

Matt Eastland:

Hello, and welcome back to the Food Fight podcast from EIT Food, a show dedicated to exploring the greatest challenges in our food system and the innovators committed to solving them. I'm your host, Matt Eastland. And today we're turning our attention to one of the most important players in the transformation of food systems, farmers. Often on the front lines of climate change, policy shifts, and consumer demands, farmers are not just producers of food, they're key to building a future that is sustainable, resilient, and environmentally responsible. And I'm delighted to be recording this episode live at Next Byte 2025 in Brussels, EIT Food's flagship event where innovators, policymakers, researchers, and business leaders are gathering to shape the future of food together. And joining me right now is Ian Marshall OBE, a dairy farmer, former President of the Ulster Farmers Union, former Senator in the Irish Parliament, and now Head of Business Development and Policy at the Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy at Queen's University Belfast. Ian, welcome to the Food Fight Podcast and Next Bite. How are you feeling about the event so far?

Ian Marshall:

I'm feeling very, very positive, Matt. It's good to see you and it's good to see so many friends here because it's a community of people who have the shared passion and energy and enthusiasm for the industry. So it's really good. It's upbeat and it's very positive.

Matt Eastland:

Ian, talk to our listeners about your background. You've worn many hats, let's say that. So you've been farmer, union leader, senator, academic. So can you tell our listeners a bit about yourself and what's driven you through all of these roles?

Ian Marshall:

Yeah, so I suppose growing up on a family farm and I was the second son because the first son didn't want to be a farmer. So I took on the farm business. And did really well at it, but I always felt there was more we could do. In my early days I looked at trying to innovate and we looked many, many years ago at producing milk on farm, pasteurising and bottling on farm. We considered that, we considered Omega 3 milk in the early days. We considered all our food ideas, we considered vending machines in the early days. So we did lots of things. And we grew a dairy herd, had a very successful dairy business. And then when my son was 16, he said, whoa, dad, I'm not sure about this. We were going to do another major investment in the business. And at 16, he sat at the breakfast table in the morning. He said, this is crazy. You're doing \$100 a week. This is nuts. It's just so much pressure. And he said that to you at 16? Yeah. And I said, OK, well, we put everything on hold. Within a few weeks, we sold the dairy herd. I didn't tell my three kids when they were very young that the most important thing they do in life is

make decisions. And the worst thing they do is not make decisions, but they're going to get some of them wrong. So my son at 16 took it to heart and he made a decision. But to be honest, he's went off, he's worked for nine years in ag-related business engineering. and he's just decided as of this last few months to return home and as we sit here today he's installing two Lely robots on the farm and he's going back into dairy farming. So 26 year old with an ambition to be back in the eye of the storm.

Matt Eastland:

Well congratulations but also how amazing that somebody of that age is so excited to be coming back into it.

Ian Marshall:

And I think that's the kind of enthusiasm. I see that agriculture and agri-food is again becoming sexy because everyone's concerned about what they're consuming. We've got this resurgence or this increase in using medication to manage weight control. and I think there's a lot of people who say without a very healthy balanced diet we would negate any of these products that we're consuming. I think there's a renewed interest in food and health and I think it's going to be a good space to work in.

Matt Eastland:

I'm glad you say that and talk to me about growing up on that dairy farm in Northern Ireland then. So what early lessons did you learn that really kind of shaped your approach to farming, community and the environment? Do you think that was pivotal?

Ian Marshall:

Yeah well look it's an interesting one Matt because it's in your DNA and I think that I remember bringing a group of scientists over to Belfast to speak about food and farming and I knew they didn't understand the significance of living and working on a farm that's been passed down for generations and I always have to refer to him to the 1967 film The Field. It's a demonstration of how land can separate families and divide families and the importance of land ownership. Because it is, and for people who live in the industry, the connection to the land is a hugely powerful feeling. So growing up on a farm, it's a lot about passing on the business in better shape than you inherited. That's fundamentally what lots of people strive to do all their time. So it was a good place to grow up. It was interesting in that when I went to agricultural college as a young man at 17, We had a mixed farm at home, it was an old style farm, it was my grandfather and father did it. So it was mixed, it was across dairy, some beef, some pigs, some sheep and some grains. But when I went to college they said, no, no, that's not the model of farming. If you're going to be a farmer, you need to be professional, scale up and pick your sector. So I subsequently picked dairying and we forged on, we expanded heavily in the dairy

