



NUFFIELD  
Farming Scholarships

# From farm to fork, from barn to brand: a study of farm diversification

*Written by:*

Natalie Hepburn NSch

**September 2025**

A NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT

**KINDLY SPONSORED BY:**

NFU Mutual Charitable Trust



**NFU Mutual**  
Charitable Trust

## **NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS TRUST (UK)**

**Awarding life changing Scholarships that unlock individual potential and broaden horizons through study and travel overseas, with a view to developing farming and agricultural industries.**

### **"Leading positive change in agriculture"**

"Nuffield Farming" study awards give a unique opportunity to stand back from your day-to-day occupation and to research a subject of interest to you. Academic qualifications are not essential, but you will need to persuade the Selection Committee that you have the qualities to make the best use of an opportunity that is given to only a few – approximately 20 each year.

Scholarships are open to those who work in farming, food, horticulture, rural and associated industries or are in a position to influence these industries. You must be a resident in the UK. Applicants must be aged between 25 and 45 years (the upper age limit is 45 on 31st July in the year of application).

There is no requirement for academic qualifications, but applicants will already be well established in their career and demonstrate a passion for the industry they work in and be three years post tertiary education. Scholarships are not awarded to anyone in full-time education or to further research projects.

Full details of the Nuffield Farming Scholarships can be seen on the Trust's website: [www.nuffieldscholar.org](http://www.nuffieldscholar.org). Application forms can be downloaded and only online submission is accepted.

Closing date for completed applications is the 31<sup>st</sup> July each year.

Copyright © Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust

ISBN: 978-1-916850-70-5

Published by The Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust  
Bullbrook, West Charlton, Charlton Mackrell, Somerset, TA11 7AL  
Email: [office@nuffieldscholar.org](mailto:office@nuffieldscholar.org)  
[www.nuffieldscholar.org](http://www.nuffieldscholar.org)

# A NUFFIELD FARMING SCHOLARSHIPS REPORT (UK)



NUFFIELD  
Farming Scholarships

Date of report: September 2025

*"Leading positive change in agriculture.  
Inspiring passion and potential in people."*

Title	From farm to fork, from barn to brand: a study of farm diversification
Scholar	Natalie Hepburn
Sponsor	NFU Mutual Charitable Trust
Objectives of Study Tour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To study farms which sell value-added products across the agricultural sector.</li> <li>• To look at the how such farms manage direct selling.</li> <li>• To look at the advantages and disadvantages of this type of farm diversification.</li> </ul>
Countries Visited	Brazil, Rwanda, The Netherlands, Ireland, Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales
Messages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Direct selling is a viable diversification strategy to enable a farm to spread risk and increase viability.</li> <li>• Farms need to use their assets in direct selling, and this includes personal skills and knowledge. A person with passion and enthusiasm is the farm's greatest asset.</li> <li>• Successful enterprises utilise their networks whether that be for funding, product development, marketing or sales.</li> </ul>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In recent years, the agricultural sector has faced significant economic and environmental volatility, prompting many farm businesses to diversify. The diversification possibilities are vast; additional agricultural enterprises can be added, farm produce can be sold directly, the farm assets can be used for tourism, recreation, events, storage and energy generation. Each diversification has its own benefits and challenges.

This study focuses specifically on farms that have chosen the route of direct selling, particularly where value has been added to the farm's primary produce - for example, when a dairy farm uses its milk to produce cheese or ice cream.

Field visits were conducted in the UK, Ireland, the Netherlands, Brazil, and Rwanda to explore the challenges, benefits, and key considerations of this type of farm diversification. These visits included farms, farm shops, and the support networks that assist such enterprises, including consultants, local government bodies, and funding organisations.

A wide range of direct-selling ventures was observed, including:

- Rwanda: Tea and coffee
- Brazil: Dulce de leche (caramelised milk) and rapadura (cane sugar block)
- Ireland: Ready-meal potatoes and cheese
- Northern Ireland: Ice cream and soap
- The Netherlands: Cheese
- UK: Direct meat sales and cider

Whilst the stories behind each of these diversifications was unique, there were common motivations, challenges and benefits. The need to spread the risk in uncertain economic times was the most common impetus for farm diversification along with the added driving force of needing a way to sustain additional generations on the farm and enable small farms to turn a profit. The major challenges were financing the venture, having the time to invest and the infrastructure to support it. The rewards were financial but also included a sense of personal accomplishment from customer feedback.

