ResULTS project – case study G, interview 58

Face to face interview with farming trade association, conducted 3rd June 2019

Interviewer: I

Respondent: R

I: So I’ve got a bit of an introduction. So we’re seeking to understand how beef cattle and sheep farmers [inaudible] businesses in upland areas of Northern England and Scotland, can improve the resilience to environmental and economic and social change, what impact they action to improve resilience we’ve had on [inaudible] local natural sources and society. We would like to thank you for being part of the project, all responsibility and [inaudible], all answers will be kept anonymous, as I said we’re going to say trade association, nothing more than that. And I need to record just to make sure we capture the meaning of your answers correctly.

R: Uh huh.

I: We appreciate that we might be talking about resilience and it might be quite a complex topic, that’s why we have [inaudible], those are completely…keep them as a starting point for the conversation. It’s only for indicative purposes it’s not an exhaustive list of issues and usually there are examples we’ve got from literature. If you see something which is not relevant or significant just let me know. [Inaudible] but as you see that rather than anything else. There is no right or wrong answers, you are the expert, we are here just to capture the experiences [inaudible]. A few things about how to answer the questions, try to identify trade-offs, and when I mean trade-offs, [inaudible]. There are some trade-offs associated with resources [inaudible] apply that or maybe trade-offs associated with effects of positive or negative effects, side effects of that solution.

So whatever trade-off comes into your mind just let me know. Provide some specific examples where it was good, try to explain why and how points happen and please try to [inaudible], so if someone says to me [inaudible], I need to go and understand the underlying cause. Try to give me a historical account of events which you deem appropriate. And then finally the focus would be obviously be from your trade association, from that viewpoint, but sometimes if whatever you would like to see to relate with all the [inaudible] or the whole UK supply chain, just let me know to understand where we focus. So this is pretty much the introduction. Any questions for me now?

R: No.

I: So let’s start from something which is pretty much, please give me a bit of background about yourself and your involvement with upland and also beef and sheep sector?

R: I’m [name]. I’m currently director general of the [organisation name], which is a food trade association, primarily representing importers and processors of pig meat, dairy and fish. We don’t deal specifically with beef or sheep. In a previous role I was a career civil servant in both the old [inaudible] and more recently DEFRA, and for a while I was in charge of environmental stewardship schemes, which included support for farming in uplands. I have quite a lot of policy background in that area and throughout my whole professional career I’ve been involved in various aspects of both the common agricultural policy and international trade in agri-food. I have I think a good overview of both schemes to support various aspects of farming, but also the market and international trade context.

I: Thank you. Also, I would like to ask you, are there any specific features, special features particular to upland areas that should be maintaining your view? And I’m talking general, whatever comes to your mind, you want to see that in 20 years to be the case?

R: This goes straight to the heart of the basic policy dilemma, what is it we are seeking to preserve in upland farming? Is it primarily a landscape and environmental issue? Is it a socioeconomic issue? Is it supply of food to the market? Is it a combination of all of those above? If it’s a combination if there isn’t a predominate clear single priority, the logical implication is that the others are suboptimal and you’re therefore looking for something that putting the whole thing together adds up to a plausible case. If you can’t make a standalone case on environmental or economic or social grounds, and you have to look for an amalgam, that means that you’ve got to have some fairly strong contributory factors to stand up. Because there will be other sectors of farming that have a more clear-cut case, whether it’s economic, whether it’s social. I think the uplands are in a position where they straddle several different policy objectives and it’s a way of seeing if that can be recognised.

And there’s lots of history, the history I’m familiar with, less favoured areas and so on, that was primarily a socioeconomic, it was areas that were in European community jargon, peripheral. It was recognised that these were fairly sparsely populated and it was looking at the broader socioeconomic arguments that if you didn’t have active farming in some of these peripheral areas, you would weaken the case for local transport, schools, medicine, et cetera. You were looking at farming as an integrated part of the whole rural economic activity in areas which were primarily or wholly dependent on that socioeconomic activity. The problem for some of these less favoured areas, in some areas you can have a whole tourist bit that sits on the back of that, rural tourism has been a fairly big thing and is a big economic contributor. But looking at it from a European perspective, some of these areas are indeed very peripheral and one of the reasons they’re disadvantaged is there’s no easy access to main transport systems and airports, fast high speed trains et cetera. And again, in the modern day and age do you actually want to encourage cars and coaches?

So it’s a very complex set of different policy issues and I think one of the major challenges, and I think probably more something at the outset, that I’m looking at this now in a post Brexit context, up till now policies in this area have been very much framed by the support structures in the common agricultural policy. And within that member states have had discretion to vary things, to make life even more complicated within the UK, agriculture is a devolved responsibility. So the Scottish government has some freedom of manoeuvre within that architecture. If we are now moving to a post Brexit environment and at the moment a) we’re not clear as we speak what’s going to happen in relation to Brexit, we have an agriculture bill that is still going through parliament. Which sets out a post Brexit agricultural strategy, which in the slogan phrase of DEFRA secretary of state Michael Gove, is public money for public goods. At one level that sounds quite appealing for uplands provided you can define the public goods. But the central challenge of that as an approach to farming is that public money for public good implies that returns from the actual farming activity should come from the market, not from financial support.

The dilemma we have in the uplands and back to my original thing about each component part possibly being suboptimal, if the economics of grazing cattle and sheep in the uplands don’t work in terms of the price premium that it might command in the market. Or a sufficient way of defraying the additional costs of that kind of extensive and remote production, and we might come on later to things like slaughterhouses and so on, which are very relevant in this context. So if that economic case doesn’t add up and if the support money is not meant to cross subsidise the animal production bit, but is only focused on the amenity and environmental benefits, will the rates of payment on those be sufficient? Now it depends how you interpret cross subsidisation but would they be sufficient to keep things the way they are? And that’s another question, do we want them the way they are or are we looking forward or backwards on that? But if you can find a way of channelling enough support in for an amenity or an environmental target, and if the animal…you then have a different question, if you’re not looking for the animals to earn their living in the market, you’re then back to what role do the animals play in preserving that landscape?

Are they actually an asset in that landscape and in some respects they are grazing and so on, some aspects of biodiversity? But the animals might pose a challenge of some other aspects of that environment, which again depends what kind of environment are you seeking to freezeframe the landscape as it is, actively grazed by animals that are part of, or be it a fragile part of an economic system, or are you going back to basics and saying what are the features of a hill landscape that we want? And are we then coming back and this is a bigger challenge for agriculture as a whole, the farming population, is it there to produce food or is it there in the rather pejorative phrase as park keepers, are they there as landscape architects, custodians of the countryside, where do animals fit into that? Now that’s a very long answer…

I: No, it did summarise quite well, don’t worry.

R: But I hope…

I: It gives…

R: …it gives you some themes in there which no doubt you’re already exploring. But coming at this as a former policymaker in this area, these are precisely the questions that we wrestled with over decades.

I: I really like these kinds of answers because they pull together all the different aspects and also obviously later on with the questions we’d have the opportunity to go deeper in some aspects. But it’s good you started pulling everything together, a really nice picture. For now because the project used the term food systems and we come…use a lot of this term and we thought it means so many different things to different people. That’s why I tried to draw this picture, which is this picture, the blue arrows is this line change, so [inaudible]. Then you have the orange circles which is all the type of organisations, all types of businesses, [inaudible], so you have banks, colleges, essential services, [inaudible]. Personally, the examples are more from Scotland but their equivalent in England. Insurance companies. So [inaudible]. Consultant services here we have all the [inaudible] or things like that.

