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| <b>Institution:</b> University of Exeter  |  |  |
| <b>Unit of Assessment:</b> UoA 21 Sociology   |  |  |
| <b>Title of case study:</b> Building resilience within the UK farming community   |  |  |
| <b>Period when the underpinning research was undertaken:</b> 2010-2018  |  |  |
| <b>Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:</b>  |  |  |
| <b>Name(s):</b>   | <b>Role(s) (e.g. job title):</b>       | <b>Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:</b> |
| Michael Winter  | Professor of Land Economy and Society  | January 2002 - Present                       |
| Matt Lobley   | Professor of Rural Resource Management | January 2003 - Present                       |
| Rebecca Wheeler   | Research Fellow                        | Month 2014 – Present                         |
| <b>Period when the claimed impact occurred:</b> 2016-2020   |  |  |
| <b>Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014?</b> No   |  |  |
| <b>1. Summary of the impact</b>   |  |  |
| <p>The University of Exeter's research on the wellbeing of UK farmers and the future prospects for small to medium size family farms has shown that many 'hard to reach' farm businesses struggle with business management, social isolation, and business succession planning. In 2018/19, 20% of UK farm businesses failed to make a positive Farm Business Income with a sub-group of these farmers suffering from serious debt. These insights, and their corresponding recommendations, <b>led to the launch of the Prince's Farm Resilience Programme</b> with an annual investment of ~ £0.5m since 2016. Provided by the Prince's Countryside Fund, the programme has <b>delivered business training and network building</b> which has <b>impacted over 3000 family businesses, improving farm resilience and creating support networks</b>. The scheme has been commended by Defra for its transformative effect on harder to reach businesses, and <b>in November 2020 Defra committed to its own £9m Future Farming Resilience Fund inspired by the Prince's Farm Resilience Programme</b> and this will be a <b>central feature of post-Brexit agricultural policy up until 2024</b>.</p>  |  |  |
| <b>2. Underpinning research</b>   |  |  |
| <p>In 2018 the UK agri-food sector contributed £120 billion or 9.4% to national Gross Value Added, and agriculture accounted for 72% of the UK land area. There is considerable variability in the performance of UK farm businesses with one in five in 2018/19 failing to make a positive Farm Business Income with a sub-group of these farmers suffering from serious debt. Many of these vulnerable businesses are located in remoter rural areas, with low levels of access to services and lone working giving rise to mental health and wellbeing problems and a high level of disenchantment with being a farmer <b>[3.1]</b>. These inherent social and economic problems provide the backcloth for the most profound set of changes in agricultural policy since the 1940s, as a result of Brexit. Even prior to Brexit, small to medium size family farms faced significant survival challenges and these were explored at length in the underlying research for this case study undertaken just prior to the 2016 referendum <b>[3.2]</b>. Our subsequent work placed these findings in the context of the need to adapt to Brexit policy changes <b>[3.1]</b>.</p> <p>Professors Winter and Lobley have been researching the changing sociology of contemporary British agriculture for many years, joined by Research Fellow Dr Rebecca Wheeler since 2014. They have identified the critical importance of well-managed farm business succession planning</p> |  |  |

to business vibrancy and the wellbeing of farm family members [3.3] and the restructuring associated with farm business transfer [3.4], the nature of farm family dynamics [3.5], and the impact of agricultural policy on farm businesses [3.6].

In 2015, Winter, Lobley and Wheeler undertook a survey involving in-depth face-to-face interviews with 244 farmers drawn from seven study areas selected to represent the major farming types of England and Wales, examining farmers' responses to the changing agricultural policy context and, in particular, the challenges associated with increasing agricultural production sustainably. This was part of the Defra Sustainable Intensification Research Platform (2014-18), a £4.5m programme of research co-led by Professor Winter and won through a competitive process. The research revealed the nature of the growing challenges faced by farmers seeking to survive and to develop economically resilient farm businesses in the context of a rapidly changing global market and new domestic social and policy concerns [3.2].

These challenges were examined in further detail, and with a particular emphasis on the prospects for small to medium size family farms in Britain, in a research project for the Prince's Countryside Fund in 2015-16 (£60k). The project explicitly focussed on whether trends towards fewer farms could be reversed, and on the conditions necessary for the survival and prospering of smaller units. Data were gathered from a call for evidence, stakeholder workshops, key interviews, an analysis of Defra Farm Business Survey data, and a 2016 postal survey of farmers in the South West of England. The postal survey resulted in 1,486 responses and was a follow-up survey to earlier surveys conducted in 2006 and 2010. The findings were reported on in a Prince's Countryside Fund Report [3.1].