industry. We grew the herd, we invested a lot of money. But the interesting thing was that a few years down the line I realised that my grandfather and father had probably the right approach to farming. Because what they had, what we were being very exposed to was volatility markets, what they had is spread of risk. So when one sector was bad, the other sector was good, so there was always some part of their businesses that were generating revenue. When I was speaking to someone earlier, I referred them to a small book that I read a few months ago, which is really insightful because it's called The Farming Ladder, and it's written by two farmers in the Cotswolds in 1948. And the really key thing, the reason I'd suggest anybody goes off and reads that is because what it demonstrates to you is that good farming practice hasn't actually changed. And if you get the basics of farming right, when you buy, when you sell, healthy soil, healthy plants, healthy livestock. The basics, the building blocks of good farming practice that they had before we had the advent of all our herbicides and fungicides, et cetera, et cetera. If you get that right, then the rest will follow. So it was good, but it was a good place to grow up, small community, family businesses, immense pride in the land and land ownership and food production.

Matt Eastland:

And since then, obviously, like I said, you've had many hats, but has your thinking and perspective on agriculture and the food industry changed in that time? Have you become more positive, less positive? What's your view?

Ian Marshall:

I think what I would say, Matt, is that As a farmer, as an independent business owner, which all farmers are, and living much of their time in isolation, working very hard on their business, it's a hard life, it's a challenging life, but it's a very rewarding life. But the biggest criticism I have, that sometimes I think that farmers believe everyone else really cares, and lots of people don't care, My older brother's a professor in Edinburgh University. He lectures in Consumer Behaviour and Marketing in Agri and he always comes home when we argue about food and farming and he'll say, well, so sell me your proposition. Why is Northern Ireland such a really good place to produce food? And I'll go into the banter about We've got small family farms, we've got pasture-based agriculture. And he'd say, stop. And he played devil's advocate. And he said, stop. I live in a big city. Supermarkets have got plenty of food.

Matt Eastland:

Why should I care?

Ian Marshall:

Why would you really care about your small family farm in Northern Ireland? And he has a point. And he makes a point well, because I do

think sometimes we assume that people understand. And people quite frankly don't, because the farmer is disconnected from the consumer. The consumer's connection to food is very often through the retailer.

Matt Eastland:

And then talk to me about farmers today then. What are the biggest challenges there, from your perspective, they're facing right now? And has that changed since you've been a farmer?

Ian Marshall:

It certainly has, and it's interesting because I think sometimes agriculture, historically, I don't think it's been really good at communicating what we've actually achieved. If we look at post-Second World War, disposable income on food was about 50% of disposable income. That now in the UK is around 9 or 10%. Across Europe, I think it's somewhere around 14, 15. In France, I think it's about 17. But people spend proportionally much less money on food because people invariably want the latest model of an iPhone or they want their Sky contract or they like their holiday or their car or whatever. It's a trade-off. It's a trade-off. So food has come to the pecking order. So the value of food proportionally is significantly less. I think that when we look at farming today compared to farming then, what we've missed completely is the efficiency gains. A hundred years ago, and I said in the session earlier, a hundred years ago we fed two billion people on this planet. On the same block of agricultural production land, we're feeding over eight billion people and still 800,000 people go to bed every evening hungry. So we've got a job of work to do. So I think sometimes we've missed the fact that farmers have been driven to be much more efficient. Efficiency, efficiency, efficiency. They've pushed everything so far. Agri-food is historically about large turnovers and very, very slim margins, unlike other sectors such as pharma or whatever else. So I think that's important. And I think that when we look at this, we look at the drive to efficiency, the pressure that coming on the industry now because when a farmer switches on his phone, when a farmer opens a newspaper, there's a pretty negative narrative about agriculture and emissions and methane and global warming and climate change. And I think what people have missed is that this is an extremely efficient industry. Part of the ecosystem is livestock, is animals, is management of the land that we've got to do. We do it pretty well. We can do better. But to enable us to do better, we're going to need support from government, policymakers, consumers. This is not just about the farmers, it's about the entire food system.

