

The Faces Behind Our Food

Interview with Amanda, Mansergh Hall Farm

Interviewer: Desna Mackenzie

Johnny Bean also present

Duration: 23 minutes.58 seconds

Date and time: 29th September 2016 9:00am

Location: Mansergh Hall Farm, nr Kirkby Lonsdale

| Time (minutes.seconds) | Interview transcript |
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| 0.00 | Interviewer in bold , Amanda in normal type Interjections in [square brackets], other sounds and notes in (these brackets) [.and that on] Yeah, no, I'm going to leave that off now, [ok] I think, cause I've left it off and I've pressed record so we're recording [oh right, okay, okay, right]. So I've nicely segued into it, so, erm [yeah, ok]. |
| 0.11 | Yeah, so it's been really interesting watching erm James doing the milking the sheep this morning, and we, we know that it's quite a new enterprise. Can you talk a bit about what Mansergh Hall were doing in business terms before and why you've made the change to the sheep? |
| 0.26 | Well, prior to that we used to erm process and produce our own fresh meats [right] , so lamb, beef and pork [yeah] . And, basically, er we'd been doing that for 24 years so not, not a short length of time [yeah] . Er, business had changed over the years and developed, erm, and was successful [yeah] . But almost too successful in that it was destroying us, as people. It was taking over our lives. |
| 0.54 | Erm my husband and I and my Dad er partners... we're partners in that business and Simon and I my husband we never saw each other [mhm] , we never saw our children, and sadly my dad isn't very well and it just made us think what is the point [yeah] . Er we needed to look at what we were doing and like I say it was very successful erm but we had er a hog roast business as well so we looked at that and thought to ourselves right, there is er two things we can do we can either get more staff and work to pay them which I'm afraid is a reality of, of employing people [yeah] or look at the element that makes more money [yeah] that we can manage and run ourselves [yeah] but have the same erm message at heart that we produce it and we care [mmm] about what we do [yeah] . So it's very much the same ethos but we're not selling it fresh, we're cooking it. |
| 1.48 | Erm so that that meant we were changing the way we were doing the farm, essentially [mhm] . Erm in that we weren't erm producing it to come through our shop, through the mail order and the [yes] to the hotels and restaurants [yeah] , so it was quite a big enterprise [yeah] . Erm so, the farm hasn't changed massively [yeah] because we're still producing the lamb, the beef, and the pork [yeah] , but it's going to a different market [yeah] so not through us but to erm more specialised butchers and not er direct to hotels and shops [yeah] but through a wholesaler, that kind of thing, through the auction markets [yeah] . |

The Faces Behind Our Food

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| 2.26 | And James, he had left the farm a few years ago to become an agricultural consultant [yeah] and through his work he was able to see or experience niche markets, you know, things that were working things that weren't working [yeah], and he saw an opportunity to milk sheep here at Mansergh Hall. We already we'd milked cattle before I was born [mhm], and er, so we had the buildings [yeah], so it was kind of like a natural transition [yeah], we had this opportunity if you like to to go down another route, cause we had not free time but, you know, [mhm] different ways of doing things. And er, and er yeah, so he went down, down that route. |
| 3.12 | Erm, he did lots of research about it. It wasn't a leap in the dark by any means [yeah]. Erm, he was working as a consultant, as I say, and he, he thoroughly enjoyed it but he wanted to be on the land [yeah]. So, for him, it was, you know, he needed to come back here and, and make it a sustainable enterprise [yeah] for to to earn a living income [mhm] for him, you know off, off the land [yeah]. Erm, and you're hard pressed to do that with a erm a more traditional farming enterprise [yes]. As I'm sure you know many farming families are no longer [yeah] doing it because they just erm they can't earn a living income. So whereas before you might have had three generations earning a living from a farm, you can't do that anymore. So, we've had to find a new way of doing that. |
| 4.10 | So have the changes you've made meant that you are able to get back some of that family life that you felt that you'd lost in [absolutely] previously...that's fantastic [absolutely] yeah. |
| 4.18 | It's been wonderful, I can't tell you, we've erm... We've all, always been passionate about what we do [yeah], you know, we care about what we do [yeah], and so we've never wanted to lose that. And we were proud of what we'd done [yeah] as well, we'd built up a business and a name [yeah], so didn't want to leave it behind, erm and so we're just mindful that we couldn't leave that behind, but you know we wanted to to carry it on in some way, shape or form, and it was just a logical transition [yeah]. And it does mean, I mean Simon, for example, has been here early this morning [mmm], been and gone probably by the ti...[we saw him] oh did you see him just [just arriving] [wheeling the...] yeah, the pig in [the pig in, yeah]. |
| 4.55 | So he's, it's still early morning and quite late nights [mmm] [yeah], but, it's not seven days a week [yes], you know [yeah]. And it has to be sustainable, for you [yeah], as well as the land and the economy, it has to be [yeah]. You physically have to do it [yeah]. Erm, and it, it, yeah. We just, erm, we were just [pause] ready to it was either going to break us [yeah] or...yeah. And it hasn't broken us and er we're yeah just much happier as a family I think. That we can enjoy time together [yeah] and what have you, so... |
| 5.28 | So, thinking about that change that you've talked about, can you tell us a bit about the business as it is now, and, and kind of, because we're recording this obviously, where you're based and how many people work for you, or whether it's just family members now? And where do you sell your products now that that you're [yeah] (unclear) producing? [yeah, well] |

