ResULTS project: case study D interview 35

Face to face interview with farmer, conducted 19th September 2018

Interviewer: I

Respondent: R

I: So, let's start with the actual questions, first of all tell me a bit more about your farm business, size, kind of different sources of income and mostly what is your position in that farm, are you the owner, the manager or, I don’t know, things like that?

R: I am an owner/occupier on the farm, a farm that has been in the family for six different generations we have been farming the land there. We are a farming partnership with my mother, who is a partner, a business partner, but I will make all the day to day decisions and management decisions. We have about 160 beef cows and the young stock of that, some of them we will sell as store cattle to be fattened further south, some of them we’ll fatten the calves ourselves and put them to slaughter. We also have about 170 / 180 sheep and again we’ll, all of the [inaudible] of that is are sold as fat to abattoirs off island. Commercial, I've got 700 acres of farms, it's a mix of good land and wetter land, it's got high environmental value. The major part of the income would be from sales of cattle and sheep, support payments from the government a fair bit of income as well, maybe about 50:50 as well, so we’d have a small [inaudible]then, just for own consumption. Yes, we get, we decided the government’s support payments prefer income from environmental schemes, from different environmental management, and then yes, the rest I think.

I: Okay, I just realised that you haven't filled in the form, could you please fill in the form?

R: Ah yes, [inaudible].

I: Okay, so what are the main features?

R: That need to be redeemed, yes, the reputation of the farmers in [area D] is I think we’ve quite a good reputation because of the good quality of stockmanship, the good quality of stock we produce. I think the health status of our animals is admired before; it's been kind of leading the way in producing good, high health status animals. And that's all to do with the fact that we are on an island, we have the extra costs, we have to make sure the animals we produce are of a high value, so yes, I think these are the kind of key attributes we want to maintain, I think that that reputation for quality.

I: What does resilience mean for you?

R: Yes.

I: So, hearing this word, what brings to your mind?

R: Yes, something that is, can withstand shocks or challenges that is maybe unexpected or expected I suppose. The ability to adapt I suppose as well, resilient, if you can adapt and change to the challenges that you face, I think as well adaptable and bounce back abilities is the phrase used in football, isn't it, the ability to come back again after a shock I suppose.

I: Okay, so when I was, because first of all [area D], although it doesn’t have a lot of hills, it's got the upland because it's a remote and a challenging environment. So, this process is about upland food system and because food system as a term means so many different things, I tried to prepare this card which pretty much explains which are the key agents or reactors in the food system. So, what you can see here is the blue arrows are the supply and chain in groups of suppliers, then upland farmer, the lowland farmer and then there is primary secondary processing, also here is retailers. And then the orange circles are pretty much all of the organisations or companies they try to support, so you can see banks, colleges, inspection service like SAC here in there, [area D] development and agencies, like, some kind of lobbyist or kind of [inaudible] is for example here, consultancies can be accounts, vets, or whatever. Research, there is a research centre here in [area D] which is related to…

R: The [inaudible].

I: Yes, so insurance companies or whatever. In all of that include together, included in the livestock supply, not supply and chain, value chain, and then you have the green which is the stakeholders effected, obviously some of them they effect also the supply and chain like governments and other funding bodies, pharmaceutical market for antibiotics, vaccines or whatever, energy market which is conventional or renewable, environmental and social interest, NGOs or charities, what they talk about, either the social communities or the, about the conservation of the nature. And then the local [area D] community, plus the tourists that are coming here, and then the general public, and this is kind of more human. And then we consider as part of that the animals, the plants, the biological organisms. So, the idea is to get all of these actors to see the interactions between those and then understand the environment they work with. Does it, that make sense to you or would you like to divide it in any…?

R: No, it makes sense, yes, yes, comes from that, yes.

I: So, when and also I was checking the literature about the food system resilience, I came across a definition which is actually it's very close to what you said. So, it's resilience of the capacity of the business, obviously your farming business or a system as a whole to either absorb, buffer against internal, external disturbances. So, they absorb the loss pretty much, they do nothing and they just absorb the loss and then, and they wait, that's something that's going to change. And then either learn, adapt through incremental changes, so small changes, so we can pretty much change the rate of the stock, stock rates, but there's a kind of incremental change. Or even touch [inaudible] through radical changes, that is, you add tourists or you give up the beef cattle and you go for dairy, or you go for cropping, very, very radical changes. So, that kind of definition resonates with you, it makes sense or you would like…?

R: No, that makes sense, yes, and yes, and that will be the time skill to probably and initially you'd maybe…

I: You just buffer.

R: …you buffer it and then you'd, yes, you adapt probably small changes to business and if that doesn’t work you would look to, yes, I can see that happening.

I: Yes, a very good point because I haven't thought about that.

R: Yes.

I: Okay, brilliant. As I said you are the expert, it's just I think about the whole reality. So, this card is pretty much summarised different type of functions or roles or goals that probably the farming business would like to adopt. And what sort of functions do you think is important to maintain for your farm business, you personally, the wider society, future generations? So, you can see here I have grouped them in three major categories, one is related with to owners with private interests, the other is related to the multiplier effect which is recycling money to the local community through buying services or inputs, and then the last one is related to the public goods. So, what I'm asking here, read this and see if there are any important factors missing and then if you can prioritise, rank the five most important critical functions for your farm business.

R: Oh yes.

I: It will be nice if you say number, I don’t know, five is important or it's… If you see something which is completely irrelevant for you as an [area D] farmer, just let me know, because obviously this is for the case studies. In the meantime, I will grab us some water and come back.

R: Okay.

[Left room]

R: So, you want me to pick my top five out of the whole list?

I: Yes, of the whole list.

R: The whole list.

I: If there are more than five that's fine, it's not…

R: And then rank then in one the most important?

I: Yes, something…

R: And this is just to me, to my specific, to mine, yes?

I: Yes.

R: Yes, and because some of the things under this one would also relate under to the [voices overlap].

I: Yes, they do, they do, they do. So, if you would like to mix them and say five and 19, they come together, so feel free, any kind of combination.

R: Yes, I think number 10 is the most important because that's what the whole point of it, life is, isn't it? So, obviously number 10 would be the most important, and probably number three, a reasonable workload, that kind of mixes together with the personal satisfaction and wellbeing, I think.

I: The, number 10?

R: Number 10 and three, yes, one kind of follows the other.

I: And number one together you mean?

R: Number 10 and number three.

I: Ah, number 10 and three.

R: Yes, they are kind of similar, but as I said 10 is most important, but three follows on from that. And then I'd say one and two were kind of similar because yes, I want to make a reasonable profit but I also want to make a reasonable profit so it's an attractive proposition for somebody to succeed me, because succession is important to me, number two. But, so it's number one because I think that's, if you're not profitable then no one is want to take over from you.

I: Okay.

R: So, they are quite, they are, I'm not sure what order I'd have them in, but yes, I would, one and two.

I: Okay.

R: Number five.

I: So, it's number five in respect of [voices overlap].

R: Yes, no I'm just, no yes, it could be one, yes, I'm not sure. Maybe yes, maybe, I don’t know, yes, I'm thinking, because like number five, respect in the community and number six is kind of similar I suppose, it's part of that. If you are contributing to social cohesion, that gives you respect in the community, and maybe respect as well is also kind of like well, number nine, adding value and increasing customer satisfaction. Again that's, when you are producing goods I suppose you want that as, that stems back to the profitability if you are satisfying your customers, then yes, it's on the [inaudible] that's mostly, number nine, yes, I would say number nine is, I go, 10 is the most important, then three, then one, two and nine.

I: Okay.

R: That's my top five.

I: And any of the rest?

R: That are important to me? I mean down here, yes…

I: If they are not, just let me know.

R: Yes, like number 20 it certainly it gives me personal satisfaction, being able to look after the landscape, preserve habitat as I, I do enjoy that and 20, 21 is a similar kind of thing.

I: What is that protect one?

R: Preservation of historic and cultural value of the landscape, you know, just that, you know, I suppose because we have been farming and the farm has been in the family for a long time, you know, I do appreciate that, you know, that yes…

I: Do you mind if I eat that?