When exploring farm diversification there are several factors to consider. These include geographical location, sales route, marketing, the access to a support network and the use of technology to reduce people and time constraints. However, the most important factor in success of such an enterprise is having the person and personality to provide the drive.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive summary.....	ii
Chapter 1: Personal Introduction.....	1
Chapter 2: Background to my study subject.....	2
Chapter 3: My study tour .....	4
Chapter 4: SWOT.....	5
Chapter 5: Strengths.....	7
5.1 Case study 1 – Westmorland Farm – where location meets vision and skills....	8
5.2 Case study 2 – Eve’s Hill Farm – using your skill set.....	9
5.3 Case study 3 – Finnegan’s Farm – using the product .....	9
Chapter 6: Weaknesses.....	10
6.1 Case study 4 – Swannington Farm to Fork – supplier loss.....	11
6.2 Case study 5 – Dukes ice cream – supporting more.....	11
6.3 Case study 6 – Yorvale – a response to quotas .....	12
Chapter 7: Opportunities.....	13
7.1 Case study 7 – Brian Exaud – determination of a new entrant.....	13
7.2 Case study 8 – Daynes Farm – supporting more of the family .....	14
7.3 Case study 9 – Two Goat Soap – meeting customers .....	15
Chapter 8: Threats .....	16
8.1 Case study 10 - Castell Howell – access to funding .....	18
8.2 Case study 11 – Dulce de leche – local support .....	18
8.3 Case study 12 – Snowdonia Wagyu – working together .....	19
Chapter 9: Discussion .....	21
Chapter 10: Recommendations.....	23
Chapter 11: After my study tour .....	24
Chapter 12: Acknowledgement and thanks.....	25
Glossary .....	26
References.....	26
Appendix 1 – Rwandan coffee .....	27
Appendix 2 – The Logie Estate.....	28

## **DISCLAIMER**

The opinions expressed in this report are those of the author alone and not necessarily those of the Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust, of the author's sponsor, or of any other sponsoring body.

All images and graphics are the author's own unless otherwise specified.

## **CONTACT DETAILS**

Dr Natalie Hepburn PhD

Cardiff, Wales, UK

[garlicmeadow@talktalk.net](mailto:garlicmeadow@talktalk.net)

+44 (0) 7817512450

[www.garlicmeadow.co.uk](http://www.garlicmeadow.co.uk)

Nuffield Farming Scholars are available to speak to NFU Branches, agricultural discussion groups and similar organisations.

*Published by The Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust  
Bullbrook, West Charlton, Charlton Mackrell, Somerset, TA11 7AL  
email : [office@nuffieldscholar.org](mailto:office@nuffieldscholar.org)  
[www.nuffieldscholar.org](http://www.nuffieldscholar.org)*



## CHAPTER 1: PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

What began as a hobby of a couple of chickens and a few sheep became a passion, a business and a career path for this essentially city girl from Kent.

I grew up in Kent, went to University in Wales to study Chemistry and then pursued a PhD and subsequent research career in medical research without any background or consideration of farming. It was in my mid-twenties with a love for food, cookery and gardening that I began to grow my own vegetables and was reluctantly persuaded to have a couple of backyard hens. Those decisions were to be the start of a change in direction.

With a small hobby flock of sheep and a few more chickens, I was splitting time between my scientific research career and the management of our smallholding. When we decided to begin our family by adopting two children it was obvious that something had to take a back seat and that was my career. For a few years I juggled the dramatic learning curve of parenting two adopted children and then a third, with life on the smallholding. As the children grew so did my passion for farming and the desire to turn the hobby into a career and business.

The addition of goats onto the holding opened the door to the birth of the Garlic Meadow brand. I developed a range of goat's milk soaps followed by hand creams as a way of adding value to the goat's milk. These were sold at local farmers markets, online and through local shops.

This experience of developing products, marketing and sales as well as still carrying out the day-to-day farming tasks made me reflect upon who does support farms to direct sell and what assistance are farms getting to add the additional skill set necessary. And so, my Nuffield project idea was born and an application made.



**Photo 1: The author with one of her smallholding goats.**



## CHAPTER 2: BACKGROUND TO MY STUDY SUBJECT

Farm income was reported to have fallen by 50% in 2023/24 [1]. This decrease has been attributed to increased input costs such as fertiliser, feed and energy. Coupled with changes in subsidies following Brexit, the cost of living crisis and uncertainties following the changes in inheritance tax, farm businesses are continually experiencing increased financial pressures.

Recent years have seen an increase in farms diversifying to overcome these financial pressures, spread risk and secure the future for the next generation. In England, 71% of farm businesses had some form of diversified activity in 2023/24 [2], whilst the NFU mutual voice of the farmer survey revealed that 30% of diversified farms expected the importance of non-farming activity to grow over the next 5 years [3].

Farm diversification can be defined as the addition of alternative revenue streams away from traditional farming activities. There are a variety of forms of farm diversification, and these often seek to maximise the use of the farm's resources of product, land or buildings:

### 1. Enterprise stacking

A farm may seek to add additional farming enterprises to those that they already carry out, for instance the addition of poultry to a beef or sheep enterprise [4].

### 2. Alternative building use

Farm buildings may be put to alternative uses such as an event space or wedding venue [5]

### 3. Alternative land use

The use of land for enterprises outside of agriculture such as for solar or for leisure purposes like dog-walking fields [6] [7]

### 4. Tourism

Space may be put aside for the purpose of tourism accommodation in the form of bed and breakfast, holiday lets, glamping or camping. Additional experiences can be included which enables visitors to participate or gain greater understanding of agriculture [8]

### 5. Direct selling

A farm's produce can be directly sold to maximise profit. This product could be in its original state such as the direct selling of vegetables, milk or meat or it could have value added to it such as crisps, ice cream or cheese.

The type of diversification an agricultural enterprise may decide to pursue is based upon the physical resources available, the geographical location, the budget as well as personal resources [9].



As my own experience is within the realm of direct selling this study tour and report have focused upon this area. I particularly wish to look at the considerations in choosing such a diversification avenue, the challenges it poses as well as the benefits.



