

1 **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

2 INTERVIEWERS: Dolores Rey (Cranfield University) (Phone)

3 DATE: 24<sup>TH</sup> MAR 2016

4 FARM LOCATION (NUTS3): UKH14 (Suffolk)

5 ***Interviewers (I)***

6 *Grower (G)*

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8 **I: Let's start with some general information related to your business.**

9 G: Do you want me to talk about all our businesses together? We have various, but  
10 they are farmed as one, so we will talk about the whole thing

11 **I: What proportion of it can be irrigated?**

12 G: 85%

13 **I: Do you remember more or less what was the proportion irrigated in 2014?**

14 G: 75%

15 **I: What crops do you grow and what are their average yields?**

16 G: We grow early and second early. I don't know where you want to put those, but I  
17 would put them all together. The average yield is 40 tonnes per hectare.

18 **I: Are they irrigated, right?**

19 G: Yes

20 **I: Do you have any other crops in your farm?**

21 G: We do lots of different vegetables, so it is difficult to give you an average but  
22 again it would be around 40 tonnes per hectare. We grow onions, carrots, parsnip,  
23 spring greens, turnips...a dozen of different ones.

24 **I: Anything else?**

25 G: Yes, cereals. Some of them are irrigated and some aren't. Wheat is grown on  
26 heavy land and not irrigated, and barleys are grown on very light land and are  
27 irrigated and they are about 6.5 tonnes. Sugar beet, they are about 70 tonnes per  
28 hectare and we have both irrigated and non-irrigated, both 70 tonnes per hectare.  
29 And we have grass but I can't give you a weight or anything because we don't  
30 harvest it really

31 **I: Now, regarding the water sources that you get the water from...**

32 G: We get 62% from surface water, 38% groundwater. We don't use public mains,  
33 collect...Well, obviously we collect water in our reservoirs but that is not really  
34 rainwater...

35 **I: Yes, we will talk about that later**

36 G: OK. And we don't reuse water

37 **I: What kind of abstraction license do you have?**

38 G: We have two types. Winter only abstraction but most of them is summer only  
39 abstraction

40 **I: OK, so you have both...What irrigation methods do you use?**

41 G: 90% rain guns, 5 % booms and 5% centre pivots.

42 **I: When you have to decide when and how much to irrigate, what methods do  
43 you normally apply?**

44 G: We use all three methods you put down...Because we use a water balance  
45 calculation, a bit by hand and a bit by computer. We also do in-field soil moisture  
46 measurement, but also...So we do 50% water balance, 50 % in-field soil moisture,  
47 which is 100%, but we also do a 100% judging by checking everything. What I am  
48 saying is that we do 50% water balance, 50% soil moisture measurement, but also  
49 as a double-check we use judgement. We never water on the basis of the first two,  
50 we always use judgement.

51 **I: What is the final destination of your production?**

52 G: Early potatoes is mostly supermarkets with a little bit of processing. Maincrop  
53 potatoes is mostly supermarkets with a bit of processing. Cereals is processing for  
54 the barley and export for the wheat. Sugar beet is processing.

55 **I: Now let's start talking about droughts...**

56 G: Very difficult for me to answer this but I will try

57 **I: Yes, this is one of the most difficult questions because people sometimes  
58 don't really remember what happened...and I don't know for how long have  
59 you been in the business, but if you could more or less estimate the impact of  
60 these droughts...**

61 G: Well I can, because there are very low impact because we got plenty of  
62 water...But the impact wasn't the drought...well, are you talking about the impact of  
63 restrictions or the fact that it was dry??

64 **I: Now we are talking about the impacts of that year being dry, so what were  
65 the impacts on yield and quality**

66 G: I wasn't actually farming at that time but I know 1976 was low because we had a  
67 very good irrigation system. 1988-92 it was low, it was a minor impact. 1995-97  
68 recall that, and we had a voluntary restriction but again because of when it came in

69 we had done most of our watering so it was low. I can't really recall an issue in 2003  
70 or 2004-06 so I put that as low. 2010-12 it looked like it was going to be a problem  
71 and then it rained every day...so I put low in all those

72 **I: And more or less what was the yield reduction if any?**

73 G: I would say 10% across the board for all the irrigated crops

74 **I: In terms of prices, do you remember any change during the last drought?**

75 G: Sugar beet definitely not, they are fixed. Cereals definitely not. Vegetables and  
76 early potatoes I could see changes in prices but not in the periods we sell, because  
77 we sell very early. So although the prices may have been affected by the drought,  
78 they didn't help us...You are getting different answers from other people I am sure.

