ResULTS project: case study D interview 39

Face to face interview with butcher, conducted 20th September 2018

Interviewer: I

Respondents: R1 and R2

I: Well, I have twin boys, four and a half years, so it has quite…

R1: Oh yes? It’s hard, like.

I: Hard, it is.

R1: Perfect.

I: Okay, so the project is, we are seeking to understand how beef cattle and sheep farmers and food processing, retail and business in areas like [area D] can improve their resilience to environmental, economic and social change, and what impact their actions to improve resilience will have on food supply, local natural resources and society, so that’s the aim. The project is funded by the UK Research Council but pretty much means the UK government, and then also from the Scottish government. And actually, this is one of the ten projects doing work on resilience in food systems. I have somewhere here the leaflet with the ten projects.

Here it is. So this is the wider programme and then it has ten different projects in the UK, this is the names on different… [Inaudible]. And this is the one which is yours, which is the only one which is upland areas. I know [area D] doesn’t have a lot of hills.

R1: No.

I: But it’s considered upland because it’s a remote and challenging environment.

R1: Exactly, yes.

I: And it’s led by Ann Bruce, Edinburgh University, but also it’s in collaboration with other…

R1: Okay.

I: So…

R1: Perfect, yes.

I: If you needed to have any information, I can send it, but this is the only leaflet I have with me.

R1: Yes, it’s fine, no, you keep that, that’s fine.

I: Okay, now a bit about…because it’s quite a complex topic, I have prepared a number of informative cards, so we’ll treat them as a starting point for the conversation, it’s only for indicative purposes, it’s not an exhaustive list, but I’m trying…if you see something there that doesn’t make sense because also these cards, we do interviews along the whole supply chain, so from farmers to retailers, but at the same time…so you might see there on the cards a few issues that are not really relevant either to [area D]’s case or to the type of business you have. So just let me know, and we can find ways to modify that.

So obviously there are no right or wrong answers, I’m not expecting certain things to hear, and you are the expert because you know the reality you’re facing much better than anyone else. And trying to answer these questions, try…it’s quite crucial to identify trade-offs, so whenever you make a choice, I’m going to do that in order to address this kind of change, behind there might be some trade-offs about what are the necessary resources in order to apply and make it feasible, or there might be trade-offs what kind of impact, because usually you want to have positive impact, but sometimes solutions might have side-effects, might create negative impacts. For example, a typical example is that you overuse a resource then that leads to the degradation of resource.

So, for example, farmers if they are overgrazing their land…

R1: It’s spoiled land, yes.

I: Yes, so that’s an example. Try to use as many examples you can from your business and then try to explain why and how things happen in the way they do and try to go bigger than symptoms, so if someone says to me that my farm is not resilient, I would like to go a bit deeper and understand the cause root of why that’s happening. And if you would like to give us any historical account of events, if you deem that I need this kind of background information to understand the context and why things have evolved in this way, that is more than welcome.

R1: Okay, yes.

I: And finally, try to focus first at your business level, but if things we are talking about is the same with…

[Interruption]

R1: It’s fine.

I: So other kinds of businesses that are the same level or the [inaudible], just let me know.

R1: Okay.

I: Okay, so pretty much this is enough of an introduction, let’s start with the actual questions.

R1: That’s fine.

I: So first question is tell me a bit about your business and the nature of your business, different sources of income and also the position of yours in the business?

R1: Yes, well, we have been at this address, [address], for about seven generations, so originally it was a dairy farm and we did, back in the wartime, my grandparents had a lot of hens, so we supplied eggs into the food chain. As it went on, then we went more into the dairy side of the farming, so we were predominantly dairy farmers for years and years but the same with that changing and the whole way that the quota was going and things, and our farm’s small, we couldn’t really justify trying to buy more land with the quota and the price of milk, it wasn’t sufficient to buy more.

So my dad was a butcher, so we’d been doing that as a side-line for years as well just to top up the farm income and in 1988 we were actually in the position to come away from dairy farming and go just purely into the butchery side. So we built this factory then in 2003, so that was built brand-new by my wife and myself then and we’ve been doing that since then, with the addition of a retail shop in [town 1] four years ago, the [shop name], so we’ve built that as well, well, not built it, but we put a shop there as well.

I: Brilliant, because actually, as I said, we’re trying to cover the whole supply chain, so the fact that you pretty much supply that shop there, it’s really nice because you get both hats.

R1: Yes, we do the whole thing. We’ve seen the farming side, we were farmers for years, we had some beef cattle as well for a while, maybe for three or four years…

I: But you have no longer?

R1: No, no, it was fine, we quite liked that but at the same time, your environmental side, environmental health, obviously you’re working with the manure inside the farming to the clean side so you had to have showers and changes between every time you fed the cattle and worked with cattle, and then something would happen, maybe a cow would get out, so you’ve got to change your clothes, go and sort that, it was just no use. It was getting too much hassle. So we decided to stop that completely and just go 100 per cent into the butchery side.

I: Concentrate on the meat processing and now also the retail?

R1: And the retail side, yes, we’ve done that for four years, coming up... Maybe today…it’s 22, 23? So yes, nearly four years anniversary, so we do that as well, so we cover the whole retail side. So we get involved with the customers more with that as well. It’s all wholesale from here mostly, we supply all hotels, a couple of hotels, all the guys [inaudible], boats, shops, just anything, everything, whatever we can.

I: Okay. So you supply primarily in [area D] or you supply also outside [area D]?

R1: Mostly internal. We stick to that. We’re actually just on the border for…the quantity of meat that we work with, if we do too much more we go into a different food body, it would be FSS because we’re just on the cusp of being too big, so we don’t want to really increase that. We’re quite happy with the size we are now, we’re just going to stick with that.

I: So you’re already under FSA?

R1: No, we’re just Environmental Health. We can still stay under that because our turnover is around…the test between the number of [inaudible] and turnover is just under…

I: Oh, I didn’t know that there is…

R1: Yes, there’s a cut-off limit to that, so we try and stick to that.

I: Ah, I thought that all processing units have to be under FSA.

R1: No, only if it’s over a certain amount of tonnage in meat.

R2: Tonnage, yes.

R1: Yes, so divided by every week in the year because obviously some weeks are quieter so you can take the busy weeks and divide it between the whole time, that’s okay, because it’s the tonnage not bone in, it’s boneless, so you’ve got quite a bit of scope. But we’re just on the border. So we try and keep to that, just under that.

I: Yes, I understand. We have this chance to talk about the relationship with hygiene and things later on. So what does resilience mean for you? When you hear that word, what springs to your mind?

R1: I’m not 100 per cent too sure what I would say for that. I’m trying to think what actually would be resilience. I don’t know. I’m trying to think how to use it. To be very resilient, usually I would say it’s even being 100 per cent [area D] resilient, just using stuff from here, but I don’t know if that’s right how you think of that.

I: I think it’s sufficiency, that you get all the supplies from here?

R1: Right, yes.

I: That you mean?

R1: That’s exactly what we do, yes, we try and get as much from here as we can. We’re very strong based on being [area D] produced if we can, everything we can get from here, we try and get. Some things we can’t, it’s just not here, but all the beef and lamb and things…

I: So that’s the definition you give it?

R1: Yes.

I: Okay, because I’m going to…why are these cards mixed? Sorry. Anyway…when I was looking at the resilience literature for this project, I came across a definition. So for example, it says that resilience is the capacity of a business or a system as a whole to either absorb, buffer against internal and external disturbances, so pretty much absorb the loss and do nothing, just absorb the loss for a time, and then either learn and adapt through incremental changes, so pretty much make little changes, or transform through radical changes, so the short and long-term pressures will no longer affect them. So does it make sense?

R1: Well, if it means that way, what we have found here, obviously, there’s no longer an abattoir in [area D], so we’re having to change for that, because it was here for years, we ran it as a group of four of us for about six years, but that’s just stopped just this year, so we’re now having to book our cattle into [abattoir name]l, so that’s changing the whole process of how we do it and it costs, so there are changes like that.

I: Who is leading that initiative?

R1: Putting them away, sorry, or the actual…?

I: Who was leading that initiative?

R1: Well, the council actually were the ones that came to us, they were helping us do it, but actually myself and three other butchers, we were actually running the whole plan though.

I: Okay, so we’ll talk about that later. When I was thinking about…you mentioned before that at some point you were doing daily, realised, no, I’m not doing that anymore, or you were doing farming and you realised, no, I’m not doing it anymore, I’m doing that, that’s a kind of radical change?

R1: Yes.

I: Yes, so pretty much you transformed the whole…

R1: We transformed the whole thing, yes.

I: So for your resilience, you keep yourself in the same location and doing something in the food sector, so that means all the other things you get involved pretty much changes.

R1: They change, yes, what we use is based here, and that’s the main hub of the business is here.

I: So the project says we’re talking about upland food systems and then I realised that talking about food systems means so many different…to so many people, so I created this kind of card which I was trying to pretty much summarise who are the key actors, agents in those systems, so here you see the blue arrows, you have the input suppliers, upland farmer, lowland farmer, primary processor, secondary processor, wholesaler, retailer, customer. So this is the supply chain. And then around that you have the orange circles, which is pretty much all the companies or organisations that can support that supply chain, so you have banks, for example, you have colleges, extension services, like, SAC, developmental agencies like [area D] Council or HIE. Maybe have standard certification bodies that give you some kind of certification. There might be insurance companies, for you also there is FSA somewhere there that is involved, research centres, I think there is agri…

R1: Yes, agronomy college, yes.

I: Consultant services can be accountants, vets, any other kind of service providers to you and also industry associations, lobbies, for farmers it’s NFU, but for you what is it?

R1: Yes, we have the Scottish Craft Butchers Society, so you’ve got the Butcher Federation.

I: Okay, Butcher Federations, so it’s at the Scottish level?

R1: Yes, it is.

I: Okay, and then the yellow pretty much is the two things together which pretty much creates the livestock value chain, and then you have the stakeholders affected, but also they affect it to some extent, so you have the government, and any funding body like the ones that fund the research, and then you have the pharmaceutical market, it’s for antibiotics, vaccines or I don’t know, whatever else, and the energy market which is the conventional or renewable market, and environmental and social interest NGOs, that’s a kind of social nature thing…this nature…I always forget the name…but they are charities or non-governmental organisations, either they’re talking about conserving the natural environment…Scottish Natural Heritage…

R1: Oh, SNH, yes.

I: Okay, and then obviously there is the local community, [area D] community, and the tourists that are coming here and the general public. So these are pretty much affected most of the times, but also affect a bit. And these are kind of human actors, but also in the system we consider the biological organisms, so the animals, the plants, the microbes, bacteria, whatever, everything. So all this pretty much are the actors or agents in the food system, but the thing is that we try to understand the interactions and the environment within they operate. So does it make sense? Do you want to change this card in any possible way?

R1: No, it looks good, yes.

