

1 **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPT**

2 INTERVIEWER: Dolores Rey (Cranfield University)

3 DATE: 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2015

4 FARM LOCATION (NUTS3): UKE22 (North Yorkshire)

5 *Interviewer (I)*

6 *Grower (G)*

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8 **I: Let's start by talking a little bit more about your farming experience, so ...for**  
9 **how long have you been in the business...?**

10 G: I have been doing this about 40 years now. We grow a variety of crops, mainly  
11 cereals, we grow peas and beans; beans usually for human consumption and  
12 potatoes.

13 **I: OK. I have seen in the online survey that you remember the 1976 drought as**  
14 **a very huge one, with very high impacts. Can you tell me what do you**  
15 **remember about that? I know it is a long time ago but...**

16 G: Basically 1975 was a fairly dry year, and the winter between 1975 and 1976 was  
17 extremely dry. And then 1976, I am sure everybody told you, was very hot and very  
18 very dry, the aquifers must have been reasonably low I think because the winter in  
19 between was dry in this area. And the summer was very hot, crops were just  
20 established...To be honest, we had about half an inch...we didn't use to monitor it  
21 but we had what we describe as a good rain around the second week of July. So  
22 our potato crops were not too bad. The biggest problem in 1976 was the 10<sup>th</sup> of  
23 September or 11<sup>th</sup> of September (my memory is rubbish...), it started to rain and it  
24 never stopped. So whatever crops you had in the ground which included at that  
25 stage 90% of people maincrop potatoes if not 100%, was just a complete battle to  
26 get it out of the ground. 1976 was a year of extremes, it went from extremely dry to  
27 extremely wet in a short period of time. So that was what it was. It contributed to  
28 exceptionally high prices of potatoes and...all the rest of it, what I am sure  
29 everybody told you

30 **I: OK, I have seen in the online survey that you remember the next droughts**  
31 **as medium impact, and the last two as low impact. Is that because you did**  
32 **something to reduce the impact?**

33 G: Yes, we basically were able to irrigate after that. We couldn't irrigate in 1976  
34 here, we were not organized. But once we got some irrigation we were watering  
35 crops as we thought necessary. In fact I am sure you are aware, there has been  
36 very little research on irrigating cereals or legumes in this country. So whether  
37 irrigation is beneficial or not, I don't know. It is timing, seems to be...nobody seems  
38 to know, because any research dates back to the 1960 and may not even been  
39 done in this country. When it comes to potatoes, vegetables and things like that,

40 there is a lot of information. But for cereals, peas, which frequently can suffer, there  
41 is no much knowledge of what to do, but we just tend to...if it looks dry, give it a  
42 drink. So we work on that basis, sorry it is not very scientific. There isn't much  
43 science there. There is for potatoes or vegs, but there is very little science for  
44 anything else. That we are aware of anyway...But if we have the water available,  
45 time available we just go and keep the irrigation going.

46 **I: I have seen that you didn't suffer any abstraction restrictions in the past,**  
47 **but how do you feel about S57? Do you think it is fair, the process is**  
48 **transparent...?**

49 G: You will have to tell me what S57 is, it doesn't cross my radar yet...

50 **I: Oh yes, the EA can apply some restrictions to abstractions when there is a**  
51 **drought**

52 G: OK, it doesn't apply to us because all our licences are pre-1963. I know as we  
53 didn't irrigate in 1976 but the licences predate that for one reason or another. One is  
54 an old quarry from washing stone in a quarry and we inherited it, and that is mid-  
55 1960s. And the other one we inherited is from another farmer, so we are  
56 unstoppable, our licences don't have any restrictions on in terms of...like that.

57 When did the restrictions come in? I can't remember...

58 **I: I have to say that I don't know exactly...**

59 G: [confidential comment]

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

61 G: Potatoes I suppose is the main one you are interested in. It is mainly for fish &  
62 chips shops, but some ware potatoes for domestic trade, household consumption.  
63 The cereals are nearly all for seed. So all we are interested in when we are  
64 producing cereals for seed is quality. We have to produce the right goods at the  
65 right time. Everybody wants results, nobody wants excuses and so we make sure  
66 that it happens

67 **I: I have seen you didn't experience any problems with your customers.**

68 G: No, we are very happy with all we've got.

69 **I: What do you think how the impacts of droughts on the fields are transmitted**  
70 **through the rest of the food supply chain? For example, do you think**  
71 **processors or supermarkets are very impacted by droughts?**

72 G: Supermarkets...we don't deal with them. I mean, they aren't very interested  
73 aren't they? In your problems. If there really is a shortage...10 years ago there was  
74 a big problem with vining peas for the frozen peas market. And normally they just go  
75 to Poland and say: can you send us a load of frozen peas please? But they couldn't  
76 have more either because there were a very short supply. So the supermarkets just  
77 low the quality a bit, but I don't think the farmers benefit from that at all. The  
78 supermarkets aren't very sympathetic to your production problems...I can't

79 imagine...There is no reason why they should be. You signed a contract, it is kind of  
80 your problem isn't it? You don't have to sign that contract.