And then if you whisk all this together and then you have other stakeholders which [inaudible]. But those to some extent affects a lot, like the government or the funding bodies that fund this project. [Inaudible] and either conventional or renewable, all the [inaudible] all the local upland communities and the tourism of the general public. And if you…this is kind of human side but we considered part of the system [inaudible]. So this as I said is a fresh thought…but does it make sense? Is there something missing…?

R: No, that looks to me like a very good articulation and I think from what I’ve just said, you can immediately see the reference points in your chart there. And again, I like the little bit along the bottom biological [inaudible] as actors, because clearly there is a huge interaction between the animals higher up the food chain, but also the basic biodiversity and so on. We’re very familiar with cattle [inaudible] whatever is a good breeding ground, but these things are very complex and quite poorly understood. The problem with food chains is if you take out one chunk of the food chain it will rearrange itself, nature will find a new equilibrium. Will that be better than what was…it will be different; how do you make a value judgement? And again, it depends what your output is? If your output, and there’s lots of different ways of defining it, your output could be a net reduction in greenhouse gas emissions for example.

Clearly if you take higher animals out of that, you’re doing a lot to reduce methane in particular. And if also you take the higher animals, take out that’s extreme, but if you diminish their importance, what happens to grass if it’s not grazed? Does it…the normal in the literature it would revert to scrubland in the first instance, it might or might not reforest, depending on the climate and topography and so on. I think from…I’m not an expert in this but my understanding is that quite a lot of these upland slopes would actually have been quite wooded in a ‘natural’ state. I think you can look at some other parts of Europe, you can look at parts of Germany, again you’ve got climate factors, you need to look at somewhere that’s got northern temperate climate rather than Greece or Italy or whatever. But you could make a plausible case that the natural state of ungrazed uplands would be a mixture of scrub and woodland. And then you have to do some fancy calculations, what’s your base case in terms of…if you’re looking at it purely from a greenhouse gas, is that a better use of that ‘land’ as carbon capture et cetera, than having a mixed system of management by combination of animals and humans, human animals and animal animals, managing that landscape?

I don’t know, this is a question which maybe your project or something analogist to it can answer. If you take the base case of free running, take the higher animals out of the equation, what do you think happens to the landscape? What do you think that looks like in terms of the greenhouse gas footprint? How does that compare to the more actively managed system? But the problem in deciding what’s the best route, you have to then ascribe some values to that, because if you’re making a policy decision, if you’re spending public money, you’ve got to do a cross benefit analysis, you’ve got to have some form of [inaudible] accounting that puts a value on it. This is all very, very difficult stuff.

I: Very, very difficult stuff. Yeah, I have realised that through this project. Okay, let’s put that aside for now and then we can come back to that. I have a general question which is, what does resilience mean for you, this word, what springs to your mind?

R: Well again, and I’m not trying to be too clever here in semantic analysis, but resilience…implicit in the context of resilience is maintaining a status quo. So resilience is keeping something in the shape or the form that it’s in. So if you have, I don’t know, a foam rubber cushion and you push on it, definitely resilience is it will assume its former shape when the pressure is removed. And I think that’s one definition of resilience. So you have an active farming system, you have people who are managing to…derive a sufficient economic return for what they’re doing to stay doing it, there are pressure impacting on them. Resilience would be the ability to carry on despite those pressures or to find ways of mitigating those pressures and possibly substituting other things. Again, in farming more generally and in some limited applications of uplands farming, you’ve got something like, under the general heading of diversification, what we’re talking here is things like tourism. If the market price collapses can you make up that income whilst still maintaining your basic farming system, but you supplement what you would have got from the market by bed and breakfast, farm shop, whatever?

The problem with tourism as pure tourism is that if people just come to look at the countryside, they’re not spending money with the farmers. That’s another paradox in this, you can have a beautiful landscape that attracts lots of visitors, but how then do you get the revenues from that, how do capture those for the benefit of the local environment? And again, one obvious model is a tourist tax, so every time a coachload of people go up to look at the highlands or something, they pay £30.00 a coach or something and that money…but this sounds fanciful but I’m trying to get at the underlying conceptual thing. Promoting rural tourism or have an amenity value of a landscape, that’s great for the people who are benefitting from that amenity value, it’s great to get out and enjoy these things, see nature, improve your understanding of ecosystems and so on. But how do you capture the value of that? That’s a public good, so the other route would be you say that’s a public good at a national level and therefore we reflect that in the payments we make. It’s that problem of how you capture that and how you then feed that back into for the benefit of the people you are relying on to deliver that.

I: The reason I stop is because I…

R: You’ve got questions on that?

I: No, I have something which we are going to continue the discussion on the same thing. So this informative plan is kind of definition [inaudible] from the literature. And what it says, is that resilience is the capacity of the business or a system as a whole, to either absorb [inaudible] services or learn and adapt through incremental changes or even transform through radical changes. So, for example, for farmers, a radical change can be if they’re farming sheep and beef cattle, they give for example beef cattle and they concentrate only on the sheep production. They move to organic farming, they move to agriculture, they start [inaudible], renewable energy. So quite big type of changes.

R: I understand that. I didn’t cover the radical because I think maybe…again it’s all how you define the terms, are you talking about…if you’re talking about the resilience of the individual, at the really, really radical extreme end, the resilience of the individual might be to give up farming in the uplands and go and move into a town and reskill as something else. So if you’re looking at the resilience of the individual actor, but I’m thinking here about the resilience or something resembling the upland farming ecosystem as we have it. And then your radical change then is to some extent circumscribed by whatever your definition of that starting system is, how far can you depart from it to have it still recognisable as the system you are trying to preserve?

I: First of all this is…I just wanted your reaction to that, as I said there are no wrong or right answers for that. The other thing is that because we came across that question, because the next question that comes to your mind how you define where you stop? And then actually the goal is to keep the people in the area and have some kind of activity which is related with agriculture, so they can diversify a lot, but still, they are doing something with agriculture. And they are staying in the area and other people then come in the area that’s fine, but the idea is to keep those populations there. So that if you want is why you try to keep it stable while everything else can change, all the other choices.

R: So you’re defining your central policy objective around population density in the area?

I: But also have a continue doing something with agriculture, so it’s not completely…agriculture is out of the equation. Do you like that? Do you think it’s problematic?

R: That’s a very difficult question because again we’re talking here about microsystems within the bigger food system.

I: Exactly.

R: What is going to happen to that bigger food system?

I: And how it’s going to affect the microsystem.

R: Exactly.

I: Yeah, that’s the thing, with the food system then the resilience particularly, so many different, how to say, scales. So what we try to understand which scale we need to propose but obviously it’s going to be affected always from the scale which has evolved that. Whatever happens for example in the EU or on a national level it’s going to affect what’s going to happen in uplands. You want to…

R: If you take a pretty extreme example but not so extreme as to be unrealistic, there is talk in post Brexit if the UK wants to do a trade deal with the United States. And we had literally last week we had the US trade representative publishing a summary statement of US high level negotiating objectives for a trade deal with the UK. Well up there in the list is effectively not only tariff free access to the UK market, but also effective massive changing in regulation departure from EU standards, and in particular the EU standards that would keep our hormone fed, hormone treated beef and chlorine washed chicken et cetera, et cetera. Now whatever Michael Gove may say, a decision on the trade relationship is going to be taken at an aggregate level of the balance of the national interest of which agriculture will be a part, but not necessarily the determining part. So it’s perfectly feasible to envisage a post Brexit either with or without a deal because with a deal the UK still wants to pursue an independent trade policy.

