life with some perspective when you take yourself out of the day to day grind of farming, and it’s so incredibly important.

I: Not only the daily routine, but also the landscape around you. If you completely change what you look around you it makes some difference.

R: Oh, it does.

I: You put things in perspective.

R: The classic for us, two years ago we went to Auvergne in France for a holiday which was part to do with looking at cheese production and part holiday. We came back home, and we live obviously in the uplands, and we immediately thought there aren’t enough trees in the [area A], full stop. There’s far more trees in the Auvergne, there should be more trees in the [area A]. There were a whole host of other things like that. But anyway, let’s crack on.

I: Information card four. We were discussing a lot of things the previous times. I wonder if there is anything there you would like to say more to discuss.

R: Resilience, disturbances and long term pressures. Changed weather patterns. Definitely. Change in disease, pests, spread patterns, yes. Energy, water availability is going to become more of an issue. In terms of the energy thing, we’ve already got a ground source heat pump in here which does contribute towards our cheese making hot water, but come the end of this month I’ll be looking at solar panels to put on the roof. The cost benefit, even without the government subsidy, is definitely there. And then I want to look at things like whether we can look at micro, I mean really small scale biodigesters. There are all these things that can contribute towards mitigating climate change. My energy costs are going to rise significantly over the next few years if I don’t do anything like put solar panels up. My electricity costs at the moment are 15p per kilowatt hour, and if I put solar panels up the cost of that electricity would come down to 7p a kilowatt hour. So there are things like that we could be doing to mitigate against energy prices.

Moving on. Land, soil and habitat degradation. For us, the [area A] is characterised by steep sided watercourses and we call them gills or deans. Erosion is taking place in those and I’m desperately trying to convince my landlord that we need to plant these watercourses up with trees because, A, that will help with biodiversity and habitat, B, it will help to try and stabilise the steep sides and stop erosion.

I: May I ask you something? The soil issue, protection of the soil or increase in the organic matter in the soil or whatever, do you think it plays a big role in livestock farming?

R: That’s a very good question and I would love to know more myself. I have been reading some material on regenerative farming where people have increased organic matter and had huge benefits. That’s largely on an arable and mixed type farming. We’re on peat largely up here, which is obviously an organic based soil, but I do feel that there is a lack of information, proper, good, peer reviewed information on soil protection and soil management in grassland systems. There’s a lot of information out there about the use of mob grazing and the fact that that has the potential to sequestrate carbon. I think the jury’s still out yet, and I think I sent you some papers to that effect the other week.

I: Yeah.

R: But we need to do more research in terms of how we manage soils for our own benefit in the long run. I don’t think that the information out there is up to the mark.

I: What is the emphasis, the advice they’re offering? Do they focus on that? Do they ignore it?

R: They’re still looking at compaction but one of the problems we have certainly in the [area A], much of our drainage is still based on more or less Napoleonic stone drains which were dug in by Irish navvies probably in the late 1700s, early 1800s to drain this really wet land, and that drainage is degrading. Coupled with that though we’ve increased sheep numbers over that last 300 years, so we’ve probably done something in terms of compaction in the upper layers of the soil, but also at the same time we’ve brought heavy equipment on there as well like big tractors, big muck spreaders, big bailers, big mowers, big everything, and we’re causing compaction further down in the soil as well with this heavy equipment. But we have no means of undoing that compaction because we’ve got Napoleonic stone drains which, A, we don’t know where they are, and, B, at best they’re probably only at most 14 inches below the surface. So if we went through with a subsoiler we’d totally decimate our drainage.

So we’re very limited in terms of how we can mitigate for modern agricultural farming practices in terms of soil compaction. Then remember we’re steep sided valleys and rainfall is increasing in intensity with climate change and we’re ending up with a great deal of overland flow. Because we’ve got up to a foot of peat over an impermeable subsoil that peat very quickly gets waterlogged and water is very quickly running off the surface, and if we’re spreading muck then we’re taking off phosphate and potash and nitrogen as well with it. So I think there’s some structural issues, there’s some fundamental soil problems there that are down to the unique nature of what we’ve got, our old drainage system and our modern farming techniques, and we haven’t go the solutions for them yet. Does that make any sense?

I: It makes a lot. You mentioned about peat. There was in the area, I think – I might be wrong – a project was about the peat management. Have you been involved in any of those initiatives?

R: Certainly our estate have been involved in some peat land restoration work. So we do graze, we have the right to graze 100 ewes together with six other tenants on our estate, to graze on [area 6], which is one of the highest peaks in the Pennines. So we’ve got sheep grazing up to 2,300 feet above sea level, which is about 700 metres.

I: Is it common grazing area?