79 **I: Have you experience any problems with supermarkets or processors during  
80 the previous droughts?**

81 G: No, we have very good working relations, so no. I suspect some people did but  
82 we didn't.

83 **I: How do you think the impacts of droughts on the fields affect the rest of the  
84 food supply chain? Or do you think the supply chain is strong enough to deal  
85 with that kind of situation?**

86 G: I can't say because I am not a believer, we actually had our sort of water. I am bit  
87 of a dinosaur you see? We pump water out of the sea every day of the year, so I am  
88 flooded most of the time so I am not sure what this drought business is all about  
89 really...To be honest the drier the better for me. From my personal position, the  
90 drier the better because there is no doubt other people have yield issues and  
91 therefore I am in a better position. So for me a drought is brilliant actually so  
92 although I said that it doesn't have that much effect on prices or yields, I am better  
93 off in a dry year

94 **I: Yes, I have heard that before from other farmers and those are the ones who  
95 have reservoirs and different alternatives...**

96 G: We have not got necessarily that much water but we can't think they might try to  
97 stop us using it but I would like to see them try... because I have a lot of water that  
98 is pump out to the sea...which in fact it has to be paid for. Suffolk is not short of  
99 water. We pump more out to sea...three pumps within 10 miles are here, than we  
100 use for the entire irrigation in the county. So I don't think we are short of water, but  
101 we need to get it to the right place, you see? So you are not going to hear me being  
102 negative about droughts

103 **I: Well, I am happy for you**

104 G: Well, I know this will come back to hit me. But droughts for me are a positive  
105 thing because we can irrigate through them and therefore give us comparative  
106 advantage. We might suffer a small yield decrease but that is usually made up with

107 people...well, not necessarily price rises but the fact that people want your product.  
108 It is actually not more per tonne but more per acre if that makes sense

109 **I: Have you been affected by abstraction restrictions in the past?**

110 G: Yes, we have. In 95-97 the EA was concerned about water. We got together as a  
111 group (WAG) and we did a voluntary 50% reduction of total water usage. We  
112 offered that we will try and keep to 50% of our total license volume. We only use  
113 60% of the license volume in Suffolk so it wasn't that difficult to achieve. Now, I use  
114 90% if not 100% but other people use 20-30% so on average we delivered what  
115 they wanted. So yes, we have a voluntary 50% and therefore we didn't have so  
116 many problems and then it also it rained again just when it got serious. Often the  
117 droughts kicked in and then we get lucky and it pours rain. In 2010-12 (I hope this  
118 year is right...)...we had a year that we had to alternate the irrigation on surface  
119 water

120 **I: And that was mandatory or...?**

121 G: Yes...well, I think it was. I am not sure actually but ...Yes, I think it was  
122 mandatory. I cannot remember if it was 2004-06 or 10-12... It was 2004-2006. That  
123 was very irritating because to set up irrigation...irrigation wasn't best if you do one  
124 day in one out, you are better off doing 4 days watering and 3 without. Alternate  
125 days was not very useful. Did it affect us? Because we are a mix of surface and  
126 groundwater we managed to irrigate every day. And reservoirs, we have all you  
127 see? It only affected surface water so we managed to get round it one way or  
128 another. It just cost me because I had to make sure that I was irrigating from surface  
129 water the day I was supposed to and then I had to move it to the groundwater  
130 supplies for the other day. It was just a nightmare but we could manage. 2012 there  
131 was a lot of talk about not being able to fill reservoirs. We had...I think I am going to  
132 call it a voluntary restriction on our reservoir filling, but we still filled in the reservoir  
133 so I wasn't too worried. But that was definitely a voluntary restriction.

134 **I: What do you think about S57 in terms of whether you get the right notice,  
135 information of how the restrictions are applied...what is your feeling about it?**

136 G: I think I would like that to go really. It is a very big hammer to smash a very small  
137 nut really. To be fair to the EA, they have never...have they?? When you said it was  
138 mandatory I wonder if those alternate days was S57...perhaps it was. Well, we  
139 haven't had a full S57 as far as I know. They are careful not to use it to be fair...But  
140 I would like to see it go because it is an uncertainty that you cannot plan for.

141 **I: Regarding the sources of information that you use when there is a  
142 drought...**

143 G: I use my WAG because they talk to the EA. They talk to all the organizations and  
144 we get all the information from them. That is the only place I bother really...I do  
145 have direct contact with the EA anyway

146 **I: Do you think governmental bodies and other farmers associations help**  
147 **farmers in the right way when there is a drought and what things could be**  
148 **improved?**

149 G: I think a lot of farmers now are in WAG and I think that is one of the best ways of  
150 extracting information. That doesn't mean you shouldn't do it yourself as well. It is  
151 very difficult for the EA, I think the information is difficult to come by but I am not too  
152 unhappy because that is why we set the group for...