If we had a trade policy where we imported from third countries at tariff rates that were significantly below the ones that are there at the moment, which for beef are 50 per cent, 60 per cent, 70 per cent very projectionist, designed explicitly to keep out supplies that would undercut EU production. If as UK we moved away from that and also if we deregulated, not to compromise actual genuine health and safety risks for either people or animal, but a different approach, the US approach is to look at the end product not the process. That’s a major change, hazard base versus risk based et cetera. You could see a situation where quite a large element of, and I’m just using the term as shorthand, mainstream livestock production, so in the lowlands including intensive systems, even those would be uncompetitive with those imports from third countries. And so in that situation that poses probably a terminal challenge to livestock rearing in the uplands, because not only would you have no lowland systems to feed things into, but the whole dynamics of the market would have changed. And unless you could convince people to pay what will be a fairly massive price premium for authenticity, origin or whatever.

But by that stage the market, and again this is even food systems within the bigger system, what’s going to happen to the economy if post Brexit we do…if GDP does fall in the short to medium term, then the ability of people to pay a price premium for food, even if they want to, will be restricted to a fairly small percentage of the population. Now if you’re delivering a niche product, that might work because you would not by definition, you’re not mass marketing a niche product. So you might be able to find pockets of UK agriculture that would be resilient in those circumstances. Because whether it’s an upland lamb, whether it’s a handcrafted cheese, whatever it is, there will still be a relatively affluent section of society that might be prepared. Particularly if they saw the mainstream product as a devalued mass market product you could, and the operative word is could, you could envisage a situation where the sorts of products or the specialised farming system such as uplands, organic, extensive and all the opposites of the mass market, could command enough of a premium from enough people to support that.

But there’s a lot of ifs in there and you would have to work quite hard to get that all put together, and you would actually have to package that in a way where you could preserve that identity and capture that value, and again return it to the people who are generating it, and not have it syphoned off by somewhere else.

I: [Voices overlap].

R: But again, there are a lot of challenges in there. It is possible but it would take…a lot of things would have to come together in a good way simultaneously and you’d have to have some really intelligent management of that system. How much support, would the market alone be sufficient to do that? Would you need some policy interventions to support the market to do that? An obvious one would be a labelling scheme, certification thing, some new upland farm logo or something. But then again as we’ve already touched on in your chart there, things like abattoirs, you’ve got to…again if you envisage we’re in the situation where the main livestock market is transformed, the ones that would be able to compete with the imports would be the larger scale ones. And they would probably have integrated slaughter facilities within the large production unit, and they wouldn’t be able to cope with a few dozen sheep or cattle coming down from the hills, it just wouldn’t work in the system. So again, you’ve then got to set up a parallel slaughter, preparation, processing marketing chain, to deal with these niche products. And that’s another challenge.

I think economics will tell you that if the return is there, the market will find a way of doing it, but that’s a kind of a chicken and egg, you’ve got to demonstrate that that potential opportunity is there in the market.

I: And prove it?

R: Yeah. Does that make sense?

I: It makes a lot of sense unfortunately. Anyway, we continue and we’ll come back because you’ve touched a lot of issues we were going to discuss later on. I’m going to make a question which is quite difficult, usually this question is about organisation…businesses, individual businesses. But now if you’re thinking about the upland farming community, how do you assess them right now? Do you think they are struggling, surviving, making [inaudible] booming, where are they at right now?

R: As I said in my introductory remarks, I don’t have much direct relationship with those sectors at the moment, but from the relatively informed position that I sit in I would go for they’re struggling.

I: How has the resilience of those have changed during the last five years, what do you expect for the next three years? What do you expect for the next 15 years?

R: I think it has got worse, timescales…I think, yeah, it probably has got worse in the last five…the next three years is going to depend massively on the immediate Brexit settlement. Although the government has given an undertaking that it will continue broadly speaking both current levels of funding and current support mechanisms, for at least that long for a transitional period. I think it’s probably safe to assume that we would have something close to the status quo for three years. 15 years you’re in completely unchartered territory because we then come back into what we’ve just been talking about, what does the UK’s primary trading relationships look like both with the EU and with the wider world? What will have happened to the rest of agriculture in that time? What will have happened to the economy in that time? It’s one thing to say that you can devise public money for public goods, but how much public money?

The pledge in the short term is to maintain existing levels for about I think three to five years. But in ten years time if the economy has taken a hit, if other industries are having to adapt because these resilience challenges apply to other parts of the economy as well, so if we are having to retrain, if we lose UK car industry for example. You may have to spend some public money to retrain and reskill people there, you don’t know what’s going to happen with net migration. You don’t know with skill shortages. So there are going to be a lot of calls on public funds, so the idea that we can sit here now and say how much money we think a future government is going to devote to the public money for public goods, even if that policy survives that long, it’s cast as a 25 year policy. But whatever else I think we can say Teresa May won’t be prime minister in 25 years, we have no idea who will be. So I think it’s a very uncertain future.

At the moment I think come back and ask me that question in a year or two’s time, but I think at the moment it’s just so unknowable. I think the immediate future, the three to five years looks probably…assuming politicians live up to the promises, that is the promise, that there will be a degree of continuity for a transitional period. If there is real turmoil as a result of wider changes, however well intentioned and however sincere those undertakings at the time, they may not be deliverable, we just don’t know.

I: We move now to something else, here in this card I was trying from the literature again, trying to say something about resilient [inaudible]. You can call it different names but pretty much if you go through this list you will see I tried to group them one [inaudible], one is related to the [inaudible], and one is related to the public. So please read the [inaudible], let me know if there are any sort of functions or goals that you think that they’re missing from that list which is important? Now we are talking about the upland planning community and then we can talk about other things, but let’s concentrate on the uplands.

R: Well at a quick glance I think that captures…I can’t immediately see something that’s obviously missing, that somebody’s…

I: Okay, if something comes to your mind, we can discuss that. Now…

R: Just one question, business owners, private, that’s another question I’m less well informed about, particularly in Scotland, because a lot of this land is not actually going to be owned by the hill farmers. So…

I: By landlords.

R: Yeah. Again, there is a whole question there because for them there’s an opportunity cost having…on the current model, and this is some really big picture questions here which pertain to agriculture altogether. It’s well known in the literature that land it’s an asset store, you don’t get returns from farming land that you would if you invested an equivalent amount in the manufacturing industry. Why do people then retain that asset store in the land? And that’s the classic Mark Twain thing well, ‘they’re not making it anymore.’ So it’s something that’s a fairly finite supply, businesses come and go but if you own land it’s there. And also, there are various tax advantages and succession inheritance tax for that, and then there are other kind of nonmonetary attractions to owning tracks of land if you are a wealthy individual, it can give you privacies, seclusion. And again, particularly in Scotland you can have shooting, whether it’s game birds, deer, whatever. So there’s an amenity value for the landlord if you like, and I’m not trying to get into a class war here, but the pleasure pursuits of the wealthy dovetail very well with the more primary agriculture thing of…those are very complimentary systems. Of course, there is again a synergy because it provides keeping people on the land in that way, gives you a reservoir of employment which helps with those recreational things. You’ve got beaters, you’ve got people who know the countryside, stalkers, whatever.