R: No, it isn’t. It’s a bit of an anomaly and we don’t know why it isn’t a common, but it’s run as a common but it’s owned by my landlord, and we do pay a rent for it. But that land was drained. It’s moorland. It’s heather moorland and bent grassland. It’s pretty rough stuff. It’s suitable really only for sheep. It’s been over grazed in the past. It was drained. There were grips put in in the 1970s, and then three years ago we were paid by the government, by Natural England to block those grips, and a lot of work took place. And that did have a significant impact on flooding further down the valley. It reduced the peak flow of water coming down the valley. So that’s been beneficial. So yes, we have been involved in that sort of work as well on a sort of bystander type basis really.

I: When you said that that land is run as common land, do you see any differences when the land is…? What are the challenges around common land management?

R: Well, as I said, it’s not a common but it’s recognised as a common by DEFRA for subsidy purposes. We have a graziers committee. We’ve got minutes of that committee going back to 1878 I think. So we meet once a year in February to organise our dates for gathering sheep and to talk about any other administrative issues. It requires us to cooperate as a group of graziers, and we cooperate with our landlord and our landlord’s agent and the gamekeeper.

I: What are the challenges around that?

R: The challenges really are the interaction with the shooting interest, which is always slightly abrasive…

I: What do you mean by that?

R: The shooting interest… We are very fortunate in that our landlord isn’t a particularly keen shooting man, so he does side with us very much. As a group of six farmers we’re extremely fortunate in that he is a farmer at heart too. So he buffers us from the effects of… His brother is the shooting tenant and his brother would be far harder to deal with if given the opportunity, and we would be financially significantly worse off if his brother was in charge. My landlord is very liberal in his views and all the payments go to the farmers and he takes a rent from them. So our landlord is pretty unique I think, and we’re very fortunate to have him. On the practical side we are struggling to… As the farming population ages we struggle to maintain the number of people required to gather the sheep in.

I: Okay. So you have an issue with staff.

R: But we’ve managed to get round that. We’ve re-sited our gathering pens and made life much more easier, so we’re much less reliant on having significant numbers of people. So we’ve had to change. Goes back to my theses, that you’ve got to change. So we’ve had to change as a group of graziers.

I: But I don’t understand, how you deal with that issue?

R: What do you mean?

I: I mean the fact that you couldn’t find staff to help you.

R: So we’ve had to get help in from elsewhere and pay for that help.

I: So you brought pretty much labour from other area.

R: Yes, labour from neighbouring farmers to do that. But we’ve now got to the point where that’s not terribly reliable, and so what we’re doing now is moving our sheep handling facilities to a much more sensible place. Our existing sheep handling facilities are medieval sheep washes and they’re situated next to watercourses so that the sheep could be washed prior to clipping. We no longer require that, so we’re going to amalgamate how we gather, and in effect because of where we’re going to site the new pens we will need fewer men to gather the sheep. So in the long term we will be more sustainable because we require fewer people to gather the sheep.

I: I understand. That’s quite an excellent example. I think it’s a very good example. About the information card four…

R: Yeah, sorry. We’re on pollution of air, water, soil. Well, we’re in the water catchment for [area A] Water, so they’re all fairly hot topics I suppose. Phosphate runoff is a big issue for us I think. So I’m told anyway. But from my point of view, if I look at what I’m doing now, traditionally in the [area A] you would spread farmyard manure from the winter, you would spread it in the spring so that it would contribute towards the nutrients for the grass to grow into a crop of hay. People still do that. But I’m aware of the fact that our ground, certainly on this farm, is too wet to spread that muck on, so we’re causing compaction damage and we’ll have issues with regard to runoff, I think.

So I’m taking the view that we need to stop spreading muck in the spring and we need to… Because the other thing, it’s also attractive to vermin in terms of seagulls and jackdaws, and what they do, they take advantage of the fact that you’re spreading manure and they’re looking for bits and pieces in there, and that all adds to pressure on the native wading bird population. We’re an area which is designated high importance for wading birds such as curlews and lapwings, and at the moment all I can see is lots and lots of seagulls and lots and lots of jackdaws invading. So I’m going to stop spreading my farmyard manure in the spring because we just can’t do it, and we will compost it and probably spread it after we’ve taken a crop of hay or silage in the summer.

I: Did you have any issues with extreme weather events?

R: Well, it’s usually extreme weather up here anyway. It’s very windy most of the time up here, and it’s wetter than normal. In the ten years that we’ve been farming here we’ve had three bad winters, but nothing has been bad enough to… We’ve been snowed in for a maximum of five days. Nothing’s been bad enough to disrupt what we do. The reason we don’t make cheese in the winter is simply because the weather is so bad, so we don’t try and pressurise ourselves to do that. Probably the worst thing in terms of extreme weather would be very high winds is my biggest worry, and it keeps me awake at night.

I: So you didn’t have any issues with the drought.

R: No, not for us. We were very fortunate. We have a very wet farm that’s very badly drained. So last year, whilst it got dry, we fared better than probably any other farm in the valley.