Matt Eastland:

Yeah, absolutely. And just on the policymakers piece, and I ask this because we were talking to a delegation of Canadians on the podcast earlier, and they were talking about the importance of getting policy makers around the table and decision makers in general, I

guess. So do you see that things get lost in translation? Because I can imagine farmers, policy makers, they're both trying to do the right thing. But particularly from your experience, do you see that they're still not seeing clearly with each other or not collaborating?

Ian Marshall:

Well, I think actually this is much simpler. This comes from my background three years in the House of the Irish Government as a legislator. The business of politics is the business of survival. So for politicians you have to survive from an election to the next election. The way you survive is be popular with your electorate, make decisions that they feel immediate benefits. That's usually a four or five year cycle that happens in politics. Agriculture on the other hand is about 10, 20, 30 year business plans. It's about intergenerational decisions that will feel the benefits 10, 20 years in time. It's about managing a business over a long term. Therein lies your problem, because those two scenarios do not marry and match up. A government minister will never make a policy decision in the knowledge today that in the knowledge in 10 years it'll be much better for everyone, because he or she will be long gone in 10 years. So what I think the important part of this is what we call the permanent government. So the civil service, effectively, the permanent government. So we've got to make sure that the permanent government understand the significance of decisions that need to be strategic and long term. Because what we don't need is a knee-jerk reaction. And it's interesting because when I was in the Irish government I spoke with the Green Party at their national convention. And I made the point that if we make these decisions now just for short-term gains then they'll have longer-term detrimental impacts. And one of the things is there's a lazy narrative around agriculture that, well, if we had less cows and less farmers, then the world would be a better place and there'd be less methane, less emissions, less global warming. And when you live in the part of the planet that we do, which is the UK and Ireland, what the science is telling us with global warming is that food production will migrate to those parts of the world that do it best. We live in some of those parts of the world with a temperate climate, with access to water and skilled labour force and infrastructure. So if we produce less, people in London, Birmingham, Manchester won't consume less red meat or dairy, they'll just get it from somewhere else. And the net consequence of that is it'll be worse for the planet. So it'll not be better. So I think we need to be really careful about knee-jerk reactions. And I think now that it's quite interesting because my current role within the Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy, we look at the link between agriculture and energy, which is carbon. We look at this journey to net zero and we did a conference last week and it's a really interesting feedback. because general public and society is looking at this slightly differently now. They're not as fixated on net zero, but they are becoming really, really concerned about food security, energy security, fuel poverty, cost of living. That's the things that are resonating with people at the moment. So food and food security, it's interesting speaking to food

processors within the last week, conversations they were having two years ago, and really difficult conversations on price. have completely changed, they're transformed. They now do not refer to price. Can you deliver? Can you give me quality, consistency, guaranteed supply? And we'll manage something on price.

Matt Eastland:

Okay and that is that a positive message then for farmers? I guess that gives more security to what they're doing and their livelihoods. Okay well that's encouraging. I was thinking back actually over the all the episodes we've done and I can remember that the conversations we were having right back in the beginning like five years ago were completely reverse. It was all about net zero and you know people weren't even talking about everything else so it almost seems cyclical to me but Ian, talk to me about the GROW programme that you're involved with and EIT Food. Can you give us just a bit of an outline of what it is and what are you trying to achieve?