That’s a good, closed loop thing that works very well, but if you have a bigger shift in the economy and if the money, and the land ownership, if that has different reasons and reassesses its priorities, again that could impact. I think for this purpose I would define the business owners’ private interest more in the unit that is actually providing the active labour, the active land management. I would regard that as the business rather than something involving the ownership of the land. So is that, I don’t know what you would call it, production unit or whatever, but I would call it as the viability of that unit, which more often than not in an upland setting will be a family based unit. It doesn’t have to be but again that’s just the sociological evolution. And again, you’ve then got other factors again which is not confined to upland farming, we all know that the average age of farmers in the UK is in the late fifties, and it was late fifties five years ago so it’s probably early sixties now. Because that whole cohort is moving through and the model, the aspiration is that the farm will go down or the farming activity.

Because again not all are owner/occupiers, but that activity will pass down through the family, because it’s more of a vocation than a job you apply for. You don’t look on the internet and see oh upland sheep farmer, yeah, what are the qualifications for that, I’ll apply for that. It’s not how it works, at least…although again just in parenthesis, you do actually see normally on the news as a curiosity item a rural part of France are on a little island off the shore will advertise for come and live here as a family, look after this environment, we’ll pay you to do it. So that does become a lifestyle…a career opportunity, people who want to opt out of the rat race and whatever. And maybe that’s another way of getting some new blood into this, but that’s a bit of a digression. But there is the problem that quite often the younger generation both because of…it’s a nice life but it’s not an easy life. I say nice, it can be very rewarding if those are your values. And maybe we’re seeing a generational shift where it will go back to people inclining back to those values and being less materialist and so on. I don’t know but those are other dynamic forces that are in here that are irrespective of the economics.

I: Great, because a lot of the things you have mentioned because we have four case studies, three in Scotland, Scottish borders, Orkney and Skye and they have completely different pictures. What you said before that there are some which is family farmers, businesses, but on the other hand you have the landlords, it’s completely different. We have seen a lot of that and there is also the land reform in Scotland right now…

R: I’m not very familiar with that but…

I: Which makes a huge difference, it has pretty much changed the whole thing. Anyway…

R: So that’s on your first bit there…?

I: Now what I would like to do is talk a bit more about that is you can combine in any possible way, for example just six and 20 you think they can be grouped together, it makes sense. And then I would like to ask you how do you prioritise them? How you rank the five most important critical functions for upland farmers? And here you can answer in two ways, you can answer what is happening now and what should happen?

R: Right okay, so you’re wanting me to prioritise out of this…?

I: Yes, if you can group it as…

R: In order to do that I would need to have a framework of reference in my own mind. I’m doing this as an informed bystander, trying to put myself in government shoes.

I: Yes, I understand. Government shoes is one option, what is the other option?

R: Well, if you’re looking at me as a representative of the food…the secondary sector not primary production, my day job is processors, importers, supply to the market.

I: Let’s do that one.

R: To be brutally honest I would not see the output of upland farming as significant in terms of supplier of food to the market. As we’ve discussed it’s nice to have, it can provide some niche opportunities and diversity, but again there’s some simplistic fallacies in this, just because something is reared in adverse conditions and in an economically fragile way, does not make it a superior product. If you took sheep, lamb chops, you had a blind tasting, four or five different lamb chops, one from a lowland system, one from an upland system, one from, and there probably isn’t much intensive sheep farming, but if there were…well let’s take beef, beef is a better example. We’ve got five steaks lined up for a blind tasting, one is from an animal that spent quite a lot of its life in the uplands, born, reared, mainly fattened in the lowlands but basically originating in an upland farming scenario. One extensive grazing in a nice, lush meadow in the Home Counties somewhere. One in a semi intensive thing and another from a ‘and I don’t use the term in a pejorative way but from a more “industrialised.” So let’s say where the animals are in more of an American model, feed lots, strictly managed ration, housed indoors most of the time et cetera, et cetera. And you had a blind tasting, I don’t know, there will be people who will claim to be able to say, oh, yes, this is definitely the outdoor reared whatever. I genuinely don’t know…

I: In terms of space do you mean?

R: Yeah, perceptions of quality. So in the blind…and this is the way you would have to come at it because there will be people who like to think that they know, but some of that can be positive reinforcement in the way that things…if you go into a restaurant and on the menu the beef steak is £50.00 you think wow. But if you’ve then got a lovely story about this was hand reared by Fergus McEwan and his struggling family on a…then you say, oh that’s why it’s £50.00. And then you get the reinforcement, you say wow, that really tastes like…but how much of that is objective, how much of that is subjective reinforcement from the narrative you’ve been told and your own virtue thing about I am spending this money to help this poor struggling farmer. And it makes you feel good so you enjoy the food more because you’re feeling better about it while you’re eating it. Does that make sense?

I: Yes.

R: But working as I do…the food industry, marketeers, a lot of the time and money goes into working out why…

I: I know, one of my degrees is marketing, international marketing, so I know exactly what you’re talking about. How you can change the…

R: Yeah, there are some tricky issues around that. Back to my saying that from a food system point of view, I don’t think the actual…either in quantity or quality it’s not significant to the generality of the market.

I: Is that both for sheep and beef?

R: I would say so. I know less about sheep but also the problem for the UK is what little I do know, we actually export large percentage of sheep production, there isn’t a very strong domestic market at the moment. And then again you come back to Brexit and are those export opportunities going to be there? If you take those out you’re fundamentally altering the economics of the sheep production system, whether upland or lowland. That’s quite tricky.

I: This is from the side of…?

R: From the side of food industry, I personally would not see it as…I would see it as it’s nice to have, it can provide a spectrum of choice, but it’s not central to the market, it’s not central to price formation and it’s certainly in terms of quantity, it’s never going to be a mass market product, it’s always going to be peripheral.

I: So from the side of price making?

R: Well, I think if we then take out that…looking at it in terms…I think you then as a food industry you’re agnostic on the wider environmental thing. I think if you were very cynical you would say, what do we as a food industry depend on? We depend on mainstream agriculture for the bulk of our business. If mainstream agriculture is on the public challenge because of perceived adverse impacts on the environment, then having a nice case study about bits of farming that are good for the environment, and we say we support those, you can then have a halo effect that insulates some other bits of farming from the pressures…put it the other way around, if we had a situation where we lost upland farming for economic reasons, we would…that in itself…you can still make the environmental case but what we’ve done is we’ve sacrificed a bit of agriculture in order to maximise the environmental benefits from the land.

But again, without sounding too cynical but it depends how you explain that narrative to people and also do you actually…back to my earlier question about, you’ve actually got to do the resource accounting, what is the optimal…if your criterium is adverse environmental impact, you can measure that in a number of different ways, greenhouse gas emissions are a very easy…well I say easy, compared to some of the others it’s an easier one to measure. If you’re looking at biodiversity that’s notoriously difficult to quantify. But again, you could say just as people say in an urban setting, the parks are the lungs of the city, if we could say that inaccessible countryside is the reservoir of biodiversity, it breeds the insects and whatever, and keeps certain bits of the ecosystem alive in a way that they wouldn’t otherwise be, then you can make the case for that. I think it’s difficult to…and again the one we’ve got here the historic and cultural value of the landscape and local cuisine; well, I wouldn’t necessarily bracket the two together. But the landscape, yeah, again it’s the problem of valuing it and for whose benefit?