I: Okay, so you can put that aside, you probably won’t like to use it later on. So now how is your business doing in terms of resilience in the way we define resilience? So if you would like to characterise that like struggling, surviving, making a reasonable living, booming? Currently where do you find yourself?

R1: Making a reasonable living, it’s not booming, we’ve had to change a bit, so I wouldn’t say struggling, so yes, I would say…

I: Okay, and how has the resilience of your business changed during the last five years?

R1: It’s changed quite a bit. As I say, the whole abattoir scene was a big part here and obviously now we can’t call it [area D] cattle, we can’t call it [area D] beef, so now we have to say [area D] beef reared or beef reared from [area D], all these things you’ve got to change the wording on the labelling and…

I: So it increased or decreased, you feel there? Because now you don’t have the abattoir.

R1: Yes…

R2: It’s not 100 per cent [inaudible].

R1: Yes, it’s getting busier, I mean, it’s not quite a…it’s just a kind of way of trying to define it.

R2: If you like in the overall business, obviously with the liners, that’s been a benefit.

R1: Oh, yes, that’s good. Yes, by the way, you mean, like, it’s just about having to change it, I don’t know…

I: I mean, the fact that the abattoir was there, did it make you more resilient at that time and now you don’t have it, it’s less resilient or…?

R1: Well, that’s what I’m trying…it’s kind of a funny one because it was here but it was very much a lot of work and a lot of hassle, so that’s actually wiped off, I now know exactly what it cost me, so that’s what I’m trying to decide, is it better or not? There is the fact that I can’t call it [area D] beef but it’s kind of nearly better…

R2: It’s taken away a lot of pressure.

R1: A lot of pressure off us, because we had to work with the FSS, we had to work with the RSPCA, with the EHO, with SEPA, with [inaudible]. I mean, honestly the pressure was terrible that if something went wrong, they were just straight on us, oh, you’ve done something wrong. Whereas that’s not there now, so we can actually concentrate on the fact that we can just run our business instead of having to be doing that side of things. So yes…I nearly find it easier, so it’s maybe better. It’s kind of a funny one.

R2: I would say it is.

R1: Yes, and the thing is because we buy our beef here, everyone knows we buy it from here, so nobody has a problem of the fact it’s got to go away. And we’ve sorted out the whole process of getting the animals away, originally that was a bit stressful because they were having to travel too long by sea, and then too long by lorry, but we got a different system now, so that’s in place and is working really, really well.

I: So what is the different system you have in place now?

R1: What we did before is ship them to [city1] so they go via here so they’re on a boat for 12 hours and then get a lorry across from [city 1] to [abattoir name] so that’s another three hours, whereas now we get it across up on the [town 2] boat which takes two hours, they rest in [area 1] overnight and then the [area 1] hauliers ship them down the road for two hours the next day, so the cattle are lying, they’re comfy, they’re not stressed, so we’re all happy the process is a better process, and the cattle are going away less stressed, which is good for everybody, so it’s much better beef.

I: So the supplier of yours, the abattoir, it’s a private company?

R1: The one it is now, yes, [abattoir name], yes, so they’re a privately owned company there.

I: So the meat you’re taking from them, it’s [area D] meat, is it from [area 2]…?

R1: No, we buy it all from here, we buy it in the local mart, and then ship the whole lot away, so it’s all bought here.

I: Okay, so pretty much you’re 100 per cent [area D] meat?

R1: Yes, it’s 100 per cent [area D] meat, just not…

R2: [area D] meat and lamb.

R1: Yes.

I: Lamb? Okay.

R1: Beef and lamb we get that here.

I: Okay, so we’ll have the chance to talk a bit more about that, but I wonder, you described how that has changed over the last five years, what is your prediction about the resilience of your business for the next three years and the next 15 years?

R1: Well, it’s very hard…

R2: Retired.

R1: Yes, retired hopefully at 50, I’ll be done, I’ll be finished, I’ll be out of here. But the next three years, Brexit’s got a lot to play in this. I don’t know yet. Everybody’s very, very uncertain on [area D]. Things have changed a lot here. There’s less cattle in [area D] now, there’s less farms. The farm numbers have changed, so has the number of cattle and sheep. They’ve dropped quite a bit. But the farmers that are in this now are quite a lot of young farmers, [area D]’s got a good core of young folk coming through, just the farms that are here are getting bigger, so it’s just changed a lot, so instead of three farms with a hundred cattle, there’s one farm with 300. So as long as that farm keeps going…but maybe like everything else, it will change and each farm will get a bit bigger and a bit bigger to be more efficient.

I do think it will be good, that, I don’t think there should be too big a problem, but really it’s the Brexit thing. It depends what subsidies…

I: So you mean it’s a good thing the fact that they become bigger?

R1: Yes, they’re more efficient.

I: Fewer but bigger.

R1: Yes, they’re more efficient and better to run, so there are less overheads as it changes.

I: And those farmers, I mean, every year you buy from different farmers or you have some kind of certain farmers you go every year?

R1: Well, there’s usually ones that put to the mart are the same folk that finish cattle, a lot of folk have changed the work they do here now.

I: So you buy them from the mart?

R1: Yes, the auction mart, we buy everything from there. So usually it’s the same folk that supply that the whole time and that’s how they work their system. They work with rearing the cattle and then finishing the cattle and then put them to the mart for sale, whereas a lot of guys now are using…putting up store cattle, they keep them for a shorter time and then put them away earlier, so they increase their count in numbers without increasing the number of cattle in the farm over the year, so it’s changed quite a bit. A lot of changes.

I: So how has that type of change affected you?

R1: It definitely affected…it means there’s less fat cattle around so the fat cattle price is up, which I know folk would think that’s bad for me, but sometimes it’s good, because if the fat cattle price is not good, then these guys are going to look and think, well, why are we doing this? You know, if the price isn’t reasonable for them, they’re not going to finish cattle. If they don’t finish cattle, there’s nothing here for me to buy, so then I’ve got to change completely again what I’m doing so then I have to buy from south… So as long as these guys are getting money that they’re happy to make enough, they’ll carry on doing that, you know?

I: So I assume when the numbers of the farmers fattening cows starts dropping…because I think in the past there were more numbers of those…

R1: Yes.

I: Now there is a shift towards store animals rather than fattening…

R1: Yes, a big shift.

I: So when that started happening, it was before your initiative with the abattoir?

R1: Yes, just slightly, it was changing then. Obviously BSE and foot and mouth changed things slightly as well here, so it was ’96 that BSE came in and hurt [area D] as well, so things changed slightly with that, it was different.

I: So you’re saying it was because BSE started, because they have to sell the animals and they realised that…

R1: They were making the same money, so some folk were, like, oh, well, we’ve made the same money…

I: After that, they realised, okay, let’s go for store instead of fattening…

R1: Yes, we’ll go store instead of fat. Store cattle went for big, big money so they started thinking, oh, well, what’s the point of keeping this cattle for another eight, 12 months, and only making £100, that’s not paying, there’s no use. So things did start changing a bit then as well.

I: But also, the fact that at those times there was an abattoir and now there isn’t, do you think it has affected that?

R1: It definitely affected it too, because a lot of folk did keep more cattle for that. They were getting a premium for [area D] meat at the time when the abattoir was here, and that changed of course when the abattoir shut too, so that did change.

I: And that was about the first initiative trying to have an abattoir in [area D] because yours was the second one?

R1: Yes.

I: Yes, so during the second one, did you see again the numbers changing?

R1: They weren’t fluctuating too much. We still had plenty of cattle to get here, but I think it’s just these last two years…this year’s been good, a nice year, but last year and the year before were very, very wet, so the guys were struggling to have cattle on the land for too long, and they were in the byres for a longer winter and it just started getting very hard for guys to actually try and fatten the cattle outside. The whole system changed, there’s not enough straw in [area D] or barley, so they just started looking at…and the price of store cattle went mad. The boys from [city 1] were paying big money, and they were starting to find that the difference wasn’t enough so they were, like, there’s just no point keeping them. So they just shifted what they were doing.

I: So pretty much that’s a kind of threat first from them but also directly affects you?

R1: Yes.

I: So it’s becoming a big threat for you, or still you can…?

R1: We’ve still got enough, there’s still plenty, there’s not been a week that we’ve not gotten cattle, we always get enough. Even if the guys sometimes say, oh, there’s not many about, they always find something. It might change yet, I don’t know, we’ll see next year what it’s going to be like, it’s an easy time to buy cattle at the minute but it might change next year. We’ll just have to see, we are watching it every year.

I: And from those number of wet years and the problems, do you think that the farming industry in has full[area D] y recovered or still…?

R1: It’s recovered this year but quite a few years…

I: Because obviously if they haven't fully recovered, the next thing that is going to be…because they had wet years and then drought, then pretty much new hit every time…so are they prepared, their capacity to recover is…?

R1: I think now they’ve been good, yes, this year has caught up from the last two or three years that were bad. This year has been a fantastic year. Everything, great crops and plenty of sileage and plenty of grass, it was a very good year. I’ve spoken to a lot of farmers and they’ve had a good year. They’re saying that themselves. The livestock’s done really well. It’s thrived because the weather’s been great, it’s been sunny, the conditions are fantastic for them. So they’ve done really well this year, so it’s good.

I: So pretty much the drought didn’t really affect…

R1: Not here, no. We actually ended up having a fantastic year. I was in [town 3] in the summertime and it was terrible, it was so, so dry, it looked terrible. They were feeding cattle outside because it was too dry, they had no grass because of the conditions being too dry, whereas we had a fantastic year here, it was just absolutely perfect for . We [area D] enough rain to make the grass grow really well, it was just cracking, a really good year here.

I: Okay. So now this is a card which pretty much tries to summarise a bit of the functions, roles or goals for a business like yours, so pretty much it’s the same thing but if you want to call them functions, you want to call them roles or a goal, it’s up to you. But I tried to summarise in three categories, one is related to the owner’s private interests, one related to the multiplier effect, by this I mean recycling money to local industries by buying inputs from the local industry, by spending in the local industry in some way, and the third category is like related to public good services. So as I said before, these cards have been for everyone in the supply chain so some of those things you might find don’t relate to you. Just let me know.

The first thing I would like, please, is for you to read those, identify if there is any important function or role that is missing and then the next thing is to tell me, prioritise a bit and say these are the five most important functions. The other thing is some of them might be interlinked, so if you would like to group them together and say, I don’t know, one and five, I think they go together so that’s my first priority, both of them.

R1: Okay.

I: If you have any question and you don’t understand what I mean by that, just let me know.

R1: Well, certainly to do with that, I think with every business, you’re looking for a reasonable profit margin.

I: And there are ways of return on investment…

R1: Yes, so you want to make that, I think that’s certainly one that I would say was very prioritised. Number ten, your personal family satisfaction as well of course, I mean, you want the kids to be happy, your family’s got to be… I used to work 16 hours a day and it was just ridiculous. You can’t do that.

Nine, adding value and increasing customer satisfaction, that’s always high priority for us, and getting sufficient local employment, everyone here is local and round about here.