I: I understand.

R: Our land generally tends to face north east and is peaty and wet, so actually this last summer was pretty good for us. Whereas if you were to ask the same question of my fellow farmers the other side of the valley, this year was extreme and a lot of them have sold most of their cows. You couldn’t make any hay or silage.

I: I understand. So the impact for them was quite dramatic.

R: It was very dramatic, yes. Their ground was burnt and dry within perhaps a month, and we continued to be green right the way through the summer really.

I: How spread it was in the area that kind of problems?

R: [Section deleted to maintain anonymity]

I: Okay. So it was quite a spread in the area, the problem.

R: I didn’t see everywhere, but I think in our sort of areas it was worse on south facing slopes with shallow soils.

I: So what about number eight, nine…?

R: One more that’s really important, sorry. Where we grazed with cows continued to be greener for longer than where we grazed with sheep. Where we grazed with sheep the grassland was visibly more stressed.

I: Okay.

R: I think it’ll be something to do with transpiration and maturity of grass and the dynamics of evapotranspiration I would imagine. But the grassland that we graze with cows looked significantly happier than the grassland grazed with sheep.

I: Okay. So you don’t mix in the same land putting both sheep and cows.

R: We do have some bits where we mix, but generally try to keep them separate.

I: Okay. Number eight, nine, any issues there?

R: Sorry, outbreaks of diseases. Seven. We’re quite lucky where we are because we’re so isolated, touch wood, we’re probably one of the safer parts of Britain to have a herd of rare breed cows. TB is probably my biggest worry. TB and foot and mouth. TB is spreading. [section deleted]

R: Yeah. And TB would be devastating for us because we produce raw milk cheese and if we were producing raw milk cheese and we’d had an outbreak of TB we would have to pasteurise our cheese. That would add to our energy costs significantly, and it would add at least three hours to every day we make cheese, and in that situation we would stop making cheese because we couldn’t cope with that.

I: Excellent example. You started from one and then you explained all the domino effects, pretty much.

R: Yes. It would more or less destroy our business. And we don’t understand how people in the south west of England who make cheese can possibly carry on. The mental anguish of losing cows, of the extra time, the extra cost, et cetera, must be devastating. I don’t know how they do it. That’s why up here we don’t want TB.

I: Okay. Stewarding schemes and environmental schemes, what is your experience from there?

R: Sorry, which one’s…?

I: Stewardship and environmental schemes, what is your experience from there?

R: Very good really.

I: So you feel they are well organised, well delivered.

R: I think it depends how you look at it. We took on a farm ten years ago that was run down, and in that ten years, with the help of a grant aid, through our higher level stewardship scheme, we pulled up nearly two kilometres of drystone walls, several hectares of trees, and we’re going to plant more. We’re in the process of restoring 15 or 20 acres of upland hay meadow. We’ve taken on a herd of rare breed cattle. And coupled to that we are investing the annual income from that agri-environment scheme into our cheese business.

So the agri-environment scheme has been our saviour. We got into the scheme, into the last tranche of the environmental stewardship higher level schemes which paid us approximately £20,000 a year, and I said to my wife at the time we need to reinvest this money into something that will take us into the future. Because even six years ago we both realised that the level of subsidy being paid to agriculture was not sustainable, so we needed to make use of that money while it was there, and that’s what we’ve done. In terms of income it’s been great for us. Because of my philosophy, I like to think it’s been good for biodiversity and wildlife, but I’m not necessarily representative of my farming neighbours and some of them may see that money as more of an income stream than an obligation to protect the environment.

I: I wonder how these schemes can be designed better.

R: Well, you need to speak to [person 1] about that. He’s got…

I: No, I don’t want to speak to [person 1], I want your opinion.

R: [person 1] has got the answer.

I: Don’t worry, I will speak.

R: He’s got an objective measure of how to do it. Through the work that he’s done he has come up with almost a mathematical model to say when you’ve done all that you… I can’t explain it. He’ll explain it better.

I: Okay, that’s fine.

R: [person 1] has definitely got an interesting proposal for you. From my point of view the only other experience I’ve come across is that there is the pay by results. So you’re being paid for outcomes. There’s some trial work being done in [area A]. They’re looking at paying farmers for the number of plant species in their upland hay meadows. So the more of the important plant species that are required in upland hay meadows are found in a specific meadow then the more they will be paid. So it’s payment by reports. The problem with that approach in my view is that it doesn’t necessarily mean that the rest of your farming is, A, environmentally sound, or, B, financially viable.

I: Okay. That’s quite interesting. Can you elaborate a bit more on that?