## CHAPTER 3: MY STUDY TOUR

I visited the following countries during my study tour:

- Brazil – March 2024  
As part of our Contemporary Scholars Conference, I was fortunate enough to visit with two farmers selling value added products and meet with those who supported such farmers.
- Rwanda – September 2024  
I attended the African Food Systems Forum to gain an overview of the factors affecting the food producers in Africa as well as visit a variety of farms in the country.
- Farm Business Innovation Show – November 2024  
An expo showcasing examples, support and equipment across a wide variety of farm diversification opportunities.
- Ireland and Northern Ireland – November 2024  
I met with a range of farmers and food producers from cheese to potatoes to juice producers.
- Scotland – February 2025  
I visited local farms of different scales as well as spoke with some of the support providers.
- The Netherlands – April 2025  
Meeting local farms direct selling particularly seeing how they have incorporated the use of technology.
- The UK – June 2025 and August 2025  
Focussing particularly upon producers within Yorkshire, Cumbria, Norfolk, Pembrokeshire, Gwynedd and Devon.



## CHAPTER 4: SWOT

It was at the culmination of my study tour that I attended a workshop seeking to support farms to diversify. This consultant-led workshop looked at identifying possibilities for diversification within your farming enterprise. After assessing each farm's available skills and resources to determine potential diversification strategies, the process recommended applying SWOT analysis to select the most suitable option.

A SWOT analysis is a decision-making tool used in project management to identify issues that would either hinder or support a positive outcome. A SWOT analysis has four elements: strengths (S), weaknesses (W), opportunities (O) or threats (T) (Figure 1). Strengths are attributes intrinsic to the business that give the project an advantage over others whilst weaknesses are internal factors that place the project at a disadvantage relative to others. Opportunities are external elements that the project could exploit to its advantage whilst threats are also external and could cause trouble for the project. Examples of internal factors that could be a strength or a weakness are personal, skills, buildings, location and finances. The external factors that form opportunities or threats can include the economy, future trends, legislation, planning and funding opportunities.



Figure 1: The Components of SWOT analysis [10].



I had a light bulb moment, across my travels not one farm had discussed going through the process of a SWOT analysis for their diversification. However, how many of us carry out an actual risk assessment before crossing the road? We look, we listen, we assess the dangers, and we decide. Similarly, these farm enterprises had looked, assessed and stepped out onto the road of direct selling.

Regardless of this, the SWOT analysis grid of strengths, weakness, opportunities and threats formed a great template by which to look at these farms I had come across. I have therefore used these four headings for my subsequent chapters:

- Strengths – the skills or assets each farm had
- Weaknesses – the driving force for the diversification
- Opportunities – the benefits of direct selling
- Threats – the issues with direct selling

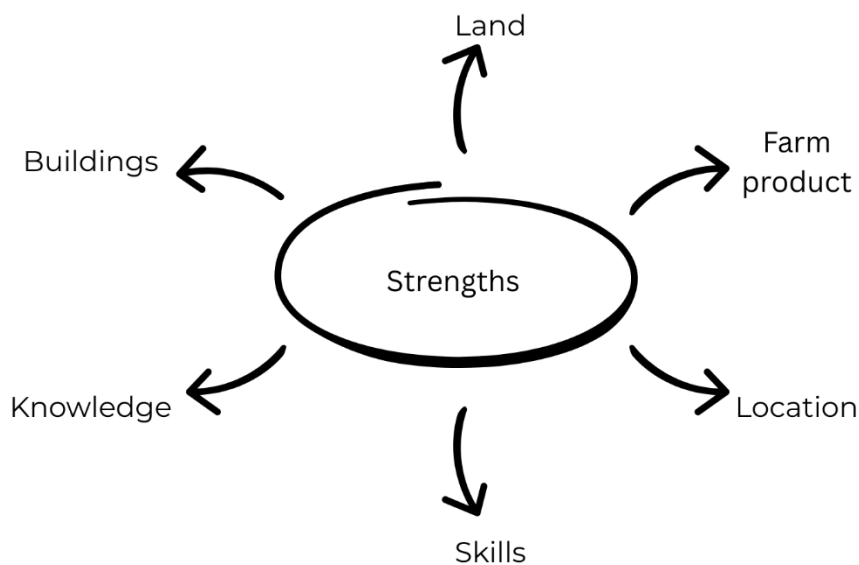


## CHAPTER 5: STRENGTHS

*“Strength does not come from physical capacity. It comes from an indomitable will” - Mahatma Gandhi*

An indomitable will, a passion, a drive, and enthusiasm was something I witnessed repeatedly, from farm to farm. Regardless of the farm’s background, driving force for diversification or product, it was evident that the common ground amongst all the places visited was the person or people involved. Not all the people were extroverts and, naturally outgoing people, but they did all share a passion for what they were doing, a determination and a hard-working attitude to see the project to completion.

When setting out on the diversification route it is important to evaluate the assets or strengths of the farm enterprise (Figure 2). For a farm wishing to direct sell, these will include the asset which your final product will be based upon. For instance, a farm wishing to direct sell meat or produce a dairy product, this will include the livestock; for a cider producer, the orchard; for a potato farm, the fields of potatoes. The land and buildings that a farm possesses are an asset; could they be used for storage, production or an onsite farm shop? The physical location of the farm: how close are customers, how easy is it to shift your product off site and get additional resources in including any utilities necessary. Finally, there are the personal assets, not only the aforementioned will and determination, but are there enough people to sustain the additional workload, what skills, knowledge and experience is there to draw upon?