I: Do you find it difficult to find labour?

R1: No, we’ve been quite lucky. We’ve got guys been here for…well, [name] ten years, we’ve got a guy been here 15 years, right from the start. Most of them are usually pretty good. We’re not bad. What other thing…? Maybe…

I: Please see also the other categories as well.

R1: Yes, is it categorise the whole lot together?

I: Yes.

R1: Okay, right. It probably is actually more the top ones, for us the bottom ones don’t really matter, so I think it probably is what I’m saying there, it’s just I think the way we’re doing it, so yes…

I: So for those ones, I suspect maybe…where is it? Counteracting negative local demographics, because you provide employment opportunities so pretty much you keep people working…

R1: Oh, yes.

I: …so that might be… And the other one which is preservation of historical cultural value, well, it says landscape but generally because by buying the product from what farmers produce in [area D], you keep them there, which is they also keep the landscape which is the landscape also attracts the tourism, so pretty much…

R1: Yes.

I: Just I’m trying to explain because it might not be obvious what they mean, but in any means, I don’t mean they are important more or less than other things.

R1: Yes, well, certainly I would say it would be one first, and then ten about my family…

I: Together?

R1: Yes, and then four…number nine, and then probably the landscape, and keeping [area D] as [area D], it’s very important, yes.

I: It seems like I forgot to ask you before but which are the special features particularly to [area D] that should be maintained in your view?

R1: Well, for me it’s keeping it grazed, I mean, it’s still looking the same, you don’t want it all going back to just being overgrown and not farmed and not ploughed…

I: You mean, rewild…

R1: Yes, going back to leaving it, I mean, I’m a great…we go shooting and stuff, we do a lot of stuff like that and folk are rowing about the grouse moors should be left, well, they can’t be left. I don’t think folk realise that pheasants and grouse and things don’t nest in bracken that’s this high. They’ve got to be grazed and they’ve got to be looked after, and that’s what gamekeepers do and I think they get a hard time saying that they kill eagles and stuff like that. It’s not true, a lot of times actually they’re helping the wildlife, and things like that… I want things to be kept the same, I don’t want to see the whole of [area 3] going back to just heathery moor, it would be no use. It’s got to be farmed properly. So I think it’s definitely important just to keep the cattle and sheep here, because being paid just to have land is probably the stupidest thing the government ever did, folk getting subsidised just to have land. That’s stupid. It should still be for the cattle and sheep, the subsidies should be provided for head of cattle or whatever, not just for actually owning land and doing nothing with it. That’s totally wrong.

I: You mentioned subsidies but definitely we have something to talk about that later on. So from there, you mentioned which are the most important for your business. Along the supply chain, obviously, in that case, for you, you have [inaudible] for farmers, what do you think should be the five most important functions for them?

R1: For farmers?

I: Yes, so from all of those?

R1: What can I say really about that? I mean, they’ve got to have a profit margin. If farmers don’t have a profit margin, nobody works for nothing nowadays, nobody’s going to work for nothing, so really it is…I mean, yes, they want [inaudible] but at the end of the day, you have to make sufficient money.

I: So pretty much what you are saying there is number one there is pretty much a precondition for everything else?

R1: For everything, it’s got to be. If you don’t have a margin, folk would stop. If this came down to the day that I started making no money, I would stop. I mean, I’m not shy of changing… Come in, you’re all right.

I mean, if it comes down to that and folk can’t afford to do it, they just will stop. I mean, that’s like us with the dairy, it was getting to the stage there was no point for us, so we stopped. I’m not backwards at that, and nor is anyone else, I think if it came to the stage that farmers actually either were just breaking even or losing money then folk just can’t do it. So everybody’s got to make a reasonable profit. I mean, nobody’s going to become rich overnight but you’ve got to make enough that you’re comfortable to live. So I definitely think that’s just the first one with anything, it has to be that.

I think with farming, a lot of farmers are looking for succession like someone else coming behind them to take over the farm. That’s a very important part for a lot of these farmers.

I: Succession, for you, is kind of on your list or not so much?

R1: It doesn’t bother me at all, no. No, I don’t care. This is getting a hard industry to work in, not physically working, I mean, I don’t mean on the physical side. It’s getting to the stage there are too many folk telling me what to do, oh, you should do this, you must do that, you must do this, and it’s getting harder and harder, the regulations we’ve got to go by are getting harder and inspections and it’s just getting more and more folk pushing pens, and it does my head in. It’s more folk not actually working but want to tell me what I do, and I’ve done this for 30 years, and they’re like, oh, that’s not right. I think, well, you don’t really know that. And I don’t like that, I’ve said to the kids, I don’t want them coming to this, it’s getting harder and harder to keep going the butchery side.

I: So when you say folks, you mean pretty much all these, like, FSA or…

R1: Yes.

I: Those organisations that are policing…

R1: Yes, well, it’s not the policing, I don’t mind that, but you’ll do everything, and then there’ll come another rule, and they’ve got changes again, you’ve got to employ more…the paperwork side, like, with [name] and that again, with [inaudible] stuff, and everything’s got to be right, but it gets more and more and more of it all the time.

I: And also, it’s changing.

R1: Yes, it changes all the time. What they want done paperwork-wise is getting more and more. The guys are at the stage that they write down more than they actually cut up. It’s getting stupid, it’s too much. It’s far too much bureaucratic shite. That’s the bit that bugs me. It gets more and more stuff like that instead of just get some work done. I think that’s ruined the whole country, there’s too much of that instead of actually getting on with work, you spend more time somebody checking to see if somebody’s checking to see if somebody’s checking to see if somebody’s done something, you know? It is, it’s ten bosses looking to see if somebody’s actually swept the pavement and that’s wrong. It should be that ten folk should be sweeping the pavement not ten folk checking to see if they’ve all checked to see if somebody’s done that. That’s where the country’s gone wrong, and I would scrap so many jobs, just, you know, I’m quite [inaudible] with that.

I: Great. Now, well, if you wanted, we can come back later on on that. So this is another list, just a moment to see if I forgot anything…ah, before we go to that one, I have a question which is is the full potential for adding value to [area D] beef and lamb products currently reached? If not, please elaborate on what more can be achieved.

R1: I think it is, to be honest. I’ve still an idea we could do something more with our waste. I would like to do something like maybe pet food ground bones, we’ve still got that side we’ve got to look into yet. I would still like to get a bit more back from that instead of disposing of the bones. We try and get rid of as much as we can to pet food owners, and again just what we can do, but some of that I think we still can do, but bar that, most of this beef, we get good value for most things, we do sausages and burgers and we still manage to get high-end good money for all those products. We’ve entered quite a lot of competitions, so we’ve got gold awards for pies, for burgers, for sausages and things like that, so if you manufacture good products, you can even get a good premium on that.

So I think our margin on that is quite good, on that side of it it’s very, very good.

I: I was thinking in terms of the whole [area D] supply of meat, because obviously in the past they have achieved, I think, through the first initiative, they have created…

R1: The [area D] Gold? Things like the brand?

I: Yes, a brand which obviously it seems that there is space for going and selling very premium products south to London or Manchester or whatever, and could be either through supermarkets or through butchers, premium butchers. So do you think the fact that there is not an abattoir here, so all the certificates or PGI or whatever, pretty much…

R1: We’ve lost that, yes.

I: What do you think there? Because do you think there are missed opportunities or because we have tried and we have seen how difficult it is…

R1: I think we’ve tried that route. It did work for a while. [area D] Island Gold was fantastic, it was one of the first brands that took the leap of being 100 per cent beef, 100 per cent traceable, 100 per cent farms that weren’t BSE, a category of beef which filled in all the specs, they were one of the first ones ever to do that. That worked for so long but then all the rest of the abattoirs and other farmers started saying, oh, they’re doing really well doing that, but we can actually offer 100 per cent Aberdeen Angus, we can go a step above that and we’ll offer hanging it for three weeks not two weeks, so folks started matching it but actually bettering it.

They started doing better, even more premium product and [area D] meat didn’t change…didn’t say, right, we’d better hang our beef for three weeks, well, we’ll start being 100 per cent Aberdeen Angus…they didn’t do that, and they started to flounder a bit with that, and then they ended up…because some of the markets they were competing with were doing it so cheap, they tried to match that price, instead of going for a better product, they started trying to match the price, and I think that was the biggest thing they did that was wrong which meant the margin was tiny. They had this miniscule margin and they started losing so much money, losing £100,000 a year and the money they’d built up was just wiped off, you know?

It went from being a good business to a poor one in no time, and they started trying to match supermarket prices. They should never have done that. They should have carried on supplying the butchers with top-end stuff, but they wanted a bit more and a bit more until they got too greedy trying to get too much and the quality of the cattle got less, and they knackered themselves. It was their own fault. They blame it on other folk but it was their own fault for trying to chase supermarkets. It ruined the whole thing.

I: Trying to chase supermarkets?

R1: Yes, they were chasing supermarkets to get their product into supermarkets and do more volume which is fine, but then the margin went from being 50 per cent margin to two. I mean, they had the tightest margin ever, on the prices they were doing, and they were making about three per cent on the cattle. It was so stupid. They went from being a good, profit-making business to a poor one overnight. Well, not overnight, but in a short time, just trying to get more volume.

I: So that was probably one of the issues. The other issues people told me might be was also the subsidies on live animals versus carcasses.

R1: That was a huge one as well. That was terrible. They didn’t get any help with that from the government. They got subsidised for the live ones as you’ve been told and then no subsidy on the dead cattle, which is totally wrong, because I mean, again then that helped the store cattle trade in [area D], the boys that were buying it didn’t have to pay for the boats and things.

I: Do you think there could be a contract with the farmers, because obviously there weren’t contracts and then the farmer pretty much had the freedom if for any reason he made a bit more money supplying live animals, which obviously they did because they had the subsidies, pretty much they didn’t supply…

R1: Yes, they didn’t supply then… There were some things too were wrong, I mean, there was quite a bit of politics at the local abattoir here. There were guys on the board, their cattle were picked before other farmers’ cattle. They did it wrong, it was totally wrong. The guys on the board were some of the ones that did the buying, so all the guys on the board’s cattle were picked every week and this other guy would have his cattle ready, they wouldn’t come and see his, so he was, like…I mean, basically it was like two fingers to you, well, if you don’t want my cattle this week, you’re not getting them next week, somebody else bought them. So they were really stupid, it was run very poorly.

I: So pretty much they didn’t manage to keep the trust and build the trust?

R1: No, there was no trust.

I: With this kind of…how to say…

R1: It’s very short-sighted, they would go and take the same farmers’ cattle every week that was on the board and folk knew that. They would see the lorries going up to the farm and they’d be waiting two weeks to get their cattle off but wouldn’t come and get them so…it’s silly.

I: Yes, so that created a bit of…

R1: Yes, it created an atmosphere then, it was, like…folk were like, no.