The Faces Behind Our Food

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| 5.47 | Erm the [pause] the lamb, beef and pork is sold from the farm directly to the auction market [mm], though the auction market, but also direct to butchers. Erm, so we supply quite a few local butchers, like Dales in Kirkby Lonsdale take the beef [right], so it's, food miles are nothing [yeah, yeah], yeah [yeah]. Erm Hornby butchers take the pork [mm], Higginson's butchers in Grange over Sands who are, oh they have a really good name [yeah], erm they take the beef and the pork [yeah]. Erm, let me think where the lambs go...oh, James's milk lambs. Because that's another side to the milking which [mm] was a new side to it you know that he's had to consider. Erm, they're going to Higginsons and to a wholesaler to go [aaah] into hotels [right]. Because it's quite a niche market that [mmm], because they're milk fed, you know, for longer than [right] they would have been [okay]. So, er... |
| 6.44 | And is that to get the ewes' milk going [er] before milking? |
| 6.47 | No, 'cause they're taken off the ewe [yeah] very quickly [yeah] to make it easier, basically, for both lamb and ewe [mhm] [yeah]. Erm, and then they're fed erm on a, you know, an artificial system if you like. Erm they thrived. We were all. My dad, who's farmed land sheep for ever [mmm], couldn't get over how they had thrived and how happy they were and you know skipping around and. Because they're in groups so they'd become a family [mm] erm and that was...obviously cause we're keen to, you know, we want happy [mhm mhm], happy animals. So, yeah it seemed to work and they're erm so that was that. Erm, let me think if anyone else really, other, I can't think of any more butchers can I. Erm, oh Low Howgill and App...Appleby [right] they take pork. Erm, so there's a few direct [mm] direct ones, and they get it every week as well [yeah]. Erm, so yeah there's quite a market for the and it's we've still got the name really [mm] [yeah], they know the name Mansergh Hall [mhm] [yeah] but also Hadwin as well [yeah], so that's er that's quite an interesting link, erm. |
| 7.55 | And then, yeah we've just, for the so the, the hog roast side of it is what, what we focus on so the pigs, James produces the pigs directly [mhm] for us as well. [Right ok] So that's [yeah] you know [and the] the link's still there. [And he was saying the sheeps' milk gets sold?] The sheep milk goes to, he's part of a co-operative [yeah], called Sheep Milk UK, and they come and collect it every week er and then that goes off to be made into cheese and yoghurt [cool] so erm it's literally picked off up [mm] and [mm] then gets taken directly to wherever it's going to go [yeah]. |
| 8.29 | Erm, so, and sometimes erm sometimes it's erm, we get enquiries from people who are making ice cream or yoghurt directly, so that's something that we can maybe look at in the future [mm]. You know going down that route [mm], erm and some people have asked us if we'd do that ourselves but I'll be honest, we've done the processing side before [yeah]. I think we'd be...yeah...we've done that [all laugh]. [So maybe not] Maybe not, maybe not, yeah, yeah. |
| 9.01 | So, erm, you used to sell organic meat in Lancaster market and [that's right] and then, then you stopped doing that. Can you talk to me a bit about why you no longer sell organic meat or, or is any of your produce labelled |