**Figure 2: The strengths a farm has that impacts upon diversification.**



## 5.1 Case study 1 – Westmorland Farm – where location meets vision and skills

When the M6 extended North in the 1969 it cut across Westmorland Farm. Rather than despairing at this loss of land, John and Barbara Dunning saw it as an opportunity and tendered for the motorway service station to make use of this unique location. Initially run as a joint venture with a local hotel and garage, it transitioned into the sole ownership of the Dunning family. John Dunning is clearly a man with the sort of drive and ambition necessary to take a farm into a direct sales role. When looking at how to get the farm produce retailed through the motorway service station, John Dunning turned to local farmer's son, butcher and slaughterman David Morland. It was evident that this partnership has been pivotal in getting Westmorland Farm and Tebay services into the position it has today (photo 2). David was responsible for taking the lambs and beef from the farm and turning them into sellable and usable items for the onsite shop and café.

One of the challenges of selling meat direct to customers is what is called carcass balance – how to use the entire range of meat available from the animal. David drew the analogy with a tube of smarties, “it’s easy to get rid of your red and blue smarties but what will you do with your yellow and green ones”. It was David’s skill, background as a slaughterman and butcher, coupled with his infectious enthusiasm that enabled him to balance the use of the meat available from the farm to enable the enterprise to achieve profitability. David’s previous experience of dealing with the legislation and in particular Environmental Health gave them a smooth pathway through the process.



**Photo 2: The butchery counter at Tebay services**



## 5.2 Case study 2 – Eve’s Hill Farm – using your skill set

Eve’s Hill is a 250-acre mixed arable and cattle farm situated in Norfolk, UK. When Jeremy Buxton returned to the farm after working away, it was evident that things needed to change especially to support the additional income. They began



**Photo 3: Farm Shop at Eve’s Hill farm.**

by selling beef boxes direct to customers and coupled that with a change in farming practices towards a more regenerative, nature-friendly approach to minimise inputs. The business has grown gradually and with enterprises that mutually support each other. The onsite farm shop is supported by a campsite and the dog-walking field encourages people to stop for both the café and farm shop.

However, it was evident that Jeremy’s background in media has helped in the promotion of the diversified enterprises. It has enabled them to tell their story on social media and in local newspapers to secure their place as a farm supplying the local community.

## 5.3 Case study 3 – Finnegan’s Farm – using the product

Finnegan’s is a 3,000-acre potato farm in Ireland; it supplies potatoes for supermarkets. Leaving the potatoes which didn’t make the grade for their contacts to go to waste was having a detrimental impact on the farm’s profits. They began by supplying peeled potatoes for the catering trade but had issues with poor payment. The farm then decided to invest and produce a range of cooked potato products for ready meals. Sold under their own name, they initially supplied local shops before supplying a supermarket chain. It was these links to companies that they already sold to which helped support this diversification with advice and guidance on product type, packaging and navigating the regulations. This diversification enterprise has seen the farm rise from employing three to 120 people.



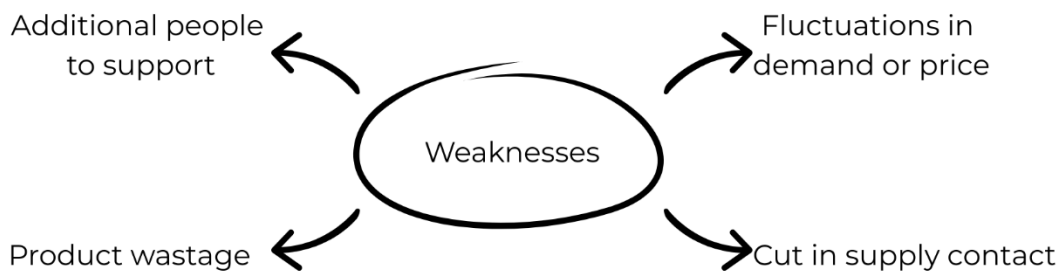
**Photo 4: The potato products from Finnegan’s.**



## CHAPTER 6: WEAKNESSES

*“Only those who dare to fail greatly, can ever achieve greatly.” - Robert F. Kennedy*

Being a farmer can at times feel a very weak or exposed position, the vulnerabilities of a farm enterprise can act as a driving force for diversification. The overarching force acting upon a farm, driving diversification, is the need for increased profitability. Many dairy farms pursued the route of direct selling to overcome the restrictions caused by milk quotas or the uncertainty from fluctuating prices. The issue with price fluctuations affected many different farm enterprises as did the impetus of having a supply contract cut. Under use or product wastage drove some farms to seek alternative avenues to sell their produce. One of the most common themes for farm diversification was the need to provide an income for the next generation or additional family members (Figure 3).