R: That's okay, carry on, yes.

I: If that comes in a plastic bag, yes, out of your window. I'm not sure what to do with my lunch [voices overlap].

R: Yes, no, yes, that would, yes, because I think preservation of the landscapes and historic, that comes above the kind of individual things like for prevention and climate change, by the way I’ll say that all covers that two kind of things I think don’t they, so I think that that's probably…

I: So, pretty much this is the means, you mean then, you know the [inaudible] is [voices overlap]?

R: Yes, I think so, yes, so if you are doing this then that will probably be it's a lot of that kind of, yes.

I: Unfortunately, I had to break them down because sometimes people they, no, that's not relevant to me at all.

R: Yes, it's a bit too, yes, I know, a bit too, yes.

I: But obviously there are a lot of linkages there.

R: Yes.

I: Okay, so that's for your farm. If you are thinking in, let's put that one that here because sometimes you might want to refer back to that, but if across the supply, not across, along the supply and chain, they demonstrate matters like the meat processors or the retailers. What do you think are the important functions or roles may need to fulfil?

R: Ah okay, what do I think they should fulfil?

I: And as you, it would be nice…I mean thinking about…I mean [area D] right now it is in a kind of strange situation because in the past they had an abattoir, so they had pretty much meat processing taking place in the island. So, right now they don’t have it, that kind of meat processing so it's somewhere in the mainland Scotland. But if you can describe for the theoretical case of you have the abattoir or for the times you had the abattoir, what would be the functions they need to fulfil?

R: Yes, oh yes, I think again number nine, adding value and increasing customer satisfaction is important for them, and then that follows on to number one which is a reasonable profit. Having that, we spoke about, we mentioned that, having that process and facility but having that process and facility would certainly provide special, local employment opportunities, number four, which again helps number six, helps the cohesion of social and community. Food security I suppose and number 21 preservation of historic and cultural value of landscapes.

I: Okay, in what terms…?

R: Sorry, I think there is cultural maybe rather than landscape maybe.

I: Ah, okay, you mean…

R: Yes, well [area D] is kind of famous for it's branded meat so that…and maybe other, for example there, Harris Tweed or whatever, that kind of thing, that kind of product.

I: Okay.

R: We don’t have that in [area D] but, yes.

I: That's fine, and now is the full potential of adding value of [area D] beef and lamb products currently reached, if not, please elaborate on what more can be achieved?

R: Is the full value currently being achieved?

I: Yes, the full potential of adding value?

R: I don’t think so, no.

I: What can be done in order to reach that?

R: Well yes, I think at the moment I suppose a lot of it is, the cattle are exported off the island to be finished somewhere else which somebody else is getting the added value of it. And I suppose there's reasons why that's happening because maybe we don’t have the resources on the island to take all the cattle on the island to slaughter, to fatten them all, but there is capacity to bring some of them to slaughter and finish them. So, I think that would retain more of the value on the island if we could do that. What's the question, [voices overlap]?

I: So, the question is…

R: Yes, well I think if we had more, had the slaughtering facilities on the island I think it would help. We certainly have the skills with the butchers here to do the processing, but it's just challenging with the, can only have smaller numbers of livestock and further away from the market the costs are higher and everything I suppose. It's difficult how you make that, you need to be selling the product for a lot more than realising the higher value for it.

I: So, did your farm in the past supply either of them, because there was a [inaudible] first it was kind of the private, there was [organisation O], yes, and that was, although it was a private company behind the scenes, it was a competitor for farmers. And then there was later on, that closed in 2012 and then it was a separate initiative from butchers, quite different orientation because they would try to serve their local market. So, did you supply any of those?

R: We were, we supplied, yes, we supplied the abattoir when it was open, [organisation O], we supplied them with cattle and sheep, yes. And I suppose that was, my business was set up at the time and the cattle we were producing to specifically to supply them with the type of cattle that they wanted, you know, that they were looking for a particular type and style of cattle and size and weight and we supplied, we could meet that and supply them that cattle, so yes.

I: But was there a big [inaudible] customer at that time? Who was the customer, was it supermarket or was it a…?

R: No, they were at the time they were selling to butchers and they were butchers in South East England where like a, I suppose there's a lot of money to go down there, but people worry, but they spend a bit more money and buy, you know, this kind of branded product that's high, quite a high-quality product.

I: And that did you, have you been involved in any of the board of…?

R: No, I wasn’t, no.

I: No, but so that kind of initiative it had a kind of gold type of times, and then it failed or…

R: Yes.

I: Yes, so did, can you give me a bit of background information why you think it has the [inaudible]?

R: Well, I think it probably when it started it was kind of unique, you know, [area D] is quite a unique area, it's well defined, it's easy to brand the product, you know, we have the cheese, we have whisky, things that are branded as [area D], so people recognise the brand as a quality brand. So, when it started marketing [area D] Beef not many people were marketing beef in that way, I suppose. And because of the success of it, maybe people copied it and saw the possibility and branded that market and that beef in that way.

So, it's been that differentiation in the beef market, where there are lots, maybe different brands or different regions sell their beef, kind of grass-fed beef and there's different breeds, bred beef that is sold at the moment. So, a lot of people copied that and maybe lost the edge, the marketing edge there. So, one of the reasons again, the increasing costs for a smaller abattoir to process that meat, also the distance away from the market, to be able to police that market, you know, you are sending this beef, that beef down to the butchers in England, it's, you know, relying on them being trustworthy and that, you might sell them one animal, but they’ll say they’ll tell the customers that they are selling, [inaudible] animals for that one [inaudible] I know they sell them [inaudible].

I: Using your own brand.

R: Yes, your label, yes, using your brand and passing it off, so there is that element of trust you need to police that market.

I: But obviously there were cases you couldn't police them.

R: Yes, you can't, because they are so far away and you don’t, you are not sure. Yes, so that and they are kind of working on our independent butchers, again it's difficult when you are working for one big supermarket, that is one person you have to deal with and you have 20 / 30 different small butchers, it's harder to deal with them I suppose, it's [inaudible] the problems.

I: But at some point there was Tesco coming up, or I do remember Sainsburys?

R: I'm not sure, I think maybe in the early part of the abattoir they did work with a supermarket, but I think they moved away from that, to this, the more butchery thing. I think in the summer it would have still been sold to supermarkets but I think most of it is, certainly the higher value stuff was sold that way.

I: Do you know why they moved away from supermarkets, they were, why that kind of collaboration didn’t work?

R: Well, I suppose they are always trying to drive down price aren't they, they are wanting to, they have a big…you know, if they are buying a lot, if you are the only one, if you are the only person you are selling to then you can ask to take the price that they are given rather than whole share price, it's difficult to do that. Whereas, so if you kind of lose one big customer it's bad, but if you have multiple different customers and you lose one, it's less important I suppose.

I: And the other thing is that someone mentioned to me the reason the fact that there was a subsidy for transportation of live animals while there wasn’t for the waste or the carcasses and that [voices overlap].

R: That's right, yes, well that's increasing the cost of it, yes, cattle leaving the island you had to be slaughtered at the abattoir in the south, they get, they got a subsidy on the ferry. Whereas, because the abattoir was exporting carcasses out of the island it was deemed to be cargo and it's no, they didn’t get any payment, any support payments on that. And again, the same with the waste.

I: So, I assume it doesn’t pay…

R: Because the cost, it costs more to [inaudible yes, so there's a disparity in it, yes, between the two markets and it's always a subsidy then to the abattoirs off island because they can get their cattle cheaper off island than the abattoir on the island get cattle off the island.

I: And so, that create incentives for the local farmers to send live animals rather than to go through them.

R: Well, it means the guys were buying, abattoirs were buying the cattle off [inaudible], because they can pay more for their cattle, because they don’t have, because they don’t have that cost, that higher cost to get them off the island that the abattoir on the island did have to pay.

I: Okay, and so that was the first initiative. The second initiative was with the butchers, what was the story there, I mean what was the incentives at the beginning to create that initiative, then why it's not exactly failed but it's stopped working??