The Faces Behind Our Food

| | organic [not any more] and if not why not? |
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| 9.16 | Right yeah, that was quite a few years ago and the reason for it was erm that at a European level [mmm] they changed the rules for pig keeping which meant that they wanted pigs outside all year round. Which is great in the South of England, not so great in the North of England, particularly in the Lune Valley, where our topography is such that when it rains it just all pours down the hills [right] into the River Lune [yeah] . And part of being sustainable is obviously the land, so managing the land and making sure we do not destroy the topsoil. |
| 9.54 | And the Soil Associ... we talked to the Soil Association about this, because it literally changed overnight. Erm, and their answer to this, sadly, was to put them on concrete (gasps) . Yeah (laughs). We were, er, shocked to say the least because that's not a natural habitat for pigs. And the way it worked before just to give you a bit of background is they were outside for most of the year [mm] so as long as was [mm] sustainable, if you like, for for not damaging the land and then they would come inside, but within their rules. So they had enough space, they had lights, they had, er you know, fresh air – happy environment [mm] inside. So it was a, a situation where the pigs were happy and the land was happy [mmm] . |
| 10.39 | And we could not envisage happy pigs on concrete [no] , erm and we actually spoke to our vets about it and they said, no, because, erm. Because of our rainfall as well they'd be s, they'd be stood on wet concrete, let's be honest, we don't get a dry winter here do we? [mm] So, it just wasn't going to be an answer and also, let's not get past the fact that it would cost a lot of money [mm] and I...we would not want acres of concrete, it's just not, yeah, we're not going to go down that route. Erm, now we could have carried on being organic for three years after this ruling came out, because you can have what are called non-compliances, but we didn't want to go down that route [mhm] . You know, our we wanted happy pigs [mm] . We couldn't envisage a way of having happy pigs [no] in that system [mm] . We talked to them about taking the pigs out of, of the organic erm registration, if you like, and farming the rest of the land as organic but not the pigs. Erm, and they wouldn't, they wouldn't do it. So, we, that's why we came out [right] and it was as simple as that [mm] . |
| 11.48 | And we spoke to our customers about why we were coming out [mm] . There was no other reason than that. It was just we couldn't see a reason for doing it. And once you...it costs a lot of money to be organic, because you have to pay them the registration [mhm] etc, [mhm] etc., and also for everything we sold we have to pay, you had to pay them a commission. So everything that's labelled with organic, yeah people don't realise that [mhm] , they take a percentage [Who's th...the Soil Association] the Soil Association, yeah, for using their label. So, you can't call something organic without being, erm you know, registered [yeah] which is absolutely right [mhm] [yeah] . Erm, so we we just had no benefit of being organic basically [mm] , of you know continuing it is what I mean [yeah] . Erm, we haven't changed the way we farm massively it's just we can't call it organic and wouldn't wish to [mhm mhm] . You know, we fully believe in the organic system, it, that wasn't the reason why, erm. |