R: Yeah. So what’s the point of you entering into a hay meadow restoration project and planting a lot of wild flowers in those meadows and receiving a lot of income from those meadows if the rest of your farming business is not viable? So how is that sustainable in the long term? Because you won’t be in business and therefore the aims and objectives of restoring the hay meadow will also not be met because you won’t be in business either. So what I’m saying is that in order for the environmental work to be sustainable the businesses have to be sustainable too. You cannot dissociate the two, and you cannot have an agri-environment scheme that takes a well-managed business separate from a well-managed environment. Does that make some sort of sense?

I: It makes a lot of sense. The previous project I was working on was a very strong argument, and I’m glad that in this project that comes again. I mean, as you said, you need to pay attention and this balance otherwise it’s a pointless exercise.

R: Yeah. And this is what worries me, again going back to agricultural education. We need our future farmers to be educated in the fact that our climate is in peril, as is biodiversity, et cetera, and our farmers need to be far more broad minded and open minded and open to change and be much more environmentally astute than they are at the moment. I’m absolutely convinced about that. The reason I’m saying that as well, we need to value that environment much more strongly. So I am in favour of getting rid of the pillar one payments and transferring it all to pillar two. I think it’s absolutely essential. Because I think pillar one payments have led to soil degradation, I think they’ve been very detrimental. But again it’s going to require enormous change to happen.

I: Anything about grazing rotation systems?

R: Grazing rotation systems. I would like to know more about it. I’d like to know more about mob grazing and how it could be managed [inaudible]. It’s not easy to put electric fences up where we are because our ground is so undulating and steep, so I don’t know how we would quite do it. And we have a very wet climate, so if we mob grazed in a very wet time we’d destroy the ground. I think the rotational grazing is worthy of further investigation, but I’m not sure how compatible it is with biodiverse grassland and meadow land.

I: Okay. Because you have spent a lot of your time I think for me it would be nice if I give you something back. That’s why I was thinking…

R: It’s completely cathartic for me. It’s so important. I’m just happy to continue if you’re prepared to listen to me.

I: No, I wanted to say something else. Because obviously I go in different places and I meet different people, I have come across some people who have tried to be very innovative and tried to find solutions. If they don’t find in the UK they try outside the UK.

R: Yes.

I: So I’m thinking of two people in [area D], one is a young farmer and he was trying to organise a small group of farmers to bring some scientists I think from New Zealand and help them with some grazing rotation systems or other stuff, quite innovative type of practices they are doing there. I’m not sure, because I met him around October and he was about to organise a visit from the science to come to the UK. I’m not sure how far they have gone, but I’m thinking of bringing you two in contact.

R: Yes, I would be interested, yeah.

[section deleted as not relevant]

R: Sorry, going back to the environmental stewardship agreement, one of the big problems with them, and I think this has been realised now, they’re terribly prescriptive. We’ve had the same management prescriptions apply to the whole of England and it’s not necessarily appropriate for me to be doing the same as someone in Dartmoor or someone maybe on the North York Moors.

So I think that’s been realised, the prescriptive nature of the agri-environment schemes are not necessarily appropriate, and I think the newer schemes are much less so. The level of bureaucracy is increasing and that is detrimental to people joining the schemes. And because of, I suppose, austerity and because of change within government departments every time we try to… There are barriers to farmers adopting change because it creates havoc with government subsidies.

The example of that is that we’ve taken some land out of grassland and put it into woodland, and we’ve had to create new boundaries for that, new fences, new walls, and when that information is fed back into the system, the system spits it out and doesn’t like it. So the one of the results of that is that I haven’t received any subsidy for last year yet, either my basic payment scheme nor my agri-environment scheme, so my overdraft is running very close to its limit and I’m owed £35,000 from DEFRA or the Rural Payments Agency.

That is just an example of what happens when the government computer systems are not able to cope with the dynamic nature of land holding that occurs in the UK, and change. So that’s another significant barrier. A lot of farmers round here wouldn’t want to put woodland in or change what they do because they know that if they change their maps and if they change that information and send it back to the Rural Payments Agency it will cause problems and cause delays to their cash flow. Does that make sense?

I: Okay. I didn’t know about that. So it’s a kind of barrier.

R: Significant barrier here. I’ve spoke to several of my neighbours who don’t want to change their field sizes, have had experience of it, don’t want to put woodland… One of my neighbours said yeah, I would think about putting some woodland in, but I don’t want to because of the hassle it causes.

I: For the payment.

R: For the payments, yeah. So that causes real issues. Finally on agri-environment, and again it goes back to what I said about education, the money needs to be going to the people who really embrace the values of the scheme, and the only way to do that is by making payment for outcome I think probably.

I: May I ask you something about that outcome? There was a kind of concern, it was expressed for some farmers. We are doing a lot of work for delivering environmental benefits right now, and if a new scheme comes and discuss about the outcomes it might reward the bad farmers rather than the ones that are already doing the good work.