I don’t know because I don’t know the numbers but if you looked at Scottish tourism for example, people going out in cars or coaches, touring the lovely scenery, how many of them are actually native British people? There is a benefit there but is it actually Chinese and Americans, and everybody else who is getting the amenity value of that? We get an indirect benefit from their tourism into the country, but again this is peripheral to what I do at the moment, but even though it’s a while since I’ve been in government, it was an issue then, trying to get people out into the countryside, how do you do that? They have to want to do it, you can’t herd people into buses and drive them out and say look at this. One of the problems we have, and again this is a slight digression, but the general public, and again I’m not being rude about the general public, it’s just the state is now so disconnected from food production. You get these stories that children don’t know that eggs come from chickens or that milk comes from cows or whatever, they just view it as a product, Mr McDonald somewhere makes this stuff.

If you’ve got that disconnect, how many people…and again it’s partly a class thing as well. How many, and it’s hard to avoid using terms like working class or whatever, but who are the people who go out for a day in the countryside? I would imagine that they are older rather than younger and wealthier rather than poorer. I would imagine, I don’t have the figures to back that up. So are we preserving…and again the cultural value and so on, big debates, whose culture? What culture? I know these are huge questions but they are important. If you’re having something like that as a priority, you’ve got to have an understanding of who are the beneficiaries and what are the mechanisms for ensuring that they actually benefit?

I: Around the…

R: And I’m not trying to avoid answering the question, but what I’m trying to say is I don’t think it’s as simple as listing one to five.

I: Yes, believe me, it’s not as quite simple question to answer but I thought it was quite easy way to get people from different backgrounds talking about the same thing.

R: I think if you take the food bit out of the equation then I think you do come back to the environmental thing and you come back to air, water, biodiversity, greenhouse gas. Soil quality not important in terms of productive potential but important in terms of the biodiversity. Those would be the things that I think would be…and then again, I don’t know, from a food industry perspective, we would be completely agnostic on whether or not there were people in these rural areas. But I think if they are intrinsic to delivery of these broader non food benefits, then, yes, they go with the package.

I: From some of the evidence from other interviews and some of them it was scientific evidence based, but the argument was like we need [inaudible] rates of both sheep and beef in upland areas in order to deliver the environmental bit. So if we move sheep and beef from those areas pretty much, it’s not going to generate at the same level of public goods. That’s one of the arguments, so it was putting that against the wideness type of…that’s the one. And I wonder having that in your mind what would this…do you think it’s a kind of…have you come across about that? Do you think it’s a valid point?

R: I’m old enough to have come across stocking densities from both sides. There’s been at times, and it sounds ridiculous, but there’s been both minimum and maximum. You’ve had a minimum in order to qualify for a payment and had a maximum in terms of management of the landscape. Again, I think that’s just another way of framing the question, it depends what you’re trying to deliver. In some circumstances having a minimum level is the right thing to do, in other circumstances you’ve got to avoid overgrazing. But, and again without trying to get too much into the semantics, overgrazing is…there are so many assumptions in there, by what criteria is that overgrazing? How are you defining an optimal level? It’s clearly not defined in relation to the meat product so it’s got to be defined in relation to the ecosystem. But again, back to one of my very early remarks, is that the ecosystem a snapshot of it as it is now, what you think it might have been in the past or what you would like it to be in the future? And depending which of those you’re talking about you will get different answers to that question.

I: Also, there was a strong argument in terms that people tend to forget that the landscape we see right now it’s a product of farming.

R: It’s a managed landscape, yes.

I: That was quite a strong argument that came from other interviews. But now we have a question and you have already I think answered part of that, but I wondered if you want to answer anything around that. What would be the impact if upland sheep and beef cattle farming is dramatically reduced or ceased altogether? You already have answered some of them, I wonder if you want to add something or we move to something else?

R: I don’t think…if you go back on the recording, I don’t see it having a measurable impact on food supply, it might have a slight knock-on effect on some of the economics of some of the lowland production, where they rely on animals being brought down from the hills or whatever. But again, it would very much depend case by case, but there would be ways around that. And again, in terms of the general scheme of things I don’t think it would be hugely significant. The real problem of an abrupt cessation would be what happened to the people and what happened to the management of the landscape? And again, back to these broader environmental goals. So that would be the thing. As I say in terms of the contribution of that bit of farming to the national food supply, again I don’t mean it to sound as harsh as it sounds but it wouldn’t keep me awake at night.

I: Don’t worry, I have come across many times about that, it’s not the first time. Actually, now let’s move to that one, this one it’s a kind of card we discuss about [inaudible] long term pressures [inaudible], whatever you would like to call that. I would like to ask you please read the whole list, first let me know if there is any important drivers for change that is missing from there? And then we can discuss further. Now we would like to discuss about what effects those businesses? I’m not talking only about affluent livestock, I’m talking also about the whole meat, beef and sheep. Let me know first of all is there anything which is missing?

R: I was going to say you didn’t have…but you do actually, number 19, societal concerns about meat production damaging ecosystems and animal welfare. Yeah, I think those…

I: You want to expand it, please?

R: I think…well it depends what we…that can work in conjunction…have you got greenhouse gas mitigation and that kind of thing as a driver?

I: No, I don’t.

R: Because that…the other driver which is not explicit in that because these…you’re looking at a kind of…this is an attitudinal thing. I think for those, as I say in the food industry, the sustainability and the health drivers are going to be quite important. The sustainability ones in terms, not just of public perception but actually the…if you’re looking long term, feeding nine billion people by 2050 in a climate change scenario, where you’ve got less water, land, energy, et cetera, et cetera. You’re going to have to improve conversion rates for plants to animal proteins or indeed as we discussed in the main [inaudible] of the project, whether you’re moving more of an actual paradigm shift towards a more plant based diet et cetera, et cetera. And that can also then link into the health thing because there is evidence about the adverse effects of diets that are too high in some forms of animal protein, red meat, processed meat et cetera. The whole thing around carcinogenic effects and so on.

If there were to be more evidence around that and that then links into the resource scarcity and the climate change. I think that’s a set of drivers that I don’t think is articulated quite strongly enough in the way that you’ve got it formulated there. Does that make sense?

I: Makes sense and thank you very much for giving that field, that’s exactly what I want to…pretty much make it much more clear and reflect exactly how you think about things.

R: Within the social drivers, you’ve got the attitude bit, we don’t like the idea of animals…milk is murder, all that, but there’s also about the whole health and nutrition thing, which is more objective. That can be genuinely evidenced based and then you’ve got the whole resource scarcity thing around meat production being a…what’s the word I’m looking for? Not suboptimal, maybe suboptimal, but if you’re looking…again in very basic terms all food production is a product of photosynthesis. The sun is the primary driver and the most direct way is to eat the plants as plants, we are fortunate that we’re in a position where we can have those plants transformed into other forms of protein. And a lot of enhancements, you get micronutrients, you get all sorts of other things that come through the animal system. But that is quite resource intensive, up till now there are enough global resources to be able to manage that there or there about. I know WWF say we’re already consuming one and a half times the planet’s worth.