As detailed in the *The Changing World of Farming in Brexit UK* [3.2] these two research projects together found that:

- British agriculture is hugely dependent on public finance through the Basic Payment Scheme (Defra's largest payment scheme with a current budget of £1,967 million in England). BPS is due to be phased out by 2027 as a result of Brexit. Livestock farmers in more marginal farming areas are particularly dependent on BPS which for many provides an income without which their businesses would be loss-making source.
- There is a wide range of productivity/performance in the industry with some farmers inhibited from performing well by scale issues, lack of capital, shortage of skills, perverse policy outcomes, succession issues, short-term land holding arrangements and/or market weakness.
- In some cases, usually but not exclusively with smaller farmers, these performance issues add up to social and individual disengagement which may seriously compromise the welfare and mental health of farmers and family members.
- As a result of these pressures, British agriculture is undergoing a profound structural change with some businesses expanding rapidly and others static or declining. The extent of the change is under-estimated in official data sets, particularly in the context of the growth of short-term land occupancy arrangements.
- These changes are not conducive to optimal societal outcomes in terms of economic, social and environmental sustainability.
- Land market conditions inhibit new entrants to the industry.
- The Government's commitments to a technologically progressive sustainable intensification of agriculture alongside landscape scale delivery of public goods such as carbon storage and greater biodiversity, can only be delivered if these challenging social and economic conditions are addressed directly within the farming industry.

### 3. References to the research

**3.1. Lobley, M. Wheeler, R. and Winter, M** (2019) *The Changing World of Farming in Brexit UK*, Routledge. 262pp

This book was published as part of a long-standing Routledge series entitled Perspectives on Rural Policy and Planning, edited by Andrew Gilg and Mark Lapping. Available on request.

**3.2. Winter, M. and Lobley, M.** (2016) *Is there a Future for the Small Family Farm in the UK?* Report to The Prince's Countryside Fund, London: Prince's Countryside Fund. 100pp

The report is available at: <https://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/downloads/research/is-there-a-future-for-the-small-family-farm-in-the-uk-report.pdf>

*Prior to publication, the report was peer-reviewed by three external academics, available on request.*

**3.3. Lobley, M. Baker, J. R. and Whitehead, I. Eds.** (2012) *Keeping it in the Family: International Perspectives on Succession and Retirement on Family Farms*, Farnham: Ashgate. 253 pp

**3.4. Lobley, M. and Potter, C.** (2004) Agricultural change and restructuring: recent evidence from a survey of agricultural households in England, *Journal of Rural Studies*, 20, pp.499-510.

**3.5. Reed, M. Lobley, M. Winter, M. and Chandler, J.** (2002) *Family Farmers on the Edge: Adaptability and Change in Farm Households*, University of Plymouth: Department of Land Use and Rural Management.

**3.6. Lobley, M. and Butler, A.** (2010) The impact of CAP reform on farmers' plans for the future: some evidence from South West England, *Food Policy*, 35, 341-348.

### 4. Details of the impact

Our report for the Prince's Countryside Fund (PCF) was published in June 2016. The report made 17 recommendations [3.1], several of which were co-designed with the PCF and proved of particular importance to the impact from the research. For example, we proposed that family farmers should be equipped to:

- Adopt lifelong learning through regularly accessing advice, support and information to help inform business decisions.
- Develop good management and technical skills to assist with the effective day-to-day management of a successful farm business.
- Develop and implement a plan for succession and/or retirement from farming.
- Collaborate with other farmers and supply chain partners, including developing local networks, peer support relationships and business opportunities.

Responding to the research insights and recommendations, the PCF developed the **Prince's Farm Resilience Programme (PFRP)**, an annual investment of ~£0.5m intended to support family farm businesses across the UK who are typically 'hard to reach' by conventional private-sector or publicly funded farm advisors. The PFRP was designed to deliver on our recommendations to up-skill farm businesses and/or help farm families take tough decisions about succession or retirement.

His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales in his annual birthday message to the countryside, published in *Country Life*, 2016 [5.1], confirmed the role this research played:

"... my Countryside Fund asked Professor Michael Winter and his colleagues at the University of Exeter to look at the role of the United Kingdom's small family farms and whether there is a future for them .... Some of the recommendations are being taken forward immediately by my Countryside Fund through our Farm Resilience Programme. This the most ambitious project we have undertaken to date."

Furthermore, the PCF formally recognised the report's insights as a precursor to the programme in a letter to trustees [5.2] and in a public response to a DEFRA consultation [5.3].

The 'ambitious' [5.1] Programme acknowledges the findings that hard to reach farm businesses can struggle with business management, social isolation, and business succession planning [3.1]. As such, the programme responds to the issues raised in University of Exeter's research [5.4] by offering free business skills training to family farms across the UK to maximise profitability and resilience. Training includes seven workshops on areas such as business planning, accounts and budgeting, and planning for the future [5.4]. In order to facilitate the report's recommendations around peer support, local networks and localised supply chains [3.1], participants also receive 1-1 advice delivered in small, local groups [5.4].

The Programme runs annually with 15 groups of up to 20 farm businesses [5.4]. The original target was to reach some 1,500 family businesses over 5 years [5.3]. Between 2016 and 2019 1,000 farm businesses were directly engaged in the programme and the target would have been reached but for delays brought about by COVID. The total number impacted is higher because farmers share experiences with others, so that the PCF estimated that its first 700 participants impacted over 3,000 family businesses: "it's like a snowball, gathering momentum." [5.5].