R: Well, the incentive did work because it was a high value market and because no one else was doing it I suppose. You want to put your product if you have a good product, you want to get them the price that people are going to pay the most money for it and that at the time that was in the butchers’ shops, in South East England or people like that…

I: No, I mean the second initiative, which is about the later on.

R: Oh, just now, oh right, yes, okay yes cost, I think they were working in a plant that was too big for them, I think it was the problem and that's why and it was just, it was difficult to maintain an older plant that was needing maintenance and repairs and it was costly to run. And they didn’t own it, it was owned by the local authority, the council own it so they were responsible for the maintenance and it was shut down because the health and safety gowns because they said it wasn’t maintained well enough. But it's a lot of, you know, it's a lot of work and you know, these butchers they have their own business, there's, you know, running a butcher shop and they are not abattoir owners or runners and they were doing that and I think that, they are having to do both jobs was it kind of, it put a lot of pressure on them and took a lot of time, took them away from that, their jobs as butchers which was their main job.

I: Do you feel there was a missing opportunity there because they focussed so much on local supply of food instead of pretty much expanding and using also, doing some of the work that previous initiative had done.

R: Yes, but I suppose it had been done and it worked well for a while and then it stopped working because of the reasons we explained, and that's maybe why they didn’t go down that route of exporting because, you know, it was a climate, financial, economic climate had changed for the…

I: Yes, that's true, and they all sort of financial crisis in the meantime.

R: Yes, yes.

I: Yes, okay, so the next card is summarised a bit of disturbances, long-term pressures, shocks, drivers for change, whatever you would like to call. And the other thing I didn’t mention before, sorry, jumping from one to the other, but these kinds of functions, if they fulfil satisfactorily then they lead to positive outcomes. If for any reason they don’t fulfil satisfactorily, then to lead to negative impacts or whatever. But let's move now to this one which is about the drivers of change, if you go through this list, most of them might be considered for a farm business, but for the whole supply and chain. Maybe consider as threats but I would like to ask you if there is any important driver that is missing from this list and at the same time whether there are any drivers that can be seen also as an opportunity for the [area D] farmer.

R: Can you guess I'm not seeing anything that's [inaudible].

I: [Inaudible] enough, I didn’t put enough water. So, before you start saying anything, I need to change [inaudible] because these flowers are about to die [inaudible]. If some doesn’t make sense to you and you would like me to explain, let me know.

R: Do you have like a, technology that, as a short, you know, artificial meats, factory grown meat, is that a…?

I: Artificial meat you mean, yes.

R: Artificial meat, yes, is that a [inaudible]?

I: Okay.

R: It does, you know, if the range in consumer lifestyles and patterns, I suppose that, like the veganism and stuff and vegetarians?

I: Yes, that's veganism.

R: Yes.

I: Yes, but those are not, yes the veganism in terms of why they would like to avoid, you know, for health reasons or for reasons for, I don’t know, animal cruelty or whatever.

R: Yes, so what, I suppose all threats can be an opportunity for somebody, so we are specifically, we are, we would be able to be seen as an opportunity.

I: Okay, and then from those ones, I would like you to prioritise and rank the five most important threads for your own farm.

R: Yes, I suppose…isn't it, don’t really get initial shocks, certainly number 12 the Brexit if we were to remove all the government subsidies, that would be a big shock to the business, I mean we’d need to, you know, we maybe absorb it, but we would need to change the business quite considerably if that was to happen. So, I think that's probably at the moment that's probably number 12 is the biggest threat.

That one from Brexit would be probably quite a worry because I certainly, anything that would affect the price we are getting for our products would certainly…

I: So, free access you mean or tariffs or whatever?

R: Yes, any increase in the, not in the competition but in the, yes it would certainly…

I: And also increase of the input of prices.

R: Yes, yes, 13 and 14 are probably, would affect.

I: The 14 is more about the production standards, so for example, now the way we produce meat in the UK is based on the European standards and for example the USA meat production is different standards.

R: Yes, if they were lower, if the standards were lower because of Brexit then that may increase similar competition from, for the, you know what I mean. And if it's increased this much…if the standards were increased but then, you can, that might make it difficult to farm an island because we mainly ship out animals off island, that's [inaudible] people.

I: There may also be differences in the conditions of transport and right now they are very high, a lot of regulations about the how you are going to move animals around, so if there is any change on that probably.

R: Yes, yes. I think most of the ones that it would be…

I: The economical, regulatory, yes.

R: …economics, it would be the…it would be the national kind of shocks that would, they are going to cause in short term, where the patterns are certainly affecting my business but it's something we can adapt to more along, kind of, it's something you adapt to kind of more long-term.

I: So, it's kind of, the wet weather that you are facing the last years or the drought, how these things affect your farm.

R: Well, yes, you need to, when you have the kind of extremes of weather it means production for your farm is affected, it's reduced most of the time, it's not at the optimum, because if the grass isn't growing, because it's too dry or it's too wet or it's too cold or the grass hasn’t grown. So, what you need to do you need to build in capacity, extra capacity within the farm to allow you to withstand that, so you maybe reduce your stock in number, reduce your stock in density or increase area land that you are farming just to give you that ability to buffer. So, in the good years you can create a reserve or maybe reduce the inputs you have to put into that farm because you don’t have to buy so much fertiliser or whatever and then the [inaudible] yes that ability just to…

I: So, you create a kind of stock or inventory for those inputs you mean?

R: Yes, you can do that, yes, you can, yes in the good years you can stock up, so that would certainly affect that.

I: So, I have, so this is for your farming business, what about the five most important threats for the other businesses, along the supply and chain.

R: Well, yes, actually I think number 12 is pretty important because, you know, if…

I: But if they, do they get any subsidies those places?

R: No, they don’t, but if we stop, if the farmers stop getting subsidised, then they don’t spend any money and they don’t produce so much product. So, again, that's the first thing I would do, if my subsidies are cut, I stop spending money, I stop employing people, I stop buying feed and cut back the number of stock I have. I'd make my own business resilient and withstand that shock, but it comes at the cost of everybody else.

I: So, it cascades in running [inaudible] effect.

R: Yes, yes, the multiply effect.

I: Yes, multiply effect, yes.

R: I get every pound or two pound I get from in a subsidy I probably spent two in the local economy, so there's that [inaudible].

I: So, it's not, it seems like the subsidies are not really only subsidies for farmers but is all, indirectly subsidies for the local community pretty much.

R: Yes, the way the, yes, there's…kind of, you get economic, the figures for farm incomes and most cases the average farm income their profit is a lot less than what their subsidies are, so they are obviously spending that subsidy somewhere and they are spending it in their local economy.

I: Oh, so you use some of the subsidy aspect for investing a bit further?

R: Yes, investing a bit, and I suppose there is that, right enough, yes, but then again when you invest in business you are buying materials and products and stuff from local suppliers.

I: When you were discussing before the subsidies, obviously they are in the future, you have experience of different type of subsidies in the past that were based on the production volume, then they were based on the land and then they were based on the environmental schemes. So, you have seen and now there is also another one which is on the calves, yes, so any other kind of subsidy type you have tried?

R: Oh, yes, we've got, we’ve got [inaudible].

I: But what is the effect of those different things, I mean do these different types, because obviously in the discussion of what type of subsidies you want, different subsidies create incentives and pretty much change the way the farmers behave of one direction or the other direction, and because you have experienced all of them, which type of subsidy you think it's more beneficial for the future farmer, farming in the UK? Because I assume you have seen side effects of some of those?

R: Yes, no, no pre-production subsidies and in [area D] you are getting a payment for every head of cow or sheep or whatever, the number that were kept were increased, the farmer stock. When that was removed, the numbers reduced slightly and that's, I think that is partly because of this, people are, this weather thing, to when people are, as they said about, you know, people are trying to build in capacity in their business, so they cut their stock back a bit and have that ability, so that's partly affected there.