The Faces Behind Our Food

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| 12.42 | So would you say you're still adhering to organic principles? |
| 12.44 | <p>On the whole [yeah], I mean you..y..it has to carry through because you learn so much [yes] from [yeah yeah], you know. But I have to say we didn't change a great deal to become organic [right] [mm]. You know, we were never...that's why it was such a good move for us [mm] if you like [mm] [mm] because we were...we never put pesticides on the land [yeah], we're not putting herbicides on the land [mhm], we're not we weren't putting artificial fertiliser on the land to [yeah] begin with [yeah] so it was just a natural transition to do [yeah] that anyway [yeah]. Erm, and and so yeah and James still isn't putting pesticides, herbicides and fertiliser on the [mhm], artificial fertiliser on the land [yeah]. Erm, it's farmyard manure [mhm mhm], it's a system of moving the animals around the farm in a rotational system [yeah], but that's good land management anyway [yeah], so [yeah] you know nothing's dramatically changed. Erm, and in terms of the you know like the drugs and things like that, we don't routinely drug them anyway, there aren't drugs in the food [mm] for the pigs for example [mhm], which some people do. We don't do that [mm]. We treat them if they need treating [yeah], erm which most [yeah] farmers do [yeah], I mean different farmers don't do they, you know the massive farmers they have to to prevent disease but we're not [yeah] in that type of farming so it's just it's not relevant for us, but.</p> |
| 13.59 | <p>Erm ,so yeah there's no, er there was no particular reason other than that [okay] and we spoke to our customers about it [yeah], you know we were very honest about it [yeah]. Erm, and what was hard was we learned that in Europe although it was a European directive, as with a lot of these things, erm these, a lot of countries weren't taking that directive forward. So although the Soil Association and other organisations, certifying bodies I should say, were taking that forward, elsewhere within Europe they weren't [yeah]. So what was sad to hear, and this was from customers, was that they knew were buying organic sausages in supermarkets which was made using pork from Germany [mmm] that was still being able to do it as we were. So the pigs were outside, then brought in [yeah]. So, ooh, yeah [mm] we felt it, there's double standards within Europe [mm mm] [yes] which was hard to...but that's that's unfortunately [that's going to lead] that was often the way.</p> |
| 15.04 | That's going to lead me onto my next question actually, so I'm going to ask how you see your business being affected – if at all – by Brexit. |
| 15.12 | <p>Well, it's very interesting that my dad was very much for not being part of Europe [right]. Even though as a farmer I know a lot of people assume that farmers would be [yeah] wanting to, to stay in [yeah]. He wasn't at all [yeah]. He's never wanted to rely on subsidies [right] [mhm]. It is a fact of farming – they're there [yeah, yeah] – and the reason for that is to try and keep food cheap [yes] [mhm]. Because, if we were to pass on the real cost of producing food in the UK to the consumer it would become unaffordable. Erm, which is why we see so many [mhm] you know, so much imported food on our shelves.</p> |
| 15.47 | Erm, now James, erm, I think he was in two minds. But the reality is that we are |

The Faces Behind Our Food

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| | <p>coming out of Europe. And, erm, (breath out), James was actually at a meeting yesterday about you know going forward. And he did say himself that he is keen to, to see the end of subsidies. Erm, so, you know, farm in a way that is [mmm] real [yeah], you know, and not rely on, on subsidies [mmm]. And the subsidies have a purpose, I mean, there's different subsidies aren't there, in terms of, erm, the environmental subsidies and that side of things which are obviously important. But, we've seen land locally that's been set aside, if you like, on environmental schemes and it doesn't, it, it's destroying the land, it's changing it. Some may say for the benefit some may say to the, you know, to the negative side, if you like, but. Erm, no, it's an interesting one, I think, because we as an island nation can't produce everything. It would be unrealistic to think we can [mm]. Erm, but there are things that we're good at producing [mhm] and, you know, we should focus on those and push that element of it. Quite how [mhm] we can do it and keep it cheap for everybody I don't know [mm]. But it, I'd be very sad to see small farms going, family farms particularly, going...</p> |
| 17.16 | <p>Do you think that's a likelihood with the end of subsidies, or the possible end of subsidies?</p> |
| 17.20 | <p>I, I think it's very different for us for example, from the, than from the hill farmers. The hill farmers are far more reliant on the subsidies than, than the low-lying farms [right], and quite often that's where you see the, the small, traditional family farms [yeah]. So, that will be quite interesting [yeah] and that worries me [mmm]. Erm, yeah, so I just, yeah, I, I do worry, I worry. But they're gonna to have to find a solution, and quick. 'Cause that was my concern [yeah] at the time of Brexit, of the, of all the vote, you know, the campaigns. For me there wasn't a solution put forward for what happens within the farming industry, particularly, when, when we're out [mmm]. Erm, and now I think there's going to be, to have to be a big and quick realisation of the situation and, and put some policies in place [yeah]. Because I haven't seen them yet, so [no] [no] (laughs).</p> |
| 18.16 | <p>OK, well thank you for that. So, slightly less controversially, no doubt... (laughs) What are the highs and lows of working at Mansergh Hall Farm? [Mmmm]. Mmmm. (laughs)</p> |
| 18.29 | <p>Erm, it's it's (pause) right, let me think about this. It's great to, to see all our hard work come to fruition, if you like, and, and produce something at the end of a, it isn't a day, it's a year, it's, you know, it's more than that, it's 30 months in the [yeah] case of the cattle, and what have you. Erm...and, I'm speaking for everybody now 'cause I don't do the farming side of it. But the, the hard work that goes into producing those things is immense, you know, and the care and the passion that goes into it. So you can't help but think, you know, wow, we did that, you know. And it's lovely when, at the end of, when it's sold and you get the great feedback about how nice it is and, and how good it is. That's, that makes it all worthwhile.</p> |
| 19.19 | <p>Erm, where we are, the location – how can you not enjoy coming here [yeah], to work. You know, it is fantastic. Erm, the River Lune's just down there [yeah], you know, we've got the Lune Valley – it's just spectacular. Erm, working with a</p> |