**Figure 3: The weaknesses a farm experiences act as a driving force for diversification.**



## 6.1 Case study 4 – Swannington Farm to Fork – supplier loss

An outdoor pig farm based in Norfolk, Swannington Farm originally bred and sold store pigs. When Robert Mutimer returned home from university, they changed to produce finishing pigs as well with all pork being sold to one company. One Monday morning they received a call to say the pigs wouldn't be collected that week or ever again. Robert worked some industry connections and managed to secure the farm a position to supply a major supermarket; but they didn't want to be in the same vulnerable situation again.

With the help of Meat England, Robert established a small processing unit on the farm to initially sell sausages to catering outlets. The diversification has altered in appearance over the years with them now sourcing additional meats to offer a one-stop shop for the catering trade. The farm also ran a farm shop on site and in the local town but closed them as they found the pressures of staffing, serving customers and having people on site impacted upon them satisfying their major catering customers.

Without this diversification the farm would not have been able to ride out the storms which has hit pig farms in recent years.

## 6.2 Case study 5 – Dukes ice cream – supporting more

With three members of the family already working on their family dairy farm, Jonny Campbell wanted to take ownership of something. Jonny and his wife Natasha were already making their own ice cream at home so taking their passion forward was a logical step. With help to scale-up the product from the local college, they initially outsourced production to another small-scale ice cream maker. This enabled them to establish the market for their ice cream without investing in a unit or essential specialist equipment. With a customer base established, they invested in a production unit on site and gradually took over the making of the ice cream.

In addition to using the college to support them on their journey, they also worked with friends to help with the packaging design. The ice cream is mainly sold on site through an honesty shop, and they have cleverly used the asset of the dairy farm as part of the retail experience as customers pass by the livestock to go to the shop. Social media has been instrumental in developing a customer base and make the farm a place to go for ice cream.



**Photo 5: The honesty shop at Duke's Ice Cream.**



### 6.3 Case study 6 – Yorvale – a response to quotas

As a first-generation farmer with an 80-acre council farm tenancy, Ian Buxton wanted to expand his dairy farm but was limited by the quotas. Milk quotas were introduced in the 1980s to limit the amount of milk a farm could produce; if a farm exceeded the limit, they had to pay a penalty. But making ice cream was exempt from the quotas. With the support of the Specialist Ice Cream Makers Association and a company that made commercial scale ice cream machines, Ian developed and began producing ice cream from the farm.

With four caravan sites in the vicinity, the plan was to sell from an on-site unit at weekends. However, planning was not granted for the retail outlet so they made the switch to selling from trailers that they took to local shows. They were supported by local food development group, Deliciously Yorkshire.

Without the diversification, Ian Buxton would no longer be farming. Whilst many dairy farms have disappeared around them, Ian remains farming and was even able to buy the council farm that he tenanted. This has not been without its challenges; at one point the farm went down to milking just 12 cows once a day to manage the workload but continue to supply the milk they needed for ice cream.



## CHAPTER 7: OPPORTUNITIES

"Do not judge me by my success, judge me by how many times I fell down and got back up again." - Nelson Mandela

The benefits or opportunities arising for farms that opt to diversify into direct selling are linked to the weaknesses or driving forces that were previously discussed. Figure 4 shows a word-cloud summarising the benefits reported by the businesses I visited and from others collected through an online survey. Farms report a financial benefit whether that be increased profitability, financial stability, value-added, a positive impact on margins or a higher return. Many farms that featured on my study tour spoke of the ability to support additional family members on the farm or attributed the survival of their farms to direct selling. The benefits often extend beyond the finances and the initial impetus for diversification and include the ability to tell your story and engage with customers. The people I visited often spoke about “the buzz”; the pride or satisfaction of creating something, taking this direct to customers and getting instant feedback.



Figure 4. The opportunities that arise from direct selling farm produce.

### 7.1 Case study 7 – Brian Exaud – determination of a new entrant

With an increasing middle-class in Tanzania, Brian Exaud saw the opportunity to directly sell beef to these customers. Brian was a new entrant into farming and went from bank to bank in Tanzania to try and get his concept financed and off the ground but found the doors just shut it his face. “Banks saw me not as an opportunity but as a liability” he explained when reflecting on this. Eventually he secured funding from a local co-operative and began with three acres of land to grow feed for his feed lot beef rearing system. Having proven the concept and established the business of direct-selling beef, he managed to secure bank finance to grow the business to 300 acres and move to an outdoor rearing cattle system.



**Photo 6: At the African Food Systems Forum, Rwanda with Brian Exuad.**

## 7.2 Case study 8 – Daynes Farm – supporting more of the family



**Photo 7: Dave Camp at Dayne's Farm Shop.**

This 800-acre family farm rearing organic meat in Devon took the initial step into direct selling following the loss of a buyer for their goat meat. Looking to step more into direct sales and enable Helen Camp to give up her job off the farm, Dave and Helen Camp invested in an onsite modular farm shop.

The livestock are slaughtered off site, the carcasses split, and the butchery carried out onsite. Initially Dave was carrying out most of the butchery, keeping the cutting simple to match his skills and ability to commit on time. A personal relationship with customers benefits their business and supports sales. Direct customer

interaction has enabled them to share their story and educate customers about meat options while addressing carcass balance challenges.



Whilst only a small percentage of the farm's production is directly sold through the farm shop, it has given the enterprise an element of resilience and enabled Helen to be on the farm.