Ian Marshall:

Yes, so with the GROW programme, what we looked at on our dairy business, we manage all our slurries, all our nutrients, all our effluents on farm. We've invested a lot of capital in that and we have a pretty good modern farm. However, A consequence of a larger farming business is that you do get run off from farmyards and from the business. And it's not a pollutant per se, but it's dirty water that runs off, it gets into the watercourses. So all we were trying to do was look at a system that we could manage this better, a completely nature-based solution. It was via the GROW programme that we started to look at the nature-based solutions. And we installed a system, it's basically underground swales, and we plant Russian comfrey on it. Normally in agriculture, a farmer's ambition is to drive the water off the land quicker. So what we actually do is slow the water up and push the water in through a series of check dams and underground swales. So some of the water dissipates into the underground and the rest would then, the plants that grow on it, draw the nutrients up. So whether we harvest a crop or whether animals graze it, they're always extracting nutrients out of the water. And we've turned it around, so it's been operating for four years. The GROW programme was brilliant because what it did, it got groups of people, whether it was farmers or researchers or government representatives, to engage, to have conversations, to have dialogue about, yeah, OK, what does this mean for sustainable agriculture? What does this mean for the farmers' role in making sure waterways are protected, waterways are cleaner and safer? And, yeah, it's been really good. And I think the really good thing about GROW is that when you bring groups and cohorts of like-minded people together, It's not only that subject that they share ideas about, but there's a myriad of other things they'll discuss and debate and talk about. And there's lots of learning for lots of people, myself included.

Matt Eastland:

You've spoken about peer-to-peer learning as well. I mean, that's something you're obviously very passionate about. Why is this something which is so important to you?

Ian Marshall:

Because it's really interesting. At least five years ago, I think I read a report that said that the survey work had said that the consumer, the general public, don't believe government, don't believe scientists, don't believe farmers, but they did believe the supermarkets. Because the supermarkets were the gatekeeper of their food. If the big supermarkets said that this was safe, then that was safe. So when you look at that, there's a kind of a parallel here with farmers, because farmers are quite sceptical of people telling them what to do and telling them things. But what I've learned over my career in agriculture is that if you want to get cohorts of farmers together and work in groups, the peer-to-peer learning is very valuable. The key to this, in my opinion, is you get the early adopters and you get them to demonstrate what good practice is. And when neighbours see neighbours doing something and say, my goodness, it's working for them or that's very successful, all of a sudden, it transfers to them. And what we found is when we work with farmers in small groups, I was, for many years, I was part of a big dairy discussion group, 50, 60 farmers. It's a good debating chamber, but the downside of that is some people then feel hesitant to stand up and share the ideas, share personal information about their businesses, share problems or concerns. When you break that down into much smaller groups and you get cohorts of three or four neighbour farmers who know each other, know their businesses, maybe know each other's families, that's when the learning happens, that's when they share maybe more sensitive issues and feel comfortable in that safe, smaller space to ask questions from their neighbours. Say, so you're doing this, I've got a real issue with this other thing, what would you suggest I do? And they'll invariably say, I had that five years ago and this is what I did and it sorted it. So that peer-to-peer learning is really, really important.

Matt Eastland:

That's amazing and actually reminds me of a previous life I used to do renewable energies and I used to work with farmers and I'm always amazed once you've got one farmer to install a wind turbine. All the other ones would come around and he'd be like oh you you hear that sound that's the sound of that's the sound of money on the on the blades and that was it that was all they needed they were like right i get it you know i want one so that's that's fascinating and just talking about the the grow again so what role the programs like that play in empowering farmers to be leaders of change? Is this something that is really going to change the needle for them or what role do they play basically?

Ian Marshall:

Yeah, I think the important thing with the GROW programme, it's exactly as you say about it, it's empowerment, it's putting power and control back in their hands. And I've always said, you know, as an industry there's no industry that can manage change as effectively as agriculture. Every time there's a challenge thrown at them, they manage change. And I've done presentations before where I've demonstrated that with the advent of the tractor, how that changed agriculture. Every time, every decade, there's another huge change. And they continually change. So the group programme to empower them to be at the front of that, to demonstrate good practice, for those shining lights in agriculture to be able to say, OK, well, look, this is what we can do. The importance, I suppose, is that network that comes in behind to support them, to encourage them, because it is a lonely place. And one person with a brilliant idea is great, but... If you're managing a business, heading up a family and doing all the other multitude of things, it's very difficult to focus, to get time and energy. But what Grow does is bring those groups together and kind of, in a sense, incubate the idea and hatch it. And then when you do that, then people say, oh, hold on, this works. And it's interesting because the Grow program that I was involved in, I know of a couple of my friends and colleagues that are farmers who have now looked at it and said, OK, we're going to do the same thing. So that's been a clear demonstration of the value of that.