The impact on participating farms is noteworthy. Sample survey monitoring of the Programme conducted in 2018 revealed that 74% of those surveyed had attended to their succession planning; 77% are better at their business planning; 91% are better at working to a budget; 89% are better at understanding their costs; 91% are better at regular communication in the family; 77% are better at staying on top of paperwork. These positive findings have been reinforced in preliminary data from an evaluation of the programme for the PCF by consultants ADAS with, for example, nearly 60% of participants reporting an increase in profitability as a result of participating in the Programme [5.5]. In a filmed message, HRH the Prince of Wales, stated 'the Programme helps farms to change, and build resilience for change in the future...[it] has had considerable success in helping farming families come together to determine the changes they need to make' [5.4]. One of the five Programme Regional Coordinators confirmed, "I'm seeing families communicating, I'm seeing families transition." [5.6].

Furthermore, the focus on peer support and local networks has been transformative: For example, one of the Programme Regional Coordinators explained "[w]hat we've also done from the Resilience Programme is develop a Farm Women's Group. ... and to see them all talking together, sat round the table, I thought was brilliant, because they would have never done that, and we would've never got them round that table without the Resilience Programme." [5.6]. Using a recent example from one family farm in Wales, HRH the Prince of Wales, describes how the workshops have helped them to develop collaborative relationships with the other farmers on the programme, helping [the] business but also for the local community [5.4].

Michael Gove, the then Defra Secretary of State, in a speech to the Oxford Farming Conference in 2018, commended the work of the Prince's Countryside Fund Farm Resilience Programme, on smaller farm businesses [5.7]. In June 2020, David Kennedy, Defra's Director General for Food, Farming, Animal and Plant Health, commented at an Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Select Committee evidence hearing on how the PFRP results are 'very significant with...harder-to-reach farmers, often older...you get significant improvements.' Kennedy goes on to confirm, '[w]e want to scale up very significantly in that area' [5.8].

The efficacy of the initiative has led Defra to use elements of the programme to inform their own £9m Future Farming Resilience Fund, announced in Nov 2020 to run up until 2024 as part of their *Agricultural Transition plan* - a national roadmap to establish post-Brexit agriculture in Britain. The Resilience Fund will target support at individuals and businesses most affected by the removal of Direct Payments. The Fund aims to support 9,000 farmers and land managers [5.9]. David Kennedy, when asked about Defra's Resilience Programme confirmed it "was inspired by the brilliant work of the Prince's Countryside Fund" with hard to reach farmers. He goes on to specify, "We will be rolling out an approach where hard to reach farmers are brought

together by trusted advisers for purposes of knowledge sharing and benchmarking.” [5.10] The scaling up of the Resilience approach is a notable policy intervention that did not appear in the early post-Brexit policy developments in 2016 and 2017, and represents a significant shift in the Government’s farming priorities.

### 5. Sources to corroborate the impact

5.1. His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales in his annual birthday message to the countryside, published in Country Life, ‘Why we must save the countryside’s soul’, Country Life, November 9<sup>th</sup> 2016, pp.22-25.

5.2. A letter of thanks from the Chair of the PCF trustees, Lord Curry of Kirkharle, to those attending a dinner at Highgrove referred to the launch of “the Prince’s Farm Resilience Programme following the Michael Winter report”.

5.3. Prince’s Countryside Fund (2016) Response to Defra’s Dairy Policy Team’s Exceptional Adjustment Aid Scheme Consultation. PCF referenced the research:

“Building on the findings of the report the Fund has launched a programme of support for family farm businesses across the UK. The Prince’s Farm Resilience Programme is aimed at small family dairy, livestock and mixed farms. It will run in 15 locations annually for the next five years reaching 1,500 family businesses”.

5.4. Quote from embedded video on <https://www.princescountrysidefund.org.uk/how-we-help-the-princes-farm-resilience-programme/the-princes-farm-resilience-programme> at 3’ 00” – 3’ 49”.

5.5 Two evaluations of PRFP: i. Saunders, C. (2018) Map of Agriculture, Results of PRFP vs Control Group, Prince’s Countryside Fund; ii. ADAS (2021) Preliminary Outputs from independent evaluation of PRFP.

5.6. Guilbert, S. (2020) PFRP Regional Coordinator Interview Summaries

5.7. Gove, M. (2018) The Age of Acceleration, Speech by Defra Secretary of State to the Oxford Farming Conference.

5.8. Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee. Oral evidence: Environmental Land Management Schemes, HC 445. *David Kennedy Defra Deputy, confirms intention to ‘scale-up’ the PFRP.* <https://committees.parliament.uk/oralevidence/523/pdf/> response to Q58.

5.9. Defra’s ‘The Path to Sustainable Farming: An Agricultural Transition Plan 2021 to 2024’ [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/939925/agricultural-transition-plan.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/939925/agricultural-transition-plan.pdf); further details of the Future Farming Resilience Fund announced in November 2020: <https://defrafarming.blog.gov.uk/2021/03/25/the-future-farming-resilience-fund-supporting-farmers-through-transition/>

5.10. Email from David Kennedy, Defra’s Director General for Food, Farming, Animal and Plant Health December 12<sup>th</sup> 2020. *Confirms influence of PFRP on Defra’s own Resilience Programme, as part of their Agricultural Transition plan 2021-2024.*