[Section deleted as sensitive]

I: And another comment I got about that story was they managed to find markets for the very premium parts, but pretty much they couldn’t secure markets for the rest? So pretty much…

R1: Yes, they were getting the good stuff away but not the poorer stuff, that was one thing they did have a problem with, trying to get rid of the second…yes, poorer cuts, the [inaudible] of meat, right enough, they did struggle with that.

I: Okay.

R1: But I think the same thing, I mean, the premium burger market was coming along so I think they could have done something with that, but they aimed at the best stuff, so…

I: Yes, so in your opinion they shouldn’t go for the supermarkets and volume…

R1: I think they tried to get to the supermarkets to get rid of the poorer cuts but the supermarkets wanted good cuts as well, of course, they wanted good stuff as well, so…it’s quite good to get the whole thing done.

I: And also, I think they had also an issue with policing the ground because even butchers they were selling…they buy from one carcass and then they sell ten under the name of [area D] but they weren’t really [area D] …

R1: Yes, that happened a lot.

I: Yes, and they didn’t manage to police…

R1: No.

I: Which is actually, if that was happening when later on you had the PGI or PDO…

R1: Yes, PDO.

I: …you could police then.

R1: Yes.

I: Because in order to get the mark it has to be killed in [area D] …

R1: Yes.

I: But obviously at that time they didn’t have that.

R1: It was happening, but then of course cheaper meat came along and we just were taking in cheaper stuff down south, it’s a shame. It did change, I mean, the whole thing was changing.

I: Sorry, what do you mean? People came and bought stuff…

R1: The butchers that were buying maybe two sides from [area D] and calling it [area D] beef, of course they’ve got a chance of stuff that was maybe £300 a side cheaper, then some of the imports from Ireland were coming in at that point cheaper, so they were buying two sides and then selling far more beef under the [area D] brand.

I: Ah, so you mean you are talking about the butchers who were outside…

R1: Outside, yes.

I: From either Scotland or…

R1: Yes, or down England direction… It’s different here. Everything’s from [area D] here but certainly the guys down there were doing that. But it does change, I mean, it was just the way it was changing, the whole thing, the freight was costing too much and the by-products were costing too much. It just wasn’t working here. The [inaudible].

I: So you think if they managed in some way to go away and do proper job at the end it will be good for whole [area D]?

R1: Yes, I think it’s changed, it will never go back to that now, never. Never, never. There’s just not enough fat cattle. I think we tried it, everybody’s seen it, it doesn’t work from the waste management point of view, it doesn’t work with the haulage, it will never go back to being what it was like before. [area D]’s changed, it’s just 100 per cent changed, it will never go back to that.

I: So because there is that shift from fattening to store?

R1: Yes, there’s not enough cattle here at all.

I: That’s happened much more since then?

R1: That’s happened as well, yes, and it will never go back to the fattening cattle to those numbers again.

I: Okay. So if we go to your initiative, the second one, how was that different from the previous one?

R1: We weren’t selling any cattle. All we did was one day a week slaughter, and it was just to maintain and fill the markets we had, so it was like myself and then two other butchers, bigger butchers and then a smaller butcher, the four of us did that just to supply our own meat in [area D]. Some of the supermarkets asked us but there’s no point doing that, we only used our own boys, so it was our own staff that went in, so we could only afford to lose them one day a week, needing them here. So we did a one day a week for ourselves, and then we were able to supply prime [area D] beef to our own markets for our own retail shops, we have our own shops, so we just started doing it that way.

I: So in order to build something like the previous one, you have to pretty much build a completely different structure?

R1: Yes, we looked at that, this year, to build a small one that would be self-sufficient, and even that, there was no way it could afford to run, again just one day a week, it just doesn’t work. We looked at that and…

I: So you’re talking about the current move…

R1: The new one, yes, we were going to build a new abattoir here and try that but I mean, we were £350,000 short that we were going to find ourselves to put into it, and we’re not putting that into a building that doesn’t pay and loses money, the running costs are too high. It just can’t be done. We looked and looked and looked, and it’s just a waste of time. I know at [abattoir name] how much it’s going to cost me to start, there’s no…having issues or extra bills or extra costs or…

I: So pretty much he absorbs most of the costs and delivers the quality…

R1: Yes, they deliver here as well.

I: So he’s a kind of…

R1: A package.

I: A package of services that he’s providing here.

R1: Yes, so we buy a lot of stuff from there as well, we get a lot of chicken fillets and bacon from them, so he’s making money on that as well so he takes up the whole thing for us.

R2: The boys were saying we might need fillets.

R1: Oh, we probably will, right.

R2: I think they’ve only got four left.

R1: Right, we’d better get on the phone and get some more.

R2: How many?

R1: Forty or something if we can get it. We’re not at the weekend yet. So… Yes, so that’s the thing with them, they’re quite good suppliers anyway, so it actually ties in really well.

I: Okay, we will talk about that. This one is a kind of card which tries to summarise the disadvantages, long-term pressures, [inaudible] whatever you would like to call them, if you go through that and think most of them are threats, so I’m asking first is there a very important driver that’s missing and second, if anything of those can be seen as opportunities.

R1: Yes.

[Pause]

R1: Probably one of the main ones at the minute is still price volatility for the products, it’s changed a lot this last while.

I: So first are there any missing?

R1: I don’t think so.

I: I think there is one which is I realised that…I’ve spoken to some other people, like all these changes in the hygiene regulations…

R1: Oh, yes, that is.

I: So that should be there somewhere.

R1: That is one I was saying before, they keep changing every year and change again and again and again.

I: Yes, which is pretty much a threat for you.

R1: Yes.

I: Okay, and is there any one which is an opportunity, can be seen also as an opportunity?

R1: I don’t think there’s any that are an opportunity.

I: So if there are not any…

R1: I don’t think so, no, I don’t think so.

I: Okay, so then the next question is how can you prioritise the five most important threats, and you started talking about the prices. Prices of what, of import or…?

R1: They’ve gone up quite a bit, so it’s been quite hard, obviously things happening, the price of chicken has gone up a lot and the pork has gone up a lot, and so has the beef, so the whole lot has gone up and obviously the slaughter price has gone up as well, so that’s been a lot of things have been quite hard to keep up with.

I: So you mean the prices of subsidy use?

R1: Well, basically just the whole thing, since Brexit was mentioned, the price of chicken went up 50p a kilo, and the excuse that they could put the price up because it was going to be harder to supply and it was a lie, it was just rubbish, they just put the price up. But they did, they made use of it to do that.

I: But probably for you it might be good because the chicken and pork is direct substitute from beef and lamb…

R1: Yes, but folks all like it, so we sell a lot of that anyway so it’s just the price you’ve got to try and increase our prices then as well.

Disease is a big thing as well…

I: The…?

R1: Disease, outbreak of disease. The swine fever type idea coming across Europe at the minute with pigs, and that’s come into Belgium at the moment, it was coming across from Asia and it’s in Belgium now which is a bit of a worry because obviously we take a lot of loins and bacon from Denmark and Holland and that’s getting very close to them, they’re panicking.

I: So except for beef and lamb, do you do products from pork and…?

R1: Oh, yes, pork. Chicken, chicken fillets, yes…

I: Ah, okay, so that’s why you are talking…

R1: Oh, we do everything, we do masses of it.

I: Because I was confused a bit.

R1: No, we buy a lot of…obviously we can’t get bacon here and we can’t get enough pork here or chicken, so we buy in stuff like that through suppliers from…like [abattoir name] take a lot of pork loin and things, the really good quality, and that side of it is quite worrying that that price might change, or supply might dry up, so it’s things you’ve got to change again. So…

I: This disease can affect also beef or lamb?

R1: Not that one, no, this is like a swine fever so it’s okay for that. But we’ve gone through two…like we had BSE and the foot and mouth which were massive outbreaks in the UK.

I: What kind of effect did it have for [area D]?

R1: Well, [area D]’s quite lucky…

I: Because I think at the beginning it was quite a threat but later on it became an opportunity.

R1: It was an opportunity, yes. We were safe because there was no foot and mouth here at all. We managed to keep it off. They just shut down the boats right away. It was brilliant. I mean, they just had zero movement and that was it. No cattle came in, no cattle went out, and we were the first place in the UK to actually move cattle off the island. We were the first…

I: Again, it built the brand and reputation like [area D] meat…

R1: Absolutely, you know? So it was good.

I: It’s disease-free, let’s say.

R1: Disease-free, yes. Even the foot and mouth, there was nothing actually…there was not any proper cases, some ones that thought they might have it but they didn’t actually, there was no epidemic here, there was nothing actually came out, like we didn’t have to burn any fields…

I: Someone told me at some point that still because they have to shut down the abattoir for a couple of weeks and how that affected your business at that time.

R1: Well, it wasn’t too bad because we knew beforehand so we slaughtered more cattle beforehand. It was just the movement restrictions they stopped for a short time, so we had enough hanging that we were okay.

I: So what do you mean, you knew in advance?

R1: Well, there was actually…

I: That there was going to be a break…

R1: Yes, they were going to stop for a minute, it wasn’t actually just overnight, they didn’t say just next day that’s it, they started looking to see…

I: So you managed pretty much to make yourself resilient to that?

R1: Yes, and what it was…

I: By stocking a bit more.

R1: …it was more to do with [area D] meat not moving the dead cattle off, so they shut down for a few weeks but they were still killing local cattle so we got our cattle killed, it was okay for that. It was just they couldn’t shift any of that, and they wanted to have total lockdown on anything until they discovered what procedures they had to do, so it was quite good, we were actually okay here.

I: But also, it was the fact that although there is a shut-down of movement, they have pretty much treated [area D] differently because [area D] has an advantage being an island…

R1: Yes.

I: So they could pretty much lift the ban much earlier for [area D] than they could… Is that true?

R1: Yes, as I say, we were the first ones to actually move cattle off the island.

I: But they could have done even earlier because…

R1: Oh, yes, easy. That’s what I said, the government taking the time to make sure it was right or whatever they wanted to do, but yes, they could easily have shifted cattle before that, you know?

I: Okay.

R1: So yes, that too certainly disease is a very important one.

I: Did you have any issues with E.coli or any other disease except those two?

R1: No, we’ve been okay. We’re okay with that.

I: No, I mean, not your business but generally [area D] has been affected with…?

R1: No.

I: There weren’t any issues there?

R1: No, none at all. Changes in consumer lifestyle and consumption patterns, that does definitely change as well.

I: So which number is that?

R1: That’s maybe number 20?

I: So it’s quite a big threat for you?

R1: Yes.

I: Is it a threat or…?

R1: Not a threat, we’ve actually, I would say, slightly embraced that because we’ve changed how we’re doing the burgers and things, folk wanted less rusk and things and a more meaty burger, again just changed the way we did it, and what we did is we did that and we had a federation competition to enter that, and we got a gold prize of that. So if you can get what folk want…

I: Which competition?

