

1 **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

2 INTERVIEWERS: Dolores Rey (Cranfield University)

3 DATE: 20TH FEB 2015

4 FARM LOCATION (NUTS3): UKH33 (Essex)

5 ***Interviewers (I)***

6 *Grower (G)*

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8 **I: Let's start by talking a little bit about this business; what is your role here,**
9 **for how long have you been here, the types of crops...**

10 G: My grandfather started the business in 1929. My father and uncle took it out in
11 the last 70s, and I came back from University and working elsewhere in 1987. At
12 that time it was the next door farm, which is 1 km away, and we had 20 hectares, 32
13 different crops and grew for markets, shops... so a very small company. And it
14 wasn't making any money because supermarkets just came in and the business
15 changed, so I went home and went to a local cooperative and start doing lettuce for
16 supermarkets. And then I got involved with another company and we started to do
17 basically lettuce for bags. And the bag lettuce industry grew very quickly and... I
18 took this farm in 2001 and started out the current salads business.

19 We currently grow 200 hectares of lettuce. In 2007 I joined with another company in
20 Lincolnshire as a joined adventure to spread the costs, and we run the business as
21 a whole. He is doing another 400 hectares of outdoor lettuce, so it is 600 ha
22 between us.

23 About 6-7 years ago we got concerned that several things...the margins started to
24 be squeezed, the weather was such a big influence, climate change or changeable
25 weather whichever you take was a real concern to us. Now I am Development
26 Director of the whole business because we decided that innovation was the way to
27 develop the business. I let somebody else to run the farm. And I have been involved
28 in start the business, we put up 20 hectares of tunnels in the last 2 years. We had
29 an arrangement with a customer and they guarantee to have the crop.

30 [Confidential information]

31 **I: Now let's start talking about droughts, in the online survey you said that**
32 **you remember the 1976 drought as a very huge one with high impact, maybe**
33 **you were not in the business at that time...**

34 G: I was very young...I just started to work, I was 16 and I just left school. It was my
35 first summer. No, 1975 was my first summer and it was also very hot. The thing is at
36 that time we only had one reservoir of 1 million gallons and we run out of water in
37 weeks. And we were selling tiny little cabbages for lots and lots of money because
38 nobody had water. 1976 inspired everybody to start thinking about reservoirs and
39 water. Since then we have really focused on getting enough water because this is

40 the driest area in the country. We have anywhere between 18 and 20 inches of rain
41 per year. I mean in 1980s we were designated as desert because we had 3 years of
42 less than 15 inches, so it is a very dry area. So because of that we are very focused
43 on being sure that we have plenty of water.

44 **I: I have seen that you said that in the 90s the impact of droughts were**
45 **medium, and low or no impact in the 21st century. I was wondering if that is**
46 **because you have done anything to reduce the impact...**

47 G: Yes, because we have joined together as a group, and there is 100 million
48 gallons there, 100 million gallons there, there is 100 million gallons there, there is 20
49 million gallons here...So as a group we can move water, and we have invested
50 heavily, we have invested very very heavily. So you never got enough water but I
51 find it very difficult to believe that we won't have enough.

52 **I: Talking about restrictions when there is a drought, I would like to know what**
53 **are your feelings about S57, if you know what are the triggers and the reasons**
54 **behind the restrictions from the EA...**

55 G: We have been lucky, we had a restriction once. One of our small reservoirs is in
56 stream reservoir so that is the one that has been restricted. It is only a million
57 gallons but...More of our water now is grey water and grey water doesn't come
58 under any restrictions. So when we have restrictions we pump the restricted when
59 we are allowed to and on the other days we pump grey water. So we haven't been
60 affected by restrictions, we are very lucky

61 **I: When there is a drought and your yield and/or quality is affected; have you**
62 **experienced any problems with supermarkets or...?**

63 G: Actually I like droughts...

64 **I: You are the first person that said this...**

65 G: Because we have spent a fortune on water and irrigation. We can irrigate all of
66 our land, once a day, any time we like. So we have no restriction on the amount of
67 water, and we have plenty of water...So actually when there is a drought then the
68 investment comes into place.