But if you look at food systems in isolation, because at the end of the day some of things around us, driving cars or whatever, we can have different forms of public transport but we’ve still got to nourish ourselves. So food takes precedence in terms of global consumption of resources. I don’t know, there isn’t an easy way to capture that but I think the long term pressures will be those…maybe resource constraints in a climate change context, maybe that’s a neat way of summarising it.

I: Yeah, I think it’s much better because the way I tried to put it as climate change is not very clear, but the way you express is more clear.

R: It’s much more to do with resource availability rather than the weather patterns. Weather patterns maybe an accelerator effect of some of that but it’s actually about the basic resource.

I: I understand. Now I want to ask you, most of them sound like threats, I wonder if you can see anything there that can be seen as an opportunity?

R: Some of these you can flip, we’ve already talked about just anecdotally examples of somebody advertising, do you want to get away from the pressures of city life, run a small holding? You can flip the demographic thing, tired of the rat race, big cities, whatever. There are opportunities out there and think of the benefits of your kids. But then again where are the supporting infrastructures? But again, with technology they can be home schooled on the internet, even for access to medicine you can get a lot…there will be some basic levels of infrastructure that would need to support that. But you could, one or two of these you could flip and again things like the infrastructure that will come and we are still struggling with an old fashioned digital infrastructure. If you look at other parts of the world where they’ve just missed out…they’ve gone straight to wireless, straight to satellite, whatever, we don’t need to dig up lots of roads and put in lots of cables. There’s other ways of doing things and that will come as well, and that will transform some of this.

I: Yes, well the infrastructure I just have to add the other issue about the slaughterhouses?

R: But that’s coming back if…if we’re back into the part of the food system, yeah, that’s an important issue because it’s a kind of key link in the chain, and that’s much harder to improvise. Some of these other things there are technological fixes, there isn’t…unfortunately meat production is at the end of the day a fairly messy business and that half of it has to happen somewhere. And you could just about restructure things but there would be a cost to doing that, if it wasn’t economic within a current structure and you had to find a way of keeping it going, you would have to create an artificial economic drivers to keep it going, because it wouldn’t be supported through the end price. You would have to factor that in, in some way. The whole thing, again vets and all that, that again is part of that thing. I know vets are not physical infrastructure but you’ve got to do something around all that.

I: Can you say a bit more about the vets and all those kind of business advisors let’s say, a bit more?

R: Vets I think are different, vets is a service, it’s a professional service, has a price, you find a mechanism for providing that just as you have to have mechanisms for providing medical provision for human beings in remote areas, you’ve got to find a way of doing that. For humans, as I say, you’ve got…there is a much clearer social obligation to do that for humans, if you don’t think the animals should be there in the first place, then it’s harder to make that case. For the other professional services again I’m old enough to remember the days when we had publicly funded extension services and advice, ADAS and all that and Scottish equivalent no doubt. That’s long gone as a…there is quite a good intellectual case for saying it needs to come back to deal precisely with some of the challenges we’re talking about, which are not monetised in the current system. So how can you expect commercial operators to provide that out of a market revenue.

I think there is a good intellectual case for that but at the moment all these…until recently I was on the board of NIAB, National Institute of Agriculture and Botany, which is about knowledge transfer and so on. But in an objective way, there are business advisors who do that knowledge transfer but only to sell the product for which they had the licence. So they are not impartial and that’s the problem in this context because there just would not be a sufficient market to support them providing that advice as part of their normal commercial operation.

I: But if there are other indicators of the fact that they are not free…anyway what are the implications for the fact that they are not free advisor services, I’m talking in terms of whether it makes more resilient or less resilient?

R: I would like to say from first principle again somebody who’s been on the policy side and been involved in NIAB and other things, I would like to say from first principles it must be a disadvantage not to have that. The whole point of knowledge transfer and so on is to improve resilience and to…and improve delivery of environmental benefits and so on. It seems to be that’s the basic premise for that whole thing is that it must be…it’s hard to demonstrate, but I can’t come at it from the point of view that not having those things available does risk…particularly in a landscape of changing challenges, you will over time people will have evolved to things that work well in a given environment and they will have done that by trial and error. But if we’re looking at an accelerating pace of change, we’re looking at a combination of unfamiliar drivers, evolution isn’t going to get you there. That incremental adaptation will risk getting swamped by the scale or the pace of the challenge. The only way to stay ahead of that curve is to have the benefits of the wider research and so on, which again you won’t be able to afford to pay for within the economic system, so you have to have a way of getting that in.

I: I’m asking because there was some kind of evidence from the interviews that farmers, they need to look more themselves like land managers, rather than farmers and providers of the food only. Also, the fact that it’s quite complicated how you can balance all the different…there are options for forestry, about how to protect the environment and at the same time they don’t get…they’re not big enough from the market. So all this…in order to put it together and make reasonable type of strategy, run their business, they need a lot of expertise.

R: Yeah, I wouldn’t disagree with that.

I: The problem is there are plenty of experts [inaudible] but there is so much conflict in methods, that the lenders today they don’t know where to invest and how much to invest.

R: Well partly because the people giving that advice are rarely completely independent because they will have a bias to whoever their primary pay master is. In the days when you actually had an ADAS where these people were public servants, had no commercial leads and would try to do it on their best…the best available knowledge and doing it in an objective way, but those people are few and far between, if they exist at all at the moment. They have got some other primary thing which is whether its to do with a particular farming method, a particular company, a particular system, a particular product, whatever it is. And again, you will get a natural bias if you’ve got somebody to advise on forestry, they will have a forestry background and they will think forestry is a good thing. So if they come onto your farm they will say you should be [inaudible].

I: That’s part of the problem. I wonder how these people given the constraints they have, that they have low resources, [inaudible] they have to rely a lot on [inaudible these things. But at the same time, they need to make a lot of complex decisions.

R: They do but again at the risk of sounding too much like a central civil servant that I used to be, the danger is…there is an attractive thing that you empower people to make these decisions for themselves and you give them the means, however you fund that and so on. But the risk of that is that if you leave individuals to weigh a set of conflicting things and come up with the right thing for their circumstances. Again, I keep using this word suboptimal, but one of the things, and again it’s more than ten years since I was doing this professionally on the policy side, but even then, we were realising that these things…that the landscape scale dimension of this. So if you’ve got neighbouring farms, one goes one way, one goes the other way, they can cancel each other out. You’ve got to find a way of doing this at a landscape scale. And that implies, coercion is the wrong word, but either you have a set of incentives that focuses people on what your predetermined vision is. It’s a bit like town planning, you’ve got to actually have a concept of what it is and then you find the levers or the ways of trying to…but there will obviously be…again there’s a conflict that if you want people of freewill to take decisions that conform to your plan, that’s almost a paradox.

Because if you’ve got a plan you want people to follow your plan and you’re going to have work very hard if you’ve got to persuade 30 individual decision takers to all opt for the same thing, if you’re giving them independent advice and if they’ve all got their own personal drivers, you’ve got to find a way of actively shaping this.

I: Actually, the other thing I would like to ask, and you already mentioned that it was about the fact that the scale that we are looking at things, individual basis is not enough, what is counteracting pretty much [inaudible]. So we need to know why the catchment area or I don’t know if it’s landscape or catchment area. That also…the other thing I was getting from the interviews is like whether we have access to executive type of scientific research that shows this piece of land in this area needs to be used in this way. So these people either they’re the business, the land managers or the advisors, they say…they talk about the same thing. Because it seems from the same piece of land there are so many different options and suggestions that people are lost…

R: There is work on that and again I’ve been out of touch with this for a while but when I was still doing it and going back about ten years, maybe a little bit more, you’re familiar with Natural England, which are one of the delivery bodies…?