81 **I: Of course, if you said you are going to provide that production and you**  
82 **don't....**

83 G: You have to do it...I am sorry, contracts work like that. Regardless of problems  
84 you have to...As I said, people want results, they don't want excuses.

85 **I: Talking about drought management strategies, although you didn't suffer**  
86 **any abstraction restrictions, if you know there is a drought and you may not**  
87 **have enough water to irrigate your crops...how do you manage droughts?**

88 G: How do you decide what is going to be irrigated and what isn't? We have quite a  
89 lot of capacity in terms of water, so I might think a little bit about this...but on the  
90 whole the strategy is irrigate early. If you got a problem, go irrigating, don't wait,  
91 because it may start to rain. And nearly all the yield and the quality is one all lost in  
92 the early days anyway. And so you have to irrigate as soon as there is a problem,  
93 as soon as there is a requirement, we would never wait. Because you know, in a  
94 month time, when things start to get tough, and we start to run out of water a little  
95 bit, it might rain. So, you know... who knows? We will always go early, if there is a  
96 strategy, that would be the one.

97 **I: Do you think your perception about drought risk has evolved over time? So**  
98 **maybe at the beginning you weren't very worried about that, but after several**  
99 **drought episodes...**

100 G: Well, it depends on where you are. I have been talking to somebody in East  
101 Anglia last week, and they said: Oh, it is really wet down here.

102 So the last 3 months, Dec-Feb we only had 109 mm here in total. It is very very dry  
103 in Yorkshire, the last year he had 330 in the same period. It is very very dry, very  
104 variable. This year...this year could be dry. The forecast of the moment if you look  
105 at the forecast of the Met Office it is basically giving a fairly dry month to come. I am  
106 sure you monitor it closer than I do, but that is what is suggesting at the moment.  
107 And here, we had a very little rainfall in Dec, Jan and Feb. That is not much over 3  
108 months...But I would not say that is....It is very very variable, tremendously variable.  
109 I think the weather is more...the weather is more lumpy that is used to be. This  
110 might be just me, but it does seem that we get a lot of one thing, or at lot of the  
111 other. I am not sure if the statistics would wrap that up, but that is what it feels like

112 **I: Talking about how governmental bodies, WAG, NFU, UKIA...what do you**  
113 **think about the help that you receive from them during drought?**

114 G: UKIA is really good, it is extremely good, it is a good thing. I wasn't aware the  
115 NFU would give me any help at all, neither the EA for that matter. As far as I am  
116 concerned the EA is just the police. I realize that they do more on that, but I never  
117 take the advantage of it. And we are not members of the NFU so...

118 **I: You said in the online survey that the most important thing to improve**  
119 **drought management is to give farming a more central role. Could you tell me**  
120 **why is that and if you think is there any other issue that should be improved?**

121 G: Why farmers should be in control of water or have more to say in it?? Well, if you  
122 take life in general, the most important thing is something to eat, isn't it? Everything  
123 else I am afraid is secondary. I realize that for most people...they just don't know  
124 anything about food there, but it is actually top of the list. So it should really, in every  
125 government thinking, be in my opinion top of the list. Everything else comes after  
126 that. You know, in this country, people with full stomach have a lot of things to worry  
127 about, hungry people only have one. And that is the situation, that is what I think.

128 **I: What lessons can we learn from previous droughts? What things worked**  
129 **well or didn't work in terms of drought management and agriculture?**

130 G: Well, they are all talking about breeding drought tolerant varieties these days.  
131 Plenty of other countries manage with a lot less water than what we get, and we  
132 may have to start to grow slightly different varieties and crops, and modify the way  
133 we do things. And think about conserving moisture more than we do. But usually a  
134 drought situation through the winter is always...you know it hits the spring or early  
135 summer and continues...And by that time, to be honest most of the crops... there is  
136 nothing great that you can do other than give them some water. Unless you  
137 have...we may have to go for varieties that grow in drier areas or even crops, you  
138 know? Things will change if these droughts do actually happen. We haven't had a  
139 drought for a little while. We had dry spells, periods of time when there is no as  
140 much water as the crops could do with...But I don't know, I don't think it is quite the  
141 same as a drought.

142 You probably read this in the paper yesterday, about this business in Syria that has  
143 been closed by drought after 4 years with almost no rainfall. It was exceptionally  
144 dry, and people was just having to leave rural areas and move to towns. So these  
145 droughts caused also that people coming from Africa and trying to cross through the  
146 Mediterranean to Italy. Quite a few have been driven by droughts really.

147 I think this country is probably pretty lucky. But having said that, all these things are  
148 going to have an impact on us. But what to do about it? I really don't know...

149 **I: Yes, it is a very complex issue...**

150 G: Yes, it is a complex situation, but you don't need...

151 **I: Is there anything else that you would like to add before finishing this**  
152 **interview?**

153 G: No, not really...Water and scarcity of water give some opportunities to some  
154 people, and that is what we think. So we try to work on that basis

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