R1: It’s like the Scottish Federation? They do awards and evaluations, so we had to run an evaluation product to see with our burgers what they were doing, so if you can get awards, like a gold award, for your burgers, then folk’s confidence in your product is very high, so if you can maintain that you do really, really well. So if you…

I: So who is seeing that award?

R1: That’s the whole federation…

I: The public, you mean?

R1: Sorry?

I: The public can see that you have the…

R1: Oh, yes.

I: So you see that there is more loyalty after you got the award?

R1: Yes, I mean, you had it anyway. Folk were saying we were really good and all the rest, but as soon as you can get something like that and you can say our burgers are gold-award-winning burgers, or the pies, the folk can say, well…it’s not only for [area D] folk, they know all about your business, but say you walked into a shop and you saw ten awards and, oh, these guys have won for their burgers, their pies, their sausage rolls, their sausages, they must be decent, you kind of get from that that they must be a decent butcher. So that side of things helps you.

So basically, it’s like folk don’t want poor quality burgers or sausages. Folk are very aware now of what’s in them. They want to know exactly what’s in the burger, they don’t want bits and pieces and floor sweepings and…

I: So I assume that kind of horsemeat scandal, it was….

R1: That was brilliant, I loved that. That was the best thing that ever happened. I thought Tesco’s, thank you, it was brilliant. It was absolutely brilliant. We never did a thing…

I: The reaction, brilliant.

R1: It was brilliant.

I: Did you have any other scandal?

R1: We said the more the merrier, the guys were, like, yes, dead right. It was, that benefitted our business, I don’t know how much.

I: So you saw a lot of increase in your sales, loyalty?

R1: Yes, definitely. For that happening because folk were buying away quite happily, and folk said if it said on the package this is a horse steak, that’s fine, they wouldn’t have cared, but it was the fact that they were trying to sell it and it came in that it was this and it wasn’t being branded…it was being deceived, again it’s the whole thing… That just helped us no end. I don’t know what we went up over that. It was…I would hate to even think. It was…25, 30 per cent more. That was mine, I think.

I: Ah, that was yours.

R1: So it was huge for us, because again they don’t trust them, and folks still actually do that, they still say they don’t trust them, you know? So that was a huge bonus for us.

I: Did you earn many more market share because of that?

R1: We didn’t try to get any more. We could have done. Actually a lot of folk…

I: What could you have done?

R1: We could have done more mail order and things like that. Folk were asking for products from here, and things…

I: So you do mail order?

R1: No, we used to send some stuff off to hotels and things, but with the postal service here, it used to take too long…

I: So you mean to the mainland?

R1: Yes, and things would get lost and boxes would get broken, and I didn’t like the fact as soon as we handed it over, they didn’t handle it…they didn’t give a monkey’s.

I: Properly, yes.

R1: So things would get messy and then it would arrive late and things like that, and it was just no use, so it was more hassle than it was worth. So we just said, no.

I: Okay, so there there is Brexit and you talked a bit of subsidies and the effect… So now farmers, for example, they have experienced head-based subsidies, land-based subsidies, environmental subsidies, calf…

R1: Calf schemes, yes.

I: …are there any other types of subsidies?

R1: No, I think that’s it.

I: No, so from seeing all of those, which ones do you think what are the effects of each one?

R1: Well, I certainly think the head subsidy for me was the best one. The environmental side is very important, but it was the guys that were just getting…like I was saying to you, the ones that were getting paid for just having the land, just because they had entitlement to own the land, they were getting paid for that. That was wrong. It’s the guys that are working hard and are rearing cattle for me, obviously with our line of work, it’s more important, headed schemes are the most important for me, or the calf scheme, so as long as there are animals being born and they’re actually having to farm the land instead of actually just having it.

I: The head-based scheme, probably it has a supposed impact on the volume of not necessarily…

R1: What used to be good in that was the original scheme, you had white papers and pink papers, you can claim on your white calf, was it eight months…

I: I don’t know what you are talking about.

R1: This was the first subsidies that came out before, you used to get for all your calves that were born, you got a white…what was it?

I: That was because they’re head based?

R1: It was a long time ago. Yes, this would have been in the ‘90s, you know, you had two papers and you could sell your calves with the pink paper and it was worth more for claiming the pink form and you got a pink one after 15 months, so some guys would try and keep the cattle on because you got your second subsidy on the pink paper, what was it, £80 a head, so that was really good because it encouraged more folk to actually fatten cattle. So instead of having just a white paper, you had the pink one so it was an extra £80 so it was a bit more making it worth keeping the cattle. We don’t get that now.

I: I got some kind of comments that head-based subsidies led to people increasing the numbers of the cows but probably to extreme, so what the land could…

R1: Yes, take, it was just…

I: So it was…and also the efficiency probably keeping cows that weren’t very productive, just to take…

R1: No, just to get the number, yes, that’s where I always thought with the white and pink papers, I can’t remember the right name of them…

I: Don’t worry, I will try to find out.

R1: Try and find out, it would be in the ‘90s, I’m sure the white one you claimed at eight months and the pink one was 15 or 16, and definitely it was that, you got paid, you claimed…

I: Extra because you’re keeping them…

R1: Yes, and I always thought that was a brilliant way of doing it because yes, you got for the calves that were born, you got the white paper and then the pink one was basically after it was fattened, so it encouraged folk to keep them longer, so I always thought it was a brilliant way of doing it. I don’t know really why they changed that. But at the same time you can change too much.

I: I wonder, do you feel that [area D] by nature has more advantages and should go in that direction of growing store animals rather than fat?

R1: Yes.

I: Because I heard some comments, it’s not the right direction for going for fattening animals because…

R1: No, there’s not enough arable here, we can’t grow enough.

I: Yes, things like that. That we have quite structural weaknesses, let’s say.

R1: [area D]’s a store area, it has fantastic land for rearing calves but we can’t grow enough arable…barley to use for bedding or for feed, so it’s not designed for that, so it’s definitely a store area.

I: Yes, okay, so from the subsidies you told me about which ones, any feedback about the environmental subsidies? Do you…?

R1: Well, I do agree with that, I mean, certainly you’ve got to look after…

I: But you mentioned something like because now the Brexit, there is a lot of talk like don’t pay the farmers to produce food, pay them to deliver environmental…

R1: Yes, well, I think that’s mental. They need a bloody slap. I mean, Britain is going to go down…like without being too coarse, it’s going to go down the fucking shiter, I mean, it just…if you understand that, it’s going to go to the stage we’ll have no bloody farmers, no bloody growing anything and then they’re going to say, ha-ha, we’ve got to change, you can’t import food, we’re going to be at the stage we’re not self-sufficient. Britain could do it no problem at all. There’s dairy farmers now, supermarkets are paying them that little, they can’t work, they’re having to sell animals because they just can’t afford to trade. I mean, it’s going to be in some mess here. They have to produce food.

I: Actually, I’m asking your opinion on all different types of subsidies because obviously with Brexit it’s open, we don’t know if there are going to be subsidies and what type of subsidies and then…

R1: Oh, it has to be produce food, it has to be.

I: Because a farmer was saying to me, look, you have to give the balance, the focus right, you have to prioritise the food production then find extra the other things, but not the other way around.

R1: No, totally have a bit of land set aside for birds and bees and wildlife, I love that myself, I love that, but you have to produce food. You know? So, no, you have to do…

I: There was a kind of feedback that also environmental [inaudible ] right now doesn’t necessarily…

[interruption]

I: About the tariffs.

R1: Yes, that is very important, I don’t know what’s going to happen with that, and the same with production standards, I hope that they keep the same in Europe as what they do here. I mean…I don’t know.

I: I wondered because obviously there are a lot of complaints from farmers in the UK saying they’re too high [inaudible]. So I assume there are going to be a lot of farmers happy to have them away, but I wonder because it’s the Scottish beef brand pretty much associated with those kinds of high standards. So how is it going to affect if these standards are no longer an obligation?

R1: I know. I’m not sure. That’ll be one to see what happens, I think. I’m not sure about that one. That’s [inaudible], I think.

I: And also, there are also the standards about processing, the standards about transporting…

R1: Everything, yes. So there’s a lot about that as well. Yes… So we’ll see it, it’s a funny one, it’s in between time, you don’t know what’s going to happen with that.

I: Yes. Okay, so for all of those, which are the five most important?

R1: Well, same, I think it was eight…

I: Eight first one.

R1: I think so. What did I say then? Oh God, I’ve forgotten now…

I: Price volatility you mentioned about the pork and the…what about the beef?

R1: Beef again too, I mean, it’s the same, it could go up, it depends how many more folk put cattle up as store instead of fat cattle, so certainly for me it’s important for here too. Yes…and then there was the seven of course, that was the other one…

I: The seven? Okay. And I assume the change of the weather but indirectly because it affects pretty much what the farmers do.

R1: Yes, at the minute if it changes the way it has done and stays the way it is this year, it will be great, because [area D] benefitted last year with the very poor summer, this was a fantastic summer, we had a beautiful year. So at the minute, it’s okay for here, I’m quite happy, so it’s no concern of mine at the moment at all. But no, definitely eight, and I think it was seven…

I: And then you said something about the changes in consumer…

R1: Oh yes, eight, seven, 20… And then Brexit was next, I think 12, and then 13 and 14 together, that as well.

I: The Brexit affects primarily the farmers, does it affect in any way…?

R1: It does affect us as a knock-on, if they don’t get subsidies and they don’t keep cattle, if they change it, it’s just environmental and they want them to just have land, folk will say…and they’ll just get rid of the cattle.

I: So pretty much…

R1: So it’s a huge effect, it really is massive for us. So it has to be production of food. You want me to mark that?

I: No, because it has been marked on the recording, so that’s why I’m asking you to say the numbers.

R1: That’s fine.

I: So you can keep that to the side.

R1: Okay.

I: So in order to face those pressures or disturbances, then you have a portfolio of different solutions. I would like you to read those, if anything doesn’t make sense, let me know, and then if you want me to explain something, some of those things are not straightforward, and the other thing is can you also say which one of those strategies do you apply?

R1: Yes.

I: So the first one it says something about…it’s more relevant to farmers but for yourself it’s like increasing or decreasing the products you’re producing, so the volume of the products, so do you do that? So in order to face all these shocks or these kinds of changes, do you increase or decrease the volume? This one is more like the self-sufficiency, trying to reduce the waste, labour and optimisation and all the assets you have…but this one is more like operational efficiency, lead time reduction or trying to see where there are bottlenecks. Diversify, well, farmers it would be income sources but for you it might be producing a number of different products, so like diversifying between pork, beef, lamb…

R1: Market status is very important for here, folk do like to know it’s [area D] stuff and we sell to a lot of tourists so they want to know it’s here, they want to know full traceability of the animals and things like that, and I can say for most of them, I know every farmer that we buy from nearly personally, there’s not many farms in [area D] I couldn’t drop by that they wouldn’t say, oh, come in for a cup of tea. It’s that sort of place. I mean, I can go by most of the ones we buy and I know them really well, so folk love that.