I: Yes.

R: And it might have been Natural England it might not have been, it might have been the Environment Agency actually, but somebody somewhere does actually have a nice series of maps where you can overlay different things on the same landscape. So you have your basic thing and then you can put a set of water criteria on that, you can overlay that with something else. So there is work out there on that and it’s very, very interesting.

I: I wonder how much they realise [inaudible]?

R: Very little.

I: Very little because some of the interviews with some of the organisations you mentioned it seems either they didn’t know about that or they didn’t have full access to that or they didn’t know how to utilise that. I wonder is it something we need pretty much to revisit because when we are talking about public [inaudible]. We need to have reference from…

R: Absolutely. Again, I’m old fashioned and you should have objective evidence based policymaking, and as I say there is good work out there and if that was good work ten/twelve years ago, I don’t know maybe they haven’t had the funding to continue it. But those…and also even in the last ten or twelve years the power of big data has just again given us massive potential to do stuff, we can get different datasets and we can overlay this with rainfall patterns and all sorts of other things. And really build some very good modelling, this is not my field at all but I’ve got enough of an understanding of what the potential for all that is. And yes, we should absolutely should be doing that but the problem is that the policy decisions, is again I know from veteran experience, will be taken on rather different and rather short term, and rather political criteria. So there is that…and again the sort of work that you’re involved in on the [inaudible] project and so on, exactly what we should be doing will…it’s not a criticism, and these things take as long as they take, but even if you’ve got a good product, will the policymakers actually put as much reliance on that evidence base or will they still be side-tracked by the other thing? But you need it there and I’m absolutely a supporter of doing more of that and absolutely that’s the way we should be looking at this.

I: Have you felt worried about all this discussion about public [inaudible] and it sounds to me that everyone understands, yes, we need to pay for [inaudible]. But no one really [inaudible] can define or measure or give exact examples to those farmers this is what I want from you to deliver.

R: Yeah, the example borrowed from a different…it’s still land based but in a completely different context, flood management. You can build some lovely maps and you’ve got some very good data and you can say, and not necessarily farming maybe housing, on a bit of coastline that’s subject to erosion, you know it’s a losing battle, you can spend money on things, but objectively the right thing is just simply to sacrifice that land. And it will be cheaper to pay to rehouse the people or relocate the farms, than year on year to try to build and maintain sea defences that are only going to delay an inevitable natural process. The correct policy analysis of that is to say we stopped doing that, we sacrificed the land and we pay what it takes to compensate. But the politics won’t allow you to do that, that’s the problem, and that’s…in a way that’s a good case study, because that’s a very clear-cut simple issue. There is an irresistible natural force of coastal erosion, you can identify the areas of risk, you can quantify what it will cost to protect them and you can quantify what it would cost to relocate people. And you can do a nice cost benefit sum but you’ll still get the wrong answer because the politics won’t let you do what the economics dictate. And as I say that’s a simple model, this is much, much more complicated.

I: In this list I wonder, you mentioned before about the change in the standards, the trade deals with the USA. I wonder what about number nine, what about the supply chain, the meat supply chain in the UK has been structured government. Do you think it’s working fine, there are broken links there, there are ways that can be improved?

R: Yeah, that’s a tricky question. I’m part of that but I’m somewhere in the middle of that, I’m not representing primary producers, I’m not representing retailers. I think my member companies would like to think of themselves as the squeezed middle, because they get pressures from both sides. The power dynamics are what they are, we have an open market…well within a set of perimeters defined by an EU membership and tariff protection and all that, and the current regulatory structure. But within that you have market economics dictating it, you have massive buying power and consolidation, our retail thing is very different even from many other EU member states. We are the most extreme model within the EU…

I: I think it’s 75 something.

R: Germany, France coming up there but I don’t know so much about Scandinavia, yeah, possibly maybe a little bit.

I: It’s quite high.

R: Yeah, but other bits of Europe not so. They are what they are, you then…

I: I wonder whether the way the market looks now it’s not exactly healthy but whether really leads you for producers to be resilient?

R: It’s a good question. I think it’s probably gone and again Brexit could be the thing that is make or break for this model. I think it’s probably gone about as far towards one extreme as it can go.

I: What do you mean one extreme…?

R: To one extreme and we are in a model where the whole post war food system in the UK has been predicated on what people call the cheap food policy. That’s been an explicit policy objective across political parties, across decades. Again, this is without overcomplicating, it is part of the Brexit debate. Other parts of Europe have different priorities in relation to their food systems, our priority has always been a cheap food system. Food in the UK is cheap both in absolute terms compared to some other…many other European countries, very cheap in relative terms. If you look at it as a percentage of disposable income, that line is like that over the last 100 years. There are some blips at this bottom end for lower income households beginning to be a hockey stick whatever, but for average income earners it’s been like that. We are now bumping up against both those resource constraints, changing market, trade relationships and so on and some of these other things that may well mean that’s gone as far as it can go.

And whether it’s a function of that slope or…I don’t know what the causation is, but that’s been very closely correlated with the concentration of retailer power as well. I wouldn’t like to say it’s cause and effect but again they follow a very similar trajectory. I think for the same sort of reasons I think that’s why…I think we’ve gone as far as we can go and we’ve just seen with the CMA turning down Sainsburys/Asda merger, they are saying, and that’s not over yet by the way, but they are effectively saying we think that’s gone as far as it ought to in the consumer interest. And they’re looking at it from the consumer interest rather than the producer, but all these things feed back. I wouldn’t claim on your number nine, I wouldn’t claim…it is what it is, there are reasons why it is what it is, will it change? Possibly yes for a variety of reasons, it may well have reached the tipping point within its own logic, but as some of these other drivers change, particularly the Brexit ones and so on, you will get…those will impact on that and whether that’s regulatory, whether that’s market forces or probably a combination of the two?

So that will change but inevitably in any system unless you’ve got direct marketing, if you’ve got any kind of chain…and of course again if we’re talking particularly about the outcomes, again they are at one extreme end of this, because the potential for direct marketing to urban population centres is by definition zero or highly limited. In any system where you’ve got a chain it’s always the primary producer is always at the wrong end of that chain, and it’s very hard in a competitive well supplied market to capture that value. But again, that comes back a little bit about what we were saying about niche markets, if you can make a clever combination based on appeals to sentimentality, possibly equality, scarcity value, good branding, whatever, you might be able to get a premium that you can capture that stays with that. But again, the risk is as we were discussing earlier somebody else can syphon quite a lot of that value, it’s quite hard to do it…

I: Very easily.

R: Yeah.

I: I wondered because…

R: I’ve probably got about five/ten minutes, is that okay?

I: Yes, sorry. I wondered whether in the supply chain there’s an issue about the feedback [inaudible] either the [inaudible] processor for the farm. Because I’m getting the feeling that the UK meat market, the way it works it’s like [inaudible], they don’t really establish long term relationships. A lot of that is through auctioning, it’s not…it’s getting less and less, I agree with that? But the logic it’s more like who is giving the best price right now? [Inaudible]. Also, the quality of the feedback, the idea of the producers, all the farmers [inaudible], all the system that [inaudible] is not developed enough in order to…but some messages are getting from other interviews and I wonder if your experience if they’re true, if they contribute…not exactly contribute, cause the problem?