R: The original agri-environment scheme was called the Countryside Stewardship Scheme, and one example there was restoration of walls or restoration of other moorland. That was when I was a student at Edinburgh, and my employer at the time was always very cheesed off, he was angry about the fact that his neighbours had over grazed their heather for years and years but were now receiving big payments to restore that heather. He had not over grazed his heather and so had kept his sheep income to a modest level, but he was unable to benefit from any restoration funds because his heather moorland was okay.

The same went for walls as well. So there is always that argument that the people who have degraded natural resources are being rewarded for doing so. I think we have to draw a line, and if it’s in a payment by results basis, well, that payment is only there if the results are there. I think my concern is that if I planted trees already knowing that we’ve got to plant more trees for climate change, for water, for flow management, for runoff management, for erosion management, and if I planted trees ahead of the game am I going to be rewarded for that foresight, and I suspect I won’t be. It is an issue. The same thing happened when we put in our ground source heat pump. We put one in because we believed in it, and then five years later people put them in and got a huge grant for doing so.

I: About the public good, because obviously there’s a very strong movement over payment for public goods. Do you consider food production a public good?

R: Not really, no. Because the issue about public goods is that they are largely outside the marketplace, and that is why public good, water management, et cetera, have suffered as a result of externalised agricultural pollution. Does that make sense?

I: Yes, it makes.

R: So food production is within the marketplace, and I don’t see that as a public good. But I’m not representative, because farmers do see it as a public good. They see themselves as providers of food for the nation and the nation relies on them, and they want to continue to feel like that and they want to continue to feel that the nation owes them a living.

I: Which is a bad attitude you think.

R: Which is a bad attitude. Which is an archaic attitude, which is an attitude that needs to change. My landlord, who we love dearly, who’s been a fantastic landlord to us, he still says oh, we need a war so people will be short of food and will buy sheep meat, and I tell him off every time. I get angry with him every time he says that. I said to him, you do not know what you’re saying, you should not say that, it is wrong. But he is typical of farming.

I: Obviously there are a lot of vague issues around public goods about how you define them, how you measure them, how you reward them. I wonder, do you have any concerns about these kind of points that haven’t developed or defined enough?

R: My concern with the public good is that actually defining the public good…and my concern from a farming and payment point of view is that it’s very difficult… For example, we could do everything we possibly could to encourage wading birds to nest on our grassland. We can provide the habitat, we can do everything in theory that provides that perfect habitat, but what happens if the wading birds don’t turn up? Currently we have six hectares of woodland. I would actually like to plant 30 hectares of woodland on my [inaudible], and receive public goods perhaps in terms of carbon credits, perhaps in terms of water flow mitigation credits, perhaps in terms of erosion credits, I don’t know. However, I won’t be allowed to do that. I won’t be allowed to do that because my landlord’s brother is the shooting tenant. He is the tenant of the shooting rights, and he will not want me to plant woodland on this land because it will interfere with his shooting interests.

I: Which is pretty much number ten there in the list.

R: I haven’t seen that. Hang on. I’m losing track of… Yes. So I think that shooting and sports, you cannot legislate in terms of farming and the environment without an eye on the shooting fraternity. We look at moorland burning that’s taking place at the moment and I think how can you possibly carry on burning moorland now? Philosophically it can’t be right to continue to burn heather moorland, because you’re causing erosion of peat and you’re also adding to climate change by increasing CO2 in the atmosphere. But the problem with these shooting interests is that they are very deep seated. They are not just deep seated within the land owning fraternity, they’re deep seated within the local community as well.

I: What do you mean by that?

R: So the land owning fraternity like today’s shooting. They like to offer shooting to their wealthy friends, which include politicians. I’m not a cynic usually, but I am on this occasion. So there are loads of politicians who like a day’s shooting. There’s probably an element of inertia in there. The land owners who have the shooting will employ gamekeepers. Gamekeepers are members of the community and spend money in the locality and send their children to the local schools. There are also people who are the beaters who basically are the labour when it comes to shooting. They flush out the pheasants or the grouse. Some of them make a semi living on that going round helping at shooting time.

So there is a vested interest within the local community to carry on the shooting status quo. And there’s a complete lack of understanding about the impact of the shooting on the local environment. I’m not a fan of shooting in its current form, driven shoots. I would be very happy to support a walked up shoot where you went with your bag and your dog and your dinner and you flushed out some ducks and some pheasants and some grouse and then took them home and ate them. That’s not what happens these days.

Our current pheasant shoots… Oh, we’re going onto another controversial one here. My understanding is that pheasant shoots use approximately ten kilos of grain per bird per year to feed the pheasants to get them ready for shooting. If you multiply that by the number of pheasants that are released annually in Britain that is an astonishing quantity of wheat. Absolutely astonishing quantity of wheat. Those pheasants are then shot in between November and the end of January. They’re shot using lead shot. So we’re peppering the environment with lead shot still. Still. In 2019 we’re still using lead shot in our guns. Lead is poisonous. And nobody seems to be wanting to stop that.