### 7.3 Case study 9 – Two Goat Soap – meeting customers

With the addition of two goats to a sheep farm in Northern Ireland arose the problem of what to do with the surplus goat milk. Not wanting to go down a food production route and wanting a product to fit into their lives, the Johnston family chose to produce goat's milk soap. Selling through local farmers markets and online, this diversification is an addition to the farm but not a major contributor to the farm's economics. The major benefit was for mental health; the ability to get out to meet people and develop a relationship with customers.



**Photo 8: A bar of Two Goat Soap.**



## CHAPTER 8: THREATS

*"It's your reaction to adversity, not adversity itself that determines how your life's story will develop." - Dieter F. Uchtdorf*

The challenges or threats that a farm faces to diversify are multiple but not insurmountable. Every farm I visited was asked to identify the three biggest challenges they faced with diversification; this question was also asked in an online survey I carried out. The greatest threat to diversification was time. Regulations, bureaucracy or legislation also featured frequently alongside cost, pricing, funding and capital (Figure 5). Other common challenges were marketing, staffing, infrastructure, location and maintaining consistency. In addition to visiting diversified farms on my study tour, I spent time interviewing support services available from regional development groups, from consultants to banks. This gave me a perspective on the support available to help overcome the challenges.



**Figure 5: The challenges facing farm diversification represented as a word cloud.**

The amount of time that taking a product directly to market needs cannot be underestimated; it was stated in one visit “there’s no such thing as work-life balance” but there are strategies to minimise the time needed. In the Netherlands it was evident how many farms employed the use of self-service vending machines or even self-service farm shops to reduce the time needed to retail the products. Case study 6 for Yorvale ice cream ([section 6.3](#)) shows how at one time the farm minimised their workload by only milking 12 cows to supply just what they needed for the ice cream. Other farms have chosen a collaborative approach with one farm producing the raw materials and the other partner making the product, or by working with additional businesses to make full use of the farms produce ([section 8.3](#)).



The regulations or legislation concerning the production of food can seem overwhelming; many farms cited this as one of their greatest challenges. Many enterprises spoke of the difficulties getting Environmental Health Officer (EHO) approval. Those enterprises that did not have issues with EHO stated that they had attempted to foster a positive relationship from an early stage; in fact, one spoke of actually leaving gaps in their plans for the EHO to correct so that they felt as if they had invested in the project. Another issue farms often faced was getting planning permission. Some had to adapt their plans whilst others started with small developments to enable them to expand over time.

The final major challenge to diversification was funding. Many farms had received EU Leader funding which left me wondering how this gap will be filled post-Brexit. To secure bank funding many enterprises spoke of the importance of a personal relationship with a bank manager, something more challenging in today's banking environment. Discussions with Oxbury bank revealed that having a personal dialogue and working with them can help secure funding. Some enterprises turned to crowd funding and found it not as onerous as securing bank finances and more beneficial in that the investors took an interest and helped to promote the business. Numerous projects were funded with the aid of grant funding although this can pose issues with cash flow as the project must be paid for prior to the grant money being released. A disjointed approach between planning and grant funding was also highlighted with many businesses failing to access their grants due to delays in planning.

Support to take a product to market can be found through local networks whether that be enterprise groups, business support groups or consultants. Wales has quite a developed business development program that can help farms diversify. Farming Connect is a rural development programme to provide subsidised advice and training with help provided in business planning. Their work in Wales sits alongside Cywain which supports primary producers to market, brand and grow their businesses. Both support structures provide training courses and mentorship that can help plug the gaps in the skill set when it comes to selling products directly. Similar programmes exist in many other countries but do vary in support level.

The outlet or route of sale for direct sales is a consideration when diversifying. Some farms sell direct either from the farm gate, website or through local markets. This route can be time consuming and involves a major customer facing element that doesn't occur with wholesaling. Farm2fork in Devon sells their meat mainly online and has found that adopting artificial intelligence to deal with standard customer queries or help produce response emails has reduced the time burden. As discussed previously, some outlets adopt technologies such as vending machines and self-service tills to reduce the staffing burden. Wholesaling a product gives the enterprise a quicker route to market but with lower returns. Many of those I saw on my study tour used previous connections to establish a wholesale market for their produce. Some businesses do sell via both



avenues but caution must be taken not to overcommit; one farm committed so much of their product to wholesale in their first year that they had none left to sell in their own shop.

Product development assistance can help get a diversification idea off the ground and can come in a variety of forms. Scotland's Rural College (SRUC) has a food and enterprise team to assist in product development whilst the Food Centre Wales has the role within Wales. Additional product development support can be found from machine manufacturers. A number of dairy farms who began making ice cream received product recipes, additional ingredients and support as part of their contract with the ice cream machine manufacturers. Groups such as the Specialist Cheese Makers Association and Guild of Craft Soap and Toiletry Makers were found to supply product development support.

### **8.1 Case study 10 - Castell Howell – access to funding**

Castell Howell now exists as a major food wholesaler within Wales but its routes began as a farm selling its produce. In this visit, I was keen to see how Brian Jones had gone from selling poultry from his farm to founding a major business.