153 **I: What kind of strategies do you apply when there is a drought and how is the**  
154 **decision process?**

155 G: I always work with the local abstractors group; that is the main thing I would do.  
156 And we probably evaluate our water resource position; that is the second most  
157 important thing. So we work out what we could do regardless of what the EA do and  
158 things like that. Then I would say we might have to personally negotiate with the EA  
159 because we have some sources that I think they are incorrectly allocated to surface  
160 and they must be ground, so it may be useful for me to argue. We will continue to  
161 irrigate the full area, whether it is to a reduced schedule or not it would depend on  
162 what I have worked out when I was evaluating my water resource. It wouldn't  
163 necessarily do the reduced scheduled, I might take a gamble of whether the rain will  
164 come...we irrigate unusually for a very long period of time because we have  
165 different crops that grow at different time. So we start in April and we are still  
166 irrigating at the end of October. So in some cases we will go flat out with all our  
167 irrigation and then not perhaps have of the very late crops, maybe don't grow them  
168 if we are worried about water. We can make decisions as the season goes on,  
169 because there are going to be crops behind other crops. So we can control our  
170 water use to a certain extent without impacting too much in our business.

171 **I: Do you give any priority to the most valuable crops do you grow?**

172 G: There is no doubt we prioritize our high value crops, no doubt. To be comfortable  
173 we need all our crops to be good. What I ticked is that we irrigate a reduce area to  
174 the full schedule, and also the full area to a reduced schedule. It would depend on  
175 day to day decisions. We don't rush around flooding the place. We would love to  
176 irrigate at night but we wouldn't get around, we would love to do it, we would aim to  
177 do it but it wouldn't work, trust me. Generally, we keep our customers informed  
178 about the situation as far as the supply contracts are concerned, but we haven't had  
179 to renegotiate them, not formally. I haven't developed a drought management plan.  
180 And water trading is too difficult and every time I have tried to look at it the EA can  
181 get their head around whether is available or not so I have given up on that. And  
182 water trading doesn't make more water as I keep telling anybody. They keep telling  
183 this is the answer to the question, but it is not the answer.

184 **I: After the 2010-12 drought, did you make any change in your business?**

185 G: Yes. We built the reservoir but to be fair it was planned really before the drought.  
186 It was built around then but it was planned prior to that drought. It was on a contract  
187 farm and the landlord...I suggested it would be no harm to have a reservoir. So you  
188 can say yes, there has been an investment and it was a reservoir. That was all.

189 **I: What management aspects could be changed to reduce the impacts?**

190 G: Get rid of S57. I don't like the next one, not the next one, not the next one. Yes, I  
191 like giving farming a central role in catchment management. Yes I like that. And that  
192 is.

193 **I: And is there any other thing that could be done?**

194 G: Yes, leave everything as it is. You know that they are changing everything at the  
195 moment. Just leave us alone. That seems to work for me.

196 **I: How do you rate drought risk for your business?**

197 G: This is interesting because I told you I don't think it is a risk, I don't think it should  
198 be a risk but I think that the powers could make it a risk. Personally, I think there is  
199 plenty of water here but there is a risk of bureaucracy. So I put it as a 5, because  
200 although I am confident I have plenty of water at me, people might not let me to use  
201 it.

202 **I: Do you think droughts and water scarcity are going to become more  
203 frequent in the future in the UK?**

204 G: In reality no I don't, so I put no. But of course the powers might suggest that it is  
205 happening more. I think those that have the agenda says that is gonna happen  
206 more, but I think we are flooded now more than we have been before and we are  
207 getting much more summer rain. So we will see, but I am saying no.

208 **I: OK, but if water scarcity and droughts will be more frequent, what things  
209 would you do?**

210 G: At the moment I am not willing to invest in drought management strategies. At  
211 the moment. But yes, an on-farm reservoir will provide greater security. So although  
212 I am not doing it at the moment I am more than happy to build a reservoir in the  
213 future if and when it becomes a thing that I need to. So it is not in the business plan  
214 but if we have to have a reservoir because the powers are insisting that I cannot use  
215 the water that is around me, I will do because I have a winter source. But I will not  
216 do it until I need to

217 **I: Is there anything else you want to add before finishing?**

218 G: We are getting better at soil management but we are not actively as we should  
219 do probably, we are doing more things to conserve water but I don't think I will put it  
220 that we are investing on it majorly.

221 I think it is government policy which will affect me more than physical water supply.  
222 So it is government policy, or EA policy, or European policy more likely to affect me  
223 that the physical water quantity that I have around me. So it is the impact that they  
224 have on the water that they allow me to use rather than the physical water here. So  
225 it is a political thing well above my head. This is my main concern.