Matt Eastland:

Amazing. Well, congratulations. Can we talk about farmers and adapting to climate change? So obviously, massive challenge to farmers. But you've suggested it can also drive innovation. So can you explain that?

Ian Marshall:

Yeah, and it's interesting because there is always this negative connotation. And when I deal with politicians and policymakers, they always assume that net zero and decarbonisation equals luxury, equals expense, equals disruption. I think there's another way we need to look at that, because what it does, it drives innovation, it drives efficiency. and the language with farmers is critically important and I've seen it in the university where we've been conducting research projects where there's been a difficulty with the project and I know of a couple of cases where I've been asked to go and meet the farmer and it's not that the farmers being awkward or difficult or challenging, but the farmer just has different values that he sees. And where a university researcher will see the value in a peer-reviewed published paper, the farmer very often doesn't see that. And I've done a couple of occasions where we've had a guy, once you talk to the farmer's language and the farmer understands, you know, what the opportunities are here, what the benefits are, they do see it pretty quickly. I think for farmers, a lot of the stuff that we do about renewable technologies, efficiencies and innovation and food, If you can demonstrate a NARF

which demonstrates to them that it won't incur more cost for them and it'll be financially beneficial, because let's be honest, they're all running businesses, and if you can demonstrate that this can equal efficiency or lower carbon footprint, cost saving or revenue generating, or biodiversity gain, or soil health, All of those things, farmers are intelligent individuals that know that if you have healthy soil, it grows healthy plants, feeds healthy animals, feeds healthy people, we have a healthy planet. That's the stuff that resonates with farmers and it's, you know, I've seen lots of cases where farmers have made business decisions not because it makes them any money, because it's the right thing to do. And I think they're a really good bunch for doing this stuff and for saying, yeah, you know what, this really does matter and we take amount of pride in what we do. And that's why the Nature-Based Solutions was interested with the GROW programme because it was something that could apply to their farm businesses which didn't detrimentally impact the environment, created positive benefits, managed waste water on their farms and was, it sounds a bit tweedish, but it was just the right thing to do. So it was good in that sense.

Matt Eastland:

I hear this time and time again, that farmers are stewards of the land, but it's absolutely true. This is something they put front and centre. We spoke on another podcast about resilience and the face of shocks, and obviously farmers are extremely resilient. So how, from your perspective, given all your experience you've had, how can we build these like resilient food systems to combat these shocks which benefit farmers, which, you know, you spoke about diversification of the farms and how do we do that?

Ian Marshall:

First thing I think we have a job of work to do and I say that the entire societal, we have a job of work to do to educate people about food and agriculture because there is a serious lack of understanding about the provenance of food, about the value of food, about food security. It makes me extremely nervous when we see the UK at 62% food self-sufficiency. That's worrying. That means in calendar months, by August, we run out of food in the UK. So that's a precarious place to be in the modern... world we live in. So I think when we look at how we build in resilience, Dan, I said earlier there's a piece of work I did with a guy from University College Dublin and it was about farm business decisions and the drivers that drove those farm business decisions on the island of Ireland. And because I've been a farmer all my life, I thought, well, this is a crazy waste of university money. Why would you ever do this? Because I know the answer. And I thought that the business decision was based on farm size, the geography, the sector they were in. Was there succession planning? Was there off-farm income? All of these things. Wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong. The one big driver for foreign business decisions was policy, government policy. And if you get policy right, that will drive the right business decisions.