Originally a 100-acre dairy farm, they had experienced financial pressures when milk quotas were introduced in the 1980s. The farm had already added an additional poultry unit so was able to weather this storm by selling whole chickens directly to a supermarket chain. With changing consumer habits, the supermarkets wanted chicken joints rather than whole birds; the farm were unable to supply the product in this form and they lost the contract. With the pressure to find an outlet for the chickens and secure the farm income, Brian started selling to local pubs.

With the number of people eating out beginning to increase, Brian realised he needed to offer a wider range of produce to be a “one-stop shop”. The business rapidly grew; this growth was only possible thanks to a personal relationship with, and support from, the local bank manager. The business continues to grow and develop today; Brian reflected upon how a business needs to adapt to changing trends to remain relevant and viable. As Brian came off the pie production line to speak to me it was evident that hard work and the dedication to muck in and take risks had got Castell Howell into its position today.

### **8.2 Case study 11 – Dulce de leche – local support**

This small subsidence farm in Brazil spreads over 40-acres and was founded in 2000. It began with a single cow producing more milk than they needed so they started making dulce de leche, a caramelised milk confectionary. Originally giving it to neighbours, they soon found that they had established a local market. Their regional development office helped them set up production, package and access markets. They are still increasing capacity and split their acreage between pasture, crops to feed the cows and growing vegetables for a local school meals initiative.



**Photo 9: The cows being milked for dulce de leche production.**

### **8.3 Case study 12 – Snowdonia Wagyu – working together**

When the time came for the next generation to take over this family farm, it was clear that things had to change to secure its future. Following a trip to Australia where Sioned Pritchard saw Wagyu production, they decided to pursue this path and began by purchasing ten animals. Initially selling them from the farm butchered and boxed, Sioned and Meilir quickly established a delivery run around the local area.

The wagyu spend three winters on the farm before they are slaughtered and butchered off-site. The butchering of the animals has altered over time in response to customer needs, with less joints being produced and more quick cook cuts. The order system has also been rationalised to make management and stock control easier with all orders now placed via the website with click and collect available from the farm at specified time slots.

Keen to use the whole carcass, Sioned and Meilir have worked with other producers to develop a product range that includes a pate from the livers, a rum using the bones and candles using the tallow. Working with partners and Food Innovation Wales has enabled them to develop their business.



**Photo 10: The Wagyu at Snowdonia Wagyu.**



## CHAPTER 9: DISCUSSION

Throughout my study tour I visited numerous farms that had chosen to direct sell their produce as well as spoken to supporting services. Although the farms differed in geographical locations, type of farming enterprise and produce, they did experience similar driving forces, challenges and benefits.

Each farm had its own unique set of assets or strengths whether that be its raw material, location, knowledge or skills. No farm had the entire skill set necessary to cover all those necessary for diversification such as knowledge of their product, marketing, graphic design, IT or sales but they did draw upon those that they had. Those lacking a skill set introduced the expertise of others such as Westmorland Farm ([case study 1](#)) or Snowdonia Wagyu ([case study 12](#)) using other businesses to help them develop their full product range. What was evident was that networking or cooperation enabled some of the skill deficit to be covered. Many farms in Rwanda worked together in a cooperative system whereby a number of producers fed into one processing unit that produced and marketed the product ([appendix 1](#)). Logie Estate in Scotland was home to a number of small businesses as well as the farm's own products; together they could afford a better marketing strategy than singularly ([appendix 2](#)). The use of regional development groups and product specialist groups can help with marketing, product packaging and sales. The greatest asset the farm had was always the people involved. Whether that be their knowledge, vision, passion or enthusiasm; it was this that drove the enterprise to success.

The driving forces or weaknesses that drove a farm to diversify split into four main categories:

- Fluctuations in price or demand of their current outputs;
- A cut in supply contracts;
- A need to increase farm profits by cutting product wastage;
- A wish to financially support additional family members.

For many the additional enterprise satisfied these driving forces by increasing profit, supporting extra family members and protecting the farm from risk. There were additional benefits recorded which included:

- A sense of pride and accomplishment in creating the products;
- Joy from connecting with customers and getting feedback;
- Mental health benefits of getting off farm and doing something different.

The greatest challenge experienced by diversified enterprises was that of time. A diversification does benefit from having someone that could make it their main focus but this is not critical. Technology can be employed to relieve the time pressure whether that be the use of vending machines to sell, self-service shops or the employment of artificial intelligence to create correspondence to



customers. Other major challenges include funding and regulation. Grant funding can be beneficial but can create cash flow problems as the money has to be claimed back retrospectively. Fostering a relationship with your bank or crowd funders can help secure funding. It helps to foster a relationship with environmental health officers and other regulatory bodies to guide the path through the legislative process.

In summary, direct selling offers a way to secure the future of a farm by spreading risk and increasing profitability. Challenges exist but can be navigated by using support and networks. Numerous enterprises I visited said that their diversification had enabled them to ride the storms experienced by their sector and without it they would not still be farming.



## CHAPTER 10: RECOMMENDATIONS

Direct selling value-added products is a viable way to spread risk and increase financial viability for a farm.

To undertake this, as well as any other form of diversification, the enterprise needs to consider its assets including the knowledge, skills and passion of the people involved, designing the business to best use these attributes.

For a diversification to be successful, the enterprise needs to use its network whether that be for product development, production, marketing, sales or funding. As well as helping to upskill the farm, these networks can help spread the word and increase the customer base.