We’ve stopped lead shot use in fishing, why can’t we stop it in shooting? There are so many pheasants reared in the UK for shooting that there is an oversupply in the market, and the price of pheasants has collapsed and there is no longer any demand for shot pheasants really of any significance. One of our neighbouring estates at least has bought incinerators to burn those pheasants, and another of the local estates is disposing of those pheasants by dropping them down a mineshaft. That is the level to which we have fallen in terms of supporting the shooting industry, and that is not sustainable, and that is probably immoral I would say, or amoral anyway, certainly. That is happening and a blind eye is being turned to it at the moment.

I: I understand.

R: Those people will continue to shoot until it’s legislated against. They will continue to shoot in their current form, and the power of that shooting fraternity will have an impact on the rural economy in good ways or bad ways, and I’m also saying on the other hand [section deleted], so I can’t really say much, but I’m just trying to give you a flavour of what’s happening out here.

I: But for a farmer for yourself can you summarise what are the negatives from shooting?

R: The negatives for me from shooting are degradation of the environment through I would say over burning of heather. I would say I’m really worried about the use of lead shot and how much lead shot is used in the UK on an annual basis. I’m also concerned about the fact that the shooting interest have a veto over what I can do on a farming basis, and also over what I can do on an environmental basis as well.

I: Environmental you mean they don’t allow you to plant woodland.

R: Yes. I am extremely fortunate because my landlord is relatively supportive of what I want to do. If his brother was our landlord then I wouldn't be able to do half of what I’ve been able to do.

I: Okay.

R: The final thing is, the other thing that the shooting fraternity does, and again I’m not representative, where payments are made on heather moorland for moorland restoration then in very many situations those agri-environment payments go to the landlord and not to the tenant. We’re pretty lucky here in that our landlord allows us to be paid the payment and then we pay him a rent. In many other situations the landlord takes the payment. And these are significant payments. When I worked as a consultant I worked for somebody in County Durham who was a merchant banker who has a large estate and draws…not that large an estate actually, but similar size to the estate I live on, and he drew £250,000 to £300,000 a year in subsidy, and much of that money was from heather moorland, and much of that money went back into investing in the shooting infrastructure.

I: I understand. About the climate change you mentioned, have you examples of how the climate change, either slow changes like gradual increase of temperature, rainfall or changes in the disease and pest spread patterns or very extreme weather events, how that affects you as a farmer? Do you have kind of a summary of…?

R: Yeah. So I would say over my lifetime, when I was little if we had an inch of rain in a day that was a lot of rain. I would say that having an inch of rain in a day is not… I’m 50. Having an inch of rain in a day is not unusual now. I would say the intensity of the rainfall has increased. Our winters are much milder and much wetter. Our growing season has probably increased, I would say. It would be difficult to say on average, but I think in extreme years our growing season can increase by a month at either end of the year.

I: What affect has on your farm? How have you changed the farming practices?

R: Well, I’ve not been here long enough to give you a proper feel for that, but I can see now that it’s too wet for me to spread farmyard manure between September and [inaudible]. So I won’t be spreading farmyard manure in the winter anymore.

I: So you don’t spread the manure and then what effect that has?

R: I don’t know that it will have a drastic effect because we don’t spread very much manure, but I’m hoping that we won’t cause as much compaction on our soils and we won’t lose as much of the nutrients through leaching.

I: In the past before you go for cheese production has that type of wet weather pushed you to go from [inaudible] store animals?

R: Sorry, what was that?

I: Before you shifted to the milk production, then this type of wet weather that was more wet than it was in the past, has any impact on trying to move away from finishing the cattle or going to the store animals?

R: No. Because our soils are peat based we can’t really out winter livestock because they just plough the ground up. Twenty miles west of here is the limestone [area A], we could keep animals out all year round.

[section deleted to maintain anonymity]

R: So in terms of production for cheese it means that because we don’t have storage facilities for milking parlour washes it means that it restricts our production season to the period May to September. One of the reasons is we simply cannot legally, sensibly and environmentally responsibly dispose of our dairy waste in the winter. So I’ve not got the money to invest in a huge storage capacity, so the simplest thing is to bed my cows on straw and stockpile that manure in the field all winter and not make cheese until the ground is dry enough for us to be able to spread the parlour washings and waste water onto the land.

I: Okay. So I understand why you don’t make cheese in the winter.

R: Well, not just that, but because our weather is so difficult. For instance, this last week has been so windy up here it would be very difficult to do anything sensibly productive. And there’s always the risk in the winter that the electricity will be cut off or things like that because of perhaps extreme weather events.

I: I wanted to move to a different topic which is about auction marts. Obviously now you don’t visit auction marts, but I wonder from your experiences what are the people in the farming upland community there doing. Can you explain a bit why people prefer the auction marts or why other people prefer to sell directly to a slaughter house?