I: But there was someone who told me that a kind of let's say negative effect of the subsidies on the head, it was pretty much that a bit of pushing the farmers to use their land to it's limits which in the long-term might be leading to the degradation of the land, while when that was removed pretty much gave some space for the land to recover.

R: Yes, you, rather than set in, yes, the number of stock you had based on trying to maximise it to get as much subsidy as you could, you set it to the level that was appropriate to the farm and the resources that you had on the farm. So, yes, that, the level of stocks at now we are, it's probably more realistic to what it should be, whereas 10 or 20 years ago when they were all getting a headage payment and getting paid, there was far too many, you know. So, I think probably the stock at the moment is probably, so it's I think going back to headage payments would be the wrong way to go.

I: Okay, what about the land subsidies?

R: I didn’t want you there because that, there was no…people didn’t have to do anything, so they got the subsidy but they didn’t have any compulsion to spend it in these areas. Because we get the money just for owning the lands, you don’t have to go out and spend it to recycle in the economy, so you could just keep it and put it in your pocket, you know, whereas…

I: So, it created a kind of thing, incentive falling back effectively.

R: Yes, yes, incentive for doing nothing, yes.

I: And be less innovative.

R: Yes, because it was all like this before that, obviously so it's maybe it's the right way to go.

I: What about the subsidies on the environmental schemes?

R: Well again, it's difficult, how do you like, we have that on the farm at the moment and how do you value that and how do you measure that? It's really difficult to do, to my mind to measure environmental benefit and to put a value on it, and to do work without being too bureaucratic or too, you know, too much of an inspection regime to police it. Do you have, I'm not sure, we have environmental schemes, we get paid for restricting the grazing period in the land and restricting when we can mow the grass to allow the birds to nest. It's set down dates, you mustn't do anything before this date and it bears no relation to what actually happens on the ground because seasons change, the weather changes the patterns of birds, they do, you know, they change every year because…

I: So, pretty much they don’t fit with…

R: It doesn’t, yes, so these prescriptive, you know, set dates don’t really fit, but then the alternative is then you need to, how do you measure that, I'm not sure? Do you have somebody there saying oh right, okay, the birds have nested now, all the young ones are away, you can go in, which means somebody would come in, check on your field the whole time, making sure and that's…

I: There is an impact, a real impact.

R: Yes, so you need to, you know.

I: And I've, someone told me about the environmental subsidies like the fact that they restrict dates you can pretty much harvest, that creates a kind of urgency for everyone has to meet with the time window, and also with winter time window there is also the effect of the weather which means practically less time window which means everyone’s machinery at 1 July, that's it, and that pretty much puts a bit [inaudible] direction people they would like to own the machinery and sometimes this kind of investment might be disproportioned to the land they have.

R: To get the job done.

I: Yes, so probably they create fixed costs that the land cannot really afford.

R: Yes.

I: This kind of effects. Or another person told me like with having all these kinds of edges around pretty much sometimes you, the cows go and they eat those kinds of weed wedges in there and, wedges, not wedges, the weeds.

R: Yes, the margins, wet margins, yes.

I: Yes, but they eat some of the plants and then you spray the rest of the land and then they go around the land and they spread the nuts. So, they increase your….

R: The weeds, yes.

I: The weeds later on, and obviously the cost of pesticides or whatever. So, it doesn’t really, it has the impact on the environment you are expecting.

R: Something I find with it as well is that you are kind of being torn in two directions. If you go down the environmental route, you know, you are being told to not cut this grass or not graze the grass until a certain date, but that date often the quality of the grass has decreased, the quality of the [voices overlap] you make.

I: Yes, that was in the, yes.

R: So, kind of we were told to be more efficient but to produce higher quality stuff but that's taking us down that way. A wee example on the farm where we were…

I: This is typical trade-offs [voices overlap]?

R: Yes, there's trade-offs, yes, like we, well we had two schemes in the farm, one when it was to improve the health of the livestock we had to fence off a wet area because in the wet area it's, there's a parasite fluke that the cattle get, so they live in this wet area. So, we had to fence this wet area off to stop the cattle getting this parasite to increase the production, but we are also being paid to graze that land at a certain time of year because it was a high value nature area and we needed to graze it at that certain time of year. So, we are also being told on one hand we must graze this land to benefit the environment and we are told on the other hand to be, no we must fence it off to increase the production because, to keep the cattle healthy. So, I was like…

I: It was really [inaudible] good direction, it was quite, very confusing?

R: Yes, so and well the payment, the payment for fencing for the production is actually more than the, but I don’t know.

I: Okay.

R: So, it's just…

I: And what about the calf subsidy, what kind of feedback have you seen that to?

R: Well yes, it's been a yes…because it's on a calf, I think it's a good thing because it means that you are actually producing something. Whereas, you know, a cow doesn’t necessarily have to have a calf previously to claim the subsidy, whereas with calf, it's, you know, you are having to work to get that calf and to rear that calf and to keep it alive for a month before you kind of get that payment. So, it certainly helped keep cows on the island, keep people raising cows and raising calves, so yes I think it's worked okay in [area D].

I: Are you in that beef efficiency schemes? Ok, so do you work with SAC or you do it independently?

R: Yes, no I just, I do it all myself, yes, I just, yes.

I: Okay, so what have you seen the effect of that kind of scheme, I mean have you learnt anything, have you seen any difference in your business?

R: No, not yet anyway. We were intending it, we were doing most of the stuff you had to do anyway, like, we were doing all the recording. So, it was no, it was no, I didn’t have to change anything, didn’t have to do anything extra to get in the scheme, more or less I didn’t need to tag calves I think or have to get the DNA samples from calves which was a bit extra, but it's not difficult. So, it wasn’t difficult to get in the scheme and get the money for it, so short term I've not seen much difference in the business. I'm hopeful because they are doing this DNA sampling and they are analysing the data from herds right across Scotland that are hopefully one of them will be some useful data comes out of it at the end that will help my business and we are able to identify certain animals with DNA and that whatever, that contribute to profitable animals, that's [voices overlap].

I: Do you use EBVs?

R: Yes, we do that yes.

I: So, for what terms and how you use it?

R: Well we breed some bulls in the farm and we’ve got pedigree…

I: So, you are doing a lot of breeding as well?

R: We do a little of that, yes, not a lot, we do a little bit, yes, so we do measure all of them and record and weigh them and do EBVs and stuff, yes, and I think that's, I've been doing it for 20 odd years, so yes, it's, you certainly see that the animals are, it does work, yes.

I: Sorry, you said it works, it's not like a, you know, more bureaucracy without the meaning, you know?

R: No, it absolutely does work, yes, and you have, they have so much, I guess for, I mean it's maybe kind of slightly in certain aspects it is kind of an old-fashioned business and it is slow to adapt change and take on new technologies and there is so much of it is just, yes.

I: So, when you say old fashioned.

R: Right, well like you talk, well like you get up and stop and check before like stock, like what is stock, like that's somebody that can look at an animal because they’ve so much experience, so much knowledge they can just look at an animal and they know, oh, or they think they can know that the animal is really good and that people…

I: You think over trust their looking at them.

R: Well, [voices overlap] a wee bit maybe, but I think that that skill, that I believe that people who can do it well are, you know, they are held in high esteem. And I think they are maybe a wee bit threatened by kind of new technology that can maybe look and do that for them, I think.

And that's why a lot of the EBVs and newer technology is slow to uptake sometimes, especially in the livestock industry because, you know, it's quite slow to change I think, yes.

I: But on the other hand, I think using EBVs you think it's going to, if more and more people they start looking at those seriously, then it's going to change a bit of the structure of the industry?

R: I think it is changing yes, the more people do look at it now and realise oh, it does work, but it just takes a long time to, will it change the structure? No, I think that that, that there will always be people that respected for their stockmanship and the skill and their ability to do that. But I think we need both I think, we need the new technology to go with it, and they shouldn’t be threatened by it, they should see it as a tool that they can use to [voices overlap].

I: So, for the calf subsidy payments there is not any big side effects so far you have seen?