I: So you use that like trying to increase the market status?

R1: Yes, and it’s very important for folk in [area D] they like to know who it is, because folk know, oh, he’s got nice cattle, yes, I’ve seen them, he’s out in the summertime and he’s sitting petting them, folk do like to see folk looking after them.

Renewable energy, we’re into that, we’ve got solar panels and turbine here as well, so we’re quite into the renewable stuff.

I: So you have the small turbines?

R1: Yes. We have a 20 kilowatt turbine here so it’s very good for here, it helps us a lot.

I: About the visibility, one is strategic, trying to understand what the consumer trends are, what are the different markets you can access and what your competitors are doing, and the other one is along your own supply chain, so it’s more about flexibility of your products and awareness what your own suppliers can do and cannot, because obviously…how much of your product is relying on the supplier, [abattoir name]?

R1: [abattoir name], yes.

I: How much?

R1: A lot now, all the cattle, all the lamb, so it will be at least 60 or 70 per cent.

I: Okay, which means that you are quite heavily reliant on one…

R1: We’re lucky, there are other abattoirs, that could change and if we need to we can change, so we’re okay.

I: So you have the choices to go?

R1: Yes.

I: But because it’s 60 per cent so it’s quite big, it’s good to know how resilient this firm is, whatever it has to face these kinds of disturbances, these shocks or whatever, how he can cope with those.

R1: Yes, he should be pretty good. I mean, it’s actually benefitted him getting our cattle into his abattoir, it’s the same thing, it’s all about throughput, so the more he has going through helps him be more efficient as well, so they were quite happy, he was delighted to get our cattle as well, so it’s an extra 20 cattle per week for him, so when we phoned to say we’re going change here, we’re going to have to come and put you guys…he was like, brilliant, he was quite happy with that, you know? So he was quite happy for us doing that, he was delighted.

[interruption]

R1: Yes.

I: This one is increased financial readiness, it’s whether you’re buying more insurance or try to have savings or try to diversify the portfolio of yours, so did you have debts or…?

R1: Yes, but we actually are going to do that as well with changing things, we own the land here, so we [inaudible] land because the land price at the moment is really, really good, so we’re at the stage that we thought, well, we might as well sell. It’s not land that we need, and pay off all our debts, clear that, and…that’s not paying any interest, so we cover that.

I: So pretty much you bought yourself ready if there was any financial crisis, pretty much you’re not dependent on the bank?

R1: No.

I: Yes, but have you done that?

R2: [interruption]

R1: Oh…

I: Have you done that or you plan to do it?

R1: Yes, we’re actually planning, it will be very shortly, and we’ve changed as well, also we’ve bought a couple of houses and things as well, so we’re changing it. We’ve got rental incomes from the houses so…

I: Okay, so there’s another kind of income.

R1: Yes, so we changed that about as well.

I: The input…

R1: Yes, no bother at all. Yes. So it’s just having a wider portfolio as well, so you’re not quite so reliant on a lot of things, in case something happens.

I: Because all these things are ways in order to make yourself ready if something happens either with the Brexit or any other…

R1: Yes. So if something did happen with Brexit, or worst case scenario, you’re covered for that anyway.

I: So non-farm activities, you mentioned the tourism, you mentioned the renewable energy?

R2: [interruption]

R1: Yes, might as well.

I: Okay, so diversifying inputs, market channels, and for you it’s more like hygiene measures, so do you try different measures to promote your hygiene?

R1: We kind of have ones like…obviously we have a HACCP folder, we stick to what we do from that, so you’re not meant to just change too much and it works really well, so our bacteria counts are really good, so the environmental health he was quite happy with the fact that our cleaning process was really good, so it was okay, so yes, we don’t change that much.

I: Okay, but about your market channels, you said you tried a bit of sending boxes but they didn’t work.

R1: No, we don’t do that now.

I: So the only market channels you have is either the retail…

R1: Yes, retail or wholesale, yes.

I: But also wholesale, so these two…

R1: Yes.

I: Okay, so at least you have two of them.

R1: Yes.

I: Because whenever the one that doesn’t go well, you have the other.

R1: Yes.

I: Do you diversify a bit of inputs? No, because pretty much you’re buying from one supplier…

R1: Yes.

I: But all the other inputs, I don’t know, the plastics or…

R1: Yes, we shop around for that, so we make sure we get a good price on things like that as well.

I: From more than one…?

R1: Yes.

I: And do you share any resources?

R1: No.

I: But I assume probably I understood wrongly, but I think between you and the other butchers if something really bad happened…

R1: Oh, yes, we can do that.

I: You can support using their facilities or using your facilities.

R1: Yes, machines or…

I: Yes, but that’s good because it’s not happening every day but if something really bad happens…

R1: Oh, yes, worst case scenario, yes.

I: You have a network where you can rely on.

R1: Yes, we don’t actually share it day to day or week to week but, yes…

I: Because the important thing is to understand how you tried to prepare yourself against all these disturbances, shocks or changes.

R1: Yes.

I: Prioritise local short market channels. I think you do that a lot because you have a local retail shop and also you get to the retail… Do you go to any farmer markets?

R1: No.

I: Okay. About the physical and electronic security, what about because you have a processing unit, I mean, how do you ensure that this is secure so the access to…you control who has access?

R1: Oh, yes, I mean, it’s just us. We’re all here so it’s quite quiet anyway.

I: And anything about the electronic security, so with the data, you pretty much store…

R1: Not much of that, no.

R2: There is no security.

I: Okay, and the last one is you utilise technological innovation, so what type of new technologies do you apply in your processing unit in order to…?

R1: [Inaudible]. There’s not much really. We have automatic stuff but until you go into massive scale there’s not much you can do, you’ve still got to be a hands-on business. So we have automatic sausage machines, burger machines, wrappers, they basically do it for you, press a button and it comes out.

I: So these kinds of machines, you mean the ones that are pretty much there for sausages, they do pretty much all the stages themselves, so you don’t need to have people to interact with that?

R1: No…

R2: You still need to operate them.

R1: Still do that, still have an operator, so somebody fills it and then you run the machine…they make the sausages for you, you’ve got to take them away, so we do that, so it’s that kind of size.

I: Okay, that’s fine. Then for the things you are doing, are there any other trade-offs you haven't mentioned, like for the resources you need in order to make those solutions visible, do you have any trade-offs on that? So how many people you’re going to use, in terms of labour or how much time it takes from you? Just guessing here.

R1: No, not really. No, there’s nothing else there.

I: Okay. So from this one, this is related to what are the characteristics that indicate vulnerability, those can be at your business level but also can be the whole supply level, so having resilience on external or distant resources, it might be to some extent that your supplier is not based here, it’s based on the mainland, so in that sense you rely on something which is at a distance and there is the ferry connection and that kind of thing, so that might create a vulnerability to some extent.

R1: It is, yes.

I: The low diversity [inaudible] has to do more like for tenants for farms, so it’s not related to that. Inequality in either access of resources or ability to take action to use resources, this might have to do with the people who are renting land, so they cannot do whatever they want to do with this land, but inequality in either access of resources… Assuming for farmers of [area D], this is not a big thing because it seems that they have all those kinds of organisations like Business Ring or whatever, so pretty much everyone has equal access to resources.

R1: Oh, yes.

I: Maybe for some farmers that are very remote islands…but most of the farmers they have it…

R1: Not bad, yes.

I: And I wonder all the butchers pretty much they have access to the same resources, there is not any kind of inequality?

R1: No.

I: This might be more for places like in other places in Scotland there might be very large estates compared to small estates so pretty much they don’t have the same access to subsidies or the same access but for [area D] it seems…

R1: No, it’s fine.

I: …the farmer or butcher level…everyone, and about the access to the financial resources from [area D] Council, pretty much do you feel they have the same like the other butchers?

R1: Oh, yes. We’re good, yes.

I: So pretty much that’s not an issue?

R1: No.

I: Inflexible policy pretty much it was what you were saying before about the regulations, the hygiene regulations, all of this that are quite inflexible, rigid…

R1: Yes, it is more and more.

I: …and becoming more complicated.

R1: Yes, it’s definitely that. I mean, there are more and more things you’ve got to do and adhere to all the time.

I: Lack of functioning markets or low level of activity, I assume the fact that you don’t have an abattoir here, it might create some problems with the markets, the functioning of the market, so…

R1: Yes, it’s quite low, it’s not a big deal, we’ve covered it quite well.

I: But I’m interested to hear a bit more because at the beginning you said, yes, when we had the abattoir, we had so much pressure for all this, which probably we’re better off now, I don’t have all of that. So it’s somewhere…

R1: So yes, it’s a functioning market but at the same time I’m quite happy not having it.

I: Yes, I understand.

R1: You know?

I: A lot of pain.

R1: [sensitive section deleted]

I: But what about the level of economic activity in your markets, do you think there is enough market for you?

R1: Oh, yes, we’ve had a fantastic summer. Very, very busy.

I: Yes, so ignore slow variables and only respond to the fast triggers. Sometimes slow variables, they can be either the demographics, they change slowly, and then at some point you look back and say, oh, [area D]’s quite different from what it was ten years ago, or climate change, increase in temperature, we don’t notice but at some point you go back and say, oh, there is much difference in the weather now. So we tend to take care and be prepared for big sudden things, rather the fast triggers, let’s say, rather than slow things. So any slow differences…?

R1: In terms of slow things, I would say it used to be more popular here to bulk buy sides of beefs, like somebody would just buy a whole side…like BSE, which was basically throughout the UK, because obviously we were BSE free here, and folk don’t get hysterical here, [area D] folk are quite calm, they know the beef’s good and there’s no problem, the price of beef dropped a lot, so the beef was actually quite cheap, so folk were buying loads and loads of beef to fill their freezer, and they were quite happy here. That’s changed a lot. We have folk that don’t buy as much now and store it. They would rather buy weekly fresh, like something from the shop in town, so we see a huge change from…we went through a lot of mixed quarters of beef and sides of beef, we don’t do near as many as that anymore.

I: So that’s again…

R1: And folk’s eating has changed, folk for a while didn’t want rib boil and poor stews, they wanted good cuts, and that’s what they do now is just buy what they want, like ten pounds of mince and five kilos of silverside and things like that, so that’s changed hugely. We used to do a lot of quarters, we don’t do near so many quarters anymore.

I: I wonder also the slow changes, it might be the fact that gradually less people fatten and more they go…

R1: Yes, they don’t fatten.

I: So far you said it’s not a threat, but in five or ten years…

R1: It might be, yes.