R: Auction marts are simply performing a social function, and it’s a meeting place. It’s a meeting place to see your farming friends that you’ve grown up with, went to school with. That’s it. The problem is I didn’t go to school with anybody here and my friends are largely found through university and my other career, so I have no need to go to the auction mart. I have no wish to go to the auction mart because you’re a complete price taker. We do go occasionally when I have some animals to sell, some cull animals. We have a dead weight collection that works very well and is time efficient. The other problem I have with auction marts is I don’t want to spend my whole day sitting down or listening to either an auctioneer or my neighbours talk about the price of sheep or the weather or something else. I find them boring, depressing places, and animal welfare is an issue.

I: You mentioned pretty much you’re a price taker here…

R: Sorry, what was that?

I: You mentioned that you…

R: Oh, price taker, yeah. Our auction mart has a very, very popular and successful dead weight collection. The reason that’s successful is that, A, you know the price that you’re going to get before you take it, and, B, you’re not spending all day there. You can take your animals, drop them off and then leave. If you were to go through the auction ring then you have no control over the price whatsoever.

I: But I assume a lot of…quite a popular thought is that the auction mart set the price, so they set higher price. Do you agree with that?

R: Sorry, what was that?

I: Quite popular thought among farmers is that the auction marts set higher price.

R: No, not really.

I: Okay, so you believe that it’s not so…

R: I don’t know enough about it. One could argue that perhaps, but the auction marts are giving you a price based on what they can sell the meat at, not necessarily about competition from elsewhere. And our auction has stopped selling sheep, fat sheep as live weight and they all go through to ABP on a dead weight basis.

I: Okay. So you are sending to ABP.

R: Yeah. Our auction mart has stopped doing live auctions on a live weight basis and simply collects fat sheep and culled sheep on behalf of ABP and they go direct. That’s actually been the savour of our auction mart.

I: So it’s providing a service to you.

R: Providing an efficient and transparent service.

I: About that transparency you mentioned, do you think the feedback you’re getting either through dead weight sales or live weight is good enough?

R: Sorry, is the what that we’re getting?

I: The feedback.

R: I think it is. I don’t send any of the animals dead weight other than culls, but I sell my store lambs to my neighbour and he finishes them and he sends them to the auction mart where he’s actually a director as well, and he gets the…

I: Director of the auction mart?

R: He’s a director of the auction mart, yeah. So he sends the fat lambs that he’s bought from me, he fattens them on grass further down the valley or on stubble turnips, and then he sends them into the auction mart on a collection day and within 24 hours he has received the killing sheets, and within 48 hours he’s received the payment and the prices.

I: What is the name of the auction mart?

R: It’s [area A] Auction Mart.

I: And the name of your neighbour?

R: [person 6].

I: Okay. I think I might need to speak to him. Anyway, about the grade system for the quality of the carcases in slaughter houses. How effective do you think it is? How can we improve that?

R: Well, I don’t really know. As I say, I’m not a fat lamb expert, but I think that ABP has just moved from manual carcass classification to computerised carcass classification, I understand, or is moving in that direction. Certainly my neighbour had a few grumbles about downgrading of carcasses. But in general I think that my neighbour is pretty happy with dead weight type marketing, and he gets information back. So what it’s meant to him is he will no longer buy Swaledale sheep because the carcasses are too poor, and he won’t fatten Swaledale sheep because the carcasses are too poor. But he’ll buy my easy care sheep because he can see, and I can see, I buy recorded tups from a farm in [area B], and he can see that the lambs that come from those easy care tups are grading well, even for a maternal breed.

I: So you’re buying your stock from a [breeder in area B].

R: Yes.

I: In upland area.

R: When I came here we originally had Swaledales and Dales Reds. I got fed up of buying Swaledales and Dales Reds not knowing what I was buying, so I moved over to recorded Scottish Black Face tups which were fabulous, brilliant tups, absolutely fabulous. I bought them from [person 7] who’s near [in area B], and they were moving onto easy cares at the time because they didn’t want to be clipping anything, just sheering the sheep. And after a few years I decided to go down the same route. So I buy my recorded easy care wool shedding sheep from [person 7] for my tups, and I won’t be changing now. They’re fabulous. The carcasses are so consistent.

I: Please forgive my ignorance, but what is easy care?

R: Easy care is a synthetic breed that’s been developed by a chap called Iolo Williams in Wales. It’s based on Wiltshire Horn which is the wool shedding aspect, and Welsh Mountain. So these are hardy, hornless sheep that shed their own wool.

I: And it’s for upland areas.

R: Well, we’re using it in the uplands and they seem to be suiting us.

I: Okay.