R: I don’t know, I don’t think so, no. I suppose for us on the island here we get a higher, we get, because we are an island we get a higher level of payment. Whereas, you go across the water to Caithness, who are not that much further away they get a much lower level of payment, so, you know, they…

I: That place is in mainland?

R: The mainland yes, sorry, yes.

I: Sorry, I don’t know all these places down here.

R: Yes, it is on the mainland, the North of Scotland, the mainland, yes, they are very similar to what we are here which is the [inaudible] and so that the, I think they might feel slightly disadvantaged because they don’t have the high payment that we have, we get an extra payment because we are on an island. I don’t think it’s; you know, it hasn’t had the same effect that previously that the people are chasing that payment, you know, they are not keeping more stock just to get that payment, I don’t think that's happening this time, and I think it's kept the numbers kind of stable, but it's not increased numbers or anything.

I: Okay, that's good, so there is a lot of discussion now with Brexit and people they say, forget about subsidies on food production and think about subsidies about the environment or the public goods. And then there is a lot of when voices say if you forget the, if you pay the farmers for doing all sort of other things but not producing food, is the wrong direction. What do you, where do you stand there, how will you see both sides?

R: [Voices overlap]. Yes, I think well, we are delivering a lot of public goods now at the moment, I think a lot of the changes just talking about kind of rebranding that, you know, I'm explaining that okay, this is why we get the subsidies because we are providing these public goods, so I think, you know, it's I don’t know how to explain it.

I: I understand what you are trying to say, but on the other hand if, it seems that the debate is like where you put the emphasis, so if you may end up with people doing all the other stuff, but they, primarily they don’t care about producing food. So, is this the kind of status you would like to see, will you find it especially for [area D] it will make sense, it will add something positively or it will create a kind of distortion if you say.

R: Yes, but again, so what's it for me as a business owner and a person, you know, it comes back down to what we discussed in whatever that sheet was.

I: The [voices overlap].

R: Yes, number 10 is my main goal, so me, yes, whatever. I get satisfaction from producing food and stuff, but I will always do that, might produce less of it because I get, well, [voices overlap].

I: It's not a bad thing.

R: It's not a bad thing really for Scottish agriculture on the whole, I think if we do, you know, if we go too far down that route and cut back or production too much, then we lose a bit of critical mass. And if you think about an area like [area D], if less cows go away, I suppose there will be less farmers which affects you sort of through cohesion, and if there's less farmers and less cows and less people spending money in the…

I: The community, yes.

R: Yes, so from the global thing, or the global [area D] or Scotland or whatever, you know, we don’t want to reduce too much production because that, that helps, that is part of the deliver, helping delivering the public goods, you don’t have cows there, I don’t have sheep in the hills, you don’t have people there and if you have people then you don’t have that money being spent, that social cohesion, that…

I: Which actually you said, actually the next question is what would be the impact on your farm business if upland sheep and beef cattle farming is dramatically reduced or ceased altogether in [area D]? So, what do you think is going to be the future for [area D]?

R: If there is no upland beef or sheep, yes…?

I: Because in the worse scenario with the Brexit, there might be a case that people they give up farming or at least this farming.

R: Well yes, what would replace it, what would you, you know, if you just took it all away, all the cattle and all the sheep in [area D], what would replace it? You'd say there's not much there to replace it, you know, it will just return to wilderness. There are some of the smaller islands in [area D] where that's happened, people have left the island and it's just, it's been returned to the wild and nothing happens on the island. So, it would be, it would be, yes, it would be a bit of a blow to [area D]. I suppose you could use the land for alternative uses, plant trees, or you could plant windmills, or renewable energy or, I don’t know, but then they don’t want any wind turbines there.

I: What is your experience by the, no we are still there. So, we are still there, let's move that to that. So, from this card it summarised a bit the alternative solutions, so it's kind of portfolio of solution or [inaudible] or whatever you want to call it, mitigation, adaptation solutions. And these I would like to go through that and see if there are any missing solutions you use as a farmer here. And then from those you, what sort of solutions you are trying to respond to those pressures we are discussing before and do they work at this factory level, what sort of constraint limits your efforts? If these things, any of those doesn’t make sense and you need more, just let me know. I think I need to call the person who is coming later and to ask a bit probably quarter…

[section deleted to maintain anonymity, reference is made to contacting several other farmers].

I: So, of those ones, which sort of solutions do you apply in order, I mean how you respond, how you…?

R: There was a…number one, we have done that, as well as reduce stocking rates by, well we bought more land so we reduced stocking rates that way. And it's totally moved stock for the months so we house them, they all go inside, so I suppose that takes them off the land, but they don’t like it, but they are taken off the land. Well, we do maybe try and sell, sell kind of [inaudible] faster and sell them, we try and sell at a younger age, that that removes them quicker, so that's kind of the same thing. You are always just, I suppose, you know, trying to improve your resource and operations and for me that's, I try and do that the whole time, that's to be, I totally, you know, I was trying to [inaudible] and work better and more efficiently. And I suppose that can, well we spoke again was this, reasonable workload and personal family [inaudible] and that comes down to that.

[Section deleted to maintain anonymity – reference is made to contacting several other farmers]

R: Yes, the first one and the second two I think, we are trying to improve our efficiency.

I: Okay.

R: Yes, that will be, we are continually doing that. Technological innovation, number four, there's, yes, we have been doing that, there's always, you know…

I: With the kind of technology do you…?

R: Yes, well I suppose EBVs are one thing.

I: Okay.

R: But, and then there will be something, electronic identification in cattle so you can identify them easier and manage them better and select the ones that you want to breed from. But kind of, there's always barriers to that when you are adapting to the new technology it's a cost and is it going to work and yes, that's always a concern I suppose. So, I haven't maybe done that as much as I would like.

I: So, it's down to on the investment?

R: Yes, well yes, exactly, it's all an investment, review the programme.

I: But that with identification and what you describe as the benefits, how help resilience, how?

R: It makes it easier and more efficient for your own farm to record performance of individual animals, so when you are breeding and you are making breeding decisions about choices, you can select the animals much more easily.

I: Okay.

R: So, you can…

I: I understand.

R: You can increase certain movement because you can pick the animals that are, and also for, just for management, it makes the management easier to, so again it's reducing your time and your time you have to work with animals and things.

I: Okay, and you had done, you diversify into new agricultural income resources because you do see beef and…

R: And a little bit of breeding, a bit of pedigree.

I: Yes, but from non-farm, you do only the renewable energy which is also later on?

R: Yes, we have a small, but it's just for our own, it's just to, rather than to increase income it reduces costs because we produce our own power, so yes, a little bit of money but not a lot.

I: So, for example, tourism or organic farming, why you don’t involve with those, what it makes not attractive solution?

R: It’s, the reason is because it takes the focus off what your core business is and we don’t have the skills either to go into tourism, some tourism and also it requires a fair bit of capital investment and you maybe need that extra, you need, kind of, if you had spare capacity in the farm in the family to do that, then fair enough. But I think my wife she has a job and she works off the farm, takes in an income in the family house, so that in a way that's a diversification for the family business, you know, and that kind of purely is a kind of family house income, that reduces the reliance on the farm because of the extra income coming in, so that sort of reverses around that way, but yes.

I: Any diversification in inputs, so for example, I know in some years they struggle, people they struggled to get the straw, they use sand or, you know, stuff like that.

R: Not really that way, that's right, these control measures, they were certain members of the [organisatio 2 name], so we monitor our disease status of the livestock and we do blood tests to control diseases and monitor them.

I: So, that came from the vet or from…?

R: Well, through the vet and through the, yes, through discussions with the vet and through the livestock association to try and prove the productivity of the animals by reducing the disease pressure.

I: So, what is the role of that organisation? It's pretty much I think related to the health of the animals?

R: Yes, it was just eradicate one particular disease in livestock, BVD. Again, it was farmers getting together to try and reduce or eradicate that disease from the livestock in [area D]. They were able to, you know, kind of act as a kind of conduit for the farmers and the vets come together and discuss how that would happen and what was best practice. And then they could also, they went to the local authority and got some funding to reduce the cost of the lab fees for testing the breed for the disease, so they kind of…

I: So…

R: …and then also to encourage and encourage farmers that were not on [inaudible], we had to kind of put pressure on them to encourage them to participate in the scheme, how to get everyone involved because they needed everybody to be involved, to get the disease eradicated.