So I think what we've got, we've still got this, in some of our sectors we've got reasonably good vertically integrated supply chains. What that means is that there's a degree of protection that puts stability in the market because the primary producer, the farmer, is dictated by what he produces by the guys who are selling, ultimately, the end product. This business, and it's situated back to the book, the thing that the book demonstrated was if you have produced stock and you decide you're going to fool the market and cheat the market or play the market and hold them off and tighten market supplies and then at least can't do that, the market will always win. So what I would be saying is we need more vertical integration within the supply chain. We need more connectivity with the consumer because we've lost that connectivity. And we need the communication piece done. So we need people to understand because let's be completely and brutally honest about this. We don't grow avocados in this country. We can't expect to have strawberries and cream on Christmas Day unless someone's producing them in a glasshouse somewhere and using energy. Sometimes I think we've complicated our food systems. I do work with a lady in Ireland and she's a surgeon by trade but she's done a lot of work on nutrient density of food and what she clearly demonstrates by her research is that there's been a bad light shone on red meat and dairy as being high carbon footprint, damaging the environment. But when you look at the food and nutrient density, red meat and dairy will compete with any of the horticultural products of the veg sector. So what I think we need to do is to get people to understand that there's a value in the food, there's a value of locally produced food, it's been really hard to get through to government and consumers about the other additional benefits agriculture and the agri-food sector provides. So we produce biodiversity, it's hard to valorise that or monetise that. You know, clean air, clean water, clean soil. The more we do of that, it's hard to put a value on that. So I think that all of these things will build in resilience. And I think where we are with climate change, global warming, we're getting more extremes. We're getting more extreme weather patterns. But I think we have A, the expertise and the skill base and B, the technology at hand to deal with that. And I think, as I said earlier, you know, we feed 8.25 billion people on this planet. That's amazing.

Matt Eastland:

That's amazing. And just to kind of bring us down to the present day, and you know, we're here at NextByte, obviously a thousand people, lots of different people from across the, you know, the agri-food supply chain. Why do you think events like this matter? And are we getting the right voices in these sorts of events, do you think?

Ian Marshall:

These events definitely matter. EAT food definitely matters, as do all the kicks. I suppose the biggest risk is that you get a fantastically enthusiastic, energetic, motivated cohort of people that doesn't expand. And that's a risk. So it's how you continually

grow that and push it out further because And in my time working in EIT Food, I sometimes felt that we were preaching to the converted, and it was the other people we needed to get in. So hugely important, and I think that what we need to do is, one of the criticisms I would have, and it's made very respectfully, is that the kicks work in isolation. So climate works, and health works, and food works. I think as we look at global warming, food security and everything, we need to be starting to work together, because agriculture, for me, agriculture has a phenomenally big opportunity now to reposition itself, to look at net zero decarbonisation of energy systems, look at all the other things we can do in agriculture, so agriculture can be a more significant key part of this whole conversation.

Matt Eastland:

I hope so. And if I'm able to kind of get you to scan forwards then, So 20 years from now, what do you imagine the food system will look like?

Ian Marshall:

There's been a natural organic shift right across Europe I believe from smaller farms getting bigger and scaling up and getting bigger and scaling up and getting bigger and there's a there's two schools of thought and there's one school of thought that says big equals bad and that's definitely not the case because Yeah, well we know lots of big businesses across all the sectors who do phenomenally good work. They produce consistent, high quality food. Their environmental credentials are superb, their ethical standards are superb, their animal welfare standards. So big is not necessarily bad. That being said, we have a proliferation of family businesses across Europe. And I think it's really important that we realise the value that they deliver for a social fabric of communities. And I think if those are profitable, viable, sustainable businesses, it'll be exponential, the benefits that they deliver. So I think what we're going to see across Europe, I think we're going to see a resurgence and an interest in farming and food production because, as I said, farming has a role to play with climate change. Farming is going to be critically important for food security. I think there are a cohort of young people, my son's one of those people, who have decided, you know what, this is actually a good way of life. But what we all have to do is make sure that they have a viable business, that there is a sustainable income, because remember, sustainability's got three legs on the stool. It's economic, it's social, it's environmental. If any one of those legs fall off, the stool falls over. So we've got to ensure that those businesses are profitable. Now, what I believe is that much more than food and the value of food, we need to be starting to work out metrics that we could pay farmers for the other things they deliver. social benefits, the biodiversity, you know those things. We haven't quantified a mechanism where we can do that and I think we should because I think as food, I can't see food getting really expensive but with the current value of food it's very hard on a smaller