R: This is not…as I say, I don’t deal directly in beef or sheep and the pig meat I deal with tends to be for bigger processes where there are indeed long term contracts and it’s a much more structured…

I: Pig and poultry is completely different.

R: Yeah. But I know enough from general conversation to recognise what you’re talking about; I think I wouldn’t disagree with those points but I don’t have direct knowledge.

I: So let’s leave that. Very quickly from those ones…you mentioned a lot, is anything else you wanted to say that this is quite a big driver for change?

R: No, I think we’ve probably covered most of that, yeah.

I: And then the last thing I would like from you, obviously through the discussion we talked about…through a lot of things, but I wonder if you would like to see things in the meat supply chain in the UK to change, anything, any change? It can be from the supply chain, it can be from the policy makers, it can be from the way that the supply chain has been organised, whatever, what kind of change would you like to see in order to make the whole system more resilient?

R: I think it comes back a little bit to the cheap food…I would like as a nation, as consumers to value food more. If that had to be a…and by value food more, understand what it takes to produce food and why we should not regard it as a lot of people do, where they buy purely on price not on…again this is a lot of the stuff we’ve discussed but it’s not just buying on values, although some people would like to see us buy it on values, but I think having a better understanding and a better value of food production. That includes understanding some of the externalities of food production, it includes understanding the social context and so on, and also I would say this wouldn’t I as somebody who represents people in the meat business, that again this sounds maybe too bland and too much, but meat has a role in healthy balanced diets. I think we are having a series of things that are moving in the wrong direction.

We still have a bias towards cheap food policy. We have a bias towards to demonising certain foods and food groups on the basis…well that meat is bad or whatever or we should all be vegan. Realising that good nutrition and good environmental sustainability is not simple magic bullet single solution. You won’t eat this and get well and live forever, you won’t…if you just ate nothing but blueberries that’s…there are…and similarly if we stopped all animal production tomorrow that wouldn’t of itself save the planet. These are complex dynamic interrelated systems but what we need is a much…but we are making arbitrary choices based on singling out individual elements of that, which we prioritise differently. Some people will prioritise price, some will prioritise values, is it kind to animals or whatever. Some will prioritise their best understanding of the health arguments or whatever it is, but we need a much more informed joined up thing, where we have some kind of societal consensus as to what constitutes a sustainable healthy affordable food system. And by sustainable, I mean that works in the overall context of the demands that we as populations are putting on the natural resources on the planet that we inhabit. I know that sounds a bit chauvinistic but that’s what I would like.

I: I understand that.

R: I think that can only come…the market won’t deliver that or if it does it won’t be within a timescale to stop some of the adverse impacts that are already happening. Because markets respond to signals, they don’t drive, they maximise within a framework, but if you’ve got a framework where things are shifting, the market will catch up, but it won’t give you a prescr…it won’t give you a preventative solution, because that’s not the way markets work. So you’ve got to have some kind of policy consensus and I think I mentioned in the [inaudible] thing, which if you haven’t looked it up yet, go and look it up, 2008 have a look at Food Matters report. It’s all in there, written ten years ago, it’s as true today as it was ten years ago.

I: I was trying to look at that but I found something completely different. Is it possible to send me the link because I found something it was completely different and I was thinking, no, definitely it’s not that?

R: Mm, let me see if I can Google it now.

I: Don’t worry, you can do it in the day it’s not needed right now.

R: It will take two seconds.

I: Okay. The thing is because obviously there are bias about in the food system resilience and that can be related with either institutions who don’t have enough…or the institutions haven’t developed at the right point. Or it can be about the infrastructures or market structures. But I was thinking…that’s a different one. Okay, can you please me that?

R: Yes.

I: Thank you very much.

R: It’s still there.

I: Is there any issues about that kind of innovation, framework which says that you look at the interactions, you look at the institutions, which is everything about the regulations or standards or whatever. Infrastructures, capabilities and market structures and I wonder where do you think its biggest problem right now?

R: At the policy institution level.

I: At this one you think? At the institution level, yeah.

R: Yeah.

I: So everything about regulations and policies?

R: Yeah.

I: From what we’ve been getting from this project I think there is a lot of issues also about the interactions.

R: But they flow from that, that governance…

I: Yeah, this pretty much effect everyone, the institution, everyone. But right now, although they’re a lot of networks, those they are staying at a level, they don’t really deliver deep to what’s needed. So we have a lot of associations, a lot of not exactly extension services, but tools, but they don’t really, how to say, there is a gap between what the industry needs and what those…all those advisors they are provided. They’re very much tied up to what the policymakers or what the funders would like to hear. But also, with the [inaudible] it’s pretty much they try to answer what the policymakers would like to hear about, but they don’t believe [inaudible] really helps…answers how we define that, how we measure that, how these affect all the issues…the interactions and how we can balance the whole thing.

The other issue also is about capabilities, about either trying to manage collective schemes. I’m not necessarily talking about comparatives here but I’m talking more about either can be private enterprises but built on more comparative type of principles. Rather than…because [inaudible] in those…when you look at…you want to look at the landscape scheme or catchment scheme and you want to pull together all those different factors, you need the type of commercial, beneficial pattern set and don’t have enough skills to build that kind of consent.

R: I’ve seen or two examples where that does work, I’ve seen a good example on water management, water catchment that was…I did…I was invited on some project with the Prince of Wales business, I forget what it’s called, it’s some charitable thing that he runs. And there’s a very good case study…

I: If you have a link to that please send me that link at some point.

R: Somewhere, I don’t know where…there will be an archive somewhere. But that was around the specific thing and that was specific about water management. And that did work but it took a lot of investment and that’s why it was a flagship project because a lot of people had invested a lot of time and money. It can work but again it comes back to having to invest a lot of time, money and expertise in doing it. And then that comes back to…

I: Just to bring the people on the same page, you need so much time, and so much effort just to bring them on the same page, not to get to the next page.

R: Yes. And then the other thing you need a single unifying threat and the single unifying threat was the water quality. And because they as farmers were being…as a community of farmers were being blamed because water coming out of people’s taps was brown and so they needed collaboratively to address this problem with the water company. And it worked, they did it and it worked.

I: You think [inaudible] the fact that there is no single clear threat, it’s kind of barrier?

R: Yeah, I think you’ve got two problems, you haven’t got a single unifying external challenge which is perceived by everyone as a single existential threat, and again just the density, the dispersal. If you’ve got these…to get everybody together in a village hall, you need 30 or 40 people, they’ve all got to leave their farms at the same time, travel to wherever this location. You could…well if you had better broadband coverage you might be able to do it in…but actually you need people in the room, you need that interaction, you need the body language. It’s hard work. Not impossible but very difficult.

I: I don’t want any more of your time. Any type of feedback on this type of interview, did you find it easy to talk through everything?

R: Yeah, absolutely. Shall I hang onto that one?

I: Yes, you can have it, you can have one of those. Please feel free any type of report or…

R: I’ll certainly send you the link to the Food Matters one. If I can find…I think it was called Business in the Community, so I think if you Google Business in the Community you might find it, it was a water catchment case study in Manchester, north of Manchester. If you Google Business in the Community. I can have a look and see if I can find something.

I: It has been recorded so I will get the details but also if you find something just send the link to me. So thank you very much, I’ll close this thing.

R: Pleasure.

**End of transcript**