I: So, do you think that there is a quite crucial or kind of vital organisation?

R: It was at the time for that particular disease and it's since been making that disease, it's been the success of the scheme in [area D] has helped them to, the Scottish Government a national scheme, so it's now kind of been overtaken. They did do some work with another disease, blood testing, but it was quite…and they got some money again to help, it was so much more [inaudible] because it was a far harder disease to eradicate, [inaudible] disease.

I: Ah okay.

R: So, they didn’t kind of have much longer terms, it didn’t kind of last at all. It got, so it doesn’t, what they do at the moment they don’t have a big role of what was normal really, they are just, they are still an organisation and still there, but…

I: But you think it's quite crucial at least you had it in the first place?

R: Yes, we wouldn’t have got as progressed as far as we did without eradicating that disease, and that eradicating that disease took out, you know, it cost that disease cost the industry in [area D] a lot of money because it was quite debilitating for kind of in your herd.

I: So, pretty much they will get the impact of that organisation, it was very good for the residents of all the farming community?

R: Yes, it reduced that [inaudible] pressure, yes.

I: And in this kind of diagram where they the organisations, did you see here in Edinburgh other organisations that have a pretty similar effect, that really play at all in helping the farmers to increase their resilience?

R: No, I think that maybe has quite the same effect is that they started, because it's not as clear, it's good to see, you quite clearly see the economic effect that it had, you know, there's other organisations that could. Sheep rearing organisations and bull breeder organisations that organise ram sales and the wool sales and things on the island and, you know, they show societies which, you know, I suppose that helps the kind of social cohesion and increase the public awareness of what, I think it covers just [area D] so that they can, yes, at least [inaudible] measure the direct impact, but you know, it just keeps awareness of what [area D] is…

I: But [area D] generally they are more like cattle orientated rather than sheep orientated around here?

R: Yes, yes.

I: So, for example, of those islands.

R: Yes, we have a lot of about, yes, we have.

I: So, in those islands where you have a lot of sheep and where you have a lot of, why you have a sheep?

R: Well, it's just because of the type of landscape, because of the type of kind of land it is.

I: And then all the rest, and I think this one is a lot of sheep, the north island.

R: They have a lot, they have, yes, there's a particular type of sheep, yes.

I: Yes, but there is a lot, there is cattle here?

R: There will be some, yes.

I: Okay.

R: Some of these smaller, these are uninhabited islands, they leave big flocks of sheep on them that are just there to graze sheep, that one there.

I: But the people, they don’t live there, they just…?

R: No, no.

I: They just have the farm there?

R: They put the sheep there and they just graze the grass.

I: Okay, so about the other islands?

R: There will be some sheep here, but yes, most will be cows, just because the type of land it is.

I: And from which islands are the right core and good quality kind of cattle, which island?

R: Well, [island 1] they would be a good island for cattle, that's into [island 2] and [island 3] would be a good island. [Island 4] there's a lot of cattle in [island 4] because they, it's, because it's quite a dry island so it's a lot of sand and that so they can keep, the cost of production would be less because they keep cattle outside, summer.

I: And about that you mean, you meant about the connection here, it's [island 4] Island, less cost. Do you see the opposite in some of the other islands, so how…?

R: Yes, [island 1] would be, they are wet islands so they do, they would have to…

I: Increased costs?

R: Yes, they are, yes, it's not a huge difference because they still have this ferry to get here and another ferry, so they are all on high cost areas, but it's just different types there.

I: And, but the quality of the cattle they produce is probably less than…?

R: Oh well, they are a different type of cattle, yes, yes, they’ll be a different type of, yes, that's maybe just because of the individuals on the island rather than the specific island I don’t think [inaudible].

I: And what about those, the…?

R: Oh no, it's just a matter what's…

I: Soft?

R: …what's the rest of the mainland, yes.

I: So, it's considered mainland pretty much because they have the road.

R: Yes.

I: Okay, okay, that's good to know. In terms of demographics there is any issues, which ones they are facing the more pressures?

R: Oh, they are all, but this is a very old population up here.

I: They are not for old’s sake, okay.

R: [Voices overlap] it's a big island that's most fragile, the most inhabited island, it's most fragile.

I: And other fragile islands?

R: That way again is the same, because it's quite small the island. [island 5], there's not many active farms, I suppose there's three or four active farms there, so again it's… Well the rest of them they are kind of big enough that there's enough people, but again there's the same problem, they can…there's…it's just getting, the farms are getting bigger, people, there are less people there and it's just, this is happening all over the place, but it’s felt more in the smaller islands because they are smaller communities, whereas the main island, mainland here you can…

I: So, you feel that farm is becoming bigger, it's not necessarily in terms of social cohesion, it's not necessarily a good thing?

R: No, yes, it comes back again as resource efficiency doesn’t it, your labour. A labour unit now, this farm who are, don’t know what a labour unit did 20 years, 100 years ago. So, there are less people and can, one man can look after 100, 150 cows. Whereas, just because of modern machinery, modern buildings, you would need far more people 20 or 30/40 years ago to look after that same number. So, yes, that's just the resource efficiencies, yes, means there is less people.

I: Less people, okay.

R: And less people it effects social cohesion because you have less families, you've less…

I: Less schools, like, you know.

R: Less schools, less doctors, less shops, less, yes, less people volunteering to run the community council or run the community hall or whatever, so that, yes.

I: So, I heard that in [area D] there is a lot of tendency for people to work voluntarily, so how makes that your farm resilient?

R: How does volunteers, yes… Well, you know, if you have a, you know, an active community where people have volunteered to, you know, to…it makes the place a more attractive place to live. So, that that makes, it means your ability to employ people and to keep people in that island, it kind of makes it more attractive to come and work here or stay and work here. And its succession, it improves succession because of if you have a nice place to live that people, you know… And most of the quality work is to do with socialising and helping people and providing activities for people of different ages and genders and whatever, and that just makes the whole place a nicer place to live and work in. So, it kind of, I suppose it's a about…and if people want to live there, and…I don’t know, [inaudible] differently, but yes.

I: So, from those solutions, are there any others that you are applying?

R: No, I don’t think so, no.

I: Okay, is there any other interesting things…

R: Sorry, thinking about one, sharing resources, we do that.

I: How do you share resources?

R: Well, I use the machinery and I…

I: That belongs to someone else?

R: Yes, and also we have labour that's…I employ somebody but I don’t need them the whole time, so he goes and work for other people when I'm quieter, so we share labour that way.

I: Okay and then do you know many interesting things people in different sector, any solutions those they apply, you don’t apply them but you think it's good?

R: Well yes, I think like increasing market, market status, profile differentiation brand. A lot of farmers aren't doing the farmers, you know, just increasing their profile on social media and engaging with consumers that way and showing them what they are doing and I think that's, you know, that helps build this brand and reputation and consumer loyalty, so I think I see people do that.

I: So, final consumers, how they deliver to those?

R: To…

I: Because…

R: Well, if there is like a massive Scottish beef producer or whatever and I'm showing, I'm showing people what I'm doing and just make people engage with what I'm doing and discussing it and showing them how I'm producing nice foods, then they are more likely to go and buy Scottish beef in the supermarket than…

I: Yes, but just general, not the product?

R: No, not like my, no, no, I suppose, well no, because I'm not direct marketing but if you are direct marketing I suppose, yes, that will be, yes, but yes.

I: To show the people they [inaudible] properly the next time it's coming.

[interruption]

Good, okay, so he gave us 30 minutes, I have a little for the next [inaudible, okay, I didn’t ask you before I went there, I realised that right now, you should have asked me before. I'm really sorry, I have lost my focus here, seriously I have lost that. Okay, so you were saying that these people they, are there people here they deal like that kind of direct selling, no?

R: [Voices overlap] I'm not sure, maybe some but not many, no, not in a big way, no.