I: …especially with Brexit, we don’t know…

R1: Yes, it could be. We just don’t know what’s going to happen at that time, I don’t know. We’ll see, and that’s what I’m doing, we are changing, we’ve always got plan A, B, C and D, that’s what I’m saying about the houses. We’ve got the houses in case we need back-up. We’ve changed the way we do burgers. We can diversify, we’re going to do meat packs shortly. A lot of folk now don’t want to think, they would rather look at a picture on Facebook and think, oh, that looks good, I’ll buy that. They don’t want to worry about how much it costs, really, it’s more a case of they can see what they’re buying and they’ll buy that. So we’re going to do packs that folk can just pick and buy. We know loads of folk that just want to just do that. They’ll see something, ah, it’s £40, dead right, I’ll buy that.

They don’t want to think about, oh, what did I want to buy? Do I want stew…they can see it, and think they can recognise that, I think it’s a picture they recognise, folk want to see what they’re buying and they’ll just buy that.

I: What do you mean? Because they see meat there, but what…

R1: Well, some folk want to buy enough for a week or two weeks, some folk still want to have some in the freezer, but they don’t want to think about what, folk don’t have as much time to phone you up and discuss it, it’s more a case of, like, everything now is Facebook and social media. Folk like to see things, they’re sitting on their phones at night-time scrolling through, they’re like, ah, there’s [butcher’s name] with special for this week is ten pound of mince, oh, click. They can just send a message saying can I have that, yes, that’s it, they don’t want to bother phoning in, they would rather just see it, click on it and then buy it, you know?

I: So if I understand correctly you mean…

R1: It’s not really mail order but it’s just buying locally, it would be just for here.

I: But pretty much you advertise the products in a more accessible way?

R1: Yes.

I: In a more attractive way?

R1: Yes.

I: Now I understand what you’re…

R1: So that’s the side we’re going to, a lot of that’s changed, folk want to just see a product and buy it for that amount of money, they know what they’re spending. I think some folk maybe got caught out buying the whole side of beef and things. They’d buy it and then they would say, well, it’s £350, so that’s quite a lot of money, and some folk were like, that’s a lot, other folk thought it was cheap but it’s quite a lot of money, whereas you know every fortnight you’re spending £40 on meat or whatever it is, they know exactly what their budget is. Folk are on a far tighter budget now, I mean, there’s more money but folk spend more, you know?

I mean, between mortgages, new cars, folk have to have everything, so there’s actually more folk with less money, ten, 20 years ago folk had more money.

I: So they’re spending less money on food?

R1: Yes.

I: Okay, they are more conscious of how they spend it.

R1: How they spend it, yes. My parents did this, the general guide they worked with was a third for spending, a third for saving and a third for eating, which was back in the old days, but I mean, if you look at it now, I think is it only between ten and 14 per cent they spend on food? It’s more like 85 per cent is spent on socialising and cars and houses and things like that. So it’s changed a lot, folk want to know exactly what they’re spending, you know?

I: Yes, so pretty much that’s a way of you trying to follow that kind of change in lifestyle?

R1: Yes, you’ve got to follow the trends of what they want, so there’s no point in saying, oh, well, we’re not doing that, you have got to look at things and see what current trends are doing. So that was my next plan to do more of that.

I: The other one was about cross-scale interactions, which means you have the [area D] and then you have Scotland and then you have UK, so whatever happens here, you don’t have…for some things you don’t have the control, so there are the other scales pretty much that they affect…so do you feel this is a vulnerability?

R1: Not too much, really, no. No, I don’t…it’s not something I worry about.

I: We can see that there’s all this tendency to become more regulated and asking for more things, it’s something which is completely outside of your control.

R1: That is, yes. They want more information, and they want more and more stuff.

I: And especially from people that it seems not to understand the practicalities?

R1: Yes, it’s the practicality side of it, they don’t understand that.

I: Or the [area D] type of special features.

R1: Yes, it’s just your paperwork side is getting more, that’s the only thing I don’t like.

I: What is the last one? It’s what I was telling you before, you remember, like for farmers they have wet…

R1: Oh, bad years, yes.

I: Do you feel they are ready to recover? And also, because it’s part of your supply chain, what happens to them?

R1: Yes, I think definitely this year has been…last year was better and then this year’s been very good so I think they’re in good positions here.

I: Okay. So I have just a few more questions and then we finish, I think I’ve already had enough of your time. But I wonder first in terms of infrastructure, and when I say infrastructure, I mean ferries, network, sorry, internet I mean, broadband, roads, bus routes, whatever is infrastructure, power interconnector, things like that, do you think the existing infrastructures are supportive enough for making your business resilient, or there are issues? For example, for the ferries, it seems you depend a lot on the ferries that link mainland with the south…

R1: Yes.

I: So do you see any room for improvement in those ferry connections?

R1: Well, even the ferries have increased and they’ve got a new boat coming on, so even that will be a huge help so I don’t think they can do much more above that. They’ve just got a new bigger boat so hopefully that will be able to go the whole time. I think the ferry service is good, we’ve got fantastic ferries. [Inaudible] they’re cruise liner standard, they’re fantastic boats, so, no, I don’t think there’s much more you can do with that, really.

I: Okay, so about power connector, broadband…

R1: Broadband’s not bad, I mean, it’s not superfast fibre but it’s good enough, we’ve no issues, we’re never stuck, very seldom a time that we can’t get on the internet, that actually doesn’t really happen. Most things are okay.

I: Is there any other infrastructure that affects you?

R1: Let’s see, the power…I mean, I would love to have three-phase power, we don’t have three phase here, we just have single phase, but getting three-phase here was going to cost an absolute fortunate, the nearest one is at the airport and I’d have to pay for the connection here. So three phase would have been very good, I would like that, but…

I: What is the impact of having one phase?

R1: Machines, it’s basically the machines.

R2: You can’t turn too much on at the same time.

R1: No, we’re restricted because the loads of the butcher machines are bigger and are three phase, so the ones we have, have to have a smaller motor so they work harder, and we’ve got two three-phase machines here so we’ve got to have a transformer type thing, my own transformer, to do that, so it’s all more hassle, so if we could have three-phase power, it would be great.

I: So that’s a kind of…

R2: You can’t put the oven and the sausage machine on at the same time.

R1: Yes, it’s one or the other, things like that.

R2: You have to work with what you can put on.

R1: We get round it, it doesn’t put me off at all, it’s not…

I: Yes, but I understand, if you could improve them…

R1: It would be great, that would be something.

I: Because this kind of section is more like if what exists is supportive enough to make your business resilient and what changes you would like to see.

R1: The three phase would probably be the biggest thing because broadband is fine, and ferries are fine, but if we could get the power, it would be magic.

I: So in terms of all these kinds of written rules, like policies, regulations, subsidies, standards, you mentioned some of the problems that are there, like with hygiene regulations, are there any other improvements? I need to go to the loo, sorry, think about it, because that’s one thing. The other thing about the market channel you have right now, the way it’s organised, it’s enough supportive for you or you would like to see any difference? So pretty much those.

R1: Yes…

I: Sorry.

R1: I suppose if we’d got subsidised ferries coming in with the meat from [abattoir name], that would be a huge help.

R2: It would be.

[interruption]

R2: I’ll get one for myself.

R1: I can’t think of much else. It would be a ferry [inaudible].

R2: Just transport costs.

R1: Yes, we were thinking was transport costs, we’ve got the lorry coming up from [abattoir name]’s for the meat, again if we get a subsidised rate on the boat for that, that would be a huge help for us, because obviously we get the live cattle at a cheaper rate, but if we could get that back in cheaper, it would help [area D] for the meat coming back in, so there’s no abattoir here, so it would be the best thing. I think it would be good. Because the power prices are fine, things like that are okay, we get a good enough rate with that.

R2: Yes.

R1: Fuel price.

R2: We’ve got the turbine and all, so the turbine kicks in…

R1: And fuel price, we have the cars, we get the national pump price, so we’re not even stung for that either. So no, I think most of that is okay. It would just be basically the price of the boats.

I: And access to the renewable…you said you have a turbine?

R1: Yes.

I: You would like to expand that? Do you have any issues or any problems? Because there are cases people said I have applied…I didn’t get planning permission for putting that. Did you face any of those?

R1: No, no problem at all.

I: Where did you meet other people in [area D], places or events or whatever that pretty much you get more…what is the new threat or what are the new opportunities, what are the available solutions, how effective is what they were trying? So obviously for you it might be…for farmers, it’s much more straight where you meet other farmers, for you it’s both where you meet farmers as suppliers but also other butchers or other retailers, you get a bit of an exchange of feedback or…

R1: Yes, feedback, the best bit is the four of us…we speak nearly daily, we all phone each other the whole time because if someone runs short of bacon, they’ll phone me…

R2: We swap.

R1: I’ll phone them. We get on really, really well.

R2: Like [person 2]’s boys come out here to pick up the meat because the meat all gets dropped off here, and then [inaudible].

R1: I was up there Monday and spoke to him, so we see each other a lot.

R2: It’s really weird, I can’t remember who was up before, but he said it was totally unique, he’d never known butchers…

R1: To actually get on so well.

R2: So friendly, so just getting on…

R1: Usually if they’re in the same area they don’t speak because they’re trying to get the same clients, but no, we’ve all got our own…

I: I was really surprised when I heard that in case of emergency we offer to others…

R1: Yes.

I: I was really, really surprised when I heard that.

R1: Oh, yes, and we’ve had [inaudible] make sausage here, and [butcher 2] make sausages, [butcher 3] got my sausage machine, he came and got one from me.

R2: You just help each other out because…

R1: Well, the next time it could be you, yes, you could be stuck next time, so…

I: That’s a really huge advantage to make your resilience, all of your resilience.

R1: Yes, I think it’s an [area D] thing, you know? I think everybody helps and I think that’s why folk come here and somebody would be walking along, you would stop and say do you need a lift, without thumbing the road, you would stop and offer, you know? Things like that. It’s just the nature of [area D] and other bits, but folk would soon give you a hand.

I: Yes, I noticed that here in [area D] there’s much social cohesion than the other places. I mean, social cohesion, I mean, you feel like part of a bigger group that one supports the other.

R2: It’s not all about money, whereas I think even with the businesses working all together, they don’t look at it as though, oh, if I don’t do…

R1: Somebody’s stealing trade.

R2: I can nick his ones, they don’t see it, they just see, oh, if I lend him the machine, he’s still going to be carrying on in business and we’re all going…

R1: Then he’ll help me. Yes, it’s just the way it is, it’s totally different.

R2: Yes, it’s a totally different…

R1: Probably it’s pretty unique.

R2: Well, it is unique.

I: I think it’s quite unique.

R2: Coming from London, I can tell you, it’s bloody unique.

I: It is. Believe me, I have seen in different countries and different areas in the UK and I can notice the difference.

R2: Going back, what you’ve reminded me of is years and years ago, I used to work on a market at [place name] Market and that used to be cattle, like fruit and veg and everything, and that was the same, if somebody didn’t have any change, they’d all help each other, you know? They’d all rob you blind as soon as anything, but they’d all help you out the minute you were in a fix and that’s the same as I think you lot all are.

R1: Oh, yes, what, robbers?

R2: Robbing bastards, yes.

I: Okay.

R2: That look after their own.