The Faces Behind Our Food

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| | family, it's hard, I will not deny that, it's [mmm] hard working with your family. But there are upsides to it as well [yeah]. You know we're (cough) very close, we support each other. Erm, I help James out when he needs it, Simon helps James out, James helps us out [yeah]. Erm, and I suppose that's like that in any family business [yeah] [mmm], you know, I, you can't say that's just farming. Erm, so, yeah it's, so the good sides are numerous [mmm] but there are the downsides as [yeah] well, you know [yeah]. It's hard work. Farming is hard work. |
| 20.12 | You do have to evolve and think [mhm mhm] almost two steps ahead of, of everything else. Erm, but I think in a way we've done, we try and do that. My dad was so forward thinking, and was almost laughed at 25 years ago now [mmm], when he started to market his own lamb. And how many other people have tried to do the same thing. You know, we've had, we've seen them...come, we've seen them a lot go as well. Erm, and you know, we've, we've evolved, so we haven't gone, we've just changed and I hope that we've become more sustainable for the future, so... |
| 20.51 | This is running very low on battery [oh, right]. In fact the battery is showing zero, so I'm going to very quickly wrap up with a couple of other questions [right, okay] if that's alright [yeah, yeah, of course it is yeah, yeah] So sorry, that's erm coming from... So, in a lot of the other interviews we've erm, or in a lot of the other farms we've visited they've been it's been very male dominated. What's it, I mean, what's you're (pause, inaudible) does that reflect your experience of farming in general and [yes (laughs)] what's your perspective as a woman. |
| 21.18 | Yes, very much male dominated. I found it really hard within, not just the farming industry, 'cause er, but also the second element of that. The wholesale, [yeah] you know marketing our produce [mhm], that also was very male dominated. (clears throat) Erm, so we were supplying shops and restaurants erm and hotels. And m..most chefs were male [yeah], erm, and it's, it was hard, I'll, I'll be honest, it is hard. And also it I think the hardest thing is gaining respect [mm], for me [mhm mhm] as a woman trying to market our produce. Erm, it, it worked but it's kind of I have to, yeah, I think I have to go that extra mile, [mmm] I'll be honest with you, yeah, and trying to balance a family life [yeah]. There's more pressures as me, as a mum (laughs), as a working mum, which I think the male element of the, of the industry doesn't get [yeah], you know [yeah]. |
| 22.18 | Erm, particularly the older generation [yeah], because...they're not used to their wives working, or [yeah] [mmm], yeah? You know, they would have been home cooking meals [mm], they would have been baking all the time, and...it's, it's not like that. James's wife works, you know, not full time now 'cause they've got kids as well, but. It's a juggling act [mmm] [yeah], so yeah, so I think it it certainly was harder [yes], yeah, definitely (laughs) [mm, that's interesting]. |
| 22.43 | Um, so, just to wrap up...oh, yeah, we're, yeah, just very quickly wrap up. (laughter) Are there are any other opportunities or challenges facing your business that we haven't covered, and you've probably gonna have about five seconds [oh my word] because it's really flashing at me [I'll make notes] |

The Faces Behind Our Food

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| | Yeah, (errrrr....) yeah, just start scribbling. |
| 23.02 | Erm (sighs) oh now you've put me under pressure [oh, sorry] . No no no, no no, erm yeah, I mean the challenges are just erm, to... (breath out) evolve again, all the time, not sitting on our laurels, erm, and making sure that we're the best at what we do [yeah] , and er which we always strive to be. Erm, so trying to, to continue what we've got, but erm, make it as, as sustainable for the future, that's, you know, that's the key thing for us, for James [mmm] . Erm, moving it forward all the time, erm, erm, s...and yeah making it economically sustainable [yeah] erm, in a challenging time [yeah] when we don't know what the future's going to bring in terms of the Brexit decision etc. etc. Erm, we do... (recording ends 23:58) |