I: I asked you before but I don’t remember if you, if you answered, why organic, are organic farming, how do you think it's a kind of solution for [area D]? Is it…?

R: Yes, I'm, I've not going down that route because I don’t…it's not something I would agree with I suppose. It's something…I don’t believe in the science behind it for a thing, but I think it's a kind of marketing tool as much as anything. I think if you are injecting all the…I think what a lot of them do is fair enough and it helps resilience and then it helps their sustainability, whatever. But I think complete rejection of all science and all of it is, you know, modern technology is just, it's kind of, you are making life harder for yourself and more difficult for yourself and I wouldn't…I would struggle to farm I think without all of the tools that…

I: There are available for them, yes okay, that's fine. I just wanted to see, yes, I mean how you are thinking about that and why it's not a viable option. Okay, at any, for the options you have selected from those ones, are there any trade-offs either related with the sources / assets that you need to have in order, as pre-requirement, pre-required in order to make this solution feasible, or any impacts?

R: Well, I can't remember what you said about that, but resource efficiency by optimising labour, it certainly has a maybe, kind of, effect social cohesion and the number of people in the community. The same with the technology, technological innovations of the trade-off there, they are kind of, they are sort of, kind of, is it going to, is the financial investment going to pay off if you are an early innovator of, an early adopter of new technology. And the same thing with diversifying, I guess it's, yes, yes, if you are not, maybe lose your focus on what you are maybe wanting to do.

I: Because operationally you are applying more than one solution, are there any trade-offs between those with the supply of choices?

R: Oh they, between the, do you mean like trade-off between these things?

I: Yes, like the fact that the you are doing, then you are applied to the factor there.

R: Oh right, yes, I see, yes, I see.

I: All the different choices you are making, are there any trade-offs within those?

R: Yes, I don’t think so, no, I think they can…I don’t see…not in what I'm doing anyway, no, no, I don’t think so.

I: Okay, how important is time for your family, friends, meeting fellow farmers, for meeting the resilience of your business?

R: I think it's pretty important, yes, well it can, because, you know, because I'm still the manager, I run the business, my health and wellbeing is pretty important to the success of the business, so I do what I can do improve my state of mind and health is important, yes.

I: What are the main places, groups where people meet each other here in [area D] and farmers and learn about transport and this mitigation, [inaudible] effectiveness?

R: I suppose the auction market, people will meet there, it's a social thing every, maybe not so much as they used to, but they do meet there. There are shows through the summertime, people will meet at them, that's kind of once a year, and then…

I: The sales markets, there is one every week?

R: Yes, every week, yes.

I: Yes, okay.

R: Well one every week and then this time of year they’ll have like a sheep sale, and cattle on Mondays, sheep on Tuesday and then other special sale, making sales to folk. So yes, but it might, generally just once a week. Then there is like society for [area D] agricultural discussions society, they have…

I: Who is leading that, which organisation is leading that? Is one society its own?

R: The discussion society is its own, yes.

I: Ah, okay.

R: And they just, they just organise meetings, have meetings every fortnight through the winter time from October to March, they just invite people to speak and so it's a kind of social thing for people as much as anything.

I: Right now, who is organising that?

[section deleted to maintain anonymity – reference to people]

I: Okay, now how important, how supportive do you think are the infrastructures? And when I say infrastructure I mean freight connections, power and the connector, [inaudible] a road or broad networks in [area D] for improving the resilience of livestock farmer procedures and the data in [area D].

R: Yes, I think it could always be better and that they are…

I: In real times, I mean what changes need to be done in order to make your farm more resilient?

R: I suppose, you know, you live in an island, you are…part of being resilient is not being too reliant on these, like, ferry connections and your power and, yes, because you're aware that extreme weathers can interrupt them and delay them. So, I suppose if you made these things more resilient, make the infrastructure more resilient to bad weather then…but how do you, is that possible, what's the cost involved in that, you know? Sometimes the disruption of your power supply or disruption in the ferry terminals.

I: So, you have frequent disruption to power?

R: Not so bad, it's better now than it used to be. You still get storms in the winter time and the power goes off for a short period of time, but they are very good at putting it back on again. It's the same with the ferries, you'll have times when the ferry, the weather is so bad that the ferries can't go for a period of time. But you, you don’t get that, so that's what happens, so I suppose making them more resilient to weather I would say would be one of the things I would change, boats are better than they used to be, the power lines are better than they used to be.

I: So, are you talking, obviously I was talking about both, but do you see any difference between the ferries with connection with the mainland and ferries between, because they run from different companies, so you see either of those can be improved in any possible ways?

R: Yes, I'm not a frequent user of the ferries to the smaller islands, so it's difficult to comment on it, but they are an older, the boats are quite old now and probably need to be renewed to increase their capacity, decrease their speed to make them maybe more resilient to weather. The fact that they are older boats it means they have to take…through the winter time they take one of the boats out every so often for its annual repairs and maintenance, so that reduces the capacity on the farms, they’ve got a less service to the islands and that sort of thing impacts them.

I: There was a kind of common, like, them…the tenders’ duration probably it should be longer.

R: That's when, for the external ferries?

I: Yes.

R: Yes, I think it's every five years. I really don’t know, you need to have it short enough to, you know, to allow changes to be made. If you've locked yourself into a long period of time and you don’t get it right at the beginning, then you have to wait a long time, because and they can't make changes, they… Currently the length of time the last tender, one of the competitor's ferries has stopped, so the ferry is now taking far more freight in them, so they need bigger freight boats. And then another freight boat which they can't maybe do until they have a new tender. So, things will change within the period of tender, you can have a [inaudible] more or less livestock may be shipped off, whatever.

I: So, we discussed a little bit for about what's called hard institutions. Hard institutions in all the [inaudible] roles, so they can be policies, regulations, contracts, tenders, things like that. How general do you find them supportive and what changes need to be done?

R: Yes.

I: We discussed a lot about subsidies, but any other kind of regulations that pretty much effect your business? You also mentioned about, you know, this kind of the [inaudible] sometimes in all the inflexibility they create with environmental schemes, any other comment about general…?

R: I think because I was thinking there's always that continuing ratcheting up of standards a way that I know of, or environmental conditions at the moment were sort of, there's… We had farming was allowed to burn waste which is now coming to an end in January, so that's a new kind of regulation people are going to have to get their heads around and how they dispose of this waste. It's just continually ratcheting them up and increasing the amount of paperwork. And it’s, you know, to stay on top of it and keep aware of what's happening and it's difficult for people, particularly people maybe can, that don’t have a lot of interest. All they do, all they want to do is farm and they contract out a lot of their paperwork and their accountancy work to somebody else to do and all they do is just the practical, physical work on the farm, they are not interested in any of that paperwork side of things. So, for them to be aware of what's happening and keep, you know, they do struggle with it and they see it as a kind of, as a challenge to them I suppose. I think it's always changing and always adapting, there is always new stuff coming in.

I: There were a kind of, if I understood correctly in the past that you were doing more fattening and then now you are doing more store, is a kind of adaption, adaptation to start let's say. So, and it seems more and more people in [area D] they are doing that.

So, generally how, I mean…obviously there's the issue about abattoir which makes the difference, but how you can… There two questions there, one is that do you feel that [area D] should go in one direction more rather than the other. If with a magical way you could have the choice of abattoir, do you think you still, you will dream that and proportion of fattening or store? So, you are going for store because you don’t have the abattoir or you are going for store animals because of other reasons, because you think that it fits better than the environment of your farm?

R: No, no…

I: Or your lifestyle, whatever.

R: Yes, I think, I don’t, this come down to… how is it going to mix, and then not do if it's worthwhile take fattening the animals and take them to slaughter, then you’ll do it. Now at the moment the differentiation is not enough to encourage farmers…

I: In the price, yes.