R1: Exactly.

I: So I assume in the question like to what extent is there agreement or sufficient discussion in the community on what should be done…?

R1: Yes, well, that’s why we were all part of the abattoir together so it was quite good, we all know what was going on, we all helped run it, so everybody knew that it was just not going to work.

R2: And even in the bigger community, Radio [area D] is brilliant, the [area D] online is…I would say Radio [area D], it’s got its finger on the pulse especially with the farming community, you know…

I: The newspaper, you mean?

R2: That’s the local radio.

I: Ah, the local radio.

R2: Somebody’s only got to sneeze in [place 3] and they’ll know about it in town by lunchtime, it is a proper farming radio, isn’t it?

I: So pretty much it’s quite an important broker, connector between…

R2: Yes, and anything important happening, they’ve got the finger on the pulse straightaway, they’ll put it straight on the radio.

I: So it’s the radio, the newspaper, what else is…?

R1: That’s the two things, really.

R2: Well, Facebook now, isn’t it?

R1: Facebook of course, social media, everyone’s on it, everything’s on there.

I: So there are particular groups that are more influential?

R1: I don’t think they’re more influential but they just let folk know what’s happening, yes, I mean, the radio’s great, they’ve got a good page on Facebook.

R2: I think between all three of them you’re covering all the age groups, because your older generation all listen to the [area D] Radio…

R1: And the [area D] paper…

I: There was someone told me about the [inaudible]? That kind of restaurant.

R1: Oh, [organisation A]?

I: Yes, that they were…I’m not sure if they were leading but they had a crucial role trying to bring together the bakers, the restaurants and the butchers, and talking about the…something…

R1: Oh, [organisation B]?

I: Yes, so…

R1: They use us, we supply the [organisation A] with their meat, so they use everything they can as well. Most folk here do, they try and use as much…

R2: Yes, use as much local as they can.

R1: …local stuff as possible. So they are very, very good with that, the folk here are really good. Folk are really proud of [area D], [area D people] are very proud people and they want to buy as much as they can from here.

R2: But again, it is all a quality product, you’ve only got to go down to the [area 4] and see how blue and how clear the sea is, you know, for the fish and everything, it is just a quality…

R1: We’re very lucky. It’s a very, very lucky place, it’s good.

I: Okay. So pretty much I have covered most of the things, just to check very quickly… At some point someone told me…no, I think it was more than one person told me that almost 80 per cent of farmers they don’t participate…20 per cent of farmers are very active in…

R1: Groups and things…

I: Yes, and then 80 per cent of farmers don’t. So do you know why that’s happening and what is the profile of those farmers that don’t?

R1: Some of them are just quiet people, they’re just shyer folk that just don’t want to be involved, no.

I: Interact so much.

R1: No, some of them don’t…

I: Or lead or raise their voice.

R1: Yes, they don’t want to be the one that somebody says, oh, well, he said that, they don’t want that, they’re just quite happy pottering away or some of them are not pottering, some of them are big, big farmers and they don’t have time. Some of the guys have got big units and they’re only maybe themselves, one person running it and they just don’t have enough hours in the day, and they’re not interested in sitting at a meeting, or speaking to other folk, they just don’t really care. Some folk are very active in that, and some folk just have no interest in it whatsoever, you know? And you can see that at a local sale, it will be the same figures, it will be the same guys, you’ll know the same farmers, and the other farmers just won’t go…

I: That’s probably another question in my mind, there is a differentiation of the profile of [area D] Auction Mart with the profile, for example, which is the main competitor, the [city 1] side?

R1: [city 1] marts, yes.

I: So there is any difference for the profile of those two marts? I mean, there are other kinds of breeds, other kinds of animals?

R1: Not really, no, I think they’re pretty similar, the [city 1] one is big, it’s a massive organisation, that’s all. But no, there’d be no difference in the breed types or things like that.

I: Or the prices you’re getting or…?

R1: No.

I: So pretty much the same…

R1: Pretty much similar, they’re pretty good. Price-wise I think they’re pretty fair.

I: And why do farmers, although they have the auction mart next to them, they decide to go…what is the extra advantage going there?

R1: Some will go to [city 1], it can be down to even there’s guys that used to be up here, there was the recruitment, the buyer for [city 1], maybe they got on well with him, some folk it’s very much…maybe he’s giving them a good turn so he’ll give the other guy a chance to look at it, and he’s maybe done well there and his cattle has sold well…

I: Sorry, I didn’t understand what you said.

R1: You know, not saying they fall out with the auction mart here, but maybe their cattle didn’t do well one time and they’ve put some in [city 1] and some in [area D] to try different prices to see, and maybe the ones in [city 1] sold better, so maybe they got 10p a kilo more or 20p a kilo or…

I: So it’s the price difference sometimes?

R1: Yes.

I: Okay, but are there any other reason they would prefer to go there?

R1: No, not really. I don’t think. Some guys just did well there and then they get it in their head that they’re going to do well there every time and that’s it. Folk are quite…they’re like, no, that’s it, I’m selling there, and that’s it.

[section deleted to maintain anonymity]

I: Okay, so pretty much I think I have covered most of the things. Is there anything you didn’t have the chance to talk to me and you would like…?

R1: No, I don’t think so.

I: Because you understand I’m trying to understand what makes your business resilient and what things need to change in order to make your business more resilient, so that’s the core.

R1: I think most of it is pretty good, it’s just getting linked from [abattoir name] to [area D], the abattoir’s not going to happen here. It will never happen again. The running costs were too high. It’s too hard. It’s just the expense was too much. It just won’t happen. So it’s keeping the link with [abattoir name] and things like that.

I: So you think pretty much that the rest of the butchers think the same?

R1: Oh, yes, definitely. We’ve all done it, been there, lost money at it, it’s just no, the amount of work that was in it to lose money was just stupid, so no, we’re not doing that again. So I can’t see that ever happening again. And things have changed here, changed a lot.

I: So if it’s going to come, it’s going to come from the farmers, if they do competitive this time and build on the different principles, let’s say…so there might be more contracts or maybe even types of distribution…a more fair distribution…

R1: Yes, it would need to be the services would change that they got a second premium, it would have to be a different premium, I think what I was saying before, the white paper and the pink ones, the pink premium, you’d have to have some encouragement to want to keep cattle longer, and at the moment there’s not that because the store cattle trade is fantastic and the prime’s just a bit more, so there’s no other way. So most of the folk here, as you were saying, kept more cows and keep them a shorter time. It’s all about numbers, it’s just generating more numbers.

I: Your business and the type of work you are doing, obviously supporting, buying a lot from [area D], what type of effect do you think the way you work, the choices you make, what type of effect do you think it has to the local community and to the environment and the landscape and also food security?

R1: Well, it’s very important. We have to buy from here, or the same thing, it will be folk change…folk like having meat from [area D], they know that it’s good meat and safe meat and green meat and fresh air, so it’s very important for us to buy from here as well. I think last year the three of us butchers, we spent £650,000 at the local mart. That’s a lot of money for the community, over half a million quid between the three of us that we spent, so that’s a lot of money going back to farmers.

I: When you mean three of us, who…?

R1: [section deleted to maintain anonymity], so the three of us bought…

I: And it’s a smaller size?

R1: Yes.

I: And I think there is one more?

R1: [butcher name], yes, they don’t buy anything from here, they don’t buy locally. So we never count them. So they don’t buy from here which is a shame but they don’t do that, so…

I: But the rest of the butchers, they are [area D] …

R1: Yes. So it was the four of us that actually ran the abattoir, well, basically the three of us, so we’ve all been there and done it and…

I: Who wasn’t in the four of that was running?

[section deleted to maintain anonymity]

I: Okay. But assuming in terms of food security, like access, availability and also utilisation, I think your businesses because they get the [area D] meat…the product of [area D] farmers, it has a huge effect because you make that meat…I mean, first you utilise a lot of that, you make so many different products with that meat, second, you make available and also because you keep the costs right you make it accessible.

R1: Yes.

I: And also, you distribute it around, so the effect you are doing is pretty much huge in terms of food security for all.

R1: Yes, definitely.

I: And at the same time, you affect the environment I suspect because through the farmers what they are doing, but the waste from your processing unit, what are you doing there?

R1: Basically, it just goes back and gets put back now to the council. They come and collect the bins from here and the local council take it away, so it’s fine.

I: And then the local community, you pretty much keep it alive…

R1: Yes. It’s busy, it’s good.

I: Good.

R1: Super.

I: That’s it.

R1: No problem at all.

I: Okay, great, thank you very much. How much time it took? Just…

R1: A minute.

I: Because I told you…what time I came here?

R1: Must have been one o’clock was it?

I: I think we were about two hours, so it is great.

[interruption]

I: Very quickly, so organic?

R1: Basically, yes, the organic side in [area D] doesn’t work very well because the land is very cold and wet in the winter, we have a really wet, cold winter, we don’t have a dry one like England has a very dry…well, it’s chilly, but we have a very wet winter, so come spring-time, our spring-time is very late compared to anywhere in the rest of the UK, so we can only get cattle out in May whereas you see some of the guys in Aberdeenshire, Inverness, England, wherever, they get cattle out in February, so…

I: So why that doesn’t make organic fit?

R1: We have a very long, slow, dark winter, so the ground is very, very cold.

R2: So the cattle are all inside…

R1: Well, it’s not that, the land, the organic side of the land is the land is very, very stressed, whereas organic land in England isn’t because they have a bit more sunshine than we have. We have sun in the summertime so the land isn’t good enough and it’s just too stressed the whole winter to actually survive…

I: Here in [area D], yes?

R1: Yes, so the grass doesn’t grow naturally, we have to feed it.

R2: But the only one that did all right with it, that was [person name], wasn’t it, and she’s got the highland cattle…

R1: Yes, but that’s not even good land, that was just poor stuff… We’ve seen guys, my neighbour tried being organic, and it was just the land just didn’t grow, the summer is too short, the growing is short.

R2: The other year, we were driving back, I said what the hell is that? The whole field was white.

R1: Like snow. It was daisies.

R2: It was just daisies the whole field, where he’d tried to go organic.

R1: It hadn’t grown on him.

R2: The daisies had just taken over so there was no grass whatsoever.

R1: Spring-time here is very, very slow usually as well, so it takes a while so organic doesn’t work.

I: So it doesn’t really fit the environment?

R1: No, it doesn’t fit, we’re too far north. We’ve got a long summer with sun, we’ve got brilliant in summer…

I: So for the people that tried for the subsidy, you don’t think it’s a future?

R1: No, they had to reduce their cattle by half or double the land but they didn’t have enough land to maintain. [area D]’s got high numbers as you’ve probably noticed, the acreage for head of cattle, it’s the highest numbers in the UK for acreage to cattle, whereas somebody else has maybe got 200 acres and 40 cattle, [area D] will have 200 acres and a hundred cattle.

I: Yes, you have I think the highest stocking rating in Europe…

**End of transcript**