business to have a sustainable income that will keep your family on the farm and as much as it's a good way of life it's a hard way of life so I think we just need to look at how we can do it and To give Europe credit where credit's due, Europe has been extremely good over the last 40 years at keeping the rural people on the land, and that's to its credit. So I think it's positive for the foreseeable future in the industry, and I think there's so much technology we're taking on board now. We're doing stuff that we never would have dreamed we could do before, and we're driving efficiency. Probably where we've moved in the last 20 years is that every time you speak to a farmer, first thing in their mind is obviously food production, but then environment, biodiversity, clean air, clean water, healthy soil. And they know and they recognise that those are really important things, because if you get all of those things right, you'll have a good business. That's interesting.

Matt Eastland:

And Ian, if I can ask you one, well, one two part question. If you had a piece of advice to give for one takeaway, maybe about about farming's role in sustainability, what would it be? And if two, because your son is obviously he's come back into the fold, so to speak. Would you have any advice for any young people looking to get into farming? And what would you say to them? Where do you start? So just given that we have a chance here to talk directly to consumers, what would you say? And for young people wanting to get back into it, what would you say?

Ian Marshall:

For consumers, regarding their attitude and their perspective on agriculture, agriculture is a pretty unique industry because it's one of the few sectors that can actually sequester carbon and add value and add benefits. So I think it's hugely important. I know that I think it's overused that farmers are stewards of the land and the custodians of the countryside and all. I know people sort of cringe when you say that, but the reality is they deliver much more than food. None of the countryside happens by chance. There's immense pride. We're lucky that we have a family farm system within the UK and Ireland and across massive chunks of Europe. So big corporate business haven't taken that over. And I think for the consumer, we have some of the highest food standards in the world, it's often taken for granted. We have some of the highest safety and quality metrics in the world, it's often taken for granted. And I think sometimes when we travel to other parts of the world and come back to Europe, then we recognise that we have a really good food system with huge integrity and it's something we should value. It's the old adage of you don't realize what you had until you lose it. So I think that as regards young people coming into the industry, I think there's this idea and it was interesting because this morning they said the average age of a European farmer is now 57. Well I'm 57 so that leaves me the average which is horrible. I've always been average all my life. But what I would say is that's never changed in 20 years, which is interesting. In fact, it's never changed in 30

years. 40 years, when I started out in farming, the average age was 57. Should we be surprised by that? No, because you know what, most of these family businesses, it's a way of life, it's a vocation. So unlike other sectors, there's not a retirement plan. Retirement usually it's either by spontaneous combustion or death or whatever, but farmers don't often voluntarily go off pitch because they've reached a certain age. They tend to work very late. So the average age isn't a problem. I think we do need to be more proactive in succession planning. I think we do need to be proactive in handing over the reins at an earlier stage. For those young men and women that are in the industry, for their parents or their associates to give them a bit of control or let them make decisions, let them get on with it. For the people outside the sector who want to get in, there are plenty of ways you can get into it. A good way is probably to get involved with an existing business and try it for a while, work in the business, see if you like it. There are plenty of opportunities where people have no successors who'd like to have a share farming model or some sort of buy-in, some equity in a business. And I know that the mindset is changing in agriculture. The old mindset of holding on to everything is changing. There's a group of young, dynamic people coming into agriculture with different attitudes, different ways of doing business. And it is a good industry. So for anyone who wants to get involved, dip your toe in the water, see if you like it. And if you do, go for it.

Matt Eastland:

Nice. What a lovely way to finish. Ian, this has been a pleasure, really. And I think I could listen to you talk for hours about farming. So thank you for that. And, you know, we're coming to sort of the end of the show now. So I just wanted to say thank you to everyone for tuning into this week's episode. This has been the Food Fight podcast. If you'd like to find out more, then check out the EIT Food website at [eitfood.eu](http://eitfood.eu) and join the conversation by the hashtag EIT Food Fight on our LinkedIn channel. And of course, if you haven't already, shame on you, please hit the follow button so you never miss an episode. Thanks very much everyone, see you next time.