R: …yes, to people to do it, yes, so it is easier to sell them at a younger age, you've less risk, less cost to buy the feed to finish them, to present them for… To present cattle for store in the markets, it's a lot easier because if you put them into slaughter you have to do a lot, you have to make sure they are clean and clipped and stuff and that's a bit of work, it's harder to do. And you have to maybe [inaudible] the cattle and like you can just take a batch, it's easier to batch them for store I think maybe, you can…whereas they come ready for fat for slaughter maybe less consistent, there maybe is a batch. So, it's certainly easier to do it as store, but [voices overlap].

I: So, it seems that you need some kind of extra skills to do the fattening?

R: Yes.

I: So, overall, then do you feel that those pool of farming skills related to fattening the, it's a bit, you are losing…

R: Yes, well…

I: …not only, I'm not talking about your farm specifically, I'm talking about the outcome in farming…

R: Yes, most possibly yes, possibly yes, because there is certain, yes, yes, possibly if you want to go back to it, yes. You need, yes, it would be a slow change to divorce. Yes, because it's not necessarily a different skill, but it's just, it's more complicated because you have to, yes…

I: And [area D], it's always selected as kind of a good example of, you know, quite a vibrant kind of community that seeks, you know, new ideas and early adopters of the ideas, but what do you feel are the essence, essential different features of [area D] population, I mean the way they think, the way they behave, that makes this community a bit different from other Scottish communities?

R: I think, I think a lot of it what makes [area D] unique in a farming context is the fact that we are all generally owner/occupiers and we have that investment in the land and the community.

I: So, meaning that you are the, you own the land?

R: Yes, we own it, and we, you can see that an investment will give you a good, will give you a return over a period of time. And because you are settled in one place you are more likely to cooperate because you are in a way, a less competitive with your neighbours, so you will, you know, it does encourage cooperation because you can see that over time that if you help somebody then they will help you out. And I think also because we are slightly further away, we are an island, you do tend to look in a bit and see, like, how can we make things work ourselves here and we are a bit further removed from the centres of power that, well we just get on and do it ourselves rather than just wait for somebody else to do it.

I: And so, there is a lot of activity, but I heard also a comment that pretty much there are 30 people or 20 people who are pretty much, they are very, very active and then there is a lot, a bulk of farmers they lay back and leave them all to be done by 30 people. so, do you recognise that?

R: Yes.

I: Okay, it was just a comment. It wasn’t my comment, and I'm not saying whose said that, but anyway…

R: Oh no…

I: …do you see that?

R: No, I can see where you are coming from because yes, if somebody is wanting to do a, you let them get on with it. But I think there will always be somebody that will step up and do it and then say yes, I’ll help, I’ll work in. People will even, if you ask people to help, yes, they always come up and help, yes. It's that kind of shy, there is a shyness or a reticence in [area D] that people don’t like to, you know, put their hand up or speak first, you know, I don’t know why it is, but…

I: They are a bit kind of shyness you mean?

R: Shyness, yes.

I: Okay, so from that list this is characteristics that indicate vulnerability, either in the farm level, or I mean individual business or the whole supply and chain. So, can you see anything that resonates with your farm or the supply and chain, the whole supply and chain in [area D]?

R: I suppose resilience on external or distant resources that we do, you know, I said about the big sale at the market, that's all the buyers for that sale will be coming from off the island, so you are kind of heavily dependent on them coming here and buying that cattle. What's low diversity in assets or entitlements, what does that mean?

I: It's pretty much, encouragement into it, it's more like tenants at the farms, but this is not a big thing, most of the, they own like the farmland. And diversity of assets is you don’t have machinery, you don’t have so, your farm doesn’t have many…

R: No, I think…I would think yes that we are fairly, I wouldn't want to play to that.

I: So, this is more like all the farming, the people, the farming community they don’t have access to the shops, there's a type of access or for tenants they don’t have the freedom to do changes on the farm as they wish to, so do you see these things like that?

R: No, I don’t.

I: But I assume from, you know, from having the business reign, having the other two organisations, you have a pretty much, a good structure in place to help people to have access to resources.

R: I think, yes I think so, yes, I'd say because it is a kind of smaller area that, kind of, we do have most of what we need here on the island, and there's a fair bit of competition between most of them, so yes. I think probably highly specialised production is probably, are pretty reliant on the beef cow.

I: So, you think it's, the fact that you are doing…

R: And they still are using us yes, we are all doing the same thing, more or less.

I: Yes, okay.

R: A little bit of sheep.

I: The slow [inaudible] I'd say is all these kinds of, like the demographics or the fact that they are, you know, slowly large businesses they absorb, not absorb…they sort of they came off the…

R: Yes, we are probably not very, I don’t know, given opportunities of new entrants is maybe something that would need to be addressed, you know, getting more people into the industry, how to keep, but it is happening a bit, but not as much as we could.

I: And then cross [inaudible] is usually a lot of the things you do here, that you don’t have actual power on those because they have been from different power centres. Either it can be from the government or it can be from, if you were supplying retailers then pretty much you don’t have any way to interact with those and do…?

R: Yes, no, well, yes, I think through organisations like the NFU and like the council do, kind of do have quite good contact with governments and stuff like that and explain the situation.

I: So, pretty much you don’t see that as an issue?

R: No, no.

I: And the insufficient recovery from previous shocks or kind of…

R: No, again [voices overlap].

I: So, for a number of wet weathers, you have all these times?

R: Yes…

I: You think that the community has recovered sufficiently?

R: Yes, I think so, yes, you get, like this year, the dry year, most people recover.

I: Okay, so the last one is this one here. Who you think are the quite, very crucial organisations, but obviously these are quite generic categories, but think more broadly? Like here in Edinburgh, I don’t know, NFUS is really, really crucial, it makes huge difference? So, it's just an example, I'm not meaning, I don’t say the NFUS is…

R: Yes, who is the key, who is the key one? Just on these ones or on the whole?

I: Yes, in the whole thing, I mean, yes.

R: The whole thing, oh the key, what's the key. Yes, I think we should say upland farmers because they…

I: So, for example here, you have the vet, you have the rings, the discussion groups, the NFUS, SAC, the [inaudible] door, that…I mean…

R: I think they are all important, I don’t think any of them were…they are, you know, part of the, the fact there is resilience because we have a lot of these, kind of, if one was to disappear it wouldn't be the end of the world, somebody else would fill in the gap I think, so like it's difficult to pick out one as being particular.

I: Okay, and what is the effect of, I mean, how much not exactly trust, but how much do you see as effective and generate good impact for your business, the advice you get in from SAC, mostly they advise you are getting for HIE, how much make a difference to your business?

R: Yes…

I: Because it got mixed, kind of, in…

R: Yes, well I don’t have much involvement with HIE much at all really in a development like this, it's kind of, no, no, I've not been hugely involved in agriculture that I'm aware of.

I: So, for example, a comment I got from there is sometimes they tend to not exactly push but pull farmers to invest a lot.

R: Well I guess, I see, yes, yes, well…

I: And pretty much later on they find difficulties to survive because they have invested too much.

R: Yes, I don’t…yes, part of the, the role of the SAC has changed over the years, you know, one time when I first remember they were at the [inaudible] they were in advisory and they kind of told you things. And now, kind of, are an extension service, now they are much more about making sure farmers comply with the rules and to fill in forms and, you know, if you not interested in doing that you get them to do all that stuff you and apply for grants and apply for…

I: Are you talking about SAC?

R: SAC.

I: Ah, yes, yes. So, because I was confused, I thought you were talking about the HIE.

R: No, no, I don’t know what they do, no, no, I'm not sure.

I: Okay.

R: Yes, so [voices overlap].

I: Okay, good, great, thank you.

R: I guess [voices overlap].

I: Did you find it difficult? Honestly.

R: Well, it made me think, yes, that's not a bad thing, that's okay.

I : Yes, do you find these cards easy?

R: Oh, it was okay, I mean I could follow them, yes, yes.

I: Yes.

R: But it was, yes.

I: I was doing my best because they are so complex and so many different topics.

R: No, I mean, that makes sense, yeah that’s good.

I: No, I mean with all the formulated cards, they were some of them they did make it more difficult for you than others?

R: No, it just made me think about things, because I don’t think it's difficult.

**End of transcript**