Finally, it is important to remember that a diversification project is a big undertaking; take it step-by-step and take people with you, telling your story of what you are doing.

*“If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together” – African Proverb*



## CHAPTER 11: AFTER MY STUDY TOUR

Since commencing my Nuffield Farming Scholarship I have begun producing sheep's milk cheeses. I have put into practice what I have learnt, using my network to help product development, marketing and sales. I have done this alongside a business partner so that our skill set is greater; his sales skills are definitely better than mine. This enterprise is more like an addition rather than a diversification as we are buying in the sheep's milk and using the facilities available at Food Centre Wales to manufacture. This approach has enabled us to establish a market to hopefully secure funding to build our own making unit and establish a flock of dairy sheep.

I continue to farm, and our land remains spread over various locations; I would love the opportunity to farm on one larger unit of land to better utilise it as an asset to help secure the future of my business and the Garlic Meadow brand.

I am incredibly grateful to be awarded a Nuffield Farm Scholarship and for the learning I have done; I don't want to stop this process of learning and listening to other people about their journeys. I also feel the need to continue to share what I have learnt to help others on their route to diversification.

*"In the end we retain from our studies only that which we practically apply." — Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe*



**Photo 11: Garlic Meadow Blue, Supreme Champion Cheese at The Royal Welsh Show 2025.**



## CHAPTER 12: ACKNOWLEDGEMENT AND THANKS

I would like to thank all those who I visited throughout my study tour; without your willingness and openness I would have learned nothing.

I thank those who allowed me to stay with them on my travels, both UK and international scholars.

I would especially like to thank Jean-Paul from Eco Terra Vista Tours; we met on the first day of the African Food Systems Forum and he helped me plan my visits in Rwanda. Since then, it has been wonderful to see how his desire to begin an eco-tourism business in Rwanda has blossomed. Thank you to Willy Epaulard for driving me in Rwanda; without him I would still be trying to fathom the rules of a Rwandan roundabout!

Thank you to my family for enabling me to go and supporting me through this and thank you to those who stood in and looked after the farm in my absences.

Thank you to Fiona Hillman for your mentorship and advice through my study tour.

Finally, thank you to Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust for awarding me my scholarship. I'm still expecting a tap on the shoulder to say it was all a mistake. Thank you to NFU Mutual Charitable Trust for your sponsorship and especially Gregor Belcher for his support.



## GLOSSARY

AI- Artificial Intelligence

Brexit – The UK’s withdrawal from the European Union

EHO – Environmental Health Officer

EU – European Union

LEADER - a European Union to rural development strategy that provided grant funding.

## REFERENCES

- [1] “ bottom-up, partnership-based approach to rural development.,” [Online].
- [2] “Chapter 5: Diversification - GOV.UK,” [Online].
- [3] “Farming Diversification - Business Advice for the Farming Industry | NFU Mutual,” [Online].
- [4] “How Somerset farmer uses enterprise stacking to maximise output - Farmers Weekly,” [Online].
- [5] “Wedding business diversification,” [Online].
- [6] “So you want to... get paid for having dogs on your land? - Farmers Weekly,” [Online].
- [7] “Warwickshire farmer installs solar panels on part of land - BBC News,” [Online].
- [8] “Embrace farm diversification and improve farm profitability - Farmers Guide,” [Online].
- [9] “Embrace farm diversification and improve farm profitability - Farmers Guide,” [Online].
- [10] “How to Do a SWOT Analysis (Examples & Free Template!),” [Online].



## APPENDIX 1 – RWANDAN COFFEE

This cooperative involved 4,000 growers. The coffee plants were grown from seed until eight months old at the nursery site. They were then transferred to the members where they can be planted out. It takes eight years for a coffee plant to be fully productive, so members are also provided with additional plants that serve dual purposes. Banana trees are provided for shade but also a crop whilst the coffee plant comes into maximum production. Cover crops provide mulch for the ground, protecting soil and reducing weeds. Cover crops are either squash plants for an additional crop or a grass species to provide cuttable forage for animals.

At harvest time, the coffee beans go to the processing plant where they are sorted, washed, graded and dried. The coffee is then retailed and the members share in the profits.



**Photo 12: Planting a coffee plant in Rwanda.**



## APPENDIX 2 – THE LOGIE ESTATE

Panny Laing initially established a customer base by selling plants from their farm in Scotland. With increasing footfall at the site, they subsequently expanded their offerings to include beef products from their Longhorn cattle herd. They had the beef slaughtered, butchered and vacuum packed off site; selling it frozen from the farm shop. Over the years the enterprise has grown and old farm buildings converted to units for other businesses. This created a larger pull for people to visit but also enables them to work cooperatively. Each business contributes to a combined marketing pool so that they can afford more than they could individually.



**Photo 13: Beef sales from the Logie Estate.**



978-1-916850-70-5

Copyright © Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust

ISBN: 978-1-916850-70-5

Published by The Nuffield Farming Scholarships Trust  
Bullbrook, West Charlton, Charlton Mackrell, Somerset, TA11 7AL  
Email: [office@nuffieldscholar.org](mailto:office@nuffieldscholar.org)  
[www.nuffieldscholar.org](http://www.nuffieldscholar.org)