69 **I: And you are in a better position than other farmers...**

70 G: Yeah. I mean sometimes it gets a little bit....

71 **I: Yes, but you are well prepared for this**

72 G: Yes

73 **I: Now, although you have different reservoirs and different water sources, I**
74 **want to know a little bit more about the decision process. So when the year**
75 **starts and you think it is going to be a dry year, you start to do something,**
76 **and then it doesn't rain so you are more worried...So what are the decisions**
77 **that you normally make?**

78 G: No, we just look after the crop. I mean if things get very low, then we do start to
79 think about process, but we've never got to that. We start a decision tree but we
80 didn't get to the point when we implement that decision tree

81 **I: Yes, it is true that you are very well prepared for that, but maybe you have**
82 **like some reservoirs that you will only use them...**

83 G: We start to move water. We start to make sure that when we are not pumping we
84 move water to the appropriate reservoir; so when we do start watering heavily we've
85 got the water in the place that we need

86 **I: Talking about the role that different agencies or the government when there**
87 **is a drought, I don't know if you are happy or you think they do enough for the**
88 **farming sector. I am talking about the EA, NFU...**

89 G: To be quiet honest, when we had the last drought, we were less prepared that
90 we are now; we found some water and tried to get the permission to move it
91 downstream and take it out

92 **I: Like a water trading?**

93 G: Yeah, and the EA couldn't have been more supportive. They were fantastic. I
94 mean, we bought it, we got the licence, and then it rained as always happens...But
95 yes, they were really supportive. I mean, you appreciate that they have a really
96 difficult job to do. So it is difficult...I mean, sometimes it is frustrating that it seems
97 that farmers take the burden of it because it is much more visible, our water. And we
98 only use 1% of the water, but if you ask anybody they will say that we use 100% of
99 water. We are not our best friends, you know? Sometimes we do stupid things and it
100 goes on the wrong side...But there needs to be a realization that water is critical for
101 agriculture and not just for housing and business.

102 **I: Talking about aspects that could be improved in order to better manage**
103 **drought, you mentioned the encouragement of water trading, giving farming a**
104 **central role...**

105 G: Yes, it really annoys me...I go to several EA talks and I have been biting on it for
106 the last 10 years saying that. We have massive floods... if they encourage farmers
107 to build reservoirs and just take it in times of floods, then you could save water off
108 and you could actually alleviate some of these problems. You wouldn't get rid of all
109 of it, you could actually benefit everybody by doing it and their argument has always
110 been that they are not willing to fund it because it such a large organization they
111 cannot do it. Although the last 2 or 3 times I have talked to them about it and their
112 opinions have softened. It seems stupid to me, it is not so much in this area
113 because we are not in a high flood area, but in parts of the country where there are
114 high flood areas then, to encourage farmers to get grants or tax relief to build
115 reservoirs and store water. It might be only 1 year out of 4 but actually it would
116 encourage people to storage enough water in that year out of 4 to last the 4 years.
117 Actually we could be like river meadows used to be, able to buffer water. I think
118 there is a real win for everybody there. And it needs to be look at by the EA, and
119 also RDP and rural funding and all the aspects of it.

120 **I: And is there any other issue that you think we should do something about**
121 **it?**

122 G: I mean, you know, as farmers we need to make sure we keep rivers clean. And
123 we are very environmental friendly in terms of spraying and washing out, things like
124 that. The EA has a role in terms of discharge to the rivers from sewage farms.
125 Sometimes when you actually look at the river, it needs sewage. So we need to try
126 to hit that spot

127 **I: In your opinion, what lessons can be learnt from previous droughts?**

128 G: Well, my lesson is to store as much water as you can. We have gone away
129 from...you know, the EA is very keen for you to build reservoirs and withdraw
130 summer abstractions. So our lesson is to build as many open sources and
131 discourage many summer licences as possible.

132 The other thing is about cooperation. You know, farmers are notoriously poor at
133 actually cooperating. And with a lot of potatoes, carrots...root crop people that they
134 rotate over a large area for 6-7 years, they have unused water sources sitting there
135 for 5-6 years and that is criminal, because it is licenced so you are not allowed to
136 abstract anymore and it is actually sitting there doing nothing. So it is their
137 responsibility to actually use that across the sector

138 **I: Do you want to add anything before concluding this interview?**

139 G: No, I think this is it.