R: They’re also for ease of management. They’re selected very heavily on management traits that reduce the requirement for labour. I’ve only got 150 ewes now, because we’ve dropped our sheep numbers, but I didn’t lamb any sheep last year. I lost very few sheep last year because we select for maternal ability. I don’t treat anything for foot rot because we don’t get foot rot. If we do have any animals with foot rot I cull them out of the flock. They’re called easy care because that’s what they are. And I don’t have to clip them while I’m making cheese in the summer.

I: Okay. Sorry, my mind…

R: Sorry if I’m overburdening…

I: No, you’re doing well. But I had a question and then suddenly it disappeared.

R: Oh, I know.

I: It was about the breed. Come on. Anyway, I lost it.

R: If it comes back to you just send me an email.

I: Okay. So pretty much I don’t have anything else to ask you. You have mentioned a lot of things how you want to see them to change over the times. I wonder if there’s anything else, any change you would like to see that you haven’t mentioned so far.

R: I would like Brexit to be undone. I would like a fairy to come and wave her magic wand and get rid of the Tory party and undo Brexit.

I: Yeah. Well, I think many people wish the same.

R: Yeah. I just want to forget the last two and a half years. It’s been dreadful, and it continues…

I: Not only you, unfortunately.

R: I hate every aspect of it. I think it’s disgusting and is dreadful, and I just dearly wish I could do something about it.

I: During summer we are going to organise some workshops which is pretty much scenario planning workshops where first we’ll present some of the information we collect through the interviews and then we get a step further. The participants are going to co-design future scenarios and discuss about those. Some of those might be in [area A]. Would you like to be invited to one of those?

R: I would like to be invited. Because we’re busy making cheese I don’t know whether we would have the time to come, but I would certainly like to be invited.

I: I wonder, based on your knowledge about the local farming community, which is the best period for organising this type of event? Obviously it’s going to be a one day event. I don’t want to drag people…

R: Yeah, really the best time is in the winter. That’s the unfortunate thing.

I: When you say winter when do you mean?

R: I mean after October really. Between October and the middle of March. Because the middle of March lambing starts, and up to the end of October is sheep and cattle sales.

I: So end of October rather than beginning of October.

R: Yeah. Trying to organise meetings here is from the end of October through to probably the middle of March.

I: Okay. But if it’s going to happen in summer is there any time which is less problematic than the others?

R: Just after the end of lambing and before the beginning of hay time, silage time. So first two weeks of June is sometimes okay for people.

I: So the first two weeks of June.

R: Yeah. End of May, beginning of June is some… But then that coincides with the Whitsontide holiday and people go away. But you can try. That’s probably the best time when farming commitments are at their lowest in the summer.

I: So first two weeks of June.

R: I would say last week of May, first two weeks of June. Then after that it’s pot luck I’m afraid.

[section deleted as not relevant]

R: One thing before I go, going back to the shooting issue and its impact on what I do, there is one more very important thing and I don’t know whether I’ve mentioned it before or not, but it’s to do with feeding grain to the pheasants. Sorry to backtrack but it’s really important. I think it’s another example of this sort of interaction of shooting and farming in the environment. So pheasants are fed, pheasant poults, so young pheasants are released in about July, August and they’re fed continuously through to the end of January. That feed is open access in woods and forests and copses and scrub areas, and that feed is also accessible to vermin, so jackdaws, gulls, other corvids, and rats. Then coinciding with that we have from perhaps the middle of… So feeding of pheasants stops at the end of January because that’s when the shooting season stops.

But then at that time farmers are scanning their ewes for numbers of lambs, and so the farmers start to feed grain to their sheep from the end of January, middle of February onwards, which is also accessible to vermin of all descriptions. Then we get to the end of the lambing period and we tend to stop feeding grain to sheep, so the vermin are then looking around for extra food, and one of the other extra sources of food around at that time are the chicks of ground nesting birds. So all of the rare bird species that I’m trying to protect on my farm are vulnerable to the hungry vermin, to rats, to gulls, to jackdaws. So we have contributed, farming and shooting is contributing to maintaining the population of vermin in rural areas by allowing access to grain year round.

I: Okay, yeah, I understand. That’s quite an interesting point because it shows that there are a lot of interactions that if you forget about pretty much they created a lot of consequences that you don’t really want.

R: So what I’m saying is I can try and work as hard as I possibly can to provide appropriate habitat for curlews and lapwings and I can try to reduce the amount of feed I feed to my sheep…in fact I away winter my sheep at the moment, which means I’m not feeding any grain to anything outside. But because my neighbours are and because the shooting interests are continuing to feed pheasants up until the end of January. Then the lapwings and curlews will nest, will lay eggs, will hatch those chicks, and then we have gulls and jackdaws and rats that will come and eat those chicks.

I: Yeah. I understand.

R: So, sorry, I thought that was important to tell you.

I: No, it was definitely worth telling me this thing. So whenever you come with any other idea you still can call me and we can have a short chat, or you can email me..

**End of transcript**